

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA



**Sexual Practices and Narratives in Swinger
Settings: an Ethnographic Analysis of an Emerging
Non-monogamic Culture**

Margaret J. Vaynman

DIRECTOR DE LA TESIS: Dr. Juan Francisco Gamella Mora

PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO EN CIENCIAS SOCIALES

LÍNEA DE INVESTIGACIÓN: ANTROPOLOGÍA DE LA SALUD, LAS ADICCIONES
Y EL CUERPO

This work is dedicated to my mother, who supported this, and all my other ventures, always.

Este trabajo está dedicado a mi madre, por apoyarme tanto en este proyecto, como en todos mis comienzos, siempre.

Я посвящаю эту работу моей маме, которая помогала и поддерживала меня, как и в этом проекте, так и во всех моих начинаниях.

Ce travail est dédié à ma mère, pour m'avoir tant soutenu dans ce projet, comme dans tous mes débuts, toujours.

Editor: Universidad de Granada. Tesis Doctorales
Autor: Margaret J. Vaynman
ISBN: 978-84-1195-292-7
URI: <https://hdl.handle.net/10481/92104>

Acknowledgements

Without the motivation and trust of each participant, this project would have never come to life. I am deeply indebted to all, for the time, effort, and soul they gave this work. Most importantly, for bringing up the most interesting and intimate topics and sharing them with me.

To Dr. Juan F. Gamella, who dared to take on this unusual project, recognized its potential, believed in it, and provided methodological advice, such as profiling couples, solutions for analysis and structure of the entire thesis continuously throughout the years. Thank you for demanding the best of me, and for making me into a true scholar.

Throughout this project, I often remembered the teachings of my criminology professor, mentor, advisor, employer, and co-author - Dr. Sveinung Sandberg, whose presence and work inspired me to become an ethnographer for the first time in 2015. You encouraged me to study the topics I felt passionate about, to use my own (narrative) voice, and you guided me through ethnographic fieldwork, ethics, and publication. You gave me the tools for ethnography – a real foundation for the rest of my life. Please continue to inspire and form the hidden talents of this world.

I hope that my study will incite more ethnographers to venture into participant observation in swinger clubs, ethically and consciously. It has been my deep wish to be open and honest about all the challenges I encountered during my journey. I tried to offer solutions or ways in which I dealt with these difficulties, to my best ability and conscience, always with the help of the participants. It has been, without a doubt, a team effort of which I am deeply proud.

Summary

This thesis explored swinger couples and single swinger men and women in the context of swinger clubs, while interviewing swingers on their perspectives on swinging and their views on swinger settings. It explored “the liberal world”¹ or “the swinger world” through the eyes of swingers, including their attitudes, and their positive and negative experiences.

The theoretical framework employed in this thesis included previous earlier and more contemporary ethnographic studies on swingers and well as on other consensual non-monogamies. Some of these include but are not limited to: Charles and Rebecca Palson, Claire Kimberly, Katherine Frank, J. Tuomas Harviainen, Brooke Wagner, Terry Gould, Dee McDonald.

The methodology used in this study was participant observation, where my participation was key in obtaining access, being in the field, making observations, and conducting interviews while using my experience as a participant ethnographer. The sample consisted of 40 participants, 30 of which were part of a couple (15 couples). The sample was varied, including previously ignored subgroups in swinger subculture, such as single swingers, intergenerational and intercultural couples as well as cuckold couples². That these groups exist may point to the need to explore these further in a more longitudinal study, addressing a specific set of questions suitable for these subgroups. Demographics also differed slightly from previous studies, including 7 nationalities, suggesting a higher level of multiculturalism among swingers in cosmopolitan and touristic areas, such as the south of Spain and south of France. The interviews were conducted in French, Spanish, Russian and English, suggesting a multiculturalism among swingers, something that should be investigated further in a larger, more generalized sample. The study was approved by the University of Granada Ethics Board, on December 14, 2020.

¹ "The liberal world" was a term used by swingers in Spain, in Spanish, and refers to people who attend swinger settings, and who are familiar with its rules. "The liberal world" is almost always synonymous with the term "the swinger world".

² A cuckold couple usually involves a husband desiring to see his wife with another man and participate in this threesome.

This thesis explored the ways in which swingers conceptualize and negotiate their world in swinger settings in Spain and France, particularly focusing on Andalusia, where I resided, and Cap d'Agde, where I travelled to conduct additional fieldwork. Drawing on the ethnographic fieldwork data, observations and participant observation in Andalusia, Spain, and Cap d'Agde, France, as well as on the qualitative, recorded interviews with 40 participants, the following main areas have been presented in the results (1) swinger couples' perceptions and dynamics (2) female swingers' perceptions in the swinger world and (3) the elements and meanings of swinger settings. Based on the conclusions drawn from this research, this study enriches the field of participant ethnography. Methodologically, this study explored the utility of participant observation, where the ethnographer became an active participant in clubs, as a single female – a role limited to some but not all exchanges, directly excluding the practice of couple swap. The advantages as well as the challenges of this method were presented, in addition to implications for further research and future ethnographies.

The first part of the results identified major themes from couples' interviews. This chapter focused on negotiations within each couple, how they managed and agreed upon seeing other people outside of clubs and without the presence of their partner, how they managed negative emotions, such as jealousy, or growing apart. The following were identified as problems by the swinger couples: superficiality and incompatibility in swinger clubs, or not being able to connect with people, going to clubs only for the purpose of sex, and not being able to find a compatible sexual partner; boredom or lack of desire; wanting more freedom and to see partners separately; falling in love with someone else, and feeling left out.

The second part of the results addressed female swingers and their perceptions, attitudes, and criticism of swinging. The following elements were addressed in this chapter: the meaning of attractiveness in swinger settings, multiple partner sexuality for swinger females; the acceptability of bisexuality in women, female swingers' assertiveness, and female swingers' ways of negotiating jealousy in their relationships. Both single female participants as well as the women in couples were included in this chapter.

Third, this descriptive and exploratory study delved into the world of swinger settings (clubs, parties, one entire city with clubs and parties, pool and foam parties) in order to know more about the management style (primarily) in swinger clubs; prevention of STI's; the purpose of organization of space inside the clubs; how privacy is guarded among swingers in clubs; and how swingers view sexism in clubs. A minor objective in this chapter was to explore the possibility of employing swingers' strategies and management style in other settings, or whether swingers' organizational dynamics may be useful in settings outside of swinging.

The limitations of this study were as follows: the relatively small sample size did not permit generalizations; my participation, although very useful, entailed a considerable amount of challenges as well; protecting participants' identity also led to a vague description of each participant; not all interviews were conducted in the participants' native language. In addition, not all the important questions were raised during interviews, such as the question of swinger economics, and the question of Covid-19, and a lack of data was available on young swinger couples and young swingers in general.

Keywords: sexual subcultures, swingers, consensual non-monogamy, swinger clubs, organization of swinger space, participant ethnography, sexual anthropology

Resumen

Este estudio explora las parejas swinger y los solteros y solteras swinger en el contexto de los clubs swinger, enfocando en sus perspectivas y experiencias. Investiga el “mundo liberal”³ a través de las entrevistas y observaciones de los participantes en España y en Francia, centrándose especialmente en Andalucía, donde residía la etnógrafa, y en Cap d’Agde, Francia, donde se desplazó para realizar el trabajo de campo adicional.

El marco teórico empleado en esta tesis incluye estudios etnográficos anteriores y más contemporáneos sobre swingers y sobre otras no monogamias consensuadas. Algunos de estos incluyen, pero no se limitan a: Charles y Rebecca Palson, Claire Kimberly, Katherine Frank, J. Tuomas Harviainen, Brooke Wagner, Terry Gould, Dee McDonald.

La metodología utilizada en este estudio fue la observación participante, donde mi participación fue clave para obtener acceso, estar en el campo, hacer observaciones y realizar entrevistas utilizando mi experiencia como etnógrafo participante. La muestra estuvo constituida por 40 participantes, de los cuales 30 formaban parte de una pareja (15 parejas). La muestra fue variada, incluyendo subgrupos previamente ignorados en la subcultura swinger, como swingers solteros, parejas intergeneracionales e interculturales, así como parejas cornudas o cuckold⁴. El hecho de que estos grupos existan puede señalar la necesidad de explorarlos más a fondo en un estudio más longitudinal, abordando un conjunto específico de preguntas adecuadas para estos subgrupos. La demografía varía de estudios anteriores, e incluye 7 nacionalidades, lo que sugiere un mayor nivel de multiculturalismo entre los swingers en áreas cosmopolitas y turísticas, como el sur de España y el sur de Francia. Las entrevistas se realizaron en francés, español, ruso e inglés, lo que sugiere un multiculturalismo entre los swingers, algo que debería investigarse más a fondo en una muestra más amplia y generalizada. El estudio fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética de la Universidad de Granada, el 14 de diciembre de 2020.

³ “El mundo liberal” es un término que utilizaban los swingers en España, en español, y se refiere a las personas que asisten al ambiente swinger, y que están familiarizadas con sus normas. “El mundo liberal” es casi siempre sinónimo con el término “el mundo swinger”.

⁴ Una pareja cuckold generalmente significa que un esposo desea ver a su esposa con otro hombre y participar en este trío.

Este estudio enriquece el campo de la etnografía participante. Metodológicamente, este estudio explora la utilidad de este método, donde la etnógrafa se convierte en una participante activa en los clubes, como mujer soltera, un rol limitado a algunos, pero no a todos los intercambios, excluyendo directamente la práctica del intercambio de pareja. Se presentan las ventajas y los desafíos de este método, además de las implicaciones para futuras investigaciones y etnografías.

Basándose en datos etnográficos recopilados en Andalucía, España, y Cap d'Agde, Francia, así como en entrevistas cualitativas con 40 participantes, los resultados se enfocan en los siguientes temas principales: (1) percepciones y dinámicas de parejas swinger (2) percepciones de mujeres swinger en el mundo swinger y (3) las características y los significados de los contextos swinger.

La primera parte de los resultados se enfoca en los temas principales identificadas en las entrevistas con las parejas. Este capítulo se centra en las negociaciones dentro de cada pareja, cómo se ponían de acuerdo para ver a otras personas fuera de los clubes y sin la presencia de su pareja, cómo manejaban las emociones negativas, como los celos, o el distanciamiento. De las 15 parejas, 6 se identificaron como parejas cuckold y estas parejas también fueron exploradas en este capítulo. También se presentaron problemas o abandono del swinging. Las propias parejas comenzaron a hablar abiertamente sobre esto durante las entrevistas, ya que eran temas importantes para ellos. Los swingers presentaron los siguientes problemas dentro de los clubs: superficialidad e incompatibilidad en los clubes swinger, ir a los clubes solo con el fin de tener relaciones sexuales y no poder encontrar una pareja sexual compatible; aburrimiento o falta de deseo; querer más libertad y ver a los socios por separado; enamorarse de otra persona y sentirse excluido.

La segunda parte de los resultados explora swinging desde el punto de vista de las mujeres swinger. En este capítulo enfoca en los siguientes elementos: el significado de atractivo en ambientes swinger, sexualidad de múltiples parejas para mujeres swinger; la aceptabilidad de la bisexualidad en las mujeres, la asertividad de las mujeres swinger y las formas de estas mujeres de negociar los celos en sus relaciones. En este capítulo se incluye tanto las mujeres solteras como las mujeres en pareja.

En tercer lugar, este estudio descriptivo y exploratorio se adentró en el mundo de los ambientes swinger (clubes, fiestas, una ciudad entera con clubs y fiestas, fiestas en la piscina y la espuma) para conocer más sobre el estilo de gestión (principalmente) en los clubes swinger; prevención de ITS; el propósito de la organización del espacio dentro de los clubes; cómo se protege la privacidad entre los swingers en los clubes; y cómo los swingers ven el sexismo en los clubes. Un objetivo menor en este capítulo fue explorar la posibilidad de emplear las estrategias y el estilo de gestión de los swingers en otros entornos, o si la dinámica organizacional de los swingers puede ser útil en entornos fuera del swinging.

Las limitaciones de este estudio fueron las siguientes: el tamaño relativamente pequeño de la muestra no permitió generalizaciones; la participación de la etnógrafa, aunque muy importante, planteó preguntas importantes para esta y futuras etnografías; el hecho de proteger la identidad de los participantes creó una descripción limitada de cada participante; no todas las entrevistas se realizaron en el idioma nativo de los participantes. Además, no se plantearon todas las preguntas importantes durante las entrevistas, como la cuestión de la economía swinger y la cuestión de Covid-19, y faltaron datos disponibles sobre parejas jóvenes swingers.

Palabras clave: subculturas sexuales, swingers, no monogamia consentida, clubs swinger, organización del espacio swinger, etnografía participante, antropología sexual

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Objectives	3
1.2.1 Specific Objectives.....	4
1.3 Concepts from the Swinger World.....	4
1.3.1 ‘Swingles’ – Single Men and Women in a Culture of Couples.....	5
1.4 Historical Context of Swinging.....	7

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction.....	10
2. 2 Early Research on Swingers.....	10
2.3 Bias in Swinger Research.....	12
2.4 Studies on STI’s.....	14
2.5 Swingers Researched Together with Other Consensual Non-Monogamies.....	15
2.6 Questions Related to Gender in Current Swinger Research.....	19
2.7 Theoretical Frameworks for the Study of Swinging.....	22
2.8 Conclusion.....	25

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Introduction.....	27
3.2 Access and Positioning.....	27
3.3 Levels of Erotic and Sexual Participation.....	32
3.4 The Sample and Recruiting.....	35
3.4.1 Profiling Swinger Couples.....	40
3.5 The Interview Process.....	44
3.5.1 Translating and Transcribing.....	49
3.6 Analysis.....	51

3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	52
3.8 Trustworthiness, Triangulation and Credibility.....	54
3.9 Treating Sensitive Information.....	55
3.9.1 Protecting the Identity of the Participants.....	57

CHAPTER 4: COUPLE PERCEPTIONS - SHARING THE ONE YOU LOVE

4.1 Introduction.....	62
4.2 Organizational Dynamics in Couples.....	63
4.2.1 Establishing Rules from the Start.....	63
4.2.2 The Rule of Open Communication.....	65
4.2.3 The Rule of Sporadic Attendance.....	66
4.3 Dynamics in Cuckold Couples.....	67
4.3.1 Audrey and Derek: Managing Threesomes.....	67
4.3.2 Diana and Nathan: The Cuckold Game.....	70
4.3.3 Tiffany and Jacob: Preventing Danger Zone.....	73
4.4 Kathy and Owen: Breaking All the Rules.....	76
4.5 Rachel and Theo: Strength of the Union.....	78
4.6 Lila and Kyle: A Female Initiator.....	82
4.7 Feeling Emotional, Sexual and Personal Interest in Someone Else.....	83
4.7.1 Irene: The Breakup of a Swinger Couple.....	83
4.7.2 Patricia and Aaron: Feeling Left Out.....	85
4.7.3 Alice and Bill: A Matter of Compatibility.....	86
4.8 Not of the Swinger World.....	88
4.8.1 Nicole and Victor: Growing Apart.....	88
4.8.2 Sabina and Walter: Never Closed.....	92
4.9 Conclusion.....	98

CHAPTER 5: SWINGER WOMEN IN SPAIN AND FRANCE

5.1 Introduction.....	100
5.2 Being Attractive	101

5.3 Multiple Partner Sexuality.....	108
5.4 Bisexuality in Swinger Women.....	114
5.5 Female Swingers’ Assertiveness.....	116
5.6 Dynamic Nature of Jealous Feelings in Swinger Women.....	121
5.7 Feeling “Saturated” in Swinger Clubs.....	126

CHAPTER 6: THE ELEMENTS AND MEANINGS OF SWINGER SETTINGS

6.1 Introduction.....	130
6.2 Community Safety.....	131
6.3 Sexism in Swinger Clubs.....	135
6.4 Geographical Spaces for “Spicing it Up” and “Getting it On”.....	139
6.5 Protecting Privacy in Swinger Settings.....	148
6.6 Swingers’ Meanings of Sexuality in Clubs.....	152
6.7 The Subjective Perception of Risk and Risk Management in Clubs.....	155
6.7.1 The Importance of Hygiene.....	157
6.8 Conclusion.....	160

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary of Key Findings.....	162
7.2 Limitations of the Study.....	166
7.3 Future Studies.....	169

REFERENCES.....	173
-----------------	-----

APPENDIX.....	180
---------------	-----

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In a society which largely disapproves of recreational sex, a community of adults who choose to flaunt their sexuality beyond the privacy of their home and in the company of relative strangers no less, implies a radical, near-revolutionary agenda.

McDonald (2010, 72)

1.1 Introduction

Swingers are mostly couples, and sometimes single women and men, who intend to participate in multiple partner sex, with other couples and single men and women (Vaynman & Harviainen, 2022). It is important to remember that not all swingers go to clubs with the intention to have sex - some only come to watch others and have sex or play with each other with the intention to be watched, or to watch.

Studying swingers has been problematic on many levels. Researchers have rarely been able to study this phenomenon through observation, even less through participation. This means that very few researchers have ventured inside swinger clubs as participants. Recently, one female reporter did participate in a swinger club and the newspaper she worked for published her story. A 26-year-old female journalist from Denmark, Louise Fischer, conducted an interview at a swinger club while having sex with her interviewee (Morgan & Johnston, 2021, May 31). The audio interview aired on the radio, and on social media, as the reporter was heard moaning while having sex with a man she interviewed - the reporter called it “natural” and “a part of her job”. Not only is it unusual for a reporter to obtain permission to record in a swinger club, but it is also considered highly unethical, both for reporters as well as for ethnographers, to conduct interviews while having sex or have sex with a participant. While Fischer’s experience aroused interest and provoked controversy among the readers, this was a unique way of gaining access to a hidden world when access is usually denied to reporters. It also pointed to a positive image of swinging and swinger clubs, and most importantly, a way to learn about swingers in their setting. One may claim that this reporter’s participation was an attempt to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of a participant, even if not a swinger but a single female in clubs. This was a contrast to the media coverage of swingers that sensationalized swingers, creating biased or

emotionally charged reports that failed to provide detailed facts and often present a one-sided view of the phenomenon and its many settings.

Swinger culture and practices attained both a popular and scandalous image in the media on the one hand while continuously linked to sexual risk in research studies. For instance, media coverage during the Covid-pandemic, focused only on the rise of Covid cases in Cap d'Agde, France, (*Naturist resort in France sees 'worrying' rise Covid cases*, August 25, 2020), and in Spain, reporters covered a police raid of a club in Andalusia, where attendees that did not follow Covid restrictions (*Police Close Seville Club*, March 30, 2021). Once again in the media, swingers were presented as lawbreakers, susceptible to deviant behavior, their spaces as seedy places, where one risks one's reputation if found out.

Despite of and perhaps because of these controversies, the commercialization of these practices forms a relevant, even though undocumented part of the swinger economy, in addition to the number of lifestyle events, cruises, swinger clubs and restaurants where swingers spend time and money. The extent of this swinger economy is presented mostly in the United States, where organized swinger conventions occur in major cities such as Miami, Los Angeles, New York, or Las Vegas, reflecting a trend that developed in 1990's, with an increasing number of businesses such as Swingers' Clubs being established in the country (Harviainen & Frank, 2018, 7). Over 300 swinger clubs have affiliated themselves with the North American Swing Club Association and an estimated three million swingers were a part of these clubs at the turn of the century (Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1998, 2014; Roberts, 2003; Tanner, 2007). However, swinger tourism around the world, even though still rarely researched, also forms part of the economy. Forga (2018, 176) noted an increase in swinger cruise tourism worldwide over the past decade, claiming that this general popularity of "marginal tourism" runs parallel to the cruise tourism. The researcher claimed that this subculture provides additional economic and commercial benefits to each port and country of the cruise's destination. Cap d'Agde the Naturist Village is located on the northeastern side of Cap d'Agde which is a resort on the Mediterranean coast of France. The Naturist Village, or 'The Naked City' is "a closed-off neighborhood, surrounded by a wall, the sea and a little port", with "a permanent population of 20,000 inhabitants throughout the year, surpassing 200,000 in the summer" (Forga, 2010, 206). While the Naturist Village existed

since the 1970's, it is not before the 1990's that swinger tourism and its venues began to develop, becoming so widespread that it the authorities had to have police surveillance to prevent from public sex as it became more frequent and explicit (Forga, 2010, 208). Neither its economic growth, nor its popularity seem to normalize swinging to the extent where people can openly talk about their private lives without feeling judged. Despite its popularity, and the economic benefits, these alternative sexual practices are still stigmatized (Bettinger, 2002). Kimberly and McGinley (2018, 2) urged that further research on swinging was needed because of "the potential of non-monogamous relationships to become more public in policy terms".

1.2 Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to explore swingers in swinger settings, primarily swinger clubs, in Spain and France. Through extensive ethnographic observations, participation, and interviews, the swinger world⁵ is explored within each couple and an analysis of swingers' interactions and strategies with swingers presented in the context of swinger clubs. The study addresses the following main research question:

- How do the swingers perceive their world in relation to their sexual practices within swinger settings in Andalusia, Spain and in Cap d'Agde, France?

This would include a description of swingers' strategies, including the language they use and their own perceptions of their sexual practices within their settings. Part of this objective is to see whether swinging as a process where the negotiations within each couple are never independent of the rules of the setting that they are a part of. In addition, this objective explored, in the course of interviews, the criticism swingers addressed towards swinging, swinger concepts, and swinger clubs.

Secondly, this study explored the possibility of finding other ways of studying swingers, thereby creating another theoretical framework that would be more suitable for future studies of this subculture or group, studied individually and separately from other non-monogamous groups.

⁵ Term used by swingers in Spain, translated from Spanish ("el mundo swinger").

1.2.1 Specific objectives

- What can swinger clubs offer people and how do they minimize physical and sexual risks and what solutions do clubs provide?
- How are strategies used by couples and single swingers in order to negotiate and communicate in swinger settings?
- What are the advantages and challenges in conducting participant observation on swingers and how can this method be employed in studying swingers in the future?
- Which theoretical framework can be used to study swingers?

1.3 Concepts from “the Swinger World”

Harviainen and Frank (2018) confirm this in their comparative study on lifestyle events in Finland and United States, suggesting that swinging as a community has similarities across cultures, and countries, taking place in venues across the Western world, and following similar patterns of behavior. The term “lifestyle” was used interchangeably with “group sex” as the ethnographers reported on Group Sex Events or GSE’s in these countries. Group sex is a concept used by some researchers in conjunction with multiple partner sexuality in swinger settings (Fulcher et al., 2019). Even though not all swingers participate in group sex, this practice can be observed in swinger settings and involves multiple partner sex.

Swingers have been linked with group sex as the concept was first introduced in Bartell’s book *Group Sex: An Eyewitness Report on the American Way of Swinging* in 1971. While this research involved swingers, and all the chapters used the concepts “swingers” and “swinging”, the author briefly explained how the book’s title *Group Sex* referred to a more appropriate term for swinging: “Group sex is a more flexible term and it is more descriptive because it does not restrict itself to married couples” (Bartell, 1971, 9).

The culture of swingers, or “the liberal world”⁶ is a social world with its own norms and rules of etiquette that exist in a common social setting, containing an internal

⁶ The concept of “the liberal world” is translated from Spanish “el mundo liberal” and is synonymous with “the swinger world” or “el mundo swinger”.

organization within each relationship, norms and rules within couples as well as exchange institutions in cultural settings. The term “liberal”⁷ is thus often used in Spain to describe sexually open-minded swingers.

In Spain, this community of swingers has been known as “The Swinger World”. It covers the general setting where swinger couples and singles interact and have sex – in clubs, on cruises, parties, conventions, and online. “The Swinger world” or “the liberal world” are also concepts synonymous with “the horizontal world”⁸, or “the world of the bed” in Spain, versus “the vertical world”⁹ or everything outside swinger settings.

1.3.1 “Swingles”: single men and women in a culture of swinger couples

The term “swingle”¹⁰ applies to single men and women who have sex with swinger couples, with other swinger singles, or in groups. Swingles play an important role in swinger clubs but have often been ignored in previous studies. Because this is a subgroup in swinger settings that has rarely been studied, the definition provided here comes from this study. The definition and description of this subgroup derives directly from the results. Because this subgroup formed a minority in swinger settings, and a minority of interviewees in this study, only this subsection is dedicated solely to the meaning and the implications of being a “swingle” in swinger settings.

In every swinger club or swinger event, there was usually an agreement about single men, where the couples, often indirectly, participated in the decision of allowing single men into the club. Both in Andalusia, and Cap d’Agde, there were about 10-20 single men in swinger clubs, on a Saturday night. Some single men who came to clubs admitted they were in relationships, hiding the fact that they went to clubs from their partner. This was confirmed by other swinger couples, and created a somewhat negative energy, as couples complained

⁷ The term “liberal”, translated from Spanish (“liberal”) is used interchangeably with swinger in Spain, but is usually regarded as more open than swinger. The meaning or meanings of this concept may vary from person to person but is always referring to the sexual lifestyle of a person, not affiliated with politics, and being sexually open-minded. It may also denote an ideology, not in the political or economic sense, but in terms of sexual and relationship attitudes, particularly in the acceptance of openness in a couple relationship.

⁸ Translated from Spanish – “el mundo horizontal”

⁹ Translated from Spanish – “el mundo vertical”

¹⁰ Term used in Spain

that single men were not open-minded (“liberals”) or really swingers but were just cheaters who wanted to have sexual variety.

Single men preferred to come to clubs because it was exciting, or erotic, to have sex with another man’s wife. Some enjoyed group sex, but most men wanted sexual variety, and preferably with not too many men around. Single men complained that they felt left out, objectified, or judged by the couples. Vlad was a single male participant who often had disagreements with couples on this matter:

I have known couples, and some are bigger advocates than others, and they would say, ‘no no, this is a world of couples’. And I would say, ‘very well then, so you eliminate all the single men and all the single women’. You don’t permit one single part of a couple, that one of the two individuals, man or woman, would be there alone. If you are going to be strict, that there is only couple exchange, or a game with four or six, always pairs, formed by the couples, not by individual singles. However, one of the favorite couple fantasies is a threesome.¹¹

Vlad, single swinger

Swingles often feel like outsiders, especially when clubs limit filter single men, and tell the men at the door that they reserve the right to refuse entry. Or when certain swinger clubs have separate spaces, even ‘cages’ for single men, and couples and single women can go and pick a man from this space. The objectification of single men was the subject of many conversations. While couples some couples preferred to be with single men, they often complained that the man would not show up or would not ‘eat pussy’ or would not live up to their expectations as a person or as a lover. Single men, on the other hand, complained

¹¹ He conocido parejas y algunas son más defensoras que otras, y dicen, ‘no no, es que esto es un mundo de parejas’. Y digo, ‘muy bien, entonces elimina a todos los hombres solos y a todas las mujeres solas’. Entonces no permitas que ni una sola pareja... eh.... Este solo uno de los dos individuos, ya sea hombre o mujer. Si vas a ser estricto, que solo sea puro y duro intercambio de parejas. O juego a cuatro, o juego a seis, pero siempre a pares, formados por parejas, no por individuos solteros. En cambio, una de las mejores fantasías que hay a nivel de parejas, es un trio.

that they felt used at times, as if the couples were there to choose them over others, have sex and throw them out.

Since there usually is a lot of interacting with couples, and since it is mostly couples that approach swingles, or vice versa, swingles must be equipped with intuitive skills, or communication skills in order to appeal to couples. It is important not to just be a lover, but a great communicator, or knowing what to say, being able to connect on some level, intellectual level for instance. Lourdes pointed out the meaning of being a swingle (male):

A swingle fits the profile of a person who takes care of his hygiene... is very conscious of the conditions of his sexuality – gets his checkup constantly, STI's. This is a person who has education – I am not talking about being cultured or educated – I am talking about behavior and knowing how to behave. It is about you knowing that if you touch me with your hand, and I remove it, that is it, you know that not right now, but later.

Lourdes, couple

Not respecting physical or sexual limits and boundaries of women can lead to repercussions, such as being reprimanded by the husband, or the club owner, and being thrown out of the club that night, and being banned entry in the future. This usually applies to single men and sometimes husbands. Women do not usually suffer consequences for similar behavior. For instance, if a man placed his hand on a woman's behind without asking, he may get reprimanded, while a woman doing the same may be encouraged to continue.

1.4 Historical Context of Swinging

Barker and Landridge (2010) pointed out that non-monogamies have been more common in gay male communities. Gay Pride Crusade and Women's Rights Movements gained momentum, but as Kreston (2014, 1) points out - "familiar as these social movements have been in the last fifty years, some groups like swingers have not reached, nor may ever reach, the critical level of a movement". As Stone and Weinberg (2015, 459) took this further to specify that while there has been a growing acceptance of alternative sexualities, such as

BDSM, polyamory and swingers, these have gained visibility and coverage in fictional and television, the acceptance has included much less the actual practitioners of these practices, as well as those that include “less palatable forms of queer life”.

In Terry Gould’s (1999) book *The Lifestyle: A look at the Erotic Rites of Swingers*, the journalist who explored swinging in the United States. This was one of the first extensive, descriptive accounts on the swinger culture, from a journalistic perspective. The author suggests that swinging began during World War II among AA pilots, due to a high mortality rate among pilots, something that led to an implicit understanding among American Air Force pilots to take care of each other’s wives, sexually and emotionally. Gould (1999) retold this story mentioning that these pilots were among the elite, and surprisingly less possessive of their wives than one would assume. Although the exact time frame and location are debatable, Gould (1999) claimed that swinging originated in military communities in the 1950’s. Historically, the 60’s movement provided the base for a variety of sexually liberal activities for all, and swinging gained popularity, maintaining it through the 1970’s.

In the United States, the secrecy that surrounded swinging in the 1980’s may have been associated with the AIDS scare at the time, as Gould (1999, 7) pointed out in his book: “AIDS-terrified swing clubs were closing and those dwindling deviants who hung on seemed to belong in a Fellini film.... Hip young people were repulsed”. Contemporary developments and the transformation of capitalist-industrial society brought a revival to a dwindling practice. Stone and Weinberg (2015, 454) note that the internet became the link for sexual minorities with one another. With the introduction of the internet in the 1990’s, swinging received increased popularity. Frank (2008) pointed out also that “swinging has begun to enter an age of increased commercialization and mainstreaming, no longer only associated with private suburban ‘key parties’ or seedy sex clubs” (440), but also using online platforms.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In the 1970's the swinging phenomenon was explored by anthropologists mostly in the United States, where ethnographers (Bartell, 1971; Palson & Palson, 1972; Varni, 1972) met and interviewed swingers, reporting on who swingers were, what motivated them to swing, and the main characteristics within swinging. Early studies can also be divided as "therapy or medical" and "anthropological or sociological". Studies on alternative marriage lifestyles, such as group marriages, and group communes (Rubin, 2001), were later contrasted with studies on consensual non-monogamies, a term used in later research. Later research included studies outside of the United States and explored swingers in later established enclosed settings, such as swinger clubs or conventions. Very few studies were conducted on swingers alone as a subculture. Aside from *Group Sex* (Bartell, 1971) and Gould's (1999) book on the lifestyle that included both swingers and polyamorists, Vaillancourt and Few-Demo (2014, 1) found 24 articles on swingers "in psychology marriage and family, and sociology journals in a 40-time period".

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the theoretical frameworks used to study swingers. There are several questions that must be addressed. I address the following differences and bias present: research conducted during different time periods, such as 1970's, 1990's, and after 2010's, on different continents, such as US versus Europe. This subculture has often been studied together with other groups, which may have produced bias in the results. This chapter also addresses the various problems with the theoretical frameworks used in studies on swingers, such as partial understanding of gender issues, a dearth of research on swinger settings, and research bias.

2.2 Early Research on Swingers

Early studies researched primarily couples, and most early studies (in the 1970's) were explorative and ethnographic. Perhaps because these studies were conducted in specific geographical areas of the United States, and based on self-selection, they often concluded that swingers were primarily white and middle-class suburban professionals. Ethnographies by Bartell (1971) and Varni (1972) were conducted together with the researchers' wives, where they presented themselves as novice swingers who wanted to try swinging. Bartell

(1971, 39) and his wife conducted a 2-year ethnography, interviewing 280 swinger couples in middle America. While the male researcher, and the sole author of their book titled *Group Sex: An Eyewitness Report on the American Way of Swinging*, claimed that it would have been “repugnant to us to have sexual intercourse with people with whom we were not emotionally involved. It also turned out to be unnecessary”, - the male author also “brought female students and secretaries to swingers’ parties and bars”, in order “to test the reactions of swingers” (Bartell, 1971, 14). These were important details of their ethnography which would form part of the bias in their research, while at the same time raising ethical questions of whether it was appropriate to bring other outsiders (from the university) in addition to already existing researchers; whether being repulsed by sex with strangers affected their analysis in that it was as a result subjectively judgmental of swingers’ practices.

Marriage counselors and therapists had a special interest in studying this group, as they studied swingers while helping them. Denfeld (1974, 46) conducted a questionnaire study involving 473 marriage counselors in the US who had counseled at least one drop-out swinger couple. This was the only study on swinger drop-outs that was ever conducted. This researcher claimed that studies on failures, dissatisfaction and dropping out in swinging were not conducted due to research designs, which focus primarily on active swingers, snow-ball design, and almost none include probability samples including past, present, and future swingers (Denfeld, 1974, 45). As this researcher claimed, most studies on swingers were non-representative and contained self-selection bias. This research reported “jealousy” as the main reason for dropping out, pointing to the existing double standard in swinger couples, where “the emphasis of the husband is on his pleasure and satisfaction as compared to that of his wife, whereas the emphasis of the wife is on the maintenance of the marital unit” (Denfeld, 1974, 46). Men in this study were bothered by their wife’s popularity and performance (“endurance capabilities”). In a similar vein, an American psychiatrist reported in his study that swinger women were motivated by attention from other men, as well as sexual intimacy with a variety of men (Grold, 1970, 522). Only a brief analysis on these gender differences was presented, and no further evaluation of these differences clearly found in swingers was presented.

Furthermore, early research started to address the idea that swinging supported heteronormative and patriarchal ideals, as it was often the husbands that initiated the wives (Henshel, 1973; Varni, 1972) and there have even been suggestions that some of the swinger women were “coerced into swinging” (Varni, 1972, 520). This last researcher wrote that, other than being equalitarian, swinging is more likely to be a truly “sexist” activity’ (Varni, 1972, 48-49). Other researchers refuted this idea and claimed that while men did initiate, it was the women that enjoyed it enough to stay (Smiths, 1970; Bartell, 1971; Palson & Palson, 1972; Groid, 1970). However, no theoretical framework to address these heteronormative ideals was presented in these studies, something that points to the observation that only partial explanations, often blurred and insufficient, were provided in these studies.

These observations and biases seemed to be ever present in swinger research, while raising more questions, and even contributing to the misunderstanding and ambiguity in understanding this subculture. For example, some researchers made claims that “the monopolization of time” was a problem in swinging and a reason that swingers discontinued this practice (Stinnett et al., 1978). This conclusion challenges the idea that the lifestyle includes and creates a network of like-minded people who enjoy spending time together, going to dinners together, organizing events and parties, and going to swinger clubs.

2.3 Bias in Swinger Research

In a review on literature on consensual non-monogamies, Barker and Landridge (2010, 753) pointed out a trend in this research, where studies were either “celebratory” or “critical”. In studies on swingers, an obvious polarization exists, where some studies were more positive, while others had a negative image of this group. Here we present two studies, conducted around the same time in two different countries, one in France, the other in the US. Each study produced different results, something that may point to swinger research bias. In addition, these partial understandings of this topic were perhaps due to the ethnographers’ perceptions of swinging, something that influenced data collection, conclusion, analysis, and theoretical framework.

“The Planet of Exchange”¹² was presented by Welzer-Lang (2001, 123) in French context. This 4-year study was probably one of the most extensive ethnographic studies inside swinger clubs. It focused mainly on AIDS prevention and while the researcher presented himself a novice swinger in the beginning of the study, he had to eventually reveal his real role, and continued as “a voyeur” or participant observer. While Welzer-Lang presented himself as a novice, and never did become a participant, he eventually adapted the role of an advocate for the prevention of AIDS. This study’s conclusion was the exchange planet was “another form of prostitution, as well as the result of the competition of the different modes of managing male multi-sexuality” (Welzer-Lang 2001, 117). There were several interesting points in this research. This author claimed that it was the men who “organize and control exchanges and access to their partners, all the while presenting it as desires of the couple” (117). Furthermore, the meaning and consequences of exchanges were clearly delineated in the following: “Far away from being a departure from masculine domination, exchange is a way of recomposition of this domination that, once integrated by the couple, influences conjugal life”¹³. The author also presented a view of female bisexuality in the following: “women and their bisexuality serve as intermediaries between men to promote contacts between couples while exciting their partners”¹⁴ (Welzer-Lang, 2001, 126).

While the author did not present actual interviews with female prostitutes or escorts, it was unclear whether he was simply referring to the general underlying oppression that women were exposed to that affected their physical and economic status. For example, the author claimed the following about single women in clubs (translated from French): “Some women, without being sex workers, look for a man, a lover among the fortunate clients that frequent the establishments. They say they appreciate the free entrance, sometimes, ‘the generosity’ of their lovers” (Welzer-Lang, 2001, 120). Furthermore, the author claimed that

¹² Planète d’échangisme (French term used by Welzer-Lang, 2001)

¹³ Dans les pratiques échangistes qui se présentent comme émanations et désirs d’un couple, les hommes organisent et contrôlent échanges et accès aux conjointes. Loin d’être une pratique en rupture avec la domination masculine, l’échangisme est une forme de recomposition de cette domination qui, une fois intégrée par les conjointes, influence la vie conjugale.

¹⁴ Les femmes et leur bisexualité servent d’intermédiaires entre hommes pour favoriser les contacts entre couples tout en excitant les conjoints.

swinger clubs competed with street prostitution, offering men an alternative to fulfill their erotic fantasies, an alternative that was much more acceptable socially (Welzer-Lang, 2001, 117). This perspective may have been a reflection of the clubs at that time in France, or it may have been the researcher's skewed perception, based on what was both observed, heard and perceived at the time in this part of France (Cap d'Agde).

A completely opposite and celebratory perspective was presented in the US by a journalist and researcher. Gould's extensive research was conducted in the USA at the same time as Welzer-Lang's. Gould's (1999) book, *The Lifestyle: A Look at Erotic Life of Swingers*, was one of the most cited works on swingers. It included interviews as well as observations of swingers in different swinger settings. The author's experience as a reporter allowed him to learn and write about the lifestyle in a way that informed the general public, and it became interesting popular reading and provided insights into swinging history and subculture. Several authors criticized Gould's work for being too anecdotal (Fernandes, 2009), especially his historical explanations on the origins of swinging. Phillips (2010, 83) claimed that Gould (1999) normalized swingers, presenting them as "good natured and easy going", "applauding their middle-class, suburban values". While bypassing all negative aspects of swinging, Gould's book portrays an inclusive image of the lifestyle, even including a chapter on polyamorists and their (positive) perceptions about swingers.

