

Relational Satisfaction in Long-Term, Non-monogamous, Heterosexual Relationships

Heather Tahler

A Proposal Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

May 30, 2014

UMI Number: 3644027

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI 3644027

Published by ProQuest LLC (2014). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Unpublished Work

Copyright 2013 by Stephanie A. Stevens

All Rights Reserved

Relational Satisfaction in Long-Term, Non-monogamous, Heterosexual Relationships

---

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

---

Heather Tahler

2014

Approved by:

---

Braden Berkey, Psy. D, Chairperson

Associate Professor, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

---

Melissa Bailey, PsyD, Reader

Adjunct Professor, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

## Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their support, encouragement, and help throughout this dissertation process. First, I want to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Berkey and Dr. Bailey, for their countless edits, meetings, and enthusiasm throughout the entire process. Not only have you helped me along this academic endeavor, you have assisted me in my professional development in the field. For all this and more, I thank the two of you.

Second, I would like to thank my family, Mom, Evan, Sarah, and Gram Rev and Papa for their endless support throughout the entirety of graduate school. I would not be here in life, or in my studies without any of you.

## Abstract

This study was designed to explore questions examining relational satisfaction in long-term non-monogamous heterosexual couples in comparison to relational satisfaction in long-term sexually monogamous heterosexual couples, as well as gain insight into whom those involved in non-monogamous relationships disclose to and the potential stigma felt by this disclosure. Demographic variables were also explored to see if any prediction of marital satisfaction occurred.

Both long-term sexually monogamous and long-term sexually non-monogamous participants responded to a secure online survey. The survey consisted of informed consent, inclusion criteria, ENRICH marital satisfaction scale (Fowers and Olson 1993) items, and open-ended questions for items not assessed by the ENRICH scale alone.

After checking for univariate normality and outliers and assessing missing value patterns, results show that both the Marital Satisfaction and Idealistic Distortion scales were reliable. The findings in the study revealed that relationship type did not have a significant impact on marital satisfaction or idealistic distortion, with similar levels of satisfaction and idealistic distortion in both monogamous and non-monogamous couples. The results also demonstrated, through linear regression for demographic variables, that only income level significantly predicted marital satisfaction. After qualitative data was coded, there were many themes found within both monogamous and non-monogamous couples.

Data supports the original hypothesis that there was very little difference in marital satisfaction between monogamous and non-monogamous heterosexual couples. With these results, non-monogamy is a more viable relationship option than previously recognized for

couples that are interested, and it is necessary to create models to work with these couples.

Developing further research within this population specifically is also necessary for the future.

## Table of Contents

Copyright.....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Abstract .....	v
List of Tables.....	x
Chapter 1: Nature of the Study.....	1
Background of the problem.....	1
Problem statement .....	4
Research Questions .....	5
Application of Results .....	5
Theoretical Framework .....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	7
A Brief History of Non-Monogamy.....	7
Anthropological.....	9
Biological .....	12
Psychological.....	14
Social .....	16
Relational Satisfaction and Stigma.....	21
This study .....	23
Chapter 3: Methods .....	30
Participants .....	30
Measures.....	30
Informed Consent .....	31

Inclusion Criteria.....	31
ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale.....	32
Open Ended Questions.....	32
Recruitment.....	32
Data Collection.....	33
Data Preparation.....	33
Research Design and Analysis.....	33
Chapter 4: Results.....	35
Assessment of Missing Value Pattern.....	35
Checking for Univariate Normality.....	36
Checking for Univariate Outliers.....	36
Description of the Sample.....	36
Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables.....	38
The Impact of Relationship Type on Satisfaction.....	39
The Relationship between Relationship Type and Idealistic Distortion.....	40
Demographic Predictors of Satisfaction.....	42
Qualitative Results.....	42
Monogamous Participants.....	42
Non-monogamous Participants.....	44
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	46
Conclusion.....	46
Demographics.....	49
ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale.....	49

Possible Implications of Results.....	52
Therapeutic Implications.....	53
Future research .....	53
References .....	58
Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire.....	63
Appendix B: ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) items.....	64
Appendix C: Open Ended Questions.....	65
Appendix D: Voluntary Message .....	66
Appendix E: Consent for ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale.....	67
Appendix F: Multiple Regression Assumption Plots .....	68
Appendix G: Multiple Regression Plot of Deleted Residuals .....	69

## List of Tables

Table 1: <i>Skewness and Kurtosis Values for the Study Variables (N = 64)</i> .....	36
Table 2: <i>Frequencies and Percentages for the Demographic Variables (N = 64)</i> .....	37
Table 3: <i>Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 64)</i> .....	39
Table 4: <i>Means, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Relationship Type and Marital Satisfaction (N = 64)</i> .....	39
Table 5: <i>Means, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Relationship Type and Idealistic Distortion (N = 64)</i> .....	40
Table 6: <i>Linear Regression Results for the Demographics and Marital Satisfaction Model (N = 64)</i> .....	41

## Chapter 1: Nature of the Study

### **Background of the problem**

Historically, marriage has been the model for long-term heterosexual relationships. Until recently it was the only option two people had for long-term commitment. Since the establishment of marriage, marriage has taken many forms and served many purposes. Stephanie Cootz (2005) argued that love has only played a role in marriage in modern times. With the advent of women's rights, industrialism, and changing societies, people have more free will over whom they marry and how their marriage looks. She argued that love is a reflection of that newfound choice. Choosing the degree of sexual fidelity in a relationship is another one of those choices.

Sexual fidelity is seen as a key component to a successful marriage. Sexual monogamy has ensured security of resources for the family and freedom from societal shame and repression. Along with choosing love, one now has the option to choose their relationship structure including the degree of sexual fidelity. The role sexual fidelity once served in long-term relationships does not play as much of a role today.

One of the main arguments for sexual non-monogamy is rooted in biology and evolutionary theory. Cootz (2005) stated that "clearly there is a biological basis for love and even, perhaps, for long-term pair-bonding, although one scientist who believes there is such a biological base in human claims that it is limited to about four years" (p. 25). It turns out there is more than one scientist whose research reflects this. Ryan and Jetha (2010) presented an alternative evolutionarily based view of human sexuality. Instead of the generally accepted

paradigm where females pair-bond with males in order to have access to resources, the authors suggested that both sexes have urges and biological dispositions for non-monogamy. For example, in hunter-gatherer societies everything was a shared resource. Sex and child rearing might have been as well. Ryan and Jetha (2010) cited other cultures as support for this theory such as tribes in South America who believe conception was a contribution from the sperm of many different men in their tribe. Hence, all the men act as a father and many parents support the children. Other arguments include the fact that human women are one of the few animals who ovulate secretly, allowing them to have sex at any time, and to keep the attention of many males, not just their monogamous partner.

Ryan and Jetha (2010) discussed other cultural views on non-monogamy. For example, the authors wrote of a small tribe in Asia where men are welcome to join women in their bedrooms for sex at night. The men and women are not bound to each other and non-monogamous behavior is encouraged. When a child is born, the village and the woman's family raise the child, meaning that the American and traditional sense of marriage, sexual fidelity, and relationships may not be the standard. This cultural standard may have been impacted by ideals such as religion, society, anthropology, and other cultural values. This idea may also have impacted evolutionary research by clouding the results with modern ethical and societal standards.

Currently, many different structures for long-term relationships exist. One can choose the traditional sexually monogamous model or the polyamorous model. In a polyamorous relationship model, multiple people may commit to each other, live, and raise families together. This structure can occur in a religious or non-religious context. Other committed relationships exist where there are non-monogamous paradigms, where a committed couple co-constructs

rules for extra-marital sexual encounters, but these people do not live with or play an equal role as the two people in the committed relationship.

In the past, sexual monogamy was seen as essential to relationship security. However, with changing societal roles such as gender shifts, and different relational constructions, sexual fidelity may not be seen as a crucial part of a relationship. Looking at the gay male community provides an example of this shift. Passing on lineage is not as fundamental for many gay couples. Hence, they have created different relational structures, often times including sexual non-monogamy. Having more freedom to operate outside of some of the societal norms of heterosexual couples, the homosexual population may be a better indicator of human nature. Heterosexuals who choose non-monogamy may not have the concerns that their ancestors did, like lineage or resources (Barker, 2004).

When looking at the literature, there seems to be two stances taken on non-monogamy. Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, and Valentine (2013) stated that negatives of non-monogamy include relationship pressure due to societal pressure, psychological complications, and logistical complications. The logistical complications can occur in child rearing, extra-marital sexual activity, establishing rules and guidelines, and whom the couple chooses to disclose their relationship to. The positives outlined are the opportunity for greater sexual expression and higher sexual and relational satisfaction, to challenge relational constructs, and to build unique relationships based on the needs of the two individuals involved.

However, there are some issues with looking at the current literature (Conley, 2013). First, all sexually non-monogamous relationships seem to be lumped together. There are large differences between different types of non-monogamy, especially polyamory. Polyamory involves multiple spouses/partners and relationships that include several people. Polyamory also

includes an emotional connection with another person; the relationships are not strictly sexual. Additionally, infidelity, swingers, and other groups get lumped into this category as well. Non-monogamous relationships have a typical couple dyad with outside sexual activity. There is a large difference and the communities should be studied separately so that their nuances can be better understood and researched. Because of this problem, it is difficult to glean which population is greater effected by the results. Second, there is very little existent research regarding heterosexual long-term non-monogamous relationships. Some research on gay male couples on this topic exists; however, this may or may not be generalizable to the heterosexual couples. Lastly, due to factors such as stigma and disclosure regarding one's non-monogamous relationship status, subjects are difficult to identify and may not wish to participate in research. Currently, there is very little literature on how stigma may affect this population.

### **Problem statement**

This study focused on heterosexual couples that have been in a consensual sexually non-monogamous relationship for at least six months, as compared to monogamous couples who have also been together for at least six months. Both parties must be aware of the non-monogamous arrangement. It was hypothesized that relational satisfaction in these long-term sexually non-monogamous couples will either not differ greatly from long-term sexually monogamous couples or will be elevated. This is based on the model of non-monogamous gay male couples, as well as the biological evidence stated above, and expanded upon in the next chapter of this dissertation. If significant differences in relational satisfaction did appear, it was hypothesized that stigma felt by the non-monogamous couples will account for the differences.

## **Research Questions**

The first question examined how relational satisfaction compared between long-term non-monogamous relationships and long-term sexually monogamous couples. The role of disclosure to outside parties will also be studied. The researcher was also interested in to whom the long-term non-monogamous couples disclosed, as well as the effect this disclosure has on their relationship. Lastly, this study hoped to gain more insight into what types of stigma could be felt by those participating in long-term non-monogamous relationships and how their relationship was affected by this stigma.

## **Application of Results**

Little research exists on consensual non-monogamous heterosexual couples. This study is the beginning in closing that research gap. Research in this area will lead to empirically supported treatment and treatment guidelines for this particular population..

