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Sexual Vampires: Myths and Motivations

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Introduction

The study of “real vampires” has attracted considerable recent academic interest (Browning, 2015a, 2015b; Laycock, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2016; Williams, 2008, 2009, 2013; Williams & Browning, 2016; Williams & Prior, 2015) in a condition which said vampires claim exists not by choice (Laycock, 2010; Williams & Prior, 2015). Thus, being a vampire is considered among academics and professionals as an alternative identity (Laycock, 2010; Williams & Prior, 2015). An individual self-identifying as a “real vampire” believes they need to consume either blood or “energy” (usually of human origin) in order to maintain their well-being (Laycock, 2009a, 2010; Williams & Prior, 2015), where the term “vampire” refers to the preferred feeding process (Williams & Prior, 2015). While the focus of research has largely been on vampires requiring blood, called “sanguinarians” (Laycock, 2009a; Williams & Prior, 2015), whose consumption of human blood is considered in mainstream culture to be socially unacceptable (Browning, 2015a), those who feed on energy, called “psychic vampires” (Laycock, 2009a), in fact use a variety of feeding methods, including sex (Browning, 2015a).

In this article, we present the results of a survey conducted to study a lesser known minority of real vampires called “sexual vampires” who claim to use sexual activity to feed (Browning, 2015a, 2015b). Apart from being mentioned briefly in literature (Browning, 2015a, 2015b; Laycock, 2009a), there is nothing reported about sexual vampires, thus this represents the first study of this particular vampire identity. Sexual vampires are sometimes called Eros vampires, a term coined by one of us (DG), and Tantric vampires (Belanger, 2004) on account of their practicing “tantric sex.” One of us (DG) defines sexual vampires as: “any vampire, regardless of their feeding needs, who actively requires some sort of sexual stimuli, either produced or evoked, in order to make the act of feeding of value.” In the present study, we explore sexual motivation and necessity for sex in the feeding needs of sexual vampires. Examining sexual feeding in a sex-positive manner (Williams *et al.* 2013, 2015) might help sexual vampires to meet their unique needs by finding donors.

At present sexual vampires are misunderstood within the real vampire community, where it is expected they ought to enjoy some measure of acceptance. Sexual vampires often remain silent regarding their feeding, yet in private online groups, many

engage in open and constructive discussions concerning their sexual practices. Communication with other types of vampires often seems hindered by a lack of information. Using collected data (including interviews), we examine assumptions surrounding sexual vampires and suggest that applying a sex-positive approach could assist this sexual minority by helping younger vampires gain assistance from the broader vampire community without fear of prejudice.

The process of vampires revealing their alternative identities (vampirism) to others has been termed “coming out of the coffin” (Williams & Prior, 2015). Within their intimate relationships, vampires appear to be open about their alternative practices. Even so, there is a general fear by vampires to discuss their condition with health professionals, and sexual vampires have been warned against doing so (Gray, 2016, para. 12), given the possible disapproval of their “deviant” sexual activity (Aaron, 2016). A sex-positive approach among health professionals could empower sexual vampires when seeking treatment for health-related issues.

Method

An online survey was posted in various Facebook groups frequented by real vampires. The target audiences were both self-identified sexual vampires and those vampires who supplement their feeding with sexual activity or sexual energy in some way. In this study a majority of the vampire-participants were chronic and reported suffering from their vampiric condition for 16 or more years. We asked 46 questions divided into three main categories: relationships (romantic and with donors), feeding practices, and participation in BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism). Our convenience sample yielded 63 responses, but we only used 40 because the answers to 23 forms were deemed either inconsistent or reflecting deliberately abusive responses. While the sexual nature of the questions might account for a high level of apparently deliberate inaccuracy, much of the discarded data also reflected generally negative attitudes towards sexual vampires within the broader vampire community.

Upon review of the responses to our basic questions, we decided that trying to better understand the mechanisms of sexual feeding and the practice of BDSM among many vampires necessitated a qualitative follow-up exploration. Subsequently, some sexual vampires were interviewed to provide more details where the original survey failed to provide sufficiently detailed information. We approached 14 vampires to share more information via email or private chats, and we estimate that at least 35 vampires engaged in discussion groups on Facebook to provide additional information on feeding techniques. This second survey was conducted anonymously and we did not ask all interviewees if they answered our original survey. In the process of analyzing these data, the issues particular to sexual vampires – a range of sexual myths and assumptions – became apparent. Our findings are important given that a sex-positive approach might lessen the preconceptions surrounding sexual vampires.

Participants

Participants reported a wide range of gender identities, which included 19 females, 15 males, three genderfluid, one agender, one trans-male, and one gender non-conforming. Sexual orientation was likewise diverse within this group, including 14 pansexual/omnisexual, 11 heterosexual, seven bisexual/bicurious, four gay/lesbian, two asexual, and one gender-queer; one female-identified respondent failed to answer the question. In private group discussions, it has been observed that sexual vampires may be more likely to present non-traditional sexual orientations compared to other vampire types (Williams & Prior, 2015).

Results

Sexual Feeding

As noted earlier, vampires believe they are born with vampirism, a condition similar to sexual orientation (Williams & Prior, 2015). Feeding methods are often used by researchers to classify vampires (Laycock, 2009a), i.e., blood (sang), energy (psi), and sexual (tantric) (Browning, 2015a). However, in this study most vampires reported using more than one feeding method, and not all methods were mutually exclusive. Some of the vampires we interviewed implied their feeding practice is, like their vampirism, not a choice at all, so we propose the term “feeding orientation” to suggest the lack of preference to modify feeding activities (Atlanta Vampire Alliance, 2007, p. 31). We did not investigate whether sexual vampires can alter their feeding methods to exclude sex and thereby use sang or psi feeding. However, a positive sexuality approach suggests that vampires’ sexuality is unique, and can thus empower vampires to meet their preferred energy needs without having to conform.

Findings show that participants practiced diverse forms of sexual energy feeding methods. “Ambient feeding” (Browning, 2015a) involves absorbing energy that surrounds people, either generated by flirtations or indirectly from excess energy given off by patrons of clubs or during BDSM scenes, and it requires the vampire to be in proximity of the donor(s). Sexual energy may also be generated remotely, either by phone or on internet chat sessions. Most of the vampires we surveyed claimed to derive sexual energy remotely. Of these, a high proportion had at least one regular donor, but it was more common for the vampire to have more than one remote donor. As with ambient feeding, flirtations were necessary to either establish or enhance the sexual feed, and intimacy with their remote donor seemed necessary.

“Contact feeding” (Browning, 2015a) occurs when physically touching the donor, but does not necessarily involve invasive contact. Cuddling, which was described as being more emotionally intense with a vampire, is a common practice. More vampires in our study reported using contact rather than remote feeding methods. Unlike remote feeding, a greater proportion of contact feeders only had one regular donor for such

purposes. Ambient, remote, and contact feeding are psychic vampire techniques, but in a sexual context, they usually involve a specific donor.

The more intimate sexual feeding methods included the ingestion of sexual fluids during oral sex, where semen is a substitute for blood; and sexual intercourse, either vanilla or tantric. Tantric sex, as practiced by non-vampires, has a spiritual essence, but vampires use the techniques to enhance the sexual energy available for feeding. With these methods there is not only the matter of safe sex, but particular to vampires is the taking in of energy during sex, so they reserve intimacy at this level for those donors who are “fluid bonded,” which implies strict monogamy between these partners.

Each of these methods was often integrated with sang feeding (blood drinking, including ingestion of menstrual fluids) and non-sexual psi feeding (either ambient or via contact). Blood drinking usually involves cutting and takes place during or after sex. One researcher previously has described observing this act as “one of the most spiritual experiences that I have ever witnessed” (Thomas & Williams, 2016, p. 91). Another intense practice almost exclusively occurring during sexual activity is “deep” or “core” feeding, initiated with a kiss to “draw out” sexual energy. Core feeding has the effect of heightening pleasure post-orgasm, often resulting in the donor falling asleep in order to recover from energy loss.

To improve sexual energy feeding, vampires reported that ingestion of sexual fluids (semen) was important but not necessarily so with blood, especially menstrual flow. During sexual activity, intimacy was reported as being somewhat important, as was foreplay to enhance the sexual feed. While vampire orgasm did not necessarily impact the success of a feed, participants reported that donor orgasm was important.

Sexual vampires often are assumed to suffer from either satyriasis (males) or nymphomania (females), and the sexual vampire label may be viewed as an excuse to have or want sex “all the time” (Browning, 2015b). While some interviewed vampires in this study admitted having high sex drives, most vampires reported engaging in sexual feeding more frequently than once per month but less than once per week. A similar number of participants reported sexual feeding more than once per week and at least once per day. Most vampires had sex for pleasure separate from sexual feeding, yet most participants claimed sex in conjunction with feeding was more enjoyable. For example, one vampire admitted she preferred “donation filled sex... In fact just the donation will do, you can keep the sex part.”

Feeding in non-sexual ways affected the regularity of sexual feeding by generally decreasing the need for sex for the majority of respondents, but some reported an increase in sex drive. For example, one vampire explained that “Simply being a man, a gay man...there is usually not much of a surprise that I like a lot of sex...most of my partners like that.” Clearly, a sex-positive approach is necessary to ensure all sexual vampires,

regardless of gender or sexual orientation, can fulfill their feeding requirements without suffering judgments that are rooted in widespread sex-negativity.

Committed Relationships

According to participants we interviewed, sexual vampires are considered promiscuous, and some have been compared to sexual predators by other members of the vampire community. However, we found most vampires were in committed relationships with a high proportion being married. Most participants described their relationships as protective, nurturing and satisfying, claiming their partner(s) knew they were vampires and that they engaged in sexual feeding. A majority of participants sourced their sexual energy from within their present relationship, but this was not necessarily the only feeding source.

Feeding outside their primary relationships is a particular concern that sexual vampires face, with the emotional burden of trust underpinning all interactions with donors. When asked if feeding outside their relationships was an act of infidelity, most answered no, but as one participant noted, “unfortunately yes.” For the most part, the definition of fidelity depended on the way the sexual energy was derived, so that if the feeding did not include contact with the donor, then as one participant believes, “... feeding off the flirtations of others wouldn’t constitute infidelity in monogamous relationships.” Several polyamorous vampires noted that relationship dynamics did not exclude the importance of honest disclosure between all partners involved. As one vampire explained, “it depends on the relationship. I’m poly, so no inherently, but if there’s no communication or consent from all parties, then yes.”

