

## LITERATURE REVIEW –THE CULTURE OF NON-MONOGRAMY

In this chapter we'll examine the research contributions to the study of human multiple partner sexuality from six disciplines: primatology, evolutionary psychology, cultural anthropology, social history, swinging and polyamory. Following the discussion of anthropology and social history, we'll detail the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oneida Community's bold 500-person group marriage. As part of our discussion of polyamory we'll examine the writings and culture of the Kerista Commune a late 20<sup>th</sup> century group marriage.

### Evolutionary Psychology and Primatology

Evolutionary psychology and primatology have offered a spate of recent books that have done much to explain why humans and their primate cousins are not by nature monogamous (Baker, 1996; Barash & Lipton, 2001; Buss, 1994; Diamond, 1992; Small, 1993). These consider sexual dimorphism, testicle size and sperm competition as biologically based indicators that confirm that the human species is by nature non-monogamous.

Lovejoy (1981) proposed that the reasons the early hominid populations grew so much more rapidly than co-resident ape populations could be linked to the emergence of bipedalism. Bipedalism, he hypothesized, enabled individual males to provision (individual) females with meat so that the females could remain protected and sedentary during pregnancy and weaning. He proposed that this evolutionary moment then allowed for the formation of permanent male-female pair bonding, and thus the emergence of monogamy. While Lovejoy's hypothesis regarding the opportunity for increased male-female provisioning seems logical, I believe he makes a fatal flaw in presuming any given male replete with freshly hunted meat would choose to provision just one female. If meat were traded for sex and sex was a desired commodity then

males would most certainly have stretched their meat into as many opportunities for sex with as many females as were game (no pun intended!). Meanwhile, the females, too, might have maximized their (dual) carnal appetites, by accepting meat from as many male sources as came forth. To me, long term pair bonding certainly did not emerge amongst ancestral humans.

Symons (1979) confirms the complete lack of biological confirmation for humans being a monogamous species in his seminal book, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*. He discusses one of the most unique aspects of human sexuality, that “humans regularly copulate at times when conception is not possible, hence human sexual behavior is commonly said to serve nonreproductive functions” (Symons, 1979, p. 97). Here, of course he is referring to human females who regularly have sex at times in their menstrual cycles (as well as life cycles) when fertilization would not be possible. While this practice has been used as speculative confirmation that in the course of evolution, human females lost a visual estrus display as a means to ensure that their male mates stayed bonded with them, Symons rightly proposes that “human sexuality is in many respects the opposite of that of ‘monogamous’ mammals” (Symons, 1979, p. 141).

Symons’ work set the stage for the popularization of evolutionary psychology as a theoretical explanation for the sexual behaviors of humans today. His campus, the University of California, Santa Barbara has in fact become one of the premiere places to study and research evolutionary psychology. Beginning in the early 1990s, primatological comparisons were often drawn to establish the relative non-monogamous nature of human sexuality. UCLA physiologist Jared Diamond in his award winning book, *The Third Chimpanzee* (Diamond, 1992) discusses that species in which there is pronounced sexual dimorphism, (size and other physical differences between males and females), are typically non-monogamous. Interestingly, gibbons are the only apes that are routinely monogamous—and as expected there is virtually no size differential be

tween males and females. Diamond (1992) goes on to explain that another indicator for non-monogamy is testicle size. And those primate species with the largest testes tend to be the least monogamous. Relative to other apes Diamond notes human males “have the longest penises, chimps the largest testes, and orangutans and gorillas the shortest penises and smallest testes” (Diamond, 1992, p. 73). Ultimately, Diamond explains, “species in which several males routinely copulate in quick sequence with one female need especially big testes” (Diamond, 1992, p. 72). Thus in the spectrum of things we might expect human males to be less promiscuous than chimpanzees but more so than gorillas and orangutans.

### *Sperm Competition*

While humans, unlike chimpanzees, do not typically partake in such copulatory behavior, they are nonetheless equipped to engage in sperm warfare. British scientists Robin Baker and Mark Bellis undertook pioneering research in sperm competition that established that male ejaculate contains three kinds of sperm: blockers, fighters, and egg penetrators (Baker, 1996). Blockers prevent intruder sperm from accessing the egg and fighters kill off foreign blockers and penetrators. When non-fertilizing sperm were compared to the amount of penetrator sperm in the ejaculate of a man who had not seen his partner for a week to one who sees his partner everyday, there were dramatic differences. These differences, they believe would confirm that a regular partner simply tops his partner off with largely blocker and penetrator sperm while a returning, infrequent or completely new partner’s ejaculate would contain a predominance of penetrator and fighter sperm. The differences in these ejaculates might then confirm the non-monogamous nature of human sexuality in that the regular partner’s ejaculate functions to guard against the possibility that an intruder might win a sperm war while the intruder’s ejaculate maximizes the possibility that he might. What science writer Matt Ridley considers most compelling about Baker

and Bellis' findings are how women's sperm retention vary depending upon whether or not they're being faithful. For women that are routinely faithful with their partners, 55% of their orgasms were found to be of the high-retention variety. Meanwhile for unfaithful women, 70% of their orgasms with other lovers were of the high-retention as compared to just a 40% rate with their primary partners (Ridley, 1993, p. 226).

As science writer Mary Batten notes human beings have "both polygynous and monogamous tendencies" (Batten, 1992, p. 140). While often monogamy has been promoted as an ideal, she notes, it's however "monogamy with a wink" (Batten, 1992, p. 141). Social psychologist Carol Tavris (1992) goes on to explode the myth of the coy female in noting the many animals species (black birds, perch, lions and primates) in which female promiscuity has been well-documented. She notes "the old notion that primate females typically form one-male breeding units" (Tavris, 1992, p. 217) is now completely up for grabs. Let's consider the social and mating behaviors of several primate species.

### *Gorillas*

Gorillas live in "harems" with one alpha male and between two and seven females and their offspring. Gorillas express the greatest amount of sexual dimorphism in the primate world with males averaging 400 pounds and females around 200 pounds. Whenever a female goes into estrus the harem male inseminates her. Gorilla males have relatively small testes and penises because they do not engage in sperm competition. When male gorillas become adolescents they leave their troops and create temporary (non-mating) troops with other adolescents. As they begin to bulk up in size and strength, they'll attempt to attract females from other troops to join them in a "harem." It's very uncommon for adult gorilla males to engage in physical fights with each other to gain access to females.

### *Chimpanzees*

Chimpanzees live in multi-male / multi-female troops and engage in what primatologists consider a *fission-fusion* type society (Stein & Rowe, 2000). Here, a variety of social groupings can occur at once: groups of females and their offspring, groups of males, adult male/female consorts, and lone individuals. Chimp females openly display estrus with large pink genital swellings (De Waal, 1982, p. 157). During estrus they actively present themselves to the males in their troops. An estrus female may copulate 30 times in a day, leaving her little time to forage for food! When females are not in estrus they typically don't have sex. Unlike humans, chimp females who have established themselves as mothers hold greater sexual interest to the males than those who are still adolescents.

### *Bonobos*

Bonobos are unique. They live in erotically charged troops where females willingly engage in sexual encounters whether or not they are displaying estrus (Small, 1992). When a new female joins a troop, she will typically engage all members sexually. A highly exciting moment, like discovering a mango tree brimming with juicy fruit, is often dissipated by everyone first having sex with each other. Female-Female sex is often so desirable, that females will shun an interested male and have sex with each other instead. Unlike most primates, bonobos engage in frontal kissing and frontal (missionary) style copulation. Orgies, which can include the young riding atop their parents' backs, are common as well. Where chimpanzees might engage in high levels of physical aggression, bonobos are likely to settle differences through sex. These different approaches have led anthropologists to draw fascinating speculations about the origins of human mating behavior.

*Origins of Human Mating Behavior*

Human DNA is 98% the same as Bonobos and Chimpanzees, making these ape species our closest evolutionary cousins. The hominid line and chimp/bonobo line split off between five and six million years ago, while the chimp/bonobo line split apart about two million years ago. We don't know if the original species was more like today's chimps or today's bonobos. We do know that all three species are sexually dimorphic (revealing that the males seek multiple female mates) and that all are equipped for sperm competition (confirming that the females may seek sexual access to multiple males).

Primatologists (Diamond, 1993) have spent much time speculating whether, when and if ancestral human females had an estrus display. Clearly such a display amongst chimpanzees has a huge impact on troop activity. Meanwhile, bonobo females can engage in sexual activity constantly, despite that sometimes they're displaying estrus and sometimes they're not. Some anthropologists have speculated that a human female estrus display would be very disruptive, such as in a chimpanzee troop, the males would be so focussed on the blossoming female, they'd do nothing else. Others have speculated that ancestral females evolved to act as if they were in estrus (by having sex with males) even when they weren't, to access male gifts such as freshly killed meat. And certainly today's women know how to dress and behave to appear sexually interested so to secure male gifts such as dinner and jewelry. Interestingly, pre-ovulatory women who frequent nightclubs are most likely to arrive without their husbands or partners and have been shown to wear attire that exposes greater amounts of skin (Taylor, 1997).

