

Choices

Perspectives of Younger Gay Men on Monogamy,
Non-monogamy, and Marriage



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Chapter 1

Study Methodology and Demographics

Overview

In a previous study we interviewed 86 long-term male couples who were in mutually consensual non-monogamous relationships. The purpose was to describe what ‘successful’ non-monogamy might look like and to identify helpful behaviors, mechanisms, and perspectives. Because we required couples to be together 8+ years, couples skewed older, with the average age being 50 years old.

This current Study targets gay men from 18 – 40 years old. We’ve enlarged the scope of the Study to include monogamous, as well as non-monogamous couples, in order to get more data about preferences of respondents in this age group. Although most of the questions and focus are on respondents who are currently coupled, we also polled younger single men on certain questions, particularly those pertaining to preferences for monogamy or non-monogamy.

Study Objectives

- Identify the prevalence and attitudes about monogamy and nonmonogamy in the younger gay male population
- Describe existing monogamous and non-monogamous couples in terms of viability, relationship health, what works and what’s challenging
- Identify to what degree gay marriage is desired by younger gay men and the degree to which marriage is associated with monogamy
- Provide findings that bring greater awareness and information to younger generations of gay men as they make decisions about their relationships

Methodology

The study consisted of two different online surveys and 30 telephone interviews.

Quantitative Survey

- Initially, we conducted an online survey which we advertised on Facebook in September, 2014. (See Quantitative Survey Questions in the *Appendix*). The Facebook referrals came from diverse parts of the USA, both urban and small town environs and their responses served as our primary quantitative data. We had the following respondents in the FACEBOOK COHORT:
 - Singles — 242
 - Monogamous Couples — 290
 - Non-Monogamous Couples — 48
- Since we had so few non-monogamous couples respond to the Facebook ad, we also, placed an ad in Grindr (a gay male sex hook-up app) in late September, 2014. We had the following respondents in the Grindr COHORT:
 - Singles — 328
 - Monogamous Couples — 42
 - Non-Monogamous Couples — 79
- Because we assumed that the Grindr audience skewed toward non-monogamy and the population was urban (Seattle, San Francisco, Portland) we were selective about how we used the data. We added the data from non-monogamous couples responding to the Grindr survey to data from non-monogamous couples responding to the Facebook survey for purposes of better understanding non-monogamous

couples. This gave us 127 non-monogamous couples. We purposely omitted the data from Grindr singles and monogamous couples in most of our analysis.

Qualitative Survey

- As we were analyzing the Facebook and Grindr data, we noticed there were a significant number of couples who described themselves as monogamous, even though they had ‘three-ways’ and/or occasional sex with ‘outsiders.’ We were curious about this, and decided to conduct a second survey in October, 2014. The survey, which primarily consisted of open-ended questions (See Qualitative Survey Questions in the *Appendix*), was conducted online using a FACEBOOK advertisement.
- In this survey we only enlisted participants who were in relationships (no singles).
- We instructed participants to identify as:
 - Strictly monogamous
 - Monogamous, but held ‘loosely’— ‘monogamish’
 - Non-monogamous
- We had the following number of respondents:

- 632 monogamous couples, of which 161 completed the written comments
- 152 ‘monogamish’ couples, of which 45 completed the written comments
- 48 non-monogamous couples, of which 16 completed the written comments

- Participants answered the open-ended questions that pertained to their ‘orientation toward monogamy.’

Interviews

- We conducted follow-up interviews with 30 respondents that volunteered by self-identification at the end of the second Facebook survey. Interviews averaged 30 minutes and provided us with additional examples, perspectives and the ability to profile a small number of couples. We interviewed:
 - 15 participants involved in a monogamous relationship
 - 5 participants involved in a ‘monogamish’ relationship
 - 10 participants involved in a non-monogamous relationship

Study Population

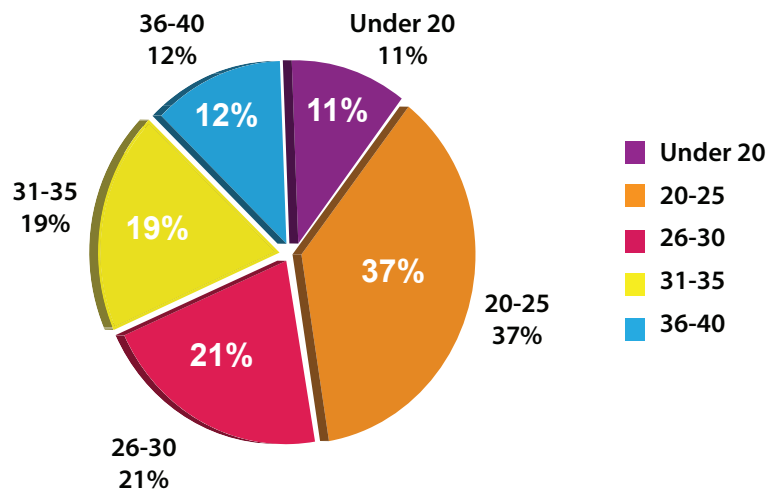
Number of Respondents	Quantitative Study	Qualitative Study
Single	242	N/A
Monogamous	290	632
Non-monogamous	127*	48
“Monogamish”	N/A	152
Total	576	853

*Includes Grindr cohort

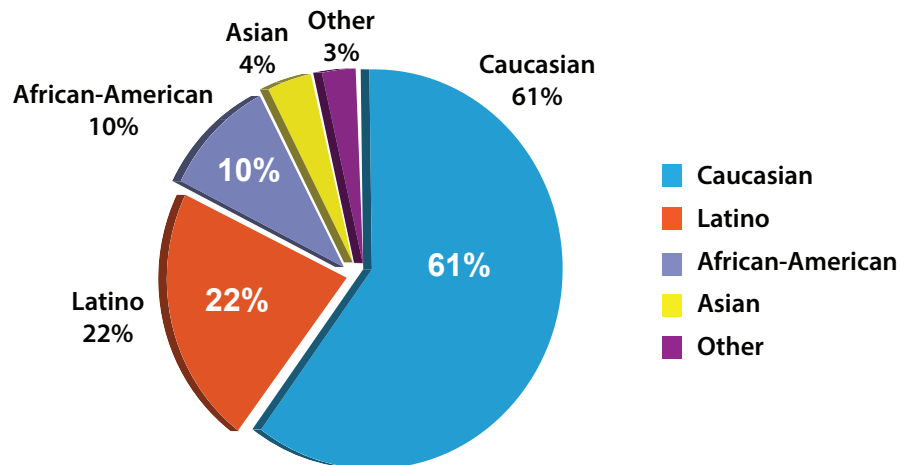
Number of Respondents with Written Comments

Number of Respondents	Quantitative Study	Qualitative Study
Single	N/A	N/A
Monogamous	N/A	161
Non-monogamous	N/A	16
“Monogamish”	N/A	45
Total	N/A	222

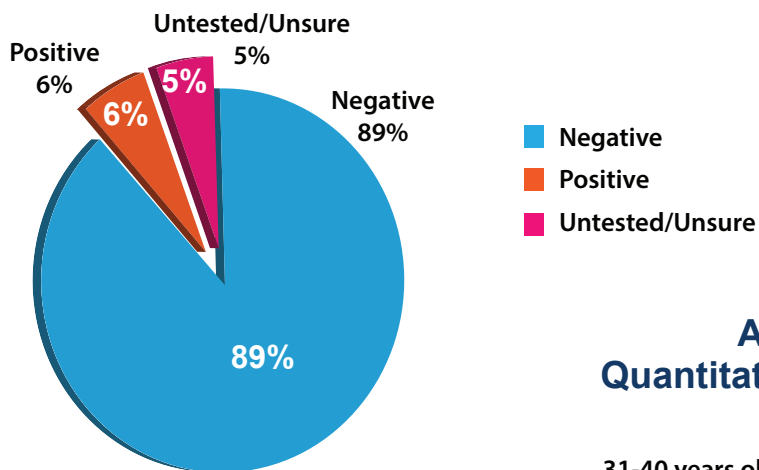
Age Range of Quantitative Study Respondents (n=576)



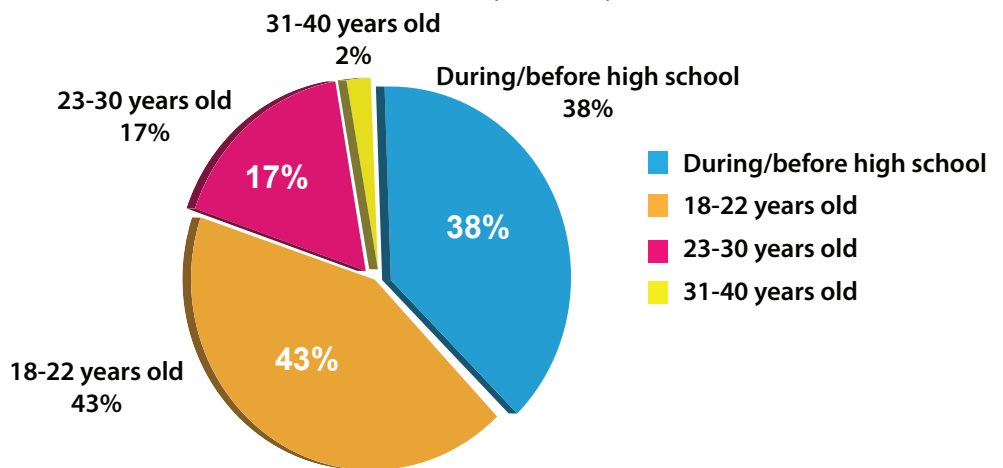
Ethnicity of Quantitative Study Respondents (n=576)



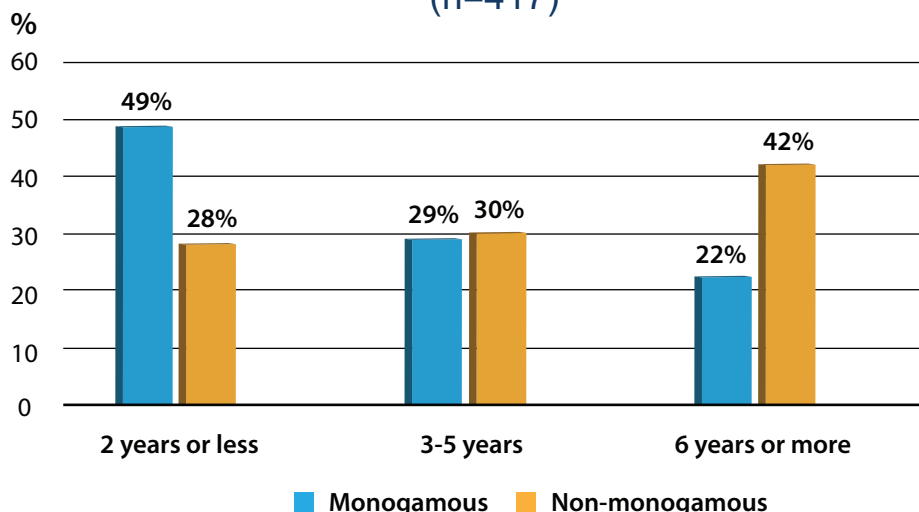
HIV Status of Quantitative Study Respondents (n=576)



Age Came Out of Quantitative Study Respondents (n=576)



Length of Relationship of Quantitative Study Respondents (n=417)



Study Highlights

- Younger generations seem more inclined toward monogamy than their elders.
 - In our quantitative study where all of the participants came via FaceBook, 42% of respondents were single; 50% of our respondents were in monogamous relationships; 8% of our respondents were in non-monogamous relationships.
 - Of the single respondents, 90% stated they were seeking monogamous relationships.
 - Research conducted by others characterizes almost half of long-term gay relationships as non-monogamous (Shernoff, 2007). See Page 7.
 - In this study, the preponderance of respondents in monogamous relationships and the expressed desire of single gay men to create monogamous relationships suggests a sweeping shift toward greater monogamy in younger gay men.
- A small, but significant number of couples described themselves as monogamous, even though they had 'three-ways' and/or occasional sex with 'outsiders.' We described these couples as 'monogamish' and had them self-identify in the qualitative survey.
- Marriage is definitely becoming the norm.
 - In our quantitative study, 15% of couples are married; 26% are domestic partners; 36% are intending to marry. A whopping 92% of single men expect to marry. 62% said most of their friends are married or likely to marry.
 - Marriage was equally prevalent among monogamous and non-monogamous couples.
 - Monogamy was equated with marriage by 58% of all respondents. However 31% viewed non-monogamy as an option for a married couple with 11% being unsure.
- Despite the myths and the anecdotal horror stories, both monogamous and non-monogamous couples can have enduring, healthy and happy relationships.
- Contrary to the fears and myths, long-term couples (both monogamous and non-monogamous) most frequently have enduring, satisfying sex lives within their primary relationships.
- We identified respondents by ethnicity and had good representation of major groupings in the US. We did not find significant differences corresponding to ethnicity.

Chapter 2

Overall Study Results

Inclination toward Monogamy

Probably the most striking finding of this study is that younger gay men seem to be more inclined toward monogamy than their elders. In our current study, both the preponderance of respondents in monogamous relationships and the expressed desire of single gay men to create a monogamous relationship seems to represent a sweeping shift toward greater monogamy.

In the quantitative study, most of the 580 participants came via FaceBook:

- 42% of respondents were single
- 50% of our respondents were in monogamous relationships
- 8% of our respondents were in non-monogamous relationships

Of the couples, 86% were monogamous and 14% were non-monogamous. Of the single respondents, 90% stated they were seeking monogamous relationships. Even in our Grindr cohort (which we would assume is skewed toward non-monogamy) 81% of the 325 singles were seeking monogamy.

Research conducted previously characterizes almost half of long-term (3+ years) gay relationships as non-monogamous (Shernoff, LCSW, 2007). In 2010 researchers at San Francisco State University carried out a study that revealed just how common open relationships are among partnered gay men and lesbians in the Bay Area. As *The New York Times* reported: “The Gay Couples Study... fol-

lowed 556 male couples for three years – about 50 percent of those surveyed have sex outside their relationships, with the knowledge and approval of their partners.” That figure is similar to another survey done by CHEST (Dr. Jeffrey T. Parsons, director of Hunter College’s Center for HIV Educational Studies and Training) which found 58% gay male couples identified as monogamous and 42% as non-monogamous.

Amongst younger gay men, there is a smaller, but still substantive group inclined toward non-monogamy.

- 14% of our respondents who were in couples, were in committed non-monogamous relationships.
- 12% of respondents’ previous relationships had been non-monogamous and an additional 15% of respondents stated they had had both monogamous and non-monogamous relationships previously. Thus, 27% of respondents had some experience of being in a non-monogamous relationship.

While the large majority are inclined toward monogamy, there is also a group in the middle that is open to the possibility of non-monogamy under the right circumstances.

- Of our single respondents, 34% stated they could imagine agreeing to a non-monogamous relationship with the right person and 32% stated they might consider opening a relationship and having it become non-monogamous depending on the length of the relationship.

- In our Grindr cohort (which we would assume is skewed toward non-monogamy) the numbers were a bit higher: 51% of single men were open to non-monogamy with the right person; 52% can imagine opening the relationship over time.
- We hypothesize that some couples will move to non-monogamy over time. We refer to our previous study (*Beyond Monogamy*, Spears, Lowen, 2010.) as a point of reference. In that study, which solely looked at long-term non-monogamous couples, 49% began their relationships being non-monogamous, but the other 51% were still monogamous after 1 year. It took the 51% from 1 year to 26 years to open their relationship (the average time being 6.6 years).

Age as factor in inclination toward monogamy:

On the one hand, the preference for monogamy seemed to cut across ages.

Singles 25 & under: 89% were seeking monogamous relationships.

Singles 26-30: 93% were seeking monogamous relationships.

Singles 31-40: 92% were seeking monogamous relationships

However, older respondents were more open to the possibility of a non-monogamous relationship.

44% of singles from 26-40 were open to the possibility.

29% of those 25 and under were open to the possibility.

Predictably, there were more non-monogamous couples in the older age groups

Of those, 25 & under: 4% were in non-monogamous relationships.

Of those, 26-30: 8% were in non-monogamous relationships.

Of those, 31-40: 11% were in non-monogamous relationships.

Additional Research Conducted in Prior Years on Non-monogamy in Male Couples

- Most research shows that approximately half to two-thirds of long-term male couples who have been together for five years or more are honestly non-monogamous (Shernoff, LCSW, 2007).
- The prevalence of non-monogamy in gay male relationships became widely known as the result of the ground-breaking book, *The Male Couple*, David McWhirter, M.D. and Andre Mattison, PhD., 1984. Based on interviews of 156 long-term couples, they found that after 5 years, all of the couples had incorporated some provision for outside sexual activity.
- Since the AIDS pandemic, four studies have found that gay men have not become more monogamous out of fear of HIV (Crawford, Rodden, Kippax & Van de Ven, 2001; Davidovich, et al., 2001; Halkitis, Zade, Shrem & Marmor, 2004; LaSala, 2005). Other studies document that only one third of male couples are sexually exclusive (*Advocate Sex Poll*, 2002; Bryant & Demian, 1994; LaSala, 2004; Wagner, Remien & Carballo-Diequez, 2000).
- One study contradicts these. In that study, 70% of men in male couples reported being monogamous and viewed any outside sex as betrayal of commitment (Campbell, 2000).

Is the shift toward monogamy perceived as generational?

In this study, the large percentages of monogamous relationships and the fact that 90% of the single men were seeking a monogamous relationship, certainly would lead one to assume there's a generational shift. Our questions directed toward the generational shifts support this, but it is not as clear cut as we might assume.

Only 25% of respondents agreed with the statement, "My generation tends to be more monogamous than preceding generations." This indicates some shift, but far from sweeping. Likewise, a majority, but not an overwhelming majority, of single respondents and respondents in monogamous relationships agreed with the statement, "The couples I know that are near my age consider themselves monogamous (57% and 69% respectively).

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements:	Single men	Monogamous	Non-Monogamous	Total
My generation tends to be more monogamous than preceding generations	22%	29%	19%	25%
The couples I know that are near my age consider themselves monogamous	57%	69%	42%	60%

The comments in the qualitative study and in the interviews reflected a shift, but again it wasn't sweeping. The majority of comments indicated monogamy was becoming the norm:

"I think that younger men are more oriented toward monogamy. There's more assimilation and with that comes more embracement of the mainstream ideal. Monogamy, marriage, having children – it's all more attainable than in the past."

"The majority of my friends want monogamy. I think it's because we grew up in a more open society. Sex wasn't ever furtive and we didn't have to get what we could when it was available. From what I've heard, there were hidden clubs, colored handkerchiefs, and ways of letting someone know you're available. We can be open about it without getting beat up. We don't have to get what we can while we can. Some of my younger friends aren't monogamous, but they're still sowing their oats. When they're done with Grindr, they will probably want a long-term relationship."

"Race and religion have had no bearing, but community has. My friends are in monogamous relationships and I think that influences us."

Whereas previous generations tended to think of monogamy or non-monogamy in absolute, 'all or nothing' terms, some respondents commented that the younger generations espouse monogamy, but hold it a bit more loosely:

"Most guys that are single are looking for monogamy. They're not any different than straight people. I think monogamy is assumed. Non-monogamy is a mode you have to actively decide upon. It's threatening. I had a friend from college tell me that non-monogamy is a sign a relationship is failing – that it's not a real relationship, but I think younger people (gay and straight) are more relaxed and loose around the edges. The topic of 'monogamish' doesn't really come up but I have friends who have been in situations when they would pick up someone, but they consider it an outlier – they're still monogamous in their minds. The lines are more blurred; relationships evolve. You see characters on TV who are non-monogamous, so you know it's an option."