While Gould celebrated female sexuality among swingers, retold stories of female eroticism from a positive perspective, - Welzer-Lang claimed that women were controlled and manipulated, even remunerated by swinger men. The dichotomy of these two works becomes apparent especially when one considers these gender issues. While Welzer-Lang's ethnography received funding for AIDS prevention, and advocated this in swinger settings, Gould (1999, 17) had heard of 'very few cases of HIV-infected swingers in North America' and wrote how despite his own concern that HIV/AIDS could affect the lifestyle the way it affected the gay community, these concerns were unfounded. Gould may have downplayed or simply did not address this issue carefully and over a long period of time, as did Welzer-Lang and other studies on STI's that followed.

2.4 Studies on STI's

Anthropological studies in the 1970's did not address STI's, prevention, health risks, from a quantitative and medical standpoint, only briefly mentioning swingers' own concerns (Bartell, 1971). For the past 10 years, however, more and more studies on STI's identified swingers as a risk group and each study called for further studies on STI's. In Netherlands, researchers conducted studies using self-identified swingers in clinics (Dukers-Muijrers et al., 2010; Dukers-Muijrers et al., 2017; Niekamp et al., 2013; Spauwen et al., 2015; Van Liere et al., 2013). Repeated, almost identical conclusions, summarized at the end of every health study, proclaimed that swingers were at a "high risk of STI's because of the high rates of unprotected sex with multiple and concurrent partners" (Spauwen et al. 2015, 34), therefore recommending outreach, because of swingers' contact with "multiple sexual partners, and use of protection is often lacking" (Andersson et al., 2021, 432). There seemed to be no collaboration or consideration derived from ethnographic studies, even though ethnographers repeatedly informed about the rule that intercourse requires a condom except between previously committed partners. Rules and expectations can be "enforced explicitly through verbal reprimands given by staff, hosts, or guests, or implicitly through the behavior of other guests" (Harviainen & Frank, 2018, 11). One wonders whether, conducting self-reported studies in clinics and observing swingers in swinger settings should be performed together as a mixed-methods approach. Existing studies rarely investigated in depth the broad spectrum of STI's; the importance of hygiene in swinger settings; how settings prevent and enforce condom use; changing condoms between partners and orifices, the effects of Covid on disease prevention and swinger sexuality in clubs.

2.5 Swingers Researched Together with Other Consensual Non-Monogamies (CNM's)

Studies have often included swingers together with other consensual non-monogamists - polyamorists, and BDSM practitioners. While swingers do share similarities with these other non-monogamists, often creating and utilizing similar strategies or rules such as for example the creation of boundaries - it is important to question whether these distinct groups should be studied together primarily because swingers, unlike other non-monogamists, often use organized settings for their practices, and only intend to practice leisure sex, or recreational

sex. Also, because of the unique and dynamic nature of each community and its people, even on the level of definitions, there is no agreement among researchers. For instance, according to a recent study on self-reported experiences of 67 adults who have participated in kink, BDSM, and other consensual non-monogamies, (Ling et al., 2022, 1) pointed out the following observation when it came to defining important concepts: “For many individuals who participate in kink or non-monogamy, community may be loosely defined, self-created, or different for every individual that participates”. Even the concept of monogamy would be a challenging term for some swingers. McDonald (2010, 70), who has been a participant in the lifestyle, as well as a lifestyle therapist, interviewed swingers, reporting that “even though they engage in non-monogamous behavior, they consider themselves monogamous”. One may also argue that swingers and polyamorists find themselves at different stages of advocacy, whereas swingers, by claiming they are just as monogamous as any other couple, even resist the term swinger, - while polyamorists, or “poly”, claim legitimacy and recognition of their relationship style. In their study, Ritchie and Barker (2006, 596) explored the ways in which members of polyamorous communities constructed their identities through language claiming that “the act of rewriting the language of identity, relationships and emotion can enable alternative ways of being”.

There are countless books on polyamory, and polyamorists have been active in trying to communicate the mechanisms, difficulties, and solutions in their relationships. *The Ethical Slut*, for example, is a book by Easton and Hardy (2009). This is a guidebook for those who want to live a polyamorous relationship, although it also includes recreational sex with multiple partners. The authors explained how to manage non-monogamy, how to communicate negative feelings such as jealousy and rejection, writing about the challenges they experienced and provided coping strategies developed through their experiences. Other researchers on polyamory explained how poly practitioners accomplished non-monogamous communication, describing it as “an acute self-knowledge that informs one’s ability to articulate needs, desires and boundaries to a partner while exercising agency through personal choices in determining and demonstrating commitment aside from socially normed tenets of sexual and emotional exclusivity” (Wosick-Correa, 2010, 45). Honesty, communication, and disclosure were part of the fidelity in the primary relationship. While

these are usually the pillars of all non-monogamous relationships, swingers may use other strategies in order to protect their relationship. In their study on threesomes, Scoats and Anderson (2018, 11) reported that participants in their study limited frequency (with extra-dyadic partners) as a strategy for couples to avoid emotional attachment, therefore protecting the primary relationship (Scoats & Anderson, 2018, 7). This strategy may be a typical one for swingers, and one that may point to characteristics that apply solely to swingers, or their commitment to “a strong dyadic identity” and the ways in which they are “prepared to sacrifice personal desires and experiences in order to ensure that they experienced their pleasure as a couple. Individual identities and desires were played down in order to privilege couple identity, couple activity and relationship” (De Visser & McDonald, 2007, 466). In this study on 4 active swinger couples recruited online in the US, De Visser and McDonald (2007) used the analytical framework of phenomenological analysis and symbolic interactionism to explore swingers’ perceptions and strategies of dealing with jealousy. While polyamorists are often practitioners who write about their relationships, researchers who study swingers and who find theories to explain their behavior, are nearly always non-practitioners and non-participants. This presents a schism between swinger and other non-monogamies research, where, unlike polyamory and BDSM researchers, those who have studied swingers have never been inside a swinger club, and even when they have, maintain their distance.

Some researchers claim that research on CNM relationships tell us very little about sex clubs themselves (Haywood, 2022), even though many swingers do attend swinger clubs, conventions, and swinger parties. This study in England conducted research on 41 sex clubs, reporting that the attendees were in fact couples who participated in multiple partner sex. This research suggests that sex clubs may be the new swinger clubs in England, even though they continue to be spaces for recreational sex for swinger couples and swinger singles, with similar (affordable) entrance fees, similar geographical spaces, and similar sexual practices. The fact that swingers enjoy going to clubs to meet other swingers, and that their socialization happens in public spaces, separates them from other alternative relationship forms.

Finally, polyamorists, BDSM practitioners and swingers, share some level of stigma, although it may be suggested that some sexualities are more marginalized than others. Studies pointed to the prevalence of stigma and negative attitudes surrounding all consensual non-monogamists (Conley et al., 2012, 2013; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016; Hutzler et al., 2016; Moors et al., 2013; Matsick et al., 2014). Recent studies reported negative attitudes by the public towards polyamorous relationships (Hutzler et al., 2016) and studies on polyamorous participants reported that they struggled with a high level of social stigma (Sheff, 2006).

Dealing with stigma is a topic that is rarely explored in literature on consensual non-monogamies, but perhaps this is another common ground these groups share. For example, Conley et al. (2013, 26) advocated for a transformation of “public perceptions of social groups”. In her research that employed 25 swinger websites, Kreston (2014, 3) explored how swingers deal with stigma by using “rhetoric to argue against covert or overt cultural stereotypes constructed and maintained by institutions, big media, and social discourse”. In this study, Kreston (2014, 23) pointed out swingers’ unique position in dealing with stigma, a position that separates them from non-monogamists:

Swingers’ sexual behavior constitutes an aberration because they deny monogamy and fidelity rules, which are key features of the normalized marriage contract supported by church and state. And, as swingers implicitly critique these rules by refusing to give up their lifestyle (evidenced by their growing numbers), they simultaneously put themselves on a higher moral plane by redefining the norms being violated. Swingers implicitly accuse society of arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and hypocrisy.

This study concluded that swingers used these online platforms to educate others on swinging, while recruiting potential members and challenging the public’s assumption about swinging. While Kreston’s initial desire was to interview swingers in a local geographical area in order to see whether they would deal with the negative portrayals in the media, - the university IRB (Internal Review Board, Virginia, USA) ruled against it, claiming that

“interviews presented a small, but unacceptable risk of harm to the participants” (Kreston, 2014, 111). Methodological problems on this level affected research design, and subsequently diverted the researcher from conducting ethnographic research to conducting research online.

2.6 Questions Related to Gender in Current Swinger Research

One issue that is important to address is heteronormativity in swinger settings, mentioned but not elaborated often in previous studies on swingers. For example, in an online study that analyzed how 12 swinger websites neutralized the stigma of swinging, Serina et al. (2013, 357) found that some elements of websites’ advertising strategies were gendered and heteronormative, while at the same time websites “provided safe space for interaction and avoided negative portrayal of swinging as a lifestyle choice”. This was just one of the many studies that pointed to the importance of addressing the issue of gender in swinger settings, without specifically examining these dynamics. The reason for this partial analysis of this important topic may be the lack of knowledge and understanding of swinging, and the missing tools for such an analysis. Also, there are contradicting and controversial statements about gender in the few studies that do explore this topic on a deeper level. For example, in the book *Understanding Non-Monogamies*, Dee McDonald (2010) reflected upon her own observations and reflections as a participant in swinging for over 20 years, as well as having been a therapist to swinger clients. This author pointed out that swinging removes the sexual double standard and provides women with “the empowerment to experience sexual life beyond the accepted form portrayed by popular media” (McDonald, 2010, 79). This author’s analysis of female “sluttish” attire as a conscious expression of freedom rather than the negative image of such attire as reinforced in pornography coincides with the observation of swingers’ tendency to play games that may appear “manipulative”, even “exploitive”, such as “depriving each other of sex to heighten desire” (McDonald, 2010, 75). This must be explored deeper and more, as the author herself admits, as the limitations of this type of this autoethnography cannot provide generalizations on swingers, only some insights on the dominant swinging themes. Therefore, it is still important to consider whether the existing

swinging discourse is aligned with female sexual agency and sexually positive attitudes for women's sexuality with multiple partners.

In a similar vein, Popplewell (2006, 3) interviewed 16 swinger women and no men, concluding that women were not pressured into swinging by their husbands, and embraced swinging as a liberating practice, both for their sexuality as well as for their social role as women. The author used sex-positive or pro-sex theory framework to analyze women's interviews, finding that swinger women were more "sexually aggressive" (or sexually assertive). Also, some women found that being objectified was part of erotic play (being considered attractive), and many understood their own sexual needs and accepted their own bodies, in addition to loving their partner more. They fought against misconceptions, one of which being that men degraded women in swinger environments, which one participant called "ridiculous" (Popplewell, 2006, 65), claiming that it was all about pleasure for her and giving pleasure to the other person, man or woman. This researcher claimed that swinger women challenged heteronormativity and claimed female sexual agency. For example, one of the author's participants talked about female assertiveness, claiming that "swinging allows women to be the unmeek sexual aggressors that society says they should not be", pointing to an observation that swinging breaks with sexual norms because women can choose, often actively, a man or men to have sex with (Popplewell, 2006, 80). This is what Frank (2008, 444) referred to as "the emancipated woman, or someone who could make the exact same choices as a man when it came to multiple sexual encounters". Frank (2008, 444) specifically pointed out that "a man who cannot accept that one of the basic tenets of lifestyle sexuality – whether or not it is actualized in every situation – is women's freedom to consent to multiple sexual encounters is not going to find the lifestyle pleasurable or welcoming".

At the same time, Frank (2008, 443) did raise the recurring question, without providing answers, whether "swinging remains a conservative practice in relation to beliefs about gender and sexuality". Swinger settings in Europe and in the USA, such as groups sex events, sex clubs, lifestyle conventions and swinger clubs are settings where one can observe gender dynamics. While these dynamics may become apparent during interviews and informal conversations, the apparent gendered power shifts present in interview situations,

do not always correspond with the observations in swinger settings and this should be studied more and deeper on several levels of interaction.

For example, a major contradiction in these studies has been the idyllic portrayal of couples who appeared both communicative and united, while side by side were couples who exhibited disagreements, arguments, even break ups. Whether it was a question of women seeking sexual validation, or reinforcing heteronormative, institutionalized values, or whether they really did practice sexual agency was unclear. Could women demonstrate sexual agency in a heteronormative, even institutional setting, exploring their own sexuality to their liking, and expressing themselves sexually as they please, often with the support of their husbands?

Even though some women formed part of the decision process to try out swinging, some of the sexual practices were thought to be motivated by the urge to incite male desire more than that of the urge to receive pleasure. For example, Bentzen and Træen's (2014, 144) research on 12 swingers in Norway concluded that "the main purpose of the sexual behavior between women therefore seems to be to create arousal in the regular male partner". Wolkomir (2020, 9) also found that "the central reward of the women's sex play was male satisfaction and pleasure", or in other words, "the sexual 'play' between two women as a kind of extension of male dominated heterosexuality in which the women's sexual activity is foreplay for 'real' heterosexual sex, making it non-threatening to male dominance". In a similar vein, Schippers (2016, 149) reflected on how "man is the desiring subject and women are objects of desire", and thus can be "incorporated into the heteromale erotic habitus" without disrupting it. Despite these conclusions, one must also consider the dynamic changes in attitudes and practices of swingers in different settings and different countries. Future studies on swingers' bisexuality could explore how some women have sex with other women while guided by their own desires, mutual satisfaction, and communication.

Vaillancourt and Few-Demo (2014, 8) briefly reported "a reinforcement of gender conventionality" or "patriarchal values" among the 10 couples they interviewed. Like other studies, these authors wrote about the importance of delving deeper into this issue, while addressing other topics in their research, such as privacy about swinging, decision-making (swingers had equal roles), and commitment to swinging (committed swingers). These other

topics had very clear results, while there was ambiguity around how couples actually reinforced heteronormativity and what implications this has for swinging. For example, the authors suggested that “voices can be silenced in a heteronormative frame of relating”, recommending that therapists should take this into account when helping swinger couples (Vaillancourt & Few-Demo, 2014, 9).

Harviainen and Frank (2018, 10) further raised questions based on the conclusions from their study on the lifestyle, pointing out that the number of single men at group sex events could be planned according to the needs of the females, single and part of a couple. It was the women that benefited or suffered from too many or too few men in swinger clubs: “after a party where several single females canceled, about half of the women interviewed found the situation enjoyable (‘pleasantly, for once enough cock to go around’), while the other half expressed misgivings (‘I felt expected to put out to too many guys, some of whom I didn’t feel attracted to’)”.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks for the Study of Swinging

Researchers proposed several theories for the study of swingers, which we identify as follows: 1) treating swinging as a phenomenon 2) treating swinging as a process 3) rules as the core foundation of swinging 4) scripts as mental schema for the behavior of swinging.

Aside from symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (De Visser & McDonald, 2007; Vaillancourt & Few-Demo, 2014), - one theoretical framework used by ethnographers to explain swingers’ behavior was script theory. The founders of this theory were Simon and Gagnon (1986), describing the meaning of cultural, intrapsychic, and interpersonal scripts. Employing this theory, Bentzen and Træen’s (2014, 136) study on 12 swingers (5 couples and 2 singles), described sexual scripts among swingers in Norway, pointing to the cultural scenarios that guided swingers in swinger clubs. Intrapsychic scripts, such as female bisexuality, were presented as internalized behavioral patterns that came from the cultural guidelines dictated by this subculture. The problem with using this theory, however, lies in the difficulty of clear distinctions between a cultural, an intrapsychic and an interpersonal script, in a setting where each member of the couple must communicate and must negotiate, verbally or physically about something they would or would not do.

Green (2008) further criticized sexual script theory for its lack of explanatory power, and offered a solution, - to simply treat sexual scripts as dramaturgical compliments. In his study of the “social organization of desire”, he extrapolated sexual fields from Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) theory of practice: fields, capital, and habitus. Green (2015, 30) explained that according to sexual field analysis, “desire and desirability are transformed over time as individuals enter collective sexual life and become exposed to field forces”, thus “exposure to a given sexual subculture within a sexual field can resocialize desire”. According to this researcher, resocialization occurred on body level, as participants acquired a “habit of action” or “dispositions” or “perceptual schema” (Green, 2015, 26). By using their *sexual capital*, or characteristics that made them attractive in a specific sexual field, players competed within each sexual field, and created *sexual circuits*, or “networks” (Green, 2015, 30). While no researcher has applied sexual fields theory to swinger research, one ethnographer talked about her own resocialization as “becoming a sexual being”, or the gradual process of her being socialized into the sexual fields of swingers (Wagner, 2009).

While participating in a NASCA lifestyle convention with her partner Trevor, this Wagner (2009, 309) pointed out the transformations in her own desires, as she became open to bisexuality as well as swinging, as she moved past the “‘good’ versus ‘bad’ girl dichotomy”, as she was able to “publicly express” her thoughts. The researcher began to acquire sexual capital through being part of the lifestyle. It could have been the other way around as well, such as by being open to new sexual experiences, she could also become more open to swinging. The process of openness, “becoming a sexual being”, or gaining sexual capital, was something that the ethnographer analyzed along with the challenges that they faced together in this process. This autoethnography or autobiographical ethnography, however, was only a brief experience and although transformative, it may not have been long enough to form habitus in the sexual fields of swingers. A longitudinal autoethnography with her partner, employing these theories, would have shown us what implications the resocialization process would have for the couple long-term.

Other ethnographers also explained swinging as a process. Jenks (1998, 513) developed a social psychological model, where couples’ approach to swinging was a gradual one, beginning with “an early interest in sex (step 1), liberal sexual orientation or low degree

of jealousy (step 2), learning about swinging (step 3), contact with swingers (step 4) and socialization into swinging (step 5)". This slow and gradual internalization of the idea of swinging, and subsequent participation, did not happen spontaneously, but rather was accompanied by on-going communication. Kimberly and Hans (2017, 4) took this further, presenting a visual model of the process that took place within a swinger setting, depicting the self-imposed rules of swinger couples. Thus, negotiations were never independent of the rules of the setting that they were part of.

Communicative techniques, rules, strategies, and negotiations were often used as pillars of swinger research. In her ethnographic study in the United States, Kimberly (2016, 65-66) analyzed communicative techniques used by swingers at a 4-day swinger convention, in addition to the 32 interviews conducted in connection with the event. Kimberly (2016, 61) viewed the initial interaction between swinger couples as based "on the role of the female and her intrapsychic script", referring to the internal script dictated by the cultural scripts in swinger settings. Each couple was then adhering to these scripts. In this study, the cultural scripts were: "being respectful, restricting nudity to private locations, no drugs, listening to law enforcement, reducing intoxication, and having IDs at all times". While this study identified what the cultural norms were, it did not explore more in depth the meanings of these rules. Furthermore, while exploring these meanings, doing so through script theory instead of swingers' already-established concepts would seem more confusing.

In their ethnographic study that explored the meanings of rules in the lifestyle in the United States and in Finland, Harviainen and Frank (2018) proposed the framework of game-theory, distinguishing between the following: "the lifestyle contains implicit expectations, explicit rules, and artificial, pleasurable limits, which are traditionally traits common to game like activities" (3). These negotiations were key elements in swinger settings, because "prenegotiated rules and expectations can ensure participant safety, streamline interactions, and foster a sense of freedom for some but remove the spontaneity and choice for others. Rules that do not allow for enough flexibility—such as an expectation that 'everyone attending should have sex'—can create a feeling of artificiality" (Harviainen & Frank, 2018, 11). Having been participants in swinger settings, both researchers had insider knowledge, as a male and female ethnographer, of these distinct settings, one in Finland, the other in

USA. Their study provided an exploration into the settings, specifically swinging, and used an external theoretical framework without overshadowing swingers' own conceptualizations and analysis of their settings from their point of view. One could claim that this study was phenomenological, exploratory, where the participating ethnographers used several settings to explore the same phenomenon in a similar way.

2.8 Conclusion

There have been a variety of directions in the study of swingers. First, swingers have often been studied together with other consensual non-monogamies, using one framework for the study of very distinct subcultures, such as polyamorists and BDSM practitioners. Meanwhile, characteristics distinguish these subcultures, each one with its own rules, negotiations, and settings. This chapter questioned whether it is even possible to place these together, considering that swingers are often exclusive couples that do attend swinger clubs with the intention to have sex with other people, men and women, couples, and singles (Vaynman & Harviainen, 2022).

The following theoretical directions have been covered in this paper: swinging analyzed as a process, swinging in light of script theory; swinging as a phenomenon; the pillars of swinging, or rules and negotiations. Researchers struggled to provide a theoretical framework to explain swinger relationships, and their dynamics, especially when it came to gender challenges that were noted in previous studies. While at a lack of one suitable theory, Barker and Langdrige (2010, 764) proposed theoretical variety when studying consensual non-monogamies, creating “a primary relationship with poststructuralism, secondary relationships with existentialism and socialist feminism, occasion brief but satisfying encounters with anarchism, and the odd secretive fumble with Rogerian humanism”.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the challenges and benefits of participation in swinger settings. Even in the very beginning of the study, this is an important question that every ethnographer must consider, whether or not to participate and what the degree of participation will be. This is, in a way, the most important question because it will affect access into the settings from the very beginning of the study. Secondly, obtaining access into swinger settings has not been an easy task for ethnographers in the past. In this chapter, I present how I obtained access for the first time, how I recruited participants, through a varied and long-term recruiting process; how I communicated with the ethics review board over long time, and finally, - how I treated sensitive data and protected the identity of the participants through the writing process.

3.2 Access and Positioning

Getting through the door was a process of accessing research sites that would give way to interesting sexuality research. Ethnographers such as Pérez-y-Pérez (2015, 111) point out that there are some sites of fieldwork “where sexuality and sexual status are part of the everyday talk and activity”. I observed certain parts of Andalusia, Spain, particularly la Costa del Sol (*the Sunny Coast*) as potential breeding grounds for fascinating sexuality research, not only because of the spectrum of sexualities that I was able to observe here, but also because of the relatively easy access to participants as a participant and as an observer, making it possible to gain access into the field relatively quickly, create a network of contacts in person and online, and obtain interviews at no cost. Being in a place that was warm, where people had time to talk, may have also contributed to this. While other areas where there were other cities where swinger clubs were also accessible, such as the East Coast of Spain, Madrid, or Barcelona, - I chose Andalusia, or the South of Spain, as my place of residence, later discovering its potential for research – and I estimated that the high number of swinger clubs available in this area would give me plenty of possibilities to observe and become an active member over a long period of time. I also assumed that future longitudinal studies in the future would be possible in case I established a network in this part of Spain.

During the preparation phase for this project, I frequented the gay village close to my home, regular discotheques where clientele comprised of both tourists and locals, and I socialized while observing people dance, drink and talk. I spent approximately one year searching for the topic for my thesis by simply spending time in these venues and observing people. In this sense, the process of choosing a topic was a physical one of an observer, where, as an attendee, I simultaneously was always thinking ethnography - considering which methods would be viable, considering access, whether people would speak to me, how much it would cost, how safe it would be. Very broadly, I knew I wanted to study sexuality; I wanted to do a night-time ethnography, and I wanted it to be safe for me as a female. My personal safety was very important as well, and I immediately felt safe in these settings. Because of my experience going out at night, often alone, in USA, in Japan, in Spain and in Norway. I was more than familiar with the different kinds of venues, characteristics, and people. This long and active search for a topic also had as an objective to find a viable and rare study. Swingers were a subculture that was not only rarely studied but rarely observed and the ethnographers who have studied them while being active members can be counted on one hand.

I had studied nighttime settings previously and had already familiarized myself with the theoretical framework of these settings in criminology studies. I had to ask myself first and foremost whether the topic was fascinating enough for me to devote 4 years of my time to study it. Secondly, I had to consider whether it has been studied before, or whether this type of research and methodology has been limited. Third, whether this type of research was viable, meaning whether this population can be studied at this site, or whether it is probable that people will talk to me. Lastly, I had to weigh out whether living in this place (Andalusia) would lead to collecting data material over long period of time, and whether it would help me get to know the participants better by living here. All these points are similar to Bernard's (2006, 70) 5 important questions each researcher should ask before starting a project:

1. Does this topic (or research site, or data collection method) really interest me?
2. Is this a problem that is amenable to scientific inquiry?

3. Are adequate resources available to investigate this topic? To study this population at this particular research site? To use this particular data collection method?
4. Will my research question, or the methods I want to use, lead to unresolvable ethical problems?
5. Is the topic of theoretical and/or practical interest?

After approximately one year of searching for a topic, one late night, I met a random man who later invited me to a random party. As soon as I entered the house and this party, I immediately knew that this was the topic I was looking for. Thoughts of analysis, of viable research, of ethical considerations ran through my head as I stumbled upon this fascinating topic and was lucky enough to have access to it. I assumed that because something is legal, safe and rarely researched in this way, it would be a fascinating and perfectly legitimate way of studying a phenomenon. This involved my own body, and my own life – something that I believed was my right as an anthropologist and as a woman. However, problems of stigma, ethics, and publication were all real fears I had and these created doubts along the way.

In the following, I describe my hesitation in going to this first swinger party, and the secrecy surrounding this event:

The first time I was invited to a swinger party, I agreed to follow my male acquaintance in my car, down this long and windy, dark road. I only came half-way when I decided to turn around and go home. It was too dark and too eerie, and I kept imagining the worst because I did not know this man very well. I kept thinking he had another man down there, and they would chop me up behind the gates. He kept reassuring me on the phone; he even passed the phone to a woman with a nice voice who was already at the party. But I was too scared, and I went home. The weekend after that, he invited me to another party at the same house. He brought another (male) friend, who looked trustworthy, and this time, I followed them all the way to the house.

Fieldnotes, Spain

At the party, there were several men, all in relationships with their swinger partners, who introduced me to the clubs, organized dinners, and presented me to everyone they knew. I told everyone from the start that I was going to study swingers, but I am certain that it was because of these three men, with experience in the swinger world, that I was accepted openly as an anthropologist, as they proudly talked about this to their friends. I believe that it was the wives as well that invited me, because without the approval or agreement from the wives, I would not have ever received an invitation.

I started getting interviews and meeting more people – the entire social network of these couples. I could say that without the help and support of my key informants, it would have been difficult for me to have such a fruitful study. For example, while meeting couples and single men and women inside the clubs provided rich observational data, it was these couples that invited me to dinners, and it was much easier to explain the study in-depth at dinner and have potential participants or volunteers for the study. Had they not invited me, I would not have had this opportunity. Also, one of my key informants asked a swinger website administrator to give me permission to present the study. Without this contact, I would have had no access to online participants or phone interviews. I was recommended by one of the key informants to a man who managed a chat group in another part of Spain. This contact resulted in 11 telephone interviews.

In my research, I am convinced that had I been a man instead of a woman, it would have been much more difficult to gain and maintain access. Not only did I use my status as a woman men considered attractive in this setting, but I also employed other personal characteristics as well. Being Oriental and being a novice participant also played an important part. During her experience as a massage parlor manager/researcher, Pérez-y-Pérez (2015, 113) reported similar observations, claiming that her “currency was based on multiple factors: being a woman, my age; being a Latina/Spanish, and being a novice in terms of practical sex work experience”. This ethnographer points to the importance of personal characteristics for positioning oneself in that setting. Even as a massage parlor manager, learning about the organizational structures of this commercial sex venue, this ethnographer pointed to the method of just “hanging out”, an approach that helped her challenge stereotypes and resist moralizing (Pérez-y-Pérez, 2015, 113). As Bernard (2006,

375) pointed out, personal characteristics play a big role in how one is perceived and have the power to influence data collection, observations, participation and interviews, as he states in the following:

Personal characteristics make a difference in fieldwork. Being old or young lets you into certain things and shuts you out of others. Being wealthy lets you talk to certain people about certain subjects and makes others avoid you. Being gregarious makes some people open up to you and makes others shy away. There is no way to eliminate the ‘personal equation’ in participant observation fieldwork, or in any other scientific data-gathering exercise for that matter, without sending robots out to do the work. Of course, the robots would have their own problems.

Being able to speak with people in French in Cap d’Agde, France gave me access to a lot of informal conversations and interviews. Many swingers were educated, and this meant that I was able to connect with them intellectually. As single women were welcomed, being able to have access automatically meant that people would speak to me more easily. My key informants were also very intelligent, or intellectuals one may say. Not only were they familiar with anthropology, sociology, psychology, and were highly well-read, but were also interested in music, literature, and had a broad cultural understanding. Bernard (2006, 196) further points out that “good key informants are people with whom you can talk to easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you”. These key informants were able to understand my role as a participant ethnographer. They also understood, and communicated to others, that I was a temporary “long-term” participant, and that I would leave at the end of the study.

I took on different roles throughout the project, sometimes simultaneously. Similar to Pérez-y-Pérez (2015, 113), where the ethnographer learned from the participants who were experts, my openness and “willingness to learn” allowed swingers to teach me, rather than to position themselves as “the passive observed”. However, both roles, one of which was a novice who was learning, and the other who was a passive observer were not incompatible. Another role I took on as I gradually became an expert, was that of a teacher

for the novices. For instance, when I was introduced to a novice couple, novice single man or woman, I would explain the norms and rules of swingers in swinger settings and show them around, as well as introduce them to the people I knew. This was common practice in clubs, even though club managers or “public relations”¹⁵ were also responsible for this, - swingers often socialized in a way that was informative and educational. Thirdly, the role of Public Relations allowed me to position myself as a coordinator or organizer; it also placed me outside of the researcher role as people were not feeling that they were observed by the writer at all times. Participating gave me the opportunity to explore a variety of roles, such as noted by (Frank, 2013, 11) in her book on group sex: *Plays well in groups: A journey through the world of group sex*, where the ethnographer pointed out that she had been “an outsider, insider, anthropologist, participant” in the roles of entertainer, single woman, part of a couple, having “multiple perspectives” and inhabiting several worlds at the same time. Stepping into the different roles was something that I discovered inside the clubs. Entertaining, teaching and learning were 3 different roles that were interchangeable and compatible. For example, pole-dancing was entertaining to the others, while being observed and showing myself. Teaching pole-dancing, learning pole-dancing were all interchangeable activities where I took on the role of a dancer. Dancing was thus a physical activity that united all these roles. Pole-dancing was a common activity in every club, and most swinger clubs had a pole. This activity was mainly for women, although sometimes a man would get up there as well. In Cap d’Agde, the art of pole dance was taken to another level, where there were numerous poles in every swinger bar and club. They were free to dance, and they were not paid to dance either.

3.3 Levels of Erotic and Sexual Participation

Observation of sexuality is powerful, and for many ethnographers, - it is as important as participating. It can provide contradictory insights to other studies by other ethnographers who also observed the same phenomenon. Observation also plays an important role in triangulation of data or verifying the results from interviews. The difference between

¹⁵ Relaciones Publicas

observing and participating makes one a “light” ethnographer, or, similar to swinger couples and single swingers who are “light”, - one can only watch during an extended period of time without touching another person. The boundary between observing and participating becomes more diffuse once one is aroused, and then perhaps touches oneself without touching another. As soon as the arousal happens, and the ethnographer touches herself or himself, then participation begins. It could begin at the arousal stage, uncontrollably.

Had I not been a participant, I may have had the opportunity to observe more. However, since I did not always participate every single minute of every single night, I spent many hours observing without participating. I spent 5-7 hours per night in a swinger club 3-4 nights a week, during 18 months of fieldwork. This would make up an approximate total of 1440 hours for 18 months of fieldwork.

From the very beginning, I had to negotiate my position as a participant in swinger settings, while it is important to distinguish between the levels of participation, which are often intertwined, or fused. Prior to this study, and as part the nighttime (versus daytime) settings, I enjoyed being attractive, flirting, being seductive, dancing and being social – all this I already enjoyed. No one convinced me to employ these strategies in order to obtain access because I was already happy while being and behaving this way in other settings, such as nightclubs, bars, and parties.

Erotic dancing (or pole dancing) was an accepted form of interaction in swinger clubs and this was an activity where I could immediately feel connected with others, while not directly participating in sexual acts. Also, it helped establish me as a member, while always allowing me to maintain a distance. I danced together with other women, and I was also someone who watched women dance, while talking to the men.

If one chooses to research on swingers through ethnographic method, participation may be inevitable, because long-term observations are not just passive. However, one can distinguish between dancing and erotic dancing, nudity and erotic nudity, - and still be a participant. However, observing someone perform a sexual act becomes a complex role when at any given moment that an ethnographer becomes aroused and consequently has the urge to participate in that moment.

In my study, it was difficult for me to remain a passive observer, and from the very beginning, I was a voyeur as I became aroused into participation. The transition into participation happened gradually in that I became socialized and “turned on” into certain aspects of participation. It is then important to consider whether an ethnographer should then struggle hard to maintain a passive or unaroused role while observing others, and what this passivity accomplish? As an ethnographer who conducts fieldwork on sexual activities, one risks losing informants’ trust and being rejected as “not one of them”, as Groes-Green (2012, 45) vividly described in his fieldnotes that involved him rejecting an invitation from a female participant to have sex with her as part of an orgy.

While some of the previous ethnographers studying swingers claimed to be strictly observers without writing about their erotic desire or involvement (Bartell, 1971; Gould, 1999; Kimberly, 2016) very few ethnographers who did participate reported on the importance of participation (Palson & Palson, 1972; Harviainen & Frank, 2018; Frank, 2013; Wagner, 2009). In their study on group sex in Finland and USA, Harviainen and Frank (2018, 5) pointed out that participation is important in these settings if one is to “produce reliable ethnographic data and to protect the community being studied”. Both researchers have been active members in the lifestyle for over 10 years, in Finland and in USA, respectively.

As a single female participant, my involvement was always limited to certain sexual practices, such as threesomes and group sex, as my single status excluded me from couple swapping. As I was not part of a couple, and since I usually only participated in heterosexual practices, - I was excluded from couple and bisexual swaps. However, I was able to relate to bisexual play, and what participants meant by “playing with girls”, as I did have some previous experience, and was able to use it as a reference point during interviews when talking about this topic.

It is also important to distinguish between sexual “play” and sexual acts, although there were types of play that often interacted with sexual acts. For example, touching private parts, kissing, hugging, rubbing, and oral sex – all could be part of “erotic play”, while vaginal and anal intercourse would be sexual acts.

There were limits of participation that I established myself because of my own personal and sexual choices. Sometimes I was approached by couples where the woman only played with women. This meant that I would only be having sex with the woman, and not with the man, in a private room. I always declined. I was not interested in solely bisexual play with women. However, and this also imitated other swinger women that I observed and interviewed, who also refrained from this type of exchange. Therefore, I only followed a standard form for negotiation or rejection.

Much of field work involved observations of sexual acts such as group sex, and interactions between swinger couples and swinger men and women. Informal conversations or short interviews happened spontaneously when people approached me in swinger clubs starting a conversation, sharing their experiences, many times with the full knowledge of my role as an ethnographer. Some of the club owners knew I was studying swingers, or writing a book on swingers, because I told them. Those that did not know were curious, and I explained my role on a continuous basis, so much so that some swinger couples that I saw every week started to introduce me as the anthropologist or the writer. I observed a wide spectrum of sexual activities, although not a lot of fetishes (hardcore BDSM, for example), in different swinger clubs that involved: kissing, fellatio, cunnilingus, vaginal and anal sex, sex between men (rarely) and sex between women, MMF and MFM threesomes, group sex, oral sex in glory holes, voyeurism, exhibitionism. Hardcore BDSM activities, such as urination, spanking, humiliation, and the art of bondage, or Shibari in swinger clubs - these practices were rare in Andalusia, and only observed in BDSM clubs or BDSM private parties.

When considering levels of participation, there was also an emotional level. I established a rapport with people that was like a friendship, and I felt emotionally close to them while writing about them. Thankfully, they told me that they accepted me as an anthropologist or writer or they understood the meaning behind my being there, even as I got very close to them. Perhaps this was what I believed or what they led me to believe. I have heard swingers use the word the Spanish word of “complicidad”, or camaraderie, solidarity, in order to describe the connection they felt with their partners, of having an accomplice, or a partner in crime. I believe they simply referred to having someone who

understood them, or a community of people with an understanding for what they did. And in the end, letting me write about them placed me on this level of involvement.

3.4 The Sample and Recruiting

Jenks (1998, 507) pointed out the difficulty of obtaining random samples when it came to sexuality research, and how, because of this, “most studies reported in the literature have been based on small numbers of people within a single city or community”. Other researchers researching on swingers have also reported on difficulties recruiting participants (Bentzen & Træen, 2014; Bartell 1970). This reflects one of the main limitations in my study, directly related to the sample. The criteria for participants were a) at least 21 years of age b) experience in swinger settings. I came upon older and more experienced swingers who were willing to talk to me. Or the swingers who were willing to talk to me were older and more experienced. They introduced me to other older and more experienced swingers, who were their friends. Some of them were single and others were couples. Both singles and couples were recruited to expand knowledge on swingles, a group of single men and women who frequent the clubs, and their experiences with couples.

In order to contrast the snowballing method, where the people I met asked the people they knew, I also recruited participants online. Out of 40 participants, - 11 were recruited online and 11 telephone interviews were conducted and recorded. These participants who I had never met, were also willing to share with me their deepest experiences and signed consent forms. Conducting phone interviews with swingers from another part of Spain was an important contrast to my fieldwork in Andalusia and live interviews in this Southern part of Spain.

My goal was to recruit participants through a variety of channels. Through the help of a few “key informants”, I developed my own personal network, which I expanded all the time as I meet new people through social events and various hobby activities that I participate in. After a longer time in the field, I was able to go out alone, and meet people in clubs. I believe that the important detail of living close to (or less than an hour drive) to 10 swinger clubs in Andalusia as well as several nude beaches gave me a lot of access to clubs and their participants.

Through one of my key informants, I was given the contact of a man who organized a WhatsApp group of 80 people, and he posted information about the study inside this WhatsApp group. This was when I had 20 participants respond right away, nearly on the same day. However, of these participants, there were none that I could observe in a club, because they lived in other parts of Spain. This resulted in phone interviews. Also, some of them have rarely been in a swinger club and did not consider themselves swingers, but rather open-minded, single people who rebelled against swinging. Although they provided valuable insights into problems with swinging, their experiences were somewhat different from the swingers who participated actively in clubs. I wanted to focus mostly on swingers who had a deeper and longer understanding of swinging and swinger clubs and were hardcore participants or participated in “hard swaps” rather than “soft swaps”. However, since some experienced swingers did consider and talk about polyamory, I felt that including some of these perspectives was important as well. In addition to snowball sampling, which proved to be the most fruitful, I also used 2 websites where I advertised the study. Only 2 couples contacted me through this method. I was denied permission to recruit on the other websites I contacted.