Ultimately, the evolutionary value of concealed estrus/ovulation would be that a female could entice multiple males into having sex with her, all believing that they could be her baby's father, and thus they would each be protective if not helpful towards her infant. Interestingly,

pair bonding often arises in species that already have concealed ovulation (Diamond, 1993) perhaps as a means for females to keep their mates around since its never known when the exact moment of ovulation occurs. Since signal switching (re: concealed vs. displayed estrus) has been rampant in primate history, it's very possible that ancestral humans have both lost it and regained it, depending upon when it was reproductively advantageous. Anthropologist Sarah Hrdy (1999, pp. 246-249) notes that infant survival is often enhanced amongst Amazonian tribes that believe in partible paternity, the notion that it takes many men to father a child. Amongst the Ache, Canela, and Bari, pregnant women will actively solicit sex with additional partners, especially those with qualities they consider admirable, believing that their still forming fetus would inherit these as well. The real social-economic advantage to their offspring is that with "many fathers," their baby's ultimate survival is clearly enhanced.

Perhaps the reason that humans (other than at sex parties) don't behave like bonobos is because since the advent of private property, males became concerned with tracking the females who were carrying their offspring. As a result they've done all they can to control the sexual access of their wives, daughters, and concubines. Before the easy access of DNA tests, males were readily cuckolded into providing for their wives' offspring. What primatological research confirms is that humans have never been a monogamous species: sperm competition confirms the female drive for multiple mates and sexual dimorphism confirms the male drive for sexual variety. Concealed ovulation coupled with year round female sexual receptivity enables females to both seek pair bonds as well as access sexual variety. Being that human sexual behavior in many ways parallels bonobo sexual behavior (e.g. concealed ovulation, year round sexual receptivity, and kissing on the lips); the differences (human pair bonding and human abhorrence of adult-child erotic expression) largely reflect human cultural beliefs and practices.

*Human Reproductive Strategies*

In consideration of evolutionary psychology's well-considered case for female sexual non-monogamy, psychologist David Buss posits several reproductive strategies including mate guarding and the sexy son hypothesis. "Mates" he explains "once gained, must be retained" (Buss, 1994, p.10). Moreover, he posits, that ancestral men who became enraged over a mates' infidelity, had a "selective advantage"...and ultimately more "reproductive success" (Buss, 1994, p. 10). Meanwhile, the sexy son hypothesis is a female strategy. Here, a woman paired with a financially secure partner might seek casual sex with physically attractive men. And if conception occurs through such encounters, "that's all they need to produce sons who will be sexually successful" (Buss, 2000, p. 164) as well. Meanwhile, anthropologist Helen Fisher (1994) contends that humans are wired for serial monogamy and that there is in fact a monogamy-adultery-divorce continuum. Her examination of divorce statistics from all over the world suggests that pair bonds that don't lead to conception within four years are likely to dissolve. This she believes enables the (former) couple to maximize their chances of reproduction by creating a new pair bond and rekindling their reproductive potentials. Finally, science writer Robert Wright (1994) posits that despite evolutionary psychology's prescriptive approach to the human genetic imperative, we are also the only moral animal and thus have the possibility of overriding what our genes tell us to do.

## Cultural Anthropology

The anthropological literature largely examines the behaviors of non-Western peoples who practice polygyny (Price, 1984), polyandry (Goldstein, 1987; Levine, 1988) and occasionally ritual group sex (Crocker and Crocker, 1994). Davenport (1976) in his tour de force survey of human sexuality across the world cultures discusses several Polynesian cultures in which multiple partner sexuality is widely celebrated. In pre-Christian Tahiti young people were encouraged to “indulge in self-masturbation and premarital intercourse” while “marital and extramarital intercourse were openly discussed and practiced” (Davenport, 1976, p. 124). He goes on to detail how in contemporary Mangaia (one of the Polynesian Cook Islands) “men are expected to express their virility to the limit” while “women are expected to be eager and active partners” (Davenport, 1976, p. 124). Amongst the Trobriand Islanders (in the southwest Pacific) who traffic in potent love magic there is a high tolerance for both pre- and extramarital affairs (Davenport, 1976, p. 131). Twenty years later anthropologist Helen Harris reconsidered the ethnographic reports of freewheeling promiscuous sexuality in Mangaia noting the countless reports she’d gathered of passionate and romantic attachment. As one of her informants explained, “a woman looks for a man who isn’t going around with other women and who wants to marry her” (Harris, 1995, p. 116).

Anthropologists have calculated that 83.5% of all human cultures allow polygyny (one husband with multiple wives), 16% only permit monogamy and .5% sanction polyandry (one wife with multiple husbands) (Pasternack, Ember and Ember, 1997, p. 86). Considering the widespread acceptance of polygamy throughout the cultures of the world, the overwhelming incidence of monogamy in the Western world deserves an explanation. The Roman Catholic Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD banned a variety of frequently practiced marital forms (including

polygyny, concubinage, divorce and remarriage) to cause many families to be left with no male heirs. Upon the death of such a family's progenitor, its wealth's would be transferred to the church. This ultimately led to the enriching of the Catholic Church which to this day is the largest landowner in most European countries (Goody, 1983, pp. 44-46).

### *Conditions Fostering Polygyny*

In polygynous societies not all men can afford multiple wives, those that have them tend to be older and more prosperous. Women may find it more attractive to marry into an economically successful polygynous household rather than marry a single male whose resources are very limited. As psycholinguist Steven Pinker surmises, "Would you rather be the third wife of John F. Kennedy or the first wife of Bozo the Clown?" (Pinker, 1997, p. 477). Certainly polygyny would be most adaptive in conditions where there is an uneven sex ratio. Such ratios can be the result of high (male) war casualties and high rates of male infanticide. Societies that practice extended postpartum sex taboos would also find polygyny attractive in that a husband with a nursing wife would still have sexual access with his remaining wife/wives.

Women in polygynous households may also benefit from mothering assistance from their sister co-wives. In cases where maternal death is common (e.g. AIDS ravaged sub-Saharan Africa), mothering insurance is valued to insure good care for a deceased mother's surviving children. Polygyny can also enable a family to become more prosperous when additional wives marry in. In my field work in East Africa I noted that women's labor power in crop cultivation, animal husbandry and housework might easily offset their resource requirements, causing male polygynists to prefer to marry wives than to hire labor. (Details from my findings are discussed in chapter 4, under "Adding a Co-Wife: What I Learned in Africa.")

### *Residence Patterns*

Residence patterns vary amongst polygynous families. In rural sub-Saharan Africa hut style residence patterns occur. Amongst the Luo of Kenya, a husband's hut would be placed in the center, surrounded by those of his various wives as well as his own mother. In this arrangement, there might be a private entrance into the compound in which the co-wives' secret lovers could enter. While Luo husbands know that it's possible that their wives might entertain outside lovers, they nonetheless regard all children conceived by their wives as their own. Here, despite the biological origins of their wives' children, they still gain prestige as well as (potential) future economic benefits of multiple progeny. Some Kenyan co-wives do not share a residence with their husbands and ultimately see them quite intermittently, leaving me to regard that marriage for them as more of a *status* than an *experience*.

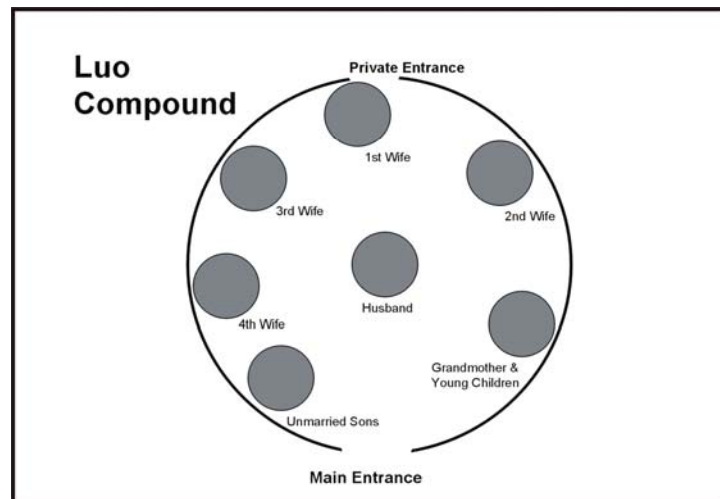


Figure 1: Traditional Luo polygynous compound with husband's hut in the center.

In Papua New Guinea there is often such fear of menstrual pollution on the part of men and semen pollution on the part of women that husbands and wives often do not share a common residence. During a field visit amongst the Huli of the New Guinea Highlands, a polygynous husband told me that he sleeps in the men's house with the adolescent and adult men from his village, while his wives share a house together with their children. As for conjugal visits, these

occur in the afternoon in each wife's own sweet potato garden. Considering that the husband never spends the night with either co-wife, there are fewer opportunities for competition and jealousy as compared to African hut style polygyny where a wife might contain the husband in her own hut and prevent him from visiting with her sister co-wives.

Amongst U.S. Mormons and other Christian polygynists who reside in rural communities in Utah, Arizona and Idaho, housing styles vary. Each wife might have a separate household, households can be communal dormitory style buildings, or there could be a main house for the first wife while subsequent wives would have their own trailers in an adjacent yard. In Angel Park, a Northern Arizona Mormon polygamous community, "united polygamy" occurs when a family lives in one house, despite this cultural ideal 60% of the households practice "divided polygamy" where they live in separated households (Jankowiak & Allen, 1995, p. 290). Often what co-wives find most difficult to share are their kitchens. Each might have particular food preparation styles and techniques that are unique to her identity; the Luo assure against this tension by separate building cooking huts for each co-wife.

