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# The Lived Experience of Monogamy Among Gay Men in Monogamous Relationships

Kellie L. Barton  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kellie Barton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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## Review Committee

Dr. Chet Lesniak, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Scott Friedman, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Susan Marcus, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2020

Abstract

The Lived Experience of Monogamy Among Gay Men in Monogamous Relationships

by

Kellie Barton

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, University of Phoenix, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

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## Abstract

Research on male gay relationships spans more than 50 years, and the focus of most of this research has been on understanding the development processes, consequences, and risk factors of nonmonogamous relationships. Few researchers have explored the nature and meaning of monogamy in the male gay community. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore the lived experience of monogamy to give voice to other expressions of gay male relationships and potentially add to the literature surrounding clinical implications of treatment. The framework for developing the research emerged from the construct of the monogamy gap, derived from theories of cultural hegemony and cognitive dissonance. Giorgi's phenomenological approach was used to explore 2 primary research questions: (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? and (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay relationships? Interviews were conducted with 6 adult men who reported being monogamous for at least 12 months. The results revealed that the experience of monogamy is not as portrayed in typical research and literature. Key themes that emerged were family of origin, societal expectations, infidelity versus monogamy, and communications of expectations related to monogamy. The discussion of social change centers on medical, mental, and personal well-being of this target group, and sharing the results of this study to inform researchers, clinicians, and those working with marginalized gay adult men.

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## Dedication

For my children, Joey, Aubrey, and Kai, who have sacrificed with me through this experience. Their support, encouragement, and understanding of the time and commitment to this process has been a daily reminder to me of why I began this journey and who I am working for. To all the men who have experienced negative stigma due to their sexual orientation, know that there are researchers working to obtain more accurate data, clinicians striving to provide a greater quality of care, and people who desire a better understanding of your experience.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In this study, I aimed to provide insight into the lived experience of monogamy in gay males who have engaged in monogamous relationships. In both research and literature, monogamy in gay male couples continues to be an under-researched or misrepresented area that lacks an understanding of perspectives, expectations, and personal views of gay males in the context of monogamous relationships. The perceptions and experiences of gay males in this study provided the vehicle to explore the implications of monogamy for social, mental, and physical health. The focus of most of the available research has been on the combining of data on heterosexual and gay relationships or data related to heterosexual monogamy, thus generalizing the data to gay male relationships (Peplau & Cochran, 1990). However, as evidenced by the research, typical heterosexual monogamy is distinctly different from the typical relationship constructs of gay males (Peplau & Cochran, 1981). A dominant heteronormative focus between a man and a woman was identified in Umberson, Thomeer, and Lodge's (2015) study. With the shift in focus, the study highlighted ways in which the experiences of intimacy differs in same-sex versus different-sex relationships.

Included in this chapter is an introduction to the issue of monogamy in gay males, including a summary of the research literature on monogamous gay males, identification of the gap in knowledge that I addressed in this study, and justification of the need for this study. Further, in this chapter, I address the research questions, conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, specific design and nature of the study, specific definitions of terms included in the study, assumptions about the research design and

their possible effect on the study, scope and delimitations, and explanation regarding the reasoning for the selection of the population. I review limitations of the study, transferability, dependability, and biases along with the significance of the study regarding social change. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the information identified.

### **Background of the Study**

Research on the issue of monogamy in gay male couples has indicated that same-sex couples enter into an explicit agreement about the boundaries of what is acceptable and not acceptable in their relationship, particularly in terms of the nature and boundaries of their sexual relationship (Mitchell, 2014). Among the range of relationship agreements that same-sex couples have adopted, nonmonogamous relationships, such as open relationships, are common among gay male couples (Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, & Grov, 2012). DaSilva-Mendes and Pereira (2013) found that monogamous relationships are more common in heterosexual couples compared to gay male couples.

Previous researchers have indicated that nonmonogamous relationships are comparable with monogamous relationships in terms of sexual satisfaction, communication, and overall relationship quality (Parsons, et al., 2012). The quality of relationships is more associated with adherence to the agreed type of relationship and not with any specific type of relationship agreement among gay male couples (Mitchell, Harvey, Champeau, Moskowitz, & Seal, 2012). Moreover, the level of satisfaction of gay male couples who are in nonmonogamous arrangements tends to be higher when there are explicit rules about the relationship (Ramirez & Brown, 2010). Therefore, although previous research has provided information about preferences for monogamy and

nonmonogamy in gay male relationships, a gap remains in the literature specifically related to a more in-depth understanding of how gay male couples experience a successful monogamous relationship.

Many researchers have seemingly neglected exploring relationship dynamics and inquiring about satisfaction in monogamous gay male couples (Mitchell, et al., 2012; Mohr, Selterman, & Fassinger, 2013; Parsons, et al., 2012). The reasons for this neglect may be attributed to two factors. First, there has been a lack of studies on monogamous relationships among gay male couples because of the prevalence of nonmonogamous arrangements in gay male relationships. Second, evidence has supported that some nonmonogamous gay male couples are just as satisfied in their relationship compared with monogamous couples (Mitchell, et al., 2012; Mohr, et al., 2013; Parsons, et al., 2012). According to Pittman, both research and literature limitations and biases can arise from an overemphasis on emic perspectives along with a lack of critical assessment (Pittman, 1990). Shattuck (2015) highlighted that the lack of comparative research on homosexual couples and the comparison with heterosexual couples have led to inaccurate predictions of both differences and similarities in the domains of relationship satisfaction.

Marriage among gay male couples has implications for stability even though there are arguments that the quality of the relationship is not related to the relationship arrangement (Chamie & Mirkin, 2011; Mohr, et al., 2013; Parsons, et al., 2012). When gay male couples formalize their relationship in terms of legal procedures such as marriage or legal unions, they often conform to heterosexual norms such as monogamy (Hopkins, Sorensen, & Taylor, 2013).

Anderson (2012) identified a phenomenon, related to relationships among all genders, called the *monogamy gap*. This is the inability to reconcile fidelity and the desire to have a sexual relationship outside of the committed relationship. This theory, the central focus in my study, contends that the cognitive dissonance between monogamy and nonmonogamy may lead to relationship problems such as cheating with another person or decreased level of satisfaction with the relationship. Because monogamy is one type of arrangement within the continuum of relationship agreements among gay male couples, adherence to the agreed arrangement of monogamy is critical for relationship quality (Mitchell, et al., 2012). When there is discrepancy between the agreed upon relationship arrangement, such as in the case of monogamy, and the actual practices of the couple, relationship quality may suffer (Anderson, 2012).

There is an argument, as well as perhaps a social perception in and outside of the gay male community, that monogamy is not compatible with long-term relationship satisfaction among gay males (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Even though Anderson (2012) argued that monogamy is not an ideal relationship arrangement, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, and Conley (2013) found that gay male couples have positive perceptions about monogamy. This finding was an alternative perspective to the more prevalent literature indicating wide support for, and practice of, nonmonogamous relationships among gay male couples (DaSilva-Mendes, et al., 2013; Mohr, et al., 2013; Parsons, et al., 2012). Two of the often-cited benefits of monogamy include the promotion of commitment and stability and prevention of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Moors, et al., 2013). As a result, Moors, et al. also found that there are some gay male couples who perceive



monogamous relationships more positively than nonmonogamous relationships. How they negotiate the monogamy gap and feel about monogamy requires further study.

### **Problem Statement**

Although there was considerable research on monogamy and nonmonogamy in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, more research is called for to better understand the monogamous experience in gay men. The current literature has downplayed or avoided the experiences of gay males who enter into monogamous relationships. This gap in literature coincides with pervasive media and cultural stereotypes of gay male couples as nonmonogamous (Moors, et al., 2013; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

My purpose in this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of gay men who are in successful monogamous relationships. I intended for this study to contribute to the body of knowledge on gay male relationships, and I focused on the experiences of monogamous relationships and the monogamy gap as the primary phenomena of interest.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships?
2. What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay relationships?

I used the identified research questions as the guide for the direction of the research. I used a phenomenological methodology research inquiry for this qualitative study.

## **Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundation**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual lens incorporated considered the potential difficulties gay males faced in navigating personal desires, stigma, changing roles, societal views, and relationship constructs. Waite and Gallagher (2002) argued that the protection of the boundaries of a relationship, as well as its success or failure, was due in part to the external recognition of the relationship. Family law, clarity of relationship status, and respect of the relationship are factors considered to contribute to its maintenance. With the recent social and legal changes surrounding gay male relationships, the assumed roles undertaken by gay male couples or views related to relationship expectations may be changing. This redefining of roles warranted further study of how gay male couples view and perceive their roles in the context of this change.

Monogamy gap theory, which describes the factors that contribute to the participant's decision to enter and remain in monogamous relationships, provided the conceptual framework of the study. This expectation should not be considered exclusive based on sexual orientation. According to Anderson (2012), entering a monogamous relationship implies an expectation for the couple to uphold the requirements of fidelity. The inability to reconcile the desire to have sexual couplings outside of the committed relationship is known as the monogamy gap (Anderson, 2012).

Although LaSala did not specifically test the monogamy gap theory, the author highlighted the significant influence of infidelity on both the individual participant and the affected partner. LaSala indicated that these occurrences can potentially result in infidelity in future relationships, negative views of the self or partner, decline in mental

and physical wellness, reduction in future relationship satisfaction, shift in views or beliefs toward relational constructs and dynamics, and development of negative relationship patterns (LaSala, 2004). There may be social and personal expectations of nonmonogamy among gay males, which may affect their relationship choices and outcomes.

Views surrounding relationship constructs, acceptable behavior, and personal values and beliefs systems can lead to conflict between self-concept and behavior (Foster & Misra, 2013). Festinger (1957) highlighted that such conflict can lead to *cognitive dissonance*. When dissonance occurs, individuals will seek to reduce discomfort by trivializing their behaviors (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995). According to Nisbett and Wilson (1977), rationalizing infidelity is often influenced by self-serving motives. This leads to lack of insight into behaviors and a reliance on social heuristics as an explanation. These social-cognitive factors influence explanations used to maintain self-views and behaviors.

Monogamy gap theory is grounded in the theories of cognitive dissonance and cultural hegemony. Cognitive dissonance is identified as the psychological or mental discomfort that one experiences when they hold two or more contradictory ideas, values, or beliefs simultaneously. When the individual is confronted with facts that contradict ideals, values, or personal beliefs, they will seek to resolve the conflict and reduce discomfort (Festinger, 1957). Gramsci's *cultural hegemony* theory (1992) is the idea that the dominant nation or culture exerts influence over conduct and values.

Although these theories have well regarded support in this industry, they have their critics. Welles (2017) identified cognitive dissonance as lacking in terms of

measurement, predictability, and occurrence outside of the lab as anecdotal. Althusser (2014) identified a conceptual criticism of cultural hegemony as the need to reject absolute historicism proposed by Gramsci (1992) and the need to include ideological states in the understanding of the structure of complex relationships.

The connection to this phenomenon in the identified framework reviewed the barriers, inability, or difficulty to reconcile dual desires within relationships in addition to ways that gay males can experience the monogamy gap and additional factors that may create difficulties or challenges.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) and Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Festinger's research hypothesized that attitudes can affect actions through cognitive dissonance. According to this theory, mental discomfort can occur when individuals take actions that are in direct conflict with their stated attitude. When this occurs, individuals may be more apt to change their attitudes to align with their actions. This occurrence leads to both attitude formation and change. Cognitive dissonance theory views preferences, ideology, and attitudes as direct consequences of actions; making this theoretical foundation well suited to explore instances in which actions and choices related to monogamy in gay males are in conflict; further helping us understand the sources of these attitudes. Gramsci's *cultural hegemony* theory was based on the idea that societies are dominated by the beliefs, perceptions, values, morals, and explanations imposed on them by the ruling-class worldview. Thus, these views become the accepted cultural norms and establish the dominant ideology. This ideology deems political, social, and economic standards as

applicable to all (Gramsci, 1992). When this occurs, individuals may be more apt to change their behaviors to align with societal norms. This occurrence can lead to conflict and further dissonance between attitude, beliefs, values, and ultimate behaviors or decisions.

In the study conducted by Foster and Misra (2013) the authors applied the theory of cognitive dissonance to examine individual views of loyalty, fidelity, and self-concept through the lens of infidelity. When discrepancy between actions and self-concept occurs, cognitive dissonance is theorized to take place (Aronson, 1999; Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962). When individuals engage in behaviors that are in conflict with their self-concept, it is theorized that they will be disposed to experience psychological discomfort and poor affect (Harmon-Jones, 2000). Simon, et al. (1995) identified that when cognitive dissonance occurs, individuals may seek to alleviate their discomfort through the use of: minimizing the importance of their infidelities, or trivializing. This study can be applied to settings in which gay males make relationship choices or take actions and later change their attitudes to be consistent with their choices.

Through research on cultural hegemony theory, Othman (2014) elaborated on the historical efforts by those in power to secure dominance over nations, people, and minority groups. This dominance resulted in the subjugation of marginalized groups who did not align with long-standing stereotypes perpetuated as normative and legitimate. Othman explored the retention of normative sexuality as a central theme in U.S. culture. These themes were identified as creating difficulties for gay males attempting to make sense of their world, specifically when being viewed as individuals attempting to disrupt the heteronormative sexual boundaries. These boundaries perceived heterosexuality as

the norm and homosexuality as it's opposite. This recent study highlights the lack of acceptance of, or resistance to, gay relationships by the dominant cultural view. This can create difficulties in formulating identity, sexual norms, and relational constructs for gay males.

Research that I detail in Chapter 2 further explains the influence of the monogamy gap, cognitive dissonance, and cultural hegemony in terms of gay males' views, perspectives, and decisions related to entering into or maintaining a monogamous relationship.

### **Nature of the Study**

To understand the lived experience and understand the essential meaning of monogamy in gay male couples I used a phenomenological approach. To achieve this, I used four principal characteristics: description, use of reduction, search for essence, and intentionality. The phenomenological method allowed the study to avoid premature analysis or explanation, to derive the meaning of the experience as is presented through the consciousness, to seek out invariant and unchangeable characteristics of the phenomenon being studied, and to identify the relation of the individual to the world and objects in it (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

The participants in this study included 6 males between the ages of 25 through 65 years who had experienced a monogamous relationship of at least 12 months in a 150 mile radius of a large midwestern city. I used data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) to determine the final sample size with the use of semistructured interviews in the phenomenological tradition. The interview was semistructured, with 11 research instrument guide questions.

## Definitions

The following terms are commonly used in studies related to monogamy. The most frequently used terms with multiple meanings have been defined as follows in my study:

*Cognitive dissonance*: Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental stress or discomfort that is experienced when an individual holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values simultaneously. Dissonance occurs when inconsistency is experienced, and psychological discomfort occurs (Festinger, 1962).

*Cultural hegemony*: Cultural hegemony is the concept that a nation or culture exerts influence over the conduct and values of others (Gramsci, 1992).

*Existentialism*: The term existentialism refers to the way in which each individual, not society or religion, is solely responsible for giving meaning to life by living authentically (Copleston, 2009).

*Gender differences*: Gender differences is the term applied to the differences between men and women specific to a particular culture and its domains such as career, communication, health, social awareness, orientation, and environment (Spade & Valentine, 2011).

*Monogamy gap*: The inability to reconcile fidelity and the desire to have sexual relationship outside of the committed relationship (Anderson, 2012).

*Nonmonogamy*: Nonmonogamy is defined as an interpersonal relationship with multiple and/or simultaneous sexual or romantic bonds (Barker, 2009).

*Psychology of monogamy:* The psychology of sexual monogamy is the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals in sexually monogamous relationships (Scaglia, 2010).

*Sexual orientation:* Sexual orientation is the enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction to persons of the opposite or same sex. Orientation can also be defined as one's sense of identity based on such patterns, related behaviors, and membership in a community comprised of others sharing the same attractions (American Psychological Association, 2013).

*Societal views:* Societal views encompass varied attitudes and beliefs on cultural, historical, social, and relational activities. Different sets of proscriptions and prescriptions may be given to individuals based upon gender, social status, age, or sexual orientation (Crompton, 2003).

### **Assumptions**

Creswell (2007) identified five assumptions of qualitative research: ontological assumption, epistemological, axiological assumption, rhetorical assumption, and methodological assumption. Qualitative inquiry is grounded in the ontological assumption that interpretations are not able to be generalized. Epistemologically, in qualitative studies, believes reality is subjective and personal constructs and social environments are created by the individual (Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, 2003).

Axiologically, the structure of qualitative research can result in the study being influenced by theories, hypotheses, and framework as well as the researcher's values which need to be accounted for (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The aim of qualitative inquiry is to investigate research questions that are ill-suited to quantitative methods,



because the rhetorical nature of the inquiry will provide a rich description of the complex or multidimensional phenomena of monogamy in gay male couples. Methodologically, qualitative research assumes the ability to serve as an initial means of developing theories and illuminating diverse perspectives related to the lived experience of gay males engaged in monogamous relationships.

The context of qualitative inquiry can present issues and concerns. The assumption is that without a clear understanding of the contextual nature of the study the reported data cannot be generalized (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995). Qualitative research thus creates a changing, or shifting, dynamic (Filstead, 1979). Qualitative research consists of assumptions made within the study. To understand the lived Experience of the subjects in this study, I did not assume generalizability. Instead, I intended to create a study whose methods and results are transferrable and meaningful to all stakeholders in academic and applied fields. Further assumptions are detailed in Chapter 3.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I focused on the lived Experience of gay males who engage in monogamous relationships and their experience of monogamy for this qualitative study. In this study, I aimed to clarify conflicting research findings and cultural assumptions. This clarification may be helpful in understanding the implications of contextual, cultural, and stereotypical views, relationship satisfaction, mental health service provisions, and major health risks (Spitalnik & McNair, 2005). This phenomenon is particularly relevant because the focus of the majority of studies on gay male couples are on nonmonogamous relationships (Mitchell, 2014; Parsons, Stark, DuBois, Grov, & Golub, 2011) or based on between-group differences in heterosexual couples (Atkinson & Hackett, 1998; Bailey & Zucker,

1995; Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 1981; MacDonald, 1998; Ossana, 2000; Peplau & Cochran, 1990).