Out of 40 participants, there were 15 couples. In other words, there were 30 participants that formed part of a couple, and 10 participants who were single swingers. Out of 15 couples, 6 couples were Spanish, and 7 couples were culturally diverse, where one member of the couple was one nationality, while the other was another nationality. One couple was French, and another couple was Northern European. There were 5 intergenerational couples, where one member of the couple, mostly male, was older. The age difference was over 20 years in most of these couples.

Although the demographics in this sample cannot be generalized to swingers in other countries, and not even to other swinger contexts in Spain, it would be safe to say that this sample’s international characteristics may reflect the cultural characteristics in other similar swinger settings as well.

These 40 participants signed consent forms. Originally, there were 55 participants in total, 15 of which did not sign written consent forms, and these interviews were not used in this study. Nevertheless, I felt that the final sample with 40 participants was sufficient for

addressing the main questions, as Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2020, 100) point out: “As the emphasis is on having sufficiently rich data as opposed to, for instance, a representative sample, a well-defined group for whom the research problem is relevant and important is worth aiming for”. Even though I point out that one of the limitations of my study was its sample size, I considered the 40 recorded interviews that I conducted to have provided rich data, especially as it was supplemented with fieldnotes.

Table 1: Geographical Regions of the 40 participants

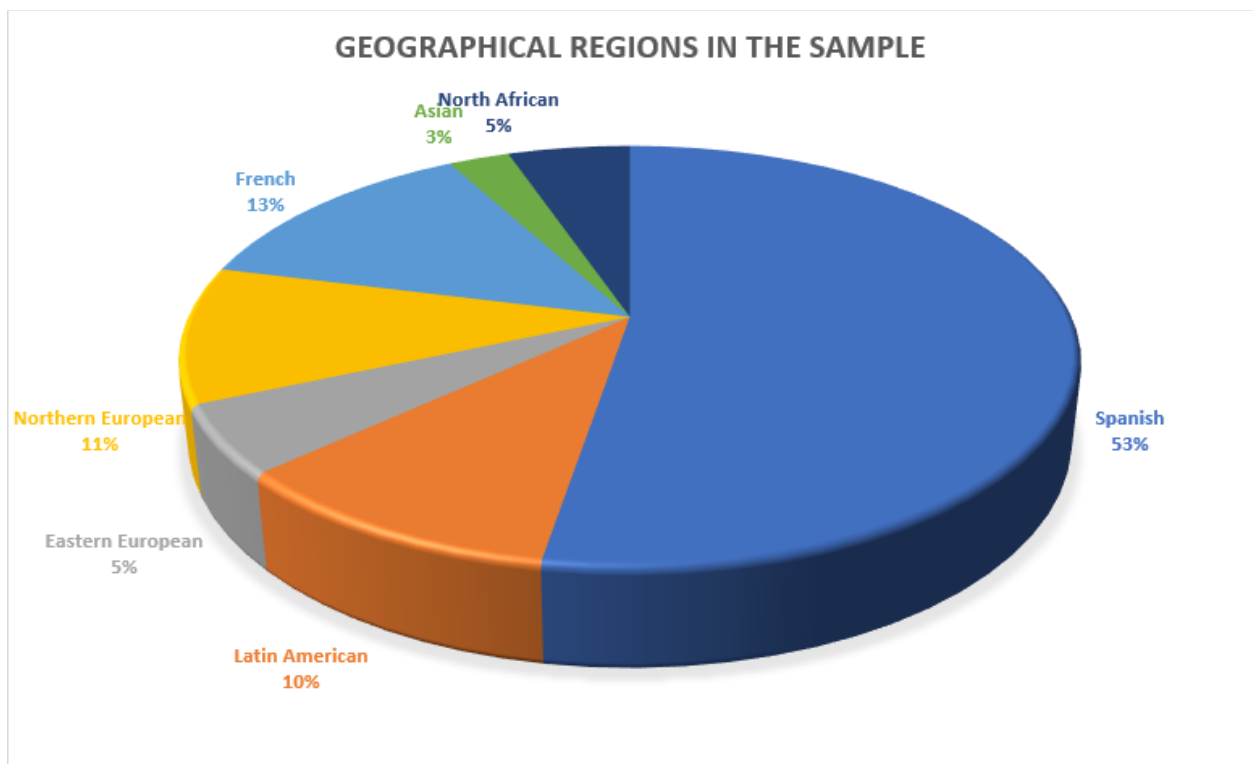
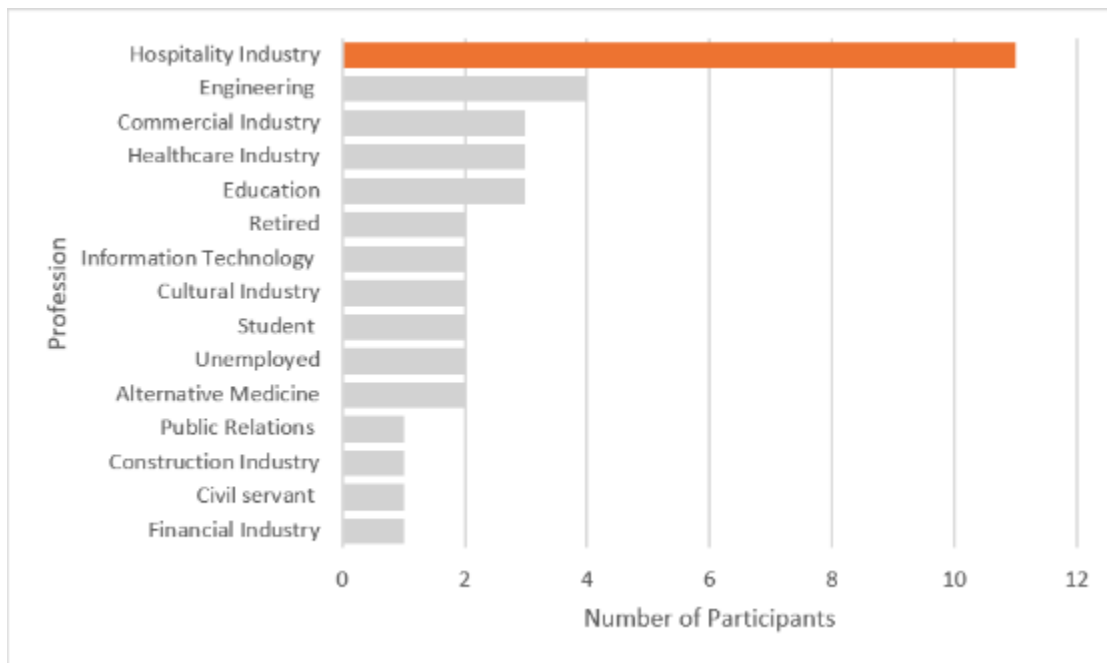


Table 2: General Characteristics – 40 participants

Bisexual Swingers	68%
Women introduced by Men	45%
Swingers with Children	45%
Swingers with Higher Education	85%
Average Years in Relationship	9 years
Average Years Swinging	11 years

Table 3: Professions – 40 participants



From my observations, the swingers I observed came from all walks of life, and many different nationalities and geographical regions. In Andalusia, Spain, I observed swingers who were tourists as well as Spanish or permanent residents of Spain. Spanish nationals with Spanish citizenship who were established in Spain but were originally from other countries also formed part of the sample. Judging from the general comments from swingers in interviews and in this setting, it would not be precise to say that swingers were all middle class, as the commercialization of swinging made it more affordable for couples and singles to attend clubs, and this may be even more so as swinging becomes a growing online phenomenon where swingers organize private parties or encounters in their homes.

3.4.1 Profiling Swinger Couples

a. Age in Couples

The mean age of the sample of the 30 persons in couples was 46 years. Men were 51 years of age on average at the time of the interview, where the oldest male was 76, the youngest was 35. The women were 40 years of age on average. Their median age was 41. The oldest woman was 60 and the youngest, 24.

Table 4. Couples: Age by decades and average age per decade (N:15)

Age Decade	Men			Women		
	N	%	Average	N	%	Average
20s				3	20.0	26
30s	1	6.7	35	3	20.0	35
40s	6	40.0	43	6	40.0	43
50s	5	33.3	53	2	13.3	52
60s	1	6.7	63	1	6.7	60
70s	2	13.3	76			
Total	15	100.0	51	15	100.0	40

Most of the male partners or husbands were in their 40s (40%) and their 50s (33%), Thus 3 out of 4 of male swingers in the sample were in their 40s and 50s. One male was younger and three (20%) were older; they were in their 60s and 70s. The women in couples were generally younger. 40% of all women were in their 20s and 30%, thus relatively young. Those in their 40s account for a similar proportion. In total, 80% of women were in their 20s, 30s and 40s. There are three extreme cases or outliers that affect mean and dispersion values. We have calculated mean and dispersal values with and without outliers. On average, husbands were 11 years older than their wives. Only in one case the wife was older than the husband. This was a larger difference than that found among Spanish and French couples in general, which was 2 to 3 years on average. If outliers were eliminated from the analysis, the age difference would still be large, about 10 years of age. Whereas age appeared to be

an important factor in swinging and in this study, further research is needed to explore this topic further. In this study, I interviewed five couples that belong to different generations, that is, intergenerational couples, where one of the partners was 15 years older or more than the other. In three cases, the age difference was larger than 25 years.

b. Nationality in Couples

The sample was varied by nationality and/or country of origin of the individuals in the sample of couples. Table 5 shows the main nationalities or groups of nationalities that were grouped to maintain the anonymity of the people observed and interviewed. Gender/sex were not included in this table to preserve the anonymity of the people involved.

Table 5: Nationality of Participants in Couples by Age

Nationality	N: Persons	%	Average Age
<i>Spanish</i>	14	46.7	40
<i>French</i>	5	16.7	61
<i>Latin American</i>	4	13.3	49
<i>Northern European</i>	4	13.3	45
<i>Eastern European</i>	1	3.3	41
<i>East Asian</i>	1	3.3	53
<i>North African</i>	1	3.3	36

Almost half of the couples studied were Spanish. French, Latin American people and Northern Europeans made up the rest of the large majority. There are five couples with partners from different countries, that is, a 33% of all couples studied. Two of the couples were of a Spanish and a Latin American partner. There are cultural differences among the partners, although also a common religion and language and many elements of cultural coincidence and compatibility. The other three intercultural couples were of people with different maternal languages, religions, and native cultures, although both members of the couple were cosmopolitan. All couples resided permanently in Spain except for two couples:

one of the couples that resided in another European country but spent a considerable amount of time in Spain, and another couple that moved from Spain during the study.

c. Time Together

These were general long-term couples that have been together for 11 years on average. The maximum time that a couple has been together was 27 years. About 46% have been together from 2 to 5 years, they were in a first phase of their relationship. In one case, they have been together for 6 years. Most of the couples have been together for 10 years or more. It could be argued that swinger practices, at least in this sample, was not conducive to breakups of couples, on the contrary, it contributed to their permanence. This could be an underlying reason for participating in swinging in certain types of couples.

Table 6. Swinger couples: Age Difference and Time Together (N:15)

Time together	N: Couples	%
2 to 5 years	6	40.0
5 to 10 years	1	6.7
10 to 15 years	3	20.0
15 to 20 years	1	6.7
Over 20 years	4	26.7
Total	15	100.0

Note: Years together as a couple by periods. Average without outliers//Total average

There were three couples with a large age difference, over 25 years. These can be extreme cases influencing the average. If we take these out, the rest of couples still have an age difference of 6 years.

d. Children

Half of the people in the sample of couples had children. In half of the couples one or both partners had children. They may be children of the couple or of previous unions of the present partners. In three cases (20% of all couples studied), the children were small and

required supervision and attention (children from 4 to 11 years of age). In the other cases, the children were adults, 18 to 30 years of age.

Table 7. Average age of men and women by frequency of swinging groups (N: 15)

Frequency of Swinging	Men			Women		
	N	%	Age	N	%	Age
Monthly	5	33.3	53	5	33.3	39
Twice a month	3	20.0	59	4	26.7	43
Once a week	5	33.3	51	4	26.7	42
Irregular	2	13.3	37	2	13.3	31
Total	15	100.0	51	15	100	40

Note: Average age. Declared most common frequency of swingers by individuals in swinger couples.

Most of the men and women in the sample of swinger couples were regular swingers that engaged in these sexual practices weekly or every other week. A third of both men and women engaged in these practices less commonly, about once a month. A small group was more irregular in their practices or could not establish a temporal pattern. Men did seem to participate in these encounters somewhat more often, particularly considering weekly practices. Sometimes couples would maintain different patterns of frequency. There does not seem to be a correlation between age and frequency of the practice of swinging. More active men seemed a bit younger on average (51 to 53 years of age), but the difference was not large. In the case of women opposite seemed to be taken place. Women who engage in weekly sessions of swinging were somewhat older than those who practice swinging monthly (42 to 39 years of age).

e. Education, Occupation and Profession

A large majority (90%) of the couples appeared to have more formal education than the average populations of their countries. Most had post-secondary education; 27 de 30 individuals went to college and have university degrees; only three people got secondary or

high school education. Perhaps due to the main region of the study, men and women working in jobs related to tourism, hotel, catering, and travel predominate. But the sample of professions and occupations was varied, from education, business, real state, etc. Most of the studied people could be considered middle or upper-middle class, educated and professionals. Some were relatively affluent, although there were a few working-class people as well. The homogenous educational, cultural and class level of the groups may have implications for their cultural compatibility.

3.5 The Interview Process

Even though I used semi-structured qualitative interview method, I thought that it was important to allow interviewees tell their stories without bombarding them with too many questions. These were in-depth interviews that lasted from 1 hour to 3 hours. I was able to improve and direct the interview better when the interviewee went off into a different subject area that had nothing to do with swinging. Furthermore, I learned how to set limits, something that came with the experience of having better knowledge of the participants and the phenomenon.

As Lincoln and Guba (1986) claim, “the relationship between researcher and respondent, when properly established, is one of respectful negotiation, joint control and reciprocal learning” (76). On the other hand, it may also be potentially asymmetrical or characterized by gendered power dynamics. Initially, I was particularly fond of the method of unstructured interviewing because it allowed more space for the participants’ voice and I would usually brainstorm new questions relevant for the interview. Bernard (2006, 213) points to the following observations on unstructured interviewing:

Unstructured interviewing is excellent for building initial rapport with people, before moving to more formal interviews, and it’s perfect for talking to informants who would not tolerate a more formal interview... In fact, really structured interviewing can get in the way of your ability to communicate freely with key informants.

Even though my interview guide was being constantly reworked as I adapted emerging or important themes learned during fieldwork, I took the interview situation as a spontaneous dialogue, in order to utilize a free-form discourse (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It seemed more logical to allow the participants talk about the experiences relevant to them, and then bring up the follow-up questions. With some participants, I would have follow-up interviews, while with others, it would only be a few brief messages as part of the clarification process or analysis. Part of the shortcomings of this particular style of interviewing was its lack of structure and objectives from my side, while also not allowing for comparisons later on. On the other hand, it permitted for a safe space where the participants felt free to share with me more openly without me being bound to a guide, and this allowed for new and important topics.

While most couples were interviewed separately, some were interviewed together. I felt that this was part of the rules or norms of “doing everything together” (a rule in some couples) that some swinger couples had, and I had to go along with it, because they were volunteering for the study, and they were able to choose. Studying both members of the relationship separately posed a problem during phone interviews, where I was not able to verify if the participant was alone, or if his/her partner was there, until halfway through the interview, when I would hear the other party present, or commenting. I conducted interviews with both members of the couple, but usually, it was only one member of each couple that opened up to me the most. I would then make conclusions based on my observations of the other member, their body language and informal conversations.

I rewrote my interview guide (see Appendix) many times because I wanted to base my questions on my own understanding of swingers, after already having been there for a few months and having had interviews with swingers and having participated in their sexual practices. The interview guide for this study was therefore a continuous work in progress. While I started with themes that were relevant in previous studies, the actual interview led me to a completely different set of questions that were based on fieldwork and earlier interviews from my study. It is the participants themselves who inspired this continuous reworking of the interview guide. Most importantly, I used it as an introduction to the study allowing a broad spectrum of themes and questions. This gave the participants room to

choose and perhaps inspired them to choose a particular topic they were interested in sharing. Thus, I developed new questions often after the interview when the participant expanded on a topic. This time-consuming process proved helpful because interviewees got the feeling that I had done my homework, that I understood and accepted them, that I asked them relevant questions. One example of this is interviewing someone who was bisexual. I would then go back to the interview guide and add questions on bisexuality.

I was included in their sexualized language, not in a negative way that made me feel uncomfortable. For example, Jacob, a male swinger, talked about a sexual experience on the beach with his girlfriend Tiffany - having sex with her in their car while men or couples watched, commented "I get a hard on just thinking about it". I did not see this sexualized comment as any more of a problem during the interview situation as it was during my interaction with the men (and women) in the club. Being one-on-one with a male or female (bisexual) participant, in my or their home, may have given them ideas of a promise of sexual intimacy, but I did not feel that there was a room for harassment or objectification. Men, bisexual and heterosexual women seemed to be motivated just to talk to me and found these interviews interesting. As Gustav said, it was interesting to talk about the things one does not usually think about. Other (phone participants) said that they gave me interviews because of "solidarity". This was an important motivating factor.

On the other hand, with some female participants, I felt a kind of reservation. This reflected our interaction outside the interview situation as well. Perhaps the women were somewhat distrustful, distant, and even when they did open up to me, - I felt that I could never reach that level of trust where they would open up on the level that the men did. In one couple, the man said, "I am completely open with you and tell you everything. When I was in the military, we had to be completely honest because it was a dangerous situation, and you had to have each other's back. In the relationship, I must be honest". His wife said, "well, I don't tell you everything, but the important things". The man seemed bothered by this lack of complete trust from his woman. This is how I felt the interview played out with women – they told me the important things, but left out some details, and this made the whole story incomplete because there were details that were missing from each account with a lot of women. One such example was when the husband shared with me about his drug

use, but the wife did not. While there may have been details that neither of the partners admitted, - I felt that the men were more sincere with me, while there was no special reason to have been so. For instance, in the following excerpt, Jacob did not want to share the reason why they left the club. I asked him why, and he answered in the following way (without revealing the answer):

You mean... that time I was upset, and we left? I know you were referring to that. It wasn't because she was with him (another man). She told me something I did not like. In that moment, I did not like it and I got angry about that comment. Just that. She told me... I don't remember what it was, but it was a stupid thing, and I didn't like it, but I didn't get upset because she was with him. What she told me, it spoiled the mood, in the same way it could happen to her, like I would say something... probably happened to you as well with a partner... that he told you something stupid and you got angry and the mood was spoiled. We were playing, and she told me something that turned me off. That's it, that's what it was.¹⁶

Jacob, couple

Jacob obviously did not want to reveal what it was Tiffany said to him, but did so with a lot of explanation, and tact. I did not want to pry into what he did not want to explain to me. There were many instances such as this one, where I just had to trust my intuition and respect their privacy. Just because I had permission to observe and interview them, did not mean I had the right to all information, nor did I have the right to insist to get answers. There were many rules I had to adhere to, and one of them was keeping a boundary, as an anthropologist, and as a single female.

¹⁶ Que... me mosqueé con ella, ¿no? Tú estabas pensando en eso, yo lo sé. No fue porque estuviera con él. Fue por lo que me dijo. Me dijo una cosa que no me gustó. En ese momento no me gustó y me entró mucho coraje que me lo dijera. Solo eso. Me dijo... ni me acuerdo lo que era, pero una tontería y no me gustó, pero no me mosqueé con ella porque estuviera con él, sabes. Lo que me dijo, me cortó el rollo y le dije 'nos vamos' porque es que me has cortado el rollo, igual que le ha pasado muchas veces a ella, que he dicho yo algo... seguramente a ti te ha pasado a alguna pareja tuya... que ha dicho cualquier tontería y te ha entrado tanto coraje que te ha cortado el rollo. Estábamos en un juego, y me dijo una cosa que me rompió el juego. Ya está. Fue eso.

Another example of sincerity that came from the male participant was when he shared the details of their financial situation, while she did not. This created a mystery, a guessing game, and I had to fill in the missing pieces after having talked to her. On the other hand, it is this ambiguity that made me focus my attention on the women further on into the study, and it is from this frustration that was generated during interviews that I decided to analyze certain characteristics among women separately from the men. In an online presentation on a swinger website, I specifically encouraged women to participate in the study, telling people how I wanted a more equal sample that included more women.

The interviewees were never coerced, remunerated, favored in some way or form in a setting where sex was available, and no one was forced into participation. In a similar way, no one was obligated to tell the truth or to lie. And I did not place too much focus on whether the participants were telling the truth, neither did I contradict them during these interviews. I postponed this in order to conduct a reflexive analysis later on in my writing. It was important to know how the participants view their world, how they express themselves linguistically and make sense of it from their view. Therefore, digging to find the truth or contradicting them would show that I did not accept them or what they did and would be counterproductive.

In their article, Atkinson and Coffey (2003, 21) claimed that interviewing can be viewed as performative: “Accounts are, or are composed of, speech acts and may therefore legitimately be regarded as games or types of action in their own right”. This had been problematized by Vaynman et al. (2020, 2), in an article that explored the reasons behind degrading language used by men in interviews. Stories were analyzed as performative, where men were able to 1) bond with each other 2) explore confusing sexual experiences, and 3) excuse sexual events characterized by aggression. The authors highlighted “the particularities of gendered sexual storytelling” (14). According to Taylor and De Vocht (2011), through the interview process, the researcher as well as the participants may reach a new understanding of the phenomenon in a cocreation of data. While the actual discourse that was generated during interviews, contained elements of play or acting and performance, - the question of whether or not the interviewees were telling the truth still remained.

Generally, I took these accounts as the truth, but then, contrasted these with other accounts, conversations, and observations.

I conducted interviews in a variety of settings, mostly allowing the participants to choose the setting they were comfortable with. When I was able to choose the place, I always preferred my house or theirs, because of the noise level in cafés, parks, beaches. The interviews that were conducted in outdoor settings were as difficult to transcribe because of the audio quality. Phone interviews were also difficult for transcriptions because of connection problems and call quality. It was upsetting to not be able to hear, miss some words and sentences because of something one could have prevented by simply planning an indoor interview. Most importantly, interviews were conducted outside of the clubs and during the day, without any “social lubricants” such as alcohol or illegal substances that night-time settings may provide.

The audio recordings were done on a professional recorder. All 40 interviews were recorded. The recordings were then transferred to an external USB device that was locked with a pass code. I kept the recordings to listen to them again and again. Audio recordings contain the feeling of the person, the feeling of the interview – these are important to me for inspiration when I write, while I remember the whole story of the participant, his doubts, his insecurities, his interests.

3.5.1 Translating and Transcribing

One of the strengths of this study its culturally and linguistically diverse sample. I conducted interviews in Spanish, French, Russian and English. I was able to observe French participants in Cap d’Agde, France, and Spanish participants in Spain and other nationalities or foreigners in both France and Spain. Some French participants were interviewed in English or Spanish (or Russian), because they preferred another language during the interview. This also applied to the Spanish participants residing in Spain, who were not originally Spanish and preferred to speak English, French, or Russian. Being able to communicate with participants in their own language brought many advantages, but so did giving the interviewees a choice in language of the interview. Thus, I was not limited by language barriers, and I was able to relate to them linguistically as well as culturally. At this

point, I realized the advantage of having studied French, for instance. Consequently, I was able to be a part of a group that spoke French and I was lucky to be able to understand almost everything and speak it. Participants used French terms for swinging such as *échangisme*¹⁷ and would talk about swinging using a French cultural and historical framework. For example, some of the themes I wanted to bring up in the interviews with French participants in Cap d'Agde was the way that swinging was organized in the past, and how Cap d'Agde was 10 or 20 years ago. Those participants who travelled to Cap continuously, or each summer, were active and avid attendees of this city, and could report interesting and insightful data about this place.

I had to improve my French to the level of fluency that would allow me to transcribe on my own, and I could not send or entrust the interviews to anyone. I hired a French tutor for a few months in order to improve to a level of advanced fluency. Since I speak Spanish fluently, I felt that I was able to conduct, transcribe and translate the interviews myself without the help of a translator. I was able to use my experience as a professional interpreter and translator of research articles in sociology while working on these transcriptions.

Conducting interviews in Russian was also very enriching. I do not think I would have been able to achieve the same amount of trust and understanding from the Russian participants had I not spoken fluent Russian and had I not had knowledge of Russian culture, mentality, and sexual attitudes. I met the participants at their level of understanding through language and cultural knowledge, something that worked in my favor and as a result, was a major strength in this study.

I transcribed most of the interviews in the original language of the interview, translating them into English. Some interviews, in Russian, for example, were translated directly into English because I did not see the point of having a Russian transcription – it would also take me a long time to do both a transcription and a translation.

¹⁷ *échangisme* literally means *exchangism* in French

3.6 Analysis

Researchers such as Frank (2008) drew on her fieldnotes, personal reflections, and preferred “to work from detailed interview material; thus, I view the observations put forth here as preliminary to a more in-depth analysis of motivation and meaning” (439). For example, as a single woman, I was able to spend time with couples, joining them in swinger clubs, at dinners, nudist beaches, and some private parties. I was able to observe and ask questions, analyze and find major themes or problems that the couples themselves identified. I also proposed my own questions, but in line with what the participants thought was interesting. Even though my lack of experience with couples made me feel very unsure as to how to analyze them, and how to behave – I wrote down my feelings, experiences, and observations in my fieldnotes each night after being with swingers. Also, I was able to supplement this with the interviews, as the participants answered a lot of my questions during these. The social dynamics of being in a threesome were very different from those of being a single woman in a group, a swinger club, or if I had formed part of a couple. I took this as an opportunity to explore this type of consensual non-monogamy and to add to the emerging literature on this topic.

It was only after one year of field work, and 40 interviews and finished transcriptions that I began to solidify themes that came directly from interview data. At this point, I was already familiar with the existing research, and I identified themes that were relevant, different, or important considering earlier research on swingers. I used several methods for coding and interpreting data, one of which Bernard (2006, 406) coined as the “eyeballing”:

You quite literally lay out your notes in piles on the floor. You live with them, handle them, read them over and over again, tack bunches of them to a bulletin board, and eventually get a feel for what’s in them... For sheer fun and analytic efficiency, nothing beats pawing and shuffling through your notes and thinking about them.

In other words, I got close to data over and over until I had ‘the feel’ for which themes were important, then revised these until I was absolutely sure that these were the most important themes.

Coding manually on my own meant that the time I spent transcribing verbatim and translating every single interview and rereading the interviews – was valuable in that I often memorized what participants said, and could find the passages, concepts, ideas just by opening the interview. It seemed to me like a more effective method.

Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2020, 105) provide an example of stages of analysis, stemming from “getting close to the data” by first reading the transcript to making comments, to “identifying emerging themes”. This step involves “mapping patterns, connections and interrelationships between the initial comments” (105). This way of interpretation of data proved to be effective in helping me look for important themes. However, this process took a long time because I was also trying to connect important themes from my fieldnotes. Each week or each month of theme analysis, I tried to “plant seeds” or plant themes I thought as important. From then on, I would see them grow (or not) by reading or rereading my transcripts and verifying whether these held true to the existing themes.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Review board at the University of Granada on December 14, 2020. The project was one year into fieldwork that started out as a simple pilot study during which I planned to see whether the project would at all be viable. Obtaining approval retroactively allowed me to write my interview guide while attending swinger settings and be present in these settings before the Covid Pandemic that took place in March 2020. It allowed me to decide on a methodology after having been to the settings. Doing so without visiting the settings would have contributed to serious methodological errors. To resolve the dilemma of retroactive approval, I decided to delete all data collected prior to approval. This included most of my fieldnotes.

According to the American Anthropological Association’s code of ethics (2012), consent may be obtained retroactively “if so warranted by the research context, process, and relations”. In addition to this, “the consent process should be a part of project design and continue through implementation as an ongoing dialogue and negotiation with research participants”. In addition to following AAA (American Anthropological Association), I had

to follow my intuition, or my professional judgement as an experienced ethnographer and begin an exploratory study before applying for approval.

Initially, approval was denied by the Ethics Review Board because it lacked signed consent forms with participants' complete names and signatures. In tune with the explicit rule of discretion that is paramount to this environment, I understood the scope of the consequences of providing participants with a printed document or an email with information about the study, how this could potentially jeopardize their reputation, their job, or even permanently affect attitudes towards them by their acquaintances, children, other family members and co-workers. This is especially true if the place of residence has a low population, everyone knows each other, and one's reputation is everything.

Out of 55 participants, only 40 were able to sign consent forms. The remaining 15 interviews were discarded because of the missing consent forms. Some participants told me that they did not want to sign because they were afraid that someone (at work) could find out. Molina et al. (2019, 3) point out that requiring consent forms from vulnerable populations, covering topics such as "sexuality of Muslim women" as an example, - would have been counterproductive and very risky. The authors propose other ways of obtaining consent, something that also worked well in my study, such as "consent as a process" or obtaining trust through "a gradual process that evolves with time" (7).

I visited 7 clubs in Spain and France and obtained permission from 4 clubs, 3 of which I attended regularly. As Wilt et al. (2018, 13) pointed out - "Many swing club owners are not willing to allow researchers into their establishments for fear of poor representation of swinging and the potential of negatively affecting business". Not only was I able to obtain permission in clubs in Andalusia, but I was also able to obtain permission in one club in the north of Spain, while spending only 2 nights total observing (not participating) in this club. In the following, I write about the process of requesting permission from the club manager/owner, and dynamics of conducting research in a club:

As we came into the club, I approached the owner and explained the purpose of the study; provided information about the university's name and faculty and asked for permission to conduct anonymous observations and possibly approach a few

participants for interviews. As I was constantly introduced to new people by already existing contacts, I didn't have to approach total strangers for interviews in a club, and therefore did not give the impression that I was bothering someone or pushing interviews on someone. The owner, however, told me to call the manager, and I did this the following day, obtaining full permission to be in the club for the purpose of the study during which I would be making observations and meeting potential interviewees. That same night, I met the manager and talked to him personally, and he reassured me that there was no problem, only that the venue would not be able to recruit participants for me, but that I was free to observe and recruit on my own.

Fieldwork, Spain

Obtaining permission online was not as simple. One major website in Spain explicitly denied permission to be a researcher as well as a participant on their website. I was often asked whether I was on this website because everyone I met was there, and I had to explain that I was not allowed to be there in research capacity, but even as a participant I would always be observing, analyzing and potentially including bits and pieces into my work, - something that would make it impossible for me to claim that I am not doing research. I understand this website's protective stance. In their words: "the users' need for privacy and intimacy" is the main reason for not allowing any kind of studies or questionnaires.

I had to consider all these ethical implications, my underlying anxiety, along with all the challenges while learning about swinger culture and reflecting on the lessons I learned. Many issues were raised during the project, and it was important to manage the dilemmas that proved detrimental to the study. Some of the main tensions were the ethical ones, and this led me to believe that we must develop further in research methodologies while studying swinger communities, methodologies that ethically adapt and solve potential field dilemmas.

3.8 Trustworthiness, Triangulation and Credibility

Dr. Juan F. Gamella, my advisor, specializing in sexual anthropology, provided readings of interview data, fieldnotes, and analysis of data at each state during the project. He provided evaluation of possible bias throughout the material and proposed theories, helping improve

the analysis of the entire thesis. While writing together with Dr. J. Tuomas Harviainen and receiving enriching comments from Dr. Katherine Frank, I was able to reflect on the data continuously so that I could provide accurate and relevant themes and analysis. This was a process that took a long time and was a continuous revision and evaluation of established themes and analysis.

Citing Lincoln and Guba's (1986, 77) techniques to increase credibility, I used all the following techniques: "prolonged engagement" in the field, "persistent observation" of the phenomena, "peer debriefing", "negative case analysis", as well as "member checks". Remaining in the field for the time that I did gave me the opportunity to question and answer questions. I was often asked by the members about the research, and it helped me reflect on the phenomenon continuously, making sense of the interpretations of the members and tying this into previous research.

3.9 Treating Sensitive Information

Sensitive information was treated according to the Organic Law 3/2018 of 5th of December, regarding the protection of data and digital rights, and the general regiment of information protection 2016/679. Each participant was informed of his/her right to withdraw from the study at any time. This right extends to consent made at any moment of the study. Each participant can decide the use of his or her personal data in case of leaving the study. The participant has the right to confidentiality of the obtained information, the existence of data files, and the result of the research. I presented information about the study on a continuous basis, providing the specifics of the study in an open and systematic manner, informing swingers that I am writing my PhD on swinger clubs. Informing people that this is an anonymous study was also part of the informative, ongoing routine. It would have been advantageous to send each informant copies of the transcripts of the interviews, to receive their comments and suggestions. This was not done in my study, although I was able to contact the participants when I had additional questions, and this I did often during the writing process.

Interviews were recorded on a recording machine, transferred to a USB device immediately after the interview. The type of USB device used in this project is called WD

My Passport, which includes password and pin protection, and hardware encryption. All the recorded interviews were stored on this device. Field notes and transcriptions were anonymized as I wrote them, and all information identifying the individuals, such as their names, names of their city of residence, names of clubs, age, profession, nationality, age of their children - were changed in order to protect the identity of the participants. Because there are a limited number of clubs, with a limited number of people – a lot of couples know each other and could potentially recognize other couples I that I wrote about. In order to prevent this, I distorted some of the information in order to protect them and their privacy. Also, I considered changing their names again, giving them a second round of pseudonyms – throughout the writing process, I changed their names three times. Names were never stored or recorded during this project, not as part of any document, and neither on a tape recorder. A file with their (real) first names or swinger names used by participants in the swinger world as well as their pseudonyms was stored on the USB device, protected by a password or a pin known to the lead investigator only. Once finalized the project, all the recordings are to be deleted, and the anonymized transcriptions kept on a USB, protected by a password or a pin, accessed by the lead investigator only.

Both the full name, first and last name, and signature, of each participant, were written by the participant himself (or herself) on the written consent form. I was nervous about keeping the written consent forms in my house. Even when I purchased a metal file cabinet with a key, I did not feel that this was a good solution. If there was a thief, he would go for this file cabinet first thing, and then wonder about my secret USB device, and maybe take that too. I did receive permission from the ethics review board to receive consent forms electronically, and that these could be stored online. However, as my home network did not seem to me the most secure one, I purchased Express VPN in order to add extra protection. Even as I did all I could to protect my informants, I still believed that the best way would have been not to contain any signatures or real names anywhere in my house or online. This would have been the safest way to protect them and myself if anything happened, such as hacking of my computer and all the online files, or home robbery.

During the project, I kept an Excel spreadsheet, using numbers instead of pseudonyms to identify participants. This Excel spreadsheet contained information about

participants, such as their age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, years they spent swinging, years they spent in the relationship, frequency swinging, initiation into swinging, whether they signed a consent form, and had a recorded interview. This excel file was kept on an external USB, protected by a password or a pin, accessed by the lead investigator only.

3.9.1 Protecting the Identity of the Participants

Some couples and swingles in this study were white, middle-class, educated at university level, and living in Spain. There were also couples from Spanish-speaking countries (Spain and Latin America), couples from French-speaking countries, South and Northern European couples as well. Also, one couple moved from Spain during the study, while another couple did not reside in Spain permanently. Some couples had children under 18 years old, but these couples were a minority, and only a few reported that it affected their swinging activities. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, a list of particular professions, age groups, particular nationalities were not provided.

Many couples in this study started swinging almost immediately or shortly after starting their relationship, and the couples who did not were already open to the idea of experimenting with multiple partners, either separately or together. For couples who met in swinger clubs, it was convenient to meet their partner in a club since they already were familiar with the norms of the club, what they wanted from exchanges or from being a couple.

Specific information, such as age, the number of children, city or area of residence, profession, education and even details about their appearance were excluded from the description of each individual couple and singles. What did they look like? Were they attractive? People outside of swinging often asked me this question that I could not answer without revealing specific details about individuals. For example, I could not describe whether someone was African, Asian, Arabic, Russian, while adding more details (wore glasses, had tattoos, blond curly hair), was in his 20's, in her 70's. The details of their appearance were not revealed here to protect their identities.

For the protection of the participants, I had to provide abstract descriptions and rely primarily on interviews and only some observations. This was done because this stigmatized

and marginalized community of people, especially in Andalusia, Spain, may already be subject to social and employment exclusion. In addition, I reiterated to the participants that none of the specifics would be included in their individual cases, but rather as general data. The reason why I did not include specific nationalities in each particular case, for instance, was because had there been (hypothetically speaking) only one Indian or only one African American woman in clubs in Andalusia between the years of 2018 and 2020, - this would have been one identifiable detail, even if this woman was not Indian but Indonesian, connecting this detail with her marital status and her approximate age (in her 30's, for example), would already create unnecessary questions and possible gossip among the permanent residents in this small community. The result was that I would potentially misrepresent swingers because I did not provide a description of them. This was a definite but unavoidable limitation in this study.