"My friends and I agree to be monogamous – I'd say 80% of us. But a lot of them end up being non-monogamous. They open their relationship over time and set up rules, although it doesn't always work out."

"With our friends we do talk about it and it's pretty split. We kid the monogamous couples and they kid us. There's not judgment. My guess is there may be more monogamy with younger men who are less experienced sexually. Perhaps if they're newly coming out or are out in fairly non-gay areas of the country where monogamy is more the norm. We definitely see a trend toward 'monogamish.' A lot of couples don't want the label of being non-monogamous. We know a few couples who have three-ways, but they consider themselves monogamous."

"Among our peers, they tend to have relationships that are monogamous. However, I see a lot of long-term gay relationships that are 'monogamish.' It's very sex positive that they can fool around and it won't threaten their relationship."

And some respondents reported their friends and their generations were still embracing non-monogamy:

"I have friends all over the spectrum. Gays tend to be non-monogamous; the straights identify as polyamorous. My best friend is monogamous. He tried to do an open relationship, but he got very jealous. I said, 'Hey, you tried, it's not right for you. He kids me about all my boyfriends.'"

"We have a good sized circle of friends – people in their 30's, 40's and even 50's. They are all pretty much non-monogamous, although to differing degrees. Some are non-monogamous, a few are polyamorous, and a few are swingers (straights). There isn't any judgment or weirdness between them. We do live in a predominantly Mormon community and so we're all supportive of each other's differences. I don't think it varies by their age and I doubt any of them consider themselves monogamous."

"I have a lot of older couple friends (mid-30s to late 40's) and they tend to have more sexually open relationships. However, our friends who are our age tend to be monogamous."

"I think that it's not shifting toward monogamy, but couples are more secretive about being open because it's taboo, and different from their families who were monogamous. I think that the generation after mine might be more open about being less monogamous. I find that when I talk with them they are often monogamish."

"I don't know a single gay monogamous couple in DC, but in Memphis everyone was monogamous. I think it depends partly on the size of the town and the norms around you."

"All of my young friends want to get married and the 'white picket fence', but they get disenchanted with it, as it's not what they expect it to be and they become bitter. We have some other friends who are also non-monogamous, like us. There are also some who are legitimately monogamous. However, a lot of them are 'monogamish' couples, some of whom are actually just cheating."

"We hang out with people from our ages (27, partner is 40) to 40' – 50's. They're all pretty much non-monogamous; they all have different degrees of monogamy than others. I don't think that any of the couples consider themselves as monogamous."

"I feel like my generation's problems with monogamy are that they're too quick to give up. In the best relationships I've had, I simply had no interest in anyone but the one I was dating. On the other hand, I have friends who enter a new relationship and seem to never delete their Grindr accounts, so they just continue to get bombarded by opportunity. It seems like they then jump to an open relationship to address their fear of missing out."

Those who observed a generational shift toward monogamy had various hypotheses as to why. The most common explanation was the acceptance of gays and their integration into the mainstream culture. A corresponding theory was that older gay men had developed much more promiscuous norms because of the furtiveness of sex and the way gay liberation had been defined and had evolved.

“With gays getting more integrated, we no longer have to hide who we are. Having a monogamous relationship seems more available/possible.”

“The younger generation is finding a lot more people being accepting and our rights are growing. As we become more accepted, gays are having children and forming beautiful bonds with each other. Before, a lot of gays were married to women and cheating, but that isn’t the case now. It makes sense that people would become more monogamous now.”

“Older gay men may not be as serious about monogamy since they had to lead secret lives and are trying to play catch up. You do that for a while and then it becomes the norm. With more acceptance, there’s more freedom to be normal.”

“The majority of our friends in relationships are in monogamous relationships, but I also know a number of non-monogamous couples. I theorize that perhaps the trend toward monogamy might be that what’s being pushed in society. We now have the right to marry and some feel that monogamy is part of that. It’s hard to live an alternative lifestyle when you’re trying to go mainstream.”

“We’re polyamorous, but our friends who are younger seem to be more idealistic with respect to monogamy. I think that there’s a ‘hetero-normative’ energy among the younger generation now that marriage is a possibility and it’s shaping their reactions.... These younger guys have grown up with the possibility of marriage and therefore some of that is associated with monogamy.”

“My impression is that younger people are oriented more toward monogamy. The reason is the fact that gay culture is becoming assimilated into the mainstream, and monogamy is part of the assimilation. The idea of finding and settling down with your soul mate is desirable, and the fact that with gay marriage, that’s more attainable now.”

For us as study authors, who are members of the older generation and have spent 40 years together in an open relationship, these theories resonate. We recently saw *The Normal Heart* and it reminded us how directly sex was linked to the gay male identity and to gay liberation. When AIDS emerged, there was a huge resistance to pulling back from promiscuous and anonymous sex. The closing of the Baths was considered a betrayal of the gay community. We remember thinking that having gay sex was a political act and the more sex we had, the more liberated we felt. To be a long-term couple at that

time, was to be an outlier. As gay men began to couple more, non-monogamy certainly fit the ethos of the era, more than monogamy.

How things will evolve, relative to relational norms, as gays are increasingly integrated into the mainstream is a fascinating source of conjecture. Where acceptance of the declared societal dictate of monogamy fits into the gay culture vs. “gays defining our relationships in our own terms” will be one of the bellwethers of what that integration portends.

Support for Monogamy and Non-monogamy

Interestingly, we heard from both monogamous and non-monogamous camps that there is a lack of support. On the one hand, those in monogamous relationships felt like there was a history of promiscuity in the gay community and that non-monogamy was considered the norm. They found a lack of respect for their desire to be exclusive.

“I don’t feel supported by the gay community in having a monogamous relationship. In fact, the norm seems to be open relationships, and we feel judged, and even pressured, to open things up, when people find out we’re monogamous.”

“I feel as if non-monogamous relationships are something that are expected of gay men, an idea that we are incapable of forming a single family unit. Homosexual or heterosexual, we all have desires and attractions directed towards people that we are not in a relationship with. However implying that we cannot control and or are not capable of maintaining a monogamous relationship takes away from us as a people. I believe the role of a monogamous relationship in the gay community shows the evolution of our place in society. Before, I felt as if I was undeserving of that or simply unfit for it because I was gay, and that’s not true.”

On the other side of the coin, some non-monogamous couples felt monogamy was expected, not just from straight people, but also within the gay community. As gays become more integrated into the larger society and gay marriage becomes common, they questioned if there wasn’t a tendency to ‘mimic’ straight relationships.

“Trying to explain our relationship status to other people can be challenging. Friends and family members who have more traditional views of romance and commitment are often confused.”

“We have encountered some disapproval from other gay men regarding our behavior, but this hasn’t caused any trouble for our relationship. Some gay men are much more attached to emulating traditional sexual norms (and gender roles), so we realize we have to be more guarded around certain friends.”

“There is too much ‘slut shaming’ among single gay men towards non-monogamous gay men. I feel like we have to be in the closet or we’ll be judged as if we were a gay couple justifying our relationship to straights. Why these single and some coupled men think their relationship must look like a 60s’ family TV show is beyond me. I think their rigidity is why many of them are still single and or unhappily coupled. When everything has to live up to an unrealistic paradigm, things have a tendency to fall apart.”

Is there something between Monogamy and Non-monogamy?

“Do spontaneous threesomes with your partner mean you’re not monogamous?”

“I feel there should be an option on the survey for having done a threesome once. I consider our relationship monogamous despite us having a threesome once because I consider a non-monogamous relationship to be one where sex with another outside the relationship occurs more often. I felt there was no way for me to clearly answer the monogamy question.”

“I wish the survey had given options on agreed sexual encounters outside the relationship where both partners participate. I don’t see that as non-monogamous or open. It’s not so black and white. I know of couples who consider themselves monogamous and closed that occasionally have sexual liaisons outside the relationship together as a couple.”

“I think there are so many more levels of monogamy that it can’t be separated into two categories. There are a lot of agreements that can happen between couples that they consider monogamous that could fall in a grey area.”

As we mentioned in the Methodology segment, when analyzing the Facebook and Grindr quantitative data, we noticed there were a significant number of couples who described themselves as monogamous, but acknowledged in the open comment box that they had ‘three-ways’ and/or occasional sex with ‘outsiders.’

In the previously mentioned CHEST study, couples identified themselves as monogamous, monogamish or open. CHEST explains on its website: “Typically gay men have been categorized as monogamous or not, and our data show that it is not so black and white.”

The CHEST survey indicated that about 60% of respondents were single and 40% were partnered. Of those partnered, about 58% were in monogamous relationships. Of those that were non-monogamous, 53% were in open relationships, and 47% were in “monogamish” relationships (i.e., couples that have sex with others as a couple such as “three-ways” or group sex).

We were curious about this, and when we conducted our qualitative survey, we had respondents identify as Monogamous, Non-monogamous, or Monogamish, but held ‘loosely’ — ‘Monogamish.’ Out of 853 respondents, 20% categorized themselves as ‘loosely monogamous’ with 45 of these completing written comments.

“We consider ourselves monogamous, but we’re still figuring out what that means to us. We’ve had the occasional threesome, but that doesn’t feel like non-monogamous activity since we’re participating together. I think there are various ways to be monogamous and various spectrums of openness that need to be defined and discussed more.”

“It is really important that people understand that there are many forms of non-monogamy. Relationships are not simply open or closed. The experiences of ‘monogamish,’ swingers, fully open relationships, and polyamorous people are all very different from each other, and lumping them all together like this really doesn’t help the surveyors to understand what it is to be non-monogamous.”

Because this seems to be a significant trend, we have devoted an entire section to responses from ‘monogamish’ couples about what they do and how they view their relationship. See page 49.



Marriage is increasingly becoming the norm

LGBT marriage is prevalent and it's safe to say is increasingly becoming the norm. It clearly is embraced by non-monogamous couples as much as it is by monogamous couples:

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements:	Single men	Monogamous	Non-Monogamous	Total
Most of the long-term couples I know are married or likely to become married	57%	75%	68%	64%

Does Marriage imply monogamy?

When asked whether they agree with the statement, "In my mind, gay marriage implies monogamy," 80% of monogamous couples agreed marriage implied monogamy. This is a marked difference from non-monogamous couples where only 26% equated the two.

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements:	Single men	Monogamous	Non-Monogamous	Total
In my mind, gay marriage implies monogamy	65%	80%	26%	65%

"As far as commitment, marriage and monogamy are the same. On the other hand, it's perfectly normal and acceptable to try new things with your partner so I guess you could be married without being monogamous. I see marriage giving our relationship that extra oomph of trust."

"For us, I think we equate marriage with monogamy, but we have friends who are married and have been together 13 years and they're non-monogamous. We're married, but we may still consider opening up the relationship down the road."

"We're monogamous, but based on my experience, monogamy and marriage don't necessarily go together. A lot of guys happen to be more promiscuous and forthright with their sexual desires."

Of course, some respondents saw marriage completely distinct from monogamy.

"I do not think that monogamy is required because you are married. If two responsible adults can communicate their desires then I see no reason that it cannot still work out."

“Marriage doesn’t necessarily imply monogamy. Your relationship should be however you and your husband want it to be.”

“We’re married and non-monogamous and we definitely don’t equate marriage with monogamy.”

“We just recently married. I don’t see marriage and monogamy as one and the same. Marriage is a commitment to a person and the terms you created are up to the two people making that commitment. As long as you are on the same page, that’s what should matter. Are you committing to your partner becoming primary in your life?”

Relationship Health

“We’re not infatuated 100% of the time. In the long run, it’s really about developing a strong partnership. The Cinderella fantasy doesn’t last forever — ultimately it becomes about friendship, kinship, partnership — that’s what’s most important.”

This statement could have been offered from either monogamous or non-monogamous couples. Both monogamous and non-monogamous couples characterized their relationships as healthy and spoke of the important qualities of partnership.

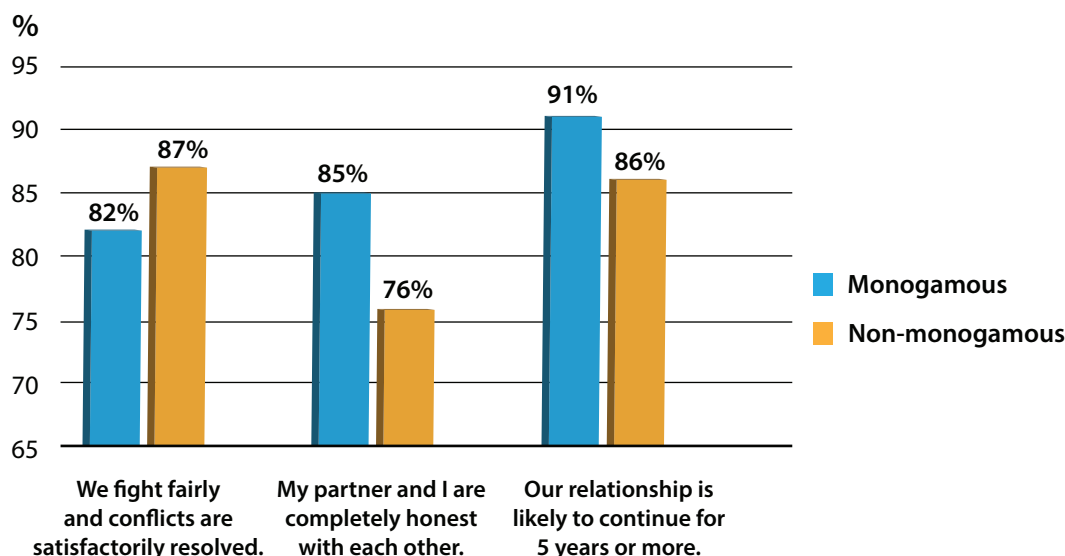
In the two most pertinent questions about relationship health, there was no difference between monogamous and non-monogamous couples. Both monogamous and non-monogamous couples viewed themselves as having a healthy, stable relationship and described that relationship as one they found satisfying.

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements:	Monogamous	Non-Monogamous
“We have a healthy, stable relationship.”	93%	93%
“Our relationship makes me happy/satisfied.”	94%	91%

On three other questions that might correlate with relationship health, responses from both monogamous and non-monogamous participants were again affirmative. The three questions related to fighting fairly, behaving honestly and the expect-

tation that the relationship would last. On these three questions, there were only minor differences between monogamous and non-monogamous respondents.

Correlates to Relationship Health



The degree of honesty had the largest variance. Non-monogamous partners reported that 76% thought their partner and they were completely honest with each other. This is lower than the 85% of monogamous couples who felt this way. Correspondingly, of the non-monogamous couples, 5% strongly disagreed with the statement about honesty and 2% of monogamous strongly disagreed. Although our numbers aren't different enough to claim statistical significance, it is an intriguing difference nonetheless. A contributing factor may be the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy of some non-monogamous couples.

Although not fully predictive, the longevity of a relationship correlates with relationship health. Respondents clearly expected their relationships to last. However, the length of time couples had been together in this study was relatively short. The average length being 3.2 years, with 29% still in the first year of their relationship. This is markedly shorter than our previous study with non-monogamous couples where the minimum length of time in relationship was 8 years (required for study participation) and the average relationship length was 16 years. We don't consider the length of the relationships in this study long enough to suggest any correlation with relationship health.

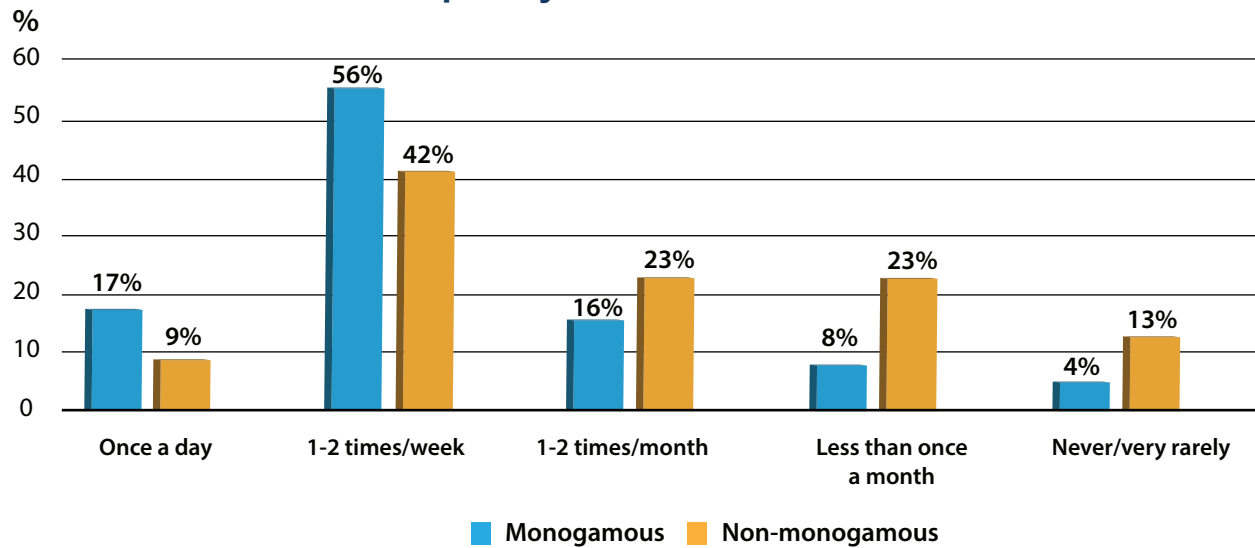
Sex Lives Together & Apart

The results on the questions asking about sex lives certainly puts to rest the notion that long-term couples can't continue a healthy sex life together. Contrary to the fears and myths, long-term couples (both monogamous and non-monogamous) most frequently have enduring, satisfying sex lives

within their primary relationships. 83% of the monogamous respondents were satisfied with their sex lives together. Non-monogamous responses were somewhat less, with 71% claiming to be satisfied with their sex lives together.

	Monogamous	Non-Monogamous
Our sex life with each other is satisfying	83%	71%

Frequency of Sex with Partner



Frequency of sex varied with monogamous respondents having somewhat more frequent sex with their partners. 73% of monogamous and 51% of non-monogamous respondents had sex with their partners at least 1-2 times per week. 12% of monogamous respondents and 36% of non-monogamous respondents stated they have sex together less than once a month.

Both monogamous and non-monogamous respondents spoke about continuing to experiment, build in fantasy, and spice things up as a way of tending to their sex lives together. The desire for couples to keep their sex lives active and satisfying as their relationship progresses over the years is discussed in greater depth in the sections following on monogamous and non-monogamous relationships.



Chapter 3

Monogamous Relationships

PERSONAL PROFILE #1

Tory and Sam

Tory is 25 years old and Sam is 34. They got together when Tory was 16 years old and have been together for 9 years.

"We got engaged a month ago and as of this morning; in Texas we can get married."

"I grew up in a Pentecostal Christian family with no music or dancing. I felt betrayed by religion, but I'm still spiritual. I think being monogamous stems from the positive underlying ideals that shaped me."

"We've been monogamous since the beginning. It's working pretty well. There are ups and downs, but I absolutely wouldn't change it. As we get older and establish ourselves, we are increasingly happy and content being together. I think it's helped our relationship last."

"4 or 5 years into the relationship, during one of our down periods, sex felt stagnant — it felt old. I began questioning. 'How do I know this is the right man? I'm still young. I haven't had many experiences. What am I missing?' Sam and I talked about it. He got mad, but we're fine now. Sex re-elevated itself — I think because we became more content."