I identified study delimitations as the study's composition of gay males between the ages of 25 through 65 years who self-identified as being in or having participated in a monogamous gay male relationship for a period of at least 12 months. Invited participants came from within a 150 mile radius of a large metropolitan midwestern city. The study consisted of 6 gay males using the phenomenological approach.

Non-English-speaking participants have been excluded from the study. The inability to translate questions and answers in a way that retained the same meaning and understanding, the inability to redirect a participant if they deviated from the course of the interview, the lack of translator availability, and confidentiality concerns of bringing in a third party to assist in the interviewing process led to this exclusion.

It would be reasonable to look at this study from the scope of several sociological theories, such as rational choice theory, social learning theory, or social exchange theory. These have comparable factors based on monetary or economic benefits of monogamy, the effects of socialization on the development of self, or interactions on the basis of reward and punishment. Elimination of many possible theories and conceptual study framework occurred due to the scope and nature of the study, my focus in the study, the size of the study, and the boundaries of the study. These alternatives lacked the ability to fully explore, comprehend, and encapsulate the lived experience of gay males who engage in monogamous relationships.

According to Shenton (2004), *transferability* is the extent to which the information can be generalized to similar situations. Qualitative research findings are

based on smaller numbers of particular environments or individuals, making it impossible to demonstrate applicability of findings and conclusions to other situations and populations. However, Stake (1994) and Denscombe (1998) encouraged the avoidance of rejection of transferability. Stake and Denscombe suggested that despite unique aspects of each case, there are still representations within a broader group. Readers must determine what information can be transferred to other situations based on the results and conclusions presented in the research. This was enhanced by providing a thick description of the phenomenon being investigated to ensure the readers' understanding of the phenomenon and their ability to compare phenomenon within the research with information emerging in their situations.

### **Limitations**

Potential study limitations related to methodological and design weaknesses included: dependability, transferability, and researcher biases. I interviewed a small, purposeful sample of participants. I also used strategies of providing rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' responses to increase the likelihood of transferability as indicated in Shenton (2004). Identified saturation is another potential weakness of the study, based on the assumption that several categories of monogamous behavior are identified from the limited number of participant responses. My biases about monogamy among gay males might represent a weakness to the design of the study in the interpretation of the participant responses and unintentional perceptual misrepresentations. Addressing these biases included using an interview guide developed by a subject matter expert, audio-recording interviews, journaling my subjective experiences, making deliberate and conscious efforts to identify, and set aside

presuppositions, peer review of the data, and member checking. I further detail limitations of the study in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

To initiate opportunities for social change, I will present study findings to organizations focused on human sexuality. These include but are not limited to The American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, The Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, and The Family Research Council. I will seek publication through forums focused on human sexuality and sexual orientation practices. These include but are not limited to *The American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *The Journal of Positive Sexuality*, *The Journal of Sexuality and Culture*, and *The Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*. I will also present this information at statewide mental health and medical conferences in addition to offering the information in an online or in-person training event.

From a positive social change perspective, through this study, I may assist medical and mental health professionals by providing additional and more current knowledge pertaining to monogamy in gay male relationships. The research results may potentially help to overcome stereotypes of gay relationships. Via this research, I may further inform medical and mental health professionals who work with gay males in terms of risk reduction and intervention strategies, psychosocial interventions, diagnoses, treatment recommendations, and service provisions. The focus of the majority of the research on gay male couples was on nonmonogamous relationship agreements (Mitchell, 2014; Parsons, et al., 2012). My findings in this study may be significant in terms of providing rich and in-depth information about the experiences of gay couples who have

chosen to be monogamous. This information may assist in challenging assumptions about gay male relationships.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced the topic of gay male monogamy including brief background information, a summary of the research literature on gay male monogamy, identification of the gap in knowledge that this study addressed, and justification of the need for this study. The research questions that I addressed followed the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, and the nature of the study including the specific design. The terms specific to this study are defined and followed by assumptions about the research design that could have affected the study. The scope and delimitations are introduced and followed by the reasoning for the selection of the population and identification of the conceptual framework for the study. The limitations of the study are outlined including biases, transferability, and dependability followed by a description of the significance of the study to effect social change. Chapters 2 and 3 further explore the information presented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the history and psychology of homosexuality, the psychology of monogamy, monogamous and nonmonogamous relational constructs, the view of monogamy in gay male couples, relationship health and satisfaction, cultural pressures and societal views, changes in law, and theoretical framework to fit the new structure of monogamy. The paucity of literature, research, and data on gay male couples has resulted in a limited and often contradictory empirical and theoretical understanding of the lived Experience of monogamy among gay male relationships. Clark and Serovich (1997) highlighted that a search of prominent marriage and family therapy, couples' therapy, and sex therapy journals contained only 0.006% of articles on same-sex couples. This deficit could account for the limitations in identifying known clinical issues facing gay male couples, as well as overlooking the need for a systematic evaluation of therapeutic interventions. Therefore, my purpose in this study was to gain understanding of the lived Experience of gay males who engage in monogamous relationships.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Professional books, peer-reviewed journals, and dissertations using an open-ended date range provided the primary literature for this review. Older seminal journal articles provided background on the topic. The literature search included dates ranging from January of 2014 through December of 2019. The following databases provided the majority of the articles or studies: PsycArticles, PsycINFO, and Sage Premiere. Related search databases used were ERIC, LGBT Life, and SocINDEX. The search terms

included *monogamy, homosexual monogamy, extra-dyadic sex, nonmonogamy, monogamy gap, homosexual male relationships, existentialism, and cognitive dissonance theory*. Given the contradictory and limited nature of resources related to the specific phenomenon studied, I completed research and analysis of citations identified in reviewed articles, dissertations, and books for content and value.

### **The Historical Context of Homosexuality**

#### **Emergence of Homosexuality as a Disease Model**

To understand the influence of psychology's historical framework on the current views of homosexuality, it is necessary to explore previous categorizations and diagnostic progression. The focus on determining the cause of homosexuality began with studies conducted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such studies suggested that homosexuality was a disease consisting of a specific pathology, diagnosis, and course of treatment (Drescher, 2010). During this period, these views likely influenced the current and future cultural views (American Psychological Association, 2008).

Bergler (1957) contributed to the perpetuation of these views into the 20th century by arguing that homosexuality is a neurotic, curable illness, consisting of a distinct clinical profile. Bergler stated that male homosexuality stems from a severe and unavoidable tendency to engage in self-damaging behaviors and is driven by an unconscious fear and hatred of women. Bergler further characterized homosexual men as promiscuous, masochistic, and dissatisfied with their sex lives. Klein (1932), Bieber (1962), and Socarides (1979) identified comparable views, which may indicate the psychoanalytic consensus of homosexuality during these periods.

Despite a subsequent paradigm shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, homosexuality continued to be viewed through the lens of a mental illness model (Cabaj & Steine, 1996). This approach to understanding homosexuality resulted in diagnoses being included in the first and second publications of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*. These inclusions may have further supported the continued stigmatization of homosexuality (Katz, 1995). Although homosexuality was initially viewed as a psychological disorder in research and literature; psychology has evolved and moved beyond its original position. The standard diagnostic manual removed the psychiatric diagnosis of homosexuality approximately 30 years ago (American Psychiatric Association, 1973).

Despite this removal, advancements in research dedicated to sexual, psychological, and relational issues of gay male couples is still needed. Researchers have attempted to further their understanding of factors pertaining to homosexuals and gay male couples using between-group comparison. Due to the distinct differences between groups, this continues to create gaps in research, literature, and understanding of the dynamics of gay male couples.

### **Transformation From Disease Model to Choice and Sexual Expression**

Morgan and Nerison (1993) reviewed historical components of homosexuality through a psychopolitical lens. They theorized that heterosexual societal influence and religious views led to the rejection of homosexuality; causing medical professionals and psychologists to be more inclined to seek out a cure or methods to treat homosexuality. Many of these methods were identified as severe. They included castration, sterilization, lobotomies, cold sitz baths, and pudic nerve sectioning.



In 1967, the Task Force on Homosexuality was established through the National Institute of Mental Health. Researchers focused on exploring concepts outside of a disease model and placed focus on sexual orientation being an in-born feature. Research resulted in the development of the idea that homosexuality is neither choice, nor disease. The Task Force along with the Gay Rights Movement highlighted the injustice and suffering associated with previous views and treatment methods. They further worked to change views of homosexuality in the medical and psychiatric worlds (Melton, 1989).

According to Forstein (1994), advancements in research in the past 2 decades has resulted from analyzing previously acquired data. This analysis has led to an increased awareness of issues faced by gay male couples. In terms of mental health, gay male couples seek services for reasons like those of heterosexual couples. These can include sexual problems, financial issues, power struggles, independence within the relationship, autonomy, and intimacy. However, there are additional areas of focus unique to gay male couples: extra-relational behaviors, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) seroconcordant/discordant relationships, and gay-specific sexual difficulties (Cove & Boyle, 2002; McWhirter & Mattison, 1987). These identified difficulties are unique in that the presentation of reported concerns are not specific to the *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria (American Psychological Association, 2013).

Cove and Boyle (2002) highlighted the lack of research on sexual functioning, the nature and prevalence of sexual problems, and mental and physical risk factors within gay male relationships. Further evaluation of the efficacy of current treatment of sexual dysfunction in sexual minorities is also needed. The diagnostic criteria within the *DSM* remains heavily rooted in work conducted by Masters and Johnson amongst heterosexual

individuals (Boyle, 1993). These diagnostic tools may not provide a reliable and valid method of assessment and treatment for sexual minorities. Additionally, areas of focus within couple's therapy are often associated with assumed gender roles within heterosexual relationships. This raises questions pertaining to sexual minority views and experiences of communication, responsibilities, sexual functioning, and assigned gender roles (Sandfort & de Keizer, 2001). Same-sex couples may also experience difficulties with shame, secrecy, fear, and isolation as a sexual minority (Simon, et al., 1995). Sexual, emotional, and psychological functioning should be further explored in sexual minority couples to assess for affected areas.

### **Monogamy and Relationship Health in Gay Couples**

#### **Comparative Studies: Hetero/Homosexual Relationship Satisfaction, Health, and Longevity**

The majority of information available to researchers, educators, and clinicians on gay male couples is derived from literature examining between-group differences and comparing heterosexual and same-sex couples (Atkinson & Hackett, 1998; Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Cardell, et al., 1981; MacDonald, 1998; Ossana, 2000; Peplau & Cochran, 1990). The relevant findings of this literature indicate that at the relationship level there is evidence to suggest significant differences between heterosexual and gay male couples; specifically, in relation to health, satisfaction, behaviors and characteristics grounded in perceived norms (Cardell, et al., 1981; MacDonald, 1998; Dantzker & Eisenman, 2003; Shively & DeCecco, 1977).

The focus of research available on gay males has historically been on the individual with relatively limited research in the context of relationships. This is

significant due to the fact that data highlights gay male relationships are not rare; just under-researched. Weinberg and Williams' (1974) review of the 1960s research study conducted by the Kinsey Institute identified that 71% of the gay males studied were living with a partner. Starks, Millar, and Parsons acknowledged additional challenges in terms of deriving meaning from available studies and their structure. Dyadic studies may consist of more highly functioning couples; resulting in inadvertent oversampling. This can be based on the participant's willingness and ability to participate in research studies. Starks, et al. (2015) highlighted that current findings may underrepresent couples who are functioning more poorly.

Some of the first correlative longitudinal studies on gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples began approximately in the 1980s (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; Kurdek, 1998). These studies concluded that gay relationships operate on the same primary principals as heterosexual relationships and that both relationship quality and outcome were equivalent for gay and heterosexual couples. This may be problematic based on data collection being correlative and reliant entirely upon self-reporting instruments. Although this type of data does provide valuable information, it limits data to the individuals' perception of their relationship (Robinson & Price, 1980).

Gottman, Levinson, Swanson, C., Swanson, K., Tyson, and Yoshimoto (2003) highlighted that there is considerable evidence that individual perception may be markedly different from actual interactions. When considering possible implications of cultural hegemony in addition to data collection methods; the study could be influenced by the respondent's perception of how the current culture views them. At the time

Kurdek's (1998) study was conducted, the current *DSM* still categorized homosexuality as a disease. This could lend itself to overrepresentation of correlatives by participants to reduce association to a relationship model viewed as problematic or pathological.

According to Peplau and Perlman (1982), there has been an increased interest in the diverse dynamics of gay male couples. This shift can be seen within the expanded scope of social science focus. This focus has placed emphasis on issues pertaining to gay males and providing forums for research and presentation of findings. This has led to an exploration of more than the culturally traditional views of marriage and family and has provided greater insight into varied relationship constructs. Previous views identified homosexuality as a perspective of deviance with limited consideration of gay male dynamics within the context of intimacy and close relationships. With these expansions in scientific research, literature has identified that gay males often do develop lasting relationships. This is contradictory to prevalent cultural stereotypes of gay males engaging in fleeting sexual or relational encounters. Although long-term gay male relationships are more common within our culture, questions remain unanswered in relation to *typical* views and applications of monogamy and other relational constructs (Neilands, Chakravarty, Darbes, Beougher, & Hoff, 2010).

Early studies of gay male couples explored personal psychological adjustment in comparison to heterosexual couples on measures of relationship adjustment. Studies concluded that gay male couples were within the well-adjusted range and there were no discernable differences from those of heterosexual couples (Cardell, et al., 1981). In the Peplau and Cochran study (1990) gay males were measured on bases of love and like for their primary partner, with no significant differences found amongst hetero and

homosexual groups. Continued research refuted previous concepts that sex is the primary basis for gay male relationships. The subsequent studies identified the significance of sexuality but also considered factors such as: love, commitment, and companionship. Bell and Weinberg (1978) reported indications that most gay males want steady relationships, preferred to casual sexual encounters.

Affection and companionship were identified as driving components in the relationship, not unlike their heterosexual counterparts (Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Ramsey, Latham, & Lindquist, 1978). Peplau (1982) reviewed research exploring factors that contribute to the quality of gay male relationships and found that research remained in its infancy, with a greater need for scientific research that explores issues and problems faced by gay male couples; as well as identifying solutions and factors that lead to successful relationships. These studies reviewed the potential affect surrounding the controversy concerning sexual exclusivity versus open or nonmonogamous gay male relationships. The studies identified far more varied causes and consequences of sexual monogamy and nonmonogamy in gay male couples.

In a study examining sexual behavior of men in England and Wales, gay men were found to engage in a variety of sexual behaviors and ranked the importance of these behaviors differently than their heterosexual male counterparts (Davies, Weatherburn, Hunt, Hickson, McManus & Coxon, 1992). In terms of clinical assessment and treatment, these variations along with relational differences amongst heterosexual and gay male couples highlight the need for more-current, methodologically sound research (McWhirter & Mattison, 1987).

## **Research on Monogamy and Relationship Health**

Relationships are generally considered to be positive contributors to overall wellness. This is due to aspects of: companionship, security, love, friendship, and happiness. There are also ties to potential health benefits resulting from greater social integration and associations to better health outcomes and longevity (Berkman & Syme, 1979). Some research further suggested that the absence of significant social relationships can be as detrimental as smoking, obesity, and high blood pressure (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). However, monogamy and its effect on relationship health requires the consideration of multiple and complex factors. Healthy relationships can consist of features that are absent from monogamous and/or homosexual relationships. These features include respect, trust, communication, mutual goals, and shared values and beliefs.

Conley, Moors, Matsick, and Ziegler (2012a) noted that individuals may perceive that monogamy has multiple benefits: sexual health, children's well-being, avoidance of stigma, sexual satisfaction, and relational adjustment. However, research conducted by Conley, et al. (2012a) suggested that evidence supporting the superiority of monogamous benefits is lacking. The study highlighted that monogamy, although not necessarily proving more beneficial than nonmonogamy, has extant and indirect evidence that does not support monogamy as a favored status. The study does highlight evidentiary support that the idea of monogamy can be a means of avoiding negative and pervasive reactions to other relationships styles; such as nonmonogamy. There is indication that more research is needed to address the question of how nonmonogamy and monogamy correlate to various outcomes. This study identified that although monogamy may be the

ideal or preferred choices for many individuals; nonmonogamy may remain a viable relationship alternative.

### **Current Research on Relationship Health in Gay Couples**

According to Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, and Be'gin (2003) the characterization of gay male relationships as inherently dysfunctional is inaccurate. Gay couples were identified as seeking similarly supportive, romantic, and emotionally intimate bonds as their heterosexual counterparts. Relationship satisfaction in gay male couples was found to be equitable and defined similarly to heterosexual couples.

Gottman, et al.'s study (2003) identified that gay male couples demonstrate healthy and adaptive methods to improve and maintain relationship quality. These were identified as: honesty, maturity, consideration, communicative strengths, and awareness and management of inequities. Data highlighted ways in which gay male couples engage in conflict discussions from a place of humor, warmth, affection, and positive emotions. Gay male couples involved in the study also demonstrated high levels of honesty in communications with less negative emotional reactivity to difficult topics. The study theorized that the ways in which gay male couples resolve conflict may enhance stability in the relationship. By starting communications in a positive way; problem solving, and conflict resolution is more likely. The implication of Gottman, et al.'s (2003) research is the need to avoid applying negative stereotypes to homosexual relationships and to acknowledge features of health, satisfaction, and commitment.

### **Studies of Monogamy in Gay Male Couples**

According to Cove and Boyle (2002) other noteworthy differences between heterosexual and gay male couples are the lower documented rates of cohabitation and

sexual exclusivity. Previous research identified monogamy rates of gay male couples as between 0% and 18% (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984; Blumenstein & Schwartz, 1983) with more-recent research identifying monogamy rates between 48% and 63% (Parker, 1994; Demian, 1994). This is compared to the rates of heterosexual monogamy identified between 52% to 71% (Warren, Harvey, & Agnew, 2012). These statistics further highlight the consistent differences reported in the literature regarding the sexual functioning of heterosexual and gay male couples.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2008), research indicated that there are multiple misconceptions pertaining to the nature of gay male relationships. Findings indicated that these relationships are not dissimilar from those of their heterosexual counterparts in terms of desiring committed relationships. Survey data reviewed by the APA indicated that between 40% to 60% of gay males were currently involved in romantic relationships. In U.S. Census data from 2000, one in nine partners living together were same sex couples. The APA addressed the fact that stereotypes remain persistent related to gay male relationships, despite having been found misleading by studies conducted. Studies have found that gay male and heterosexual couples are equivalent to one another in measures of relationship satisfaction, durability, commitment, and stability. Reviewed survey data further indicated that between 18% and 28% of gay male couples have lived together for a period of greater than 10 years. The APA noted that it is also reasonable to suggest that the stability of gay male couples could be enhanced with an equitable level of support and recognition in their relationships like the support received by heterosexual couples. These could include legal rights and responsibilities associated with marriage.