Writing is something that can be incredibly revealing to others. I wanted to reveal everything but the identity, and how to remove the identity completely without removing the feelings, the experience, the sexual act, the linguistic repertoire, the connection between us, and the setting itself – was a skill I tried to improve upon throughout this work, rewriting, and editing all the time. I would have liked to present a specific table of demographics, such as the one below, from Vaillancourt and Few-Demo's study on 10 swinger couples (2014, 4). However, due to some of the participants' explicit requests not to reveal the details of their nationality and profession, together, for example, - I had to refrain from creating such a specific table, and created separate tables, one for nationality, another for profession. In addition to excluding specific details and specific descriptions about each couple and swingles, I changed some of the participants' pseudonyms 1-3 times during the writing process as a protective measure. When I was not happy with the pseudonym because it sounded too ethnic or because it sounded gender neutral, I changed the pseudonym to adapt to the needs of readers in other countries as well as to protect the anonymity of the participants. I was not able to use Spanish names as pseudonyms because there were many participants in my study with Spanish or Hispanic names, and this would create confusion for me and for the participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Couple #	Names	Age	Race Ethnicity	Spiritual/Religious Practices	Occupation	Education	Annual Income	Children	Years Married	Years Swinging	Freq. of Swinging
Couple 1	Cherisse	24	White	Christian	Teacher	MS	US\$35,000	No	4	3	1× every 1–2 months
	Drew	33	White	None	Fed. Govt.	BS	US\$35,000	No	4	6	1× every 1–2 months
Couple 2	Rachel	34	White	None	Homemaker	HS	US\$0	Yes, age 9	11	2.5	1× per month
	Martin	35	White	None	Police officer	Some college	US\$85,000	Yes, age 9	11	2.5	1× per month
Couple 3	Rose	26	White	Catholic	Structural engineer	MS	US\$46,000	No	5	4	1× every 2 months
	Gene	29	Pacific Islander	Christian	Teacher	BA	US\$30,000	No	5	4	1× every 2 months
Couple 4	Kitty	45	White	Christian	Admin. assistant	HS	US\$35,000	Yes, aged 16/18	21	2	1× per month
	Spoke	45	White	Christian	Air force	Assoc. degree	US\$42,000	Yes, aged 16/18	21	2	1× per month
Couple 5	Carrie	31	White	Catholic	Tax professional	BS	US\$85,000	Yes, aged 3/5/9	6	1.25	1× per week
	Harley	30	White	Catholic	Government	Assoc. degree	US\$85,000	Yes, aged 3/5/9	6	1.25	1× per week
Couple 6	Dee	34	White	Wiccan	Disabled veteran and Student	Some college	US\$17,000	No	1.5	1	1× per week
	Melvin	22	White	"Just a good person"	Mechanic and student	Some college	US\$17,000	No	1.5	1	1× per week
Couple 7	Jennifer	34	White	Christian	Administrator	Some college	US\$35,000	Yes, aged 3/9	3.5	1	1× every 2–3 months
	Stan	36	White	Christian	Military	Tech. school	US\$30,000	Yes, aged 3/9	3.5	1	1× every 2–3 months
Couple 8	Sally	33	White	No practices	Insurance	Some college	US\$26,000	Yes, aged 1.5/4/6/9	5	3	1× every 6 months
	Frank	36	White	No practices	Student/stay-at-home dad	Some college	\$0	Yes, aged 1.5/4/6/9	5	3	1× every 6 months
Couple 9	Marie	34	Native American	Pagan	Stay-at-home mom	HS	No response	Yes, aged 4/13/16/18	6	6	1× every 3–4 months
	Kristov	41	Multiracial—Hispanic	Pagan	Student	Some college	No response	Yes, aged 2/4/9/10/13/16/18	6	6	1× every 3–4 months
Couple 10	Johnnie	29	Native American/White	Wiccan	Retired/disabled	Assoc. degree	US\$20,000	Yes, aged 7/9	11	10.5	1× every week
	Frances	30	White/Hispanic/Black ancestry	Agnostic	Customer service Rep.	Some college	US\$20,000	Yes, aged 7/9	11	10.5	1× every week

Anonymization was a process that took time and effort, but even after I anonymized data, I felt that I had to protect their privacy even more. At times, I felt more comfortable saying “one participant” instead of using a pseudonym because it would separate any identifiers from the participant, leaving only the experience and the words for the analysis. This was because, especially towards the end of my writing I realized how much they shared with me and the scope of the risk if someone was to identify them in this work, even if it was other swingers within the same setting.

My advisor, Dr. Juan F. Gamella never saw the official list of names, signed consent forms, or details and real names of participants, only pseudonyms and anonymized data, which I changed several times throughout the writing of the thesis. He received different versions with new pseudonyms.

In addition to all this process of anonymization, I had to exclude all specific information or descriptions about each individual or couple. I did not describe each individual person’s or couple’s age, profession, education level, culture, language. More

specifically, I could not even describe how a woman, or a man was attractive without writing details about her or him. Particularities about people are what makes them interesting (and attractive), but this was precisely what also makes them recognizable. Protecting participants' identities made me feel impotent as a writer because I was restricted to what they said and what they did, and even that had to be filtered because it was too revealing.

Sometimes throughout the analysis, I would mention that the participant was Spanish, but this was because this sample was largely Spanish, and most interviews were conducted in Spanish, most participants spoke Spanish, - thereby making identification difficult when one considers the population of Spain and the study being conducted in Spain. Another example was the number of children each participant had.

While protecting participants' identities, I was not able to analyze what they said within their specific cultural contexts and backgrounds. Doing so would risk revealing details about their specific culture, while substituting this culture with another one would be misleading. For example, a Ukrainian does not have the same history, language, and culture as a Russian, even though these countries are geographically close. A Kazakh woman has a different language, culture and religion from a Russian, even though these countries are geographically close.

Most of the original interview excerpts were not included as footnotes due to a similar reason. If I were to include the original quote in its original language, such as Russian, there would be a greater chance of identification. This is especially true when my place of residence and fieldwork was already known to many people and considering that we already know the exact location of Cap d'Agde, France as well. When one is considering the number of minority cultures in swinger settings, - the risk of identification is even greater.

CHAPTER 4: COUPLE PERCEPTIONS - SHARING THE ONE YOU LOVE

The first time we went to a swinger club, it was a disaster for both of us...because she didn't know how... what to do, how to react.... and me neither. I remember that the first time, she was with a guy... we were with a couple, then she was with a guy... and I got these jealous thoughts, deadly jealous thoughts... 'please, please, don't do it, don't do it' - this was how I felt, you know. And she told me later, 'I wanted you to hold me, that's what I wished for', - 'why didn't you tell me?' I asked her. 'That you rescued me...grabbed me'... and I was like 'had you told me, we wouldn't have had such a horrible time'. And we got in the car, and we said, 'well... so we've tried swinging, right? That's it'. And that was our first night.¹⁸

Jacob, couple

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes couples' dynamics, or the organizational dynamics of swinger couples. This also includes cuckold couples, where the man is interested in fantasizing and watching his wife with another man. No female cuckolds were included in this study, and I have yet to meet one. I observed and spent time with couples on an average of 20 hours a week for 18 months. I listened to their problems and challenges, and I was able to observe them interact with each other both in social situations, and during their sexual practices. I specifically chose active couples because the couples who were not active did not consider themselves swingers, or were only watching, dancing and socializing without participating in exchanges. They did not volunteer for the study either. Each couple was treated as a unit, and analyzed together, while most couples were interviewed separately. The following were common themes found while analyzing couples: breaking the established rules or transgressing one's own boundaries; lack of compatibility during swaps; not belonging in the swinger world; growing apart; being a female initiator and expanding into polyamory.

¹⁸ Cuando fuimos por primera vez a un club, fue un desastre para los dos... porque ella no sabía cómo... comportarse, o sea, como responder... y yo tampoco. Y yo me acuerdo... que la primera vez... ella se fue con un chico... estuvimos con una pareja, después se fue con un chico... y yo estaba con unos celos de muerte... unos celos muy muy grandes (o graves) ... 'por favor, por favor, no lo hagas, no lo hagas'... así estaba, sabes... Y ella me dijo después, 'yo estaba deseando que tú me agarraras' - 'pues joder, pues habérmelo dicho, coño'.... 'que tú me cogieras... me rescataras'... y yo 'pues habérmelo dicho y no lo hubiéramos pasado malamente'. Y nos montamos en el coche y nos dijimos, 'bueno'... ya hemos experimentado de swinger, ¿no? Hasta aquí. Esa fue la primera noche.

4.2 Organizational Dynamics in Couples

4.2.1 Establishing Rules from the Start

Lourdes and Edgar met in a swinger club. They have been swingles for a few years, or on their own in clubs, meeting with couples, and other single men and women. Being on the same wavelength or familiarizing oneself with the norms of the club as well as deciding what one wants in a swinging partner – all this can be acquired by being part of a setting or a network. Being part of the swinger world', by going to clubs or parties, and interacting with people who are also on the same wavelength would contribute to the internalization of values, norms, and rules of a swingle. This couple had already acquired a swinging network, knowledge, and experiences prior to meeting each other. Edgar considered meeting Lourdes inside a swinger club a definite advantage.

What helped us a lot is that we met in the (swinger) setting. One of the most dangerous things is if one is from the setting, and the other is not... You must talk to each other from the start, if you are going to have an emotional relationship; it will be inside the setting. And I more than agreed on this issue. She did comment that she preferred that we moved as one unit in the settings, except if one of us went with people that we already knew, and then she would know where I was. And well, sometimes, I go alone to the club, but it is something I do sporadically, but we talk about everything, the truth is everything is agreed upon, the limits one sets, what one cannot do.

Edgar, couple

Edgar and Lourdes' relationship reflected that of many couples who had a solid relationship and were clear from the start about what they wanted. This couple identified as swingers and identified clearly the separation between their love and relationship, and the recreational sex they find in clubs. Because of their established framework, they were able to further agree on clear boundaries when meeting each other. They could have disagreed, for instance, on several important points, such as, for example, even though affection and tenderness form

part of her swinger affective vocabulary when being with other people, Lourdes rejected the term 'polyamory' completely:

For me someone who is polyamorous would not be going to a swinger club and doing swaps. It is simply a person who, emotionally, is having more than one relationship. Polyamory – I see that as completely different from what we do, and something we will never be. I want to be with him. I want to wake up next to him every day, not 'today I wake up with him, and tomorrow I wake up with her'. No, I don't understand that concept, I don't like it.

Lourdes, couple

Both Lourdes and Edgar made it clear that their emotional relationship was an exclusive one. Another point of agreement they had was meeting people outside of their relationship. Lourdes did have an understanding that before her, Edgar had female friends, or "friends with benefits". While there was no possibility of an emotional relationship with these women, there was friendship or a friendly affection. Lourdes told me that she felt a lot better when she knew the woman and could trust that this woman did not have any other intentions aside from the sexual friendship.

When I met Edgar, he had some friends.... a group of 2 or 3 women... that he would get together with and had a lot of affection for. I told one of them, 'you're like my mother-in-law, you're like my mom'. But, well, I know that this woman was there before me, but she knows that I am his partner. A few times she even sent me a WhatsApp, 'Hey, Lourdes, why don't we get together, and meet, I really want to talk to Edgar'. 'Well, meet with him, there's no problem'. But of course, this is not hooking up, this is simply fucking, like I told you, it is this affection you have with a person, it is not love, it's not hooking up, it is simply... appreciation.

Lourdes, couple

This rule or agreement ran parallel to what Lourdes referred to as “being able to talk to the person you have sex within swinger clubs” or “feeling some tenderness for this person”. All this was part of the affection, which did not, in Lourdes’ eyes, enter the field of polyamory where emotional love for the other was part of this relationship. Both Lourdes and Edgar were in unison about the need for affection while drawing a line at the point of having feelings for another. Lourdes compared the cold aspect of Cap d’Agde where everything moved so fast, meeting a large amount of people, compressed into a short amount of time at parties, and then not having the time to have a drink, or go out to eat together, so that ‘it is not so cold’.

4.2.2 The Rule of Open Communication

As did other participants in this study, Edgar and Lourdes placed communication and trust as pillars of a successful swinging relationship. They tied this directly to managing jealousy. In his previous relationship, uncontrollable jealousy was very much part of the reason that Edgar broke up with his girlfriend who was constantly jealous. With Lourdes, he did not want jealousy to become a destructive force in their relationship:

Edgar: One can say, ‘look, I am a little bit jealous’. I would say, ‘Relax, don’t worry. It is nothing’. Of course, because there is the belief that if you don’t get jealous, it means you don’t love the person. And it is a very unhealthy belief. The idea that ‘if you are not jealous, you don’t love me’ - has nothing to do with reality. I am a very calm person, I don’t like to argue, and I don’t like to fight. I prefer to get along instead of having a conflict. I hate hate hate fighting. I can’t stand having jealousy in my life. And had my girlfriend been jealous, we would not be together.

Interviewer: One can conceal (feeling jealous).

Edgar: Conceal... (pauses) That’s something I would not want, for her to swallow jealous feelings, and be quiet about them. Because that’s about pleasing the other person and it is not healthy. This is something that stays inside of you, you know. If she felt a lot of jealousy, and I knew that it was hurting her, I would not be able to be with her, because it would be suffering. It’s like saying, well, we are in the swinger

world, he fucks other women, I feel incredibly jealous, but I swallow it so that he would be happy'. This would not be fair. There are a lot of couples where the man wrongly pushes the woman into this world when she does not want it. And this is not right.

Edgar, couple

Perhaps Edgar's comment about having a distinct belief system, one that does not tie jealousy into the love equation, was directly related to the previous section about established rules from the start. If both members of the couple agree on having a different belief system, such as the one Edgar (as well as other swinger couples) proposed, then this belief system was then supported by the rule or agreement of honesty and trust. Even though there were rules that were flexible, this rule of honesty and trust was non-negotiable for most couples in this study.

4.2.3 The Rule of Sporadic Attendance

Emily and Alfred started swinging immediately after they started their relationship. In Alfred's case, there was no danger having repeated sexual encounters, because they were so sporadic. They had clear and definite boundaries, as they only participated in swinging every few months. I asked Alfred if there was danger in repeating sex with the same person, to which Alfred responded:

Zero danger. Why? Because we go there very sporadically and because I am very certain about who I love. We don't do it like other couples we've met, who go to clubs every single weekend. For us, it is an extra – we don't need it.

Alfred, couple

When I met them, I thought that they were very much in love. Some may doubt this love, claiming that if you love someone, you will not want to have sex with anyone else, the thought would be repulsive. However, this couple's adoring attention was touching and tender. The way that Alfred explained it, the separation between the physical and the

emotional was clear from the start, for both of them, and this was the main reason why he did not view swinging as dangerous:

I am thinking, as an example, of a person who I am really into, physically, she attracts me a lot, but I don't go beyond the physical attraction, or sex. Why? Because I am in love with my wife: we understand each other incredibly well, I really like her physically as well, I love her mind, her body language, everything about her. And the other woman, well, I like her physically, I like to have sex with her, I like to have a good time, but that's it, that's where I draw the line. I don't have any thoughts beyond the sexual relationship.

Alfred, couple

It seemed logical. Sporadic or limited meetings prevented the risk of developing feelings for someone or falling in love. Many swinger couples established particular, limited timeframes where they did not spend more than 1-3 hours with extra-dyadic sexual partner, for example, and therefore, had much less of a chance to know them better, get close to them emotionally, and fall in love. Some couples, such as Emily and Alfred, did not ever move to the next step of seeing people separately, while other couples, who ventured into more sporadic attendance, later decided that spending time with other people was also harmless, and did not actually mean that one could fall in love - "Falling in love is unpredictable, you could fall in love with someone on the street, a passerby, and that's it", as one participant told me.

4.3 Dynamics in Cuckold Couples

4.3.1 Audrey and Derek – Managing Threesomes

Audrey and her husband Derek mostly practiced threesomes and often looked for single men on swinger websites and in clubs. Derek's fantasy revolved around watching Audrey with other men. Even talking about it excited him deeply, and when they were at home, making love, he would ask her to tell him about another man, how she would seduce him, go over to his house, how she would have sex with someone.

Audrey also enjoyed this fantasy, but it was often difficult for her to find men she found attractive. This had a lot to do with other characteristics, not only physical ones. She enjoyed talking with someone who was extroverted, someone who could hold a conversation with you, for example. While for Derek, the cuckold experience was purely sexual, Audrey was more selective and because of this, it was unlikely for Audrey to engage in multiple partner sex as her husband desired. In her interview (Derek was sitting nearby), she commented that she did enjoy it most when it was just one man and her husband:

I enjoy meeting with one man (and my husband), but well, sometimes Derek says, 'no, let's go in with 4 guys' because he loves to watch me surrounded by men, and I think that in the end, especially when it comes to a group of men, they look for their own pleasure, and if there is a group of men, and they start to penetrate you, well, ok, for a little while it is ok, but... in the end, you just get fed up because you get to a point where you stop enjoying yourself. And that's when, you're not enjoying the situation.

Audrey, couple

It seemed that one part of the problem Audrey described was not being aroused by each man, not being attracted to all the men simultaneously, physically or emotionally. A second issue was not receiving pleasure. Audrey complained that in these situations, what one would call a "gangbang", men were not interested in pleasing her, but were more likely to focus on their own pleasure. A third issue had to do with men getting the wrong idea and wanting to meet with her alone.

A lot of times men... start to take the wrong turn, try to get you to meet them alone. One time, a guy told me, 'but if we can meet alone', so then one cuts it off quickly. A guy told me that he fell in love with me, well, it is things one says, and in the end, it is someone who does not really know you, because someone who you just met, you went out, fucked, well, I will feel something, but he doesn't know you and should not say, 'it is just that I fell in love with you' - you do not even know me! The person

that lives with you, on a daily basis, knows your circumstances, your family, and everything that is your life – that person knows you.

Audrey, couple

Derek did not feel threatened by the very handsome men his wife had sex with. Sometimes they were amazing lovers – hot and tender, generous and hard, long-lasting and passionate. Audrey has had several lovers like that, whom she liked a lot, so much that she would tell Derek as soon as a man she liked came into the club, ‘make sure he doesn’t go anywhere’ or ‘watch him’. This possessiveness only lasted up until she had an orgasm with him, and then she was ok with letting go of him. She spent the whole time up until that moment kissing him and holding his beautiful body. Derek did not ever feel less than this beautiful man, did not try to get rid of him, and the whole time talked about what a great turn on it is for him. He even wanted men to meet with them outside of the club, to have sex with Audrey in the back of their car, for him to watch. For Derek, it was the opposite of jealousy - the sexual excitement from the situation seemed to act as a positive force in their relationship, reinforced by open communication, trust and love for each other.

Audrey and Derek never told anyone that they go to swinger clubs, only that they go out on the weekends. They both preferred it this way, even though it was not an easy task if you had books at home, a lot of sexy clothing (to go out at night), sex toys, plus pictures and videos. If someone knew you well, or lived with you – family, they were bound to start to wonder. Audrey shared these doubts with me during her interview:

My mother does not approve of us going out so much. Previously, when I was married, with children, you never go out, you are always home with your children. So, now, she thinks it is strange that we go out so much. She would ask the other couples, ‘and how do you know my daughter?’

Audrey, couple

Derek also expressed the need for secrecy as forming part of the eroticism, - it was much more interesting when it was a secret. However, after a few years, Audrey and Derek started

to have more swinger couple friends and meet with them outside of the club. Both Audrey and Derek claimed they left their non-swinger friends gradually, or after negative comments from these friends about their private life, simply because they started to have more in common with swinger friends, such as sharing experiences of the night at the club, for example.

I often felt that it was Derek who was more open about his feelings, because he often voiced his frustrations to me. On nights that were less sexually stimulating, he was openly telling me that he wished Audrey was more flexible, "I wish she was more like you" he would tell me. Derek would then share with me, in front of his wife, that when he goes home frustrated like this, he doesn't even want to have sex with her. Sometimes he complained that his wife was too shy. Audrey, however, would maintain quiet about the matter, or would just say that there was no one that caught her eye that night. Her criticism was mainly directed towards the single men, and not being able to connect with them.

There are a lot of men that come only to fuck, and they suggest things like, 'if only I could be alone with you' and I tell them, 'excuse me, but you did not just meet with me, you met with a couple'. And if not, you should look for a single woman. Don't seek out a couple. I think a lot of men are not aware of where they are. A lot of men can't get it up because having a man next to them intimidates them.

Audrey, couple

The clash between Derek's desires which could not be completely fulfilled, Audrey's selectivity, and the single men's lack of sensitivity – all contributed to this couple's dissatisfaction on some nights, while on other nights they seemed to be in tune with each other's desires, and suddenly, a man would enter Audrey's fancy, and then, everyone was happy.

4.3.2 Diana and Nathan: The Cuckold Game

Diana reported that she was introduced into swinging by her husband Nathan almost on their first date, and ever since, he always only wanted to watch her be with men (and himself),

never interested in women for himself. In the following excerpt, Diana told the story of their first or second date, when Nathan introduced her to swinging as a surprise. The initiation began at a party which began with a dinner, as it was often customary among swingers:

We had a nice dinner, there were a lot of people there, especially a lot of girls. And after the dinner, I started seeing strange things, such as the girls taking off their clothes, doing a strip tease, dancing in a very sexy way. And I thought, how was it possible that the women were so free, so open? And then later, they started to fuck. Me, I thought, ‘what do I do? - I have a partner who is a foreigner (in her country)’. He was foreign, of course, I wasn’t to these things. It was the first time. What I did was, my reaction was... I was scared and excited, between those two... And I started to dance as well, and to take off my clothes. Without understanding what was going on. I thought, all the girls are doing it, I’m going to do it too. And I felt very free, very happy, I don’t know, it was a very strange feeling. I didn’t do anything that night, the other girls did, with other couples, the couples swapped, for me it was a shock. I took off my clothes and started to dance alone, and there were other men who were watching me, but I was afraid that someone would touch me.

When we left, that’s when I told my partner ‘Well, explain to me – what is this?’ He started to explain to me, how a ‘liberal’ couple lives, that all those couples were ‘liberal’, and ‘liberal’ couples have a very strong relationship, and they can exchange sexual partners, they can play with other couples, women can be with a lot of men, he explained to me all this. And then, I had to choose – to get rid of this man and see this world as sick, or to give in, with all my cultural background, my origins, my education, and to experience freedom. And surely enough, I chose freedom. So, I stayed with him, and I enjoyed it a lot, the ‘liberal’ world. And this was how it all began.

Diana, couple

Diana told me that she never “entered the game of jealousy” as Nathan did. For him, it was a game, where he felt a little jealous but also exciting. For her, she never went there – she

just enjoyed sex with people, both men and women. For her, it was about exclusivity – Nathan was with her, and she did not want to allow for anything else:

I am not jealous. For instance, if he went out with another girl, to a brothel, behind my back, and if I didn't know about it, - I would leave him, I wouldn't get jealous. I would leave him, that's it, I wouldn't cry, I would leave him because I wouldn't like it. If one day he wants to be with someone, with another person, then he should leave me.

Diana, couple

Diana said that some people thought that she was with Nathan for his money, when people saw them on the street, because he looked older. Nathan was always elegant, the way he dressed, the way he walked, although in his talk, he was often talking about sex, he said he had sex on his mind all day long – he wanted to know about other people's sex stories, he was always joking or talking about sex.

Diana was a very attractive, sensual woman who was often surrounded by men in swinger clubs, having a group of men following her, at any given moment, her husband included. Some men asked, 'who is this man?' and she told them 'it is my husband', with a little mischievous smile. In a club, Nathan had this quiet demeanor about him, almost like a shadow lurking in the back, behind a curtain, in the corners of the club. This was part of his eroticism and fantasy. He followed his wife, as she danced around the pole, flirting with the men, seducing them, getting them to come closer. He let her do that; he would wait while she seduced them and when they would start to surround her or start to touch her - that's when Nathan would get closer. Diana performed fellatio on one, two, three or more men, having sex from the back, surrounded by three, four, five men. Her husband would join in when everyone was already excited, or finished, or both. Maybe this was part of their play. Maybe Diana did not want the men to be uncomfortable, as she told me in her interview – the men felt uncomfortable that her husband was there, lurking in the back.

After some years swinging, there was a disagreement between them, directly related to the mechanisms in their cuckold game. According to Diana, she did not want to be

watched throughout the whole process – she wanted to be on her own (and then come home and tell her partner, or not tell). I think that what she meant was that she felt constrained within a formula that Nathan set up for them, and that she previously enjoyed and agreed with, but now wanted to break free from it only for one night per week. This problem led Diana to want to break up with Nathan, and they did break up several times, but then got back together again. She admitted that Nathan was afraid to lose her and did not want her to go without him. His idea, for example, was to go to a nightclub with her, or wherever she wanted to go, and watch from a distance how she met men, how she brought them home, to watch them and then participate. Eventually, Nathan decided to give her more freedom, and she was able to have time to herself, where she would go out, dance, meet new people, and have sex with men on her own. She would take trips alone or with her girlfriends, where she would go to clubs and enjoy herself.

4.3.3 Tiffany and Jacob – Preventing Danger Zone

Tiffany and Jacob both claimed that they wanted to see each other happy, and this was related to their logic of swinging. For Jacob, it was always about sharing or feeling her happiness, pleasure and joy in swinging: “How would you want to see your partner – sad and bitter in the morning?” he asked me during his interview. “When you wake up, happy, this lasts the whole day. And I love her so much, I want the best for her, and this is what makes her happy, well... What’s the problem? Our fantasies are a reality for us”.¹⁹ For Jacob, watching Tiffany excited him and created a connection with her – before, during and after the sexual experience:

The point is seeing it (watching her). It is like when someone tells a joke, the juice is in seeing it, who laughs, or who doesn’t. Well, for us, the excitement is... it turns me

¹⁹ ¿Tú cómo quieres ver a tu pareja – triste y amargado por la mañana? Cuando tú te levantas feliz por la mañana – eso te dura todo el día. Y como yo la quiero tanto, y quiero lo mejor para ella... y eso le hace feliz, pues... ¿Dónde está el problema? Nosotros tenemos una ventaja, que nuestras fantasías son realidad.

on so much to see her, or that she sees me doing it with someone else. And then, when we get home and fuck, we think in what we did in the club.²⁰

Jacob, couple

Seeing people outside of swinging was something Tiffany suggested after they started to go to clubs:

I say to Jacob - let's meet people separately, 'maybe someone you know that you could meet' and he says no no no no, because I am afraid that you will fall in love with someone'. That's what he tells me. And I tell him, 'we can't be afraid that that will happen', it can happen any day of the week with anyone, 'you can't live with this fear'. It's just that, we are all travelers, we are all souls. That's the way I see it. Love is.... sharing... the moment. For me, sharing... is with everyone. There is the monogamous love, - that's what Jacob and I have... monogamous love. Love, but not in sex. But did you know that love, you can give it to everyone, at the same time? Love is so large that it can be for everyone.

Tiffany, couple

In the beginning, she told Jacob how "I was inside a cage for years, I don't want to be locked up again". When they met, Jacob asked her what she looked for in a relationship, and she said, "I want to experiment", so he said, "come I will show you a place", and he took her to a swinger club. The first time she was very jealous, and it was very hard to be there. But with time, going again and again, it was more and more fun and now they go in, and may not even see each other for hours.

²⁰ La comidilla es verlo. Como también el que cuenta el chiste, la comidilla es verlo, quien se ríe, o no se ríe, claro. Pues, el morbo para nosotros... a mí me da mucho morbo verla a ella, o que ella me vea haciéndolo con otro, o con otra, lo que sea, me da mucho morbo. Y después cuando llegamos a casa y follamos, y pensamos en lo que hemos hecho, eso...

Jacob would probably say, 'you only make love to me... I am your partner', but I would say, 'one can make love to everyone... but with you it is stronger than with others'. I do recognize the electricity I feel with Jacob... is a lot stronger than with other electricities. There is electricity and magic – that for me is sex. To interchange energies. Let everything flow... whatever comes up. It is the moment... naughtiness, I don't know, I don't know. I don't plan it, the dance....

Tiffany, couple

Despite her desire to experiment with people outside of clubs and without his presence, Jacob was against it. To him, it broke with the logic of swinging:

What I would not like, and we talked a lot about this, Tiffany and I... for example, I meet with you, just you and I, and she meets with another person... and for that, I would prefer not meeting at all, because then it becomes a dangerous game, because, then there comes a moment when you don't even see each other – 'you know, I am meeting this guy'. So what is the relationship based on? We end up sharing nothing, if you Will go out with one, and I will go out with another, what is the point of being together? I think what is beautiful about being a swinger... it is the advantage of doing what you want in front of your partner... you know? And sharing it with her.

21

Jacob, couple

For Jacob, meeting someone separately broke with the concept of sharing and this was anti-swinger. Whether their relationship went through difficult times because Jacob wanted to

²¹ ...que no me gustaría a mí hacer, y lo hemos hablado mucho de eso Tiffany y yo, eso de... yo quedo contigo, solo tú y yo, y ella queda con otra persona... es que para eso mejor no estar con nadie, entiendes... porque es que eso ya es un juego un poco peligroso, porque es que, claro, es que llega un momento a lo mejor, que es que ya ni os veis. Es que he quedado con fulanito. ¿Entonces en que se basa la relación? ¿No estamos compartiendo nada, tú te vas a salir con uno, y yo me voy a salir con otra? ¿Para qué estamos juntos? Entonces yo creo que lo bonito de ser swinger...es hacer que también es una ventaja de poder hacer lo que tú quieras delante de tu pareja... ¿sabes? Y compartirlo con tu pareja.

continue to go to clubs, while Tiffany fantasized about meeting men separately, - I did not ask, but I believed that there were things that did not tell me, or what they did to resolve this issue. Perhaps they did not do anything, and Tiffany remained with her fantasy. Half-jokingly, Jacob said to me, “the only bad thing about being a swinger is... all the fantasies.... I mean, all sexual fantasies... nearly all... you will have realized”²². In this sense, perhaps there was nothing wrong with having a few fantasies left.

4.4 Kathy and Owen: Breaking the Rules

Kathy and Owen have been swingers for over 15 years. This was one of the few couples who talked to their family and friends about being swingers, in addition to being very open about their sexuality to other people, even strangers. They did not care to keep their sexuality a secret to the world. This decision was in sync with an openness and the transgression of sexual limits, social limits, and romantic limits in their relationship as well. Owen told me that in this past year and a half, they “broke nearly all the taboos and I still want to break some more”. He made an analogy of this transformation, comparing this to life stages, or stages that occur “every 8, every 10 years, as if closing cycles, maybe every 7 years, or if you are younger, every 4 years”. Owen talked about this in terms of a spiritual awakening, or mystical powers, which he called “superpowers”²³ that made them feel “like breaking chains, chakras, I don’t know, we have liberated ourselves so much, so much. I cannot even recognize myself”. When asked about these superpowers, Owen described that his love for Kathy was bigger, there was more trust as well, they experimented barebacking (sex without a condom with other partners), - something that Owen thought of as the most forbidden.

Owen analyzed this past year as the happiest one with his wife, a year with less arguments, while sharing “a complicity”²⁴ with her or sharing an understanding of doing something forbidden. Openness to polyamory, to barebacking (sex without a condom with other people), same-sex practices – these practices ran parallel or were brought forth by experimenting with MDMA and cocaine, said Owen. Owen was optimistic about these

²² lo único malo que tiene de ser swinger... es... que todos los sueños... o sea, que todos los sueños sexuales... casi todos... los tienes cumplidos...

²³ Superpoderes (in Spanish)

²⁴ Complicidad (in Spanish)

experiences. He claimed that in his life achievements, and his career... he had to have order, physical and financial, to continue to accomplish what he set out to do. And this was also one of his goals this past year – to create order in his life and continue to achieve his dreams.

While Owen's interview dealt with transformation, Kathy's interview was very emotional in that she cried several times and I wanted to reach out, feeling her sadness on several levels. It was as if we went into a cave, together, and dug out all the past sorrows in her relationship with Owen. Was it my choice or hers? I let her talk freely, although at the end of the interview, she said to me... "well, this wasn't so much about sex"...

First, Kathy was jealous about Owen's relationship with this other woman, which he maintained openly. Even though they talked about sharing a relationship, or living with a man or a woman together, - this was not what Kathy had in mind: "His modus operandi was to tell me when it was already done, so that if I did say no, it would not mess up his plan, just in case I would say no". Instead of asking her, he would just go on and do it first, and not just have sex, but have an involvement with this woman.

Another aspect was Owen's way of controlling her that she was not happy with: "he forbid me to meet with guys (separately)". This applied to the female lovers that Kathy had as well. She would end up breaking up with them because he insisted. Third, and probably the most important, Kathy was insecure about not being good enough for him, and that the other woman or other women, would take her place. Somehow, this was related to the way that Owen gave preference to the other woman, and Kathy felt left out. Despite all these challenges, Kathy did want to see other people, and her claim was that swinging was too restricted, although polyamory was very challenging as well:

Interviewer: You have an open relationship.

Kathy: Yes, it is open. I have resisted a lot and we were on the verge of... breaking up several times because of this... because I resisted quite a lot... to open the relationship, to do things separately.

Interviewer: You did not want to.

Kathy: No.

Interviewer: Why?

Kathy: Because I get jealous. Because... I like doing things with my partner, and swinging was for sharing something with him. When he does it separately, I don't like it.

Kathy, couple

These boundaries were often crossed by both parties, on the verge of a separation. The fear of losing, of not being able to control the situation was present in Kathy's account, but observing them together, one could think otherwise. While playing in group, I observed how attentive Owen was with Kathy by touching her, caressing her all the time, watching her, not leaving her alone even for a minute with other, handsome men who wanted to be with her. The need to be there, to be present while the other men were there near their wives was something several swinger men had in common. Furthermore, Kathy talked about reporting back her adventures to Owen as a requirement. She sent him pictures and videos of her escapades when they were not together, and she did not always want to do this, was this necessary, she asked. After some time, they made up, as Owen stopped seeing this other woman, "for everyone's mental health"²⁵ as he explained it. His lingering, or indecision, was what caused the problem, or the time it took for him to make this decision not to be with the other woman.

4.5 Rachel and Theo – Strength of the Union

Rachel and Theo were established swingers. The idea of introducing new people was whispered by Theo while there were in bed, and Rachel opened to it almost immediately after. They both had a very clear and distinct position, separating sexual play from emotional involvement, for years, and theirs was a partnership grounded in common home, children, family, hobbies and careers. In the following, Theo explained a situation where both he and Rachel had to draw the line when it came to another person wanting emotional involvement with Theo.

²⁵ Por la salud mental de todos (in Spanish)

Theo: There was a party, and I don't remember if Rachel was with the partner of this woman, but then the woman and I were alone, and in the beginning it was to have sex, and on the third time, well she wrote to me and she told me that she wanted a more continuous relationship.... and that she felt very good being with me, and that she wanted to be with me. I told Rachel, and we thought, analyzing it a bit, that this woman wanted a more serious relationship than a swinging one, and so I met with her and I told her that I didn't want this type of relationship and did not want to continue this path. And that's it.

Interviewer: How did Rachel react?

Theo: Rachel thought that if this relationship continued it could be dangerous for our relationship, she said that obviously I am the one that will make the decision according to what I thought best, but she clearly did not like it. Rachel told me that. So I told her that I agreed that this could place... well, we didn't know, I didn't know what I was getting myself into, I mean, I knew how it started, but I didn't know how it would end, and because I didn't want to have another type of relationship, well, the best thing was ... to break it off. Also, I wanted to talk to this woman in person, have a drink with her, and speak with her face to face, and Rachel told me that.... she would not do it this way, that she would simply send a message, and I told her no, I was going to meet with her. I think that Rachel did not agree with me on this, but she didn't say anything, so I did meet with the woman, and we went to have a beer and we talked.

Theo, couple

When Theo told the woman, she reacted well to the message, and did not insist, and it was over. Most importantly, Theo not only listened to Rachel's request but always kept his relationship with his wife as the only important one, where all decisions, even intimate ones, were made together, keeping with the guidelines of communication, trust, transparency.

On the other hand, even though Theo had never fallen in love with another woman, it seemed to me that crossing the danger zone into loving 2 people would have been the next question for Theo, a question I failed to ask. It was interesting that it was Rachel that viewed the danger zone and not Theo, who did not even know if it would lead there, or if he would

only experience affection for this woman. Should it not have been his choice, and not the decision of his wife?

Limiting the number of times with sexual partners was the norm in swinger settings, and there were several explanations for this. One obvious explanation was not wanting to allow for the emotional contact to develop. The other explanation was simply not experiencing the intensity of a first or second meeting and maintaining the intimacy with one's stable partner.

Theo explained this in the following:

Theo: When you have been with a woman 2 or 3 times, you still like to be with her, but you don't have the desire as you did the first times. And well, you start to look for other people. We call it 'being promiscuous' and that's how we are.

Interviewer: Your wife is the same way?

Theo: Yes, and curiously enough, this does not occur with your partner. With my partner, I never get tired of being with her.

Interviewer: How do you explain this?

Theo: Well, I understand why with your partner, there is 'something more', call it love if you like, this makes you something more so that you are very much an accomplice. This is why you don't get tired of being with her.

Interviewer: Maybe it is because you know each other so well, and there is more love with time.

Theo: It is possible, but I assure you that when you have sex with your partner, there are a series of nuances that, being with another woman many times, would appear as well. I have had the experience of having sex with my partner, let's say, thousands of times, and with other women, at most 6 or 7 times with the same woman. A series of nuances that show up with her that don't show up with other women.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?

Theo: I don't know how to describe it to you. A caress with your partner says a lot and transmits a lot... with another woman, well, caresses transmit less. Why does it

happen that way? I don't know, I don't know. But it happens to a lot of swinger couples.

Theo, couple

What Theo may have suggested was that having sex with someone over time could potentially allow for a depth of feelings that would be tied into sexual experience with that person, and if one allowed for it to grow, then one could possibly have it.

This couples' main concern was the men's behavior, which was often impertinent or inconsiderate of the norms of couples, single women, and swinger clubs. Theo and Rachel traveled to Cap d'Agde every year. When asked to compare, Theo claimed that the French men in Cap d'Agde were very familiar with these roles. He gave an example of how men in Cap d'Agde were more considerate, something that Theo claimed happened a lot less in Spain:

Rachel does not speak French, a man who wants to hook up with her, usually watches her, because Rachel wants to hook up with this guy. They start. They find themselves with a language barrier. So Rachel calls me. This happens often, in Cap d'Agde. Rachel calls me. She asks for my help, so it is as easy as to say, 'well, she wants to be with you, you want to be with her, so from here on, everything is crystal clear'. The French man is grateful for this gesture. I mean, in a way, he is attentive to you. In some way, he respects you because you are her partner.

Theo, couple

Everyone who entered the swinger world was confronted with the difficulty of sharing, even entering as a single woman or a man. Single men had to understand that the husband will be right next to him, often, and the wife will look at him, seducing him, or both, and there will be that connection with the other man. The single women in clubs usually had to obtain permission from the wives to be with their husband. Jealousy from the wives became real when permission was not given, for instance. Couples had to stretch themselves to please the partner; some were forced to consider each other's desires, compromise, fight within to

beat jealousy. Love required more than regular love at home. But many people thought it was worth it while others thought there was no other way.

4.6 Lila and Kyle: A Female Initiator

Lila introduced Kyle to swinging, and it was she who was more sexually experienced as well. Younger, and more experienced, Lila had a penchant for older men, something that started in high school when she met her high school teacher:

Those were the best and most productive years of my life, and I only spent time with my teachers instead of my classmates. I really my (philosophy) teacher a lot, but well, I couldn't have sex with him because he was very professional. And after so many classes, lingering at breaktime, and getting horny just thinking about philosophy, - well, I took the exams and got a perfect score in high school, got awards, won 1000 euros, and then competed in Spain. This was perfect because I got the best grades. Then in the university, I pursued... sex. I spend the whole summer rocking Tinder, and then swinging, I spent my free time working out and going out... - what I wanted was to have fun. What I discovered was that I liked older men (veterans) but not just any veteran. I like men who look good, and I have good taste, good taste, and flexibility, because that is something that is acquired.²⁶

Lila, couple

²⁶ Cuando vine al instituto, fueron los mejores y más productivos años de mi vida, pero no me relacioné con nadie de los compañeros, con los profesores. Y me gustaba mucho, lo que pasa es que no podía tirármelo porque bueno, el hombre era muy formal. Y al raíz de mucha clase, mucha clase, de entretenermelo en el recreo, y ponerme cachonda nada más en pensar en la filosofía, pues me metí en los exámenes de estos... bueno, saqué todo 10 en el bachillerato, saqué extraordinario en los exámenes, gané el premio... porque ... gané 1000 euros luego competí en España, bueno, aquello, fue un puntazo porque yo tenía un bachillerato perfecto, y entré en la universidad. Entonces me dediqué.... a follar. Entonces me dediqué... un verano entero a darle caña al Tinder, que fue cuando ya me metí en el mundo este, porque ya, dedicaba mi tiempo a entrenar y a salir.... entonces...Lo que quería era disfrutar. Es que... y como me atraían.... Es una cosa que la descubres. Cuando es algo novedoso, al principio descubrí el tema de que un montón de tíos que están bien, porque eso.... me gustan los veteranos, pero no me gusta cualquier veterano.... Me gustan los tíos que están bien, me gustan los mayores, pero tengo un buen gusto.... buen gusto y flexibilidad, porque es una cosa que se aprende.

