

9. Sexual exclusivity was not necessarily discussed by participant couples.

All couples in this sample either were currently having or once had a sexual relationship with one another. Ninety-two participants (75.4% of 122) reported that they had specifically discussed being monogamous with their partners, while 30 participants (24.6% of 122) had not. It is thought provoking that in this sample of men who have been together for ten years or more, 30 participants had not explicitly discussed monogamy, but rather relied on assumptions regarding each other's positions about monogamy. ***This suggests what so many coupled individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, experience: There are barriers to discussing sexual matters and desires and unarticulated expectations of the same.***

Of the 92 participants who had discussed monogamy, 48 (52.2% of 92) determined that sex outside of the relationship was acceptable under some circumstances; 39 (42.4% of 92) determined that sex outside of the relationship was never acceptable; and 5 (5.4% of 92) discussed monogamy, but were not able to come to agreement. In their discussions about monogamy, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, played a “major ” or “next to major role” for 56 (60.9% of 92).

Of the 30 participants (24.6% of 122) who had not specifically discussed being monogamous with their partners, 20 felt that their partners would agree with them that under some circumstances having sex outside of the relationship was all right; 7 felt that their partners would agree with them that sex outside of the relationship would not be alright under any circumstances; and 3 felt that they would not agree with their partners regarding sex outside of the relationship. The difficulties that gay partners have in discussing monogamy have been explored by several researchers and clinicians. Participants in self-described monogamous relationships who engaged in outside sex minimized its importance, many saying that monogamy was assumed, but had never been discussed with their partners.¹ In a study of 11 New Zealand couples who had discussed issues of monogamy and trust, but while participating in unprotected sex with one another, researchers found that the couples maintained what the researchers termed “infidelity anxiety” and a reluctance to disclose outside sexual encounters.²

A definitional clarification of monogamy occurred during the Phase III interviews. Several couples revealed that they defined their sexual relationships as monogamous even if their sex lives included negotiated sexual experiences (e.g., inviting a third man to have sex with them—a “three-way”). For these participants, ***the addition of a third party to their sexual experience did not dilute the primary expression of the partners' love for and sexual attraction to each other, but merely enhanced the excitement of the interaction. Correspondingly, among some monogamous participants, the concern was more about a partner having an emotional relationship with another person than sex with another person.*** Prizing sexual variety, men in open relationships cognitively separated sex from intimacy, but still faced the challenge of

¹ LaSala, M. (2004, October). Monogamy of the heart: Extradynamic sex and gay male couples. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 17(3), 1-24.

² Worth, H., Reid, A., & McMillan, K. (2002, September). Somewhere over the rainbow: Love, trust and monogamy in gay relationships. *Journal of Sociology*, 38(3), 237-253.

emotional insecurity that could arise from having sexual partners outside of the relationship.³ This cognitive separation of sex from intimacy is echoed in the finding that coupled gay men reported feeling emotionally and mentally removed during a sexual encounter more often than did lesbian and heterosexual couples.⁴ The revising of agreements regarding sex—where they existed—was one way to address the emotional challenges of non-monogamy.⁵ Non-monogamous couples managed emotional insecurity by establishing guidelines to safeguard health and to affirm couple primacy.⁶

³ LaSala, M. (2004, October). Monogamy of the heart: Extradynamic sex and gay male couples. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 17*(3), 1-24.

⁴ Carroll, L., Hoenigmann-Stovall, N., Turner, J.A., & Gilroy, P. (1999). A comparative study of relational interconnectedness, merger, and ego development in lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual couples. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 9*(1), 51-67.

⁵ Shernoff, M. (2007, July). Negotiated nonmonogamy and male couples. *Therapy Today, 18*(6), 18-21.
LaSala, M. (2001, November). Monogamous or not: Understanding and counseling gay male couples. *Families in Society, 82*(6), 605-611.

⁶ LaSala, M. (2004, October). Monogamy of the heart: Extradynamic sex and gay male couples. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 17*(3), 1-24.