"The majority of my friends are monogamous. A few friends aren't, but I don't have any judgments about that. I'm not into pushing what's right for me onto others. I do think my generation is more monogamous. When I read about earlier eras, I don't think I would have handled it all that well. Coming out was hard enough, I'm glad I came out when the environment was more supportive. I think when it used to be harder, being gay got suppressed and could only come out in sex. Maybe that's why there was more emphasis on multiple partners. I know for me, I'm more comfortable being with one person."

Choosing Monogamy

Our study results and interviews suggest that most couples came to the agreement to be monogamous without too much difficulty. 88% of our 290 monogamous respondents said both they, and their partner, preferred having a monogamous relationship. In our previous research, we found more angst, need for discussion, and sometimes conflict when couples decided to be non-monogamous.

While most couples expressed a strong desire for monogamy, the majority did not hold negative judgments about non monogamy or non monogamous couples. In fact, many held an open mind about the potential of their relationship evolving to include ‘outsiders’ in some fashion. Usually, this was a stance against ‘certainty’ — “never, say nev-

er”. But some held opening their relationship as a real possibility, although it wasn’t what they wanted currently.

On the other side of the coin, 14% of monogamous respondents reported having arguments about opening their relationship and a few stated they would prefer non-monogamy, but were comfortable with doing what their partner wanted.

9% shared they might break up because of issues related to monogamy. We would assume this fits with the 12% of couples where both don’t prefer monogamy. However, it could also additionally be related to the 25% who acknowledged having outside sex without prior agreement.

Reasons for being Monogamous

In our qualitative survey, we asked respondents about their reasons for being monogamous. We had 161 responses with many participants listing several reasons.

Reasons for being Monogamous	Percent Identifying Reason (N=161)
Love	26%
No need for more: Devoted to each other	21%
It’s what we believe in	19%
No STD’s	14%
Commitment	13%
Jealousy; Could cause problems	12%
Respect and consideration for my partner	11%
Trust	11%
Closer; Build a stronger bond	9%
Wouldn’t be comfortable being with another; wouldn’t be comfortable sharing him	8%
Our sex is special; It gives us an exclusive status; Greater intimacy	5%
BF wants it	3%

We grouped comments by theme with the following being the predominant reasons:

Theme	Reasons for being Monogamous	Percent Identifying Theme/comment (N=161)
Emotional Commitment		
	Love	26%
	No need for more: Devoted to each other	21%
	Commitment	13%
	Our sex is special; It gives us an exclusive status; Greater intimacy	5%
Creates a Strong Foundation		
	Respect and consideration for my partner	11%
	Trust	11%
	Closer; Build a stronger bond	9%
What we Believe In		
	It's what we believe in	19%
The Pragmatic		
	No STD's	14%
	Jealousy; Could cause problems	12%
	Wouldn't be comfortable being with another; wouldn't be comfortable sharing him	8%
	BF wants it	3%

Emotional Commitment

There were several reasons to the theme of emotional commitment. Not surprisingly, 'love' was at the top of the list. Not much was written about 'love', but it was on 41 participant's lists (26%).

"Love is special and treasured. Having one person in your life that you connect with and share everything with is what makes Love LOVE."

"My partner and I are best friends, and we are meant to be together. We have been together for almost 8 years, and we love being together. We love each other's families, and we have a great life. We want to grow old together, and we want to share our lives together. I cannot imagine being with anyone else, and neither can he."

Closely related was the desire to focus and depend solely on one other person (21%) and to make a commitment to that one person (13%)

When I met my partner, I didn't look at anyone like I looked at him. He grabbed my full attention. I also felt comfortable to be myself and safe around him. So I didn't need anything from anyone else."

"We do not see any reason to bring someone else into our relationship. We are happy with each other. We enjoy each other's company and want to give our love to only one person."

"Love is not lust and infatuation through the entirety of the relationship. Love is compromise, but more importantly partnership. I don't see the need to sacrifice what I've spent 5 years of my life building, to throw it away on a casual hook-up. If I wanted to fuck around, I'd be single; I don't wish to fuck around."

"He's the only one who was as emotionally invested in me as physically, and once I found that, I knew what I had was special - I don't need anything else."

Most saw sex being an expression of their love and 5% mentioned that their sexual exclusivity was a reward and/or a pathway to greater intimacy and meaning.

"I believe there is something sacred about sex when it's kept between two people who care for each other. There's an element that can't be felt through casual sex and random partners."

"Being monogamous gives our sexual relationship an exclusive status - which means it is more meaningful, or special."

"Sex within a relationship has a deeper, more worthwhile meaning, because we love each other and the ultimate sign of love is monogamy."

Creates a strong foundation for the relationship

9% spoke of monogamy encouraging closeness and creating stronger bonds and 11% commented that monogamy and commitment provided a safety net of trust.

"We feel like monogamy is necessary to keep a relationship intimate and reach the levels of trust and communication needed for a fulfilling and meaningful bond with one another."

"Right now, we feel monogamy is best for us. We have been together for 9 months and our bond grows stronger every day. Currently, there is no need nor is there room in our growing bond for the sexual experience of another."

"We believe that being monogamous in a relationship sets the foundation for us to build a life together. We feel that if you cannot be monogamous then you should be single, where you can do what you want without hurting anyone else."

"We are firm believers that the best way you can respect your partner is to give yourself fully to them. Some people have "needs" that make monogamy impossible for them, but our love outweighs any sexual desire we might have. We are certainly open and understand that our bond may evolve, but the feeling of being equals is important to us."

11%, viewed monogamy as the best way to respect and honor their partner. Monogamy was a way of being considerate of their partner's feelings.

"Monogamy lends itself to consideration of each other's feelings and mutual respect."

"I love my partner a lot and would not do anything that would hurt him and I believe that not being monogamous would hurt him deeply."

"It's a way of having respect for my partner and being respectful of his insecurities."

It's what we believe in

For 19%, monogamy is what they believed in. For some, this stemmed from beliefs about love and their definition of a healthy relationship.

"Being in a relationship is between you and the person you are in love with. That's the way it's supposed to be."

"We are monogamous because we respect what a relationship should be about. It is not about sex or physical standards. It is about love and maintaining a relationship with someone you care about and trust. The 'hook-up culture' is a real issue and it is embarrassing. It is lessening the value of sexual relations and it is making it harder for people to become committed."

"I'm Catholic and we're pretty strict about relationships. Once you're married, you're married and monogamy is expected. Believing that has helped me with monogamy. The downside is I can feel trapped."

"We believe that monogamy is the fullest, most complete way of expressing our love for and commitment to one another. We also have spiritual reasons for espousing monogamy."

"I'm very traditional, and I believe there can only be one person for you, It's a matter of respect and trust. Besides the gay community is very promiscuous - you sleep with one, you've slept with them all."

"I feel like true love isn't something that is shared with someone else. When you truly love someone, then you are not going to look at your partner as someone whose body is just for fun. It's something that's intimate between the two of you, so you have to respect each other even when times are hard. Random sex isn't what's going to make you last, but a true love and a bit of selfishness of keeping what's yours will."

"Being with someone you love shouldn't be about who your next fuck will be. We're monogamous because we love each other – being with that one person that makes you feel like you're flying every time you kiss. Sex is something that you share with the person you love. Being able to get close to someone to have them know your weaknesses and your fears. I've never really liked the whole, 'I'm gay and let's fuck this one and that one.' It makes no sense to me."

"My partner and I both feel monogamy works for us. We have no interest in seeing other people."

"Today we have no need to hide our sexuality and therefore can integrate ourselves into the monogamous normative belief-system which promotes healthy and fulfilling spiritual bonds. Non-monogamy does not promote spiritual growth because it solely promotes physical lust and selfishness. If a person is to discover their true selves untainted by the physical sexual urges, monogamy is a key ingredient."

For some, it wasn't so much a belief as it was a function of what they had experienced in their lives. Monogamy was rooted in traditional values, having observed it working for their parents, and wanting to be close and accepted by family. It was assumed, without much consideration.

"It was an automatic assumption – we have a traditional mindset and this is the deep South. It makes sense to devote your time and attention to one person. Non-monogamy would feel like we're being unfaithful to each other even if it was a three-way. It would create instability. It would mean the relationship was flawed and we weren't enough together."

"I was raised Lutheran – that shaped me somewhat, although I'm atheist now. Regardless, my values are around stability, growing old together, raising a family. I'm planning on having kids. We have the option of marriage and pursuing a family."

PERSONAL PROFILE #2

Steven and Luis

Steven, 30, and Luis, 24 have been together 5 years.

“Our parents were monogamous and we have their values. We both were in agreement about wanting to be monogamous. We discussed experiences with friends who were in open relationships and knew we didn’t want that. In one situation, we saw them experiencing a high level of jealousy and it was hard for them to resolve that issue. We also couldn’t imagine having someone we hardly know coming into our home.”

“Being monogamous helps the relationship be healthy. Being consistent allows us to be closer. We don’t have any conflict to worry about. We’re both close with our families and that’s easier without anyone else involved. Our straight friends see us as dependable and reliable. We’re both from Catholic backgrounds. We’re not religious per se, but our upbringing and the experience with our families has shaped our values. My parents were married 50 years and his 35 years and our siblings are all monogamous. Everyone – my parents, aunts and uncles have stayed together, even after tough times.”

“When we met, Luis was here illegally. He had to be deported to make it legal. We were separated for a year without sex. We both got very jealous of each other’s friends at the time even though neither of us were cheating. We talked about it. We needed extra reassurance. It was hard being separated - we didn’t know if he would be able to come back.”

“When Luis was younger he was sexually abused and so he’s somewhat restrained around sex. When I discovered that (in our second year) I was able to be more understanding of his approach to sex. At that point, I shared with him that I had been totally into pornography and even though I had given it up, I had a higher engagement in sex because of my pornography. He was accepting and it helped to understand why we were both the way we were. We got closer and trusted each other more.”

“What we’ve learned is there will be desires and other people involved in our lives that are tempting. Communication is the most critical thing. We agree on the same moral values and we stay true. It’s okay for others to not be monogamous, but we want to stay monogamous.”

The Pragmatic

The rest of the reasons could loosely be grouped as 'pragmatic.' For 14%, the primary reason for being monogamous was related to health risk. Others mentioned this as an added benefit.

"I feel monogamy is the safest way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. With each new partner, before the condom comes off, we each get tested – this way we both feel good about being clean and don't have to worry. Also I make it known from the start that I'm more willing to forgive them if they cheat as long as they inform me before we have sex again. This is because to me that shows they care enough to protect my body from diseases than trying to hide the fact that they were unfaithful."

For 12%, monogamy was preferred out of a desire to avoid problems they associated with non-monogamy. For some, it was the fear of jealousy; for others, it was not wanting the complications or the relationship risks that non-monogamy introduces.

"We trust each other very much but feel that introducing external sex partners would complicate our relationship and introduce some jealousy that is not necessary."

"For us, the relationship is about my partner and me, and bringing another person in for either a three-way or allowing each other to be with others sexually would only cause problems. When we discussed the idea of monogamy we both agreed that we would not be able to be comfortable seeing the other with someone else. We see our relationship as not needing to be clouded by discomfort, and so choose not to be open. It just doesn't work for our psychologies."

"Personally, I am the jealous type and have problems sharing. Plus, I was in a relationship once where we had threesomes and it backfired on me and opened up the door to cheating. All in all, I have a problem seeing the guy I'm with be in another man's arms, hold another man's hand, or even kiss another guy."

"I don't think that one person can satisfy another person totally (sexually, emotionally and intellectually). You have to determine what is important to you (Is having a closed relationship and a family more important than having outside sex or other relationships?). I don't have a strong pull toward or against monogamy. Probably, my partner and I could be in a non-monogamous relationship. However, we are both jealous so it would be hard to do."

Some spoke of the discomfort they would feel sharing their partner with another and some expressed a desire to know deeply that they are enough. (8%)

"We are both very selfish individuals and the idea of another person being with my partner makes me angry. It also makes me think that I am not enough."

"I would feel like he wanted to get it elsewhere because I wasn't pleasing him."

"Neither of us would be comfortable 'sharing' and neither of us wants to be with anyone else. I was previously in an open relationship and it was depressing and not fulfilling – not feeling like I was enough for somebody."

3% of participants were inclined toward being non-monogamous, but chose monogamy because of their partner's preference.

"It was non-negotiable. My partner is very much against open relationships. He calls himself an 'old school romantic.' He doesn't think you should want to be with anyone else when you're coupled. I would be open to having an occasional three-way if we met a friend and it clicked, but he's not open to anything other than strict monogamy. I'm happy with him and so I don't have any problem deciding to be monogamous."

"My partner thinks that being polyamorous is cheating in a certain way and that he would not like to share me with anyone else. I am strictly monogamous because he is not open to non-monogamy. I am choosing to have him over leading a polyamorous life."

"It's what he wants. I wanted to mess around together but he has had poor previous experiences with similar arrangements. We have several times, but now are completely monogamous."



Benefits of being Monogamous

In the quantitative survey, we asked about personal benefits in being monogamous. In many cases the benefits and reasons for being monoga-

mous overlap. Out of 290 respondents, below are the percentages who agreed with the following statements:

Benefits of being Monogamous	Percentage
Encourages trust and security	68%
Encourages connection and closeness	63%
It feels right – it’s the way it should be	62%
Makes us more likely to stay together	58%
Minimizes conflict and hurt feelings	52%
It prevents or minimizes jealousy and envy	48%
Encourages us to attend to the sex we have together	40%

We also asked about the benefits of being monogamous in the qualitative study, Answers correlated strongly with the quantitative responses about benefits. Below are the benefits coupled with representative comments from the qualitative survey and follow-up interviews.

Encourages trust and security—68%

The most commonly-named pay-off was trust and security. Comments about trust, loyalty, and the feeling of faithfulness were numerous.

“We can both trust each other completely! Neither of us has ever had to question the other’s feelings towards us.”

“The payoffs of monogamy? Being cared for; Never feeling alone; Someone to do things with; Never having to look for sex; Feeling secure and loved.”

“A total commitment to monogamy has strengthened our overall commitment to one another; it has greatly reduced the potential for jealousy, and it has encouraged us to rely on each other. We couldn’t believe that we are completely given to one another if we were not monogamous.”

“The pay-off’s are security and the comfort of having somebody there for me at the end of the day - no matter what. Not being under constant scrutiny gives me a greater sense of self.”

“We assume that we wouldn’t feel the same security and intimacy if we were non-monogamous.”

Encourages connection and closeness—63%

Monogamy encourages connection and closeness. Comments referred to enhanced intimacy and the feeling of a deeper love.

“We are not close-minded to think monogamy is the only way, but we believe it has boosted our trust in each other and allows us to be on an equal level.”

“An intense love that only the two of us share. I cannot see myself with any other man. I love him and cannot wait to be married to this man.”

“It’s easier to spoil one person with your love than multiple people. Take road trips, buy stupid little surprises, leave love notes. Inside jokes and finishing each-other’s sentences will start to be unplanned and natural.”

“Monogamy is a way to tell your partner how much you love them and how much you care about them.”

“We both feel that we can share our deepest desires together without feeling judged at any point. Being open to different things and willing to share them with someone who means the world to you, makes the intimate relationship mean that much more.”

Makes us more likely to stay together—58%

58% said monogamy helps them stay together. The strong partnership that can flourish under monogamy was identified by many.

“We are growing together as one right now and monogamy is one of the ways we strengthen our bond. We are learning so much about ourselves and each other in many ways, including finances, spirituality, and politics.”

“We have created a home for ourselves – 2 dogs, a cat, and a turtle. We have put ourselves through school. We have our own apartment. I guess the payoff for being monogamous is knowing that we build each other up and motivate each other to do better. We have each other’s best interest in mind and can completely put trust in each other without worry of the other’s intentions being bad.”

“We have been able to live as a couple who help each other in whatever way when needed. We’re unified financially and make the sacrifices necessary to take care of each other.”

"We have taught each other patience which is a big thing.... Things always work out, even if things get really bad. This is because we trust each other and because we love each other. Relationships are hard work, but in the end, when you find someone you love who loves you back with the same effort, it is so worth it."

"We have become each other's best friend. That is what is most important to us. We have amazing communication and intense amount of depth in our relationship, physically and emotionally."

"You can tend to your partner's needs and help develop and heal them. My partner came into my life after I had lost my grandma who I was extremely close with. One of the most beneficial things I have gotten from our monogamy is his full heart to help warm and heal mine."

"We have built a shared life together including buying a home and sharing a social circle. I have matured a lot in my relationship with my partner."

"The pay-off is a longer, healthier relationship – staying true to myself and another. We are fixing to get married and hopefully live the rest of our lives together."

Minimizes conflict, hurt feelings, jealousy and envy—52%

52% thought that monogamy minimizes the potential for jealousy, hurt feelings and the resulting conflict that come with them.

"No drama or jealousy about who is getting hit on more or who is getting more attention."

"I see less complications as a monogamous couple and more opportunities to focus on your partner."

"Knowing that the only person my partner is sexual with is me eases my mind about the stability of the relationship. There are no doubts or fears that someone might be able to provide sexual satisfaction that I cannot."

"I feel like I am enough. I feel wanted and desired and special - that I was chosen as the one person he would love."

Encourages us to attend to the sex we have together—40%

40% said monogamy helped their sex lives and made sex special.

“We’re able to be more open about what we want from one another sexually because we’re not getting it elsewhere.”

“We are much more open to sexploration on our own, and pushing the limits to what we consider sexually appropriate, as we simply have to ask the other for something if we want it. Instead of either one of us saying “no” to something, and looking for it elsewhere, we discuss any sexual fantasy or need, and find a way to make that work creatively in our sexual relationship.”

“We are able to grow and experiment sexually and our sex is more meaningful because we’re not sharing ourselves with anyone else.”

“One of the ways we communicate is through sex. Until we speak each other’s love language fluently we have decided not to bring another into our bed.”

Additional Benefits

Although not frequently stated, three distinct themes were identified in the qualitative responses that we had not included in the quantitative questions.

10 respondents mentioned Happiness and/or Joy:

“The biggest payoff is true joy and happiness in our lives.”

“We get to spend a lot of time together and have learned to enjoy each other in every way. We have become more than lovers, we’re best friends, and we love going out together.”

“I am able to recall “special moments” when the two of us are just alone being silly and downright obnoxious to each other. I feel like spreading that to more than one partner loses value and doesn’t make the person feel like they are your world, when they are!”

“I am the happiest I’ve ever been.”

6 respondents spoke of becoming family and of family acceptance:

"It gives us a larger support system - both of our families are trusting and engaged in our relationship."

"My partner and I have become very close with each other. Our families have conversed and we are one big family and we are happy because of it."

"Because we're monogamous, I get to consistently see his hot dad and brother. Oh, and beefy cousin. And also his straight friends."

A final benefit mentioned by 5 people was "Others respect us":

"All of our friends and people in the gay community really respect us for it."

"Others respect us as an actual gay couple. They don't see us as sex-craved fools."

"It results in a large sense of normalcy and the respect of peers and family."



Challenges of being monogamous

In the quantitative survey, we asked about the challenges of being monogamous. Out of 290 respondents, here are the percentages who agreed with the following statements:

Theme	Challenges of being Monogamous for us Personally	Percentage
No Challenges		
	There are no real challenges to being monogamous	43%
Temptation		
	The desire for more variety in partners and types of sex	29%
	Staying faithful when I'd like to stray	18%
	Being honest about temptations and/or 'slip-ups'	18%
Jealousy		
	Jealousy/Envy even though outside sex is not involved	23%
Sex life is unsatisfying		
	Our sex life together is limited and/or un-satisfying	20%

There are no real challenges to being monogamous

43% agreed with the statement that they didn't find monogamy challenging. In the qualitative survey, where respondents were encouraged to identify challenges, only 8% of the 160 responded that there weren't any challenges. However, most of the challenges they identified, were framed in terms of success. Respondents acknowledged that at times, there are challenges, and spoke of what they found to be helpful. From the written comments and the interviews, we came away with the perspective that the vast majority did find monogamy required some work, but the benefits of monogamy were a strong motivator and reinforcement for that effort.