In practice, couples, family, and individual therapy do not address this topic. Clinicians need to be aware of this relational structure and therefore begin questioning their own possible biases towards this population. Second, many traditional couples therapists will not see a couple if extra-marital sex is occurring. This rationale may apply if cheating is occurring, but still applied when it is an important part of the relationship. For example, John Gottman who is a well-established and respected couples therapist will not see clients at all who are engaging in extra-marital sexual activity (Adam, 2006). There needs to be models for therapy, which include non-monogamy to help this population, not hinder it. Lastly, relationship constructs should be included in the diversity discussion so that non-monogamy and polyamory as well as other relational structures are not often overlooked. If all these goals are met, the non-monogamous

population will be better served by the psychological community. Conversely, the psychological community will gain new knowledge and treatment interventions in a place where it is lacking.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed in systems theory. Systems theory informs much family therapy work. It came about in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an integrative theory on how to conceptualize and work with families (Day, 2008). Along with being the theoretical orientation for which couples therapy falls, systems theory also allowed for the incorporation of external factors, such as laws and societal restrictions, which impact the non-monogamous couples. Systems theory also allowed for possible explanations regarding how the couple was affected by these external factors along with the context for why these couples may have chosen this type of relationship and how it affects them as a couple or as a family, if applicable.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **A Brief History of Non-Monogamy**

Historically speaking, marriage has been the only socially recognized option for two people seeking a sanctioned relationship. Strict rules have been in existence for two people who want to enter into a long-term committed relationship. While marriage is still a valuable construct today, some of the reasons for entering into a marriage have changed. Monogamy played a role in making traditional marriage work and has provided an outline for how the purpose of marriage could be carried out. The functions of traditional marriage have included providing security for women, property transaction, and ensuring that one's genetic legacy would be passed down along with ensured paternity (Coontz, 2005). Marriage also ensured that two spouses were caring for children in multiple ways, including raising the child, providing resources, and assuring blood lines. Once marriage became a legal entity, it became a mechanism to keep positions, property, and other valuables in the family. Sexual monogamy was an important part of this arrangement because it ensured legacy and also that the children were biologically related to both parents (Coontz, 2005; Kipnis, 2003). People still adhere to these reasons for entering into marriage. However, more options exist for marital constructs than there were in the past, and monogamy does not need to play as large of a role as it did previously.

Coontz (2005), who has developed ideas around modern day marriage, argued that part of the reason marital constructs have changed is because of love. Coontz traced the history of marriage and argued that love was not an important factor until recently. In some cultures where

arranged marriage exists, love is still not a reason to be married. Coontz cited the Fulbe people in Africa where culturally love is not a legitimate emotion. Women often deny any emotional attachment to their husband. In public both genders often relate to each other like there is a war between the sexes because it is not culturally accepted to admit their feelings to one another (Coontz, 2005). Using the Fulbe culture as an example, one could theorize that children, resources, and some of the other reasons mentioned above are more important in a marriage than affection. Monogamy would serve as security that children are biologically bound to both parents, and that the spouses would provide for one another and their shared offspring. In modern, America when people began marrying for love, affection, and emotional commitment, the other reasons stated above became less significant. This shift began to occur around World War II era (Coontz, 2005). Providing a significant other with emotional commitment opened up marriage to have a different structure than it had in the past (Cherlin, 2004). The construct of a relationship became a little less concrete because love is a less concrete concept. This vagueness allowed for more options in the relationship structure. As an aside, the term “structure” is being used to mean the process by which the relational dyad constructs their relationship. This includes rules on monogamy, roles of the partners in the relationship, and what being in a relationship entails for those involved. Part of the new relational structure includes the role monogamy plays in a relationship. After World War II, monogamy shifted from something that was expected to something that was co-constructed. This mainly occurred through the changes societal norms after World War II and other influences of the time period (Conley, 2012). With love being paramount, what one partner will do for the other includes examining the role monogamy plays in their relationship. Monogamy was sometimes viewed as a symbol of the

love one had for another (Coontz, 2005). This is the similar assumption and value that is still ongoing in the United States.

Due to the various structures relationships can take, one must examine all aspects, including monogamy with a different lens. Many different disciplines can be applied to this argument: biological, anthropological, psychological, and social.

### **Anthropological**

The debate around sexual monogamy has slowly gained attention in the anthropological community. Until recently, humans were believed to originate in hunter-gatherer societies where the men hunted and women stayed back and gathered food, cooked and took care of the children, and were sexually monogamous with one partner (Marlowe, 2005). Other assumptions have been placed on the actions of the human race using the hunter-gatherer paradigm. This paradigm was thought to have established couples as dyads, until more recent research. These assumptions come from many different fields including anthropology and evolutionary psychology (Epstein, 1988). Because this paradigm has been in existence for so long, many people accept this as fact. For example, men are labeled naturally as non-monogamous because they “hunt” and want to father as many children as possible due to biology. Women, on the other hand, became more selective about their sexual partners because they need a man to provide for them. Researchers have studied this paradigm and found that it may not be universally true. Ryan and Jetha (2010) proposed a different view of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. They propose that both men and women worked together in these early societies for survival. The men hunted together and brought all the meat back, while the women shared in the child rearing and caretaking. Unlike the common belief, Ryan and Jetha (2010) argued that

when people lived in small societies non-monogamy was smarter and ensured the tribes survival if resources were shared. In this fashion, sex was most likely shared as well. When one is sharing all the resources and living in a collective culture, cultural norms would dictate that everything would be a collaborative effort. If the people in the community had no reason to separate food or other resources, sex and child rearing were likely not separated either. For years, researchers have applied the morals from their own societies to their anthropologic research. Researchers most likely came from a monogamous society and assumed hunter-gatherer societies were a clue into their own society.

Lee and Daly (1999) conducted much of the published anthropological research regarding hunter-gatherer societies. This information became the foundation for the field and model for other research to come. However, much of this research was tainted with western societal norms and expectations. Applying these norms regarding monogamy could have lead anthropologists to misinterpret what they were finding. This may be how the didactic traditional hunter-gatherer paradigm became prominent. Utilizing this paradigm was also a convenient means for justifying the current relationship structure that exists throughout Europe and America regarding monogamy and marriage.

Some non-western cultures have the view that sex can be a shared entity among the group as a whole (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). For example, there are tribes in South America that believe conception does not occur from sex with one partner. They believe that children develop from the accumulation of sperm of several different men (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). For example, if one man was a prized warrior and another was intelligent, the child would be thought to possess both these qualities from the different fathers. Because the single biological father of the child is not important to the tribe, the children are raised together and all the men provide resources. In

this way, non-monogamy brings the tribe together. In an Asian culture, men are encouraged to visit women in their rooms at night. The men come and go as they please without having sexual attachment to a single woman. If a woman becomes pregnant from a sexual encounter, the baby lives with the mother and other women where childcare is a shared responsibility. This arrangement is consensual on both counts, and neither gender expects a sexual attachment (Ryan & Jetha, 2010).

European bias also clouded how American settlers have been viewed. Godbeer (2002) described the sexual attitudes and practices of early American settlers, painting a different picture from what has been accepted. Part of the reason the Pilgrims left England and came to America was to explore their ideas for sexual reform. He quoted a ballad, dating back to the 15-1700's:

Loe in this Church all shall be free  
To enjoy their Christian liberty;  
All things made common, t'[a]voide strife,  
Each man may take another's wife,  
And Keep a handmaiden too, if need,

To Multiply, increase, and breed. (Firth, as cited by Godbeer, 2002)

This ballad describes a society that is more focused on procreation than monogamy in marriage vows. Divorce dated back to 1670 when husbands and wives would live in separate colonies and start new families (Godbeer, 2002). Similar to the hunter/gatherers mentioned above, practicality dictated cultural norms. Predominant modern western ideas have appeared to be the cause for researchers to rewrite history.

Typically people use “puritanical” as an adjective to describe someone who is sexually repressed. This usage may be incorrect. Taking an objective look at history, non-monogamy has always been present. Throughout modern history stories exist about men with multiple female lovers and secret lovers that defy cultural norms. However, non-monogamy has been recorded through history. Looking at literature, authors such as John Irving (Irving, 1973) and F. Scott Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald 1925), have written major characters whom were not monogamous. Going further back into history, Zeus of Greek mythology was non-monogamous, sleeping with many other women besides his wife Hera. Every era of society chooses to conceptualize and react to these sexual infidelities differently whether ignoring it, punishing it legally or socially, or silently encouraging it. However, historical evidence suggests that non-monogamy is not something that has come about in modern times. For example, polygamy was accepted in the Roman Empire. Additionally, the Bible has instances of polygamy in the form of men being married to more than one wife. For example in Exodus 21:10, “a man can marry an infinite amount of women without any limits to how many he can marry.” The prevalence of non-monogamous structure and behavior across cultures suggests a biological basis.

## **Biological**

Ryan and Jetha (2010) pointed out biological factors that support sexual non-monogamy. For example, most female animals have swollen genitalia or other physical signs when they are ovulating. Female humans have hidden ovulation, making their bodies always ready for sexual activity and their partners are unaware when ovulation is occurring. Hidden ovulation means that women can have sex with multiple partners and hide it. Human females have more control of sexual activity than other mammals that have sex during ovulation strictly

for conception. There is an argument that there are subtle features that clue in a male such as pheromones, but overall, female humans are more in control of their sexual activity than many other species (Tarin, Gomez-Piquer (2002).

Along with hidden ovulation, many biological similarities are seen when looking at the way both humans and bonobo monkeys copulate (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Traditionally, other models were applied citing chimpanzees and baboons as the closest relatives to human interaction (Bagemihl, 1999). However, Ryan and Jetha (2010) argued that bonobos are a better model because of their egalitarian organization. Ryan and Jetha (2010) argued that humans adopted a hierarchical structure after the advent of agriculture (Ryan and Jetha, 2010). Bonobo monkeys have not gone through an agricultural revolution the way humans have. Thus, if one is going to talk about humans before this point, it is important to note that the hierarchical structures did not exist at that time, similar to bonobos. Additionally, the fewer societal and relational structures that exist, the easier it is to study the biological basis of behavior. Past researchers ignored female's roles in cultures and that female Bonobo monkeys more closely exhibit past female relational structures. Foragers and the early people known as hunter/gatherers were egalitarian in structure. Therefore, to get a better understanding of biological factors determining human behavior, bonobo monkeys are a better match. In both chimpanzees and bonobos multi-mating behavior by the female monkeys is exhibited. Additionally, the primates exhibit similar patterns of female vocalization during sex that other animals do not (Adovasio et. al 2008).

Primates and humans are also rare in their high paternal investment (Ryan and Jetha 2010). Paternal investment refers to the involvement of the male with his offspring (Wright, 1994). Traditional theory states that human males are not as invested as females because they only

provide the resources. Men are said to focus on sexual fidelity in their mate because they only wish to provide resources to their biological children only. Traditionally, men are thought to provide a limited number of resources for a limited number of biological offspring. This may not be the case; men are often involved in child rearing and emotional upbringing as well in United States' culture. Paternal involvement stretches beyond resource provisions and supports a shared model of child rearing (Geary, 2000).