### *Polyandry*

Polyandry as described by Goldstein (1987) where Nyinba brothers from the highlands of Tibet share a wife also has economic considerations. Intact hillside farms tend to be more prosperous than those that brothers would be required to subdivide if each were to marry a separate wife. Considering the extensive male farming responsibilities: yak raising, yak trading and the growing of crops, multiple resident males are clearly economically advantageous. While polyandrous brother co-husbands are expected to share the wife selected by the eldest brother there are instances where youngest brothers may request a portion of family resources and set off on their own. Ultimately, the widespread practice of polyandry in Tibet has impacted the repro

ductive capacities of non-married women. While some unmarried women do have children, altogether they average .7 children while polyandrously married women average 3.3 children. Ultimately, polyandry has restrained the region's population growth, ensuring that land with a limited carrying capacity isn't overextended (Goldstein, 1978, p. 330).

*Plural Marriage in Contemporary America*

In 1994 anthropologist Philip Kilbride examined the various reinventions of plural marriage in the contemporary world. He considered data from a variety of cultures including Celestial Marriage amongst U.S. Mormons, Africa-American man-sharing, the reinvention of polygyny amongst professional East African women, and my own early work on polyamory and polyfidelity. One of his more intriguing discussions focuses on the “wife-in-law,” a fictive-kin term for the relationship between the former and present wives of American men. Here, he very much establishes that despite that polygamy is illegal in America, the widespread practice of serial-monogamy / divorce creates compelling pseudo-polygamous relationships in our contemporary marriages.

Jankowiak and Allen's study of family dynamics in Angel Park explores the ambivalence of intense romantic passion amongst contemporary Mormon polygynists. Prospective brides are counseled “not to fall in love with their husbands” so as to avoid heartache when new wives are added (Jankowiak & Allen, 1995, p. 285). While Mormon Celestial Marriage promises to elevate the spiritual rank of men who practice plural marriage, their cooperating wives can be extended this ranking as well. Despite this incentive, adjusting to a new wife is never easy. As one woman reported:

I did not think my husband's second marriage would bother me—I was ready to live the principle. But I stayed awake at nights, unable to sleep. I felt so alone and abandoned. (Jankowiak & Allen, 1995, p. 291).

Ultimately Mormon co-wives struggle with an often uneasy balance between embracing Biblical polygyny and grappling with the incorporation of new wives. At last the success of these unions often depends on a husband's ability to manage the needs and expectations of his first wives while carefully engaging romantic intensity with a new wife.

### Social History

Once private property was invented and foraging was for the most part replaced by agriculture, polygyny reached immense proportions. Despotic men monopolized all of the women they could, guarded them closely with eunuchs, and only released them once their fertile years were over. King Solomon had 1000 concubines, the Roman emperors referred to them as slaves, while the European Kings called them serving maids. Here, the few but extremely powerful polygynists endeavored to be the primogenitors of their regions. Perhaps the most successful was hyperpolygnist Moulay Ismail the Bloodthirsty of Morocco who reportedly fathered 888 children (Pinker, 1997, pp. 476-7).

In ancient Rome legal distinctions were made between concubinage and marriage. Since upper class men typically marry women of their own class, a law was established to settle the issue of inheritance for the many concubines such men might also keep. Simply put, children from a marriage could legally inherit from their father, while children from concubinage were considered illegitimate to the extent that they could make no claims on their father's estate (Kiefer, 1934, p. 39). In 4<sup>th</sup> century Greece, courtesans functioned as independent prostitutes. Often they were affiliated with a temple as the "queens of pleasure" who were consecrated at the temple of Ishtar. One pious athlete, following his success in the Olympic games, dedicated a contingent of courtesans to the Corinthian temple of Aphrodite (Flaceliere, 1960, pp. 134-5). Before the 11<sup>th</sup> century in England polygyny and divorce were common and there was much concubinage

(Stone, 1977, p. 29). It wasn't until the 1753 Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act that public registration of marriage became the law. Consequently secret marriages were legally banned, preventing men from having multiple wives in different cities and towns without them being aware of one another (Stone, 1977, p. 33).

### *Ritual Group Sex*

Historian Burgo Partridge describes the history of sexual orgies, "the organized blowing-off of steam" resulting from daily lives of "abstinence and restraint" (Partridge, 1960, p. 7). He discusses sexual release activities in the Western World including Greeks and Romans, Europeans during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Puritan times, and the Victorian age as well as bit of Euro-American activity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His broad definition of orgy goes well-beyond a followed by its sacrifice (1920s), 18<sup>th</sup> century abbey-based encounters between monks and nuns, and Augustus Caesar's sexual appetite for young virgins.

Anthropologist Bill Crocker (1994) chronicles ritual group sex activity amongst the Canela, a communally oriented tribe living in the Brazilian Amazon. During Wild Boar Day young married women meet a group of young men in a secluded patch of the jungle and have sex with each of them. Upon returning to the village each woman is given some freshly hunted meat that she cooks into a pie and brings to her mother-in-law as a prized souvenir. In recent years activities such as Wild Boar Day, with the community bonding that they afforded, have diminished as private-property notions of capitalism have seeped into Canela consciousness, causing husbands to become jealously possessive of their wives.

Verrier Elwin's inimitable description of the sexual socialization of young people amongst the tribal Muria of East India is probably the most endearing description of ritual group sex. The tribe's dormitories or *ghotuls* provided a socially approved hands-on learning environ

ment where children beginning at the age of six would learn about sensual touch, dancing, and erotically engaging a partner. The walls were decorated with pictures of clitoris' and young boys would be offered special instructions in how to engage the females in their dormitory (Elwin, 1968).

## The Oneida Community: A Bold 19<sup>th</sup> Century Group Marriage

The Oneida community was a 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian community founded by religious leader and free thinker, John Humphrey Noyes. With the American Revolution now history, free thinkers abounded, creating dozens of utopian experiments, with Oneida being one of the best remembered ones. It began in the early 1840s when Noyes inspired a small community in Putney, Vermont to embrace a brand of Christianity he called Perfectionism. Creating an alternative structure, in 1846, the group began to share spouses.

The Putney Perfectionists became an economic community and Noyes became known for his skills as an iconoclastic faith healer whose methods included sexual intercourse. In 1848 an irate mob drove him out of town and the group relocated to a track of land along Oneida Creek in upstate New York. Beginning with less than 100 members, over the following 30 years, 500 people would join. The group attracted well-educated idealists who endeavored to live as communally as they could. All activities were designed to include group participation. Dancing and quilting bees were encouraged because they were group activities while smoking and drinking coffee were not because they were considered to be individualistic.

The Oneida Community is probably best known for its unique sexual practices, many of which very much reflected Noyes personal views and experiences. Early on Noyes wrote a pamphlet, *Male Continence*, in which he set forth his pioneering practice, *coitus reservatus*. Here, a male might train himself to enjoy sexual intercourse without attaining an ejaculatory climax. Devastated by his own wife's suffering from having delivered five stillborn babies in six pregnancies; he endeavored to prevent so much suf

fering. Being that 19<sup>th</sup> century women were burdened by constant pregnancy, he viewed the practice as a way to better women's lives.

Another important practice was Noyes' notion of free love, which was practiced in what the Oneidans called *complex marriage*. He believed that it was natural for all men to love all women ...and all women to love all men. He viewed monogamous pair-bonded marriage to be harmful because it excluded others from sharing in connubial affection. In the Oneida community everyone had their own bedroom and members were expected to have conjugal visits with a number of partners. Initially, males would approach females, and if the females consented they would spend the night together. Eventually, "go-betweens" were established so that the women didn't have to reject the men to their faces. Many women found that a full-night visit was too much which led Noyes to shift the standard visit to about an hour after which the man retired to his own room.

*Complex marriage* demanded an across-the-board ban on pair bonds. While romantic feelings abounded in the community, having a special one-and-only love connection was seen as so detrimental that the offending couple would be physically separated. The goal was to celebrate the glowing attraction of new (pre-marital) love...in a non-possessive context. Men would be considered selfish if they were unable to joyfully witness a woman they loved be loved by others. This appears to be the same concept that over 100 years later the Kerista Commune called *compersion*. Certainly, the Oneidans may have had a relatively easy time actualizing compersion in that their social identity and economic support came from a 500-person community rather than a single interdependent relationship.

In that pair bonding was so discouraged at Oneida, the community's central council was able to devise a *stirpiculture*-breeding program. Here, certain people were designated breeders because of their youth (women) and special qualities (older men). As far as the male breeders were concerned, the program would adhere to the Oneidan practice of *ascending fellowship*. Older members were ranked as more perfect, placing them higher on the spiritual scale. Younger members were advised to have conjugal visits with elders to access their experiential wisdom. As an added bonus, all males of the community were allowed to have ejaculatory orgasms with the post-menopausal females.

