

**EXPLORING SEXUAL EXCLUSIVITY
AMONG INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF SAME-SEX, MALE COUPLES
IN LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS**

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that *Exploring Sexual Exclusivity Among Individual Members of Same-Sex, Male Couples in Long-Term Relationships* is my work. The full extent of referenced sources have been provided. This work was not submitted previously toward any degree at any university.

Signed: Bryan R. Campbell

Date: 9 February 2020

ABSTRACT

Queer studies have not adequately considered gay men seeking sexual exclusivity within long-term relationships. In contrast, the emphasis has been on understanding evolving queer norms. Homonormativity has been informing sexual permissiveness. In accordance, and contrasting gay men seeking sexual exclusivity, gay, male couples tended to use relationship agreements to stipulate guidelines for extradyadic sex. This study was inspired by my inability—as a counsellor of gay men seeking sexual exclusivity—to provide them with credible insights to better understand their goals. Representing an initial step in generating practical knowledge, it was anticipated that my counselling clients could benefit from an exploration of lived experiences rather than having to rely on theoretical inferences and opinions. “How” and “why” participants maintained sexual exclusivity were the main targets of discovery. Eleven gay, Canadian men aged thirty-three and older, in relationships of five years or longer, participated in semi-structured interviews in-person or via video chat. Using Kleiman’s (2004) protocol for phenomenological analysis, common units of meaning were coded, from interview responses, so that distinct subthemes, contributing to six themes, were identified. These findings included content concerning “seeking positive affects,” “avoiding negative affects,” “factors supporting sexual exclusivity,” “threats to sexual exclusivity,” “rigidity in beliefs,” and “decision-making toward sexual exclusivity.” The first two themes integrated innately to form a meta-theme, “emotional optimization.” An essential insight into how participants maintained sexual exclusivity was their awareness of, and restraint in using, sexually tantalizing, visual stimuli, which was the primary risk to sexual exclusivity. Suggestions for gay men desiring sexual exclusivity included discontinued utility of pornography and cybersex. Varied implications for

prospective research, clinical practice and support groups were delineated.

Keywords: gay, sexual exclusivity, monogamy, long-term relationship, extradyadic sex, relationship agreement, phenomenological research method, existentialism, homonormativity

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passion for the provision of psychotherapy. Research on relationships reawakened not only a sense of privilege, for counselling members of my community, but also, a regained respect for the crucial purpose of societies: the interconnected, interdependent endeavors of people helping each other satisfy needs so that we can, collectively, create environments in which we have freedom to strive to actualize our fullest potentials.



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GLOSSARY

Affects: It is an alternative word for *emotions* or *feelings*. Examples of affects, noted throughout this thesis, include anger, jealousy, happiness, intimacy and loneliness.

Cisgender: The condition in which a person's birth sex corresponds with his or her gender identity is referred to as cisgender (Steinmetz, 2014).

Compartmentalization: In this study, compartmentalization refers to the unconscious defense mechanism needed to circumnavigate difficult emotions that arise from the gap between valuing monogamy and living monogamously (Leary & Tangney, 2012).

Closed Relationship: A closed relationship is a partnership in which sexual exclusivity is maintained. It means that both men in a couple practice sexual exclusivity (Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010); therefore, closed relationships are a topic of this study. Conversely, an open relationship means that one or both members of a couple have sex with individuals who are not their primary partner(s) (Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018).

Existentialism: Individual perspectives, free from objective norms, are the focus of existentialism. While similar to phenomenology, existential theory is also concerned with common challenges of being human (Grierson, 2007). Existential theory rejects the notion of predetermination and views people as evolving, over time, along with the consequences of their choices (Reynolds, 2006). Since nothing is set, individual decision-making and responsibility for

selected courses of actions are essential. Criticisms of societal expectations—relative to individual, lived experiences—and anxieties surrounding the awareness of our inevitable, impending death are common themes. In existentialism, existence, or being, is valued rather than assuming there is any essence to phenomena (Tanzer, 2008).

Gay Man: A gay man is a male aged eighteen years, or older, who identifies as being exclusively, sexually attracted, or orientated, to other men (Lippa, 2002). In contrast with a gay man, who is homosexual, a bisexual man identifies as being sexually attracted to both men and women, and a heterosexual man identifies as being exclusively, sexually attracted to women. The gay sexual orientation extends to more than direction of attraction and with whom someone has sex. The gay identity can be considered a process reflecting a person's history and experiences in conjunction with assumptions about same-sex relations—as set forth by both general, societal, and gay, cultural norms (Schippers, 2001).

Heteronormativity: This term refers to the assumption that everyone should be heterosexual and that norms based on common heterosexual experiences are superior to alternative perspectives and behaviors (Bartholomay, 2018). The denotation of heteronormativity extends past its imperatives to ignore or disqualify the experiences of other sexual orientations; people acting upon heteronormatively may actively oppress sexual minorities or conclude that gay men, and other non-heterosexuals, are perverted, ill or even dangerous (Signorile, 2014).

Homonormativity: This describes stereotyped norms for gay people that develop in contrast with heterosexual norms (Flores, 2017). This can represent a form of in-group, internalized

oppression originating from heteronormativity: In attempts to forge artificial, mutual-exclusivity identities distinct from heterosexuals, gay culture can develop expectations for its members to conform to gay norms that can also restrict, and devalue, the authentic beliefs and expressions of individuals (Matos, 2013).

Long-term Relationship: According to Bricker and Horne (2008), gay men typically regard being pair-bonded for two years, or longer, as a long-term relationship. In this study, however, a long-term relationship was defined as a pair-bond, that was both sexual and romantic in nature, in which a member of a gay, male couple had most recently maintained sexual exclusivity for five years or longer. The rationale for selecting a span of five years, in this study, is presented in the Assumptions and Delimitations section of Chapter 1.

Pair-Bond: It is an exclusive union with a single partner or mate. A pair-bond is generally defined as a monogamous relationship in which there has been no distinction made between emotional and sexual monogamy (Johnson, 2013).

Phenomenological Research Method: Highly congruent with existentialism, the phenomenological research method provides a technique for understanding individual, lived experience in which specificity, of individual phenomena, is valued over commonality among people (Creswell, 2012). Since this approach to research is qualitative and values depth in understanding individual experiences rather than objective, generalizable results, it is best suited for initial efforts to garner insights concerning lesser understood topics (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Promiscuous: The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines this term as “having or involving many sexual partners” (Promiscuous, 2020). People adopting a heteronormative stance view men as more likely to engage in promiscuous behavior. In accordance, women, being partners of men, are viewed as, at least partially, responsible for deterring men’s inherent promiscuousness by inspiring or enforcing sexual exclusivity in relationships. Conclusions from these heteronormative premises are that when two men form a relationship, considered inferior to heterosexual ones, there is no female to thwart fundamental, male promiscuousness (Bartholomay, 2018).

Relationship Agreement: This can refer, generally, to discussions that members of relationships have with their partners regarding conditions and goals for their relationships, but when people are endeavoring to impart this intended meaning, other terms such as *relationship contract* are more commonly utilized (Doll, 2012). Relationship agreement, instead, is typically referred to when couples decide to engage in extradyadic sex: In representing the outcomes or conclusions of conversations within partnerships, concerning the expectations, details, rules and guidelines for an open relationship (Whitton, Weitbrecht, & Kuryluk, 2015), this specific meaning of the term has been used extensively in research articles and books exploring gay men in romantic relationships.

Sexual Exclusivity: Lee and O’Sullivan (2019) defined sexual exclusivity as a condition in which a member of a relationship only has sexual relations with his or her partner. In this study, sexual exclusivity was defined as when individual members of gay, male couples only engaged in sex acts with their partners. Specifically, maintaining sexual exclusivity meant that

participants did not engage in sexual activities—with sexual intent and context—in close proximity to anyone other than their romantic partner.

Sexual Monogamy: Sexual exclusivity and sexual monogamy are equated in meaning (Lee & O’Sullivan, 2019). Both terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis. In contrast, sexual monogamy should be distinguished from *emotional monogamy*. In emotional monogamy, there is an emotional commitment to a relationship in which sexual monogamy may or may not exist. Where I refer to sexual non-exclusivity, extra-relational sex or extradyadic sex, I am referencing incidences in which people are having sex with one or more individuals outside of their primary bond (Ryan & Jetha, 2010) and are, therefore, not being sexually monogamous.

Chapter 1:

Introduction and Orientation

There is a dearth of research reporting on how sexual monogamy agreements and independent decisions to remain sexually exclusive are maintained within male couples in long-term relationships. In an effort to distinguish itself from heterosexual assumptions, gay culture, in general, may have overlooked the value of sexual exclusivity as a viable sexual option for the subset of gay men who sincerely seek it. Possibly reacting to a history of social marginalization and discrimination, gay researchers may have concentrated their efforts on the uniqueness of gay male relationships rather than attempt to approximate or identify with the broader social norm of sexual monogamy in heterosexual marriages. This study will start to bring to light information that may expand perceived lifestyle options available to gay men and begin to empower those who seek sexual exclusivity.

History of the Problem

During the era when the gay rights movement struggled against heterosexism to expand social space for gay men, Michel Foucault (1998) was shifting his focus from the problems of sexual repression to defining “gay culture.” Foucault (1998) described “a culture that invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals, which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms” (p. 159). Weeks, Heathy and Donovan (2001) describe contemporary gay relationships as “positive and creative responses to social and cultural change, which are genuine experiments in living” (p. 5).

Researchers exploring the realms of contemporary gay communities have been struck by the emerging freedoms available for same-sex relationships in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Bech, 2002). Henning Bech (1997) commented that male couples are, in a sense, "condemned to freedom" while they construct relationships without many of the signposts familiar to heterosexual couples such as sexual monogamy. Bech (1997) also remarked, "no societal norms stipulate that two men must live in a one-to-one relationship, nor is it dictated by financial necessity" (p. 142). Adopting a more critical stance toward new gay freedoms, in association with the abundance of options attributed to modern gay relationships in Western societies, and with sexual addictions at an all-time high among gay men, Down (2012) disclosed that he ponders whether or not gay relationships are really any better off compared with previous generations.

Contextualizing the Problem

Despite the devastating effects of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, rates of sexual exclusivity in gay male relationships remain low (Whitton et al., 2015), reflecting, in part, the gay culture's lack of adherence to the societal norm for sexual monogamy for heterosexuals. Observations of innovation and construction of unique patterns of relations within gay culture is predominantly experienced within gay male relationships where the rate of negotiating terms of sexual non-exclusivity is significantly higher than in heterosexual relationships (Whitton et al., 2015).

The Gay Couple Study out of San Francisco State University is the largest longitudinal study of gay couples ever attempted with over 500 couples. Approximately half of the couples had agreements for sexual non-exclusivity. While approximately half of the couples knowingly

practice sexual non-exclusivity, it is estimated that the majority of those without explicit agreements are also practicing sexual non-exclusivity (Hoff, Beougher, Chakravarty, Darbes, & Neilands, 2010).

Referencing the concept of compartmentalization, queer relationship researchers and advisors have tended to openly espouse the accommodation of extradyadic sex within gay relationships. Compartmentalization is defined “as an unconscious defense mechanism used to avoid cognitive dissonance, the mental discomfort and anxiety caused by a person having conflicting values, cognitions, emotions, beliefs, etc., within themselves” (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 58). In discussing compartmentalization in relation to sexual monogamy, the conflict that is avoided is typically between valuing sexual exclusivity and wanting to engage in extradyadic sex (Adam, 2006). Although researchers have consistently characterized the use of compartmentalization, secrecy and attempts at negotiating sexual non-exclusivity as healthy strategies in gay male relationships (Adam, 2006; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Charles, 2002), sexual exclusivity has not been explored in any depth; for example, as a comparison, more would need to be known about sexual exclusivity so that the presumed value of compartmentalization could be gauged against lived experiences in which it is not present.

Where historically, opinions and research findings, and perhaps opinions fueling research findings, have forthrightly proposed that there is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between open and closed relationships (Bonello & Cross, 2010; Charles, 2002; James, 2010; Whitton, et al., 2015), recently, academics have started to open up to, reportedly notice and acknowledge, the idea that sexually exclusive couples might experience a better quality of relationship (Levine et al., 2018).

When the present study began in 2015—despite an extensive literature review—I could not identify previously conducted research concerning the potential value of sexual exclusivity in gay relationships; however, by 2018, I was able to identify an article starting to acknowledge possible benefits of sexual exclusivity (Levine et al., 2018). This phenomenon may reflect novel changes in the perspectives of modern gay men and/or those examining gay relationships. The present study was considered timely.

Aims of the Study

Given that, at the beginning of this study, I could not identify prior research that explicitly explored the subset of gay men in long-term relationships who practice sexual exclusivity, the primary aim and main purpose of this study was to explore this subset of gay men qualitatively, to generate informational insights from lived perceptions, so that those who seek sexual exclusivity may begin to understand it and therefore have a better chance of achieving it.

I was unable to identify any prior research that attempted to definitively determine how sexual exclusivity was maintained. Therefore, one objective of this study was to investigate, and begin to understand, how gay men in long-term relationships had maintained sexual exclusivity.

Literature proposed factors—including religious influences, the avoidance of sexually transmitted infections and difficult emotions such as jealousy—that might have explained why this subset of gay men decided to maintain sexual exclusivity; however, research had not yet attempted to confirm these proposed factors. Therefore, another objective of this study was to contribute to confirming or debunking generally accepted motivations while potentially

uncovering unknown motivations regarding why this relatively small subset of gay men maintained sexual exclusivity.

It was anticipated that insights into how and why participants maintained sexual exclusivity would be useful for those seeking it; however, to benefit monogamy seekers, I also wanted to attempt to uncover specific factors—separate from those illuminated by the other goals of the study—that, reportedly, either supported or impeded the maintenance of sexual exclusivity. I correctly anticipated that questioning, relevant to how sexual exclusivity had been maintained, would uncover supportive factors, but distinct questioning also had to take place regarding possible factors working in opposition to sexual exclusivity—including those factors that were inferred, by the review of prior research results, as being problematic.

I thought that the findings of the study would also start to generate general knowledge of the subset of gay men who had maintained sexual exclusivity in their long-term relationships rather than opting to negotiate extradyadic sex or choose to engage in sexual non-exclusivity without their partners' knowledge. Therefore, the final objective was to remain as unassuming and cognitively receptive, as possible, to discover additional insights, from shared experiences, that were unforeseen.

Research Questions

These research questions guided the study:

- How did the participants maintain sexual exclusivity?
- Why did participants maintain sexual exclusivity?
- What factors supported and impeded the participants' maintenance of sexual exclusivity?

- What additional insights could be identified so that general knowledge can begin to develop regarding the subset of gay men who maintain sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships?

Rationale for the Study

This study started to address the problem of the subset of gay men who, despite challenges of maintaining sexual exclusivity, continued to value the goal yet lacked substantiated information regarding how to achieve their goal.

In providing psychotherapy as a private clinician, when gay, male clients who were interested in sexual exclusivity asked me for information to help them attain it in prospective relationships or maintain it in present relationships, I had little to share with them. I initially attempted to draw upon my observations, both inside and outside of psychotherapy, of several incidences of gay, male couples who were, supposedly, sexually exclusive; however, not only was it impossible to know, with certainty, if the relationships I had observed actually maintained sexual exclusivity, the relationships I had considered were mostly limited in their descriptions as being monogamous; in real-life or informal discourse, people often use the general term, monogamous, and do not discriminate between sexual and emotional monogamy. Furthermore, of the couples I had referenced, at least two of them claimed that they had maintained sexual monogamy despite having sex outside of their relationships; they believed that remaining in accordance with their relationship agreements meant they were sexually monogamous; whereas, my clients were seeking information about sexual exclusivity among members of relationships who would not have in-person sex with others. Memories of my prior preference for sexual exclusivity, during my early 20s, allowed me to empathize with clients seeking it; however,

attempting to recall my experiences, when I sought sexual exclusivity more than a decade or two prior, provided me with no useful insights for gay clients seeking sexual exclusivity in their long-term relationships.

Failing in my ability to bring credible insights to my clients who were requesting them, I looked to peer-reviewed articles in psychological journals for the information; however, to my dismay, I discovered that researchers in queer studies had not explored this topic explicitly. I then turned my attention to prominent relationship advisors. When I was unable to identify any gay experts on relationships who overtly espouse sexual exclusivity, I sought perspectives from relationship experts in areas outside of queer studies. Experts were identified who openly explored the potential value in maintaining sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships; however, while they may have provided useful considerations, they were heterosexual and describing the role of sexual exclusivity in relationships generally. In order to generate insights more apt to be relevant to gay men specifically, this study was implemented.

Gay men without guidance. Becoming caught up in society's expectations for gay men to be promiscuous (Signorile, 2015), gay men less likely to stray sexually from their primary partnership may do so (Duwe, 2018a) since there are not yet prominent gay roles models espousing sexual exclusivity (Radkowsky, 2015).

Not necessarily being aware that some gay men do attain sexual exclusivity can be discouraging to those who want it. Potential, initial lack of awareness for successes in sexual exclusivity may represent a primary emotional hurdle. This study may help gay men increase their awareness that other gay men have achieved sexual exclusivity and in accordance remedy any preliminary discouragement; however, without insights into how to attain sexual exclusivity, essentially, a secondary emotional hurdle must be overcome.

This study endeavored to start providing gay men with information that might assist them in understanding how to achieve sexual exclusivity so that they are more likely to circumnavigate the secondary emotional hurdle. In avoiding learned hopelessness, with an associated detrimental impact on mood, gay men initially determined to experience sexual exclusivity maybe more apt to persist in their pursuit of it: Armed with insights into techniques or perspectives that have worked for others, they are more likely to be pleased with the outcomes of their strategies. Conversely, if they think they cannot attain what they want, they are more likely to give up and become depressed; and in turn, depression tends to further decrease prior interests (Frankl, 2014).

Lacking in knowledge of how to reach their goal is more likely to result in futile, or unsuccessful, attempts, that can add to the experience of hopelessness. Associated dips in mood can compound the problem since prior interests can dampen as a direct result. Downs (2012) suggests that repeated, unsuccessful attempts to form desired connections with other men can thwart healthy gay development. Downs (2012) implied that learned hopelessness manifests as bitterness when gay men are unable to graduate from, what he characterizes as the stage of gay development called *compensating for shame*.

The fundamental attribution error (McLeod, 2018)—in which gay men seeking sexual exclusivity, with frustrating attempts, may conclude that the gay men, they are dealing with, are not able to provide it rather than thinking that the situation requires insights into how they can achieve it—may play a role in how learned hopelessness comes about and impedes gay development beyond Compensating for Shame. Without knowledge of how to attain their relational goals, these gay men are more likely faced with repeated, unsuccessful attempts for sexual exclusivity. During this second of his three stages of shame, Downs (2012) infers that the

accompanying pressure of taking on more sexual partners—in an attempt to transcend their shame for being gay by, compensating, acting more outrageously masculine—propels gay men who might have otherwise striven for sexual exclusivity to give up on what is more authentically in line with their individual values. It follows that when taking on more sexual partners is personally inauthentic, especially within the context of an unwanted open relationship, the non-sexually exclusive behavior of men seeking sexual exclusivity—those still stuck within the second stage of their gay development—reinforces any residual perspectives that sexual exclusivity is not a viable goal (Downs, 2012): Insights on how to attain sexual exclusivity, resulting from this study, may help men initially seeking sexual exclusivity transcend a potentially negative self-fulfilling prophecy flowing from their inauthentic sexual behavior in the Compensating for Shame stage.

When the topic of the present study is represented in scholarly literature as a viable option, it can provide hope for those who certainly want it (Radkowsky, 2015). Alternatively, consistent with unbiased perspectives, this study could start to provide gay men, initially seeking sexual exclusivity in relationships, with findings that might help them make informed, conscious decisions not to continue in pursuing them.

Limited support from research. Little information was available for gay men who—despite many influential factors that result in sexual non-exclusivity—continued to value and were determined to behave in accordance with sexual exclusivity: Their experiences were overlooked and possibly undervalued within the social environment of gay research (Philpot et al., 2018). In attempting to understand the relationships of gay men, queer researchers had virtually ignored sexual exclusivity (Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010). Prior studies relating to the topic of sexual monogamy among gay men had almost exclusively focused on, the opposite,

relationship agreements guiding sexual non-exclusivity (Adam, 2006; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Charles, 2002). Furthermore, queer researchers in this area, tended to move beyond objective consideration to offer recommendations that predominately celebrated extradyadic sex as being symbolic of relationship innovations (Foucault, 1998; Whitton et al., 2015). This study began to generate grounded knowledge, in this area, beyond the bounds of relationship agreements for extradyadic sex or the potential influence of homonormativity, in which extradyadic sex may be expected to be viewed in a favorable light or at least accommodated without resistance.

In assuring that gay men are not subordinated, many theorists and researchers examining the lives of male couples seem careful not to espouse sexual monogamy (Spears & Lowen, 2010). It is typically considered to have originated within the societal norms of heterosexual pair-bonding and the associated practice of ancient religions (Bech, 2002). These factors generally dissuade homosexual behavior (Bech, 2002). In contrast, scholars involved in research on gay relationships sometimes use a tone in writing that extols differences and the uniqueness of experiences (Foucault, 1998) including sexual non-exclusiveness. This can magnify said differences to the potential detriment of some gay men (Levine et al., 2018). Perhaps in an effort to avoid judgment of a population that has historically endured discrimination, researchers in the field may have been hesitant to explicitly espouse the physical and emotional health gains that sexual exclusivity sometimes represent (Spears & Lowen, 2010).

In support of sexual exclusivity. While this study does not attempt to imply any prescription for gay male couples, sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships can represent a practical option for consideration that may allow for a higher quality of relationship among gay men who want it (Levine et al., 2018). Generally, there are indicators that sexual exclusivity helps people trust their partners and decreases the frequency and intensity of disputes (Johnson,

2013). Ornish (2019) offers an experiential conceptualization of monogamy based on reverence and sacrifice: He suggests that relationships become purpose-driven and develop meaning, respect and emotional depth—and thereby become more fulfilling—when sexual behavior is limited to sole romantic partnerships. After interviewing thousands of couples who experienced the adverse effects of sexual infidelity, Perel (2017) points out a practical consideration; when couples repeatedly have sex with just one person, it helps them to better understand the unique preferences, responses and physical abilities of their partners. She concludes that the quality and satisfaction of sex is improved via practice within known parameters.

Sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships can represent a practical option for consideration that does prevent sexually transmitted infections (Darbes, Chakravarty, Neilands, Beougher, & Hoff, 2014). In recent years, with advances in prophylactics for, and treatments of, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), there are indications that sex without the use of condoms has increased significantly (Darbes et al., 2014), resulting in a resurgence of other sexually transmitted infections (Giovannetti, 2019); whether or not condoms are used, gay men who are both practicing sexual exclusivity in relationships significantly decrease the chance of acquiring new infections.

While research establishes that gay males in long-term partnerships are predominately in open relationships (Adam, 2006; Bonello, 2009; Spears & Lowen, 2010), recent survey findings by pioneers in exploring non-monogamy in gay, male relationships reported being surprised by what they characterized as a significant shift toward a favoring of sexual exclusivity among *younger* gay men. Among the 242 single men aged 18 through 39 in Lowen and Spears's (2017) study, 90% indicated that they were seeking sexual exclusivity in relationships. In association with their own non-monogamous relationship of over 40 years, Spears and Lowen (2010) were

initially interested in researching non-monogamy among gay couples; however, given the clear and unexpected finding in their recent study, in 2017, documenting a shift in perceptions among gay males toward both wanting marriage and its commonly expected correlate, sexual monogamy, the research-couple began reconceptualizing their scholarly intent. Where Lowen and Spears (2017) used to explicitly disclose their primary interest in helping gay men in relationships feel better about their extra-relational sex, to normalize it, they then realized they needed to adopt broader, less biased, points of view going forward. Their statements (Lowen & Spears, 2017) represented the first, albeit subtle, acknowledgment by gay researchers that they had, in fact, been celebrating extradyadic sex in their prior research on gay male relationships.

While Lowen and Spears (2017) were starting to become aware of their history of this bias, alternatively, other scholars, working within modern queer studies, generally continued to report an appreciation for extradyadic sex—where it is framed as being innovative and presumed healthy in gay relationships (Whitton et al., 2015). Findings of the qualitative component of Lowen and Spears's (2017) study indicated that the legalization of gay marriage in the United States was related to increases in singles seeking sexual monogamy, and the quantitative component of the study indicated that 92% of single men expected they would marry and that 62% of them said that most of their friends were married. If Lowen and Spears's recent study reflects the beginning of a sustained shift toward gay men favoring sexual exclusivity in relationships, this study, *Exploring Sexual Exclusivity Among Individual Members of Same-Sex, Male Couples in Long-Term Relationships*, may represent a timely resource for gay men who seek sexual exclusivity.

Assumptions and Delimitations

It is common for same-sex male relationships to become established and exist, for a variable span of time, before an explicit conversation takes place regarding sexual monogamy (Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010). In some relationships, the conversation never happens, and in others, the conversation happens at the onset (Bricker & Horne, 2008). While members of couples can make assumptions regarding sexual exclusivity in their relationships, unless and until they engage in a process of a relationship agreement, their assumptions remain hunches, completely unsubstantiated (Darbes et al., 2014). While there is no guarantee, even following relationship agreements, that partners are behaving in accordance with agreements, relationship agreements typically help to foster and maintain feelings of trust that are supportive of relationships in general (Johnson, 2013). A relationship agreement includes the decision made by both members of a couple to engage in either an open or closed relationship following the agreement; furthermore, couples agreeing to open relationships tend to further define what behaviors, contexts, environments and people are acceptable and which are not (Darbes et al., 2014). While technically, relationship agreements can concern mutual decisions regarding all aspects of a relationship, in queer studies, it is most often referred to in the context of open relationships. Specifically, when relationship agreements are discussed in this study, these references are almost always describing how couples have discussed guidelines regarding how extradyadic sex will be accommodated and therefore is not relevant to closed relationships.

While by their third year, almost three out of four gay male couples experience extradyadic sex (Adam, 2006), research indicates that by the fifth year of their relationships, sexual exclusivity rapidly drops below 10 percent, yet there is no indication that it appears to change much thereafter (Darbes et al., 2014). This is why participants consisted of members of

gay male relationships of five years or longer duration: After five years, a remarkably small, and unchanging, subset of gay men maintains sexual exclusivity, and I wanted to know why and how they did it.

Both members of a couple were not interviewed concurrently to avoid the potential ethical problem of spontaneous disclosure of infidelity, which could damage relationships, and demand characteristics such as consensus toward lying to portray sexual exclusivity or selective memory (Greene, Andrews, Kuper, & Mustanski, 2014). Demand characteristics refer to the factors that result from a participant trying to acquiesce with or even please a researcher; in such a situation, participants will change their behavior to conform with perceived expectations and the outcomes of such studies thus lack validity (Cherry, 2018).

Given that no prior study of sexual behavior in gay couples in which individuals were interviewed, rather than couples, could be isolated from an extensive review of the literature, I initially reconsidered my approach. Using my intuition and experience as relationship therapist, I attempted to uncover or discover potential benefits for the precedent and standard practice of interviewing couples. When I could not conceptualize any benefits, I decided to proceed in interviewing individuals so that potential ethical problems and demand characteristics could be avoided.

It was not necessarily important that both members of a couple were sexually exclusive but rather that the research participants were: There was no practical way to determine, with certainty, that a research participant's partner was sexually exclusive. Further calling into doubt outcomes from prior research—representing initial forays into the examination of sexual exclusivity, itself, rather than its comparison with open relationships—was both; 1) acknowledgments that some participants suggested they were members of the sexually

monogamous group even though they were occasionally involved in threesomes with their partners; and 2) their permission to be nonetheless categorized as sexually monogamous by the authors of the study (Lowen & Spears, 2017).

Participants were initially sought out within Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia, Canada, since it is where I reside. This allowed for some in-person interviews. An extended geographical area, including all of Canada, was then included to secure enough participants. Many interviews had to be conducted via video chat. While in-person interviews were originally preferred, the mixed mode of interviews did not pose problems or unique challenges, which might have implied it was an inferior approach.

While the outcomes of the research may serve as a starting point for quantitative exploration of themes among the target population, extrapolations cannot be made concerning the generalizability of outcomes since this is qualitative research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This study was conducted utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological research design for two main reasons. Firstly, the participants' points of view, and the meanings they attached to their identified motivations and strategic behaviors, were the main interests of the study. Secondly, I am a humanist-existentialist psychologist, so the design was congruent with, and a logical extension of, my theoretical philosophy (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Phenomenological reduction (i.e., bracketing) guided analysis of subject responses: Judgment concerning the natural, objective, world was suspended to allow for a focused understanding of the lived experiences of each research participant (Creswell, 2012).

Given its depth—and in adopting balanced perspectives through unbiased observation—this research was inevitably designed to explore both the benefits and detriments of sexual

monogamy. Special care was taken to avoid subordinating the predominant experience of gay men, in long-term relationships, who engage in sexual non-exclusivity.

Outline of the Study

The Introduction outlined the essential purpose of the study. Due to a lack of information regarding the lived experiences of sexually exclusive men in long-term relationships, the study aimed to uncover insights that may prove useful to those who seek it. Aiding to a reader's comprehension, the study's essential term, sexual exclusivity, was defined based on the lack of all three factors, sexual context and intent and close proximity with men outside of the relationships of participants. In other words, participants had to not have been in close proximity with men outside of their relationships if, at the same time, they were acting with sexual intent within a sexual context; otherwise, they would not have qualified for the study. A phenomenological approach was selected since it was best suited for uncovering the meaning that participants attach to their sexual exclusivity, helping to understand their motives, while also being congruent with my humanist-existentialist paradigm.

In Chapter 2, a critical examination of relevant literature is presented. A description of how I searched for and sourced research studies and other literature is noted. The theoretical framework is presented. In balancing the preponderance of studies reporting the suggested benefits of extradyadic sex, within the **Relationship Advisors Promoting Monogamy** section described in Chapter 2, perspectives of modern, relationship specialists who champion sexual exclusivity—as either being the norm in relationships or having potential for enriching relationships—are presented (Johnston, 2013; Ornish, 2019; Perel, 2017). Notably, they are heterosexuals.

Since research is scant in addressing the specific topic of the study, I believed I had to expand my literature search further into the past than what would have been ideal; therefore, many of the cited studies are dated out of necessity. The preponderance of researchers in queer studies had apparently increased their interest in open relationships, over time, rather than in sexual exclusivity. Typically, in best practice, recent literature is valued over dated sources (Creswell, 2012; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006); however, in preparing for field work, I believed I needed to be pragmatic in also considering the most relevant literature that was available.

The remainder of the chapter discusses themes that arose from an extensive literature review. The classic debate of nature versus nurture, is described, in which both sides ultimately contribute perspectives both espousing and arguing against sexual exclusivity. The male gender's apparent entitlement toward sexual freedom is explored along with a consideration of the abundance of research that infers that extradyadic sex is the norm for gay males. The chapter concludes presenting potential factors, suggested in literature, related to the maintenance of sexual exclusivity.

In Chapter 3, the research design is explained. Ethical considerations are stated. Rationales for selecting a phenomenological method of inquiry are described in greater detail. The target population is defined. The sampling technique is discussed. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of modes of data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 4, the study's findings and discussion were combined into one chapter, which is often the case for practical purpose within phenomenological studies: When findings are qualitative rather than quantitative, interpretations and discussions become more meaningful when integrated directly with the information, raw data, provided by the participants (Creswell,

2012). The findings start with brief demographic summaries for each of the eleven participants. Common subthemes that arose from participant interviews were then presented in succession. Within each subtheme, direct quotes from participants were listed to substantiate findings. Related subthemes were then clustered and presented within one of six themes or *conceptual umbrellas*. In the Discussion session, the subthemes were analyzed by starting to address the study's four research questions using relevant subthemes and a critical review of related literature. Demographic impressions and limitations for the study are noted before Chapter 4 concludes with some reconsiderations and expansions upon the study's main discoveries.

In Chapter 5, the research questions are answered by a concise presentation in which the study's subthemes and themes are interrelated, integrated and consolidated. The chapter ends with my suggestions regarding study implications for future considerations in clinical practice and research.

The thesis concludes with a list of references and appendices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Two men building a committed partnership are free to do so without prescriptions of societal norms, such as sexual exclusivity, expected for heterosexuals. There are well-established causal variables affecting sexual non-exclusivity in the general population (Ryan & Jetha, 2010); however, only associate factors have been explored in research literature to attempt descriptions of the lower prevalence of sexual exclusivity among men, and gay men specifically, in long-term relationships (Adams, 2006).

Potentially influenced by the general societal norm of sexual monogamy, religious directives, desires to avoid emotional disturbance and/or sexual diseases, most gay men entering their first gay relationship value sexual exclusivity (Anderson, 2012); however, as years pass, these typically young, gay men are exposed to the practical aspects of gay culture. Most discover that sexual exclusivity among gay men is not a common experience and that sexual non-exclusivity enters their relationships through either their intentional behaviors or via the intentional behaviors of their partners (Anderson, 2012). Factors including sexual habituation, relatively high levels of testosterone and common masculine values of freedom and adventure (Adam, 2006), which is sometimes colloquialized as *sowing wild oats*, make it challenging for even those most highly committed to sexual exclusivity to achieve that goal.

Notwithstanding the unlikeness of sexual exclusivity, there remains a subset of gay men who sincerely want this lived experience (Lowen & Spears, 2017). The main purpose of this study is to explore gay men in long-term relationships who practice sexual exclusivity so that

those who seek it may better understand it and therefore have a better chance of achieving it. Since this study will explicitly focus on the subset of gay males who have maintained sexual exclusivity in their long-term relationships, research outcomes may act as springboards for other researchers who are interested in conducting similar, more specific, studies among this subset of gay men. The initial identification of themes using qualitative research often acts as a signpost, preparing others with insights for quantitative investigations on the same topic (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). For example, future quantitative (i.e., generalizable) studies could determine if and how participant characteristics and demographics relate to sexual monogamy among members of gay male couples.

The lived experiences among the research participants was explored, in depth, with the hope that motivations toward sexual exclusivity could be identified. Many rationales for sexual exclusivity are identified, mostly through conjecture of researchers, including a desire to maintain focus of affection or ‘specialness’ and avoidance of an affective motivator, jealousy (Spears & Lowen, 2010); however, in the literature, one consistently proposed purpose for sexual exclusivity is the avoidance of sexually transmitted infections (Blashill, Wilson, O’Cleirigh, Mayer, & Safren, 2014).

Search Description

Research articles were identified using online searches via Google Scholar, the American Psychiatric Association’s content site, psycnet.apa.org/search, and the PubMed category of the United States National Library of Medicine’s National Institutes of Health site: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed. Arrangements were made online to purchase articles that were

not offered free of charge. Some books were acquired at Halifax Central Library using its online search portal.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I describe two theories that guided this study. They are existential and queer theory. Both frameworks aided decision-making regarding research design. These theories reflect my practice paradigms as a psychologist. Accordingly, they compliment the topics of this investigation.

Existential theory. A reaction against the Age of Reason (Hoffman et al., 2019), in opposition to the idea that things are what they are with unambiguous, rational underpinnings, existentialism is based on the premise that *existence precedes essence* (Tanzer, 2008). The existential theorists challenge our understanding of what it means to be human. Existentialists encourage the ambitious goal for each person to seek out his or her *authentic* existence (Reynolds, 2006; Stokes, 2002). Conceptualizing how to create that authentic existence and how sexual exclusivity fits in the lives of gay men was the overriding principal of this study.

Despite the ancient history of existential theory, it is more recently grounded in nineteenth century Europe (Tanzer, 2008). It developed into a prominent theory, significantly influencing psychology, during the twentieth century after the cessation of World War II (Cotkin, 2003; Grierson, 2007). Resulting from war, it took a long time for Europe to recover. During this time, much of the population began to doubt, or feel confused by, religion, which was not adequately providing explanations for the remarkable suffering they endured (Cotkin, 2003). At this time, people were seeking philosophical guidance (Reynolds, 2006). Existentialism offered another mode for people to make meaning out of their strife (Grierson,

2007). Soren Kierkegaard is considered the philosopher responsible for initiating what evolved into our modern understanding of existentialism (Hoffman et al., 2019; Stokes, 2002).

Kierkegaard was, reportedly, the first philosopher to reject an emphasis on universalism and to, instead, promote individual experience (Reynolds, 2006; Stokes, 2002; Tanzer, 2008).

Existentialism concerns the lived experiences of individuals (Hoffman et al., 2019). It is integrative in that it values the thoughts, feelings and actions of individuals; however, it focuses on and centralizes the concept of *being* (Reynolds, 2006; Stokes, 2002; Tanzer, 2008).

Existentialism attempts to make sense of and provide clarity for the circumstances of the human condition (Grierson, 2007); however, rather than concerning itself with objective standards, dilemmas are addressed at the individual level (Orbach, 2008). Individuals view and interpret life through individualized prisms (Hoffman et al., 2019); therefore, life is a purely subjective experience for each existential being.

Choice is an important aspect of this theory (Cotkin, 2003). Individuals are conscious and free to make choices for themselves. Existentialism suggests that people find themselves in the world and simply exist; who they choose to be creates their personal essence without a preconceived nature of human experience (Hoffman et al., 2019). In achieving meaningful authenticity, each being must commit to realizing his possibilities, decide what to choose and act on his decisions (Orbach, 2008). Individuals, therefore, have responsibilities for the experiences they choose as they construct meaning in their lives (Grierson, 2007). The meaning they develop is continually being guided by their individual experiences and by reflecting upon those experiences (Reynolds, 2006).

While not a formative tenet of existential theory, existentialists tend to be social critics (Reynolds, 2006; Stokes, 2002; Tanzer, 2008). This is due, at least in part, to the focus on

individualism. The prominent philosopher, Sartre, applied social criticism thoroughly in areas that included psychoanalysis, society, morality, politics, scientism, technology and religion (Hoffman et al., 2019; Tanzer, 2008). Rather than live congruently with societal norms or the norms of subcultures (Stokes, 2002), including that of gay men, participants in this study were living authentically with sexual exclusivity despite pressures from the larger world to do otherwise. The majority of participants were socially critical during their interview responses.

It would be irresponsible to discuss existentialism without mentioning one of its most defining themes, death. The opposite of being is non-being—the result of death. Knowledge of one's own death creates an urgency that guides life choices (Tomer & Eliason, 2008). Self-awareness of the inevitability of death generally affects how time is viewed (Harman, 2007). Selecting existentialism as a guiding principal, resulted in relevant considerations in this study for two reasons. Many participants were critical of gay men who appeared to be making choices more in line with youth rather than adults. Also, the majority of participants were of an age that meant that they were post-puberty during the apex of the AIDS epidemic. At that time, most gay men with AIDS were dying (Duwe, 2018b); since reflecting on lived experiences, from an existentialism viewpoint, allows people to develop meaning vis-à-vis their authentic choices, it was possible that the fear, of death, some participants had felt during their late adolescence and early adulthood (Stokes, 2002; Tomer & Eliason, 2008) was continuing to affect their decisions to maintain sexual exclusivity.