### **Psychological**

Freud (1962) theorized that there is a core conflict between people's base instincts and what society expects of them. The Id, which represents base instincts, contains sexual urges. Society places stipulation on these urges, like monogamy, which causes the individual to mature and function in that society. Using this logic, being monogamous in a marriage is a core psychological conflict. One's base instinct, according to Freud (1929), was animalistic. In terms of the activity of sexual behavior, this term means having sexual contact with many partners. However, many modern societies dictate that people find a sexually monogamous mate and suppress the animalistic instincts for having sex with multiple partners. Avoiding this psychological conflict may increase emotional satisfaction in a relationship because the people in said relationship would not experience the stress of fighting their core urges with society's expectations. One way to ensure that this psychological struggle does not dominate a relationship is to open up the relationship sexually. Freud (1929) was one of the first people to contribute to the foundation of psychological theory in relation to non-monogamy. However, non-monogamous relationships have not been given much attention until recently.

Many theories and ideas have existed between Freud's time and current psychology. Ellis (1927) studied sexual disorders and deviations from normal human behaviors in relationships and sex. Other researchers like Masters and Johnson (1966) separated sex from relationships and strictly studied sex from a biological perspective. Lastly, couples therapy became a branch of psychology where relationships and sexual behavior in those relationships were theorized.

In most of the widely accepted couple's counseling theories, there are no models or guidelines for working with couples who participate in a consensual sexually non-monogamous relationship. An attempt has been made to fill this void by experienced therapists who have worked within sexually diverse populations. However, academic research and theory has not caught up with the current range of relational structures. Many models encourage therapists to cease therapy until there is no extra-marital sexual activity occurring at all. While this may make sense for an affair or sexual activity hidden from one partner, this model does not work for couples in a co-constructed non-monogamous relationship. If therapy was stopped due to extra-marital sexual activity, it would devalue the relational structure agreed upon by the couple. For example, the couple may have certain rules around the sexual activity that occurs outside of the dyad. Rules may exist regarding the types of activities allowed, or how often one engages in sexual activity. Another rule could be about the openness of one partner to another about these sexual activities. If a therapist attempted to stop therapy with one of these couples, this action would be stigmatizing. The couple may or would likely feel as though the therapist does not understand their lifestyle and associates them with people who have affairs or lies to their partners about sexual activity.

## **Social**

Sexually non-monogamous relationships can take on a variety of forms. Along with the different forms, there are also many different definitions people use to describe their non-monogamy. Polyamory has been defined as the following:

A new word that has gained a great deal of currency in recent years. We like it because, unlike “non-monogamy” it does not assume monogamy as a norm. On the other hand, its meaning is still a bit vague-some feel that polyamory includes all forms of sexual relationships other than monogamy, while others restrict it to committed love relationships (thereby excluding swinging casual sexual contact, and other forms of intimacy). (Easton & Hardy, 2009, p. 275).

This definition is positive in several ways. First, it captures the complexity of non-monogamy. Second, the stress of societal pressure on the relationships can be seen. However, the important component of this definition is that polyamory consists of committed love relationships between more than a dyad. Sometimes the people live together and may have children, which is often the case in religious polyamory, but not always. Typically, there is also an emotional involvement and shared resources with polyamory, especially if children are involved or there is co-habitation (Easton & Hardy, 2009).

Another paradigm is swinging; couples who mix sexual partners with other couples. They can do this on their own or at swingers clubs. Open-relationships or self-defined non-monogamists also exist, where a couple establishes certain rules for extra-marital sexual activity. Agreements can range from a fully open relationship where any sexual act is a possibility, to certain acts being allowed or with certain people. The couple may have a mutual

play partner or include others in their sexual activity together. Non-monogamy differs from swinging because it can be done alone or together and it is not restricted to certain bars or events.

Much diversity exists between the various sexually non-monogamous communities. Many different labels exist for many different types of relationships. However, all these relationships are co-constructed and serve an important role in the relationship's identity. Affairs or cheating are not considered non-monogamy because they are not co-constructed with both individuals in the relationship. A distinction is also made between sexual non-monogamy, which is listed above, and emotional non-monogamy. Emotional non-monogamy differs from sexual non-monogamy by allowing strong emotional connections to be formed outside of the relationship. An example of a strong emotional connection could be a best friend, or someone of equal emotional significance. Emotional non-monogamy is a different construct and will not be the focus of this study.

Non-monogamy differs from polyamory in one key way. Polyamory involves long-term commitment with more than one person, where other types of non-monogamy do not (Barker and Langdrige, 2010). Polyamory is a form of non-monogamy, but it should be considered as separate for research reasons. Polyamory involves a different relational structure and logistics, as well as belonging to a different community than swingers or other non-monogamists. Early researchers, such as Conley, Moors, Matsick, and Ziegler (2012), grouped the different communities together. All types of non-monogamy have been studied together, with results generalized to all groups. This type of research does a disservice to all non-monogamous communities. First of all, when research subjects are too widely cast, the results cannot be generalizable to everyone. Adding all these groups together can also skew the research. For

example, if research stated that all non-monogamy decreases intimacy and only one polyamorous relationship was in the study, the results are skewed towards non-polyamorous non-monogamy. As this informs treatment or information, that group is unfairly represented, and real information is not gained. In the future, these two groups should be separated so more accurate and specific information can be gained about both populations. Non-monogamy, as a relational structure, has not been well researched within psychological research. Non-monogamy was first studied in the gay male community because these couples “were without guidelines and regulations imposed on heterosexual couples, like monogamy...” (Barker & Langdrige, 2010, p. 55). The AIDS epidemic had a significant impact on non-monogamous relationships of the gay male community. Much of the existing research surrounding non-monogamy in the gay male community has focused on the transmission of AIDS. According to Barker and Langdrige (2010), 82% of gay males couples were non-monogamous at some point in their relationship before the AIDS epidemic. Forty-three percent of participants were non-monogamous without having a mutual understanding. Additionally, 90% of couples together over five years reported being non-monogamous at some point, with 66% being non-monogamous after a year (Barker and Langdrige, 2010). Since the AIDS epidemic, the numbers have decreased a bit due to physical safety and safe sex practices. A debate exists within the community and academics about when the AIDS epidemic officially ended. Hickson, Davies, Hunt, and Weatherburn (1992) argued that the epidemic is still alive today. However, Barker and Langdrige (2010) refer to the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Looking at these numbers, many people in the gay male community have experienced non-monogamy at some point. However, Patterson (2000) suggested that young gay men are choosing marriage and monogamy as their relationship structures and adopting a more traditional heterocentric model

of relationships. The gay male relational structures differ from heterosexual couples. Non-monogamous heterosexual couples have more of a societal stigma than gay male couples due to the social constructs of relationships. At the same time, the socio-political atmosphere has been changing. This allots the gay community to have greater access to heterocentric ideals and values than had previously been given in the past.

Although the AIDS epidemic had an impact on the gay male community and their relational structures, much can be learned from the community's acceptance of different relational structures. Part of this reasoning was due to the fact that different relational structures were created for safety. For example, sexual contact outside of a dyad was safer with a third person or someone continuously involved in the dyad. Additionally, because gay marriage was not legally recognized, gay couples had the legal freedom to co-construct their relationship. The redefinition of relational structures could have been a reaction to homophobia and heteronormativity or could have been a different way of thinking about romantic relationships. It also shows some acceptance on the part of the dominant culture. Regardless of the reason, some of these couples choose to include sexual non-monogamy in their relationship structure. Even though the trend may be shifting again towards more traditional marriage, this population demonstrates the inclusion of sexual non-monogamy into relationships.

Evidence based research on non-monogamous lesbian couples and heterosexual couples is extremely limited. Therefore it is difficult to make any generalizations about these two groups. Additionally, research on bisexual couples is complicated due to the fact that some straight-identified couples exhibit bisexual behavior. For example, the couple may have a rule that extra-relational sexual activity is allowed with members of the same sex. Because of the

difference between behavior and identity, many public health studies examine behavior strictly instead of identity.

The fact that little research has been done on non-monogamous populations can be attributed to the stigma attached to intercourse outside of marriage. America has a limited view of marriage and relationships. Only 16 out of 50 states and Washington D.C. currently allow same-sex marriage (Cable News Network, 2014) and none recognize multiple or polyamorous marriage. Additionally, laws are in place that encourage traditional couple dyads, such as only one spouse being allowed on an insurance policy. Hospitals used to limit who may and may not visit or make health care decisions by requiring “legal spouse” status. “Legal spouse” is usually only reserved for biologically or legally related family. Additionally, religious groups promote traditional marriage while implying that other relationships are less than or wrong (ACLU.org, 2014).

However, views may be changing from this traditional model. In fact, California made it legal in October 2013 for three parents to legally adopt a child. According to Senator Mark Leno, courts need to recognize the changes that are occurring, and the adults that are supporting these children, regardless of number (McGreevy and Mason , 2013)

Individuals who participate in non-monogamous relationships are subject to the stigma created by society. This stigma can either come from the laws themselves, or stigma could promulgate the laws. Society’s views on non-monogamy can affect individuals in certain ways. Non-monogamous individuals may internalize the message that what they are doing is wrong or less valuable than a monogamous heterosexual relationship. These internalized feelings may create stigma, depression, and shame. This stigma may lead to a person to deny their rightful state of being and enter into a monogamous relationship. Additionally, when people disclose

extra-relational sexual activity it is first assumed to be cheating or an affair, not something that was previously agreed upon. This stigma could also lead to less disclosure among people in non-monogamous relationships for fear of being judged, not getting promoted for a job, or other consequences. Continuing to monogamous standards may decrease relational satisfaction which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Relational Satisfaction and Stigma**

Relational satisfaction is a measure and a construct that has been used in the past to assess how happy or satisfied a couple is with their relationship (Jones & Cunningham 1996). Traditionally this has been measured through self-report measures (scales, surveys, etc.) and seen as fairly accurate. Typically these measures were developed and tested on married heterosexual couples. This means that there is a large sample for comparison, but it also means that the scales in question were not necessarily designed for the sexually non-monogamous community.

Common factors among the developed scales suggest that several themes capture relational satisfaction. Some of those themes are attitudes towards the relationship and partner, leisure activities done together, dividing of house work, and finances. On a similar note, negative feelings towards one partner (getting irritated by their actions, disliking their attitude) and fighting excessively can decrease one's relational satisfaction. Some of these negative themes may actually be a predictor for how the relationship will fare in the future, depending on severity (Fowers & Olson, 1993).