Sexual initiation became the responsibility of the *ascending fellowship* and Noyes, especially, made it his responsibility to initiate many of the pubescent girls. Fear of criminalization due to this practice was a prime reason that Noyes fled Oneida for Canada in the late 1870s. Noyes' efforts to keep the *ascending fellowship* on center stage are also seen as the cause of a youth rebellion and the final collapse of the community. Many of the young men resented being told they could not be breeders and moreover that they could only have sex with the community's older women. Having returned from college in the world beyond, they felt justified in challenging Noyes' autocratic authority. While Noyes' own needs were certainly satisfied by *ascending fellowship* and the *stirpiculture*-breeding program, there was virtually no room for the next generation to assert itself.

While the young men of Oneida may have had a hard time of things, in general the women prospered much more than most of their 19<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries. They weren't burdened by an endless career of pregnancies and stillborns, they were involved in many of the leadership and business activities of the community, and their needs were

listened to. Rather than the confining dresses of their day, they wore comfortable smocks and pantelettes and were free to bob their hair many decades before it became a popular fashion statement. Moreover, the sexual practices of the community would not have worked unless the women enjoyed them as well. Women initiated the use of go-betweens, the reduced visiting hours, and could have easily over-ridden whatever breeding program the men devised. Due to the lack of DNA tests, any young woman who was designated to be a breeder could have cajoled any man she wanted to father her children—and no one would have known the difference.

Perhaps Oneida's largest contribution to human sexuality was demonstrating that when men take responsibility for birth control, they liberate women socially and economically from an interdependent pair bond, and ultimately both sexes can wallow in the best parts of romance. This cultural invention was so successful that for upwards of 30 years, women joyfully took part. Certainly what made this 500 person group marriage viable was its' economic success. The groups' first successful enterprise was the manufacture of animal traps. These eventually gave rise to Oneida silverware, which remains a compelling international business today.

## Swinging

In the 1960s and 1970s swinging, wherein committed couples engage in recreational / social sex often in the context of party, captivated the book writing imagination of journalists, social scientists and swingers themselves. Ultimately, three very different genres of books were created.

### *The Journalists*

Journalists told engaging stories about their forays into the likes of Sandstone, Southern California's famous and to some, infamous, 70s utopian personal growth center that pushed the boundaries on monogamy and sexuality, and engaged participants in thoughtful interviews about multiple partner sexuality. Typically these journalists enjoyed the excitement of researching something edgy and taboo and dove deep into their story telling. Marcia Seligson published *Options: A Personal Expedition Through a Sexual Frontier* in 1977 as a chronicle of her four-year journey into alternatives to the then faltering nuclear family. Beginning with the collection of searchers and thinkers that habited Sandstone in 1972 she crisscrossed the country to meet with people in open marriages, triads, and quads. All the while she churns their stories in her head surmising her own intermittent interest in non-monogamy. She explains, "When I'm happily linked to a man, as now, the dream is buried and still" (Seligson, 1977, p. 226). Then two page later, "Sometimes I want to fuck someone new, just for fun and for serious. If my mate wants to, of course I go crazy" (Seligson, 1977, p. 228). Her chapter on Sexual Jealousy offers up some of her finest considerations as she notes, "sexual jealousy wires us into the oldest, most treacherous of our fears—abandonment and helplessness. It jolts us back instantaneously—sidestepping our mental ruminations and mature rationality—to our most primitive states" (Seligson, 1977, p.

246). After several more pages detailing encounters with jealousy faced by several friends, associates and subjects she links jealousy to capitalism, property rights and ownership. Finally, she hammers it head on with, “Implied in sexual jealousy is a loss of control over the other person. Fundamental possessiveness” (Seligson, 1977, p. 250).

Several years later Gay Talese published his tour de force eight-year research project, *Thy Neighbors Wife* in which he tells engaging stories about the sexual escapades of both prominent as well as a several average Americans. He goes into the soul of John Williamson, the creator of Sandstone, noting that his “career ambitions seemed to be shifting from mechanical engineering to sensual engineering, from the wonders of electronics to the dynamics of cupidity” (Talese, 1980, p. 186). He chatters on about the explicit films shown at the Masters and Johnson center and then psychologist Albert Ellis’ conclusion that swinging might be considered “healthy adultery” and can be a boon to some marriages. Unlike Seligson who dropped in on Sandstone, Talese dwelled there. He named names and followed Southern California’s literati as they explored “open infidelity” and wrestled apart their marital claims on one another. Talese explores the many innuendoes that occur as wives witness their husbands engaging in “uncomplicated” recreational sex whilst their own interludes with other men stir up feelings of passion and commitment (Talese, 1980, p. 287). Ultimately, the years he spent and the confidences he gained impacted his own life and his own marriage. Talese became a character in his own book when John Williamson’s wife Barbara found him writing in his guesthouse and began to massage his neck and back. He then describes, “with a minimum of words and no resistance on his part, she guided him into the bedroom and proceeded to make love” (Talese, 1980, p. 541). Ultimately, the press got wind of the “fragrance” (Talese, 1980, p. 542) of his research, placing his own mar

riage on very shaky grounds. Nonetheless, *Thy Neighbors Wife* became a timeless bestseller, embalming the provocative world of Sandstone into American social history.

While Sandstone attracted those with names and bank accounts, about ten years earlier Southern California journalists Herbert Margolis and Paul Rubenstein published *The Groupsex Tapes*. In their very focussed research they contacted 628 swingers, consulted with medical doctors, psychologists and sociologists to fashion a story of what was then a new social phenomenon. Their book features the transcripts of interviews with couples and singles who swing as well as the parents and children of swingers. Their interviews probe for early family issues, sexual learning and relationship histories, initiations into swinging, reports on the social and sexual dynamics experienced at swing parties, and the impact of swinging on personality and well-being. The bold language their subjects use is preserved as with Gene, a 38 year-old man who discusses his views of jealousy in swinging:

Take ten couples, put them in the same room and watch the wives fuck other husbands and the other way around, and watch the look on the women's faces when they catch their husbands squirming and groaning and eating these chicks out like they've never done with their wives. They're about ready to cut their husbands' balls off. And the same holds true for the husbands. They see their wives getting it on with other men for maybe three hours and they're ready to call their attorneys for a quick divorce. Again, I'm speaking from personal experience. (Margolis and Rubenstein, 1971, p. 115)

### *Social Scientists*

In the 1970s there was serious funding for social research on alternative lifestyles such as swinging. Sociologist Brian Gilmartin obtained a grant from the National Science Foundation to compare 100 swinging couples with a control group of 100 non-swinging couples in Southern California. He dedicated two years to conducting detailed interviews with his subjects and in 1978 published a highly authoritative book, *The Gilmartin Report*. Several years earlier anthropologist Gil Bartell studied 280 married couples in the Chicago area in part by attending their

swing parties. Bartell and his wife were decidedly against participating in the sexual side of swinging but disrobed and carried drinks in their hands to appear participatory. Ultimately their subjects believed they were participants in that none of them were tracking whether or not the research couple was engaging in party sex. Both Gilmartin and Bartell's swingers were largely white, middle class, early baby boomers who had minimal connection to organized religion.

Perhaps the first effort at a scientific account of swinging for this period was William and Jerrye Breedlove's 1964 book, *Swap Clubs*. Clubs, including some very secret ones were tracked from California to the Midwest and East Coast. One required all members to be sterilized so as to avert unplanned pregnancies (AIDS was not a consideration in those days), others included famed Hollywood actresses, and another began as a group of Washington D.C. couples who gathered to view pornographic films in each other's homes. While the Breedlove's ethnographic data is intriguing, their estimate that there were between 8 and 16 million swingers in the U.S. was later disputed by Bartell (1971) and Constantine and Constantine (1973) who believed there to have been between 1 and 2 million swingers during that time period. The Breedloves entertain a fascinating discussion on the experience of being initiated into "co-marital coital sex." They consider the impact of prior discussions and whether there was dancing or some form of "sex play" prior to the act. They then conclude that, "There is usually greater reserve—more inhibitions in evidence when the transformation has been more abrupt" (Breedlove & Breedlove, 1964, p. 213). Finally, they discuss sexological details regarding the means in which women adjust coital positions to accommodate men of differing sizes and proportions.

Anthropologists Nena and George O'Neill published the runaway bestseller *Open Marriage* in 1971. While their title very much inspired a decade of sexual freedom, their book itself largely discusses open communication, role flexibility and non-possessiveness in the context of a

pair bonded marriage. They consider whether sexual monogamy is realistically viable in a pluralistic society where lifestyles change and life span is extended. In addressing traditional notions of jealousy as a measure of love, they note:

Monogamy, as our culture defines it, *is* closed marriage. It implies ownership, demands sexual exclusivity, and denies both equality and identity. It perverts jealousy into a “good”: many husbands and wives actually *try* to make their mates at least a “little” jealous, going just far enough to elicit a response that assures them they are really “loved.” For them, jealousy is supposed to show you “care.” But no matter how little or how much, jealousy is never a good or constructive feeling. It may show you care, but what you are caring for is too much for yourself, and not enough for your mate (O’Neill & O’Neill, 1972, p. 246)

Beyond producing widely read books, social scientists were also publishing their findings in academic journals and creating institutes like the Self-Actualization Laboratory in Berkeley, the Center for Family Change in Boston, the Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment, and the Topanga Center for Human Development in Southern California. Considering the overall positive reports most social scientists offered, Denfield proposed that “many swinging researchers are in fact “swinging” researchers who, wittingly or unwittingly, play the role of advocate with a sometimes missionary zeal” (Denfield, 1974, p. 267). When the Lifestyles Organization began hosting its annual conferences in 1974, the early meeting programs were a thoughtful colloquium between social scientists, participating swingers, and perhaps swinger-researchers. Rather than today’s spate of sexual technique workshops, the early programs featured discussions centered on the social and psychological transformation of marriage and intimate relationships.