Further misconceptions related to differences in goals and values were countered by research findings highlighting that factors which influence relationship satisfaction, stability, durability, and commitment are remarkably similar for both gay male couples and heterosexual married couples. Currently, only a relatively small number of researchers within the field of gay and lesbian studies have contributed to the literature on gay men and monogamy. Anderson (2012), for instance, found that one of the unique features of intimate relationships of gay men is the departure from the normative values characterizing monogamy. LaSala (2005) stated that gay males are more likely to be engaged in unions that are lenient towards extra-relational sex. Adams (2006) found that among a study of gay male participants, only 26% chose to practice monogamy. A majority of those in monogamous relationships had been together for less than 3 years.

Aside from practicing nonmonogamy, Gotta, Green, Rothblum, Solomon, Balsam, and Schwartz (2011) found that gay men are more willing to discuss the topic of nonmonogamy in contrast to heterosexual men. This willingness could indicate that gay men view nonmonogamy as the norm and feel a certain amount of freedom to discuss such views. Anderson (2012) added that when infidelity transpires, gay males rarely contest the value of monogamy within their relationship. This response could indicate that gay males experience a type of cognitive dissonance when it comes to the importance of monogamy and their sexuality, or that they have less of an expectation that monogamy can occur in a gay relationship.

According to Anderson (2012) the failure to recognize this unique feature of gay male relationships can be problematic. For instance, clinicians who are not aware of current ethical practices in working with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

(LGBT) community may construe the nontraditional values within gay male relationships as a problem that needs to be resolved. Nonmonogamous arrangements could be pathologized. Such pathology could increase the potential for gay men involved in these arrangements to be viewed as having some form of psychological disorders.

Researchers have not found significant differences in measures of love, liking, relationship satisfaction, and levels of commitment when comparing gay men in monogamous or nonmonogamous relationships (Blasband & Peplau, 1985). Moreover, a more recent study by Parsons, et al. (2011) highlighted that men who practice nonmonogamy are less likely to be depressed and more likely to be satisfied with life than single or men in monogamous relationships. These findings suggested that mutually consensual nonmonogamous relationships can still be as satisfying and healthy as monogamous relationships.

Nonmonogamous relationships among gay males often have unique forms and dynamics not found in nonmonogamous relationships among heterosexual males. For instance, gay males may create rules that regulate their extra-relational sex so that the primary relationship will not be affected. Some examples of regulations could include no sleepovers, no sex with the same person more than once, no anal sex outside of primary partner, or no sexual encounters in the couple's home (LaSala, 2005). One can question if some of these accommodations are ok with the person or if there is a continued need to develop specific rules when monogamy is not expected, or extra-relational dynamics are rationalized.

In a study conducted by Pawlicki and Larson (2011) gay males identified a range of nonexclusive relationship agreements and various conceptualizations of relational

constructs. Four categories were identified: the unconventional nature of nonexclusive relationships, variety in nonexclusive relationships, distinctions between recreational sex and intimate sex, and the strongest emotional connection with the primary partner. The unconventional nature of nonexclusive relationships identified participant beliefs that these arrangements fell outside of social and cultural norms. This lack of conventional application resulted in mixed reports of experienced personal pride and peer criticism. Variety in nonexclusive relationships was reported by participants as a means to experience and appreciate sexual variety. Participants noted that this allowed them to participate in sexual activities outside of their partner's preferences or interests. Views expressed by participants identified this construct as a way to resolve sexual differences within their primary relationship, a way to enhance the quality of their primary relationship, and as a means of maintaining intimacy. Recreational sex was reported as a deviation from beliefs that monogamy was the primary method for maintaining relationship health. Participants identified differences between sexual activity with their partner and recreational sex as primary partner encounters based on intimacy, whereas, recreational partner encounters are based on sexual gratification. The emotional connection to the primary partner was identified by participants as a relevant factor in sexual encounters. Participants reported varying levels of emotional connection to sexual partners outside of their primary relationships but as having the strongest connection to the primary partner resulting from: comfort, reliability, emotional connection, and security in the relationship.

Among gay males, monogamy can be divided into two forms: sexual monogamy and emotional monogamy (Bonello & Cross, 2010; LaSala, 2005). According to Bonello

and Cross, gay males often value emotional monogamy over sexual monogamy. In addition, Trussler, Perchal, and Barker identified that gay men perceive monogamy in two ways: either enhancing or sacrificing. Trussler, et al. (2000) correlated this to the cognitive dissonance that results from the desire to engage in monogamous relationships and casual sexual encounters simultaneously.

Peplau and Cochran (1981) theorized that sexual monogamy was much more important to heterosexual men than gay men. This theory alluded to the fact that sexuality leads to varying views of monogamy and nonmonogamy. Individuals with specific sexual orientations will be affected by the domains that are uniquely important and relevant to them. Harris (2002) hypothesized that all men are biologically pre-disposed to desire sexual variation (*nonmonogamy*) in their coupling and mating practices. Harris suggested that there is a primary difference between heterosexual and gay men as it relates to ease of access to casual sex partners, views on monogamy, and frequency of nonmonogamous acts. Harris implies that gay men are able to obtain willing sexual partners for casual sex at a greater rate than heterosexual males-thus engaging in nonmonogamous acts more frequently than heterosexual males. Harris speculates that individuals engaging in these acts do not view them as harmful or damaging to their existing monogamous relationships. Harris tested these hypotheses by incorporating homosexual and heterosexual men and women. The results indicated that more heterosexual individuals identified sexual nonmonogamy as more damaging, whereas homosexual individuals identified emotional nonmonogamy as more troublesome.

Blow and Hartnett (2007) theorized that although sexual nonmonogamy within a homosexual relationship may be seen as more acceptable, nonmonogamy does not occur

without pain or damaging effects. According to Steffens and Rennie (2006) it is not specifically sex outside of the relationship that causes pain. The damage to trust and belief in the partner can result in feelings of betrayal. The responses to relationship betrayal can include: Emotional lability, hypervigilance, attempting to combine unrelated events in an attempt to predict future betrayal, sleeplessness or nightmares, difficulty focusing on daily activities, obsessing about the trauma, depression, isolation, compulsive spending, eating, or exercising, intrusive images or thoughts about the betrayal, and avoidance of thinking about or discussing the trauma experienced.

In this same 2006 study conducted by Steffens and Rennie individuals whose partners had engaged in nonmonogamous behaviors reported experiencing anger toward their partners as well as themselves. Some study participants reported engaging in self-destructive behaviors such as drinking, substance abuse, overeating, compulsive spending or exercising, or cheating as a form of retaliation. Participants identified feelings of anger, mistrust, hurt, confusion, loss of worth or value, and shame. Individuals who chose to remain in the relationship reported experiencing difficulties in managing pain and rage, re-establishing trust, setting appropriate boundaries, and managing the on-going desire to question their partner about current and past behaviors (Steffens & Renni, 2006). In a later study by Lowen and Spears the lack of research conducted on gay male couples makes it difficult to accurately answer what relationships of young gay male couples are like. How these couples build and sustain their relationships, their thoughts on monogamy and marriage, and what they believe about the attitudes of their peers remain unanswered (Lowen & Spears, 2016).

The continued application of heterosexual norms to gay male dynamics can further perpetuate stereotypes, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination; resulting in minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Marmor (1980) postulated that these factors can result in an impaired self-image. This raises the question of what one might consider the appropriate expression of gay sexuality and relational norms and what role stereotypes play in terms of defining self and relational constructs.

### **Role of Health and Medical Concerns**

Therapeutic models of sexual function and dysfunction informed by research based on heterosexual practices need to be re-evaluated in the context of gay male relationships. Relational and sexual problems of gay male couples identified in the literature appear to have an etiological link to engaging in open relationships. Engaging in extra-relational sex may result in a decrease of sexual activity with the primary partner (MacDonald, 1998), creating relationship and sexual issues. These patterns of sexual behavior also increase health-related risks such as: exposure to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Researchers identified a steady decline in casual and anonymous sex in gay males following the onset of the AIDS epidemic, resulting in an increase in monogamous relationships (MacDonald, 1998; Ossana, 2000; Seigel & Glassman, 1989). This decline does not negate clinical implications of gay male couples who are negotiating extra-relational dynamics, the emotional and psychological effect of HIV/AIDS diagnosis amongst partners, and relationship satisfaction.

Starks, Doyle, Millar and Parsons' research (2017) surveyed gay males and their partners; totaling 256 individuals with an average relationship length of five years. This study explored associations between intimacy development, relationship satisfaction, and

depression amongst gay male couples. Study findings suggested that in gay male relationships, the presence of depression in one partner, capacity or inability to show intimacy, and relationship satisfaction has novel implications for couples-based therapy and individual therapy with gay males who are in romantic relationships. Analysis indicated that intimacy development directly predicted relationship satisfaction in both partners. The research suggested a strong connection between the mental health of both partners in the relationship, possible implications for relationship functioning, and relationship satisfaction or dissatisfactions direct connection to depression.

In a study conducted by Swan and Thompson monogamy was explored through the lens of definitions, practices, cultural values, and risk reduction strategies. The study identified the potential psychological and social pressure to engage in monogamous relationships derived from the emphasis placed on sociocultural ideas of trust and commitment as well as reduced risks for contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) (Swan & Thompson, 2016). Gotta, et al. (2011) noted that following implemented measures monogamous relationships have increased amongst two high risk groups-gay males and heterosexual college students.

Cultural competency and tailored intervention needs were identified in a recent study (Fields, Bogart, Smith, Malebranche, Ellen, & Schuster, 2014). The study identified disproportionately high rates of HIV infection among young, gay, black males.

Commonalities within the study participants were exposure to rigid anti-gay attitudes, rejection, traditional views of masculinity, pressure to conform, desire for acceptance, desire to hide their sexual orientation, and the need to prove their masculinity.

Participants identified that these factors made them more prone to engaging in high risk

behaviors, less likely to form or maintain monogamous relationships, and to view unprotected sex as an expression of love and trust with their chosen partners (Fields, et al., 2014).

Study participants reported a perceived expectation of family, friends, and community to engage in aggressive and overly masculine behaviors. When lack of conformity occurred, participants reported being ridiculed or ostracized. Compensatory efforts to prove masculinity were identified as: hyper-masculine persona, aggression, fighting, risk-taking, and substance use. Fields, et al.(2014) theorized that findings indicated the conflict between internal sexual identity and external expectations; thus, creating negative behaviors, reduced esteem, chronic anxiety, and loneliness. The awareness of cultural pressures in the context of sexual practices underscores the need for specific and culturally competent medical and mental health interventions.

Prior to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, monogamy was not the identified relationship construct amongst gay males (Mitchell, 2014). Considerations within this study include ways that monogamy within the studied groups seemed to have inconsistent definitions and applications, as well as being further complicated by differentiation between emotional and physical monogamy practices. These studies lend themselves to further speculation related to ways that pressure to conform to practices may affect definitions and views of monogamy (Gotta, et al., 2011).

### **Cultural Pressures and Conformity**

Nail, MacDonald, and Levy (2000) assert that people comply with cultural rules to obtain social acceptance, reduce conflict, and avoid rejection. Although individuals recognize that they possess characteristics that are unique and individual to them;



compliance with cultural and societal rules occurs in most circumstances. Johnson and Sheets (2004) determined that individuals make interpretations based on social cues and that the desire to be accepted leads to conformity. Motivation to conform stemming from the pressure to fit in can lead to reduced esteem, engagement in risky behaviors, and lack of regard for personal wellness.

When the cultural norms embodied by a society are not adhered to, the implications for the affected individual are considerable. Depression, poor sexual health, discomfort with sexual orientation, poor peer socialization, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, suicidality, delays in psychosexual maturation, and difficulty with social integration are all correlated to homo-negativity. Oppressive attitudes, victimization of, and negative behaviors toward gay males are positively correlated to increased mental health problems (Nicholson, 2013).

In a study conducted by Gray, Mendelsohn, and Omoto (2015) individuals in minority groups experience stigmatization that can contribute to distinct sources of stress, conflict, and psychological challenges. However, the study indicates that when these individuals have a sense of connectedness, they are able draw on sources of support. This can lead to adaptive thoughts, behaviors, and overall resiliency

According to MacDonald (1998) as a sexual minority, gay male couples are more likely to develop their own normative relationship dynamics. This is believed to result from an absence of relationship role models. Whereas heterosexual couples were identified as having greater access to advice or validation from other heterosexuals; gay male couples may experience a reduced number of role models which can limit their opportunity for relationship feedback. MacDonald noted that this may result in

maladaptive beliefs that their sexual orientation is the cause of difficulties as opposed to the relationship itself. There are pervasive and consistent media, societal, and stereotypical portrayals of gay male couples as nonmonogamous (Moors, et al., 2013; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). According to Gomillion and Giuliano some gay males find their role models on television or in the public eye, but there are still limited numbers of these role models who have been noted as having a positive influence on homosexual views, beliefs, and perceptions. Even with an increase in public awareness, gay male couples continue to find themselves subjected to discriminatory and prejudicial practices in many venues.

According to Netzley (2010) television programming reinforces the idea that men in gay male relationships practice nonmonogamy as the norm as opposed to the exception. Netzley further states that gay male characters are more likely to be represented as more sexually active than their heterosexual counterparts. Bond (2014) illustrated that there are further discrepancies in the representation of gay males. Bond stated that heterosexuality is overrepresented in television shows whereas gay men are underrepresented or represented inaccurately. For example, themes related to sexual practices frequently include stereotypes, jokes, and insults related to gay practices. These themes fail to address the accurate components of gay male relationships.

Bond (2014) noted the potential for these themes to affect how gay male couples are perceived as well as the direct effect on gay males when they are looking for information related to sex, sexuality, and sexual socialization. This could contribute to ambiguity and ambivalence related to the expression and experience of sexuality and relationships.

### **Effect on Health Due to Changes in State and Federal Law**

According to Munsey (2010) there is scientific evidence supporting the mental health benefits of marriage and the negative health effects of stigma and discrimination. The former denial of gay male couples' right to marry deprived them of multiple benefits. Munsey identified these as: the potential to enjoy greater relationship stability, receipt of social support and recognition, and access to financial rights and privileges. This expression of stigma was viewed as negatively affecting gay male couples by increasing stress. This stress was reported to effect physical and mental health in addition to perpetuating maladaptive beliefs that support the need to conceal the authentic self and remain vigilant in ones' own protection from disapproval and violence.

Adverse health outcomes and compromised delivery of care has been well documented for gay males. Societal prejudice and heterosexism creates a phenomenon called minority stress; creating negative mental and physical health effects. Although there is a prevalence of same-sex households and enacted measures to protect human rights; gay males' sexual orientation continued to be subjected to legislative debates, court rulings, and mainstream media. Individuals or organizations that remained unaccepting of current medical and social science literature subjected gay males to ridicule, demeaning or derogatory terms, and the questioning of their value and morality as individuals.

Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, and Hasin's study (2010) of more than 34,000 sexual minority participants found empirical evidence supporting negative health effects of discriminatory practices related to marriage equality. In states where marital restrictions had been enacted; higher incidents of mood disorders, anxiety disorders,

alcohol use disorders, and psychiatric comorbidity were reported. The connection to the prevalence of these disorders and institutionalized stigma, internalized prejudice, and minority stress highlights increased rates of STI's, depression, suicide, and drug use. When this occurs in conjunction with limited access to health care and disruptions in the family-support system; increased mortality and morbidity is anticipated from cancers, hypertension, heart disease, and cirrhosis.

Srivastava & Singh's study examined factors related to the effect of societal attitudes toward sexual minorities. The stigmatization of sexual identity demonstrated adverse effects on the lives and wellbeing of sexual minorities (Srivastava & Singh, 2015). Medical and social science research suggested that with social and legal recognition of same-sex marriage; gay males have experienced positive health effects. Improved outcomes are further expected due to the granting of medical and wellness benefits under state and federal law and the reduction of institutionalized stigma on sexual minority group members. By diminishing disparities in health care for gay male couples or households, access to healthcare is greatly improved. Greater access is correlated to lower mortality, and improved mental and physical outcomes comparable to majority outcomes (King, & Bartlett, 2006).

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Many theoretical perspectives and models can be applied to understanding monogamy and monogamous behavior. In order to assess factors contributing to the formation and disruption of monogamous relationships this dissertation applied Eric Anderson's monogamy gap theory. The monogamy gap theory is grounded in Leon Festinger's (1957) theory on cognitive dissonance (Anderson, 2012). Cognitive

dissonance can be applied specifically to the incongruence in beliefs and actions within monogamous relationships. The monogamy gap theory is also grounded in Antonio Gramsci's (1992) cultural hegemony theory. Cultural hegemony can be applied specifically to the idea that dominant views establish cultural norms and ideology (Anderson, 2012).

### **Defining Monogamy**

Alexander (1980) highlighted the complexity of defining monogamy. Citing cultural, historical, political, religious, and materialistic influences; Alexander noted the discrepancies in overt and implicit social expectations of monogamy. Scientists use the term monogamy to differentiate relational constructs. Monogamy can include marital, sexual, and societal monogamy. Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) defined monogamy as the adherence to an identified set of rules or relationship norms. Lowe (2003) stated that monogamy occurs when an individual has a relationship with only one partner. Monogamy can refer to a single relationship for the duration of the individual's lifetime or multiple relationships with a single partner over a period of time. According to Barta and Kiene (2005) the definition of monogamy depends upon the expectations of exclusivity within the relationship. This would imply that the meaning of monogamy differs among individuals. When meaning is defined by the individual there is a lack of a singular definition, expectation, or experience of monogamy.