What Lila meant about good taste and flexibility, was that even though she chose men who looked good, and were interesting – “everyone was human, and was bound to have faults somewhere”²⁷.

When she met Kyle, she could not keep swinging and her experiences a secret from him, but she claimed that she continued to go to clubs because she wanted him to enjoy it: “I like to see Kyle very happy and excited, in a place that’s new (a novelty)... me I have been to swinger clubs so many times, but he... he told me that he has been to a club only once, and a few times in his life to a nudist beach”²⁸. While female initiators were rare in this study, as in previous studies, and Lila would not consider herself a cuckold female where she was sexually excited to see Kyle with other women, - this was a couple who considered swinging a sporadic and entertaining activity, although less of a priority than other activities they shared, such as traveling, hiking, meeting new people and working on their careers.

4.7 Feeling Emotional, Sexual and Personal Interest in Someone Else

Five participants in this study admitted to having feelings for other people in the swinger world outside of their relationships, something that was not accepted by their partners. For these couples, they felt that a decision had to be made to end these emotional, sexual and personal relationships that involved feelings and were the cause of jealousy and problems within their dyadic relationship. Out of these five participants, or five couples, only one participant, Irene, decided to continue a relationship with an outside partner, leading to the eventual break-up of her swinger marriage.

4.7.1 Irene: Break-up of a Swinger Couple

Irene and her ex-husband had been swingers for several years when Irene met a man online and started a relationship with him that was solely virtual. Her husband grew more and more tired of this, trying to impose the rule of “doing everything together”, something that was

²⁷ porque el ser humano es humano, y tiene defectos por algún sitio.

²⁸ A mí me gusta ver a Sigmund muy contento y muy excitado, muy rodeado de su ambiente y tal, no. Bueno, su ambiente no pero un ambiente muy novedoso, yo es que me he hartado de salir, pero él ha estado.... me ha contado que ha estado una vez en el club, un par de veces en las playas nudistas.

not possible in a relationship of submissive-dominant dynamics between this new man and his wife. Irene claimed that anything can happen when one was open to situations and like her, was a curious person: ‘you offer yourself to a person and do as they say.... This can be 24 hours, 7 days, or just during sessions. Well, I liked this man, and I got hooked on this man’. Even though it was really her swinger husband who found this man online, because, like many husbands, he looked for men for his wife. When she happened to like this new man, he started to get jealous: “He was jealous of my phone. It was this – messages, messages, messages, every morning, every night, every afternoon. And he just could not stand it and did not want it. He wanted me to eliminate all my contacts”. Irene not only enjoyed this virtual domination, but even preferred it to going to swinger clubs. Meanwhile, her husband longed for their life as swingers, and tried to convince her to go back to clubs with him. Irene, on the other hand, found her preference online, and this was where she felt excitement, inspiration, and confidence, while her husband did not understand it. Irene described their arguments in the following excerpt:

I told him... I don’t understand... what is it that bothers you, that I pick up my phone and talk to men, without you knowing? And I would give him examples. ‘When you flirt with a girl at work, a co-worker or here (in a Café), - it doesn’t bother me, but it bothers you when I...’ Because that was how he was when I met him, his personality is very open, when he meets you, he starts to talk to you, flirt... This is how he is, at work, co-workers, joke around, always joking... all this never bothered me. And I would tell him, ‘Well, this is the same thing that you do, but... he would say, I would never flirt with anyone here’. I am a very shy person. But when it’s through the phone... I am – I like to flirt, I don’t care.²⁹

Irene, single

²⁹ Le dije - no lo entiendo, no lo entiendo... porque lo que te molesta... lo que te hace mal, es que yo... coja el móvil y hable con chicos y que tú no lo sepas. Es lo que te molesta. Le ponía ejemplos. ‘Tú estás trabajando y tontearas con una chica, tontearas con tu compañera de trabajo o aquí (en el café). Y a mí eso no me molesta pero a ti sí te molesta que yo...’ Porque yo lo conocí así, su carácter es abierto, si te conoce a ti, empieza a hablarte, tontear, no sé qué. Es su forma de hacer, el trabajo, las compañeras, gastar bromas, siempre hacía bromas... y a mi nunca me molestaba. Y le decía ‘Pues es lo mismo que tú haces, pero... yo aquí no soy capaz de tontear con nadie’. Yo soy muy tímida. Pero por móvil yo soy... me gusta tontear, no me importa.

Even though her relationships were virtual, and Irene rarely went to meet this man, - she felt a devotion to this man that her ex-husband was jealous of or felt betrayed about. Also, Irene met other men online, although not often, and had parallel virtual relationships with them as well. She rarely went to clubs, but she admitted that she would go if she had someone to go with. She and I talked about going together one day.

4.7.2 Patricia and Aaron: Feeling Left Out

Patricia and Aaron have been swingers for many years, for as long as they have been together. Aside from swinger clubs, their sporadic exchanges also involved threesomes with other men, which Aaron enjoyed these sporadic experiences a lot. Sometimes he would introduce her to a male friend, and they would have a threesome, during a vacation, or on a nude beach. At one point, they invited a man to live with them in their house. In the beginning, it was a sexual relationship, and as time went on, this man began to demand more of Patricia and Aaron felt excluded, something that came to bother him with time. Gradually, as he voiced his discontent, Patricia had to choose, and the lover ended up leaving. Aaron shared how he felt said that it was not that he was jealous, but he was not happy:

Patricia did things with him that she never did with me, because he (the lover) was very young... because he took out his cock all the time. He was very sexually entrepreneurial... very very very and I think that... I don't know if she would talk better about how she felt but she did things with him that she no longer did with me, and I was not at all happy about that.

Aaron, couple

One such example was when Patricia did housework, and the young lover would come up from behind and make love to her, suddenly and in a hurry. Aaron, on the other hand, could not do that because she would scold him: "Aaron, I am cleaning, I have cleaning products here, I am not in the mood to make love right now". But the lover "was young and always hard", and it bothered Aaron that she would say no to him, and then do the same thing with the lover. Were all three playing with fire? After a while, especially after having to "pay

attention to me, pay attention to him, both demanding her attention always” – this became too complicated, claimed Aaron, and the relationship with him was over.

4.7.3 Alice and Bill: A Matter of Compatibility

Bill told me that when Alice fell in love with another man, Bill felt excluded. As they would walk together, the three of them, Bill would feel more and more excluded, often telling Alice to “slow down”. During his interview, I asked Bill if they had any rules in their relationship, to which he answered that the only rule he had was “not to go too far”:

Bill: She had a lover in France, not especially good-looking but a very good lover, and she fell in love. I told her that maybe it was important to slow down a little, - that is the rule – one must have a minimum that should be respected, it is not about restricting the relationship but nevertheless, I have certain limits, and when we are a couple, we can be 3 but we cannot be 2 and myself. And there was a moment when I didn’t exist, you understand. So, I don’t ask for much, - a minimum.

Interviewer: And how did she respond when you told her?

Bill: She understood, this brought her back down. We always see him now, but she no longer wants to have sex with him.

Bill, couple

I did not know how Alice felt about this and did not dare to ask. In her interview, she claimed that she was not a jealous woman, and jealousy was never a problem in their relationship. There seemed to be a complicity between them, or an understanding from the start, where Bill knew that they were suitable for each other, what they wanted as swingers.

The first time they met, they went to a nude beach, and it just happened that there were men nearby, and it just happened that she started to touch one, then another. Then, they ended up in a nightclub, and there was a dark room, where Alice went in, and had sex with someone. Observing Alice, and knowing her, I believe that she enjoyed her sexuality, and especially multiple partner sex with men. Alice did not have any qualms about having sex with strangers, even before she met Bill, and when he came into her life, and they married,

may we say that there was a legitimacy to her behavior. To be with a swinger husband who enjoys watching you have sex with others, while you enjoy this as well, - this was the understanding.

Alice and Bill started swinging from the very beginning of their relationship. It was Bill who introduced Alice to swinging, although she considered herself promiscuous and open to experimenting before she had met her husband. This couple was very well-traveled, educated, and cultured. Having been swingers for a long time, they found frequent travel as a remedy for monotony, or being bored in swinger clubs and meeting the same people. Bill complained often that there was “no desire” anymore, that people did not experience or show desire as they used to, and that there were too many people just watching, not participating, both in Spain and in other countries as well.

Keeping the passion going was a challenge in their relationship. Bill admitted that “my wife no longer desires me physically, it has been this way for a long time, so I am used to it”. Alice did not talk about this in her interview (which was a joint interview with Bill, because of a language barrier), but she never did describe what kind of men she found attractive, “there has to be a feeling”, and I thought, from observing her, that Alice kind of went with the flow, felt the moment, and “if there was something”, as she said, then she would initiate, or let the man initiate.

The interview with Alice was conducted together with Bill. He was often answering for her, and it was because of the language barrier on the one hand, and on the other hand because he enjoyed talking, and sharing. Alice, however, contradicted him on some of the answers. In the following, I wanted to know more about what kind of man she desired:

Interviewer: What is an attractive man for you?

Bill: A big cock.

Alice: Well, that’s a minimum. (Laughs) It’s not easy. A single man... If there are a lot of single men there – I am not interested in a beautiful strong, muscular man. The physique, or a beautiful man physically – it is not too interesting for me.

Bill: Someone disgusting, slutty, with a lot of imagination.

Alice: Yes... so old or young, it is unimportant.

Interviewer: Is there a race you prefer?

Alice: I like dark men, African.

Bill: The American blacks are better.

Alice: Maybe it's because of age. When I was younger, it was like a sport (makes a fast-thumping sound, of having sex) - someone who moves well. But now, I prefer more feelings, a relationship.

Alice and Bill, couple

It was fascinating to watch and be with this couple. While Bill claimed that Alice was an introvert, and she was indeed often quiet and had a demure appearance, - he was gregarious, analytical, a great conversationalist and even enjoyed giving speeches. On the other hand, Alice was extremely outgoing sexually while Bill was the reserved one, sometimes watching or standing or being in the vicinity but without joining in. It seemed as if all that she stored inside herself, all that emotion was unleashed during sex as she did it with pure abandon. He, on the other hand, was often quiet and reserved, mute in his own way.

4.8 Not of the Swinger World

4.8.1 Nicole and Victor: Growing Apart

During my trip to Cap d'Agde, I met a couple who I spent a lot of time with previously in Spain. One could say that both Spanish and French swinger couples traveled to Cap d'Agde, some did so every summer. It was not unusual to run into someone you knew in the summer because Cap was like a meeting point, and you could even agree to meet next summer, for example. The following excerpt came from my fieldnotes. This couple enjoyed meeting new people in a resort-like, foreign place. Both Victor and Nicole were organized, punctual one should say, prepared, correct, intelligent people as well as experienced travelers. They enjoyed new cultures and new experiences. One could ask if this need or thirst for something new came from boredom in their relationship, with life, or whether it was a natural curiosity – the need to break monotony, even in non-monogamy, was often apparent.

I was invited to a little party at Victor and Nicole's. They were renting a beautiful apartment that was next to a swinger club. Victor talked about us going to this club later. When I got to their apartment, they were just preparing everything for the party. It was around 9 PM and there were not many people around outside (most people go out to dinner around this time). We sat outside, not on the terrace but in the narrow walkway where Victor placed bar chairs, and food, so that people who passed by could join us if they wanted. This was very common in Cap, meeting people and inviting them to a party in your apartment was easy. On the other hand, it was also common that people made plans to come to your party, and then they did not show up, either because they were too tired, or they simply went somewhere else. Victor and Nicole had met a German couple at the foam party that afternoon, and invited them to their apartment in the evening, but the couple did not show up.

This night, Nicole was wearing a dress that was 'very Cap d'Agde', and she bought it here last year. It was short, and she did not wear any underwear. It had leather strings on top, and one could see her nipples through the strings. As I complimented her dress, Victor brought out a bag where they had their sex toys and showed me the latest toy for her clitoris. Apparently, it had been on the market for a few years, but was very popular as a suction toy for oral sex for women, and Nicole liked it a lot. There was another toy that had a big round head and this one differed from others because it had enormous vibrating power.

The three of us were sitting and talking. Victor and Nicole shared with me their experience today at the foam party. They said that taking ecstasy was amazing, and they had a great time. Nicole said that it was completely unlike her to have sex with strangers so fast, because she usually likes to take her time, and is always unsure (used a gesture for this). But this time, she had sex with really good-looking guys, and black guys with big penises. She was surprised, and Victor really liked it.

Fieldnotes, Cap d'Agde

During her interview 6 months later, Nicole told me that maybe if one was experimenting with drugs, then maybe one should rethink whether swinging was the thing one should be

doing. As if the need to take drugs to have sex was something that may have been too much for her. I wanted to know more about this but did feel like I would be prying into her life. What the excerpt above shows was that a typical night with a couple involved spending time, talking, sharing food, and meeting new people together. This couple, that night or that week I was in Cap let me observe them, answered my questions, opened their apartment to me, told me about their everyday life, their experiences with others, and did not ask for anything in return. Had their story been perfect, “too good to be true”, or full of happy moments, - then I would have understood their desire to share this with the world. But their story, this couple’s story was poignant.

I could have asked them why they invited me, why they talked to me, but I did not want to pry. I intuitively assumed that each couple was different, and this couple wanted to share their story with someone who could understand and see it in swinger context. Nicole asked me that week why I wanted to know so much about people’s lives, and asking questions always, and observing them. I told her that it was very fascinating for me, and this was what I did – I studied people. She thought it was strange, and it made me think that maybe she did not like to talk about herself, but I did not want to ask more questions here.

Lately, Nicole and Victor have been growing apart, and had quite different perspectives on swinging, as well as in other parts of their lives. While Victor wanted to let people know about swinging and thought that it should be talked about to others openly, Nicole did not agree with him, and believed that one’s private life was one’s own and no one needed to know about it. Her need for privacy may explain her questioning why I studied people.

Victor’s desire to tell everything reflected strongly in his interviews and his behavior, as he talked about sex with men, women, and transsexuals, his thirst for variety, group sex, and experimenting with MDMA and cocaine. Meanwhile, Nicole did not go deep into these transgressive topics, although she did mention a few during the interview. Eventually, Victor talked to me about the possibility of a divorce, several times during the study. Their main problem was, according to Victor, was that Nicole was not as interested in swinging as Victor was, and not as often.

Swinging posed a definite problem for both, as Nicole complained to me that she thought she was not a swinger and that Victor wanted to have sex with attractive women and was often off on adventures or thinking about doing so. Victor, on the other hand, complained that his wife did not share his interest in swinging, and that swinging was always best when shared with a partner.

I spent more time with Victor than with Nicole. We would go out to swinger clubs as well as parties and nudist beaches. During this time, his wife often traveled to her home country, and she gave him permission to go out to clubs with women that she knew. This was the first thing I asked, and he told me that she knew, and was ok with me going out with him.

While Victor was “allowed to go out” with another woman to a club, when I asked him if he would give the same permission to Nicole, he smiled and said, ‘no I don’t think I would like that’. While they both said that they would be open to polyamory, the lines they drew and rules they made may have been more rigid than they themselves expected. For example, sleeping together was an implicit rule for Victor while bring others home was an explicit rule for Nicole. While on vacation, Nicole slept with another man while Victor slept with another woman in the same room, and Victor became very jealous of this man sleeping with his wife, while she was very aroused throughout the night with him:

The guy was there with my wife kissing for hours... very romantic. I could hear her...very excited. My wife was very wet, and I could hear as he was touching her pussy and she was so horny all night long, and I was there pretending to sleep but I could not sleep. Afterwards, I became very jealous, the guy was very handsome, and he was our friend. He was like in love with my wife in a friendly kind of way but in any case, he liked my wife a lot.

Victor, couple

Throughout my time with them, I wondered whether these experiments, or experimenting with the limits or putting everything they talked about in practice – was really destructive for their marriage, or whether this was just fun and games, and the only problem they had

was that they were growing apart. Perhaps it was a complicated mix of all these reasons that accumulated and were not resolved. One night, Nicole told me that that lately, “Victor has been roaming around, looking for God knows what, somewhere else”. As an example, she said that the minute they got to a club, Victor started having sex with someone, at once, forgetting about her. This made Nicole feel left out and angry: “It was like, I didn’t have any attention whatsoever, I felt completely ignored”.

4.8.2 Sabina and Walter: Never Closed

I included Sabina and Walter as the couple that was critical to swinger clubs and was in a polyamorous relationship. For Walter, the concept of being sexually ‘open-minded’ did not only apply to himself and to his partner Sabina – it was his way of life:

To me, having an open mind means to wrap your life in this adventure, to be able to talk with anyone, love anyone.... your woman loving more people as well... and it’s not about ‘letting me do it as well’, but rather, as it is with Sabina, - I love knowing that she is enjoying herself. I love that she meets new people.... Not too long ago, last week, she went on vacation (to another country) with 2 male friends. And when I explain this to my friends, they tell me I’m crazy. ‘Don’t you feel strange? It doesn’t affect you at all? ‘ For me, the most beautiful thing in the world is to watch my woman enjoy herself, it doesn’t matter if it is with me or with another person. I want her to live, to have experiences, to have a life.³⁰

Walter, couple

³⁰ Tener la mentalidad abierta para mí significa envolver tu vida en esta aventura, ser capaz de hablar con cualquiera, de querer a cualquiera... que tu mujer pueda querer a más personas... y ya no es el hecho de ‘déjame a mí también hacerlo’, sino que lo me pasa a mí también con Sabina, que me encanta que disfrute. Me encanta que conozca gente... Hace poco, la semana pasada, se fue de vacaciones (a otro país) con 2 amigos. Y cuando explico esto a amigos míos, dicen que estoy loco, me dicen ‘¿Como no te da cosa? ¿Como no te afecta? ‘ Pues porque quiero que disfrute... Para mí lo más bonito del mundo es ver disfrutar a mi mujer, me da igual que sea conmigo o con otra persona. Quiero que viva, que tenga experiencias, que tenga vida.

Sabina transmitted to me a sense of confidence about herself and her relationship that was unlike other women in other couples, and so did Walter. There was a peace about them, something that told me that they nurtured their relationship and accepted each other, were in a loving partnership that was open to other experiences, even the experience of falling in love with outside partners. I never observed them as a couple, however, and only interviewed them on the phone. This meant that my understanding of them was limited to this one-time interview with them, conducted separately.

Sabina and Walter were a young couple and have been living together for a few years at the time of the interview. During the interviews, they both claimed that their relationship was open-minded from the very beginning, where they did not want to limit themselves or confine themselves inside a label that is 'swinger' or 'non-monogamous' or even 'polyamorous'. They wanted to come to an agreement that made them happy, satisfied, fulfilled. Unlike a lot of the other (swinger) couples I interviewed, this couple claimed they were not afraid that the other would fall in love. The only limit that was drawn, by Walter, was living with a third person. Sabina elaborated on how they established their limits when they first started to live together:

When we put, in parenthesis, a contract on the table, meaning when we sat down and decided, hey, we already know that we are very open, and haven't had jealous feelings of any kind as of yet, but for my own peace of mind, 'where would I be hurting you?' and so we started talking and we realized that neither of us was afraid that the other would fall in love with another person. So my partner said that he wasn't sure, but he thought that this limit would be living together with a third person I was in love with or.... maybe because he considered living together difficult in general, and on top of it getting involving emotions. Even then, he wasn't sure, he said, and if it happened, we would have to talk about it, but we were so far away from this. And then I said, 'if I feel that there is sincerity and trust, I think that we can talk about everything, and depending on how we feel'. So I don't know, there was complete openness, we started having a very open limit, and did not ever have to close it.

Sabina, couple

It was Sabina that took the initiative to look for outside partners that were interested in non-monogamous relationships, setting up a profile on a website, specifying her interest in non-monogamous relationships and men who were looking for the same thing. Both Walter and Sabina wanted to find like-minded people with similar interests and hobbies that they could spend time with. They were open to emotional and sexual relationships, and they found the swinger world as limited to only brief sexual encounters, lacking in connection, tenderness, romantic involvement with other people that they both wanted. Sabina described their last experience in a swinger club:

Our last experience in a swinger club was... we looked at each other when it was over, and we realized....this is the same as the monogamy, and we told each other, well, we had this feeling of having been fucked, because we went out with a couple, it was great, talking, in a club, we already knew where this was going, and we were there, and it was cool. Then suddenly, the couple said, let's go to the playroom, and we said, ok let's go, we will change and let's go. And I started to be more with the man of the couple, and she with my boyfriend, and we were there everything was nice, and we started to feel things, and the moment I started to feel a nice connection with him, suddenly he became a little distant and started to move towards his partner. And I thought, well, no problem, feel free, right? And we finished up, more or less, but as soon as we finished having sex, he moved and joined his partner, and we went to the bar, danced – I danced with my partner and they were on their own, you know, as if all contact was over. My partner and I are so emotional – we like caressing, we would have like to stay and hug the four of us in bed. Nothing would happen, you know, we wouldn't go and get married afterwards. And if it does happen it's because it must happen. You know? It's like there is fear.... and well, later we were talking to people who knew this couple, and they told us that, they already had problems with jealousy, and I think it is the same thing – it is a monogamy that is even more... to control, because you expose yourself, but there are so many fucking norms that you never open up to anything. It's just that you never open up to anything.

Sabina, couple

In the swinger world, there was a general resistance towards emotional involvement, especially when it involved people outside of the couple, over long-term. Then it was considered “not a swinger relationship” but a polyamorous or open-minded one. And those people may have felt out of place in a swinger club or setting. As a result, several couples and swingles rejected swinger clubs because of these emotional restrictions. On the other hand, those couples that did venture to have more open relationships, also found themselves within their own restrictive brackets, which were no different from other swinger couples’.

Both Sabina and Walter believed that being emotionally and sexually involved with others as something positive, ‘always going towards something more open, we never closed ourselves’ (Sabina, interview). Sabina claimed that “while there is sincerity and trust, we can talk about everything, anything is possible”. As with the other couples, their absolute requirement is being honest.

Sabina talked about the octopus of jealousy, referring to the 8 tentacles of an octopus, each tentacle serving as a meaning behind jealousy. Sabina said that she identified with the “possessiveness” tentacle, or “feeling special”.

It is important to know this because when I do feel somewhat jealous or when I something like that awakes in me, it is because, because I think that I am no longer special because there is another person that is special. Or because I am no longer important, I am just another one. Well with my partner, I think I will never lose this, because I know that the connection that we are creating is so cool, so beautiful that no matter how many interesting and special people appear in his life, I will be special in my own way.

Sabina, couple

Walter has had negative experiences with jealousy in his previous relationships, during which he decided to set it aside as something unnecessary, something unproductive in relationships. He rationalized jealousy as social programming, not as something innate or natural in ourselves:

Society teaches you that you must get jealous, if a person you love looks at someone or flirts with someone, this nails us, this gets inside of us. Even when we don't want it, society constantly sends us messages that if you don't get jealous, it means that you don't care about this person. But if you analyze it, you say, 'and what does jealousy do for me?' - Makes me lose the person I love? ' That question really made me think, and I told myself, if that's the case, then no.

Walter, couple

They were both in agreement when it came to treating jealousy with care, and Sabina's solution was to reconnect with one's partner through spending time and communicating, while Walter responded as other swinger men did, - wanting to make her happy:

Sabina can tell me something like, 'well I would like you to be here more' or 'I don't want you to be with that person because she does not really convince me', well, then we talk and.... most probably I would stop seeing her, because as I said, the most important thing for me is she (Sabina).

Walter, couple

This discourse runs parallel to the discourse by other swinger couples who were often in unison with each other when it came to choosing their or each other's sexual partners. Both female and male partners would voice their approval or disapproval on a new partner. As in every relationship, decisions were made together, and agreements were redrawn in order to adapt to a new situation.

What made this couple stand out, however, was the way that they were able to quickly reconnect (or forgive) after feeling disconnected while having other lovers or relationships and being able to preserve the primary relationship. Sabina described this process in the following:

I think one must take care of one's relationship in general, this one and any monogamous one. So, what happened once was that he was traveling a lot for work, and I started to have romantic involvements with the other two men, so of course, when he was out from Monday to Friday, and when he came on Saturdays and Sunday, it was all these logistics, we had to have a family dinner, had to go shopping, had to.. So of course, there was a crisis... I was here, and he was traveling, and in between I was seeing these two guys. And it very good, and happy, but when he came, it was all logistics, so there was a moment that... it wasn't exactly jealousy, but he told me that he was a little bit sad because he noticed that I was somewhat distant, and I told him, 'not exactly distant, darling, but it's just that you come home at the end of the week and it's all about logistics and I need to connect with you emotionally'. Well, at that point was when we said, well, we both know that we don't want to have just a friendship, we want something else, right? And this was when we decided to take a beach trip together, for some time, and we spent a weekend on the beach, and from then on, we put in the work, and recovered very quickly but it is about staying aware all the time to make sure that the other person feels well and that you feel well too. And I think that making a little effort to not lose the connection, right? Because it is important... if that's what you really want. We are both open to the idea that if we don't feel the same one day, that it's ok. But in the meantime, if you want to preserve a romantic relationship, then it is about putting in a little of effort.

Sabina, couple

Perhaps Walter's absences during his travels provided the opportunity, not a problem, for Sabina to explore new, fresh and loving relationships, instead of this being a problem for them in the future. Allowing this would be a sign of generosity and understanding from Walter's side.

4.9 Conclusion

The main objective of this chapter was to present the important themes that were explored by the participants and the researcher during interviews, and to juxtapose these with the observations and important conversations during fieldwork. Participants brought up their conflicts and problems with swinging. Several couples had challenges with swinging, and others had difficulties in their relationships. Some of these challenges had to do with the superficiality and lack of affection in swinger settings, because some couples, like Sabina and Walter, for example, wanted more out of swinging, or wanted to be emotionally involved with others, and their boundary was on the level of living together with a third person. Other couples, such as Diana and Nathan, were on the verge of a separation, because Diana wanted to have time to herself, to go out with her friends and maybe have lovers independently from her partner. For Tiffany and Jacob, this was not an option, because Jacob thought about the danger of falling in love with potential partners outside of clubs and was reluctant to agree to doing things separately. For some couples, such as Rachel and Theo, and Abigail and Scott – meeting people separately and having sexual encounters without the presence of one's partner sometimes, was completely accepted by the partners, and was not a problem at all. Communication and trust were the pillars for these couples, although always accompanied by the rules constructed by each couple. The individuality of each person and each couple, or the way that each person was unique, made it difficult to create a model for couples' behavior, and to create overarching themes emerging from data. Rather, I had to use descriptions that were unfortunately limited by the privacy constraints in this research.

CHAPTER 5: SWINGER WOMEN IN SPAIN AND FRANCE

I've changed a lot... there are people who see me now, three years later and tell me 'You look radiant'. Back then, I didn't realize it but I was in a monogamous relationship and I felt very repressed, very locked up, and of course there was a part of me that I had to hide so that my (former) boyfriend would love me, because I talked about threesomes, I talked about opening the relationship, and my boyfriend... 'what if he gets angry, what if he judges me, what if he feels hurt', well, he does not love that part of you, and that part of you is your part, it is you...³¹

Sabina, couple

5.1 Introduction

Both men and women in this study equally reported that they enjoyed sexual variety or having new sexual experiences with new partners. Even though 45% of the women were introduced into swinging by a husband or another male, 55 % were introduced by other couples or women. None of the women felt pressured or coerced into participation.

Women were a (desired) minority in swinger clubs in Andalusia, Spain, in Cap d'Agde, France and online swinger websites. Single and bisexual women were called 'unicorns' because of they were like these mythical creatures, women who could be with both the man and the woman in a couple. After having talked to several men, I noticed that being with a transvestite was an erotic fantasy as well, and this made me wonder whether they were the real unicorns after all as they were even more rare in clubs than single women.

I often asked the participants my rather redundant question - so why were there more single men than single women in swinger settings? Even though some may say that this was such a simple question to answer, many did not have an answer, while others had several. Because of this enigma, to me and to others, I thought that it may have been interesting to explore the different aspects of female swinger sexuality that the participants and I found

³¹ Me he cambiado un montón... hay gente que me ve ahora desde hace tres años y me dice es que tú eres radiante. Pero es que claro yo, yo no me daba cuenta, pero estaba en una relación monógama y me sentía super apretada, super encerrada, es que claro había una parte de mí que tenía que ocultar para que mi novio me quisiera, porque yo hablaba de tríos, hablaba de abrir la relación, y mi novio, a ver, si se enfada, si te mira mal, si se aleja de ti, y está dolido, pues no ama a esta parte de ti, y esta parte de ti es tu parte, eres tú...

important throughout the interviews, always keeping in mind, and comparing my own and participants' observations in swinger settings. These elements were: the perception of female attractiveness; multiple partner sexuality for women; female bisexuality and assertiveness; jealousy for swinger women.

5.2 Being Attractive

Some participants in my study claimed that women put more effort into getting dressed up and taking care of their bodies in general. Women had their nails done, went to hair salons, bought new dresses, new perfume. Women took the time and effort to dress up in what was meant to be “sexy” attire, such as lingerie and high heels.

There was an unspoken dress code that applied to women. It was a dress code normalized by both sexes, as women also enjoyed it and claimed it was their choice to dress this way. They wore high heels, short skirts, low-cut shirts. They would come in one outfit, and then changed in the club into lingerie, kinky leather outfits, or some other fetish. For example, they would dress up to go to dinner with their partner, and with other swingers, and would wear something elegant, an evening dress, maybe even somewhat revealing. In addition, they would bring another attire for the club to change into later during the night, - lingerie often chosen and bought by their partner. They were not pressured into being and looking sexy, but these women wanted to be desired. It was expected of women to come and be attractive, to smell nice, and to give off a sexual or sexy vibe. They could dress up like schoolgirls, university students. Sometimes there was theme night at the club, “night of the schoolgirl”³². From the impression I got, many women enjoyed this, and it was perhaps exactly why they came to the club – to be seen, to be noticed, to get attention from other men. This tells us a lot about the dominant assumptions in this environment, expectations and the ways in which swingers contributed to elements of play³³ or the game of seduction.

There were also women who rebelled against the idea of attractiveness, simply because getting dressed up was too much work. One such participant in my study was Lila. In her interview, she admitted to me that she considered herself completely unattractive for

³² Noche de la colegiada (Spanish)

³³ Dar juego (give way to play in Spanish)

most of her life – “a loser”³⁴. She refused to wear high heels, dress up or even wear perfume. The main reason was that it took too long to dress up and was uncomfortable. She refused to wear a short skirt or dress, or low-cut clothing, simply because it was often too cold. Lila often wore pants or shorts, and a regular shirt. Instead of high heels, she wore sneakers or comfortable shoes. I never heard people talking about her, neither did I observe anyone commenting her attire. However, she was one of the few women who dressed so casually, and this was not the norm. Lila also pointed out how in clubs the level of attractiveness was considerably lower than in discotheques:

Well, it surprises me because I am not pretty or anything (laughs). I am a good-for-nothing. I also understand that there are contexts that are relatively easy. If you are a woman, 20 to 30 years old, single, and you go to a club, like club Lux... where it costs 50 euros (for couples) and the women that go there are like 50 years old and above.... And the men that take care of themselves are, well, out of 20 percent well around 15... and out of the women that take care of themselves, an X percent, - well it is quite possible that you would be viewed as a piece of candy. Like being one-eyed in the land of the blind. If I went to a discotheque... I am sure that I would not be as successful... It is like the story of the ugly duckling, and also a little bit of will, taking care of oneself and getting dolled up.³⁵

Lila, couple

³⁴ Una pardilla (in Spanish)

³⁵ Bueno, me sorprende muchas veces, porque no soy ni guapa ni nada (se ríe). No tengo ni oficio ni beneficio. Entiendo también que hay contextos que son también relativamente fáciles. Si tú vas como mujer de 20 a 30 años, soltera, a un club ... como club Lux... que la entrada vale 50 euros y las mujeres que van tienen de 50 años para arriba, - y hombres que se conservan bien, de 20 por ciento que se conservan bien pues habrá un 15 y de las mujeres que se conservan bien, un X por ciento, pues bastante posible que sea un bombón. Como ser el tuerto en el país de los ciegos. 22: 07. Si posiblemente si yo fuera a una discoteca...seguramente no tendría tanto éxito... es como el cuento del patito feo, y es también la voluntad, y el peine y el cuidarse.

Adele, on the other hand, a bisexual female participant, had high standards for female attire, and was somewhat critical towards women who she claimed were careless about their appearance. At the same time, she felt that a positive attitude went a long way:

If she is very fat, I don't like it. If she doesn't care what she looks like, outfit is messy. Because there was this one lady, remember, in the club, that lady I told you 'why she's here?'. She was wearing a T-shirt, trousers, and she was like coming from work or somewhere. But there are always ladies who look very nice – nice dress or nice outfit or... yeah. And when they are happy or smiling, I like, that they are happy, they look happy. Because there are lots of women who are snobbish, or arrogant and I don't know how to approach them, I think, but when they are happy and dancing and have a good vibe, I like it.

Adele, couple

One could claim that the women in some settings set standards for dress code simply by dressing nice, or that one influenced the other. However, since attitude and personality formed part of the attraction and were usually considered together with the physical appearance and dress code, - these characteristics were also taken into consideration when evaluating a person's attractiveness. This applied to both men and women.

Patricia was another female participant who rebelled against the image of sexiness in clubs, but her philosophy was different from Lila's. Even though Patricia has been in the swinger world for many years with her partner, she was still very much a naturist, and believed naturism a better alternative than swinging because there was less obsession with attractiveness or being desired. Patricia's account is a counternarrative to the swinger world, during which she described nudism as a world that accepted what was considered unattractive in the swinger world:

Patricia: There are women that have had cancer, who are missing a nipple, and nudists don't look at this because there is so much diversity. In the swinger world, we feel free, but we are not really free. One must be like this or like that.

Interviewer: Women?

Patricia: Yes, it is less if you are a man, I don't know, I am not a man, I don't know how they feel. We women are not really free.

Interviewer: In the swinger world, you cannot be old, but in the naturist world you can be.

Patricia: In the naturist world, your physical aspect is not the most important thing. What is most important is your mind. We live in the sun, to take advantage – to be with the elements and close to nature, but we are not there to show our bodies.

Patricia, couple

Patricia felt it was unfair that in the swinger world, a female body was not treated the same way as a male body when it came to aging. She compared this to Hollywood, where an actor who was 70 years old was considered and treated as seductive, but an actress such as Katherine Deneuve, who Patricia regarded as very beautiful, was still less attractive as she aged. Perhaps Patricia was not the only one for whom the swinger world was too superficial. She did not feel that she belonged to this world. Patricia's account may point to the existing separation between nudism and sexuality in certain swinger settings, such as Cap d'Agde, where swinger settings involve a fusion of looks and nudity usually with the intention of stimulating erotic behavior and talk, while. Erotic behavior and erotic talk is then somehow connected to the body image and nudity in swinger clubs, usually with the intention of "being turned on". The idea that sexually-laden behavior is encouraged by some couples and swingles more than others, is then contrasted by those nudists who frequent swinger settings on occasion, and then question the importance of body image, dress-code and sexually-laden behavior and talk.

Another female participant, Alice, raised the importance of age in swinger settings. She said that she was desired by many men in swinger settings, for over 20 years as a swinger. This was due to her physical attractiveness, her sexual capital, sexual experience, in addition to her exotic look. Alice enjoyed being a swinger with her partner. In the following, she demonstrates how, as a young woman, she would support older women by sharing male attention and male sexuality with them:

Alice: Before, when I used to go to clubs quite often, I was younger, and I felt that there were a lot of men who approached me, so I would not move right away (would not make contact) because there were older women. There were always women older than me. So, I would wait... because I was young and exotic and there were a lot of men, so if I consumed everything, everyone then afterwards... there would be nothing for the women. So I did not move, and at the last moment, when the club was closing... I made a move (let the men approach her, have sex)

Interviewer: But why?

Alice: The older women were there, and the men...

Interviewer: I don't understand.

Bill: If all the men had orgasms, there would be nothing left for the other women.

Alice: And the women didn't thank you?

Bill: They didn't know.

Alice and Bill, couple

Alice did this for the women as a gesture of sharing, of solidarity, as she explained it. For Bill, being an older woman in the swinger world, is tough: "when you have been a beautiful woman, to see yourself age – it is hard, very hard to accept". Bill was referring to the swinger world, having a lot of attention from men, and then this attention becoming less and less, this was what he considered to be difficult for a woman. Alice contradicted him on this aspect, pointing out, "yes, it is very difficult, but it is all in one's head". She admitted that she was "now older", but she did not consider her age to be an impediment to her sexuality because she still enjoyed herself, because "there is still always someone". Alice was still an attractive woman and has been very active as a swinger.

There was a general belief that women worked harder to look attractive than men. While some women brought another set of attire or lingerie to wear inside the club, men's only requirement was a nice shirt. Women complained that some men did not put in the effort into looking good. Some men did not put on cologne, others did not dress up, did not get a new haircut, did not buy a new outfit. It was obvious by observing that men did not generally put in even half of the effort that women did in Spain and in France. And this

applied to both single men and the husbands. Some women rebelled against this idea of spending time and money to look more beautiful. Also, I did observe that some men, both in Andalusia and in Cap d'Agde enjoyed dressing up, paid for laser removal of body hair, and went to the gym and had a strict diet, even prepared for going to Cap d'Agde one year ahead of time.

For the swinger men in couples, age was not a factor that would make them stop swinging, on the contrary, they thrived in the swinger men as older men, and even claimed that women liked not only older, but 'ancient men' as a fetish. Several couples had a significant age difference, the woman being younger (20 years or more). Nathan, a male swinger in a couple, talked about the fact that he has always had relationships with younger women, women who were 20 or more years younger than he was. When I asked him about the age difference, he said that it may be difficult waking up next to someone who is no longer a young woman, deflating the question from himself as someone who is older than his partner. Nathan's partner Diana took pride in being able to have sex with younger men while being with Nathan who introduced her to the swinger world and became her longtime partner. On the other, feeling that her time is limited was something that she talked about often, with him and in the interview. She wanted to enjoy her attractiveness while she could, and felt that after a certain age, she will not be very attractive.