Textbooks were generated like *Marriage and Alternatives: Exploring Intimate Relationships* (Libby & Whitehurst, 1977), *Beyond Monogamy: recent studies of sexual alternatives in marriage* (Smith & Smith, 1974) and *Traditional Marriage and Emerging Alternatives* (Butler, 1979). Butler’s work included chapters on open marriage, expanded families and communes as well as swinging. Various benefits to swinging were considered including enhancing marital

happiness, increasing information and confidence in sexual techniques, greater honesty and communication and a more enriched social life. Unlike other alternatives to nuclear family marriage, Butler (1979, p. 203) notes “little change is required in major values related to the traditional family form.” The main transformation would be letting go of the belief that having sex outside of marriage was improper, especially the prevailing double standard that extra-marital sex was acceptable for husbands but not for wives. Finally, Butler considers that swinging enables a couple to affirm their commitment to each other and thus enhance feelings of marital security because “you feel and know that the partner is coming back to you even though they have had a sexual relationship with someone else” Butler, 1979, p. 1999). Because of this experience Butler reports, “swingers do not show jealousy on the surface” though he does reveal that “marriage counselors report jealousy as one reason for dropping out of swinging” (Butler, 1979, p. 1999). Other reasons couples may leave swinging are that the process may feel too mechanistic—the unique and romantic reasons why one might choose to have sex with a particular someone else get lost. Ultimately this “noninvolvement [becomes] the antithesis of sexual pleasure and satisfaction to some people” (Bartell, 1970, p. 129).

One of the more intriguing things social scientists did during the 1970s was attempt to codify the different kinds of swinging. Ramey (1974, p. 113) placed swinging on a continuum that began with “Beginner Swinging” and then moved onto “Escalated Swinging,” “Intimate Friendship,” “Evolutionary Commune” and finally “Group Marriage.” Varni (1974, pp. 257-8) proposed distinctions between “Hard-core Swingers” (who want no emotional involvement, have little selectivity, and seek to swing with as many partners as possible), “Egotistical Swingers” (who seek little emotional involvement and are fairly selective about the partners they’ll engage), “Recreational Swingers” (who enjoy the social aspects of swinging and engage other couples in

non-swinging social activities as well), “Interpersonal Swingers” (who desire close emotional relationships with their partners), and finally “Communal Swingers” (who seek to create close emotional relationships that might lead to group marriage).

Gilmartin (1978, p. 208) went on to create a five-stage adjustment to swinging continuum for wives. For his data set of 100 couples, 62%, which had no previous experience in swinging, all reported some version of this process. There was no documentation of a parallel dynamic of enthusiastic wives and reluctant husbands. Gilmartin’s continuum included:

- Stage One (revulsion) which could be either short-lived or permanent.
- Stage Two (resistance) where typically the husband works to break down the wife’s reluctance by introducing her to respectable couples that swing.
- Stage Three (resignation) where the wife agrees to attend a swing party.
- Stage Four (acceptance) occurs if favorable experiences occurred during stage three.
- Stage Five (enthusiasm) where guilt is released and swinging is relished.

Once the social scientists finished creating continuums they began counting things like the average number of partners that women vs. men engaged at a swing party. They then began evaluating such things as the emotional adjustment of women that participated in gang-bang type behavior (Brecher, 1969, pp. 257-259) and the psychotherapeutic value of swinging for discordant couples (Gilmartin 1978; Bartell, 1971). Swinging was seen as having far fewer social and economic costs relative to prostitution and extramarital affairs. Moreover, there were believed to be manifold benefits to couples in being able to mutually engage in a compelling social activity (Butler, 1979, p. 197). After all the codifying, describing and counting perhaps Gilmartin’s conclusion says it the best, “the most remarkable thing about swingers is how unremarkable they are” (Gilmartin, 1975, p. 58)

*Publications Produced by Swingers*

While many couples may have reasons to be private about their participation in swinging, some have stepped forth, bared all they could and wrote their own books. In 1972 John and Mimi Lobell, artists and free thinkers, published *John & Mimi: A Free Marriage* a bestselling paperback on the history and dynamics of their open relationship. Several years later Ann Whitfield created *The Joy of Swinging* replete with chapters on Getting Started, Risks, Etiquette, Ethics and Women's Liberation. Whitfield's advice included her tried and true findings such as avoiding men who wear boxer shorts with obscene sayings on them as well as women who sport crotchless panties (Whitfield, 1975, p. 142). As for the sexuality to expect at parties she explained:

If your only glimpse or hint of swinging is from distorted porno literature or movies, you probably think swinging is a lot of people licking each other's assholes, doing all sorts of indecent things that you couldn't, or wouldn't, cope with. Rubbish! (Whitfield 1975, pp. 146-147).

As for how to join in she offers instructions for placing ads in one or more of the ten swingers magazines of the day as well as phone numbers and addresses of swing clubs in the U.S. and Canada. In those days, Southern California was clearly the swinging hot spot with more than 20 clubs listed.

In 1976 Ann and Ed Allen published *Together Sex: the Playful Couples Key to Better Sex Parties* which was revised in 2001 by Ed Allen and his present wife Dana Allen. The guide includes chapters on attitudes, handling emotions, physical matters and what to expect at swing parties. The book emphasizes the importance of play in the culture of swinging:

When we speak of recreational sex—of sex play—some people accuse us of being frivolous. In actuality play is a serious and meaningful activity, even more serious and

meaningful than work. After all work is merely a way of getting what you want, a means to an end. Play *is* the end. Play is the very thing we want. (Allen & Allen, 1976, p. 5)

During the same time period Mel Martin, the director of a Canadian swing club and the publisher of one of Canada's swinger's magazines self-published *I'm for Group Sex*. His book reads as if he dictated his sequence of gossipy chapters into a tape recorder. In some moments he runs commentary on the hundreds of people he's encountered in the world of swinging, what he's done when "square innocents who don't know from nothing" (Martin, 1975, p. 117) show up at his parties, as well as plenty of his own erotic encounters. Martin reflects on the jealousy provoking dynamics that might ensue when a couple decides to swing separately:

Going out in separate paths is tricky for even the most together swingers, and demands honesty of emotion with your partner...It is imperative that your partner at least knows your lover—real flesh and bones are easier to deal with than fantasy. If your mate sees some flaws and ordinariness about the new competitor, she will be reassured as to her own capabilities... Ideally, they might even become social friends. But all this theory is utopian and often breaks down in the heat of challenge (Martin, 1975, p.187).

### *Swinging After the 70s*

During the 1980s social scientists continued to publish their findings in professional journals, though rather than counting, codifying and describing they tended to examine personality types, compare "normal" with "clinical" populations, and scrutinize marital satisfaction (Chernus, 1980; Sanville, 1980; Dixon, 1985, Duckworth & Leavitt, 1985; Eisenberg, 1985; Murstein, Case & Gunn, 1985; and Leavitt, 1988). Beginning with the 1986 efforts of a young Minnesota physician Keith Henry who performed AIDS tests in several Twin Cities swing clubs and tracked two infected members, a national hysteria occurred. What had become a highly organized subculture with upwards of 200 clubs, several national conventions, party cruises and special events dramatically shifted (Chapple & Talbot, 1989, p. 6). The Minnesota clubs quickly disbanded with members fearing for their lives. When Henry took his concerns to Bob McGin

ley the President of the Lifestyles Organization and requested an audience at the organization's upcoming convention in Las Vegas, he was shunned. McGuinley contended:

Swingers are not at risk because the virus cannot be transmitted through vaginal intercourse unless there is bruising and that sort of thing. So there is no need to promote the use of condoms. I personally never use them because they interrupt sexual play. Swingers rarely get sexually transmitted diseases because they are careful. Furthermore, anal intercourse between men is extremely rare in the swinging community as is intravenous drug use, so there is little threat of the infection spreading through those practices. (Chaple & Talbot, 1989, p. 15)

By 1987 swing clubs nationwide experienced a 50 percent drop in attendance, Southern California's hey day of twenty-plus swing clubs was over as all but the Lifestyle Organization's Club Wide World would disappear or go deep underground. As swinging waned in popularity, that era's books on sex and society reflected the retrenchment of expanded sexuality and instead fueled the gender war. Barbara Ehrenreich wrote the *Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (1983) while Warren Farrell produced a bestseller in *Why Men Are the Way They Are: The Male-Female Dynamic* (1986). The decade also spawned books on adultery (something swinging had endeavored to transcend) including Laurel Richardson's *The New Other Woman: Contemporary Single Women in Affairs with Married Men* (1985) and Annette Lawson's *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal* (1988). Towards the end of the 80s Arno Karlen braved the waters of sexual exploration with *Threesomes: Studies of Sex, Power, and Intimacy*. He explored three-way sexual encounters often single-time menages but also on-going triads, considering sexual dynamics, emotional conundrums, commitment and the challenges of jealousy. Karlen observed:

Some people achieve warmth, intimacy and sensuality in triads. Sometimes these last, but often competition, jealousy or one member's preference for another ends the spell...Some people have used threesomes as a way of trying to conquer possessiveness and jealousy...Defeating jealousy may be as difficult as defeating the needs for power and intimacy. (Karlen, 1988, pp. 307-8)

Ultimately it was the Internet that revitalized swinging. Rather than clumsily meeting potential partners through magazine-style-connections that could take weeks to forward letters from post office boxes, the Internet infused considerable speed into the process. Connection web sites, chat rooms, e-lists, and cyber magazines brought swinging to a new generation, the peak baby boomers who were still in their teens during most of the 70s action. As for AIDS, the 90s generation of swingers were much more wary. Club owners routinely placed baskets of condoms in play rooms, the Lifestyles Convention program featured talks on safe sex, and in AIDS-ravaged San Francisco, condom patrols would enforce a zero-tolerance policy at the city's popular pansexual sex parties.