Queer theory. Queer is an umbrella term. It is often used to distinguish people with minority sexual expressions or less typical sexual circumstances from the dominate sexual culture (Ahmed, 2006; Kempt, 2009). Not only are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and intersex people—individuals born with sexually ambiguous genitalia (Morland,

2009)—considered queer, but many heterosexuals who’s sexual or gender experiences do not conform to common societal expectations also use the term as part of their definitions of self (Kafer, 2009; Kramer, 2009). Gay men were the sole participants in this study; therefore, queer theory was examined, from the onset, to help inform the process of research.

Queer theory is a component of the discipline of queer studies. Gay and lesbian studies, postmodern and poststructuralist theories, feminist theory and Women's studies have all contributed to queer studies (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2013). One of the central ideas in queer theory is that identities are not deterministic, stable, especially in consideration of gender, sex and sexuality (Giffney, 2004). Historical approaches to conceptualizing identity, in general, are targets of criticism within the domain of queer theory (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005). Assumptions that heterosexuality is the normal and superior sexual expression, heteronormativity (Bartholomay, 2018), within the bounds of masculine and feminine gender expression is challenged by queer theory (Kempt, 2009). For example, traditionally, the two simplistic categorizations—in which men necessarily had penises and XY chromosomes and acted *masculine* yet were not penetrated during sex and women necessarily had vaginas and XX chromosomes and acted feminine yet were not penetrating others during sex—were deconstructed to better accommodate the rich variances of human experience: Queer theory gained momentum in the early 1990s and has been busting the rudimentary, binary assumptions concerning human sexuality ever since.

The recognition of the oppression of sexual minorities was a profound contribution of queer theory (Matos, 2013). Not only had queer theory contributed to the construct of heteronormativity (Bartholomay, 2018; Robinson, 2016), it was able to remain impartial in its criticism of a term it coined, homonormativity, in which the oppressed become the oppressors

(Flores, 2017). Homonormativity refers to in-group norms, or expectations, that have the power to emotionally cripple the especially vulnerable minorities among minorities, who do not feel, think or act in accordance with dominant gay presumptions (Flores, 2017). Homonormativity was an especially relevant consideration in this study because since participants maintained sexual exclusivity, in this way, they were minorities among sexual minorities.

Queer and existential theories complement one another. Both are based on tenets that exactly parallel the research design of this study, phenomenology, since the focal point of all three fields of theory is subjective, individual, rather than objective *reality* (Ahmed, 2006). In my role as a humanistic-existential psychologist, and my experiences as a gay man, I have been aware of the complexities inherent in attempting to capture average, or standard, human experiences. And for good reason, it does not exist.

Relationship Advisors Promoting Monogamy

Demonstrated in the subsequent review of the literature, pertaining to sexual monogamy, little effort to understand the role of sexual exclusivity had taken place within the scope of research in queer studies (Spears & Lowen, 2010). I expanded by breadth of reference to include a few prominent relationship advisors who, despite their differing theoretical backgrounds, had thought deeply about, and freely communicated their understandings of, the role and function of sexual exclusivity within long-term relationships.

Given that sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships were the fundamental conditions for this study, it was useful to present balanced, via varying, perspectives (Ahmed, 2006) regarding open versus closed relationships before readers are presented with participant findings. It was important to provide the points of view of well-informed, social advocates, who are in

support of monogamy (George, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Ornish, 2019; Perel, 2017), before readers then delve into research interests and findings—set forth in the review of the literature—in which extradyadic sex is predominantly normalized for gay men.

In conceptualizing how couples define relationship commitment, especially within marriage, monogamy plays an important role (Perel, 2017). Typically, when people consider commitment, they also think of sexual monogamy (Johnson, 2013). Members of couples often expect their partners to be exclusive (Ornish, 2019). Couples are also socially expected to be sexually exclusive within their romantic relationship, which means that they are expected, by their community, to only interact sexually with one another (Anderson, 2012). Establishing and maintaining committed, intimate relationships is assumed to be an essential component of healthy human development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In Canada, with few exceptions of specific subcultures, monogamy is defined as “the practice or state of having a sexual relationship with only one partner” (monogamy, n.d.). This is the general, socially prescribed norm of exclusivity within romantic relationships (Perel, 2017).

Dr. Sue Johnson, the co-founder of emotionally focused therapy, is a remarkably strong supporter of sexual exclusivity in relationships. Her highly effective approach to couple’s counselling, is based on attachment theory and is considered evidence-based since her perspectives have been reinforced by ongoing research outcomes (Johnson, 2013).

Dr. Johnson has stated that she believes that all humans are instinctively monogamous regardless of sexual orientation. She suggests that like other social animals, such as the great northern loon or gray wolf, while brief and casual incidents of sexual non-exclusivity do occur, the overriding preference is to mate and bond with one partner at a time (Johnson, 2013). Dr.

Johnson believes that research findings that imply that sexual infidelity is very common are exaggerated. She proposes that reliable research outcomes indicate that approximately just 25% of men and 11% of women have sex with someone other than their life partners (Johnson, 2013). Dr. Johnson suggests that captivating public stories of deception and intrigue tend to overshadow the relative mundane reality that the vast majority of us remain sexually exclusive (Johnson, 2019).

She posits two main reasons that sexual monogamy is the norm for humans. This kind of monogamy is evident among animals that invest time and effort into rearing children and dealing with survival challenges (Johnson, 2019). When working as a team in coordinating efforts and whereabouts to provide food and shelter, they need to learn to read each other's cue and communicate. This means members of a couple must depend upon one another and it is this interdependence that supports sexual exclusivity. While Dr. Johnson's line of reasoning appears consistent and rational, it is less likely to reflect the lived experiences of most gay men who do not have to contribute to child rearing directly (Signorile, 2015). Her second, more general stance is that humans are genetically predisposed for sexual monogamy. Dr. Johnson says that a huge part of our brain is not only designed for social group interaction but for the intimate synchronicity of pair-bonding through emotional connection (Johnson, 2019). The tuning in, give and take, pacing and adapting to the other's emotional cues, between lovers, is about bonding.

Johnson (2013) concludes from outcomes of research on adult bonding that it is an instinct to strive for, connect with and rely on loved ones. Bonding is a primary, more fundamental, instinct than even sex. Monogamous mammals like humans have special hormones like oxytocin that are associated with cuddling (Pappas, 2015). Oxytocin turns off stress hormones, like cortisol, activates reward centers and induces feelings of calmness, contentment

and well-being. It is released during orgasm and even when thinking of our mate (Johnson, 2013). In the presence of oxytocin, our minds are more easily attuned to our partner and we more readily decode intentions. Research on other social animals indicates that when scientists increase oxytocin, social animals cuddle more and mate less (Johnson, 2019). When scientists block oxytocin, social animals have sex but do not cuddle (Johnson, 2013). Johnson concludes that our brains are wired for a special kind of committed connection with those we depend on (Johnson, 2013).

Attachment bonds persist. Once formed, a bond is particular to the irreplaceable person. We are deeply distressed upon physical or emotional separation from that person (Johnson, 2019). A sense of security and comfort is provided by the bond. While we can have more than one bond, the majority of humans have ranked bonds with one or two loved ones, and the sexual partner is usually top ranked (Johnson, 2013). Bonds have incredible survival value. Humans are happier, psychologically healthier and live longer when pair-bonded (Johnson, 2019).

When prompted to explain motives when “affairs” in relationships occur, Dr. Johnson says she has heard repeated derivations of two similar reasons spanning her, over, three decades as a clinician and researcher specializing in relationships. Unbearable loneliness resulting from not knowing how to make love work is her main explanation for sexual non-exclusivity (Johnson, 2013). Secondly, individuals may engage in preemptive attempts to reach out of the relationship for a loving, sexually exclusive bond when the relationship they are in is disintegrating and negatively impactful (Johnson, 2013).

Another prominent supporter of sexual exclusivity is Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventative Medicine Research Institute. He proposes systemic changes to improve the general health of his patients. Among the factors of his comprehensive approach to lifestyle

management—proven to significantly improve the quality of the lives of his program participants—Dr. Ornish promotes logotherapy (Frankl, 2014). In accordance with the primary tenet of logotherapy, Ornish suggests that optimal wellness is a result of consciously choosing to live a life, through valued behaviors, that is personally meaningful, grounded in purpose (Ornish, 2019). The physician says that making decisions to limit experiences, small sacrifices, such as only having sex with one's primary partner imbues reverence, a sense of specialness and deep meaning that more than makes up for the minor choice to control or limit one's behavior (Ornish, 2019).

Ornish's (2019) perspective is interesting since he makes parallels to how multiple religions prescribe limits on diet that also results in a deepening of personal meaning and quality of life. He suggests that, regarding diet, it does not matter what the specific religious-based limits are on eating as long as there are limits, or small sacrifices, that result in big pay offs in purpose and meaning (Ornish, 2019). Ornish suggests that the same process works with sex in relationships; however, in this realm, the small sacrifice that results in a deepening in meaning is sexual exclusivity specifically. Beyond the findings of his research, and speaking from personal and clinical observations, Ornish comments that when compared with his and his patients' prior lived experiences of non-sexual exclusivity, he noted a significant improvement in the quality of his and his patients' lives when they began practicing sexual monogamy and virtually consistently thereafter. I appreciated Ornish's (2019) acknowledgment that humans are drawn in both directions, toward the security of a loving relationship, that imbues life with meaning, and also toward freedom and adventure that sexual non-exclusivity offers, yet Ornish promotes the power of our free will to choose sexual monogamy so that we both increase the potential for meaning in our relationships and are put into positions where we challenged to become

innovative to find increased sexual satisfaction with the person to which we are committed (Ornish, 2019).

Ornish's position on sexual exclusivity is highly consistent with one of the world's most notorious relationship therapists, Esther Perel. In her overriding pursuit to understand the dissonance between the human need for love, belonging and closeness and our need for freedom, including erotic desire and adventure, therapist Esther Perel (2017) presents a counterargument to—the classic economic principle often applied to relationships—the law of diminishing returns. Typically, the law of diminishing returns posits that the more of something we receive, the less we value or enjoy it (Wells, 2019). Instead of getting less out of increasing encounters of sex with your committed partner, Perel explains that complete sexual investment in your spouse can result in increased satisfaction.

Perel (2017) says the more you do something, the better you get at it. The better you are at it, the more you are going to enjoy it. Perel (2017) simply suggests that when we are able to practice skills in a specialized area, our skills improve in that specialized area. Improved skills lead to better outcomes, an improved quality of life. The skills we develop within a focused area are also more reliable than if we had not focused in one area (Perel, 2017).

Perel states that when you practice sex with the same person, you can specifically learn how to optimize what you can give and take away from the experience; therefore, you are more likely to enjoy sex as you develop skills adapted to that person specifically. In contrast, when you have sex with strangers, there are more unknowns about how to give and take away from the experience since their unique sexual responses are less known and your skills are less adapted for them specifically (Perel, 2017). Differences in sexual responses among people means that sex

with strangers, a variety of people, or anyone beyond one's primary partner ultimately minimizes potential sexual satisfaction. Using an analogy, Perel explains:

The weekly tennis player who continues to improve his game would argue for the positive effects of frequency. [It] just keeps getting better. The more [the tennis player] practices, the stronger [his] skills. The stronger [his] skills, the deeper [his] confidence. The more confident [he] feels, the more risks [he] takes. The more risks [he] takes, the more exciting the game. Of course, all this practice takes effort and discipline. It is not just a matter of being in the mood; it requires patience and sustained attention. The tennis player knows intuitively that growth is rarely linear; [he] may experience some plateaus and some slowdowns, but the reward is worth the effort. (Perel, 2017, p. 211)

The key to optimizing sexual exclusivity in a long-term relationship is the mobilization and application of emotional intelligence to work toward the goal of satisfaction rather than the alternative of broken expectations due to passivity:

Unfortunately, all too often we associate effort with work, and discipline with pain. But there's a different way to think of work. It can be creative and life-affirming, sparking a heightened sense of vitality rather than a bond-deep exhaustion. If we want sex to be fulfilling, then we have to apply effort in just this artful way. (Perel, 2017, p. 211).

There are four general dimensions of monogamy. These are emotional, sexual, viewing monogamy as relationship-enhancing and viewing monogamy as a sacrifice (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007). In addition, an important component of monogamy is social. The social

aspect shows how the individual within a relationship wants to be thought of as monogamous by society (Anderson, 2010).

When individuals view monogamy as relationship enhancing, they are espousing monogamy as a way to build intimacy and strengthen the bond within their relationship (Johnson, 2013). Individuals viewing monogamy as sacrifice are more aligned with beliefs that suggest that exclusivity blocks natural drives and needs (Hosking, 2014). There are conflicting perspectives on monogamy that show monogamy as essential to healthy emotional development or as impeding natural human needs and desires and making relationship satisfaction impossible to reach (Charles, 2002). Perel (2013) offers a solution to the apparent paradox by distinguishing between, and then integrating, what people *need*, security, and what they *want*, desire. She implies that both are possible as long as couples persist in consciously engaging in healthy bonding behaviors while also allowing space so that we can see our partners enjoying independent pursuits. When we watch others interact with our partners while they are engaged in their own special interests, leisure and work, it creates a sense of mystery and distance that sustains our fascination in them, which continues to spark sexual interest (Perel, 2013).

Dr. Kenneth George (2010), a gay author of books concerning how gay men can discover and maintain satisfying romantic relationships, shares Perel's (2017) belief that a healthy type of *separateness* allows for desire to persist in long-term relationships; however, in his case, George (2010) reports that desire is more of a product of the freedom felt by one man when his gay partner allows him to be "a star" in, and does not encroach upon, his specific area of identified expertise. Where Perel (2017) focuses on desire being maintained through fascination in viewing one's partner engage in independent interests at a sensed distance, George (2010) focuses on the

avoidance of a dampening of desire when a gay man's partner does not allow him to be independently recognized as embodying special skills or knowledge in his field of interest.

Writers on topics of monogamy are typically dichotomous in espousing sexual exclusivity or criticizing it with few emphatically supporting the middle path, suggesting each couple does what is best for them. The sexual orientation of authors seems to be strong determinant of what branch of the dichotomy is chosen. Unlike the entirety of heterosexual therapists, researchers and authors, referred to in this study (Johnson, 2013; Ornish, 2019; Perel, 2017), who have all examined the quality of sex, monogamy and emotional connectedness in long-term relationships, none of their gay counterparts have claimed that sexual exclusivity is typically the better option in supporting the overall health of relationships. While certainly promoting the value of long-term relationships for gay men, George (2010) is careful, in his writings, to make no distinction between open and closed relationships in terms of the potential satisfaction in, or health of, them. Entirely consistent with other gay authors, George goes further to frequently remind his readers that emotional and sexual monogamy are mutually exclusive constructs that, for the most part, only randomly overlap. George states several times how important the terms of agreements are concerning how gay couples decide they will be opening up the relationship to accommodate sex with other men. Similarly, in his most recent book, a well-respected relationship advice columnist, author and gay activist, Dan Savage (2013) repeatedly reminds his fans of the unlikeliness of sexual exclusivity in long-term gay, male relationships. As explained in his vlog, *Why Monogamy is Ridiculous*, Savage (2011) sometimes goes further to suggest, at some point, it is almost inevitable that relationships are going to open it, and it is better for people to find ways to accommodate it. Perhaps though, there is no better example, in queer studies, of the support for extradyadic sex in gay relationships than the title

Bonello and Cross (2010) decided to attach to their survey, *Gay Monogamy: I Love You but I Can't Have Sex with Only You*.

Despite evolutionary perspectives traditionally indicating a genetic predisposition toward sexual non-monogamy (Ryan & Jetha, 2010), historically, monogamy has been generally accepted as the healthiest and most natural type of union between two people (Erikson, 1997). This apparent contradiction between biological and psychological imperatives commonly results in serial-monogamy (Perel, 2013); however, it may be surprising for most people in commonwealth countries to discover, the practice of engaging in integrated romantic and sexual relationships is not the global norm. Merely 16% of 853 currently defined cultures prescribe monogamy (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2011). Non-monogamy, commonly referred to as open relationship, is a relationship structure that allows for many variations regarding exclusivity. It is still often perceived as deviant or unhealthy, or at least a subordinate form of union, in relation to current Canadian values (Johnson, 2013).

One subculture that has embraced alternative ways of forming romantic relationships, despite prescriptive relational norms, is the gay community (Barker & Langdrige, 2012; Rose, 1996). Providers of psychological services should better understand the unique aspects of these individuals' romantic relationships so that they can inform the counselling profession, when working with this community, and learn from a community that actively re-defines relational norms, within their intimate relationships, as a reflection of their values (Spears & Lowen, 2010). In academic literature, non-monogamy, as the norm, has been well documented among gay men (Barker & Langdrige, 2012; Blasband & Paplau, 1985; Bryant & Demian, 1994; Gotta et al., 2011; LaSala, 2004, 2005).

Spanning approximately five years, while searching for and reading articles, books, and the outcomes of research, since it seemed germane to my topic of inquiry, I had hoped to identify a variety of contributions from gay men transparently exploring their belief that closed, versus open, relationships were advantageous. I could not. I was able to source one online article (Papa, 2016).

The contributor, of that one article, is not as well-known as Savage (2017). Technically, Papa (2016) may not be considered a relationship advisor like Johnson (2013); however, unlike Ornish (2019), who had publicly promoted sexual exclusivity, Papa (2016) is gay man. I thought it was purposeful to acknowledge Papa's unique input as a gay man who wrote, and published an article, about his unequivocal, personal conviction regarding the value of sexual monogamy.

Papa (2016) shared opinions that were similar to concepts explored by researchers, and others, within the existing body of knowledge; however, additionally, he provided a few viewpoints to which I had not been exposed prior to reading his article. Given that some perspectives were novel and he embodied the only public admission of belief in sexual exclusivity by a gay writer, it seemed agreeable to me that Papa labelled himself as an "independent thinker" (Papa, 2016).

Two concepts that were addressed by others directly were concerns that jealousy (Spears & Lowen, 2010) would, and sexually transmitted infections (Blashill et al., 2014), could enter an open relationship. Papa (2016) characterized the jealousy that he anticipated he would feel, resulting from extradyadic sex, as being painful.

In relaying his distinctive views, Papa (2016) premised his opinions by explaining that he believed that people cannot control their feelings, especially regarding sexual attraction. Reacting to those who value open relationships, in association with the assertion, by others, that

men are attracted to more than one person, Papa suggested that merely because a man has attraction to others, it does not mean, ipso facto, that man must act on it. Papa was giving credence to our ability to control our behavior, which is obviously a common consideration in the realm of psychology (Cotkin, 2003; Grierson, 2007; Hoffman et al., 2019) yet not one that was highlighted in any literature I could find specifically pertaining to monogamy among gay men. In addition, Papa made a distinction that I had not formerly read in literature regarding gay men: Just because a man is sexually attracted to someone, it does not mean he wants to have sex with that person. Conversely, Papa (2016) is conveying that, for some other men, being sexually attracted and wanting to have sex are fused perhaps in a manner in which reductionist-biologists might explain mating (Pinker, 2008; Schrein, 2016).

Describing how he values the specialness of sex, Papa (2016) reacts to a modern adage in open relationships, that it does not matter who one's partner is having sex with along as he returns home to be with his spouse whom he loves. Papa responds to this idea by concluding that nonchalant sex is the opposite of valuing it. Papa emphatically states that it is disrespectful to value sex so little as to give it to just anyone. For Papa, he is not interested in being in a relationship with someone who does not value the specialness of sex the way he does.

One area of partial overlap between Papa's opinions and what I had read elsewhere (Whitton et al., 2015) is the fear of losing one's partner, the termination of the relationship, because one's partner developed feelings for, or fell in love with, someone with whom he was engaged in extradyadic sex. Where Spears and Lowen (2010) had noted that open relationships were more likely to end as time passes, little insight was provided for why that was the case except an implication for the development of negative, intra-relational feelings. Papa's (2016)

opinion centered on the idea of a partner leaving for a desirable other rather than the alternative of a partner escaping from dissatisfaction.

Rather than promoting sexual exclusivity to others, Papa (2016) thinks and recognizes that people are either interested in it or not. Congruent with the existential underpinnings of this study, Papa suggested that we all need to live our own lives, established by our authentic selves (Reynolds, 2006), without any required justification to others with differing interests. In accordance, Papa's sentiment is apparently free from the influences of both heteronormativity and homonormativity (Bartholomay, 2018).

Review of Existing Body of Knowledge

Effects of nature versus nurture on sexual exclusivity. Two distinct theories offer comprehensive explanations within academic literature on the construct of sexual monogamy. Firstly, biological determinism is the belief that genetics, alone, predisposes individuals to behave the way they do. It excludes the concept of free-will or choice (Pinker, 2008). Biological determinism is similar to the evolutionary perspective, the belief that behaviors are the result of evolutionary succession (Darwin, 2016) and ancestral imprinting (Malamuth, 1996). Secondly, social learning theory, or socialization, takes a psychosocial perspective in the exploration of norms, customs and values within specific societies and how they relate to human psychology, especially behavior (Lott & Maluso, 1993).

Biological perspectives. Concerning sexual monogamy, evolutionary perspectives examine biology, sex characteristics and our closest genetic match in the animal kingdom, chimpanzees (Schrein, 2016). Research from evolutionary perspectives offer a variety of theories and explanations for our modern sexual practices with a focus on mating for procreation

(Schrein, 2016). In examination of our modern-day sex characteristics and our closest genetic relatives, a preponderance of contemporary evolutionary theorists suggests there is evidence that we are not genetically predisposed toward sexual monogamy (Ryan & Jetha, 2010) in long-term relationships. Moreover, meta-analysis of evolutionary research concerning monogamy indicates that we are a sexually promiscuous yet monogamy-valuing society (Anderson, 2012; Ryan & Jetha, 2010).

Biologists and social anthropologists present evidence that the testicle size—and relative, positively associated effects of testosterone—of human males falls between gorillas and chimpanzees (Dixson & Anderson, 2001). Biologists point out that gorillas have significantly smaller testicles and more sexual exclusivity, and chimpanzees, our closest genetic relatives, have significantly larger testicles and less sexual exclusivity (Ryan & Jetha, 2010; Simmons, Firman, Rhodes & Peters, 2004). In specific consideration of sperm competition and its role in successful procreation, bigger testicles make more testosterone and sperm (Dixson & Anderson, 2001). More sperm is required to compete with the sperm from other chimpanzees, engaged in excess sexual non-exclusivity, fueled by more testosterone (Simmons et al., 2004).

A logical extension of biological mechanisms, habituation of sexual response has also been identified as an essential challenge to sexual exclusivity (Plaud, Gaither, Henderson, & Devitt, 1997; Zemishlany, 2015). Unless a special effort is made to *keep things fresh*, people find repeated exposures to the same person less sexually rewarding because the initial thrill or excitement that novelty provides cannot be reestablished. Related to less release of dopamine in the brain, the typical effects of behavioral habituation tend to gradually make sex with the same person less rewarding over time (Zemishlany, 2015).

In consideration of gender identity, the evolutionary perspective espouses the position that our biological sex, or assignment of a biological sex, primarily dictates to which gender we are likely to conform (Safron et al., 2007). Gendered behaviors result from our genetic make-up and hormones (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Evolutionary psychologists believe that males perform gender through stereotypically “masculine” behaviors as a consequence of testosterone resulting in higher sex drives (Safron et al., 2007).

Ryan and Jetha (2010) describe how females in species who engage in copulatory vocalization are more likely to be polyamorous. Humans are among the species whose females commonly make sounds, especially during their sex preceding climax and at orgasm. Likewise, biologists have well established evidence that species whose females are relatively quiet during sex are more likely to be sexually monogamous (Dixson, 2012). Copulation vocalization is objectively identified as pleasurable even by those individuals who have not heard these sounds previously. It is thought that when other males of the species hear the vocalizations of pleasure, it cues them to join in, on the fun (Ryan, 2010), or perhaps, more easily identify the female enjoying sex so that they can *have their turn* soon thereafter (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). This theory is highly consistent with the fact that females in a species that engage in copulatory vocalizations typically have potential to be multi-orgasmic (Dixson, 2012). The functioning of female copulatory vocalization is assumed to promote sperm competition, which is thought to result in stronger offspring (Dixson, 2012; Simmons et al., 2004).

In the United States, adult males are approximately 16.5% heavier and 9% taller than adult females (Buss, 2007). While the observation of sexual dimorphism in humans—that men are, on average, larger than women—initiated an inquiry that suggested humans are polygynous (Vanpé et al., 2008), a depth of research on the topic has started to imply that humans are

becoming more monogamous over time as differences in size between men and women has been equalizing (Flinn & Ward, 2004). Polygynous refers to a man having more than one female sex partner; whereas, polyamorous refers to either a man or woman having more than one sex partner, male and/or female (Sheff, 2018).

In animal species that practice polyamory, males compete with other males for control over access to females (Buss, 2007). Larger males are advantaged for successful procreation (Darwin, 2012). They were more likely to pass their genes on to a larger number of children (Vanpé et al., 2008). Some academics speculate that because of the effects of evolution (Darwin, 2012), over time, male animals in polygynous environments become significantly larger in body size than females since larger animals can exert more physical control (Buss, 2007).

Highly influenced by Darwinism and commenting on dimorphism, Daly and Wilson (1996) suggested, "The sexes differ more in human beings than in monogamous mammals, but much less than in extremely polygamous mammals" (p. 13). Also implying that humans are not *naturally* monogamous, Ryan and Jetha (2010) state that human sexuality developed in much the same way as with its closest evolutionary relative, the bonobo. This chimpanzee has sexual dimorphism that is almost indistinguishable to humans, and bonobos are polygynandrous. Sex is used recreationally, by bonobos, to both reduce aggression and secure social bonds (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). *Polygynandrous* refers to both males and females taking on multiple mating partners during a breeding season (Ryan & Jetha, 2010).

Studies have reported a large degree of sexual dimorphism in the ancestor of human being, Australopithecus, who lived between two and five million years ago (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Biologists tend to assume that Australopithecus were highly polygamous (Ryan & Jetha, 2010); however, sexual dimorphism began to decrease significantly up until about a half million

to two million years ago when our species, homo erectus, emerged (Flinn & Ward, 2004). Given the biological perspective, our ancestors began polygamous and began transitioning to sexual exclusivity between half and two million years ago (Flinn & Ward, 2004).

Moving away from reductionist perspectives of biologists, social scientists tend to suggest that humans are more complex social animals, with stronger potential for agency and self-direction associated with social norms, than that of other primates (Johnson, 2013).

Social learning perspectives. Social learning theory argues that various agents of socialization such as government, church, school and family dictate gender appropriate behaviors (Jacklin & Reynolds, 1993). “Masculinity is conceptualized as culturally defined, embedded in social relations of power and acted on by individuals through performative aspects of behavior” (Wheldon & Pathak, 2010, p.461). Social learning theory purports that, similar to binary gender identity formation, stewards of socialization reinforce the value of sexual monogamy and promote it as the sole healthy option for pair-bonding. Governments sometimes identify sexual non-exclusivity as cause for legal divorce. In the province of Ontario, Canada, for example, proof of adultery is one way to pursue unilateral divorce (Galbraith, 2013). Christianity, the dominant religion in Canada, generally restricts most sexual activity beyond married, monogamous, heterosexual and potentially reproductive sex. Liberal Christian organizations such as the United Church—the first to embrace gay civil unions prior to the legalization of marriage—promoted sexual exclusivity for the health of gay unions (Huntly, 2003).

Social learning theory also encompasses a depth of complexity to accommodate the contradiction of monogamous values and sexually promiscuous behavior. Social learning theory explains patterns and behaviors of sexual non-exclusivity as resulting from covert attitudes that

permit people, typically men, to engage in extradyadic sex, providing it is secretive and not openly valued (Ryan & Jetha, 2010).

Modern theorists tend to support a bio-psychosocial perspective, a marriage of biology and socialization that also readily allows for the apparent sexual paradox of promiscuous behavior and monogamous values (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Examining the bio-psychosocial perspective, married men are socialized for sexual exclusivity while generally, typically younger, single men are socialized to be promiscuous until they decide to marry a woman; this socialized approach also encompasses the evolutionary perspective since up until the time of marriage there is a behavioral allowance for high levels of testosterone among young men (McIntyre et al., 2016).

Relatively high testosterone levels and cultural allowances for, or expectations of, sexual exploration are highly influential associates of men in their 20s practicing sexual non-exclusivity in their relationships (McIntyre et al., 2016). Sexual exclusivity becomes significantly less prevalent when both members of a relationship are under the influence of typical young male values of risk-taking, adventure and freedom that are both espoused culturally and fueled hormonally by high levels of testosterone.

Masculinity and entitlement toward sexual freedom. Regardless of the theoretical framework used to examine gender conformity and values espousing sexual monogamy, differences between the sexes are readily apparent in the literature. It could be hypothesized that some of these found differences, within opposite-sex relationships, may in fact translate to relational similarities for same-sex couples.

Schmookler and Bursik (2007) created two measures, the Monogamy Attitudes Scale and the Emotional and Sexual Monogamy Views Scale that could be used to bridge the gap between

research concerning sexual exclusivity and monogamy values. Schmookler and Bursik found that heterosexual men and women differ in their valuing of monogamy such that women were found to value both sexual and emotional monogamy more strongly than men. Men and women perceived monogamy to be relationship enhancing; however, men were more likely to view monogamy as a personal sacrifice (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007). People who internalized traditional gender roles were found to value monogamy in the following ways: Traditionally masculine individuals reported valuing both sexual and emotional monogamy less than traditionally feminine individuals, and sexual monogamy was valued significantly less.

In support of Schmookler and Bursik's (2007) research, numerous sex differences had been previously identified regarding sexual non-exclusivity within couples. Men are more likely to participate in ongoing sexual relationships without wanting emotional involvement (Townsend, 1995) and give reasons for engaging in sexual non-exclusivity that emphasize sexual pleasure and recreation rather than intimacy (Leigh, 1989). Several studies describe similar findings showing that men are more likely to separate love from sex than women (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 1999; LaSala, 2004; Lawson, 1988; Nabavi, 2004). This is a form of compartmentalization that is congruent with Schmookler and Bursik's distinction between sexual and emotional monogamy.

Men and women differ in their jealousy responses to real or perceived infidelities. Studies have claimed that men maybe more threatened by women's sexual infidelity, whereas women appear to be more threatened by their male partners' emotional infidelity (Bhowon, Ah-Kion, & Tseung-Wong, 2004; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004; Schützwohl & Koch, 2004). It is uncertain if these differences are socially conditioned or routed in a biological basis. This might, at first, seem inconsistent with aforementioned research findings, that suggest that men tend to view sex

acts, beyond pleasure, as relatively meaningless, when compared with emotional monogamy. This may possibly uncover a double standard: Men may want to enjoy the freedom to enjoy the pleasure of sexual infidelity, but they do not want their female partners to do the same. If this male perspective carries over to gay male relationships, it might mean that generally, there could be more tendency for both sexual non-exclusivity and jealousy arising from it.

Researchers have attempted to seek out associations between relationship satisfaction and extra-relational sex. Findings were mixed. Glass and Wright (1985, 1992) found that most of the men in their sample, who had extra-relational sex, indicated that their marriages were happy or very happy. They sought out extramarital relationships for sexual excitement rather than emotional fulfillment (LaSala, 2004, 2005). In a similar study, examining gender differences in extra-relational sex, relationship satisfaction was not found to be a factor. The only observed variance between men and women was that women tended to incorporate emotional infidelity in addition to sexual infidelity within their extra-relational relationships (Cohen, 2006). Again, heterosexual men were found to be more apt than heterosexual women to separate sexual from emotional monogamy. When they did engage in non-exclusive sex, it was for personally satisfying experiences, sexual excitement, rather than a reflection of perceived problems in their relationships.

Given that research consistently concludes that heterosexual men are more independent, and heterosexual women are more relational (Ryan & Jetha, 2010), it is not surprising to discover that heterosexual women are more likely to integrate emotional with sexual infidelity; however, while heterosexual women are less likely to engage in extra-relational sex, when they do, it might represent purer instances of polyamory. Conversely, heterosexual men are more apt

to seek out sexual non-exclusivity, and they view the sex as recreational, less meaningful, just for fun and free from the milieu of emotional bonding.

Signorile (2015) suggests that gay men often internalize homophobia when they are bullied, following their identification as being gay, due to apparent effeminacy. Their internalized homophobia can manifest as conscious mobilization against effeminacy. Gay men can openly seek out more sexual non-exclusivity in attempts to be viewed as more masculine (Signorile, 2015).

In endeavoring to determine whether or not gay men experience the same inclinations concerning an entitlement toward sexual freedom, an examination of gender role conformity might offer a depth of understanding: More traditionally masculine men are more apt to value sexual non-exclusivity, yet gay men are more likely to embody freedom in gender roles. While Schmookler and Bursik (2007) uncovered gendered patterns of behavior, it generated further research questions, rather than provide conclusions, when applied to gay men. Gay men and lesbians tend to be more gender nonconforming than their heterosexual peers (Lippa, 2000, 2002; Pillard, 1991). Gender nonconformity is often most pronounced in the areas of voice, movement and appearance (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Bailey, 2003). While gender nonconformity and sexual orientation are apparently associated, not all gay men and lesbians are gender nonconforming. Many gay men and lesbians report gender conforming interests and behaviors (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Friedman & Downey, 1999). The relationship between sexual orientation and gender nonconformity, while documented in many studies, is not entirely understood. Further research needs to be conducted before conclusions can be drawn. Due to the complexity of the association between sexual

orientation and gender conformity, it is currently impossible to predict how gender may influence sexual exclusivity among gay male couples.

Gay, male couples and extradyadic sex. Researchers are now contributing to an expanding body of knowledge regarding gay men and extra-relational sex. A defining difference within male couples is the departure from normative values surrounding monogamy (Anderson, 2012; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Demian, 1994). Research comparing gay male and lesbian couples (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Wagner, Remien, & Carballo-Diequez, 2000) or comparing gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) consistently conclude that gay male research participants are more apt to be involved in pair-bonds that openly allow for sexual non-exclusivity (LaSala, 2005). Some older surveys report that more than 90% of gay men have engaged in sexual non-exclusivity since their relationships commenced (Blasband & Peplau, 1985). A more recent study found that 74% of the male couples in the research sample were sexually non-exclusive; in each case of this extradyadic sex, the couple had been together less than three years (Adam, 2006). Research has determined that agreements concerning sexual non-exclusivity are more common among men in relationships of a longer duration and older gay men (Prestage et al., 2008).

Gay men are more likely to discuss the topic of sexual non-exclusivity compared with heterosexual counterparts (Gotta et al, 2011) indicating that gay men feel a freedom in defining their intimate relationships in a different way compared with heterosexuals; however, when infidelity does occur within gay male couples, rarely do the men then contest the value of sexual monogamy within relationships (Anderson, 2012). Gay men apparently experience a form of cognitive dissonance regarding the value of sexual exclusivity within their relationships. It is of interest that despite a relative openness in disclosing sexual non-exclusivity, male

couples also recognize potential value in sexual monogamy. It follows that this may be more than an inconsistency between behaviors and values but rather embodiment of opposing values.

Among gay men, it has been concluded that, generally, no significant variances in relationship quality or satisfaction exists between samples of sexually exclusive and non-exclusive couples (Blasband & Peplau, 1985; Bonello, 2009; LaSala, 2004, 2005; Wagner, et.al., 2000). Men and women's understandings and experience of monogamy is quantifiably different from one another; therefore, gay male couples may potentially value and practice monogamy differently than lesbians and opposite-sex partnerships.

The norm of sexual non-exclusivity. After an extensive review of research literature concerning monogamy within gay male couples, when I commenced this study, I could not identify a single article that specifically examined sexual exclusivity. Related articles, instead, tended to examine relationship satisfaction comparing monogamous versus non-monogamous couples, sex acts within couples with high risks of HIV transmission or details regarding agreements to engage in sexual non-exclusivity where sexual non-exclusivity is purported to be innovative (Duncan, Prestage, & Grierson, 2014).

Compared with the minority, sexually monogamous gay men, gay men in open relationships are more apt to cognitively separate sex from intimacy, prize sexual variety (LaSala, 2008) and experience less intimacy and communication (Hoff et al., 2010). Beyond comparisons between open and closed relationships, little is specifically known about the experiences of men in sexually exclusive relationships. Deduction implies that there is a lack of interest in exploring this subset of men who value and attempt to maintain sexual exclusivity.

Possibly tied to seeking sexual variety (LaSala, 2008), habituation of sexual response is the essential challenge to sexual exclusivity (Zemishlany, 2015). Studies in humans consistently demonstrate the habituation of sexual arousal. Repeated exposures to a single erotic image resulted in less subjective and physiological sexual arousal than exposure to novel erotic images (Plaud et al., 1997). The presence of new sexual partners within sexual fantasies, and the frequency with which extra-marital relationships occur, is also consistent with the influence of novelty in sexual desire.

Since high testosterone levels and cultural expectations of sexual exploration are highly influential factors in young men who maybe attempting to practice sexual non-exclusivity in their relationships (McIntyre et al., 2016), it might be hypothesized that sexual exclusivity becomes significantly less prevalent when both members of a relationship are under the influence of the sexual risk-taking, and values of adventure and freedom, that are hormonally-fueled by high levels of testosterone.

Observing the biological fact of sperm competition, both biologists and social anthropologists identify evidence suggesting that the testicle size—and relative effects of testosterone—of human males falls between gorillas, with significantly smaller testicles and more sexual exclusivity, and chimpanzees with significantly larger testicles and less sexual exclusivity (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Findings of this inquiry imply that while human males may practice sexual exclusivity in the short run, from a reductionist, biological perspective, they are unlikely to practice it in the long run.

Savage influences. In recent decades, in association with having one of the, top-10, most popular podcasts in history, no other relationship advisor has had more of a significant effect on practical sexology in North American culture than Dan Savage (Augustyn, 2019). He is called

“America’s leading sex-advice columnist” and considered virtually synonymous with the accommodation of extradyadic sex in long-term relationships (Oppenheimer, 2011). Known for his strong opinions, remarkable oratory skills and thorough justifications of positions—with research findings and excerpts from 100s of thousands of submissions from his readership—Savage rose to popularity, before his podcast, writing an advice column, making high profile media appearances and authoring six books (Augustyn, 2019).