Jake was another participant in a relationship with a younger woman, Valerie, and he argued that the swinger world will provide a solution for their relationship in the future, as his partner Valerie was younger. The age difference was a concern for him from the start, and in the following, he pointed this out as a motivating factor for him personally:

What worries me is the difference in age because there are 20 years between us. Currently, I have sexual desires that are practically the same that I had when I was young, but it is not the same because before I had an obsession with sexuality just like any adolescent or young man. And with time, there were professional motivations, becoming recognized, having prestige, also clothing became more important, buying a house, a lot of other things that became more important. Sex is still important, but before it used to occupy everything. And with time, it is not that

it is secondary, but it sides with other things. And sometimes I think, what will happen when I am in my 60's and 70's, and my partner is still a young woman? She will be a woman full of strong sexual desire. And me, at 70, my testosterone levels will have lowered a lot more, and I will probably have a lot of desire, but not the same sexual capacity that I have now. So what will happen? What will happen then? I ask myself whether the swinger world will be a good outlet for maintaining a good relationship when, in my case, in 20 years, my sexuality is no longer the same. She will be in her prime, and for me, surely, it will not be the same as it is now. So, to keep her, sometimes I think that the sexual freedom that we have now can be something positive in the future. To keep the relationship, I mean. This is something I never told her.

Jake, couple

For women, looking younger was a definite part of feeling attractive in the swinger world, while other aspects were important for the men when they thought about their own attractiveness. Many women claimed that after a certain age, and if they gained weight, they would not feel as attractive to go to clubs. Holly, a female participant, said that "the single women that come to swinger clubs are the ones that are not very attractive in the world outside the clubs, and maybe cannot get a man". They are maybe overweight, or they are older (over 40). Edgar, on the other hand, noticed that a lot of women he has been with were indeed over 40, but did not want a serious relationship because they already had been married and have children. He claimed that they only wanted to have brief sexual encounters in clubs. Adele, a female participant in her 40's, said that lately, she felt "old and fat" and did not know if she wanted to go to clubs and "look sexy", that she was not feel like dressing up, and was not feeling very attractive. Her husband, on the other hand, convinced her to go, and she said, they had a very nice time. Valerie also had a period when she felt that she gained a few pounds, and did not want to go to clubs, until she got in better shape. After a while, she felt better, and started going again.

5.3 Multiple Partner Sexuality

Swinger women were called “Queens of this World” by swinger husbands. Contrary to the idea that women were coerced into swinging, it was the husbands that regularly combated heteronormative attitudes, claimed female sexual agency for their wives and defended consensual non-monogamy as a valid relationship form. I have seen husbands who stood by to regulate group sex so that their wives felt comfortable having sex, preventing any type of unpleasant behavior from other men. By exercising their rights to pleasure, swinger women claimed equality on many levels.

Swinger husbands Jacob and Alfred told me that if someone found out that they were swingers, it would not be as bad as if someone found out that their wives were swingers because it would imply that they had multiple (male) partners. During interviews, swinger husbands rejected the negative connotation of such terms as “promiscuous”, among others:

The word ‘promiscuous’ is pejorative, it is usually interpreted negatively, relating to a person who has several partners and is irresponsible, in the sense that he/she is not careful. A liberal (open-minded) person does take care of herself/himself, as well as of the people that are involved. And from then on, if he wants to be with 20 or 30 per day, this is his/her choice, as long as there is respect and hygiene.

Edgar, couple

Thus, it could be said that swinger women suffer twice – once for being swinger, and the second time for being a woman. In addition to that, if she is an immigrant, then it is three times. If she is a mother, bisexual, polyamorous, then these are the additional labels she would have to fight. Female participants themselves expressed that male centrism in the swinger world was no different than in the regular world. I witnessed one such example at dinner, when a swinger couple (Derek and Audrey) and I were sitting in a restaurant, and we asked the single man sitting with us: “What if you were given the opportunity to be with two or more women, how would you feel about that?”, to which he answered, “great, I would be very happy”. Then we asked, “What about if the woman, someone you had been together with, was surrounded by men, and was having sex with them, several at the same time, -

how would you feel about that?” - “Well,” the man said, “That would not be very hygienic”. The double standard was obvious in this example, as the man felt that it was wonderful for him to be with two women, but it was unclean, improper, maybe even disgusting for the woman to have more than one man in the same exact setting. Perhaps what repulsed him the most was being one of these men or witnessing himself as just another lover and nothing special. Many swingers criticized this kind of thinking as not swinger.

Single men who went to clubs sporadically (every couple of months or a few times a year) were not used to the situation of being next to several or many naked men in a room. The men who were habitual swingers and were used to this situation would be open to practices such as double penetration or a woman performing fellatio on two men (a common practice). Men who open up to this understand that this is what the woman wants, and they do it to please her, and have pleasure themselves. It turned out this man’s attitude prevented him from being invited to be with Derek and Audrey, and this would probably lead to further exclusions among other couples, based on this one recommendation (or rejection).

The idea that women are more emotional and must “feel something” in order to have sex was something that contradicted the tenets that these swinger women lived by. In her interview, Diana explained her need for multiple partners as a transgression of cultural norms:

Interviewer: You don’t like repeating with the same person. This turns you on, having a variety of partners, there is something very masculine about it, don’t you think? Could you tell me more about this desire for variety?

Diana: To break with cultures. I know that a guy usually likes to be with a lot of women, have variety, and the woman searches for stability and security, always with the same man. But me, I don’t know, I want to break with this culture, and I have always wanted to try this, in the very beginning, change partners, different guys, but of course, without having feelings, and I did like it. I thought, if a boy can do it, - a woman can do it too. But she has to want it, and free her mind. Because it is always like us women when we are with a lot of men, our culture and the education that we received tells us that we are easy, we are together with a lot of men. No? But

it's not like that. The more men you have, the freer you become as a woman. Because...you fuck one man, and you throw him away and look for another one. This is very good (laughs).

Interviewer: This is very...feminist. Aren't you a feminist?

Diana: No, I'm not a feminist because I adore men. Because I know my rights and I have my freedom, so no man acts macho around me. It's not feminist. It is the way a woman should be. That's it. If I ask for something and I say that I'm a feminist, I realize in that moment that I'm weak.

Diana, couple

Once, inside the club, Diana admitted to me that she was very shy. She was dressed in a white corset, her curly hair all over the place. She was very attractive that night. Perhaps it was this idea of catching men and throwing them away that took away this shyness or social anxiety. Maybe the root of the problem is the lack of communication between the sexes. Were women able to express and satisfy their desires and feelings, accompanied by the constraints of one's own mind, the social mind, the husband's mind? Audrey shared her frustrations about communicating her desires to the single men:

I am a pleaser, so many times I am not capable of expressing or saying 'I don't like this'. I find it very difficult, when it comes to sex, to express what I want, how I want it. Many times, I do do it, if I don't like something I have learned to say no, or to leave, or whatever, but I find it extremely difficult to say what I want in the moment. And this is where my husband comes in because he knows me, so many times he is the one proposing things because he knows that I will like them, so he is very attentive to me.

Audrey, couple

Audrey also admitted to being very shy, that she has always been this way, pointing out that she always had more male friends growing up. When I talked to her in clubs, she had a very reserved demeanor, her enigmatic smile was usually between a yes and a no, after a while

often rejecting the men that her husband was so eager to present to her. She felt that the best sex was always with one's partner, and that he was her ideal man, sexually. However, sometimes there were men that are "attentive to her". For Audrey, sexual satisfaction was directly linked to physical pleasure that was provided through cunnilingus. She felt that a lot of single men in clubs were very selfish, only thinking of satisfying their own desires, and not thinking about giving pleasure to her. In this, she referred to oral sex first, or "the preliminaries":

Audrey: "I am a 'Clitorian'³⁶ and well, this is just what it is. A lot of times when a man starts out (with vaginal sex): 'you like it, you like it?' Well, I don't know if I like it, but... he can be at it until tomorrow and there comes a moment, and you notice it - 'I will never come for the life of me', let's face it.

Interviewer: And if you don't come, you start to get dry...

Audrey: And it hurts.

Audrey, couple

For Tiffany, sex was tantric, and she often told me, "you have to feel it", "if the man transmits the energy, only then will I be with him". Tiffany told me that she was able to have many vaginal orgasms throughout the night in a club and would go home and have sex with her partner as well. When she had an orgasm, there would be fluid coming out of her vagina and spraying all over the floor. And she would scream and moan, and close her eyes, squirting liquid everywhere. Another female participant said that "a woman is naturally tantric". I was able to observe Tiffany's tantric lovemaking in clubs, and I asked her about her experiences in the interview:

Interviewer: Are you able to have orgasms with men in clubs?

Tiffany: Yes.

Interviewer: What kind of orgasms?

³⁶ 'clitoriana' in Spanish, or someone who has pleasure from stimulating her clitoris, usually arriving at an orgasm

Tiffany: Intense ones. This is always when I surrender myself... in the moment and I explode from pleasure.

Interviewer: What type of orgasm?

Tiffany: Various types.

Interviewer: Anal?

Tiffany: Vaginal.

Interviewer: And through the clitoris?

Tiffany: Yes, that too, depending on the moment... on the situation... there are moments that... from both sides. Anal, vaginal. Also with girls, just watching them, I would come.

Interviewer: Without touching yourself?

Tiffany: In the moment... touching myself a little. But... touching her too.

Tiffany, couple

Both Diana and Tiffany enjoyed both vaginal penetration and performing fellatio on a lot of men. They did not feel bound to swinger clubs to obtain sexual satisfaction— their goal was to have sexual variety and they both had husbands who enjoyed watching them have pleasure. For Diana, it was the best of both worlds. Adele also talked about how much she enjoyed sexual variety and the spontaneous nature of sexual experiences with multiple partners:

It's a different kind of situation, you can't understand that if you're just watching that. If you are there, in the bed, it's... when somebody's touching you and you like it, and 'oh, this is nice', you can change. Well, I have never counted how many men I have been with. This was the first time for me to count them. I don't think about that at all. Everything just happens, there.

Adele, couple

Adele counted 6 men from that night, but the number was not important, she did not think about counting them, but rather about the experience, feeling open, feeling an attraction in that moment.

Many female participants claimed that they looked for a person who transmitted something, had something, that there was 'a feeling'. They were not looking for someone good looking, muscular, young unless he offered something else, something more. Female participants who were in their 50's, such as Alice and Nicole, liked sentimental elements from potential partners. Alice admitted that being older gave her the desire to look for something more in men - a feeling, an element of surprise. When I asked Nicole what she looked for in a male lover, she told me that she enjoyed the element of surprise and spontaneity, as well as something special about him:

Nicole: I always think that I already have a good lover for myself, my husband, so for me, I would rather have new experiences, I would rather have something different, something that I don't do at home, I would rather have it with women because I don't have that at home. If I want to have a good lover, I stay with my husband, but if I want to have new experiences I go with other people, and then I would like them to be something special...

Interviewer: How do you decide that they are special, to have sex with them?

Nicole: I don't know, I guess I just sense it. It's just the feeling, the moment. There is a chemistry between 2 people or there is not. But earlier I just sometimes like without talking anything blah blah blah, but nowadays I like to get to know them more. To be able to know if I like them or not. But sometimes it's spontaneous, like in the last party, I just go with the guy, I saw him earlier and I thought ooo wow, what's there, and then I forgot, and then he was leaving, and then I said, 'you're not leaving anywhere, you're not going anywhere...stay here'. And then he was, ok, 'let's go' and then I thought, 'oh, that was a nice one', 'what's your name?' and then he told me his name (laughs). But sometimes there can be a party and everyone's telling you, 'there's a guy and he's really nice nice nice' and everyone's telling you the same thing, and I'm like ok.

Nicole, couple

One example of female sexual assertiveness, and one could say of flexibility of female sexuality is experimenting with glory holes. The concept of glory holes is taboo because, unlike “the dark room” or “the theater room”, the lounge with sexual furniture, or “the BDSM room”, - it contains an element of disgust for many people. A woman would be transgressing many misconceptions in order to touch, perform fellatio or have intercourse with a stranger. One can also talk to the strangers on the other side of the wall. I have heard women ask men to take out their penises to check them out, if they are big enough, if they get hard.

5.4 Bisexuality in Swinger Women

In clubs in Andalusia, Spain, it was perhaps more common to see two women play together than two men. However, most participants in my study were very supportive of male bi-playfulness, and bi-curiosity in males. They demonstrated their acceptance and opposed the idea of inequality in bisexual play. However, some male swingers even told me that they did not include “bisexual” as part of their profile on the swinger website. There was a general reluctance to see or experience male bisexuality, although women constantly expressed to me and to others their desire to watch men have sex, kiss, play and any activity among men was generally wanted by women. The fact that it took place behind closed doors or in very small circles at private parties only reenforced the already existing taboo.

As an example of what the participants in my study advocated, Audrey demanded a change in this respect:

There is this machismo, and it is part of the swinger world. In fact, is it quite typical for us to talk with other couples and then the man of the other couple would say, ‘well, we got together with another couple and the man tried to touch me... tried to feel me up... can you imagine!?’ So then, when I listen to things like that, it bothers me. It bothers me because, supposedly, we are open-minded, so then I don’t understand why there is so much... so much.... I can’t even find a word for it, but... it is very much ok that the women are bisexual, fantastic for everyone. Now when one talks about the topic of bisexuality between men it is like a taboo topic. So, I always say that respect everyone’s taste and desires. Maybe you like me.... maybe

you like women... or whatever, but I don't understand this repression of the men to talk about male bisexuality as if it were a forbidden topic.

Audrey, couple

Erotic acts between men were frowned upon in many swinger clubs, often because other men did not feel comfortable. Women, on the other hand, said that it was exciting to see 2 men have sex, often expressing the desire to watch their husbands with other men.

One male participant, Edgar, claimed that "80% of women in swinger settings are bisexual". Men assumed that many women in the swinger world were bisexual. Perhaps this was in line with the heteronormative fantasy of a man being with two women. Women were therefore encouraged to play together, even when they said that they were not bisexual. One could argue this as an example of a lack of female agency. There was a very common belief that most female swingers liked to play with girls, although from observing and talking to women in swinger clubs, this was not always true. In fact, women often said, "I am more into men", and this was a way for women to gently change the subject.

Women shared with me that they often just like 'to play' with other women in order to warm up the men. In the following, Tiffany explains how she may be in a situation where she has sex with a woman, but it is rare. I have observed Tiffany having sex with (performing oral sex) on a woman, once, in the many times that I have seen her have sex, and later on she told me that sometimes, one has to please one's partner too.

Interviewer: You are bisexual...

Tiffany: Not completely. Had I been bisexual, I would always want to be with a woman, and I don't always feel like being with a woman. Sometimes I am disgusted. But it is because I am not (bisexual)... I only go with people that I connect with, in that moment. Or depending on how turned on I am at that moment. It has to be a person that transmits to me.... not physically, but that turns me on, it is more about being turned on that anything else.

Tiffany, couple

Tiffany often talked about this connection or “if there is a feeling”, with males and in this case, with females. It would be difficult to place a finger on how this connection is established, but according to Tiffany, it is a spontaneous act of play – a spark that occurs, a mood. Therefore, one may, in one moment or another, transmit and receive this energy that drives one into sex with another. According to Tiffany, nothing should be forced, all should flow freely. Another male participant, Greg, expressed his disapproval over the expectation that a woman must “eat pussy” even though she does not really enjoy it:

Greg: Imagine you are simply a heterosexual woman, and your husband or your partner would like to watch you eating another woman’s pussy, but you are hetero. And you tell him, ‘I just don’t like eating pussy’.

Interviewer: No...

Greg: So, why would you do what you don’t feel like doing? But then you think, well, you’re going to do it because it turns him on. And then, when you are in that situation, you will tell yourself, ‘I am going to feel disgusted, I just don’t want to do it’. You will devote yourself to sucking on the groin of the girl. You will kiss her, you will touch her breasts, but surely you will not eat her with the desire you would have had if you really wanted to eat her. And imagine being that girl who receives the cunnilingus! And you are thinking, ‘What is this woman doing?’

Interviewer: And the woman is also pleasing the husband (by allowing the other woman to perform cunnilingus on her).

Greg, single

Women played with women for different motives. Some women were turned on by other women sexually, frolicked in the erotic games that happened spontaneously, while the men watched. I was lucky to interact with and observe some women who were confident about their sexuality, and therefore confident about their bodies. These were not women who had perfect bodies, but rather focused on the sexuality and their own pleasures.

5.5 Female Swingers' Assertiveness

Swinger women who claimed their agency expressed their sexual desires clearly and even used their sexual experiences outside of swinger settings in order to combat stereotypes. In the following, Lourdes described how she would stand up to men at work, for example, when they talked about women in a derogatory way:

The man said, 'I could fuck 3, 4, 5 women. My woman – fucking her once a week, that would be enough for her'. - to which I answered, 'then you must be lousy lay, because if my husband does not fuck me 24 hours a day, I rip off his head. If you don't give her good sex, then maybe you're the one with the problem'. There were these derogatory comments...more towards their own women... and then towards other women in general. Well, I could not take it.

Lourdes, couple

While Lourdes did not reveal to her co-workers that she was a swinger, even though the men at the table talked openly about their private lives, - she did talk about her own sexuality as very active and experienced, fighting against the belief that women are passive and waiting for their husbands to conquer them sexually. Her partner told me that Lourdes lost some friends because she told them that she was a swinger, and Edgar was not prepared for this. He was very strict about revealing that he was a swinger, while Lourdes told me that she wanted to educate people. I asked her what she thought was the best way to fight the stereotype that a woman who is active, experienced, has multiple orgasms or multiple partners is simultaneously dirty and aggressive.

The first thing that men must learn is where the clitoris is, where the G spot is, knowing how to give a woman pleasure. Because since I have been with Edgar, I have had incredible anal orgasms. I never experienced this before. Or if you think of the women in their 50's that experienced squirting for the first time. So of course, if your man does not know how to touch you, and does not know how to give you pleasure, you don't even want to touch yourself because a woman should not touch

herself, society says. A sexual culture is lacking here. There is a lack of a culture of pleasure and eroticism. It is not just about the penetrations – there are so many other games.

Lourdes, couple

Lourdes was a single female swinger in clubs before she met Edgar, also a single swinger in clubs. She began her sexual experimentation on her own and when she talks of a culture of sexuality, she probably means that education on an individual level as well as sexual collective education must take place. Some women felt that swinger clubs provided them with the freedom to have the sexual experiences they could not have outside of clubs.

Sabina, a female swinger in a couple, has been critical of swinger clubs and the swinger world, but was very assertive in her way of communicating to others about her relationship. She insisted on removing the labels that society and swinging placed on non-monogamous relationships and suggested that it was this labeling that did not help the negative stereotypes. She combated stereotypes and misconceptions both in the swinger world and in her social network outside of clubs. When asked about her relationship with Walter, she would tell people that they are happy, and reported people being shocked.

I cannot go to work and say that I have an open relationship in a live-in partnership. Of course, I could say, that I have an open relationship and people would say, ‘ahh, nothing serious’, and I would say, yes, serious, we have lived together for years. ‘What?’ Yes, living together. ‘Are you serious?’ – Yes! ‘And what if one falls in love?’ Well, it already happened. You know? It is as if people don’t... work would be the only place where I have not talked to anyone, but it is to protect me at work because I work in a... (names the workplace). And I am telling you... we are the new gays. Swingers and polyamorists I believe they are the new gays.

Sabina, couple

Sabina admitted that she lost friendships because she talked about her relationships and being a swinger. She felt that she was criticized for this and had to leave these friendships that did not accept her.

Lila, a young female who has been a single swinger in clubs for several years on her own, introduced her partner to swinger settings after they met. Lila said that when she was single, she enjoyed going to swinger clubs because she could go out, have sex, and be in the company of friends. She did not feel alone. Even though swinging was not an important part of her life, - this was a safe place she could come and go, as she pleased. For Lila, who had felt as an outsider all her life, - being a swinger was one step away from that feeling, a place she was accepted and cared for by friends, a place where she could be assertive. With her partner, she claimed that she could use it as a kind of therapy occasionally, and it did not hurt nor was it an absolute necessity in their relationship. Lila's explanation of pleasing her man was a rather practical one, although it would be easy to argue that adherence to patriarchal and heteronormative values play a much stronger part here:

I like to see him very happy and excited, in a new place with new people. Since I have been going out so much, and he hasn't. He is very visual... I do it because I want him to enjoy himself. What happens is... you get there, the poor man has paid the cover charge, drove far when he hates driving. He is cold, and now it turns out there's nothing going on (no one is having sex), and it's like, buffff, we're not going to go out anymore because to go out like this it's And sometimes Peter is there in the club and then I don't have to do anything. Because Peter is the king, he gets there and right away everyone is at his feet. So, if you don't participate the club stays like a regular club (discotheque), people... nobody dares to do anything, and well, one must be a little daring. People who are very reserved, even couples who have been together for a long time... they just stand there staring, maybe because of laziness, or because it's cold, to see what happens. You have to initiate something because if you don't nothing will happen. Enjoy - yes, of course I enjoy the sex, but at this point, it's more about his enjoyment, for me it's not really important. Obviously, if you go to a place, well, you go to look for a guy that you like. If you will have a swap, you're

not going to go with the shortest, baldest man. But sometimes you like a guy, and he is very very reserved, shy, he doesn't move, and that's that.

Lila, couple

Lila's sexual assertiveness is demonstrated in her willingness to have sex with others, or in her promiscuity. It is hard to measure to which extent this satisfies her sexually, or emotionally, although she resisted the idea that she was a cuckold wife. I have yet to meet a real-life cuckold wife who seeks out women for her husband and derives pleasure in doing so, and watching the women be with her man. Another participant, Emma, a bisexual single swinger, shared the idea of pleasing her man:

It would be enough to see him enjoy himself, that he exists, and that he is happy. This is the most important thing. We're not going to do drugs, I mean, it is within limits.... What I mean is life... it can be over any second. Life is there to be enjoyed.... Let this joy be through work, through kids, through a loved one, through sexual experiences. Doesn't matter, through hobbies, or things you like doing. That's the only important thing, because at any moment, life can be over, and not to enjoy it is the biggest sin. If my loved one, my man, wants something and I can give it to him, whatever I can give him, to travel somewhere, meet someone, polyamorous relations, something I can do, something that is in my power to do, - knowing that he's happy, I will be happy.

Emma, single

Emma claimed that feeling this joy in watching her lover is what eliminates the negative feeling of jealousy some people experience. This selflessness is perhaps the other side of the assertiveness she started experiencing as she began frequenting clubs. Emma recognized that it was when she began going to clubs that she also started to accept and love herself:

I finally started to love myself, started to spoil myself, organize trips for myself. I want to go here, or there. If I want, I can meet this guy, or that guy. I was very

comfortable. I finally started to love being alone, without explaining anything to anyone, or come up with excuses for anyone. I would tell my parents that yes, I was going out, not a club because I knew they'd have a heart attack, but, for instance, going to a discotheque. I was done hiding, yes, I was feeling very free. I had a great time.

Emma, single

Emma's assertiveness was manifested through her own individuality and independence. To allow herself to go out and be sexual was in direct opposition to her family and her family values. In a culture that did not view female bisexuality as acceptable, Emma admitted that she enjoyed sex with women, openly during the interview and in swinger settings where she was allowed (and encouraged) to play with girls.

5.6 Dynamic Nature of Jealous Feelings in Swinger Women

Jealousy played a different role for swinger women. Some were far from being free of jealousy, but it was the idea of sharing their partner sexually within the confines of swinger clubs that distinguished them. They also used strategies for "unlearning jealousy" (Easton & Hardy, 2009, 115), and believed that it did not have to dominate their lives. One could wonder whether swingers' regimented and tightly regulated practice lead to an even more controlling monogamy, only permitting certain acts under the surveillance of one's partner. For Holly, jealousy was an important part of swinging:

Interviewer: You mean that your partner should get a little jealous?

Holly: He should enjoy the journey, but he has to feel that I am getting attention, and he has to see that someone is interested in me and feel that he is not the only one in the world, that he can lose me. This spice is very important. But then again, all of this must be within limits.

Holly, couple

Holly's viewpoint was in line with a lot of what other swinger women told me, how the importance of some jealous feelings from one's partner contributed to the eroticism of the situation, while at the same time this was juxtaposed against the safety of the controlled environment within swinger clubs. Some women never 'entered the game of jealousy', and claimed that if there was another woman, then the relationship would be over (Diana, interview).

Nicole explained to me how, when it came to jealousy, she wanted to push her own boundaries to see how she felt:

Nicole: Sometimes I push it... I'm like, I'm doing things that I maybe know that I will regret. Like we were once in a party where there was this gorgeous young girl, her body was like perfect, and I just... I just needed my husband to be with her so that I could see how I would react. And I even said to her, 'go to our room, go and wake him up and do whatever you do there, in our room'. And I did that.... (We were in a hotel). I told the girl to do that so that I would see how I felt later, after they had already been together. And at that time when my husband started... too much... to talk about her, then I noticed, hey, there is this jealousy, maybe I just wanted to see this, that there is something still left, hm, I am a little bit jealous.

Interviewer: This was after he had been with her.

Nicole: Yes, after, when he started talking about her, 'oh, she's so lovely and beautiful and blah blah blah...and she's single'. That's the point. She's single. If she was in a relationship with somebody, I wouldn't have thought about it, but I think single women... it's something like they can cause a little problem sometimes. Can be... in your mind. Because if it's.... I've been also, because it interests me as well, because I think why don't we women, why don't we think single men.... or why don't men think... single men as a threat, they never do.

Nicole, couple

Nicole pushed the situation to see if she still felt jealousy because she rarely felt it. Perhaps because Nicole was a spiritual person, it was probably a test she designed for herself, or a

series of tests throughout their relationship. One important test was allowing Victor to go to swinger clubs alone, and another test was allowing him to be with very beautiful women in the same hotel.

As a contrast, Amber was a young and single woman in swinger clubs. I asked her whether couples saw her as a threat, as a single woman, and she admitted that sometimes it happened, especially because she was young. When I asked about how she usually reacted to this, Amber answered - "by being sweet, showing that I didn't want to get in between.... inside any relationship. All I wanted was... sex. That was it. I didn't want a partner, least of all a 40-year-old, God no". However, she understood sharing one's love as something very difficult, and she was not ready to do it in her relationships. While it was easy to be a single woman in a couple, she saw it as very difficult to be a swinger woman sharing her man.

As a swinger woman in a couple, Valerie believed that jealousy was something that could be fought, like a battle with one's insecurities. She told a story of feeling threatened by a very attractive woman who walked into the swinger club one night and proposed to have sex with her. She was way too attractive for Valerie, and she just did not want to have "her body next to mine". Regardless of a woman's appearance, on the other hand, Valerie felt jealousy imagining her partner ejaculating in another woman. This was in the very beginning of swinging:

Thinking that my partner would become aroused with another woman and come with her – having that thought broke my head. I think that this is the way we as women were brought up: "You are a wonderful being, idyllic, you must be adored. You are special, and there is no one like you". So for me, my head would explode thinking that my partner could desire and ejaculate in other women – it was more about the idea that he would ejaculate in other women. One time, we were in a club, and we did an exchange – he was with a girl, and I was with the guy, but they were not a couple. The guy had a problem with erection, and he left, and I was alone. My partner did not realize it, or he was in his own world penetrating the girl, so he kept going, and I felt alone, I felt that he was not paying attention to me at all, and on top of that, - he came, and I felt horrible. I suffered so much jealousy in that moment. I also had

the will to fight against those jealous thoughts because it was precisely something that, if I continued to have them, - it was something that would prevent me from enjoying all this, because in the end, it was very selfish too. I know that other times, my boyfriend was a little excluded, or more like a spectator... and I well, completely carefree and he did not feel bad, so, in the end, I realized that these were foolish thoughts in my head that did not help me at all, did not bring anything into our relationship, and well, I tried to fight them but yes, I have had those jealous emotions, and he probably did too, and in the end, we fought them.

Valerie, couple

That must have been a very difficult moment for Valerie, difficult to take and hold herself together, not explode, not show her feelings – and worst of all, not react to her partner while he was in the middle of a pleasurable experience. The desire to make it work because she really wanted to stay in this world, actually selfishly as well, was what may have stopped her from exploding. And maybe what she also suggested was the gender roles (female adored, male adoring) trained the man to be less jealous and competitive, while women were usually hurt if threatened?

Sabina presented another perspective on a similar matter, but hypothetically speaking. From her suggestion, this has never happened before. I asked her how she would feel if her partner Walter was intimate with another woman without her, to which she answered as follows:

Personally, it would make me happy because Walter is an emotional person, who likes contact, tenderness, and it is hard for him to find women that he really likes, and that would give him these things, so normally when he does find someone, I am very happy, honestly. And if this girl asked to be alone with him without me, it would be strange for Walter to ask me this, but he could ask me not to come, for whatever reason, because this girl... clearly it would be better for him to be alone with her, so it wouldn't matter at all, because I know that Walter always likes to include me but well, if he asks me this time not to go together, it wouldn't matter, at all. I am sure.

Sabina, couple

I wondered with Sabina how it was possible to be so open-minded, not to get jealous, not to be possessive. But from I understood, Sabina was not in this situation often, and she told me about this situation only hypothetically, not that she had experienced this in the past.

Emily told me that she had never experienced jealousy. Emily was a seductive, sensual, elegant woman. We went out to several dinners together, and I noticed her way of passing the dessert to her husband, with so much tenderness and passion, the way he looked at her, the way she looked at him. Emily claimed that if her husband became interested in another woman emotionally, or fell in love, then it would be clear and simple - 'then this person is not for me, then it would be over'. Emily was the one that incited her man to start swinging, almost immediately after going out. She said that he was a bit shy, and she was the one who was curious about it. She shared with me her main fantasy, yet to be realized:

I have a fantasy, and he knows about it, I tell him 'I would like... for you to be with a woman, and I would be there, watching, but I wouldn't participate... Instead, I want you to disconnect to the point of really enjoying being with her, without needing to see me have pleasure, but rather... to detach yourself from everything that's happening around and really enjoy yourself'. I can imagine that it's about his upbringing, the way that he was brought up, or habit, that tells him 'I can't enjoy myself unless she is'. It is difficult for him.

Emily, couple

This fantasy did not trespass into emotional territory, and Emily was desiring to watch him lose control, be with his own pleasure instead of think of hers. She was the one that suggested to swing together, and she was the one that suggested to transgress into this experience. Perhaps it was the transgression that attracted her into this world, while he was more content with seeing her happy.

5.7 Feeling “Saturated” in Swinger Clubs

Emma shared with me that she felt “saturated”, after being a regular for years, as a single woman. She wanted to step back and live a relationship away from clubs, especially when the man she had a relationship with did not want her going to clubs on her own, and not with him either. Perhaps this feeling of being saturated came from a dissatisfaction she felt with the way she was treated by the men, something that other female participants confirmed as well:

No woman likes to feel like a toy, I mean, a doll, especially not a blow-up doll, like a used condom, fucked in all the holes and good-bye...Yes, she came here for sex, that is true, but every woman, regardless of age or nationality, likes to be courted a little bit, - ask her if she wants a drink, order a drink for her, just as an example, talk to her, at least for 5 minutes, rather than ‘let’s go to the room’.

Emma, single swinger

Kathy was another female participant dissatisfied with swinger settings, claiming that she never liked them from the start. Kathy felt that the idea of swinging was too restrictive for her personally, and presented the following reasons:

Now it is about couple exchange. This concept for me, it is much more difficult because then there is the right of possession – ‘this is my partner, and I will swap her/him’. Then there are a lot of things that bother me. They say, ‘It is couple’s play’, that it is a way to be closer to your couple, when in reality, it is not like that. When you try hard to all be together (2 couples), there is always one person in the couple that does not fit in, there is no connection, and the other two yes, and it is a lot less fluid than when it is unpredictable. A lot of times, one of the two must give in so as not to annoy the other. Women are much more selective. I am more selective.

Kathy, couple

Some participants who were negative to swinger clubs reported it was because they did not find a connection with people or complained about the impersonal nature of a club.

Irene started as a swinger together with her husband, and they went to clubs in Spain, travelled to the different existing clubs in different parts of Spain. While her husband enjoyed swinger clubs, Irene was ambiguous about her motivation: “Why is it that I am so turned on in the beginning (entering a club), and when I come out, I am so frustrated? I mean, in the beginning, there is so much excitement, a lot of expectations, and I really want to... but then, leaving, you think, I could have stayed at home, watching TV”. As we were sitting on a patio, having coffee (in her house), I told her that I could relate completely. There was the excitement of getting dressed up, going to dinner, seeing people. However, the disappointment seeps in at some point. For Irene, it was because physically, and sexually, the man was not what she expected: “I met guys who were very handsome, but then, did not turn me on at all, not even ‘a feeling’, then I would meet guys who looked ok, and I really enjoyed myself with them. So I don’t want to close off completely because you never know, but there are times when I say, I go out and I think... pfff, ‘why, why did I go along with the game instead of going home?’ I have regretted doing things.... many times. And I don’t know if other couples will tell you the same thing”. Valerie, a swinger who attended clubs with her partner, described her experience of being in a club as fleeting:

The club – the club is the night. The club is also a nightclub. It is to drink, and a lot of people drink a lot or take other things. So, it is a party. And it is not so much because it is a club, but rather because it is a party setting, giving you that feeling that everything goes by quickly, the night... people are into this, right, you talk to someone, and in 5 minutes, they are like, ‘so let’s go fuck or what?’ So nothing is created, there is no continuity, nothing. I don’t know, there isn’t a more intimate relationship, and you lose that feeling of intimacy.

Valerie, couple

While reminding her more of other nightclub settings, swinger clubs failed to offer Valerie the personal connection desired or a sense of belonging to a group or a community. In her

experience, swinger clubs alluded to the fleeting sense of the night, observed in other studies as well.

Nicole resisted the idea that one must go to swinger settings for sex. She insisted on needing something more, something special, for her to have sex with that person. More and more often, she did not want to accompany her partner to swinger settings, and she explained the reason being that one must have sex, instead of focusing more on the art of seduction, which for her, was in the conversation:

For me, attractive can be many things, it doesn't have to be a beautiful person. Actually, if somebody is too good looking, it's boring. It's ... there must be... something about the person for me. It can be that the person looks naughty, or a little bit dangerous, or something like that. Or somebody is very intelligent, and you just notice 'ok, I like this guy. I like the way he talks'. Often, I would someone, and I would be thinking, - that's the last person I would be with. And then, I feel like, I'm talking to this person, and I'm so relaxed because I'm thinking, 'I'm never going to bed with him', and then I'm talking, talking, talking, and then little by little, I notice that, actually, it's quite an interesting person, and I'm laughing, and I find myself in bed with him, because I got to know him, and I noticed, 'ok, this is a very nice guy'. Attraction can be everything else except the physical. It can be like... the way he looks at you, or the way he talks to you.

Nicole, couple

The importance of getting to know someone has been emphasized by many participants in this study, something that runs contrary to the fleeting nature of swinger clubs. For Nicole, the value of a conversation lies in the possibility of being seduced by someone who is adept at talking to a woman, perhaps somewhat extroverted, or funny, entertaining. These are qualities and characteristics that women reported as attractive. And without the men that possess these characteristics that are considered attractive by the women – what would be the motivation for a woman of going to a swinger club?

CHAPTER 6: ELEMENTS AND MEANINGS OF SWINGER SETTINGS

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to present a variety of swinger clubs in Spain and to refer to Cap d'Agde, France as a setting that swingers compared with Spain. The idea of comparing settings came from the participants' constant comparisons during interviews and in informal conversations, an important element that should be addressed in future research. Comparison of settings came from swingers who longed for an earlier time when clubs were more luxurious and when there was more intensity of desire and more sexual activity. Swingers often compared settings in reviews online, and in informal conversations as well. Clubs were rated informally, by word of mouth, and usually wanted to know what kind of people went to clubs (older, younger, attractive), how each club was set up³⁷, or the décor, the private rooms, access to parking; how clean it was; how much it cost. Couples who traveled through Spain, or France, wanted to know which club to go to, or asked in one club about the other. Considering this common practice, it would be interesting to write a more in-depth comparison of settings in different countries, not only Spain and France. Secondly, this chapter employs participants' comments and critique while presenting elements of clubs and the meanings of these elements for the participants in this study.

This chapter will address the important elements observed in clubs, and presented by the swingers themselves, namely the importance of set-up, or the organizational spatial construction of the club: its furniture, including the furniture used for sexual activities, such as the beds and large beds for group sex, the presence of a pool or jacuzzi, the presence of bidets and showers, the BDSM room and its paraphernalia. This chapter will explore music as a segregating factor for age groups in clubs, the importance of safety, discretion, health prevention and hygiene for swingers.

Finally, swinger settings, in Spain and France, were observed as spatial organizations, and this geographical planning or the organization of space was specifically designed to ensure safety, provide intimacy and privacy, incite eroticism or "turn on", and facilitate negotiations among the attendees. One could describe this system as a spatial layering. Overall, the chapter's focus is to present the meanings behind these elements, and

³⁷ Instalaciones (in Spanish)

the variety of roles that swinger settings play in the construction of the swinger world. This chapter raises important questions around what swingers can teach us about organization of space and whether these lessons learned can be employed in other nighttime settings.

6.2 Community Safety

One of the first misconceptions about swinger clubs or settings is whether these settings are conducive to some form for gender violence. Swinger club attendees in Spain and in France were aware of and followed strict rules of behavior regarding safety, and these were established, agreed upon and enforced by its members, managers, and owners of clubs. This framework worked to prevent physical violence or harassment of any kind.

There was usually a sign at the door that clearly expressed the venue's right to refuse admission, or that one was admitted by VIP or invitation only. This first restriction differed from your local discotheques where a bouncer or security guard would tell you if you could come in or not. Swinger settings in Spain did not have bouncers, security guards, police on sight, or any form of organized or paid security service. Cap d'Agde, France, reflected the same kind of safe environment observed in other settings in Spain. The only difference I observed was in Cap d'Agde, there were police officers walking around outside, although not inside the actual swinger clubs. This reflected the general and more explicit enforcement of rules in Cap. For example, in swinger clubs in Cap d'Agde, for example, rules and regulations of the club were hanging on the wall outside the club - in Russian, Italian, Spanish and French. There were 10 rules of behavior. One was about the dress code, another had to do with respecting when someone says 'no', another was respect in general (I do not remember all the rules because I could not take a picture of the sign).