Journalist Terry Gould chronicled the culture of what is now referred to as "the lifestyle" in *The Lifestyle: A Look at the Erotic Rites of Swingers*. Gould contacted me in 1996 after I'd presented a paper to the Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES) on how swinging mimics Darwinian reproductive strategies, something the 70s researchers hadn't considered. Gould, who in 1989 had written a scathing magazine article on the degeneracy of swinging, had a change of heart and was interested in chatting me up for theories, leads and ideas. Meanwhile, he talked about his own contention that swinging afforded workaday people the sensation of sexual gluttony typically reserved for royalty and pop stars. I encouraged him to include polyamory in his cultural survey by attending that summer's (1996) Loving More Conference. He arrived with reams of yellow legal pads and painstakingly scrawled down countless mindless and not so mindless comments. While I'd been studying swinging and polyamory for several years by that point, for him everything about this culture was new. To me it looked like he had no filters at all and just wrote it all down. That summer and the following one he attended the Lifestyles Convention and chronicled a talk I gave on polysexuality (Gould, 1999, p. 329). Unlike several of

the journalist-researchers of the 1970s he resolutely kept his clothes on, meanwhile chewing countless tabs of nicorette to alleviate his nicotine addiction. Nonetheless, in 1999 the year his book came out, he gave the keynote address at that summer's Lifestyles Convention. His book, unlike avowed swingers Steve and Cathy Marks' 1996 *Swing (Dawn of a New Era)* was authoritative, well written, and hugely interesting. Gould captured the feeling of the lifestyle as it was being lived in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. He chronicled the inside world of Bob McGuinley, visited New Horizons, a delightfully upscale swing club in the outskirts of Seattle, and followed a group of swingers on a Lifestyle's Vacation to the Eden Resort in Baja California. Moreover he explained Darwinian reproductive strategies, sperm competition theory, and deconstructed biblical morality. His discussion of how male swingers might process traditionally jealousy-provoking feelings drew upon recently promulgated evolutionary psychology theories:

[Swinging husbands] enjoy the feeling engendered by a wife's sexuality "infidelity." This, I suggest, is partly because they have learned to experience an automatic reaction they can use for their own pleasure—"sperm competition syndrome." SCS could explain the biology behind the pleasures swinging men get from sharing their wives. The 1.5 million men in the subculture appear to be able to accept and capitalize on what every man seems to be programmed by evolution to accomplish when he consciously or unconsciously suspects a partner has been unfaithful (Gould, 1999, p. 206).

Ultimately, swinging today has transformed in many ways from swinging in the 60s and 70s. Initially it was so avant-garde that the upscale literati participated in discrete enclaves such as Sandstone and Hollywood Hills hideaways. Swinging was a form of socializing that occurred so frequently that being a "swinger" per se was not a meaningful identity. By the time the social scientists set out to count and codify, swinging had become a relatively widespread middle class phenomenon. Often the primary social focus of some couples' lives became the friends and activities engaged through swinging.

Catapulted by the organizational efforts of Bob McGuinley, much of today's swinging has become a corporate affair. There are commercial swing clubs with pricey entrance fees ranging from \$30 - \$110 per couple. The Lifestyles Organization now sponsors three conventions each year, costing participant couples upwards of \$1000 for a weekend. In addition many regional conventions pepper social calendars throughout the year. There are lifestyles vacations where entire resorts, houseboats and hotels are four-walled for swinger-participants. For the tourism entrepreneur, the participants provide their own "entertainment" making lifestyle vacations a potentially lucrative market.

While swinging may have been devised to address the potentially devastating consequences of clandestine affairs, for many swingers the threat and power of jealousy very much exists. Sometimes threatening comparisons may be drawn between those whose physical attributes and sexual skills seem superior. And certainly, jealous feelings may surface when an intimate extra-marital love relationship seems possible. Nonetheless, seeing one's mate engage in non-emotional sexual activity with others can fuel sexual interest as well as strengthen marital bonds. This process is described in more detail in chapter 7, under "Watching and Being Watched."

## Polyamory

Well before polyamory got its name utopian ideas about group marriage abounded. Swingers drawn to communalism saw group marriage as a goal, while for others encounter group experiences could lead to notions of expanded family and intimate network. In the late 60s family therapists Larry and Joan Constantine set out to study this burgeoning phenomena of what they called multilateral marriage. They hitched a trailer to their dented Volkswagen Squareback and loaded up with tape recorders, note books and diapers (they had two young children) and made six coast-to-coast trips tracking families in group marriages (Constantine, 1973, p. 40). Their only funding came from individuals who liked the idea of their ethnographic research project and send them small donations averaging \$20. In 1973 they published *Group Marriage: A Study of Contemporary Multilateral Marriage* with a major New York Publisher. Ultimately they studied twelve families through detailed interviews, extended visits and questionnaires. They looked at communication dynamics, sleeping arrangements, conflict resolution, money management and sexuality. Their research led to what they considered a new definition of jealousy:

Most jealous behavior has its origins in anxiety, in unpleasant anticipation due to insecurity. The potential for loss need not be real. Because it is learned behavior, jealousy may occur in response merely to the nature of the situation without any strong basis in feelings. Anything valued may be the trigger for jealousy; what is valued in the relationship need not make sense, need not even be real. Individuals may exhibit jealousy over a loss of status, diminished control over the other person, loss of actual possession or the quasi-legal sense of ownership, loss of sources of need gratification (or loss of need gratification) or even the loss of time spent with the person. The experience of jealousy leads to a variety of secondary feelings and coping behavior, some of which are markedly more productive than others. (Constantine and Constantine, 1973, p. 181)

In 1974 Anna and Robert Francoeur grappled with the transformation of marriage and relationship in *Hot & Cool Sex: Cultures in Conflict*. Noting America's rising divorce rate, they sought new models for social, emotional, and sexual expression. Hot Sex culture embraced patriarchy, monogamy, sexual exclusivity, possessiveness and a double moral standard (Francoeur & Francoeur, 1974, pp. 86-7). The book celebrates the Cool Sex cultures of traditional societies and advocates alternative lifestyle practices like "contemplative intercourse" where sexual energy might be transformed by means of the tantric yoga form of *maithuna*. *Maithuna* "lifts sexual desire and intercourse out of the limited genital segment and into the totality of personal expression and communion" (Francoeur and Francoeur, 1974, pp. 60-1). Ultimately, they surmised that to change our sexual attitudes the value system of the culture at large would demand readjustment to "promote truly non-possessive, synergistic love" (Francoeur & Francoeur, 1974, p. 199).

#### *The Kerista Commune*

The Kerista commune, founded in the early-1970s by Jud, a self-styled utopian relationship guru, pioneered the practice of *polyfidelity*, a group relationship in which all partners are primary and sexually faithful to each other. Based in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district this living and working intentional community supported itself through desktop publishing. Members resided in discrete "best-friend-identity-clusters" or B-FICs who were exclusively sexual with each other. B-FICs, however, were fluid units: at any given time they might merge, split-up or otherwise reconfigure. Prospective members had to go through an extensive screening process that included a six-month waiting period. During this period they would reside as participatory but celibate members of a B-FIC.

The very first Kerista household was a 1950s-New York City commune made up of five women and five men who lived in the nude. They would invite their visitors to shed their clothes as well and if they weren't willing, they'd then be informed of their lack of psychological liberation. Jud, the only original commune member to retain the original Keristan identity, had also frequented some of the New York's earliest all weekend swing parties which fueled his "fantasy projections of a sexually enlightened community" (Eve, 1987, pp. 8-9).

During its 25-year existence, Kerista produced many publications that discussed its viewpoints about the utopian world it was in the midst of creating. The Keristan lifestyle promoted a "Utopian Psychology" within which members would live peaceably without jealousy and possessiveness. Keristans coined the word "compersion" to describe "the positive emotion of that comes from seeing one's partners enjoying themselves together, the antithesis of jealousy" (Eve, 1985, p. 23). In that they lived in sexually bonded groups and disallowed pairbonding, enjoying their (multiple) partners express love for each other may have felt thoroughly comfortable. Certainly the Keristan experience of compersion could differ dramatically from that of a poly couple who share a primary pair bond with each other.

The whole community (35 core members) engaged in regular "Gestalt-O-Rama" group processing sessions. In the commune's 1984 publication, *Polyfidelity: Sex in the Kerista Commune and Other Related Theories on How to Solve the World's Problems*, the group's 84-point social contract is presented. Minute details of social living are addressed ranging from group accountability to being cooperative, proper party behavior and cleaning up one's mess. Keristans aspired to total accountability wherein real (or

imagined) “dirty laundry” would be discussed as well as positive thoughts and feelings “in order to break down interpersonal walls and keep a clear head” (Eve, 1984, p. 144).