Sexual activity outside the relationship for non-feeding reasons was mostly answered with no, with all yes responses of such behavior being consensual. However, some respondents claimed that their partners display a higher level of mistrust in their relationship due to the very nature of being a sexual vampire.

Donors

A donor is (generally) a non-vampire who, for various reasons, provides blood and/or energy to real vampires. The sexual orientation of the vampire did not necessarily influence how they selected donors, but it proved important for feeding. Still, a third of the sample reported that their sexuality played no part in how they gained sexual energy from their donors. In ambient or remote feeding, sexual orientation plays no part in the flirtations; but by being responsible and having the donor’s full knowledge and consent, they reduce the opportunity for unwanted sexual attention. In the process of arousal to generate sexual energy, the donor also benefits because, after the feed, they remain sexually excited for their own partner.

Most vampires gained their sexual energy from donors using contact or sexually intimate feeding methods. During a feed, most vampires required only one donor at a time, with about a third requiring more than one donor simultaneously at the feed. A high proportion of sexual vampires claimed they did not have enough regular donors to satisfy their energy needs. Of those vampires who actively sought new donors, the reasons were mainly that their present donors did not supply enough energy or that occasionally they enjoyed the “thrill of the hunt.” It was the “feel” of the donor’s energy which attracted vampires in nearly all cases.

Awakening

The “awakening” of a real vampire is not an incident but more akin to a process, involving “the discovery and acceptance of our true nature as [vampires]... a period of personal struggle that is marked by emotional and metabolic changes, increased sensitivities and intuitive awareness...” (Madame X, personal communication, May 26, 2016). Vampires believe that awakening is not a choice, much like puberty, where physiological changes occur with sexual development. But because awakening also involves self-acceptance, not all vampires become aware of their nature automatically. The data revealed that although a majority of vampires in our study are chronic, the periods of self-identification do not necessarily correlate with age.

One of the serious issues discussed by sexual vampires in this study is the education of young vampires who are awakening. They are considered vulnerable if they are left to experiment on their own with feeding methods, where for sexual vampires this includes not only coming to terms with their sexuality during puberty but the need for energy produced during sexual contact, which can prove confusing. Any physical contact with their peers can derive an energy reward, such that the young vampire quickly learns more intimate interactions produce more satisfying energy. Without guidance to explain the source of these energy sensations, they run the risk of an “unsafe” sex practice peculiar to sexual vampires; i.e., that sex is not “food” but via intimacy they can gain more than just energy and experience the full pleasure of sex.

Education for young vampires concerning feeding methods is a controversial subject within the vampire community, particularly for those engaged in sexual feeding. Vampires in our study reported they started seeking sexual pleasure between the ages 12-18, but in rare cases this occurred earlier. From an early age, children are taught sexual acts are wrong, or “bad,” thus cultivating shame and making it difficult for sexual vampires to feed void of guilt. Many sexual vampires complain that they still suffer the feeling they are “sluts,” where the term has no gender affiliations. A sex-positive approach could assist vampires in understanding that any sexual topic and issue can and should be discussed in an open and mature way.

Early “Causes”

There is also the false belief that sexual vampirism is somehow “caused” by sexual trauma, particularly childhood sexual abuse (CSA) (Aaron, 2012). While we did not directly investigate this in our survey, discussions on sexual behavior and history indicate CSA does not seem to influence sexual vampire nature. Sexual vampires do not exhibit sexual inhibitions, fear sex, or suffer a lack of interest in sex. Sexual dysfunction is not discussed, no matter the gender of the vampire. While it might be argued that sexual vampires are sexually compulsive, they are very aware of why they seek sexual contact, thus negating the charge that they suffer from sexual behavior problems. Compulsive masturbation and performance issues do not seem to plague sexual vampires. Findings suggest that pornography, while interesting to some, did not form a particular fascination, and it certainly was not a dependence issue. This is not to say sexual vampires have never suffered CSA, only that if they were such victims, they do not display common sexual problems associated with CSA as adults.

BDSM

Sexual vampires are more likely than the general population to indulge in kink activities, and vampires have a long history of involvement with the BDSM subculture (Laycock, 2009a). The motivation for vampires indulging in BDSM extends beyond mere pleasure to include sexual feeding. Feeding may also include sang feeding, where caning the donor produces blood for the vampire to lick from the donor’s skin.

Research to explain the attraction for and participation in BDSM is varied (Taylor & Ussher, 2001; Weinberg, 2006; Williams, 2013). For sexual vampires, one reason for kink is to obtain the sexual energy generated during the scene. In our survey, all vampires who practiced BDSM (about three-quarters of our total sample) fed during the scene, with about a third engaged in BDSM activities solely or primarily for feeding. The rest also sought BDSM play for non-feeding pleasure.

In our investigation of feeding practices, we did not examine the pleasure derived from non-feeding BDSM, which may or may not be primarily sexually motivated (Sagarin, *et al.* 2015; Williams, *et al.* 2016). Interest in BDSM is associated with power exchange, psychological factors, and a spiritual practice called “Sex Magic” involving play with cutting. In Sex Magic, “...when you open up the body by cutting...there is often a genuine opening of the mind, emotions and spirit as well...” (Easton & Hardy, 2001, p. 127). Vampires practice Sex Magic, but while deeply spiritual in nature, their rituals appear to have strong sexual overtones, in that the focus is for controlling orgasm, which is often necessary for sexual feeding. While the intentions for non-vampires vary widely, sexual vampires almost certainly aim to influence any working to maximize the energy benefits. Sex Magic is often associated with “Blood Magic,” where the blood is symbolic so only a drop is necessary for the ritual. How Sex and Blood Magic works in BDSM is a matter of personal choice, as not all vampires use it in conjunction with BDSM. Whether

non-vampires will adopt vampire versions of Sex Magic remains conjectural. Despite recent assessments of BDSM *per se* as non-pathological (Weinberg, 2006; Williams, 2013, Williams, *et al.* 2016), a sex-positive view may be useful for potential donors when participation in BDSM is associated with vampirism.

According to our data, feeding occurred in progressions of the scene from the build-up, involvement, and climax, but did not occur within the period of aftercare. Most feeding occurred during scene involvement. Important reasons given for not feeding during the scene included respect for the “bottom” (submissive) and the necessity for “tops” (dominants) to adhere to BDSM rules of SSC (safe, sane, and consensual). Respect for the bottom extended to aftercare, and as one vampire explained, “that is a time for comfort and winding down; I respect them by not feeding...it could alter their mindset, ruining everything worked for during the scene.”

In the choice of role during BDSM activities, the majority of vampires answered with a preference for switching (topping and bottoming), but approximately equal numbers of the rest preferred either topping (dominance) or bottoming (submission). This result was unexpected, as vampires are usually considered dominant, using the role of topping to focus the energy of the feed. But as one participant observed, there are “a lot of vampires who are primarily sexual submissives and masochists... (they) get energy by acting as lightning rods, grounding the massive energy their top puts into the dominance and sadism.”

Feeding Necessity

Vampires believe that their specific risks extend beyond the physical, but a unique issue involves feeding from a donor without the “right energy.” The significance of “right energy” was not directly explored in our study; however, when asked about the consequences of not feeding at all or not feeding regularly, the effects reported were mainly physical and emotional, including lethargy/fatigue, various illnesses, headaches/migraines, body pains, eating problems, sensitivities, depression/anxiety, mood swings, and increased sexual desire. These symptoms were not dependent on the source of energy, which for some vampires included blood and psi energy. That sexual vampires should treat or avoid these complications seems to form a strong motivation for their sexual feeding. The necessity for a sex-positive understanding of sexual vampires becomes important so that their sexual behavior is not misinterpreted as part of their health issues and considered a problem. The need to feed might also be a motivation, as one participant commented, “Sexual vampires need to know how to keep fed, so that they don’t get too energetically hungry and engage in any risky sexual behavior.”

Conclusion

Our primary goal for this study was to examine possible motivations of vampires who claim to require sexually stimulating activities in order to feed. While considering

motivations for sexual experiences, many find that the most important factor is indeed the personal choice to seek sex (or avoid it), yet the claims of sexual vampires suggest that they need some form of sexual activity in order to optimize their health. We hoped to investigate the necessity of sex for sustaining the energy of sexual vampires, but the data revealed that this is more complex than expected; for example, vampires seeking sex primarily for ordinary pleasure or for preferring sex for the purpose of feeding. We found that this little-known sexual minority faces many complex issues, not only those arising from their condition as real vampires but in particular from complications arising from the apparent need to feed sexually. More research exploring these issues is warranted. A positive sexuality approach that emphasizes empowerment, self-determination, unique sexuality, and human diversity is needed for sexual vampires, as well as other minority communities.

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Conversational Phases in BDSM Pre-Scene Negotiations

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Introduction & Background

Sexual consent has, and continues to be, a nebulous and ill-defined topic of academic, sociological, and social inquiry (Archard, 1998). Consent in BDSM contexts is even more poorly defined, despite its central importance to the subculture. The existing literature notes this significance (for example, Barker, 2013; Jozifkova, 2013; Langdrige & Butt, 2004). However, academic investigations are yet to examine the ways in which consent is constructed by BDSM practitioners, particularly through language and interaction. Through the application of an ethnomethodological (EM) and conversation analysis (CA) framework to audio-recorded pre-scene negotiations of BDSM practitioners, a preliminary investigation into consent in BDSM contexts shows there are distinct conversational phases during pre-scene negotiations.

Research on the lived experiences of BDSM practitioners has seen a marked growth in the last decade. Writings on kinksters, their experiences, and their practices have begun to move away from pathologising a ‘deviant sexuality’ and are beginning to explore the nuances and techniques involved in ‘what it is that we do’ (WIITWD). Many note the central importance of consent to the BDSM community yet none delve into the process by which consent is actually constructed in the kink community (Chatterjee, 2012; Hopper, 2011; Lindemann, 2011; McLachlan, 2011; Stiles & Clark, 2011; Taylor & Ussher, 2001; Tsaros, 2013; Turley, King, & Butt, 2011; Victoria, 2014; Wismeijer & van Assen, 2013).

