Walden University
ScholarWorks

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection

2019

A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Consensual Nonmonogamy Among African-American Couples

Krishna Jones Clanton
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

 Part of the African American Studies Commons, and the Psychology Commons

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Krishna (Jones) Clanton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Sandra Rasmussen, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Jeremy Grabbe, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Melody Moore, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2019

Abstract

A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Consensual Nonmonogamy Among African-American Couples

by

Krishna (Jones) Clanton

MA, Argosy University, 2005

BS, Morris Brown College, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Psychology: Research Methods and Evaluation Specialization

Walden University

December 2019

Abstract

Monogamy is recognized as a singularly accepted relationship construct within the United States. As a result, little is understood about alternative relationship constructs and those who choose them. Even less is understood regarding these practices among members of marginalized communities. Despite this lack of knowledge, there is evidence to suggest that approximately 4-5% of the United States population is engaged in some form of consensually nonmonogamous relationship pairing (a percentage comparable to the LGBTQAI community), and an estimated 25% of the population will engage in some form of consensual nonmonogamy over the course of their lifespan. This study looked to understand the lived experiences of African American men and women in married or cohabitating relationships who have participated in consensually nonmonogamous relationships with secondary partners. This qualitative study was conducted with 3 African American heteronormative married couples, using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and a combined theoretical framework which includes symbolic interactionism and queer theory. Study findings concluded that consensually nonmonogamous couples viewed consensual nonmonogamy as an orientation as opposed to a lived experience in which their primary relationship remained their priority. Emerging themes included rules related to consensual nonmonogamy, emotional regulation, stigma, and the intersectionality between race and sexuality. Implications for social change include reduced stigma related to nontraditional families, a more informed understanding of practices and experiences involving consensual nonmonogamy and the development of sociopolitical interventions, policy and advocacy, and positive and negative consequences of consensually nonmonogamous experiences.

A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Consensual Nonmonogamy Among African-American Couples

by

Krishna (Jones) Clanton

MA, Argosy University, 2005

BS, Morris Brown College, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Psychology: Research Methods and Evaluation Specialization

Walden University

December 2019

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to anyone and everyone who has ever had a dream and refused to give up. No matter what, do not give up, do not let go and do not stop trying until your dream is actualized. The road to completing this journey has been a long and arduous one. It has been full of the challenges and pitfalls that were the result of difficult choices, poor choices and, at times, circumstances in which it felt like there was no choice that could be made at all. Despite these circumstances, I persevered. In completion of this dissertation, I was reminded of the undying power of your dreams. Your dreams contain your deepest passions. They are your heart's desire. As such, they will always be there, whispering to you, reminding you of their presence in your quiet moments, begging for your attention. If you have you have a dream, acknowledge it. Honor it. Labor over it. Fight to bring it to fruition. Slow down if you must, but don't quit. Take a break if necessary, but don't give up. Regroup if the possibility exists to do things in a better way, but do not *ever* stop.

I would also like to thank every friend, family member, colleague, client and stranger who along the way offered a kind word, homecooked meal or playdate to assist me with, "The Littles." Thank you for ushering me toward the finish line. It has truly taken a village. Thank you guys for being my champions, my accountability partners and my shoulders to lean on.

To my husband, Baby…there are no words. You and me, Clyde. Ride or die forever. Lastly, to my Momma & Daddy…look guys! We *finally* graduated!

Acknowledgements

There are more people than I can name herein that I wish that I could thank for their help in completing this dissertation. First and foremost, thank you beyond measure to my Dissertation Committee members, Drs. Rasmussen and Grabbe. Dr. Rasmussen, thank you for every vote of confidence, every word and encouragement and sharing your knowledge and expertise with me in a way that brought my study to life. There were many times when I wanted to give up – when I could not see my way to the finish line, and I would open my inbox and see a kind word from you which allowed me to pick myself up by the bootstraps and begin again. For believing in me when I could not find the wherewithal to believe in myself, thank you.

To Dr. Grabbe, thank you so much for lending your expertise and your voice to this study. You pushed me to learn more, to go deeper and to always remember to take just one more look. Thank you for bringing my vision to life. Your guidance was impeccable. I owe so much of my confidence and competence as a researcher to your guidance. Thank you a thousand times over.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Topic of Study

Sexual minority groups remain a hidden population within American culture. While a large number of studies have considered the consensually nonmonogamous behaviors of Caucasian men and women across the United States, data related to the behaviors of African Americans have been notably absent from the research. The study assessed the lived experiences of African American married and cohabitating couples who have participated in consensually nonmonogamous relationships.

Consensual nonmonogamy remains a little understood and highly-stigmatized relationship construct within many societies across the world. Throughout its history, Western culture has perpetually framed single, long-term, monogamous, and heterosexual relationships as the primary relationship archetype. Despite this cultural imposition, there is increased evidence to suggest that a significant segment of the population has elected alternative and consensually nonmonogamous forms of relationship pairings. These relationships, which can be sexual and/or emotional in nature, are typically characterized as secondary relationships occurring with both the knowledge and consent of the primary partner (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). An estimated 4-5% of the United States population is actively engaged in some form of consensual nonmonogamy, with an estimated 20% of Americans engaging in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship at some point during their lifespan (Haupert et al., 2016).

Despite studies related to consensual nonmonogamy dating back to the 1970s, much of these data are comprised of a homogenous participant pool representative of

primarily Caucasian college-educated middle to upper-middle class males. Lack of diversity related to study participants selected for inclusion in consensual nonmonogamy studies has left a notable gap in research regarding this topic. Less than 3% of research identified in relation to this study specifically focused on the generation of data purposely focused on members of an identified ethnic minority group. As intimate partner relationships are not only a significant developmental milestone beginning in early adolescence and continuing throughout the lifespan, data providing increased understanding of this area of human behavior remains a critical need across numerous segments of American society.

The lack of data related to the consensually nonmonogamous behaviors of African American couples impairs the ability of the community at large to adequately respond to the needs of this unique population due to a lack of cultural competency. As this study sought to understand not only the motivations for such relationships, but also perceived and actual consequences, this study captured life circumstances that may not have been previously thought to be associated with involvement in consensually nonmonogamous relationships. This was critically important because it is virtually impossible for one area of an individual's life not to affect other areas as well.

To this end, the study sought to learn more about the lived experiences of African American cohabitating couples who have chosen to participate in consensually monogamous relationships with secondary partners. Completion of this study is believed to have significant social implications, including but not limited to: the contribution of

meaningful data of historically (sexual and ethnic) marginalized groups, generation of empirical data that could inform therapeutic interventions in counseling/clinical settings, and galvanization of political and social advocacy efforts in support (or at minimum, with respect or consideration) of these minority groups. Chapter 1 discusses consensual nonmonogamy and its need for further study, in addition to contemporary research and notable gaps. Chapter 1 additionally explains the research problem and questions and theoretical foundations that will frame the study as well as assumptions and limitations.

Background

Consensual nonmonogamy is the voluntary engagement in secondary intimate partner relationships with the awareness and agreement of the primary partner (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). The nature of these relationships can be unique. Some of these relationships may be limited to recreational sexual encounters with random (or even regular) partners, couples, or groups, also known as as swinging. Other types of consensually monogamous relationships, however, may be emotionally significant relationships which may be as committed and/or significant as the primary partnership. Relationships of this kind are typically considered to be polyamorous in nature, which literally means many loves. Consensually nonmonogamous behaviors exist on a spectrum.

Consensual nonmonogamy should not to be confused with sexual orientation (i.e. the gender or genders that an individual is attracted to), cheating, or other related forms of relationship infidelity. Although it is often characterized or stigmatized as such,

consensual nonmonogamy is not considered to be a form of cheating as the primary characteristic of these relationship pairings is inherent in its name. This mischaracterization may be the result of a combination of factors, including engagement or interaction with multiple partners through varying forms of courtship ranging from flirting to dating to sexual intercourse and long-term partnerships (which may or may not include commitment ceremonies, children, and cohabitation). The fact that consensually nonmonogamous relationships are also often secret within private communities, or that its participants go to great lengths to ensure that their behaviors and partners remain concealed to avoid many of the negative consequences that may be experienced by members of this sexual minority group are also likely factors leading to consensual nonmonogamy commonly being mischaracterized as a form of infidelity.

Consensual nonmonogamy is largely ill regarded by the general public. In addition to general mischaracterizations associated with consensually nonmonogamous relationships, sexual promiscuity, particularly by/among women, has historically been seen as immoral and off-putting according to societal norms. Women who have engaged in such behaviors have suffered ruined reputations as a result of their sexual inhibitions and have typically been seen as devalued members of society, worthy of little more than sexual objectification. It is perpetuated as a form of hedonistic depravity which ultimately poses a threat to the sacred institution of marriage and ultimately the traditional American family unit (Page, 2004).

Despite the negative stigma and societal perceptions typically held related to consensual nonmonogamy, a significant segment of the population is in fact engaged in some form of consensually nonmonogamous relationships. Approximately 20% of the American population will engage in some form of consensual nonmonogamy at some/various point in their lives, with some 4-5% of the population involved in consensual nonmonogamy at any given time (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). This number is significant because it is comparable to that of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual and ntersex (LGBTQAI) communities which are identified as another collective sexual minority group in the United States that has enjoyed increased civil liberties and social acceptance.

In more recent years, research related to consensual nonmonogamy has evolved from seeking to characterize these behaviors and their origins to attempting to understand what drives motivation to participate in consensually nonmonogamous relationships and the actual and perceived positive and negative consequences. Most research focused on members of the majority culture in higher education: middle to upper middle class college-educated Caucasian males. This led to an overrepresentation of data involving this participant group and an underrepresentation of most other groups, including African-American men and women.

As a result, there is much about the practice of consensual nonmonogamy that we do not understand within the context of the African American experience. It is not known, for example, whether or not a unique relationship exists between race and

consensually-nonmonogamous practices. Consequently, we do not know if there are circumstances that are distinctively informed by being a member of these two minority groups. The study not only looked to assess specific experiences, perspectives, and motivations of African-American participants, but also provided conclusions related to these dynamics in addition to providing empirical data that can inform future research.

This study also provided data that specifically addresses consensual nonmonogamy from the perspective of the collective couple as opposed to individuals who may belong to a couple. There may be differences in perspectives held by couples as opposed to singles engaged in consensually nonmonogamous practices. Haupert, Gesselman, Moors, Fisher, and Garcia (2017) said that additional considerations may emerge in terms of assessing group differences that may exist between those who are married and those who are not. .

Above all, there is a need for this study due to the ongoing invisibility of marginalized groups within research and others areas. Lack of knowledge related to both groups leaves us ill-informed and incapable of adequately identifying, meeting, or otherwise responding to the needs of individuals belonging to these groups. The consequence of this is believed to be far reaching, impacting persons within these groups socially, politically, spiritually, psychologically, financially, and legally (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014; Graham, 2014; Pillai-Friedman, Pollitt, & Castaldo, 2015). Data gathered from this study provided insights that can inform future interventions, policy, social advocacy efforts, and legislation.

Problem Statement

While mononormativity has typically been presumed to be a universal aspiration for most American men and women, evidence suggests this assumption to be a logical fallacy. Consensually nonmonogamous relationships are characterized as extra-dyadic pairings that allow for the formation of sexual and emotional connections with secondary partners outside of the primary relationship (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). This comparison relates to achievements of the LGBTQI community, including the right to marry, benefits for domestic partnerships, antidiscrimination legislation, and increased social acceptance.

In most social circles, however, consensual nonmonogamy has not benefited from similar acceptance. A significant body of research exists which suggests all forms of sexual desire are normative and should be seen as such. Dennis and Martin (2005) said that failure to accept the full range of human sexuality is the result of strictly imposed sexual moralities enforced by a sexual majority that demonizes any sexual behaviors or desires deemed undesirable. This subsequently demonizes those associated with those behaviors and or desires as well.

As most research related to consensual nonmonogamy is typically related to the behaviors of middle class Caucasian men, findings specific to African American couples address several gaps currently present in the research literature. These gaps include demographic underrepresentation related to ethnicity, gender, and marital status. This increases the significance of the current study involving this population since gender and

sexual minorities have been recently recognized as health disparity populations by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The NIMHD characterized health disparity populations as specific groups within the American population that experience higher rates of disease, mortality and hardship than the general population. Completion of this study will provide meaningful insights about sexual behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of African American men and women, both as individuals and collectively as couples, who elect to participate in a lifestyle that further increases their minority status as well as the perceived and actual consequences.

Purpose of the Study

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) characterized the research paradigm as the way in which a researcher sees the world. As this worldview is what ultimately informs the way in which the researcher understands the conceptual methodology as well as data, it is important that the investigator and readers of their work understand the contextual lens that frames this analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four components that encompass a paradigm: epistemology (what differentiates supportable belief from opinion), ontology (the way in which one interprets what they constitute as fact), methodology (the standardized procedures that drive the process of investigation within a particular discipline), and axiology (the value or aims of a study).

Because the discussion of consensual nonmonogamy is often seen as taboo within most social circles, most people, including those engaged in these kinds of relationships, typically do not realize how common these relationships are nor how

otherwise similar those engaged in this lifestyle are to their monogamous counterparts. As a result, many men and women are left feeling ostracized, outcast, or otherwise forced to keep this part of their life and personality hidden from those around them. The result has the potential to cause a significant amount of occupational, social, and/or educational stress to those individuals. It also perpetuates ongoing stigma and misconceptions related to what consensual nonmonogamy is, what it is not, and the impact of this phenomenon within American culture.

Providing an objective look at the actual experiences of African American couples who have participated in consensual nonmonogamy will provide meaningful information regarding these relationships, ultimately leading to a less stigmatized view of this lifestyle and those who practice it. A review of historical data related to consensual nonmonogamy found revealed descriptions of consensual nonmonogamy and those who practice consensual nonmonogamy as social pariahs of sorts. They were often seen as psychologically damaged or hypersexualized individuals who were miserable in their relationships and had therefore turned to others to satisfy needs that could not be addressed within their marriages.

It is the hope of this researcher that this study provides a fair and balanced assessment of consensually nonmonogamous relationships. By providing data related to this specific lifestyle and minority populations, future actions will be taken to develop services that will better support the needs of this specific population socially, medically

(in terms of both medical and mental health), politically, as well as other ways that normalize this human behavior within contemporary American society.

Rappaport (1987) defined phenomena of interest as, "what we want our research to understand, predict, explain, or describe" (p. 4). The intent of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of African American heterosexual couples who have committed themselves to primary relationships while consenting to either themselves and or their partners engaging in secondary relationships with others. The study involved recording, dissecting, and detailing personal relationship accounts of consensually nonmonogamous African American couples until data saturation was reached. The goal of this was to accurately characterize these relationships and experiences in order to provide objective and empirically-based data instead of anecdotal assumptions. While no study can fully speak to a particular phenomenon, this study was designed to provide a foundation for future studies.

Research Question

RQ: What are the lived experiences of consensually nonmonogamous African American couples in married and/or cohabitating relationships as they relate to their involvement with secondary partners?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study is queer theory and further supported by the theory of symbolic interactionism. Queer theory means that all forms of sexuality are not only normal, but also undeniable. Emerging out of the feminist movement between

1990 - 2000, queer theory allowed consensual nonmonogamy to be considered with a presumption of normalcy. This vantage point provides an objective lens from which to evaluate the phenomenon. This theory will be further expounded upon in Chapter 2.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory which suggests that culture constantly evolves over time based upon the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of its community members. These changes occur as the perspectives and behaviors of those within the society change (Denzin, 2016). Use of this theoretical framework provided an added layer of objectivity from which to consider the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy. These contemporary theories added a present day understanding of consensual nonmonogamy according by exploring the way that consensual nonmonogamy is perceived to have evolved over time by those who have engaged in the phenomenon firsthand. This theory will also be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This study involved an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) conducted with three African American couples involved in heterosexual relationship pairings. This number of participants was found to be sufficient in the generation of data which achieved maximum depth and richness of emerging themes. IPA is a qualitative research approach that looks to provide insights into how a particular phenomenon is experienced by someone who has lived it (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Study participants completed a series of face-to-face couple and individual interviews chronicling their perceptions and experiences related to consensual nonmonogamy. These perspectives

involved the following information: psychosexual histories, core beliefs related to sexuality, monogamy and consensual nonmonogamy including motivations for choosing a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle, and positive and negative consequences believed to be associated with consensually nonmonogamous experiences. This data collection phase also included analysis of personal communications, artifacts, and other visual illustrations.

Operational Definitions

African American: A native born American who self-identifies all or most of their ancestry as descending from the African diaspora (Willis, 2018).

Cohabitation: Living together and being involved in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a primary partner without being married to them (Reinhold, 2010).

Consensual Nonmonogamy: A sexual or emotional relationship with a secondary partner or partners with the knowledge and consent of a primary partner (Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013).

Couple: A married or cohabitating man and woman involved in a primary emotional and/or sexual relationship with one another (Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000).

(LGBTQAI): Initialism of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Asexual, Intersex.

Monogamy: The practice of being involved with only one emotional or sexual romantic partner at a time (Henrich, Boyd, & Richerson, 2012).

Psychosexual History: History and information relating to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of sexual development (Domoney, 2017).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the attitudes and societal values which influence the manner in which a researcher completes their study. However, these beliefs cannot necessarily be demonstrated to be true (Pistrang, 2012). These assumptions also include the conceptual framework that the researcher chooses to frame their study. As related to the current study four assumptions were made.

The first assumption took for granted the assertions that all information provided by study participants were true and accurate representation of their lived experiences, and that variations in terms of these experiences may have been uniquely impacted by belonging to a specific ethnic minority group. The study, however, did not detail consensually nonmonogamous experiences or practices specific to other ethnic groups, unless such experiences were detailed by study participants as it related to their actual lived experiences.

The study also assumed that the intersectionality between race and sexuality is a universal experience. The third assumption presumed that members of each couple participated in this study voluntarily. Similarly, it was also assumed that all participants involved in the study elected consensually nonmonogamous relationship pairings of their own volition and were in no way being coerced or exploited within these relationships.

These assumptions informed the nature of the interview questions and assisted the researcher in maintaining neutrality in reporting of the findings. In effort to uphold this objectivity throughout the research process, bracketing was utilized to allow the researcher to remain focused on analyzing participant experience as opposed to drawing a subjective conclusion about it. Bracketing was selected for use in this study due to its described ability to, "[stretch] beyond the constraints of egocentrism and ethnocentrism to facilitate innovation and renewed insights into the pressing social phenomena of our time" (Tufford, 2010, p. 83).

Scope and Delimitations

The study involved the lived experiences of African American couples who engage in consensually nonmonogamous relationships with secondary partners. The study explored the psychosexual histories of primary partners in order to gain insights into their sexual beliefs and experiences prior to entering into their current relationships, circumstances which led to their engaging in consensual nonmonogamy within their current relationships, and perceived positive and negative experiences that they believe have resulted from their electing a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle. This study also examined the reasons why study participants are no longer engaged in consensual nonmonogamous secondary relationships and the perceived impact of this as well. Finally, study participants were asked to describe the ways in which they believe their ethnic identity impacted consensually nonmonogamous experiences.

The specific focus for this study was chosen primarily due to the lack of significant representation of African American men and women in studies about consensually nonmonogamous relationships. It is of vital importance that a substantive body of empirical data be available to inform and support actions taken on behalf of this specific population. Otherwise, loosely-related or altogether-unrelated findings and assumptions specific to other groups may be applied to this unique population. Such assumptions may include the use of anecdotal evidence or continuing to ignore or mostly omit this specific population from current or future interventions. It may also include drawing ill-informed assumptions or conclusions which assume homogeneity based upon historical findings obtained with primarily Caucasian male populations.

The scope of this study was limited to married or cohabitating African American couples whose primary relationships were heterosexual pairings. Inclusion criteria were selected because they adhere to heteronormative standards typically assigned to intimate relationship pairings within contemporary American society. Understanding the reasons why those in heterosexual couples may elect an alternative or additional relationship pairing has the potential to provide critical insights into the ways that intimate partner relationships are currently understood. These findings may contribute to a change in the way that sexuality, relationships, and intimacy are understood by future generations. Such understandings may lead to reduced societal stigma, greater visibility of this historically hidden minority group within the mainstream culture, and the development of

sociopolitical initiatives that are intentionally designed to address the needs that may be unique to this specific population.

Study findings included thick descriptions of the phenomenon as well as data collection techniques that ultimately led to full detailed understandings of the research processes, the study setting, and conditions that study participants were exposed to at the time of their participation. It also included data about this researcher in addition to information about relationships between the researcher and study participants in order to allow the reader to assess the ways in which transferability might be appropriate. This is not to assume, however, that the findings will have generalizability across populations or settings in the same manner as quantitative studies.

The findings related to this study may inform specific protections that members of consensually nonmonogamous communities may need both legally and legislatively. It could also inform healthcare policies and services, including medical and behavioral health treatment interventions, patient rights, and family planning. Information related to the lived experiences of those practicing consensual nonmonogamy might also lead to enlighten societal speculation about this lifestyle. It could additionally be transferred to future studies allowing for an even broader and more objective understanding of this phenomenon.

Limitations

As it was impossible for the data not to be influenced by the knowledge, personal experiences, and biases (both conscious and subconscious) of the researcher, it is

plausible that these circumstances limited the scope and findings generated by the researcher within this study. More specifically, this background may have limited researcher impartiality despite the efforts undertaken to maintain neutrality in describing participant experiences. Another limitation of this study was the inability of the researcher to objectively substantiate the claims of study participants. As the study assumed that study participants were truthful and detailed in their responses, omissions or mistruths in disclosures would have prevented the researcher from accurately interpreting and explaining what it is like to engage in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship as a married or cohabitating African-American couple. Similarly, because the interview questions for this study were primarily open-ended, study participants ultimately had the ability to control what information was actually collected. This meant that researcher ability to adequately describe the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy was limited to participant ability to comprehensively describe it.