Kerista is perhaps most notorious for its prescriptive sexual practices. Each B-FIC (averaging between four and fifteen members) engaged in a “balanced rotational sleeping schedule.” Here, each member would be on a constant rotation, sleeping with perhaps a different partner every night of the week. Eve comments:

Romantics might consider such a system too “mechanical,” but those who use it think it’s a marvelous way to ensure that every twosome in a B-FIC has equal and ample time to build their own special, one-to-one intimacy. Being non-preferential does not imply that the relationship inside the dyad is identical. Every combination has its own unique qualities, which does not have to compete with any other dyadic relationship. (Eve, 1986, pp. 23-24)

All members were expected to be co-primary in their bonding and commitment to all other members. Moreover all members were expected to be sexual within their gender preference bounds, for example bisexuals would be paired with other same sex bisexuals as well as with opposite sex heterosexuals. While the schedule ensured that every member would be included every night, passion and favorite-friends were discouraged. Polyfidelity was considered to be appealing, not just for the opportunity to regularly engage multiple lovers, but because strong same sex friendship connections could be forged. “Starling” sisters and brothers who share the same lovers are portrayed as having “unique and delightful” friendships (Eve, 1987, p. 13).

When two psychologists set out to study Keristan attitudes towards what control group Americans and Israeli’s might experience as jealousy provoking behavior, the Keristans experienced and displayed none:

None believe in monogamy, all are totally open to their partners about other sexual experiences, all expect their partners to be totally open with them. They all report having been totally faithful to their partners and that their partners have

been totally faithful to them. They claim that the total trust and lack of jealousy extends to people outside the polyfidelitous family, and that outsiders are not viewed as a threat. (Pines & Aronson, 1981, pp. 382-3)

Considering the deep level to which Keristan respondents appeared to be enculturated in the belief systems of their community, Pines and Aronson then proposed that perhaps “Keristans were simply reiterating their ideology. . . . Since jealousy is not normative in their community, it may be that Keristans are reluctant to own up to it” (Pines & Aronson, 1981, p. 384). Certainly in this example we can appreciate the power of cultural learning in jealousy attitude formation.

Due to a variety of internal issues centered around Jud’s autocratic behavior, Kerista disbanded in the mid -1990s, leaving behind a not-easily forgotten legacy. Ultimately, Kerista’s “invention” of polyfidelity did much to catalyze the more free-form practice of polyamory.

### *Polyamory Today*

In 1992 the first books on polyamory were produced, *Loving More: The Polyfidelity Primer* by Ryam Nearing and *Love Without Limits: the Quest for Sustainable Intimate Relationships* by Deborah Anapol. The prolific publishing world of the 1970s had been decimated by chain store marketing, leading each of these books to be self-published by the author’s respective organizations. At the time Nearing had been in a polyfidelitous triad for 11 years and was the publisher of the *Loving More Journal*. Her book is designed as a workbook with self-tests and practical how-to style information. It offers ideas for finding like-minded people to create a multiple-adult-household, ways to manage finances for such households and as well as important legal considerations. Various partnering and marriage patterns are illustrated with tangible diagrams including intimate networks, open and closed group marriages and polyfidelity. She comments, “Just

remember *multiplicity is complex*: each additional person involved adds many new one-to-one relationships, many different group relationships and a whole bundle of karma (positive and negative)” (Nearing, 1992, p. 11). As for jealousy she contends fears can be worked through processing past problems and directly asking for time and attention. Ultimately she surmises that it requires “personal growth” to transform into being neither jealous nor possessive.

It necessitates a commitment to loving yourself enough to face your fears and to move through them. Internal sources of jealousy can be eliminated, at least in part, by developing a secure self, complete with a value beyond that bestowed by any particular partner. (Nearing, 1992, p. 65)

Meanwhile psychologist Deborah Anapol’s *Love without Limits* focussed more on the vagaries of process. Being that the word polyamory had not been coined, she discussed “responsible non-monogamy” in that the love style she was promoting was not as narrow as a polyfidelity. She outlined seven steps to becoming responsibly non-monogamous: 1) Know yourself. 2) Heal yourself. 3) Replace guilt and shame with self-acceptance and love. 4) Master the art of communication. 5) Open yourself to sexual energy. 6) Let jealousy be your teacher. 7) Adopt a moral code. (Anapol, 1992, pp. 27-38).

Anapol contends that jealousy is culturally conditioned and can be undone by being honest all of the time. She advises that one’s partners should be told everything, e.g. every thought / sensation, the “microscopic truth.” Devising strategies for processing jealousy became a major focus of Anapol’s work during much of the early 90s. She explains, “Obviously you can’t reconstruct your personality overnight, but you can transform your jealous feelings if you’re willing to invest the time and energy” (Anapol, 1992, p. 37). According to Anapol this personality transforming process might involve desen

sitizing oneself by listing jealousy arousing experiences and then imagining the most uncomfortable scenarios. Once this can be done without losing control she advises “you may be ready to start letting jealousy be your teacher” (Anapol, 1992, pp. 37-8).

Still, Anapol found a hungry audience for ways to address the rumble of polyamorous jealousy in her 1997 collection, *Compersion: Meditations on Using Jealousy as a Path to Unconditional Love*. Here her aim was to “transcend jealousy” by restructuring our beliefs about the nature of love and relationship. Sensitive to these challenges, when Anapol revised her 1992 book into *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits* in 1997, she devoted additional sections to ethics and jealousy. Clearly the fledgling movement was in need of ways to rethink and otherwise process untoward feelings. She contends that what makes jealousy confusing is that “each person’s jealousy is not the same” (Anapol, 1997, p. 54). Ron Mazur’s (1973) typologies are outlined: 1) Possessive Jealousy (typical in monogamous couples) 2) Exclusion Jealousy (feeling left out—deprived of equal time and attention, common in polyamory) 3) Competition Jealousy (jealous person compares themselves with another lover and comes to believe they’re inadequate in some way) 4) Ego Jealousy (fear that others will judge them as inadequate if they find out that they are sharing their lover) 5) Fear Jealousy (anxiety about aloneness and rejection if ones partner leaves for someone else). Ultimately, Anapol assesses:

Polyamory is not a throw back to more primitive modes of sexual relating... [Rather] it is a more advanced form of relationship for men and women who have already mastered the basics of intimacy and are prepared to evolve beyond the confines of the isolated and, perhaps anachronistic dyad. (Anapol, 1997, p. 145)

I met Deborah Anapol in 1992 shortly after the release of her first book. She invited me to several of her workshops and later that year published several excerpts from my essay “Exploring Nonmonogamy” in her organization’s newsletter, *Floodtide*. Ulti

mately my connection to her inspired the final chapter of my 1993 book *Women Who May Never Marry: The Reasons, Realities and Opportunities*. In my discussion of “Families of the Future: The Quest for Intimacy and Community” I proposed that the nuclear family had become a cultural artifact:

Rather than hang onto a dying family form, we need to socially and politically embrace and financially support the many ways we raise children and nurture ourselves. (Wolfe, 1993, p. 170)

I go on to discuss group/plural marriage, triads, polyfidelity, co-housing, and ultimately building an “Extended Family of Choice:”

Extended Families of Choice may very well be the emergent family model. While first-generation immigrants (like our grandparents) relied on the extended family for nurture, food, housing, financial assistance, and emotional support, these needs are being filled more frequently and more joyously by our families of choice. A family of choice might include close friends, former lovers/spouses, co-workers, current and former partners, and romantic partners. Rather than trying to get everything from one other person or trying to find and then force one other person to meet all of our familial needs, we might be better off to expand our family base. Today’s eclectic families of choice may be very much become our culture’s families of the future. (Wolfe, 1993, p. 174)

In the early 1990s mainstream American publishers were decidedly uninterested in books that proposed topics like polyamory and group marriage. (Mine got through because it was largely about the social and sexual dilemmas of single women.) Other books that considered multiple partner sexuality included Dalma Heyn’s *The Erotic Silence of the American Wife* (1992) which detailed many of the positive reasons married women have affairs and Sonya Friedman’s *Secret Loves: Women with Two Lives* (1994). In *Secret Lives* Friedman explores the lives of wife/wenches and Madonna/whores who seek both to keep their marriages intact as well as to address their compelling desire for extramarital engagement. Robin Baker’s (1996) *Sperm Wars: The Science of Sex* managed to slip in a theoretical paradigm for how a group sex encounter between two couples en

abled one husband to impregnate both wives. Here, the fighter sperm in the other man's ejaculate equalized the impregnator's ejaculate that routinely contained an excessive amount of penetrator sperm, which typically overwhelmed his wife's eggs.

Nonetheless, *Hot Monogamy* (Love & Robinson, 1994) was the decade's more popular book, opening with a discussion of how a housewife rediscovered her interest in sex through a clandestine affair and how therapist Susan Love engaged her into the Hot Monogamy program so that she (and all of her readers) might rekindle sexual sparks with their spouses/life partners.