Buunk and YanYperen (1991) and Judge and Bono (2001) indicated that relational satisfaction is important to psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. If one is not

satisfied in their current relationship, stress will increase. Stress can cause distance, increased arguments, and general unhappiness in a relationship. Lower relational satisfaction is also associated with lower sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2002). With added stress, divorce rates can increase (Bodenmann et al., 2007). Individuals who report more satisfaction in their relationships have an increase in conflict resolution, productivity, and happy homes for children. Additionally, there can also be a decrease in stress. In summation, relational satisfaction is crucial to a positive happy relationship.

The gay male community research in non-monogamy provides a window into what the research may show for non-monogamous heterosexual relationships. Using this logic, similarities may be found in relational satisfaction between gay and heterosexual non-monogamous communities. Overall, the relational satisfaction is higher in gay male couples that define their own relational structure, which can include non-monogamy (Adam, 2006). The results gained from research in the gay community may be similar to heterosexual couples who define their own relational structure. Differences may also exist between the two communities because the gay male community needs to redefine their relationships due to restrictions placed on them or other societal stigma. Since children cannot be naturally conceived, paternity and providing resources is not the same as it is for heterosexual couples. This fact regarding natural paternity negates much of the biological argument that has been made in the past, and is discussed above. Additionally, heterosexual couples may experience more stigma from their community for being sexually non-monogamous than men in the gay community since non-monogamy is more common. Sexual non-monogamy is still considered to be more common and more widely accepted in the gay community even though there is a trend of sexual monogamy in younger gay male couples.

Stigma is an unfortunate commonality between the gay community and those participating in non-monogamous relationships. Stigma can be experienced through legal restrictions and homophobia (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee, Good, 2007).

Stigma can affect both an individual and a relationship. Feeling the pressure of stigma may cause increased depression, hypervigilance and paranoia (Yang, et. al 2007). Stigma may also cause someone to stay in the closet or not participate in the kind of relationship that feels the most comfortable for oneself. Additionally, relational strain can be felt because the couple may not feel invited to participate in the acts that they choose or go certain places for fear of being discovered. These actions can be due to the stigma they may experience from others or the fact that they do not wish to disclose their relationship status to everyone in their lives. Typically, if a person is discovered having extra-relational sex it is usually considered an affair or infidelity by others, which has stigma of its own attached to it. With this type of societal pressure, a relationship may end prematurely or not come to fruition.

Those participating in heterosexual sexual non-monogamy do not necessarily come out like those in the LGBTQ community. However, if they do choose to disclose they may be met with judgment, close mindedness, and other negative reactions as well. This is where the topic of disclosure comes into play. Many people discuss with their partners who does and does not know about their sexual non-monogamy. This disclosure could make the couple feel like outsiders, and make them feel not accepted in general society.

### **This study**

This study focused on long-term, heterosexual, consensual non-monogamous couples and their relational satisfaction. Long-term non-monogamous is defined for the purpose of this

study as someone who was in his or her relationship for at least six-months. If the couple was in a non-monogamous relationship, their relationship must have been co-constructed. Heterosexual couples were chosen because there is a lack of research on this population.

The predicted results for this study were that the long-term non-monogamous couples will have equal to or greater relational satisfaction when compared to their monogamous counterparts. The author predicted these results for the three main reasons: biology, similar studies on gay male non-monogamous couples, and current relationship trends for monogamous couples.

First, one must consider the new research being done on the non-monogamous nature of human beings such as research by Ryan and Jetha (2010). As stated earlier in this literature review human beings are not naturally sexually monogamous. Regardless of the social constructs that have been put into place, like marriage, people throughout history have had multiple sexual partners. This idea is corroborated by anthropological research rethinking hunter-gatherer structures, recognizing other cultures where non-monogamy is commonplace, and examining that woman's biology such as hidden ovulation (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Taking biology into account, one can hypothesize that entering into a relationship where one works with their biological predisposition, and not against, will yield more satisfaction. If there is not continuous stress in attempting to fight biology, the two people in the relationship will have decreased individual stress which could very well lead to decreased relational stress. Along with decreased stress, more positive and fulfilling interactions may occur between the couple. This lack of stress and increased positivity is predicted to increase relational satisfaction.

Currently, a large portion of the gay male community participates in some form of non-monogamy. The couples participating in these relationships do so because they feel as though

they have the freedom to create their own relationship structure (Hoff & Beougher 2010).

Many of these couples report that this co-constructed non-monogamy adds a positive dynamic to their relationship (Barker & Langdrige, 2010). The couples also report not feeling jealous or insecure within their non-monogamous relationships (Adam, 2006). Using this information as a template, even though the populations differ, it is hypothesized that similar results would exist for heterosexual couples in these relationships.

Lastly, data on current relationships can be used to predict trends regarding non-monogamy. According to Huber, Linhartova, and Cope (2004), over half of the participants from 60 societies reported “moderate infidelity,” being unfaithful “often and more than once.” Over 50% of people from different societies have participated in extra-marital sexual activity. If this high of a percentage of people are participating in affairs, monogamy is not working in these relationships. Similarly, when 30% of couples seek couples therapy for affairs (Gurman, 2008), society’s current perception of what components define a romantic relationship need to be challenged. Lastly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), 844,000 (with 6 states excluded) people got divorced in 2008 while 2,157,000 people got married. This high divorce rate coupled with high infidelity rates indicate that monogamy may not be working for a large portion of the relationships. Perhaps some of these marriages or relationships could have been saved if both partners agreed upon a non-monogamous relationship model or were not held to rigid automatic views on monogamy. Using these statistics as support, one may deduce that the infidelity, cheating, and affairs are not a problem. The fault may not lie in the acts themselves, but in the thinking about said acts. Perhaps if extra-relational sexual activity is accepted, there will be less stress and increased relational satisfaction. Along with these results, de-stigmatizing non-monogamy may increase disclosure in the relationship. This may be because one partner

would not have to hide or sneak about to have sex with another person. This increased disclosure may make the couples feel closer together. Additionally, sexual boredom would most likely decrease because people are allowed to go after their fantasies and others they find attractive. There may also be less resentment from a partner, specifically if they do not feel completely sexually satisfied by the relationship. These statistics show that the traditional monogamous model may not work for many Americans and indicate that marriages may be saved if there were more acceptable options for relational structures in existence.

Part of the effect stigma has on people is their degree of disclosure or the couples' level of "outness" to borrow a term from the LGBTQ community. For the purposes of this study disclosure is simply who the couple informs of their sexual relationship. Examples can be family members, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, or even their extra-relational sexual partners. People may not wish to disclose their non-monogamous relationship for several reasons.

Non-monogamy is not the societally accepted norm in American culture. As a result, a couple who chooses non-monogamy as a part of their relational structure may feel stigma from mainstream society. The couple may fear judgment or misunderstanding from others in their lives. Family members or friends may call the couple negative names and demand that they fall into socially accepted relationships. Family or friends could also disown or stop speaking to the couple. Employers may judge someone for their relationship choices. The person who is grouped as "other" for being in a non-monogamous relationship may possibly get passed over for a promotion. In lieu of someone whose relationship they may not understand, the employer may go with someone more traditional and comfortable. These examples show that one may

lose a lot due to participating in a non-monogamous relationship. These fears, as well as feelings of stigma, would encourage someone not to disclose.

A couple may feel judged for being in a non-monogamous relationship by their own culture of origin. Many religious groups such as specific sects of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, etc. support the idea that marriage is between a man and a woman, the married couple must remain sexually faithful, and that sex is mainly for conception, not enjoyment (Lewis, 2009). Individuals raised in this environment may have difficulty reconciling these two sides. For example, the individual may feel like their religion does not understand them and they are abandoned. If a household also preaches these values, this can cause stigma for the individual. Society supports these values by the laws it creates, such as determining who can be listed on one's health insurance or parental rights and whom someone can marry. These laws imbed the idea that non-monogamy is not legitimate. Legal mandates in existence increase stigma felt by individuals.

This study builds on the data gained in terms of practice and research. As far as research is concerned, non-monogamy and polyamory need to be seen as two distinct populations. In the future, and with more research, there may be more than two populations in the non-monogamous community. Additionally, there is very little research done on heterosexual couples involved in long-term non-monogamous relationships. Ideally this study will encourage future research as well as contribute information to this gap in knowledge.

In terms of practice, there are several advances that may occur. The first is in couple's therapy. Many of the highly regarded current theories in use for couple's therapy today are based on heterosexual monogamous couples. Couple's therapy has not been proven effective for the non-monogamous population because they are currently excluded from the theories. Many

leading therapeutic techniques discount the non-monogamous population. For example, the Gottman method, which is well-established couple's therapy theory does not allow space for non-monogamous couples (Wolska, 2011). Scheinkman (2003) stated that many therapists will not see a couple in therapy if there is extra-marital sexual activity occurring. The author described many therapists' view that the betrayal of infidelity can act as a trauma to one individual. However, not all outside sexual contact is a betrayal or trauma. This study hopes to inform models of couple's therapy that is focused on working with non-monogamous couples. This population is neglected in the extant empirical research regarding couples therapy. If these clients come into therapy, it is imperative that the therapist is knowledgeable about non-monogamy as well as how to treat a couple who identifies in this way.

In clinical practice, it is important for mental health professionals to check their biases to assure that they do not affect their work with clients. Discussing non-monogamy and bringing it to wider attention will help psychologists become aware of a potential bias they may have against this population. If practitioners are aware of these biases, they may also ask broader questions about client's relationship structures at intake and make the therapeutic environment an open place for the couples to discuss their relationships. This attitude of mental health professionals could increase the amount of non-monogamous couples who may seek therapy and increase research in this domain.

Lastly, this study will hopefully make a change when it comes to policy. In the future, mental health professionals and others will consider this population when designing interventions and community outreach programs. The American Psychological Association, along with other psychological and counseling associations, may develop treatment guidelines

and divisions devoted to various relational structures. Currently no treatment guidelines or divisions exist. This will ideally change in the future.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### **Participants**

All subjects in this study have self-identified as being adults in a long-term, co-constructed, sexually non-monogamous (experimental group) or sexually monogamous (control group), heterosexual relationship. Adult was defined as being 18 years of age and older. Long-term was identified as participating in the relational dyad for at least six months. Co-construction was important to note so that people cheating or having affairs do not skew the data sample. Those who identified as polyamorous, or used another relationship label, were not included in this present study.

### **Measures**

All measures were combined into a secure internet-based survey created at [www.poll daddy.com](http://www.poll daddy.com). The survey was distributed through an electronic link posted on websites identifying as open to the community, or targeting non-monogamous people, as well as distributed through email utilizing a snowball technique, and posted on social media. A snowball technique is defined as emails sent out to contacts of the colleague who received the original email. For example, if the writer sent an email to a professor, that professor would be allowed to reach out to professional groups and other colleagues who were not on the original email list. The survey consisted of a) consent, b) inclusion criteria, c) demographic questions (appendix C), d) ENRICH marital satisfaction scale (appendix A), and e) open ended questions (appendix B). Those willing participants who meet inclusion criteria were then directed to the

rest of the survey. Those participants who do not meet inclusion criteria were directed to a page stating that they did not meet criteria, thanked them for their interest, and supplied the researcher's contact information for any questions and or concerns.