An innovator in modern sexology and how emerging sexual issues interweave with education, politics and religion, Savage became known for coining terms such as “pegging,” “santorum,” “it gets better,” and “GGG.” Pegging reflects changing norms in heterosexual culture in which it is becoming more common for women to use strap-on dildos to penetrate their male partners anally (Savage, 2003). While “peg” originally referred to “peg boys” and the well-known accusation that members of The Royal Navy once used to “peg” male children as sex slaves on British ships (Adams, 2008; Savage, 2003), Savage was the first person to coin “pegging,” a term now commonly understood and used by younger generations such as with Millennials (Augustyn, 2019). This reinforces claims that Savage is a highly influential figure, regarding sexual perceptions, within North American culture (Oppenheimer, 2011). Referring to the frothy mixture of fecal matter and lube that is the occasional by-product of anal sex, *Santorum* was devised, as a term, to criticize Rick Santorum’s positions rejecting gay marriage and suggesting homosexuality was subordinate to heterosexuality (David, 2011). Rick Santorum was a prior United States senator. Frequently asking his massive readership, of 10s of millions, to vote on the definitions of terms, resulting on “Santorum” being selected to define a gross substance, Savage was able to promote his pro-gay stances in opposition of Republican politicians, such as Rick Santorum, right-wing religious groups and others working against gay

civil equality (David, 2011). In describing his more positively coined terms, “It gets better,” refers to Savage’s *It Gets Better Project* designed to inform gay youth, with messages of hope, that their lived experiences will improve as they age; with video participants such as Barack Obama, and well known celebrities, it was Savage’s intent to help decrease the incidence of suicide among LGBT youth (Stelter, 2010). Savage’s influence, in spreading the message that *It gets better* was evidenced by thousands of video uploads, not only in the United States, Canada and Mexico but also, beyond North American, in Australia, Columbia, Chile, Finland, throughout the European Union, Italy, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and beyond (“It Gets Better Project,” n.d.). If Savage’s perspectives had not been globalized by the inception of the *It Gets Better Project*, this not for profit initiative provided an opportunity for his international audience to expand significantly (Augustyn, 2019). Referring to “GGG,” Savage explicitly normalized sexual desire among men and women regardless of orientation implying that if both members of a potential sexual encounter were “good, giving and game” then the criteria for good sexual partners were met (Muise, 2012). *Good* referred to talented or skilled sexually. *Giving* referred to proving a relative balance of time and effort in performing for the pleasure of the other and not merely being selfish. *Game* referred to an open willingness to try most anything the other proposes sexually.

Savage’s position on sexual exclusivity, as being ridiculous (Savage, 2011), was an important inclusion in the present study since not only is he the most notorious sex and relationship advisor and LGBT activist in North America, he is also a gay man who speaks openly about his lived experience within his long-term relationship of 24 years and marriage of 14 years (Kompanek, 2016). Savage offers gay youth a role model for long-term relationships,

and he is decidedly and explicitly non-monogamous. Radkowsky (2015) suggested that there have been no prominent, gay role-models who openly espouse sexual exclusivity.

Savage's thesis on sexual exclusivity is anchored in his criticism that people tend to devalue the entirety of their relationship upon discovery of any infidelity. Rather than limiting the importance of sex as one component of a relationship, and fidelity as only one part of sex, Savage observes that people usually—overlook the history of meaningful companionship, emotional intimacy and the security provided by long-term, committed relationships, and—view relationships as failures when people stray sexually (Savage, 2013).

He personifies sex in suggesting that instead of “us having sex, *sex* has us” (Savage, 2017). Savage explains that we are a product of sex, and the reproductive imperative is a powerful, ancient force, far greater than ourselves. We should not pretend that sex is entirely under our conscious control. We are not in charge of sex. Savage says *sex* may have ideas and aims that are beyond our awareness. It acts upon us and therefore, Savage claims, we are not entirely responsible for rare indiscretions that may occur—especially among couples trying to maintain sexual exclusivity over a very long span of time (Savage, 2017). Savage recommends making allowances for the creative power of sex, which is far greater than ourselves by being flexible in how we view sexual exclusivity in the long run. If we do so, we will not end up losing the entirety of our relationships. We can preserve valued relationships by acknowledging that we cannot completely control our sex drives. Here, in using the analogies of “spillways” and “channels,” Savage is referring to another term he has coined, *monogamish* (Savage, 2018):

The sex drive has to be channeled. It cannot be damned up. If you build a damn without spillways, it collapses. If you do the same to the sex drive; if you attempt to damn it up

without releases, without a spillway, without channels, it will collapse and wash away everything in your life that you value. (Savage, 2017, 5:29)

Dan Savage believes that while it is fine to aim for sexual exclusivity, we would be better off, initially, in being more sincere regarding our goal and accept the inevitability of a monogamish relationship in the long run (Savage, 2018). Monogamish refers to being mostly sexually exclusive but in rare instances, when the greater power of sex wins out and we do stray sexually, to accommodate these “spillways” without overreacting and calling into question the overriding value of our relationships (Savage, 2018).

In considering the sexual development, Savage suggests that approximately sixty years, society decided that men should be sexually exclusive like women. He suggests that for the entire history of humanity, men had concubines and whores for sex outside of marriage, yet 60 years ago, instead of equalizing privileges and extending sexual exclusivity to women, we, instead, decided to revoke that privilege from men (Savage, 2011). Savage explains that marriage used to be a property transaction but when it evolved to become based on the construct of romantic love, it became more egalitarian; when marriage became a union of two equals, under the guise of romantic love, married men lost their sexual freedom (Savage, 2011). Savage argues that by putting monogamy at the center of egalitarian, romantic love, and no longer allowing flexibility to accommodate diverse sexual desires, it devastated and destroyed a large proportion of functional relationships, and families, unnecessarily (Savage, 2011). In explaining why people stray sexually, Savage declares that people are not “wired for it,” did not evolve to be sexually exclusive and that the entire concept of monogamy is outrageous. The expectation to be

effortlessly sexually exclusive places an undue strain on marriages and this pressure results in relational degradation (Savage, 2011).

Savage posits the importance of distinguishing between being in love and not want to have sex with others. He says that sustaining the false belief that having sex with others means you do not love your husband or wife is very problem that results in the majority of the increased divorce that has been observed for past half century (Savage & Perel, 2016). Savage considers not only the futile consequences of infidelity but also errors in thinking when a married person encounters a person they desire sexually and concludes there must be something wrong in their marriage, that they must not love their spouse if they are attracted to someone else (Savage, 2011). Desiring others, usually more strongly than our spouse, does not mean we do not love or should not be with our spouse. Savage recommends that we get past this insecurity. He discloses that he is conservative regarding relationships and he thinks people tend to needlessly end what they have built, rather than preserve and value their investments; his remedy is to adopt more realistic attitudes surrounding sexual behavior while in marriages and long-term relationships (Savage & Perel, 2016).

In accordance with his concept of monogamish, Savage emphatically critiques the belief that when people that have been in a relationship for decades, for example, have had just a few indiscretions of sexual infidelity that they were bad at monogamy (Savage, 2011). He suggests that if after so much time, they only had sex with others a few times, they were, in fact, very good at monogamy. Savage focuses on their near complete success rather than their rare exceptions when gauging whether or not they were good at maintaining their goal to be exclusive with their spouses (Savage & Perel, 2016).

While Savage thinks deeply about how those seeking sexual exclusivity can learn how to accommodate realistic attitudes regarding sex, especially when directing his public speaking toward heterosexuals, he and his husband's relationship agreement is open (Savage, 2013). He often suggests that it is a better relationship configuration. Typically speaking about gay men, Savage suggests that when you truly love and want the best for your partner, that concern for their optimal experience should extend to supporting their interest in pursuing their sexual desires beyond the marriage or long-term relationship (Savage, 2013). Given the nature of his work, popularity, positive regard and beneficial impact on youth—based on a multitude of apparently sensible talking points—Dan Savage is a gay role model who happens to warn gay males against the dangers of maintaining sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships and marriages (Savage, 2013).

In a shared public presentation, Savage and Perel (2016) agree that we should find ways to accommodate sexual desire in a long-term relationship. The two relationship experts vary significantly in their suggestions. Perel points out that it is natural to become less sexually interested in one's spouse in modern cultures since where once the whole community, several people, met our emotional and practical needs, we now place it all on our spouse, which is unrealistic, and associated with less desire for our spouses (Perel, 2017). Working so closely to meet our needs, there is no space for mystery and fascination to be sustained and this weakens our sexual interest. Potentially influenced by experience as a heterosexual woman, Perel's recommendation is finding ways to distance ourselves, from our partners, so we can feel separateness through individual monogamous encounters and personal interests (Savage & Perel, 2016). However, where Savage's suggestion to accommodate waning or disperse sexual desire is to naturally allow for sex to occur outside relationships, Perel maintains that the optimal

approach is to work to discover ways to redevelop desire within the bounds of the relationship (Perel, 2017).

Perel often reports to her audiences that having traveled the globe for over a decade, speaking with thousands of married couples—devastated by infidelities and affairs—that the one response she hears repeatedly when people are asked why they strayed sexually is that it made them feel alive (Perel, 2013, 2017; Savage & Perel, 2016). It might be implied that her suggestion to create distance in the relationship so that desire can, once again, grow, is her recommended substitute for *feeling alive*; however, she does not offer any other advice regarding this issue. Her suggestion to attempt to rekindle desire for sex with one's spouse may not quite reach the intensity claimed by those people who described how extradyadic sex made them feel alive. Potentially influenced by his experience as a gay male, it can be imagined that Savage's advice to enjoy novel sex outside relationships (Savage, 2013) may better tap into the positive experiences, offered by affairs and brief trysts, that Perel is told about so frequently.

Factors espousing sexual exclusivity. This section explores support for closed relationships.

Introduction. Even if the percentage of gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in relationships is small, the absolute number of men and their unique experiences are significant and thus worthy of focused inquiry. Increasing knowledge regarding why and how sexual exclusivity is maintained in this subset of gay men might assist those who are seeking it: Living in congruence with personal values is positively associated with improved mental health (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).

Starting with the viewpoint that there are several biological and psychological influencers of sexual non-exclusivity (Anderson, 2012; Ryan & Jetha, 2010), why would a minority-subset

of gay men want to have and maintain sexual exclusivity in their long-term relationships? In-depth explorations of this topic are required since researchers are presently ill equipped to provide substantiated responses to this question. It follows that one purpose of this study is the generation of a *starting point*: Specifically endeavoring to understand the lived experiences of gay men maintaining sexual exclusivity, in long-term relationships, will enable us to begin evaluating what many researchers have proposed, via extrapolation, as origins of motivation for the maintenance of sexual exclusivity in this target population.

Three main factors were identified, in research literature, that imply possible motivators for why the minority-subset of gay men in long-term relationship seek sexual exclusivity. Three main considerations proposed by research literature include conscious efforts to avoid sexually transmitted infections (Sendziuk, 2003), an ongoing cultural influence regarding prescriptions of sexual monogamy by major ancient religions (Vines, 2014) and the following affective factors. Avoidance of jealousy, sometimes considered a consequence of perceived interpersonal possession, is noted in the literature (Spears & Lowen, 2010). Feelings of humiliation or *being made a fool of* upon discovery of broken fidelity assumptions or agreements is occasionally discussed by researchers (Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010). Anger about lies, which are often associated with sexual non-exclusivity, has been linked to the termination of relationships (Whitton et al., 2015).

Prevention of sexually transmitted infections. In purposely avoiding identification with heterosexual norms and shame originating in bias against gay promiscuity (Foucault, 1998), pioneering researchers may have, essentially, turned their backs upon the minority-subset of gay men seeing sexual exclusivity. One associated risk might be increased infections among gay men since lack of support from leaders in queer studies may be a factor contributing to

discouragement, which could generalize into learned hopelessness (Sendziuk, 2003); when even the leaders within queer studies are not discussing the viability of sexual exclusivity, as one option, their silence may be interpreted to mean that it is a futile pursuit. Feeling as though what you want is unachievable on the basis on sexual orientation can not only add to shame, which further shuts down attempts for sexual exclusivity, the shame itself is associated with sexual health risk taking (Downs, 2006). Adding to the sense of hopelessness was a history of physicians labelling gay men as ill solely due to their sexual orientation, which is why the term, “homosexual,” was constructed even before the distinction of “heterosexual” was commonplace: When gay men were initially becoming sick (i.e., AIDS) from HIV infection, many did not trust physicians due to their history of discrimination toward gay people.

Learned hopelessness was observed during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic when some gay men consciously opted to become infected with HIV, to avoid anticipatory anxiety, since they believed infection was inevitable. Learned hopeless might have been the origin of the phenomena of *conversion parties*, *bug chasers* or *gift givers*, (Duwe, 2018b) which, themselves, became sexualized—perhaps due to the thrill of risk taking or association with sexual freedom. Attempting to remedy learned helplessness, some gay men still seek out conscious infections since it reportedly helps them to take control of related fears about becoming infected. It both reduces general anxieties regarding getting infected and reduces sexual anxieties specifically. When one becomes infected, apparently, precautions during sex acts are not considered as important. It reportedly increases a sense of belonging. Furthermore, infecting others can provide a sense of empowerment to those already infected (Duwe, 2018b). When the possibility of sexual exclusivity is ignored by high profile, gay leaders, those interested in it may be more prone to

remit in their attempts to attain it. This could increase their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases.

Despite opinions concerning sexual monogamy, it can safeguard against the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections for a number of reasons. For example, there are indicators that the use of condoms is several times less commonplace among gay male couples than among single gay men (Mustanski, DuBois, Prescott, & Ybarra, 2014). Since male couples develop their long-term relationships without the effects of the heterosexual norm of sexual exclusivity, it may, unfortunately, place them at increased risk for sexually transmitted infections compared with their heterosexual counterparts.

Sexual exclusivity prevents the spread of sexually transmitted infections, and gay men in long-term relationships sometimes identify this as a motivator toward their wholistic stance valuing monogamy. Unfortunately, gay men in relationships are typically overlooked in HIV prevention efforts, yet they commonly engage in sexual behaviors that increase their HIV risk, and many seroconvert consequently. In the United States, it is estimated that approximately half of new infections with HIV are acquired through sex with infected partners within gay male relationships, yet few HIV-prevention programs specifically exist for gay male *couples* in the United States (Mitchell, 2014).

Evidently, extradyadic sex is a significant source of risk for sexually transmitted infections among men in same-sex relationships. Young gay men, seeking intimacy in their relationships, are less apt to use condoms than single gay men (Mitchell, 2014). Sexual monogamy agreements, either explicit or implicit, may be less common among male same-sex couples, yet sexual exclusivity remains an exceptional target for risk reduction interventions.

When seeking intimacy in their relationships, young gay men are more likely to engage in unprotected anal intercourse with their primary partner; however, this puts them at considerable risk for HIV infection unless both partners are sexually exclusive (Greene et al., 2014). Gay men in relationships, who are HIV positive, generally engage in significantly fewer sex acts with a high risk for transmission when they are both sexually and emotionally monogamous as compared with those who are only emotionally monogamous or in open relationships that lack both emotional and sexual monogamy (Blashill et al., 2014). Furthermore, compared with HIV-negative male couples and serodiscordant male couples, HIV-positive male couples experienced less reported intimacy and communication in their relationships (Hoff et al., 2010).

Considering that the experiences of men wanting sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships are virtually ignored by academic inquiry—given that it protects their physical health and is associated with emotional gains such as greater intimacy and communication—it may call into question whether or not leaders in queer studies have been adequately responsible in working for the wellbeing of their community thus far. It is possible that in attempts to potentially avoid contributing to feelings of shame, which may now seem archaic to younger generations living in progressive societies, leaders in queer studies have simply ignored the needs of gay men seeking sexual exclusivity. While it may feel like a *balancing act*, it is possible that sexual exclusivity could be espoused and even promoted by gay researchers as a viable option—among those gay men in long-term relationships who want it—without resorting to prescriptive norms of yesteryear and without applying dated morals that imply that sexual monogamy is exclusively practiced by individuals worthy of respect.

Religious prescriptions of sexual exclusivity. Continuing to be the predominant religion in Canada, Christianity promotes both emotional and sexual monogamy. Despite inconsistent themes in the Holy Bible concerning gay relationships and sex, monogamy, in general, is promoted as a sacred oath within marriage, and by logical extension, the ideal within long-term relationships (Vines, 2014).

Religion has a strong influence on the culture, and participation and belief in associated ancient rituals such as baptism—to supposedly rid of an original sin of sex—is especially promoted among youth. During formative years, regardless of assumptions regarding sexual orientations, gay youth exposed to the religious ideal of monogamy become gay men who sometimes continue to embody these spiritual beliefs concerning sexuality (Vines, 2014).

Religion prescribes sexual exclusivity within the context of marriage and until recently, marriage was not an option for gay men. While gay youth, exposed to religious values, may have been influenced toward sexual exclusivity (Vines, 2014) and young gay men may continue to espouse these values within an environment in which they are free to choose marriage, the older gay male experience may differ. Having entered adulthood without marriage equality, and the correlate value of sexual exclusivity, may have dissuaded older gay males from that goal (Lowen & Spears, 2017).

While it has not been explored explicitly, since sexual exclusivity is unanimously prescribed by religions, and religions differ significantly in how they range from condemning to tolerating gay people (Signorile, 2015), it is possible that religions permitting gay marriage and perceived as generally friendlier to gay people may provide a more advantageous environment for gay adherents who value sexual exclusivity to engage in it. While beyond the scope of the present study, where religion is seen to support love between men and espouses sexual

exclusivity when they marry, it is possible it could act as an environment in which sexual exclusivity is more likely to occur. While the present study is qualitative, basic demographic information was gathered and descriptive data on religious affiliation was explored. Eighty-four percent of respondents in a survey of LGBT Americans (Taylor, 2013) consider the Muslim religion as unfriendly toward them, yet in Christian religions that allow gay marriage, such as Protestant Christian churches, less than half of respondents (44%) considered them as unfriendly. The Catholic church was considered almost as unfriendly as Mormons, at 83%, with 79% of respondents saying it was unfriendly. While there is no data linking religions perceived as more friendly to increased sexual exclusivity among gay men, generally, people who are married, in association with a religion, are significantly less likely to have sex with people beyond their husband or wife than those who are not married yet in long-term relationships (Wang, 2017): Marriage increases sexual exclusivity.

There is a history of evangelistic Christian organizations that argue that gay men should not be allowed to marry, in part, because they are innately promiscuous (Signorile, 2015). These same organizations recognize marriage as a union, only between a man and woman, in which sexual exclusivity is the sole acceptable arrangement (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). Conversion therapy, a series of cognitive and behavioral interventions, has been proposed and implemented as a remedy to change gay men into heterosexual ones (Signorile, 2015). The implication was that evangelistic Christian organizations, using conversion therapy, believed that by changing sexual orientation, non-promiscuous heterosexuals would result. The assumption was that these *new, straight* men would virtually assure sexual exclusivity within their pursuant heterosexual relationships (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). Critics of churches that promote conversion therapy suggest that rather than expecting to cure these men of their promiscuousness, in their futile

attempts to change sexual orientation, the churches were, in fact, simply trying to return to an era where homosexuality was considered a pathological anomaly (Signorile, 2015) and in which heterosexual men were entitled to use sex workers and seek out affairs for extradyadic trysts yet their wives were not (Savage, 2013). Drawing attention to descriptions of the tolerated use of prostitutes by married men in the Holy Bible, and even positive depictions of prostitutes in the Holy Bible, critics of gay conversion easily debunk conservative, religious implications that heterosexuality is a cure for promiscuousness or adultery (Savage, 2011).

Even some mental health professionals, typically fueled by religious affiliation, believe in conversion therapy (Nicolosi, 2009); however, since transitioning into the 21st century, they almost exclusively admit it does not work (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). Others go as far as apologizing for ever backing the concept of attempts to change sexual orientation (Carey, 2012). Joining the worldviews of credible mental health professionals, many past proponents of conversion therapy—sexual orientation change efforts—now acknowledge that it psychologically harmed, and/or resulted in the suicide of, a significant percentage of its participants (Turban, 2018). Birthed from conservative, religious ideals that commanded that the gay lifestyle was a sin, conversion therapy fostered shame and self-loathing (Turban, 2018). It reinforced the belief that being gay meant that it would be impossible to experience the security in relationships that sexual exclusivity, within the context of Christianity, promised (Conley, 2017). Gay youth were especially at risk. They were typically born into an evangelistic community, often attending schools that continued to promote select irrational beliefs of an ancient religion—written during a time and in a place highly unrelated to their modern experience—and not yet having enough life experience to easily debunk the nonsensical ideas pushed by dubious spiritual leaders (Conley, 2017). During adolescence, when the forces of

sexual desire repeatedly reminded these gay youth of their interest in same-sex relationship, adults in power were telling them they could never have a loving, committed, monogamous relationship unless it was heterosexual (Conley, 2017). The discord between physical truth and the might of religious etiology is often devastating (Peterson, 2018).

Despite mental health professionals being instructed by the national associations in psychology, social work and psychiatry to not practice conversion therapy for over two decades, merely 18 of the 50 *united* states have banned the practice. These bans only started in 2013, and of the 18 states, 10 of the bans were in just within the last couple of years, 2018 and 2019. Signorile (2015) points out the importance of remaining vigilant in the face of advances in gay rights since he observes that enemies of civil rights, often acting upon religious imperatives, are “rebranding, recalibrating and readying for battle” (p. 57). Signorile (2015) points to when in assuring to block gay men from joining professional sport, prior New York Giants player, David Tyree, was chosen to fulfill this role. Inspired by his evangelistic New Apostolic Reformation (Signorile, 2014), Tyree’s background includes dedicated work to prevent gay marriage, stating that he has met with men who successfully converted from being gay to being heterosexual. Despite experts agreeing that conversion therapy is dangerous—and even lacking insights into how their own minority statuses have been used against them by out-of-groups majorities—Religious zealots like Tyree continue to care less for what is in the best interest of the LGBT community while consistently promoting misguided ideologies that prescribe modes of behavior proven to harm minorities. Signorile (2015) reported that Tyree stated that there are not enough men for single Christian women because too many them are effeminate, his code for gay.

Ornish (2019), one of the world’s most prominent promoters of a plant-based diet, suggests that religions did not merely prescribe specific sexual and dietary limitations for reasons

pertaining to practical physical health concerns during the era of development—such as avoiding shellfish at a time when they may have been resulted in illness from undetected, toxic bacteria—but they espoused limitations on behavior so that people would develop more meaning and purpose in their lives. It follows that for Ornish, religious prescriptions of sexual exclusivity, especially in long-term relationships, can provide practical psychological gains that may not be readily understood or acknowledged in the general population.

Affective dimensions of sexual exclusivity among gay men. Gay, male couples may be more likely to dissolve when members adopt non-monogamous agreements: Members of male couples who agree to have extra-relational sex, perceived higher quality of alternatives to their pair-bonding and lower dedication than did men with monogamous agreements. Adopting non-monogamy may create relationship instability in the long run, by raising attractiveness of alternatives and lowering commitment (Whitton et al., 2015). A quantitative study of 566 male couples found that members of open relationships reported significantly less trust than monogamous ones (Hoff et al., 2010). Gay men in open relationships, experience lower levels of attachment (Bricker & Horne, 2008) and reported lower affiliation/dependency, less favorable attitudes toward the relationship and higher interpersonal tension than partners in closed relationships (Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010). In most open couples, non-monogamy is associated with risks that require maintenance; non-monogamy can trigger uncomfortable feelings, especially jealousy, and provoke disagreements and tension (Spears & Lowen, 2010) that can result in failed relationships.

Gay men typically learned to lie more as children and adolescents to mask their sexuality and avoid discrimination (Berg & Lien, 2008). In some cases, secrecy about sexuality has saved lives; however, over time, secrecy can generalize and become a frequent, reinforced habit that

impairs perceptions of trust in long-term relationships (Johnson, 2013). Many leaders in queer studies conclude that secretiveness is a device for preserving emotional monogamy, and the quality of the primary relationship, among couples who engage in sexual non-exclusivity (Bonello & Cross, 2010); however, in one study, sexually monogamous couples scored significantly higher on tests of affectional expression and sexual satisfaction compared to a combined subgroup of partial knowledge and secretive couples (Wagner, Remien, & Dieguez, 2008). It may be possible, again, that wanting to espouse distinct differences of gay male relationships, such as the higher likelihood of sexual non-exclusivity in their relationships, results in a priori reasoning that considers the predominance of behavior in gay relationships as advantageous—where lying, for example, must be reframed as a prosocial tactic (Wagner et al., 2008).

While open relationships, with associated agreements, were considered celebrated innovations by some gay theorists (Foucault, 1998), they are often complicated by uncomfortable feeling that they were, in part, constructed to avoid. One common line of reasoning is by formulating detailed agreements concerning how sexual non-exclusivity unfolds, a couple can circumnavigate lies so that trust can be maintained (Wagner et al., 2008); however, rules of sexual non-exclusivity tend to evolve over time following discovered lies resulting from rules being broken (Wagner et al., 2008). In many cases, the rules concerning sexual exclusivity do not assure maintenance of trust any better than if rules were never constructed (Wagner et al., 2008).

Many gay, male couples, with agreements for sexual non-exclusivity, describe a shift toward a deemphasis on sex and emphasis on friendship within their primary relationship, and the same research concludes that open relationships were less passionate than monogamous or

“threesome-only” relationships (Hosking, 2013). It might be possible that in attempts to seek out more intense sexual fulfillment, some gay men actually developed situations in which they received less of what they were seeking; and as a result, they transformed prior romantic partners into merely friendships or roommates (Hosking, 2013).

Loneliness is a common complaint among older gay males (Berger & Mallon, 1993). Gay men in open relationships are generally less likely to remain pair-bonded over time (Spears & Lowen, 2010). If gay male couples are more apt to end in association with extra-relational sex, which some research implies, it could be suggested that agreements to have sex outside of relationships could create indirect paths to relatively higher levels of loneliness among older gay men.

Observer as subject. Consistent with phenomenological theory, my lived experience—as a gay, male psychologist-clinician whom had provided counselling to gay men for over 22 years—had potential for providing relevant units of meaning (Rudestam & Newton, 2001): Interestingly, following disclosures of the topic of this study, I was repeatedly met with smirks, snickering and non-verbal gestures such as eyebrow raising potentially reflecting judgment by others. This could indicate that some people may have difficulty accepting the idea of monogamy in gay relationships (Salfas, 2018). I wondered if emotional intimacy between two men remained an uncomfortable consideration by considerable proportion of society during the same time when sex between two men had become more accepted and was readily represented, and enjoyed as entertainment, throughout the mediums of movies, television series and podcasts (Clark & Nowlan, 2018). Conversely, in rare exceptions, when sexual exclusivity in male couples is represented in popular entertainment, the relationships tend to be

brief or its characters are depicted as peculiar and gender nonconforming for comedic effects (Rothmann, 2013).

In my experience as a psychotherapist, having worked extensively with gay men in long-term relationships, several clients wanting to maintain sexual exclusivity reported a common barrier: They believed, as they grew emotionally closer to their partners over time, that their partners started to feel like “best friends” or so close that they were like “family members” such as a brother, and it apparently became associated with urges to seek sex from others. When this resulted in sexual non-exclusivity, these clients started to describe their ongoing partnership as “being like roommates”; they typically continued to have sex with their partners infrequently or not at all despite the continuation of the emotional relationship for years or potentially indefinitely. Remaining an interest of mine, I was surprised that except for a single, indirect inference (Hosking, 2013), I could not find the phenomenon identified, let alone described, upon a literature review, in queer studies, in conducting the present study. Potential insight to this phenomenon, however, may have been provided by Perel’s (2015) suggestion for maintenance of *separateness* in modern relationships.

Possibly one of Perel’s (2015) less popular stances, how to maintain sexual fulfillment in long-term relationships, is her suggestion that *separateness* is useful (Nehring, 2006). Perel explains, in establishing security, many couples mistake love with merging. This confusion works against sexual interest in the relationship. In sustaining desire, or a movement, toward the other, there must be a gap to cross. Eroticism necessitates a sense of separateness. It flourishes in the space between the self and the other (Perel, 2015). Perel continues with her thesis concerning the value of separateness by explaining when people become fused as if the two are one, connection between them can no longer take place. The possibility of connecting with the other

is taken away. “Separateness is a precondition for connection: This is the essential paradox of intimacy and sex” (Perel, 2015, p. 8).

If it is possible that gay men in long-term relationships are more likely to experience what Perel claims as a *merging into one* due to increased similarities such as both members of relationships being male, having similar gender roles, sharing each other’s clothing, etcetera, it might represent a barrier to sexual exclusivity. Examination of participant responses, in the present study, addressed this possibility.

Gay zeitgeist. We are in an era of rapid change in which male couples in long-term relationships are starting to normalize within popular culture (Signorile, 2015). More countries are legislating same-sex marriage and more benchmarks of sexual development, such as gay adolescents openly dating in high school and attending proms as gay couples, are becoming commonplace (Baume, 2017). Increased knowledge and understanding of transgender experiences are also contributing to socially supported options and creating more acceptance of gender fluidity (Savage, 2013). While a multitude of social and other factors may have limited the reality of sexual exclusivity for gay male couples historically (Signorile, 2015) at this time, more than ever before, there may be value in challenging the common assumption that gay men are innately unable to maintain sexual exclusivity. Opening more options for gay couples can provide greater freedoms to a subculture for which overt oppression has been the norm (Signorile, 2015). A component of these new freedoms could include growing social acceptance, and support, of sexual exclusivity among gay male couples in long-term relationships.

Conclusions

Consistently, the literature concludes that men, especially gay men, are more apt to practice sex outside their primary relationship, more freely (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007). Whether or not they value sexual exclusivity, men are more apt to engage in sexual non-exclusivity than women. Whether factors of higher testosterone, values of freedom or others determine the distinction between men and women, it became evident that men, and especially those acting more congruently with traditional male gender, are more apt to stray sexually beyond their partnerships (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007).

More questions than answers flow from the literature review. Conflicts and inconsistencies among opinions and research findings, considering the harm versus the value of extradyadic sex remain. Where heterosexual researchers, academics and clinicians provide perspectives indicating that sexual exclusivity can enrich relationships with meaning (Johnson, 2013; Ornish, 2019; Perel, 2017), and a subset of gay men continue to practice it in the long run, the predominance of findings point to equal levels of relationship satisfaction, in general, among gay men in open relationships when compared with those in closed relationships (Spears & Lowen, 2010). What, at first, can seem paradoxical might be explained by higher levels of testosterone in younger men and societal accommodations and expectations of younger men to express their sexuality freely (McIntyre et al., 2016). This is why men under the age of 30 were not included in the study, with the intent to circumnavigate these potential confounding factors.

It is also clear that a greater percentage of gay men are transparently in open relationships when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Hoff et al., 2010). Apparent differences in sexual exclusivity between heterosexual and gay men may be explained, quantitatively, by

access to willing sexual partners and degree of child rearing time and duties where gay men are more likely to have more of the first and be less involved in the latter (Johnson, 2013).

The literature identified three general factors that may thwart sexual non-exclusivity. Gay men in long-term relationships might be more apt to practice sexual exclusivity in relation to religious imperatives (Vines, 2014) and the avoidance of sexually transmitted infections (Blashill et al., 2014) and affective turmoil (Spears & Lowen, 2010). Following a description of the research design in Chapter 3, findings of the interviews are explored in Chapter 4 to determine if the aforementioned factors are relevant to the lived experiences of the participants and to address the other research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

Research design is a decisive framework that guides the process of research so that valid conclusions can be reached (Hofstee, 2006). The particular research design that is utilized should be a direct reflection of specific research goals and questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The designed selected to conduct research must include selecting a suitable sample, utilizing effective data collection techniques and analyzing the information gathered using appropriate strategies (Dawson, 2002). Ethical considerations, described later in this section, guide all aspects of research beginning with design (Hoffman, 2013).

The three general research designs are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research designs are frameworks to explore objective theories via the examination of how variables relate among one another (Smith & Davis, 2010). Alternatively, qualitative designs are used to comprehend the meanings that participants construct in relation to social phenomena and lived experiences. Mixed methods designs utilized both quantitative and qualitative forms of data in providing more comprehensive perspectives than would be possible when using merely one of the other approaches (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Creswell (2012) informs researchers that the there designs are best illustrated as a continuum ranging from qualitative at one polarity, to mixed methods at the equidistant point and qualitative at the other polar point.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) explain that different ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives and behaviors affect how research questions are answered.

Ontology refers to how humans operate in the world with limited knowledge, without actually being sure they know what they know (Jonker & Pennink, 2010); therefore, they must make assumptions about the basis of reality. These assumptions are referred to as ontology in research endeavors (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It follows that using their assumptions about reality, as a framework to guide their inquiries, researchers attempt to discover approximations of truth (Mouton, 2002). Epistemology refers to the stance that researchers take in response to what they are investigating. Researchers may begin with personal opinions; however, epistemology is the consideration of what distinguishes their opinions from justified belief (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It follows that researchers must make transparent their epistemological assumptions, and state their justifications, when conducting studies (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). Methodology refers to how, the methods, researchers use to gather information (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It includes the tools utilized to generate information about the world that enable answering of research questions (Smith & Davis, 2010). Methodologies are associated with, and ultimately a consequence of, researchers ontological and epistemological assumptions (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). Methodology approaches should be congruent with researchers' assumptions about the nature of reality and their stances towards knowledge they are addressing.

Sampling, data collection and data analysis are three essential components of a research method (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Sample refers to a subgroup of the population that I intended to study (Smith & Davis, 2010). There are real-world restrictions that do not allow for the totality of the target population to be studied, thus a sample is selected for practicality. A sample is selected from the group of individuals with specific identifying characteristics that match the population being investigated (Creswell, 2012). Researchers need to gather

information before they can then formulate answers to their research questions: The adopted mode of data collection, similar with other research activities, is determined by whether research is qualitative, quantitative or falling elsewhere on the continuum. After data is collected, it is analyzed through a process of taking the information apart to differentiate unique participant responses and then putting it back together by synthesizing commonalities to present summarized interpretations (Creswell, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics refer to accepted norms that guide behavioral standards. Ethics are used to differentiate between what is acceptable and unacceptable course of action, especially when considering how people in positions of power treat those in position of less power (Hoffman, 2013). Guiding ethical conduct, all humans should be treated respectfully so that their dignity and right to live self-determined lives remains intact (Hoffman, 2013). It follows that research participants should be treated with intrinsic rather than instrumental value: While they are instrumental in providing data for research, their innate value as humans is honored when they are treated with dignity through the process of research (Hoffman, 2013).

One essential component in maintenance of ethical conduct in research is informed consent. The form in Appendix A was used, in advance, to inform participants concerning the potential risks and benefits of involvement in the study. It outlined their right to participate or not and to discontinue their involvement in research at any time without providing a reason and without negative consequence (Smith & Davis, 2010). Participants must be made to realize that they are not being coerced or pressured to engage in research. Hoffman (2013) also explained

that other components of informed consent include determining if potential participants are capable of understanding what they are consenting to, explaining the purpose of the study, providing descriptions of the information and procedures in a non-technical manner, stating whether or not confidentiality will be provided, explaining who will have access to findings, describing how their data will be stored securely and disclosing whether or not findings will be printed as a thesis or other text or presented at a workshop or conference.

Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were displayed on the informed consent form (See Appendix A) in case participants had questions regarding any aspect of the research or wanted to contact the researchers for any reason directly or indirectly pertaining to the overall study. Participants were asked to provide written consent by signing the form in-person before interviews took place, or in the case of video chat interviews, they printed the form, signed it, took a picture of their signature and forwarded the document electronically. This further enabled them to ask questions, in-person or via email, before ultimately deciding if they wanted to initiate participation in the data collection component of the study.

Three ethical principles for careful consideration whenever conducting social research are autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence. Informed consent can not be assured unless all three principles are implemented (Wassenaar, 2006).

I demonstrated respect for the participants' autonomy in two explicit ways. Informed consent was obtained using the form in Appendix A and participants, on the same form and verbally, in-person, were informed of their freedom to participate, decide not to participate, or initially participate but then leave the study. Furthermore, participants were assured that if they decided to leave the study that there would be no negative consequences.

Nonmaleficence refers to safeguarding participants so that they are not harmed due to their involvement in research (Wassenaar, 2006). One concern arose when I was envisioning interviewing gay male couples in which potential risk for harm was anticipated if, during the process of interviews, one partner disclosed to another that they had, in fact, engaged in sexual non-exclusivity; in avoiding maleficence, I decided to alter the mode of data collection to individual interviews. While every attempt was made to avoid harm to participants, they were informed, on their consent form, that if they had experienced any negative affects, specifically arising from the process of research, free psychotherapy would be provided by another therapist.

Beneficence refers to the research being of benefit to participants (Wassenaar, 2006). A likely gain from doctoral studies is the expectation that findings will contribute to knowledge in the field being researched (Kapp, 2010); however, in the present study, the intent was also to provide gay men seeking long-term, sexually exclusive relationships access to the lived experiences of the subset of men who had already achieved it, with the hope it could support their understanding of their goals.

I received approval for my study from the University of South Africa's Board of Ethics. The board adheres to guidelines set forth by the Health Professions Council of South Africa. I did not envision any detrimental outcomes from the interviews conducted with the participants; however, in the unlikely event that a participant felt adversely affected, for any reason, I invited him to contact me so that I would provide a referral for, and cover the cost of, a psychotherapist external to the study (See Appendix A).

I maintained confidentiality, locally, by securing the audio and text of interviews by locking all hardcopies and associated hardware in a file cabinet when not using it. I notified the participants that I would be destroying the data three years following the end of the study (See

Appendix A). In assuring full transparency, I additionally informed participants (See Appendix A) of the possibility that limits on confidentiality may, at least theoretically, remain: I could not account for how online applications such as Skype[®], Google Hangouts[®] or Google Voice Typing[®] managed information that was transmitted, transposed and/or stored. I advised participants to be mindful of the non-local, electronic limits of confidentiality before providing their consent (See Appendix A). Furthermore, I recommended that only first names be utilized during interviews in case online applications were, in fact, storing content; I thought this caveat reinforced participants' awareness of the online limits of confidentiality effectively.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological research design for three main reasons. Firstly, qualitative methodology is best suited for studying phenomena that has not been previously investigated (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Secondly, the participants' points of view, and the meaning they attached to their identified motivations and strategic behaviors, was the main purpose of the study, and this type of detailed data is typically qualitative in nature. Thirdly, consistent with the ontological assumptions in the study, I am a humanistic-existential psychologist: A phenomenological design is a logical extension of my theoretical philosophy. Where both humanism and phenomenology share a focus on individual experience and qualitative inquiry, as essential features, over the concepts of 'average' experiences or scientific reductionism commonplace in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2012), humanism does assume that individuals tend to make the most out of their situations. My perspective may depart slightly from a purely phenomenological perspective in that the phenomenological perspective focuses solely on individual experiences without making an

assumption that people naturally strive to be their best or that people have any preexisting tendencies (phenomenological, 2013).

The goal of phenomenological research is to “seek to understand the lived experience of a small number of people” (Rossman & Rallis, 2016; p.68). A phenomenological methodology was selected because, as stated by Marshall and Rossman (2015), the primary goal is to capture the full meaning of the participants’ experiences as shared in their own words. It was of critical importance to process the information, and reflect patterns, provided by participants without allowing personal biases, or outcomes from the literature review, to prompt identification of similar findings due to a priori assumptions.

Seidman (2012) discusses in-depth interviewing as a way for researchers to understand the attitudes of the research participants. This provided context to their behaviors and actions. When a participant described a behavior, I could then put that behavior into context. This created thorough understanding of each participant’s behavior. It follows that the information gained through the face-to-face interviews enabled contextual understanding (Seidman, 2012). This methodology enabled participants, as co-directors of the research, to reveal new questions from the stories of their daily lived experiences.