Another limitation of this study was its time-consuming, labor-intensive process. This data mining process included extensive individual couple interviews, categorization, coding and recoding, interview transcription, and cultural analysis. The use of nonprobability sampling in participant selection was also identified as a limitation of this study. As a random sample of participants were not selected, it could therefore not be inferred that consensual nonmonogamy for this specific pool of participants was universally shared by all African American couples who may differ in terms of

generational identification, socioeconomic status, relationship progression, or other factors that the researcher may not have accounted for.

As it related to researcher biases, the researcher noted significant experience working with individuals and couples in a private practice (i.e. mental health counseling) setting who were either actively involved in consensually nonmongamous relationship pairings or had disclosed a history of consensually nonmonogamous involvement at some point in their lives. The researcher further disclosed participating in multiple immersion experiences within various consensually nonmonogamous environments. These environments included workshops, social gatherings, legal proceedings, and advocacy-related events specifically involving consensually nonmonogamous men and women. It was assumed that these experiences contributed to or reinforced feelings of positivity and normativity that the researcher holds related to consensual nonmonogamy. This bias was controlled for by using open-ended questions that solicit both positive and negative experiences from study participants. These limitations, biases and efforts to minimize their impact will be further expounded upon in Chapter 5.

Significance

Findings resulting from this study have the potential to provide a wide variety of meaningful contributions as they relate to societal understanding of consensual nonmonogamy on both a national and global scale. The implications of this study may not only inform future research studies, but also provide a basis for evidence-based intervention strategies and cultural competency models. It may additionally assist in the

development of medical interventions specific to consensually nonmonogamous couples, their secondary partners, and those within their social support system. These findings may also provide an objective understanding of consensual nonmonogamy and its viability as a potential relationship alternative for those desiring relationship options that may deviate from the cultural expectations of monogamy. The data also highlights how pervasive the practice of consensual nonmonogamy is and may bring more accurate information regarding sexual minority lifestyles which have been historically misrepresented otherwise been rendered invisible in American life.

Study findings additionally expanded the theoretical application of both symbolic interactionism and queer theory by effectively applying these theories to sexual and ethnic minority groups in a manner that had not been originally posited. All forms of sexuality share commonalities and should be viewed from a perspective of being normal and undeniable as opposed to debaucherous and immoral. The firsthand accounts and interpretative analysis of these experiences provide previously nonexistent empirical data related to consensual nonmonogamy that did not previously exist within the related literature. This identified gap in the research literature is further discussed in Chapter 2.

This study may also advance future political agendas and policies benefitting those who elect consensually nonmonogamous partnerships. This might include the opportunity to recognize secondary partnerships within the context of legally recognized civil unions. This may also lead to legislation which abolishes legal consequences related to bigamy and polygamy. It may also drive policies which protect consensually

nonmonogamous individuals from various forms of discrimination in terms of housing, employment, family court proceedings, insurance coverage, and everyday social functioning.

Summary

This study was about the lived experiences of African American married and cohabitating couples practicing consensual nonmonogamy . This phenomenon is characterized as sexual and/or emotional involvement in secondary partner relationships with both the knowledge and consent of a primary partner. As sexual minorities have historically been a hidden cultural group within American culture, those additionally belonging to ethnic minority groups may face further discrimination due to their historical underrepresentation with this research topic. While consensual nonmonogamy remains largely misunderstood and stigmatized among mainstream culture, which almost exclusively supports and encourages monogamous relationships, A significant number of men and women across cultural divides choose consensually nonmonogamous engagements in numbers similar to other sexual minority groups such as the LGBTQAI community.

While societal attention related to motivation, behaviors, and perspectives associated with consensual nonmonogamy continues to become more prevalent, significant gaps in research continue to persist. This study was designed to provide meaningful data regarding the practice of consensual nonmonogamy, reduce societal stigma involved with this and other sexual minorities, inform sociopolitical initiatives

that may directly impact this marginalized group, and provide implications and opportunities for future related studies. The study called upon eligible participants to describe in rich detail their experiences related to consensual nonmonogamy and involved interpreting these descriptions using symbolic interactionism and queer theory as theoretical frameworks through which to examine the phenomenon. Shared experiences involved psychosexual histories, reasons for entering into consensually nonmonogamous agreements with partners, reasons for terminating or suspending their involvement in secondary relationships, and perspectives of consensual nonmonogamy as a viable relationship construct following their engagement in such an arrangement.

The study included a series of face-to-face individual couple interviews with a targeted number of heterosexual African-American couples involved in consensually nonmonogamous relationships. The data were then evaluated using IPA to assess the information. IPA was selected as the methodology of choice due to its ability to bring forth significant data related to a singular phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA entails the researcher investigating the manner in which an individual assigns meaning to their experiences utilizing data generating questions, small sample sizes, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and exhaustive data analysis in order to identify emerging themes. These themes were then utilized to generate an interpretative account of the consensually nonmonogamous experience of married and cohabitating African-American couples.

While it was assumed that the study would be completed in a manner which would allow for meaningful transferability, this is not to be mistaken for generalizability

within ethnic groups or across populations. Despite the identified study limitations, the study provides meaningful contributions to the discipline while producing evidence-based findings that have the potential to inform social change and policy as well as recommendations for future studies. An exhaustive literature review related to the topic of consensual nonmonogamy in Chapter 2 provides a contextual basis for the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While Chapter 1 was about contextual understandings of consensual nonmonogamy, Chapter 2 will explain why studying practices involved with consensual nonmonogamy within the African-American community are needed to substantively address current gaps in the research. This chapter also provides a summary of current literature related to this topic and key areas related to practices involved with consensual nonmonogamy, including an overview of sexuality in Western culture, an explanation of what consensual nonmonogamy is is not, the prevalence and perceived consequences of its practice, and societal perspectives related to consensual nonmonogamy. It concludes with a justification for why the research approach is meaningful as it relates to the understanding of consensual nonmonogamy.

Moors et al. (2013) contended that the study of consensual nonmonogamy is, in many ways, a new area of study and as such, "researchers have a plethora of choices about research directions" (p. 54). More recently, the existing gap in the literature leaves the door open for the development of a wide variety of nuanced studies related to consensual nonmonogamy. These studies appear to suggest an interest in understanding consensual nonmonogamy from a non-pathological perspective as opposed to looking to develop effective intervention strategies to remediate the consensually nonmonogamous attitudes and behaviors specific to this population (Finn, Tunariu and Lee, 2012).

An estimated 4% - 5 % of the American population is engaged in some form of consensual nonmonogamy at any given time, and as much as 20% of the total population

will have engaged in some form of consensually nonmonogamous activity at some point over the course of their lifespans (Bennett, 2009; Conley et al., 2013; Haupert et al., 2016). As these numbers are comparable to more recognized and socially accepted sexual minority groups including the LGBTQI communities, a more objective understanding of consensual nonmonogamy may allow the larger society (i.e. majority culture) to be more responsive to the needs, values, and challenges of a significant segment of the American population that may be typically unseen and unrecognized by those who are unfamiliar or opposed to consensual nonmonogamy.

Since much of the literature that does exist related to consensual nonmonogamy includes representations and analyses of Caucasian heterosexual men and women of higher socioeconomic status, the current study sought to understand the phenomenon specifically from the perspective of African-Americans involved in committed relationships. It was hoped that the findings of this study would assist the reader in developing a broader understanding of the cultural nuances related to the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy. It also intended to objectively capture the lived experiences of a historically invisible group within American society.

The ability of the research community to adequately analyze the participation of African-American men and women in consensually nonmonogamous activities has been historically difficult. This was primarily due to a lack of relevant qualitative or quantitative data or substantive literature related to the phenomenon. As a result, this literature review focused on the collection of data which emphasized a societal

understanding of consensual nonmonogamy as a phenomenon. It also included common elements of consensual nonmonogamy in general and specific circumstances that may be unique to individuals who participate in consensually nonmonogamous relationships.

Literature Search Strategy

For this study, 25 searches were conducted (see Table 1). A Boolean phrase broad search, as well as an advanced search and specific title search were all used to identify literature related to the identified phenomenon. The following databases were used: ProQuest, PsycINFO, EBSCOHost, SocINDEX, PsycARTICLES, Google Scholar, Dissertations & Theses at Walden University, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Keywords used were: consensual nonmonogamy, swinging, nonmonogamy, monogamish, infidelity, omnisexual, bisexual, comarital, sex, promiscuous, lifestyle, pansexual, ostensible, monogamy, polygamy, relationship, anarchy, unicorn, wife swapping, group sex, triadpolyamory, cheating, orgy, sexuality, compersion, polyandry, and open marriage. ., Relevant literature was then identified and selected based upon its relevance and alignment with the topic. Due to the limited body of literature that exists regarding the topic, keywords were used to find the largest amount of information possible relevant to the topic. Keywords were: monogamy, nonmonogamy, consensual nonmonogamy, CNS, sexuality, African American sexuality, swinging, polyamory, open marriage, comarital sex, relationship anarchy, alternative lifestyles, alternative marriages, and compersion.

Theoretical Foundation

For the purpose of this study, two specific conceptual frameworks were used to frame experiences of consensual nonmonogamy. The first of these two frameworks was queer theory. Queer theory originally emerged from the feminist movement in response to similar sociopolitical struggles experienced by LGBTQQI communities. The term queer was originally used to describe something that was eccentric or unusual. Over time, it came to be used as a derogatory synonym for the term, gay, until the term was reclaimed and rebranded by the gay community in early 1990.

This specific theory offered a foundation which challenged historical cultural mores of western cultural beliefs as it related to sexuality and heteronormativity. Instead of perpetuating culturally-based norms as empirical facts, queer theory means that human sexuality is fluid based upon a variety of societal, physiological, and psychological factors. A goal of queer theory is to reject the notion that the only normal relationships are heterosexual and that in order for these relationships to be considered moral, they must occur within the bounds of marriage. Since its origin, the theory has continued to evolve in ways that make it relevant to other marginalized groups, including various ethnic and sexual minority groups. For this reason, the researcher believed that queer theory was an ideal lens through which to study the concept of consensual nonmonogamy.

Queer theory was used within this study to evaluate consensual nonmonogamy as a natural relationship pairing. Consideration was given regarding whether or not those who practice consensual nonmonogamy perceive their sexual needs and desires through a

lens of variability and fluctuation as queer theory suggests (and if consensual nonmonogamy is perceived to satisfy this variability), or as a more static and fixed state typically perpetuated throughout Western culture. Queer theory was also used to assess the perceived moral implications of consensual nonmonogamy among those who practice it. Perceived moral consequences not only involved ways that participants believed that the majority culture felt about their consensually nonmonogamous behaviors, but also ways in which they reconciled these behaviors with their own moral convictions.

The second theoretical framework that was used to consider the practice of consensual nonmonogamy was symbolic interactionism. This theory contends that culture is constantly being defined and redefined based upon the ways that members of a particular society perceive themselves, one another and the ways in which they behave. Simply stated, this theory suggests that an individual's perspective is shaped through their social interactions with others. Use of this theoretical keystone allowed the researcher to evaluate changes that may or may not have occurred over time as it relates to the ways in which consensual nonmonogamy is viewed within contemporary society.

The practice of consensual nonmonogamy has traditionally been characterized within American culture as deviant, or immoral. This viewpoint has often been held without any scientific conclusion to substantiate such an opinion. Symbolic interactionism was applied to the findings of the study to empirically inform this perspective. This scholarly exploration was further utilized to help identify significant patterns related to the practice of consensual nonmonogamy. As both symbolic

interactionism and queer theory are rather contemporary philosophies, historical research involving consensual nonmonogamy (particularly within the African-American community) had not yet been evaluated utilizing either of these theoretical paradigms.

While a more detailed explanation of these theories is explained in Chapter 2, these constructs provided a unique framework to study the lived experiences of African-American, married and/or cohabitating couples who elect to engage in consensual non-monogamy within. As each theory focuses strongly on cultural nuances and societal influences, the intersectionality between ethnicity and sexuality had the ability to be highlighted in significant ways within this study. Also, as a substantial body of data had been previously amassed related to consensual nonmonogamy among the majority ethnic group (i.e. White/Anglo Americans), the present study generated data that allows for comparative analyses to be performed in future studies.

Conceptual Framework

Consensual nonmonogamy is not a new concept. It is likely a relationship pairing that dates back to the early origins of humankind. In fact, Scheidel (2009) asserted that monogamy, in its purest form, has never existed. Neilson (2004) characterized what he considered to be staggering levels of both polygyny and polygamy among horticultural and agrarian societies dating back to the earliest civilizations. The idea of prescriptive monogamy did not increase in prevalence until more modern eras in history.

While there is no singularly agreed upon consensus related to the origins of monogamy specifically within the United States, Price (2011) described monogamy in

Western culture as a social imposition likely incentivized as a means to entice able bodied men who were able to both serve in the local militia and pay taxes to settle in particular regions. Price (2011) furthered reported that the practice of monogamy became such an acculturated principle within American society that Westerners came to view it as the singular way to approach intimate partner pairing. This resulted in other universally practiced relationship structures such as polygyny and polyandry to be seen as unacceptable forms of coupling. Betzig (1995) further suggested that similar to many other Christian based societies, the west is, "so consistently monogamous that what was once the rule [(i.e. polygyny, now] looks like an exotic exception" (p. 182). By 1979, researchers had become acutely interested in the practice of consensual nonmonogamy. However, many of the early studies intentionally excluded ethnic minorities, including African-Americans and Hispanics, among their study participants (Bartell, 1970).

Key Concepts

Sexuality within Western Culture

A guiding principle of sexual intimacy within American culture is characterized by a high regard for the specialness of sex, with the dominant, heteronormative social narrative placing the long-term, monogamous relationship at the helm of its core principles (van Hooff, 2016). Fricker and Moore (2002) contended that, "Attitudes and beliefs regarding love can differentially impact sexual and relational dynamics for both men and women," while Moors et. al (2014) said that men and women have consistently differing love styles.

Cronin (2015) described sexual intimacy as a finite resource that within American culture predicates a sexual double standard whereas women are judged more harshly than men as it relates to sexual desire, attitude and behaviors. A broader understanding of the construct among researchers posited that sexuality should be more accurately recognized to be, “a multifaceted construct, which includes behaviors, attitudinal dispositions, and desire” (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008, p. ##?). This popular view encompassed the perspective that one’s sexuality is thought to be influenced by a variety of personal and cultural factors including cultural norms, personal moral conviction (Haidt, 2001) and sexual history with an overarching belief that this expression of sexuality leads to an attachment style that tends to associate, “romantic love and security with sexual exclusivity (Moors et al., 2014). Rubel and Bogart (2015) said that a commonly held belief system is that, “monogamy is the only natural way to form sexual relationships.”

Within this centralized perspective about relationship structure, however, is also a commonly held belief system which characterized infidelity as a normal phenomenon within the human experience. Druckerman (2007) suggested that despite monogamy being recognized as the only widely accepted relationship pairing in modern society, infidelity is such commonplace among couples who are considered to be monogamous, that it is, “considered to be an institutionalized part of the intimate and sexual landscape.” While there is no unilaterally agreed upon definition of infidelity, it is generally understood and accepted within the contemporary American society that infidelity is, "a betrayal of…implied or stated commitment regarding intimate exclusivity. With

infidelity, emotional and/or sexual intimacy is shared with someone outside of the primary relationship without the consent of the other partner (Fife, Weeks, & Gambescia, 2008).” It is important to note that a key characteristic of infidelity is, “without the consent of the other partner.” This disloyalty is contrary to consensual nonmonogamy whose nuclear characteristics encompass extra dyadic relationship pairings which are comprised of some form of intimacy outside of the primary relationship with both the knowledge and consent of their primary partner. Haupert et al. (2016) estimated 4-5% of the western population is believed to be actively involved in some form of consensual nonmonogamy, with approximately 20% of the population having engaged in some form of consensually nonmonogamous activity over the course of their lifetime.

Anderson (2010) said that there is a positive correlation between the desire for sexual encounters with multiple partners and the duration of their relationship. As this practice does not fit neatly into the commonly acceptable relationship understanding of monogamy, nor can it be seen from the same vantage point of infidelity, the desire to better understand the construct of consensual nonmonogamy appears to be growing among the research community as evidenced by a rapidly expanding body of empirical data related to this topic (Barker & Landridge, 2010). However, despite this growing body of research, the participants include in the data sampling continue to remain a homogenous representation of the phenomenon.

Finn and Malson (2008, p. 522) characterized monogamy as a form of, “dyadic-containment,” which required a relationship to be, “fixed, enclosed and exclusive,” in

order to be viewed favorably. Support for monogamy had been reinforced and held fixed within western culture since the early 1970's, arising from Psychologists such as Bowlby in response to Freud's sexualized psychoanalytic explanation of human development which dominated cultural understanding up until that time. Bowlby (1973) said that human nature was not motivated by subconscious, hypersexualized processes, but rather by a strong affectional bond, first within the mother-child relationship and later, in romantic partnership pairings. Through these secure relationship formations, Bowlby endorsed that psychological safe havens would be created within individuals allowing them a secure base from which to then explore the world around them.

Over time, this perspective went on to be specifically applied to romantic relationships by theorists such as Hazan & Shaver (1987) and Foucault (1985) who characterized uncontained sexual expression as not only pathological, but also dangerous, unhealthy and indicative of a need for increased security. Researchers such as Byers (1996), for example, took this perspective a step further, suggesting that, "In heterosexual sexual contexts, women are stereotypically expected to be generally uninterested in sexuality outside relationships, protective of their sexual 'honor,' and interested in sex in relationships only to please the man involved" (p. 11).

Despite these negative perceptions, however, researchers such as Schmitt (2005) believed that monogamy is neither considered to be a universal, human motivation nor an inherent, genetic, or biologically predetermined drive (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick and Valentine, 2012). Opposing perspectives contended that while monogamy had been

hailed as the original, natural relationship pairing, it had been at that points, in fact, a recent phenomenon (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick & Valentine, 2012; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2012; Kipnis, 2004; Perel, 2006). Buss and Schmitt (1993) refuted the notion that marital monogamy was a societal norm for any identified group, including those in the United States. Monogamy, in the strictest sense (i.e. a single sexual partner across the lifespan, Pinkerton & Abramson, 1993), was seen as far less practiced than serial monogamy, which defined as, "several mutually monogamous, non-concurrent partners across the life span" (Conley et al., 2012, p. 138). Additionally, there was little to no significant body of empirical data to support the superior status that monogamy occupied within American culture, apart from being able to avoid the negative consequences and stigma which remain pervasive throughout modern-day society (Conley et al., 2012).

Consensual Nonmonogamy

Conley et al. (2013) defined consensual nonmonogamy as any sexual or romantic relationship had outside of the primary relationship with the knowledge and assent of the primary partner. While most researchers tended to utilize a similar operational definition for the purpose of attempting to adequately characterize consensual nonmonogamy – for example, Moors et al. (2014) defined consensual nonmonogamy as an agreement between all partners that it is both acceptable and agreeable to be involved with more than one romantic partner concurrently while Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, and Valentine (2013) operationally defined consensual nonmonogamy as relationships, "in

which all partners explicitly agree that each partner may have romantic or sexual relationships with others" (p. 124). It is also important to note a significant distinction in the manner in which the rules for participation in consensual nonmonogamy varied from couple to couple and that the right, ability, or desire to participate in secondary relationships may not have applied to each partner within a couple in equitable fashion. The three most commonly researched forms of consensual nonmonogamy included swinging, polyamory and open relationships (Conley et. al, 2013). However, as this area of sexuality continues to evolve based upon the individual needs and desires of those who engage in these forms of relationship pairings, it was assumed that emerging forms of consensually nonmonogamous styles would continue to evolve. These have included, for example swolly (i.e. individuals who engage in both swinging and polyamory) and monogamish (Hosking, 2012; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin and Conley, 2013).

While there is no singularly agreed upon definition of swinging, Fernandes (2009) defined it as, "a context in which married couples, or couples in committed relationships, consensually exchange partners solely for sexual purposes." This operational definition appears to share agreement with similarly defined characterizations by their predecessors including Bartell (1970), Denfeld & Gordon (1970) and McGinley (1995). While the practice of swinging has been commonly credited to key clubs held by soldiers of the United States Air Force and their wives (a custom in which soldiers would place the keys to their homes in a hat and have their wives randomly select a key and go home for the night with the soldier whose key she drew to have recreational sex) following World War

II (i.e. 1939 – 1945), the practice was believed to have become more mainstream in the 1950's with the emergence of organized swingers clubs throughout suburban America (Butler, 1979).

A significantly distinguishing trait of swinging was that the sexual activities engaged in outside of the primary relationship were considered to be solely recreational in nature and were not intended to be consequential to the primary relationship (Butler, 1979). The term swinging evolved into the more encompassing term lifestyle in late 1980 after many individuals within the swinging community were desirous of characterizing their extra-dyadic behaviors in a manner which reflected a more integral, less stereotypical, aspect of their overall functioning (Gould, 1999). While swingers were believed to be, by the general public, primarily habitual drug and alcohol users who were ethnic minorities (Jenks, 1998), the vast majority of swingers identified within research have been found to be, mostly middle-class white married individuals (couples) holding, for the most part, conservative views (Gilmartin, 1975; Jenks, 1985; Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). These individuals also reported that they regularly attended church (Fernandes, 2009).

Although largely recognized as a popular form of consensual nonmonogamy, polyamory has been characterized in a notably different manner than that of swinging. Balzarini et. al (2017) described polyamory to embody a wide variety of coupling as it related to intimate partner relationships. However, they contended that most individuals who identify as polyamorous had two concurrent partners which they distinguished as

primary and secondary relationship partners. Polyamory, by definition, included emotional and sexual commitments to both the primary and secondary partner(s) (Mogilski, Memering, Welling & Shackelford, 2015) which was notably different than the recreational, short-lived sexual relationships comprised by the act of swinging. Belzarini et. al (2017) reported that prior to 2017, "the majority of prior theoretical and empirical work on polyamory [had] focused on polyamory as part of a general category of [consensual nonmonogamy]" (p. 12) as opposed to understanding the practice of polyamory as its own unique relationship construct.