"Nothing is really challenging. We trust each other and want the same thing."

"To be honest there's not much we would consider challenging. We've never been in a fight since we talk through our problems, and we enjoy spending time together whenever we get the chance since we both have busy schedules."

"Nothing, really. Just don't rip his head off when you are fighting!"

"I don't think there is anything very challenging about monogamy. We trust each other, so we don't really have to worry about cheating. I don't find anything or anyone particularly tempting. I am in love and I guess that makes monogamy easy."

Temptation

For those who did acknowledge challenges, temptation was by far the most common struggle.

Statements related to Temptation	Percent Agreeing
The desire for more variety in partners and types of sex is a challenge.	29%
My partner or I have had sexual experiences outside our relationship without prior agreement	25%
Staying faithful when I'd like to stray is a challenge	18%
My partner or I have 'gotten involved' with someone else without prior agreement	18%
Being honest about temptations and/or 'slip-ups' is a challenge	18%

Below are comments from the qualitative survey and the interviews that are related to attractions and dis-tractions – the desire for variety and the discipline of staying faithful.

“I find the urge to be with another person a challenge. After years of hook ups it’s hard to stop wanting it. I handle it by thinking of my partner and how upset it would make him.”

“From time to time, there is an urge to have sexual encounters with other men. Having the same thing over and over can get monotonous. My personal way of handling this is I watch porn. Sometimes, it will be for hours while my partner is at work and it all works up to an amazing ending and after that, I’m good!”

“The inability to just hook up with someone like I used to is challenging. I am a very flirty individual so when I go out with friends (without my partner) I am always chatting with people but know that I can’t take it further than that even though a lot of times I really think about it.”

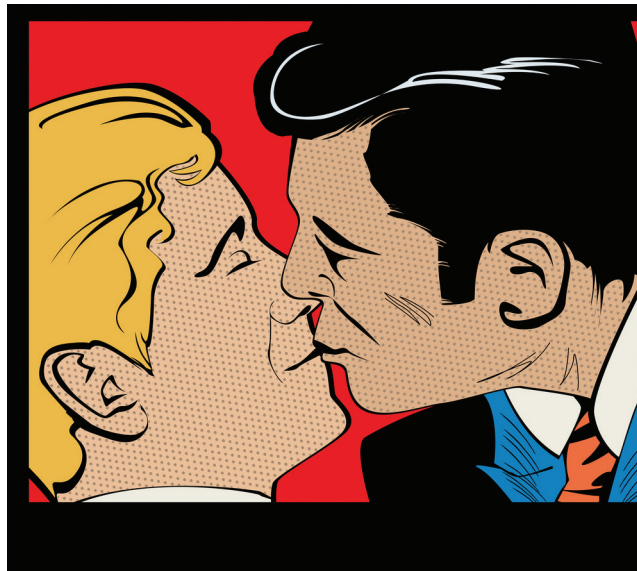
“We really haven’t been tempted to cheat. We find other guys attractive and talk openly about it. Even though we’re monogamous, we have had 3-somes with other guys, but it’s been rare. We do acknowledge that we jack off to porn.”

“The most challenging part of being monogamous is not getting yourself in a position to cheat. If you know you’re going to flirt when you’re drunk around hot guys, don’t get drunk around hot guys. If you’re tempted by Grindr, don’t log onto Grindr. Just avoid situations where you know you’re likely to lapse rather than testing your willpower. Honestly, it’s pretty easy.”

"It's hard when I do see someone I want to sleep with but have to turn them down even when the offer is right in front of me. Trust and faithfulness are more important in the long run."

"The most challenging thing is how to handle a wandering eye and where is the line between 'inappropriate behavior' and 'conversation with other gay males'. We're all flirty beings and if two gay men find one another attractive it's very hard to tone down the lasciviousness. When I find myself in a position of being with another homosexual male whom I find attractive, I think of all of the things I'd lose in order to gain one lusty night with this stranger. Usually once I compare the two roads I could take, it immediately reaffirms my decision to stay with my boyfriend."

"Any time I see an attractive man at a club or bar, there is always a moment of slight temptation. Just because I am committed to my boyfriend doesn't mean I have gone blind to all the other men in the world. But as soon as my thoughts begin to wander, I remember my boyfriend and how much fun I have with him and how much I enjoy having sex with him, and I realize there isn't anything I would do to ruin that."



PERSONAL PROFILE #3

Terry and Tim

Terry is 38 and Tim is 41. They've been together 11 years.

"We were both raised conservatively. We never had a conversation, I just assumed we would be monogamous. During the first month, the condom broke and he said, "Well I have whatever you have now." And we didn't really look back. At Year 7, we talked about opening the relationship. We scheduled a three-way with a guy, who ended up getting gun-shy."

"When that didn't happen, we kept talking and decided we wanted to continue to be strictly monogamous. Since I was his first lover, my fear was he would find someone that is a much better lover than me. His fear was catching HIV or super-gonorrhea. I'm kind of glad it didn't happen. If he said he wanted to sleep with other people now, I'd probably be okay with it. Our relationship grows and changes - I never say 'Never.' He still adores me and brings me flowers. We got married three week ago and he said, "Thank you for choosing me 11 years ago." He still thinks I'm a prize. That's the greatest feeling in the world."

"After 11 years, you certainly notice other people. We say, "Just because you're on a diet doesn't mean you can't look at the menu." The first 5 years were like a honeymoon – sex 5 times a week. Around year 7, we went back to school and didn't have enough time together. That was really hard. Sex had slowed down. I asked friends if they had less sex and they reassured me it was normal. I was surprised and sad. I offered to split up and he said 'No.' We knew each other so well and he accepts me. We started working on the relationship and now it's wonderful. I want to feel needed and I get emotional and I need reassurance. He reassures me and then we're good. We still have date night. We're publically affectionate. Romance is important to me. Monogamy works, but you got to work at it."

"We have multigenerational friends. Half of our friends are non-monogamous. Two couples are in a foursome. They're deeply committed so does that mean they're monogamous? A lot of people are afraid to tell you they're not monogamous. I don't judge people so they often tell me."

"We both grew up pretty religious. Maybe we were just mimicking our parents. Our parents have been married 40+ years. Our families are very supportive of us. Now we're looking at adoption and having babies. We're working towards being able to afford children. For us, I think we equate marriage with monogamy, but we have friends who are married and have been together 13 years and their non-monogamous. We're married, but we may still consider opening up the relationship down the road."

“Temptation is natural at times, but when you have a Porsche, why fool around with a Toyota? A simple one night stand is not worth risking something unique and special that has been cultivated over time.”

“Honestly, I find other guys attractive and I have a high-functioning libido. I handle it by understanding that there are severe consequences when acting on such impulses and realizing that I truly care for the one I am with. I also think of the person I’m with being with that same person and wonder how I’d feel... which isn’t very good.”

“We get the same urges as straight men. Just pray and jack off.”

“I occasionally get propositioned, hit on or cruised by guys that I am attracted to. It is not a strong temptation, but it is a temptation. My love for my partner and my respect for our relationship always keeps me grounded. To handle temptation, I take the compliment of someone’s interest, and sometimes I fantasize about that person when I am with my partner or when I am alone masturbating.”

“As of right now, he wants me and only me. We have discussed opening our relationship, but he feels opening the relationship is something we can do later when our sex gets boring. I do worry that if we open our relationship, it will be the end of it. I worry some other man may come sweep him off his feet, or me. I know right now I cannot commit 100 percent to my boyfriend so opening up our relationship could very easily be the end of it. I want it to grow to be stronger, I go onto many gay sex app sites to see what’s out there and talk to older couples and see how they make it work. I do know these urges to cheat are selfish and not worth what I am being offered.”

“Sure there are other attractive men out there and yes you might notice them ... ignore them! You just have to think to yourself... will giving attention to another man be worth losing the love of the one person who you want to grow closer to and potentially be with forever... Something that seems to help with this is our openness about our taste in men. We can talk about who we find attractive openly and many times jokingly. As long as we are not excessive with these comments it doesn’t damage our egos. I can point out guys who are clearly my partner’s type... The features and characteristics that he admires and finds attractive are typically ones that I possess, which reassures me he is still in to me.”

PERSONAL PROFILE #4

James and Stockton

James, 32, and Stockton, 26, have been together 1 ½ years.

“My parents divorced when I was in 2nd grade, because they both cheated on each other. I’ve always been determined not to do that. I look at my grandparents as role models. They’ve been together for 70 years and are as happy as possible. They are each other’s ‘everything’ and that’s what I’ve always wanted for myself.”

“To me, monogamy feels like security – emotional, mental, and physical. At least it did up until this year’s Pride Celebration. That’s when I found out that my partner let someone suck him off at a Pride party. It just happened and we’re still in the stage of talking about it. My partner feels terrible about it and wished he could take it back. I’m trying to be forgiving and I’m cautiously optimistic about returning to monogamy. However, I’m concerned. It’s still a sore spot with me – we have to figure out how to regain the trust.”

“I want to be monogamous, but I’m petrified that these situations will continue to happen. Stockton is younger than me and he didn’t get a chance to have flings – I’m worried I’m holding him back.”

“My advice to couples considering monogamy is know each other well as it’s an important decision. Be honest. Communicate. Both people need to be committed to it. If one isn’t committed, then the other will likely be hurt.”

Given that 25% of 290 respondents acknowledged straying, these coping strategies may not work for everyone or in every situation. Although 25% of respondents acknowledged straying, none of the participants in the qualitative survey or in the interviews offered this information

about themselves – (a few did complain about their partners). Perhaps it’s easier to check a box than to acknowledge a ‘mistake’ by writing a comment. In the quantitative survey, 18% out of 290 said it was a challenge to be honest about temptations and/or ‘slip-ups.’

“Although I had believed that I was in a monogamous relationship, it turns out that my boyfriend had cheated on me with several of his friends over an extended period of time. The benefits of trust and intimacy were shattered and I contracted chlamydia and gonorrhea.”

Jealousy

In the quantitative survey, jealousy was mentioned as a challenge by 23%. This was a bit surprising to us since the partners were being monogamous. Perhaps related, for some, the tendency toward jealousy is part of their reasoning for choosing to be monogamous. Jealousy and the difficulty of trusting also were identified in the qualitative survey. Representative comments:

“I get jealous of my boyfriend’s connections with one or two other people I fear would be more sensible boyfriends for him than me. I think being non-monogamous would make that worse.”

“We both get attention from other men for different reasons. Sometimes, it can be hard to see past that. I have, however, noticed a direct correlation of increased jealousy or anxiety when I am experiencing more stress at work. I think emotions spill out in odd ways sometimes.”

Our sex life is unsatisfying

Beyond finding other men attractive and wanting variety, there were a number of participants who acknowledged their sex life wasn’t satisfying. For some, it was merely a matter of sex becoming too routine.

“Sometimes sex can lack after a certain period of time. We still try to be regular or semi-regular and we try to be more inventive when we do it, talking about wants, needs, turn-ons, and turn-offs.”

“There’s no freedom; it’s the same sexual partner; we get bored with each other. We deal with this by giving freedom to one another and spicing it up in the bedroom.”

“Keeping our sex life exciting has been a challenge but not a big challenge. We make sure we mix it up and try new things and surprise one another with sweet thoughtful gestures, inside and outside of the bedroom.”

“Keeping sex fresh is a challenge. We have been together for nearly 14 years. I remember a time when it was harder to suggest trying something new, such as a fetish. But, as time has gone by, we both feel open enough and know most of one another’s boundaries that we have no problem suggesting whatever comes to mind.”

“Sex with one person is a challenge because of the way our brain operates – we respond to variety. We push ourselves to be physically fit, which keeps the excitement – but we also try many experimental things sexually together – imagination goes a long way to keep things fresh and exciting.”

15 participants spoke of differences in sex drives and/or sexual interests as the reason for dissatisfaction.

“We have different sex drives. I just realize that sex isn’t the most important thing in the world, and I need to slow my roll a little. When you’re with somebody, when you’re committed to them, you are trying to build a life together. And you just have to accept the person for who they are and compromise. That’s just life.”

“I’m a little younger than my partner and I want sex more than he does. However, I know it’s better to be committed to the man I love and having to wait grows my desire for him.”

“Also, going so long without having sex with my partner makes me think that just having the ability to be monogamish would satisfy my sexual needs.”

“Having sexual desires for other men or to experiment with things that he is not comfortable with doing. I usually just discuss these things with him but then also have some alone time to masturbate about these desires.”

“I was once very promiscuous, and enjoy the pleasure of having multiple partners at one time. Group sex was something I engaged in consistently. I am happy to leave that sexual fantasy behind. When it becomes a real desire, we use dildos and other sex toys to simulate group sex.”

“Sometimes I get very curious about being with other people especially girls (I’m bisexual). However, I really love my boyfriend and that is enough.”

And finally, age differences and limited previous sexual experience were an issue for some.

“Sometimes I wish I’d given myself more time to experiment sexually between coming out and coupling up.”

“When I was his age I was wild. I don’t want him to feel like he missed out.”

"I'm very sexual and hadn't really experienced much before him so I'm curious and would love to try new things. He's square and not very open about sex. Plus he doesn't really want me to top him. It's still unsettled between us, although we're working on it."

"I didn't date much before this relationship so it's hard when other people flirt but I can't do anything back. I would never stray, but the temptation is strong."

Lack of Support for Monogamy

There was only one challenge not identified in the quantitative survey, that became apparent in the qualitative survey. That was the lack of support for monogamy. Although it wasn't named by many, it was held passionately and sometimes painfully by those who wrote about it or shared in the follow-up interviews. Whether it was feeling like a misunderstood minority or having to fend off unwanted sexual advances, it was often characterized as a lack of respect for monogamy.

"Perhaps the most difficult aspect of monogamy is the lack of support we have felt from other people due to the widespread practice of "opening up" relationships."

"The most challenging aspect is having values that are viewed as old fashioned and prude. It's difficult to feel a part of a community when a majority see things differently than you and don't understand."

"We have often been asked by other gay men if we would be interested in a three-way, and explaining that we are not into that can be hard for some people to believe. I think there is this general misconception that ALL gay men are in open relationships, and that's just not the case."

"Surprisingly, there's not a lot of support within the gay community for monogamous couples. We've had to distance ourselves from a few friends who don't seem to understand that there are boundaries of what is and isn't appropriate."

"When we socialize with other gay men they automatically assume we are in an open relationship. We pick our friends carefully – finding other gay friends that are monogamous isn't that easy."

"Keeping other non-monogamous guys from trying to climb in bed with us. We have to sometimes be very forward about our relationship with other people and that we are monogamous."

Advice to others who want to be monogamous

In the qualitative survey, we asked participants for their advice to others who want to be monogamous. We had 149 people respond. Some responses contained multiple ideas. We have grouped the ideas and the percentage of people who made them.

Advice to others wanting to be monogamous. (N=149)	Percent Agreeing
Communication, communication, communication	22%
Make sure you BOTH want to be monogamous	15%
Be open and honest about your feelings	13%
Stick with it; It requires patience and work	11%
Trust each other	9%
Share fantasies & sexual attractions	7%
Respect your partner	6%
Avoid the 'gay scene'	3%
Be each other's best friend	3%

Communication, communication, communication (22%)

Communication was at the core of what many had to share about what works. Whether talking about the relationship, expectations, or moment-to-moment reactions, they all focused on the importance

of an ongoing dialog about the couple's desire to be monogamous and where each individual is with respect to the relationship.

"Being monogamous can be tough at times, but also very rewarding. I'd suggest talking to your partner every step of the way to be sure both are on the same page and understand one another's feelings."

"Talk about what IS and IS NOT okay for you and your partner. Discuss rules and what you're comfortable or not comfortable with. Communication is SO key."

"Do not be naive. Make sure that you have an open dialogue and explicitly state what your expectations are. Revisit these throughout your relationship."

"Find someone who wants the same thing. Talk and talk. Share goals. Share stories. Get to know the person you are going out with."

"Have a clear vision about what kind of relationship you want and need. Focus on what will make you happy in the long run, and what your long term wishes are. Check in with your partner and be open with one another about your satisfaction in the relationship."

Make sure you BOTH want to be monogamous (15%)

15% of respondents said to make sure BOTH partners want to be monogamous. They stressed the need to be on the same page – remarking that

“It definitely isn’t for everybody. Make sure it’s a mutual choice. If you plan to be monogamous, then stick to it! No one wants to be that person that gets cheated on. Once you have become that person that has been cheated on, there are so many other issues that get raised once you find out.”

“Figure out if you really want to be monogamous first. Is this REALLY what you want? Monogamy isn’t for everyone - some people are better suited to other relationships. If you are determined to try monogamy, avoid situations where you’re going to do something stupid or outside the boundaries of the relationship. And if you decide later that monogamy might not work, set an option to renegotiate terms at the start of the relationship.”

“It’s easier to value and respect monogamy when you can learn to think about it as a tool to learn more about yourself and your partner, instead of a way of inhibiting sexual expression. If monogamy isn’t for you, you shouldn’t force it. Sexual expression should be fluid. It’s a personal experience. Not being monogamous doesn’t mean you can’t be happy and in love and trust each other.”

“It is important to want to do it 100%. If you have doubts, it’ll be that much more difficult to withstand your desires, especially if you are naturally flirtatious.”

“Make your decision together, and make sure you’re not just doing what you think others want you to do.”

“It’s about commitment. If you can’t commit to one person, you need to express that with people you might potentially date. Monogamy is not for everyone, and that’s totally fine.”

“If both parties aren’t in agreement, it’s very difficult to compromise between monogamy and nonmonogamy. You’re either monogamous, or you’re not.”

Be open and honest about your feelings (13%)

Many participants advised couples to be very clear about their own feelings when entering and continuing in a monogamous relationship. This advice requires honesty and the willingness to communicate, but also a certain amount of self-knowledge.

"First of all, love yourself. If you want to be monogamous, then you have to be strong in who you are. If you are not, it will be extremely easy to project your insecurities and doubts onto your partner. This is the fastest way to end your relationship. It's all about candid communication. And you have to know and be honest with yourself before you start talking."

"Focus on what will make you happy in the long run, and what your long term wishes are. Honesty in all talks you have, even if you are fighting. If you can't be truthful, you can't last."

"#1. Be honest with yourself about whether or not you are truly ready to be monogamous."

"Be honest about your feelings and don't try to hide anything. Make sure that you are truly in love with the person. Know yourself and what it is you really want before you do it. Speak up - don't wait for them to read your mind."

Stick with it; monogamy requires patience and work (11%)

11% of respondents spoke of the effort and discipline monogamy requires.

"Be willing to fight for it. If monogamy is truly something you wish for your relationship you can have it, but it takes continuous work and commitment from both partners. It's certainly not a 'one time' decision; you may commit to the idea once, but – in practice – exclusivity is something you must choose to live every day."

"Don't think it will be easy because you will be challenged and tested but it will always pay off with love and the support."

"It is challenging to keep a monogamous relation BUT it is highly possible. The pride you feel about your relationship when you are in a serious and long term monogamous relationship will make you feel that love you long for from another human being. Everyone will respect your decision of a fully committed relationship."

"It may be hard sometimes but think of the guilt that you would have afterward and having to deal with the lies. The reward is much better."

"Take the time to work on your relationship. If you really want it, you'll do whatever you need to keep it. Always try and motivate each other, don't just give up right away. Forever is a long time and between now and then lots can happen, so don't waste your boyfriend's time or your own by giving up so easily. Patience is a virtue and love is a journey."