A phenomenological methodology was appropriate for this study because it enabled me to understand the meaning that participants attributed to their actions. Their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds were all explored. This allowed me to understand deeper perspectives that could only be captured through face-to-face interactions (Rudestam & Newton, 2001) and adaptation of prepared questions to accommodate semi-structured interactions.

Phenomenological inquiry is useful for researchers who are interested in “What has this person experienced? How does this person understand his...experiences” (Rossman & Rallis,

1998, p. 68)? Adopting a phenomenological, analytical perspective, researchers are interested in “What do the stories people construct about their lives mean? How does the articulation of those stories empower them” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 68)? These were important considerations for this study for many reasons. Primarily, through phenomenological inquiry, the participants become co-researchers of the study through the open process of interviewing (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Secondly, there was no research specifically examining the experiences of gay men who are sexually exclusive in long-term relationships. This lack of information may have contributed to inaccurate, misinterpreted and unrealistic expectations of gay men seeking sexually exclusive long-term relationships. Beginning to uncover lived experiences, this research aimed to provide preliminary insights for gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships and to their parents, friends, educators, employers, community members and researchers. This enabled a more effective response to the needs of this population. Most importantly, phenomenological inquiry offered the research participants the chance to have their stories validated through their own voices; in this way, phenomenological inquiry had the ability to empower the research participants and strengthen the purpose they had developed through their lived experience. Consistent with my ontological assumptions, arising from my work as a psychotherapist, the phenomenological approach was advantageous since participants may have been helped through the process of research.

Research responses, made available through this phenomenological study, created preliminary documentation of the experiences of sexually exclusive gay men in long-term relationships. It generated an opportunity for people, with their general minority experience, to become more evident and acknowledged. Unlike the concept of an average experience, espoused by those using quantitative methodology, the phenomenological approach enabled a raw

exploration of unique and shared values and needs in the participants' own words and from their own perspectives.

Target Population

The participants consisted of gay male adults, aged thirty years or older, residing in Canada. The target population was limited to self-identified members of male couples currently in long-term relationships consisting of five or more years. Furthermore, these men were self-identified as having entirely practiced sexual exclusivity for the duration of their long-term relationship.

Sexual orientation criteria. Bisexual men were not explicitly sought out for the study. Theoretically, and potentially in rare instances, bisexual men could form long-term relationships with other men in which they were sexually exclusive despite indicators that bisexual men virtually exclusively select women for long-term relationships (Gates, 2014). The title of the study—and phrasing utilized in marketing for participation in the study—theoretically allowed for participation by bisexual men; however, it was thought that it was highly unlikely that a bisexual would respond to marketing: It was not my intent to interview men in secret, sexually-based relationships but rather in comprehensive, acknowledged relationships traditionally characterized as being *romantic*. Participants were, in some degree, open about the emotional intimacy they experienced with their partners thus reflected by their willingness to share, with me, that they were in relationships with men. Gay male relationships were the focus of the literature review since any depth of examination concerning bisexual men was not deemed practical for the purpose of the study.

The demographic intake form included a question concerning whether or not potential participants had sex with their partner during the past year; this was included to help screen for people who identify as being asexual. Asexual people have no interest in sex with others and sometimes not even in masturbation (Betchen, 2014). Interviewing an asexual man regarding why and how he maintained sexual exclusivity in his relationship would not meaningfully contribute to understanding gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships since, predominately, they do seek sex, and understanding motives surrounding sexual behavior between men was one of the main considerations in this study.

Age criterion. Men under the age of thirty were excluded from participation for two reasons. Substantiated by Schmitt (2016), a higher level of testosterone is strongly associated with sexual non-exclusivity. According to MayoClinic.com, testosterone levels in men peak somewhere between late adolescence and early adulthood, but it then decreases by about one percent per year after the age of thirty (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2017). In Canada, there is a general cultural imperative for people in their late teens and early 20s, especially men, to ‘explore sexual options’, *sow wild oats*, before ‘settling down’ with a life partner, for example, by the age of thirty. This is also evidenced by urgent attempts for pair-bonding when people, approaching the age of thirty, intensely increase their efforts to secure a partner (Bontemps, 2019). The men who do turn thirty while single are considered “a motley crew” (Urban, 2013).

In endeavoring to avoid the positive association between peak testosterone levels and sexual non-exclusivity, which may take place as late as in the early 20s, for a participant to be interviewed at the age of thirty, he would have been no younger than twenty-five when he entered into his long-term relationship—thus increasing the likelihood of him avoiding the remarkably strong motivation to stray sexually. This study intended to reflect the lived

experiences of most gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships rather than the minority of those men within the decade of their lives when testosterone peaks.

Individuals, not couples. Importantly, individuals, rather than couples, were sought for participation to assure validity and for important ethical reasons. If couples had been interviewed together, demand characteristics such as consensus or lying to portray sexual exclusivity might have occurred. I would have likely been unable to detect misinformation that would have jeopardized the validity of the study. Alternatively, a member of a couple might have disclosed sexual non-exclusivity during, or in relation to, the interviews. This could have potentially harmed their relationship; therefore, interviews of individuals rather than couples were required. Even if a member of a couple had expected that their partner would have participated, and his partner agreed to participate, I was bound by confidentiality; therefore, I did not confirm nor refute participation upon inquiry. I simply indicated that all interviews were on an individual basis. In safeguarding against potential harm in relationships, marketing explicitly stated the individual nature of the research and recommended discussing details of sexual exclusivity, pertaining to the study, with me rather than with their partners. The marketing recommended individual decisions to participate and suggested that, other than potentially informing their partners of the opportunity, no pressure or expectations were to be placed upon them to participate.

Relationship span criteria. *Sexual exclusivity* means research participants had only had sexual contact with their sole male partners. Men reporting that they had continued to practice sexual exclusivity from the beginnings of their relationships were included in this research. Given that participants were selected based on relationships of five years or longer, the beginnings and lengths of relationships had to be determined concretely. In being pragmatic,

“beginnings” and “lengths” of relationships were technically defined by when they stopped having sex with other men and only had sex with their primary partners. This criterion was clarified with participants upon initial contact by phone or email since some people continue to have sex with prior sex partners, for some period, after initiating an intimate relationship and before deciding to proceed in it as a sexually exclusive relationship (Bonello & Cross, 2010); this clarification with participants was meant as both a reminder of the spirit of the study and to acknowledge the common experience of *sexual overlapping* at the beginning of many gay male relationships (Bonello & Cross, 2010; Spears & Lowen, 2010).

For the purpose of the study, the initiation of long-term relationships included the criterion of when participants stopped having sex with other people despite when they actually started meeting with or dating their long-term partners. This criterion accommodated those relationships that may have started while sexual non-exclusivity was still occurring, especially with prior, regular sex partners. In other words, since the focus of the study is sexual exclusivity, the beginnings of relationships were defined by when they became closed if they had not been closed from the onset.

Instead of tending to explore or celebrate the nuances of open relationships, which had been the preponderance of research in this area during the past few decades, I had to turn to early surveys in queer studies in attempting to gauge the rate of sexual exclusivity in gay relationships beyond three years. That rate tended to drop to more than 90% (Blasband & Peplau, 1985). While almost all gay men in relationships have experienced sexual non-exclusivity after 5 years, a subset continues to engage in it. This was the population that was of interest, as the target of exploration, in the current study.

A relationship duration of five or more years had been selected. The majority of gay male relationships begin with expectations and the practice of sexual exclusivity but following a year or two shift to sexual non-exclusivity (Anderson, 2010; Barker & Langdridge, 2012; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Kurdek & Schmitt, 2010). Research outcomes indicates that spanning three years, a minority percentage of gay men maintain sexual exclusivity in their relationships (Alvy et al., 2011; Bech, 1997; Hoff et al., 2010; Remien & Carballo-Diéguez, 2000). One study found that approximately one in four of the male couples in the research sample were sexually exclusive, yet in each case of sexual non-exclusivity, the couple had been together less than three years (Adam, 2006). Another study (LaSala, 2004) suggested that approximately one in three gay men in relationships remain sexually exclusive by the third year of the relationship. If a relationship span shorter than five years had been selected for this study, it may have represented a futile attempt to understand sexual exclusivity: Gay men who might have maintained sexual exclusivity in the short run for, say, a year or two were unlikely to have maintained it for an additional year or longer.

Despite indications that relationships of longer duration are more apt to become open (Prestage et al., 2008), it may be possible that the modern rate of sexual exclusivity levels off somewhere between one in four and one in three: According to Shernoff (2006), among male couples that had been together for five years or more, most research indicates that approximately one-third of surveyed male couples had been sexually exclusive. It is important to note that Shernoff's proposed statistic, like others mentioned in this study, are based on couples who had been interviewed rather than individual members of couples being interviewed in isolation. When both members of a couple are interviewed together the effects of demand characteristics come into play in which members of couples are more likely to lie to say that they had been

sexually exclusive when they had not. This might represent one of at least two factors that may explain why Adam's (2006) statistic for sexual exclusivity is lower for relationships at three years versus Shernoff's (2006) assertion for a higher statistic for relationships at five years. Another possibility that might account for the apparent paradox is that many of the relationships that shift from sexual exclusivity to non-exclusivity after one to three years may terminate, which would further support the need for a longer relationship duration, at five years, in examining sexual exclusivity. If this is examined in future studies, there would be a possibility of identifying a binomial distribution of sexual non-exclusivity across the span of long-term relationships for gay men.

Sexual exclusivity inclusion criteria. Whenever participants were unsure of whether or not they had maintained sexual exclusivity, they were reminded that the guiding principles, in this study, defining an act of sex were close proximity and sexual context and intent.

In operationally defining the inclusion criteria for this study, 'sexual exclusivity' referred to the lack of several sexual scenarios. Engaging in one or more of the three basic modes of sex with someone other than one's partner disqualified men from the study: The most explicit definition of sexual exclusivity meant that no oral and anal sex and no manual stimulation, also referred to as hand jobs, took place with a man or men other than one's partner. Furthermore, with sexual intent, any extradyadic, direct contact of one's body with the penis, hand or anus of another man, or vice versa, with or without the use of a condom, disqualified potential participants from this study. Maintaining sexual exclusivity also meant that masturbation, unilateral or mutual, in the physical presence of another man was not indicated.

The definition of what constituted sexual behavior accommodated norms within gay subculture regarding physical socialization. Open greetings with casual kisses and brief touching,

grabbing, slapping or pinching over clothing, even over the buttocks, for examples, are common among some gay friends or acquaintances (Alford, 2012) at house parties. Casual kissing and touch between men are not limited to gay culture. Kissing and physical embrace, as a greeting, are becoming more common between men regardless of sexual orientation (Hester, 2016). It is a result of increased interactions between men from North America and men from other locations—such as the Middle East and specific parts of Europe, Africa and South America—where non-sexual kissing is the social norm (Hester, 2016).

The main reason for the accommodating stance of casual kissing and non-overt sexual contact over clothing was meant to accommodate casual, affectionate touch at parties that may have occurred among gay friends and acquaintances especially when greeting one another (Alford, 2012) or when saying goodbye. Regardless of sexual orientation, groups of men, in the absence of women, commonly slap one another's buttocks over clothing to bond, especially in association with sports (McDermott, 2018). Furthermore, within the non-sexual context of sport, even direct touching of penises, such as with some locker room antics or Turkish oil wrestling, sexual exclusivity was not considered compromised. Context was the overriding consideration. If the same gay men at the same house party, referred to earlier, had *made out* within a sexual, rather than casual, context of kissing, it, too, would not have reflected the maintenance of sexual exclusivity.

Potential, rare situations included incidences in which there was no sexual context for the research participant yet inadvertent or purposeful touching under or over clothing by another man or men resulted in partial or full erection or even orgasm. These situations would still have been considered maintenance of sexual exclusivity due to the lack of sexual context, and intent, for the participant.

Like masturbation, frottage, the rubbing of the penis through clothing, where a man was aware of it and consensually participated within a sexual context, disqualified men from participation. Frottage entailing rubbing over clothing, when the intent and context was sexual in nature, disqualified men from participation regardless of the outcome—whether or not an erection or orgasm was achieved.

What is typically identified as a sex act, such as oral, anal or manual sex, was not required for sexual exclusivity to have been breached. Touch with sexual intent and context was enough. For example, if the buttocks were touched directly by another person's hand—outside of non-sexual context such as a physician's office—sexual exclusivity could have been compromised. Consistent with other studies (Adam, 2006; Bonello, 2009; Spears & Lowen, 2010), the definition of *sexual contact* or the act of *sex* meant that passionate kissing within a sexual context, even without any direct or indirect touching of the penis or buttocks, would have meant that sexual exclusivity would have been compromised.

When marketing for participants, parameters defining sexual exclusivity were discussed explicitly during the phone call with each potential participant to determine if they qualified for the study. If, at any point after the in-person interview at my office, 1446 Dresden Row, or online interview via video chat, by Skype[®] or Google Hangouts[®], had a participant indicated that he had not meet the definition of sexual exclusivity, his information was not going to be included in the study.

The close proximity inclusion criterion. Since sexual intent and context, along with close proximity, were the guiding principles used to define the nature of sexual behavior that was the target of sexual exclusivity within this study, consistent with the predominance of research concerning sexual activity in gay relationships (Adam, 2006; Bonello, 2009; Spears & Lowen,

2010), traditional sex rather than cybersex, was the focus of the present study. Virtual sex, over the internet, phone or by texting or messaging, did not disqualify participants. In cybersex, the sexual behavior involving two or more men does not require them being within close proximity. In other words, while there was no indication that participants did so, men engaging in cybersex could have participated in this study.

The construct of cyber infidelity is increasing in awareness and in many cases, especially among heterosexuals, it has been the cause of significant emotional distress in relationships (Wasserman, 2015); however, the lack of real-life sexual behavior, beyond a primary partner, was the focus of this study. Mileham (2007) discovered that 83% of respondents in chat rooms, considered online sexual acts as acceptable while in a committed relationship. In his research findings, Mileham suggested that the large percentage of chat room participants did not think online *sex acts* were harmful because no physical contact was involved. This implied that online sex acts are not necessarily considered sexual infidelity let alone indicative of sexual non-exclusivity. Providing several examples in his article in an attempt to substantiate the standpoint, Ben-Zeév (2008) suggests that a common belief is that online lust, or cybersex, is not infidelity; instead, it is *talk about sex* and most often a form of masturbation. In describing a recent survey of 1000 gay men, conducted by the Gay Men's Health Project of the United Kingdom, Murphy (2018) reported that two out of three gay men did not consider sending private messages of a sexual nature to be infidelity. The majority, 57%, of gay men did not consider sending sexual images online, to men outside their relationship, to be infidelity.

It follows that close proximity and sexual intent and context were the deciding factors concerning sexual exclusivity. It follows that sexual exclusivity, the specific focus of this study, was defined as not giving and/or receiving any duration of oral, anal or manual sex, through real-

life contact, with another person. Additionally, in maintaining sexual exclusivity, no one-sided or mutual masturbation, in-person, with a man other than one's romantic partner could have taken place.

In contrast, some terms used in other research, cited throughout this study, such as *monogamy*, *fidelity* or *cheating* are of a much broader scope, open to differing, more accommodating definitions. Beyond the original intent of the study to examine the lack of real-life sexual behavior, outside of relationships, among gay men in long-term relationships, is another practical reason to limit the conceptualization of sexual exclusivity to sexual activity between or among men in close proximity: If cybersex had been included, the ability to secure enough participants to conduct the study would have been significantly impeded. Gay males typically initiate sexual expression online as adolescents and continue these cybersex activities after they form real-life relationships (Barker & Langdrige, 2012).

Sampling

I initially opted to sample eligible participants in both my city of Halifax and the entire province of Nova Scotia, Canada, rather than merely limit the sample to my municipality. Believing I would not be able to secure a sufficient number of participants since it was a sampling of a minority—men maintaining sexual exclusivity in a long-term relationship—within a minority, gay men; I then extended my search to the entirety of Canada.

Marketing consisted of Facebook advertisements that were configured to display to the general population of Facebook users in Canada. Facebook was selected since it is the most popular social media site that is least likely to be limited and biased by a younger-user age effect (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

The Facebook® ad simply stated, “Seeking sexually monogamous gay men, aged 30 years or older—in relationships of 5 years or longer—for confidential participation in doctoral research in psychology.” An email address and a phone number were provided for modes of contact.

There was an ethical reason for marketing to the general population. While phenomenological research is typically congruent with seeking participants directly from most specialized sources, ethics may have become compromised if I had identified gay family-based groups or associations or approached gay couples known to have been in long-term relationships: Assumptions concerning sexual exclusivity could not have been made, and members of couples could have become aware of sexual non-exclusivity had inquiries been made more directly.

It is generally accepted that fewer than ten interviews can be utilized for effective phenomenological research (Moser & Korstjens, 2018); however, attempting to assure that all relevant insights could be drawn from research responses, a minimum of ten participants were initially sought in this phenomenological format of qualitative research. Obtaining most or all the available perceptions led to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Creswell (1998) suggests that saturation can occur with five participants; however, I decided that a minimum of ten participants would be my goal to virtually assure that saturation occurred (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I was able to secure eleven men for participation.

A specific informed consent agreement was developed to gain the informed consent from participants via signatures. Contents included:

- that they were participating in research;
- the purpose of the research;

- the procedures of the research;
- the risk and benefits of the research;
- the voluntary nature of research participation;
- the participant's right to stop the research at any time;
- the procedures used to protect confidentiality

(Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Kvale, 1996).

Data Collection

Phenomenological reduction (i.e., bracketing) was foremost in my mind during both data collection and analysis. Data was obtained about how research participants “think and feel in the most direct ways” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). The focus was on “what goes on within” the participants. I asked the participants to describe their lived experience using language as free as possible from expectations of intellect or society. In accordance with Miller and Crabtree (1992, p. 24), another form of bracketing is when the researcher “must ‘bracket’ ...his own preconceptions and enter into the individual’s lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter.”

The structured component of the interviews, the prepared questions exhibited in Appendix B, were initially provided to participants via e-mail for their consideration prior to in-person or video chat interviews (Cregan, 2017; Wilson, 2008). It was hypothesized that inquiries into motivations and protocols to maintain sexual exclusivity may have required careful consideration and reflection that may not have been readily elicited without adequate time for contemplation (Cregan, 2017).

After I was contacted by email or phone, the participants confirmed that they met the inclusion criteria, signed the informed consent (See Appendix A), and completed the demographics questionnaire (See Appendix C), which were distributed by email. I then arranged to meet with them, individually, in a confidential environment, either at my counselling office or via video chat using Skype® or Google Hangouts®.

All participants opted to initiate contact by email. No man was rejected from the study as a consequence of not meeting the inclusion criteria or meeting any of the exclusion criteria: I thought this, at least partially, indicated that the content displayed in the Facebook® ad had been effective. Furthermore, no participant chose to cease his involvement in the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, in the confidential, mutually agreed upon location or online, with 11 participants. I first presented the pre-determined set of open questions and then the questions prompted unstructured discussions that enabled me the opportunity to explore responses, depths of lived experiences, to the point of perceptual saturation and emerging subthemes and themes in detail.

Interviews were captured using audio recordings by both Google Voice Type® and the SpeechTexter® app that translated speech to text in real time, a digital recording device was also used to capture audio during interviews. This provided backup in the case of technical failure using the primary mode of data collection. The speech to text technology, both the Chrome SpeechTexter® app and Google Voice Type®, operated virtually flawlessly to record text in real time. The two applications ran simultaneously for mutual backup during instances of translation errors. Consistent with a phenomenological approach, using the self as a research tool, I also took field notes.

Memoing (Bailey, 2007) was utilized in this study. My fieldnotes concerning what I experienced, thought, heard and saw during collecting and reflecting upon the process was incorporated. This safeguarded against me becoming absorbed in the process of data collection and failing to reflect on what was happening in real time. One caveat is that it was important that I maintained a balance between reflective and descriptive notes, such as with hunches, impressions, feelings and so on. Furthermore, Bailey (2007) suggested that fieldnotes must be time-dated so that researchers can easily correlate them with the data, and this was done predominately.

At the end of each interview, I verbally invited each participant to contact me if there was information the participant would have liked to change based on what was discussed. Participants were invited to contact me following interviews since the unstructured component of interviews had potential, upon reflection, to generate important information that could not have been relayed during interviews. Following interviews, participants were provided with physical or electronic business cards listing all modes of communication, if they had information to add, omit or change that was not relayed during interviews. Participants were told that they could forward emails, or use any other mode of communication, to provide their information for up to two weeks following their interviews.

Individuals, rather than couples, were interviewed to avoid the potential for breaking confidentiality if, for example, it came to light that a member of a couple had engaged in virtual *sex* with other men, over the internet, etcetera.

Data Analysis

An adapted format of Hycner's (1999) *explicitation process* acted as a general guide to the process of examination and interpretation of research data. Hycner's five phases are: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; 2) delineating units of meaning; 3) clustering of units of meaning to form subthemes or themes; 4) summarising each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it; and 5) extracting subthemes, or themes, from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

I omitted Step 4 since Creswell's (1998) concept of perceptual saturation had been identified as the main goal of sampling and data analysis, and it was the precedence: While each participant's narrative was provided utmost respect and appreciation—symbolized by the initial presentation of quotes antecedent the discussion—capturing comprehensive subthemes, and themes, among participants was the overriding objective for the sake of insight generation. Moreover, Step 4 was deemed unnecessary since validation of lived experience occurred during interviews, and the concept of modifying content of interviews to match units of meaning could be considered counterproductive from a purely phenomenological perspective (Kleiman, 2004).

Data was coded (open, axial and selective) and categorized so that sense could be made of the essential meanings of the phenomenon. I worked with the rich descriptive data and common essences or themes that emerged. In assuring that a pure and thorough description of the phenomenon was captured, I completely immersed myself in the process of analysis for as long as it took.

The three types of coding are detailed here. Open coding is a process of reducing the data to a small set of themes that appear to describe the phenomenon that is under investigation. Axial

coding involves putting data back together in new ways by making connections between categories. Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category and then systematically relating it to the other categories; it can be considered the storyline that generally describes the entire phenomenon.

The structure of phenomena is the essential goal of a descriptive phenomenological inquiry. The structure is based upon the essential meanings that are present in the descriptions of the participants and is determined both by analysis (as described below) and also by my intuitive insights.

Kleiman (2004) outlines a specific protocol for data analysis:

- Read each interview to develop a general sense, and understanding, of the whole.
- Read each interview a second time, but this time, slowly, to divide the data into meaningful units.
- Integrate the units that you have identified as having a similar content or focus and make sense of them.
- Process your integrated meaningful units using a process known as free imaginative variation.
- Elaborate on your findings to include descriptions of the critical meanings that were identified through the process of free imaginative variation.
- Revisit the raw descriptions again to justify the interpretations of both the critical meanings and the general structure. This substantiates the process. Proof of the validity of all findings is by referencing the raw participant data.

- After completing the data analysis, follow this with an essential analysis of your work within your research study. This critical analysis included verification that:
 - a) concrete, descriptions have been obtained from the participants;
 - b) the phenomenological reduction has been maintained;
 - c) critical meanings have been discovered;
 - d) a structure has been communicated;
 - e) the raw data has confirmed the findings.

Participant responses were coded and analyzed using Microsoft Word[®] (MS Word[®]) software and the Google Sheets[®] application. Delineating units of meaning—via coding and eventual subtheme identification—was used to allow for subsequent quotations and interpretations (Kleiman, 2004). Color-coding of similar units of meanings, constituting the subthemes, and the *word find* function in MS Word[®] were used extensively.

All text composing similar units of meaning (i.e., a subtheme) shared the same text color. Where units of meaning clearly related to a second subtheme, the relevant text was also highlighted using the corresponding color of the additional subtheme so that both the text was color-coded and the text was highlighted with another color, using the *highlight function*, within MS Word[®].

Using Google Sheets[®], a separate guide—in addition to the color-coded one that utilized MS Word[®]—was constructed to display how each subtheme was substantiated by similar units of meaning among participant responses. Subthemes, with corresponding quotes, were organized by extracting color-coded information from MS Word[®] and placing it within Sheet 1 of Google Sheets[®]: Each similar unit of meaning (i.e., subtheme) fell along one axis, the top/horizontal, and

each participant pseudonym fell down the other axis, far left/vertical. Participant quotes, relevant to each subtheme, were extracted from MS Word[®] and inserted into corresponding cells in Sheet 1 of Google Sheets[®]. In the infrequent case of highlighted text, it was placed in cells of two subthemes in accordance with both the colors of the text and the highlight. Research objectives were then considered by reading relevant content displayed within each column, for each subtheme, within Sheet 1 of Google Sheets[®]; this helped to direct my analysis in the Discussion section of Chapter 4.

The subthemes were then reviewed so that I could discern if there were meaningful similarities, or associations, that resulted in the construction of categories of subthemes; these categories were labelled thus symbolizing the study's six core themes. The themes were then reviewed in order to determine if there were further intrinsic commonalities of meaning among them that might enable the identification of meta-themes (Tesch, 1987). A sole meta-theme was discovered, but it did not have to be exhibited in further coding or analysis using Google Sheets[®].

In Sheet 2 of Google Sheets[®], the research questions were listed along the top, horizontal axis, and the subthemes and themes were placed down the left, vertical axis. I placed checkmarks within cells in which the subthemes and themes contributed to answering research questions directly.

Rereading contents in the columns of Sheet 1 of Google Sheets[®] and observing interrelationships among the subthemes and themes that addressed each research question in Sheet 2 of Google Sheets[®] prepared me for concisely responding to the study's four research questions presented, as a summary, within the initial section of Chapter 5.

Fieldnotes were reviewed both during subtheme construction and when reflecting upon identified subthemes before the analysis commenced. Fieldnotes were especially valuable in decoding and documenting non-verbal information and along with the use of real-time, clarifying questions—the semi-structured component of questioning—during interviews.

Assuring the epistemological soundness of the study, phenomenological reduction, also known as bracketing, guided the analysis of participant responses: Judgment concerning the natural, objective world was suspended to allow for a focused understanding of the lived experiences of each study participant (Kleiman, 2004).

Conclusions

A phenomenological approach was the best match with the goals of this study since virtually no information was available previously and it enabled the most direct route to uncover the actual thoughts and feelings of gay men who were actively maintaining sexuality exclusivity in their long run relationships. In understanding how and why they do it, a phenomenological method had the power to explore the meaning that participants attached to motivations and behaviors so that the main purpose of the study could be realized.

Younger men, under the age of thirty, were omitted for approval with the intent to avoid confounding factors of high testosterone and societal expectations of sexual exploration. In this way, the vast majority of the potential lifespan of relationships, and of gay men themselves, could be understood free from the effects of the formative years of relationships that typically occur during the 20s. Furthermore, a minimum of five years of duration for relationships was selected based on prior research outcomes indicated that it was approximately two years after the

majority of relationships become open thus representing those minority of gay men who continue to engage in sexual exclusivity beyond what is typical.

Sampling using general Facebook® advertisements presented to the general public allowed for the avoidance of ethical problems concerning potential disclosure of sexual non-exclusivity among men assumed to be exclusive. Likewise, individual men were interviewed, rather than couples, to avoid inadvertent disclosure of sexual non-exclusivity.

Two speech to text software applications were used along with memoing to assure the research participants' responses were captured validly and reliably.

Common subthemes, constituting themes, that arose from participant interviews are presented in the next chapter. The subthemes ultimately link interview responses, vis-à-vis answering the research questions, to the conclusions of the study. Within each subtheme, direct quotes from participants are listed to substantiate findings. The subthemes are presented, nested within their themes. In the Discussion section, subsequent to the findings, where subthemes and themes addressed research questions, discussions took place so that the research questions could begin to be answered. In Chapter 5, the reader will then see the research questions being answered, succinctly, along with the subthemes and themes that pertain to each one in the Summary section. Implications for future clinical practice and research are then integrated into the subsequent Suggestions section.

Chapter 4:

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

Aiding in the establishment of integrated narratives, pseudonyms were used with brief summaries of participant demographics. These demographic summaries are exhibited before the study's findings are presented. The subthemes, nested inside of corresponding themes, that were identified by the analysis of the interview responses from the eleven participants, comprise the finding. Subthemes consist of common units of meaning that were both delineated and elaborated upon by several participants. The subthemes and themes were then consolidated in the subsequent, Discussion section in a manner that began addressing the study's research questions. When the findings in this study highlighted prior research outcomes or relevant theories in psychological literature, those research results and theories were linked with the corresponding findings using critical, written discourse; while this is customary in research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006), prior outcomes and psychological theories were included, in the discussion, for another purpose, so it would be easier for readers to distinguish between prior knowledge and emerging, novel insights.

In accordance with phenomenological research (Baily, 2007), qualitative descriptions of lived experiences are ultimately valued over the number of people reporting similar experiences. Depths of descriptions and frequency of references to similar units of meaning were the main criteria for the selection of subthemes. This means that even if, for example, two participants had provided several contextually detailed references to—examples of—the same units of meaning, a subtheme could have been substantiated; however, in this study, the most referenced units of

meaning all also happened to be reported by many of the participants. In other words, while it is theoretically possible in phenomenological research (Baily, 2007), in this study, no subtheme arose from merely two participants. The six themes and numerous subthemes, falling under each theme, are displayed in no particular order followed by direct quotes from participants.

In cases where additional participants may have contributed responses to a subtheme, yet their responses were highly similar to the ones presented, less descriptive, or not as thoroughly conceptualized by the participant, they were not quoted for a number of reasons. It created denser content. It improved the readability of the findings. Importantly, it assured that I applied adequate bracketing. In this case, *bracketing* refers to how I did not allow similar units of meaning expressed by several participants to then influence my interpretation of some more ambiguously stated content by other participants (Kleiman, 2004).

I was sensitive to the adverse effects of redundancy (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Valuing the generation of a concise document, I opted to only occasionally include quotes, or portions of quotes—that contributed to the establishment of multiple subthemes—along with more than one subtheme. Instead, where units of meaning, exhibited in a participant quote, contributed to more than one subtheme, with a few exceptions, that quote was typically presented after the subtheme the quote supported the most. A benefit of this format included a lack of need for the presentation of extensive descriptions from fieldnotes to assure adequate comprehension for readers. Even when a quote encapsulated units of meaning that contributed to the formation of more than one subtheme—such as when the text and highlight colors were different in MS Word®—the quote was mainly just presented with the one subtheme it supported most strongly. Conversely, in cases when a subtheme had to be described more extensively, for ease of reader comprehension, there were exceptions when one quote had to be displayed with more than one

subtheme; therefore, the anticipated ease of comprehension, for readers, also became a factor in my decisions in how to display participant quotes with the subthemes they formulated.

In the presentation of the findings, the quotes of sentences, as they are presented in this thesis, did not necessarily flow in exact sequence in accordance with actual participant responses. Rather, the quotes, listed beneath each of the identified and stated subthemes, reported the exact sentences spoken by participants; however, sometimes, sentences were not exhibited in the exact succession that they were spoken during interviews. The goals were to report common units of meaning contextually and to do so in a manner that most clearly facilitated comprehension for readers (Creswell, 2014).

At the beginning of interviews, I invited participants to share specific examples of lived experiences to highlight and substantiate their perspectives, so when possible and beneficial, it was important to include portions of their example-descriptions among the findings of the study. In accordance, where this context could aid in fully imparting, to the reader, the actual lived experience of a participant, this additional example-content was provided within quotes. This meant that readers could be provided with a depth of comprehension so that a participant's unique experience could be shared adequately. In addition, when contextual content could be included, example-based or otherwise, and it was deemed valuable for understanding the full scope of the participant experience, sentence-quotes that may not initially seem especially relevant to the reader for the specific subtheme, were included for the sake of imparting gestalts—overall participant perspectives. Deeply understanding each participant's lived experience is the essential purpose of phenomenological research (Hycner, 1999), so I thought it was important to impart wholistic perspectives rather than just fragments of experience, when possible, when espousing specific subthemes.

Each participant quote following a subtheme is in the form of a single paragraph. Each paragraph represents a separate participant. Other than stating participant pseudonyms, to identify quotes, I opted to forgo numbering or introducing any quote since it was thought that there could be no pragmatic gains in doing so.

Analyses then took place in the subsequent Discussion section; participant responses were interpreted and linked to subthemes in meaningful ways, and the subthemes and themes were considered for both their interrelated and mutually exclusive qualities (Hycner, 1999).

The Discussion section of Chapter 4 starts to describe how the subthemes and themes and corresponding participant responses answer the study's four research questions. The study's demographic impressions and limitations are then explored. The chapter ends with a Conclusions section in which I started to consolidate what was learned. Remaining mindful that the findings of this phenomenological study are not generalizable—and readers are therefore cautioned to interpret findings cautiously so that outcomes are not objectified (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006)—in the Conclusions section, gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships are offered lived insights along with associated ramifications that they may decide to consider in concert with their goals.

Demographic Summaries

In assuring anonymity, one-name pseudonyms were randomly selected and used in reference to each of the eleven participants throughout the findings. Their ages ranged from thirty-three to seventy-one. Eight participants were Caucasian, one was African Canadian and two were Asian Canadian. All participants were cisgender gay men.

James. Aged forty years, James categorized his ethnicity as African Canadian. Notably, he was one of three participants who had experience as a parent; at the time of his interview for this study, he was actively raising a child he had adopted with his spouse, husband. James was reared and residing in an urban setting, a city. He rated his masculine gender expression as a 5 out of 7. His interview was conducted via Skype®.

Tony. Aged fifty-one years, Tony categorized his ethnicity as Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, he was raised in a rural environment, a village. Tony rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7. His interview was in-person.

Dave. Aged thirty-five years, Dave was Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, he was raised in a rural environment, a small town. Dave rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7. His interview was via Google Hangouts®.

Samuel. Aged sixty-two, Samuel was Caucasian. He was raised, and living, in an urban setting, a city. Samuel rated his masculine gender expression as a 3 out of 7. His interview was in-person.

John. The oldest participant, John, aged seventy-one, was a Caucasian grandfather. He had been active in parenting his biological children, with his wife, spanning his early thirties to his early fifties. He was raised and living in rural settings, villages. John was distinct as the sole participant living in a rural area. He was married to his male partner. John rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7; however, he claimed that observers might rate it lower. His interview was by Skype®.

Brent. Aged thirty-three years, Brent was Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, he was raised in a rural environment, on a small, isolated island. Brent rated his masculine gender expression as a 5 out of 7. His interview was by Google Hangouts®.

Fred. Aged fifty-two years, Fred was Asian-Canadian. He was raised, and living in, an urban setting, a large Canadian city. Fred rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7. His interview was by Skype®.

Thomas. Aged thirty-eight years, Thomas was Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, Thomas was raised in a rural environment, on the “outskirts of a very small town.” Thomas rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7. His interview was in-person.

Matthew. Aged fifty-five years, Matthew was Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, he was raised in a rural setting, in a “community of less than thirty people.” Matthew rated his masculine gender expression as a 2 out of 7. His interview was by Skype®.

Morris. Aged forty-six years, Morris was Caucasian. Residing in a city at the time of the interview, he was also raised in an urban setting, in a different city. Morris decided to not rate his gender expression. Morris had been married to a woman, for an unspecified span of time, during his twenties. He and his husband were fostering children at the time of his interview, which was in-person.

Edward. Aged forty-eight years, was Asian Canadian. He was living in an urban environment, a large Canadian city, but he suggested he was “the only Chinese [Canadian] kid he knew” raised in a rural setting, a village. Edward rated his masculine gender expression as a 4 out of 7. His interview was by Skype®.

Themes Among Lived Experiences

The six following themes were compiled from distinct, common units of meaning, or subthemes, that participants often described during the study’s fieldwork, their interviews. Each

of the following subthemes introduces a specific insight along with supporting, contextualized quotes from participants—to whom are referred by their pseudonyms.

Subthemes, contributing to each indicated theme, are then integrated with the research literature findings, critically, in the Discussion section that is immediately subsequent to this themes' section. Appendix D provides a visual representation of the study's subthemes, themes and meta-theme that can be referenced concurrently to act as an overview for readers.

Seeking positive affects. Participants considered sexual exclusivity as a path toward rewarding emotions. The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were “belonging,” “intimacy,” “emotional maturity,” “respect,” “security,” “integrity,” and general “quality of life.”

Belonging. Sexual exclusivity enabled the fulfillment of long-held, self-known needs for a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Thomas said,

- As a kid I thought I was an alien. When I took my shirt off, I imagined I was being researched and they'd give me a needle when my view was blocked. I tired out for hockey, but they made fun of me [including even] my dick [size]. My parents could tell I was gay. Everyone could. It was mom that cracked the nasty jokes. Dad was better about it. I thought moving to the city would cure my loneliness since I'd have a boyfriend soon after. All the guys wanted was sex. Duh. I wanted more and never gave up even though it felt like an impossibility. I had the bright idea to find someone [who] actually want[ed] me, the person. When he'd talk about having fun with others it cut deep. The only reason I'd be

with other guys was because he was. He saw how much it hurt me. He says he loved me enough to stop; it made me cry in a great way when he said that. I figured, I wasn't good enough for him at first. The, what, monogamy, or sexual exclusivity helped my self-esteem. He likes me as I am. He never criticizes me.

Matthew said,

- I never felt truly cared for until I entered into this monogamous relationship. I know he loves me completely, completely accepts me as I am. I was a nerd in high school, and I knew I was gay. I felt like an outsider. Being gay meant I couldn't even get support from my family since I had to keep it a secret. I never knew how they might react. There was a good chance it would be bad. When I went to college, I hesitantly joined [the LGBT group at Dalhousie University] and it was okay. I still didn't feel like I belonged though. It was highly political and there were lots of graduate students from different background. They had strong opinions. People seemed to get their feelings hurt a lot. I tried the group at [Saint Mary's University] and there, lots of guys just seemed to want hook ups. People did and people got jealous. Older men, from the community, were allowed to go to meetings, and they were basically trying to hook up with young men. I was more of the cerebral type and a lot of the serious talks became negative. It offered a bit of support but less than I had hoped. It was not worth the drama. I then became involved in [the local advocacy organization, in Nova Scotia, for individuals living with HIV] and equality groups. I continued to feel disconnected. Many people with AIDS at the time were in a very difficult spot. Society was cracking jokes, people were dying, and they were treated poorly. It

was pretty hopeless for them. Some of them were not very careful about the sex they had. They were treated poorly and many were angry and irresponsible. I did not fit in nor feel safe. In other gay community groups, I continued to try to fit in but it never seemed to work out. I tried to get with the bears, as a chaser, but [while I was] hairy, I was not overweight and not part of an open relationship and those factors seemed to exclude me from acceptance there. I wanted to find a place where I fitted in, where I belonged so I focused on groups. It was ironic that gay groups often made me feel like more of an outsider. I found straight people friendlier in general but they didn't quite understand me. I was in two relationships that were open, not because I wanted, but I didn't have much choice. I had given up on wanting to feel a sense of belonging. I resigned myself to being a type of loner. It was after a couple of years in my monogamous relationship that it hit me. I feel completely accepted by [my partner]. There is no doubt that he cares for me. I don't think I even knew that my mother felt that way. I belong in his life and his in mine.