### **Informed Consent**

Upon clicking the link provided, the participants were first directed to a page explaining the risks and rewards of the study, stating that their participation was voluntary (Appendix D). They are free to stop at any point they like. Upon signing this consent, the survey began.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

After signing the informed consent, the participant was then asked to fill out sample demographic questions on the participants' age, race/ethnicity, income, geographic location, sexual orientation, length of relationship, and any other relevant factors to the study. The participant was then asked about their relationship and how long they have participated in a sexually non-monogamous or monogamous relationship. If they meet inclusion criteria, they moved on to the surveys.

For the section mentioned above, the participants were required to give a response and could not opt out. This was especially important for the inclusion criteria. However, on the demographic questions there was an option to not identify if the participant wished to not reveal something about him- or herself.

### **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**

The ENRICH marital satisfaction scale was invented and tested by Blaine J. Fowers and David H. Olson (1993). Fowers gave consent to the researcher to use this relational satisfaction tool (Appendix E). A review of the existent literature found no scale for specifically assessing the sexually non-monogamous community. However, the ENRICH scale was used with several heterosexual couples, so the results could be easily compared (see Appendix X). This particular scale was selected because of its reliability and validity. Reliability was shown to be .86 using Cronbach's alpha for both internal reliability and test-retest reliability after four weeks. The construct and concurrent validity ranged from .61 for individuals and .81 for couples (Fowers & Olson 1993).

### **Open Ended Questions**

The researcher believes that certain items for this population would not be assessed using the ENRICH scale alone. Because of this, several open ended questions regarding rules the couple follows, their opinion of their relationship, and who they disclose to were added (see Appendix B).

### **Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through several means to try and get a diverse sample. The Internet was utilized to try and gain a diverse geographic sample as well as reduce stigma participants may have felt talking to a researcher face to face. Participants were recruited through the following means: a) personal and professional contact through the researcher, b) blogs and community websites focusing on alternative sexual lifestyles, c) podcast websites

who speak of sexual non-monogamy positively (Sex is Fun Podcast), d) online communication, e) electronic email lists to interested groups, and f) social media such as Facebook.

### **Data Collection**

Participants' contact with the study began when they clicked the link in an email or on a website posting. Once the participant met inclusion criteria and electronically signed the informed consent, they proceeded to the study. The participants were also informed that they were entered into a drawing to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card, if they choose.

### **Data Preparation**

In order to avoid problems with missing data, all items in the quantitative section of the study were carefully scanned through to look for omissions. If there were several omissions or outliers, the participant was removed. Twenty-three respondents did not have marital satisfaction scores given by the ENRICH marital satisfaction scale. To determine how these scores were missing, Little's MCAR test was conducted via SPSS to ensure omissions did not skew the data. It was found that these scores were omitted at random; therefore, expectation maximization was used to fill in the scores. Next, SPSS was utilized to make sure all data meet univariate norms and there were no outliers. All the data was normally distributed.

### **Research Design and Analysis**

This study investigated several research questions based on demographic questions, the ENRICH marital satisfaction scale, and several open ended questions. After data preparation

and cleansing, the totals of the ENRICH marital satisfaction scale were compared through Cronbach's alpha via SPSS to analyze internal consistency within the population. All the data was found to be reliable. To compare the experimental and control groups, independent t-tests were run. Demographic variables were also looked at using this method.

The qualitative questions were more open ended and fewer statistics were applied. These questions were analyzed individually. Two examiners coded the qualitative data in order to ensure inter-rater reliability.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether relationship type (monogamous or non-monogamous) would have an impact on marital satisfaction and the idealistic distortion. A second purpose was to examine whether certain demographic variables would predict marital satisfaction.

All subjects in this study have self-identified as being adults in a long-term, co-constructed, sexually non-monogamous (experimental group) or sexually monogamous (control group), heterosexual relationship. Adult was defined as being 18 years of age and older. Long-term was identified as participating in the relational dyad for at least six months. Co-construction was important to note so that people cheating or having affairs would not skew the data sample. Those who identified as polyamorous or identified with another relationship structure were excluded from this study.

### **Assessment of Missing Value Pattern**

There were a total of 64 participants in the study. Twenty-three respondents (35%) did not have marital satisfaction scores. To determine whether the values were missing completely at random or purposely omitted, Little's MCAR test was conducted using the SPSS Missing Values add-on module. The findings indicated the above missing values were missing completely at random,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.92, p = .166$ . Therefore, missing values were imputed via the expectation maximization (EM) method (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

### Checking for Univariate Normality

To determine whether the variables were distributed normally, the skewness and kurtosis indices were examined. Per Kline (2011), a variable is non-normal if its skewness index (i.e., skewness statistic/SE) is over three and its kurtosis index (i.e., kurtosis statistic/SE) is over 10. As shown in Table 1, the two dependent variables were distributed normally.

Table 1

*Skewness and Kurtosis Values for the Study Variables (N = 64)*

Variable	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Marital satisfaction	-.41	.30	.75	.59
Idealistic distortion	-.20	.30	-.66	.59

### Checking for Univariate Outliers

To determine whether there were univariate outliers, the variables were standardized. Cases whose standardized values were above the absolute value of 3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) were categorized as outliers. None of the cases, however, had standardized absolute values above 3.29; therefore, there were no univariate outliers.

### Description of the Sample

As shown in Table 2, majority of the respondents were male (71.9%) and were White (92.2%). Close to half graduated with a Bachelor's degree (43.8%) while 46.9% had a graduate degree. The majority of the respondents lived in a city (65.6%) and earned \$50,000 or more

(61.9%). Respondents were married (39.1%), dating (25%), living with a partner (25%), or “Other” (9.4%). Close to half reported being in relationships between one and five years in length (43.8%). About a fifth of the sample was in relationships between six and 10 years in length (23.4%); only a tenth reported they were in relationships between 11 and 15 years in length. Slightly more than half indicated they identified as non-monogamous (59.4%)

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for the Demographic Variables (N = 64)*

*2.1 Gender*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	46	71.9 %
Female	17	26.6 %
Other	1	1.6 %

*2.2 Ethnicity*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity		
White	59	92.2 %
Other	4	6.3 %

*2.3 Education*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Highest level of education		
High school equivalent	4	6.3 %
Associates	2	3.1 %
Bachelors	28	43.8 %
Masters	19	29.7 %
Doctorate	11	17.2 %

*2.4 Areas of Residence*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Area of residence		
Rural/suburban	21	32.9 %
Urban	42	65.6 %

### 2.5 Income Level

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Income level		
Below \$50,000	24	37.5 %
\$50,000 to \$74,999	10	15.6 %
\$75,000 to \$99,999	9	14.1 %
Over \$100,000	20	31.3 %

### 2.6 Marital Status

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status		
Dating	16	25.0 %
Living with partner	16	25.0 %
Married	25	39.1 %
Other	6	9.4 %

### 2.7 Length of Relationship

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Length of relationship		
Less than one year	4	6.3 %
1 to 5 years	28	43.8 %
6 to 10 years	15	23.4 %
11 to 15 years	8	12.5 %
Over 16 years	9	14.1 %

### 2.8 Relationship Type

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Relationship type		
Monogamous	26	40.6 %
Non-monogamous	38	59.4 %

## Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 3. The Marital Satisfaction scale was reliable since its Cronbach's alpha was .72 and above the acceptable criterion of .70 (per Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Marital satisfaction scores ranged from 26 to 50; the mean score was 41.29 ( $SD = 4.74$ ). The Idealistic Distortion scale was reliable at .80. Idealistic distortion scores ranged from six to 24; the mean score was 16.36 ( $SD = 4.50$ ).

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 64)*

Variables	$\alpha$	Range	$M$	$SD$
Marital satisfaction	.72	26 to 50	41.29	4.74
Idealistic distortion	.80	6 to 24	16.36	4.50

### The Impact of Relationship Type on Satisfaction

The first research question sought to determine whether relationship type would have an impact on marital satisfaction. To answer this question, a *t*-test for independent samples was used. A two-tailed significance level of .05 was specified. The findings in Table 4 reveal that relationship type did not have a significant impact on marital satisfaction,  $t(62) = -1.18, p = .243$ . Monogamous ( $M = 40.44, SD = 4.23$ ) and non-monogamous ( $M = 41.86, SD = 5.03$ ) participants had similar levels of marriage satisfaction.

Table 4

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Relationship Type and Marital Satisfaction (N = 64)*

Variables	Monogamous		Non-monogamous		$t$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$	
Marital satisfaction	40.44	4.23	41.86	5.03	-1.18

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### The Relationship between Relationship Type and Idealistic Distortion

The second research question sought to determine whether there would be an association between relationship type and idealistic distortion. To answer this question, a *t*-test for independent samples was used. A two-tailed significance level of .05 was specified. The findings in Table 5 indicate that relationship type was not associated with idealistic distortion,  $t(62) = -1.45, p = .153$ . Monogamous ( $M = 15.38, SD = 4.28$ ) and non-monogamous ( $M = 17.03, SD = 4.57$ ) participants had similar levels of idealistic distortion.

Table 5

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Relationship Type and Idealistic Distortion (N = 64)*

Variables	Monogamous		Non-monogamous		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Idealistic distortion	15.38	4.28	17.03	4.57	-1.45

$p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Demographic Predictors of Satisfaction

The third research question sought to determine which demographic variables would predict marital satisfaction. A multiple linear regression procedure was conducted to determine which variables would significantly predict marital satisfaction. Education was recoded into a binary variable: respondents with less than a graduate degree were categorized into the Non-Graduate group while respondents with a Master's or a Doctorate were categorized into the Graduate group. Relationship length was recoded into a binary variable: respondents who were together for five years or less were assigned to the Short Relationship group while respondents

who were together for more than five years were assigned to the Long Relationship group. Income was recoded into a variable with three levels: the first level consisted of respondents who earned less than \$50,000; the second level consisted of respondents who earned between \$50,000 and \$99,999; the third level consisted of respondents who earned \$100,000 or more.

Prior to conducting the regression procedure, the assumptions of multivariate normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were all met. Per Norusis (1991), multivariate normality is fulfilled if the points are clustered towards to the diagonal. The points in the normal probability plot (see Appendix F) were clustered towards the diagonal; thus, the assumption of multivariate normality was fulfilled. Per Norusis (1991), the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity are fulfilled if the plot of the study deleted residuals by the standardized predicted values yield a random scatter. Given the plot yielded a random scatter, the two assumptions were fulfilled (see Appendix G).

The regression findings in Table 6 reveal that only income level significantly predicted marital satisfaction,  $F(1, 58) = 5.66, p = .021$ . Respondents who earned between \$50,000 and \$99,999 had significantly higher marital satisfaction scores ( $M = 42.95, SD = 4.27$ ) than respondents who earned less than \$50,000 ( $M = 39.79, SD = 4.98$ ).