Grunt-Mejer and Campbell (2016) defined an open relationship as one, "in which couples typically retain emotional intimacy within a primary relationship and pursue additional casual and/or sexual partnerships" (p. 47). Researchers including Zimmerman (2012), however, viewed these forms of relationships more broadly, defining open relationships as a catch all phrase of sorts which was thought to include any relationship pairing that was not perceived to be completely monogamous. While this form of consensual nonmonogamy may be perceived as the vaguest characterization of this lifestyle, it can more so be thought of as a starting point in defining a relationally non-exclusive (RNE) orientation (Fleckenstein & Cox, 2015) to be further described by the individual members of the extra-dyadic relationship. Open relationships, however, are not to be mistaken for other forms of relationship pairings in which those involved may see those relationships as closed amongst committed/secondary partners.

While such terms are generally recognized labels that have come to be socially accepted in our general understanding of consensual nonmonogamy, how individuals who engage in consensual nonmonogamy choose to identify themselves may not necessarily fit into the accepted behavioral categories (Igartua, Thombs, Burgos and Montoro, 2009) and that some individuals may actually self-identify with one or more of these categories without presently engaging in extra dyadic encounters at all (Barker, 2005). In pursuit of understanding what consensual nonmonogamy is – and what it is not - Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin and Conley (2013) caution researchers against focusing on any one form of consensual nonmonogamy over another (i.e. polyamory as opposed to swinging) in effort to avoid a perceptual hierarchy emerging as a result of this emphasis. Visschedijk (2015) also stresses the importance of being aware of our personal biases and the possible consequences that can result from them. If unimpeded, this bias can place us, "at risk of being co-opted as agents of social control, despite our best intentions for acting in the interests of more equitable social change" (p. 64).

Characteristics of Consensual Nonmonogamy

Lano and Parry (1995) suggested that the term polyamory should be considered as the commonly recognized term for all forms of consensual nonmonogamy because they believe that consensual nonmonogamy can seldom be characterized as related exclusively to sexual intercourse. However, Rubel and Bogaert (2015) contended, "that consensual nonmonogamists are not all alike, and consensual nonmonogamy, in each of its many forms, has differential effects that depend on who is participating in it" (p. 979). This

perspective seems to be more broadly accepted, both by those who practice consensual nonmonogamy and those who share an interest in explaining the practice.

Their belief is that as consensual nonmonogamy continues to remain a growing topic of interest among researchers, those devoting their consideration to studies in this area should consider paying particular attention to the social factors which may influence individual reactions to consensual nonmonogamy. This is because it is believed that such responses will likely change over time as societal norms and perceptions change (this will be further elaborated upon later within this review). Further, consensually nonmonogamous relationships can differ vastly in terms of their emotional and sexual intimacy (Matsick, 2014). Blaney and Sinclair (2013) also suggested that there may be benefits to looking at married and nonmarried couples separately because the two groups are often viewed differently by the greater society at large.

Consensual nonmonogamy is seen as a desirable relationship option by those who elect to participate in this relationship construct due to their ability to address their desire to engage in multiple relationship pairings in a manner which encourages honesty, respectful negotiation and decision making, integrity, reciprocity and equality as guiding principles (Anapol, 2010; Barker & Langdridge, 2010). As with monogamous relationships, a high degree of trust among partners has been found to be a highly-regarded value within consensually nonmonogamous partnerships (Easton & Hardy, 2009). Giddens (1991) advocates that a key component of healthy intimate partner relationships is a high degree of trust "…that can only be mobilized by a process of

mutual disclosure" (p. 6) between partners. Therefore, the fundamental principles of consensual nonmonogamy foster an environment which enhances intimacy and trust between partners by allowing them to freely express and explore themselves within the union of their relationship with one another in ways that monogamy may not offer.

Within consensually nonmonogamous relationships, there are typically basic rules that couples agree to related to allowances and/or restrictions of emotional intimacy with extra dyadic partners (Blasband & Peplau, 1985; de Visser & McDonald, 2007). While consensual nonmonogamy requires the agreement of all parties affected, it does not necessarily mean that all partners participate in extra dyadic relationships. In fact, it is quite possible that in some cases, it may be mutually agreed upon that only one partner will engage in secondary relationships with other parties while the other partner chooses to remain monogamous and exclusive to the primary relationship (Moors et al., 2014; Kleese, 2006), or that the parties may agree to exclusively engage partners of a particular gender while avoiding sexual engagements of any kind with the other. These partners may instead agree to or elect participation in this relationship pairing for a multitude of reasons, including (but not limited to) the derivation of compersion (which is considered to be an important aspect of intimacy to be understood within the consensually nonmonogamous relationship) – that is, a partner's ability to derive pleasure vicariously from their partner's pleasurable interactions with another (Kleese, 2011) or to satisfy sexual desires that fulfill the duality (i.e. bisexuality) of one partner's sexual orientation.

In the development of consensually nonmonogamous pairings, there is thought to be a dynamic core comprised of the initial, primary partners whose relationship has such depth, security and significant meaning to each of them that they have the ability to open their relationship up to other parties in order to engage in mutually pleasurable experiences which further benefit the core relationship (Finn & Malson, 2008). It is not unusual to see contemporary literature related to consensual nonmonogamy emphasize, optimal dyadic functioning which include the establishment of agreed upon boundaries/rules between the primary partners and prioritization of the original pairing in the primary position of importance, distribution of resources (i.e. finances, time, commitment, etc.; Finn, Tunariu and Lee, 2012).

There are times within the life cycle when consensual nonmonogamy may be less desirable than a dyadic partnering. These periods may include, for example, major life transitions such a childbirth, changing careers, geographical relocation, during periods of extreme personal stress, etc. (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick and Valentine, 2012). This is theorized to be largely due to the exhaustion of resources that are generally associated with maintaining a relationship. In instances when the primary relationships requires the dedication of these resources in order to maintain the integrity of the relationship, couples may suspend or altogether discontinue secondary relationship pursuits.

Perceptions of Consensual Nonmonogamy

Although Rubel and Bogart (2015) suggest that, within certain contexts, “consensual nonmonogamy can be viewed as part of the normal range of human sexuality

rather than as a symptom of a psychological problem or a problem within an individual's relationship," (p. 962) this is not a commonly held perspective within the greater Western society. Moors and Schechinger (2014) contend that Western society typically supports heterosexual, monogamous relationships and punishes relationship pairings that do not conform to these standards. Generally speaking, Western culture, objects to the practice of consensual nonmonogamy as a respectable, legitimate relationship practice (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013) and, instead, tends to lean heavily in favor of mononormativity (Anapol, 2010).

Individuals who have never participated in consensually nonmonogamous activities typically have difficulty envisioning any specific benefits to this form of relationship pairing. As a result, they are not only more likely to hold negative perceptions about consensual nonmonogamy, but the very idea of the practice is also likely to elicit feelings of repugnance and moral angst among those who identify as monogamous (Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin and Conley, 2013). Reproach such as this typically results in societal stigma, defined as a social construct in which a specific attribute is deemed inappropriate or undesirable and, consequently, any individual who possess or embodies this characteristic is devalued and ostracized within that society (Dovidio, Major & Crocker, 2000). In essence, the person is stigmatized as a less valued member of their social group (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Subsequently, individuals who participate in consensually nonmonogamous relationships have the potential to experience a wide variety of negative societal consequences as a result of this election.

Those who engage in consensual nonmonogamy are likely to experience a significant degree of backlash, social isolation and negative financial consequences as a result of this choosing (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Rudman and Fairchild (2004) suggested that individuals who worry about how they may be perceived may attempt to hide, deny or even publicly condemn consensual nonmonogamy and those who choose it in order to avoid rejection and also maintain their social status. They may also go to great limits to support activities that support cultural stereotypes in order to further obscure themselves. This negatively held perspective then remains reinforced, argued and upheld across the majority of societal cross sections.

One concern related to consensual nonmonogamy held by both the general public and many religious sects, for example, is that its acceptance will create a slippery slope of societal acceptance of varying forms of relationship pairings, including concurrent marriages and open infidelity (Conley, Moors, Matsick & Ziegler, 2013). Emens (2004) also identified legal proceedings in which children had been removed from the custody of their parents, despite clinical findings of well adjustment, solely based upon the parent's consensually nonmonogamous status and because no legal protections exist for this specific group, individuals can face employment, housing and other forms of discrimination with minimal to no recourse. This form of stigmatization has even revealed itself within helping professions. Among those seeking therapeutic services, for example, Ley (2009) and Weitzman (2006) noted a significant degree of judgment within the counseling relationship due to a commonly held perception by members of the mental

health community (during this period) that individuals electing consensual nonmonogamy had either developed an unhealthy attachment style, were unfulfilled in their marriage or had a fear of intimacy (Hymer & Rubin, 1982). Their suggestion was that individuals should instead aspire to adopt healthier pairing options.

"The pervasive cultural message that all of our emotional and sexual needs should be met in our pair relationships undermines any opportunity for participants to consider or negotiate polyamorous or open relationships" (van Hooff, 2016, p. 12). Conley, Moors, Matsick and Ziegler (2013) noted that this cultural expectation results in an inability of romantic partners to engage in open, honest dialogue with one another about their needs and desires that may not be able to be satisfied within their primary relationship without the fear of negative ramifications. As a result, an objective understanding of what consensual nonmonogamy is, and what it is not, becomes more difficult to understand. This poor understanding related to this phenomenon may likely be the reason that consensual nonmonogamy is often erroneously characterized as infidelity, adultery, or an in some way distressed marriage (Conley, Moors, Matsick & Ziegler (2013).

Burleigh, Rubel and Meegan (2017) contended that consensual nonmonogamy may be viewed negatively by contemporary society due to zero-sum thinking (i.e. the idea that emotional/sexual resources are not infinite and therefore when it is shared with someone outside of the primary relationship, as with consensual nonmonogamy, then the partner of the consensually nonmonogamous individual suffers a deficit in this area). It

has been suggested that consensually nonmonogamous practices that are seen to more closely mirror monogamy (in terms of emotional affection, commitment, etc.) are seen more favorably than some forms of consensual nonmonogamy which may be void of these (or similar) characteristics and tend to focus more explicitly on sexual gratification and variety. The work of Kleese (2006), for example, describes different forms of consensual nonmonogamy as existing on a spectrum of sorts, with the, "good polyamorist," existing on one end of the spectrum and the, "promiscuous swinger," positioned on the other.

As it relates to this halo effect surrounding monogamous relationships (i.e. cognitive bias in which our impression/perception of a particular thing causes us to see every aspect of that thing as superior to other things similarly related; Moors et al. 2013), some of the negative perceptions related to consensually nonmonogamous relationships, and those who elect to participate in them, are that they tend to be lonelier, they are more likely to engage in riskier sexual behaviors, are less sexually satisfied and tend to have poorer quality (primary) relationships than their counterparts who are involved in monogamous relationship pairings (Moors et. al, 2014). In van Hooff's 2016 study, study participants even went so far as to describe monogamous partnerships as, "…the only legitimate sexual outlet for participants" (pg. 6).

In a study which looked to assess generally held societal perspectives related to consensual nonmonogamy Conley, Moors, Matsick & Ziegler (2013) found that monogamy was more positively perceived in all criteria evaluated, even among

individuals who reported participation in consensual monogamy. van Hooff (2013) suggested that there is an inherent expectation of monogamy in long-term intimate partner relationships and, for that reason, monogamy is often seen as a key characteristic of a traditional, committed relationship. Some individuals find the notion of consensual nonmonogamy to be equally or more offensive to their senses than other forms of infidelity, describing it in such ways as dubious, immoral, and immature whether consensual or not (van Hooff, 2016). It was also a commonly held belief – even among many within the mental health community – that individuals who elected to participate in consensual nonmonogamy must be suffering from some form of mental health disorder (Page, 2004). Despite a host of negative perceptions related to consensual nonmonogamy, Conley et. al (2013) denoted a limited body of evidence to support this position.

Rubel & Bogart (2015) refuted the notion that consensual nonmonogamy should be considered an act which, in and of itself, is indicative of some form of pathology. Rather, they suggested that, "consensual nonmonogamy can be viewed as part of the normal range of human sexuality rather than as a symptom of a psychological problem or a problem within an individual's relationship" (p. 962). Instead, rather than acts such as consensual nonmonogamy being viewed as a punishable, immoral act, they should instead be judged for merit for their ability to yield pleasure, do not rely on coercion or exploitation and, overall, should be evaluated by the way that the partners treat one another (Moors and Schechinger, 2014). Blow and Hartnett (2005) contended that sexual encounters with partners outside of their primary relationship is usually not reflective of

the health of the relationship, but rather more so reflective of individualistic functioning such as sexual desire, self-esteem, life choice satisfaction and other related circumstances. Levitt (1988) and Viwatpanich's (2010) findings included reports by some who participated in consensual nonmonogamy that these experiences resulted in their separation and/or divorce. Levitt (1988), however, also chronicled results which refuted such findings, stating instead, that consensual nonmonogamy had not only kept their marriage together, but also fortified it. Rubin and Adams also conducted a longitudinal study in 1986 which found couples in who participated in consensual nonmongamy to be no more likely to separate or divorce than their monogamous counterparts. For reasons such as this, it is suggested that perhaps a consideration for contemporary research should be a departure from the notion that consensual nonmonogamy is synonymous with infidelity. Among much of the literature reviewed, consensual nonmonogamy was presented through the lens of infidelity, thereby characterizing it as a threat to primary pairings due to it being considered the ultimate threat against an intimate partnership between two people (Cronin, 2015; Gabb et al., 2013).

This position was further supported by the work of researchers including Conley, Moors, Matsick & Ziegler (2013) who contended that although a limited body of research exists related to consensual nonmonogamy, much of the qualitative research that does exist, "shows that those in CNM relationships report high degrees of honesty, closeness, happiness, and communication and low degrees of jealousy" (p. 4). Rubin (1984)

believed there to exist a moral hierarchy or sorts which remains both persistent and pervasive throughout Western culture. Rubin (1984) stated, “According to this system [of moral hierarchies], sexuality that is ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial...any sex that violates these rules is ‘bad,’ ‘abnormal,’ or ‘unnatural’” (p. 152). Feeling discouraged by what she believed was a negative fixation on sexuality within Western culture, Rubin (1984) challenged female researchers and clinicians, in particular, to be dedicated to engaging in objective processes which counter notions of mono-normativity and, instead, promote varying relationship structures as both healthy and normative.

Collins (2005) suggest that people of color have an added stigma to have to deal with – that is the sociohistorical sexual biases typically attributed to communities of color in which their sexuality is often portrayed as deviant and hypersexual. Such stigmatization may lead ethnic minorities to be less forthcoming about sexual practices that depart from societal norms and customs (Rubin et al., 2014). As a result, many benefits of consensual nonmonogamy may not be able to be objectively explored for their potential benefits. For example, Gibbs and Campbell (1999) suggest that man sharing specifically within the African-American community may address many issues within the community – most of which being social conditions that have little to no sexual implications. They argue that it gives African-American women who desire relationships with African-American men access to such interactions that may otherwise be impossible due to the, “unavailability of marriageable age African-American males as a result of:

incarceration, drug addiction, rampant poverty, premature death and already overburden males with females who they are unable to care for emotionally and/or financially" (p. 149). Rubin (2014) further noted that most studies do not specifically demarcate the inclusion or representation of sexual minorities groups except gay men in their findings. It was for this reason that Rubin (2014) emphasized the importance of utilizing research and recruitment strategies that specifically seeks to not only include ethnic minority groups among the study population, but provides an accurate representation of their experiences related to consensual nonmonogamy.

Incidences of Consensual Nonmonogamy

Despite the popularity of the construct of consensual nonmonogamy, there remains an unavailability of a large body of research related specifically to consensually nonmonogamous communities. As it relates to this data, researchers such as van Hooff (2016) suggested that while consensual nonmonogamy is occurring at rates that are significant enough to spark the interest of both the academic community and the general public at large, they contended that the majority of nonmonogamous encounters remain adulterous encounters of infidelity. However, scholars including Bennett (2009) proposed, "that are now more than half a million openly polyamorous families in the United States," while Conley, Moors, Matsick and Ziegler (2013) suggested that consensually nonmonogamous partnerships may encompass approximately 4% - 5% of the population – a number which is believed to be comparable to same sex orientations which are increasingly advancing their civil rights and societal profiles. Findings such as

these provide a compelling argument for the consideration of alternative, consensual forms of nonmonogamous pairings among long-term partners.

Consensual nonmonogamy has been previously assessed through a variety of theoretical lenses including (but not limited to): “The Big Five” personality traits (De Raad & Peabody, 2005), Attachment Theory (Barker, 2005) and as a feature of Machiavellianism (Salmansohn, 2009). Research typically characterizes those who participate in consensual nonmonogamy in the United States as overwhelmingly White/Caucasian, college educated and representing advanced social classes (i.e. middle and/or upper-middle socioeconomic classes; Kleese, 2011; Sheff, 2006; Wosick-Correa, 2010). As it related to sexual satisfaction within the primary relationship, historical data found that heterosexual men who engaged in consensual nonmonogamy reported higher rates of sexual satisfaction within their marriages (Dixon, 1985), bisexual wives reported being more sexually active with their husbands at rates higher than the nationally reported average (Dixon, 1984) and an overall better/improved quality of sex within their primary relationships than individuals who identified their relationship dyad as monogamous (Viwatpanich, 2010).

While early research (Denfield, 1974) suggested that jealousy was the primary reason leading to the termination of consensual nonmonogamy, more contemporary studies found that those who engaged in consensually nonmonogamous relationships due not experience feelings of jealousy in ways significantly different from individuals who engage in monogamous relationships (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). Rather, they

utilized more effective coping strategies to manage these emotions (i.e. open communication, compersion or empathetic joy for their partners and positive reframing of jealousy in effort to increase feelings of closeness between couples). Also, despite commonly held stereotypes, those who participated in consensual nonmonogamy did not typically engage in high-risk sexual behaviors, did not ineludibly have sex with a large number of sexual partners and were more likely to engage in safer sex practices than individuals who did not subscribe to consensual nonmonogamy (Rubel and Bogart, 2015).

Justification for Current Study

Much of the contemporary literature and applications developed in the intimate partner relationship space support normative sex standards that reinforce monogamous partnering dyads (Moors and Schechinger, 2014). Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick and Valentine (2012) questioned whether or not historical frameworks that were used to assess constructs related to monogamy could adequately assess consensual nonmonogamy due to their being an inherent bias which favored monogamy within traditional research methodologies. They further identified a gap in the literature related to consensual nonmonogamy and challenged future research to consider the question of whether or not it has the potential to be as (or more) beneficial as monogamy among those who voluntarily elect it. Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick and Valentine (2012) not only supported this perspective, but contended that a significant body of qualitative and quantitative research indicated that participants in consensually nonmonogamous

relationships reported high degrees of most positive relationship dynamics. These identified characteristics included honesty, closeness, happiness, communication, and relationship satisfaction within their relationships (Bonello & Cross, 2010; Klesse, 2006). Researchers supporting further study related to consensual nonmonogamy suggested that this phenomenon should be subjected to further empirical scrutiny in effort to provide objective data which may aid in "thwarting prejudice and changing people's attitudes for the better," in pursuit of positively affecting policy, law, and social justice (Schmader & Stone, 2008; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin and Conley, 2013).

As a general lack of understanding of the social divisions occurring within the consensually nonmonogamous construct is often highlighted in the works of most research related to consensual nonmonogamy (Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006; Noël, 2006), Blaney & Sinclair (2013) considered there to be a significant need for reliable data related to consensual nonmonogamy and also the notable segment of the population who elect it. Their criticisms identified a need to better understand the ways in which circumstances related to race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation may also influence involvements and perceptions related to consensual nonmonogamy.

Barker (2005) argued that more support from the academic community elucidating consensually nonmonogamous relationships as a normative, viable relationship arrangement is needed. The work of Rubin et al. (2014) challenged future researchers to be more objective than their academic predecessors in their representation of consensual nonmonogamy. Implications for future studies by researchers such as

Moors et. al (2014) provided the greatest support for studies such as this study which sought to explore consensual nonmonogamy explicitly within the African-American community. Their work identified a significant gap in the availability of data specific to sexual minorities and their inclination to engage in consensually nonmonogamous behaviors. This gap may be due, in part, to historical difficulty in adequately identifying and recruiting consensual nonmonogamists of specific ethnic minority groups.

Rubel and Bogart (2015) contended that identification of members of these populations have been one of the biggest challenges related to the study of consensual nonmongamy. In essence, they were considered a hidden population of sorts. In instances where these individuals were able to be identified and agreed to participate in relevant studies, it was noted that typical sampling methods (i.e. snowballing, recruiting/advertising at specific locals, referrals, etc.) lead to homogeneity of the study sample and was also found to be an issue.

The researchers also theorized that despite the quality of data that has been produced by the research community, this data may not have been able to significantly capture data related to those whose relationship(s) may have been negatively impacted by their consensually nonmonogamous experiences. For reasons such as these, they endorsed the need for future research to comprise a more inclusive, diverse exploration of those individuals desiring engagement in consensually nonmonogamous relationship pairings. The work of Rubel and Bogaert (2015) specifically called for future research to include more diverse population samples, as well as include a sharper focus on

psychological wellbeing and relationship quality correlates of those who participate in consensual nonmonogamy. This ideology, however, was not an original notion.

The call for the development of rich, quality data has been shared by early scholars such as Foucault (1978) who contended that a failure to develop value-neutral data (Tiefer, 1987) related to the preferences and behaviors of sexual minorities may have likely reinforced many sexual stereotypes related to human sexuality (Rubin, 1999) while also supporting a superior perspective of not only monogamy, but also the heterosexual male. Contemporary studies related to consensual nonmonogamy largely suggested a generalized consensus that consensual nonmonogamists tend to consist of a largely homogenous group comprised primarily of Caucasian, college educated, middle- to upper-middle class men and women ranging in age from their late 30's to their early 50's (Rubin et al., 2014). Sheff & Hammers (2011) study in particular actually noted the percentage of individuals of color electing to engage in consensual nonmonogamy as zero.