Scheidel (2009) believed that the origins of monogamy stemmed from the influence of Christianity. However, Betzig (1995) argued that monogamous practices pre-date Christianity's influence and identified the existence of monogamous practices as far back as ancient Mesopotamia, Assyria, Egypt, Israel, Greece, and Rome. Although

Christianity has played a role in the spread of monogamy throughout Western culture the practice of monogamy has shown to pre-date religious constructs and definitions. Betzig noted that following the establishment of societally imposed monogamy people became so accustomed to the practice that it became a normalized form of mating or coupling. These practices defined cultural, moral, and legal expectations of monogamy. This normalization resulted in the former practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time (polygamy) to be viewed as strange or unacceptable. These monogamous coupling and mating practices have resulted in polygamy being regarded as an exception to common coupling practices, as opposed to the norm. Anderson (2012) highlighted that normalizing monogamy within a culture can put pressure on individuals to think this is the correct or acceptable way.

### **Framework for the Current Study**

#### **Monogamy Gap**

Eric Anderson (2012) expanded on Antonio Gramsci's (1992) cultural hegemony theory and Leon Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory to identify relational components of social processes as well as the behavioral effect of established cultural norms. This expansion was named the monogamy gap theory. Anderson's theory can be applied in order to understand the views, beliefs, and social and cultural components of monogamy in gay male couples.

#### **Research Examining the Tenets of Monogamy Gap Theory**

Gramsci's research argued that political control stems from two sources: domination based on coercion and hegemony based on consent. Hegemony was identified by Gramsci as the process by which the leading or ruling class of a society transforms

interests and values into a commonsense notion for all of the society's members (Gramsci, 1992).

Joseph (2000) researched and applied hegemony by incorporating intersubjective hegemony; which gives primacy to interactions and the social actors involved. Group interests, social alliances, and political focus are all factors related to ways in which social actors construct consent and achieve dominant views within the society. On a deeper level of institutionalization; social mechanisms and structures are identified as the elements that perpetuate the cohesion and reproduction of hegemony. This unity and replication within a society, its structures, and its institutions form concrete and intentional agency.

Joseph's analysis focused on domestic politics, critical realism, and ontology. Hegemonic power is purported to be derived from both the agent and the structure and operates through the interactions within a social space. The movement of power further identifies where power comes from, is targeted, and how it operates. This allows for analysis of the agents' capacity and structural constraints (McAnulla, 2005).

Hardt and Negri's research (2000) can be viewed through four different lenses as: a production of coercion, a production of consent, the production of attraction, and the production of life. This study theorized that hegemony can exact command over the life of a population when hegemony is embraced by individuals as an integral and vital function of their life. Hegemony becomes a condition of existence for the individual; preventing life beyond hegemonic existence.

Critics of Gramsci's (1992) research argued that in order to accurately conceptualize the effect of hegemony and ways in which it operates; social forces must

be seen through a national lens and viewed as a system of totality (Gill, 1993). Cox's (1993) analysis further highlights that hegemony is better described as a social, economic, and political structure. This definition is expressed through institutions, mechanisms, and universal norms which establish general rules of behavior for societies in support of the dominant view.

Cognitive dissonance theory explains aspects of human behavior in addition to providing real world applications. These can include decision making behavior, joining groups, public health and other campaigns, and psychotherapy. Although challenges and revisions have been suggested for Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory; research indicated that the original formulation is still influential, robust, and that the basic behavioral observations remain not only valid but continue to drive on-going research. The application of cognitive dissonance has demonstrated the ability to yield nonintuitive predictions with far-reaching effect. Since the time Festinger's theory was published, numerous studies have been conducted on cognitive dissonance. Study reviews identified three paradigms: free choice, forced compliance, and effort justification. The identified differences within the paradigms relate to the type of situation that arouses cognitive dissonance (Cooper, 2007).

In Brehm's free choice study (1956) dissonance was identified as almost always occurring when having to choose between two or more choices. As advantages and disadvantages are weighed, individuals must face the realization that they will be forced to give up advantages of the refuted options thereby accepting disadvantages of their selected options. This study highlighted that as the difficulty of the decision increases, dissonance increases. In order to reduce this dissonance, individuals will exaggerate the



difference between the choices in order to justify the choice made. This tendency results in an overstatement of the positive aspects of the selected choice and the minimization of benefit of the rejected choice.

Festinger and Carlsmith's induced compliance study (1959) identified that dissonance occurs when individuals are forced to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their attitudes and beliefs. This study identified that when individuals experience inconsistencies between their true feelings and things they were induced to do or say; they modified their cognitions in order to convince themselves to align with the forced or induced actions or statements.

Aronson and Mill's effort justification study (1959) identified that dissonance occurs when individuals invest a significant amount of time and energy into something; later finding that the investment did not yield the desired outcome or rewards. Furthermore, when individuals experience high levels of embarrassment, there is a known tendency to provide a more positive rating of the experience. This is believed to stem from the fact that the experience had already occurred, and dissonance was reduced through the development of a more favorable attitude toward it.

Several criticisms of cognitive dissonance theory remain despite the noted applications and affect on the field of psychology. Given that cognitive dissonance cannot be observed directly; objective measures and quantifications are not possible. Researchers also argued that the theory remains ambiguous due to the potential for results to be effected by cognitive processes such as: self-perception and impression management. Caution is recommended in generalizing the results of studies due to results derived from artificial conditions and lab experiments that may not fully encapsulate real-

life situations. Individual differences may result in variations of the experience of dissonance: period of time experienced, tolerance, and levels of arousal from dissonance (Baumeister & Bushman, 2017).

### **Cultural Hegemony**

Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory is based on the idea that societies are dominated by the beliefs, perceptions, values, morals, and explanations imposed upon them by the ruling-class worldview. Thus, these views become the accepted cultural norms and establish the dominant ideology. This ideology deems political, social, and economic standards as applicable to all (Gramsci, 1992). Anderson applied Gramsci's hegemonic theories to further explore the pervasive views of monogamy as an ideal construct and to enhance understanding of monogamy and nonmonogamy in relationships.

Anderson explored ways that hegemony creates cultural reverence for monogamy, ultimately preventing critical analysis of the risks or costs of monogamous relationships in terms of sexual and emotional health (Drigotas & Barta, 2001). Anderson highlighted ways in which a lack of critical analysis can lead to acceptance of criticism for open relationships and nonmonogamy without equitable criticism of monogamy. Anderson highlighted the experienced conflict in the desire for sexual coupling with others yet being influenced by monogamy's hegemonic cultural dominance. This state of contradiction is further explored through Festinger's cognitive dissonance (1957).

Perfunctory or obligatory monogamy compelled by social hegemony was identified as a barrier to honest discussions with a partner in terms of sexual desires and an exploration of viable relationship constructs. The hegemonic perspective defines these

desires as equitable to loss of love, diminished sexual appeal, and failure of the relationship. This can unintentionally create the illusion that love is measured by sexual desire and encounters. The desire to maintain the relationship with the perceived limitations along with the desire to pursue sex outside of the relationship creates dissonance that when combined with hegemony can ultimately lead to infidelity. Anderson (2012) describes this monogamy gap as a rational response to an irrational situation. Anderson disputed the concept of monogamy as the determinant factor for relationship satisfaction and fulfillment. Anderson highlighted ways that placing value solely in the monogocentric cultural views establishes a faulty basis for assessing relationship satisfaction (Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003). Anderson's monogamy gap theory in the context of cultural hegemony posits that without the stigmatization of nonmonogamous or open relationships; love for one's partner would not be contingent upon sexual exclusivity. This was directly applied to gay relationships with the pressure of cultural hegemony, as cultural hegemony influences the practice of psychology which originally not only considered gay unions as a disease but further supported the incorrect stereotype that most gay males have frequent and noncommittal sexual encounters.

### **Cognitive Dissonance**

Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) posited that actions can subsequently influence beliefs and attitudes. This theory implies that our actions stem from our existing beliefs and attitudes as opposed to being the cause of them. Addressed by cognitive dissonance is the tendency to rationalize choices and behaviors. The fundamental assumptions included in Festinger's theory are sensitivity to inconsistencies

in actions and beliefs, recognition of inconsistencies will create dissonance, dissonance will be resolved by changing your beliefs, actions, or perception of actions.

According to this theory, all individuals are conscious at some level when actions are inconsistent with beliefs, attitudes, or opinions. This inconsistency motivates resolution of dissonance through experienced discomfort. The degree of discomfort is variable based on the importance of the belief, attitude, or principle in relation to the degree of inconsistency in the behavior. The theory postulates that the greater the dissonance the greater the motivation to resolve the conflict. Resolution can occur through changing beliefs, changing actions, or changing one's perception of actions.

Studies have indicated that men are more likely to cognitively differentiate love from sex (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; LaSala, 2004; Nabavi, 2004). This distinct compartmentalization supports the views of differences in sexual and emotional monogamy. This compartmentalization is identified in psychology as a defense mechanism to avoid cognitive dissonance. Anderson's dyadic dissonance theory (2009) further supports this as a process that negates the predisposed expectations of monogamy; allowing one to value monogamy yet still engaging in nonmonogamous behaviors.

Statements related to gay male monogamy highlighted contradictions between the value of monogamy within their relationship due to the perceived societal benefits and mutually desiring a heteronormative relational structure. Competing factors of morality, sexual health, and societal norms seemingly all influence monogamy; likely resulting in contradictory beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Anderson, 2012). Given the various beliefs, attitudes, and opinions surrounding gay male relationships and the multitude of

factors that influence them; it was important to apply cognitive dissonance theory in order consider what choices will be enacted to maintain homeostasis and reduce discomfort when entering into monogamous relationships.

### **Theoretical Application**

Anderson (2012) theorized that monogamy is a societally established norm that affects individuals in their selection of relational constructs, expectations within the relationship, self-views, and perceived relationship satisfaction. The applied model sought to understand the development of monogamous and nonmonogamous behaviors as well as the beliefs of the individual and partner in terms of relationship expectations, satisfaction levels and experiences. The Monogamy gap theory provided the ability to view participants' experience of monogamy through the lenses of cultural hegemony and cognitive dissonance. This allowed me to listen for ways that their lived experience confirms or disconfirms this model and theories from which the model is derived.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on the history and psychology of homosexuality, the psychology of monogamy, monogamous and nonmonogamous relational constructs, the view of monogamy in gay male couples, relationship health and satisfaction, cultural pressures and societal views, changes in law, and theoretical framework. As can be seen in this review of the literature on monogamy in gay male couples, it contained little information on the lived experience of gay males who engage in monogamous relationships. Literature available consisted of information that was contradictory, based on heterosexual practices, or failed to account for the complexity of factors that may affect decisions related to engaging in monogamous relationships.

Although views related to homosexuality and monogamy are continuing to change; pervasive misconceptions continue to impede social-sexual progress and understanding. The aim of the research is to fill gaps in the literature and extend knowledge in the fields of medical and mental health by exploring expectations and behaviors outside of compulsory or societally normed constructs. There is a clear need for continued theoretical and practical research into understanding lived experience of monogamy in gay male relationships as indicated by the lack of data specific to this demographic.

Addressed by Chapter 3 is the methodology of the qualitative, phenomenological research study. Chapter 3 provides information related to the method selected, the study design, participant selection process, the role of the researcher, data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. As identified above, phenomenological research conclusions did not investigate the lived experience of gay males engaging in monogamous relationship; which would provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon through their examination (Willis, 2007). Research focused on understanding the lived experience of gay males engaging in monogamous relationships from their perspective.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

A review of the literature on monogamy in gay male couples indicated that there is both a lack of research and conflicting results in existing findings. My purpose in this study intended to expand on the existing research by exploring the lived Experience of monogamy in gay male couples. In this study, I used a phenomenological tradition and focused on the lived Experience. I begin this chapter with the research questions, research design and tradition, methodology, a description of the study design, and my central focus of the study. In this chapter, I also identify my role as the researcher. In the methodology section, I identify and describe the sample population, instrumentation, and data analysis. The chapter addressed: limitations of the study, ethical concerns, and ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Research Questions**

The following are the primary questions that I explored in this study:

1. What is the lived experience of monogamy in gay male relationships?
2. What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay relationships?

#### **Central Concepts of the Study**

My purpose in this phenomenological study: to understand the lived Experience of monogamy among gay male couples. At this stage in the research, the *lived Experience of monogamy* will generally be defined as ways in which gay males interpret, understand, and view relational constructs. The study's 11 interview guide questions assisted in

identifying and understanding the lived experience of gay male couples in monogamous relationships (Appendix C). Bernard (1995) stated that semistructured interviews provide a clear set of instructions, allows the researcher to obtain reliable and comparable qualitative data, and demonstrate benefit when the researcher will only be able to conduct one interview or when there will be multiple interviewers collecting data.

Gomm (2004) highlighted that the interview process facilitates an intimate, trusting, and empathetic relationship with the participants. This relationship can foster discovery by creating a comfortable environment, conducive to self-disclosure by reducing participant's inhibition or hesitation to disclose fully. Semistructured interviews can provide rich, original information that can be used to construct research narratives, allowing this method to capture the individual's unique experiences.

### **Research Tradition**

Following the guidelines established by Giorgi (1986), I used the phenomenological tradition for this study. Through this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of gay men who are in monogamous relationships through the narratives as told in response to the research and research interview questions. A form of inquiry which seeks to obtain a deep and rigorous understanding of the human experience through descriptions of phenomena is qualitative research (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

Defined as the knowledge of a phenomenon as it appears in its essential and immediate form to the consciousness, *phenomenology* is both a philosophy and a method. Phenomenology seeks to understand the fundamental meaning or essence of a phenomena through the richness of the lived experience (Giorgi, 1983). This largely



reflective process aims to discover, reflect on, and clarify meanings based on the phenomena's descriptions (Giorgi, 1992a). The investigation of consciousness through phenomenological reduction involves the researcher's view of the phenomena without preconceived notions and by setting aside prior knowledge to allow the true meaning to emerge. As a method, phenomenology involves three steps: phenomenological reduction, description, and search for essence (Giorgi, 1997).

Operating under assumptions dissimilar to natural sciences and traditional psychology; phenomenology posits that the method used to study a given phenomena should be compatible to the way the phenomenon presents itself to the consciousness. Starting from the beginning, without any presuppositions, phenomenology negates the belief of subject-object splitting and focuses instead on subject-object relationship (Giorgi, 1983). Phenomenology seeks to understand the information through the subjective perspective and the understanding of the role of the subject-object description. Subjects cannot be described without the acknowledgement of the subjects' relationship to the object and similarly, the object cannot be described without acknowledging its relationship to the subject. Therefore, phenomenology is an appropriate method to research the lived experience of gay males engaging in monogamous relationships due to both the adherence to rigorous description and access to a deeper understanding of the psychological phenomena (Giorgi, 1997).

The meaning of the phenomenon as experienced by the person is referred to as *phenomenal meaning*. Phenomenological reduction requires that the researcher bracket prior knowledge, experience, or preconceived notions related to the phenomenon of interest to allow the phenomenon to be seen specifically as it is understood through the

consciousness (Giorgi, 1997). The reduction also takes the description and experience of the phenomenon provided by the individual as a subjective example of the phenomenon. This occurs without assumption of definitive existence based on the participants' description, but rather it assumes that the description provides a true representation of the participants' experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1992a). Reduction avoids making existential claims and instead states that there is a presence as opposed to an existence (Giorgi, 1985a). Phenomenological reduction must occur to deem the method and analysis as phenomenological inquiry. I applied the principles of bracketing and reduction in the preparation for and conducting of the data analysis process.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In the undertaken role of researcher in this process I attempted to become a detached, objective, and scientific observer. I sought to build a picture consisting of the experiences, ideas, and theories from participants using reflective listening skills, probing questions, and clarifying questions.

As a qualitative researcher, I sought to describe relevant aspects, my biases, assumptions, expectations, and specific experiences (Greenbank, 2003). In assessing my potential research biases, I identified the risk of confirmation bias. In my therapeutic and familial interactions with gay males, I have seen the negative effect of inaccurately representing gay male relationships. In my observations these relationships have been represented in society as largely nonmonogamous and based on sexual gratification. This appeared to diminish the significance of individual relationship needs, expectations, and to perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes. These identified factors manifested as shame, guilt, and decreased satisfaction with self and relationships with those I had personal

interactions with. Due to these preconceived ideas and beliefs related to monogamy and the sexual practices of gay males, I had to address the potential for dismissing evidence that did not support my experiences, hypotheses, or beliefs. This required an analysis of my own tendencies to filter information based on my own understanding and the potential for information to lend itself to evaluative impressions based on preexisting assumptions if left unchecked.

As part of the phenomenological research process, I bracketed my own experiences and feelings related to the experience of monogamy in gay male couples. I remained aware that not only did my presence and participation affect the participants in this study but that the participants also affected me. My role as the researcher consisted of completing the interviews, transcribing the data, interpreting the results, and presenting findings of the study. I incorporated the use of journaling to reflect on my experience and to identify and monitor any biases which could have affected the study's validity. No known conflicts of interest or undue familiarity to the proposed study population occurred. No participant recruitment or selection from any source directly or indirectly connected with my workplace or the school occurred. The proposed population did not receive incentives for participating in the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The target group for this study consisted of gay males who have engaged in a monogamous relationship for a period of at least 12 months. The selected period provided a reasonable time frame to account for various relationship stages and changes. A large urban location increased diversity of participant background and experience. Age ranges

remained broad enough to account for possible differences in generational views, beliefs, and experiences. The participant selection basis allowed for inclusion based on participant's potential ability to expand upon the literature and available research given their experiences of the phenomena.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The criterion sampling strategy used for this study identified gay males who have engaged in a monogamous relationship for a period of at least 12 months and provided information rich cases that contributed insight into the phenomena in question (Patton, 2015).

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

Gay males between the ages of 25 through 65 who self-identified as being in a monogamous relationship within a 150 mile radius of a large mid-western metropolitan city met criteria for inclusion. Participants' self-reported status of age, location of residence, involvement in a monogamous relationship for a minimum of 12 months, and ability and willingness to describe their experience of monogamous relationships determined criteria for inclusion.

### **Rationale for Number of Participants**

Excess participant data was avoided to prevent lack of clarity in qualitative data analysis (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). According to Dukes (1984) 6 to 10 participants were recommended for a qualitative, phenomenological study. During data collection, extensive and sufficient depth of data occurred by the sixth participant.