Trust each other (9%)

9% of respondents commented on the need to actively trust your partner.

"Trust is always key. If there is ever a moment where trust falters in a relationship you have to work to rebuild or maintain that trust. Adding another man into the mix will only begin to tear away at the solid foundation that has been built. If there is no solid foundation to begin with the cracks will destroy the relationship."

"Trust and communication are really the key. I struggle with them sometimes and I can tell that it affects my relationship as well as my own mental state."

"Trust each other. Love each other. Be there for each other."

Share fantasies and sexual attractions (7%)

We heard this repeatedly in various parts of the survey. Talk openly about attractions and share fantasies – intimacy requires authenticity and is fueled by creativity.

"Talk. Be honest about where you are comfortable and what situations make you uncomfortable. Allow yourself to experience new things and allow yourself and your partner to talk about fantasies and the boundaries associated with such fantasies."

"Communicate. We have no problems discussing other people, even going so far as to speculate about someone and how they are in bed. It can be a form of foreplay."

"Instead of trying to be in an open relationship or cheating, one great way to avoid the need for other lovers is to spice it up in bed. Know their wants, needs, fantasies, and desires like your own; make their pleasure your pleasure."

“Explore your sexualities together. Be open to trying new things. If you want to try something, don’t assume your partner wouldn’t be interested, even if they said something before. My boyfriend said at some point he would never want to use a dildo, but right now I am working on the other side of the country, and he’s using a dildo on Facetime.”

“Keep a little bit of mystery, dress up for your partner like you would when you first started dating. Once you let it fizzle, it’s hard to get that spark back.”

Respect your partner (6%)

6% of respondents spoke of respect and consideration as being critical.

“Never take your partner for granted, small gestures of appreciation and affection go a long way.”

“Respect each other and learn to love all the imperfections, as well as everything that is perfect about your lover.”

“Be willing to see and try things from your partner’s perspective. Expand your mind and open your heart to this one person. The ultimate goal is to spend the rest of your life with him, so be honest, be kind, be patient, be respectful.”

“Take into consideration your partner’s feelings. You have to be true to yourself, but if you have feelings for your partner, then do everything in your power to keep him happy and do nothing that would bring him suffering. Relationships are a 50-50 deal. So, my advice is two-fold: CONSIDERATION and COMPROMISE. Do not let yourself get walked on, but compromise none-the-less.”

Avoid the ‘gay scene’ (3%)

A few recommended avoiding the ‘gay scene’ as a way of avoiding temptation, as well as common values that may not support staying faithful.

Stop trying to fit into ‘gay culture’ and be your true selves. So many give up on monogamy because it is hard to find in the gay scene, and isn’t well accepted. There are other places to find friends, and not all of them have to be gay. Be human, not a stereotype or a member of a clique.”

“Take yourself away from the gay scene with all its drama and pretense. Put your time into work and your relationship.”

““Don’t download Grindr. Why tempt yourself?”

Be each other’s best friend (3%)

3% of respondents reminded couples that being best friends is part of the foundation.

“Don’t get caught up in being their significant other, be their best friend too!”

“Above all else, make sure that you are dating someone that you would be willing to consider one of your best friends.”

“Be each other’s best friends. Find common interests and stay active.”



PERSONAL PROFILE #5

Andy and Stuart

Andy is 39 and Stuart is 50. They've been together 4 years.

"We each had a strong preference for monogamy. It wasn't explicitly discussed, but it became self-evident. We did have a discussion when he did something that made me insecure and we talked through the terms. For me, it's driven out of insecurity. My self-esteem is somewhat fragile. Non-monogamy would be extremely stressful and hard for me to deal with. If I perceived Stuart was positively reacting to a 3rd person, it would affect me and bleed over into the relationship. Stuart has his own reasons for wanting monogamy. He has a history of addiction including sex addiction. He's careful about exposing himself to situations where he would get a rush and get himself in trouble again."

"Stuart was a former model and highly promiscuous. I never did all of that. In my head, I feel like I missed out on something – adolescence with the drama and self-discovery. I wonder what it would have been like. I'm envious of him and others who had that wild adolescent experience."

"Sexually, I get better with time – I become more confident. Stuart brings his A game from the start, but then becomes more inhibited. He wants to be in control and I'm becoming more assertive because now I'm more confident. We have to figure out how I can do new things that don't make him uncomfortable as my range broadens. It's not always easy, but the challenge is interesting. For example, how can I top him, but let him be in control? I also think that communication can be helpful – give me clues. Bringing all the facets of our personalities forward without judgment allows sex, monogamy, and the relationship to flourish. We recognize that people are not static. What creeped you out at one point might excite you now."

"Religion hasn't shaped my views toward monogamy, but race may have. The Asian-American community is more socially traditional. More importantly, if I had been born beautiful, handsome, sexy, and white, instead of Asian, I would have had a different experience and I might have chosen a different path."

"When you choose to be monogamous you're choosing to orient yourself around that one person and being mindful of going deep, rather than tasting all the varieties. My advice is 'Be there in the moment and appreciate what is going on and don't become complacent.' Men aren't necessarily wired to be this way. Monogamy has to be a conscious choice."

Chapter 4

Monogamish Relationships

“The millennials are optimistic about monogamy. However, real life intervenes, and we’ve become monogamish.”

How do you define ‘monogamish’?

The term ‘monogamish’ was originally coined by acerbic sex columnist, Dan Savage. Dan used the term to describe couples who are perceived to be monogamous, who are mostly monogamous, but who aren’t 100% monogamous. Such couples have an expressed understanding that allows for some amount of sexual contact outside the relationship. Partners give each other wiggle room when it comes to the terms of their fidelity.

Savage believes that of all the couples people think are 100% monogamous, a lot of them are more monogamish than people realize. In fact, “A lot of

people out there are in a monogamish relationship and don’t even realize it.”

“People simply are not always wired to be monogamous creatures.” The benefits of this arrangement, according to Dan, are realism, along with occasional allowance for sexual adventures alone or with another partner.

Some of the appeal of the term ‘monogamish’ may stem from its vagueness – people fill in their own meaning. We had respondents use ‘monogamish’ in many ways. For some, it was a way of creating a ‘safety net’, (some critical observers viewed it as a euphemism for cheating).

“We’re monogamous, but understanding if one of us slips up. Sex with someone else is not grounds for us breaking up by any means, but we’re also not actively seeking out other partners. An emotional affair (e.g., going on a date with someone else) would hurt much more than a one-off drunken sexual encounter.”

“When my partner and I first started to be non-monogamous, we were perhaps monogamish. The way that Dan Savage presented it, I found that it gives you an escape door for couples. This is a way to describe a mistake or where forgiveness is required. However, it may be a mile marker to non-monogamy. Whether your relationship can handle non-monogamy is another question. Can you handle the stress of non-monogamy? Is it possible to deal with all of the issues that it might bring up?”

“We have friends across the spectrum. Our younger friends all want the ‘white picket fence’ and then they get disenchanted and sometimes bitter. We do have friends who are monogamous and legitimately so. And then we have friends that are monogamish. That means they consider themselves monogamous, but they go out sometimes but don’t tell their partner.”

Chapter 4

More typical would be a self-described 'monogamish' couple allowing an occasional 'three-way.'

"My boyfriend and I have discussed this several times in the past, but it does not come up very often in conversation. We both feel the desire to have others involved in our sex life, but not without our significant other. We have had other men in bed with us, multiple times, but it has never been a common thing."

The term 'monogamish' suggests a certain ambiguity, but by doing so, it seems to invite confusion.

"I define monogamy as being totally exclusive with each other with NO outside sex. People sometimes use the term 'monogamish' and I think they tend to have very strict rules, e.g. they only allow oral sex or they only play with outsiders as a couple."

"We hear the term 'monogamish' a lot. Our friends and us think it's kind of a joke. Either you're monogamous or you aren't. I hear the term more from straight friends. I think gays are more open to expressing that they're non-monogamous."

"We constantly have conversations about monogamish and the differences in sex. There's the act of fucking, which requires no attachment. And there's making love, something we restrict to our relationship only. More than semantic, it's an attempt to clarify our desires for healthy sexual expression on our own terms."

Despite, or because of its ambiguity, 'monogamish' seems to have appeal and an energy around it that suggests it is an important, emerging trend. Whether or not one uses the term 'monogamish', what is clear is there are a significant number of couples that consider themselves monogamous, but who allow involvement with outsiders in some form.

Having become aware of this trend as a result of written comments in our quantitative survey, when we conducted our qualitative survey, we had respondents identify as:

- Monogamous,
- Non-monogamous, or
- Monogamous but held 'loosely'—'Monogamish'

Monogamish – ways you've included outside sex?

75% of our 45 'monogamish' respondents reported mostly having three-ways and always playing together as a couple. A few couples mentioned sex parties and bathhouses, but were clear they always played together.

"We occasionally engage in sexual activities with other men outside the relationship. This sometimes includes bringing other men into the bedroom to participate in voyeuristic entertainment."

"We've had our share of 3-somes and trips to the bath house but we have never played separately from each other and are always safely together."

"We have a couple of profiles Grindr that we use to bring in the occasional third/fourth person. We don't do it very often, but we have had one-time flings. We'd like to find one or two 'friends wit benefits' but haven't met anyone suitable yet."

"We have a buddy who comes and plays with us. My partner is a total top who is into sounding and I am versatile. We decided to find a versatile bottom who was into sounding so we could experience sexually what we wanted."

"We only have sex with other people... together. Basically as long as it's an activity we are both participating in, all is fair. It's something we only do together to enhance our own sexual relationship. We've talked about what we're comfortable seeing the other person doing, and those are the rules."

25% of respondents said they played together and very occasionally separately.

"Sex with other couples, and occasional 'get out of jail free' cards (one night stands and hook ups)"

"Threesomes and groups together. Occasionally, we play apart with the other person always being informed."

"Once or twice a year, we both get the option to have a little 'change' and cut out some of the monotony."

"It tends to occur sporadically particularly around the holidays and during summer after drinking. We also each take one week a year "off" from our relationship to experience being single."

PERSONAL PROFILE #6

Bob and Ron

Bob, 30, and Ron, 38, have been in a 'monogamish' relationship for 2 years.

"We only do 3-ways, and they are rare. We're only comfortable if we're both there. We look at it as a sexual adventure that we're both going on together. The end goal is to bring ourselves closer together, trust each other more and have fun!"

"We only have safe sex and my partner doesn't like to see me kiss someone really deeply. It's not a rule, but we like to cuddle with each other afterward."

Being monogamish has helped open communication between them. Bob has used it to look at his own feelings of insecurity and his fear of being abandoned. Ron is bi-sexual, and wants to explore with women. Although it would be hard for Bob, they are considering finding a bisexual couple.

"Being monogamish has also made our sex better. We have more sex with each other now and it's more exploratory. We've used toys and tried things we didn't do before."

"We're not sure how it will evolve. The most important thing is that we respect the relationship, which must remain primary."

Monogamish – What's Working? What's Not Working?

When we asked how it's working, 90% of the respondents said it was working, although about 15% of those acknowledged dealing with challenges.

"I am not a fan of traditional monogamy, so I was the one that initially brought up the idea. He was hesitant at first and it took a lot of talking to get to a place where we were both comfortable. But I think that it has made us more secure in our relationship over time - I don't really worry about jealousy because we are able to openly talk about our attractions, and it has helped us communicate and explore what we like sexually."

"Well, our relationship has gotten tons better since the boy toys and threesomes happened – It made me see how lucky I am to have my husband. We are open to sex with others as long as it's together."

"I find this works for us. However, monogamy is our basis, because that devotional base is how we show and receive love."

"Exploring together is working. It's important to keep an open mind."

"Having clearly defined boundaries really works, actually that's the only way it would work! We talk about our desires and fantasies and remember to keep them in the context of sex... which is different from love. I can watch my man having sex with another man and know that he loves me, he goes home with me, he shares his life with me... and we can share having sex with someone else... together."

"What doesn't work? When we forget to communicate, or take communication for granted. When we make assumptions. When we jump to conclusions, that's when we have to check ourselves and remember that this is something we do together because we love each other and want to please each other. Sex with other people is not a substitute for sex in our relationship, it's in addition to sex between the two of us. It's something we jointly do together to build our relationship. And that is something we try to remind each other of before, during and after!"

Over a third of respondents mentioned that communication was key to having a "monogamish" relationship work for them.

"Being open is working. Communication is key. As soon as someone starts hiding something, it all goes down the drain. Secrets come out one way or the other"

"Understanding desires and needs and communicating works for us. Openly expressing attraction for others as well as checking out guys together. Being open and honest about needs and desires."

"We have not found anything not working. We talk about it beforehand to see if we need to set any limits. During, we always do a quick "Are you good?" to make sure everyone is still comfortable with the situation."

"What works is when ground rules and expectations are laid out and fully communicated and understood. We both are completely honest and communicate everything that we engage in. Nothing negative has come of this, thus far."

"It works because we discuss what we are planning to do and with whom – If one of us doesn't feel comfortable with it, then we wouldn't do anything with that person. The satisfaction with outsiders is physically gratifying, but it's short-lived."

What couples found challenging varied. 7 out of 45 respondents mentioned jealousy, which was the most commonly named challenge.

"We tend to have jealousy issues when we play apart."

"Flirting on social media has created unnecessary jealousy on both sides."

"We tell each other if we've hooked up separately, but I've occasionally been less than forthcoming with details or downplayed what happened with another man if my boyfriend and I are experiencing issues in our relationship unrelated to sex that would make full disclosure have a greater negative impact than it normally would. It's a less than perfect system, but it also allows us breathing room to enjoy a modest amount of sexual freedom. My boyfriend is jealous by nature even though he's more likely to have sex with other guys than I am."

"We find that jealousy is actually minimized since sex with outsiders requires another form of trust between me and my partner. We can have sex with other people and be reassured that neither of us is going to leave for someone else because of it."

Other challenges mentioned by respondents:

"I haven't really had too many issues, although I've found sometimes when I just want to have 'us' time, one of us is too consumed looking for someone to have sex with on Grindr."

"I personally prefer monogamy, but my partner likes having sex with other people. We are trying to compromise on this. We still haven't found anything that I am completely comfortable with yet, but I still want to try."

"Sometimes people like one of us more than the other and some have tried breaking us up. We've gotten better at filtering. We look for the easy going guys and make them buds."

"Some of the boy toys got where they wanted to not include my husband and that's when it ends. He was here first and I'm not giving him up."

"Three-somes don't work for us."

"My biggest challenge is being honest with myself about my insecurities and communicating those feelings to my partner."

Monogamish – possible future experiments?

We asked about possible future experiments to get a sense of how 'monogamish' might evolve for couples. About 10% described a general openness, which they held cautiously:

"We are open to anything that doesn't disrespect our relationship to each other."

"Any and all avenues with other open parties as long as there is no prior affiliation with either me or my partner before-hand."

"We're open to considering any possibilities, but we would not want a triad/permanent third in our relationship."

"I'm older and open to most of what he may want to do. I'm not against letting him be young; I know where he is going to end up at the end of the day."

"We're open to having it go to monogamy, poly or other arrangement. The most important thing is that we keep the respect for our relationship, which must remain primary."

55% mentioned things that piqued their curiosity that they conceivably might try. These included:

- "Going to a bathhouse together"
- "Hiring a prostitute"
- "SM/BD with a boy toy since my husband is into that"
- "A gang bang"
- "Group sex"
- "Nudist venues (beaches, etc)"
- "Gay cruise"
- "Couple swapping"
- "Voyeurism"
- "Have someone spend the night"

A few mentioned trying outside sex without their partner:

- "Asking to experiment on my own, but I know I would get too jealous if he did the same."
- "Maybe sex with other guys, but not as a three-way."
- "Just a friend to have sex with, but nothing more."

A few mentioned bringing someone into the relationship:

- "Possibly the idea of integrating someone into the relationship"
- "A third that we really like and who eventually moves in."

Chapter 4

25% of the couples said they were content and not really looking for any more than what they were currently doing.

“We don’t want more. Within the context of our boundaries.....we’ve done it all...together! I don’t feel the need to look anywhere else for anything, because we do it all together.”

“I know I’m content with just he and I doing occasional three-ways and mainly just doing each other.”

“I don’t see it evolving, but rather staying about where’s it at. 10-20% of my sex is with outsiders – I don’t see it changing. My partner’s the one for me.”

“Maybe fooling around with someone if we go out of town? I really can’t say because it’s not a set goal of ours to explore out of the relationship.”

“Having a loose definition of monogamy worked for us for several years. We loved each other but were not ready to settle down. Things have changed so strict monogamy is our current, and future, focus.”

Monogamish – Reasons?

We asked why couples chose to be ‘monogamish.’ What we heard was strikingly similar to what we heard from non-monogamous couples.

Accommodates differences

The most common reasons for being ‘monogamish’ were to satisfy different sexual interests, different libidos, or compensate for sexual/physical limitations.

About 10% described a general openness, which they held cautiously:

“We’ve found when my sex drive is low and his is high we compromise with a 3rd – sometimes, but not often.”

“It’s mostly because I have a higher sex drive than he does. However, he has to approve the boy toy or three-some and he decides when it’s over or if someone steps over a line.”

"I have never really been a fan of traditional monogamy. I think it puts too much pressure on a relationship to expect that one person will be able to meet your every need. My last serious relationship before this one was entirely monogamous and after that experience I realized that a traditional relationship was not really for me. Additionally, my current partner has difficulties with premature ejaculation, so we aren't able to have sessions where he tops without using toys. Sometimes I just want the real thing, or I want to tag team him, or I want to be in the middle of him and another person. These desires and communicating about them is what led us to our current practice."

"My boyfriend and I are both versatile, but my boyfriend has irritable bowel syndrome and cannot bottom often. So we opened up our relationship so that I could top as much as I needed to and he doesn't feel pressure to satisfy me in that way when he is physically incapable to do so."

"We're both very sexual people and don't get too caught up on 'possessing' each other. We both acknowledge when we see a hot guy and discuss all the dirty things we'd love to do to him. Our sex is still great and often times he's the only one who knows exactly what I like and need, but we both have our own separate desires – for example, he's into military guys and I'm into older 'daddy' types."

Provides Variety and Adventure

Not surprisingly, many opened the relationship because it added fun and excitement to their sex lives and met desires for sexual variety.

"Mainly lust. We are sexual beings who are attracted to a lot of different people."

"It really was about being partners in fulfilling each other's sexual desires. It took a lot of faith and trust to even bring it up and have the conversation about trying it. And it took a few tries to set up the boundaries, with some adjustments along the way. Being able to say, 'Nope, didn't like it when you did that', or 'Yep...that was awesome.' But we found where we were both comfortable and now it's something fun and exciting for both of us."

"Guys are hot and sex is fun and we don't want to feel like our relationship is causing us to completely miss a good time."

"We are all men and still find others attractive. It is our nature. Speaking about it and openly pursuing it is being responsible."

“Billions of years of evolution have programmed humans to go out and have sex. We are not programmed for strict monogamy. If you’re open about it, and talk up front it can be fun and exciting, just play safe.”

“Before we were both young, both curious and very much in love with each other. Just not ready to settle down. Within the last year, of our 7 years, we have decided to become strictly monogamous and are planning for marriage.”

Keeps it fresh

Somewhat similar were comments about keeping the relationship fresh and interesting.

“We plan on being together forever and it keeps our relationship fresh.”

“It allows a little freedom and breaks monotony in a relationship. As long as everything is fully communicated and understood, it’s okay.”

“Sexual curiosity and to form a stronger bond through this joint adventure.”

“We have a complete understanding of how much we love each other. We just feel that we have enough love to share with each other and possibly one or two other people.”

“We both realize and agree that as humans we are sexually interested in many experiences, and we accept this and embrace our inherent sexuality.”