Academic and activist Meg Barker notes that for BDSM practitioners “consent has occupied a place of central importance” (2013, p.896). Her analysis of emic writings on enthusiastic consent¹ explores the dynamics involved in gaining consent and notes that “the conversations themselves can be erotic, and create norms of having such dialogues” (2013, p.904). Consent conversations as the norm within the BDSM context is similarly taken up elsewhere. Tsaros highlights that explicit negotiation of boundaries and consent in BDSM contexts are the norm within these spaces, while in ‘vanilla’² sexual encounters “all actions can be assumed to be consensual” until consent is explicitly withdrawn (2013, p.865). This distinction between vanilla and BDSM sexual interactions highlights the importance of furthering research on the constructions of consent. By exploring the processes by which consent is experienced within BDSM contexts, the complexity and

¹ Enthusiastic consent refers to consent explicitly gained through dialogue between individuals (Barker, 2013, p.904).

² ‘Vanilla’ refers to either individuals not involved in BDSM or sexual behaviours which do not involve BDSM. It is sometimes used as a pejorative in the community.

malleability of consent in all contexts, sexual or not, is emphasised (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

Consent and its malleability is one of two narratives identified by Langdrige and Butt (2004) in their analysis of BDSM textual discourse. Their analysis focuses on two narratives arising from the collected online texts: 1) the explicit negotiation of consent and 2) the rejection of the pathologising of BDSM. In their analysis of the former, they contend that subscribing to the tenet of ‘Safe, Sane and Consensual’ is “*the* key condition for membership” in BDSM (2004, p.42, original emphasis). They suggest that this notion of ‘Safe, Sane and Consensual’ is the difference between pathological sexuality and a sexuality “worthy of respectful sexual citizenship” (2004, p.44).³ Langdrige and Butt’s analysis of consent highlights that communication and negotiation are not only necessary but expected in BDSM relationships, and thus kinksters new to the scene come to be socialised in its importance by experienced practitioners.

In noting the danger of inexperience in potentially crossing the boundary between consensual play and violence, Jozifkova’s (2013) article highlights socialisation as one of the key themes in literature on BDSM. Hopper (2011), for example, focuses on the processes that one must undergo in order to become a socialised kinkster. To become a socialised kink practitioner, he suggests, requires navigating several complex stages; processes of introduction, peer association, the learning of sexual scripts, and the learning of behaviours appropriate to the chosen role identity (*cf.* Hopper, 2011, p.7).⁴ Turley, King, and Butt (2011) expand on this notion of socialisation by noting that engaging in the process is often viewed to be an exciting change from normative sexual behaviours by their participants. Involvement in BDSM became not only a rejection of normative social mores, but also a way to achieve transformation or healing and to escape everyday realities of human existence (Turley et al., 2011, pp.131–133).

Thus it can be seen that while there are numerous key themes and focal points within the current BDSM literature, the central importance of consent cannot be understated. Much of the literature notes the significance of consent to the experiences and study of kink but few specifically explore the ways in which consent is constructed and negotiated by practitioners themselves.

³ Other consent frameworks used within the community include Risk Aware Consensual Kink (RACK), Personal Responsibility in Consensual Kink (PRICK), and the “4Cs” (Williams, Thomas, & Prior, 2014). I am grateful to the Reviewers for bringing the 4Cs to my attention and regret not being able to include a more in-depth discussion of these different frameworks at this time.

⁴ Hopper’s notion of socialisation in order to become an accepted member of the scene is echoed in Langdrige and Butt’s suggestion that adherence to the tenet of Safe, Sane and Consensual is “a key condition for membership” in the community (2004, p.42).

Methods

Academic investigations of BDSM have been influenced by numerous perspectives, both theoretically and methodologically (Turley et al., 2011, p.125). Given the central importance in BDSM of ‘meanings’ that are culturally learned, enforced and reproduced (Weille, 2002, p.134), this plethora of methods used to study kink is unsurprising. For this project it was determined that a synthesis framework of ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA) would provide the greatest likelihood of achieving an explication of the meanings present in pre-scene consent negotiations. By using an ethnomethodological perspective this research project attempts to discover the minute details of society-in-practice (Sacks, 1984; Schegloff, 2007) within the BDSM community as it relates to pre-scene consent negotiations. In utilising an ethnomethodological perspective, the practical minutia of these negotiations are treated as “anthropologically strange” (Garfinkel, [1967]1984, p.9) and the research proceeds in a fashion that will demonstrate the processes and meanings of these actions. That is, the analysis is grounded in the conduct of competent members and thus the research questions become elucidated by the data – the answers provide the question “in the participants’ own terms” (Schegloff, 1997, p.75).

The author’s involvement with the local BDSM community where the data was gathered is twofold – engaging as both practitioner and researcher. Prior to events, permission was sought from event hosts/organisers to gather data at their events. Posts were then made in the relevant groups on Fetlife⁵ letting event attendees know about the project and what was involved in choosing to participate. Consent forms were signed on the night of the event and participants were free to record their negotiations at a time of their choosing. In total, 7 recordings from 14 participants were collected. The relatively small sample size was not considered a limitation of the study due to the EM/CA framework applied to the collected data. There were 6 male-identifying practitioners and 8 female-identifying practitioners in the sample with various role identifiers. Their experience level ranged from less than twelve months to more than 15 years and the recordings included male-female pairings, male-male pairings, female-female pairings and one female-female-male trio. The recordings were transcribed according to the Jeffersonian notation system (Jefferson, 2004) using audio-editing software, Audacity, to ensure conversational details were able to be included in the transcripts. Following transcription the recordings were examined using an EM/CA framework.

Findings

The structure of consent negotiations in BDSM contexts have not hitherto been subject to academic examination. The data suggests that there are at least four distinct – but not discrete – phases present in these conversations. That is, the phases may be

⁵ Fetlife is a social media site, not dissimilar to Facebook, for BDSM practitioners.

moved through in different orders in any given negotiation or they may blend or overlap with other phases but they are always present.⁶

These phases include [Style], [Body], [Limits] and [Safewords]. [Style] encompassed the type of play to be done, the sensation that the type of play would elicit, the intensity of this sensation, and the toys that would be used in producing this sensation and intensity. [Body] allowed the negotiation of bodily considerations such as the location on the bottom's body where play was acceptable, the position the bottom would assume during the scene, whether touch (sexual and non-sexual) was allowed, to what extent this touch was permitted, and finally, considerations of existing injuries or safety requirements that may impact the play to be had. Often overlapping with [Body] negotiations of safety, injury and touch was [Limits]. During [Limits] the boundaries of each practitioner - though most frequently the limits of the bottom - were outlined and agreed upon. Due to the personal and unique nature of limits this phase showed the least congruence between recordings in terms of how this phase was discussed. Lastly came an examination of [Safewords]. This phase allowed practitioners to negotiate and ensure mutual understanding of how the scene was to be ended in the event that the bottom reached their limits or experienced some sort of unexpected distress. Three ways of ending a scene were identified: 1) the use of the traffic light system where "red" signals the need to immediately end the scene, 2) the use of plain English where "Stop" actually means stop rather than being a kind of mock protest or way of managing pain, and 3) the use of body language such as gestures or hand signals.

Navigating these phases requires kinksters to have and display a certain level of social proficiency. This proficiency ensures that the locally produced understandings of certain terms can be agreed upon. It was shown on several occasions that this proficiency can be shared with others of a lesser proficiency – as an experienced top did with their inexperienced bottom during their negotiation, bolstering his proficiency by displaying her own.

Summary & Conclusion

The findings demonstrate the critical role of norms within BDSM contexts. That is, how ethnomethods and scripting inform and shape consent negotiations. Sandnabba et al. (2002, p.40) note that "little is known about the 'scripting' of more unusual sexual activities, including sadomasochistic sexual behaviour". This is not to say that scripting does not occur in kink situations, in fact, quite the opposite (Newmahr, 2011, p.8). Given the highly ritualised nature of many BDSM interactions, these scripts serve an important function in the performance of complex kink interactions (Sandnabba et al., 2002, p.40).

⁶ There was, however, one instance in which the identified norms of pre-scene negotiations were not adhered to. This recording was identified as a deviant case and, as per the EM/CA framework employed, allowed for greater refinement of the analytic schemes applied to the rest of the data (Silverman, 1985, p.21). Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the deviant case analysis in greater detail at this stage.

These scripts – or rules – create a sense of local orderliness (Lieberman, 2013, p.16). The scripts for negotiations in BDSM contexts are part of an enculturation process where people learn to negotiate by watching others then later reproducing and adapting it for themselves (Lieberman, 2013, p.19; *cf.* Hopper, 2011, p.3). These scripts form part of the accepted foundations of BDSM negotiations – the rules that have come to be seen as “pre-existing the social activity that they organise” (Lieberman, 2013, p.83).

The specific findings of this research contribute to the examination of BDSM as a diverse sexual practice. Studying consent in BDSM contexts enriches broader understandings and applications of consent as well as how it is created, understood, and mobilised in various contexts. The implications for studying consent in pre-scene negotiations are not only sociological in nature but also legal, psychological and medical. The findings of this research highlight that BDSM practitioners are skilful sexual citizens rather than pathological subjects. Through the use of role identifier-specific language patterns and behaviours kinksters cooperatively and collaboratively construct consent in pre-scene negotiations. Consent frameworks, like ‘Safe, Sane and Consensual’ or ‘the 4Cs’, are more than mantras to those within the scene; they have a profound influence on the importance of pre-scene negotiations and enthusiastic consent to the BDSM community.

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Black and Blues: Sub Drop, Top Drop, Event Drop and Scene Drop

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A couple of days after a magnificent BDSM scene with her Dominant, KittyK feels unusually sad and insecure. While it was one of the high points of her D/s relationship with SirStephan, “I feel a little lost and unconnected, maybe even a bit embarrassed, even though Sir has been so attentive,” she reports.