Despite these findings, however, Rubin et al. (2014) contended that Caucasian men and women are no more or less likely to engage in consensually nonmonogamous relationships than men and women of color (i.e. individuals self-identifying as African American/Black, Asian/Asian American, Latino/a, Native American, [or] multiracial). Their findings reported that the inclusion of more diverse identities and behaviors would be a step in the right direction for studies related to consensual nonmonogamy. This suggestion was further supported by their belief that prior findings and perspectives had

several issues, including but not limited to: monochromatic sampling, written content associated with the subject matter oriented toward White audiences while simultaneously omitting the experiences and multicultural competency affiliated with various ethnic minority groups. Nöel (2006) described a reinforced culture of Whiteness that leads to individuals of color feeling unwelcomed or unsafe within consensually nonmonogamous community spaces and recruitment strategies which failed to control for over- or under-sampling of specific groups.

Rubin et al. (2014) specifically stated that, "Although results suggest that individuals of color are equally likely to engage in [consensual nonmonogamy] relationships as White individuals, more nuanced research using different assessments of [consensual nonmonogamy] are needed to elucidate this finding" (p. 12). Particular emphasis of future research related to consensual nonmonogamy should also include exploration of the circumstances that influence the election of consensual nonmonogamy (Moors et al., 2014). For example, in sexual encounters which are comprised of the primary couple engaging in a sexual encounter with a third party or multiple partners together, this may often be seen by the couple as a shared (dyadic) experience which can still be perceived as a form of sexual exclusivity because they see themselves as a singular unit. Finn and Malson (2008) see these forms of, "practices of non-monogamy [as] the common construction of relationships as fortified spaces and exclusive bonds wherein extra-dyadic practice is made compatible with monogamous ideology" (p. 530). Understanding relationships from this perspective – without condemning or asserting

support - may work to broaden the way in which we define fidelity in addition to commitment, trust and intimacy (Finn, 2005).

While consensual nonmonogamy is not an exhaustive area of study, a limited body of phenomenological research related to this topic does exist. One such study undertaken was that of Richard and Dee (2007) who successfully interviewed 4 cohabitating couples who had been involved in consensually nonmonogamous sexual activities for the last year. The study utilized snowballing and community advertising (i.e. swing clubs) in association with its recruitment efforts and conducted (and later transcribed) two interviews with each couple totaling approximately one hour and 30 minutes. As with this study, researchers chose to utilize both IPA and the conceptual lens of symbolic interactionism to perform their analysis. Smith (1996) believed this methodology allowed the researcher to not only understand both the individual and identities of the couples, but also provided the researcher the opportunity to apply theoretical conceptualization to their analysis utilizing a double hermeneutic – that is the ability of the researcher to make sense of the perceived experience of the interviewee (Smith, 1996).

Baumgartner (2017) drew upon interpretative phenomenological analysis to reveal that the nonmonogamous experiences of bisexual women may have caused them to experience internalized binegativity as well as a perceived expectation to conceal or even reject their identity (p. 3). The use of IPA was selected to explore the meaning that participants assigned between their sexuality and their fidelity. Mavhandu-Mudzusi

(2018), called upon interviewers to be both skilled and experienced in their ability utilizing IPA to complete couples' interviews. She also contended that, if conducted with the appropriate level of expertise, rich data that could not be captured by conducting individual interviews alone had the potential to be gained. Such data included interactions, power dynamics and related data that could only be obtained by observing the couples together.

As with all approaches, there are strengths and weakness inherent in their utilization. For example, the use of the couple interview in the study undertaken by Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2018) allowed the researcher to capture rich data that may not have otherwise been obtainable using other methodologies. This was due to circumstances which included nonverbal cues between the partners eliciting additional data, partner responses generating additional questions that the researcher did not initially present and the ability to observe firsthand specific issues related to gender issues, intimidation, and power inequality, etc. However, Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2018) also noted that interviewing the couple together may have, at times, impaired the researcher's ability to gain data related to negative experiences/perspectives held by the female of the couple due to her partner's intimidating or disapproving responses. Difficulty coding the nonverbal responses of the partners was also noted as a weakness in the utilization of this approach.

Similarly, many of the strengths and weaknesses associated with snowball sampling (also known as chain sampling) methods are well documented – particularly when dealing with sensitive populations. On the one hand, it is likely than many studies

might not have been able to have been completed without this form of participant recruitment due to an inability to identify qualifiable participants or gain their trust in participating. On the other hand, the inability to randomly select research participants can cause sampling bias and affect the variability of the data collected since the identified participants may be similar in nature. Bancroft (2000) suggested that individuals who participate in sexuality related research are more likely to be more comfortable with themselves and their sexuality than non-participants and, as such, the data captured may not be representative of the larger population. This issue is less concerning in qualitive studies such as this study, as qualitative (case) studies do not look to generalize their findings and, in fact, typically seek to utilize homogeneous study samples in their analysis (Noon, 2018).

As the overwhelming body of research available related to consensual nonmonogamy has criticized existing research for its failure to consider several key factors, this study looked to fill an important gap in the research literature. Blaney and Sinclair (2013), for example, called for future studies to include: evaluation of whether or not differences exist between married and nonmarried individuals in their decision-making processes, "…the timing of the decision, the mutuality of the nonmonogamy, the frequency of the nonmonogamy, and whether the extradyadic partner(s) are temporary sexual partners or also members of the romantic relationship" (p. 39) while researchers including Bergstrand and Williams (2000) as well as Jenks (1998) contended that the reasons why people engage in swinging could only come to be better understood through

exhaustive study. More specifically, these researchers, "[recommended] 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."

Justification for this study was further supported by the work of Fernandes (2009) who contended that the motivation to engage in consensual nonmonogamy had yet to be fully studied or understood within the context of current research. The works of Bergstrand and Williams (2000) and Gould (1999) indicated that previous findings consisted of data generated from the responses of individual participant reporting as opposed to couples in studies related to consensual nonmonogamy. Gibbs and Campbell (1999) posed the question, specifically as it related to African American men and women, whether or not they had, "…created other types of linkages, which bring them together into a multi-spouse household or family structure?" These conclusions speak directly to the rationale for a study with an explicit focus on the consensually nonmonogamous behaviors of African-American couples. McGinley (2005) called for future research to not only characterize who swingers may be, but also answer questions including, "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?" These questions could also be broadened to capture data related to the most commonly identified forms of consensual nonmonogamy.

The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities previously identified sexual and gender minorities as a recognized health disparity population. This was due to ongoing mental and physical health concerns resulting from societal stigma and discriminatory practices (Pérez-Stable, 2016). Conley et al. (2012) said that future research undertaken by social scientists should refrain from making moral judgments about consensually nonmonogamous behaviors engaged in by adults. Instead, they called upon researches to encourage individuals to be guided by their own needs and convictions in order to shape collective norms of their societies. In doing so, individuals would be more representative of the culture than ostracized within it.

Although the current body of research supports the implication that a significant percentage of the population is actively involved in some form of consensually nonmonogamus union (i.e. 4% - 5%), with an even larger percentage of the population having engaged in such sexual behaviors at varying points across their lifespan (e.g. an estimated 25%), little is understood about extra-dyadic relationships and those who choose to participate in them. Even less is known about the impact, if any, between the intersectionality of belonging to both a racial and sexual minority group. In pursuit of that question, this study looked to answer questions capturing the lived experiences of African-American couples who have elected consensually nonmongoamous relationships. An interpretative phenomenological study was uniquely poised to capture data which remains notably absent within the current body of available literature. Use of an interpretative phenomenological analysis involving this population is believed to have

addressed several areas of further study challenged by previous researchers. This includes (but is not limited) an effort to obtain a deeper understanding of the behavioral (i.e. motivation) aspects of this lifestyle election, the contribution of empirical data which broadens the diversity of the participant pool studied and findings that are comprised of data originating from couples as opposed to that of individuals. While a study adding any one of these contributions would have been meaningful, the completion of a study offering multiple stratums of new data made the current study particularly significant.

Summary and Conclusions

It is suggested that an estimated 4-5% of the American population practices some form of consensual nonmonogamy. This number is comparable to estimations of other sexual minority groups identified as members of the LBGTQQI communities. Although consensual nonmonogamy has been studied as a recognized relationship pairing since early 1970, much of this research specifically features White, middle aged, middle class, college educated men and women as the primary subjects of study. Moreover, in many studies related to consensual nonmonogamy, ethnic minority groups were purposely excluded from the data. As a result of this omission, little is known about biological, psychological, or social, race-associated differences that may exist within this phenomenon.

This study attempted to fill the gap within the current body of literature as it relates to the practice of consensual nonmonogamy within the African-American community. While a single study cannot in and of itself remedy this gap in its entirety,

these findings will serve as a starting point to consider both the potential impact and significance of race on consensually nonmonogamous practices. In exploring the lived experiences of committed African-American couples who practice consensual nonmonogamy, emerging patterns and themes related to the reasons why couples elect to engage in consensual nonmonogamy (as well as depart from it), perceptions related to consensual nonmonogamy, perceived positive and negative experiences and implications for future studies were assessed.

To address the gaps in the currently available literature, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted in a manner that will be further clarified in Chapter 3. This methodology was believed to provide the best opportunity to learn more about consensually nonmonogamous practices within the African-American community in a naturalistic way. As a pure researcher, the ability to conduct multiple, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with a select number of couples collectively captured previously unavailable data related to the beliefs, intentions, perceptions, motivations and revelations of this historically underrepresented population.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide an impartial account of what it is like to live a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle as a member of a married or cohabitating African American couple. An IPA was used to address the experiences and insights of select African-American couples willing to share their experiences using symbolic interactionism and queer theory as theoretical frameworks. This chapter will highlight the methodology used in pursuit of these findings. Within this chapter, the specific research design and motivation for using this particular design method is characterized, along with the role of the researcher. In assessing the role of the researcher, this description also included researcher biases and the limitations and ethical issues that may have impacted the study and or its findings.

An in-depth summary of the study methodology can also be found in this chapter. This summary includes elements such as participation selection criteria, instruments used for data collection (including justifications for use), recruitment procedures, and an outline of the data analysis plan. The chapter also contains an examination of issues that had the potential to threaten the integrity of this study related to credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and coder reliability. The chapter concludes with an overview immediately following a detailed synopsis of ethical procedures undertaken in accordance with IRB approved standards of practice for this study. Walden

University's IRB approval number for this study is 05-09-19-0045723 and it expires on May 8th, 2020.

Research Design and Rationale

This study looked to understand the research question: What are the actual lived experiences of married or cohabitating African-American couples involved in consensually nonmonogamous relationships? For the purpose of this study, consensual nonmonogamy was defined as a voluntary election to participate in emotionally and/or sexually romantic relationships outside of the primary (i.e. married or cohabitating partner relationship) with both the knowledge and consent of the primary partner. These secondary relationships may have occurred in a variety of configurations, including (but not limited to): (a) both primary partners involved with the same secondary partners together and/or separately, (b) one member of the primary couple participating in a secondary relationship or multiple secondary relationships while the other partner did not engage in relationships outside of their primary relationship, or (c) both partners were involved in secondary relationships completely separate from their primary relationship. Consensual nonmonogamy was not confused or conflated with cheating or any form of relationship infidelity. The defining caveat of consensual nonmonogamy was, as the name suggests, consent of all parties.

This study was primarily interested in understanding who the members of the primary couple were. It looked to understand them both as individuals and as a couple. The study assessed their psychosexual histories, perspectives related to consensual

nonmonogamy and how these dynamics evolved over time. The ways in which this form of fidelity affected their primary relationship, and their current views on consensual nonmonogamy were also assessed. The study explored how the couple came to consent to a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle between one another, what these experiences have been like, what were the perceived effects on their relationship, why were they not presently engaged in consensually nonmonogamous practices, and whether or not they believe that they might ever resume consensually nonmongamous involvements with others. The primary goal of the study was to determine if a singularly shared experience exists, and if so, to describe in great accuracy the essence of what it is like to be a member of this sexual minority group. The study also considered what role if any ethnic identity was perceived to play in terms of the ways in which the couples experienced or engaged in consensually nonmonogamous practices.

Lauden (1977) said that, "What we need, if our appraisals [of alternative theories] are to be at all reliable, is serious historical scholarship devoted to the various research traditions in any given field of inquiry" (p. 194). These traditions allow the researcher to organize their thoughts and data in a manner which allows for exploration, comparison, and sharing in a manner that can be universally applied and understood. A qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis was selected to examine the specific experiences of the identified population. This qualitative approach was chosen for this study because its specific purpose is to provide a comprehensive account of respective lived experiences. Smith and Osborn (2015) characterized IPA as an interpretative

methodology that "produces an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions" (p. 41).

IPA features three key characteristics as its fundamental principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. IPA has been noted to be especially useful in the exploration of topics that are complicated, ambiguous, or emotionally nuanced (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As issues of race, sexuality, and intimate partner relationship dynamics are often characterized by one (or all) of these qualities, this study was uniquely positioned to benefit from the use of IPA as its identified research tradition. Study findings had the potential to be further enhanced by the use of double hermeneutics that is characteristic of this methodological approach. Understanding the way in which these elements interact with one another were critical to yielding quality findings from the research question.

Phenomenology is a mental imagery and recall method advanced by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s. Its focus emphasizes the way in which an individual perceives the happenings that they experience (Groenewald, 2004). This means that the researcher focuses on, "how people perceive and talk about objects and events, rather than describing phenomena according to a predetermined categorical system, conceptual and scientific criteria" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 363). The primary goal of phenomenological research is to describe. Groenewald (2004) summarized five distinct phases of phenomenology. These included bracketing and phenomenological reduction, identifying elements of significance, clustering elements of significance into thematic

categories, data summary, authentication and revision as applicable and describing the thematic experiences emerging within the data.

Hermeneutics is underscored by the subjective interpretation of information (Hunter, 2004). Like phenomenology, its approach is characterized by five major distinctions. These distinctions include seeking to understand, observing from a particular vantage point, considering the role of both syntax and history, the use of conversational processes to extrapolate data, and being comfortable with vagueness (Kinsella, 2006). Noy (2006) stated that when effectively implemented, hermeneutics "can generate a unique type of social knowledge—knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional" (p. 327).

The ideographical underpinning of IPA was originally introduced by Allport in 1937. His original intent was to legitimize the study of the individual, both in theory and in practice through the application of epistemology (Robinson, 2011). Piccirillo and Rodebaugh (2019) defined ideography as the study of psychological processes at the individual level. Kimstra, Dennissen, and Jaap (2017) said that the individuality of a person is often affected by those within their social support system or group.

Role of the Researcher

For the purpose of this study, my role was that of an active interpreter. This was seen as a dynamic process which significantly impacted the quality of the data that study participants were willing to share as well as the meaning given to these shared experiences. Despite this role, however, it is important to note that the researcher had

previously had significant interactions with individuals who had practiced consensual nonmonogamy in various professional and social settings. It was critical for the integrity of this study that I remained aware of the ways in which these interactions had the potential to impact the impressions gained throughout the course of this study, including my interpretation of emerging themes and overall descriptions of the phenomenon. For these reasons, bracketing was found to be of the utmost importance in maintaining the overall integrity of this study.

Conversely, it was also believed by the researcher that the personal experiences and knowledge related to the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy would be an asset in the completion of this study. This was particularly true as it related to recruitment efforts, rapport building with study participants and deeper understanding of language, context, and data provided in pursuit of thematic identification. This also allowed for a fundamental understanding of the negative social, occupational, and/or academic consequences that could befall study participants should their identities as a member of this sexual minority group be exposed through their participation in this study. In order to minimize these risks, significant efforts were taken to maintain the confidentiality of study participants including meeting with study participants in nondescript but confidential locations, debadging data, and further securing all information related to this study in ways that obscured the identities of study participants while maintaining their confidentiality. Ensuring that study participants and the consensual nonmonogamy community at large have access to study findings related to the completion of the study is

also a critical component in addressing or otherwise maintaining the psychological safety of this sensitive population.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population selected for inclusion in this study was self-identified African-American married or cohabitating couples. Inclusion in this study required that both members of the primary couple self-identify as African-American in order to qualify for the study. African-American was operationally defined within this study as, “A native born American who self-identifies all or most of their ancestry as descending from the African diaspora (Willis, 2018, p. 10). The terms Black, Black American, Afro-American, or similar were also used by those individuals meeting the selection criteria for inclusion. The rationale for this specific ethnic stratification was to control for cultural differences or perspectives that may occur within ethnic group (i.e. Black) as a result of being born, living or being raised primarily outside of the United States.

For the purposes of this study a couple as operationally defined as a married or cohabitating man and woman involved in a primary emotional and or sexual relationship with one another as operationalized by Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan and Ruckstuhl (2000). This delineation was selected to subscribe to the most traditionally held perspectives of what a monogamous union is considered to be within mainstream American culture. It is important to note, however, that this distinction did not mean that members of the couple must have identified as heterosexual. Their primary relationship

only needed to be a heterosexual pairing. This selection criteria was also selected to conform to traditionally held value systems typically promoted within western culture.

Those African-American couples selected for inclusion in this study were also required to have been either married or cohabitating at the time of their involvement(s) with secondary partners. The duration of these unions were not a consideration within the scope of the study in effort to obtain data related to what role, if any, the length of time that these couples may have been involved in a primary relationship with one another might have influenced their consensually nonmonogamous activities. Cohabitating was defined within this study as a nonmarried couple who lived together and involved in a romantic and or sexual relationship (Reinhold, 2010). No distinction was made between married and cohabitating relationship dyads within the present study.

In order to determine eligibility for inclusion in this study, couples were prescreened to confirm their meeting the criterion for inclusion. An exhaustive search for screening tools related to consensual nonmonogamy yielded no valid measures. As no valid prescreening tool related to consensual nonmonogamy determinants currently exist, general questions were developed to determine participant eligibility for inclusion. Couples were asked the following questions in order to ascertain their eligibility: do you identify your ethnicity as African-American, are you and your partner a married or cohabitating couple, is your primary married or cohabitating relationship a heterosexual pairing, have either you and or your partner participated in an emotional or sexual engagement with a secondary partner with both the knowledge and consent of your

primary partner, was or were these secondary involvements engaged in of your own free will and volition?

As it related to participant sample size, Smith and Osborn (2015) contended that a adequate sample size does not consist of a singularly defined number. This is largely due to the focus of interpretative phenomenological analysis being to achieve data saturation as opposed to an exhaustive body of responses; in essence, depth versus breadth. Smith and Osborn (2015) further suggested that three cases is the ideal number for beginners (more specifically, students) engaging in IPA for the first time. Their belief was that this sample size provides for, "…sufficient in-depth engagement with each individual case but also allows a detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence" (p. 57). Data collection was therefore guided by a goal of producing data-rich findings while avoiding an overwhelming production of data.

Study participants were identified for inclusion in the present study by soliciting volunteers through known consensually nonmonogamous events and activities within the metropolitan Atlanta (Georgia) area. These events included parties, mixers, social media sites and forums, workshops and other locals that members of this hidden population were known to frequent. As this is a sensitive population that requires special protections, specific locations, organizations and internet destinations are not listed in order to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of study participants and their associated peers. Community gate keepers were also solicited for assistance in the event that direct

recruitment efforts failed and snowballing would have become a necessary recruitment strategy (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2004).

Snowball sampling is often utilized to identify members of hard to reach populations (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). While a noted weakness of the utilization of this nonprobability sampling method was noted to be that it fails to collect data from individuals who may be more isolated or less known by members of their peer group (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), IPA encourages similarity among samples in effort to capture the overall essence of a phenomenon. Therefore, this weakness was not believed to be an issue within the context of this study. Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb (2014) further noted that it is quite common to utilize this sampling method when attempting to identify hidden, vulnerable or otherwise sensitive groups for the purposes of study.

Upon identification, individuals were provided with an introduction to the researcher in effort to establish rapport building (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). Participants were then provided with a brief description of the study with information including the nature, purpose, significance of the study, eligibility criteria and a reassurance of both discretion and confidentiality. Screening was conducted with demographic data omitted for those individuals not selected for inclusion in the study in order to protect the identities of the members of the population who fail to meet the criteria for inclusion. Those who meet the criteria for inclusion were communicated with primarily via phone in effort to minimize uncontrolled access to study related documentation and given the option of participating in the study in a controlled,

confidential environment. These locations included the researcher's office in an area executive park in addition to mutually agreed upon locations selected by the study participants.

Instrumentation

Focus group interviews, individual interviews, documentary reviews and various forms of observation are all commonly used forms of data collection used in qualitative study. Few qualitative studies, however, utilized the couple interview (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). The couple interview is a technique characterized by two participants who are knowledgeable about a specific research topic interacting with one another in response to open-ended research questions (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). This technique is also referred to as a dyadic or joint interview (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). This was the primary data collection method for the current study.

In effort to illicit the subjective experiences of study participants with as little interference as possible from the researcher, an interview protocol was developed by the researcher that was consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological studies (Salamon, 2009). This format included the use of open-ended questions which allowed participants to fully describe their consensually nonmonogamous experiences. Content validity was determined by assessing the ability of the study participant to fully describe their lived experiences based upon the questions presented (Brod, Tesler, & Christiansen, 2009). This was assessed in order to ensure that the data collection instruments were effective in

answering the research question. All couple interviews were conducted via audio recording in effort to maintain the confidentiality of study participants.

Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection Procedures

Castillo-Montoya (2016) described the research interview as an instrument of inquiry. It serves to answer questions specific to the research question while holding a conversation with participants about a specific topic (Patton, 2015). Comprehensive interviews were conducted with study participants. This interview took place at an undisclosed location agreed to by both study participants and the researcher prior to the interview in effort to maintain the comfort, privacy and confidentiality of each study participant.