### **Data Saturation and Study Sample Size**

Upon completion of the sixth interview diminishing return in the qualitative sample occurred. Recurrent data, or codes, consistently presented; making them part of the analytical framework. These occurrences ceased to lead to further acquisition of data by the sixth interview. The sample demonstrated its ability to account for most of the perceptions that are significant to the underlying meaning without resulting in repetitive and superfluous data. Given that upon the sixth interview the collection of data ceased to shed any further light on the issue under investigation no further interviews were needed.

### **Instrumentation**

To retain focus on the participants' lived experience, collected data came from the 11 interview guide questions to address the research questions (Appendix C). As per Giorgi, interview guide questions consist of open-ended format through semistructured interviews. According to Giorgi (2009) these interviews avoid the use of highly structured and unstructured methods, allowing the interviewee the ability to speak freely about whatever comes up. This carefully designed method elicits the interviewee's ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, without leading the interviewee to a preconceived choice. This method required me to follow up with further probes for in-depth information related to the topic of interest. The underlying principles prevent leading the interview or imposing meanings.

**Basis for Instrument Development.** I followed Giorgi's (2009) instrument development methods through the use of semistructured interviews from a phenomenological perspective. Resulting from two primary research questions, the 11 interview guide questions (Appendix C) allowed for participants' description of

situations, lived Experience, and effect (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The structuring of the interview guide questions allowed participants' to provide an overview of something they know well, the ability to speak to their experiences in a focused way, and to retain focus on actual occurrences (Spradley, 1979). The instrument further allowed for a detailed description of experiences along with allowing for the inclusion of personal thoughts and feelings, yet avoided interpretations by the participant(s).

Qualitative interviewing became a flexible tool used to capture participant voices and identify meaning from their experiences. Semistructured interview and instrument guide questions developed using the following methods. As per Denzin and Lincoln (2005) establishing an initial frame of reference allowed for placement of the selected method within a larger qualitative framework. The semistructured interview guide questions allowed me to narrow down areas and topics specific to gay males in monogamous relationships.

As explained in Chapter 2 interview guide questions elicited topics and themes most closely related to the research questions under consideration. These questions reflected on implications of homosexuality being identified as a diagnosable condition, fears surrounding STI's, cultural expectations of monogamy, possible lack of modeling of relationship norms, and social misconceptions. Instrument guide questions 1 through 4 directly related to the perceived phenomenon that participants experience pressure to be in a monogamous relationship. Question 5 reflected on the fact that gay male relationships are not commonly portrayed as being monogamous. The guide determined whether or not participants felt pressured to be in monogamous relationships or to align with societal perceptions. Questions 6, 7, and 8 elicited participant's experience of the

monogamy gap, if any. Questions 9, 10, and 11 obtained a better understanding of factors of success in relationships, barriers, and what participants want on a personal level versus societal expectations.

Developed interview guide questions maintained a respectful and culturally sensitive tone and established communication with the ability to elicit participant stories, adhere to ethical guidelines, establish a solid relationship between the questions asked and the content produced during interviews, and to allow for data analysis and summary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

**Establishment of Content Validity.** The utilization of the chosen design allowed for structure within the inherent flexibility of qualitative methods. The research design effectively provided me with the means of obtaining data that answered the research questions within my time and skills constraints (Ghuari & Gronhaug, 2005). Determined validity occurred through the data's identification of concepts the research set out to measure. The instrument demonstrated ability to reflect the world of the object of study. As described in the previous section, I have identified that there was sufficiency of data collected. This is indicated by the illumination of relevant themes on a recurrent basis, thus concluding the interview process.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Invited study participants included: English speaking, gay males, between the ages of 25-65 years, living within a 150 mile radius of the Northern, Midtown, and Greater Downtown Kansas City area, self-identifying as being in monogamous relationships for a period of at least 12 months. Each singular interview occurred at a location of the participants' choosing, lasting between 45-60 minutes. Taking place at a

time established between myself and the participant(s), interviews took place in a private conference room or location designated by the participant to ensure that disclosure was not heard by others. I completed written transcription and audio recording for all interviews.

Recruitment of individual participants occurred via social networks such as gayresearch.com, facebook.com, craigslist.org and newspaper ads (Appendix A). Due to the limited response to recruitment efforts, I invited peers to distribute invitations to recruit additional participants. Upon receipt of expressed participant interest, I conducted phone calls and communicated through email in order to determine eligibility for study inclusion based on criteria specified. I provided informed consent documents and scheduled interview dates and times.

Participants provided informed consent by their review of the electronic consent form and provision of the response of 'I consent' via email (Appendix B). These procedures detailed my purpose and participatory requirements of the study and clarified the rights as a voluntary research participant. The consent form included potential risks and benefits of participation in the study. I completed a review of confidentiality with each participant and achieved confidentiality through the use of encoding of names, alteration of personally identifying information, and through the use of a password-protected data program on the personal computer used.

Participant notification included a review of the voluntary nature of the study at the beginning of the recruitment process and clarification of their freedom to accept or decline the invitation. I informed participants of their ability to change their mind



regarding their participation at any time in the study and notified participants as to whether or not they were selected for the study. Following completion of the study, no further interviews or contacts took place. Participants received additional debriefing information regarding possible effect of study participation and contact information for myself along with additional resources, services, and supports.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I followed the data analysis steps identified by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) to inform the procedures used. I remained aware of Giorgi's (1992a) caution to avoid reaching beyond the available data and instead focused on the goal of describing the information present versus interpreting). I used broad and open-ended questions in order to derive a detailed account of the participants' experience (Giorgi, 1997). I also conveyed the attitude that the descriptions are of use and value (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), in addition to retaining subjectivity and the experienced reality of the participant through the use of listening to each description as though it is the first time (Giorgi, 1983, 1989). I avoided analysis or interpretation of the descriptions during the initial data collection in order to preserve the meaning of the participants' phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985a).

I read to obtain a sense of the wholeness of the experience, reading the entire description prior to analysis to gain a holistic view of the experience. I sought to understand the language of the describer without applying meaning or judgement (Giorgi, 1997). Descriptions identified as lengthy or tangential, were read by me multiple times to attain a sense of the experience.

Before establishing meaning of units, I assumed the attitude of scientific psychological phenomenological reduction (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In order to take on

this attitude, I bracketed out former knowledge, impressions, or experiences regarding monogamy in gay male couples by applying the understanding that each description is only an example of the participants' construed experience (Aanstoos, 1985; Giorgi, 1997). I used this method to reduce my subjectivity in addition to maintaining the participants' subjectivity. I remained cognizant of the function of reduction; which is to take the descriptions exactly as presented in accordance with the participants' genuine experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I did not take or affirm acts of consciousness as presented, but rather, viewed these as acts of individuals relating to the world. As asserted by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) this is a necessary part of reduction to overcome natural human bias that occurs when stating our experiences without critical evaluation. I used this method to allow the dimensions of the total experience to emerge.

I approached the data from a generic psychological attitude as opposed to a theoretical perspective (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) due to the various perspectives that can be used to process data as well as the lack of applicability to all participants (Giorgi, 1985c). I retained the concept that a psychological attitude is only a perspective or attitude and processed data by setting aside prior knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon in order to establish units of meaning. I assumed that the participant descriptions provided true examples of gay male's experiences of monogamy. I sought to establish units of meaning by breaking down lengthy descriptions into manageable parts (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I read slowly through each description and annotated noted changes in meaning that appeared to be psychologically sensitive. Meaning units remained expressed in the participant's wording during this phase and I considered these to be context-dependent rather than independent elements (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

I transformed data into meaning units with psychologically sensitive expressions through the transformation of the language from everyday expressions into psychologically scientific ones. I incorporated this step to ensure that scientific achievement could be obtained (Giorgi, 1989). I expressed meaning units in a way that retained the richness of the participant's description by following Giorgi's (1985) recommendation to articulate participant expression through the use of commonsense language enlightened by phenomenological perspective. I used psychological language consisting of reflection to transform the participant's everyday expressions. I included: redescribing meaning units from the reduced stage, removing repetitive meaning units, changing first person point of view into third person, using relevant parts of the context outside of the meaning unit to assist in co-determination of the transformation of meaning, clarifying and elaborating on the meaning of the units through relation to one another and the whole, and reflection on the possibilities of meaning (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I sought to discover the true essence of the experience of monogamy in gay males through each meaning unit.

I took on the stance of psychological reflection through the use of five characteristics: empathic immersion, consideration of all details of the experience, magnification and amplification of the situation, suspension of belief, and focus on meaning of objects versus the object itself (Wertz, 1985). I further included Wertz's 11 activities of psychological reflection. These activities consisted of: using an existential baseline, reflecting on judgment, understanding implicit meanings in descriptions, making distinctions, seeing relations to the whole within the statements, thematization of

recurrent meanings, reducing ambiguity, reflection on the essence of the experience, transforming participant language into meaning and researcher language, verification, modification, and reformulation to reduce distance between expressions and descriptions, and the application of existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

According to Morrow (2005) qualitative research has been derived from various paradigms, disciplines, and epistemologies. This research incorporated the standards of quality: validity, rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness. I assessed qualitative inquiry on the basis of these paradigmatic research factors and the associated standards of discipline. Shenton (2004) identified the use of distinct changes in terminology to assist in clarifying the trustworthiness of qualitative research. I derived corresponding terms from the criteria required for trustworthy research identified as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is focused on the congruence between reality and the research findings. This is identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. In order to achieve credibility, I adopted research methods that are well established in qualitative investigation and incorporated correct operational measures for the concept being studied (Yin, 1994). These methods involved using line of questioning and data analysis procedures that have been identified as being successfully used in comparable projects

To ensure honesty in the data obtained I provided the opportunity to refuse participation at any point in the research without the requirement of an explanation to all

participants. This ensured each individuals genuine willingness, ability, and preparedness to take part in the study and to freely offer data.

Emerging patterns and theories developed the detailed description of the phenomenon being studied. Providing a detailed description is important to establish credibility through the investigation of actual situations and the context surrounding them (Alkin, Daillak, & White, 1979). I examined previous research findings to assess the degree to which the study results were congruent with past studies. This demonstrated my ability to relate the findings to an existing body of knowledge; a key criterion for evaluating qualitative inquiry (Silverman, 2001).

### **Transferability**

According to Merriam (1998) external validity is the extent to which study findings can be applied to other situations or a broader population. Given the smaller number of individuals in this qualitative study; applicability of findings and conclusions to other populations and situations could not be demonstrated. However, Denscombe (1998) highlighted that despite the unique aspects of each case, it can still represent examples within a broad population or group. Thus, transferability should not be rejected in entirety.

I used this approach with caution to avoid minimizing the importance of contextual factors. I took precautions to avoid relating findings to my own position through the use of bracketing and journaling. I ensured that the reader was able to infer meaning by providing sufficient contextual information to the reader as opposed to making inferences about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided sufficient description of the phenomenon under investigation to allow the reader to understand,

compare, and transfer information related to the phenomenon of study. In accordance with Guba's (1981) stance, I provided a full description of background information and contextual factors that affect the inquiry. I conveyed the boundaries of the study to the reader and encouraged the consideration of these boundaries prior to making attempts at transference. According to Pitts (1995) this information should include the number of individuals taking place, the location of the individuals, restrictions in the type of individuals who participated, the number of participants, data collection methods used, number and length of data collection sessions, and the period of time for data collection.

### **Dependability**

To address issues of reliability, one would need to demonstrate that the work can be repeated, using the same methods, with the same participants, in the same context, and produce similar results. Given the fluid nature of phenomenological studies, qualitative research identified this definition as problematic. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified correlations between dependability and credibility. Through the use of interview methods; overlap will occur. To address dependability, the study processes were reported in detail; enabling future researchers to repeat the work without implying that the same results will be obtained. This detailed reporting method also allowed the reader to assess appropriateness of research practices, develop understanding of the methods, and identify efficacy of methods. I include sections on research design, design implementation, description of planning and execution. I used operational detail of data gathering, reflective project appraisal, and an evaluation of the efficacy of the inquiry processes.

## **Confirmability**

According to Patton (1990) objectivity is associated with the use of instruments as opposed to perception or skill. Due to the inability to avoid the affect of human elements; research bias was identified by Patton as inevitable. Therefore, confirmability became the focus of the research. Confirmability is defined as the extent to which the researcher admits their own predispositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I acknowledged beliefs related to decisions made and methods employed in the research through the research report. I identified reasons for selecting a particular approach when others were available, along with identifying weaknesses within the selected methods.

I created an audit trail; allowing the reader to identify the course of research through the decisions made and the described procedures and provided this information through a data-oriented approach. This approach demonstrated how the data was gathered and processed during the course of the study and resulted in any recommendations made.

## **Ethical Procedures**

### **Access to Participants or Data**

According to Bell and Bryman (2007) ethical considerations emphasized that I did not use coercion to ensure participation in the study. I achieved this by providing all participants the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding consent. In adhering to the APA's (2017) ethical guidelines I ensured that all participants were voluntary and had full knowledge of the relevant risks and benefits. This included providing participants with information that might influence their willingness to participate. I provided information in a format that could be understood and comprehended by the participants. I informed them of my purpose of the research, expected duration,

procedures, right to decline to participate or withdrawal from the study, potential risks or adverse effects, potential research benefits, limits of confidentiality, incentives for participation, and points of contact for any questions or needs that arise from study participation.

I provided participants with an overview of the study, introduced them to the content and theme of the study questions, and informed them of my purpose and nature of the study (Appendix A, Appendix B). I discussed the research with participants and gained their informed consent as the initial basis of establishing trust and rapport, as crucial to the collection of data. I established whom data was collected from selection of the participants. This resulted in three specific areas of focus with regard to choosing participants: the need to ensure the sample enabled me to collect data that are appropriate, the use of specific sampling techniques to choose participants whom are appropriate to meeting the research aim, and the number of participants that are required to provide sufficient data (Saunders, 2012).

### **Treatment of Human Participants**

I acknowledged the potential to experience emotional distress during the research process. This may result from the activation of traumatic memories or disturbing emotions during participation in the research interview. Due to this potential, I followed several steps to address ethical concerns. These included adhering to the APA's guidelines for conducting research with human participants, obtaining approval from Walden University's Ethics Committee and following the established research guidelines, treating all involved participants with respect and consideration of effect of participating in the study, including only voluntary participants, providing all participants with a full



description of the research project prior to their commitment to the study, informing all participants that they can terminate their participation at any time, keeping all material confidential, refraining from engaging in any act(s) that may identify study participants, and refraining from altering any potentially identifying information.

I made every effort during the interview process to respond appropriately, respectfully, and ethically to the participant(s). I responded in supportive and empathic ways to emotionally charged questions, responses, or concerns that arose. Additionally, I monitored for indications of distress and remained available to debrief participants (Appendix D) as necessary. I anticipated the experience of anxiety, depression, or affective reactions requiring professional attention. I provided a list of public mental health agencies along with private mental health professionals for clinical assessment, follow-up, and treatment.

### **Institutional Permissions**

Given that the location for the interviews is not unaffiliated with Walden University, I obtained written permission to use the designated facility for the research. The permission letter included letterhead and signatures of appropriate officials. I submitted this documentation to the IRB and did not engage in recruitment and research activities prior to receipt of approval.

### **Ethical Concerns-Recruitment Materials and Processes**

I considered several factors to ensure recruitment practices and provided materials adhered to ethical and guidelines. My recruitment strategy helped to ensure equitable and appropriate selection of study participants based on the identified requirements. I obtained confirmation from the participants to ensure that they met the criteria for

participation. To ensure respect for privacy, I conducted screening questions in a private setting where others could not overhear the answers. I did not recruit participants from a recruitment database; thus, I precluded the need to obtain permission to use the individual's information. I introduced the study in a manner that allowed participants ample time to consider participation and included considerations that avoided undue pressure in the timing of the request.

I did not provide incentives for the study, thus I eliminated the concern of excessive inducements. To avoid placing participants in a position to be hesitant or reluctant to decline participation, I did not recruit minors, students, clients, or others who may have been affected by undue influence or power differentials. I presented study information in a way that was balanced, accurate, and free of misleading emphasis to prevent representing the study as excessively attractive or enticing. The study information I provided informed participants of the lack of assured benefit to participation and I clearly outlined risks of participation (Appendix B).

### **Treatment of Data-Collection, Dissemination, and Destruction**

I collected all documents and audio files electronically and stored them on a password protected laptop. I housed all study information containing personally identifying information (PII) stored on the password protected laptop in encrypted files to prevent unintentional breaches of confidentiality. Due to the nature of the research site (off campus), I maintained consent forms and audio files in their electronic format in an encrypted file. I redacted participant information or PII from consent forms and audio and coded to further protect participant information. I stored all electronic records in

password protected files through the University server and conducted regular and secured back-up on a monthly basis.

I adhered to University guidelines for protecting PII by encrypting, storing, and securely erasing all sensitive data. Audio recordings stored in the same manner as electronic records were erased as soon as information had been coded, transcribed, and was no longer needed for research. I conducted annual reviews of IRB approval and board review protocols, prior to the approval expiration date. I completed continuing reviews for the duration of recruitment, while data collection was occurring, and throughout storing of PII data.

Data will be retained for five years in accordance with University policy. Records to be maintained include: copies of all research proposals reviewed, scientific evaluations, consent documents, progress reports, reports of injuries to subjects and other unanticipated problems, copies of all correspondences between myself and the IRB. Records will be preserved in electronic and media form and will be accessible for audit purposes. Records for completed projects will continue to be stored on a secure server, on a password protected laptop, in an encrypted file. The same methods for the active project will remain in effect for five years after project completion.

The destruction of human subject research records will be performed in a fashion that protects the confidentiality of the research subjects. Electronic documents, physical audio tapes, and paper records will be destroyed, physically erased, and data scrubbed to ensure deletion. Data will be considered completely destroyed when all links between individual identity and data are destroyed.