Table 6

*Linear Regression Results for the Demographics and Marital Satisfaction Model (N = 64)*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Whites vs. others	-.03	2.28	-.00	.00	.989
Bachelor's or less vs. graduate	-.06	1.25	-.01	.00	.962
Income level					
Less than \$50,000 vs. \$50,000 to \$99,999	3.49	1.47	.34	5.66	.021
Less than \$50,000 vs. \$100,000 or more	2.49	1.45	.25	2.93	.092
Five years or less vs. six years or more	-.61	1.25	-.07	.24	.626

*Note.* Model  $R^2 = .099, F(5, 58) = 1.27, p = .289$ .

## Qualitative Results

### Monogamous Participants

After the narrative data was hand coded, several trends were noticed among the control group, composed of subjects who self-identified as being in a long-term monogamous relationship. The top two reasons given for being in a monogamous relationship were commitment (21%) or to decrease stress and complication (17%). Under the idea of commitment, many respondents stated that being monogamous was a way to show commitment to one another and to increase stability. The second most popular reason was to decrease stress and increase stability. Some reasons given by participants were that jealousy would complicate the relationship and make it less stable. Aside from these themes, about 14 percent of monogamous participants listed reasons such as trust, safety, comfort, and desire as other reasons to participate in monogamous relationships with their partner.

When asked, 17 percent of control group respondents stated that they have participated in sexual contact outside their current relationship. This is in opposition to the 60 percent who have never participated in outside sexual activity. In addition, 14 percent stated that they participated in sexual activity outside of a monogamous relationship before entering into their current relationship. Only 91 percent of respondents answered this question, leaving nine percent unaccounted for. Of those who have participated in outside sexual activity, the majority had disclosed this fact to their partners. This disclosure had no long-lasting effect on the relationship according to the participants. One participant chose not to disclose, and one other participant kept it a secret. Not only is this a difference in language, but a difference in action. Not disclosing implies that one may imply when confronted, while keeping a secret is deception

even when confronted. Lastly, there was one participant who stated that she was allowed to have outside sex in the relationship but identified as monogamous.

Participants in the control group were asked about their own definitions and rules around monogamy. First, the results of the definition will be discussed. The main parameter described by 56% of respondents was that monogamy was defined as sexual or physical contact with one partner or “no outside partners.” Seventeen percent of respondents felt that emotional monogamy went along with physical/sexual monogamy. These participants stated that a deep emotional connection coexisted along with a sexual one. One respondent stated that emotional monogamy was the only defining factor for them. While another participant stated crushes and flirting are okay, but nothing past that.

As far as rules are concerned, 21% of participants stated that there is a “mutual understanding” and no specified rules. From the descriptions provided, it seemed like these rules are understood but no specific conversation was held regarding the relational rules. Similarly, 10% of respondents stated that they have “unspoken rules.” Seven percent stated they had no rules and one participant stated they have specific rules. These results suggest that many people operate under the assumption that monogamy is the default agreement in their relationships, without explicitly agreeing to it. It is also the assumption that greater society has around what it means to be in a romantic relationship.

Lastly, the participants were asked how they feel monogamy affects their relationship. Twenty-eight percent of participants feel that monogamy strengthens their relationship for reasons such as increasing an emotional bond and that monogamy makes the relationship stronger. Seventeen percent stated that monogamy increases trust, closeness, and confidence. Ten percent stated that monogamy allows the focus to remain on the couple instead of other

things. Seven percent of respondents stated that monogamy increases closeness; while another seven percent stated that it is easier to be present or supportive. One participant reported the following effects on one's monogamous relationship: positivity, made the relationship uncomplicated, was not concerned with others, prevented jealousy, and had no effect on the relationship at all.

### **Non-monogamous Participants**

After analyzing the non-monogamous or experimental group, qualitative data several themes were uncovered. The first question the non-monogamous participants were asked was why they decided to be in a non-monogamous relationship. Sixteen percent of respondents stated that being in a non-monogamous relational structure was a "better fit" or "felt right." Thirteen percent of respondents stated they appreciated the variety, and another 13 percent stated that they were unsatisfied sexually with their partner. Ten percent of participants stated that freedom or fewer restrictions in their relationship were important to them. Lastly, 8% stated that they are bisexual and non-monogamy was a way to accommodate a partner's sexual desires for the same sex. While these participants stated that they are in a heterosexual relationship, they identify their sexual orientation as bisexual.

Participants were asked about rules in their non-monogamous relationship. Forty-three percent stated that safety, mainly physical safety, was a primary rule. The main argument they have is no unprotected/unsafe sex with outside partners and that protection or safe sex must be used. Forty percent of participants responded that open communication and honesty were important rules, while 13 percent stated that full disclosure was important and another 10 percent specified discussion before action. Sixteen percent stated that respect is an important

rule. Eight percent of respondents have no hard rules. Five percent stated that details are not required or that they “avoid[ed] sharing lots of details.” The last five percent stated that outside sexual contact is only allowed with people of the same-sex when one person is bisexual.

Disclosure was also being assessed for in the open-ended questions. Some participants stated that they disclosed to friends (59%) or close friends only (27%). Others disclose their relationship status to family (27%) or some family (29%). Twenty-four percent of participants respond to some co-workers and only 10% disclose their relationship status to everyone.

All participants who were involved in non-monogamous relationships at the time of the study were asked if they felt stigma and/or judgment about their relationship choices. Twenty-seven percent of respondents stated that they felt some judgment from friends and family. There were statements regarding religiosity being conflicted with non-monogamous relationship status and even attempts by family members to sabotage the relationship. Other respondents (16%) stated that they only surround themselves with open-minded people who will not judge their situation. Ten percent of this experimental group reported they feel stigma from society and the larger traditional marriage paradigm.

Lastly, non-monogamous participants were asked how their relational structure affected their relational satisfaction. Forty percent of respondents stated that their relationship has more open communication. Many respondents said that they have greater communication and openness and that their relationship requires high levels of communication to operate functionally. Others stated that it has made their relationship stronger, and that it strengthens their respect for each other and made the couple more secure (16%). Eight percent stated that non-monogamy is the reason for the longevity of their relationship.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

As relational constructs evolve and change, more research is needed to understand the implications of identifying such populations, empathically studying them, and explore therapeutic implications in order to better serve this population. Currently, there is no standard of practice for conducting couples, family, or individual therapy with individuals in relationships that are explicitly sexually non-monogamous. Additionally, the non-monogamous populations are being lumped together into one community. Researchers and mental health professionals need to use multiple lenses when looking at these populations. The non-monogamous community introduces new family structures, and should be approached from a multicultural perspective.

### **Conclusion**

Subjects who participated in this study self-identified as being adults in a long-term, co-constructed, sexually non-monogamous (experimental group) or sexually monogamous (control group), and heterosexual relationship. Out of a sample of 64 participants, it was found that the relational satisfaction scores for both groups were deemed as equivalent, meaning identifying as monogamous or non-monogamous did not predict relational satisfaction. Both the experimental and control groups had similar relational satisfaction scores. This supports the original hypothesis that the non-monogamous group's relational satisfaction scores would be equal to or greater than those of their monogamous counterparts.

When asked, 17% of the monogamous participants in the study stated that they had outside sexual contact in their relationships. This finding demonstrates that while many people identify as being in a sexually monogamous relationship, often times those expectations are not met and outside sexual activity occurs. This point is in support of operationalizing the term monogamy. Different cultures may have different expectations of definitions of what monogamy means. Oftentimes, behavior does not meet the identified label a person has. In the future, it would be interesting for researchers to look at what constitutes as monogamy and infidelity in these relationships. For example, some people consider online intimate relationships or watching pornography cheating. This study did not ask specifically what type of outside sexual contact occurred. However, since the participants identified as being in a sexually monogamous relationship, it would be interesting to explore their concepts of monogamy. It would also be valuable to examine behavioral manifestations of monogamy, what acts occur more than others, or abstention from what activity constitutes as a monogamous relationship. Some individuals in both the monogamous and non-monogamous groups may participate in the same sexual activities outside their relationship but ascribe a different meaning to it. Additionally, another big factor would be disclosure. Further research is warranted to discover if the partners of the monogamous subjects whom endorsed outside sexual activity were aware this activity was occurring.

When the monogamous subjects were asked what they believe strengthens their relationships, 28 percent of participants felt that monogamy strengthened their relationship for reasons such as increasing an emotional bond. Seventeen percent stated that they believed monogamy increases trust, closeness, and confidence.

This is not in stark contrast to the rationale given by those participants who were engaging in non-monogamous relationships. Forty percent of those respondents stated that their relationship had more open communication. Many respondents said that they have greater communication and openness and that their relationship requires high levels of communication to operate functionally. Others stated that it has made their relationship stronger by strengthening their respect for each other and made the couple more secure (16%).

Participants in both groups believe that what they are doing strengthens and increases their relational satisfaction. Since neither side is the “correct” side, there should be more room for an open discussion on diversity among relational constructs, especially if the relational satisfaction levels are the same. If both sides feel the same way about their relationship, and if all people are equally as satisfied in their dyads, there must be ways to further accommodate this diversity factor into therapeutic practices. Additionally, the relational satisfaction scores indicate that subjects feel secure and trusting in their relationships in both groups. It could be further hypothesized that these feelings are at the core of healthy relationships, and that therapy models need to expand beyond rigid expectations and prejudices to support and foster different relational structures.

Another interesting point is what was absent from the data. The open-ended questions were designed to welcome of all kinds of responses, including negative ones. However, none of the 64 participants described dissatisfaction. No subjects stated in either group that their relational structure was not working or that they were unhappy or unfulfilled with their choice. This supports the greater argument that relational satisfaction is possible because of how the relationship is co-constructed.

## **Demographics**

Several factors affected this study's generalizability as far as the sample is concerned. One is the ethnicity of the subjects. The intention of the researcher was to conduct the study online in order to attract the greatest diversity of subject participants. It was thought that stigma would be reduced since there was no face-to-face contact required, as well as very little identifying information given. Additionally, it was thought by the researcher that access to a computer may be greater than many people's access to reliable transportation, time off of work, etc. Despite the researcher's efforts to access a diverse sample, the sample was fairly homogenous. Fifty-nine participants (92.2%) of the sample self-identified as being white. And only four participants (6.3%) identified as other. Generally speaking, the majority of the participants were also male (71.9%), holding a bachelor's or master's degree (73.5%), and residing in urban areas (65.6%). This lack of variety in the sample creates some difficulty with generalizability of the results.

There are several factors that may compound each other. One, there may have been a flaw in the research design. The researcher may have overlooked some recruitment efforts or unintentionally recruited in areas that attract educated urban Caucasian males. However, the second option is that this data may point towards trends in the non-monogamous community. White males may be more engaged in this kind of relational construct, or other people are not disclosing their non-monogamous relationship label. Further research is needed within different ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural groups to ascertain which of these are occurring. Currently, there is very little research that exists on the cultural make-up of non-monogamous couples in the United States. This is an area for more research.