Dave said,

- I stuck out. Like an ugly thumb. Very...expressive...and very short. I tried the Gay–Straight alliance at school but nerds were just tolerated there. The [notorious place where local gay men, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, cruise for sex without commitments] freaked me out. Dating was impossible; just the look on their faces when they'd see me was depressing. I'm, ya know, this way [obese]. I was with an online gaming group that did have a good community vibe and there were quite a few gay and trans people. They found out I was talking to a 16-year-old

and I got in trouble. I was 22 but I know it was wrong. I had to avoid online stuff for a long time. On one channel, I started talking to [partner's name]. He was in North Dakota. We are basically twins. Here look at him. It was instant. We belong together. I don't believe in God but now wonder, maybe there is something [because I found my partner]. He believes in fidelity even more than me if that is possible. It freaks me out how incredible it is to have him...who thinks I am good enough, more than enough. Complete support, always there for me.

John said,

- I was so happy to leave the prison of being married to a woman and the *normal* life. I was so naïve, I thought there would be lots of guys wanting me. Every single time I tried to be involved in groups, there was over-labelling and in-fighting. It was so...parliamentary. It was overly formal. People had their feelings hurt always. I couldn't just be a bear. I had to be an otter or into leather or another category. Each niche thought they were right or better. It was crazy. There was so much drama. My straight friends were good about it! Gay people, nope! I thought it would be easier as a couple, but we were pressured to have sex with others. We were criticized when we just wanted to be with one another. Strangers would just walk up to me and grab my crotch. These days, it would be considered sexual assault. I divorced my wife and thought I'd slide easily, right into the [gay] community. All I heard was about Pride, and I was extremely disappointed by what I found: back-stabbing, competition and the opposite of support. We just decided to put space between the flocks of gays and our relationship. Lesbians are great, since they don't want to sleep with us. One friend is still with a woman and

he actually admires my monogamy and finds it an inspiration. There is one trans person that I talk with. Unlike [gay, male] groups, lesbians are not against monogamy whether or not they do it themselves. The trans woman is open to the idea of it for others despite not knowing if she wants it. The ironic thing is I feel more a part of things when I avoid [gay, male] groups, spend more time with [my partner] and hang out, from time to time, with the few open-minded people. The men in those groups are not open to monogamy, seem insulted by it. If [my partner] slept with other guys, I don't think I'd feel so accepted. I'm enough for him. He likes me as I am, and I am not an easy person. I never felt like this before [I met my partner].

Brent said,

- The outsider always. I had to fake it with gay friends, pretending I was having fun drinking, drugs or the bathhouse. It was superficial and childish. I found guys my age so young and cold. It just made me feel more lonely. I didn't fit in. Not in a million years would I think I'd end up with my professor. I did not think he looked good, but I loved his warmth and maturity immediately. [Partner's name] puts up with my endless chatter, accepts it. When he hugs me, I know I am totally cared for and accepted. He actually loves me. He was only with me from the beginning; I realized I was being stupid, to risk what I have, so I closed it up after the first year or so. He found out [about the early infidelity], and I never felt so alone; I hated myself, thought about killing myself. He was devastated. I still regret it and I'll probably always be angry at myself for it.

Tony said,

- My first experiences with gay sex were messed up. My father basically passed me around for his friends to use [me sexually]. As a teen, I started off getting fucked by two or three guys at a time at their houses. They were fishermen who even fucked skate. I guess I was better than fish. It was what I knew, and I liked it and would seek it out all the time. Group sex was all I knew. With boyfriends, I'd feel something was wrong unless [I was permitted to] have group sex. Sex with one man at a time was boring. I kept feeling alone even with good boyfriends. It wasn't until I had next to no sex drive that it dawned on me that I hardly even touched him outside [of] sex. It was me that fucked up my relationships. My sex drive stopped being very strong, in late 40s. I felt so much closer to my partner right away. I stopped having sex outside the relationship and right away, I felt a sense of being in the right place. Like being with him was like being at home. It was easier to accept my life as it was, and I felt closer to him. I wish I had understood the value of monogamy sooner; I felt lost most of my life.

Edward said,

- It's like I am part of a family I never really had. He is not looking for something that he doesn't get in me.

Intimacy. The majority of participants explained how sexual exclusivity made their relationships feel distinct, or special, so that deeper intimacy could be realized.

Morris said,

- Having sex with just my partner means that no one else shares in it. It's a part of him that no one else experiences. It's a sense of privacy between us that causes deeper friendship, intimacy and closeness.

Matthew said,

- Monogamy makes our sex life special. It's the one thing we don't share with others. It makes me trust him and him me.

Thomas said,

- What I have is a closeness that I've never known before. I can finish his sentences. I feel so much warmth and understanding. A closed relationship feels respectable, even distinguished.

Fred said,

- I used to have friends ask me about my sex life. I stopped answering. What I have with [partner's name] is no one else's business. Sometimes we have inside jokes about it. We sneak away when camping and shag in the woods and when they ask where we were, we pretend we just went looking for firewood. It makes me feel like we are in it together and separate from others in that one important way.

James said,

- Letting him cum in me with no condom requires a lot of trust. It was over half a year before I let that happen. I was determined to avoid disease my whole life. Not using condoms is a type of acceptance. Part of him is literally in me after sex.

It actually makes me really happy. I feel desired and loved. I get so happy about it I almost cry. Sex with [partner's name] feels like...home...there is no risk.

Brent said,

- I've only had actual foreplay and pillow talk with [partner's name]. That kind of sharing of what's on my mind just didn't make sense before. Sadly, [laughs] it used it used to be get it up, get it in, get it out, don't mess my hairdo.

Emotional maturity. The majority of participants reported or implied that sexual exclusivity reflected and/or developed emotional maturity in the relationship.

Brent said,

- It always seemed like my friends were young for their age. Acting like [they were in] junior high [when they were] in their 20s. I stood out and was called the science nerd. [My gay friends were] bragging about who they slept with. My straight buddies were getting married by [the age of] thirty. [My gay friends were] bragging about orgies when my straight friends were committing to their wives. I wanted what my straight friends had.

James said,

- Monogamy makes the relationship more emotionally mature.

Dave said,

- [Sexual exclusivity] helped me realize that one person cannot meet all my needs. And the expectation for that is not good. And no one will get all needs met period. Acceptance of limits is, like, maturity. [Alternatively], the purpose of being in a

relationship is sharing all of life together, having a companion on the journey of life is the reason for a relationship, and sex is just one part of the journey.

Fred said,

- I seek satisfaction, as does he, but the purpose of being together is to share all of life together. Sex is just one part of it. I think most gay men miss the point. It's like they think the sex is the most important thing. Dating, if you didn't rock their world on the first try, they absolutely would not bother talking to you again. The rest of you didn't matter to them. They miss out on growing together, the depth of experiences together, what really matters.

Morris said,

- Having sex with just my partner means that no one else shares in it. It's a part of him that no one else experiences. It's a sense of privacy between us that causes deeper friendship, intimacy and closeness.

Matthew said,

- I like the feeling of security, of having support. I have a strong feeling that we are going through life together. Monogamy made me think about the relationship deeply, almost mine it for other things that are there. It made me realize his needs more and how I might meet those needs, and now, that makes me feel good too. [It's] security.

Respect. A few participants suggested that sexual exclusivity was associated with self-respect and respectful interpersonal behavior. Consequentially, these participants implied that the higher degree of respect made them view themselves and others in a more positive light.

James simply stated,

- Women seem to respect [sexual exclusivity].

John said,

- I want my grandson to respect us. I want to feel normal and to be viewed as normal.

Morris said,

- The idea of all gay men will drop to their knees for any straight man. That idea made us jokes. I was tired of being used. I deserved more, a real relationship. I am proud to say I have a husband. Society respects marriage.

Samuel said,

- I don't want people to think I am unethical. I am more moral than most people I know. I grew up hearing that gays were molesters, out of control sexually. If I bragged about cheating on my partner, it would just make me look bad. Not to judge but that is what people think when it happens. I am a role model and I decided to be the type of man that deserves to be considered a role model.

Security. Several participants said that sexual exclusivity was enriching since it contributed to a sense of security in the relationship.

John said,

- [My spouse before I married him] was going to the gay club with friends and I was very jealous, possessed, a Tasmanian devil. He never gave me reason to be insecure, but it was an insecurity on my part. The person before my 2nd marriage...it was very toxic. [My husband] said you have more baggage than a garbage truck. [My husband] sat me down and was blunt. He promised me 110%, he would never, ever cheat. It took awhile, but if I am tired, I stay in, and I feel secure, fine. I just needed to know things weren't going to change with him and me.

Dave said,

- Monogamy helped a lot. It felt like a foundation, stability. Not ever having to wonder what he is doing. I know he is there for me. There is continuity. I was a Navy brat, always moving. I like things familiar and secure now. I can rely on him; he is there for me, my rock.

Samuel said,

- To have security you need trust and [sexual] commitment builds trust. Guys will say that honesty is more important than the actual sex with others. Okay, but in an open relationship, there are going to be things he is doing that you are not aware about. And you are going to be wondering about those things. There will be risks to what you have with one another happening all the time.

Matthew said,

- I like the feeling of security, of having support. I have a strong feeling that we are going through life together. Monogamy made me think about the relationship deeply, almost *mine it* for other things that are there. It made me realize his needs more and how I might meet those needs, and now, that makes me feel good too. [It's] security.

Integrity. In offering differing descriptions of the construct, integrity was a value, almost all participants, associated with sexual exclusivity.

Edward said,

- I wanted my outside to match my inside. My actions should sync with the man I want to be. Controlling my behavior makes me feel strong, and I have always wanted to feel strong. I used to feel weak, focusing on superficial stuff and just doing what was pushed in magazines and porn. It is easy to go around screwing everything you can but mastering fleeting urges makes me more disciplined, a strong, real man. Not like some horny, out of control, teen. I'm not going to just say I'm not going to harm others and then go ahead and harm them. I want to be trusted, that kind of man, respectable. It's how I always viewed myself, before things got carried away, and now I am living it.

Dave said,

- I know I am a good person and good people just don't disrespect their partners that way: I knew a couple and when I would hang out with my friend and he would sometimes seem kind of off, I'd ask him what was wrong. He once said

that he had just picked up [name]'s buddy from the airport and he was waiting for [name] to come home upstairs. My friend was basically asked to pick up his [partner's name]'s sex tourist and my friend was the first to say gays should have open relationships since that is all that works, he'd almost push it on me, but he was clearly sad many times when [name] would stray. He just used to repeat what he was supposed to think and feel as a gay man but, in reality, it did bother him. What he was saying was not what he actually felt about the situation. I got real about what I wanted and it was my man only sexing with me and so when I am asked about it, I tell the truth and more importantly, I live it by not straying. Not to judge, but one way or another, in open relationships, people get hurt. And how can you hurt the person you supposedly love?

Morris said,

- We are married, made a commitment to only be with one another. I said this man would be the one special one, and if I fuck around then I am a liar. It's as simple as that. I lied to my wife and it made me feel shitty. I decided to live an authentic life and put that bullshit behind me. I was never that kind of guy and I made excuses that I had to cheat because deep down I found men hot not women, but the truth is sneaking around, even then, bothered me, made me feel like a bad person. That kind of behavior hurts everyone.

James said,

- The whole world, well, the vast majority, equates marriage with fidelity. I am married. I decided to sign up. And a big part of why I signed up was because I

believed monogamy would make a relationship more real or of a higher quality. I saw my parents do it and it worked for them. I wanted that. I value it. I guess I have always valued it. It's who I have always been. If I blow some random guy, sure it would be exciting, but it is not the person I want to be, not who I actually am. It would not reflect the man I've become. Sure, I've had my fun when younger. I had my slut stage and I think everyone should have that if they want it. I had fun because I thought it would be good to get it out of my system. I had my fill. I'm not in my 20s anymore. Of course, I am a different person now than when I was a kid. Who I was then meant I messed around but who I am not means I am committed to my husband. I would never want to hurt the person I love. I've developed inner wisdom about the world and how relationships actually work. I use it to guide what I do, and I feel better about myself when I can attain it. Not being open to other men makes me feel sincere or like I am *walking my talk* so to speak.

John said,

- With my wife I was a total conservative prick. I used to be so uptight. It is hard to believe looking at me now. I used to be a different person, pretending to be someone I wasn't. It was a small place, the valley. Everyone knows your business. I went too far to throw people off my track. I even pretended to vote conservative. Sometimes I did, which I regret because they are the ones against gays. I fished. I hated fishing. I wanted people to think I was that straight guy with his traditional wife. I used to criticize gays and gay marriage, make fun of gay people with guy friends so they would not think I was gay. I was bullied in

school since I guess some kids picked up on me. They said I was, ya know, effeminate, so I started to overcompensate and was pretty convincing by the time I graduated. I wanted a family, ya know, the wife, the house, kids, all of it. At that time, the message was clear that fags didn't get that. Fags got beaten up and people thought they were garbage. I wanted a good life. Pretending got me a family but I was often secretly depressed, even suicidal sometimes. I always had to dampen my expressions. I couldn't just be me, express myself naturally. I was acting. Joe Schmo. I knew I was attracted to hot men since I was young but I never cheated on my wife. So why should I cheat on my husband, make him feel bad. It is not me. I really am happy I can be me, totally, now. So I definitely want to respect him and I can look but can't touch. And he is fine with me talking about a guy in an uniform and mentioning how much a guy is hot as long as I don't touch I am still being a *stand up* guy.

Fred said,

- It is a matter of self-identity. Who I am, who I want to be. Who I am on the outside is who I am on the inside. It's about what I want. It's more of an internal thing. Being independent, not following the herd. The herd was doing everything. Listening to my own inner voice. Doing what I thought was right. Being consistent, what feels right. Listening to yourself. Being my own man, my values. Then do what I can to be that man, a man that treats my husband well.

Thomas said,

- I was an activist in university. It was, like, pioneering stuff. Gays were considered perverts by society. In a way, I was a role model. I always dreamed of having a boyfriend and how special and warm it could be, like a heterosexual couple. I viewed monogamy as essential to relationships since it was a contrast to the idea of gay men having sex in bathrooms or late at night on the hill. I didn't want to be another AIDS stat either. I viewed myself as an independent, self directed man. It was hard trying to find a guy in my 20s willing to actually just have sex with me, but I was hell bent on having it. I was black and white about it. The one thing I kept thinking was, "how can I expect to get it if I don't do it myself." When I found out my boyfriend was cheating, I just dumped him. Cut and dry. I never compromised and it worked. I'm certain being true to myself was why I am the only gay guy I know at 38 who has been in a monogamous relationship of almost 15 years. My spouse is just like me. We are both strong men and it makes for some yelling matches, but I am so happy with it after all this time. We don't work against each other, and we are our own men, and in some way, I don't fully understand, I think monogamy is a big part of it. Maybe competition, I mean, if we butt heads and one of us cheated, it would be like a way to say f-you.

Matthew said,

- I lived with my parents for a long time. I left at twenty-seven. They used to have borders and one guy [had] a big dick, and we'd secretly have sex. He really was good. My parents were Catholic. [My siblings] were married, and I was the youngest. I was adopted. I worked at the video store and it has a sex video section

and guys and couples would hit on me. So I had lots of fun with men starting when I was young and always, but I absolutely did not want anyone to know about me. Keeping the secret was important. I lied way more than normal. Lying got out of control. I'd lie about everything for no reason. It was easier to just lie about everything than to have to think about what to lie about. It was fucked up. I was fucked up. I know that now. People used to tell me I was crazy but it took a long time to realize I kind of actually was. Anyway, a guy came onto me at a bar when I was trying to live in Halifax for a few months and it seemed like an opportunity to have a place to live for free. He was nice but [I] was not that into him. I began to have feelings and we had good sex at first. He was exceptional at taking me. He tried to talk to me when I was just living with him but the sex stopped. I just kept lying about where I was or how I felt. A few months in I was back to fucking everyone I could and it went hand in hand with lying. Long story short, he caught on. He asked me to come clean. I denied it all. Then he was chatting with people that told him the truth and I could not really deny it anymore. I agreed to stop fucking other guys. He even offered to open it up if I need to but I said no. I didn't want him to have sex with others. He went back to [the Canadian province of] Ontario to visit family and left me in [the Canadian province of] British Columbia for a week, and I had an Irving guy spend the night. The guy left his truck in parking and buzzed the condo. But the buzzer was connected to [prior partner's name] cell. [Prior partner's name] found out. Then [prior partner's name] made me believe we were going to work it out but he took the time to basically torture me. He purposely hooked up in front of me, get a stranger to

come over. [Prior partner's name] told me to leave, "I'm going to blow this guy." It was messy. But I felt I deserved it. Then [prior partner's name] told me he got warts from me when we met but hid it so it wouldn't ruin the relationship. [Prior partner's name] then sold the car and moved back to Ontario. I begged him to stay but he totally rejected me. It was the worst year of my life. I drank heavily and considered killing myself. I felt so much shame. My niece had moved to [city name] and one day she just said I needed to get my shit together. It was a light bulb moment. I decided to stop lying. I realized that what is good for the gander is good for the gander. It always bugged me, the idea of my man cheating but I was cheating all the time. I grew up about it. The first couple of guys after that I did not do well, but after a few years, I finally learned to stop fucking around. It wasn't easy for me. I had been called a sex addict and that really bothered me. I did not view myself as some sort of sex maniac, but I was acting like one. I knew I drank too much and was maybe an alcoholic, I still drink a lot more than others. I felt shame for being the stereotypical promiscuous gay guy. [Partner's name] is the first guy I've been faithful to and I wasn't totally at first but it's easier now. I would go a long time without hooking up and after I did, I'd feel so bad. Then I realized I have a good thing in [partner's name] and he deserves better. I wanted to become a better man and I've done it. It is probably the first time in my life that I truly like myself. I am proudly monogamous.

Tony said,

- Gays lie so much to hide who they are. I didn't want to lie anymore. It made me feel like a piece of shit. To look into the eyes of the person you love and lie is the

lowest form of life. I was lying to my boyfriends about not having sex with others. They were lying to me about not having sex with others. It was so fake and stupid. It was too much work. Lying is work. It was a huge relief to stop. Then open relationships were tense and felt like [I was] at a distance from them. I got jealous of my female friends who definitely had men that really wanted them. In an open relationship I never felt like I was number one. Confidence is sexy, and when I'd catch a guy in a lie, he'd just look insecure and weak. I didn't want to seem that way. I could always sense a lie. To me, it made guys look wishy-washy. I made a choice to be more desirable man, like a rock by not lying, and being monogamous helped a lot.

Quality of life. Many participants described how they believed that sexual exclusivity could provide a better quality of life and allow for opportunities that gay men in open relationships did not have. Those who believed it would benefit them in these ways suggested that it had done so.

Matthew said,

- A lot of open relationships consisted of an older one with money and a younger leech. At some point, the younger ones would leave and the old guys would be heartbroken. I wanted two incomes for an easier life. It worked out.

John said,

- I appreciate the opportunities we now have compared to historically, or in other cultures. Men used to have to have sex in bathrooms. It wasn't a choice. There was no other option. People in other cultures would kill for what we can have [in

terms of opportunities to live freely without past inequalities based on sexual orientation], and we should value it. We cannot forget our history. Men had to go to bathrooms for sex, but our community needs to wake up. Things have changed. Have a real conversation with your man. We don't *need* to fuck everything on two legs. If you want people to feel comfortable, make the community less judgmental. There are no A [class] gays, B [class] gays, stop that talk. So much dismissiveness in the community. If they'd show respect, stop sleeping around and allow for intimacy, they'd likely be surprised how good it can be.

Edward said,

- [My friend] left his deadbeat, cheating partner of a long, long time. Right away, [both single men] looked for someone else. [My friend and I] had a bad sexual thing once, but soon after, he met someone else. Within months, he [was] moving into this third house, and he was not even 30. I was in awe. They made money flipping houses. Both worked on it together. They opened clothing stores, moved away, and he retired by 40. He was very confident and told [his new partner] that if he cheated, he'd be gone. I respected that. It's true that after I entered into a closed relationship, we worked more together on making money. Combined incomes. It got me out of apartments.

Avoiding negative affects. Participants considered sexual exclusivity as a path away from problematic emotions. The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were “troublesome feelings,” “observational learning,” “feeling used,” and “geriatric loneliness.”

Troublesome feelings. The majority of participants referred to the avoidance of difficult emotions such as jealousy, sadness and anger as either a motivation toward, or outcome of, sexual exclusivity.

James said,

- How cruel would it be if your man said, you know that guy I have been playing with, I'm leaving you for him. I knew a couple where [sexual non-exclusivity] broke it apart. The guy left after nine years to be with his new sex partner. How do you do that to the person you love?

Morris said,

- It hit me like a train. There was a freedom in it. It didn't matter what most guys were doing. I was sick of feeling jealous and angry all the time. If a guy wanted an open relationship, he was not going to be for me.

Dave said,

- He can be gone for over a week, meeting with doctors, having meals. I'd be jealous if we were open. I used to get into arguments all the time in open relationships but it hardly ever happens now.

Matthew said,

- Previous boyfriends made me feel inferior. There would be a new shiny thing in the picture, I'd know because he'd be so excited for no reason. He'd stop listening and be texting all the time. His attention would disappear. Now I feel like I am the

center of attention. Without monogamy, it's not really what people mean when they talk about being in a relationship. It is a completely different experience.

Thomas said,

- We were open at the beginning. He saw how much it killed me inside. I would interrogate him. He'd get defensive. I'd be angry all the time. I'd end up with other men just to see if I could show him how bad it made me feel. [Partner's name] was the one that brought up shifting to a closed one.

John said,

- I wouldn't be able to sleep if he wasn't in bed with me at night. If I was alone in bed knowing that he was sleeping with another man...I think I would throw up.

Fred said,

- There is an ease to it. There is no doubt that he loves me. I no longer feel insecure like I did as a young man. The relief of knowing I don't have to worry about sexual infections anymore is worth it alone.

Observational learning. Seeing others suffer emotionally as a consequence of, extradyadic, sex with people outside of relationships was mentioned when many participants were asked for their motivations to seek out sexual exclusivity.

Samuel said,

- You'd think more people would "get it." People are destroyed when their man cheats. Some guys pretend it doesn't matter, to seem tough, but I bet it does for almost all. I've seen people that never recover.

Thomas said,

- My aunt's husband basically slept with his much younger secretary. She is still alone and angry at him.

Fred said,

- Why chose monogamy? It's everywhere, how cheating cuts a person deep, movies, TV...I watched my friend at school get depressed for years when his dad left. For one second of a thrill it ruins families. I actually think when gay guys in their 50s are still chasing after the next hot guy, it's mental illness. They jeopardize everything they have and often they lose their partners but they keep it up. They may not be able to get it up, but they keep searching for something better.

Dave said,

- My mother embarrassed dad. Ya, she was only 21 when they got married...I get it. Apparently, she wasn't very private about it. I remember, perhaps, the only vacation we went on and she did seem too friendly with a guy. I now understand why dad used to get mad at her for no good reason. I realized, later on, I was sort of neglected that night [of camping].

Edward said,

- Growing up, it's half the songs. [The participant briefly sings a misquote from Carrie Underwood's song, *Before He Cheats*...] One day, he'll think before he cheats. [Chuckles] Movies were made about temporary insanity [concerning

people discovering that their spouses were having sex with others] and, oh yeah, O.J. Simpson! [Laughter]

Feeling used. Most participants referred to sexual exclusivity as a way to avoid being used by other men. Four types of examples were described concerning perceptions of being used: 1) younger men who want free residential accommodations, food and/or drugs; 2) bisexual men in relationships with women who want extra-relational gay sex; 3) gay men who have kinks of a sexually submissive nature; and 4) gay men in open relationships assertively seeking threesomes or orgies.

James said,

- I first remember feelings used by the Rockstar; I call him that since he had a guitar with him the first time. He seemed younger but he might [have been] twenty-five when I was, what was it, twenty-eight, I think. He just wanted to blow me and pushed my hands away from him. He'd just kneel on the floor and almost talk in gibberish while blowing me and calling me daddy. He'd be normal but when he started getting into [that state], it was like he was gone and mostly masturbate. I was only there for Rockstar to get what he wanted. Why I met with him for so long I don't know. He'd go into his trance and almost forget about me. He was just using me. It was the same feeling as when in threesomes and they'd forget I was there. When I decided to commit to my husband sexually, I was so happy to no long feel used.

Matthew said,

- Until I became monogamous, I was just a pawn in other men's fantasies. They were trying to do shit they see in porn and they needed somebody to use. It didn't have to be me, it could have been anyone. I decided to get what I want and not give strangers what they wanted. I mean, it should come from inside not what is expected by society or giving selfish bi guys more sex when they bragged often about having a hot blonde with nice tits at home. I thought, they have wives and what do I have, nothing. He has a wife and I'm supposed to fuck him so he has his cake and eats it too. One day I just woke up. I have always found bi guys hotter, but it was a dead-end street especially when I found myself single and lonely and aging. It didn't get better with gay guys that slept with others. I tried that a couple of times and I still felt alone even though I was in a relationship. It was against the grain to want monogamy, but it worked out. I don't feel like someone else's tool now. There is a depth to it, a mature give and take.

Fred said,

- As a kid, I used to judge older guys that would chase after the 20s crew. I thought it was pathetic, gay men acting like straight guys, just trying to sleep with the youngest possible thing. I left [my partner] because he cheated on me a lot. I found myself in late 30s trying to date guys my age or even older. Most of them were running after the 20s guys. One guy was way too nerdy to handle. Mostly guys my age weren't interested in [me] for some reason. But online, there were lots of horny young men. I was with quite a few that were, ya know, 15 years younger. One I ended up with for over 5 years, he was around all the time; he

basically moved in. Then one day I realized, I was basically paying for all his meals, providing a free place to live. He was never buying the [cannabis we used]. He quit his part time job and had no money. Things were not fair sexually. He was getting everything. I tried to tell him nicely, but nothing changed. This happened with a few guys. I was finally ready for something real so I forced myself to date a different guy my age once a week. It took two years but I am so happy I found [my partner]; he had similar experiences with younger guys. It is so effortless now. There is no work and I feel cared for the first time.

Thomas said,

- I started dating another guy, many times, and he wanted to see where I lived. He had moved from another province and was living outside the downtown. After the last date, I noticed him online, and he was arranging [an orgy in which the participants also used cocaine]. He had just left me after having sex. He didn't know my nick online but I knew it was him. I asked what a ski party was and he wanted people to take cocaine. It was an orgy he was trying to arrange, and he was trying to get people to take cocaine. That was the end of me dating for a long, long time, years. I thought we were getting along well, he was only about 6 years younger, but he was only looking for a better place to live. And he was using sex to get free drugs. I thought I had found a guy that was into me but he was just using everyone for a free place to live and free drugs. After that and all the crap I had to deal with over the years, I just decided, never again! I was determined to only accept a real relationship after that in which I was respected and there were absolutely no other men in the picture.

Morris said,

- We'd go to the [gay] bar and other couples from the Bear's group would be there. They'd grab my cock when I was alone and say they'd take me in the bathroom. To have sex with me when [my partner] was off playing pool. Like, what the fuck?! It's one thing to be asked to swing as a couple but the idea of sneaking around, expecting me to do this behind [my husband's] back, really pissed me off. They have no morals and assumed I didn't either or maybe they just could not see beyond their own kinks or whatever. The more I told them we were monogamous, the more they seemed to want to ruin it for us. They just wanted what they wanted and didn't care about the repercussions. It came to a point where we had no other choice than to distance ourselves from them. We hang out with lesbians and straight people mostly now. They don't want to use us to get off.

Edward said,

- He was like a drug. It seemed like he was straight. I think he was. He was from the hood, Spryfield. Thugs were enticing for me. I'd see him on the street with his girlfriend. He contacted me on Craigslist. He was looking for women to peg him in the ads. But he wanted me to rape him. He wanted to feel dominated and not have a choice and get fucked rough. It went on for about a year and I never could really give him what he wanted. He gave up and left. Another young guy was a powerlifter [of weights], which really turned me on. He would show up at my door at 2 am after drinking with his buddies, and he just wanted me on top of him. Sometimes he'd get frustrated with me and punch a wall. It was bonkers. It was just sex, but he was 20, and I was 40, and he was pushy about me dominating

him. [He] was hot and maybe he had daddy issues, but I still don't know why he wanted me. There were times I pissed off my friends or even my partner since I'd drop everything for this secret boytoy. I lied a lot then. As soon as I started really providing what [that younger lover] wanted, that was it. [He] checked it off his list, and he ghosted me [meaning, he no longer contacted me nor responded to my attempts to contact him]. By that time, I started to have feelings. It was all such a waste of time. All that time I could have been getting closer to my man. I wish I had been more focused on my partner sooner and closed it up a long time ago.

Brent said,

- Even at college, I'd end up being friends with bi men I had crushes on. Then every time I was single, I'd end up sleeping with married men. Bi guys never made fun of my body. Gay guys were brutal. Like retarded children with no filter. "You got bitch tits." Or pointing to my stretch marks and saying, "Eww, what's that?!" Bi guys were always the nicest in how they treated me. They'd talk proudly about their kids. I think bi guys must be the best dads. They were trained to be respectful to women so maybe they just treat anyone they are naked with respectfully. But it would always play on my mind. I'd be fucking a guy and I couldn't stop thinking that he was getting what he wanted sexually then his wife was getting him to pay for trips and the power bill. And I would be left alone after giving him what he wanted and not necessarily getting what I wanted. Then in one email to set up sex, one of them had his recent marriage pictures included. Like he was bragging. It angered me. It was a wake-up call. I was mostly avoiding being treated poorly by gay men, but I wasn't going to continue to just be a tool

for someone else. Then after a few years with my current guy, I realized in order to respect him, I had to stop sleeping with others. I never liked thinking I was being used. In the beginning of our relationship, I was becoming like the men who used me, and I was using others outside the relationship. It was superficial stuff. I wasn't completely valuing what I had at home. I feel like a better person now.

Tony said,

- Sexual exclusivity was the key to having something meaningful and intimate with a man. I wish I had come to this [earlier]. So...I was adopted. My father basically passed me around for his friends to use. As a teen. My mother didn't say a thing. He said if I ever got HIV, I could come home and he'd look after me. I started off getting fucked by two or three guys at a time at their houses. It was what I knew and I liked it and would seek it out all the time. It wasn't until I had next to no sex drive that it dawned on me that I hardly even touched men outside sex. And it was me that fucked up my relationships. I was so mean to my ex; almost laughing at him when he'd talk about monogamy. I feel guilty and regretful that I now have what he wanted with me.

Geriatric loneliness. Many participants thought open relationships were more likely to result in them being alone later in life and wanted to avoid that possibility. They were motivated toward sexual exclusivity in attempts to secure companionship for their senior years.

Fred said,

- Being rational, I don't have kids. I thought, who will be in my life when I am 70. I felt my sex drive waning by 45, and it does decrease a lot no matter what guys

say. I was lucky enough to find [my partner]. I was not about to ruin my chances of him sticking around. I'm not as horny as I used to be, so it wasn't that hard to commit to him.

Thomas said,

- I can see myself growing old with [my partner]. My family doesn't live around here. I don't want to be alone. He caught me leaving the apartment for no reason. I know I must have looked and sounded guilty. I was. It was a wake-up call. In a flash, I committed to it.

Edward said,

- I remember being a teen and thinking I'm not going to be one of those old, bitter queens. Being monogamous is the norm for a reason, it makes for long relationships. Everyone needs companionship later in life. Life is hard enough without being alone, especially at a time when society no longer values you much.

Matthew said,

- It's morbid, I know but, I knew if I failed, did something to make him leave, I'd be sitting there on my death bed full of regret. I had enough cock when I was in my 20s; more of it wasn't worth the danger of the crushing regret later. My uncle was a lifelong bachelor. My sister had to go through his stuff when he died. She hinted he was gay. I think [my uncle] was sad due loneliness at the end. I don't want that.

Factors supporting sexual exclusivity. Participants identified and described six insights into their experiences of support for sexual exclusivity. The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were “keeping sex fun,” “evading sexually transmitted infections,” “reciprocal fear of loss,” “misuse of sex as an unhealthy habit,” “female support,” and “mounting support in the modern era.”

Keeping sex fun. A few participants reported that sexual exclusivity was supported by their partners’ active willingness to help fulfill sexual interests.

Tony said,

- I have kinks, which I won’t get into, but he does whatever he can to help meet my needs in that department. We try to find ways to keep things fresh in the bedroom for one another.

John said,

- Uniforms are a big part of my sexual desire. He’ll surprise me at the door dressed up as a cop. I look forward to Halloween, which is like our Christmas, because he always manages to surprise me with a Roman gladiator or plumber costume, which he keeps a secret until he walks out [of] the room.

James said,

- He used to bottom, ya know, he *was* a bottom, almost exclusivity. He knew I was more into oral, and after awhile, he just gave me what I wanted, stopped asking for me to top. I will take him off guard and pull a new toy out of nowhere, and he

appreciates the thought and effort. Once a year, I might top him just so he knows I am not being selfish.

Evading sexually transmitted infections. A frequently identified motivation for, and benefit of, sexual exclusivity was avoiding sexually transmitted infections. In addition, participants noted the value in avoiding any negative emotional impacts of new sexual diseases spreading between partners.

Fred said,

- [Avoiding] disease was part of being monogamous. It was, for sure, on our minds.

John said,

- The topic of STDs [, also known as STIs,] came up. We discussed it. After coming out, I was a tramp, bareback. So for the first year or two, we used condoms. And we were vanilla. [Then it was] safe to starting have uninhibited sex. There was less drama, less arguments. No worry about catching a disease.

Dave said,

- The boyfriend before him, at the beginning of it, had given me anal warts, and I kept it a secret. When I found him cheating, and he had syphilis then, I let him know. I wasn't going through that again. No sex with others is the only way to avoid it.

James said,

- I don't know how guys in open relationships can fuck without condoms. It would ruin sex thinking [my husband] was just inside some stranger. I hate condoms.

They ruin sex. I got to 40 disease free and really want to keep it that way. Letting [my husband] cum in me with no condom requires a lot of trust. It was over half a year before I let that happen. I was determined to avoid disease my whole life.

Not using condoms is a type of acceptance. Part of him is literally in me after sex.

It actually makes me really happy. I feel desired and loved. I get so happy about it I almost cry. Sex with [partner's name] feels like...home...there is no risk.

Thomas said,

- I wouldn't be able to live with myself knowing I hurt [partner's name] in that way. If someone gave me something, and we were supposed to be monogamous, I'd just walk [away].

Matthew said,

- Yes, the fear of STI was a factor. I used to do volunteer work with [the local advocacy organization for people living with HIV,] AIDS Nova Scotia. I met many people with AIDS. Many people with AIDS at the time were in a very difficult spot. Society was cracking jokes, people were dying, and they were treated poorly. It was pretty hopeless for them. People would pass away, no treatments. A lot of emotional reactions to what was going on. Some of them were not very careful about the sex they had. They were treated poorly and many were angry and irresponsible. I did not fit in nor feel safe. Not everyone that had AIDS was concerned if they transmitted it or not. They were very much marginalized, badly treated. It was a terminal illness and some people were irresponsible. I got

the message that it was easy to acquire, and I did not want to transmit it to a partner. Monogamy was pretty much the only option.

Reciprocal fear of loss. Several participants implied that there was a higher risk of losing their partners if the relationships had been open. The implication was it contributed to their motivation to practice sexual exclusivity in return for their partner also agreeing to and practicing it.

John said,

- I'm not going to lie, there were times I had a chance to have a bit of fun on the side. One guy was pretty much perfect to me. Wore a uniform and I get weak at the knees. But you start that and what's to say my man gets kind of boring compared. Actually, he's more the catch. I couldn't stand it, once at the beginning, when he went to the club with other friends and didn't tell me. All I could see is him with someone else. It was like a nightmare. If we were [in an] open [relationship], he'd be snatched up fast. It was a [perceptual] turning point [for me].

Thomas said,

- I was in an open relationship against my will. He said we were monogamous, but I saw his online account when he was in the shower. He just wouldn't admit it. I almost left when he didn't come home a couple of times. He'd ask me about how big of a deal an architect is. It was one of the guys he was with. I said, "Is that one of your boyfriends?" He didn't say, "no." I had actually saw him talking to an architect online. He still wouldn't admit it. He left me for the architect. If

[partner's name] ever pulled that one, not coming home, and with no good explanation, that would be it, I'd be gone.

Matthew said,

- [At that time,] I was with [prior partner's name], my first relationship. We were friends with a couple that were open to everything. [The junior of the couple] was much younger but they both were open and almost religious about, trying to convert others to their religion of sex with anything that moves. [Prior partner's name] was interested in [the junior of the couple], but [my prior partner] was a *black and white* person. I didn't think he'd ever cheat. He was hardly sexual anyway. Eventually, [the junior of the couple] and [his partner at the time] broke up, [after] nine years. No one saw that coming. One night at the bathhouse, and boom, [the junior of the couple] left [his partner at the time]. I got to know [the junior of the ex-couple's] new man. [The other member of the ex-couple] didn't skip a beat and would hang out with them trying to play it cool like it was okay. No thank you.

Samuel said,

- I've seen it: A couple is together for years and then one finds a hotter guy. He leaves, abandons his partner. Ten years later, my buddy, [name], never fully recovered. I must know of five times it's happened. It's a shame how guys give up on the dream" [-life of sexual exclusivity].

Misuse of sex as an unhealthy habit. Several participants compared sex outside a relationship to an addiction, compulsion or bad habit that works against the overall quality of

life; therefore, wanting to circumnavigate the bad habit of sexual compulsion supported the maintenance of sexual exclusivity.

Morris said,

- I hesitantly joined [the LGBT group at Dalhousie University] and it was okay. I still didn't feel like I belonged though. It was highly political and there were lots of graduate students from different background. They had strong opinions. One opinion they all seemed to have was sex was for pleasure, recreation, and that is it. Sex and love were separate and totally unrelated. That was not true for me. All you had to do was see how sex was combined with other addictions. Lots of gay men told me they had never had sex without drinking or smoking weed first. Never had sex sober. Dating, guys would pull out [an inhalant intended to dilate blood vessels thereby making orgasms more intense] just before they came. It grossed me out. Like they were chasing a high and a normal orgasm wasn't enough anymore.

Brent said,

- I started with online porn by 16. I'd jack off 5 times a day. I scraped by in high school. First thing before school, I'd be watching hard core sex at seven [am] in the morning. I was having sex with the janitor at school almost every day. When I moved for college it really got out of hand. After being online looking for sex for two or three days straight, maybe having had sex with ten guys. Not even leaving my apartment. No sooner would one guy leave would I be back online looking for the next one. It was when I was losing entire days in a row to it that I realized

what it was. There was no sex addiction groups at the time at least not here. It was AA that turned me around. Wanted to feel a connection, a real one, and sex was just a series of failed attempts. My cock would hurt maybe even friction rash and be swollen, and I'd still be looking for more. Monogamy was suggested [and at the time,] it seemed like a radical concept. It didn't happen right away.

Dave said,

- My older brother is gay. I used to look up to him. It was fun at first, his stories of debauchery. Kind of exciting. I had a bit of fun but always wanted a monogamous thing. I became worried about him. Listening closely, it became evident he was...having sex with a different guy every day. It scared me in a good way. I didn't want that kind of life.