All contacts made during the recruitment, informed consent, and debriefing processes adhered to the same protocol identified above. This included individuals who requested removal from the study at any point in the research process. As identified in the section above, I minimized adverse effect of study participation to the furthest extent and further addressed through the use of the debriefing form and by providing contact information for resources, services, and supports to all participants.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the details of the method and procedures for this research study. The use of semistructured interviews in sequence with a qualitative phenomenological research design addressed my purpose of the research: to understand the lived experience of gay males in monogamous relationships as explored through the narratives. I identified a clear need for continued theoretical and practical research into understanding monogamy in gay male relationships as indicated by the lack of research and data specific to this demographic. I provided a well-grounded research design based on epistemology and theory. In Chapter 3, I also included information on the role of the researcher, data collection process, data analyses, and identified themes related to gay males engaging in monogamous relationships. Finally, in this chapter, I discussed the appropriateness of the research design, the population, assumptions and limitations, and ethical assurance. In the following chapter, I present the results for this study, where they will be examined and assessed.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

### **Introduction**

To address the gap in literature regarding the experience of monogamy for gay men, my identified study objective is to explore the lived experience of gay males who have engaged in monogamous relationships. In this study, I further addressed the gap in literature regarding the experience of monogamy for gay men. This gap in literature has been identified as playing a role in supporting or maintaining stereotypical views of nonmonogamous practices of gay males and as resulting in the use of broad comparisons to practices amongst heterosexual males (Moors, et al., 2013; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Meyer, 2003).

This chapter is a presentation of the results obtained from the audio recorded and transcribed interviews of six participants. I interviewed participants using semistructured and follow on questions based on the established research questions of: (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? and (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay relationships? This method allowed participants to respond based on their perspectives and understanding of monogamy. I conducted interviews and data analysis in accordance with the procedures described in the Methodology section. In the previous chapter, I provided the study rationale for the research design and tools used. In Chapter 3, I further explained the study procedures, supported the validity of the study results, and reviewed issues of trustworthiness.

In this chapter, an analysis of the data is presented, followed by proof of the study's trustworthiness. Emergent themes in answer to the research questions will be derived from the study results. This section begins with a review of the setting for the

research study, the demographics of the participants, and the methods used in data collection and analysis. This chapter continues the data analysis in relation to the research questions followed by an interpretation of the outcomes. The section concludes with a summary of the most relevant context within the interviews.

### **Setting and Demographics**

To enhance the sense of comfort and safety, I conducted all interviews in a location determined by the research participant(s). For interviews conducted in public settings, I implemented additional measures to ensure participant anonymity and privacy of disclosure. No changes in personnel or organizational conditions identified as influencing the participants, their experiences, or the interpretation of the study results occurred.

I contacted participants who responded positively and met inclusion criteria by e-mail and phone. I obtained demographic information for each participant from the responses given during the pre-screening process. Each participant confirmed their age, area of residence, identified sexual orientation, relationship status or history, and primary language spoken.

The participant selection criteria consisted of gay males, English speaking, between the ages of 25-65, residing within a 150 mile radius of the Northern, Midtown, and Greater Downtown Kansas City area. Four gay males currently in monogamous relationships and two gay males who previously engaged in a monogamous relationship for a period of at least 12 months comprised the six selected research participants. Actual participant ages ranged from 33-49 years of age and identified ethnicities consisted of three Caucasians, two Hispanics, and one African American.

### **Data Collection**

I initiated data collection processes after Walden University's IRB granted research approval (02-13-19-0268261). This approval expired on 02/12/2020. I followed Walden University's established research protocols to ensure study validity and compliance with ethical procedures and guidelines.

To obtain the 6 participants, I distributed the research recruitment announcement using the methods identified in Chapter 3. After speaking with individuals who expressed interest in study participation, I ensured that each participant met the study criteria through phone call or e-mail communications. I informed each individual invited to participate in the study of the university's ethical procedures. I followed Walden University protocols for conducting interviews involving human subjects and confidentiality. Only 6 individuals responded positively and met the study criteria. I then submitted the consent form via e-mail to each potential participant. Upon receipt of the consent form acknowledgement, I made follow up communications via phone or e-mail in order to ensure the participants' understanding of the voluntary nature of participation, answered any additional questions or concerns, and determined a time, date, and location for the interview. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 90 minutes in duration. I conducted all interviews in a private area of the designated interview location.

The interviews consisted of semistructured and open-ended follow up questions designed to assist in answering the research questions identified in the study. I structured the questions to allow each participant to express a broad scope of lived Experience and perceptions of monogamous relationships. Each interview began with an introduction and reminder of participants rights and ability to withdraw from the interview or study at any

time. I provided each participant with the option to receive research results following completion of the study, thanked participants for their time, and engaged in a review of the audio recording procedures and privacy protection measures. Participants acknowledged understanding of processes and verbally expressed agreement for participation. In each interview, I provided opportunities for the participants to ask questions prior to the start of the interview. Following participant confirmation that no further questions remained, the interview process commenced.

I audio recorded all files and did not experience issues related to deleted or failed recordings. Digital recordings ensured retention of data and provided the ability to review and transcribe participant responses. Participant's freely provided responses and required little prompting. I transcribed notes highlighting key phrases or elements during each interview and annotated repeating words or themes. Immediately following primary questions, I used probing and follow on questions.

Following each interview, I uploaded audio recordings to encrypted files on a password protected laptop and transcribed each interview in entirety within one week of the interview completion. To preserve participant anonymity, I coded interview recordings and transcriptions. I uploaded all transcription documents to the encrypted files on the password protected laptop. I bracketed through the use of journaling to account for potential researcher biases. I locked hard copy documents containing signatures, interview notes, and journals in a fire and waterproof safe in my home. I completed written analysis of audio and transcribed interviews and accounted for the emergence of key words, phrases, and themes that presented during the interviews.



### **Data Analysis**

Based on Giorgi's (2009) method of phenomenological analysis, I conducted data analysis as described in Chapter 3. After reading each interview in entirety, I used meaning units to divide participant data into psychologically sensitive changes in meaning. Once I identified meaning units, I transformed them into psychologically sensitive expressions. I used these expressions as the basis for a list of common themes identified amongst participants. In the psychological expressions, I identified four salient themes that encapsulate the gay male's experience of monogamy. Each theme reflected the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of the participants and highlighted both conscious and subconscious aspects of the experience of monogamy. I individually described each of the four themes to ensure validity, and selected direct quotes from the individual transcripts to support each theme. I identified significant and essential themes of gay male's experience of monogamy within these results.

### **Coding Procedures**

After I transcribed each interview, I began the process of analyzing the qualitative data. I read interviews multiple times to obtain a sense of the experience, understand the language of the participant, and identify meaning within lengthy or tangential descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). Prior to establishing the meaning of units, I bracketed out former experiences, knowledge, or impressions regarding monogamy in gay male couples.

I achieved understanding of each description by categorizing the description as an example of the participants' expressed experience (Aanstoos, 1985; Giorgi, 1997). I took descriptions exactly as presented and interpreted acts of consciousness as acts of

individuals who are relating to their world. I used this method to overcome natural bias that occurs when stating experiences without critical assessment (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In using this method, I allowed the dimensions of the total experience to emerge. I approached data from a generic psychological attitude due to various perspectives that can be used to process data as well as the lack of applicability to all participants (Giorgi, 1985c; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I set aside prior knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon in order to establish units of meaning and retain the assumption that participant descriptions are true examples of gay male's experiences of monogamy.

To establish units of meaning, I broke down lengthy descriptions into manageable parts (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I read slowly through each description and noted changes in meaning that appeared to be psychologically sensitive. I considered meaning units to be context-dependent rather than independent elements and maintained expressions using the participant's wording (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Data was then transformed into meaning units of psychologically sensitive expressions. I did this by transforming everyday expressions into psychologically significant ones (Giorgi, 1989).

I used meaning units to retain the richness of the participants' description by: re-describing meaning units from the reduced stage, removing repetitive meaning units, changing first person point of view into third person, using relevant parts of the context outside of the meaning unit to assist in co-determination of the transformation of meaning, clarifying and elaborating on the meaning of the units through relation to one another and the whole, and reflecting on the possibilities of meaning (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi, 1987; Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Through the use of empathic immersion, consideration of all the details of the experience, magnification and amplification of the situation, suspension of belief, and focus on the meaning of objects versus the object itself, I undertook psychological reflection. Psychological reflection consisted of 11 activities: use of an existential baseline, reflection on judgment, understanding implicit meanings in descriptions, making distinctions, seeing relations to the whole within the statements, thematization of recurrent meanings, reducing ambiguity, reflection on the essence of the experience, transforming participant language into meaning and researcher language, verification, modification, and reformulation. I conducted these activities to reduce the distance between descriptions and expressions and guide reflection (Wertz, 1985).

### **Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes**

Identified here are the four themes that emerged from the study data. Supporting statements for each theme answering the research questions and describing the lived experience of monogamy in gay male couples will be further reviewed in the results section.

- Family of origin-include values, beliefs, and relationship constructs
- Societal expectations-include media, social networking, religion, and peers
- Infidelity vs. monogamy-include relationship norms, personal experience, and emotional, sexual, and agreed upon arrangements
- Communication of expectations-include initial, follow-on, and revisions or change

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

To ensure credibility, I used saturation. Dukes (1984) recommended six to 10 participants for a phenomenological study in order to achieve the extensive and sufficient depth of data required for qualitative research. I gathered adequate data supporting the research and ensuring that the study effectively measured or tested the intended elements and determined congruence between reality and the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data saturation occurred by the sixth interview as no new concepts, themes, findings, or insights were identified (Guest, et al., 2006).

### **Transferability**

External validity is the extent to which this study's findings can be applied to a broader population or alternate situations. With the small number of individuals in the study; it could not be demonstrated that findings and conclusions would apply to other populations or situations (Merriam, 1998). However, despite the unique aspects of each case, the study results still represent examples within a broad population or group (Denscombe, 1998). To avoid minimizing the importance of contextual factors, I used bracketing and journaling to prevent relating the findings to my own position or biases. By providing sufficient contextual information, the reader retains the ability to infer meaning as opposed to making inferences about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Background information and contextual factors related to the inquiry and boundaries of the study provided sufficient description of the phenomenon being investigated. This allowed the reader to understand, compare, and transfer information related to the phenomenon of study (Guba, 1981).

**Dependability**

In qualitative research, the fluid nature of phenomenological studies can create difficulty in demonstrating the ability to repeat the work and the results by using identical methods with the same participants and content. To address this issue, I reported the study processes in detail; allowing future researchers to repeat the work, without implying that the same results will be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Chapter 3 provided an extensive overview of: research design, design implementation, description of planning and execution, operational of data gathering, reflective project appraisal, and an evaluation of the efficacy of the inquiry processes used. By providing a detailed reporting method, the reader is further able to assess the appropriateness of the research practices, develop an understanding of the methods employed, and assess the efficacy of the methods used.

**Confirmability**

Patton (2015) identified the inability of the researcher to avoid the affect of human elements. The element of researcher bias is considered to be inevitable; making the focus of research confirmability. Confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits their own predispositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this process I described relevant aspects of self-related to biases, assumptions, expectations, and specific experiences (Greenbank, 2003). To achieve confirmability, I acknowledged my own beliefs related to methods employed in the research and decisions made. I further identified my potential research bias and acknowledged the risk of confirmation bias.

I achieved this through the use of the research report. The research report identified my reasons for selecting the particular approach despite the availability of other

options and further identified the weaknesses within the methods I selected. I created an audit trail to allow the reader to identify the course of research through the decisions made and procedures described. I used a data-oriented approach to demonstrate how data was gathered and processed during the study and the recommendations made as a result of these methods.

To retain participant objectivity, I avoided filtering information based on my own understanding. To limit my effect on the study, I used bracketing to reflect on my own experiences and feelings related to the experience of monogamy in gay male couples. I remained aware that my presence and participation in the interview process affected study participants as well as me. I incorporated the use of journaling to reflect on my experience and to identify and monitor any biases which could have affected the study's validity.

In my therapeutic role and familial interactions with gay males, I have seen the negative effect of being inaccurately represented, the affect of inaccurate stereotype perpetuation, and the outcomes of diminishing the significance of individual relationship needs, expectations, and experiences. Due to these preconceived ideas and beliefs related to monogamy and the sexual practices of gay males, I addressed the potential for dismissing evidence that did not support my experiences, hypotheses, or beliefs.

I did not identify any known conflicts of interest or undue familiarity to the proposed study population. I did not recruit or select participants from any source directly or indirectly connected with my workplace or the school. The proposed population did not consist of any part of my current work environment and I did not include incentives for participation in the study.

## Results

### Research Questions and Supporting Themes

This study included two research questions that provided the structural framework of the research: (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? and (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay relationships? 11 instrument guide questions expanded on the research questions and provided additional clarity on the essence and experience of monogamy (Appendix C). Supported by rich and descriptive statements, the data revealed the essence and lived experience of monogamy amongst gay males. Responses from participants described what participants had in common, what they experienced, and how they experienced the monogamy phenomenon.

The first question (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? can be understood and answered by Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4. As referenced below in these themes, participants experienced negative implications of cultural and societal norms, stereotypical views, challenges in communication, and personal experiences of infidelity. Participants further identified personal norms and relationship expectations that have been shaped by their experiences within their family of origin. Aligned with theoretical framework of cultural hegemony this data highlighted the implications of ruling class worldviews and cultural and societal norms.

The second question (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay male relationships? can be understood and answered by the overall lack of endorsement in participant interviews. As referenced below in Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 data supported ways in which cultural, familial, and societal views affected the participants' desire to engage in monogamous relationships. However, no participant fully endorsed

the specific experience of the monogamy gap, as contrary to the hypothesized framework suggesting that there is an existing desire to engage in monogamous relationships yet still engaging in sexual couplings outside of the relationship with their partner.

### **Theme 1: Family of Origin**

Six out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they derived part of their basis for developing relationship constructs from their family of origin. The participants' responses (4 out of 6) revealed that they grew up in homes consisting of what they defined as "traditional" relationships and "lifelong" marriages or couplings. These four participants identified these types of relationships as commonplace in their immediate and/or extended families.

P1 "I mean, all of the examples I saw growing up, the relationships were all monogamous relationships. I mean, I had my parents to base my relationships off of, all my family, really. I grew up in a fairly conservative Southern family, so, everybody got married young, had babies, and that's just what I always saw. So, that seems normal to me. I never really considered anything else. My relationship is different than my parents obviously. I'm with a guy instead of a girl, but I feel like I have pretty much the same relationship my parents had with each other as I do with my husband."

P3 "That's the way I've always been. I've never wanted open relationships. I've always wanted a long-term relationship with one person. It's just never come to me as a real relationship. I mean I grew up with parents that have loved each other since day one. You know, that



never waivered, that's what I grew up with. I never saw anything else but my parents, or my sister and whoever she was dating, or my brother or whoever he was dating or married to at the time. That's what I saw. There was no openness to another person coming into that. It was always one man and one woman or however that worked out with the people around me. To me, that's what a true relationship is. It's that love and that building of a life together."

P4 "My parents and most of my family have what you could call real 'traditional' relationships. There are a lot of them who dated in school and ended up getting married after high school. They have been together for forever. I don't think anyone ever really thought about doing things differently, it was just the way that it was. You found someone you loved, you made a promise or like a commitment to them, and then you kept it throughout your life. I never really considered having a different kind of relationship. It just seemed normal and it was something I wanted for me and my partner. I would say we have a relationship that is pretty much like the rest of my family. We have known each other for a long time and once we decided to be committed, I never pictured it being different from what I grew up with."

P6 "I came from a really small family. It was really just my parents and my two siblings. Most of our family died before I was born or when I was young. But, what I knew of them was that most of them had never gotten divorced or anything. Like my grandparents were married for a long time

and my parents are still together. Neither of my brothers have gotten married yet but they have always been in long term relationships. I think I just always expected that my relationships would be the same. I think I just assumed that it's what people do."

Of the 6 participants, Participant 2 and Participant 5 identified differences in the relationship constructs within their family of origin. Participants identified these discrepancies as nonmonogamous practices engaged in by their parents. Although both participants identified a lack of modeling of monogamous practices in their family of origin, both participants similarly endorsed that these experiences contributed to their decision to engage in monogamous relationships and therefore, I included in the results.

P2 "I grew up believing that my parents were one hundred percent monogamous and never, ever, thought of ever straying until I was an adult. Then I learned that even that wasn't true. My father couldn't keep it in his pants. As an adult I'm not crushed that my dad wasn't the man I thought he was because I understand and I am my father's son. I am just like him. I look like him, I act like him, I speak like him, so I figure I think a lot like him. So, I get it. I get where he was coming from but that's another thing. I was like, look, if they couldn't even do it...if they went through the whole you lied to me thing.. I'm just going to cut that part out and just be honest that it's happening."

P5 "My parents were a mess. They were always getting together, breaking up, dating each other, dating other people. They couldn't figure things out and it was really hard on all of us. We were always changing houses and

my parents were always bringing new people around. It was really messed up. Me and my brothers and sisters were really sick of it after a while. I think I decided when I was young that I never wanted to go through that again. I think I just knew that it doesn't work and it just screws everyone up. My brothers and sisters are the same way. I think that we didn't want to be like them. We have long term relationships and we don't date or have sex with more than one person at a time. But, I think it makes it harder to be in a relationship. It's a lot harder to trust people and to know how to do it."

## **Theme 2: Societal Expectations**

Six out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they have been directly affected by societal expectations in various ways. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 identified being influenced by societal perceptions and portrayals of their relationship dynamics and behavioral norms. Participants identified these expectations or views as stemming from society, religion, and the media. Participant 5 reflected on the affect of societal expectations but differed in report of personal experience.

P1 "Christianity tells you that you have to do it and other religions do too. I was raised fairly religious. My husband was raised basically atheist. We have both kind of adopted the agnostic characteristics but we both know like what a traditional Christian family would look like. I don't want to say we model ourselves after that because we don't by any means but I feel like what they view what their family structure is according to their beliefs is pretty much how our family works. I mean, we have two parents,

a kid, and we just live our life the way we want. I can usually slide in with nobody realizing that I'm gay and when I come out it's like, holy crap! I get labeled as straight acting which I absolutely hate. When it all starts coming out, I hear 'I don't know any gay people but I expect them to be, like, overly flamboyant and with a lot of partners.' Here I am, I have been married for 8 years, been with him for 10, we have a 4-year-old and we look like any normal family would. I think societies expectations of gay men are not to be in monogamous relationships. So, it kind of surprises them to see that my husband and I are just like them with their wives. There's no real difference. One of my fellow co-workers was concerned that I would redecorate the place. Because that's what a gay man will do, they will come in and redecorate. I have the worst fashion sense and the worst decorating skills of any gay man that I've ever met. So, yeah, I think that they definitely expected me to be one way and I know I have surprised a lot of them by not being that way."