It was estimated that this interview would take between one hour to one- and one-half hours to complete. As future interviews had the potential to be impacted by the initial interview (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010), every effort was made to focus on obtaining as much rich, quality data as possible during the initial interview. These exchanges consisted of semi-structured interviews which allowed for initial research questions to be expounded upon or adjusted to accommodate or probe for additional data that is presented by study participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Subsequent interviews were scheduled to occur only in the event that additional clarification or information was needed. Interviews were audio recorded using a high-end audio condenser microphone and transcription software.

In the event that recruitment efforts did not yield the number of participants necessary to reach saturation, a second round of participant recruitment would have been initiated utilizing a variety of snowball sampling methods. Chain referral sampling (Biernacki, & Waldorf, 1981) is often found to be a highly effective method in gaining access to hidden or hard-to-reach populations. This method is characterized by soliciting the assistance of research participants to identify appropriate candidates for participation in the current study. Atkinson and Flint (2001) contended that chain referral sampling can be particularly effective in recruitment efforts because it, "[imbues] the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member and this can aid entry to settings where conventional approaches it find difficult to succeed" (p. 3). This method is further known not only for producing effective results, but for being able to produce them quickly as well (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Upon completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and debriefed on how the information collected would be used. Participants were reminded about the confidentiality that was associated with their participation and provided with appropriate contact information and course of action that they should pursue in the event that they experienced any form of psychological distress as a result of their involvement in the study. Study participants were also provided with the contact information of the researcher as well as the contact information of the related supervisor or study chair. Study participants were additionally provided with the names and contact information for the university IRB and the research participant advocate. They were also

provided with the opportunity to receive the study results upon completion of the study findings.

Study participants were informed prior to consenting to participate in the study that more than one interview may be requested. This would have been the case in effort to garner clarification of data provided in a prior interview. An additional interview may have also been requested to elucidate on emerging themes that may have arisen from data generated by other participants. In the event that an additional interview was desired, study participants were contacted via the preferred method(s) provided to the researcher during the period of completing informed consent.

Data Analysis

IPA emphasizes an interpretative relationship between the researcher and the transcribed data (Smith, 2007). Its focus is on understanding the meaning of a specific phenomenon for the person experiencing it (i.e. content, context and intended meaning) as opposed to generalizations or unfounded perspective. The data were comprised of transcribed interviews completed between study participants and the researcher. After the transcription was completed, the transcript was read multiple times for the purpose of increased familiarity with the data and the development of initial interpretations. A left-hand margin was created alongside the transcribed data in order to not only flesh out interpretations, but also to summarize data, note identified connections or observations and denote patterns, contradictions (i.e. disconfirmatory or contrasting themes) and questions that may have arisen during the initial stages of data review and interpretation.

A variety of coding and interpretation procedures were utilized to analyze the transcribed data. Coding is described by Saldana (2013) as small number of words or phrases that, "…symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Coding strategies were utilized for this study to identify critical links (Charmaz, 2001), or commonalities found to exist among a data set. A descriptive coding analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) was utilized to compare and contrast the themes that emerge within the data while the utilization of in vivo coding (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005) was considered in effort to capture language or jargon that may be specific to this specific population. Saldana (2013) described in vivo coding as extremely beneficial, "particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice."

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Qualitative research dictates that four aspects of trustworthiness must be established. These elements include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility is often considered the most important aspect of establishing trustworthiness because its function is to align the research findings with reality in order to support that the findings can, in fact, be trusted. As researcher bias, descriptive validity and sustained participant motivation throughout the study were all recognized to have the

potential to threaten the internal validity of a study, triangulation and member checking were both utilized to protect the trustworthiness of this study.

As a student researcher, analyst triangulation (i.e. multiple analysts or observers review of data and its analysis) was used to ensure that study findings included the valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities needed to ensure trustworthiness as identified by Golafshani (2003). Detailed, accurate coding followed by crosschecking codes across interviews further ensured internal validity. Member checking allowed study participants to review study data, interpretations and conclusions (Krefting, 1991). This was an important caveat in ensuring trustworthiness because it allowed study participants to provide additional information or otherwise clarify the data and also correct misinterpretations that may have been inferred by the researcher.

Transferability

As it relates to transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that it is, "not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). With this in mind, this study included the use of thick descriptions possible in order to compile this data base. These descriptions included a detailed contextualization of the social and cultural patterns associated with this field experience (Holloway, 1997). This will allow future researchers and reviewers to evaluate whether or not themes related to situations, times or other related circumstances

are transferable for themselves. Ensuring the transferability of this study in this manner also protected the integrity of its external validity.

Dependability

Dependability relates to study findings being both repeatable and consistent. This means that an outside researcher would likely conclude similar findings if provided with the same data. This should not, however, infer that findings would be exact. This is because interpretative analysis utilizes the researcher as a tool in understanding and giving rise to the meaning of the data collected. This means that even the most thoughtful and in-depth analysis would still be limited by the interpretative skills of the researcher (Fielden, 2003).

Mason (2002) contended that the key function of reliability in qualitative study is to ensure that the researcher has not misrepresented the data or been in any way careless in their data collection or analysis. While dependability can be established in a variety of ways, it was established within the present study utilizing an audit trail (Cutcliff & McKenna, 2004) to evaluate the overall quality of data collection methods, analysis and findings of the research study. Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods and data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of consensual nonmonogamy amongst the identified population (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014), was also utilized to establish dependability within the current study. It also ensured the identification of rich, robust data that had the ability to yield comprehensive, well-developed findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability exists to ensure that the findings arrived at by the researcher are representative of the experiences of the participants and not a derivation of the bias of the researcher. It is similar to objectivity in quantitative research. This element of trustworthiness looks to ensure, in essence, that perspectives presented within the findings are, "grounded within the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018)." Reflexivity was utilized in effort to maintain trustworthiness as it relates to confirmability. Reflexivity was also engaged in through the maintenance of a diary by the researcher which included an ongoing examination of researcher assumptions (both implicit and explicit), preconceived ideas related to the phenomenon and those who engaged in its practice, personal values and biases and how these internal processes may have affected all stages of research study (Sim & Sharp, 2017).

Ethical Procedures

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, participant confidentiality was of the utmost importance. This was largely due to the overwhelming negative sociopolitical stigma associated with consensually nonmonogamous relationship pairings. As individuals who have been known to have engaged in consensual nonmonogamy have faced varying forms of discrimination in legal proceedings, occupational endeavors and other aspects of their daily living (Peterson, 2017), additional steps to obscure the identities of study participants were taken. Participants were therefore assigned unique pseudonym identifiers that they used throughout the course of their participation in the

study. Any identifying information obtained during data collection including (but not limited to) proper nouns (i.e. recognizable persons, places or things) were similarly debadged or scrubbed within the transcription.

In accordance with the protections afforded to human beings electing to participate in research study respect for persons, beneficence and justice were at all times upheld. These principles, as identified in accordance with the Belmont Report (Sims, 2010), were utilized in conjunction with the ethical obligations set forth by Section G, Research and Publication of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014). This treatment emphasized conducting research in a manner which upheld all legal and institutional sanctions. This included proper informed consent, providing participants with realistic limits and risks related to confidentiality and a reminder that they were free to withdraw their election to participate in the study at any time without reason or provocation. The Walden University Research Ethics Planning Worksheet which identified 40 ethical standards for consideration upon university IRB approval was also utilized to manage the care and treatment of study participants.

Prior to the initiation of the study, the IRB was solicited to obtain guidance on which forms should be submitted to the board in order to effectuate study approval. Forms were completed in accordance with IRB requirements and all identified ethical issues related to permissions, recruitment and data were remediated. Revised versions of the proposal (and its related forms) were then resubmitted to the IRB on a continuous basis until IRB approval was obtained. Data related to the current study was also handled

in a manner that provided for the strictest level of protection possible. All data were only be accessed by the researcher, respective study participants and committee members (on an as needed basis). Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-09-19-0045723 and expires on May 8th, 2020.

All data obtained in association with this study was stored as a series of encrypted documents with password protected access. The documents were stored electronically on a singular password protected computer that remained in a locked room during periods that it was not in use; a singular backup copy of all data were also stored in the cloud via secure server until the completion of this study. While these methods were used to protect the identities of study participants in the event of theft, these methods in and of themselves could not guarantee the confidentiality of study participants. This was because informed consent documents as well as raw data contained identifiable information. Since completion of the study, all data been stored or destroyed in accordance with IRB regulations.

Summary

This study looked to provide an unbiased account of the lived experiences of African-American married and cohabitating couples who have participated in consensually nonmonogamous secondary relationships utilizing an IPA. This phenomenon was examined utilizing both symbolic interactionism and queer theory serving as the theoretical frameworks of the study. The present chapter outlines the methodological process for this study, including a justification for the executed strategy.

The chapter begins by highlighting the research question of: What is the actual, lived experience of a married or cohabitating African-American couple involved in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship? The question was selected to ascertain if a singular, shared experience exists related to this question and, if not, what is the essence of the experience had by members of this hidden sexual minority group.

IPA was determined to serve as the best methodology in pursuit of the research question due to its loosely structured processes which emphasizes participant perspective and elucidation as opposed to other processes which may minimize or otherwise obscure desired data. To further support data collection efforts, the researcher functioned solely as an objective observer in the current study. The study was comprised of a predetermined number of African-American couples needed to competently effectuate IPA as a student researcher. The couple interview (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018) was also used for data collection efforts for the study.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, a series of recognized processes were utilized as it related to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These processes included triangulation, member checking, thick description, audit trails and reflexivity. Ethical issues were also considered as it related to the access, storage and protection of confidential data. The chapter concluded by addressing these issues and the manner in which IRB requirements were effectively managed in order to obtain IRB approval for working with human subjects prior to proceeding to the initiation of the completed study presented within Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This study looked to explore, understand, and successfully describe the lived experiences of African American couples who have engaged in consensual nonmonogamous relationships over the course of their marital or cohabitating relationships. In pursuit of this objective, the study posed the question: What is the actual, lived experience of a married or cohabitating African-American couple involved in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship? The study explored both the emotional and sexual aspects of consensual nonmonogamy and variations in secondary pairing structures that may occur. It also distinguished consensual nonmonogamy from other forms of unfaithful relationship behaviors.

The current chapter evaluates any unanticipated conditions that may have influenced the quality of participation for study volunteers. The chapter then highlights specific participant characteristics and demographics that are significant to this study. Participant demographics precede annotation of the data collection methods and data analysis proposed in Chapter 3. This description is immediately followed by the presentation of evidence in support of study trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with the study results and a brief introduction of Chapter 5.

Setting

No personal or organizational conditions were believed to have been present at the time of this study that may have impacted the overall experience of study participants

or the interpretation of study findings. Participants were provided to complete the study in either a natural setting or in a research setting at the research facility. Neither environment was manipulated by the researcher.

Demographics

This study was comprised of three African American heteronormative married couples. Each of the couples had participated in some form of consensual nonmonogamy throughout the course of the marriage or cohabitating relationship. However, none of the study participants were involved in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship with a secondary partner at the time of this study. A summary of each couple experience can be described as follows:

Couple 1

This couple reported that they had been together for 12 years. They met at an event specifically geared toward consensually nonmonogamous activities. He was married at the time of their initial engagement. She was single and initially came to be a secondary partner for both him and his wife until this marriage ended in divorce. The couple maintained their relationship beyond the dissolution of his marriage and transitioned into a primary union with one another. The couple had engaged in countless consensually nonmonogamous relationship pairings throughout the course of their relationship and saw these engagements as a form of recreational activity. Both members of this couple described consensual nonmonogamy as a persistent aspect of their sexual

behavior throughout their sexual histories and believed that the construct of consensual nonmonogamy extends beyond individual acts of engagement.

Couple 2

This couple had been together for approximately 23 years. They reported that they became involved in consensual nonmonogamy after she became increasingly desirous of exploring the feelings of arousal that she felt in response to the sexual fantasies that her partner shared with her. She also was interested in questioning her own sexual orientation, which was bisexual, within the confines of her marriage. The couple indicated that while they were not currently involved with secondary partners, both remained open to future relationships should they find themselves compatible with an appropriate mate.

Couple 3

This couple had been together for 19 years. They described themselves as curious about consensual nonmonogamy after watching a documentary detailing this lifestyle early in their marriage. While the couple indicated that many of their experiences related to consensual nonmonogamy had not necessarily yielded the quality of experiences that they had hoped, they remained open to exploring consensually nonmonogamous relationship in the future, should the right circumstances arise.

Composite Summary of Participant Experiences

All participants characterized their familial relationship structures as typical in nature. All participants denied any knowledge of their parents, siblings, or other known

family members being involved in consensually nonmonogamous relationships during their childhood or adolescent years. They described their consensually nonmonogamous activities as recreational engagements in which their primary relationships remain of utmost importance to them. Each of the study participants said that while they enjoy the explorative aspects of consensual nonmonogamy, they would cease such activities without hesitation in the event that their partner so desired. However, no individual participant was able to foresee a circumstance in which such a request would be made.

While all participants expressed being comfortable with their choice of consensual nonmonogamy, most participants expressed a significant need to maintain a high level of discreetness related to this. This was largely due to perceived societal stigma and fear of negative consequences that participants believe may arise as a result of this becoming known for those who are either unfamiliar with or oppose this type of relational agreement.

Participants reported that excluding their consensually nonmonogamous involvements, their lives are otherwise similar to those of their monogamously-oriented counterparts. They considered their lives to be otherwise unremarkable and suggested that they deal with the same daily stressors and responsibilities as members of the majority culture. Each considered themselves and their partner to be upstanding and productive members of American society who are active within their communities, families, religious institutions, and civic organizations. Participants believed that their lives were in no way different than those within their peer group.

Data Collection

In accordance with the data collection proposal outlined in Chapter 3, detailed semistructured face-to-face couple interviews were conducted with three married African-American couples. Each couple completed one 90-minute interview at a discreet location of the participants' choosing. Interviews were audio recorded using individual lapel microphones and transcription software with both the written and stated consent of each participant. No variations occurred related to data collection methods previously proposed. No circumstantial events were additionally noted during data collection.

Data Analysis

Interview data were initially transcribed verbatim using automated transcription provided by Amazon Web Services (AWS). The data were then reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and edited accordingly. The data were then reviewed on multiple occasions by the researcher to formulate initial impressions of participant meaning, data contexts, and content familiarity. Margins were created alongside the transcribed data in order to summarize data, identify themes, patterns, contradictions, questions and diagnostic impressions of the data.

Categories and themes were then identified using coding strategies which included short phrasing and essence-capturing. Descriptive coding analysis was then used to compare and contrast emerging themes within the data. The individual themes were then combined to present a generalized representation of consensually nonmonogamous experiences among married and/or cohabitating African-American couples. Emerging

themes representing the core lived experiences of participants included seven distinct groupings: Discrepant or nonconforming data were included in study analysis and are identified as variations in participant perspectives within emerging themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The credibility of study findings were established through the use of analyst triangulation, crosschecking codes across interviews, and member checking. Analyst triangulation found researcher analysis to be long, detailed, sensitive, and insightful while crosschecking codes across participant interviews enhanced the internal validity of study findings. Member checking not only allowed study participants to review the data provided, but also ensured that the researcher objectively interpreted the intended meaning of the data collected. The external validity of this study was maintained through the inclusion of comprehensive descriptions of the ways in which social and cultural norms affect the practice of consensual nonmonogamy. This implementation strategy ensures the ability of future assessors to draw transferability conclusions utilizing an index of transferability compiled through naturalistic observation as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The dependability of study findings were preserved through the generation of an abundance of in-depth data. The triangulation of participant interviews, research interviews and researcher notes were also implemented in effort to maintain the trustworthiness of the current study. These notes also included a detailed audit trail chronicling the decision-making steps leading to the establishment of initial themes.

Lastly, the ongoing exploration of implicit and explicit biases held by the researcher were continuously examined throughout the research process. This act of reflexivity was engaged in to maintain the confirmability of this study.

Results

The organization of study findings is arranged by emerging themes in effort to accurately depict the actual, lived experiences of married or cohabitating African-American couples involved in consensually nonmonogamous relationships.

Defining Consensual Nonmonogamy

All study participants reported that they were unfamiliar with the term consensual nonmonogamy prior to their participation in the current study. While the couples agreed that the term was an accurate description of their relationship dynamics as it related to partner awareness and participation, each participant denied feeling any significant connection or relatability to the term as a personal identifier. Instead, participants characterized consensual nonmonogamy as a lifestyle of sorts in which sexual interactions with others is, at times, a very small part. While participants described this aspect of their relationship election as the aspect that is most emphasized (and frowned upon) by the mainstream culture due to societal stigma, limited understanding of this relationship election and preconceived (mostly negative) ideas about what it means for a couple or individual to be consensually nonmonogamous, they agreed that sexual intercourse is often the least important aspect of consensual nonmonogamy. Participants

identified the terms, swinging, swinger, and swingers as the relevant descriptors to accurately depict their consensually nonmonogamous behaviors:

> Um, I…to me, it is…the…an agreement between the couple (Researcher: Okay) to…invite others into the relationship or the bedroom (Researcher: Okay. What about for you?) I mean, I would, I would describe it from hearing it the same as what she just said, um, but um. I, that's the first…that's the first I've heard of [consensual nonmonogamy]. Yeah, I've never heard that term before either (laughter). (Researcher: Okay, so what other terms do you guys… have you guys heard or do you guys use for yourselves?) I mean, we don't have…we don't use terms. We just, we just, we just use, "us." You know? Um… (clears throat) you know…I, whether, whether there are, are names or titles for anything that we do or don't do… you know…I…My mind don't go to that part of it because it's just something that's gon' be done between us regardless (Researcher: Yeah.) So, a lot of these things, I – the terms and, you know, the…I guess, I guess terminology-wise we would be… a…a…a full swap, swinging couple. (Researcher: Okay. So, swing… so you - so swinging then… that is a term. But you go, "But we don't necessarily use it; we don't, like, think of ourselves like that?") I mean…Nah. This is just, this is…whether, whether it had a name or not, we'd still be doing it. (Researcher: Yeah.) You know what I mean? (Participant 1)

> Consensual… nonmonogamy (chuckling)…I'm just saying…like who would come up with that word? …It's got to be like some specific scholar somewhere being - some psychologist somewhere. (Researcher: But what do you call it? That's a – I want to call it what you call it. What do you call it?) Life. (Researcher: Life?) Like we put ourselves in a, in a, in a... we chose… to live our life a certain way. (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.) So that's it. For us, it's a, it's more of a lifestyle. It's not a, it's not a, fad. Like, with some people. It's a fad now, you know, since it's so mainstream. (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.) But we chose to live it as a lifestyle. So, when we vacation, we vacation in that environment (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.), around those type of people. (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.) Um, those type of resorts. That's, that's our choice. That's the way, you know, we like to live. And even if we go to those environments, for example, if I go…I can go for a week and not do anything. But I know that I have his okay to do something. But, I'm just there because I like the open mindedness and the relaxation and (Researcher: Mmm) nobody's bothered me. So, it, um, I don't know what he would call it. I would, I would technically call it swinging. Like living a swinging lifestyle. (used air quotations) (R: Mmm Hmm.) But (H: That's too broad now), Yeah. Now, mainstream is completely different. But it's, like I said, the dynamic has changed. (Participant 2)

> Well, honestly, we don't give it a title because we feel we are just being ourselves. That term, consensual nonmonogamy is rather new to us, so this is a first for reference of it, but it's very fitting. We use the word swinging, and of course that means we are that…consensually nonmonogamous, but well, we really all consider ourselves swingers. I mean, we go to the parties and everything, but at the same time, way play (i.e. have recreational sex) with others. But we get to know the people. It's not just, "bang, bang" hit 'em (i.e. have sex with them) and we're done. (Researcher: Okay.) We actually get to know the person and form a friendship, and as far as sex, whatever happens, happens. (Participant 3)

Rules

One of the most prominent themes expressed by study participants was the importance of rules related to their participation in relationships with secondary partners. These rules sometimes implied and other times, directly negotiated between the primary partners, can best be characterized as general rules of engagement that were unique in nature to the individual needs and desires of the couples and those they chose to engage. Each of the study participants emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining agreed upon boundaries in which the integrity of the primary relationship remained paramount to any secondary engagement. Although each participant identified the primary relationship as superior to all secondary relationships, Participants 2 and 3 stated that some degree of emotional connection was a requirement for their consensually nonmonogamous engagements with secondary partners while Participant 1 took great care to avoid establishing emotional connections with secondary partners that they chose to interact with:

> Well, it takes a long time for us to find somebody actually to play with because of the fact that if they're not interesting or if, if I don't feel a bond with him, like a friendship or something like that, I feel like we can become friends. I can't do it. (Participant 2)

> When you're our friend it is never just sex. It's always outside of sex first and if sex comes along with it, then great, but friends first. (Participant 3)

> I got an unspoken rule, especially when it comes to guys. (Pause) And he ain't never heard this come out of my mouth, so… (grinning) this is new. But (pause), any guy…who I want (cough) to have sex with like I have is something about this guy that I just want I would never have sex with. I will refrain from that whole situation. I'll care how cool use I'll care. You know. You know how the connection is. I don't care how [attractive] his wife is. I don't care. I will not put myself in a situation that can jeopardize where we are… There, there, there are things that I want. Not necessarily people that I want. The 'what' is important. The 'who' can vary… And if I don't never put in that with you, I can never love you. (Researcher: Gottcha.) I could be cool as hell with you (She: Right.), but I could never love you. And because I know that's what it takes to love, to love somebody else, they don't get that. (Participant 1)

Substance Use

Despite their stated desire to mutually engage in consensually nonmonogamous encounters, each participant reported the use of alcohol and recreational drugs (i.e. marijuana) by one or both partners in a concerted effort to lessen the intensity of emotions experienced preceding and or during their first sexual encounter with a secondary partner. These emotions, which were reported to have ranged from feelings of nervousness and anxiety to anger and sadness, will be discussed in further depth as its own emerging theme (i.e. emotional regulation). Despite experiencing these negative emotions, however, participants also described feeling an overwhelming sense of excitement, anticipation and genuine desire to engage in the consensually nonmonogamous behaviors that they ultimately elected to engage in. While Participant 1 endorsed the use of recreational drug and alcohol use as a habitual part of their consensually nonmonogamous activities over the years, Participants 2 and 3 described

their utilization of recreational substances as more of something that they elected to utilize from time to time to enhance their sexual and or social interactions, depending on the nature of the encounter:

> The first time she was with another man, I wasn't jealous, but I wasn't myself. I wasn't trying to control my jealousy in the moment. It wasn't anger, but more like a little sadness and a little jealousy. But I was high. So, the emotions with hidden away. They were pushed away. (Participant 3)

> I was drunk, so… (she giggles) …just thinking of him being with somebody else, even though it excited me in a way, it…it scared me some, too. Because is he…is he gonna like her better than me? Is he gonna wanna be with her all the time? Is he gonna want this situation all the time? Because that's not what I wanted. (Researcher: And did that help?) Believe it or not, that's what everybody says. (She: It helped.) To some level like, you go, "I gotta numb this, like I gotta take the edge off this (he laughs loudly)." Yeah. I was. I was drunk and um, and we were able to go through it. (Participant 2)

> …like I said, we had a lot of conversations before, during and after. So, you know, we would say, you know, in conversations especially when we started 'smoking' (i.e. marijuana; chuckling) and you know, those, those in depth conversations came to be in those moments and it would be, uh, you know (pause) I remember there was a time when I didn't like him…I didn't like to see him kissing people. (Participant 1)

Emotional Regulation

Researcher noted that while each participant expressed a genuine desire to voluntarily participate in the consensually nonmonogamous interactions that they had engaged in, the utilization of substances (i.e. alcohol and marijuana use) appeared to be a reoccurring coping strategy to attempt to manage their negative emotions. This usage seemed to be particularly notable when they anticipated that their primary partner would be likely to engage in a sexual act that they may have been less than comfortable with.