“Keeps life interesting. Fulfilling the desire to see my man take it and lay it on someone right. Very hot to watch. It’s a shared experience.”



Chapter 5

Non-Monogamous Relationships

We had 48 respondents in our quantitative survey that identified themselves as part of a non-monogamous couple. Because this number was small, we ran an advertisement with the same survey invitation in Grindr, a gay sex hook-up application. From Grindr, we received 79 responses from individuals currently in non-monogamous relationships. For this analysis of non-monogamous couples we have combined the two populations (127 respondents).

The Grindr data may skew the results slightly in that the respondents are from San Francisco, Seattle and Portland. Given the perspectives in urban West Coast cities and the fact that the respondents were utilizing a sex hook-up app, we also expect their views to be somewhat more 'liberal' than our Facebook population. However, given our primary goal here is to describe how couples are handling non-monogamy, we felt increasing the size of the population was worth any increase in 'liberal perspectives.'

"We were more like friends with benefits, the first six months of our relationship. We both were still seeing others and things were pretty fluid. At about 6 months, we started seriously discussing becoming a couple and what we each really wanted. In my previous relationship I was monogamous and I didn't want to do that again. It didn't fit who I was – I like being flirtatious. My partner had also been in a monogamous relationship, but he had cheated on his boyfriend. For him, a perfect world would have been that I would be monogamous and he would occasionally 'slip', but not tell me. I really wanted us to be able to be honest about what we each wanted and what we each were doing. After much discussion, we agreed to be non-monogamous, but we were very cautious. Initially, he was afraid to tell me when he had gone out. He didn't want to hurt me or lose me. I was clear with him that I much preferred the truth and he's seen over time that I can handle that. It's gotten better and easier as we've gone along."

Opening the Relationship

47% of non-monogamous couples were open from the beginning or within the first year. That means 53% didn't start out that way - they opened their relationships after some time of being monogamous. The timing of when couples opened their relationships varied.

- 24% opened between year 1 and year 3
- 19% opened between year 3 and year 5
- 10% opened during or after year 6

Couples describe different scenarios for how they came to the conversation and decision to open their relationship. Some understood from the beginning and some took time to consider and explore. In some cases, one partner pushed the envelope or an incident occurred that forced discussion – "I got caught and had to come clean". And some couples described it as, "it just kind of happened."

“We had been together 8 years (15 years together now) when we decided to become non-monogamous. We had never considered non-monogamy; we both come from traditional backgrounds. But we were approached by a friend we had known for five years who expressed interest in becoming a part of our relationship. We had a surprisingly positive reaction to his overture. Our relationship was good at the time, but we both liked the idea of having another sexual outlet. We knew the guy well and knew he brought different qualities or traits that we didn’t necessarily both have. For example, his politics were more in line with mine and he and I did the same type of work. We saw him adding to our relationship. Although we ended up not going through with it, it got us thinking. We realized we were both polyamorous and decided that having someone else be part of our relationship was something we would explore.”

“We arrived at the decision to be non-monogamous after my partner hooked up with someone when he was very drunk. I had never really had an opinion one way or another about monogamy, because I always felt that the emotional component of a relationship was more satisfying than the physical component. So when my partner told me what he had done, I didn’t want to end the relationship, but instead we decided to have our encounters on the side. We have never done anything together with other people, but both of us play around with others when the other is not available or not in the mood.”

“Right at the beginning, I told him I wanted non-monogamy. He was okay with that. Both of us have a history of not succeeding in monogamous relationships. We’d been in relationships that started out monogamous, but ended in fooling around and lying. We didn’t want that to happen. We also enjoy the variety that comes with being allowed to have many sexual partners. We both had been around a lot already. We’re just being realistic and honest. Partners-in-crime.”



Are We in Agreement?

Both partners wanting to be non-monogamous is critical in being able to navigate non-monogamy.

“In my past relationships, we were ‘monogamous’ but I cheated and people got hurt and I felt badly. I didn’t want to do that again – my desire is to be non-monogamous. But that’s very threatening to many people. Fortunately, my current partner likes autonomy, so me having fuck buddies gives him some distance. He’s never gotten threatened by my fuck buddies.”

Of the 127 non-monogamous couples, 78% of respondents agreed that both partners preferred having a non-monogamous relationship. However, some partners have not fully come to agreement. 22% reported only one partner preferred having a non-monogamous relationship. 31% of the 128 couples acknowledged that they found their differences in wanting to be non-monogamous challenging. 16% agreed that they might possibly break up within the next 5 years due to issues related to non monogamy such as honesty, jealousy, emotional involvement or not wanting the same things.

It’s clearly a discussion point in almost a third of the relationships. However, based on the comments from the qualitative survey and the interviews, the number of couples where these differences feel irreconcilable seemed small. Some difference in preference and what non-monogamy should look like comes with the territory.

There are the exceptions, where the differences are pronounced and resolving the conflict is difficult.

“I’ve invested in this relationship and I don’t want to break up. But being in an open relationship makes me feel like I’m not desirable enough. I know I would blame him if I became HIV+. I don’t want to see him with anybody because I know I will feel jealous.”

“We haven’t argued about monogamy, I would be willing to try a polyamorous relationship if the circumstances were right, but he would not be willing to. Therefore it’s not going to happen.”

The bottom line is that both partners have to find their way onto the same page. We heard this from monogamous couples about monogamy and we heard this from non-monogamous couples about non-monogamy.




What does non-monogamy look like?

One respondent commented, “There’s as many ways to do non-monogamy as there are people being non-monogamous.” In our first study where we interviewed 86 long-term non-monogamous couples, we were quite struck with the variety. We went into the study thinking we would find models and ‘solutions’ that would work for others. We quickly realized every relationship was different – with different personalities, different needs, and facing different situations. There was a fluidity to the construct. Furthermore, it often changed and evolved for couples as their comfort grew or they

hit challenges that were threatening.

While acknowledging the great variety, we do think it’s helpful to describe the various configurations we discovered as a way of giving readers a picture of the many choices available.

In our previous study, we found some couples only played together; some couples only played separately; and some couples did both. We placed what we were hearing on a continuum from Joint to Independent.

JOINT			INDEPENDENT
Only play together	Primarily play together, and might play separately when they go to a sex venue together	Primarily play together and occasionally play separately	Only play independently

We heard about similar variations in the current study.

“We play more together than apart, but I have fuck buddies and my partner makes connections which sometimes turn into sex.”

“Over the last 5 years we continued to be non-monogamous. It’s been episodic – sometimes there’s been more outside sex; sometimes less. 99% of the time it has been separate, not 3-ways. We both have had fuck buddies, although my partner is a ‘once in a blue moon’ guy about outside sex. When we were living apart, I had fuck buddies (friends and sex partners) I saw every couple of weeks. For the last 6 months we’ve been monogamous – not because we’ve chosen it, but we’ve both been very busy. My desire to seek outside partners ebbs and flows – sometimes I’m on the prowl, but lately I haven’t had the inclination. We both are in agreement with this arrangement and it hasn’t been a source of conflict or tension or fighting.”

For some couples, a three-way may just be part of their variety of experiences. However, 28% of our non-monogamous couples limited their play with outsiders to something they only do as a couple. They maintained this as a norm and tended to see it as a firm boundary that enabled them to feel more comfortable.

"My partner and I are open to having a third, but we do not sleep with others alone."

"We only do 3-ways, although sometimes we're just plain monogamous. A lot depends on circumstances, like where we're living at the time. For several years we were in a very small town and we were essentially monogamous."

There are clear advantages to playing together, and for some couples distinct drawbacks:

Advantages to playing together include:

- We share the experience, which could be fun and enriching
- It's reassuring to be right there and know what's happening and feel like you have some influence in shaping or stopping it.
- It limits the opportunity of one person getting too involved emotionally.
- We have a say in who we do or don't do and when it happens or doesn't happen.

Drawbacks to playing together include:

- We may have trouble finding 'outsiders' we both like or who like both of us.
- We may get jealous, envious, competitive or insecure.
- We may prefer different types of sex or sexual activities.

Rules

Much like 'only playing with outsiders as a couple', there are other norms and rules that couples develop as a way of promoting some predictability and ensuring a sense of security. Often the rules evolve based on what works and as needs-desires change.

"Occasionally, we have arguments about outside sex. It usually means we need to re-visit a rule. For example, we both had sex without prior permission; so we decided we needed to update the rule."

“We had been together for 2 years, and I thought we were monogamous, but I caught an STD from my partner. I wasn’t comfortable with us fooling around without being open. I brought up the possibility of us doing a 3-way on an upcoming vacation. He liked the idea and we had two successful 3-ways on vacation. When we got home, we talked and decided we would play when we went on vacations. It evolved from there. We did a three-way at home and then one time I was traveling and a situation presented. I asked my partner for permission and that turned out to be fine, so the new rule was we could play when either of us was traveling. Eventually, we shifted the rules so we could play independently even in town. It’s worked well and we’re good about keeping things out in the open.”

Excerpt from *Beyond Monogamy* (Spears & Lowen, 2010)

“Injunctions are typically serious and impersonal but given we’re gay men, negotiated agreements often had a playful edge or matter-of-fact bluntness. We’d like to share some of our favorite rules that joyfully reflect our gay sensibilities.”

Ms. Manners' Top Ten List

10. You can see him as many times as you want, but you can't schedule it.
9. If they're in our bed when I get home, they're fair game.
8. If you're in love with the guy, you're not allowed to fuck with him one-on-one.
7. You can put him in the sling, but no cuddling.
6. If you bring him home and he's cute, you have to let me join.
5. You can fuck whoever you want, but you can't take him to dinner.
4. If you're in the mood to fuck someone else, but I'm horny, you have to do me first.
3. You have to spend twice as much time with me than with any of your tricks.
2. You're only allowed to date the terminally ill.
1. “The Sauna Clause”: Sex at the gym doesn't count as sex.



In the qualitative study, we specifically asked the non-monogamous couples about rules. Below are the most common areas in which couples had rules:

Honesty

Honesty is foundational – a prerequisite for any rules to have meaning. Although couples have different amounts of disclosure, some basic truthful communication seems essential.

“Communication and honesty are key. No lies.”

“We communicate upfront and have a conversation before we actually do anything. We like to keep in touch and want to know what will happen.”

“We haven’t found any need for a disclosure rule, since we generally enjoy telling and hearing about positive encounters, and not about negative ones.”

“If either of us is going to start seeing someone on a regular basis, we would like to be informed.”

No emotional involvement

Although it’s clearly not a norm for all couples, a majority of couples have an understanding about not getting too emotionally involved. Many couples have specific rules to help prevent this.

“We avoid emotional involvement – we have rules: no dates, no dinners, no spending the night.”

“We are allowed to play together or separately. The main rules concern safety and preventing inappropriate emotional attachment. ‘Cuddling’ with outsiders is prohibited. Since we are now in a long-distance relationship due to professional requirements, we have a no-sleepover rule as well.”

“No emotional involvement allowed. The person you’re playing with must understand that.”

“Emotional involvement isn’t ever an issue for my partner. Occasionally, I’ve had people that wanted to get too involved. I set the limits, and if that doesn’t work, I end it.”

We take priority

A number of couples described rules that emphasized their desire to put their own relationship and sex life first.

“Do it on your own time. We are not allowed to cancel on each other to be with someone else. For example my boyfriend and I usually go to a Karaoke Bar every Friday so it would not be acceptable for me to cancel that event so that I could meet one of my outside sexual partners.”

“No spending time hooking up with others when time could be spent with one another.”

“The rules are very simple. We don’t cut into ‘our-time’ with outside partners. Also, our bedroom is considered “our area” so any of these encounters are not done there.”

Basic courtesy

Some rules are designed to avoid hurt feelings and/or uncomfortable situations.

“No sex is allowed in the apartment when the other is home or might come home.”

“Our primary rule is respect and safety for each other. He can get jealous. We just talk about it; I reassure him. I never take the lead with someone unless he’s clearly sanctioned it. He’s quieter than me, but doesn’t want to get ignored.”

“Each of us has the power to veto if we’re not comfortable with someone. We’ve used the veto twice in 7 years.”

“We have a rule that we let the other know first if we’re going to be having sex with someone. For example, sending a text saying something like ‘I’m over at so-and-so’s house, looks like I’m going to spend the night.’”

Safe Sex

Many couples had rules about safe sex:

- “No unprotected anal sex.”
- “Always play safe. Get tested regularly.”



PERSONAL PROFILE #7

Randy and Jeffrey

Randy and Jeffrey are 28 and 29. They've been together 1.5 years.

"We started talking about having an open relationship at the beginning. There were lots of conversations about what we wanted and how we could do it in a way that didn't harm our relationship. We both have different tastes and we're both mostly tops. Neither of us wanted to go without or take those options away from the other."

"We mainly play together, but if one of us is traveling, either or both of us might have outside sex. If it's separate from each other, we have to talk about it and get permission. We actually use Permission Slips that we fill out and sign. It forces us to have a conversation and so we know exactly what is okay or not okay. It also limits casual or anonymous sex – it means our outside sex is important enough to us that we will explicitly get permission."

"We only allow protective sex. We're both on PREP, but we still don't allow receptive intercourse if we're not playing together. We limit any emotional involvement."

"It's important to us to separate sex from the intimacy of our relationship. We want to make sure we're not doing anything that would harm the relationship."

"Jealousy is rare because we talk about it ahead of time. Once when I had more free time, Jeffrey got upset because I was having sex while he was in a super busy work mode. We had to talk it through. It was less about jealousy and more about "You're having a good time without me. I want to be there." We don't have problems with jealousy when we do three-ways. We have different tastes but we're compatible. If he really likes someone, I will say, "Okay, it's your night" knowing I'll get a chance the next time we do a three-way. We're both adventurous in bondage and kink and it's about sex, not emotional involvement."

"Clear communication has helped avoid issues. We agree that anything outside our relationship will never get in the way of us as a couple."

Disclosure

The amount a couple discloses or wants to disclose varies. Some couples prefer sharing everything, including the details. 73% of our couples

said they routinely share some information about their outside encounters. While 27% had a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy.

"We both have fuck buddies. We give a low-down at the end of the day, so we always report what we've done. I share in general terms and he's more specific and graphic, which I like."

"We have a rule we have to tell the other about the encounter (but not necessarily before it happens). My partner has a harder time disclosing than I do. Sometimes he doesn't reveal he's played with someone until much later. It's not like he's trying to hide it or keep it a secret – he just isn't as comfortable bringing these things up. I don't really care that much, but sometimes I remind him we have an agreement."

"Love can be on different levels. You can love someone differently than you do your significant other. Both my husband and I constantly make sure our communication is open. We like to know what happened with each other, and we don't really "sleep around". We have a small group of friends with benefits we trust. But knowing when one of us is envious of a situation helps us understand that we need to change what we're doing or look for a way to make both parties comfortable."

"We're polyamorous, so we're quite open and disclose everything. We use Google tools a lot. We're on each other's calendars – we know what's planned. We're on individual chats between each of us and we have a group chat for all of us. We talk a lot."

Emotional Involvement

Although some partners only have anonymous sex, 63% said that one or both of us have 'fuck-buddies', or 'tricks we get to know.' This would imply some connection, but without deep emotional involvement. 64% of respondents said they have a policy of not becoming emotionally involved with others. Having said that, 36% said one

or both partners has become emotionally involved with an 'outsider.' For some couples, this is acceptable. However, 14% reported that one or both of the pair has gotten 'too involved' with someone else. In some cases this is despite clear rules. In some cases, it just happened and became a catalyst for discussion and greater discernment.



“We haven’t gotten emotionally involved. I would avoid that because it could be a problem. My partner tends to play with people that he doesn’t see socially so it’s not much of a possibility. Most of my sex is with friends. We have strong social ties, but they’re not romantic. I was playing with a couple for quite a while. That was nice because you knew they didn’t want anything more than sex.”

“Awhile back, we got very involved with another couple. The four of us hit it off and we sort of paired off sexually. For a couple of months, the four of us only played together. It seemed great, but then my partner played with someone outside the ‘foursome’ and the other couple felt hurt. I suppose we were almost at the ‘falling in love’ stage, but they had gotten more emotionally attached than we had. We decided to ‘take a step back.’ We still see them once or twice a week, but it’s rare that we’re sexual. I felt it as a loss. The four of us were good friends and we got to have sex together. It was the best of both worlds. This was the first time that either of us had feelings for someone outside our own relationship. The lesson was to slow down the emotional involvement – keep it at some kind of midpoint – keep it under control.”

Based on our interviews in this and the previous study, we would recommend that emotional involvement is an area worth discussing ahead of time. In our first study, we were surprised how many couples hadn’t discussed this. For some couples, emotional involvement is not a concern, yet it’s still

worthy of a conversation so that assumptions aren’t erroneously made. Monitoring ‘how involved’ and ‘too involved’ takes some conscious awareness. Some partners report being able to easily set limits around their emotional investment, while others find this difficult.

Polyamory

About 7% of our non-monogamous respondents identified themselves and their relationships as polyamorous. They saw polyamory as differing from what most couples considered non-monogamy. Philosophically and psychologically, they embraced the idea that they could fall in love with multiple partners; that this could be advantageous, and that they were open to their partnership growing into a family where there are multiple loving,

sexual and romantic relationships.

One respondent saw this ‘potential for deepening’ as the primary distinction of polyamory. “We’re only a couple currently, but we’re both open to deeper connections and where that could lead. We have more of an interest in finding others that are polyamorous than finding men who are only looking for sex.”

"My partner and I were involved together with a third person which lasted 2 years before he moved away for work. We're still open to bringing a 3rd partner into the relationship."

"There's two of us that are primary. We're husbands and have been together 2 years although we saw each other for 5 years before that. Together, we have a boyfriend who we've been seeing for 7 months. We weren't actively looking for a third – it just fell into our laps. Our boyfriend has a partner of 18 years. We're clear we don't want to interfere in any way with their relationship. He's slowly getting more comfortable with the situation and much closer to us."

"My partner and I are domestic partners and we live together. In addition, I also have 2 secondary boyfriends. One I've been seeing every other week for 2 years. One is in med school and I only see once a month. We all identified ourselves as poly or non-monogamous from the beginning. We divulge everything; share calendars – everything is out in the open; we're very trusting of each other. Previously, I was in a triad for 4 years. All three of us considered ourselves equals and it was a closed relationship between the three of us."

"I get something different from each person - e.g., I'm versatile while one of my boyfriends is a top and one is a bottom. My primary partner doesn't like Asian food so I have Indian, Chinese and Thai with my boyfriends."

"We are more polyamorous rather than just non-monogamous - more relationship-minded than just sexual. We've had a few types of experiences. My partner had a boyfriend for the last year. His boyfriend and I were just friends, not sexual with each other. That relationship just ended last month. Currently, my partner is dating another guy, but that's not sexual. I'm dating a guy I've known for several years and have been seeing him for 6 months."

Polyamorous respondents had much to say about their perspective on relationships and how polyamory is viewed by others.

"Polyamory isn't for everybody. It takes a lot of work. You have to be adult about your emotions and you have to be willing to talk about them. It doesn't mean you don't get jealous or envious – I think that can happen to anyone. It means being open about feeling jealous or envious – not hiding the issue. Trust is important in any relationship, but it's even more critical in a poly relationship. You have to keep it honest."

“I feel there is an important distinction between polyamory and open/swinger relationships. However, in terms of perceptions within the gay/bi male community, I think people tend to view themselves as either looking for monogamy or looking for an open relationship. There is little visibility or understanding of polyamory, the desire for emotional/relationship attachments with multiple people.”