P2 "I grew up in a very nonreligious family. I believe our culture is set that way because of religious values, which I think in our country of choose your own religion, participate or not, a lot of the moral laws that we have are very Christian based laws. Religion sets up the culture for monogamy and I don't really participate in that. I've tried, it didn't really work out so well. Not to say that I'm an atheist, I wouldn't go that far. I would consider myself agnostic; a spiritual person. I think that it's not having, for lack of a better term, not having any forefathers to look at to

generate an idea of a relationship. So, when you take that stereotypical male/female relationship and you try to put that on a male/male coupling, then how does that work? There are a lot of ideas about gay men and relationships, but most of them don't work for me or for my husband. We are in a monogamous relationship where we do have sex with other people...But even that is different than how society views it. We aren't polyamorous, we aren't bringing other men into our home, we aren't forming relationships with other people. And, I think that's where society and media get it wrong."

P3 "I am not a religious person, but I grew up in the Methodist Church. I was made to go to Sunday school and church every Sunday up until the time I was 10. But I think depending on the aspect of religion, I think that plays a huge part in what is right and what is wrong in the relationship for a lot of people. I think the way that a lot of times that you see a gay relationship being portrayed, or gay men in general; they are very promiscuous, they are not faithful, they are always flamboyant, which is an out and out lie. I feel like certain aspects of things especially in the news and on television; it shows us as something that we're not and I think that in some aspects it has effected me because I've seen so much. The way that things are portrayed it is scary, it is concerning, because for the longest time I didn't think I was ever going to find that one person that was looking for the same thing I was. I worried that that's what every other man was going to act like and I think that's part of the reason why I

have such a huge wall. Because they were going to have to prove to me that they were not like everyone else.”

P4 “I grew up in the Pentacostal Church and it was really confusing for me because I was really involved and close to the people in the church. But then, there I was almost every week hearing something about the ‘sin’ of homosexuality. I mean, I think I always knew that I was gay and that was going to be a problem. When I got older, I think I felt like I had to pull away once I came out. I just figured they wouldn’t be able to accept me after that because of their beliefs. I get really tired of how gay men are stereotyped. When I meet people they just assume that I am in an open relationship or that I sleep around. It’s really frustrating because they never ask about my partner or, like, talk about normal relationship stuff with me. Really, they kind of leave me out of relationship conversations. Like, one time a friend of mine was complaining about his relationships and he said ‘You’re lucky that you don’t have to deal with this stuff. You get to have all the benefits without the problems.’ I guess he just thinks that I sleep around and have fun. I guess I can’t blame them. Every time I turn on the tv or look at my social media, there’s some episode or article where gay men are just living this party life. It’s not even like that...at least for me, it isn’t. Sometimes I think I should write an article or be on tv—let people see what it’s like.”

P6 “I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church. Religion was a big part of our family life and I think it goes back a lot of generations—at least that’s

how my parents tell it. I remember trying to talk to one of the priests about being gay. It was one of the worst times I can remember. He told me to pray about it and that I could overcome it. Like, I could pray away my arms or something. I just felt like there wasn't a place for me there anymore. It kind of felt like disappointing my family and losing my own history. I know that there are more accepting views now, but that time will always be in my mind; it's hard to get over. I deal with a lot of people who don't really understand my relationship. They think we live together but have boyfriends on the side, I guess. It's kind of weird trying to explain it to them because they kind of act like I'm lying or something... Like, yeah, sure, you're monogamous. I think we have just stopped trying to help people understand because all they know is maybe what they've seen. Like, on TV or the internet, or maybe even at a gay bar or something. They always act surprised when I tell them I'm gay, even more surprised when I tell them I'm in a committed relationship. I've heard things like, 'I thought gay men talk different.' or 'But you don't walk gay'. Like, really, there's a walk and a talk I'm supposed to do?"

Participant 5 identified differing experiences related to exposure and affect of societal views and expectations. These discrepancies, based on Participant 5's reported lack of exposure to stereotypes, tied directly to his orientation through various mediums. However, he endorsed personal views and beliefs based on perceived expectations of societal constructs and practices and therefore, I included this information in the results.

P5 “My family was never religious and I don’t think I ever really wanted to participate. I know that a lot of religions don’t accept homosexuality. I mean, who wants to be around people who think there’s something wrong with you? I don’t think I ever cared about what people thought about me. My family was such a mess so we were never really ‘normal’. People judged us all the time. So, I never really expect people to understand me...my relationships, my sexual orientation....they’re going to think what they want to. I just have to make sure that I am making the right choices for me.”

### **Theme 3: Infidelity vs. Monogamy**

Research participants in this study each shared specific views related to the expectations or experience of personal or partner infidelity and definitions of monogamy. These participants further shared examples of how experiencing infidelity and responding to infidelity shaped their relationship dynamics and expectations. The participants’ responses (4 out of 6) revealed that they experienced some type of infidelity in previous relationships. Three out of 6 participant’s further identified infidelity as a reason to end the relationship.

Six out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they have specific definitions of monogamy. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 identified definitions of monogamy that are aligned with predominant societal norms. Participants identified these definitions as being derived from various factors such as: personal experiences, relationship dynamics, and environmental norms.



P1 “I never saw the appeal to sleeping around or being with multiple partners. I like my life the way it is. I don’t see it as a challenge for either of us, maybe for other people. Both of us are away and we are both put in situations where we are definitely around extremely attractive people. But, I don’t think it’s a challenge or anything. We would definitely sleep with other people if life was a different way. But, I think it’s a conscious decision not to act on it. It’s just not one of those things we’re ever going to do, I guess. I expect my husband to support me. I expect him to not seek attention elsewhere. I mean all of our friends have always called us weird. We both check out other people, talk to other people, but, how does he put it? It doesn’t matter where you get your appetite as long as you come home to eat. That has always been our kind of stance.”

P3 “I’m not going to play second fiddle to somebody, especially if I’m in a marriage or a relationship with them. It’s just not going to happen. Every relationship I have ever been in before now, I’ve been cheated on, I’ve been lied to, I’ve been used, I’ve been abused-verbally, mentally, and sometimes physically. It has worn me down. I think with the hurt that comes along with that, you always have it in your mind. To me, an open relationship is you are together but you can go and have fun with other people, but you still come home to the one person. And to me, I don’t want any of that. No kissing, no sexual intercourse with anyone of any kind. No, to me, that’s cheating and I don’t like to share. Monogamy is comfortability. Knowing that there’s nothing else that’s going to come

between us. We have an understanding of what we want together and there's not a third party or fourth party or anything like that. It's just the two of us working together to make the relationship work."

P4 "I've been cheated on...a lot. It's always bad. When it happens, I can't stay in the relationship because...you can't trust them, you can't feel safe with them. When you get cheated on, it makes it hard to trust people. It makes new relationships really tough because you get worried that it will happen again. I always told my partners that I wouldn't deal with cheating, ever. Not that it kept it from happening, but I always told them up front. If I'm going to commit myself to someone, I want them to do the same.

Monogamy is about protecting the whole relationship. Emotions, sex, communication; it's everything. There should never be another person who comes between you and your partner in any of those areas."

P6 "I don't think I could ever deal with my partner cheating on me. We have been together for so long and I think it would tear us apart. I trust him, he trusts me, and we have an understanding that it isn't ok for us. I mean, sure there is always temptation...but it's something I won't do. If he did, it would be over. I didn't really have any long-term relationships before him so I have never really experienced cheating. I haven't cheated, my other relationships haven't as far as I know. So, I can't say for sure how I would react, but I know I couldn't stay with him. For us, well, for me, being committed, being monogamous means we are committed to

each other...only. We don't sleep around, we don't fall in love with other people, we don't share our lives, or, ourselves, I guess, with anyone else.”

Participant 2 and Participant 5 both identified definitions of monogamy that are not directly aligned with societal norms or expectations. These discrepancies included definitions of open sexual relationships with emotionally monogamous expectations as well as allowable indiscretions followed by reconciliation and recommitment. However, both participants endorsed monogamous constructs with varying expectations and therefore, I included this information in the study.

P2 “My ideas of monogamy came from my previous relationship. We both promised each other monogamy all the time and we both cheated and we both got caught 90% of the time. So then you have that dynamic of you lied to me, you broke my trust, how can you be a partner if you're going to break my trust? I would say that my husband and I are very emotionally monogamous. I mean, when we got married we wanted to say vows and exchange rings and all that. We just kind of looked at each other and said divorce is not an option. As a couple, we are very solid-we are very united. Sexually, we are 100 miles apart. I just see monogamy as something women say and totally mean and are 100% behind. They put the definition in the dictionary of one man, one woman, always. No stray, no look, no touch. In reality, I'm not saying there aren't guys that are 90% monogamous, but as soon as the sex wanes in their relationships, which I truly believe it does, I just don't believe that men follow through. I believe women do, but I don't believe men do.”

P5 “I’ve been cheated on. I mean, hasn’t everyone pretty much? It’s really hard because trust and relationships have always been hard for me. I think it just comes from what I’ve seen. So, when a partner cheats, I have a really hard time with it. It doesn’t always mean that the relationship ends, it kind of depends on the situation. I mean, sometimes people make mistakes. But, if someone is always cheating or lying; I’m not going to put up with that. That isn’t a relationship, it’s just like friends with benefits, you know? I think when you make a decision to be with someone, that means just them. But, I mean, like I said...sometimes people screw up. You can decide to stay together, but that means having to make changes. Having to recommit to one another and the relationship. They would have to be willing to do that.”

#### **Theme 4: Communication of Expectations**

Five out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they have engaged in discussions related to their expectations of monogamy with either current or previous partners. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 identified initial and/or subsequent discussions with partners in which they communicated expectations, changes in expectations, or specific problems or concerns.

P2 “Well the agreement was, from day one, I always said that I can promise you the moon, but I cannot promise you that I will be a you only person, and I can’t believe that you can tell me that you will too. I mean, you can tell me that but I’m really not going to believe it. So when I brought this to the table with my partner I said, I’m just being honest with you now, rather than being a liar with you later. And he was like, ‘Totally,

that's totally fine.' The only stipulation he had was, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And I was like, 'True that, I don't want to know all the details about it.' We do talk, I mean we talk about meeting a guy but don't go into all the details."

P3 "We discussed it. I told him that I did not want an open relationship. He agreed, you know, it was just monogamous from day one. We have kind of come to an understanding and I have explained it to him. I can't really remember sitting there and discussing it with each individual ex, you know, is this a monogamous relationship? I just went into it expecting it to be because that's what I always grew up with. Not until I was in my late 20's did I realize there was such thing as monogamy in a sense of people discussing it. I just thought it was a way of life."

P4 "In the past, I always made it real clear. I would not put up with cheating. I think the way I described it was, I'm here for you-totally and I want you to be here for me in the same way. That means no so called 'friends' you sleep with or like, really talk about the important stuff with. You know, when you start opening up to people, it can create some emotions. I feel like that's where you know you crossed the line. Those are for your partner. If you start crossing those lines, it gets easier to cross other lines-like sex. It hasn't meant that I was never cheated on, but it meant that the discussion was already had and so they knew where you stood, you know? With my partner, we are always talking about things. I want him to feel safe in our relationship and I want to, too. So, if

something seems 'off' we talk. If something seems like it's crossing or getting close to crossing a line, we talk."

P5 "I guess maybe I have a hard time in relationships. Because it's hard to trust people, maybe I just expect them to cheat. So, I think I'm maybe not as clear as I should be. I try to tell my partners what I have been through. I, like, explain why trust is important and what it was like growing up or being cheated on. But, it is hard to really say 'no' or like, really set up rules for the relationship. I think I probably hint more than I say. If they do cheat, that's when I think it gets more clear. Like, then I can say 'no' to things that I'm not ok with."

P6 "I've never really had relationships outside of my partner. I think when we got together, we really just talked about our goals for the relationship. Or, like, what we wanted it to be like. I think we used a lot of comparisons to other people's relationships. Like, we want to be like Aunt and Uncle whoever...or, we don't want to be like so and so...we would talk more about how they were. I guess talking about monogamy was kind of like, using those comparisons. It was like we were saying those people cheat or those people don't...or like, those people are happy and those people aren't. We do talk about things that make us mad or worried. Like, if he thinks I may be attracted to someone or if I think we may be kind of getting distant. We talk about those things."

The discrepancy identified by Participant 1 stemmed from his involvement in a long term, monogamous relationship, without specific or in-depth discussions related to

expectations of relationship constructs or monogamy. However, Participant 1 identified a cursory conversation that consisted of current couple status and future expectations of relationship dynamics and therefore, I included this information in the results.

P1 “I don’t know that we’ve ever really talked about it. I think when we decided that we were going to be exclusive it was ‘Well, I’m not talking to anybody else right now, you’re not talking to anybody else right now, so we are just not going to talk to anybody else.’ I mean, we were I guess ‘dating’ or whatever for a couple of months before we decided to be exclusive. I don’t think we ever really, like, sat down and made an agreement on how we were going to be monogamous. It was just an ‘ok, here we are’ sort of thing. Yeah, it just kind of happened.”

### **Summary**

My purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore how gay males experience monogamy. More specifically, my purpose of the study was to explore the common themes that emerged from their experiences with the phenomenon. The two central research questions and 11 instrument questions guided the study. I collected data collection via face-to-face, semistructured interviews. I used an analysis of qualitative data to understand each description and to categorize the descriptions as examples of the participants’ expressed experience (Aanstoos, 1985; Giorgi, 1997). Data was then transformed into meaning units of psychologically sensitive expressions. This was done through transforming everyday expressions into psychologically significant ones (Giorgi, 1989).

Throughout these previous sections, themes emerged from each of the research questions which identified different factors surrounding the decision to be monogamous, the definitions of monogamy, and the experience of engaging in monogamous relationships. Also, research and instrument questions in this study yielded an array of different experiences and perspectives emerging from similar themes. For example, all participants shared different examples of ways in which their family of origin influenced their views and decisions related to monogamous relationships. Participants also described ways in which societal views have affected them personally and within their relationships.

As noted above the research question of (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? is understood and answered by Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each of these themes identified negative implications of cultural and societal norms, stereotypical views, challenges in communication, and personal experiences of infidelity. Participants further identified the ways in which their experiences within their family of origin shaped their personal norms and relationship expectations. Participant interviews did not endorse the second question (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay male relationships? as referenced by Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4.

No participants fully endorsed the specific experience of the monogamy gap within the context defined in the literature. In this specific example that would mean that partners are fully monogamous yet experiencing difficulty or conflict in avoiding external sexual couplings. However, this is identified in part by Participant 1's response of conscious decision making to maintain his current relationship in lieu of sexual experiences outside of his partnership. This is further reflected on in Participant 4's



response in which he identified a conscious choice to avoid sexual exclusivity and still maintain emotional fidelity.

In this chapter, I covered the setting, demographics, data collection method, data analysis method, the evidence of trustworthiness, the results of the data analysis, and a summary. In chapter 5, I will review my interpretation of the findings, limitations of my study, my recommendations regarding future research studies on this matter, the implications of social change for this research study, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

My qualitative, phenomenological study explored how 6 gay males experienced monogamy in their relationships. More specifically, my study explored the common themes that emerged from their experiences with the phenomenon of monogamy. In this study, I used semistructured, open-ended questions to understand the perspectives of the participants and how they made sense of their experiences. Gay males who had been in a monogamous relationship for a period of at least 12 months participated in this study .

Previous research and literature has under or misrepresented the experience of monogamy in gay male couples. These faulty representations led to gaps in understanding perspectives, expectations, and personal views of gay males who are or have engaged in monogamous relationships. In this study, I explored the implications of monogamy for social, mental, and physical health in gay males. My research focused on gay relationships in contrast to available research whose emphasis was on heterosexual relationships and heterosexual monogamy (Peplau & Cochran, 1990). This research used a distinct focus due to evidence indicating that typical heterosexual monogamy is different from typical relationship constructs of gay males (Peplau & Cochran, 1981).

I collected the data for this study via face to face, semistructured interviews as part of the qualitative, phenomenological design. My ability to understand the phenomenon via addressing the two research questions resulted from participant selection using self-selection random sampling. I used the qualitative phenomenological inquiry design in this study because it allowed me to explore the perceptions and common themes that emerged from the participant's responses. I applied Creswell (2009) and Giorgi's

(2009) methods of analyzing the data and a total of four themes emerged. All four themes emerged from asking the participants the interview questions related to the experience of monogamy and the monogamy gap in gay relationships.

As described above in Chapter 4, there were four specific themes that emerged from the study data. Participants endorsed ways that the values, beliefs, and relationship constructs within their family of origin influenced the development of their relationship norms. Participants also expressed ways in which media, social networking, religion, and peers affected their self-views, worldviews, and relationship behaviors. Study participants also defined relationship norms stemming from personal experiences and agreements related to emotional and sexual arrangements with their partners. Participants each identified communication patterns related to the expectations of monogamy. Identified as occurring from the on-set of their relationships, participants reported that these communications continued to evolve throughout the relationships' course.

These emerging themes aided in answering the following research questions: (a) What is the experience of monogamy in gay male relationships? and (b) What is the experience of the monogamy gap for men in gay male relationships?. These research questions can be understood by presenting themes 1, 2, 3, and 4. In answer to the first research questions themes identified negative implications of familial, cultural, and societal norms, stereotypical views, challenges in communication, and experiences of infidelity for all participants. Participant responses indicated that that their personal norms and relationships expectations had been further shaped by these factors. In answer to the second question some participant responses indicated a shift from a monogamy gap

experience in prior relationships to their current relationship, in which no gap is experienced; or it has become a point of relationship communication.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The results of the study have been considered in light of the prior research and organized by themes. These results have been examined from the perspective of the theoretical framework of monogamy gap theory, cognitive dissonance, and cultural hegemony.