This kind of correlative relationship was most notable in participant data shared between substance use and emotional regulation.

> I didn't like to see him kissing people. (Participant 1)
>
> Is he gonna want this situation all the time? Because that's not what I wanted. (Participant 2)
>
> The first time she was with another man, I wasn't jealous, but I wasn't myself. (Participant 3)

While participants recognized the contradiction between their stated desire to voluntarily engage in specific consensually nonmonogamous encounters and an identified use of recreational drugs and or alcohol to effectively mitigate the presence of negative emotions, participants also described an effort to manage these emotions internally as opposed to attempting to resolve them directly with their partner within the confines of their relationship as a seeming act of fair exchange extended to their partner as a courtesy for the consensually nonmonogamous acts that their partner may have at some point agreed to or participated in as either an act of comparison or courtesy to their partner (as opposed to their deriving their own direct pleasure from the acts):

> … I started really evaluating why do I feel like this? You know, instead of putting my feelings on him, making him fix it (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.) when it's me that had to fix it. You know? And a lot of the insecurities that I did have within the lifestyle was my personal stuff. It was my insecurities with myself that I didn't want somebody who didn't have those to be there. (Participant 1)
>
> …I think I learned early on that (pause) I had to be (pause) accommodating because of what we've done in the past and how we started. And then it will be unfair for me to say, "You know what? You can't do that or have some type of resentment is something that she wants to do. Because I know what you've allowed us to do in the past. So therefore, I cannot (pause) say okay, "No, no." Just completely….I…There'd have to be something just really, really wrong (Researcher: Okay.) for me to be like, "No…" In the beginning, I used to take

> one for the team (i.e. have sex purely for the benefit of the other partner) all the time, and I was like, “I can't do this anymore.” I'm not just going to have sex with him because you’re attracted to her. I can't do it. I can’t do it anymore. (Participant 2)

> …when [her having sex with another man] came up, it caught me off guard. I really wasn't ready for it. So, so, I was like, “Well? What do I do now? You know?” And like I said, I'm tried to push it off, push it off, push it off, to the point where, you know, we got to the point she was like, “Okay, we're not going to play (i.e. engage in further sexual encounters with secondary partners) anymore.” So we came up with a plan to go to a swinger club and find a random dude (i.e. secondary partner that they have no preexisting relationship with) and I know this is completely going against our whole thing (i.e. rules of engagement), but, I had to get, I was trying to get my mental together. (Participant 3)

Participants denied feeling as if these negative emotions were an indicator that they should not be engaging in consensually nonmonogamous behaviors. But, rather, they experienced these feelings as normal human emotions that require some degree of management within all relationships – monogamous and consensually nonmonogamous alike.

> What we're doing is 100% right according to our relationship and anybody who tries to tell us anything different, who tries to mirror what we – You wouldn’t be able to make it. (Researcher: Really?) You wouldn’t be able to do it. (Researcher: Why not?) You wouldn't want to do it because it took so much. It took so much that didn't have nothing to do with sex, (He: Yeah.) to get us to where we are, and the average person couldn't and wouldn't do it. (He: And they said -) You, you have to do what’s right for you. (Participant 1)

> He has never come up to me and told me somebody was attractive. I figured it out from talking to him (He: Yeah.) Which that bothers me. (Researcher: Okay.) That does still bother me. (He: What?) That you won't just open up and just say, “Hey, I'm attracted to her. What do you think?” (Participant 2)

> …in the lifestyle that just comes out that way (i.e. negative emotions related to a secondary partner). Okay, but even in monogamous relationships,

> everybody compromises. You say things like, “I don't want to cook dinner today, but I gotta cook for him because he's hungry.” (Participant 3)

Evolution of Consensual Nonmonogamy

Participants noted a stark difference in the way that consensual nonmonogamy was engaged in during the period that they engaged in relationships with secondary partners and the way that they believe that people are presently engaging in such pairings currently. They described these changes to include a significantly diminished degree of discreetness related to being identified as a member of this sexual minority group and also a commercialization and or co-opting of the associated lifestyle that was perceived to be associated with a consensually nonmonogamous relationship election. Participants expressed a great degree of frustration and disappointment related to this perceived evolution and suggested that this evolution is largely due to previous stigma related to consensually nonmonogamous behaviors being replaced with by a perspective of trendiness or haphazardness by younger generations of consensually nonmonogamous men and women who are more willing to live a more transparent lifestyle (in general) due to their growing up in a culture which includes a perceived expectation of regular social media engagement (i.e. oversharing all aspects of their life), increased acceptance of many identified sexual minority groups (i.e. LGBTQ communities) and their civil rights and a current societal culture which was seen to have embraced sexual exploration (i.e. identity, orientation and expression) and a perceived hypersexualized climate:

> … everybody is so for profit now (Researcher: Mmm.) that they don't care who coming in the house as long as they're giving them $50, or whatever they’re charging that night (Researcher: So, it’s become like, commercialized?). (She:

Yeah. Big time.) Big time! Oh…big time. The lifestyle is commercialized. Oh yes. It's got big dollar signs on it. And when it truly changed was when everybody started caring more about the money than the safety and the fun… It's quantity over quality. You know, let's, let's, let's get 3,000 people in these (consensually nonmonogamous social media) groups so we can, so, so we can, we can post pictures and memes all day long… I can't recall how many times we have been in the Wal Mart Parking lo- I mean in the line and we hear people talking about the party that's happening Saturday at such and such's house. At Wal Mart! They invite the person in front of them at Wal Mart! (Researcher: Wow.) and that's when we started thinking like, "Okay, stuff is changing. Something ain't right." You know, when… (Researcher: Hmm.) And that's honestly when we started doing things differently (Researcher: Okay.) because it used to be where it was a private thing (Researcher: Yeah.). It was it was it was kind of like a secret society. (Researcher: Right. Right.) You didn't know unless you knew. (Researcher: Yeah.) Now everybody knows. (Participant 1)

With some people, it's a fad now, you know, since it's so mainstream. …One reason why I believe discretion is good and, al… also because (He: It's nobody's damn business.) I don't, I don't want to be at work, and somebody say, "Oh, I saw a picture of you because that happened (He: And that happened. Researcher: Really?) to me. (H: inaudible) Yeah, that happened to me…a young, uh, a guy I worked with was like (He: You know, on the phone...), he was like (He: What happened this weekend?), he was like, "Oh (Researcher: Wow.), oh, you have really nice breasts." I was like, "What are you talking about? And why are we talking about this in a, you know," (Researcher: In an office.) uh, you know, "in the hospital? Why are we talking about this…"? He was like, "Oh, a friend of mine is trying to get me to join this group and she was showing me pictures of the group and there's a picture of you in there with your top off (Researcher: Wow.)." And I was like, "Are you kidding?" …they created a toxic environment from…being on social media, making it accessible to everybody. Whereas before - and also monetizing it. you had to know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody, (She: Right; Researcher: Yeah.) to even be invited into something. But social media has made it so accessible for a lot of people that have no business being there because they're not together himself (Researcher: Okay.). (Participant 2)

If we do it, we do. It is nobody does business, but ours. In other words, it is *our* life. And our lifestyle is not up for display. It is not something that we have to convince others that is happening or that is not happening. (Researcher: Okay.) Just like we don't talk about how often we have sex with each other, we don't feel the need to talk about how often we have sex with other people, right? You know…so it's not, uh, it's not a showcase for us. And it's not a badge of honor, so to speak. Where we have to go and convince everyone else that this is where

> we're doing. We're adults. If this is, this is something we want to engage in, we do it to our own comfort level. We do not need the approval of others to say that, "Yes, you're doing it right. Yes. You're doing it. No, you're doing it wrong. You're not about that life or, you know, you guys really are down (i.e. serious about the acts that you are engaged in). (Participant 3)

Consensual Nonmonogamy as an Orientation

Despite having engaged in consensually nonmonogamous behaviors for an extended period of time, study participants reported minimal awareness of consensual nonmonogamy as a formal construct. Upon consideration, however, participants suggested that the current understanding of consensual nonmonogamy as presently understood and described within mainstream culture is severely devoid in its breadth and depth. While they felt that the term consensual nonmonogamy was accurate in its accurately encapsulating both agreement between the parties and their relationship including varying forms of (sexual and or emotional) intimacy with more than one person, participants felt that this was an oversimplification of what consensual nonmonogamy is. They endorsed that consensual nonmonogamy is experienced as more of an overall lifestyle which influences the way an individual engages in the world around them and is not accurately described simply by whether or not an individual or couple is actively engaged in a romantic and or sexual relationship with a secondary partner.

> We will never stop doing what we do simply because this is what we do. Even if we, even if we're not together, even if we're not together over, over, over, a period of time, it's going to come out with whoever we're with simply because it's, it's who you are. (She: It's who we are.) (Participant 1)

> (Consensual nonmonogamy) is about being realistic about the fact that you're human and you're gonna be attracted to other people. You are just human. Nature takes over at some point. It still has to get involved. You know what I mean? (Participant 2)

> I, I would say that there is a (consensually monogamous) lifestyle community only because it exists. A community exists where people do not feel the need to be monogamous and because we do not necessarily know of your term, "consensual nonmonogamy." …being consensually nonmonogamous doesn't necessarily mean that we're always having sex. (Researcher: No?) No. (Researcher: What are we doing?) Sometimes if we're not having sex, sometimes we can just have an emotional connection, not even romantic in nature. You are just an important part of my life. (Participant 3)

When asked if they believed that consensual nonmonogamy should be considered within the context of an orientation as opposed to a specific set of behaviors, participants agreed that consensual nonmonogamy was an innate, likely unchanging aspect of their individual identities that is not defined by the pervasiveness of its behaviors. Participants described themselves as being in control of whether or not they elected to engage in sexually or romantically involved relationships with secondary partners much in the same way that monogamous individuals choose to engage in similar relationships with singular counterparts:

> … there's no label to what this is, you know? I was born the way that I am. So how can somebody, the powers that be, that's sitting on a big Game of Thrones throne somewhere who had a piece of paper and decided that you live, you get married, you stay with one person, and that's what it is. I don't believe that. Nothing else in the world were supposed to do exactly the same. So why this one aspect? This is what it is. I don't buy it. And ever since I stopped buying it, I have been happy… It's who you are. (It's who we are.) (Participant 1)
> It's… well, it's a part of who we are. But at the same… I think it's controlled. I think it's extra. (Participant 2)

> …maybe consensual nonmonogamy can't be considered from a lived experience because you don't necessarily close the door on it. It's just sometimes we are

> sexually active and sometimes we're not. So maybe it's more of an… maybe it is more of an identity or like a sexual orientation. Maybe it needs a different understanding. (Participant 3)

Participants further agreed that while they could make a monogamous election at any time of their choosing (or at the request of their partner), they would not feel personally fulfilled in this choosing, nor would it change their core desire to engage in multiple relationships concurrently, even if they opted not to physically act on this desire:

> …it's hard to go back, it's hard to go down. (Researcher: Mmm…okay.) (he giggles) It's hard to go down. I mean, I'm just being – keeping it 100 (i.e. 100% honest or genuine). (Researcher: Yeah.) You know, if you, if you were driving a hooptie (i.e. a car in very poor condition) then you got a Cadillac, then you had to go back to the hooptie, you'd feel a way. (Researcher: So…So would going back to vanilla sex (i.e. monogamous forms of sexually interacting) be 'going down' to you?) Absolutely! (everyone laughs) (Participant 1)

> I think just because I like doing so much stuff, (Researcher: Mmm Hmm.) I could live with it or live without it, (Researcher: Okay.) honestly. Whereas I enjoy it. You know what I mean? I, I, I enjoy it. And I think it's part of it is because my sex drive is higher than his. (Participant 2)

> I will say if, no, when done correctly, the lifestyle can be great to me because I don't feel that we as human beings, were naturally meant to be monogamous. We're the only mammals that are, so to me that says that that's not natural. Is this forced upon us because we're taught that that's a requirement, but we're taught by man? …Are you really supposed to be with someone, just that one person for the rest of your entire life, like you never swerve? Don't you want to experience something different than the way that you felt when you experienced that person that you're with? It felt great. It felt new. It felt different and you enjoyed it. You enjoyed it long enough to keep it. But are you not supposed to want that ever again in your life, right? It just seems like a prison sentence to me to a certain degree. But this is just how *I* feel. (Participant 3)

This notion of understanding consensual nonmonogamy from the perspective of an orientation as opposed to a collective grouping of behaviors is particularly noteworthy as it would mean that an individual or couple may still consider themselves (and or one

another) to be consensually nonmonogamous even during the periods that they are not involved in secondary relationships. Therefore, an individual who is open to or desirous of engaging in consensually nonmonogamous relationships may also, at times, elect monogamous pairings for unspecified periods in the same way that an individual who is bisexual may choose a monogamous relationship with a singular partner for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons may include a lack of compatibility or attraction to potential mates, desire to focus on strengthening the primary relationship, child rearing, occupational and educational responsibilities.

Stigma

All study participants associated a significant degree of societal stigma to be related to consensual nonmonogamy. This stigma was said to have the potential to negatively impact job security (including career advancement opportunities), acceptance or rejection within their social support system (friends, family members, civic organizations) As a result, most study participants indicated that this stigma had meaningfully impacted the ways in which they had expressed their consensually nonmonogamous thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

> When my mother inadvertently found out about all of this… it was an email debacle. But, she did. I was so petrified. Now mind you, I'm grown, and I was petrified. (Researcher: What were you afraid of?) I didn't want to be that whore. (Researcher: Ah.) I didn't want my mother to think that I was that whore that she told me never to be. (Participant 1)

> I know the way I joke about it is I would prefer to be discreet about who I'm seeing, because what if I want to be a Senator or something one day? (Participant 2)

> If we do it, we do. It is nobody's business, but ours. In other words, it's our life. And our lifestyle is not up for display. It is not something that we have to convince others that is happening or that is not happening. Just like we don't talk about how often we have sex with each other, we don't feel the need to talk about how often we have sex with other people, right? You know… so it's not, uh, it's not a showcase for us. And it's not a badge of honor, so to speak. Where we have to go and convince everyone else that this is where we're doing. We're adults. If this is this is something we want to engage in, we do it to our own comfort level. We do not need the approval of others to say that. (Participant 3)

Despite experiencing (and also perceiving the existence of) a significant degree of stigma, participants stated that they did not desire acceptance or recognition by the majority culture. They did not believe that their sexual desires or practices should be open for discussion any more so than monogamous couples should feel compelled to have their behaviors, preferences or desires accepted or evaluated by anyone other than the partners that they elect to engage.

> And even if, and even if… if you never got an understanding of what it is that we do it don't matter to me at all. (Researcher: Mmm.) Whether you understand it is irrelevant to what we got going on. So as long as we got it then we're good with us? What I need…the only thing I need you to understand is that we're fine. As long as you understand that, we're good. (Participant 1)

> It's nobody's damn business… I don't believe we need to share this with everybody because it's nobody's business except she and I. You know what I mean? Now if we're all together and we're in an environment, and I know you… You know what I mean? Then that's different because I see you there. You know, we've interacted before, but yes, for the most part (Researcher: Hmm.), like it's nobody's business. I should be able to just be out talking to my neighbor about anything (Researcher: Yeah.) and they not have the foggiest idea. (Participant 2)
> Our lifestyles are our lifestyle, and that's just the way we role. (Participant 3)

Consensual Nonmonogamy Within Marriage

While study participants described the acts associated with consensual nonmonogamy as basically the same in and of themselves, they considered the stakes

associated with consensual nonmonogamy to be greater among those involved in long-term cohabitating and marital relationships. The most commonly stated risk discussed was the potential loss or dissolution of the primary relationship, which each participant described as a potentially devastating consequence that they were not willing to jeopardize. While no participant felt that engaging in consensual nonmonogamy posed any immediate risk to their marital relationship, each participant stated that they would immediately discontinue any secondary relationship, or consensual nonmonogamy altogether, in the event that these activities threatened the integrity of their primary relationship. However, none of the study participants believed that this would ever have been an issue of concern for them. Additionally, each study participant endorsed a belief that at some point in the near future, they would resume their engagement of secondary partners.

> I got a question first, because, 'cause I need, I need… clarity on what we're talking when we say nonmonogamy because to me, my relationship is monogamous. Can't nobody else have her (Researcher: Oh!). Can't nobody else have her. And can't nobody else have me. Now, we can share our bodies (Researcher: Okay. Okay.). We can share our bodies, but, but soon as…we turn the light on, it's time for y'all to go home (Researcher: Okay! So, then it's, it's purely just about the sex then?). Absolutely! But the commitments stay - the commitment don't leave, no - don't go nowhere past here (signals between the two of them). You're, you're, you're, you're just, you're a toy - with respect. You know? You know…uh, the same way you reach into your drawer when you and your husband are doing your thing and you pull out your, your little vibrator out the stand, we reach in and we pull out another couple. But, when the lights go on (That's it!), we putting you back in the drawer and we'll see you next weekend. (Participant 1)

> This is my wife. It's a lot different. Rules change. You know what I mean? You could do whatever you want to do with your girlfriend. (Researcher: Hmm.) You know, I can't do that with her… I think we have more invested. When you, when

> you're married, you have a lot more invested. So, you kind of think a little bit more about your choices of who you're going to be with. Um, the environments you're going to be in versus a single person who's for themselves. They're going to do what they feel is best for them, of course. But we always have to think about what's best for the two of us. (Participant 2)

> … I could cut this off without consequence at any time. If I got to choose my marriage or you, this is not even anything that think about it (Researcher: Okay.). Because that's how we went in. And that was the agreement before we went into it, is that we were not letting this destroy our marriage. You know? It is something that we wanted to do when we started out. It was purely for entertainment. You know, we weren't looking for another life mate. We weren't looking for a third (i.e. additional partner) in our marriage or our relationship. We were just purely looking for, um, entertainment. (Participant 3)

Race and Consensual Nonmonogamy

Study participants did not see the intersectionality between their racial identity and consensual nonmonogamy similarly. As no ethnic group is homogeneous and, therefore, variations in perspectives and experiences are to be expected, the degree to which study participants either believed that their race impacted their consensually nonmonogamous experiences or did not was notably striking. Participant answers ranged from race not being a factor in consensual nonmonogamy at all to the issues that exist are comparable to the generalized issues involving race in America. Participants also highlighted the preconceived ideas and prejudices related to race, stereotypical behaviors and an overall lack of exposure and awareness about consensual nonmonogamy as a viable universal relationship construct.

> …and we've been welcomed with open arms, given the red carpet, not treated like a spectacle, except for that one time, but it was fun. It was funny. (It was.) And you know, they… you know, we've, we've had a great time. And then we've also been to Black events and had the exact same experience. So, it really depends on you as a person. If you can't get along with White folks at [the grocery store]

> (Researcher: Right.), you're not gonna be able to get along with 100 naked White folks (Researcher: Yeah.). You know, it's just, it's really got to do with you as a person, and we don't have a problem fitting in anywhere, even when I try not to. (Participant 1)

> But to me, I think that we kind of like I said, as a culture, we're so worried about what other people think about us, that if you go to a Black party to vibe, is completely different than when you go to a White party. I believe that (Researcher: Why do you think we care what other people think about us?). That's just being black eight, period. That's even vanilla (i.e. monogamous individuals). We worry about what other people think about us that way. We try to dress a certain way, we spent all this money on,
> um, on clothes and shoes and gear to look a certain way because we want people to perceive us a certain way and that's just something in our culture. I don't know if it's from stemming from slavery, where we couldn't have these things, and now we don't want anyone to think badly of us. But that's just something that's prevalent in our culture. Be a vanilla or in his lifestyle either way and that I mean, I get to see a lot of different socioeconomic things because of what I do and that's always a point with Black people. We, you know, want to make sure people think highly of us. (Participant 2)

> And I think it's probably because most people only know White people who are swingers and so when Black people do it, it's more, "Uh, y'all doing some White people stuff!" It's almost like when you find someone who can speak proper grammar. It's like, "Oh, why are you talking like a White person? So, this is just for them, right? You know? So, but, that's the ignorance of it, you know? And I don't mean ignorance as in stupid. It's more of ignorance of the unknown. So, when you don't know any better, you can't do any better. People think only White people do it because they don't think that Black people do it. (Participant 3)

Summary

Chapter 4 sought to objectively describe what the consensually nonmonogamous experience is like for married and or cohabitating African-American couples who have made such an election by answering the question: What is the actual, lived experience of a married or cohabitating African-American couple involved in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship? This question was explored utilizing IPA to depict the

essence of consensually nonmonogamous experiences. The study highlighted the experiences of three African American couples as suggested for a novice researcher engaging in the IPA method for the first time. The essence of consensual nonmonogamy was then described by identifying emerging themes that occurred within participant data. These themes included defining consensual nonmonogamy, rules, substance use, emotional regulation, evolution of consensual nonmonogamy, consensual nonmonogamy orientation, stigma, consensual nonmonogamy within marriage, and race and consensual nonmonogamy.