More educated individuals are may have more Internet access, which could have affected recruitment (Zickhur & Smith, 2012). Additionally, Zillien and Hargiatti (2009) found that more educated individuals with Internet access are more likely to engage in online surveys and online research. The results of this study may reflect a response bias and not a trend in the larger community. The sample obtained may just reflect who participates in online research. If this is the case, different methods such as community involvement and intervention may be needed in order to study different cultural groups and to attain a more diverse sample.

In the future, some of the wording should be changed in order to attract the target demographic for the study. Instead of heterosexual, the phrase “opposite sex relationship” or “same sex relationship” should be used. These words would assist in recruiting subjects that are in either same or opposite sex relationships. This phrasing may also assist in clearing up confusion around the person’s sexual orientation and the current relationship they are in. For example, someone in an opposite sex relationship may identify as bisexual, but may still participate in a study focused on opposite sex relationships, even though they may not consider their relationship heterosexual.

Lastly, some people who identified as polyamorous took the study’s survey. It is unknown by the researcher how many polyamorous people took the study. Both subjects and leaders of polyamorous groups contacted the researcher via email to ask questions and disclose that polyamorous individuals took the survey. This may impact generalizability. The intention was to recruit people participating in non-monogamous (excluding polyamorous) relationships only. This was defined as couples in a relational dyad whom had a co-constructed relational paradigm which allowed sexual activity outside the relationship. Polyamory is different in that

there are more committed relationships beyond a dyad. However, during the recruitment phase, people identifying as both took the survey.

This result could have been a problem with the recruitment method, or the investigator not using specific enough language. In addition, this could be a reflection on the current literature, thinking, and attitudes towards non-traditional couples. Currently researchers are lumping all definitions of sexual non-monogamy together into one “other” category. However, all these definitions differ in their own way. This study meant to target only individuals in committed non-monogamous dyads. However, due to the sample being contaminated, the results may either be generalizable to both the polyamorous and non-monogamous populations or are generalizable to neither.

Unfortunately, there was no discerning way to extract the polyamorous responses from those of other participants. There were no identifying questions to identify other communities besides the defined target, so there are no discerning identifiers which would indicate who was polyamorous and who was non-monogamous. In the future, investigators should include parameters that will yield a more specific sample.

### **ENRICH Martial Satisfaction Scale**

The ENRICH Martial Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993) was utilized due to its generalizability, reliability, and validity. However, this scale was not created for the non-monogamous population. Not all individuals surveyed were married (39.1%) as the scale indicates, and there were no questions geared towards this community specifically. In the future, the researcher hopes there will be scales and measures created with this population in mind, and ideally they will be more reliable when used in the community. However, to reach the levels of

generalizability that the existing scales have may take some time. These instruments will need more defined identifiers for non-monogamous, poly, or other participants so the scales would be normed on the proper populations they are aimed at studying.

### **Possible Implications of Results**

There are several hypotheses for why people had similar relational satisfaction scores in both the control and experimental groups. Both groups stated that they felt their relationships were stronger. The difference here was that the monogamous couples felt sexual monogamy strengthened their relationship (28%), while 40 percent of experimental group stated that having a non-monogamous relationship required the communication in their relationship. Therefore both groups believed that increased communication made their relationship stronger. Both dyads feel that their relationship is the strongest for different reasons. Given the large variety in people's emotional needs and maturity, relationship and lifestyles, and attachment style, makes logical sense that different people would prefer different relational constructs.

Stigma exists for those participating in non-monogamous relationships, so the results may be underreported. Twenty-seven percent of respondents stated that they felt some judgment from friends and family. This could keep people from participating in studies. In the future, it is hoped that research will focus specifically on stigma felt by this group and how the members of this group react and handle these feelings of stigma. Stigma could be a reason for the sample size in this study. If clinical stigma was lessened, the non-monogamous group may have more representation, and they may disclose more.

## **Therapeutic Implications**

An unknown portion of couples seeking therapy will be non-monogamous, polyamorous, swingers, or have another non-traditional relational structure. It is also unknown what percent of individuals seeking therapy prefer non-monogamous relationships to monogamous ones. Currently, there are no standards of practice, theories, or therapeutic frameworks for work with these populations. The more relational constructs that exist, the more psychology needs to educate itself regarding the populations being treated.

The more specialized research that can be done, then the more cultural considerations will be learned and considered in treatment. For example, polyamorous couples will have different cultural considerations than a non-monogamous couple. Couple's therapy with a polyamorous couple may need to include several other members of the relationship and may look a bit more like family therapy. Therapy with non-monogamous couples may only involve the original dyad, but may focus on establishing rules and incorporating others in a way, which is comfortable for both people involved. The only way to truly know and understand specific cultural considerations would be to conduct more research. However, it is crucial to involve these considerations when working with these populations. Different relational structures are not typically thought of as a traditional diversity factor. Therapists would also have to work at incorporating this topic into therapy the same way other diversity factors are incorporated. This would include psychology programs including this into their curriculums.

While couples therapy is a place that needs to shift its expectations, individual therapy does as well. Often times when diversity factors are discussed, those in non-traditional relational dyads are often not brought up. People in these relationships may often feel stigma about disclosing their relationship status to others. Fear of other people's reactions or

misunderstanding may exist. Additionally, there could be a fear that friendships and familial relationships will dissolve, or they miss out on other opportunities both social and otherwise. Due to this, stigma and disclosure may be traumatic for an individual. Both individuals and couples therapists working with this community must be aware of considerations such as this so that they may be properly addressed in therapy.

Additionally, therapists need to address and think about how the non-monogamous population is viewed. Many graduate school curriculums do not address how to work with non-monogamous groups, couples, or individuals. It is hypothesized by the writer that current therapists perpetuate stigma for non-monogamous groups through the assumptions they are making. Instead of asking about someone's relational structure, most therapists assume that the person sitting across from them is either involved in or interested in a traditional monogamous relationship. By not inquiring or beginning about the dialogue, the patient could feel stigmatized to bring this up or challenge the therapist on their traditional view. In other words, the client will remain quiet because the therapist is placing an assumption on them.

Many therapists also hypothesize that any sexual encounters outside of a relationship are detrimental or dangerous in nature. This is for several reasons, one being that therapists often equate co-constructed outside sexual activity with cheating or affairs. Another reason is that therapists are basing their opinions on a very small sample. Any client who walks in the office for therapeutic services is not operating at their best or has some kind of dysfunction in their lives. This is no different for those in non-monogamous relationships. In other words, therapists may believe that every non-monogamous relationship is unhealthy because those are the only people the therapist is seeing in their office. The healthy, well-functioning non-monogamous couples are not going to seek therapy, and therefore the therapist will not be exposed to this

healthy model. Mental health professionals need to expand their mind and opinion around non-monogamous relationships and how they can be healthy for those individuals involved. A strength-based approach should be utilized instead of what is currently being used.

Lastly, therapists could be challenged to think about non-monogamous and polyamorous couples as a cultural or diversity factor. There are many kinds of “non-traditional” families: blended families; interracial families; mixed religion families; gay, lesbian, or transgender families, etc. Polyamorous or non-monogamous families can also be included in this list. These groups are currently not seen as being diverse; however, they should be treated with the same sensitivity and attitude that other diverse groups are.

### **Future research**

This study opens the door for the exploration of treatment models and therapeutic implications for working with the non-monogamous population. In conjunction with this, more research could be conducted on the impacts of stigma and disclosure on these populations. Additionally, this was a foundational study. As such, these results should be replicated by other studies.

Because there are several non-monogamous populations, future research needs to be done on specific groups. Better and more solid definitions need to be in place for people to better understand relationship identities, and how different relational structures should be engaged clinically. With more research and case work, more can be discovered about what it means to identify as one of these groups, and what they need from therapists and the general population in order to feel more accepted and understood. This will give the general population a better idea between the difference of polyamorous, non-monogamy, swingers, and other

identifications. Lastly, as more research is done and incorporated into training there will be more clinically acceptance of these groups and stigma can decrease and disclosure can increase. People can often times be afraid of the unknown. With more research and more education hopefully more people who identify outside the default status will feel more comfortable disclosing and living in their chosen relationship. Additionally with stigma decreasing, more of these couples and individuals will seek couples therapy as well. Additionally, research needs to be conducted on the differences between cheating, infidelity, and affairs and the non-monogamous community. The longer all these groups are linked together, the more detrimental it will be to the non-monogamous individuals and couples.

While research needs to be conducted on both individuals and couples, it would also be useful to understand how families may be affected. Family would include children of the couple, and/or immediate family members. This designation may also include friends, employers, etc. whom interact with the couple on a regular basis. Understanding effects on others, and others reactions may also assist individuals and therapists working within these populations. More understanding could be given to those identifying as open when they seek therapeutic services. Additionally, couples therapy models could integrate ideas such as acceptance, and focusing on emotional intimacy instead of exclusive physical intimacy and mandatory monogamy. Lastly, many models that state therapy must end with any extra-relational sexual activity needs to make special accommodations for those in non-monogamous relationships. While therapy may end if there is an affair or hidden activity, if non-monogamy is a co-constructed ideal the couple deserves a right to have a couple's therapist who can accommodate the couple.

Another theme from this research is that for many couples monogamy seems to be the default or assumed trait for a dyadic relationship. However, there may be different expectations of what monogamy is depending on whom is asked, such as if a virtual relationship violates monogamy. Many people have differing perspectives on pornography as well. Lastly, there is this idea of emotional fidelity or emotional monogamy. Future research should explore what constitutes emotional fidelity and/or how that is breached. While this study did not explore constructs of monogamy, these expectations would be of interest to explore.

The researcher hopes that others will focus on defining several different populations and cultures within the “sexually non-monogamous” umbrella in order to better understand and work with the various populations. One may also look at the families and other people affected by the relationships. There is a large gap in the current research on all of these topics. For example, books like Barker and Langdridge’s (2010) *Understanding Non-monogamies*, which is a well-researched book does not discuss the non-monogamous or open community. Many books like this focus on polyamorous populations.

Lastly, psychologists should take note and include the range of relational constructions into their diversity discussions and therapeutic considerations. Currently there are no models, considerations, or best practices in existence for any of these populations. These should exist for couples and individual therapists in order to accomplish best practice.