Furthermore, security and privacy in Spain were interlinked, and layers of control were similarly established in every club. One such example was the use of cameras. Many swinger clubs (in Spain) had cameras outside, where the manager would screen customers, and allow 0-20 single men per night, for instance, and most couples and single women were admitted without screening. This type of screening was a way to simultaneously ensure safety and privacy. While a security guard would be a blatant way of controlling entrance

and an element of security, - the use cameras was a more subtle form of filtering clientele and prevention of allowing problematic clientele in clubs.

Cameras at the door were also used as safety and surveillance over the parking area. In some clubs, one had to walk down a narrow alley, and while you're walking down this alley, from the parking, cars passed by slowly – taxis, people going out at night, and if you were a woman, in high heels, and short skirt, people would look and see you go into a swinger club. It was not as if someone stopped and made comments. It was just curious looks, maybe wondering what kind of place this was. I never felt unsafe particularly because there were cameras at the door of each club that surveilled the entire area from the parking lot to the club. Also, the couples who went in and out were people I knew; I knew the barman and the managers and felt that these people were inclusive, helpful, and taking care of me. Most clubs had a similar attitude to provide safety, even in the parking lot, and be helpful to the clientele.

The managers' restricting access was a way to protect regulars (mostly couples) from men who happened to see the club from the road, or from a friend and wanted to try it out without knowing anything about its rules and norms. Even though clubs permitted single men who were new to this, some restrictions, such as dress code or limiting the number of men, were enforced at the door. Evaluation happened at the door, then in the social/bar zone, and even in the sex area.

The effective way in which community safety was enforced socially, by the social and cultural norms that were the same in most settings in Spain and in France, made me often wonder as to whether these elements are transferrable to other nighttime settings. My assumption was often supported by the participants' own comparisons of discotheques to swinger clubs, as they insisted that the latter were safer when one thought of the physical and gender violence. One participant brought up a comparison between swinger clubs and a public beach in Spain. Jacob used to enjoy camping on the beach with Tiffany, his girlfriend:

Not in a sexual sense, but romantically-speaking, watching the stars, the moon... we enjoyed it... but one day, we realized that it was somewhat dangerous, because there were all types of people, and as soon as they'd see that you were alone and helpless,

some asshole could come with a knife and take whatever... One day, we saw this one strange guy, and I thought, 'that's it'. You're in a tent, and completely alone, some psychopath could come and it's dangerous.³⁸

Jacob, couple

Many participants, like Jacob, suggested that, unlike other settings that take place at night, swinger clubs nurtured safety through the community of swingers themselves, as well as the club owners and managers. Any type of physical and verbal aggression or harassment was not tolerated. Theft, for example, was prevented by reminding attendees (both swingers and managers reminded people) to leave their things in the lockers, wristband keys provided at the door.

While each swinger club was organized differently, not only in their management style, but also in spatial organization – they shared many similarities. First, management was familial. In Andalusia, each club was managed locally. It is important to point out that management at local level was important in that it gave a sense of ownership to the managers. It also meant that owners or managers, although not always swingers, were usually very close to or familiar with the swinger world. For example, they could have swinger parents, or swinger children, were brought up as open-minded because of their families.

The rules of the clubs were enforced by the managers, and usually they were a couple, or a man and a woman that managed the club together. Some of these couples did own the club, while many who did not own but managed it while still treating it as their own. This sense of ownership meant that they were reluctant to have problems in their club, or even outside in the parking lot. These managers or owners were the ones that limited alcohol

³⁸ ...pero ya no solo en plan sexo sino en plan romántico, ver la estrella, ver la luna y eso... nos gustaba... pero un día nos dimos cuenta de que era un poco peligroso porque hay gente de toda clase, y lo suficiente de que tú estés allí solo y estás indefenso... te viene cualquier gilipollas con una navaja... y al rato te lo dan, entiendes.... Te quitan lo que sea, yo qué sé. Un día nos vino un tío muy raro y... uff... Y dije yo, 'que va, hasta aquí'.... Sabes estás en una tienda allí estás solo completamente solo, te puede venir cualquier psicópata qué sé yo, y es peligroso...

consumption, and they were the ones that informally enforced this limit. Most importantly, they did not allow an intoxicated man or a group of men enter the club. Contrary to the discotheques and bars, swinger clubs in Spain and France did not have bouncers at the door to control or throw out a drunken customer. Furthermore, only four drinks were included in the entrance fee for each couple (two drinks per person), and if one wanted more, one could buy it at the bar, but most couples did not pass over this limit. The managers told me that they did not want someone consuming too much alcohol and becoming so intoxicated that he or she would have to be thrown out of the club.

While discotheques and bars promoted a high consumption of drinking, the consequences of which affected the safety of the other customers, swinger settings had a moderate attitude on alcohol, and while they still depending on alcohol sales, the managers did everything to prevent negative consequences. What I found interesting was that for the first time going out in the night, I met some people who did not drink at all. Vlad, a male participant, claimed that he met very few people who didn't drink alcohol, who were "abstemious" like him, "especially when you are in this environment with the intention of having a good time, sexually".³⁹ For people like Lila, who worked out regularly and was focused on her career, drinking was "counterproductive":

This was one thing I could never understand – people who must drink, or smoke... to fit in socially to have sex. In the end, it is completely counterproductive. I have always been into sports, always focused on taking care of nutrition, and this gave me a lot of energy, and it shows, in the end.⁴⁰

Lila, couple

³⁹ He encontrado poca gente que no bebe alcohol como yo, que sea abstemio, sobre todo cuando te mueves en este ambiente con la intención de pasarla bien sexualmente.

⁴⁰ Es una cosa que nunca he comprendido, la gente se tiene que alcoholizar, o tiene que fumar, o tiene que.... para integrarse socialmente para tener sexo. Al final, es totalmente contraproducente, yo siempre he sido muy deportista, siempre me he dedicado a cuidarme mucho, siempre he dedicado a cuidarme mucho en la alimentación, en el tema de alcohol y tal, y eso te da mucha vitalidad, se nota, al final.

I have met many people who had a similar attitude as Vlad and Lila (and her partner Kyle). They were people who enjoyed going out without drinking or smoking. They enjoyed sports, nutrition, and sexual recreation. Emma, a young single female participant, made an obvious distinction between discotheques and swinger clubs in the following:

Nightclubs are there for people to come and drink. For people to spend money on alcohol, that is how discotheques and bars make money. So, all the people who go out to discotheques go there to get drunk. I don't understand how people look for sex in discotheques. If you are looking to have sex, swinger's clubs are ideal because there will be another person just like you looking for sex. The main focus is not alcohol, but rather a place where people can have sex.

Emma, single

When it came to illegal drug use and drug dealing on premises, - there was a sign at the door of every club rejecting the use of any types of illegal substances. Even when it came to smoking marijuana, this was discouraged by other swingers and looked down upon socially. Club owners and managers would not tolerate someone selling drugs on premises. I rarely heard about anyone selling drugs to swinger clubs' attendees. Swinger attendees were generally conscious about the fact that alcohol and illegal substances could affect sexual performance, and men preferred to use Viagra or Cialis when going out to swinger clubs. The use of this medication was widely accepted, and men would even openly talk about it as a solution for being able to keep going for hours.

6.3 Sexism in the Swinger World

Participants sometimes mentioned the existing "machismo"⁴¹ in clubs, but the idea or concept of "machismo" was perhaps somewhat different in their world. One example of this was men paying for women. Peter, a male swinger, often stated, as a matter of fact, "The man pays" referring to restaurants and clubs. There was logic to this high demand or placing

⁴¹ Sexism, hypermasculinity, chivalry in Spanish. Has both negative and positive connotations in Spanish.

a high value on what was most scarce in clubs – young, attractive women, who wanted to have sex with couples or singles. Even though this was a social value, or these women were valuable, there was also a monetary value on this clientele, in Cap d’Agde and in Spain. A single woman was privileged socially, spatially, and economically in Spain and in France. Also, in all swinger settings, it was common for the man to pay the entrance fee, whether it was a couple or a single man, or a man inviting a single woman. This fee was established by the local venues, in Spain and France. Single men paid more (40-60 euros), couples paid 40-60 euros per couple, while a single woman in all the swingers’ clubs only paid 10 euros (2 drinks included in this price). Even though swinger settings cost money, and people had to be able to afford 40 euros plus dinner (another 40 euros) per couple, - there was this separation between the couples’ economy, the single woman economy, and the single man’s. I have never seen a woman invite a man to a club, pay for the dinner, and the entrance fee to a swinger club. Also, it was the man’s responsibility to buy condoms, lubricants, either before coming to the club, or in the club where these were for sale. If there were many partners in the night, or several sexual acts, he would have to buy more condoms. Parties were usually organized by men as well, either by the husbands or by the single men. Women usually did not organize parties.

Although participants have not mentioned this, there was another element of clubs that could have served male eroticism, such as the presence of a TV screen (in most clubs), featuring mainstream pornography (versus other types of pornography, such as amateur or homemade). A few clubs, such as club Lux, played movies that were old-fashioned, because the pornography seemed softer, the lighting in the movie was dimmer, some women had pubic hair, and there was a kind of amateur quality to the movies. Pornography movies did not feature male bisexuality, only female. A woman (or a man) could ask (the managers) to play other films featuring bisexual men or transsexuals, for example, or amateur porn, but this was not common. Maybe it was not important, and the TV screen formed a small part of the ambiance and did not represent the entire experience of being in a club.

On the level of sexual practices, there may have been more heteronormativity or sexual inequality. During fieldwork in swinger clubs, I generally observed more fellatio than cunnilingus in Andalusia, Spain. When I asked some of the single men, they told me that

cunnilingus was something that they reserved for their girlfriends or wives, not on strangers. Women often thought this was unfair. One participant, Audrey, complained about this many times. She talked about the time when that she explicitly asked the man to perform oral sex on her, and while he promised to do so after she performed fellatio on him, he blatantly refused to do it afterwards. Her husband was upset about this as well and told the man that there will be no sex. Both Audrey and Derek thought it was unfair. I observed women who insisted on receiving oral sex before intercourse, and before they performed fellatio. Some men enjoyed cunnilingus greatly and performed it every time on several women per night, but this was less common. Perhaps not all women enjoyed oral sex, and preferred vaginal sex, for example. If they did enjoy oral sex but were not verbally requesting it, then this may have been the reason for men not performing it. Perhaps in a club setting, the most natural thing was to perform fellatio because everyone was doing it, and if more and more men had been performing cunnilingus, - then this would have led to a higher prevalence of this practice, and sexual equality between genders in clubs.

Another major difference was single female attendees were a minority in clubs in Spain and in France. There were almost always more single men than single women. When I asked the participants, they named several reasons for there being fewer single women: a single woman did not need to go to a club to have sex; a single woman did not know about clubs; a single woman did not go to a club because of social stigma. A single woman was sometimes invited by a single man, but she was under no obligation to have sex with him or even spend time with him inside the club. One young female participant expressed the value that her youth, single status and personality brought to the club:

I possess 3 qualities for which I am loved in the swinger world: first, I am a woman, I am a single woman. Secondly, I am young. There are women who come here alone, and they are older. Usually, this is the way it is. Most women I've seen that were single, were older. In the history of the club, I was probably the only woman who was 20 years old, this was strange. And the reason why a lot of people really started to value me, and why I started to work, was because I brought my single female friends, and they were young and beautiful, delicious women. I have 3 girlfriends

who participated in all this since they were 19 years old. This was just... I remember when we first entered the club all of us. There were four of us. I am always welcomed (loved) by the owners of the club, by the wives as well, because I come with my girlfriends. Because I really... I never claim anything as my own.

Interview with a Female Participant in Spain

This female participant worked as a hostess in one of the swinger clubs, and reported that some single male clients wanted her to act as an intermediary to find a couple and a single woman for the night. Although this was her job, and it was the job of the hostesses (public relations) in clubs, to be the intermediary and introduce couples to single men, and single men to women, - this participant found it difficult at times to combat certain attitudes by single men:

Participant: Because, in a way, 'I have paid for it' and this... this kind of attitude... - to which I would think 'No darling, you didn't come to a brothel'.

Interviewer: How did you answer something like that?

Participant: I answered... naturally, if this was a client, one must, somehow, work on him, saying 'ok, I will try', but... when it was all very direct, you know all too well that he won't be able to do anything with anyone because this was not the way...

Interviewer: So why didn't men go to brothels instead?

Participant: Because for men, to accept that he must go to a brothel to get laid – is not right, it's below his dignity, because he is a hunter, he has to... seduce the woman. And if you just pay, she opens her legs, and that's it, then that part is lost. This means that as a man, I am worthless.

Interview with a Female Participant in Spain

As an employee, she often spent time explaining and teaching about the cultural norms and meanings of being a swinger and educating men to become more understanding and knowledgeable. Later on, when she was no longer an employee but a single female participant

in clubs, it was important that a man seduced her, and she complained that this part was often missing from her experiences with single men. This suggests that perhaps the art of seduction was more persistent or inculcated in women, rather than men, because men had to be taught, whereas it was more natural for women. Also, most hostesses in clubs were women, which meant that it was the women that were the instructors, or educators, entertainers – those workers who helped smooth negotiations, resolve misunderstandings, and provided information. However, most swinger settings did not employ hostesses, but rather had a system of community education, where the community acted as an educator, and those who were new to the community were instructed or taught by the established members.

6.4 Geographical Spaces for “Spicing it Up” and “Getting it On”

How was intimacy created in clubs? How did people feel comfortable enough to be intimate in front of others, or with each other in a club? Perhaps there was no feeling in that moment on the pole, and then, suddenly, while walking around, there would be “a connection”, “a feeling”, as some participants said. Many connected “morbo” (or being turned on) with spontaneity, and the importance of it being unplanned, not pre-planned – like now we go and have sex. I often wondered, after having been in situations in clubs that were very exciting, erotic, a turn-on, - what elements in clubs were conducive to creating this morbo⁴² that so many talked about in Spain? “Me da morbo” (in Spanish) means she (or he) turns me on, but it also means “it turns me on”, or the situation and the setting incites me sexually, erotically, sensually. As a contrast, swingers complained about there not being “morbo” at times, and I wondered whether it was the setting, or the people, or both. One such example was this very insipid night we had, and club attendees complained, and were reserved, in the following (a club in Spain):

The social zone in most swinger clubs and settings was the bar and dance area. This was the first major important area, designated for interaction between couples and singles. This was where people mingled and relaxed - talking, dancing, having drinks, and negotiating what each person and couple liked, desired, and wanted. The social zone was

⁴² A turn on

considered “safe” space in most clubs, “safe” for newcomers or new swingers, light swingers, because even though there could be some sexual activity, it was not common to have group sex in this area, and the majority of activity observed here was dancing and social, not sexual interaction.

Many couples spent a considerable amount of time (hours) in this area, simply enjoying socializing with people they knew, or meeting new people. Beginner swingers found this to be a nice area to get to know someone, maybe dance or pole dance, without feeling pressed to have sex or even negotiate a swap. For instance, one could watch people have sex through a transparent screen on the other side of the wall. While it was actual people having sex, one could only observe their silhouettes, or shadows, and because of the music, one could not hear moaning. One could observe someone pole dance and take her clothes or her top off, or two women dance and kiss. This was also very light in the sense that the erotic dancing was only suggestive and not “too much”. Some women would pole dance without taking off their clothes, while others would only kiss each other and take off their tops. Couples and singles who enjoyed “only watching” or were not used to being in a club preferred to restrict to this area. One could always retreat or escape into the social zone, have a drink, talk, and dance. One could say that the smoking zone (usually in the back of the club) was also a social zone where people talked, mingled, socialized. Often, there were 2 smoking zones in a club, - one for the couples and the other for everyone, single men, and couples. Many couples spent time having a cigarette and socializing. Intimate contact, such as hugging, flirting, kissing, laughing, caressing – all happened sporadically in the social zones. Some swingers, who identified themselves as swingers, and who felt that they belonged to the swinger community and attended clubs regularly, actually preferred spending most of their time in the social zones socializing. They came here to meet their friends, to gossip, have a good time, and to blow off steam socializing.

Other areas in the club were sexual zones, and there were a variety of rooms that were designated for erotic play. The organization of this erotic space in a club played an important role in the creation of erotic interaction among attendees. For example, in one club, there was one room that was named as a movie room. There would be a couple making love in the room on one side, while people on the other side would be watching through a

window, while the couple would not be able to see the onlookers on the other side. In the movie room one could watch this scene through the glass with a screen. The screen was there so that the people making love could not see the audience who was in the other room on the other side, sitting on a sofa. This was rather original, and particular to this one club. The eroticism created here allowed for the suspense of not knowing who would be watching you, while both rooms were rather small, which added to the coziness of space, and the lighting was dim as well. One could sit on a small couch, made just for one or two couples, and watch another couple in a bed make love. Perhaps a single man could join, or not, and the suspense of his appearance was intensified by the narrow confinement of the doorways, and the labyrinth that was geographically intended in this club. Did this containment, or a kind of compartmentalized space contribute to the eroticism or to the turn on? Did not knowing or the suspense of not knowing who was on the other side create the spark needed to incite both voyeurs and the active party? Nevertheless, it still seems that the forbidden, the hidden, the naughty elements were spatially planned, and if they are, then they can be reproduced in other settings and clubs.

This separation of space, and the lack of visibility created erotic suspense both for the onlookers and for the actors. The single men were allowed to stand there but not come closer than the invitation, which could be extended at any moment by the woman in the couple.

An important element in most swinger settings, in Spain and in France, was the manipulation of lighting. Lighting was a constant and dynamic element, in that clubs played with it in the different zones, and at this manipulation was common in most clubs I have been to. For example, while the social area had more lighting, the zone for group sex had less lighting, and the darkroom (“el cuarto oscuro”) had no lighting at all. Sometimes there was more or less lighting, depending on the night, and this was up to the managers, who also heard requests from the attendees. The darkroom was common room or passage with no light where the couples (and single women) were on one side, and the men were on the other, behind bars or separation. The couples would be able to be touched in the dark by the others without seeing them. While some people did not like the dark room, others thought it was

interesting, erotic, exciting – the element of not knowing who touched you was scary and exciting at the same time.

In each club, there was space for collective sexual activity, or a large bed in an open room that allowed for multiple partner erotic activity, as well as space around this large bed for onlookers, or voyeurs, who could easily join if invited or could have sex with each other. Some clubs had many rooms that were open for group sex or watching others have sex. Other clubs had more private or closed off rooms. Participants reminisced about a time when there was more action in clubs. For example, some remember a club in Spain that had no private rooms at all. It was open a few years ago, but then it closed for several reasons. This club had an open bar, and the entrance fee was a little more expensive, but people said that everyone who went there was active or having sex. There was a lot of group sex, and it was fun. People remembered this club and criticized the existing clubs as having too many onlookers⁴³: “people are just going around in circles without doing anything”⁴⁴, some participants commented.

In the following, I describe some of the clubs I attended regularly, and compare them with other clubs and settings. There were several elements that differed from club to club: age of attendees, the music, the level of cleanness, the set-up, the lighting, and the amount of sexual activity. There were differences in age groups (one had an older crowd, the other younger). I did not have access to interview these young couples about their experiences, motivations, and their perceptions of being young swingers in a club, and how often they had sex and if they were only onlookers. Approaching them was not an easy task, when many were perhaps looking for other young couples, or came with friends. Perhaps because of the age groups, there was a difference in type of music – one played louder and more contemporary music, which is called trap or reggaeton in Spain, the other played less loud music and bachata, for example, although you could always request a song (from the barman) for pole dancing.

⁴³ Mirones (in Spanish)

⁴⁴ Dando vueltas (in Spanish)

Club Lux

Club Lux was a more luxurious club. Club Lux had very nice private rooms with showers and nice decor. There were more private rooms available, and the setting was more intimate – the lighting, the music, and the geography of the club contributed a lot to this sense of intimacy. Some people said that they liked being able to talk and being able to hear someone moan was erotic for a lot of people. A couple could get to know another couple, have some drinks, then start having sex in a private room or in an open bed where others can join.

This club was often, but not always, frequented by older couples, with the emphasis on couples. On Saturday night, there were a lot of couples in their 40's, 50's, and 60's. This was probably the reason why a lot of younger couples (such as those in their 20's, 30's or 40's) often decided to go to another club with a younger crowd, after having been here. On the other hand, club Lux had a more international clientele, especially in the summer when people from a lot of different countries came to this club and it was possible to meet people from everywhere.

Fieldnotes, Spain

Was luxury or the employment of expensive elements, such as a pool and a jacuzzi, conducive to inciting more eroticism, desire and turning on the couples to more sexual activity? In the following, a male participant described the importance of luxurious elements in providing a feeling of safety and comfort for the attendees. This was a club in Spain that closed because it cost too much to maintain it.

One of those was the best club in Spain, it was incredible, but it was not incredible because it was big, or because it was.... Because I, for example, I brought Kathy there for the first time. I can assure you that you weren't ashamed. You wouldn't be ashamed to bring anyone there. You could perfectly bring your sister there, or your father or whoever, because it was very nice. Because it was all luxurious, it was all classy, it was glamorous, all super fashion, and this was 10 years ago. So now we have club Ice that costs 40 euros, which I love. But it does remind me of a booth at

the fairgrounds. It has the air of a booth at the fairgrounds. There would have to be a serious reform to get rid of this feeling of a booth at the fairgrounds.

The club I was talking about before, there was a pool, it could have been 15 or 20 meters long, a hell of a pool, a hell of a terrace. It had a jacuzzi for 12 people or so, a real jacuzzi that that really worked, not like a jacuzzi where you get in and it does not work. There was hydromassage and you could set it to hot or cold water. There was a sauna, and I mean a real sauna, and there was espresso capsules you could make coffee. And for the same price as club Ice, there was an open bar, open bar for the top brands of little bottles of champagne, of red Bull. No, it was the same price as club Lux, but with open bar. It was a super luxurious place. I mean, this was an attempt at have a place with an open bar. Well, people would drink, sip their drinks and leave a nearly full glass, - they would waste the drinks.

Owen, couple

Similarly, most participants referred to Cap d'Agde as being the ultimate party for swingers, where all was possible. This was perhaps the most expensive and luxurious setting. There was also different clientele, because there was a variety of age groups, meaning all the different age groups that was present here, and a variety of sexual preferences and identities here. Cap d'Agde, for example, had a lot of LGBTQ clientele, as well as a variety of services for a variety of people with different sexual preferences, especially a large portion of BDSM practitioners. Cap d'Agde setting really was a hodgepodge of sexualities, nationalities, languages, and people from all walks of life. It would also be wrong to say that there was low alcohol and drug consumption because there participants reported that there were parties that started at two in the afternoon, and people were drinking (and there was talk of recreational drug use, such as ecstasy and cocaine) during daytime and nighttime and in private parties and possibly in clubs as well.

It was widely known among swingers that Club Ice attracted a younger crowd primarily because of its choice of music, but there was also a slightly lower entrance fee than in other clubs. I really had the feeling of a discotheque here, mainly because people enjoyed dancing here, and I did as well.

Club Ice

Club Ice was known to attract a younger crowd. I observed couples in their early 20's, 30's and 40's, the average age range was between 20 and 40. There were several reasons as to why this club attracted younger people. They played club popular music, and it was more like a discotheque. There was a lot of dance music throughout the night. Sometimes it was full of people having a good time, and people say it was no different than a nightclub.

One some Saturdays, there was a live band, with drums, mike, that was playing rock music that was not erotic at all. It was loud, and if you liked hearing someone moan, you wouldn't because of the loud music. You couldn't hear yourself speak, and the only place where people could talk was outside in the back, the smokers' area where there were a lot of people coming in and out, smoking and talking throughout the night. There was a flow of people in the bar area and smoking area, a much bigger flow as far as number of people there than in the group sex area, or even in the rooms. As others did, I roamed around, watching, and observing, and found that even though the club was full, there were not many people (both couples and singles) having sex, and even when a couple did have sex or played around, it was only them and they were older and not very attractive. The younger couples did not engage in sexual activity and mostly watched and talked. Perhaps because of the rock music, there wasn't much dancing.

Much like many other swinger clubs, this club had a back door where couples (and single women) could enter without being seen through the front door. A lot of people preferred this and used this back entrance. Then they went directly to the lockers, changed and went to the bar. Single men were often gathered in the same area – the bar, and the glory holes divisions (these are cardboard walls that separate one little room with glory holes from the others).

Similar to other clubs, Club Ice organized parties, or events. These were birthdays and theme nights, such as 'day of the schoolgirl'. During 'fetish day', for instance, one was encouraged to wear leather. On 'Angel Devil' day, the club gave out

costumes, or lingerie, cake, presents, lottery prizes... Sometimes there were erotic dancers that put on a show.

Fieldnotes, Spain

The main criticism of this club by some of the participants was that there were too many onlookers and voyeurs, and that the younger couples “didn’t do anything”. There was sexual activity, or couples touching each other, oral sex, having intercourse in front of others, multiple couples having sex in the main group sex area, but this was mainly between the hours of 2 AM and 4 AM and it seemed a little planned, a little too planned, like clockwork. People come in, pay the fee, take off their coats, have a drink, dance a little, have sex, go to the bathroom, put on their coats, get into their cars, and leave and go back to their regular lives. “Active” swingers complained a little about this lack of action, these reservations from young couples.

There were other clubs that could have been viewed as “seedy” (Frank, 2008, 440). Club Chain, for example, did not have the best of reputations among the participants, and I only visited this club a limited number of times (maybe 5-7 times), together with a male acquaintance who wanted to see it. While other clubs had dimmed lighting, and nice music, - this club was darker than others.

There were dark, small rooms with plastic curtains, with red lights. It smelled of humidity, and there were rooms and rooms, separated by plastic curtains or plastic walls. And the lights were all red and orange. The ceiling had tubes, and something that looked like factory objects. There were bathrooms that were dark, showers you could barely see.

It gave you the feeling of mass production of sex, people coming here, having sex, and leaving. Not to linger, not to dance (there was no dance podium, no pole), not to live out an erotic fantasy, but more like a fuck factory so to speak. And perhaps, if one is there with someone special, it might be special anyways, but the cold, plastic rooms and plastic beds, the slippery floors, and the humid room smell, were limiting as far as the spectrum of excitement one may experience in a club. Several people

complained to me about this club. They said it was not very clean, that ‘you shouldn’t get in the pool with someone’.

Fieldnotes, Spain

My first impression of this club was not pleasant, particularly because of the quality of the set up or instalaciones⁴⁵ as participants called it. I preferred better quality beds, for instance, walls that were actual walls between the rooms to enhance privacy or intimacy. This may be according to each participant’s preference. Some participants preferred solid walls and solid doors instead of very thin walls and doors, because they wanted to have more privacy with another couple or single and not hear other people.

Some clubs were popular because they had a variety of attendees of all ages, and people were “more active”. I have heard that the entrance fee in the club was affordable, and this was perhaps the reason why there was a younger crowd also:

Club Dyadic looked like a dungeon. There were small, dark rooms without doors where people could wonder around, tripping against... a dark stranger on her knees performing fellatio. This one was a type of Bangkok experience, looking like a dark alley with a lantern that led you to a doorway bead curtain where a stranger.... Dirty, dark, effervescent – a little taste of the forbidden had to be the main ingredient in such escapes. There were large glass windows into other rooms and people having sex were seen through into the main bar area, where those who danced all night were onlookers, or voyeurs. As you walked around the pungent smell of sex spread, between the hours of 2 and 4.

Fieldnotes, Spain

While some participants were critical to this same element, many participants preferred this deliberate choice of night space in which impersonal sex could occur with people they may never see again. There was a contradiction that clubs created, providing a sense of

⁴⁵ Spanish term for the way the rooms were set up, the décor, the beds, the showers – the physical set up of the club

community or having a network of swingers, having swinger friends and acquaintances while also having sex with stranger or new lovers that one never saw again. While some swingers preferred never repeating, others wanted more stable lovers to repeat with. The contradiction, which is not really a contradiction but a misreading or misunderstanding, has to do with this sense of community. Some swingers claimed that they belonged to a community, on the one hand, and on the other, there was a lack of deep relationships and a superficiality that came with having sex with strangers. On the one hand, swingers talked about having complicity⁴⁶ with their partner, but this complicity also existed with other swingers. That others knew about your private life, your bisexuality, your group sex experiences, have watched you do it in public space, but cannot, under no circumstances, reveal this to others outside the club: if these walls could talk!

6.5 Protecting Privacy in Swinger Settings

The secret element of these settings and the need for discretion were reinforced in the geography and the rules of these settings. One of the main rules in swinger settings was the use of camera. The explicit rule against the use of photos and videos was reinforced by owners of swinger clubs, and the swingers themselves. For example, the manager or one of the employees could come up to an attendee and say “please put away your phone” when someone took out his or her phone. In certain places, it was also against the law. Taking pictures in Cap d’Agde, for instance, was punishable by law. Signs such as “no photos or videos allowed” are hung everywhere in Cap d’Agde, a naturist and swinger community in the south of France.

These rules, norms of the club, and laws that applied to other people’s privacy were also broken when people were turned on by pictures of their wife and sending these (with her consent) to third parties, such as single men on online platforms. Some people wanted to make these public, and posted these on websites, or would have these pictures and videos to post on swinger website to attract potential partners. Photos became readily available online, and provided the name of the location, or Cap d’Agde, where the photo was taken.

⁴⁶ Complicidad (in Spanish)

Despite (and probably due to) the forbidden element of taking photos, it was easy (and exciting) to take a picture and judging from some websites with pictures from Cap d'Agde, one can imagine that a man could film his wife, with other men and women standing around, without anyone noticing. Then these would become available on www.mobileporn.cam, such as the picture above.

Closely related to this concept of maintaining (visual) privacy was the social norm of discretion⁴⁷. Most swingers wanted to keep their participation in the swinging world a secret from most people because they did not feel that what they did would be accepted, and they would face negative reactions from others. One participant, Jacob, did not want to hide being a swinger, and felt that the constraints of his culture, upbringing, and the network of friends and family that would not accept this prevented him from sharing this information. In addition, it would implicate his wife and her job, family and friends:

I would love to tell the entire world what we do... yes, we have sex with everyone. So what? But, well, since it is still... well... people don't understand. We live in a society where it is not very accepted. And there are times when you do care what others think. Because we live connected. I assume that homosexuals also had to fight, that this was viewed as very bad, they were called 'fagot' and names like that... but that was how it was. You, for instance, I think that in your country, you had your family, people you knew.... Here you probably have more freedom of doing what you want than in your neighborhood where you grew up. Not everything, I suppose.⁴⁸

Jacob, couple

⁴⁷ Discretion is a term adapted from Spanish (discreción) and it refers to keeping a secret or not revealing what one knows when there is no need for others to know it.

⁴⁸ A mí me encantaría poder cantar a los 4 vientos lo que hacemos... pues sí, pues follamos con todo el mundo, ¿Qué pasa? Pero, claro, pero como eso es... todavía... como que no se entiende... no se entiende y tal. Vivimos en una sociedad en que no está tan aceptado eso... Y hay veces que te importa lo que piensan los demás. Porque vivimos dentro de ese vínculo, de esa cúpula... entonces tenemos que hacerlo así, y eso... Supongo que los homosexuales también tuvieron que luchar contra el tema, ha estado muy malamente visto, 'maricón' no sé qué... pero es así. Es lo que hay. Tú por ejemplo, yo pienso que en tu país... en tu país... claro tú tenías a tu familia, a gente conocida... tú aquí quizás tienes más libertad de hacer lo que tú quieres que en tu barrio donde te has criado, ¿no? Pero tampoco toda, me supongo, ¿verdad?

The social constraints Jacob talked about influenced him as he was not able to share his experiences with anyone other than swingers. He did not dare disclose his private life, even if he wanted to, and his wife could not do so either. On the other hand, like most participants, swinging was done outside their house. Swingers in general were reticent about having parties at home, because of the noise, because neighbors may complain, because of the mess as well. The general preference of going out and having swaps outside of one's house prevented a lot of indiscretions, rumors, and the risk of disclosure.

Derek, a male swinger, wanted to tell a male friend (not a swinger) about his sexual adventures, after listening to his friend telling stories about having sex every weekend. But he did not because of the consequences of being judged by someone outside of the swinger world:

What would I gain telling someone I am a swinger? Sure, the satisfaction of the moment, of release...ah, hahaha, hehehe, but that's it, and then in the end the opposite, I mean, uy, this guy, he could tell other people... This guy...could be judging me. I mean, I will not gain anything, so I would rather be practical in this world.⁴⁹

Derek, couple

Many men and women felt this way about disclosure. Therefore, one did not speak to the outside world about someone being a swinger, or having seen someone swinging, on a swinger website or in a swinger setting to others who were not from that world. Swingers actually asked about a newcomer, - "Is he from the little world?"⁵⁰

In addition to the norms of discretion in swingers, every club had an air of privacy, secrecy to ensure or reinforce discretion. This was enforced by the managers or the staff; one even had to ring a doorbell in each club, and there was a camera and a sign "entrance

⁴⁹ ¿Qué gano yo diciéndole a alguien que yo soy swinger? Claro, la satisfacción del momento, de soltarle, ah, hahaha, hehehe, pero ya está, y luego al final al contrario, digo, uy, este, se lo puede estar contando a otras personas... Este... puede estar criticándome... O sea, no gana nada, entonces me gusta ser practico en este mundo...

⁵⁰ Del mundillo ((from the little (swinger) world in Spanish))

reserved for members only” or “right to refuse entrance”. Could anyone go in? Yes, any woman or women, or couples could go in. Single men could be refused entrance if there were too many men in the club, or if they were not well-dressed, or if there were no men allowed on this particular night. Everything depended on the manager’s or the owner’s assessment. It was not that the manager made all the decisions of who entered the club, because the manager’s decisions were influenced by the general requests and complaints of the attendees, the majority of which were swinger couples.

Jake, a male participant, described how difficult it would be to disclose his private life, or even hint about it, considering the scope of consequences it would bring. In the following, he explained the reasons why he kept his swinging activities a secret, and will continue to do so:

I don’t talk about it, because I feel that a lot of people have cultural, social, and religious constraints, making them view this as something negative, something bad: ‘How can you share your wife with other men?’ as an example. I am afraid that I will be judged and that this will influence my relationships with my friends, and in my professional network. And besides, sexual choices are part of every individual, so I don’t have to air them out. But I don’t see why anyone must air them out.

Jake, couple

Business owners, professionals, office workers, and other individuals in this study who were devoted to their careers often used online platforms to promote their work, and most participants were resistant to the idea to support the swinger world openly. Swingers had private businesses. Many private businesses used google reviews, and these were directly linked to their websites, which are also linked to one’s private Facebook page, with a private or business WhatsApp phone number. If one was to give like and/or follow a swinger club or swinger group on Facebook, one’s family, friends and clients would immediately suspect that you may be associated with this kind of practice.

6.6 Swingers' Meanings of Sexuality in Clubs

Swingers' sexual practices may be studied from the point of view of swingers' own subjectivity, or from the starting point that it is the swingers themselves that should describe, construct, and evaluate their experiences. I observed how the intensity of emotion, seduction and sensuality were all meaningful for swingers.

There were several elements at play that helped contribute to the erotic intensity. One was the person who put on the music, - who listened to our requests and created a mood by repeatedly putting on the different music that Tiffany and I enjoyed dancing to. Secondly, she and I genuinely enjoyed dancing, especially together. We danced hard, a long time, we danced until we sweat. Third, there were women who may have been angry or irritated looking at us, but unlike other (hostile) instances where this would demotivate, - it only added to the intensity of emotions. Emotions were important here, and they continued to intensify throughout the night.

When Tiffany and I were together (she always told me that she loved dancing with me), we danced in such a salvage way. We would lose ourselves dancing. I think it was because we were both exhibitionists in this way, dancing and getting attention. She told me 'the most important thing is to enjoy dancing together, the rest doesn't matter'. We would start to swing from the pole and to embrace each other, watch each other, touch each other. We probably looked very loose, unbridled, salvage like fresh from the jungle. She didn't wear any underwear, and her hair was long and in disarray. The look in her eyes was like she was in another world, her own world, erotic, yes, like a nymph.

Contrary to the belief that swingers have wild sexual experiences, - not all multiple partner sex was always exciting and transgressive. In fact, several (older) participants claimed that there was not as much desire in swinger clubs, as there used to be in the 80's for example, in France. Both Bill and Alice, a swinger couple who spent a lot of time traveling in Europe and going to swinger clubs, both believed that the swinger world is no longer what it used to be, and people just come to watch, and there is a lack of excitement. Secrecy, they said, was necessary for there to be desire or excitement – there must have an air of forbidden. They, and other swingers, complained that there are too many onlookers, especially younger couples, who did not come to the clubs to have sex, but rather to watch

and dance. Curiosity may be considered as an important motivating factor for young couples. Sometimes one could hear them laugh, or watch their faces ridiculing others, and this was something that active, more established swingers disliked and considered a turn off. Being voyeur could be both a passive or active role, and if one stood around and laughed at the participants of an orgy, - this created a negative energy and made people less eager to be involved in this transgressive activity.

It was perhaps of this very idea that many couples, especially young ones, or young friends of opposite sex, came to a swinger club to “just watch”. A swinger couple who was monogamous, decided to just watch or do a “light swap” with another swinger couple would still be within the limits of monogamy, according to the general public, because, as a lot of especially younger couples might admit, having a curiosity to experiment with new things would legitimize their presence in a club or on a website. While watching or observing or simply being in a sexualized setting could incriminate someone who was seen there, it was not hardcore swinging, but only a brief, maybe one-time occurrence.

The term being “light”, an established term in the lifestyle, refers to those swingers who are just trying it out, maybe by watching or observing others. The concept of “light” can also be used interchangeably by couples who may do everything except sexual intercourse, or “just play” with other couples or singles without having sex. “Light couples” may also have sex within their own couple, next to other couples having sex. These swingers come to the club with the intention of swapping but may spend all their time only watching. Because of the prevalence of these couples, it would be wrong to claim that swingers are people who have multiple partner sex. Some swingers, who claim to be “light” swingers, - never reach a point of readiness to have sex with anyone else than each other. “Hard swap” or “full swap” couples, on the other hand, have been swinging for years and have been completely open to have sex with others in group sex, threesomes, couple swap, and some even meeting lovers outside of the club. These are categorical and conceptual systems of reality, fluid and continuous, but which also intend to divide and compartmentalize.

It was interesting that one of the main motivations for couples was to spice up their own bed or avoid monotony. Meanwhile, swinging itself could also be insipid, automatic, and completely uninteresting. Watching people have sex could be boring as well. Could it

be possible that each person's inhibitions or fears contributed to a collective culture of clubs preventing the excitement of transgression? I observed instances where sex did not seem to excite others or myself.

My observation of the erotic schedule confirmed this, where couples had social interaction from 00-2 in the morning, having a few drinks, and from 2-4 was when erotic activity happened, allocated to sex zones. Some of the couples I studied, some of which were older, wanted to break with taboos, longed for excitement, and tried to create it. Some group sex sessions were very interesting, intense, connected, and lasted anywhere from 2 – 7 hours.