### **Connections Between the Literature and Theme 1**

The first theme of this study revealed ways in which the participants' internalized cultural and family values affected their relationship choices, behaviors, and constructs. This finding is consistent with Nail, et al. (2000) who asserted that individuals comply with cultural rules for the purpose of obtaining social acceptance, avoidance of rejection, and conflict reduction. Despite participant's unique characteristics, interview responses highlighted ways in which participants complied with cultural and societal rules in most examples. These interpretations of social cues and desire to be accepted highlighted the occurrence of conformity as noted by Johnson and Sheets (2004). As stated by Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6, they did not consider alternative relationship constructs due to the exposure to values, beliefs, and views within their family of origin.

Theme 1 features included the theory of cultural hegemony. As mentioned previously, cultural hegemony theory is based on the idea that societies are dominated by the beliefs, perceptions, values, morals, and explanations imposed upon them by the ruling-class worldview. Thus, these views become the accepted cultural norms and establish the dominant ideology. When this occurs, individuals may be more apt to

change their behaviors to align with societal norms (Gramsci, 1992). This is evidenced throughout the research findings as indicated by Participant 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6's endorsement of these behavioral patterns and themes.

### **Connections Between the Literature and Theme 2**

This study's second theme revealed ways in which participants displayed inhibited or avoidant behaviors related to engaging in critical analysis or criticism of monogamy. According to Anderson (2012), hegemony creates a cultural reverence for monogamy. Without the stigmatization of nonmonogamous or open relationships, love for one's partner would not be contingent upon sexual exclusivity (Drigotas & Barta, 2001). Anderson highlighted ways that placing value solely in the monogocentric cultural views establishes a faulty basis for assessing relationship satisfaction (Dush, et al., 2003). Elements of this theory can be seen in Participants 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6's reflection on the automatic acceptance of monogamous constructs, reverence for monogamous practices, and the participant's identified choices and behaviors.

Moors, et al.'s (2013) reflection on pervasive media, societal, and stereotypical portrayals of gay male couples as nonmonogamous further illustrates Theme 2. Bond (2014) stated that heterosexuality is overrepresented in television shows and gay men are underrepresented or represented inaccurately. For example, themes related to sexual practices frequently included stereotypes, jokes, and insults. These themes failed to address the accurate components of gay male relationships. With limited role models in television or the public eye gay males can be affected by negative views, beliefs, and perceptions. Gay male couples continue to find themselves subjected to discriminatory

and prejudicial practices in many venues (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). All 6 participant interviews identified these themes.

### **Connections Between the Literature and Theme 3**

Anderson (2012) added that when infidelity transpires, gay males rarely contest the value of monogamy within their relationship. This response could indicate that gay males experience a type of cognitive dissonance when it comes to the importance of monogamy and their sexuality, or that they have less of an expectation that monogamy can occur in a gay relationship.

Addressed by cognitive dissonance is the tendency to rationalize choices and behaviors. The fundamental assumptions in Festinger's theory included sensitivity to inconsistencies in actions and beliefs, recognition of inconsistencies will create dissonance, dissonance will be resolved by changing your beliefs, actions, or perception of actions (Festinger, 1957).

According to this theory, all individuals are conscious at some level when actions are inconsistent with beliefs, attitudes, or opinions. This inconsistency motivates resolution of dissonance through experienced discomfort. The degree of discomfort is variable based on the importance of the belief, attitude, or principle in relation to the degree of inconsistency in the behavior. The theory postulates that the greater the dissonance the greater the motivation to resolve the conflict. Resolution can occur through changing beliefs, changing actions, or changing one's perception of actions.

Anderson (2012) identified a phenomenon, related to relationships among all genders called the monogamy gap. This is the inability to reconcile fidelity and the desire to have a sexual relationship outside of the committed relationship. This theory, the

central focus of this study, contended that the cognitive dissonance between monogamy and nonmonogamy may lead to relationship problems such as cheating with another person or decreased level of satisfaction with the relationship. Because monogamy is one type of arrangement within the continuum of relationship agreements among gay male couples, adherence to the agreed arrangement of monogamy is critical for relationship quality (Mitchell, et al., 2012). The occurrence of discrepancies between the agreed upon relationship arrangement, such as in the case of monogamy and the actual practices of the couple, can cause relationship quality to suffer (Anderson, 2012).

Research participants in this study each shared specific views related to the expectations or experiences of personal or partner infidelity and definitions of monogamy. The participants' responses (4 out of 6) revealed that they experienced some type of infidelity in previous relationships. Three out of 6 participants further identified infidelity as a reason to end the relationship. These participants further shared examples of how experiencing infidelity and responding to infidelity shaped their relationship dynamics and expectations.

Six out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they have specific definitions of monogamy. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 identified definitions of monogamy that are aligned with predominant societal norms. Participants identified these definitions as being derived from various factors such as: personal experiences, relationship dynamics, and environmental norms.

#### **Connections Between the Literature and Theme 4**

This study's fourth theme revealed ways in which the participants viewed and engaged in communications regarding expectations of monogamy with their partners. For

those participants identified as engaging in perfunctory or obligatory monogamy compelled by social hegemony, participants noted barriers to honest discussions with partners in terms of sexual desires and further exploration of viable relationship constructs outside of monogamy.

Hegemonic perspective is reflected in Theme 4. This perspective defines the desire for external couplings as equitable to loss of love, diminished sexual appeal, and failure of the relationship. This can unintentionally create the illusion that love is measured by sexual desire and encounters. The desire to maintain the relationship with the perceived limitations along with the desire to pursue sex outside of the relationship creates dissonance that when combined with hegemony can ultimately lead to infidelity (Anderson, 2012).

Five out of 6 research participants in this study shared that they have engaged in discussions related to their expectations of monogamy with either current or previous partners. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 identified initial and/or subsequent discussions with partners in which expectations, changes in expectations, or specific problems or concerns were communicated.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this study, I explored the lived experience of gay males who are or have been in monogamous relationships. I intended to contribute to the body of knowledge on gay male relationships, and focused on the experience of monogamous relationships and the monogamy gap as the primary phenomena of interest. Study participants included gay males between the ages of 25 through 65, who have experienced a monogamous relationship of at least 12 months, and who resided in a large midwestern city.



To ensure credibility I made sure that line of questioning and data analysis procedures were consistent across participants. I provided participants with multiple opportunities to refuse participation. I compared research findings to past study results and assessed for congruence. Although I am unable to demonstrate that findings and conclusions are applicable to other populations and situations the unique aspects of each participants experience is still representative of examples within a broad population or group. I took precautions to negate my personal biases through bracking and journaling in order avoid minimizing contextual factors. I accomplished inference of meaning by providing sufficient contextual information and description of the phenomenon of study. Due to the phenomenological nature of the study I reported processes in detail to enable future researchers to repeat the work without implying the same results will be obtained. I admitted my own predispositions and I acknowledged personal beliefs related to decisions made and methods employed in the research. I identified the reasoning behind selections as well as weaknesses. I created an audit trail to allow for identification of the course of research and described procedures.

The focus on one geographic location, the inability to generalize results of a phenomenological study to a wider population versus being specific to the study participants, and the specific interest criteria limiting findings to the portion of the population who share these demographics and criteria are identified as limitations of this study.

Identified differences included incorporating other geographic locations, nonconforming genders, changing the required duration of monogamous relationships,

defining the constructs of monogamy versus participant definition, and conducting interviews in the presence of participant partners.

### **Recommendations**

As explained earlier previous phenomenological research did not investigate the lived experience of homosexuals engaging in monogamous relationships. This may have provided a greater understanding of the phenomenon through it's examination (Willis, 2007). The continued application of heterosexual norms to homosexual dynamics can further perpetuate stereotypes, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination; resulting in minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Marmor (1980) postulated that these factors can result in an impaired self-image. This raises the question of what one might consider the appropriate expression of gay sexuality and relational norms and what role stereotypes play in terms of defining self and relational constructs.

This study's six participants revealed multiple ways in which the existing stereotypes do not consistently apply to gay males in monogamous relationships. Participants highlighted ways in which people's experiences within their family of origin and other cultural contexts can result in stereotypes that are unfairly and inaccurately applied personally and within their relationships. It is of critical importance that further research into these areas occur. It is suggested that future research continue to explore how cultural constructs are experienced uniquely among all members of the target group. As a cultural phenomenon that results in negative outcomes it is both relevant and important to gain greater insight and understanding into these areas. As such, it is recommended that future research expand the target groups to include other genders, relationship constructs, orientations, and geographic locations. Some specific examples

include men who are in long term relationships, marriages, and the role that children play in monogamous relationships. It is recommended that further research be conducted on nonheterosexual relationship constructs as well as views and practices of monogamy.

### **Implications**

Implications of the current study include gaining greater insight and clarity into individual decisions surrounding monogamous relationships, factors that influence these decisions, and identifying long-standing and inaccurate assumptions surrounding gay male relationships. These inaccuracies are felt at individual, familial, organizational, and societal levels. This is highlighted in both current and recent legislation, clinical diagnostic criteria and practices, family expectations and individual choices, and discriminatory practices. Potential effect for positive change is related to greater awareness surrounding this particular phenomenon and could include further changes in legislation, employment practices, medical and mental health interventions, and familial and societal awareness and acceptance.

This is significant from a clinical perspective in order to understand additional ways in which members of this specific population are being marginalized and experiencing pain. For example, clients experiencing this circumstance may have symptomology that is more global to their status in society and needs to be considered in the treatment of their specific presenting concerns. Specifically, as a clinician, I will incorporate this research into my clinical practice by listening for these conditions to be present in the clients with whom I work and educating colleagues as applicable in the consultation on case dynamics..

Empirical research shows that gay males can experience diminished relationship satisfaction, decline in mental health, and exposure to major health risks. The implications of contextual, cultural, and stereotypical views surrounding monogamy require further clarification, insight, and understanding (Spitalnik & McNair, 2005). My goal of this research study was to ensure that the findings will make a positive contribution toward both social change and current research and literature.

The methodological design of this study highlighted the ways in which these stereotypes influence and are felt at individual, familial, and societal levels. These identified factors have shown influential in the individual decision making processes and lifestyle choices. This methodology showed the extent to which this phenomenon is felt by these participants and can potentially be generalized across members of the communities these participants represent.

This implies that as researchers and clinicians we must always be listening for, and aware of, the implications of this phenomenon and it's effect on client's symptomology and overall functioning. Each of these elements can potentially drive clinical practice, applied interventions, and aid in the reduction of continued misinformation and potentially harmful practices.

### **Conclusions**

My goal of this study is identified as gaining greater insight and understanding into the complexities of monogamy in gay male relationships along with the affect of cultural and societal expectations and norms within the gay male population. In my research I identified discrepancies in early correlative longitudinal studies that concluded that gay relationships operate on the same principals as heterosexual relationships and

that relationship quality and outcome were equivalent for gay and heterosexual couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; & Kurdek, 1998).

Participant responses and study outcomes endorsed Gottman, et al.'s study (2003) which highlighted ways in which perception can be markedly different than interactions. Participant responses further highlighted the implications of cultural hegemony by providing specific indications of current cultural views, attempts to reduce association to relationship models viewed as problematic or pathological, and the diverse dynamics in male couplings.

Marginalization of any population can result in the loss of or limited access to political rights, economic opportunities, and social integration. Individuals and populations suffering from marginalization can experience detrimental effects to their livelihoods as well as experiencing restricted personal, educational, employment, societal, and cultural opportunities. With the long-standing and on-going scarcity of valid and reliable research surrounding gay male relationships, the likelihood of continued marginalization, negative outcomes, and decreased personal wellness is likely to continue. Therefore it is incumbent upon researchers, clinicians, and those working with marginalized populations to continually educate themselves about the many ways in which these phenomenon are experienced and can occur in order to support and reduce the effects of these concerns.

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### Appendix A: Recruitment Posting

Dear Potential Study Participant, my name is Kellie Barton and I am a student at Walden University working on my dissertation in psychology. You are invited to take part in a research study about your experience of monogamous relationships.

I am inviting English speaking, gay males between the ages of 25-65 who self-identify as being in monogamous relationships for a period of at least 12 months and are within a 150 mile radius of the Northern, Midtown, and Greater Downtown Kansas City area to participate in this study. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your experience of monogamous relationships. This interview is a one-time occurrence that should last between 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a location of your choosing. In the event that the identified location is too great of a distance to travel from your location; you can identify a neutral location of your choosing. This can be: public libraries, community centers, or another location that provides privacy and confidentiality. These interviews will take place at a time that is convenient for you. We will meet in a private conference room or the designated alternate site to ensure that what you disclose is not heard by others. I would like to audio record your interview and then use the information to add to the existing research about monogamy in gay male couples.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to participate in the study or not. If you would like to participate, please contact me to schedule an interview between the dates of March 1st and May 31st (2019) and times of 8:00 a.m.- 8:00 p.m. Before the interview, I will be able to more thoroughly explain the interview process to you and answer any questions you may have that will allow you to decide as to whether you

should participate in the study. I will also ask that you sign the forms that give permission for me to interview you.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked: to be in or previously involved in a monogamous relationship for a period of at least 12 months, schedule your interview at a time that is convenient for you, and to provide your own transportation to and from the interview.

If you would like to schedule an interview or have any questions about the study, contact me, Kellie Barton, at the identified email or phone number. Thank you very much.

## Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about your experience of monogamous relationships. The researcher is inviting English speaking, gay males between the ages of 25-65 who self-identify as being in monogamous relationships for a period of at least 12 months and are within a 150 mile radius of the Northern, Midtown, and Greater Downtown Kansas City area to participate in this study. I obtained your name and contact info via your email response to the recruitment posting.

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kellie Barton, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to gain greater insight and understanding into the lived experience of monogamy in gay male couples.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- \* Answer some questions about your experiences, perspectives, and views related to monogamous relationships
- \* Be available for approximately one to two hours
- \* Schedule an interview with me at a time that is convenient for you
- \* Allow for audio recording of the interview
- \* Provide your own transportation to the interview (site determined by you).

### ***Here are some sample questions:***

- \* How did you decide to be in a monogamous relationship?
- \* Are there cultural expectations to be in a monogamous relationship?
- \* What do you and your partner agree is a monogamous relationship?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Please note that not all volunteers will be contacted to take part. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as: fatigue, stress, requirements of your time, or inconveniences of travel. There is a potential for minimal risk in that you may find some

of the questions about your relationship experiences to be sensitive in nature. This risk may create distress, depression, or anxiety.

**Contact and Questions:**

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have before you begin the interview. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Kellie Barton. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university.

Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number** here and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of your disclosure of experiences during this study, if you feel especially concerned about the impact on your mental health and/or overall emotional wellness, please utilize the additional resources provided to you before and during the interview.

In the event of information presented during the interview process pertaining to abuse or neglect of a minor child or a dependent adult or expressed intent to harm yourself or someone else; the participant should be fully aware that the researcher is required to adhere to mandated reporting requirements. The researcher will review mandated reporting requirements with the participant prior to obtaining informed consent and will further review these requirements should these elements present during the interview.

Potential study benefits of this research are to obtain a greater understanding of the lived experience, perspectives, and views of gay males engaging in monogamous relationships. This research aims to further contribute to the existing literature and data available on monogamy in gay male couples.

If any participant would like to receive results following the completion of this study; please check the box provided. Results will be emailed to the participant using the established email address provided by the participant to the researcher. Email address(es) provided will not be retained following the initial consent form completion if distribution of results is declined, or, will be removed following distribution of the study results if the participant requests study outcomes.

**Payment:**

There is no monetary or incentive-based compensation for your participation in this study.

**Privacy:**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of the individual participants. Details that might identify participants such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose

outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by coding participant information to avoid identification. Research records will be stored using a locked file cabinet and encrypted software. Only the researcher will have access to the records. The tape-recorded interviews will be destroyed following transcription, which is anticipated to occur within two months of the taping. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Multiple methods of participant recruitment will be utilized during this study to include social media, newspaper ads, and online research platforms. To reduce risk to participants and ensure confidentiality, direct participant contact will only occur with the researcher, all interviews will be confidential, participant information will be redacted, and raw data will not be shared with third parties. Facebook, newspapers, or online platforms will not have any means of accessing participant data or results of the study.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about participating, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent."



### Appendix C: Interview Guide Questions To Address Research Questions

Interview Guide Question 1. What is it like for you to be in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 2. How did you decide to be in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 3. What are/were your expectations of being in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 4. Are there cultural expectations to be in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 5. Are there ways that societal portrayals of gay relationships have affected you?

Interview Guide Question 6. Are there trade-offs to being in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 7. What, if anything, can make it challenge to be in a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 8. Are there difficulties in maintaining monogamy in your relationship? If so, what?

Interview Guide Question 9. What do you and your partner agree is a monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 10. How do/did you feel about your monogamous relationship?

Interview Guide Question 11. How satisfied are/were you with the relationship?

## Appendix D: Debriefing Form

**STUDY TITLE:**

Lived Experience of Monogamy Among Gay Men in Monogamous Relationships

**THANK YOU:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of this research is to obtain a greater understanding of the lived experience, perspectives, and views of gay males engaging in monogamous relationships. This research aimed to further contribute to the existing literature and data available on monogamy in gay male couples.

**STUDY PARTICIPANTS:**

The study invited gay males between the ages of 25-65 who self-identified as being in monogamous relationships who residing within a 150 mile radius of the Northern, Midtown, and Greater Downtown Kansas City area. Participants were selected based on their status, shared experience, and knowledge of engaging in monogamous relationships.

**STUDY PURPOSE:**

In this study, you were asked to describe your views, perspectives, and experiences of engaging in a monogamous relationship. The results from this study will aim to enhance the current body of existing literature and data on monogamy in gay male relationships, as well as to address any misconceptions, stereotypes, or inaccuracies in previous research and literature.

**CONTACT AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE:**

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of your disclosure of experiences during this study, if you feel especially concerned about the impact on your mental health and/or overall emotional wellness, please contact the researcher, Kellie Barton. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university . Additionally, you may utilize the resources provided before and during the interview.

- If any participant would like to receive results following the completion of this study; please check the box provided. Results will be emailed to the participant using the established email address provided by the participant to the researcher. Email address(es) provided will not be retained following the initial consent form completion, or, if the participant requests study outcomes, will be removed following distribution of the study results.