## References

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). (2014). LGBT rights: lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender project. Retrieved from: <https://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights>
- Adam, B. D. (2006). Relationship innovation in male couples. *Sexualities*, 9(1), 5–26.
- Barker, M. (2004). This is my partner, and this is my...partner's partner: Constructing a polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18, 75-88.
- Barker, M., & Langdrige, D. (2010). Whatever happened to non-monogamies? Critical reflections on current research and theory. *Sexualities*, 13(6), 748-772.
- Barker, M., & Langdrige, D. (2010). *Understanding non-monogamies*. New York, NY: Taylor and Routledge.
- Bagemihl, B. (1999), *Biological exuberance: Animal homosexuality and natural diversity*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bodenmann, G., Charvoz, L., Bradbury, T. N., Bertoni, A., Iafrate, R., Ciuliani, C., Banse, R., & Behling, J. (2007). *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24(5), 707-728.
- Bonello, K. (2009). Gay monogamy and extra-dyadic sex: a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature. *Counseling psychology review*, 24(3,4), 51-65.
- Buunk, B. P., & YanYperen, N. W. (1991). Referential comparisons, relational comparisons, and exchange orientation: their relation to marital satisfaction. *The Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, 17(6), 709-717.
- Byers, S. E. (2002). Evidence for the importance of relationship satisfaction for women's sexual functioning. *Women and Therapy*, 24(1-2), 23-26.

- Census.gov. (2012). Births, deaths, marriages and divorces. Retrieved from [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/births\\_deaths\\_marriages\\_divorces/marriages\\_and\\_divorces.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/births_deaths_marriages_divorces/marriages_and_divorces.html)
- Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 848-861.
- Cable News Network. (2014). Same sex marriage in the United States. <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/us/map-same-sex-marriage/>
- Conley, T. D., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Ziegler, A. (2012). The fewer the merrier? Assessing stigma surrounding consensually non-monogamous romantic relationships. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 00(00), 1-29.
- Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Valentine, B. (2013). A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, 17(2), 124-141.
- Coontz, S. (2005). *Marriage, a history: From obedience to intimacy or how love conquered marriage*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin Group.
- Day, S. (2008). *Theory and design in counseling and psychotherapy*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Easton, D., & Hardy, J. (2009). *The ethical slut: A practical guide to polyamory, open relationships and other adventures*. New York, NY: Celestial Arts.
- Ellis, H. (1927). *Studies in the psychology of sex: Volume 6*. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13615/13615-h/13615-h.htm>
- Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

- Fowers, B., & Olsen D.H. (1993). ENRICH marital satisfaction scale: a brief research and clinical tool. *Journal of Family Psychology*, (7)2, 176-185.
- Freud, S. (1962). *Sigmund Freud: Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality*. Library of Congress: United States
- Geary, D. C. (2000). Evolutions and proximate expressions of human paternal investment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(1), 55-77.
- Godbeer, R. (2002). *Sexual revolution in early America*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Greve, C., & Ejersbo, N. (2002). Serial organization monogamy: Building trust into contractual relationships. *International review of public administration*, 7(1), 39-51.
- Gurman, A. (2008). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hickson, F. C., Davies, P. M., Hunt, A. J., & Weatherburn, P. (1992). Maintenance of open gay relationship: Some strategies for protection against HIV. *AIDS Care*, 4 (4), 409-419.
- Hoff, C., & Beougher, S.C. (2010). Sexual agreements among gay male couples. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39, 774-787.
- Huber, B. R., Linhartova, V., & Cope, D. (2004). Measuring paternal certainty using cross cultural data. *World Cultures*, 15(1), 48-59.
- Irving, J. (1973). *The 158-Pund Marriage*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group.
- Jones, J. T., & Cunningham, J. D. (1996). Attachment styles and other predictors of relationship satisfaction in dating couples. *Personal Relationships*, 3(4), 387-399.
- Judge, T. A., & Bono, J. E. (2001). Relationship of core self-evaluations traits—self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability—with job satisfaction

and job performance: a meta-analysis. *The American Psychological Association*, 86(1), 80-92.

Kipnis, L. (2003). *Against love: A polemic*. New York, NY: Random House.

Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Lee, R. B., & Daly, R. (1999). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of hunters and gatherers*. Cambridge, England: University Press.

Lewis, P. (2009). The body as symbol: Bringing together theories of sex/gender and race for theological discourse. Marquette University. E-publications at Marquette.

Levenson, R. W., & Gottman, J. M. (1985). Psychological and affective predictors of change in relational satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49(1), 85-94.

Marlowe, F. W. (2005). Hunter-gatherers and human evolution. *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, 14(2), 54-67.

Masters, W., & Johnson, V. (1966). *Human sexual response*. New York, NY: Ishi Press International.

McGreevy, P., & Mason, M. (2013). Brown signs bill to allow children more than two legal parents. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-brown-bills-parents-20131005-story.html>

Norusis, M. J. (1991). *SPSS base systems user's guide*. Illinois: SPSS.

Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Patterson, C.J. (2000). Family relationships of lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1052-1059.

- Polygamy.com. (2013). History of polygamy. Retrieved from <http://www.polygamy.com/history-of-polygamy.html>
- Roach, M. (2008). *Bonk: The curious coupling of science and sex*. New York: NY: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Ryan, C., & Jetha, C. (2010). *Sex at dawn: How we mate, why we stray, and what it means for modern relationships*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Pearson.
- Tarin, J.J., & Gomez-Piquer, V. (2002). Do women have a hidden heat period? *Human reproduction*, 17(9), 2243-2248.
- Wright, R. (1994). *The moral animal: The new science of evolutionary psychology*. New York: Pantheon.
- Wolska, M. (2011). Marital therapy/couples therapy: Indications and contraindications. *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 13 (3), 57-64.
- Yang, L. H., Kleinman, A., Link, B., Phelan, J. C., Lee, S., & Good, B. (2007). Culture and Stigma: Adding moral experience to stigma theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64, 1524–1535.
- Zickuhr, K., & Smith, A.(2012). Digital differences. *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Digital-differences.aspx>
- Zillien, N. & Hargiatti, E. (2009). Digital distinctions: Status-specific Internet uses. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(2), 274-291

## Appendix A

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) What ethnicity do you identify with?
- 3) Which gender do you identify with?
- 4) How long have you been involved in your heterosexual relationship?
- 5) How long have you and your partner been in a co-constructed, sexually non-monogamous relationship?
- 6) What is your zip code (optional)?
- 7) What is your SES?

## Appendix B

### ENRICH Martial Satisfaction Scale (EMS) items

- 1- strongly disagree
  - 2- moderately disagree
  - 3- neither agree nor disagree
  - 4- moderately agree
  - 5- strongly agree
- 
- (+) 1. My partner and I understand each other perfectly
  - (-) 2. I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner
  - (+) 3. I am very happy with how we handle role responsibilities in our relationship
  - (+) 4. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood
  - (-) 5. I am not happy about our communication and feel my partner does not understand me
  - (+) 6. Our relationship is a perfect success
  - (+) 7. I am very happy with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts
  - (-) 8. I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions
  - (-) 9. I have some needs that are not being met by our relationship
  - (+) 10. I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together
  - (+) 11. I am very pleased about how we express affection and relate sexually
  - (-) 12. I am not satisfied with the way we each handle our responsibilities as parents (if applicable)
  - (+) 13. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment
  - (-) 14. I am dissatisfied about our relationship with my parents, in-laws, and/or friends
  - (+) 15. I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs and values

## Appendix C

### Open ended questions

Non-Monogamous couples:

- 1) Why did you decide to engage in a sexually non-monogamous relationship?
- 2) What are the rules (if any) involved in your non-monogamous relationship?
- 3) To whom do you disclose your relationship (friends, family, co-workers)?
- 4) Do you feel any stigma and/or judgment regarding your relationship choices? If so, please describe how
- 5) How do you think your non-monogamy has effected your relationship?

Monogamous Couples:

- 1) Why did you decide to engage in a sexually monogamous relationship?
- 2) Have you ever had any sexual contact outside your relationship?
- 3) If so, have you disclosed to your partner? And how has it effected your relationship?
- 4) What do you consider monogamy? Do you and your partners have certain rules?
- 5) How do you think your monogamy effects your relationship?

## Appendix D

### **Voluntary Message**

Thank you for participating in this survey. It is normal that questions regarding your relationship may bring up some emotional stress. If any of these questions cause extreme distress please feel free to skip the question.

## Appendix E

### **Consent for ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**

The experimenter Heather Tahler, M.A. Would like to thank Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D for his permission to use the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale for her doctoral dissertation.

Appendix F

Multiple Regression Assumption Plots

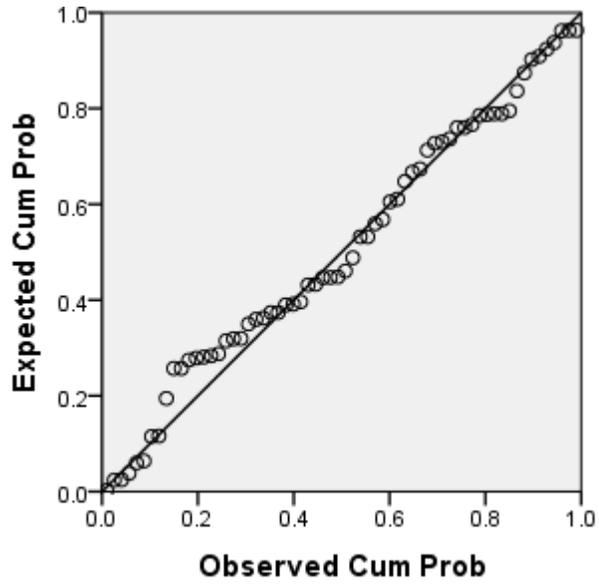
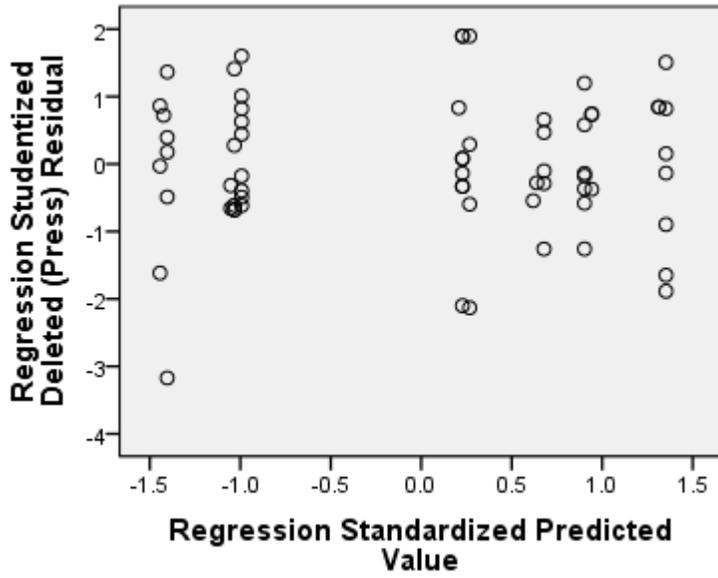


Figure 1. Normal probability plot of the standardized residuals.

Appendix G

**Multiple Regression Plot of Deleted Residuals**



*Figure 2.* Scatterplot of the studentized deleted residuals by the standardized predicted values.