Then there is Samuel, who attends his first full weekend kink/leather event – filled with valuable classes and exciting play parties. He connects with some awesome people and gets a sense of being immersed in this world that he has always dreamed about; he feels a great sense of belonging. A few days later, after he gets back to his everyday work and home life, he finds it hard to concentrate, he feels exhausted, and he lacks interest in the usual things that bring him pleasure and satisfaction.⁷

It is not unusual to hear descriptions like this when a person spends time in various kink, BDSM and leather communities. For some people, after having a wonderful, energetic, amazing kink/BDSM experience, they seem to have some sort of letdown, emotional downturn or crash. This appears to happen to people from different cultural backgrounds, and across genders and orientations and ages. Within the kink world, these post-event occurrences are often labeled with terms like “sub drop” or “event drop” – as well as “Top drop” or “Dom drop”⁸. These terms are used to describe many different kinds of feelings, involve many time frames; from minutes to days after. What exactly is this experience? As researchers with a keen desire to better understand the kink experience and how this understanding can translate to clinical practice, this paper is an enquiry into what drop might signify.

In the Moment.....the term “drop” may be ambiguous

Many people in the kink communities talk about “sub drop” or “Top drop” as an exhaustion or refractory phase of an intense scene, as the moment when “all the endorphins and adrenaline are settled down again.” (Charisma, n.d.)

“Since the increase of hormones and chemicals has produced a trance-like state, as play ends the submissive may feel out-of-body, detached from reality. As the sub's system stops producing morphine-like drugs, and as the parasympathetic nervous system kicks in again, the sub may feel a deep exhaustion, a sharp drop in temperature, as well as

⁷ These two case descriptions are each an amalgamation of several clients' experiences. They are not descriptions of individual people or their experiences.

⁸ In keeping with a kink community practice, we are using capitalization to indicate submissive roles (lowercase) and Dominant roles (uppercase).

incoherence and un-coordination. In the lifestyle, this is commonly referred to as ‘drop’ or ‘sub-drop’” (Dexter, 2012).

“As the high comes down, and the parasympathetic nervous system kicks in (to counteract the effects of the aforementioned chemicals), a deep exhaustion, as well as incoherence may result.” (asibdsm, 2013).

The above quotes are some of the prevailing descriptions of the experience of “Top drop”, “scene drop” and “sub drop” mentioned by kink educators, online blogs and informational sites. These descriptions capture what some individuals feel immediately after a kink scene. There are others who describe another phenomena, a later onset of sub drop or event drop that can happen hours or days after a scene. We propose the term “x-drop” to refer to all four types of drop: sub drop, Top drop, event drop, and scene drop.

The kink subculture seems to have accepted the above lay explanation for the first kind of x-drop that happens at the end of a scene or near the end of a scene. The biochemical proposal, involving the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems and hormonal fluctuations, seems to be relevant especially for a sub or bottom who is receiving intense sensation and experience. However, we also point out that there is no research to test these ideas about the physiological profile of the immediate x-drop, and in fact one could argue that the exhaustion phase of a stress reaction is more complicated than the above physiological descriptions.

Those biological explanations are problematic, however, when it comes to the more delayed x-drop experience. Many sources, like those detailed above, often do not make a distinction between what happens at the end of an intense scene and what happens a few days later, referring to both with the same term and using the same explanation. This more delayed onset of x-drop is typified in the examples of KittyK and Samuel at the start of this article – with an emotional reaction or state that can involve guilt, anxiety, melancholy, or exhaustion. It describes an emotional reaction that usually appears several days, maybe even up to a week, later. These different onsets piqued our curiosity. What might be happening in individuals who experience these emotional changes in the days after? Perhaps there are other possible explanations about the later x-drop phenomena.

Our aim in exploring x-drop is two-fold: to shed some light on the phenomenon so as to improve the way those who encounter x-drop understand and cope with their experience; and to normalize, de-pathologize and perhaps even transform our comprehension of what individuals experience during x-drop, especially for clinicians (doctors, therapists, etc) who may encounter individuals experiencing x-drop.

Days Later ... Later X-drop is not a biochemical reaction

It is not difficult to establish that there are two different types of drop, due to differences in reported phenomenological experience, time of onset, and different behaviors people use to cope or provide care in response to the experiences. We hypothesize the immediate scene drop, at the end of an intense and demanding BDSM experience, may reflect various hormonal changes described by the above referenced explanations, e.g., the exhaustion phase of an intense, acute stressor experience. Undoubtedly, the hormonal

changes in scene drop are more complicated than a simple adrenaline and cortisol shift, pointing to a need for more empirical studies of scene/Top/sub drop, similar to the work of Brad Sagarin and his colleagues who have studied how BDSM scenes affect cortisol and testosterone levels (Sagarin et al. 2009).

Stress is inherently neutral. Depending on context and perception, an individual may perceive the stress as positive (eustress) or negative (distress). For example, a positive reaction to stress can stimulate motivation and development, or if perceived negatively, it may produce anxiety or illness. Any stress reaction has three phases: the initial phase of flight or fight, (or “tend and befriend” or immobilization/freezing - two other possibilities for reacting to a stressor initially). This is followed by adjustment and accommodation to the heightened state of arousal, also called “resistance” phase, wherein the body adapts to functioning in this state of readiness, alertness and activation. The third phase of the stress reaction is exhaustion - as the body cannot function at this heightened level for very long, without some rest and recuperation (Sapolsky, 2004).

However, most of the common descriptions of the hormonal changes in scene drop are changes that occur in terms of minutes, not days. This is distinctly different from the drop that can happen the next day, or the day after – or two days after. These are not the exhaustion phase of an acute stress response. They seem to be related to some other dynamic.

We propose that the experience of this later x-drop may reflect a meaningful psychological process, relatively independent of the cascade of hormones that are implicated in the more immediate experience of scene drop. Later x-drop requires a different kind of explanation. We wish to explore a few possibilities, which may lead to some new research questions and new ideas that may guide treatments by kink-competent therapists.

Days Later... Later x-drop is a reaction to loss

When experiencing x-drop, what is the deep psychological process that leads one to be feeling lost, ungrounded, disconnected, unsatisfied, depressed, irritable, vulnerable, raw, sad? We propose that the process may be one of grief and bereavement. X-drop may be the psychological reaction to a loss.

But what, exactly, is lost? What are people grieving after a wonderful experience, an intense scene, or a fantastic weekend with other kink-identified people who have gathered together as a community?

In order for us to make sense of the proposal that later x-drop is grief/bereavement, we first need to discuss the intense and positive experiences that seems to proceed the x-drop. As we explore “what is lost”, we also wish to point out the the reaction to a loss as proposed here is not a different process from other kinds of intense experiences and the loss reaction afterwards - the grief/bereavement reaction is not unique to BDSM. We believe the same process occurs in the aftermath of any intense performance or activity. We note that actors

and directors in theatre often discuss a similar phenomenon (Attanasio, 2014), and athletes have noted the “post-Olympic depression” (Florio & Shapiro, 2016).

Background: Peak Erotic Experiences shape our erotic template

Back in the 1970s, Dr. C.A. Tripp, a psychologist and sex researcher who trained with Alfred Kinsey, proposed that sexual excitement was a result of a combination of attraction and overcoming obstacles to that attraction – something he called “the erotic equation.” He described that the more barriers or hurdles to jump over to reach the goal, the more intense the experience of satisfaction and pleasure felt when one fulfills the driving need to reach the object of attraction (Tripp, 1975). Interestingly, the idea of that forbidden fruit heightens desire and longing; in fact, anything that at first inhibits people sexually can later become a major turn-on. It was a theory that could explain hidden fantasies and even fetishes. People start to associate the obstacle with the erotic excitement of finally-overcoming-the-obstacle and reaching the desired object of attraction. In this paradigm, soon the obstacle itself cues people directly to experience that erotic excitement.

If this erotic equation works, then BDSM especially may work to intensify the obstacles to objects of desire, and yet also to facilitate the consummation of desires. The bondage holds a person back, but allows the person to experience being sexually taken. The willingness to brave an erotic spanking means that a person will earn the caress that one desires (whether that is the caress of endorphins or the caress of tender aftercare). The planning and preparation to Top someone else becomes a journey to sexual satisfaction, as the Top needs to acquire the skills (the hurdles) to do the scene before a person can consume the object of their desire, the satisfaction of Topping someone. Delayed gratification occurs for both the Top and bottom in a scene, although in different ways.

Thus, BDSM attempts to heighten the erotic experience by intensifying the obstacles and facilitating the overcoming of those obstacles. BDSM also strengthens the attraction and expands it to include more elements, such as the obstacles themselves (eg. the feel of the leather restraint or the skin-tight latex each facilitate increased eroticism). By working with Tripp’s “erotic equation”, BDSM intensifies the excitement of an erotic encounter.

Abraham Maslow first described peak experiences for psychology in 1962. "Think of the most wonderful experience of your life: the happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly 'being hit' by a book or painting, or from some creative moment." (Maslow, 1962, p. 9). People have often included sex/eroticism and intimacy as common triggers for peak experiences, along with nature, discovery, and extreme sports (it is not a far leap to frame “kink” as an extreme sport of sexuality) (Morin, 1995).

Adding to this understanding of how individuals create erotic interests, Jack Morin, in his 1995 book, *The Erotic Mind*, incorporated C.A. Tripp's concept of the "erotic equation" and John Money's theory of "love maps," to develop his own theory of core erotic themes (Morin, 1995). Comprised of earlier "erotic experiences" and significant moments of excitement and pleasure, our turn-ons embody early types or themes. The intensifying of the

excitement made with these turn-ons means that we may be more likely to experience a “peak experience” through sex or kink activities.

Perhaps for Tops, or submissives-in-direct-service, the peak experience during a BDSM scene, may involve a state of consciousness called “flow.” Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi coined the term in the 1970s to discuss a mental state of focused motivation and attention, when a person is fully absorbed in performing a creative, challenging activity. Sometimes during, but especially afterwards, emotionally there is a positive experience of joy. One can think of “flow” as a mental state that is the opposite of depression or apathy. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In her work approaching kink as serious leisure, Newmahr (2010, 2011) discusses the state of flow as a component of people’s motivations to engage in kink activities.