Tony said,

- Men use sex compulsively as a drug to escape, for pleasure and the people are just props. It ruins lives. I saw a lot of people die.

Fred said,

- It was a relief, deciding to stop being a whore and get serious about one man. I no longer had to keep trying to figure out what the guys wanted. With one guy, you get to know that. Looking back, I used to be almost manic. I was in a desperate pattern, pathetic, to try to figure out how to make some random guy happy so he'd want me. Wow, so fucked up when I think of it. [Laughter] Ya, "I can give you the best BJ of your life!" I'd say to lure in married guys. Then they'd go home to their wives. Their poor wives.

Female support. The support that participants experienced for their sexual exclusivity was described as generally coming from women.

Edward said,

- Gay guys seem out for themselves whether or not they are in relationships. I've overheard a couple talking about who was going to bag a guy first, and it turned out to be [my partner with whom they wanted to have sex]! If we hang with a straight couple or lesbians, they seem to look up to us [for being monogamous]. The guys joke around in good fun but the women, or even my trans friend, a trans woman, she thinks it's great. I can tell she is kind of jealous of what we have, my trans friend.

Fred said,

- A friend said, "If I was gay, I'd definitely be a [whore]." I asked why, and he said it's hard for [heterosexual] men to get sex even if he has a lot going on. Two men, they both are wanting it all the time, no one is saying no all the time. His wife overheard and told him to shut up.

James said,

- Lesbian friends told us, jokingly, that we are honorary lesbians—except we are lucky that we actually *have* sex in our relationship.

Thomas said,

- Straight guys will, kind of, seem more comfortable when they hear we are committed; however, even they will push it a bit and flirt or get touchy at a party,

drinking. If anything, their wives get less touchy feelie after they find out we are committed. Women seem to respect it.

Mounting support in the modern era. A few participants reported a recent change in attitudes toward gay relationships among a portion of the general public; they thought that some people in society were starting to shift their thinking toward believing it might be possible for gay men to have sexually committed relationships, especially in association with marriage. While a few participants described this subtheme, others did not experience it.

Samuel said,

- I do think things are getting much better quickly. Gay marriage did a lot to normalize committed relationships between two men. TV series and movies often show married guys committed to one another. Modern Family and Grace and Frankie. I like on Grace and Frankie how they entertained the idea of having a threesome but couldn't. Showed the reality of jealousy. People see that and it has an effect.

John said,

- I have a grandson and [sex outside the relationship] doesn't fit with that image. I want my grandson to respect us. He was at the marriage. It was great. They won't have to have this conversation in 50 year's time. It won't be called gay marriage just marriage. We can't forget our history but don't let it define us. It seems to be taking gay guys the longest to move on from the past. There aren't the same excuses now for gay men to be sneaking around and lying to get sex. I tell you one thing, I never thought I'd be saying I am married to a man, not in this lifetime

so I value what I have. I say he is my husband every chance I get. People know that marriage means monogamy; being faithful was one of the vows.

James said,

- A student in one of my classes [at a university in British Columbia], maybe 21, was talking about how he was going to get married to a good Jewish [male] doctor, adopt two Vietnamese kids and have a house by thirty [years of age]. And how he had no time to waste on Plenty of Fish because it was only about hooking up. I was amazed. He was serious, not kidding at all. There is no way I would have heard that even ten years ago.

Threats to sexual exclusivity. Participants identified and described two insights into their experiences of threats to sexual exclusivity. The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were “risky imagery” and “anger.”

Risky imagery. Many participants indicated that visual stimuli of a sexual nature, specifically pornography, was the main risk, at least in theory, making sexual exclusivity harder to maintain.

Tony said,

- In the beginning, we were not monogamous. We didn’t talk about it at first, but I think we both sort of assumed the other one was being monogamous. Or we put it out of our heads, didn’t think much about it. Well, that is what I did anyway. I can’t speak for him. Friends would show me what guy they were having fun with on hook up sites; sometimes I was jealous of the fun they were having. Sometimes, I would do it too. I would feel guilty. It happened twice, I think, even

after we agreed to be monogamous. Lying like that made me think I was a shifty whore. I'd watch some porn while [my partner] was at work then end up on a site, and before I knew it, [I would have sex with another man]. I had to stop watching porn.

Matthew said,

- Porn was my first exposure to gay men. It's how most start out. And it is so twisted and fake, not a reflection of reality. You keep trying to imitate what you see or looking for a guy with a perfect body and feeling bad you don't look that way. When I see hot guys it does make me, briefly, think of how it would be fun to have sex with a stranger. I have purposely diverted my eyes when I see a cop. I decided to stop watching porn completely since I noticed I'd start chatting with guys online sexually after watching it.

Brent said,

- I had to stop using porn. There was no way I could have been monogamous if I had kept using it.

Dave said,

- I used to watch videos of local guys on [a website for gay men to quickly access strangers for sex,] Squirt. It was how I'd jack off after work. Or sometimes, I'd hunt the best guys down and have sex with them. [My partner] was right to shut that down. He knew we couldn't have a closed relationship [with me] using [that website] despite [us originally] meeting there. He was right.

Thomas said,

- The guys at the bar would purposely show me pictures on [a mobile-phone-based, social application for gay men,] Grindr to try to lure us into a threesome. It never worked. It pissed me off. I have to admit it did make me think of sex with other guys though.

Edward said,

- We are visual beings. It's when I see a man jacking off...my brain short circuits. I have to stop myself from looking that up. If I don't, I'd end up on some chat line or end up in some [stranger's] living room [for the purpose of sex].

Anger. Anger at partners was a risk for maintaining sexual exclusivity for many participants.

Dave said,

- It took a while to grow up. I did get with other men at first. I found myself getting mad at [partner's name] and the next thing I knew, [I] was on [a website for gay men to quickly access strangers for sex,] Squirt. It took me time to make the connection. He wouldn't answer my questions and it drove me nuts then I'd fuck some random guy even though I felt guilty afterwards.

Tony said,

- I thought about revenge sex. I'd fantasize about some big black guy pounding me on our bed every time I'd be insulted. I set it up once. The guy came over, but I didn't open the door.

Fred said,

- If [partner's name] wasn't going to spend time with me anymore, I thought, "Why should I go without [sex]?" I knew it was either lose him or we had to start having real conversations.

Morris said,

- We started to compete without even knowing it was happening. Little Mr. Know-it-alls. I saw it and decided to just let him win. It doesn't even matter. Before that I'd end up flirting heavily at parties or even at work and imagining how it would hurt him [, if I had sex with other men].

Rigidity in beliefs. Participants frequently demonstrated and discussed their cognitive resolve in contrast with flexibility or openness in their thinking concerning gay, male relationships and sexual exclusivity. The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were "relationship equates to sexual monogamy," "the idea of attentional control," "promiscuity bias," and "having no regrets."

Relationship equates to sexual monogamy. Many participants referred to a binary perspective regarding statuses of relationships with sexual monogamy being the core determining factor. In other words, sex was valued as the essential defining criterion in relationships. Many participants differentiated between who was considered their partners, spouses or husbands and all others based entirely on with whom they had sex. This was consistent with the inclusion criteria, in this study, that defined the starting point of relationships as when sexual exclusivity begins regardless of whether or not they had been with their present partners when sexual exclusivity was established.

John said,

- I committed to him. We got married and that's it. You are either all in or not. There is no point if he is going to be having sex with [other men]. That is too complicated. Emotionally, it makes everything simple, not having to have a battle in your head.

Fred said,

- Ultimately, the only thing that really distinguishes him from every other man is he is the only one I have sex with. He'd only be a roommate if he had sex with others. This way there is no confusion.

Morris said,

- I had vows to my wife, and I felt shitty when I cheated on her. I was done with lies. It really bothered her. [She was] saying our relationship wasn't real. I did love her, but it was more of a friendship not, you know, man and wife sort of thing. After 20 some years, I wasn't about to do that again. Plus, I had a chance at a real relationship...I mean, being true to who I was...I am. Now I have what I want. It wasn't easy to find someone to put up with me. It would be stupid to throw that away.

Matthew said,

- People like to have their cake and eat it too. I've been an accountant for a long time, and one thing I learned from business is opportunity cost. You give up something to have something else. I value what I have. I am all in. I don't want to

feel like I've done something wrong, and I'm not going to risk a good thing just for some *strange*.

James said,

- I signed up. Besides, not screwing around, not focusing on just sex, allowed me to get to know him better, deeper, as a person. Without conflicting emotions, I could go deep. It's not superficial, based so much on looks. It's about the person. Full commitment made it possible to trust and to feel intimate, to go beyond the surface and really understand him. There is no [other] way I could feel this close. It's what a relationship is all about. It's not all roses and rainbows but at least it has substance.

Thomas said,

- If I knew he was sleeping around, I don't know if I'd stay. It wouldn't be my definition of a partnership. Either you are with someone or not. A woman can't be sort of pregnant. She is or she isn't. A few things are like that in life. A relationship is. Not to judge others and they can do what they want, fine, but I do think they are fooling themselves; there is no clarity in that approach.

The idea of attentional control. Some participants claimed that sexual exclusivity helped to maintain the primary focus on their relationships rather than outside of the relationship. The partners' attention was not unwantedly dispersed toward others, or outwards, but rather, it was focused on the primary partner.

Dave said,

- Since I am the only one he has sex with that means he has to keep chasing after me if he is horny. I continue to see him desiring me. [It] keeps him coming back even when he has to travel all of Ontario selling medical equipment. He can be gone for over a week, meeting with doctors, having meals. I'd be jealous if we were open. I know he'll be back because I am his sex toy. And I do whatever I can to please him that way so he will come back.

John said,

- I get sick of him sometimes. He drives me crazy. Sorry about crazy...you know what I mean. We were so active during that time with travel and opening-up the flower shop in [city name]. [We were] almost always together and working 60-hour weeks. It was only when other gay friends would brag about their threesomes, or even try to lure us in, or show pics of hot guys. I did almost mess up. I was annoyed with his inflexibility at the shop. Not open to my ideas there. I purposely spent most of the week away from him. I started to fantasize about someone I met, and I knew I had to go create a date night environment. I then swallowed my pride. I cooked him his favorite meal. Complemented him. Rubbed him the right way. I knew it would work, and for us, sex can clear the air. It pressed the reset button. Right after we made love, we knew we were going to have to sell the shop.

Thomas said,

- There are times when people grow apart for a few months, busy at work or what not. Or if one of us is mad at the other. When one of us is in the mood, maybe we have to work something out before the other is okay with it. He is not always easy to get along with, so stubborn. But I think that makes us closer, having to solve problems together before we get back into the sex zone again.

Promiscuity bias. Many participants believed that society generally expected that gay men in relationships were having extradyadic sex. In accordance, these participants believed that they were, symbolically, helping to disprove the stereotype of gay promiscuity in their decisions to maintain sexual exclusivity. While my use of fieldnotes helped me to understand this phenomenon—since my memos reminded me that these participants all used a tone of voice reflecting a sense of pride while relaying their insight—the possibility of internalized oppression is explored, through discourse, in the subsequent Discussion section.

John said,

- I was faithful to my wife so why wouldn't I be faithful to my man? People assume gay men cannot be monogamous. It annoys me. One of my old friends says gay men are lucky since they are allowed to have sex with others whenever they want. He says this even after the four of us have been meeting up for years as couples, and we keep saying we are monogamous. The implication that I can't control myself because I am gay just makes me more determined.

Samuel said,

- What makes it harder to not cheat? Society expects men to be loose, and when two are together they think there are no brakes. Gay culture celebrates how sex and love are not joined. I always thought that was shallow. I take pride in busting those ideas.

Fred said,

- There is often some truth to stereotypes. Gay men do tend to have a lot of sex partners. Good for them. But with any stereotype, there are lots of people that don't fit into it. I always just wanted one good man. I heard the gay jokes, gay...Got AIDS Yet? They were terrible, but they just confirmed what I wanted for myself. Usually it's gay men that say something, assuming that we swing. I make sure they know we don't and never did.

Edward said,

- It gets awkward at gay parties. At the end of the night, after drinks, couples often wander off together. Leave. When there is a kid there, early 20s, I feel good that he gets to see that we go home alone.

Having no regrets. A few participants paused, and looked puzzled, after being asked if they could describe any negative aspects, or perceived losses or trade offs, regarding their experiences of sexual exclusivity. Matthew said, “That is a strange question.” In these interviews with James, Morris and Matthew—sensing their discomfort with the question—I proceeded to the next question without rephrasing the standard question, without tapping into the available, semi-structured mode of inquiry. Brent and Dave simply indicated that they did not know what

to say or how to answer the question. They both replied, "I don't know." After I reframed the question, to assure they understood it, Brent and Dave remained silent for several seconds thus indicating that they were done speaking about the idea of problems with sexual exclusivity. In contrast, represented in the subsequent quotations, other participants offered details in their descriptions of this common insight concerning having no regrets for having maintained sexual exclusivity.

Fred said,

- It's not like I hadn't had sex with tons of guys. Straight folk fuck around in their early 20s then they decide to have more depth, an intimate, meaningful relationship. I've seen straight guys stop having sex with others. I have even seen them shift gears within a few months. I thought, "why not gays?" Men are men. One-night stands and quasi-relationships are part of being a young man so I did that. I was just as horny as the next guy. After a few years though it becomes clear that it's empty or unhealthy. You end up feeling lonely and feeling sad. You keep enjoying getting off and seeing what it's like to sleep with a black guy or a middle eastern guy. But there does come a time when you've seen every kind of cock and every kind of body and done just about everything possible sexually. But you are still lonely. Then you find yourself spending the entire day, on the web, looking for cock. Or blowing three strangers off in a row. I once found out that I blew a father and his son in the same week. Gross, it almost felt like incest to me. I am so glad that is behind me. When you are in the kind of gay lifestyle, that society criticizes, you end up finding yourself being a total whore several days a week, and you realize you must be addicted or nuts or something. It's definitely an

addiction. I watched almost all my straight buddies...ended up focusing on making lots of money while my gay friends were shifting from one retail job to another, spending outrageous money on expensive t-shirts or coke. It was so dumb. It was pathetic and [I] wanted more [for myself in life]. I wanted more and committing to one man was the path for me. Isn't it the only path for a real relationship? Is that what you found? [I commented that I could not respond to the question]. Okay, [I am] not judging others, but what I am *trying* to say—sorry I ramble, just ask [partner's name], I am so like that, I don't know how he puts up with me, but I put up with him too—is I know I didn't miss out on anything. Actually, chaos is the only thing I missed out on. Best decision of my life!

Edward said,

- [I have] no regrets, [there was] no missing out [due to our sexually exclusive].

Thomas said,

- Yes, I see hot men and briefly think, "I'd so like that on me." It is brief. I know one moment of pleasure cannot even come close to what I have with [my partner].

John said,

- No. At the beginning and for a few years, doubt would linger in my mind, maybe a little bit. Not for long before passing. We were so active during that time with travel and opening-up the flower shop in [city name]. [We were] almost always together and working 60-hour weeks. Honestly, I didn't have much opportunity to doubt things. It was only when other gay friends would brag about their threesomes, or even try to lure us in, or show pics of hot guys. But threesomes

weren't really my thing. I never liked them much since I was usually the one left out at some point. That always seems to happen in threesomes, someone being left out and feeling inferior. I was smart enough to know that people talk a lot of smack too. I know it's not nice of me, but they would show me pics off a hook up sites, and I'd think, "yup, he's hot, but I didn't have to get warts scraped off my holes and they did." They'd laugh about it, or say it was just part of being gay, and it was no big deal. I dumped some of those people. It was hard to not *look down* on them, but I tried to be openminded. It seemed like they had no self-respect. I have no regrets not having been like them. It was hard to continue to be their friends. I believe that all but one...I continued to be friends with... eventually grew up. Or at least stopped the hard drugs. Honestly though, they all seem quietly sad or bitter now. Too old to get the hot guys but also starting to realize, maybe, hopefully, that it's not all about that. Quite the opposite really. The one in a relationship seems the loneliest. I don't think he learned how to communicate with his partner. They are just roommates and hardly see one another. I think people get into bad habits. It's hard to break away from it after a decade or two passes. I'm not perfect. Who is? I can tell you, I like myself and love my life. My man is sublime! Not because he is hot. He isn't. Nor am I. But he feels like home. I feel lucky or blessed because I was smart enough to not go that other route.

Tony said,

- Humans are always about greener pastures, right? Is that what you have found? It doesn't take long to discover that there isn't anything better. It's what you put into it, mature effort, that counts.

Decision-making toward sexual exclusivity. Participants, sometimes spontaneously, referred to particular details of their decision-making processes regarding how they, ultimately, concluded that sexual exclusivity was authentic, meaningful and purposeful for them (Hoffman et al., 2019). The associated subthemes, introduced below, that contributed to this theme were “internal locus of control,” “monogamish initiation,” and “rapid commitment to sexually exclusive behavior.”

Internal locus of control. In association with sexual exclusivity, many participants described a gradual shift toward an internal locus of goals based on personal values and away from what others wanted or expect for participants. For some, this type of autonomy was fostered relating to their value of sexual exclusivity, at some point, before they committed to it behaviorally.

Fred said,

- I woke up and was laying in bed thinking, “Why do I care about the stories in magazines or what my friends say they want?” Trying to look a certain way doesn't get me what I want. It made me unhappy, feeling like I fall short. I'm not sure what I was proving, the point of trying to look like guys in porn. And I thought, there must be others like me that want a monogamous relationship. I am

my own man. I not going to be used by men anymore. I am going to live the life I want.

Matthew said,

- Not to look down on others, but I was in my MBA and working as an accountant. I didn't fit in. It was hard to relate. I wasn't interested in shopping all the time or wearing the right t-shirt. I see older friends in their 50s still wearing the Hubley shirts. I'd see [the drug] coke at a party and make my Irish goodbye. I didn't have any interest in threesomes or the bathhouse. Why did I ever do it, because I was gay and that is what you were supposed to do. Thirty and single, with my own house. I walked in on a good friend stealing from me. That was it. I just kept dating until I found a decent guy with my values. He cheated on me. I just didn't give up on what I wanted.

James said,

- At Saint [Francis Xavier University,] I was selling diamonds and rings when my classmates were asking, "Do you want fries with that?" I was simply going to get what I wanted, and I knew it from a young age. I was going to be upper class and have a faithful man. I'm sorry but being closeted was the best thing for me. There was no pressure to, ya know, do gay *things*. I never had the strongest sex drive anyway, average at best. The first [boyfriend] wanted to drink and go to the club; I just wanted to dance slow with him, more the romantic type. [Partner's name] said he would move to Canada if I would marry [him]. I asked a couple of friends what they thought, and they said you only live once, and life is short. I came out a

week before my marriage. [Laughs]. They all said, “Ahh, ya, we know [you are gay].” The funny thing is part of being in the closet was so I could play sports without being given a hard time. After I got married and they saw my husband, it turned out there were two other gay guys on the curling team who came out to me.

Edward said,

- I’d think about it sometimes. At first, it was almost like figuring out why I would turn hot guys down, feeling a like a rebel to not do what was assumed of me. I eventually knew it had to do with just being the person I was, my personal ideas.

Monogamish initiation. Several participants indicated that they were monogamish (Savage, 2013) with their current partners when their relationships commenced. Those who were monogamish, in the beginning of the relationship, reported increased awareness of how sole or infrequent incidences of sexual non-exclusivity had harmed the relationship or had potential to do so and how the monogamish behavior had increased their conscious value of sexual exclusivity.

Dave said,

- There was a transition away from old sex partners. They’d contact me and I’d mostly say I was in a relationship. It was just the beginning few months and maybe two times I decided to have one last romp. After a couple of discussions about monogamy, I knew I was lucky to find someone with my values and that for the sake of the relationship I had to stop.

Brent said,

- It was strange getting used to going a week or two without sex. Although I was committed to monogamy, I'd slip up from time to time. Watch some porn while [partner's name] was at work then end up on a site and before I knew it, there were times I'd have sex with another man. I didn't want to risk losing him. The few times it happened I felt like a hypocrite. I knew cheating would be an easy habit with potential to destroy everything. I had to stop watching porn. I haven't watched porn or slipped up since the first year.

Edward said,

- One guy showed up at my door while [my partner] was in the shower. [My partner] asked about him and made fun of me. About a month after it, it was on my mind. The guy at the door kind of was into me. I went over to explain and he asked to have fun one last time. I felt so bad. I basically used him, a guy that had feelings for me. It reminded me of all the emotional turmoil of the lifestyle I was leaving behind. I then channeled all my energy into the relationship. It's a weight off my shoulders. The gay drama is a thing of the past.

Tony said,

- I was laid off just a few weeks after we got together. I am the type that always needs to be doing something and boredom led to porn and wanking. I'd jump [my partner] as he entered the house. There was a local guy...that uploaded videos and I totally screwed up. I told [partner's name]. He'd say something nice and we'd be laying on the bed where I fucked the stranger. I couldn't keep it to myself. It

nearly ended the relationship. It was not worth it. [Partner's name]'s ability to forgive me made me value him more and value monogamy more. It made me look at myself and how out of control I had been in all areas, even when I'd say stupid things without thinking.

Samuel said,

- The first few months of a relationship, you just can't get enough. Then reality sets in. I was weak a couple of times when we were butting heads trying to find our places in the relationship. We were competing and not realizing it. It wasn't until I cheated on him a couple of times that I truly got it: Brief pleasure with another was not worth the lack of trust, anger at myself, the regret, the guilt and paranoia that he was doing the same. It made me feel weak and like a slut. Then after a year or two of not cheating, I came to understand I was not missing out on anything.

Rapid commitment to sexually exclusive behavior. Whether before or within their relationships, many participants described how sexual exclusivity followed a rapid, highly conscious and explicit decision to commit to it behaviorally. Rather than spontaneously occurring, or it necessarily resulting from a conversation with a partner, these participants said it was a clear, personal choice, happening rapidly, to commit behaviorally. Some reported the eureka effect—also colloquially understood as an *Aha! Moment* (Grierson, 2015).

Matthew said,

- It was a light bulb moment. I decided to stop lying. I realized that what is good for the gander is good for the gander. It always bugged me, the idea of my man

cheating, but I was cheating all the time. I grew up about it. I decided to stop watching porn completely since I noticed I'd start chatting with guys online, sexually, after watching it.

Thomas said,

- I was an activist in university. It was like pioneering stuff. Gays were considered perverts by society. In a way, I was a role model. I always dreamed of having a boyfriend and how special and warm it could be, like a heterosexual couple. I viewed monogamy as essential to relationships since it was a contrast to the idea of gay men having sex in bathrooms or late at night on the hill. I didn't want to be another AIDS stat either. I just decided, never again! I was determined to only accept a real relationship after that in which I was respected and there were absolutely no other men in the picture.

Fred said,

- I woke up and was laying in bed thinking, "Why do I care about the stories in magazines or what my friends say they want?" Trying to look a certain way doesn't get me what I want. It made me unhappy, feeling like I fall short. And I thought, there must be others like me that want a monogamous relationship. I am my own man. I not going to be used by men anymore. I am going to live the life I want.

Tony said,

- Confidence is sexy, and when I'd catch a guy in a lie, he'd just look insecure and weak. I didn't want to seem that way. I could always sense a lie. To me, it made

guys look wishy-washy. I made a choice to be more desirable man, like a rock by not lying, and being monogamous helped a lot.

James said,

- When I decided to commit to my husband sexually, I was so happy to no longer feel used [by other men for sex].

Morris said,

- It hit me like a train. There was a freedom in it. It didn't matter what most guys were doing. I was sick of feeling jealous and angry all the time. If a guy wanted an open relationship, he was not going to be for me. I decided to live an authentic life and put that bullshit behind me. I was never that kind of guy, and I [had] made excuses that I had to cheat because, deep down, I found men hot not women, but the truth is sneaking around, even then, bothered me, made me feel like a bad person.

Discussion

In this section, the subthemes constituting the six themes of the study were both interconnected and consolidated in meaningful ways to help readers comprehend the insights relayed to me during fieldwork. The Discussion section thoroughly examines the most commonly referenced and contextualized units of meaning in the study—which were further integrated in the Summary section of Chapter 5 where the research questions are answered.

Where possible, relevant information from Chapter 2 was analyzed critically in conjunction with the study's findings and vice versa. Some of the participant insights were foreshadowed by previous, scholarly impressions, and my predictions, yet just as many were not. In providing a comprehensive analysis of unpredicted phenomena, sometimes, academic writing and perspectives, novel to this point in the study, had to be utilized and cited.

Additionally, contributing to context and providing boundaries among interpretations, “demographic impressions” and “study limitations” were presented at the conclusion of the Discussion section, which ends Chapter 4.

Theme-based analysis. The choices participants made, in line with their *true selves*, based on their individual experiences (Tanzer, 2008), both guided them toward, and helped them to maintain, sexual exclusivity.

When I was endeavoring to understand how sexual exclusivity was maintained, participants invested significant response time, following related interview questions, into descriptions of highly conscious shifts in their perceptions of their own motives and behaviors relative to sexual monogamy. Participants explained that the initial decision-making, itself, was an important factor that had effects that continued throughout their relationships. This was true for those having experienced a gradual process of valuing personally meaningful goals over external expectations (Marcia, 2010)—captured by the “internal locus of control” subtheme—and for those who experienced sudden commitments to sexually exclusive behavior, which was captured by the “rapid commitment to sexually exclusive behavior” subtheme. Not only did sexual exclusivity come about due to conscious decisions, it was, apparently, also maintained in association with decisions made years antecedent. In applying the existential framework of this study, for which choice-making is a central tenet, these participants reportedly committed to

sexual exclusivity, despite its anomalous status relative to homonormativity, because sexual exclusivity was authentic to their identity—based on their prior experiences (Reynolds, 2006). The “having no regrets” subtheme may have been consistent with existential theory: Participants indicated that based on their experiences, after they committed to sexually exclusive behavior, they did not believe anything of value was given up or negative about their new lifestyle. They suggested they had been correct in their original impressions, based on their individual lived experiences, that it would help them to “seek out positive affects” and avoid negative ones. They indicated that their choices were based on authentic, internal values, developed from their life experiences rather than from societal expectations; apparently, the ongoing evolution of their being (Tanzer, 2008) after their commitment to sexual exclusivity maintained synchronicity with their original choices because they did what was right for them, as individuals, at least five years prior; they reaped anticipated rewards (Ornish, 2019) so that they did not need to make different choices, such as for extradyadic sex, as time passed. Reflecting on his sexual exclusivity, Fred offered his emphatic evaluation, “Actually, chaos is the only thing I missed out on. Best decision of my life!

While relationship agreements have been repeatedly examined in research exploring gay male relationships (Adam, 2006; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Charles, 2002), this study draws attention to the effects of other types of conscious decision-making. Where relationship agreements describe decisions resulting from partners collaborating and communicating to identify the terms and bounds of open relationships (Bonello & Cross, 2010)—finding consensus in what they think is acceptable extradyadic sex—participants in this study tended to describe individualized decision-making concerning their maintenance of sexual exclusivity. It is not possible to conclude that gay men in open relationships are more apt to make decisions

interpersonally, or by seeking out external information, but I was surprised that the participants did not refer to having special discussions with their partners leading up to their decisions to live with sexual exclusivity. In contrast, there is evidence that heterosexuals commonly construct relationship contracts (Doll, 2012) that stipulate agreements espousing sexual exclusivity.

In association with their decision-making toward sexual exclusivity, many participants described a gradual shift toward an internal locus of goals based on personal values and away from what others wanted or expected for them, the “internal locus of control” subtheme. Some participants explained that a sense of independence was fostered relating to their value of sexual exclusivity. They indicated that there was a shift in their perception toward personal agency and deciding what they wanted rather than being influenced by others within gay culture (Giffney, 2004) and by society as a whole. Perceptual shifts were described as a process in which participants, such as Fred, revisited ideas such as becoming one’s “own man” or thinking that attempts to imitate the men they had viewed in pornography were pointless.

Responses constituting the “internal locus of control” subtheme included criticisms about how individuals generally do what is expected by society (Flores, 2017). A few of these participants referred to their resistance to the effects of images and stories—in real life, the media, magazines, movies, television and other sources of entertainment—that reportedly promoted how gay men were supposed to act in contrast to how they wanted to act independently. It had been noted, within queer theory (Downs, 2012), that some gay men had been avoiding shame with a bias against gay promiscuity. They were not conforming to homonormativity (Bartholomay, 2018; Robinson, 2016), which rather than accommodating sexual exclusivity actively promotes sexual freedoms including open relationships (Adam, 2006; Whitton et al., 2015). Rather than endorsing a range of choices and creating freedom, such as is

the case in feminist theory (Jackson & Scott, 2004), homonormativity can be oppressive since it, essentially, only seeks to reproduce objective norms within a minority for the sake of identity validation, which is, in itself, a subordinating attitude (Signorile, 2015). Instead, aligned with Marcia's (2010) *identity achievement* status of development, many participants in this study claimed that they were forgoing groupthink and adhering to personal values regardless of sexual orientation. In offering his insight into the subtheme of "integrity," Fred explained the connection he experienced between it and his pride for self-directedness. He said, "Who I am on the outside is who I am on the inside. It's about what I want. It's more of an internal thing. Being independent, not following the herd."

Another, related, subtheme contributed to the apparent power of personal decision-making in the establishment and maintenance of sexually exclusive behavior. Many participants indicated that they had experienced a "rapid commitment to sexually exclusive behavior." This was viewed as a separate category of response since the specific units of meaning entailed the rapidity of their decision to commit to sexually monogamous behavior; whereas, the "internal locus of control" subtheme focused on descriptions of participants' gradually developing awareness of individual life goals in opposition with the norms of gay culture (Matos, 2013). Rather than describing a gradual shift in perceptions, or it resulting from conversations with partners, the majority of participants indicated that their uncompromising commitment to sexually exclusive behavior, was a rapid personal decision with some describing the eureka effect (Grierson, 2015). Fred's facial expression and tone of voice highlighted the explicitness of his experience. Fred recalled the exact moment he experienced his rapid shift in perception to commit to sexually exclusive behavior—soon after waking up, it happened while he was still laying in bed. He implied that related images remained in his mind's eye years later.

While there was not an exact overlap between those disclosing gradual shifts toward internal locus of goals, in line with personal values, and those indicating that they had experienced rapid commitments to sexually monogamous behavior, these two themes might be related in a manner not yet entirely understood: Gradual decision-making hints that spans of unconscious decision-making had been mixed with episodes of conscious processing, and the eureka effect is typically viewed as a sudden culmination and integration of previous, unconscious decision-making (Grierson, 2015). It is possible that some participants were occasionally becoming aware of their unconscious decision-making, concerning personal values of sexual monogamy, over a longer span of time, while new experiences may have been contributing content, before the final conscious decision concerning sexual behavior. If this were true, it would unambiguously adhere to the existential framework of the study since existentialists view beings as evolving over time (Tanzer, 2008).

Galvanizing their decision-making to be independent in living a life based on personal values was the determination, of some participants, of not behaving sexually in line with societal expectations. Deciding to place it within the “rigidity in beliefs” theme, I identified the “promiscuity bias” subtheme. This subtheme encompasses participant impressions that suggest that society generally expects that when gay men form relationships, they are in open ones. Associated with some participants’ interests to seek out sexual exclusivity were ideas of disproving the stereotype of gay promiscuousness through their lived experience; the tone of voice and non-verbal expressions that were displayed during these participant responses stood out as the most impassioned content relayed to me. These men seemed frustrated since what they wanted sexually was, predominantly, not acknowledged, recognized or understood even within gay culture. Samuel said, “Gay culture celebrates how sex and love are not joined. I always

thought that was shallow. I take pride in busting those ideas.” In accordance, Edward said, “At the end of the night, after drinks, couples often wander off together. Leave. When there is a kid there, early 20s, I feel good that he gets to see that we go home alone.”

While individualized motives were linked to sexual exclusivity, there may have been a subtle distinction between these proposed, motivational constructs and the pervasive influence of heteronormativity (Robinson, 2016). When societal biases persist, concerning the behavioral norms of heterosexuality—in which there are assertions that heterosexual sex is natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality (Bartholomay, 2018)—this heteronormativity has the power to induce internalized oppression among sexual minorities (Signorile, 2015). If, for example, a gay man wanted to be promiscuous but decided not to have sex with many men to avoid the shame (Downs, 2012) produced by discriminatory judgements, grounded in heteronormativity, internalized oppression had a role in his thwarted sexual pursuits (Savage, 2013). It is possible that unconscious assimilation of heteronormativity (Signorile, 2015) cooccurred along with what was perceived as the “internal locus of control.” It might be difficult to disentangle personal from heteronormative influences toward sexual exclusivity (Nadal & Mendoza, 2014). Concerned with observational influences of sexual exclusivity, John said, “I want to feel normal and to be viewed as normal.”

A practical technique for maintaining sexual exclusivity included avoiding exposure to visual cues for sex outside of the relationship. Many participants indicated, in their contributions to the “risky imagery” subtheme, that visual stimuli of a sexual nature would have made sexual exclusivity more difficult. They mentioned that avoiding pornography or sexual images of men contributed significantly to their ease of maintenance of sexual exclusivity. Tony said, “I’d watch some porn while [my partner] was at work then end up on a site, and before I knew it, [I

would have sex with another man]. I had to stop watching porn.” Brent said, “I had to stop using porn. There was no way I could have been monogamous if I had kept using it.” This phenomenon is represented in research literature. According to findings by Maddox, Rhoades and Markman (2011), sexual infidelity is significantly lower among couples who do not use pornography. In a series of five experiments, Lambert, Negash, Stillman, Olmstead and Fincham (2012) concluded that not only did watching pornography increase extradyadic sex, it generally diminished commitment in relationships.

Included within the theme of “rigidity in beliefs” was the subtheme of “relationship equates to sexual monogamy.” Many participants referred to this reductionistic perspective; they believed that sexual exclusivity was the core determining factor. In other words, the act of sex, alone, was valued as the essential defining variable in relationships—effectively differentiating between those who were considered partners or spouses and all others. After experiencing a sudden commitment to sexually exclusive behavior, despite being aware of their value of it for years—if not for their entire lives—some participants described leaving compartmentalization behind: Acting in accordance with the belief that sex is the sole defining consideration for the legitimacy of a relationship allowed for an emotional ease since their behavior was congruent with their thinking. The same concept purported, by relationship researchers, to be aiding couples in their inauthentic use of extradyadic sex (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 1999; LaSala, 2004; Nabavi, 2004; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007) was described by participants except they suggested they felt relief when compartmentalization was no longer needed. John said, “I committed to him...Emotionally, it makes everything simple, not having to have a battle in your head.” James said, “Not screwing around, not focusing on just sex, allowed me to get to know him better, deeper, as a person. Without conflicting emotions, I could go deep.

It's about the person. There is no [other] way I could feel this close. It's what a relationship is all about." Thomas said, "If I knew he was sleeping around, I don't know if I'd stay. It wouldn't be my definition of a partnership. Others...they can do what they want, fine, but I do think they are fooling themselves; there is no clarity in that approach."

In accordance with eliminating the need for compartmentalization, the subtheme of, valuing and embodying, "integrity" was commonly provided as an explanation for why participants engaged in sexual exclusivity. Participants provided examples of wanting to avoid lying to themselves and others as a motivation for sexual monogamy. Dave said, "I know I am a good person and good people just don't disrespect their partners that way. I tell the truth and more importantly, I live it by not straying. In open relationships, people get hurt. And how can you hurt the person you supposedly love?" Congruency between values and behavior was the most typical reference to integrity, yet the construct was often meaningfully linked to both self-identity, being a "good person," and how participants were presumably viewed favorably by others. Consistent with Berg and Lien's (2008) research findings, indicating that gay people report lying more than heterosexuals, Tony shared, "Gays lie so much to hide who they are. I didn't want to lie anymore. When I'd catch a guy in a lie, he'd just look insecure and weak. I didn't want to seem that way. I made a choice to be more desirable man, like a rock by not lying, and being monogamous helped a lot." Many participants implied they could be "trusted" because who they were was reflected by their behavior. In their narratives, a few participants were more specific, explaining how being a "good person," having integrity and not hurting, and therefore being respected by, others were all entangled conceptually.

In attempting to make better sense of the conceptual entanglement, I relied heavily upon unstructured questioning and my fieldnotes. It became apparent that the participants who

described the subtheme of “integrity” directly believed it was impossible for members of open relationships to not be causing their partners emotional distress. In their line of thinking, the participants’ presuppositions that gay men in open relationships were surely contributing to their partners’ suffering meant that those in open relationships were either lying to themselves, in denial, or if even partially aware of their wrongdoing, certainly not “good people” and lacking integrity. Dave suggested, “Not to judge, but one way or another, in open relationships, people get hurt. And how can you hurt the person you supposedly love?” Edward said, “I’m not going to just say I’m not going to harm others and then go ahead and harm them.” Related to how most of the participants in the study reported a conscious decision to practice sexual exclusivity, so they would be acting responsibly (Tanzer, 2008), some participants claimed that gay men in open relationships were “fooling themselves” by thinking that extradyadic sex was not harming their relationship. In other words, they implied that gay men in open relationships were ignoring the objective, emotionally destructive reality of extra-relational sex and therefore could not have integrity in their sex lives. Without any expression of the possibility that men in open relationships may have, alternatively and simply, not been aware of the certainty of causing suffering via extradyadic sex, participants, sometimes emphatically, stated that men in open relationships were becoming the primary sources of suffering for their partners—even when their partners were unaware of the infidelities. This meant that these participants clearly thought that men in open relationships were not “good people,” not acting with integrity.

Further examining responses from unstructured questioning and fieldnotes, to understand why the concepts of integrity, being a “good person,” not hurting others and being viewed favorably by others were repeatedly linked, I noticed that those participants who had discussed integrity, in detail, all made references to how sexual exclusivity made them look better to

others. These participants alluded to being “more respectable” or having higher social status due to their sexual integrity. One married participant, Morris, who equated marriage with sexual exclusivity said, “The idea of all gay men will drop to their knees for any straight man. That idea made us jokes. Society respects marriage.” In two cases, integrity was merely described as individual consistency between values and behavior, but most participants discussing integrity provided social considerations that were inextricable from their definitions of the construct. For these participants, whether or not they were aware of it, they may have been striving to approximate heteronormativity (Signorile, 2015).