In 1995 two British writers, Kevin Lano and Claire Parry compiled a collection of personal stories and theoretical essays, *Breaking the Barriers to Desire: Polyamory, Polyfidelity, and Non-monogamy – new approaches to multiple relationships*. The book features writers from England, Australia and the United States. Writer Alison Rowan reflects on group sex, suggesting that expectations be flexible:

Don't expect multiway simultaneous orgasms – group sex is often a more relaxed experience than sex in a couple....There's not a lot more to say, except that it is perfectly accepted to spend the first half of the evening saying "are we really doing this?" The people in the porn films wouldn't dare let themselves be caught giggling – but we know better than that... (Rowan, 1995, p. 35)

Kevin Lano discusses the variety of models now available for creating non-monogamy including triads, polyfidelity, "line marriages," (borrowed from science fiction), open marriages, and "distributed commitment" (a British poly term). Ultimately, such relationships could restructure family dynamics to the extent that children might no longer be the sole responsibility of their biological parents. Lano then assesses:

Non-monogamy would help to break down the atomised and isolated nature of present Western society, organized around family units and couples, and excluding those who fall outside of such units. Ideally it should be possible for there to be a continuum between friendship and sexual relationships, with the details of

particular arrangements determined by the individuals involved, not by legal or conventional constraints. (Lano, 1995, p. 78)

Greenery Press a San Francisco based publishing company that specializes in BDSM published *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities* in 1997. Janet Hardy, one of the company's owners who uses the pen name Catherine A. Liszt co-wrote the book with her long time poly lover Dossie Easton. Both authors are both happy survivors of the Haight Ashbury 1967 Summer of Love. Unlike Nearing and Anapol's books which purport to offer third person sounding advice and strategies, *The Ethical Slut* is decidedly about it's authors lives and strategies. It begins with fun-to-read ramblings about how each author landed in the world of multiple partner living. Liszt opens her discussion while her life partner is downstairs "showering another woman's juices off of his skin" and other than trying to focus on her writing, she's not it in the least bothered. She assesses:

For most people, I guess, this would be unthinkable. I'm supposed to be feeling rejected, and insecure, awash in rage and jealousy. If I were really good at this I'd throw stuff at him, cry, threaten to leave him. So what's wrong with me? (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 14)

Quickly we find out that the author's have shared lovers for years—when one of them meets someone new, their frequent protocol is to introduce them to their other lovers and invite them to be intimate with their whole "family." They go on to discuss old and new paradigms for relationships including letting go of the idea that long term monogamy is the only real relationship, that when you love someone deeply it's okay to control their behavior, and that outside involvements reduce intimacy in the primary relationship. They explain:

Many people have sex outside their primary relationships for reasons that have nothing to do with any inadequacy in their partner or in the relationship. Perhaps this outside relationship allows a particular kind of intimacy that the primary partner doesn't even want, such as fetish behavior or particular sexual activities, and thus constitutes a resolution of an otherwise insoluble conflict. Or perhaps it meets other needs—such as a need for uncomplicated physical sex without the trappings of relationship, or for sex at a time when it is otherwise not available. (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 33)

They go on to discuss “slut skills” which include setting limits, communicating, planning, knowing oneself, and being faithful. Unlike mainstream notions of fidelity, here they contend, “Faithfulness is about honoring your commitments and respecting friends and lovers.” Without the “security blanket of monogamy” it becomes extremely important to demonstrate to your partner or partners that your caring and commitment are sincere (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 63).

While they contend that being truthful to oneself is paramount in ethical sluttery, what one tells one's various lovers may need editing. Their list includes:

- Don't regard “It was such a good fuck” as an adequate excuse for coming home late without calling.
- Don't expect necessarily to like your partner's lovers.
- Don't tell your lover more than your lover wants to know. (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 66).

The book then goes on to discuss the differences between singles culture where every sexual encounter is assessed for it's life-partner potential and the ethical slut world of sexual friendships and fuck buddies. In pondering sharing intimacy without falling in love they conclude:

We would propose that we do love our friends, and particularly those we share sex with: these individuals are our family, often more permanent in our lives than marriages. With practice, we can develop an intimacy based on warmth and mutual respect, much freer than desperation, neediness or the blind insanity of falling in love (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 74).

The book tackles agreements partners might draw up, raising children in a slut positive environment and of course jealousy. In the chapter devoted to jealousy a variety of tactics are offered including feeling jealousy without acting on it, distracting oneself, writing in a journal, watching a movie, going online, calling up friends for support, remembering the good parts of the relationship and being out right candid with one's partner about jealous feelings. Ultimately, they contend:

We can't tell you how to banish jealousy, or now to exorcise it as if it were a demon. Jealousy is not a cancer that you can cut out. It is part of you, a way that you express fear and hurt. What you can do is change the way you experience jealousy, learn to deal with it as you learn to deal with any emotion – until it becomes not overwhelming and not exactly pleasant, but tolerable; a mild disturbance, like a rainy day rather than a typhoon. (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 137).

While coverage of polyamory in the mainstream press has increased in recent years, its discussion in academic textbooks and journals has been limited. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Family and Personal Relationships* (Vail, 1999), a reader that's used often in college sociology classes, includes "Should We Accept Alternatives to Monogamy?" Here, Deborah Anapol's "Monogamy: An Idea Whose Time Has Past" is contrasted with John Gray's "Monogamy is Essential to Keep Love's Spark Alive."

While several anthropology journals (*The California Anthropologist* and *Teaching Anthropology: SACC Notes*) began publishing my work on polyamory beginning in the late 1990s (Wolfe, 1998; Wolfe, 1999; Wolfe, 2000; Wolfe, 2002) the journal, *Alternative Lifestyles: Changing Patterns in Marriage, Family and Intimacy* is no longer published. In the early 1980s it typically featured academic studies on sexuality and jealousy in open marriages (Buunk, 1981; Watson, 1981) as well as addressing activities like man-

sharing in African American communities (Scott, 1980). Since the 1990s much of the published academic research related to multiple partner sexuality has focussed on extra-marital sex, (Wiederman, 1997; Levine, 1998; Tuch, 2000), infidelity, secret affairs, inappropriate relationships (Treas, 2000; Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Allan & Harrison, 2002), and sexual strategies (Greiling & Buss, 2000).

The very limited extent to which open partner sexuality is discussed includes an article on the fear of AIDS amongst swingers (Jenks, 1992), a retrospective on what happened to swingers, groups marriages and communes (Rubin, 2001), and an article on models of open relationships (Labriola, 1999). This last Spring the *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* broke the mold and published David Hall and Unitarian Universalist minister Dererk McCullough's "Polyamory – What it is and what it isn't." The article, based upon a sermon that McCullough delivered to his congregation presents a strong case for the logic and morality of polyamory. It embraces polyamorists efforts to create a culture where "jealousy is not innate, inevitable and impossible to overcome, (Hall & McCullough, 2003). It engages the poly "family values," contending that "children having multiple parents are more likely to be better cared for, and less likely to feel abandoned if someone leaves the family" (Hall & McCullough, 2003). While the piece is largely a positive position statement rather than a report on scientific research, it nonetheless validates its claims through ethnographic references including Murdock's (1986) *Ethnographic Atlas* and Beckerman and Valentine's (2002) *Cultures with Multiple Fathers*. Finally, it embraces self-acceptance and ethical behavior:

One of the best gifts that you can give yourself is the permission to be yourself. By loving yourself unconditionally, and respecting all your qualities and inclinations, you allow yourself to be at peace. This becomes part of a larger process of self-differentiation – of determining who you are and what is important to you. To live as a poly requires the same value base as living morally, ethically, honestly and responsibly (Hall & McCullough, 2003)

In 2001, Canadian documentary filmmaker Maureen Marovitch produced “When Two Won’t Do” which chronicled a four-year odyssey across North America where Marovitch and her partner David engage others living in multiple partner relationships. The filmmakers very honestly portray the huge emotional challenges they faced in trying to create a poly family. As Marovitch describes, “The results are as giddy, painful, sad and loving as real life tends to be” (Marovitch, 2001, p. 32). The film faced criticism from those who believe the polyamory movement is too new (and too fragile) to expose itself in such a way (Lou, 2002) – that a film for mass consumption shouldn’t show some much bumpiness and pain.

*Loving More Magazine*, a glossy-covered quarterly publication, reflects the 1995 merging of Ryam Nearing’s *Loving More Journal* and Deborah Anapol’s journal *Flood-tide*. It features contributions from social scientists, poly activists, dreamers, schemers, poets and creative writers. A variety of viewpoints and experiences are shared with no particular party line vis-a-vis “poly-correctness.” Briefly, the magazine’s mission is to:

Provide information and inspiration for people of all orientations who are interested in evolving relationship options which embrace freedom, responsibility, nonviolence, increased personal awareness, cooperation, and love. (*Loving More*, inside cover.)

Several of my publications (Wolfe, 1998; Wolfe, 2000; Wolfe 2002) have been adapted for inclusion in this dissertation. Topics that *Loving More Magazine* has addressed include managing jealousy, adding a partner, love and money, awakening to polyamory, poly parenting, poly

amory and the law, and communication techniques. In 2000 Loving More was funded to conduct a national polyamory survey, largely focussing on demographic information and safer sex practices. Portions of this research have been analyzed in recent issues of the magazine and are compared with the results of my survey in chapter 7.

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