So if individuals are experiencing peak moments or moments of flow during one of these BDSM scenes, these profound states of consciousness might be “what is lost,” afterward. The incredible mental state is no more. It is gone. Perhaps what is lost is the view from the mountaintop; the moment of transcendence, or the experience of fully functioning at the higher reaches of a person’s potential without inner conflict or tension, without fear, doubt, or self-criticism.

While the theory of “peak erotic experience” can address our understanding of x-drop after a scene or intense weekend of Dominance/submission, there are other kinds of peak experiences besides erotic ones. These peak experiences can be felt at the level of the group, of the community. Being in a space with others of like mind, being able to express one’s self and have one’s relationships fully acknowledged and supported, can be its own fulfilling experience. Often for many people, having this side of a person’s sexuality and kink identity supported and expressed when, in comparison, most other spaces and events do not support or allow expression, can be powerful and very impactful. Event drop can include peak erotic experiences in the whole, but larger BDSM events usually involve a community-space (communal) brand of peak experience which are not necessarily erotic. This peak experience involves the release of a part of ourselves that we often feel necessary to keep under wraps, and so community kink events can impact our identities and self-concepts just as much as a deeply personal, individual peak erotic experience may.

We have focused on positive experiences, such as peak experiences, as this is generally the context that kink community members have discussed their experiences of x-drop. The word “drop” itself implies going from a high point to a low point. However, there is nothing in the phenomenon or in the theoretical framework proposed here that requires a later x-drop experience to be confined to positive experiences. It raises the empirical question of whether x-drop happens more after positive experiences than negative experiences.

Two Reactions to Living After Peak Experiences: Grief and/or Identity Change

We’d like to now focus on two possible psychological reactions to the loss of the peak experience. One is grief, the emotional reaction to a loss and bereavement that one

experiences when the peak experience is over. Another reaction caused by x-drop might be a shift or change in our self-concepts, our sexual identities and/or our kink identities. We propose that both processes are possible explanations for what is happening in the process of later x-drop.

Proposal A: X-drop initiates a process of grief and bereavement

We posit that perhaps grief may be one of the sequelae of x-drop and carries with it a process of change. “Grief” refers to the emotional and cognitive reactions that a person has when one experiences a loss or separation. Though usually thought of as different from the characteristics of clinical depression, grief can include a range of emotions like anger, sadness, longing, or acceptance. An additional accompanying reaction to loss and separation, “bereavement” refers to the adjustments and changes that a person has to manage in order to adapt to the loss that is being grieved. The experience of bereavement may include identity or role changes, changes in a person’s worldview or values brought on by the experience of loss, or changes in managing and adapting to a different physical environment or context because of the effects of the loss. So, if x-drop is a process of grief and bereavement, then the peak experience might be what is “lost.” A few days later, as regular life settles in, the amazing moment is still there in our memory, in sharp contrast to our regular functioning or being.

The first person to write about “grief work” was Erich Lindemann in 1944, a psychiatrist in Boston. He described the struggles of people who were grieving the loss of loved ones in the Coconut Grove fire in 1942, the worst nightclub fire in U.S. history which killed almost 500 people. He observed themes common to these grieving people. They were struggling with guilt and regret, often preoccupied with their loss, and were confused and angry. The work of grief allowed them process their grief, make adjustments to their loss and then make new relationships. He also discussed the importance of creating new roles and new identities in the bereavement process. (Lindemann, 1944).

In applying this grief concept to the feeling of x-drop, we wonder: Do some people experience guilt afterwards? If not guilt, what about regret? Guilt and regret both involve the wish that things could or should have been different. Perhaps people after an important, positive kink experience ask themselves, “Why did I wait this long? Did I do the right thing? Why did I listen to all those people who said I shouldn’t embrace my sexual desires? Why did I not listen to my gut or my heart? ”.

Lindemann's work led to additional theories about grief, including one by psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who in 1969 initially described observable “stages of grief” in her work with patients who had terminal illness. Later, she recognized that “stages” was imprecise, because it implied a linear progression (and in developmental psychology, a stage theory proposes that a person cannot go back to previous stages, because each stage is a significant transformation of the person that cannot be undone by going backwards). Her approach outlined different states of mind in grief: denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. She described the denial, bargaining and anger phases as the grieving person’s attempting to control the situation and make the loss go away, in an attempt to preserve the

way things were. Her depression and acceptance phases involve mourning, the adjustment to the loss, and the acceptance of it. (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Is it possible that feeling x-drop might be about “trying to preserve” an individual's recent peak experience, or the need to let the experience go when people accept that their wish to preserve or maintain it cannot be realized? In x-drop, do people experience any states that parallel bargaining, e.g. “If I do it again, exactly like before, can I have that experience again!”) in their later x-drop? Some people talk about having experiences like dissociation when they have later x-drop — is that a kind of denial? Some people talk about heightened irritability as characteristic of their x-drop experience - isn't that an anger phase?

Another theory about grief is the Parkes-Bowlby approach. Colin Parkes, in the 70s and 80s, proposed four phases of grief, based on the attachment theory articulated by John Bowlby and his colleagues (Parkes, 2015). First, there is a numbness/shock phase. The loss involves a deep change in how a person organizes and orients their life (attachments are emotional bonds that allow humans to create a sense of “home” or “safe space” that they then can venture out from, explore the world, and return to). A second phase is “yearning and searching” where the person attempts to reunite with the lost attachment figure or secure base. This is an attempt to “preserve” the way things were. A third phase is “disorganization and despair” wherein the person accepts the loss and lets go of the old way of orienting their world. Then a fourth phase of “reorganization and recovery” when a person establishes a new secure base or emotional home. If x-drop involves a loss of a secure base or sense of home, if it involves the loss of attachments, then perhaps this grief process is implicated in x-drop. Perhaps an intense BDSM experience can bring up memories of lost attachments, so that what is lost is not the peak experience itself, but coming into touch with past losses and grief. The different headspace or state of mind in the peak experience allows the past to come to the surface.

Proposal B: Identity Development

So far, current psychological theory would suggest a grief or bereavement process because of either the loss of a peak experience state, or the loss of an attachment. But what if the person has lost an identity? A sense of themselves, at least an old way of seeing themselves? Perhaps, for some people, later x-drop is a process of identity change.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory proposes that people's development should be thought of as an ongoing process of identity - that in fact “identity” itself is an ongoing process, not a thing one “has” or “possesses” like an object. It is a process of reconciling one's unique properties and characteristics with the social expectations and pressures which we are surrounded by all the time. Internally, the process of identity is how one balances the need to belong and connect with the need to be empowered, autonomous and self-authoritative. This balancing has to occur every day, especially as the individual changes (a person's body grows and ages; a person's interests shift), and as society changes (Erikson, 1968). Hence identity can shift as the person and the social environment changes. And one has multiple identities, but some identities are more central to us, to our sense of self, than others. If those change, then it can be felt as a seismic experience.

Robert Kegan (1982) proposed a theory of self development that synthesized Erikson's theory with Jean Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development. The Self is the way in which we make sense of the world, of our experience - how we make meaning. The Self undergoes stage-like transformations as a person develops. Kegan noted in his book that a stage change can involve what he called "developmental depression": a person has lost the old way of making sense of the world, but the new way isn't here yet, has not yet been established. In this in-between, one can experience things that are disorienting, deeply unsatisfying, scary, confusing. Old behaviors, relationships, interests, values and worldviews feel fake or constricting or one feels disconnected, lonely.

Is this what later x-drop is about? One's self, or a central identity, is changing in some way. And that change involves a loss of the old self, the old identity. And hence grief as a reaction to that loss.

Conclusion

We propose that the later kind of x-drop is not a biochemical process as much as it is a process of loss and grief, or a reaction to loss that is part of identity change. Perhaps the later x-drop is a sign of growth, but a growth process that involves negative emotional experiences as part of the change. X-drop becomes the felt aspect of the challenge of incorporating the peak experience into one's life. Or integrating past losses into one's present life. Or it is the felt aspect of identity change. In either case, the experience of drop may be a healthy process and may not be a sign of something going wrong, may not be a sign of pathology or dysfunction.

BDSM in particular may heighten the "erotic equation" that heightens the possibility of a peak experience: BDSM scenes often involve some sort of barrier or constriction (physical and/or psychological barriers) that is then overcome, so that the person finally consummates their desire, achieves erotic release. This intensified experience may result in peak experiences which then can have significant impact on one's consciousness, identities, relationships, intimacies, etc. And then the experience is over, and so it would not be unusual to experience a loss, with a resultant grief process.

Clearly there is more research needed, both biological and psychological, to examine this relatively common phenomenon. There are some possible immediate research questions to be addressed: Does later x-drop occur more frequently after positive kink experiences rather than negative kink experiences? Are some individuals more prone to experience later x-drop than others? What are the physiological processes occurring during the x-drop experience, and are these processes different between immediate x-drop and later x-drop? What exactly are the emotional dynamics of later x-drop, and do they involve regret, guilt, or bargaining? Does later x-drop involve identity change? We believe that this is necessary work, because it would be easy for doctors, therapists, and psychologists to interpret the drop experience as a sign of dysfunction, illness or disorder, leading them to an interpretation of BDSM behaviors and activities as being pathogenic or clearly dangerous to people's mental health. We hope these proposals point to a non-pathologizing way of understanding x-drop.

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Three's a Crowd or Bonus?: College Students' Threesome Experiences

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Abstract

Undergraduates (196) at a large southeastern university completed a 59 item Internet survey on threesome attitudes and behaviors. Fifteen percent of the sample reported having engaged in a threesome. Men evidenced more interest in having a threesome than women and persons most likely to report having had a threesome held hedonistic compared to relativistic or absolutist sexual values. The motivation for a threesome was primarily curiosity and the third person invited to join the couple in a threesome was most often a friend/acquaintance of the woman. The outcome of a threesome for the couple was primarily no effect with about a fifth reporting negative outcomes and a similar percentage reporting positive outcomes. Finally, the event happened only once for 83% of the respondents who had a threesome. Symbolic interaction, operant learning, social learning, affective theory and feminist theory were used to interpret the data. Implications and limitations are identified.