Falling under the conceptual umbrella of the “seeking positive affects” theme, several participants contributed to the subtheme of “belonging” by reporting how sexual exclusivity enabled the fulfillment of long held, unsatisfied needs for a sense of belonging and acceptance. These participants described repeated attempts to seek out groups of gay men before and during their relationships, in efforts to feel supported emotionally. Generally, they were disappointed since they did not feel cared for, supported, comfortable or, even sometimes, safe in the special-interest group environments in which they participated. A number of participants noted their previous involvement in LGBT or gay–straight alliance groups at universities. Two of the study’s participants had been involved in a *bear* group—a social organization for gay men who are heavier, or hairier, than average and other gay men who find heavier or hairier men appealing (Hudson, 2019). Thomas had been an activist and worked as an administrator in an AIDS society. The participants seeking belonging and acceptance through the varied groups of gay men all indicated that there was an unpleasant degree or quality of competition in the form of conflicting ideas and beliefs. John referred to there being too much “drama” and “backstabbing.” Contributing to their discomfort were incongruencies between their values of sexual

exclusivity and group expectations for threesomes and other forms of extradyadic sexual engagements. A few participants said they had been pleasantly surprised, or had found it ironic, that it was with one person that they had finally felt as though they “belonged”—yet groups had been unable to provide that feeling. Sexual exclusivity was bound to their feelings of acceptance. Some participants said they had many experiences of being in prior relationships where they knew their boyfriends were unhappy with some physical aspect of their bodies. These participants believed that part of the reason old boyfriends had sex with others was because they were seeking, in others, something not provided, nor accepted, in the primary relationship. While possibly influenced by internalized oppression (Nadal & Mendoza, 2014), in their current sexually exclusive relationships, they felt that their partners were accepting all of them despite their average penis sizes, hairy backs or extra poundage. Brent implied that his partner completely accepted his tendency to talk excessively, and for him, that was significantly different than what he experienced in his prior, open relationships. Beyond the direct acceptance and belonging they reportedly enjoyed with their primary partners—while offering comments that helped substantiate the “factors supporting sexual exclusivity” theme—a few participants noted that women—transgendered, lesbian and heterosexual—also contributed to feelings of acceptance and belonging. Women were more likely than gay, bisexual or heterosexual men to demonstrate explicit support for sexually exclusive relationships. In these cases, belonging was not contingent on sexual orientation but, rather, on the shared value of sexual exclusivity. This observation was consistent with Schmookler and Bursik’s (2007) finding that women were more likely to value sexual exclusivity than men; and replicated research has demonstrated that women are much less comfortable with the proposition of separating love from sex (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 1999; LaSala, 2004; Lawson, 1988; Nabavi, 2004). The

subtheme of “female support” was not considered a standout discovery since, generally, women are more apt to provide interpersonal support, than men, spanning a variety of emotionally salient topics (Pascale & Primavera, 2017). In compliance, displayed, albeit sarcastically, in Hastings’s (2015) cartoon—which precedes the body of this thesis—of the nine men and three women depicted, none of the men yet all of the women were supportive of the gay, male couple disclosing their monogamy.

In addition to the emotional gains provided by a sense of belonging and acceptance, the “seeking positive affects” theme involved comprehensive advantages of sexual exclusivity. Many participants believed that sexual exclusivity could provide a better “quality of life” and allow for opportunities that gay men in open relationships do not have. Those who believed it would benefit them in these ways suggested that it had done so. Two participants described how the spending power of two incomes “made life easier.” Contributing to the subtheme of “security,” they may have made a perceptual link between sexual exclusivity and combining rather than keeping incomes separate. Along with security may come a willingness to risk greater financial investments: According to Forrest Talley, a psychologist in California, maintaining a joint bank account means trusting that one’s partner will not selfishly remove money to satisfy his needs over that of his partner’s needs (Braff, 2018). Alternatively, they may have assumed open relationships were likely to only have one income provider, which would be consistent with reports of previously having been used financially by younger men in open relationships. Participants referred to how they believed owning, rather than renting, a home was more likely in closed relationships.

Other participants spoke of how the subtheme of “respect” was fostered from sexual exclusivity and how this led to more “intimacy,” another subtheme. This is highly consistent

with LaSala's (2008) assertion that members of gay, male couples, who practice sexual exclusivity, are less prone to separate sex from intimacy and other observations (Hoff et al., 2010) that it is more probable for gay men practicing sexual exclusivity to report more intimacy, and communication, in their relationships. John said, "If they'd show respect, stop sleeping around and allow for intimacy, they'd likely be surprised how good life can actually be." During the interview, I added, "how good life can actually be," to John's section of my fieldnotes, along with several asterisks, to draw my attention to how often I had heard similar phrases spoken by the participants.

The majority of participants made references to how their quality of life had been improved by sexual exclusivity; while participants may have based this perspective on their personal beliefs, most either referred to their previous experiences in open relationships or—adding to the "observational learning" subtheme—specific engagements with other peoples' open relationships when comparing closed relationships with open ones. The belief that closed relationships were significantly more rewarding than what open relationships could possibly provide was clearly imparted to me. Another common quote in fieldnotes was, "I'm not judging, but..." Samuel, who used the phrase, also offered, "It's a shame how guys give up on the dream [-life of sexual exclusivity]."

Observing others suffer, emotionally, as a consequence of sex with people outside of relationships was frequently mentioned, and it contributed meaningfully to the "avoiding negative affects" theme, when participants were asked for their motivations to seek out sexual exclusivity. Several participants provided examples of a type of vicarious learning that contributed to their interest in securing a closed relationship. Samuel indicated that he had learned the value of sexual monogamy from interacting with friends who had never recovered

from broken relationships following extradyadic sex, “Ten years later, my buddy, [name], never fully recovered. I must know of five times it’s happened.”

Having seen the negative consequences of when people, supposedly in closed relationships, cheat sexually or those pretending to be content with sexual non-exclusivity actually not be okay with it contributed to another subtheme that helps explain why participants maintained sexual exclusivity. The majority of participants referred to the avoidance of “troublesome feelings” such as jealousy, sadness and anger as either a motivation for, or outcome of, sexual exclusivity. John suggested that the idea of being in an open relationship would disturb him emotionally, to such a degree, that it would have physical effects. John said, “I wouldn’t be able to sleep if he wasn’t in bed with me at night. If I was alone in bed knowing that he was sleeping with another man...I think I would throw up.” Some prior research findings, noted in the literature review, are congruent with participant perceptions that unpleasant feelings are more likely associated with open relationships. Kurdek and Schmitt (2010) reported that members of open relationships experienced more interpersonal tension than partners in closed relationships. Spears and Lowen (2010) have both acknowledged and criticized the experience of jealousy in gay male relationships. Their collaborative background in queer studies included a suggestion for gay men to avoid perceptions of possession for their partners, so that gay men might circumnavigate the problem of jealousy; however, in their most recent study, Lowen and Spears (2017) were transparent in their discovery that avoiding jealousy continued to be repeatedly identified as a motivation among a younger generation of men seeking sexual monogamy. Noting differences in attitudes, in gay men, toward open relationships both over the span of their research and in contrast with their own open relationship—of more than forty years—Lowen and Spears (2017) were admittedly surprised that their findings had begun pointing

toward a growing interest in closed relationships. While the relatively new civil right for gay men to marry was proposed as offering one, impactful, template for sexual exclusivity, Lowen and Spears (2017) also commented that their research participants had described intentions to bypass interpersonal feelings, such as sorrow and loneliness, by seeking out closed relationships. Similarly, highlighting the absolute risk to relational integrity, Whitton et al. (2015) indicated that lies are regularly utilized to maintain extradyadic sex, and when these deceptions are uncovered, intolerable emotions such as anger, confusion and sadness often result. The associated relationships often terminate.

Whether participants described guarding against difficult emotions or fostering positive ones via sexual exclusivity, affective considerations regarding sexual monogamy revealed the greatest consistency among participant reports. I characterized this phenomenon as the study's meta-theme, "emotional optimization."

Adding to this overall impression was the specific insight with which the majority of participants viewed sexual exclusivity as a means to eliminate the chance of "feeling used" by other men. Among the examples provided, four distinct scenarios were described by participants in narratives of how gay men were used when extradyadic sex was experienced or observed.

Participants recounted instances in which younger gay men started to reside with older gay man—within the context of sexual relationships—and the younger gay men benefited from having their principal costs of living paid by the older men. At the same time, the younger men engaged in extradyadic sex. In these situations, while the main concern, by participants, was that older men were being used financially, the implications were that the older men would not have felt as used, or used at all, if sexual exclusivity has been intact.

The example referred to most often was when bisexual men, in relationships with women, wanted extradyadic, gay sex. The majority of participants provided descriptions of past sexual experiences with men—who were married to, or in common-law relationships with, women—in which they felt used sexually. Reportedly, it harmed their self-worth. Participants concluded that all they were valued for was being an instrument of pleasure for men who already enjoyed the benefits of a comprehensive relationship with their spouses.

Similarly, a few participants—who had previously become involved with men who had kinks of a sexually submissive nature—also reported feeling used. They believed that only their provision of the kink-related, sexual behavior was valued. Participants' attempts to engage in the type of sex they had wanted, beyond the scope of their sex partner's kink, was not, evidently, valued. More importantly, these participants had not felt valued as human beings. Instead, jeopardizing their agency, they had felt like instruments used to fulfill specific sexual fantasies based on the desires of other men. Rather than living their values, they became embroiled in satisfying the sexual values of others. Analyses of responses, however, indicated that the participants—who had felt exploited by men seeking out their kinks of submissiveness—presumed that these men had not espoused, had interest in nor were capable of sexual exclusivity.

Lastly, several examples of gay men in open relationships, assertively seeking threesomes, were chronicled. Relevant participants suggested that whether it was before or during their current relationship, they believed that the men propositioning them were attempting to use them with absolutely no regard for who they were as people. When participants had been in relationships, during their propositions for threesomes, they suggested that their partnerships had been disrespected. Responses to the semi-structured component of questioning revealed that

the participants had presumed that only sex was implied and that there had been no possibility of establishing comprehensive relationships involving three members. If there had been circumstances in which sexual threesomes had potential to evolve into emotionally romantic relationships involving three members—while participants would not have been realizing their desire for sexual exclusivity in pair-bonding—the assumption that gay men were merely being used for sex could not have been substantiated.

Exercising my privilege of *observer as subject* (Rudestam & Newton, 2001), detailed in Chapter 2, contrasting the lived experiences of many participants, I consider as self-evident, a likely exception to the standpoint of being used for sex. Out of the four scenarios presented by participants, two involved depictions of single men. Whether or not a gay man's goal is sexual exclusivity in a long-term relationship, there are most likely instances in which he would—and almost certainly while single—be interested in having sex for the intrinsic enjoyment of the act. Every sexual act undoubtedly does not have to result in the establishment of a loving relationship. It is entirely possible that in the cases of the submissive-kink-seekers and young-dependents, they were primarily, or entirely, centered on the enjoyment of sex and did not harbor any disrespect nor intend to exploit others. These scenarios could have represented errors of circumstance in which there were mismatches between gay men embodying different goals. When everyone involved in a sex act is getting what he wants, without expectations of something else, no one feels used (Matos, 2013; Savage, 2013). Since the aforementioned had not been readily considered despite its popularity, it may be possible that some participants who reported feeling used simply could not separate sex from love, and this fusion should not be considered a preference but rather a requirement.

In summarizing the subtheme of “feeling used,” in seeking pair-bonding, or maintaining it, more than just sex was obviously valued, and the majority of participants felt that other gay, and bisexual, men had overlooked the participants’ intrinsic value as people, and alternatively considered them as objects to be used for the fulfilment of sexual or financial desires. In the minds of these participants, extradyadic sex became associated with, framed as, and limited to, the intentions of gay and bisexual men to use gay men sexually and otherwise.

Pertaining to “the idea of attentional control” subtheme, some participants said that sexual exclusivity helped to maintain their partners’ primary focus on their relationships rather than outside of the relationship. This intra-relational emphasis played a role in why these participants maintained sexual exclusivity. With this rigidity in belief, the premise was that partner-attention was not dispersed toward others, or outward in general, but rather, it was preserved for and focused on primary partners. This subtheme may be difficult to reconcile with Perel’s (2017) concept of healthy distance within couples.

Taking the same reasoning a step further, many participants reported that there was a risk of losing their partners if these relationships had been open ones. The implication was wanting to avoid that risk contributed to their motivation to practice sexual exclusivity in return for their partner also agreeing to and practicing it. In this manner—with the “reciprocal fear of loss” subtheme—mutual commitment to sexual exclusivity was viewed as a safeguard against relationship dissolution. Thomas disclosed that he lost a prior partner when sex outside the relationship resulted in a shift from an intra-relational focus to what was viewed as a better option, “He left me for the architect. If [partner’s name] ever pulled that one, not coming home, and with no good explanation, that would be it. I’d be gone.” Given Zemishlany’s (2015) claim that novelty adds to sexual satisfaction, matched with Perel’s (2017) observation that those

engaging in affairs say it makes them feel alive again, participants viewing extradyadic sex as a risk for loss of partnerships might have a substantiated point of view.

Many participants referred to sexual exclusivity as making the relationship special so that “deeper intimacy” could be realized. Exploring the subtheme of “intimacy,” participants provided different explanations with a few frankly suggesting that closed relationships were associated with trust and privacy. Two participants provided more details; they focused on their rationality that sex with their partners was the only thing that was not shared with others. They believed that special distinction, the only thing not shared, set the foundation for deeper emotional intimacy. When prompted for elaborations, to provide better understanding, they responded with a practical implication, that when no one else is available to provide intimacy through sex, it increases the likelihood of more intimacy derived from one’s partner, the sole source of sex.

Two participants referred to how intimacy grew out of the happiness that was derived from allowing for receptive ejaculate in association with feeling safe and believing there was virtually no risk of sexually transmitted infections. One participant mentioned that he had heard that women whose partners ejaculate into them directly were less depressed than partners who did not; and similarly, he said he felt much happier after sex in which his partner ejaculated into him.

Not familiar with the link between receptive ejaculate and elevated mood in women, I was eventually able to confirm the original study (Gallup, Burch, & Platek, 2002) and additionally uncover the impressions of an author and professor (Bering, 2010) that were more relevant to the present study. Bering (2010) discussed the potential relationship between feelings of intimacy in gay men and direct exposure to the oxytocin in ejaculate. In criticizing other

researchers' post-modern, symbolic, interpretation of why gay men that bareback report feeling more intimacy, Bering (2010) suggested that, among others, the *love hormone*, oxytocin, is the more likely explanation. Where Bering (2010) was careful to point out the risk of HIV transmission, and caution against unprotected sex, his posit could be associated with the participant's descriptions of feeling especially intimate with his partner after his partner had ejaculated into him. While Bering (2010) takes more of a reductionist, biological perspective, participants, instead, believed that trusting they could enjoy being receptive to their partners' ejaculate without the risk of a sexually transmitted infection added to their experience of intimacy, security, and "joy": For them, whether or not they were aware of the presence of, for example, oxytocin in semen, the happiness they felt was interpreted as closeness, and a deeper intimacy, with the man they loved. In accordance, Johnson (2019) pointed out that research on other social animals indicates that when scientists increase oxytocin, those animals cuddle more.

Not only did participants maintain sexual exclusivity since it seemed to be providing a better quality of life, improving positive feelings and helping them to avoid difficult emotions, there was a strong anticipatory component. Several participants believed it would benefit them in the long run. One subtheme that captured the anticipation of emotional benefits was when many participants thought open relationships were more likely to result in being alone later in life. They wanted to avoid that possibility. They were motivated toward sexual exclusivity to avoid loneliness later in life. Specially, the troublesome emotion, they most often identified as wanting to avoid in the future, was loneliness. Edward was especially explicit in answering why he chose sexual exclusivity, "Being monogamous is the norm for a reason, it makes for long relationships. Everyone needs companionship later in life. Life is hard enough without being alone, especially at a time when society no longer values you much."

The most frequently identified motivation for, and benefit of, sexual exclusivity was avoiding sexually transmitted infections—along with the negative, emotional impact of them. Only three of the eleven participants did not comment on their fear of a sexual infection when considering why they maintained sexual exclusivity. Two participants shared stories of having been infected with minor sexually transmitted infections outside of closed relationships. The majority of participants commented on how they did not want to harm their partners by inadvertently spreading unknown infections. A few participants referred to sexual exclusivity as allowing for sex—without condoms or consideration for the relative infection risks of specific sexual acts—without the worry of disease. They were implying that sexual exclusivity added to their freedom to enjoy sex uninhibitedly.

Support for sexual exclusivity or closed relationships was described as generally coming from women. The distinction between men and women, in this regard, seemed absolute. A participant explained that his transgendered, female friend either admired his closed relationship or was jealous that she did not have it. Cis women, whether heterosexual or lesbian, were identified as the main providers of active support in verbally agreeing, and sharing opinions, that the participants' sexual exclusivity was valid and healthy. Several references were made to how heterosexual, married, female friends offered social support to participants for sexual exclusivity specifically: Participants had been reportedly told that they could speak, in-person, about any challenges surrounding the topic anytime it was required.

One exception was the participant, John, who was once married to a woman for over twenty years. John said he had a supportive, gay friend who was still in a marriage with a woman: John's friend was a man who was not transparent about his sexuality. John suggested that he was more of a mentor than a friend to the married man. In his role, John was more apt to

offer support than receive it. In contrast, many participants reported that not only did they not receive support from other gay men, they sometimes posed risks in the form of unwelcomed sexual advances. With his parallel point of view, John also speculated that a possible reason that lesbians were supportive, but not gay men, was because lesbians did not want to sleep with their male friends.

A few participants reported that sexual exclusivity was supported by a partner actively willing to help satisfy sexual interests. The importance of maintaining desirability was recognized by their partners. This call to duty resulted in some of their partners engaging in less preferred sexual positions, their partner's kinks and costume play for the sake of "keeping things fresh." In accordance with Perel's (2017) expert observations—that without thoughtful interventions, sexual interest tends to wane over time within long-term relationships, and part of success in sexual exclusivity are conscious decisions and actions to *work at* improving sex while being creative in boosting desire—many participants indicated that their partners acknowledged a need for doing what they had to in order to keep attracting their partner in the long run.

Introduced in the inclusion criteria for this study, online engagements in sexuality could better be conceptualized as "talk about sex" or masturbation (Ben-Ze'ev, 2008) rather than sexual infidelity, non-exclusivity. While this allowed for participants—who, at the same time, were not in close proximity to men outside their long-term relationships—to potentially use pornography or engage in cybersex without either scenario being considered extradyadic sex, no participant explicitly made reference to using pornography or cybersex, at any point, during the full duration of their sexually exclusive relationships; in this study, long-term relationships were defined as either beginning after their last in-person sexual experience with a man outside of their partnerships or beginning when the men entered into their relationships with absolutely no

history of in-person sex outside of them. It may have proved useful, deepened my understanding, if I had directly asked each participant if they had used pornography or engaged in cybersex during their span of sexual exclusivity; however, I did not. If they had, in fact, avoided all intentional exposure to online pornography and cybersex, it was fortunate since several participants indicated that visual stimuli of a sexual nature were the main sources of difficulty in their successes of maintaining sexual exclusivity. The participants, who reported their beliefs that gay, online pornography has potential to increase the likelihood of straying sexually, provided examples of how visual stimuli sexually depicting men had initially made them unsuccessful at sexual exclusivity before they were able to establish it with their partners. Participants also provided examples in which others inadvertently displaying sexual stimuli, made participants temporarily insecure in their abilities to maintain sexual exclusivity.

Included within “factors supporting sexual exclusivity,” one example of the “keeping sex fun” subtheme, involved a participant admitting that his interest in seeing men dressed up in uniforms resulted in him cheating—on his husband before he established sexual exclusivity within the relationship—when he viewed videos that a local man had uploaded to a gay social site. This participant’s husband started greeting him at the door to their residence dressed in uniforms, which delighted the participant. Where other men may have avoided indulging his partner in costume play since it was associated with a history of sexual infidelity, like other partners of participants, he allowed his awareness of what his partner wanted to fuel his efforts to provide his partner with what he wanted sexually. In this case, instead of promoting his own sexual interests, this partner of the participant decided to provide for his partner’s sexual interests. When members of relationships realize that their sexual interests are being satisfied by

their partners, their perceptions of needing to seek sex outside of their relationships are diminished significantly (Savage, 2018).

The impression that visual stimuli of a sexual nature is a risk to sexual fidelity was noted in Murphy's (2018) survey of 1000 gay men in the United Kingdom. While still a minority, forty-three percent of gay men considered sending sexual images online, to men outside their relationship, to be infidelity. Possibly, more than two out of five gay men consider displaying sexual images online to be a breach of fidelity. While not exact semantically, findings of Murphy's (2018) survey were aligned with the descriptions of the participants, in the current study, who reported thinking that sexual images, online, could pose a risk for increasing the possibility of extradyadic sex; however, the distinction between visual stimuli of a sexual nature being a risk to sexual infidelity and it being, on its own, sexual infidelity, is an important one. Consistent with the inclusion criteria, in this study, that allowed for participants to be potentially using pornography or engage in cybersex, I found it interesting that no participant made a statement to claim that merely using pornography or engaging in cybersex was, in their opinions, a breach of sexual exclusivity. Rather, participants proposed that visual stimuli of a sexual nature is risky and that it might lead to extradyadic sex. In addition, a number of descriptions of participants starting to use visual stimuli of a sexual nature were presented in which it was implied that they had to stop in case it developed into sexual infidelity; in these examples, the participants were suggesting that the use of stimuli of a sexual nature was not, in itself, sexual infidelity. Furthermore, for the sake of clarity, it is important to note that in Murphy's (2018) study, infidelity was open to interpretation, and infidelity might have encompassed emotional infidelity; whereas, the focus in the present study was decidedly the lack of in-person, sexual activity outside of primary partnerships.

Additionally, contributing to the theme, “threats to sexual exclusivity,” was the subtheme of “anger.” Anger at partners was a risk for maintaining sexual exclusivity for a few participants. These participants suggested that “revenge sex” characterized part of their earlier experiences in relationships. These participants described prior, impulsive decisions to have sex outside of relationships when partners would insult, spend too little time with, compete with or ignore them. In accordance, George (2010) and Perel (2017) supported the development of expertise in mutually-exclusive subject matter, between gay men in a relationship, to avoid the detrimental effects of them competing in one area. Two participants suggested that anger continued to make sexual exclusivity harder to maintain. Noting anger as motivator, two participants had previously strayed sexually from their present partners—during their initial monogamish behavior.

Concerning the “mounting support in the modern era” subtheme, some participants reported a recent change in societal attitudes, thinking it might be possible for gay men to have committed relationships, especially in association with marriage. Participants often equated marriages with sexual exclusivity. Samuel commented, “I do think things are getting much better quickly. Gay marriage did a lot to normalize committed relationships between two men.” In support of this impression was the contrast noted in Lowen and Spears’s (2017) recent study compared to their older study (Spears & Lowen, 2010) in which Lowen and Spear’s (2017) stated that they were surprised to discovered that significantly more young, gay men anticipated that they would be marrying and living monogamously.

Consistent with James Marcia’s theory of identity development (Kasinath, 2013; Marcia, 2010), it is possible that when the young men in Lowen and Spear’s (2017) study were considering, choosing and committing to gay identities during their adolescences in San Francisco, California—a well-known location where prominent activists had been pioneers in

sexual politics (Spears & Lowen, 2010)—they were able to more readily attain Marica’s most advanced developmental status, identity achievement (Kasinath, 2013), in which lifestyle alternatives had been explored and conclusions had been drawn. The timing would have been synchronistic for the younger participants in Lowen and Spear’s (2017) most recent study since they would have been teenagers when the option of marriage was first extended to gay couples in California in 2008 (Snibbe, 2018). Being immersed in a local culture that had contributed so significantly to gay civil rights, at the exact time when marriage was extended to gay men, could have facilitated its consideration, prominently, relative to other gay men living in less progressive parts of the United States or in countries where marriage remains illegal for gay men.

Many participants said that sexual exclusivity added to a sense of security in the relationship. A few participants suggested that a sense of security resulted from the trust that was built and that sexual exclusivity was essential for the development of trust. Adding to a frequently disclosed sentiment that people in open relationships are lying to themselves, Samuel explained, “[Despite an agreement to be honest] in an open relationship, there are going to be things he is doing that you are not aware about. And you are going to be wondering about those things [making the relationship feel unstable]. There will be risks to what you have with one another happening all the time.” Participants were concerned that opening their relationships would make their partnerships prone to a variety of changes, and they already enjoyed their relationships as they were configured. Participants wanted their relationships to remain stable. Sexual monogamy was an important area of consistency that directly resulted in feelings of security. This phenomenon is entirely consistent with the findings of researchers who predominantly study heterosexual relationships (Johnson, 2013; Ornish, 2019; Perel, 2017).

Most participants either reported or implied that sexual exclusivity was associated with emotional maturity in the relationship. A number of examples were discussed. Overhearing men discussing sexual conquests made them seem youthful. Exactly in line with Ornish's (2019) point of view, one participant said that accepting sexual limitations or boundaries reflected emotional development that allowed for more meaningful and closer emotional connections. Similarly, in referencing the renowned developmental psychologist, Eric Erikson, Marcia and Josselson (2013) explained that in Erickson's *intimacy versus isolation* stage of psychosocial development, the topic of love is deeply explored during the ages of twenty through thirty-nine; if there is unwillingness to make required commitments in the form of compromises or sacrifices—such as for sexual exclusivity—long-term, intimate relationships may not be possible. When sacrifices are not made, adequate closeness in relationships may not be established, and isolation can result with an accompanying feeling of angst (Marcia & Josselson, 2013).

In describing what sexual exclusivity provided emotionally, a few participants noted how superficial open relationships, they had viewed, appeared. These participants repeatedly suggested that others were overly fixated on physical appearances. One participant said that focusing almost entirely on physical appearances—a recognized ideal of homonormativity (Noyes, 2018)—seemed to thwart the emotional development of men in open relationships. It is possible that in open, gay relationships, beyond the scope of the present study, some gay men had not experienced Marcia's (2010) developmental status of identity achievement, typically occurring during adolescence, in which people develop internal loci of self-definition. Operating with external loci of self-definition—which sometimes is represented by strong congruence with the physical ideals of masculinity—some gay men are adversely influenced by heteronormativity

that oppresses them and homonormativity that makes the oppressed the oppressors (Flores, 2017).

The subtheme of “respect” highlighted a specific area of emotional maturity to which many participants referred. Sexual exclusivity was associated with self-respect and respectful interpersonal behavior. Some participants believed that respect was generally missing from open relationships. Behaving respectfully, by adhering to sexual exclusivity, made participants view themselves and others in a more positive light. In contributions to the subtheme of “respect,” it was suggested that extradyadic sex was deemed unethical from a societal perspective, and participants tended to agree with this viewpoint. Specifically, it was inferred that the societal expectation that people are monogamous in marriages (Johnson, 2019), leads those viewing marriages to think that the partners being cheated on are being disrespected. My fieldnotes documented a tone of pride that was relayed when participants were commenting on how they were respecting their partners sexually. Describing what he meant by “respect” through sexual exclusivity, John offered his perspective that loyalty was a demonstration of morality.

The “monogamish initiation” subtheme was an element of the “decision-making toward sexual exclusivity” theme. Many participants implied that they had been monogamish with their partners when their relationships commenced; those who has been monogamish, at first, reported increased awareness of how sole or infrequent incidences of extradyadic sex had either harmed the relationship or had the potential to do so. Two participants alluded to how guilt concerning monogamish behavior increased their conscious value of sexual exclusivity. In accordance with Perel’s (2017) observation that many couples feel closer after affairs since the value of their relationships becomes underscored, Tony said, “[Partner’s name]’s ability to forgive me made

me value him more and value monogamy more. It made me look at myself and how out of control I had been in all areas, even when I'd say stupid things without thinking.”

I considered the following to be one of the more interesting findings since it appeared to be the opposite of what the relationship expert (Savage, 2013) who coined the term, monogamish, had reported in what he described as the development of the quintessential, long-term relationship between two men. Savage (2013) suggested that in most gay relationships, following approximately a year or two of sexual monogamy, there is a shift to an open model with or without discussions concerning agreements, sexual boundaries. It is objectively beyond the scope of this study; however, it might be possible that the subgroup of gay men in sexually exclusivity, long-term relationships are more likely to take the reverse path. They may be more apt to let go of old lovers or sex with strangers—as time passes during the first year or two—before committing to sexually exclusive behavior.

Consistent with participant narratives, South African relationship expert, Blom (2016), maintains an alternative point of view concerning opening relationships to extradyadic sex. Where Savage's (2013) assertion is that sexual exclusivity evolves to monogamish behavior, Blom (2016) warns people to think deeply, and cautiously, about engaging in extradyadic sex before doing so since it risks the continuity of loving connections. Blom (2016) recommends that couples communicate extensively if extradyadic sex is going to be negotiated. Savage (2013) infers, by using his term, monogamish, that there will, undoubtedly, be spans when extradyadic sex is not happening; however, he does not explicitly state that instances of extradyadic sex are optimally based on conscious decisions to do so, via effective communication within couples, nor does Savage outline how couples can decide, in unison, to reintegrate distinct spans of sexual

exclusivity. Blom (2016) reports that relationships can accommodate extradyadic sex, but he believes that open relationships can not survive over time; they need to be closed, for agreed-upon periods of time, for the purpose of protection, which he defines as exclusive connectivity with one's partner. In his hypothesis, Blom views extradyadic sex as something that may have to be accommodated, or permitted; however, it needs to be consciously limited since it has potential to entirely end the love in relationships that is fostered by on-going emotional connectivity in the absence of extradyadic sex. Blom and Savage diverge appreciably with their suggestions on how to manage extradyadic sex; notably, Blom promotes the necessity of collaborative decision-making regarding exactly when a relationship will be open and when it needs to be closed.

The "misuse of sex as an unhealthy habit" subtheme was interwoven within reports of how participants ceased their initial monogamish behavior and transitioned, sometimes suddenly, to sexual exclusivity. Sex outside a relationship was often compared to an addiction, or bad habit, that worked against the overall quality of life. Participant concern dovetailed with Down's (2012) thinking, and implication, that with sexual addictions at their highest documented prevalence among gay men, he wondered if, generally, the quality of their relationships had declined consequentially.

When participants started to revisit the idea of extradyadic sex as a bad habit or potential addiction, sexual exclusivity became easier for them. Bad experiences during their early 20s were referenced as examples. Morris said, "Dating, guys would pull out [an inhalant intended to dilate blood vessels thereby making orgasms more intense] just before they came. It grossed me out. Like they were chasing a high and a normal orgasm wasn't enough anymore." Morris's experience had been consistent with Duwe's (2018a) observations that took into account the interpersonally destructive impacts of chemsex addiction. A number of participants mentioned

how they had struggled in their early attempts to develop meaningful relationships because they would spend too much time online looking for sex with strangers. Tony said he would take a break from online sex sites and go to a gay bar to find “a real man,” but he would become overly drunk and end up engaged in sexual situations he regretted. Tony said that while he felt more in control online, he would intermittently become aware that he had spent three, or more, successive days almost entirely dedicated to searching for sex on gay hookup sites. Excessive use of sex sites became associated with men in open relationships since participants explained that often, when they were single, it was men married to women who would meet with them for sex.

Falling under the conceptual umbrella of the theme, “factors supporting sexual exclusivity,” was the subtheme, “evading sexually transmitted infections.” This further helped to explain motivations regarding why participants had sought and maintained closed relationships. Having volunteered for an AIDS society, Matthew said, “I got the message that [HIV] was easy to acquire, and I did not want to transmit it to a partner. Monogamy was pretty much the only option.” Given Matthew’s experience working for an AIDS society during the last half of the 1980s, when the disease was still, predominately, considered fatal (Duwe, 2018b), and he disclosed that he had personally known many of the men who died, his motivation to avoid infections, via sexual exclusivity, was apparently related to the existential framework of this study: Thoughts of death are often forefront among the core challenges pertaining to an individual’s raw experience of life (Orbach, 2008; Stokes, 2002; Tomer & Eliason, 2008).

Dave suggested that he thought that sexual exclusivity was “the only way” to avoid sexual infections. Fred commented, “[Avoiding] disease was part of being monogamous. It was, for sure, on our minds.” In accordance with participants’ lived experiences and considerations,

concerns surrounding the risk for novel infections within gay, male partnerships was examined and documented in prior research literature (Blashill et al. 2014; Greene et al., 2014). Mitchell (2014) claimed that young, gay men were especially vulnerable since by seeking intimacy in their relationships, they were significantly less willing to wear condoms during sex as compared with their single counterparts.

Helping to establish the theme, “avoiding negative affects,” was the subtheme, “geriatric loneliness.” The fear of being alone, lacking companionship later in life, represented an element of motivation explaining why some participants sought and maintained sexual monogamy. In agreement, Johnson (2013) portrayed the intensity of this type of loneliness as being, in some cases, unbearable, and she depicted this phenomenon as being her principal explanation for her preference for sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships. Berger and Mallon (1993) documented that loneliness was a familiar reality among older gay men who were single. Given that gay men in open relationships are more likely to be single during their senior years (Spears & Lowen, 2010), participants’ anticipation that their closed relationships might help them to maintain companionship, and avoid the effects of solitude as time passed, corresponded with prior findings regarding this topic. Congruently, as well as suggesting that older gay men can become hostile as a result of being single, Thomas shared, “I can see myself growing old with [my partner]. My family doesn’t live around here. I don’t want to be alone.” Edward commented, “Being monogamous is the norm for a reason. Everyone needs companionship later in life.”

The sole area of consensus among the eleven participants was that there were no reported opportunity costs or regrets with sexual exclusivity. Some participants displayed nonverbal facial cues that were interpreted as their surprise that a question about potential negative outcomes of sexual exclusivity was asked or that negative consequences could result from the lifestyle they

chose. In these circumstances, I explained that some questions had to be included so that an unbiased, or balanced, perspective could be maintained for the sake of a scholarly endeavour.

Demographic impressions. This study was not quantitative; however, rudimentary attempts were made, using face validity, to uncover potential patterns that might be explored, in the future, among researchers interested in conducting studies in which findings could be generalizable. A wide range of demographic responses were elicited. One example was how ages spanned from thirty-three to seventy-one with no obvious over-representation within any cohort. Merely three participants were non-Caucasian, yet this did not stand out as especially divergent from the overall Canadian population (“Immigration and Ethnocultural,” 2018). Observing associated demographics, no potentially meaningful differences could be identified between the participants who were married compared to those who were not married within their long-term relationships. There may have been two exceptions, worthy of further consideration, relative to the otherwise seemingly typical demographics that were exhibited.

Seven of the participants indicated that they were raised in a rural community rather than in a town or city. This was the case despite that all but one of them were now living in an urban center. Given that more than 80% of Canadians live in urban centers (Crenna, 2015) and nearly half of the study’s participants indicated that they had lived in communities smaller than towns as children and adolescents, it is possible where one is raised has implications for increased likelihood of sexual exclusivity in their long-term, gay male relationship. This observation was congruent with Adam’s (2006) finding that his participants were more likely to have been monogamous when their formative years had been within cultures with absent or limited independent gay subcultures. This could have indicated conservative roots. Adam’s finding was also the rationale for that demographic information being gathered for the present study. In

association with potential conservatism, which is sometimes overrepresented in rural environments, during interviews, participants were asked if they had believed that their religious backgrounds influenced their impressions regarding sexual exclusivity; participants did not believe it was relevant. It is important to note that only a quantitative study with a much larger sample size could possibly investigate this objectively.

No participant offered descriptions, or comments, supporting Johnson's (2019) theory that extradyadic sex is less probable among men who are actively parenting; however, since all participants had maintained sexual exclusivity, it generally made distinctions between sexually monogamous and non-monogamous gay men far less possible. If a study were to have participants who also were in open relationships, it could enable potentially meaningful comparisons. I noticed, nevertheless, that only the three participants who were married had been, or were actively, parenting children. Whether or not married, gay men are more apt to be actively parenting children, compared to their unmarried counterparts, could only be ascertained at the conclusion of a quantitative study.

Another potentially meaningful observation was how participants responded to a demographic item concerning gender expression. Schmookler and Bursik (2007) suggested that traditionally masculine individuals reported valuing sexual monogamy significantly less than people with more traditionally feminine gender expression; the related demographic item was included in this study to determine whether or not reports from the participants were consistent with Schmookler and Bursik's (2007) implication that more traditionally feminine gender expression is associated with the valuation of sexual exclusivity. Given historical prejudices toward gender atypical people (Downs, 2012), sensitive to keep participants comfortable with the demographic item, the question asked those participants who wanted to respond to rate

themselves on a continuum with a total of 7 possible selections. The box on the far right represented the most masculine gender expression and the box on the far left represented the least masculine gender expression. Rather than having to state that the box on the far left represented the most female gender expression, participant references during the interview indicated that it was understood.

No participant selected the two highest categories of masculinity in describing their gender expression and no one selected the lowest category; however, one participant, each, selected the second- and third-lowest categories. The middle or average spot, the rating of 4 out of 7, was the statistical mode with 6 participants selecting it.

One of the participants who had selected the middle slot, used humor during the interview to mediate his apparent, minor discomfort in examining his gender expression; he once referred to how others likely viewed him as falling within a lower category of masculine gender expression. It was possibly his way of communicating to me that he was not comfortable selecting a category below average even though it might have been more accurate from a viewer's standpoint. I responded to the participant by reminding him that the design of inquiry was rooted in each participant's experience and that from their experiences others may gain insights; however, because of the mode of inquiry, it did not matter to me how others might rate participants on the item. What mattered was how participants rated themselves (Detmer, 2013).

Two participants selected the category slightly higher than average, rating themselves as 5s out of 7. During interviews, the one man that opted to forgo rating his gender expression seemed somewhat defensive during a related discourse he initiated, which might have been an indicator that bad feelings—associated with historical criticisms of gay men as being less manly than average (Signorile, 2015)—were cued. Fortunately, he appeared satisfied, no longer

appearing defensive, when I carefully maintained an open, receptive and accommodating stance often staying, “okay, thank you for helping me understand this better; this is useful information. I’m glad you discussed this with me.”

In summary, two of the ten men who rated their gender expression selected a category on the masculine side of the range, above the exact middle, average, gender expression category.

Limitations. A number of methodological restrictions should be considered when interpreting this study’s finding, conclusions and suggestions. While an exploration of the lived experiences of gay men, maintaining sexual exclusivity, in long-term relationships, allowed for meaningful insights to be identified and suggestions were provided for clinicians, community groups and men seeking the lifestyle of the participants, I made decisions concerning the trajectory of the study that should be considered carefully so that thesis can be understood within its context.

The inability for findings to be generalized to the broader scope of the target population, is intrinsic to qualitative research. While interpretations of the study’s findings must only be limited to the sample and this is the case for all phenomenological inquires, it is also important for readers to remain mindful that the participants were all Canadian; even the findings pertinent to the sample could have varied significantly as a consequence of geographical, cultural and political influences. If the sample had been of South Africans, the findings could have been quite different.

While the sample size was sufficient to allow for saturation, in which adding more participants was unlikely to uncover additional units of meaning (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), it was too small to allow for reliable comparisons among different demographic subgroups. Furthermore, while insights were shared and suggestions were presented, I decided to use the

terms, “findings,” and, “suggestions,” rather than, “results,” and, “recommendations,” to acknowledge the relative weakness of objective analysis inherent to phenomenological methodology in which, technically, individual lived experiences ultimately supersede observed commonalities. When endeavoring to understand the study’s findings, readers should remind themselves that the phenomenological method can be better compared to a series of case studies than it can be to objective, quantitative inquires.