“I started a non-monogamy social support group. It’s a community to talk about things – a place to come where you know you won’t be judged. We’re on Facebook and we meet in person every 3 months. Sometimes we serve as a sounding board to each other; it’s also a way to find friends and other like-minded people. As gay marriage becomes more prominent and there’s an embracement of the hetero-normative ideal – a couple with a house in the suburbs, kids and a dog and white picket fence, it can take away our queerness. The polyamory community needs to stick together in order to feel like we’re not alone. It’s true of the BDSM community as well”.

“What would I like people to understand about polyamory? 1) It’s not all about sex. 2) It’s natural to us – we have a proclivity to seek different things from different people 3) It’s mutually beneficial. It’s not selfish or greedy – we each want the other to be happy.”

Advantages of Non-Monogamy

We asked respondents about the advantages of Non-Monogamy for them personally. Below are the results from the 127 non-monogamous couples in the quantitative survey followed by examples from the qualitative study.

Advantages of Non-Monogamy	Percent of Respondents Agreeing
Variety of Partners	66%
Opportunity for sexual acts/ types of sex that my partner doesn’t enjoy	58%
Helps with differences in libido	55%
Brings new experiences, learning, friendships into our lives together	55%
Brings energy/fantasy/excitement into our own sex together	54%
It allows us to stay together even though our sex together is limited/waning	42%

Variety

The most common response was the variety of sex partners. 66% of respondents in the quantitative study agreed with this statement and a majority of the respondents in the qualitative survey offered comments relating to variety.

“My boyfriend and I both have a history of not succeeding in monogamous relationships. We also enjoy the variety that comes with being allowed to have many sexual partners.”

“I’m slutty.”

“It started when my boyfriend worked on a cruise ship but ultimately we realized we simply have more fun (being non-monogamous).”

“I was fortunate enough to find two men who loved me. Instead of conforming to normal expectations and excluding one of them from my love, I’ve accepted both of them into my heart and have sustained a beautiful long lasting and loving relationship with the both of them.”

“Boredom.”

“I felt stressed being ‘tied down’ to a single person for sex, and found it completely unnecessary.”

Different Needs

Respondents spoke of satisfying different sexual needs. Enabling partners to have different types of sex that they, themselves didn’t enjoy was a common response (58%). 55% also said non-monogamy helps them deal with differences in libido.

“I’m a top and my boyfriend is versatile, so to satisfy each other’s needs we allow outside sex.”

“We both consider ourselves tops and came to the agreement that bottoming wasn’t really our thing, so it was a mutual understanding to become non-monogamous. We had several conversations about it first to make sure it was truly what we both wanted. It didn’t mean we loved each other any less, it just meant we wanted to have the freedom to have sex.”

“We each have certain things we like and are fine with each other experiencing this. We also separate sex and relationship.”

Introduces energy, new experiences

Although 27% of respondents have a 'don't ask, don't tell' agreement, the large majority of respondents were more apt to disclose. Depending on the level of disclosure, respondents spoke of integrating their experiences into their relationship. 55% of respondents said non-monogamy brings new experiences, learning, and friendships into their lives

together. For some, this was routine fuck buddies, but many couples spoke of becoming close friends with someone they had originally met sexually.

Respondents also used their outside encounters to 'goose' their own personal sex lives. Some brought home new sex techniques, some used their 3-ways or stories from their partners as titillation.

PERSONAL PROFILE #8

John and Sandy

John and Sandy have been together almost 2 years in a non-monogamous relationship.

"It's easier for our relationship to exist if we can have outside sex. Sandy doesn't like to bottom much. I can go out and be a top and it takes pressure off him. It's made our sex better – less predictable. We still have the spark and it lowers stress. There's no pressure for him to bottom and no pressure to have more or less sex."

"We do have rules. No friends. Nobody super close. Don't start a second relationship – no re-occurring thing. Not more time with outsider than me. Always safe – condoms. We have to be honest and tell each other."

"Sometimes we like to know the details because it can be hot. We find that jealousy is actually minimized while maintaining an open relationship as it establishes another form of trust between me and my partner. We can have sex with other people and be reassured that neither of us is going to leave for someone else because of it. As long as we're honest and show each other behavior-wise that the other is top dog, jealousy isn't a problem. We're the main focus."

"I don't see it evolving, but rather staying about where's it at. 10-20% of my sex is with outsiders – I don't see it changing. He's the one for me."

Compensates for our limited/waning sex life together

For some couples, non-monogamy is a way to stay together despite a lack of satisfaction with their sex lives together. 42% of non-monogamous respondents agreed that “It allows us to stay together even though our sex together is limited/waning. There is a difference between limited/waning. For some, outside sex is how they are getting particular sexual

proclivities met – it doesn’t mean their sex life at home is waning.

71% of the non-monogamous respondents agreed they had satisfying sex with their partner. Although this is significantly lower than the monogamous couples (83%) it’s still a sizable majority.

	Monogamous Couples	Non-Monogamous Couples
Our sex life with each other is satisfying	83%	71%

We also looked closely at the amount of sex, respondents were having with outside partners versus their primary partner. For some respondents, sex with their primary partner was most prominent

– e.g. sex with outsiders was infrequent. 29% of respondents were having sex without their primary partner less than once a month, very rarely, or not at all.

“It hasn’t had any impact on our sex life together. We both like to have sex at least once a day. We would stop going out, if we thought it was lessening our own sex life together.”

For some, though, sex without their partner was much more frequent (in some cases, this is the only sex they are having). However, for the most part,

respondents were having sex with their primary partner more than without their primary partner.

Frequency of Sex with my Partner	With Primary Partner	Without my Primary Partner
Once a day	9%	21%
1 - 2 times per week	42%	35%
1 - 2 times per month	23%	14%
Less than once a month	13%	12%
Never/Very rarely	13%	17%

On the other hand, 26% did say they had sex less than once a month, very rarely, or never with their partner. In this study, we didn’t hear first-hand accounts in the interviews or comments from couples who no longer had sex, but we imagine some of the same type of dynamics and characteristics may be in play that we heard about in our previous study.

In our previous study of 86 long-term non-monogamous couples (Spears & Lowen, 2010), 15% of the couples no longer had sex together, but still felt very close, loving, and connected to each other. Most of these couples seemed quite comfortable with having let go of their sex lives together. They talked about not wanting to throw away the love, camaraderie, and lives they had built together be-

cause of a lack of sex. Rather than lamenting their lost sex life together, they focused on the strength and joy in their relationship and were pleased that the open relationship allowed them to carry on as sexual beings without giving up what they most valued – each other.

We Believe In It

Although we didn't ask about it in the quantitative survey, it became clear in the qualitative survey, that for some, non-monogamy just seemed to be natural – the way it should be. This is similar to how some of the monogamous couples felt about monogamy.

"I think it's monogamy that's not natural."

"Monogamy is just one version of 'commitment' and we agree we don't believe it to be necessary. We're very committed to each other, and don't see non-monogamy as something that would undermine that."

"We both believe that all people seek sex and companionship outside of their primary relationship. Many just cheat, where as we are open with our feelings and urges."

"I do not believe that how I feel about one person affects how I feel about another. When my partner finds someone else to make them happy, whether for a night or long term, I am happy that they have found something to make themselves happy."

"Non-monogamy removes the greatest 'threat' relationships face (cheating/adultery) which was problematic in my past relationships."

"I believe non-monogamy requires a greater level of respect, trust, and intimacy than monogamous relationships and the success of it within a relationship can be a barometer for many other aspects of a relationship."



Challenges of Non-Monogamy

We asked the 128 non-monogamous respondents which statements about challenges fit their experience.

Challenges of Non-Monogamy for us personally	Percent of Respondents Agreeing
Jealousy/Envy	41%
Differences in the degree to which we both want to be non-monogamous	31%
There are no real challenges	30%
Communicating honestly	26%
Communicating frequently	21%
Encourages unsafe sex	18%
Encourages too much emphasis on sex - sexual compulsivity	17%
Getting too emotionally involved with outsiders	14%

Jealousy

The top challenge was jealousy – 41% agreed it could be an issue. We asked about challenges in the qualitative study as well and jealousy was also the most common response. However, in the written comments couples spoke of it as something they learned to deal with (sometimes repeatedly). They didn't speak about it as a deal-breaker.

"I can get jealous. I just try to breathe and remember he loves me."

"Sometimes I have to prevent myself from getting jealous, but it's not too hard."

"Jealousy comes up, but we try to combat that with open communication and trying to stick to the rules as best as possible."

"My partner used to get jealous. We would talk about it. I would reassure him. And most importantly we would change any dynamic where he felt neglected. The longer we've been together, the less we worry; the relationship feels secure; he knows I'm not going to leave him."

“Early on, there was some jealousy so we created a ‘veto list’ – people we don’t want the other one doing. We don’t use it much, but we each have put a few people on the list – it gives us a sense of control.”

PERSONAL PROFILE #9

Larry and Tom

Larry, 34 and Tom, 33 have been together 9 years.

“At year 5, I found out that Tom had been going out. Shortly after that I went out. After a year of back and forth, we decided to call ourselves non-monogamous.”

“When we first agreed on being non-monogamous, we only did 3-ways. We weren’t very successful at it – finding the right guy was hard. I’m really thin and Tom weighs 100 pounds more than me – we attract different types. We decided to try playing separately and that has worked out. We had a rule that we could only do a guy once, but we let that go. Now our rules are 1) Always play safe and 2) Don’t take away any time we could be spending together.”

“At first, I had trouble with jealousy. I felt insecure because of Tom’s experiences with outsiders earlier in the relationship. I wasn’t sure if he was as committed to the relationship as I was. Tom, on the other hand, doesn’t get jealous at all. But it’s different now, we’re closer than ever and the jealousy has dissipated – although I can still get upset when Tom idolizes one of his tricks or insists on sharing about one of his conquests.”

“Non-monogamy really hasn’t had much impact on our own sex life. We still have sex 2-3 times a week and our sex is a bit more diverse now. Tom is versatile and I’m a top, so it allows Tom to top other guys.”

“It’s been good for us to open the relationship. It’s allowed us to become more intimate emotionally – we’re more honest about our desires and it’s made us closer.”

Do we both want it?

31% acknowledged differences in the degree to which they both wanted to be non-monogamous. (Discussed previously – see page 61.)

“I do not find it challenging at all.”

“For the most part, it has worked great for us. The only thing we sometimes run into is guys hitting on one of us and not respecting the relationships. We’re secure with who we are and what we have so we only see it as a nuisance.”

“There haven’t been any real difficulties aside from trying to explain to others. With the exception of this, we never hit any bumps because of our non-monogamy. The main thing that we find helpful is to be open about it. Treating it like a forbidden topic only makes it feel wrong.”

No challenges

30% agreed with the statement, “There are no real challenges.”

Communication

Although we heard the need for active communication espoused by nearly everyone, it still can be difficult. 26% agreed that communicating honestly was a challenge and 21% agreed they had to work at communicating frequently enough. Previous comments have emphasized the importance of communication. Honesty seems foundational for both non-monogamous and monogamous relationships. Struggling with communicating hon-

estly runs the gamut from acknowledging who you find attractive, to admitting unsafe sex, to being forthright about the extent of sexual or romantic involvement. Interestingly, we didn’t hear references in current relationships about where it was grossly lacking, but rather proselytizing about its importance and appreciation of the benefits to the relationship when it was consistently practiced.

“Opening our relationship has been a very positive experience for both of us, after a difficult initial conversation and a select few major incidents that I really don’t think will be repeated. I think we both attach different meanings to our own “extracurricular” encounters, but this hasn’t proven to be too big of an obstacle to understanding. I feel really lucky not only to have someone who trusts me this much, but also to have someone in my life who I can trust that much.”

Staying Safe

18% of respondents listed unsafe sex as a challenge. Many couples had rules about safe sex, but this didn’t ensure they always complied.

“Unsafe sex has been a point of contention. My partner isn’t good at sticking to it – sometimes he doesn’t use condoms. I’m better at it, but I occasionally slip. We both get tested every 2-3 months and we’re both on PREP.”

“I contracted syphilis once, but my partner wasn’t upset. The only difficulty in this was having to explain to the doctor the details of our relationship and getting the judgmental looks from her.”

“At the beginning we had the fear that one of us would play without using protection. The idea of getting HIV or infecting the other was very scary. We both wanted to have outside sex. So we decided to go on PREP. We still use condoms, but PREP allows us to be more comfortable. Being on PREP has increased our willingness to bottom in a 3 way (with protection). We know other couples who have gone on PREP and it has affected their decisions as well.”

Encourages too much emphasis on sex

17% agreed with the statement that non-monogamy can encourage sexual compulsivity. Interestingly, respondents in the qualitative survey didn’t identify this as a challenge. 17% agreement certainly suggests it is part of the landscape. However, it’s clearly uncomfortable to talk about.

We included the statement in the survey because we observed what we thought was sexual compulsiveness in some of the 86 non-monogamous couples we interviewed in our previous study. In that study, in which partners were interviewed separately, some participants claimed it was an issue for their partner, although the partners themselves didn’t surface it as such. Our hypothesis is it’s a real concern for some, but it’s still rather taboo to acknowledge, particularly since it is a judgment call and it can share characteristics with other addictive behaviors.

The fact that 17% acknowledged they have or have had some challenge with sex being over-emphasized or becoming compulsive is worth noting. It makes sense that continuing to seek outside sexual encounters could fuel tendencies towards sexual compulsiveness and so we see this as a serious concern to take

Emotional over-involvement

14% agreed that one or both partners had gotten too emotionally involved with an outsider. We discussed this previously (see page 67; also, our previous study, *Beyond Monogamy*, Spears & Lowen, 2010, has multiple examples).

One Last Profile

We close with a profile that illustrates much of what’s been said in this chapter.

PERSONAL PROFILE #10

Todd and Roger

Todd, 29 and Roger, 36 have been together for 4 years.

"My partner is 7.5 years older than I am, and we met when I was 25. I was fairly inexperienced and had been in the closet for a while. From early on, he was very concerned that I would miss out by limiting myself sexually, and he let me know that it was acceptable to him if I wanted to fool around on the side, as long as I told him. I was a little hurt by this, since I assumed it meant he didn't take the relationship seriously. He had been in a non-monogamous relationship that lasted for years previously, and I don't believe it was the cause of significant problems for him."

"Neither of us acted on this until we were on vacation and the abundance of attractive men was making me antsy. We decided to turn each other loose in the club and observe our reactions to seeing the other flirt and fool around. We quickly figured out that jealousy over casual sexual encounters was unlikely to be a big issue, and consequently, we opened the relationship."

"We play together and separately. The main rules concern safety and preventing inappropriate emotional attachment - we have a no-sleepover rule. We haven't found any need for a disclosure rule, since we generally enjoy telling and hearing about positive encounters, and not about negative ones. As I started getting a little more curious about the leather/BDSM scene, we mutually agreed to a more-or-less "vanilla only" rule with others, since this is something we want to save for a later point in our relationship. If we go out to a bar or club together, we leave together."

"Small jealousy issues do pop up from time to time, and my partner believes that because of my younger age I'm more prone to infatuation with others. One problem that is a result of my age is impulse control. I can sometimes go a bit off the deep end in "cruisy" clubs and bar environments, especially when a significant amount of alcohol or drugs is involved, whereas he prefers to remain a bit more aloof. Sexual interactions we have in these environments can sometimes lead to conflict if he feels I'm following my impulses without making enough of an attempt to include him, which I admit can happen (I'm young and not unlike a puppy chasing a squirrel into traffic sometimes). Hurt feelings can also result when he feels someone is more attracted to me than to him or on a few occasions when he felt I'd become friends with someone I had played with on my own. As for me, I struggle with a bit of envy at his level of confidence and self-control."

“Being frank about our emotions is important. I suppose I would be upset if I found out that he became emotionally involved with someone else, but I really can’t imagine it happening. Likewise, I don’t think I would ever forgive myself if I allowed myself to become involved with someone else.”

“As for what has helped, I think it’s no different from what makes a relationship strong in other respects. When problems arise, we find the ways in which we are responsible and can improve. We almost always come to a point where the “offending” party empathizes with the other, and the “offended” party usually finds that he has overreacted. I can usually tell immediately when I’ve hurt him and why, and I find that just showing that I’m aware of it goes a long way, and vice versa. Many of the problems have dissipated simply due to the fact that we’ve now seen them before and realize they are not a threat or they are imaginary products of insecurities that have nothing to do with the other person.”

“Overall, our sexually open arrangement has been a positive for our relationship. It’s really clarified the meaning of what we have together, and has improved our sex life with one another. We consider our ability to navigate an open relationship as a sign of its strength. We are both from somewhat repressive conservative environments, and we find that holding on to the old norm of the “San Francisco relationship” is a good antidote to what I think could be an unfortunate neutering of gay life. We both had to go through quite a bit of a struggle to be comfortable with ourselves, and we don’t want to give up and conform to societal pressures that I don’t believe make room for the full flourishing of gay male relationships and sexuality.”

“We do believe in marriage and plan to get married next year. We expect to be together for the rest of our lives.”



Chapter 6

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The most striking finding of this study is younger gay men's greater inclination toward monogamy. We see this in the overwhelming number of relationships that are monogamous (86%). In addition, 90% of the single younger gay men were seeking monogamy. This is a sea change compared to older generations of gay men (30 - 50% of relationships are monogamous)

We concur with some of the comments we heard, that as younger gay men have the option of marriage and homosexuality becomes increasingly accepted, the traditional heterosexual model of monogamy and marriage become much more viable options. Younger gay men have the option of adopting to the norms of the heterosexual majority and becoming integrated into the mainstream in ways that weren't possible before. In this study, we see them taking advantage of those options in large numbers.

We also heard a second rationale for the shift toward monogamy in younger gay men. Younger gay men are coming out much sooner and are much less likely to have the experience of 'closeted sex' or to develop the sexual patterns of previous generations where a great deal of emphasis was put on sex. One way to think about this is that younger gay men come to terms with their sexual orientation much earlier and get to experience their age appropriate adolescence as gay men. This was not the case in previous generations and it could be hypothesized that because of the furtiveness, the need for an underground sub-culture and the tremendous emphasis on sex, that previous generations

of gay men tended toward prolonged periods of sexual adolescence when they finally did come out.

A second finding is the sub-set of younger gay men who consider themselves monogamous, but are holding the construct much more loosely. The notion of 'monogamish' appears to be increasing, particularly as couples are together for longer periods of time. Interestingly, there is a dis-owning of the notion of 'open relationships' which younger gay men assume are wide open, whatever goes, relationships. Open relationships are associated with previous generations of gay men and are viewed as part of the previous gay culture that is no longer necessary.

One consideration is that as younger gay men stay together for longer periods of time in their monogamous relationships, more will make a shift towards 'monogamish' or non-monogamous relationships. In our previous study of long term (8 years or more) non-monogamous relationships (Spears, Lowen, 2010), 58% of the couples didn't become non-monogamous at the outset. In this group, couples went an average of 6.6 years before opening their relationship. In the current study, only 22% of the monogamous couples had been together 6 or more years. And 49% had been together 2 years or less. So they are still early in their relationships and the likelihood of them moving towards 'monogamish' or non-mongamous relationships increases over time. This possibility doesn't minimize the strong embrace of the concept of monogamy we see in the vast majority of the couples in this current study.

Along with the shift towards monogamy is an overwhelming acceptance and adoption of marriage. 92% of single gay men expect to marry. Non-monogamous couples were as likely to marry as monogamous couples and clearly didn't equate marriage with monogamy.