Having a "threesome" (three individuals engaging in the same sexual encounter, all not necessarily with each other) is a sexual fantasy for some, a reality for others, and debauchery for still others. Are threesomes an adventure for the curious or a playground for the depraved? Is three a crowd or a bonus for the couple? And what are the motivations for having a threesome and the relationship outcomes for the couple who have a threesome? This study focused on the frequency of threesomes among undergraduates, the motivations, and the outcomes.

Background

Monogamy is most commonly defined as the act of being married to one person at a time or being sexually or emotionally committed to one person at a time. Research on non-monogamy has included extra-marital sex (Scuka, 2015), polyamory (Scheff, 2014), and swinging (Vaillancourt and Few-Demo, 2014). While the benefits of monogamy are still debated, research on non-monogamy includes positive interactions and outcomes. Christian Klesse (2011), in his article "Notions of love in polyamory", identified polyamory as a responsible, consensual, and ethical approach to non-monogamy. Similarly, Kimberly (2016) examined the social scripts of swingers, and emphasized the quality of it being consensual. Regardless of whatever benefits non-monogamy may involve, stigma associated with non-monogamy has been a focus of research (Moors, Matsick, Zielgler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013).

While there has been research on multiple partners in general, none has been specific to the phenomenon of threesomes. The exception is research conducted 25 years ago by Arno Karlen (1988) who interviewed 50 subjects who had been involved in a threesome. He found that threesomes were variable from single encounters to decades-long triads, reflected motives from intimacy to conquest and resulted in consequences from enhancing to ending a relationship.

More recently, Joyal, Cossette & Lapierre (2015) surveyed the sexual fantasies of 1516 Canadians (ages 18-77) and found that 57% of the respondents had fantasized about sex with two men; 85% of men had fantasized about sex with two women. Forty percent of the women had fantasized about sex with two women; 16% of the men with two men. When asked about having fantasized about “engaging in sexual swinging with a couple I know” 18% of the women and 42% percent of the men reported this fantasy. The current study was designed to provide more data on the threesome behavior- how it is negotiated, the frequency with which it occurs and the outcomes for a sample of college students.

Theoretical Perspectives

Various theories may be applied to the understanding of threesomes. Symbolic interactionism theory suggests that meanings, labels, and definitions are not inherent but learned through interaction with others. According to the interactionist view, individuals respond to their definition of situation rather so that some will view it as an experience to pursue while others, an experience to avoid.

Operant learning theory emphasizes that the consequences of a behavior influence whether or not that behavior will occur in the future. A partner who suggests the possibility of a threesome will be met with interest/reward or disinterest/disapproval/punishment. The experience an individual/couple has with a threesome will determine whether or not a threesome recurs. Social learning theory emphasizes that, through modeling or observing others, behavior can be influenced. Having friends who discuss their experiences with having a threesome will impact an individual’s or couple’s view of wanting to try a threesome or not.

Affective theories emphasize the fact that emotions, such as love, jealousy, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and frustration, may be involved in the evaluation of a sexual phenomenon (threesome), may be a component of the sexual expression, and/or may be a consequence of sexual activity. For example, love for the partner or fear of disapproval for not going along with the suggestion of a threesome are emotions which may operate in deciding about a threesome. Anxiety and fear may occur as the time for a threesome occurs and joy or disgust may be the predominant feelings following an encounter.

Feminist theory focuses on the imbalance of power and resources between women and men and explores its effect on sexuality. In the feminist view, women are restricted in regard to their appearance and sexual activity in that they are stigmatized if they do not fit the culturally identified ideal body (trim and slim) and/or hide their enjoyment for a wide variety

of sexual behavior/partners. While men are applauded for their interest/participation in threesomes, women may be slut shamed.

Hypotheses

With no data on threesome experiences of undergraduates, the goal of this study was to help fill the research gap. Hypotheses included:

1. There is a very small (under 5%) incidence of threesomes among undergraduates.
2. The primary reason for engaging in a threesome will be to live out a sexual fantasy.
3. The person selected to be part of a threesome will most likely to be a stranger.
4. The effects of involvement in a threesome experience will be primarily positive.
5. Persons with hedonistic sexual values will be more likely to report a threesome experience than those with relativistic or absolutist sexual values.
6. Respondents who reported having had a threesome experience will be more interested in a future threesome than those who have not had the experience.
7. Undergraduate men will evidence more interest in threesomes than undergraduate women.

Sample

A 59 item questionnaire on "Threesomes" was approved by the Institutional Review Board at a large southeastern university and posted on the Internet. Students in the second author's Courtship and Marriage (N = 250) and Human Sexuality (N = 40) courses were emailed the link and asked to complete the anonymous survey. No extra credit was provided for completion of the Internet survey.

A total of 196 respondents completed the survey for analysis. The majority of respondents (85%) were women, white (72% with 16% black, 5% Hispanic, 4% Biracial, 3% Asian and 1% Native American) and heterosexual (92%). Over half (63%) were either first-year or second-year undergraduates. Almost half (46%) were emotionally involved in a committed or engaged relationship, 40% were not seeing anyone/not involved, and 13% were casually dating different people.

The respondents reported that they were drinkers (57% consumed alcohol 3-5 times a week), sexually experienced (87% had had sexual intercourse), and spiritual ($M=4.2$, $SD=1.41$ on a 5 point scale). When asked about condom use, 48.3% reporting having used a condom or other contraceptive method during threesome, 41.4% did not and 10.3 % did not answer.

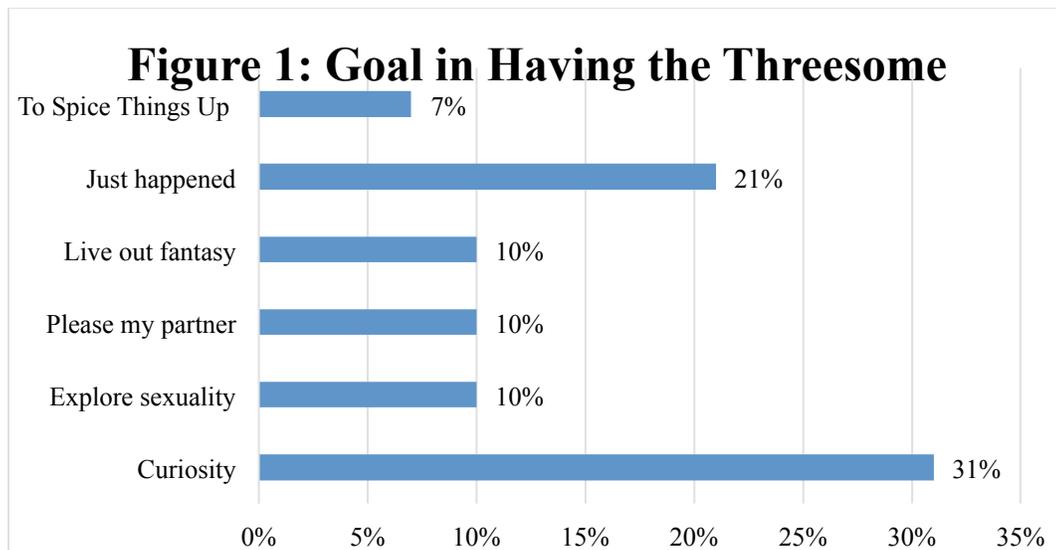
Results

Eight primary results are discussed below.

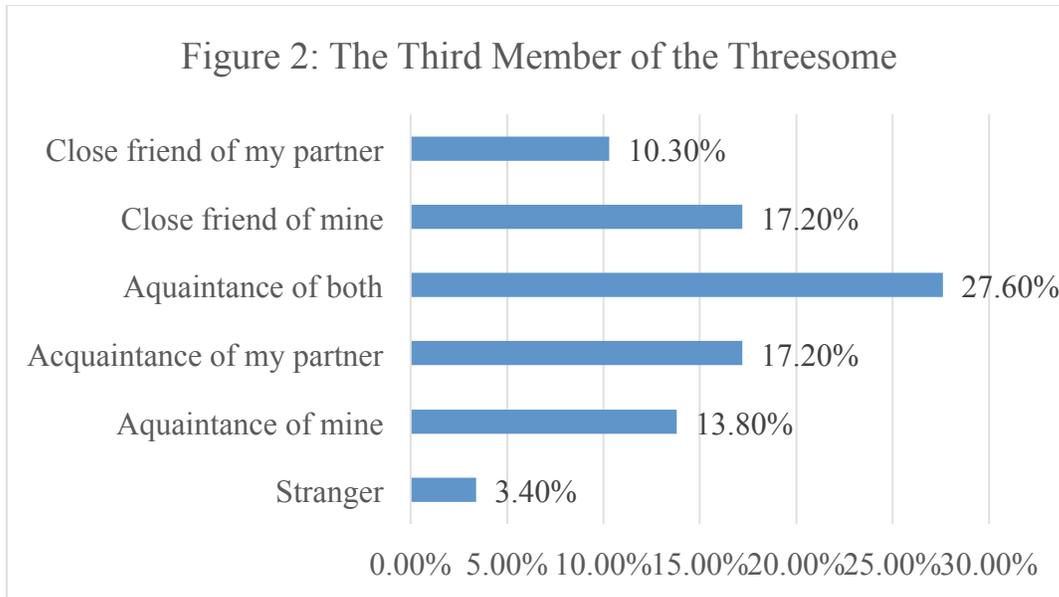
Prevalence of Threesome. As for who suggested the threesome, in 41% of the cases, the third party; 31% of the time the partner (more often the man) suggested the threesome,

and 21% of the time the woman suggested the threesome (10.3% did not answer). In regard to the hypothesis which predicted a small (under 5%) incidence of threesomes among college undergraduate, was rejected. Fifteen percent of the sample reported having experienced a threesome and almost half of the respondents (49%) knew a couple who had had a threesome. The majority of the threesome participants (81.5%) did not discuss rules and boundaries. Over two thirds (67.9%) had viewed pornography depicting a threesome. In regard to who brought up the idea of a threesome, 44% reported that their partner had done so. Finally, the event happened only once for 83% of the respondents who reported having had a threesome.