In the study, I decided to constrain the concept of monogamy to in-person sexual behavior with one’s partner. Research in the area of monogamy may or may not distinguish between sexual and emotional monogamy, so I operationally defined monogamy as sexual exclusivity so that participants and other would better understand that emotional monogamy was not a criterion for inclusion. This was meant to represent a more traditional understanding of sexual behavior in which people in close proximity were engaged in sexual acts, in a sexual context, with sexual intent (Mileham, 2007); however, in the last decade, some relationship specialists have expanded the concept of sexual exclusivity to include cybersex, the sharing of sexual images and even flirtatious chat online (Perel, 2017; Wasserman, 2015). My decision to not consider online interactions of a sexual nature as a breach of exclusivity was based on practical matters. Firstly, with the proliferation of social media, and other advancing technologist, people have generally increased the time they spend online thus increasing the chance of communication eventually taking on a sexual tone; if even a brief reference to a sexual topic or a sole statement that might be interpreted as flirting was made, it would lend itself to consideration, and debate, for participant omission. Increasing risk to participant omission was salient since it was both anticipated, and realized, that it would be difficult to secure enough participants given they represented minorities—gay men in closed relationships—among

minorities, gay men; before expanding marketing to all of Canada, less than half of the participants could be secured locally, and out of approximately 37.5 million Canadians (Crenna, 2015), and investing heavily to fund marketing, only eleven participants could be identified. Thirdly, given the small sample size, and potential differences between men who had in-person sex versus those who engage in sexual chat or image exchange online, the two subgroups could not have been meaningfully compared and if they had not been, there was a risk of gleaning insights from mixed phenomenological perspectives; therefore, I believed restricting the breadth of conceptualization for sexual exclusivity was the correct course of action. While I felt justified in my stance, it is important that, as time passes and it becomes generally accepted that online sexual activity equates to sexual infidelity in the same way that in-person sex does, future research must employ differing, more inclusive, definitions concerning sexual exclusivity.

Among the suggestions in Chapter 5, I refer to the Big Five personality traits (Allen & Walter, 2018) and infer that lower scores on an *openness* scale, if attained, might help to explain some of the participant decision-making; however, a related construct, conservatism, could have been anticipated and described directly and in greater detail. Conservative morals were referenced, superficially, as criticisms by queer activists (Savage, 2018; Signorile, 2015); however, some of the responses by participants potentially indicated that conservative morals might be of greater relevance to the target, rather than, general population. Future iterations of this study's topic could expand the scope of research to include specific questions related to conservatism and conservative morals.

I decided to separate the Discussion section from the findings whereas other researchers integrate them. My less orthodox format may have challenged readers' patience since they would have to wait for themes and subthemes to be linked, along with relevant interpretations, further

along in the thesis. My decision concerning the format for the findings was based on two main considerations. Firstly, I wanted to remain as purely dedicated to phenomenological theory as possible: I believed that the best way to honor the lived experiences of each participant was to provide excerpts from participants along with contextual content, when required, to assure depth of reader comprehension. Secondly, I wanted to respond to the research questions in a matter that was as clear as possible for readers rather than commenting on the research questions repeatedly, which would have been the case if an integrated model had been selected.

I clustered related subthemes under themes since I thought that, sometimes, even minor distinctions among related subthemes warranted mindful consideration: In a phenomenological approach, individual narratives are of ultimate value (Ahmed, 2006), so when similarities among participants arise even for minor distinctions between units of meaning, I thought it was important to represent each distinction—or topic of the related units of meaning—as a separate subtheme. Existentialism teaches that specificity trumps generality (Reynolds, 2006); therefore, the subthemes, rather than the themes, were referenced most often when the research questions were answered in the Summary section. Alternatively, it may have been a matter of conceptual semantics (Larsson, 2013) if readers preferred to view the themes as headings and the subthemes, as I defined them, as themes. Moreover, I decided to note one meta-theme, “emotional optimization,” simply because seeking out positive, and avoiding negative, emotions could be framed as two sides, or aspects, of the same phenomenon.

Conclusions

The concept of *individuality* was repeatedly referenced among participant narratives spanning their formation of this study's six themes. Further delineated in the subsequent paragraph, decision-making toward sexual exclusivity was exemplified as essentially-based on the evolving realizations and values of participants, grounded in their authentic selves (Reynolds, 2006; Stokes, 2002), whether or not they referred to having discussions with their partners concerning sexual exclusivity—and, unexpected to me, most had not. Accordingly, their tendencies toward differentiation, as a sense of personal agency, were especially featured among the units of meaning that comprised the subthemes of “integrity,” “respect,” “emotional maturity,” and “troublesome feelings.” Among Marcia's (2010) stages of development, the last status of identity achievement best signified participants' standpoints in which internal loci of identities was theoretically proposed as typically occurring within adolescence (Marcia & Josselson, 2013). There was ample signalling from descriptions, nonetheless, pointing to the attainment of identity achievement during adulthood—at least for the majority of participants. It is possible that this is meaningfully correlated to participants' references within the subtheme, and their valuation, of emotional maturity. The validity of this association was apparently strengthened by participants who claimed that other gay men, not behaving in line with sexual exclusivity, seemed youthful by comparison.

Regardless of how participants maintained sexual exclusivity, their final decision to apply the value and their commitment to behave in line with the value were described as highly conscious. Whether or not they had discussions with their partners, no participant provided information suggesting that sexual exclusivity happened without some depth of consideration of who they, sincerely, were individually and how their identities related to what they wanted in a

relationship. Occasionally, how participants viewed others and how others viewed them were referenced, but ultimately, participants believed they were self-directed in their decision-making. With the exception of relationship agreements, in which couples defined the boundaries of their decisions to open relationships to extradyadic sex (Whitton et al., 2015), in my thorough review of research literature, I had not been able to detect models of decision-making concerning sexual exclusivity; therefore, this omission, along with participant reports of common decision-making experiences, may point to a direction for further inquiry.

Identifying as a man with integrity was the main subtheme that participants recognized as their motivation for maintaining sexual exclusivity. Links between integrity and sexual monogamy were varied—some practical, some rational, and others being affective; however, in defining integrity, participants said it was meaningful to establish consistency between their identities and their actions. Consistent with their emphasis on individuality, an important underlying belief was that to be honest, so you can have integrity, you can not lie to yourself. Many participants believed that men in open relationships were lying to themselves about the possibility of treating their partners respectfully and not being the sources of their partners' emotional suffering.

Congruent with the research findings of Whitton et al. (2015), I repeatedly heard participants directly or indirectly alluding to, describing, and elaborating to assure that I understood their shared perspective: Sexual exclusivity safeguarded them against difficult emotions such as jealousy, sadness, and anger. Many participants indicated that they simply could and would not tolerate situations in which jealousy, sadness and anger would intensify in relation to, or thoughts of, their partners having sex with other men. I used the term, *meta-theme*, when referring to participants' descriptions of how they considered sexual exclusivity as critical

to the quality of their affective experiences in relationships. Sexual exclusivity was heralded not only for allowing them to circumnavigate unpleasant feelings but also for its apparent ability to induce or strengthen trust, closeness, security, and intimacy and generally improve the quality of their lives.

In contrast to reports of self-harming behaviors, such as engaging in unsafe sexual practices, due to internalized homophobia (Halkitis, 2012), participants in this study indicated that avoiding sexually transmitted infections helped to explain why they maintained sexual exclusivity. Rather than speak, at length, about their self-perseverance of health, they tended to focus on how guilty they would feel if they ended up inflicting their partners. Where other gay men might view sexually transmitted infections as easily accommodated or at least manageable in the relationship (LaSala, 2004), some participants made references to the likelihood of leaving the relationship, or being abandoned, if novel, sexually transmitted infections entered their partnerships via extradyadic sex. Whether this was predominantly a reflection of the general emotional consequences of acquiring infections or a sense of betrayal, specifically, for having been lied to, was hard to determine through the unstructured component of questioning during interviews.

Johnson's (2013) perspectives concerning the importance of emotional bonding and interdependence was explored among the responses of this study's participants. Among gay men in long-term relationships who maintain sexual exclusivity, it was of interest when they commented about higher degrees of emotional bonding, cuddling and dependence.

I thought that Johnson's theory (2019)—concerning the need for interdependence during parenting and how interdependence facilitates sexual exclusivity—may not have been as relevant a consideration for gay, versus heterosexual and bisexual, men. In evaluating my presupposition

and for the sake of suspending my belief so that I could, instead, focus on the lived experiences of the participants—bracketing or phenomenological reduction—it was of interest for me to explore the comments made by the participants engaged in team parenting efforts with their partners. Despite my initial thinking that Johnson’s theory concerning interdependence and parenting might not be as relevant for gay men, I continued to wonder how parenting might have increased interdependence and might have been associated with the sexual exclusivity of the participants.

Johnson’s (2019) stance that the time and emotional investments in parenting were strongly associated with sexual exclusivity was not evident among participant responses; however, this does not indicate that her theory or its application to gay, rather than heterosexual, men is not relevant since the lack of support for it may have resulted from the qualitative design of the study, the fact that no participants were in open relationships for comparison, or the small number of participants—especially those who were parents. Three of the eleven participants had children. One participant, John, had non-dependent children from a prior marriage with a woman. Morris had foster children with his husband and another participant, James, had adopted a child with his spouse. While no responses were provided to suggest that active parenting, of dependent children, espoused nor hindered sexual exclusivity, one partial exception was the grandfather, John, who indicated that his self-image, in his role as a grandfather, was inconsistent with extradyadic sex. In his case, the oldest of the participants—who also referred to himself as having been conservative in this prior marriage to a woman—was referring to not only his identity as a grandparent but also to how others might critically view a grandfather who was in an open relationship: He suggested that sexual infidelity did not fit with generally preconceived notions of how grandparents should act. Furthermore, having previously parented dependent

children within his marriage to a woman, John indicated that he had also been sexually exclusive with her. John's disclosure of having previously maintained sexual exclusivity with a woman, despite his knowledge that he was gay, represented the sole reference, out of eleven participants, of a possible connection between actively parenting dependent children and sexual exclusivity; however, it is important to note that at the time of John's prior marriage, it concerned opposite-sex pair-bonding rather than the subject of this study.

Johnson's (2019) perspectives on parenting are entrenched in practical considerations including the reality of how much time and resources parents must invest in efforts to parent successfully and how this joint effort, sometimes characterized as being a sacrifice (Johnson, 2019), is so extensive that it does not easily allow, nor is it pragmatic, for occurrences of extradyadic sex. While some parents do *cheat* sexually on their spouses, Johnson (2019) does not believe it is as common as it is depicted in the media, and her overriding thesis is that the time, planning, logistics, and moment-by-moment emotional investments of parenting contribute to sexual exclusivity. While consisting of a very small sample size, neither of the two participants, who were actively engaged in parenting their children, commented on how Johnson's (2019) theory contributed to their own successes concerning sexual exclusivity. It is possible that in future studies, Johnson's thesis will be supported if larger sample sizes are explored.

Not a single participant could identify any meaningful downside, compromise or problem associated with their more than five years of sexual monogamy with their partner. With this specific consideration, not one of the eleven participants used sarcasm or humor when answering this interview question; they all clearly indicated that sexual exclusivity had been nothing but beneficial.

Chapter 5: Summary and Suggestions

Answering the Research Questions

This chapter begins with a summary, a concise outline of how specific subthemes and themes addressed the study's four research questions. Responding to research questions, the subthemes were occasionally illuminated by the provision of observations from my fieldnotes (Bailey, 2007)—especially concerning non-verbal communication and tone of voice—that allowed me to better represent the full extent of participant narratives and points of view.

How did the participants maintain sexual exclusivity? Subthemes constituting the themes of “decision-making toward sexual exclusivity” and “rigidity in beliefs” predominantly provided the relevant content to address this inquiry. Decision-making for sexual exclusivity, based on “rapid commitment to sexually exclusive behavior,” due to “internal locus of control”—which was sometimes informed by the awareness of mounting opposition between the authentic self and “monogamish initiation”—helped to explain how exclusivity came about and was sustained, at least, initially. Continued adherence to rigid beliefs helped to explain how exclusivity was maintained. Participants were emphatic in their descriptions that constructed a subtheme, “relationships equate to sexual monogamy,” in which the entirety of partnerships were reduced to, and defined by, acts of sex. Within “the idea of attentional control” participants described their belief that sexual exclusivity would preserve their partners’ interpersonal focus on them rather than have attention dispersed to others; another element of “the idea of attentional control” is how scattered interpersonal attention threatens the integrity of pair-bonds. The subtheme of “promiscuity bias” arose from participant descriptions in which sexual exclusivity

was a result of efforts to symbolically discredit societal expectations that gay men would have extradyadic sex since they are, presumedly, inherently promiscuous.

Its behavioral underpinning means that, potentially, the most practical insight into how gay men, who seek sexual exclusivity, can strive for it was revealed by participant responses that formed the subtheme of “risky imagery” included within the conceptual umbrella of the theme, “threats to sexual exclusivity.” Participants’ awareness of their need to exercise restraint in using visual stimuli of a sexual nature was easily identified as a useful and pragmatic strategy.

Compared to how participants were able to maintain sexual exclusivity, a larger number of subthemes were formulated from their responses to the second research question.

Why did participants maintain sexual exclusivity? While the “promiscuity bias” assisted in both answering the first and second research questions, subthemes clustered within the themes of “seeking positive affects” and “avoiding negative affects” supplied insights to thoroughly establish why participants maintained sexual exclusivity. Participants indicated that they were motivated by feelings of belonging, acceptance, intimacy, emotional maturity, respect, security, integrity and hope for a better quality of life. From the other side of the same perspective, they attempted to avoid “troublesome feelings,” associated with extra dyadic sex, of which they sometimes became mindful via “observational learning.” The reason many participants were drawn to sexual exclusivity was to avoid “feeling used,” especially sexually, by other men. The existential threat of “geriatric loneliness” helped to explain why a few participants were attracted to sexual exclusivity along with their assumption that comprehensive monogamy increased the probability of maintaining their partnerships until death.

Representing almost half of the total subthemes of the study, in addressing why sexual exclusivity had been maintained, the themes of “seeking positive affects” and “avoiding negative affects” were conceptually combined to signify the identification of a meta-theme, “emotional optimization.”

What factors supported and impeded the participants’ maintenance of sexual exclusivity? Espousing sexual exclusivity were the subthemes of “keeping sex fun,” “evading sexually transmitted infections,” “female support,” and “mounting support in the modern era.” In accordance, “reciprocal fear of loss” referred to a participant agreeing to sexual monogamy in return for the hope that one’s partner would do the same thereby evading the prospect of triggering troublesome emotions, from either side, that would threaten the continuity of the pair-bond. The subtheme of “misusing sex as an unhealthy habit,” involved participants who essentially equated extradyadic sex as bad habit, compulsion or addiction. From this standpoint, they clearly did not want to embody that problem behavior. In contrast, “risky imagery” was acknowledged notoriously as a threat. Participants additionally recognized the subtheme of “anger” as being a feeling that requires management via effective communication so that gay men do not act upon it impulsively or without clarity of thought since it can entail revenge-based attributes, both conscious and unconscious, that can jeopardize sexual exclusivity.

What additional insights could be identified so that general knowledge can begin to develop regarding the subset of gay men who maintain sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships? Falling within the conceptual umbrella of the “rigidity in beliefs” theme was the “having no regrets” subtheme. Not only did participants not believe there were any trade-offs or sacrifices in maintaining sexual exclusivity, many seemed confused that I had asked them about potential, negative qualities of the phenomenon.

Suggestions

The Suggestions section presents a range of implications for prospective research, clinical practice and support groups based on the analysis of findings presented in Chapter 4.

The tone in their responses and passion exhibited by participants, while describing their sexual monogamy, confirmed the importance, to this subset of gay men, to have their lived experiences more readily acknowledged and better represented in academic literature. Additionally, many participants indicated that gay support groups of varied type could especially benefit from broadening their perspectives to include those of gay men seeking closed relationships.

As a qualitative mode of inquiry, this study helped to uncover aspects of monogamy that were not previously considered. While it is important to recognize the limitations of phenomenological inquiry, the findings in this study could enable future social scientists, interested in this topic, to formulate initial directions of inquiry for both qualitative and quantitative, generalizable, research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004).

While this study provided consistent findings relative to past inquiries that suggested that avoidance of sexually transmitted infections and difficult emotions were linked to sexual exclusivity among the target population—and it did not provide support to the prior thesis that religiosity might be a relevant factor—given the pioneering aspect of the study, it was the unanticipated themes that stood out, to me, as the more interesting possibilities for further investigation.

Is it possible that this target population experiences more emotional intensity? Prior research had found that many gay men in open, long-term partnerships experienced an equal level of relationship satisfaction as gay men in closed, long-term partnerships (Bonello & Cross,

2010; Whitton, et al., 2015). If men in open relationships had been experiencing the intense affective disturbances that the present study's participants insisted were inextricably associated with extradyadic sex, it does not seem likely that their level of relationship satisfaction would have been as equal as reported.

The concept of "being used" is not one that was uncovered during the literature review. When the idea of being sexually used by a man arises in popular culture, either in-person or represented in media or entertainment, it tends to be expressed by heterosexual women (Rosenfeld, 2019). Gay men having sex with bisexuals, married to women, is sometimes viewed in a favorable light, with a portion of gay men characterizing it as being especially exciting. In contrast, participants voiced concerns that bisexuals, married to women, were just using gay men for sex and not offering up the kind of emotional commitment they provided to their wives.

Young, heterosexual men having sex with gay men for money, alcohol or other non-sexual benefits, have been called "hustlers," implying they are using gay men (Goldbaum, Perdue, & Higgins, 1996). In researching a similar phenomenon in South Africa, Mantell, Tocco, Osmand, Sandfort, and Lane (2016) discovered that gay men having sex with *After Nine men* also felt used; the apparent *costs* to have sex with these more masculine men—who were restricting their gay interpersonal involvements to sex and only after nine o'clock in the evening—were typically alcohol and other commodities. Alternatively, when younger gay men are having sex with older gay men in a matter that might be viewed as using older men, it has not been identified as such in academic literature. Generally, in situations in which a much older gay man has much younger gay partners, the older man is criticized for the apparent power differential (Blum, 2018). It may be the case that the target population in this study is more likely to view themselves as being used when entering into relationships with younger men that have

less financial security despite, generally, younger men having had less time to developed it. These considerations could provide for a number of future research directions. Paralleling the present study's finding that older gay men, with more financial resources, sometimes feels used by younger men, is Masvawure, Sandford, Reddy, Collier, and Lane's (2015) observations that even when less masculine men pay to have sex with more masculine men, the transaction does not increase the power of the less masculine men in these sexual relationships. A prospective study that may illuminate reasons concerning feelings of being used by younger, less financially stable—and more masculine—men when transactions occur in which sex is exchanged for resources, is if the men receiving resources for sex with older, less masculine and other men, could be interviewed. Their perceptions of whether or not they believed they were getting more, less or equal value in their exchanges could be compared with the types of men with whom they were having sex. Researchers could then look for meaningful differences, in perceived fair versus inequal exchanges among the demographic categories of men who were providing resources. One advantage of interviewing the sought-after men, rather than the men providing the resources, is the direct exploration of motivational insights rather than the interpretations of other peoples' motivations.

Given the highly conscious decision-making toward sexual monogamy—instead of any participant providing content suggesting it occurred spontaneously—it might be possible that the target population differs in some meaningful way cognitively. Specific areas of inquiry cannot be provided objectively since it was a qualitative design. Beyond the prior suggestion for investigation into decision-making models other examples might include searching for differences in emotional intelligence, self-awareness and all of the Big Five personality traits (Allen & Walter, 2018)—perhaps especially including openness, judging and conscientiousness.

It is possible that these, and other, cognitive constructs could be relevant for consideration in future research seeking to identify significant cognitive differences between the relatively small number of gay men practicing sexual monogamy, in the long run, and the majority of gay men who do not.

Further considering the question of meaningful differences, the value of integrity was highlighted by many research participants as being especially important. In describing how they defined integrity, there were links made between continuing to lie to oneself about believing extradyadic sex was benign and how middle-aged gay men, who were still secretive about their orientation, are also “fooling themselves” to think it can be healthy. Participants seemed especially opposed to the idea of lying to oneself or others. Participants seemed sensitive to inconsistencies between their beliefs or values and how they behave. In a similar path as trying to determine if the target population is more emotionally intense, or has cognitive differences, researchers may want to specially consider whether or not the constructs of integrity and honesty are more descriptive of these men. Likewise, as one of their sub-definitions of integrity, research could investigate if these men actually have more consistency between their values and actions.

It has been purported that women not exposed to semen are more likely to become depressed, since they are not receiving as much semen-containing neurotransmitters that are associated with happiness (Gallup, Burch, & Platek, 2002). It has been speculated that gay men may not feel as intimately connected to their partners unless barebacking sex occurs (Bering, 2010); however, while it has been established that oxytocin is present in semen (Goverde et. al, 1998; Thackare, Nicholson, & Whittington, 2006), no study has yet been conducted to objectively determine if more intimacy is induced, in gay relationships, when men are directly exposed to these neurotransmitters in ejaculate, such as oxytocin, compared to those who are not

exposed to semen due to the use of condoms, facials, hand jobs and oral or anal sex without internal completion. Beyond its scope, the present study could not objectively distinguish between men who were directly exposed to semen and those who were not, but there were participants who suggested that being internally receptive to their partners' ejaculate made them feel happier, closer and more intimate. This might have had more to do with psychological factors as they suggested. Only a carefully designed quantitative study could possibly determine if there is validity for semen exposure creating a neurophysiological effect of increased intimacy among gay men, being sexually exclusive, in long-term relationships. A relationship therapist, Johnson (2019), reported that in laboratories, when oxytocin is increased in social animals, they cuddle more.

While not a specifically identified theme, no participant had described the dissolution of a relationship in which sexual exclusivity had been maintained. As a caveat, it is important to consider that many of the participants might have briefly dated men in which there was sexual exclusivity despite the relationship ending, but no relationship of five years or longer, in which there was sexual exclusivity, was mentioned by participants that resulted in dissolution. Conversely, many examples of long-term, prior relationships that were open were reported to have ended. This potential phenomenon held true for both the descriptions of relationships the participants had been in and those they reported observing, involving other gay men. It is not possible to posit what variables might explain this potential phenomenon; however, researchers could set up studies to determine if sexually exclusive relationships are, in fact, more apt to continue.

In their attempts to seek out a sense of belonging and acceptance, many participants indicated that they had been disappointed that their frequent attempts to find these modes of

support within gay community groups had failed. A lack of comfort, anger, sadness and broken expectations were described by participants accessing gay groups at universities and within the general public. Two sources of disappointments were delineated. There were “clashes of ego” among members in which people with “strong opinions” about the structuring or content of the group came into conflict with other group members. More frequently mentioned, participants said that they encountered explicit criticism of, and disrespect for, their sexually monogamous values. A couple of participants also suggested that the humor that some group members used to “make fun of” the idea that gay men could be sexually exclusive in the long run was especially hurtful. While these limited reports cannot concretely substantiate this phenomenon, further research is not likely needed for a recommendation to members of gay support groups to be careful to adopt or maintain open-minded perspectives to accommodate differing values. Inclusiveness is a benchmark for support groups so that there were many examples of disappointments among participants in this small study indicated that improvements needed to be made—whether or not the passage of time had already done so.

One of the pivotal reasons for conducting the present study was to provide gay men who seek long-term, closed relationships preliminary insights into how they might better accomplish it, attain their goals. A practical result from this research points toward a recommendation to gay men, who intend to maintain sexual exclusivity, to avoid watching pornography. Equally important would be for their spouses, or potential spouses, to forgo watching pornography, or engaging in cybersex, too.

Consistent with Gwinn, Lambert, Fincham, and Maner’s (2013) findings, from their two studies, concluding that extradyadic sex increases when pornography is utilized, repeated examples were provided by participants, in this study, in which exposure to pornography, while

in relationships, made it more difficult to maintain sexual monogamy. A few participants went further to describe pornography as a bad habit, or even an addiction, that jeopardizes sexual exclusivity and its related benefits. While quantitative research should first be used to determine if this study's result is generalizable, participants were highly consistent in their stated impressions that individual pornography use was a risk for the maintenance of sexual exclusivity. While no participant commented on his opinion in using pornography together, with his partner, all participants commenting on pornography cautioned against its use individually. If generalizable research is conducted in this area, it may prove useful for the design of the study to distinguish between individual use and mutual use of pornography as they relate to sexual exclusivity.

Another consideration for gay men seeking long-term sexual monogamy, in a partner, is that no participant reported initiating their relationship while authentically valuing any aspect of extradyadic sex. While many participants described how the gap between valuing sexual exclusivity and behaving monogamishly ended upon their commitment to sexually exclusive behavior, no participant claimed that they had shifted from valuing open relationships to valuing closed ones. This insight would first need to be researched using a quantitative modality and larger sample size; however, if confirmation results from replicated, quantitative investigations in this area, there may be value for gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in potential partners to cautiously consider pursuing relationships in which their men of interest espouse open relationships.

Participants referred to failed attempts to seek out love and belonging within university and community groups of gay men; however, for the subset of gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships, they might be assisted in their goal if a social app,

designed specifically for them, became available for their use. Given their focus on love and belonging, in their understandings of comprehensive relationships, rather than on merely sexual activity, such an app might have to limit picture uploads to faces and body shots in which clothing is worn. Furthermore, from what was learned in the present study and indicated previously (Gwinn et al., 2012) pictures of shirtless men, for example, could represent risks for extradyadic sex among gay men in relationships who decide to use, or continue to use, the app. If such an app were designed, insights about this subset of gay men—derived from this study and prospective studies in this area—might be used to design an optional relationship interests questionnaire to help users more readily identify like-minded individuals.

If such an app were to be designed, the dating site, eHarmony[®], may provide some insights. From its inception, a thorough, science-based questionnaire, constructed by a psychologist, was promoted for validating *matches* (Rhodes, n.d.). The dating site purposely encouraged its users to communicate without initially seeing pictures of other users (Rhodes, n.d.), which if integrated into the app, I propose, might discourage its use by gay men who are, in fact, sex- rather than relationship-focused. It may encourage use by gay men, similar to this study's participants, centered on developing emotional intimacy and a comprehensive, sexually exclusive relationship.

While a general app for gay men seeking sexual exclusivity could be designed, one potential niche section within the app could be for users from cultures in which *arranged marriage* is a traditional practice. Many gay, Asian men, personally desiring arranged marriages, have voiced disappointments concerning their family's lack of interest in providing eligible candidates for consideration (Dhillon, 2018), and other gay, Asian men have sought this type of relational arrangement without their family's initial awareness of their sexual orientation. This

lack of awareness is, in part, perpetuated by the lower incidence of acceptance of gay relationships within cultures that traditionally espouse arranged marriage (Dhillon, 2018). One premise of the purpose for arranged marriage is the assumption that close friends and family members are more likely to know who is a better fit for a comprehensive relationship (Dhillon, 2018); therefore, once the app uses a validated questionnaire to create matches, all information associated with those matches would be forwarded to a few friends and/or family members who the user identified as their match evaluators. This niche section within the app may represent an opportunity for social constructivism, to broaden alternatives available to all gay men seeking sexual exclusivity in longer-term relationships: Its users not originating within cultures espousing arrange marriage—who are aware of, and value, this approach for relational genesis—may decide to engage in it. Given that research indicates that relationship satisfaction is generally higher among marriages that have been arranged (Dholakia, 2015), this section of the app may not only offer gay men a more engrossed format for dating, it could possibly result in more rewarding relationships.

Finally, in the spirit of this existential, phenomenological study—in which my lived experiences meaningfully contributed to learned insights—the need to adapt my service provision as a psychologist, for the pandemic that global inhabitants are experiencing currently, inspired me to identify an online application that offers higher degrees of privacy and confidentiality than the video chat platforms used in this study. If I conduct interviews online in the future, in addition to openly warning potential participants of the limits of non-local, electronic confidentiality, I will recommend that we utilize the telehealth, video chat platform that I now use for the provision of psychotherapy and assessment services, www.doxy.me[®]. This application promises to destroy all individually identifiable information at the end of each

session. Only group analytics are used by Google[®], and www.doxy.me[®] reportedly adheres to the world's most stringent security requirements for video conferencing (“doxy.me,” n.d.).

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Appendix A:
Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations Email-Letter

Who and What?

My name is Bryan Campbell. I am a psychologist, with 22 years of professional experience, who resides and works in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am currently conducting research for a doctorate in psychology, via distance education, at the University of South Africa, an internationally accredited educational institution. My supervisor is Professor Dr. Juan Nel. The main topic of the research is sexual exclusivity/monogamy among gay men in long-term relationships consisting of 5 or more years.

Purpose of This Email

Since I have emailed you this form, it means that you have viewed my ad on Facebook, advertising this study, or someone has informed you about the study, and you have initially contacted me by email or phone. I am responding, with this email, to (1) thank you for your initial interest, (2) assure you qualify for the study and (3) provide you with essential information so that (4) you can decide if you will be participating (5) after giving me your informed consent. This means that you understand the purpose of the study and conditions for participating in the study. Informed consent is an important ethical consideration since researchers must be transparent, upfront and straight forward in conducting a study.

Purpose of the Study

Little specific information is known about sexual exclusivity in long-term relationships between gay men. This topic has not been studied, with much depth, previously. Your contributions represent a virtual ‘starting point’ that will generate information, for interested parties, on the topic. The main intention is that this survey will provide single gay men, seeking long-term, sexually monogamous relationships an opportunity to develop insights that will assist them in achieving it. The primary areas of interest concern understanding why and how these types of relationships are formed and maintained. A summary report, outlining the key findings, will be shared with participants upon request. One gain from your participation is knowing that you will be helping others understand lived perspectives so that sexual exclusivity among gay males in long-term relationships does not remain a mystified topic within academic literature; therefore, you might help others, who are interested, attain what you have achieved.

Participant Criteria

If you are (1) a gay man, (2) in a long-term relationship of 5 years or more, (3) at least 30 years old and (4) you do not, nor have you had, sexual relations with someone other than your partner during your current relationship (i.e., for at least the past 5 years), I would appreciate and greatly value your participation. Note: If you had sex with others after you started your relationship, but you (1) decided not to have sex with others for (2) at least the past 5 years, you still qualify for participation.

In this study, the concept of sexual relations refers to the three most common forms of genital contact with others and in-person masturbation with another; therefore, sexual relations are defined as giving and/or receiving any duration of oral, anal or manual (i.e., hand jobs) sex, through real life contact, with another person and one-sided or mutual masturbation, in-person, with another person—who is conscious it is taking place. Sexual intent and context and close proximity guide determinations regarding sexual exclusivity: Your experience engaging in potentially, or actual, sexual scenarios online, or casual greetings in conjunction with kissing or hugging, etc., would not exclude you from participating in this study—nor is there any expectation that you will discuss these details with me.

What Will You Do?

Your participation in the study will consist of one, in-person or video chat, interview that will last approximately 45 minutes yet no longer than 1.5 hours. While a semi-structured interview will take place, with questions arising spontaneously, there is a structured component, with prepared questions, that will be sent to you by email several days before your interview; it will give you time for careful consideration so that you can begin to formulate your responses in your mind and/or with the aid of written notes before we meet. You may decide to answer all, some or none of the questions presented during the in-person interview at my office, 1446 Dresden Row or via video chat, using Skype® or Google Hangouts®. You may decide to provide any information you think is relevant to the topic even if it is not elicited by questions.

Informed Consent and Ethics

If you want to participate, in assuring ethical practice and informed consent, please place your initials after each point, below, before responding to this email. If you do not agree with the points below, you should not participate in the study since these ethical assurances are important and required. Thank you.

1. Participation is completely voluntary.
2. Participants can withdraw at any time during the research process.
3. Individuals are interviewed. Couples, both members of a partnership, are not interviewed together. While you are a couple, accurate descriptions of individual, lived experiences are sought, thus I am only conducting individual interviews.
4. I will be taking notes, typing, during the interview. I will be using online speech-to-text software to document the interview. I will also be using a digital recording device in which audio will be stored for three years after the completion of the study. The audio recording, storage hardware (i.e., SD card) will be locked in a file cabinet when not in use. Three years following the study, the SD card will be physically destroyed by hand.
5. While I will maintain confidentiality by securing the audio and text of the interview—by locking any hardcopy or hardware in a file cabinet when not using it and destroying it three years following the end of the study—at least theoretically, limits on confidentiality may remain: I can not account for how online applications such as Skype, Google Hangouts or Google Voice Typing manage the information that is transmitted, transposed and/or stored. For this reason, it is important that only your first name will be spoken during interviews.

6. If you want to participate, (a) while you may or may not inform your partner of the opportunity, (b) you agree to not encourage, pressure or expect your partner to participate in this study. Issues concerning validity of information and ethics assuring ‘no harm’ necessitate the individual, confidential nature of data gathering—and a need for considering your participation as an individual choice and a self-directed, -motivated endeavor.
7. Research participants will not be paid for their participation; however, where there is interest and a request, a summary of research findings will be provided after the study is complete.
8. The South African Professional Conduct Guidelines in Psychology and Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Fourth Edition), CCEP, and will be followed. The confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants are assured based on how I will conduct myself. You may wish to review or read the guidelines and code here:

https://www.psyssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SOUTH-AFRICAN-PROFESSIONAL-CONDUCT-GUIDELINES-IN-PSYCHOLOGY-2007-PsySSA_updated_01-12-2016pdf.pdf

http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Ethics/CPA_Code_2017_4thEd.pdf

Again, if you wish to participate, please type your initials at the end of each point above before responding, and including the full original text, by email.

Note: If challenges or difficulties arise that are directly associated with your participation in the study, you should contact me for a referral to, and provision of, a clinician, external to the study, for professional counselling services.

Contact

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using the following confidential e-mail address that is used specifically in my professional practice as a psychologist—
bryancampbell@live.ca. Alternatively, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Nel,
nelja@unisa.ac.za.

In responding to this email, (1) initializing the six points above, (2) typing your first and last names at the end of your email and (3) stating “yes” in the subject line, you consent to participate in this study. You will be contacted to schedule the in-person interviews at my office, 1446 Dresden Row, or the video chat. All stored electronic and paper-based information will be managed, to assure confidentiality, in accordance with both the SAPCGP and CCEP (see above).

Your participation and input are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Bryan Campbell

Bryan Campbell, MSc, RPsych,

Doctoral Research Student.

Appendix B:
Structured Component of Interview Questions

In answering the questions, when you think it maybe helpful for others to understand what you are saying, you may opt to provide examples. It can reflect your lived experience in the form of discussing or telling stores of what happened. This can include what happened to you or what you observed happening to others in real-life or otherwise. If you are not comfortable responding to a question, just tell me to “move on” to the next one.

1. How did the sexual exclusivity in your relationship happen or *come about*?
2. Were discussions with your partner, concerning maintaining sexual exclusivity, or having a closed relationship, part of how it happened? If so, at what point in the relationship did these discussions happen? If so, approximately how many times did you discuss it?
3. At the beginning of your relationship, did you have sexual exclusivity or did sexual exclusivity start after some span of time? Why? If it started after a span of time, roughly how long a span?
4. Later, I will be asking you about *the how*, but now, I am asking, why do you maintain sexual exclusivity/monogamy in your current relationship? Here, I am both asking what internal motivations—what beliefs, thoughts or feelings—are the basis of your maintenance of sexual exclusivity, and I am, also, interested in any external sources of motivation that might be part of why sexual exclusivity is maintained.
5. What specific factors do you think helped you to maintain sexual exclusivity in your long-term relationship?

6. What specific factors do you think impeded, or worked against, the maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your long-term relationship?
7. If you have not yet commented on this, what role, if any, have general, social-cultural influences & expectations of sexual monogamy played in your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship? Here, I am asking about general, societal factors supporting your sexual exclusivity.
8. If you have not yet commented on this, what role, if any, have general, social-cultural influences & expectations of sexual non-exclusivity (i.e., expectations that you will have sex outside your relationship) had on your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship? Here, I am asking about general, societal factors that seemed to have hindered, or worked against, your sexual exclusivity.
9. If you have not yet commented on this, what role, if any, have the social-cultural influences & expectations among gay culture and/or your gay friends and/or your gay family members—regarding sexual monogamy—played in your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship? Here, I am asking about gay culture’s supportive influences in maintaining sexual exclusivity.
10. If you have not yet commented on this, what role, if any, have the social-cultural influences & expectations among gay culture and/or your gay friends and/or your gay family members—regarding sexual non-exclusivity (i.e., expectations that you will have sex outside your relationship)—had on your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship? Here, I am asking about gay culture’s influence in hindering your maintenance of sexual exclusivity.

11. What role, if any, have health- or disease-related considerations played in sexual exclusivity?
12. What role, if any, have religious or spiritual beliefs, past or present, played in your sexual exclusivity?
13. What role, if any, have emotions played in your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship?
14. What role, if any, have emotions played in making your maintenance of sexual exclusivity in your relationship difficult or challenging?
15. Earlier, I asked about *the why*, but now, I am asking, how do you maintain sexual exclusivity/monogamy in your current relationship?
16. How easy or difficult has it been to maintain sexual exclusivity?
17. If not yet discussed, what specific factors, situations or influences, internal or external, have made it, at times, relatively easy to maintain sexual exclusivity?
18. If not yet discussed, what specific factors, situations or influences, internal or external, have made it, at times, relatively challenging or hard to maintain sexual exclusivity?
19. What are the positive consequences or outcomes of practicing sexual exclusivity?
20. What are the negative consequence or outcomes of practicing sexual exclusivity?
21. How has practicing sexual exclusivity helped or hindered the emotional and/or behavioral qualities of your relationship?
22. Since sexual behavior, itself, distinguishes between those in open and closed relationships, I thought it might be relevant to ask about any potential differences you think could exist in the sex you have with your partner and the sex that happens in the relationships of gay men in long-term relationships that are open. Before considering this,

please know that while you are welcomed to offer any impressions you have, if you do not have any or are not comfortable in sharing content that you consider private, please simply let me know to ask the next question.

23. Is there something you would like to discuss, in further detail, that we have already discussed—something that is so important, to you and this topic, that it deserves further elaboration?
24. Is there anything you believe is important, and/or interesting, about the topic of sexual exclusivity within long-term, gay, male relationships, that you could share, that we have not yet discussed?

Your partner's gender expression (i.e., check off one box with the first one—on the left side—being the lowest possible level of masculine gender expression and the last box—on the right side—being the highest possible level of masculine gender expression). Place a check mark in one of the 7 boxes on the continuum:

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Your sexual identity (e.g., cis male—assigned male at birth or transgender—assigned female at birth or intersex (i.e., born with sexual anatomy not fitting the typical definition of male or female, First Nation Two-Spirited, etc.)?)

Your partner's sexual identity (e.g., cis male—assigned male at birth or transgender—assigned female at birth or intersex (i.e., born with sexual anatomy not fitting the typical definition of male or female, First Nation Two-Spirited, etc.)? _____

Your partner's sexual orientation (e.g., gay, bi, asexual, etc.)? _____

Have you and your partner had sexual relations in the past year? _____

Level of education (i.e., grade school, GED, high school, post secondary certificate, post secondary diploma or associates degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, non-degree professional training with designation, post-degree professional training/degree with designation. Please provide a detailed description. _____

Appendix D:

Themes' Relational Graphic