The study found that African American couples are likely to experience consensual nonmonogamy in a manner similar to non-African American couples who make this relationship election. Deviations related to this experience were believed to be due to their being a member of the African-American population in general as opposed to these perceived deviations being related to the practice of consensual nonmonogamy itself. Study participants also reported being unfamiliar with the term, consensual nonmonogamy as a formal descriptor of this relationship dynamic. Study participants discussed the strategies utilized to maintain the integrity of their primary relationships, how they perceived the practice of consensual nonmonogamy to be changing over time and the ways in which they conceptualized consensual nonmonogamy in relation to their overall identity. Study participants explained why consensual nonmonogamy may not be able to be appropriately considered from a phenomenological perspective and the reasons

that they remain open to secondary relationships despite their not currently being involved and a consensually nonmonogamous relationship at the time of the study.

Formal interpretation of these findings will be further discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter will additionally highlight study limitations, recommendations and implications. The chapter will conclude with a conclusion of the study which captures the overall essence of the inquiry related to what it means to engage in consensual nonmonogamy as a married or cohabitating African American couple.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The current study was conducted to understand and explain the essence of consensual nonmonogamy among married or cohabitating couples within the African-American community. Study findings suggested that African American couples experience consensual nonmonogamy in a manner similar to those experienced by consensually nonmonogamous couples within the majority culture. Findings further proposed that racial identity is a less consequential factor than other emerging themes. These findings also addressed themes related to defining consensual nonmonogamy and consensual nonmonogamy within marriage. Table 2 highlights all emerging themes.

Table 1

Emerging Themes

defining consensual nonmonogamy
rules
substance use
emotional regulation
evolution of consensual nonmonogamy
consensual nonmonogamy orientation
stigma
consensual nonmonogamy within marriage
race and consensual nonmonogamy

Interpretation of the Findings

Study findings disconfirmed the assertion that consensual nonmonogamy is a relatively new area of study. However, the contention highlighted in Chapter 2 that the scope of available data lacked the nuances necessary to provide a broad understanding of consensual nonmonogamy was found to be substantiated. The lack of data related to the experiences of both African-Americans and couples resulted in a significant gap in the literature. This gap included significant qualitative data focused on the firsthand experiences of individuals engaged in or who had engaged in consensual nonmonogamy, information related specifically to the experiences of heteronormative couples involved in consensual nonmonogamy, as well as data focused on the experiences of prominent minority groups within the United States, including women, various ethnic minority groups, and persons with disabilities. The preponderance of data also failed to consider consensual nonmonogamy from the perspective of a healthy normative relationship construct and instead appeared to pathologize consensually nonmonogamous behaviors and those who engaged in such behaviors. Finn et al. (2012) said that contemporary research is therefore uniquely poised to provide new perspectives through which to consider the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy.

Although the prevalence of those engaging in consensual nonmonogamy is estimated to be comparable to other sexual minority populations, current study findings suggested that members of the current study population may have less desire to be recognized as a minority group, and as such may enjoy less benefits, protections, organization, and support than members of recognized minority groups. As study

participants expressed a belief that being African American resulted in greater negative consequences than their being consensually nonmonogamous, the current study also supports the importance of cultural competency as it relates to working with members of the African American population.

This study applied two conceptual underpinnings to frame the practice of consensual nonmonogamy. Those theoretical foundations were queer theory and symbolic interactionism. The essence of queer theory specifically seeks to challenge Western cultural beliefs related to heteronormativity and sexual norms. It proposes that human sexuality is fluid in its nature and is driven by not only societal expectations, but also the physiological and psychological processes of the individual.

Within the scope of this exploration, study participants repeatedly described their consensually nonmonogamous thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with a sense of ebb and flow. Each participant explained that they had vacillated between singular relationships and consensually nonmonogamous attachments throughout their lifespan. These activities ranged from casual flirting with others while involved in committed relationships to taking a break from emotional and sexual relationships with secondary partners while participating in social and or civic engagements specifically intended for those oriented toward consensual nonmonogamy as well as frequent and or long-term engagements in consensually nonmonogamous relationships with secondary partners.

In accordance with queer theory, study participants questioned the perceived imposition of a singularly accepted relationship construct within American culture and

challenged the idea that all people are innately desirous of a monogamous union. Study participants highlighted some of the circumstances that they believed to have influenced their consensually nonmonogamous status (relocation, social and occupational stressors, stigma) and some of the perceived benefits to honoring these desires. These benefits included enhanced sexual experiences, increased self-esteem and self-awareness, a greater sense of freedom, and an enhanced sense of community. Couples denied a desire to conform to perceived societal norms or gain support or acceptance for those consensually nonmonogamous behaviors that they elect to engage in.

As it related to societal perceptions related to the morality of consensual nonmonogamy, study participants indicated that they did not feel a need to reconcile their actions nor desires with the mores of the mainstream culture. Each study participant was emphatic in their position that the manner in which they choose to fulfill their emotional and sexual desires is, in short, solely the business of the primary partner that they have made a marital commitment to and the partners with whom they choose to engage. They did not believe that their practice of consensual nonmonogamy should have any further relevance beyond those parameters. Study participants also did not believe that their practice of consensual nonmonogamy posed any moral dilemma as the act of consent between the partners safeguarded their marital bed from being defiled.

Symbolic interactionism is best characterized as the theory that societal norms are ever evolving based upon the ways in which people perceive their social interactions with one another. Use of this theoretical framework was intended to evaluate the ways in

which perspectives held related to consensual nonmonogamy may or may not have changed over time. Findings related to the current study suggested that there may be changes in terms of the ways in which the majority culture views consensual nonmonogamy. Study participants suggested that media (i.e. television, music and online content) has increased both the visibility and engagement in consensually nonmonogamous exploration.

Study participants characterized such changes in perspective as consensual nonmonogamy becoming trendy, commercialized, and exploited by individuals outside of the consensually nonmonogamous community. They specifically attributed this evolution to those who have found ways to profit financially from their efforts to provide services specifically geared toward those who elect a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle. Descriptors of these services included (but were not limited to): private parties, travel groups, product lines, special events and online forums. Study participants did not describe increased societal awareness or acceptance as particularly beneficial or desirous to them as a group. To the contrary, the expressed a desire for things to return to earlier times in which consensual nonmonogamy was engaged in as a discreet practice with only those who were oriented to or interested in participating in the practice itself had any knowledge or understanding of consensual nonmonogamy or the lifestyle and community typically associated with its practice.

Limitations of the Study

While great care was undertaken to establish and maintain the trustworthiness of the present study, some limitations related to the dependability of this study are also noted. Although the evidence of trustworthiness was set forth in Chapter 4 by detailing the utilization of such strategies including analyst triangulation, member checking, use of an audit trail and the generation of rich, comprehensive data, it is conceded that execution of this study utilizing IPA may impair study findings. This is because IPA is a subjective process in which participant subjectivity is coupled with the interpretative biases of the researcher. As IPA provides for researcher analysis of subject data, researcher subjectivity is not inherently the problem, provided that the researcher holds neither particularly positive or negative feelings related to a particular phenomenon (or can effectively manage such biases utilizing related IPA techniques such as bracketing). However, the degree of familiarity with the subject matter (i.e. associated jargon, activities, locations) may have unknowingly limited the richness of researcher analysis despite the employment of member checking to counter such probabilities.

An additional limitation of this study was the small sample size. Three couples (i.e. six study participants total) were utilized for the current study in effort to maintain researcher focus on the generation of rich, meaningful data without becoming overwhelmed by the volume of data generated as a novice researcher. This small sample size raises the issue of generalizability of the findings. Conversely, as understanding the actual, lived experiences of the individual is the goal of phenomenological research,

limited generalizability of study findings is to be expected within the current investigation.

The present study also failed to include African American couples whose sexual orientation did not conform to heteronormative standards. This selection criteria was intentionally chosen in effort to generate initial data related to the identified study population (i.e. African-American couples) that conformed to the most traditional societal relationship constructs. The sampling method in which study participants were recruited to partake in the study (i.e. snowball sampling) was also identified as a limitation to the completion of this study. This is largely because study participants were likely to share similar perspectives, quality of experiences and other cultural similarities that may have unintentionally created a uniformity of data shared. As IPA emphasizes the essence of the lived experience, it is possible that a different sampling method (i.e. purposeful or random sampling) or design method (i.e. mixed method or quantitative study) may yield altogether different findings.

The overall number and quality of consensually nonmonogamous experiences, as well as participant ability to accurately recount these experiences was also a potential limitation of this study. This limitation included (but may not be limited to) opinion bias on the part of the researcher, willingness to communicate (i.e. free from coercion or pressure from their partner) and the ability of study participants to provide data in an expressive, detailed manner. As phenomenological research seeks to generate initial understandings related to a particular phenomenon to provide insight, encourage further

study, the manner in which the current study was executed is believed to hold significant value despite its limitations.

Recommendations

Available data related to consensual nonmonogamy currently lacks the significant inclusion of various minority groups. Therefore, future research should make a concerted effort to include the representation and perspectives of historically marginalized groups. Examples of such populations include women, ethnic minorities, persons who are members of uniquely abled communities, rural communities, non-Christian religious denominations and individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses. Future studies should also take into consideration the importance of cultural competency related to the specific populations included in the study. While this circumstance may have less significance in studies where racial considerations are believed to be of less relevance than the variables identified for study, researchers should bear in mind that most variables are typically underscored by racially interrelated dynamics that typically remain unconsidered and unacknowledged historically within most research study. Future studies should strive to include both.

Further research studies should also take great care to pursue and reflect cultural competency related to the populations being studied. This competency has the potential to enhance research design methods, recruitment efforts, data analysis and mitigation of study limitations. Specifically as it relates to consensual nonmonogamy, future studies should take into consideration that members of various sexual minority groups may not

necessarily subscribe to the formal titles or identifiers that members of the research community recognize. For example, all six of the study participants who contributed to this study reported that they were unfamiliar with the term consensual nonmonogamy prior to their participation in the current study. Instead, each participant contextualized these experiences as some variation of swinging or lifestyle engaged in by likeminded individuals.

Failure to adequately address such nuances in future studies may jeopardize the trustworthiness of study findings and put the populations of focus at risk for unintended negative consequences. Forthcoming studies should also consider the utilization of quantitative and qualitative methodologies that do not include phenomenological perspectives as part of its analysis. This is because study participants suggested that consensual nonmonogamy cannot be understood in such linear terms. Instead, individuals who are not actively involved in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship may still consider themselves (and or their partner) to be appropriately identified as some variation of such (i.e. a swinger, monogamish, polyamorous, etc.) even during periods seemingly characterized by monogamy, singleness or abstinence.

Although Moors et al. (2013) cautioned researchers against concentrating on any singular form of consensual nonmonogamy over another in order to avoid the development of unintended hierarchy or stigma based up prominence of study, present findings suggest that future studies should consider variations that may exist within consensual nonmonogamy. This stratification will enhance the ability of future studies to

more accurately characterize consensual nonmonogamy. As with most phenomena, homogeneity should not be assumed, but supported or refuted utilizing trustworthy, empirically based data.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Findings from the current study (and future studies like it) have the potential to influence positive social change in a variety of ways. The changes may be, in many ways, relational to one another in that it is virtually impossible to impact a microcosm without this effect in some way affecting the macrocosm and vice versa. Therefore, possibilities for social change should be considered on all levels. These points of consideration should include potential individual impact, familial transformation, organizational shift and sociopolitical advancement. Examples of potential changes are clarified herein.

Individual Benefits

Individual benefits may include the ability of consensually nonmonogamous individuals to identify as such without fear of persecution or other negative consequence. This may result in lower physiological and psychological stressors related to being a member of a hidden minority group which may also result in improvements in overall physical and mental health and wellness outcomes. In addition to potentially enhancing overall quality of life and functioning, data contained within the current study may also result in individuals having greater access to benefits occurring at the familial, organizational and sociopolitical levels. Such benefits may be likely to include special

protections that would insulate consensually nonmonogamous individuals from being negatively impacted by varying forms of judicial, occupational, housing, medical, political and social discrimination and or abuse.

Family

Consensually nonmonogamous couples, as well as their partners and children, may be able to live a more transparent lifestyle. This might result in their receiving increased support from family members, friends and other close members of their social support system. Consensually nonmonogamous families may also feel more closely connected to their family members as a result of these systemic changes. This overall effect of this sense of connectedness may result in increased familial engagement and investment in one another due to the reduction of negative emotions such as fear, guilt, shame, rejection, depression and anxiety that may have been previously associated with participation in a consensually nonmonogamous lifestyle.

Organizational Efficacy

Meaningful data extracted from this study can be utilized to increase organizational efficacy in meeting the needs of the consensually nonmonogamous community at both the structural and managerial levels. This may include the way in which affected organizations such as academic, religious, civic and social organizations respond to those individuals and families that include members of this sexual minority group. These responses may lead to the improvement of standard operating procedures,

as well as the use of more appropriate, culturally sensitive language, support, resources, client bills of rights and culturally informed staff training practices.

Societal Policy

Study findings may also lead to the development of empirically based clinical practices, intervention strategies and cultural competency models that emphasize nonpathological perspectives related to consensual nonmonogamy and those who elect it. The data may also lend itself to inform future studies which may further support shifts in societal perspectives related to normative relationship behaviors. Finally, data generated within the current study could also lead to the initiation of formal policies and amendments specifically benefiting those practicing consensual nonmonogamy. This legislation has a possibility to include partner recognition, benefit elections, personal identity designations and representation elections. Most importantly, present data may serve as a tool in reducing societal stigma and lack of understanding related to a cultural phenomenon that is far more common that most individuals may be aware of.

Methodological Implications

Future studies should consider whether phenomenological examination of consensual nonmonogamy is an appropriate methodology to assess this phenomenon. This approach should be carefully considered in light of current findings suggesting that consensual nonmonogamy may not be seen to be a terminating experience for those who engage in it. More specifically, there may be periods in which those who consider themselves to be consensually nonmonogamous may not be actively involved in, nor

pursuing, secondary engagements with others. However, during these interludes of monogamy and or abstinence, individuals may still see themselves (and or their partners) as consensually nonmonogamous. They may also still interact with others who, like themselves, are engaged in varying forms of relationship fluidity and community engagement.

Additionally, those scholars engaging in future research study that emphasizes the impact of racial identity should not minimize the importance of cultural competency. As current findings support that the impact of race may be an overarching aspect of individual identity, perspectives and experiences, a lack of cultural knowledge may negatively impact study outcomes. This may be particularly significant in the utilization of methodologies requiring interpretative analysis, efficacy is identifying and accessing a representative sample, generation of meaningful data and participant retention. Cultural competency considerations should also be prioritized in the selection of theoretical foundations, conceptual frameworks and relevant methodological approaches that support the utilization of community gate keepers and member checking for consultative purposes and receiving feedback directly from study participants in effort to mitigate deficiencies in cultural competency or researcher bias.

Recommendations for Practice

Study findings suggest the need to understand consensual nonmonogamy as a viable, nonpathological relationship construct. Considerations should therefore be made by those within their respective industries to reflect on the ways in which they have the

ability to impair or aid in such considerations. As most public service industries outline some form of ethical or professional obligation to promote, protect and advocate the highest level of functioning of those that their service impacts, great care should be taken by all organizations to consider the implications of the current data within their respective industries. Whether it be the development of specific intervention strategies, to the development of relevant educational materials, to making culturally appropriate changes within their organizations, every individual has the ability to positively influence societal advancement as it relates to the phenomenon of consensual nonmonogamy.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken to understand and explain what it is like to practice consensual nonmonogamy as a married or cohabitating African American couple in the United States. Although the practice of consensual nonmonogamy has been studied to varying degree for the last several decades, minimal attention has been focused on the ways, if any, that race or ethnic identity may inform this practice or experience. This study not only sought to examine these dynamics, but to also give voice to a seemingly ignored subgroup within a hidden population. Study findings suggest that African-American couples engage in consensually nonmonogamous activities with a frequency similar to those within the majority culture. However, they may perceive, or actually experience, higher instances of stigma, a more intense need for discretion and limited social support as it relates to their election.

The manner in which African-American couples engage in consensual nonmonogamy may be rapidly changing over time as the once discreetly practiced behaviors are becoming more openly engaged in, discussed and overall understood. The limited availability of relevant data over a longitudinal period, however, makes this progression difficult to assess. While study participants reported being extremely comfortable in their choice to engage in a consensually nonmongamous lifestyle, they did not feel the need to be recognized, accepted or in any other way acknowledge by the mainstream culture. Conversely, it was their preference that no special considerations or attention be given to their relationship election.

While study participants desired to remain a hidden population, they acknowledge that younger generations may aspire to engage in a more transparent form of consensual nonmonogamy. This contemporary form of practice may include considering consensual nonmonogamy with the same rights, respect and privileges afforded to monogamous unions. These possible trends are consistent with the theoretical frameworks used to examine the construct of consensual nonmonogamy. More specifically, these frameworks contend that all forms of human sexuality are normal, that sexuality is fluid and that society is constantly redefining normative markers through increased interaction with those around us.

Despite believing that they do not need special protections or consideration, historical evidence suggests that those who practice consensual nonmonogamy are indeed more likely to experience negative consequences at the hands of the majority culture.

This not only includes societal shaming, but actual discrimination as it relates to career advancement, legal proceedings, access to quality medical and behavioral healthcare, and civil rights. Those African-American couples may be less sensitive to this discrimination due to their ability to obscure their consensually nonmonogamous identities in effort to avoid their being discriminated against. However, they are not able to avoid varying forms of racial or gender discrimination and as a result, they prioritize a need to address these circumstances over those of their sexual identities.

Although these perspectives are not without merit, practitioners informed impressions and resulting actions should give consideration to mitigating all forms of discrimination, including those that may negatively impacting those African-American couples engaged in consensual nonmonogamy beyond their complete understanding. Future researchers should not shy away from addressing the intersectionality of race and cultural phenomena and not hesitate to investigate the ways in which a failure to conduct research in such a way historically has impacted not only professions related to scholarly pursuits, but also the societies in which it has informed as well. If future researchers do not continue to advance the field of research in a manner that is inclusive, comprehensive, objective and trustworthy, then the psychological research community may be denied access to the very populations most in need of objective examination.

References

American Counseling Association. (2014). 2014 ACA code of ethics. Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf

Anapol, D. (2010). *Polyamory in the 21st century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Anderson, E. (2010) "At least with cheating there is an attempt at monogamy": Cheating and monogamism among undergraduate heterosexual men. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *27*, 851–872.

Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update, 33*, 1-4.

Balzarini, R., N., Campbell, L., Kohut, T., Holmes, B., M., Lehmiller, J., J., Harman J., J.(2017). Perceptions of primary and secondary relationships in polyamory. *PLoS ONE 12*(5). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0177841

Bancroft, J. (Ed.). (2000). *The role of theory in sex research*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Barker, M. (2005) This is my partner, and this is my. . . partner's partner: Constructing a polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *18*(1), 75–88.

Barker, M., & Langdridge, D. (2010). Whatever happened to nonmonogamies? Critical reflections on recent research and theory. *Sexualities, 13*(6), 748-772. doi:10.1177/1363460710384645

Bartell, G. D. (1970). Group sex among the mid-Americans. *The Journal of Sex Research, 6*(2), 113-130.

Baumgartner, R. (2017). "I think that I'm not a relationship person": Bisexual women's accounts of (internalized) binegativity in non-monogamous relationship narratives. *Psychology of Sexualities Review, 8*(2), 1-25.

Bennett, J. (2009, Month day?). Only You. And you. And you. *Newsweek.* www.newsweek.com/2009/07/28/only-you-and-you-and-you.html

Bergstrand, C., & Williams, J. B. (2000). Today's alternative marriage styles: The case of swingers. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, 3*, 10. Retrieved from http://www.ejhs.org/volume3/swing/body.htm

Betzig, L. (1995). Medieval monogamy. *Journal of Family History, 20,* 181-216.

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research, 10*(2), 141–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/004912418101000205

Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, H. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 5*(3), 214-224. doi: 10.1080/14780880802314304

Blaney, A. D., & Sinclair, H. C. (2013). Defining concepts and new directions: A commentary on The fewer the merrier?: Assessing stigma surrounding nonnormative romantic relationships. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 13*(1), 38-41.

Blasband, D., & Peplau, L. (1985). Sexual exclusivity versus openness in gay male couples. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 14*, 395-412. doi:10.1007=BF01542001

Blow, A.J., & Hartnett, K. (2005). Infidelity in committed relationships II: A substantive review. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 31,* 217-233.

Bonello, K., & Cross, M. C. (2010). Gay monogamy: I love you but I can't have sex with only you. *Journal of Homosexuality, 57*, 117-139.

Bowlby, J. (1973). Affectional bonds: Their nature and origin. In R. S. Weiss (Ed.), *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation* (pp. 38–52). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brod, M., Tesler, L. E., Christensen, T. L. (2009). Qualitative research and content validity: Developing best practices based on science and experience. *Qualitative Life Res, 18, 1263–1278.* doi: 10.1007/s11136-009-9540-9

Burleigh, T. J., Rubel, A. N., & Meegan, D. V. (2017). Wanting 'the whole loaf': zero-sum thinking about love is associated with prejudice against consensual non-monogamists. *Psychology & Sexuality, 8*(1/2), 24–40. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/19419899.2016.1269020

Buss, D. M. & Schmitt. D. P. (1999). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review, 100*(2), 204-232.