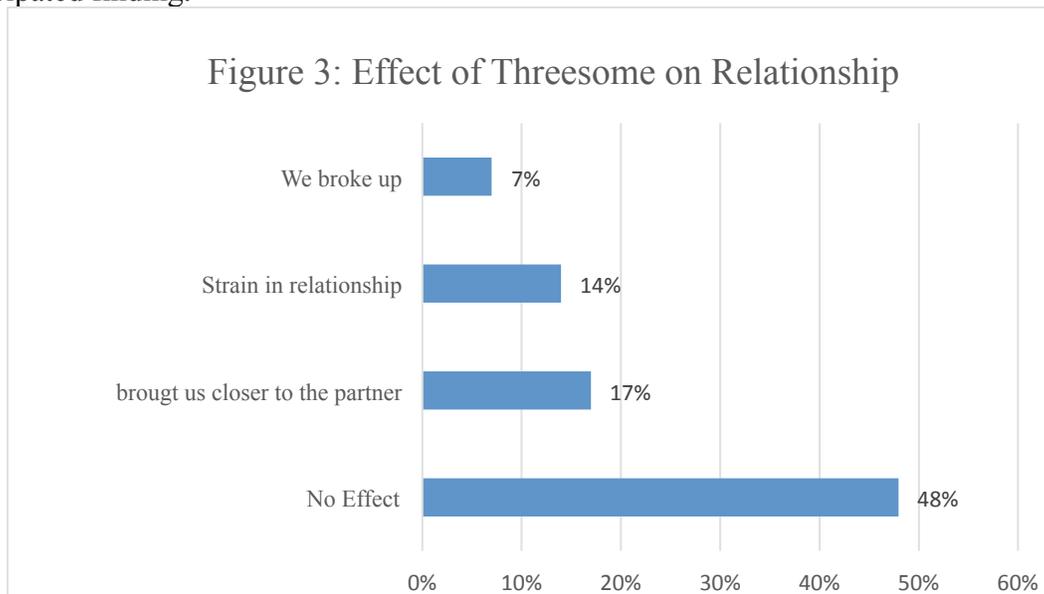
Reason for Threesome. The hypothesis which predicted that the primary goal for engaging in a threesome experience would be to “live out a fantasy” was rejected. The number one reason for engaging in a threesome reported by 31% of the participants was “curiosity” with 21% reporting that they were “drunk or it just happened.” Other reasons included “to please my partner” (10%), to explore my sexuality (10%), “to spice things up” (7%) and to live out a fantasy (10%). Ten percent of the respondents did not provide a motive (See Figure 1). Hence, threesome participants seemed to be a curious group of sexual experience seekers. Some were aware of the caution needed if they were in a relationship (17% discussed rules or boundaries prior to the threesome experience).



Third Member of the Threesome. The hypothesis which predicted that the third member of the threesome would most likely to be a stranger was rejected. In 97% of the cases, the person the couple invited to join them in a threesome was a close friend or acquaintance of one of the partners- most often a friend of the woman (see Figure 2).



Effects of Threesome. The hypothesis which predicted that the outcome for engaging in a threesome would be primarily positive was rejected. Almost half (48%) of the respondents reported “no effect.” About 17% reported the positive effect “felt closer to the partner” (17%). About 20% of the respondents reported a negative relationship outcome with 14% reporting a strained relationship; 7% reported that they broke up. (See Figure 3). Fourteen percent did not answer the question on outcome. There was also caution about wanting to have another threesome- a mean of 4.8 ($SD= 2.76$) on a scale of 0 to 10. Eighty three percent of the respondents reported that they experienced a threesome only once, an unanticipated finding.



Sexual Value and Threesome. The hypotheses which predicted that respondents with hedonistic sexual values would be more likely than relativists or absolutists to be interested

in a threesome were accepted. Respondents identified which of three sexual values they adhered to: absolutism (“intercourse before marriage is wrong”), relativism (“if you are in a loving relationship, intercourse OK even if not married”), and hedonism (“if it feels good, do it” - being in love or being married does not matter). One-way analysis of variance revealed a significant sex value effect $F(2,191) = 8.43, p < 0.001$. Tukey post hoc comparison test was used to detect the group difference. Participants who endorsed hedonistic sexual values ($M=4.6, SD=2.8$) were more likely to be interested in having a threesome than the Absolutists ($M= 2.44, SD= 2.42$), $p < .05$. Participants who were relativists ($M=3.01, SD= 2.6$) were also more likely to be interested in having a threesome than the Absolutists ($M= 2.44, SD= 2.42$), $p < .05$. Interest in Sex and Interest in Threesome. Participants who had experienced a threesome were not more interested in sex than those who have not done so. Students were asked to report their interest of sex. The responses were 1 “no interest in sex” to 5 “can’t get enough”. Those who reported having experienced a threesome scored an average of 2.77 ($SD= 1.18$) whereas those who have not experienced a threesome scored higher, an average of 2.97 ($SD= 1.43$). The difference was statistically nonsignificant $t(191) = .83, p > .05$.

Interested in Future Threesome. The hypothesis which predicted that respondents who had had a threesome experience would be more interested in a future threesome was accepted. Compared to respondents who had not had a threesome experience ($M= 3.09, SD= 2.6$), people who have had experienced threesome ($M= 5.76, SD= 2.77$) were more likely to be interested in threesome if given the opportunity of another threesome $t(193)= 5.05, p < .001$.

Gender Differences. The hypothesis which predicted that men would be more interested in a threesome was accepted. If given the opportunity, men ($M= 7.17, SD= 2.94$) had a higher interest in having a threesome than women ($M= 2.84, SD= 2.21$) $t(193) = 9.25, p < .001$. Among people who had had a threesome experience, men ($M=9.2, SD=1.79$) reported higher satisfaction than women ($M= 4.89, SD= 2.85$) $t(22)= 3.19 p < .01$.

Regarding who initiated the threesome experience among respondents who had experienced a threesome, 40 % of the men compared to 18% of the women reported suggesting a threesome. When participants were asked to indicate “how many times were you asked/ did you ask before the threesome took place?”, 37.9% of participants agreed immediately, 41.4% less than five times, and 10.3% were asked between 5-10 times. Hence, there is evidence of some pressure on the part of the person who suggested the threesome to get the partner to agree.

Although women scored higher on jealousy ($M=3.55, SD= 2.76$) than men ($M= 1.80, SD=1.10$), there were no significant gender differences in reported jealous among the participants who reported having had a threesome experience $t(25) = 1.37, p > .05$.

Discussion

While there is no doubt a biological component to male sexuality (e. g. high levels of testosterone), social/cultural influences may be more profound. Men are socialized early to

be sexual, to be sexually aggressive, and to be involved in sexual variety. The data for this study reflect higher interest by men, aggressiveness and participation in having a threesome than reported by women.

In regard to symbolic interaction theory, men learn sexual social scripts of seduction to move their partners into sexual contexts. The scripting of a threesome includes defining the sexual situation ("this is going to be an exciting sexual adventure"), naming the actors ("you and I can find someone to make a threesome hot") and plotting behaviors ("let's ask your former roommate to come over, we can get liquored up and see if she is up for a threesome").

Operant learning theory is relevant in that while 48% of the respondents reported that the result of having a threesome had "no effect" on their relationship, 14% said that it "strained" their relationship and 7% reported that they "broke up" after the threesome. Hence, experiencing a threesome was not particularly reinforcing so there was little motivation to repeat the experience. Eighty-percent of the respondents who had experienced a threesome said that the behavior occurred only once.

Social learning theory helps to explain knowledge of threesomes in that almost half (49%) knew someone who had had a threesome. It would have been interesting to know if the experiences of these "others" was positive or negative. We might posit, that rave reviews about having had a threesome did not occur which helped to socialize our sample to approach having a threesome with caution.

Affective theory is relevant to the emotions related to having a threesome. Curiosity was the top motivation for becoming involved in a threesome with "wanting to please the partner" (was this love?) reported by ten percent. Other emotions were revealed as negative consequences of a threesome- strained the relationship and one might assume sadness for the 7% who broke up following the threesome.

Feminist theory reflecting inequities in power between women and men may be relevant to the 10% who reported that their motivation for experiencing a threesome was to please the partner. Reading between the lines, might pleasing the partner be code for avoiding disapproval for not complying?

Summary

While we expected an incidence below five percent, 15% of the respondents reported having experienced a threesome. Curiosity, not sexual fantasy, was the top motivation. A close friend of the woman, not a stranger, was the person most often invited to join the couple in a threesome. "No effect" was the predominant outcome of involvement in a threesome and over 80 percent did not repeat the experience. The two hypotheses that were confirmed by the data were that hedonists were more likely have had a threesome experience than relativists or absolutists and men evidenced more interest in having a threesome than women (and may have pressured the partner in at least ten percent of the threesome events).

Implications

There are two implications of the data. First, the data from this study reflected that for 85% of the sample, a threesome had not occurred. Hence, the idea that most college undergraduates have threesomes was not supported by these data. An undergraduate woman was asked her feelings about a threesome and replied, "Not just no, but hell no."

Second, the outcome of involvement in a threesome was as likely to be positive as negative for couples who participated. Approximately one-fifth of the respondents reported that participating in a threesome brought them closer together, another one-fifth reported a negative experience (strained the relationship or broke up), and almost half reported no effect on the relationship. Some respondents expressed a need for caution before becoming involved in a threesome. A graduate student woman in a stable relationship with her partner said, "I think that threesomes could be a fun and interesting way to explore sexuality, but I think that you have to be careful because it is very easy to make a person feel left out, which defeats the purpose of it being an experience of building the relationship."

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, the convenience sample of 196 undergraduates, with an overwhelming women representation at one university, is hardly representative of almost 20 million undergraduates in colleges and universities across throughout the United States (*Proquest Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2016*). Second, university students also are not representative of the entire U.S. population; they represent a specific demographic. Third, threesomes may not be a subject college students are comfortable talking about (e.g. no experience, negative experience). Indeed some of our respondents may have experienced a threesome but were reluctant to admit it.