A few conclusions we made as observers and authors of the study:

- Despite the myths and horror stories, both monogamous and non-monogamous couples can have enduring, healthy and happy relationships.
- Also counter to myths and assumptions, it is the norm for long-term couples (both monogamous and non-monogamous) to have enduring, satisfying sex lives within their primary relationship.
- Both monogamous and non-monogamous couples were very clear about the advantages that come with their respective choices. They also recognized that challenges were probably inevitable and looked for ways to overcome the challenges in order to make monogamy or non-monogamy work.
- We went into this study knowing that non-monogamy requires both partners to fully commit to the notion of non-monogamy. However, we were surprised to hear the exact same comments from monogamous couples. Monogamy has to be seen as a choice and both partners need to embrace the concept. Having this choice be conscious (not assumed) and discussed was recommended by numerous respondents.
- Likewise, we knew that non-monogamy requires a fair amount of work, steadfast honesty and agreement to follow the rules. We found the case to be similar for monogamous relationships. Being monogamous isn't a 'done deal', but requires on-going communication,

self-awareness, strong intention, and discipline.

- Challenges come with the territory of both monogamy and non-monogamy. It is critical that a couple sees these challenges as a given and looks for ways to persevere, mitigate problems and resolve differences. Although the circumstances and situations are very different, we found it ironic that both monogamy and non-monogamy presented somewhat similar challenges (jealousy, clarity of intention, frequency of communication, consistency of truth-telling). In both cases, the key was the willingness to accept and work on the challenges
- Honest communication was consistently the top recommendation, whether talking with monogamous or non-monogamous couples.

As study authors, we know how important communication is to non-monogamy because we had lived it ourselves. However, in this study, we heard how key communication was for monogamous couples, as well. In our previous study of non-monogamous couples, although communication was espoused by all and practiced rigorously by some, we were surprised at the number of couples who communicated poorly or infrequently. In this study, we had the opposite experience. We found the communication among monogamous couples to be quite good and on the whole, probably more consistent than what we had observed in our previous study with non-monogamous couples.

We want to close with one final conclusion. Oddly, we heard both monogamous and non-monogamous respondents complaining of the lack of support for their respective relationships. To the degree monogamy and non-monogamy can be more fully discussed in the community, the better.

Both monogamy and non-monogamy are viable. Let's provide enough information and adequate avenues for discussion, so that couples can make

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informed decisions. Furthermore, as a community, let's stop proselytizing our preference as 'the right way' and demonizing that which we don't embrace. We need to create norms in the community, where both monogamy and non-monogamy can be rationally discussed and considered. If we can do that, both monogamous and non-monogamous couples will feel supported by the larger community.



Chapter 7

Appendix

Quantitative Survey

Demographics - All Respondents

1. What is your current age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 20	10.6%	61
20-25	37.0%	213
26-30	21.5%	124
31-35	19.3%	111
36-40	11.6%	67
Over 40	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		576

2. At what age did you come out?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
During or before High School	37.7%	214
18 - 22	43.3%	246
23 - 30	16.5%	94
31 - 40	2.5%	14
<i>answered question</i>		568

3. My partner has already completed this survey		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	0.0%	0
No	59.7%	338
I'm single.	40.3%	228
<i>answered question</i>		566

4. Longest gay relationship I've been in:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
3 - 6 months	20.2%	113
6 months - 1 year	13.4%	75
1 - 2 years	12.5%	70
2 - 4 years	22.3%	125
4+ years	31.6%	177
<i>answered question</i>		560

5. Number of previous long-term gay relationships:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
0	33.3%	187
1	33.1%	186
2	22.2%	125
3	8.4%	47
4+	3.0%	17
<i>answered question</i>		562

6. My previous long-term relationships were:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Monogamous	73.1%	402
Non-monogamous	12.0%	66
Both	14.9%	82
<i>answered question</i>		550

7. Ethnicity/Race:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Caucasian	64.0%	365
African-American	10.4%	59
Latino	22.1%	126
Asian	2.6%	15
Other	6.1%	35
<i>answered question</i>		570

8. HIV Status:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Negative	89.1%	509
Positive	5.6%	32
Untested/Unsure	5.3%	30
<i>answered question</i>		571

9. I currently reside in (City, State, Country if not USA):	
Answer Options	Response Count
	516
<i>answered question</i>	516
<i>skipped question</i>	60

10. I am currently:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Single	37.0%	242
In a monogamous relationship	44.0%	290
In non-monogamous relationship * includes Grindr	19.0%	127
<i>answered question</i>		659

Currently Single

1. What is your current age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 20	17.8%	43
20-25	45.9%	111
26-30	18.2%	44
31-35	11.6%	28
36-40	6.6%	16
Over 40	0.0%	0

2. To what extent do you agree?		
Ratings 4= Strongly Agree; 3=Agree; 2=Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree		
Answer Options	Rating Average	N = 242
I'm looking for a committed relationship.	3.51	
I would want any new relationship to be monogamous	3.47	
I would want any new relationship to be non-monogamous	1.59	
I can imagine agreeing to a non-monogamous relationship with the right partner.	2.07	
Depending on the length of the relationship, I might consider opening a relationship and having it become non-monogamous.	2.02	
I would be inclined to marry a long-term partner	3.66	

3. In the last 3 months:		
Answer Options	Response Per- cent	Response Count
I've been primarily seeing one person	10.0%	24
I've dated multiple people	8.8%	21
I've been having casual sex	23.8%	57
I've been mainly sticking to myself	45.2%	108
I split up with my boyfriend	12.1%	29

4. To what extent do you agree with the statements below:		
Answer Options	Strongly Agree/ Agree	N = 242
My generation tends to be more monogamous than preceding generations	23%	
Most couples I know consider themselves monogamous	60%	
Most of the long-term couples I know are married or likely to become married.	60%	
In my mind, gay marriage implies monogamy.	68%	
I can talk to close friends about non-monogamy	59%	
I know where to find info about non-monogamy	41%	

Currently in Committed Monogamous Relationship

1. What is your current age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 20	5.9%	17
20-25	32.1%	93
26-30	24.1%	70
31-35	25.2%	73
36-40	12.8%	37
Over 40	0.0%	0

2. Number of years together?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 1	27.4%	79
1-2 years	21.9%	63
3-5 years	28.8%	83
6-10 years	15.6%	45
11 years or more	6.3%	18

3. Number of years our relationship has been monogamous?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 1	30.2%	87
1-2 years	21.9%	63
3-5 years	28.8%	83
6-10 years	14.2%	41
11 years or more	4.9%	14

4. My partner is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Similar in age	52.6%	151
5-10 years older than me.	20.6%	59
5-10 years younger than me.	14.3%	41
More than 10 years older than me.	10.1%	29
More than 10 years younger than me.	2.4%	7

5. To what extent do you agree		
Ratings 4= Strongly Agree; 3=Agree; 2=Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree		
Answer Options	Rating Average	Strongly Agree/Agree
We have a healthy, stable relationship	3.43	98.8%
Our relationship makes me happy/satisfied.	3.49	98.7%
Likelihood of current relationship to continue for 5 more years	3.46	98.7%
We have conflicts/arguments periodically	2.66	98.6%
We fight fairly and conflicts/arguments are satisfactorily resolved	3.08	98.7%
We have considered having an open relationship	1.60	97.1%
We BOTH prefer having a monogamous relationship	3.45	98.7%
We have had arguments about opening the relationship	1.49	96.3%
My partner and I are completely honest with each other	3.30	98.7%
My partner or I have had sexual experiences outside our relationship without prior agreement	1.72	97.7%
My partner or I have 'gotten involved' with someone else without prior agreement	1.56	97.1%
We might break up because of issues related to monogamy.	1.38	95.0%
Our sex life with each other is satisfying	3.27	98.7%

6. We usually have sex together:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Once a day	16.7%	48
1 - 2 times per week	55.6%	160
1 - 2 times per month	15.6%	45
Less than once a month	8.0%	23
Never/Very rarely	4.2%	12

7. For us the primary benefits of having a monogamous relationship include		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
It feels right - its the way it should be	62.2%	179
Encourages connection and closeness	63.2%	182
Encourages trust and security	68.4%	197
Minimizes conflict and hurt feelings	52.4%	151
It prevents or minimizes jealousy and envy	48.3%	139
Encourages us to attend to the sex we have together	39.9%	115
Makes us more likely to stay together	58.0%	167

8. Our biggest challenges in being monogamous include:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
The desire for more variety in partners and types of sex	28.7%	82
Staying faithful when I'd like to stray	18.2%	52
Being honest about temptations and/or 'slip-ups'	18.2%	52
Jealousy/Envy even though outside sex is not involved	23.1%	66
Our sex life together is limited and/or un-satisfying	20.3%	58
There are no real challenges to being monogamous	43.0%	123

9. We are:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Domestic Partners	26.2%	75
Legally Married	14.7%	42
Intending to become Married	38.8%	111
None of the above	25.2%	72

10. To what extent do you agree with the statements below:		
Ratings 4= Strongly Agree; 3=Agree; 2=Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree		
Answer Options	Rating Average	Strongly Agree/Agree
My generation tends to be more monogamous than preceding generations	2.12	96.8%
The couples I know that are near my age consider themselves monogamous.	2.79	98.2%
Most of the long-term couples I know are married or likely to become married.	2.97	98.2%
In my mind, gay marriage implies monogamy.	3.31	98.1%
If I were considering having a non-monogamous relationship, I would be comfortable talking to close friends.	2.65	97.9%
If I wanted information about non-monogamous relationships, I would know where to get it.	2.54	97.7%

Currently in Committed Non-Monogamous Relationship

1. What is your current age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 20	0.8%	1
20-25	17.3%	22
26-30	27.6%	35
31-35	26.0%	33
36-40	28.3%	36
Over 40	0.0%	0

2. Number of years in current relationship?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 1	11.8%	15
1-2 years	15.7%	20
3-5 years	29.1%	37
6-10 years	26.0%	33
11 years or more	17.3%	22

3. Number of years our relationship has been non-monogamous?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 1	28.6%	36
1-2 years	30.2%	38
3-5 years	19.0%	24
6-10 years	16.7%	21
11 years or more	7.9%	10

4. My partner is...		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Similar in age	47.2%	60
5-10 years older than me.	14.2%	18
5-10 years younger than me.	11.8%	15
More than 10 years older than me.	22.8%	29
More than 10 years younger than me.	3.9%	5

5. To what extent do you agree?			
Ratings 4= Strongly Agree; 3=Agree; 2=Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree			
Answer Options	Agree & SA	Rating Average	
We have a healthy, stable relationship	92.9%	3.42	
Our relationship makes me happy/satisfied.	90.6%	3.40	
Likelihood of current relationship to continue for 5 more years	85.8%	3.39	
We have conflicts/arguments periodically	72.4%	2.75	
We fight fairly and conflicts/arguments are satisfactorily resolved	87.3%	3.17	
We have considered having a monogamous relationship	66.1%	2.69	
We BOTH prefer having a non-monogamous relationship	78.0%	3.09	
My partner and I are completely honest with each other	75.6%	3.13	
We have a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy	27.0%	1.87	
We routinely share some information about our outside encounters/relationship	71.7%	2.95	
One or both of us have 'fuck-buddies or 'tricks we get to know'	62.7%	2.68	
We always play together when playing with 'outsiders'	28.3%	2.12	
We have a policy of not becoming emotionally involved with others	64.3%	2.84	
One or both of us have become emotionally involved with an 'outsider'	36.5%	2.15	
One or both of us have 'gotten too involved' with someone else	17.5%	1.69	
We might break up because of issues related to non-monogamy	16.0%	1.51	
Our sex life with each other is satisfying	70.9%	2.92	

6. We usually have sex together (with or without outsiders):		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Once a day	8.7%	11
1 - 2 times per week	41.7%	53
1 - 2 times per month	22.8%	29
Less than once a month	13.4%	17
Never/Very rarely	13.4%	17

7. I usually have outside sex without my partner:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1 or more times per week	21.3%	27
1 - 2 times per month	35.4%	45
4 - 6 times per year	14.2%	18
Less than 4 times per year	11.8%	15
Never	17.3%	22

8. For us the primary benefits of having a non-monogamous relationship include:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Variety of partners	65.6%	82
Opportunity for sexual acts/ types of sex that my partner doesn't enjoy	58.4%	73
Helps with differences in libido	55.2%	69
Brings energy/fantasy/excitement into our own sex together	54.4%	68
Brings new experiences, learning, friendships into our lives together	55.2%	69
It encourages and reinforces honesty with each other	38.4%	48
It allows us to stay together even though our sex together is limited/waning	42.4%	53

9. Our biggest challenges in being non-monogamous include:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Differences in the degree to which we both want to be non-monogamous	30.7%	39
Communicating honestly	26.0%	33
Communicating frequently	21.3%	27
Jealousy/Envy	40.9%	52
Differences in our desire for connection with others through outside sex	24.4%	31
Getting too emotionally involved with outsiders	14.2%	18
Encourages too much emphasis on sex - sexual compulsivity	17.3%	22
Encourages problematic drug use	2.4%	3
Encourages un-safe sex	18.1%	23
There are no real challenges	29.9%	38

10. We are:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Domestic Partners	19.7%	25
Legally Married	24.4%	31
Intending to become Married	33.9%	43
None of the above	26.8%	34

11. To what extent do you agree? Ratings 4= Strongly Agree; 3=Agree; 2=Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree			
Answer Options		Agree & SA	Rating Average
My generation tends to be more monogamous than preceding generations		18.8%	1.96
The couples I know that are near my age consider themselves monogamous.		42.0%	2.42
Most of the long-term couples I know are married or likely to become married.		67.6%	2.79
In my mind, gay marriage implies monogamy.		25.7%	1.96
If I were considering having a non-monogamous relationship, I would be comfortable talking to close friends.		79.4%	3.25
If I wanted information about non-monogamous relationships, I would know where to get it.		57.0%	2.66

Qualitative Survey Questions

All Participants

- * 1. How long have you been in your current relationship?

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

3-5 years

6+ years

I'm not currently in a relationship

- * 2. Do you and your partner consider yourselves:

Strictly monogamous

Monogamous, but held 'loosely' - 'monogamish'

Non-monogamous

Not currently in a relationship

Strictly Monogamous

- * 3. What is your primary motivation/reasons for being monogamous?
- * 4. What pay-off's have you experienced as a result of being monogamous?
- * 5. What do you find most challenging and how do you handle it?
- * 6. What advice would you give other couples who want to be monogamous?
- * 7. If you would like to share more, or, you prefer answering on the phone, please give us your email address and we will contact you to schedule a brief interview.

'Loosely Monogamous' – 'Monogamish'

- * 3. In what ways have you included outside sex into your 'monogamish' relationship?
- * 4. What do you find is working and/or not working?
- * 5. What other outside activity might you consider in the future?
- * 6. What's your motivation/reasons for considering a 'looser' form of monogamy?
- * 7. If you would like to share more, or, you prefer answering on the phone, please give us your email address and we will contact you to schedule a brief interview.

Non-monogamous

- * 3. What outside sex do you 'allow' in your relationship?
- * 4. What rules/understandings/agreements (if any) do you have around outside sex?
- * 5. What's your primary motivation/reasons for being non-monogamous?
- * 6. What do you find most challenging and how do you handle it?
- * 7. If you would like to share more, or, you prefer answering on the phone, please give us your email address and we will contact you to schedule a brief interview.

Interview Questions

Interview Questions - Monogamous Respondents

- How did the two of you arrive at the decision to be monogamous? At what time period in the relationship? What were the circumstances? What was your reasoning?
- Why do the two of you choose to be monogamous? What are your reasons?
- How has monogamy shaped your relationship? What do you experience as the advantages of being monogamous?
- What about monogamy has been most challenging for you? To what extent does it get harder or easier over time?
- To what extent has jealousy or envy been a problem? What do you find to be helpful?
- What advice would you give other couples who are wanting to be monogamous?
- What impact has being monogamous had on your sex life at home?
- The research shows a shift toward greater monogamy in younger generations. To what extent have you experienced this in talking with friends, etc.? What would you speculate is contributing to this shift?
- How do you feel about this shift?
- There is also a much smaller trend toward being 'monogamish' – being monogamous, but holding it a little more loosely? Have you heard friends talk about this? What is your perspective?
- How has race, religion, or community shaped your views on monogamy?
- What are your thoughts about gay marriage? About gay marriage and monogamy?
- Anything else?

Interview Questions: 'Monogamish' Respondents

- How did the two of you arrive at the decision to be 'monogamish'? At what time period in the relationship? What were the circumstances? What was your reasoning? Were you monogamous before that time?
- How would you define 'monogamish' or how you think about monogamy and your own relationship?
- What outside sex do you allow in your relationship?
- How do you handle this? What are the rules or agreements?
- How do you think this may evolve in the future? Are there other things you might consider down the road? What's the likelihood of you returning to monogamy?
- Why do the two of you choose to be monogamish? What do you experience as the advantages?
- To what extent has jealousy or envy been a problem? What do you find to be helpful?
- What about being 'monogamish' has been most challenging for you?
- What impact has being 'monogamish' had on your sex life at home?
- The research shows a shift toward greater monogamy in younger generations. To what extent have you experienced this? What would you speculate is contributing to this shift? How do you feel about this shift?

- How prevalent is being 'monogamish' among your friends? How is it regarded? How open are you with your friends about being 'monogamish'?
- How has race, religion, or community shaped your views on monogamy?
- What are your thoughts about gay marriage? About gay marriage and monogamy?
- Anything else?

Interview Questions: Non-Monogamous Respondents

- How did the two of you arrive at the decision to be non-monogamous? At what time period in the relationship? What were the circumstances?
- Why do the two of you choose to be non-monogamous? What do you experience as the advantages?
- How do the two of you handle outside sex? E.g. play together? Anonymous partners? Only when travel?
- What rules or norms do you have around 'outside sex' (if any)? How have they evolved over the years?
- To what extent has jealousy or envy been a problem? What do you find to be helpful?
- What about non-monogamy has been most challenging for you?
- What impact has being non-monogamous had on your sex life at home?
- The research shows a shift toward greater monogamy in younger generations. To what extent have you experienced this? What would you speculate is contributing to this shift? How do you feel about this shift?
- There is also a much smaller trend toward being 'monogamish' – being monogamous, but holding it a little more loosely? Have you heard friends talk about this? What is your perspective?
- How has race, religion, or community shaped your views on monogamy?
- What are your thoughts about gay marriage? About gay marriage and monogamy?
- Anything else?



Blake Spears is a founder and principal of InSight Healthcare and has eighteen years of experience in working with clients in the healthcare industry. Blake conducts research to assess market potential and the positioning of new pharmaceutical products and medical devices in a variety of clinical areas.

Blake has moderated over 150 focus groups and conducted thousands of in-depth interviews with clinicians and opinion leaders. Blake's academic credentials include a B.S. in chemical engineering from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Other Interests:

Blake serves on the boards of the National AIDS Memorial Grove, The HIV Story Project, The Maitri Compassionate Care Foundation, Second Opinion, and the Oakland Mayor's Commission on Aging.



Lanz Lowen coaches executive leaders and facilitates teams in clarifying purpose, defining strategic priorities, resolving conflict, and increasing influence. Coaching engagements, as well as team interventions, typically begin with survey assessments and/or individual interviews. For more information see: (www.mandanagroup.com)

Lanz is an adjunct staff-member at Stanford University's School of Business and at JFK University's Coaching Certificate Program. Prior to establishing his consulting practice, Lanz was the Manager of Organization Development and Training in the corporate offices of Mervyn's Department Stores.

Lanz Lowen has an M.S. in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from San Francisco State and an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from the Professional School of Psychology in San Francisco.

Other Interests:

Lanz was very involved in the early AIDS movement, running volunteer support groups for the AIDS Health Project and creating an independent video profiling long-term survivors (Living Courageously). He is a founding Board Member of Shamanic Circles (www.shamaniccircles.org), an occasional DJ and a dedicated flagger.