Butler, E. (1979) (Ed.). Traditional marriage and emerging alternatives. New York: Harper & Row.

Byers, E. S. (1996). How well does the traditional sexual script explain sexual coercion? Review for a program of research. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality, 8,* 7–25.

Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(5), 811-831.

Carrère, S., Buehlman, K. T., Gottman, J. M., Coan, J. A., Ruckstuhl, L. (2000). Predicting marital stability and divorce in newlywed couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14,* 42–58. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.14 .1.42

Carter J. (2012) What is commitment? Women's accounts of intimate attachment. *Families, Relationships and Societies 1*(2), 137–153.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncol Nurs Forum, 41*(5), 545-7. doi: 10.1188/14.ONF.545-547.

Charmaz, K. (2001). Grounded theory. In R. M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research: Perspectives and formulations* (2nd ed.) (pp. 335–52). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Collins, P. (2005). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Conley, T. D. (2011). Perceived proposer personality characteristics and gender differences in acceptance of casual sex offers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*, 309–329.

Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C. (2013). Backlash from the bedroom: Stigma mediates gender differences in acceptance of casual sex offers. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *37*(3), 1-16. doi: 10.1177/0361684312467169

Conley, T. D., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Ziegler, A. (2013). The fewer the merrier?: Assessing stigma surrounding consensually nonmonogamous romantic relationships. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *13*(1), 1-30.

Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Valentine, B. (2012). A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *17*, 124–141. doi: 10.1177/1088868312467087

Crawford, M., & Popp, D. (2003). Sexual double standards: A review and methodological critique of two decades of research. *Journal of Sex Research, 40*, 13–26.

Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. T. Gilbert's. T. Fiske& G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vols. 1–2, pp. 504–553). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Cronin, A. M. (2015). Gendering friendship: Couple culture, heteronormativity and the production of gender. *Sociology, 49*(6), 1167–1182. doi:10.1177/0038038514559321

Denfeld, D., & Gordon, M. (1970). The sociology of mate swapping: Or the family that swings together clings together. *The Journal of Sex Research, 6*(2), 85-100.

Denzin, N. K. (2016). Symbolic interactionism. *In The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (eds K. B. Jensen, E. W. Rothenbuhler, J. D. Pooley and R. T. Craig). doi:10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect143

de Visser, R., & McDonald, D. (2007). Swings and roundabouts: management of jealousy in heterosexual swinging couples. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 46*, 459–476. doi:10.1348=014466606X143153

Dixon, D. (1985). Perceived sexual satisfaction and marital happiness of bisexual and heterosexual swinging husbands. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *11*, 209–222. doi:10.1300=J082v11n01_15

Dixon, J.K. (1984). The commencement of bisexual activity in swinging married women over age thirty. *Journal of Sex Research, 20*, 71–90. doi:10.1080=00224498409551207

Domoney, C. (2017). Psychosexual disorders. *Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Medicine, 28*(1), 22 – 27. doi.org/10.1016/j.ogrm.2017.10.004

Dovidio, J., Major, B., & Crocker, J. (2000). Stigma: Introduction and overview. In T. F. Heatherton R. E. Kleck M. R. Hebl & J. G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 1–28). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Druckerman, P. (2007). *Lust in translation. Infidelity from Tokyo to Tennessee*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Easton, D., & Hardy, J. W. (2009). *The ethical slut* (2nd ed.). Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Elo, S. & Kyngäs, H., (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(1), 107–115.

Emens, E. F. (2004). Monogamy's law: Compulsory monogamy and polyamorous existence. *New York University Review of Law & Social Change, 29*, 277-757.

Engelhard, G. (2008). Historical perspectives on invariant measurement: Guttman, Rasch, and Mokken, measurement: *Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives, (6*)3, 155-189, doi:10.1080/15366360802197792

Fernandes, E. M. (2009). The Swinging Paradigm: An Evaluation of the Marital and Sexual Satisfaction of Swingers. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, 12*. Retrieved from http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/Swinging2.htm, December 26, 2018.

Fielden, J. M. (2003). Grief as a transformative experience: Weaving through different lifeworlds after a loved one has completed suicide. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 12*, 74-85.

Fife, S.T., Weeks, G.R., & Gambescia, N. (2008). Treating infidelity: An integrative approach. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 16*, 316-323.

Finn, M. (2005). The discursive domain of coupledom: A post-structuralist psychology of its productions and regulations. Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Western Sydney.

Finn, M., & Malson, H. (2008). Speaking of home truth: (Re)productions of dyadic-containment in non-monogamous relationships. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 47*, 519–533.

Finn, M. D., Tunariu, A. D., & Lee, K. C. (2012). A critical analysis of affirmative therapeutic engagements with consensual non-monogamy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 27*(3), 205-216.

Fischer, C. T. (2009). Bracketing in qualitative research: conceptual and practical matters. *Journal of the Society of Psychotherapy Research, 19*(4-5), 583-590. doi: 10.1080/10503300902798375

Fleckenstein, J. R., & Cox, D. W., II. (2015). The association of an open relationship orientation with health and happiness in a sample of older US adults. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 30*(1), 94–116. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/14681994.2014.976997

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality*: Vol. 1. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1985). *The use of pleasure: The history of sexuality* (1992 ed., Vol. 2). London: Penguin.

Fricker, J., & Moore, S. (2002). Relationship satisfaction: The role of love styles and attachment styles. *Current Research in Social Psychology, 7*(11), 182-204.

Gabb, J., Klett-Davies, M., Fink, J. and Thomae, M., (2013), Enduring Love? Couple Relationships in the 21st Century. Survey Findings Report, The Open University.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gibbs, T., & Campbell, J. (1999). Practicing polygyny in Black America: Challenging definition, legal and social considerations for the African American community. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, *23*(3), 144-154.

Gilmartin, B. G. (1975). That swinging couple down the block. *Psychology Today*, *8*, 54-58.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597-607.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104

Gould, T. (1999). *The lifestyle: A look at the erotic rites of swingers*. Buffalo, NY: Firefly.

Graham, N. (2014). Polyamory: A call for increased mental health professional awareness. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 43*, 1031-1034. doi:10.1007/sl0508-014-0321-3

Grunt-Mejer, K., Campbell, C. (2016). Around consensual nonmonogamies: Assessing attitudes toward nonexclusive relationships. *Journal of Sex Research, 53*(1), 45–53.

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review, 108*, 814–834.

Haritaworn, J., Lin, C., & Klesse, C. (2006). Poly/logue: A critical introduction to polyamory. *Sexualities, 9*(5), 515–529.

Haupert, M. L., Gesselman, A. N., Moors, A. C., Fisher, H. E., & Garcia, J. R. (2017). Prevalence of experiences with consensual nonmonogamous relationships: Findings from two national samples of single Americans. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 43*(5), 424. Retrieved from https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=124337638&site=eds-live&scope=site

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*(3), 511–524.

Hewer, P. & Brownlie, D. (2010). On market forces and adjustments: Acknowledging consumer creativity through the aesthetics of debadging. *Journal of Marketing Management, 26*(5-6), 428-440. doi: 10.1080/02672570903458730

Henrich, J., Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (2012). The puzzle of monogamous marriage. Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, *Biological Sciences, 367*(1589), 657-69.

Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for qualitative research*. London: Blackwell Science.

Hosking, W. (2012). Satisfaction with open sexual agreements in Australian gay men's relationships: The role of perceived discrepancies in benefit. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, online publication ahead of print. doi: 10.1007/s10508-012-0005-9

Hunter, C. (2004). *Hermeneutics and phenomenology in research*. Melbourne, Australia: John Mark Ministries.

Hymer, S.M., & Rubin, A.M. (1982). Alternative lifestyle clients: Therapists' attitudes and clinical experience. *Small Group Behaviour, 13*(4), 532–541.

Igartua, K., Thombs, B. D., Burgos, G., & Montoro, R. (2009). Concordance and discrepancy in sexual identity, attraction, and behavior among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 45*, 602–608. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth/2009.03.019

Jenks, R. J. (1985). Swinging: A replication and test of a theory. *The Journal of Sex Research, 21*(2), 199-205.

Jenks, R. J. (1998). Swinging: A review of the literature. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 27*, 507-521. Retrieved December 2018, from http://proquest.umi.com/pdqweb

Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, (2009). Pearls, piths, and provocation: Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(2), 279-289.

Klimstra, T. A., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2017). A theoretical framework for the associations between identity and psychopathology. *Developmental Psychology, 53*(11), 2052–2065. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/dev0000356

Kinsella, E. (2006). Hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics: Exploring possibilities within the art of interpretation. *Qualitative Social Research, 7*(3). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-7.3.145

Kipnis, L. (2004). *Against love: A polemic*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education,6*(5), 26-41. doi:10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26

Kleinplatz, P., & Diamond, L. (2014). Sexual diversity. In D.L. Tolman 8c L.M. Diamond (Eds.), *APA handbook of sexuality and psychology*: Vol. 1, person-based approaches (pp. 245—267).Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, (xxviii, 804). doi:10.1037/14193-009

Klesse, C. (2011). Notions of love in polyamory – Elements in a discourse of multiple loving. *Laboratorium, 3*(2), 4-25.

Klesse, C. (2006). Polyamory and its 'others': Contesting the terms of non-monogamy. *Sexualities, 9*, 565–583.

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120-124. doi:10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45*(3), 214-222

Lano, K., & Lano, C. P. (1995). *Preface in: Breaking the barriers to desire. New approaches to multiple relationships*. Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications.

Levine, E. C., Herbenick, D., Martinez, O., Fu, T. C., & Dodge, B. (2018). Open relationships, nonconsensual nonmonogamy, and monogamy among U.S. adults: Findings from the 2012 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior. *Archives of sexual behavior, 47*(5), 1439-1450.

Levitt, E. E. (1988). Alternative lifestyle and marital satisfaction: A brief report. *Sexual Abuse, 1,* 455–461. doi:10.1177/107906328800100307

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Futing Liao, T. (2004). *The sage encyclopedia of social science research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412950589

Ley, D. J. (2009). *Insatiable wives: Women who stray and the men who love them*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (Eds. 1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Matsick, J. L., Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C., & Rubin, J. D. (2014). Love and sex: Polyamorous relationships are perceived more favourably than swinging and open relationships. *Psychology & Sexuality, 5*(4), 339-348.

Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H. (2018). The couple interview as a method of collecting data in interpretative phenomenological analysis studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917750994

Maxwell, J.A., 2005. Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach, SAGE Publications. Retrieved January 25, 2019 from https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Qualitative_Research_Design.html?id=XqaJP-iehskC&pgis=1.

McCurdy, D. W., Spradley, J. P., and Shandy, D. J. (2005). *The cultural experience: Ethnography in complex society* (2nd ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

McGinley, R. (1995). *History of swinging: Steve & Sharon's Internet Lifestyle Club*. Retrieved December 27, 2018, from http://www.stwd.com/ss/info/history.html

Metz, M. E., & McCarthy, B. W. (2007). The 'Good-Enough Sex' model for couple sexual satisfaction. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *22*(3), 351-362. doi:10.1080/14681990601013492

Mogilski, J.K., Memering, S. L., Welling, L., L., Shackelford, T., K. (2015). Monogamy versus consensual non-monogamy: Alternative approaches to pursuing a strategically pluralistic mating strategy. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *1*, 11.

Moors, A. C., Conley, T. D., Edelstein, R. S., & Chopik, W. J. (2014). Attached to monogamy? Avoidance predicts willingness to engage (but not actual engagement) in consensual non-monogamy. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 1*(19). doi:10.1177/0265407514529065

Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., Ziegler, A., Rubin, J. D., & Conley, T. D. (2013). Stigma toward individuals engaged in consensual nonmonogamy: Robust and worthy of additional research. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 13*(1), 52-69.

Moors, A. C., Rubin, J. D., Matsick, J. L., Ziegler, A., Conley, T. D. (2014). It's not just a gay male thing: Sexual minority women and men are equally attracted to consensual non-monogamy. *Journal for Psychology, 22*(1), 1-13.

Moors, A. C., & Schechinger, H. (2014). Understanding sexuality: implications of Rubin for relationship research and clinical practice. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 29*(4), 476-482. doi:10.1080/14681994.2014.941347

Morgan D. L., Ataie J., Carder P., Hoffman K. (2013). Introducing dyadic interviews as a method for collecting qualitative data: Advancing qualitative methods. *Qualitative Health Research, 23*, 1276–1284.

Morrow, S. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,52*(2), 250-260.

(Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education, 14*(3). doi: 10.5812/sdme.67670

Nöel, M. J. (2006). Progressive polyamory: Considering issues of diversity. *Sexualities, 9*(5), 602– 620.

Noon, E., J. (2018). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: An appropriate methodology

for educational research. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 6*, 1, 75-83.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Page, E. H. (2004). Mental health services experiences of bisexual women and bisexual men: An empirical study. *Current Research on Bisexuality*, *4*, 137–160. doi:10.1300/J159v04n01_11

Palmer, M., Larkin, M., De Visser, R., & Fadden, G. (2010). Developing an interpretative phenomenological approach to focus group data. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *7*(2), 99-121.

Penke, L., & Asendorpf, J. B. (2008). Beyond global sociosexual orientations: A more differentiated look at sociosexuality and its effects on courtship and romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*, 1113–1135.

Perel, E. (2006). *Mating in captivity: Reconciling the erotic + the domestic*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Pérez-Stable, E., J. (2016). Director's message: Sexual and gender minorities formally designated as a health disparity population for research purposes. National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Retrieved from https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/about/directors-corner/message.html.

Peterson, J. (2017). Polyfidelity and the dynamics of group romantic relationships. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection.

Piccirillo, M. L., & Rodebaugh, T. L. (2019). Review: Foundations of idiographic methods in psychology and applications for psychotherapy. *Clinical Psychology Review*. Retrieved from https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2019.01.002

Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J., A. (2012). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal, 18*(2), 361-369.

Pillai-Friedman, S., Pollitt, J.L., & Castaldo, A. (2015). Becoming kink-aware: A necessity for sexuality professionals. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 30,* 196—210. doi:10.1080/14681994.2014.975681

Pistrang, N. (2012). Varieties of qualitative research: A pragmatic approach to selecting methods. In H. Cooper, P. Camic, D. Long, D., A. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. Sher (Eds.), *APA Handbook of research methods in psychology (Vol. 2).* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Price, M. E. (2011). Why we think monogamy is normal: How polygamy became the exception. *Psychology Today*, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/darwin-eternity/201109/why-we-think-monogamy-is-normal (April 7, 2018)

Rahman, M. & Jackson, S. (2010). *Gender and sexuality: Sociological approaches.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rankin, C. H., Abrams, T., Barry, R. J., Bhatnagar, S., Clayton, D. F., Colombo, J., & Marsland, S. (2009). Habituation revisited: An updated and revised description of

the behavioral characteristics of habituation. *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, *92*, 135-138.

Rappaport (1987). Phenomenon of interest, framework, or theory? Building better explanations in community psychology. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 7*(2), 1-6.

Reinhold S. (2010). Reassessing the link between premarital cohabitation and marital instability. Demography, 47(3), 719-33.

Richard, de V., & Dee, M. (2007). Swings and roundabouts: Management of jealousy in heterosexual 'swinging' couples. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *24*(2), 459. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1348/014466606X143153

Robinson, O. C. (2011). The idiographic / nomothetic dichotomy: Tracing historical origins of contemporary confusions. *History & Philosophy of Psychology*, *13*(2), 32–39. Retrieved from https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=70483195&site=eds-live&scope=site

Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2012). Status incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice toward female leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*, 165–179.

Rubel, A. N., & Bogaert, A. B. (2015) Consensual nonmonogamy: Psychological well-being and relationship quality correlates. *The Journal of Sex Research, 52*(9), 961-982, doi: 10.1080/00224499.2014.942722

Rubin, G.S. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of politics of sexuality. In C.S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 267-319). Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Rubin, A. M., & Adams, J. R. (1986). Outcomes of sexually open marriages. *Journal of Sex Research, 22,* 311–319. doi:10.1080/00224498609551311

Rubin, J. D., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., Ziegler, A., & Conley, T. D. (2014). On the margins: Considering diversity among consensually non-monogamous relationships. *Journal of Psychology, 22*(1), 1-23.

Rubin, G. (1999). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In R. Parker & P. Aggleton (Eds.), *Culture, society and sexuality: A reader*, 143-179. London: UCL Press.

Salamon, G. (2009). Justification and queer method, or leaving philosophy. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, 24*(1), 225-230. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.00015.x

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Scheidel, W. (2009). Princeton/Stanford working papers in classics: Monogamy and polygyny. Stanford University. https://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/scheidel/010903.pdf

Schmader, T., & Stone, J. (2008). Toward a problem-focused understanding of prejudice. *Psychological Inquiry, 19*(2), 108–113.

Schmitt, D. P. (2005). Sociosexuality from Argentina to Zimbabwe: A 48-nation study of sex, culture, and strategies of human mating. *Behavioral & Brain Sciences, 28*, 247-275.

Sheff, E. (2006). Poly-Hegemonic masculinities. *Sexualities 9*(5), 621–642.

Sheff, E. & Hammers, C. (2011). The privilege of perversities: Race, class and education among polyamorists and kinksters. *Psychology & Sexuality, 2*(3), 198-22.

Sim, J. & Sharp, K. (1998). A critical appraisal of the role of triangulation in nursing research. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 35*, 23–31.

Sims, J. (2010). A brief review of the Belmont Report. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, *29*(4), 173-174. doi: 10.1097/DCC.0b013e3181de9ec5

Smith, J. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health*, *11*, 261–271.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research.* London: SAGE.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British Journal of Pain, 9*(1), 41-2.

Sprecher, S., & Hatfield, E. (1996). Premarital sexual standards among U.S. college students: Comparison with Russian and Japanese students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 25,* 261–288.

Taormino, T. (2008). *Opening up*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.

Tiefer, L. (1987). Social constructionism and the study of human sexuality. In P. Shaver & C. Hendrick (Eds.), *Sex and gender*, 70-94. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

van Hooff, J. (2013) *Modern couples? Continuity and change in heterosexual relationships*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Tufford, L. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work, 11*(1), 80-96. doi:10.1177/1473325010368316

van Hooff, J. (2016). An everyday affair: Deciphering the sociological significance of women's attitudes towards infidelity. *The Sociological Review* doi:10.1111/1467-954X.12417

Visschedijk, M. (2015). Review of the Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies Conference (NMCI). *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, (4), 61–65. Retrieved from https://search-ebscohost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=111962413&site=eds-live&scope=site

Viwatpanich, K. (2010). Swinging: Extramarital sexuality in Thai society. *Anthropological Notebooks*, 16, 57–70. Retrieved from http://www.drustvo-antropologov.si/AN/2010_2.html

Weitzman, G. (2006). Therapy with clients who are bisexual and polyamorous. *Journal of Bisexuality, 6*, 137-164.

Willis, T. (2018) Facilitating factors and positive reasons African American men attend psychotherapy. Walden University ScholarWorks. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6149/

Wosik-Correa, K. (2010). Agreements, rules and agentic fidelity in polyamorous relationships. *Psychology & Sexuality, 1*(1), 44–61.

Zimmerman, K. J. (2012). Clients in sexually open relationships: Considerations for therapists. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 24*(3), 272–289. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/08952833.2012.648143

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Participants' Experience of Consensual Nonmonogamy

1. What does the term, "consensual nonmonogamy," mean to you?

Prompt: How would you describe it?

2. What other terms might you use to describe it?
3. How does this term relate to your own life?
4. How did the two of you come to be consensually nonmonogamous?

Identity

5. How would you describe yourself?
6. How would you describe your partner?
7. Do you feel that consensual nonmonogamy is an important part of your identity?
   Prompt: Why or why not?
8. How about the way that other people see you?

Experiences

9. How do you feel consensual nonmonogamy has affected your life?
10. What, if anything, did you find enjoyable about consensual nonmonogamy?
11. What, if anything, did you not find enjoyable about consensual nonmonogamy?
12. Why are you currently monogamous?
13. What is the likelihood that you would consider consensual nonmonogamy in the future?

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Date:

Dear (Insert Participant Name Here),

My name is Krishna Jones and I am a doctoral student in the General Psychology program with a specialization in Research Methods and Evaluation at Walden University. A mutual associate, (insert referral source here), thought that you and your partner might be ideal participants for my current research study which seeks to learn more about consensual nonmonogamy in the African-American community.

If possible, I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and your partner more about the study. If the two of you are able to speak with me privately by telephone, I can provide a more detailed explanation about the study to help you determine if you would be willing to volunteer your participation. I anticipate that the call should last no more than 10 minutes.

You are also welcome to contact me at any time that may be convenient for the two of you. I can be reached either by telephone at (study phone listed here) or you can email me at (email address listed here).

Sincerely,
Krishna Jones, LPC, CFMHE, NCC
Doctoral Candidate in General Psychology, Research Methods and Evaluation Specialization
Walden University
(university address listed here)

Appendix C: Researcher Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 04-Apr-2019
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 31205908

This is to certify that:

Krishna Jones

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student Researchers (Curriculum Group)
Student Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w56912ac3-7c8b-4ccd-8735-61c1e91bbd30-31205908

Appendix D: Study Flyer

Calling Participants for a research study on: **Consensual Nonmonogamy**

A confidential, interview-based study is interested in learning more about consensual nonmonogamy within the African-American community. Eligible study participants include married or cohabitating couples who are:

- Opposite sex partners
- African-American
- Currently monogamous but have previously been involved with 1 or more additional partners with the knowledge, consent and/or inclusion of their current partner

Contact Researcher via phone or text at:
(678) 210-1473

Researcher is a doctoral student completing dissertation research in the General Psychology program at Walden University. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University.

Appendix E: Social Media Flyer