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Survey on Threesomes

You are invited to participate in a **research** study titled "Threesomes: Data on Engagement and Negotiation," conducted by David Knox, a sociology faculty member at East Carolina University and Hannah Morris, an undergraduate senior majoring in sociology. The goal is to survey 400 individuals enrolled in courses that by Dr. Knox. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The goal of the research is to provide empirical information about the degree to which individuals in a relationship have threesomes, how they are negotiated, and the outcome of these experiences for the respective participants. The survey is anonymous and confidential. No data will be collected which will identify you. Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call David Knox at 252 756 3562 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

There is no "capturing of your email or IP address" when you submit this questionnaire. In addition, no identifying code will be attached to any response. Finally, the questionnaire is to be completed by only by individuals age 18 or above. If you are underage, you have received this questionnaire in error; please disregard. The survey can be found at ****insert link here****

Background/Demographics

1. Sex
 - Male
 - Female
 - Transgender
2. I regard myself as:
 - White Black Hispanic Asian Native American Biracial Other
3. My class standing in college is:
 - Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student
4. I define my sexual orientation as:
 - heterosexual
 - homosexual
 - bisexual
 - transgender
 - other
5. I consider myself a religious/spiritual person
 - Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Neither disagree nor agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
6. My Grade Point Average (GPA) is:
 - 2.0 or lower
 - 2.1-2.8
 - 2.9-3.4
 - 3.5- 3.7
 - 3.8 or higher
7. On average, I consume alcohol:
 - Once per day
 - Between 3-5 nights a week

- Once a month
 - Several times a year
 - Almost never
 - I have never consumed alcohol
8. What is your mothers' highest level of education?
- she did not finish high school
 - high school graduate
 - some college but did not graduate
 - college graduate
 - Master's degree
 - Ph.D., MD, or degree in law
9. How would you describe your parents' sexual attitudes?
- They are very open about sex
 - Discussion of sex is a household taboo
 - They hold traditional sexual values (e.g. virginity at marriage)
 - Sex is acknowledged, but not spoken of often
10. How happy is your parents' relationship?
- they divorced
 - very unhappy
 - unhappy
 - okay
 - happy
 - very happy
 - they were never married
11. Has your mother or father ever had an affair?
- yes
 - no
12. Have your parents ever gotten into a physical fight?
- yes
 - no
13. Do your parents believe in an open marriage?
- yes
 - no
14. Approximately what age did you first kiss?
- I have never kissed anyone
 - Younger than 5 years of age
 - Younger than 10 years of age
 - Between the ages of 10-15 years of age
 - Between the ages of 15-20 years of age
15. Approximately what age did you first masturbate?
- I have never masturbated
 - Younger than 5 years of age
 - Younger than 10 years of age
 - Between the ages of 10-15 years of age
 - Between the ages of 15-20 years of age
 - Age 21 or older

16. Approximately what age did you first have sexual intercourse?
- I have never had sexual intercourse
 - 13 or younger
 - 14-15
 - 16
 - 17-18
 - 19-20
 - 21 or older
17. Approximately what age did you first have oral sex?
- I have never had oral sex
 - 13 or younger
 - 14-15
 - 16
 - 17-18
 - 19-20
 - 21 or older
18. Have you ever been sexually abused?
- yes
 - no
19. Have you experienced any sexual activities (kissing, touching, fondling, intercourse, oral or anal sex) with someone of the same sex?
- yes
 - no
20. Approximately how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse with?
- I have never had sexual intercourse
 - 1
 - 2-5
 - 6-10
 - 11-20
 - 21 -50
 - 51- 75
 - 76-100
 - More than 100
21. What is your current relationship status?
- not dating and not involved with anyone
 - casually dating different people
 - emotionally involved with one person in a committed relationship
 - Engaged
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Legally Separated
22. How would you describe the average number of weekly sexual encounters with your partner?
- not sexually active with my partner
 - 1-3 times a week
 - 3-5 times a week
 - at least once a day
 - several times a day

23. What is your level of sexual satisfaction with your partner?

Not Satisfied Very Satisfied
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sexual Values and Behavior

24. The sexual value which best describes me is:

- absolutism- intercourse before marriage is wrong
- relativism- if you are in a loving relationship, intercourse is ok even if not married
- hedonism- "if it feels good, do it"- being in love or being married doesn't matter

25. Have you engaged in a threesome (you and two other sexual partners)?

- yes
- no

26. Given the opportunity, what is your level of interest in becoming involved in a threesome?

Not interested Very interested
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

27. How many couples do you know who have had a threesome?

- none
- one
- two
- three
- four
- five or more

If you have not engaged in a threesome, please answer the following questions. If you have engaged in a threesome, please skip to question 37.

28. On a ten point scale, to what degree are you open to having a threesome?

Never I am ready now
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

29. On a ten point scale, to what degree do you find the idea of participating in a threesome appealing?

Not appealing Very appealing
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

30. I sometimes feel that I am hypersexual, that I can't get enough.

- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neither agree nor disagree
- agree
- strongly agree

31. Have you ever heard the term ménage a trois (a domestic arrangement in which three people having romantic and/or sexual relations with each other occupy the same household)?

- yes
- no

32. Have you ever watched a pornographic scene involving a threesome?

- yes
- no

33. If you have ever watched a pornographic scene involving a threesome, what were the sexes of the participants?

- male-male-female

- male- male- male
- female-female-female
- female-female- male
- unknown
- at least one was transgendered
- I have never witnessed a pornographic scene of a threesome

34. Has any romantic partner ever suggested a threesome?

- yes
- no

35. Have you ever suggested a threesome to a romantic partner?

- yes
- no

36. Would you rather have a threesome with someone you know, or a stranger?

- someone I know
- stranger
- no preference
- I am not interested in a threesome

37. On a ten point scale, to what degree are you open to new sexual experiences?

Not open											Very open
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

If you have not engaged in a threesome, you have finished the survey. If you have engaged in a threesome, complete questions 38 to the end of the survey. If you have had more than one threesome with several partners, refer to the last relationship.

38. What was the outcome of having a threesome with your partner?

- I have never had a threesome
- brought us closer together
- created stain in our relationship/more emotionally distant
- no effect
- we broke up

39. What happened with the relationship with the third party to the threesome?

- my partner became involved with the third party
- I became involved with the their party
- Neither me nor my partner became involved with the third party

40. What level of jealousy did you experience during the threesome?

Not Jealous											Very Jealous
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

41. Which party suggested the idea of a threesome?

- I did
- my partner
- the third party

42. Were alcohol/drugs involved during the threesome?

- yes
- no

43. Before the threesome, did you discuss rules or boundaries about who could do what?

- yes

- no
44. What was the sexual orientation of the third party?
- heterosexual
 - homosexual
 - bisexual
 - transgender
 - other
 - unknown
45. How many times were you asked/ did you ask before the threesome took place?
- less than 5 times
 - between 5 and 10 times
 - we immediately agreed
 - more than 10 times
46. What was the length of time between first talking about a threesome and having the threesome?
- around 1 week
 - around 1 month
 - less than six months
 - less than a year
 - greater than a year
47. Describe the nature of your encounter
- one time occurrence with the same third party
 - occasional occurrence (less than five times) with the same individuals
 - occasional occurrence (less than five times) with different individuals
 - frequent occurrence (more than five times) with the same individuals
 - frequent occurrence (more than five times) with different individuals
48. What was the relationship with the third party?
- no prior relationship—this person was a stranger
 - this person was an acquaintance of mine
 - this person was an acquaintance of my partner
 - this person was an acquaintance of both me and my partner
 - this person was an ex of my partner
 - this person was my ex
 - this person was a close friend of mine
 - this person was a close friend of my partner
 - this person was a sibling
49. What was your goal in having the threesome?
- to spice things up
 - to live out a fantasy I have had about threesomes
 - to please my partner (I knew my partner would like it and I wanted them to enjoy)
 - curiosity
 - to explore my sexuality
 - alcohol or drugs were involved and it just happened
 - to stop my partner from pressuring me, I gave in
50. How many people did you ask before you found a willing third party?
- one
 - two
 - three or more

51. What was the sex of the third participant?

- male
 female
 transgender

52. What was the outcome of your relationship with the third party?

- never saw them again
 we became friends
 our friendship dissolved
 my significant other got closer to them
 I became jealous of the third party
 they are now a regular installment in the sex life with my partner

53. What was the effect of the threesome on your subsequent sexual encounters with your partner?

- improved our sexual relationship
 no change
 our sexual relationship got worse
 our relationship ended

54. What is your evaluation of the threesome sexual experience?

Terrible Wonderful

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

55. Did you reach climax (or orgasm) during the threesome?

- yes
 no

56. Did you use a condom or other contraceptive method during the threesome?

- yes
 no

57. What are your feelings about having participated in a threesome?

- I feel ashamed
 I am proud
 I enjoyed the experience
 I brag about my experience
 I keep this a secret
 I violated my own values
 I regret the experience

58. What is your level of interest in having another threesome?

Never Can't wait

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

59. Who did you tell about your threesome?

- no one
 closest one or two friends
 a lot of people

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Submission Guidelines

We invite original submissions from diverse epistemological and methodological approaches on any topic that explicitly pertains to positive sexuality. A full range of qualitative and quantitative methods are acceptable. We also encourage nonacademic professionals and graduate students to submit original work. Please follow these guidelines as you prepare your work for submission:

- All manuscripts should be written in American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition format and should be up to eight double-spaced pages, including references.
- Given the diverse readership of the journal, authors should try to avoid using highly technical jargon whenever possible. As best as possible, strive for a manuscript that can easily be understood by scholars and professionals outside of your field.
- For traditional research manuscripts, authors should provide a short summary of the current literature, briefly explain the methods used, and clearly report findings and implications.
- Theoretical, conceptual, and creative analytic (narrative, poetic representation, etc.) submissions also should reflect appropriate scholarly criteria and aesthetic presentation. Case reports and creative essays may also be submitted for review.
- Manuscripts should be submitted as an email attachment (Microsoft Word) to the co-editors at submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

More Information:

Manuscripts will be screened initially by the editors and anonymized before being reviewed by at least two experts. The editors will make publication decisions based on recommendations from the reviewers.

Publication decisions normally will occur within six weeks of manuscript submission.

Revisions and Publication:

Authors may receive a reply that asks for revisions before possible publication. Authors are encouraged to revise their work as noted by the editors and resubmit for publication.

The editors will not revise content nor alter layout (other than necessary for transfer from Word document settings to PDF and web-based layout) of submitted work without the author's permission.

As best as possible, the editors will provide a sample of the final manuscript to the author before publication occurs.

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