In a group sex session, one could do what one liked and it was supposed to be free. All I did at times was stand, watch, and hug someone, - a man or a woman, someone I did not know. And I wondered what it was about group sex that was so fascinating. The language they used was supposed to incite desire, and often it did. For example, participants would use language such as “pounding”, or “I want you to pound me”. Pounding means to have intense penetrative sex. Another was the way that a man would say “puta...que puta eres...guarra” (‘you’re so nasty, you’re such a whore’) – this was language that was considered to be admissible and encouraged in a group sex session. Group session allowed for multiple possibilities for excitement, and it involved many different perspectives. While to outsiders, this sexual practice may seem shocking, embarrassing, even disgusting, restricted to superficial or physical body, for the swingers themselves there were sexual possibilities found in these settings. One participant, Derek, told me that his wife Audrey looked for experiences, not just sex: “Audrey does not look for sex, Audrey has a lot of sex with me.... What she wants is... excitement, a situation, a game, not sex”⁵¹. All group sex, or partner swap or any kind of multiple partner sex usually contained elements of oral sex and vaginal penetration, but to be turned on, to feel excited by this enough to join – this was individual; it was up to each person or couple.

⁵¹ Audrey no busca sexo, Audrey tiene mucho sexo conmigo...Audrey lo que busca es... morbo, una situación, un juego, pero sexo no.

6.7 The Subjective Perceptions of Risk⁵² and Risk Management in Swinger Clubs

The commercialized sexual practice in established swinger venues in Spain and France may have incorporated a normative system, demanding and strict, which helped reduce the risks of transmission of STI's. First, most participants were aware of the risks they were taking, and some compared this type of activity to mountain climbing, which they thought was equally risky or even more so. Most swingers were conscious about using protection or condoms during all activities that involved penetration (vaginal and anal). Social regulation of condom use was common. One such example was Peter, who told me that he would be an economy pack online of his favorite brand of 300 condoms and would give them out at clubs or parties. Other swingers had a whole kit or travel bag with them, carrying condoms, lubricants, hand sanitizers, and wet towels. They would leave it in the locker while they socialized, and when they started to have sex, they would bring this kit to the group sex zone. When it was people they knew well, or were friends, one could always ask for a new condom, or small and unused lubricant if needed.

Negative experiences and accidents did occur, although very rarely because of the social norms based on a social conscience. Sometimes single men would forget to change condoms from one woman to the next, or from one orifice to the to the other (from vaginal to anal) but this was not the norm and both men and women were mindful that condom use was enforced. One participant, Lourdes, was appalled that some men would forget and would always insist on watching them put on a new condom, and was always checked with the men:

‘When did you put on the condom?’ (Lourdes asked the man) – ‘I just put it on’. ‘Ok, where is the condom wrapper?’ – ‘Ah, it fell’. ‘Ok, put on another one’. ‘Oh, come on’- ‘Well then don’t fuck me’. This happened to me quite often, men who try to play smart.... Well, I bring my condoms, and here, put it on. In that sense, I am a control-freak.⁵³

⁵² Fulcher et al. 2019

⁵³ Desde cuando que te has puesto el preservativo, ‘ - ‘me lo acabo de poner ahora’. ‘Vale, ¿dónde está el paquete?’ - ‘Ah, se ha caído’. ‘Vale, ponte otro’. ‘Hombre, no, no.’ - ‘Pues no me folles.’ Eso si que me ha

While condom use was strictly reinforced by the swingers themselves, especially couples, in nearly all swinger settings I have been to, and not using a condom caused reactions from others, - other issues were overlooked simply because they were not considered as dangerous. Within each couple, there was unprotected sex because they were stable couples who usually lived together. These couples went to clubs together and were aware of any possible sexual partners, and both members of the couple used protection with outside partners. This was the norm.

Much of STI prevention was based on the trust that people will do regular checkups for STI's, and if they had anything, they would communicate this to others and would get treated. Swingers were aware of the responsibility to tell others in case they had STI's. In this study participants reported conducting regular checkups, either every 3 months or every 6 months. Some who did not consider themselves very active had check-ups once a year. Perhaps single men tested more sporadically because they were also sporadic attendees in swinger clubs. I got the impression that they did not test regularly. More research would be needed on this subgroup to find out about their testing routines. Regular and active swingers, however, had the habit of testing.

Swingers usually were aware of the risk of having a cut on one's body while coming in contact with another one's cut or semen. However, some assumed this to be an unlikely way to get anything serious. Because swinger clubs were not well-lit places, where dimmed lighting forms part of an erotic ambience, it was difficult to see skin lacerations, rashes, or even skin ulcers that may be contagious. There were no kind of inspections before sex; this was uncommon, and it would also work negatively to create the mood or excitement.

Swingers practiced oral sex regularly and without protection. Even though some considered this practice risky, others claimed that it was not as risky as sex without a condom. Derek's stand on this was "if you can't do that (oral sex), then you can't do

pasado bastante, de tíos que intentan ir de listo y (reusar el preservativo).... Pues no, yo ya llevo los míos, pues toma, ponte uno. Yo en ese sentido tengo mucha manía.

anything”, meaning that if one abstained from oral sex or used a condom with oral sex (fellatio, for instance), then it was very limiting in the number of sexual activities you could do. Oral sex included ejaculation if the man ejaculated or if the woman had an orgasm, and there were times when sperm and vaginal secretions were swallowed.

While swingers practiced oral sex without protection, I did observe more fellatio than cunnilingus in swinger clubs. The practice of fellatio, especially performed with regularity, must be examined further. One fascinating example of this practice was the use of the glory holes. Glory holes were multiple holes in a wall (2,3 or 4 holes per wall), where on the one side, there were the single men (or men from couples) offering their members and on the other side of the wall – the active party who wanted to touch, perform fellatio, or have sex with (with protection) a man’s penis.

Sometimes men would watch couples have sex through the glory holes or put their hands through to touch the woman while a couple was having sex. While more women were open to performing fellatio, or more fellatio was observed than cunnilingus, - the practice of glory holes was in fact regarded as risky by some female swingers, particularly because they felt uncomfortable about touching a stranger without a face, without meeting him. Still, glory holes were for men to use, or there were never any women on the other side placing their private parts through the hole.

6.7.1 The Importance of Hygiene in Swinger Clubs

Some clubs were cleaner than others. It was also one of the reasons that people chose a club over another. However, it was hard to tell how often showers, toilets and beds were disinfected. One way one could tell was the frequency with which the staff cleaned the rooms. In club Ice, this was often, especially during the peak hours when people had sex (between 2 and 4 AM). Staff moved a lot more throughout the hallways, usually carrying extra sheets, towels, or a mop, and cleaning after each session, say once an hour in every room, or after people finished.

Many swingers gave high importance to hygiene, and they told me about this often – “He has to have good hygiene”⁵⁴ several women would tell me. I often wondered what they meant by this, and when I asked them to specify, it was about the man washing his hands, showering, mouthwash. Women would also refer to themselves, or washing in the bidet, taking a shower after sex. They meant that not only was hygiene important for them, but that it was very important that the other person, or their potential partner or partners, had good hygiene. One participant, Peter, a man who has been a swinger for over 20 years with his partner, would give advice to someone with bad dental work, telling them that it is worthwhile investment to take care of it.

The habit of maintaining good hygiene was important to both women and men and applied to clubs as well. There were instances in the clubs that were highly unhygienic. For example, one club had a rumor about the level of cleanliness. Valerie, a female swinger, did not observe any cleaning throughout the night: it was dark, and people would ejaculate anywhere, and it was impossible to see if one touched sperm or sweat. She told me, laughingly, that “you couldn’t sit down on a bed because you were afraid you would sit in cum”.

While some women did not go to clubs while on their period because they didn’t have the desire, or because they felt it was “disgusting” - other women did, considering it to be no big deal. These women went to clubs while on their period, using a menstrual cup.

While we were at the bar, Tiffany stood and talked to me. She said that she was on her period and wanted to see if there was a sponge (menstrual cup) in the bathroom. She came back from the bathroom saying that they didn’t have any there, but that the manager probably had one in the back to give her. She asked the female bartenders if they would get the manager, and then she waited around to talk to the manager. I asked her later if she was able to get it, and she told me yes. This was interesting because Tiffany was having sex with several partners that night, and probably for the duration of a few hours, and the fact that she had a sponge in her vagina and probably

⁵⁴ “Tiene que tener sus higenes” in Spanish

not all men were aware of it, was something that astounded me, although I think it would probably be considered normal by some swingers. Victor, for instance, told me that it was no big deal, meaning that for him it was no big deal to have sex with women who were wearing sponges during their period.

Fieldnotes, Spain

While hygiene was a standard that swingers often expected, having sex while on one's period was a matter of personal choice. Women who wanted to have sex on their period had the practical choice of using a sponge, while women who did not want to have sex could also wear pants, for example. Some women would say they were on their period as an excuse not to have sex. Menstruation was thus used as an excuse to abstain from intercourse in clubs.

There were some clubs with jacuzzies, and one could touch the area around the jacuzzi to note the level of cleanliness. Many swingers were careful about sharing a jacuzzi or a pool with others. In most settings, it was forbidden to have sex in the jacuzzi or in the pool. The aspect of water was present in all clubs, where people were able to shower together, or be in the pool or in the jacuzzi together. Not all swingers thought of this as hygienic, and not everyone got in the water. However, as a rule, most clubs did not allow sex in the water as a preventive measure. In Cap d'Agde, there were pool parties most days (during the day). The pool parties were 'no clothing' events, although I did see a few women in bikinis, and some women just wearing bottoms, such as Brazilian bikinis. One would bring a towel as well. For women, it cost 20 euros, and couples were also 20, including a drink or two. There were a lot of people dancing, and some were having sex on the mattresses around the pool area. A lot of people were drinking and dancing. Since the pool party started around 14 and ended at 19, it was during the day and it was hot and sunny, so a lot of people did drink, and some were having sex. There was a lot of oral sex, and some penetration, but mostly it was people dancing.

I rarely observed pool parties in Spain, while in Cap d'Agde, these pool and foam parties took place every afternoon. These parties were day parties and were set up in a very basic way. They differed in set-up and in relation to hygiene as well. Each swinger club in Spain and France had showers with soap and most had bidets (with soap as well). Swinger

clubs usually provided a variety of toiletries in the bathrooms, such as mouthwash with disposable cups, tampons, condoms, towels, deodorant spray and lubricants. Meanwhile, pool and foam parties did not provide these, but then again, the whole intention of these parties was to warm-up to go a club later, or to warm-up for the swinger party in someone's hotel.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored the important elements observed physical geography in swinger settings, namely the décor, the lighting, the furniture and the general set-up, and the architecture of the zones (social versus sexual), or organization of space. Furthermore, elements that varied from one setting to the next was the choice of music, the age groups of attendees, the amount of sexual activity. I analyzed in particular the ways in which security, privacy, spatial organization, and all the other aforementioned elements played a part in creating meaning in the swinger world. Specifically, how geographical space and decoration worked to incite eroticism and sexual activity in swingers. On the other hand, some swingers criticized this use of space or the ways in which swinger clubs commercialized sexual activity, creating a lack of desire. One example of this was this same presence of sexual furniture in clubs, making it so readily available that the mystery is absent. The ways in which this commercialization affects swingers must be explored further, as well the meanings of swingers' sexuality in clubs, and the subjective aspects of risk and hygiene, only briefly touched upon in this study.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

The objective of this study was to present swingers' own experiences and attitudes on swinging in the context of swinger clubs, including their critique or counternarratives of swinger settings and swinging. Results were divided into the following major themes: couples' experiences, dynamics, and their negative and positive perceptions of swinging; swinger women and their perceptions of clubs and swinging, and the characteristics and utility of club settings – what clubs accomplish in the context of swinging. Results included a description of swingers' strategies, their concepts (translated from Spanish, English, French and Russian) and their own perceptions of their sexual practices within their settings. Part of the analysis explored the negotiations within each couple and singles that were linked to their practices in the swinger settings that they were a part of. I addressed the following rules in the chapter on swinger couples: open communication as a rule, sporadic attendance, rules while doing things separately, rules in case of emotional involvement. Critique of swinging was also included in this chapter, where swinger couples were dissatisfied with some aspects of swinging. It is probably the critique of swinger clubs, reviews, and the general access to information that allowed for an informal quality check or quality control that added to the already well-managed system. I provided descriptions of organization of swinger settings, both social and sexual, in swinger clubs in Andalusia, Spain and in Cap d'Agde, France. Descriptions were supported by the swingers' accounts of the settings and reflected my own observations. This study built on the existing research on swingers while presenting new and emerging (contemporary) themes that were not brought up in depth in other studies, such as an exploration of clubs (in Spain and France) as a participant ethnographer, a closer analysis of couples, singles, and swingers' general critique of swinging.

I observed how this management style allowed for a close collaboration between the attendees and the managers, where one could indirectly assume that the implementation of norms and rules in couples could be indirectly linked to the management of clubs, - as norms and rules were dynamically constructed within each couple, and in the club setting, therefore affecting the dynamics of couples as groups, or the group dynamics of swingers. Thus, the organization in couples reflected management decisions in clubs. The chapter on couples

was thus linked to the chapter on swinger settings. One such example was the existence of cuckold couples, where the man desired to see his wife with another man. While some couples were critical of single men in clubs, these cuckold couples wanted to have a variety of single men to choose from. This had a direct affect on the number of men in a particular club, where the managers had to choose a balanced number of men, to please both the couples that did not want single men, and the couples that did. While the structure of each couple was different, and the rules were dynamic or “to be broken”, - couples’ comments and requests were usually accepted and taken seriously by the managers or owners of clubs. While each club was unique, many requests from clients affected the choice of music, lighting, furniture and the geography of the clubs. This meant that there was a process of collaboration, some elements of shared decision-making, and the desire to achieve common goals between the managers and the clientele. The swingers who were unhappy with the clubs expressed so clearly in this study, claiming that there was little desire and intimacy, too much focus on sex. These were the main criticisms of the swinger settings. However, these couples still suggested that they were non-monogamous, and it was not as if they wanted to leave swinging but were most critical of the commercialization of swinger clubs.

This study used the method of participant observation. I felt that being a woman had definite advantages in swinger settings, allowing physical access but also inspiring emotional trust in participants who expressed their need to talk to someone who has been to clubs and understood them, their challenges, and the dynamics in settings. Thus, this study was not only an attempt to provide more knowledge on swingers; it also helped swingers express their perceptions and disagreements to someone who could understand. Arendell (1997) observed this as well, pointing out how “these men disclosed their experiences and feelings to me in the depth and emotional detail which they did because I am a woman” (1997: 348). I was able to relate, as a woman, to the male (and some female) participants, about my own experiences in clubs and in my personal life, and I believe that this common ground allowed for richer, more deep interviews with participants. In addition, as someone who could communicate in their native language, I was being able to learn, use and present their vernacular, so that it was more accessible to the readers outside of academia. Swingers themselves asked me if this work would be available for them to read when it was finished.

My participation allowed me to establish long-term contacts or networks, where the participants not only gave me permission to write and publish, but (most of them) requested to that I sent them the finished thesis.

This study addressed the challenging objectives of finding other ways of studying swingers, while considering other theoretical frameworks that would be more suitable for future studies of swingers. Most importantly, it suggested that swingers should be studied from the inside, using the perspective of a participant as a tool. A non-judgmental, experimental approach, or the ethnographers' own positive attitude of learning from swingers, would contribute to an enriching study. This approach would even be helpful when speaking with swinger critical to swinging, because it would create an understanding between the interviewer and the participant.

Furthermore, swingers could teach us about the possibilities in sexuality: how to express our sexual needs and desires to our partners, create limits, try new experiences – skills that could be useful even for couples in monogamous relationships. Many swinger couples reported a rich sex life, not only with other people but within their own couple, practicing open communication daily, and exploring their own fantasies and imagination through traveling, role play, sex toys, recording each other – conventional sexual practices, not only what would be considered kinky sexualities such as BDSM or multiple partner sex. While I believe that we have a lot to learn from swingers, I would not go so far as to recommend this “dangerous method of teasing and arousing the primary partner” (McDonald, 2010, 71) to non-swinging couples. When already decided to try it, a couple would not have problems finding information, and like-minded couples to learn from.

Finally, this study proposed swinger clubs as safer, more organized venues, and suggested the utility of these spaces, as alternative night-time settings. I described how these settings were also more effective in implementing prevention of STI's, substance abuse and gender violence. However, more research is needed to explore (and implement) the strategies used in swinger clubs in Spain and France, in other settings and other countries. While recommending that future research should focus on how night-time economies can be “operationalized” or “envisioned” more effectively, - Shaw (2010) simultaneously pointed to Hadfeld's suggestion about music in nightclubs as one solution: “DJ's as having a key

role in the management of affect within a club” (899), creating “effects of excitement, joy, and exhilaration through their manipulation of light, music and other sounds, whilst employing the same tools to keep these affects at a manageable level” (900). Music was in fact somewhat of a segregator of ages in swinger clubs, where younger couples went to clubs with more popular music. Perhaps it was the managers who wanted to attract a younger crowd, charging less for the entrance, and playing more popular music in younger-crowd clubs. Regardless of age differences in clubs, most swinger settings shared characteristics that ensured safety for attendees, and the question of whether these characteristics may be implemented into other settings that support risky behavior, must be explored in other studies with these specific objectives.

7.2 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was its qualitative methodology, deriving conclusions mostly from observational fieldnotes and interviews. Certain questions that I wanted to ask, were someone uncomfortable for an in-person interview. online poll on swinger economics in Spain and France, for example, would have been more effective than asking these questions in person. However, the questions that seemed of relevance to this particular group of swingers were brought up during interviews, and a quantitative study would have been a good idea after the interviews. Many previous studies on swingers used questionnaires, on-line surveys and were quantitative, but these studies were conducted without the preliminary in-person interviews. Perhaps using a mixed-method approach in the future would work well both to describe and quantify how much swingers spend on swinging, and what their economy is like. Quantifying this could be more natural online than in an interview setting or in a club, where I did not feel participants wanted to address these questions.

My choice of methodology also placed a limitation on the choice of questions that asked during interviews. Not asking the question of swinger economics, even though it seemed important, created a lack of data on this topic. My overall assumption after some time was that there may have been economic gender inequality in some couples, and while this raised serious questions, I was not able to address this topic at the time of the interview, for the fear of asking the wrong questions and stigmatizing swingers, especially female

swingers. A full study focusing on swingers' finances in European countries such as Spain and France would do this topic justice. An example of this was a study on swinger economics conducted in Italy, in which the author curiously concludes that swinging may crowd out prostitution due to the reducing costs of swinging (D'Orlando, 2010, 20). The author points to the dearth of quantitative empirical data in this area on swingers, and states that it is due to this fact that the theoretical framework is still underdeveloped in this area. While this author suggests examining further the sex market as a whole, while including swingers and swinger couples with reference to pornography and prostitution (D'Orlando, 2010, 21), I suggest examining swingers' economics separately from the sex industry, and if possible, analyzing tax returns and incomes of swinger couples as a unit. This type of study may also allow researchers to ask further questions about resources swingers spend on their bodies, traveling, clubs, nude beaches, resorts, bars, and restaurants. In addition, questions about leisure time available, and leisure time spent on swinger activities and settings could be added to the interview guide. Because of the general responsiveness in my study, and the interest to see the interview guide, it is my suggestion to have future interview guides ready to send to possible participants beforehand, and to use the interview guide as a recruiting agent in future studies of such sensitive nature. However, as it happened in my study, because I revised my interview guide several times in order to adapt it to my particular context and this topic, - a completed interview guide may be difficult in the beginning of the study, and some preliminary interviews may be needed in order to tailor the questions to the participants and present a completed set of questions.

Aside from the difficulties in tailoring the interview guide were the limitations of time-constraints during interviews. For example, I did not ask questions about political and religious orientation during my interviews because I was limited within a timeframe and the interview situation was guided by the topics participants chose over others. While the topic of religion and politics did not come up, I was also told that the topic of politics was to be avoided at the dinner table. While I did not have many questions on bisexuality in the initial interview guide, I had to add these in the later versions. The limitations of such a working and re-working of the questions are that one does not have a complete interview guide ready

at the beginning of the study. On the other hand, the advantage of this methodology is that one is able to tailor the guide to the participants' needs.

Even though nationality, or geographical regions (where the participants were from) was not the most important factor to be considered, the cultural aspects were important, or the fact that this was such an international sample with all these different cultures and languages. It would have been more informative to explore these cultural and ideological aspects more in depth, and this can be done in future studies, especially if conducted in more cosmopolitan and touristic regions in the world today.

Another limitation of this study was its relatively small sample, consisting of 40 participants. The sample used here is not representative of the swinger community in Spain or France. Participation bias may have also played a role. Refusal rate could not be determined. With the 40 participants, I felt that the data they provided in interviews did generate a lot of insight into the world of swinging, especially because of my participation, something that allowed for more trust and openness among them. Future studies investigate swinging, swingers and swinger clubs using a more representative sample. Meanwhile, a small sample that is studied in-depth can be adequate to accomplish some objectives, while not others, such as the prevailing norms or swinger language.

I obtained limited data on the young couples (age 20 to 30) in the swinger world, where both parts of the couple are young. Studying young couples' motivations and dynamics would help understand young people's sexuality. Older couples said the young people were not very active, and it was hard to get them to have sex. It was therefore very difficult for me to observe young couples, because I was usually not invited into the private rooms with them, nor was I able to talk to them often. There are 2 young women in my study, and I was able to interview them. From these interviews, I could infer that young swingers form an important group that should be interviewed in the future. Barker and Landridge (2010, 764) also pointed out the importance of studying non-monogamies in young people, or how "identities and practices of younger generations relate to those reflected in current research or in the previous writings of the 1960's and 1970's".

As a single female ethnographer, I would have reached more understanding of the world of swinger couples had I myself conducted an ethnography together with a partner. In

his book on the lifestyle, Gould (1999) was conducting research together with his wife, Leslie, who agreed to come with him to lifestyle events. It would have been a much more difficult task to conduct research as a single man, and his wife must have facilitated a lot of the access to participants' interviews and observations of sexual practices. I myself often felt like a third wheel, and my frustration with the couples stemmed from feeling like an outsider in a dyadic communication. This made research limited to a framework that was regulated by two people. As swingers often reiterated: "Every couple is its own world".

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, I had to interrupt the project for several reasons. First and foremost, a sexual practice that was legal suddenly became illegal. Even when restrictions were lifted, some clubs could have been fined for breaking the law of social distancing. If there were more than 4 or 6 people in one spot having sex, even with masks on, the club could have been fined if it opened. As a researcher, had I continued to conduct research during the Covid-19 Pandemic, I would have found myself in a difficult situation, because I would have been observing illegal acts. I would have suddenly become an unwanted intruder, a kind of reporter. In addition, participants told me they were not very interested in sharing their thoughts or giving interviews about the Covid-19 Pandemic and how it affected them. This may have reflected the general attitude of information saturation at the time, and the reluctance of focusing on the same topic the whole world was talking about. In a study on group sex and community building during Covid-19, Fournier et al. (2021) reported participants' use of technology in order to have online orgies, for example, with others while isolated.

7.3 Future Studies

Future research on swingers that will decide to conduct ethnographies or fieldwork inside swinger settings should consider doing so on a variety of venues in different countries, and longitudinal studies are needed to make more generalizations across space and time. A cultural, linguistic, and geographic comparison is important when considering the international scope of swinger settings, in Europe and in the USA, and the future development of swinging over time in other countries. Based on my observations and interviews in this study, swingers come from all cultures, age groups and socioeconomic

levels, and future studies should therefore take this into account, conducting ethnographies in a variety of settings, and using participant observation in order to include other understudied populations within swinger communities.

I recommend participant observation as part of the methods used, because my participation (and retelling of my experiences) helped me gain access to swinger settings, meet new participants and inspired trust among the participants in general, allowing me to become an active member in swinger settings. This method also helped achieve enriching data through phone interviews, as I was able to connect with participants through my experiences in the swinger world

Another group of swinger club attendees that I was not able to interview were the single men who came to the clubs sporadically and may or may not have considered themselves swingers. Some participants, who were also critical of this, suggested that single men attended swinger clubs without the knowledge of their partners. Perhaps these men were more secretive than other attendees, especially when it was looked down upon that they lied to their partners. The scope of this practice is unknown, although they still formed part of swinger clubs and settings, both in Spain and in France. It would be interesting to learn more about their sexuality, and this could possibly be done by a male researcher, with similar practices or perspectives. A study on single men who frequent swinger clubs has not been conducted yet, as single men accounts were only studied once while studying swingers (Fernandes, 2009). Perhaps online questionnaires should be used as a method to provide data on this hidden subgroup.

Vaillancourt and Few-Demo (2014, 8) recommended that marriage and family therapists learn more about relational dynamics in swinging couples to understand how they “experience trust, intimacy, and power within the context of their marriage and sexuality”. Most importantly, they suggest that therapy may be valuable to “assess how power is shared and implemented in this relationship to facilitate a road to egalitarianism” (Vaillancourt and Few-Demo, 2014, 9). The authors point out that a female and a male interviewer should be available to conduct interviews in order to compare interview dynamics, because, as the authors pointed out, - “voices can be silenced in a heteronormative frame of relating” (Vaillancourt and Few-Demo, 2014, 9). These are important suggestions when considering

the dearth of existing research that explore therapists who treat swinger couples and single swingers. An exploration of the therapists' own observations of couples, and interviews with couples would be an invaluable way of changing perspectives on swinger studies, or another type of ethnography, not necessarily a participant ethnography in swinger clubs, which would be enriching, as therapists already have an established relationship with their clients. Considering the lack of research on single swinger men who attend swinger clubs, or men who are interested in swinging but do not disclose this to their partners, - therapist ethnography may be successful in recruiting this unstudied subgroup.

More mixed methods, including qualitative and ethnographic studies, should be conducted on STI's in the context of swinger settings, to reevaluate the previous literature, theory, methodology and analysis on health, risk, and prevention within swinger clubs. In my research, I suggest this, and the participants in this study state that swinger clubs (in Spain and France) are settings where swingers use protection (condom-use is prevalent). However, I believe that this is a vast and important subject that requires further research, using a mixed method, such as interviews, participant observation and questionnaires. Additional studies on swinger clubs and swingers, or collective sex venues, may include questions about the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on swinging, for example. I did not have the opportunity to investigate this closely in my study, although I believe that online questionnaires using swinger chat groups would probably serve best for this type of study. While conducting studies on risk and protection on swingers, it may be interesting to also include and explore those swingers who do not participate in any kind of exchanges with other people, but who identify themselves as "light" swingers. This subgroup of swingers could be regarded as those who were not exposed to any kind of sexual activity with others at all. These potential participants may not volunteer for a study on swingers because they do not have any experience having sex with other people. While these onlookers or voyeurs made up a considerable portion of attendees in the swinger clubs I attended, this is an under researched group in swinger research, and it is important to consider the implications of not including this subgroup in the sample when researching on risk and prevention.

I believe that with the help of motivated ethnographers, more studies involving participant observation could give way to enriching data on swingers. Ethnographers who

are a couple could conduct such a study. As an example, Charles and Rebecca Palson (1972) studied swinging through participation, reporting only briefly on the value of their participation. Theirs was one of the few studies on swingers that lacked the problems with recruiting, pointing directly to their participation as a major important element. Further details on their participation, such as their disinterest with swinging, jealousy during and after sexual acts, conflicts in their relationship and other couples' relationships when swinging with them; how they viewed sexual risk – all would have been important themes to elaborate on in their study. An ethnographer couple who starts swinging during the project would have the opportunity to record their own initial feelings, experiences, and challenges as “newbies”, something that could be beneficial – a study recording both sides of the couple as they go through swinging for the first time.

Finally, we need more studies on the social and legal implications of swinging and swinger clubs, considering the article by Pérez Navarro (2017), who raises concerns over the legality of polyamorous and other non-monogamous relationships in Spain. The author does not analyze this issue separately from the existing dynamics and experiences of the (poly, BDSM) couples he interviewed. Would it not be most logical to consider these same biographical stories while addressing the legality of their relationship, situation, and setting? The issues around the legality of research within such settings cannot be completely ignored in future research either, where all the decisions must be made in context and at the time of the research. As Perez Navarro (2017, 447) keenly points out, “precariousness is the new black”.

REFERENCES

1. American Anthropological Association. (2012). *Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibilities*. <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>.
2. Andersson, N., Ejnestrand, J., Lidgren, Y., Allard, A., Boman, J., and Nylander, E. (2021). Are Swedish swingers a risk group for sexually transmitted infections? *International journal of STD & AIDS*, 32(5), 427-434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956462420973108>.
3. Arendell, T. (1997). Reflections on the researcher-researched relationship: A woman interviewing men. *Qualitative sociology*, 20(3), 341-368. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024727316052>.

4. Atkinson, P., & Coffey, A. (2003). Revisiting the relationship between participant observation and interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.). *Postmodern interviewing* (pp. 109–122). Sage.
5. Barker, M., & Langdridge, D. (2010). Whatever happened to non-monogamies? Critical reflections on recent research and theory. *Sexualities*, 13(6), 748-772.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460710384645>.
6. Bartell, G. D. (1970). Group sex among the mid-Americans. *Journal of Sex Research*, 6(2), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224497009550655>.
7. Bartell, G.D. (1971). *Group sex*. Wyden.
8. Bentzen, A.S., & Træen, B. (2014). Swinging in Norway in the context of sexual health. *Sexuality & Culture*, 18(1), 132-148. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9181-6>.
9. Bergstrand, C., & Williams, J.B. (2000). Today's alternative marriage styles: The case of swingers. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, 3(10).
<http://www.ejhs.org/volume3/swing/body.htm>.
10. Bernard, R. H. (2006). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. AltaMira Press.
11. Bettinger, M. (2002). Sexuality, boundaries, professional ethics, and clinical practice: The kink community. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 14(4), 93–104.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J041v14n04_06.
12. Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction. A social critique of the judgment of taste*. MA: Harvard University Press.
14. Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
15. Conley, T. D., Moors, A. C., Ziegler, A., & Karathanasis, C. (2012). Unfaithful individuals are less likely to practice safer sex than openly nonmonogamous individuals. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 9(6), 1559-1565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2012.02712.x>.
16. Conley, T. D., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Ziegler, A. (2013). The fewer the merrier?: Assessing stigma surrounding consensually non-monogamous romantic relationships. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, (13), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-2415.2012.01286.x>.

17. Denfeld, D. (1974). Dropouts from swinging. *Family Coordinator*, (23)1, 45-49.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/582523>.
18. De Visser, R., & McDonald, D. (2007). Swings and roundabouts: Management of jealousy in heterosexual 'swinging' couples. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(2), 459-476.
<https://doi.org/10.1348/014466606X143153>.
19. D'Orlando, F. (2010). Swinger Economics. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 39(2), 295-305. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1375093>.
20. Dukers-Muijters, N.H., Niekamp, A.M., Brouwers, E. E., & Hoebe, C.J. (2010). Older and swinging; need to identify hidden and emerging risk groups at STI clinics. *Sexually transmitted infections*, 86(4), 315-317. <http://doi.org/10.1136/sti.2009.041954>.
21. Dukers-Muijters, N. H., van Rooijen, M. S., Hogewoning, A., van Liere, G. A., Steenbakkers, M., & Hoebe, C. J. (2017). Incidence of repeat testing and diagnoses of Chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhea in swingers, homosexual and heterosexual men and women at two large Dutch STI clinics, 2006–2013. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 93(6), 383-389. <http://doi.org/10.1136/sextrans-2016-052807>.
22. Easton, D., & Hardy, J.W. (2009). *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships and Other Adventures*, 2nd updated & expanded edition. Celestial Arts.
23. Fernandes, E. M. (2009). *The Swinging Paradigm: An Evaluation of the Marital and Sexual Satisfaction of Swingers*. [Doctoral dissertation, Union Institute and University].
24. Forga, J. M. P. (2010). Turismo naturista: una apuesta por el turismo marginal. El caso del barrio naturista de Cap d'Agde en Francia (Naturist tourism: opting for the naturist tourism. The case of naturist enclave of Cap d'Agde in France). *Cuadernos de Turismo (Journals of Tourism)*, (26), 201-216. <http://hdl.handle.net/10201/23223>.
25. Forga, J. M. P. (2018). The Boom of Marginal Tourism: 'Swinger Cruises' Today. *Gran Tour*, (17), 158-179. <http://hdl.handle.net/10201/73014>.
26. Fournier, A. B., Fulcher, K., Shumka, L., & Lachowsky, N. J. (2021). Group sex in the time of COVID: Intimacy, learning, and community-building in sexual communities during a pandemic. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 30(2), 278-285.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2021-0014>.

27. Fulcher, K., Shumka, L., Roth, E., & Lachowsky, N. (2019). *Pleasure, risk perception and consent among group sex party attendees in a small Canadian Urban Centre. Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 21(6), 650-665. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2018.1508749>.
28. Frank, K. (2008). 'Not Gay, but Not Homophobic': Male Sexuality and Homophobia in the Lifestyle. *Sexualities*, 11(4), 435-454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460708091743>.
29. Frank, K. (2013). *Plays well in groups: A journey through the world of group sex*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
30. Gould, T. (1999). *The Lifestyle: A Look at the Erotic Rites of Swingers*. Firefly Books.
31. Green, A. I. (2008). Erotic habitus: Toward a sociology of desire. *Theory and society*, 37(6), 597-626. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40345604>.
32. Green, A. I. (2015). Sexual fields. In J. DeLamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities* (pp. 23-39). Springer.
33. Groes-Green, C. (2012). Ambivalent participation: Sex, power, and the anthropologist in Mozambique. *Medical Anthropology*, 31(1), 44-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2011.589418>.
34. Grolld, L. J. (1970). Swinging: Sexual Freedom or Neurotic Escapism? *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 127(4), 521-523. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.127.4.521>.
35. Grunt-Mejer, K., & Campbell, C. (2016). Around consensual nonmonogamies: Assessing attitudes toward nonexclusive relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53 (1), 45-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2017.1419984>.
36. Harviainen, T. J., & Frank, K. (2018). Group sex as play: Games and Transgression in Shared Non-monogamy. *Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media*, 13(3), 220-239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016659835>.
37. Haywood, C. (2022). Sex Clubs in the UK: Recreational Sex, Erotic Diversity and Geographies of Desire. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-022-00108-8>.
38. Henshel, A.M. (1973). Swinging: A study of decision making in marriage. *American Journal of Sociology*, (78)4, 885-891.

39. Hutzler, K. T., Giuliano, T. A., Herselman, J. R., & Johnson, S.M. (2016). Three's a crowd: Public awareness and (mis) perceptions of polyamory. *Psychology & Sexuality* 7(2), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2015.1004102>.
40. Järvinen, M., & Mik-Meyer, N. (Eds.). (2020). *Qualitative Analysis: Eight Approaches for the Social Sciences*. Sage Publications.
41. Jenks, R. J. (1998). Swinging: A review of the Literature. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 27, 507-521. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018708730945>.
42. Jenks, R. (2014). An on-Line Survey Comparing Swingers and Polyamorists. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, 17. <http://www.ejhs.org/volume17/swing.html>.
43. Kimberly, C. (2016). Permission to cheat: Ethnography of a swingers' convention. *Sexuality & Culture*, 20(1), 56-68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S12119-015-9309-Y>.
44. Kimberly, C, & Hans, J.D. (2017). From fantasy to reality: A grounded theory of experiences in the swinging lifestyle. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 46(3), 789-799. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0621-2>.
45. Kimberly, C., & McGinley, R. (2018). Changes in the swinging lifestyle: a US national and historical comparison. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 21(2), 219-232. https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs/16079.
46. Kreston, B. (2014). Refusing a spoiled identity: How the swinger community represents on the Web. Old Dominion University.
47. Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage.
48. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E.G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 30, 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1427>.
49. Ling, T. J., Geiger, C. J., Hauck, J. M., Daquila, S. M., & Pattison, J.E. (2022). BDSM, non-monogamy, consent, and stigma navigation: narrative experiences. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-02191-6>.
50. Matsick, J. L., Conley, T.D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A.C., & Rubin, J.D. (2014). Love and sex: Polyamorous relationships are perceived more favourably than swinging and open

relationships. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 5(4), 339-348.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2013.832934>.

51. McDonald, D. (2010). Swinging: Pushing the boundaries of monogamy? In M. Barker and D. Landridge (Eds.), *Understanding non-monogamies* (pp. 82-93). Routledge.
52. Molina, J. L., Santaló, J., Darbra, S., Martínez, V., Pont, I., & Gamper, D. (2019, May 17-18). *Informed Consent in Research on Vulnerable and Culturally Diverse Population* [Conference Presentation]. 5th National Conference of Research ethics, University of Valencia, Spain.
53. Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., Ziegler, A., Rubin, J. D., & Conley, T.D. (2013). Stigma toward individuals engaged in consensual nonmonogamy: Robust and worthy of additional research. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 13(1), 52-69.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12020>.
54. Morgan, C., & Johnston, H. (2021, May 31). Danish journalist, 26, who could be heard moaning as she interviewed man while having sex with him at swingers club reveals her dad says it's 'really cool' and mum thinks it's 'funny'. *Dailymail*.
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-9636967/Danish-journalist-26-interviewed-man-having-sex-says-dad-thinks-cool.html>.
55. Nourist resort in France sees 'worrying' rise Covid cases. (2020, August 25). *The Connexion*. <https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Nourist-resort-Cap-d-Agde-in-southern-France-closes-in-worrying-Covid-coronavirus-outbreak-cluster>.
56. Niekamp, A.M., Mercken, L. A., Hoebe, C. J., & Dukers-Muijers, N. H., (2013). A sexual affiliation network of swingers, heterosexuals practicing risk behaviours that potentiate the spread of sexually transmitted infections: a two-mode approach. *Social Networks*, 35(2), 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2013.02.006>.
57. Palson, C. & Palson, R. (1972). Swinging in wedlock. *Society*, 9(4), 28-37.
58. Pérez Navarro, P. (2017). Beyond inclusion: Non-monogamies and the borders of citizenship. *Sexuality & Culture*, 21(2), 441-458. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9398-2>.

59. Pérez-y-Pérez, M. (2015). Ethnography in a “sexy setting:” Doing research in a New Zealand massage parlour. In DeLamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities* (pp. 109-122). Springer.
60. Phillips, S. (2010). There were three in the bed: Discursive desire and the sex lives of swingers. In M. Barker & D. Landridge (Eds.), *Understanding Non-monogamies* (pp. 94-98). Routledge.
61. Police Close Seville Swingers Club for Not Enforcing Social Distancing Restrictions. (2021, March 30). *Andalucia Today*. https://andaluciatoday.com/archived_-_police-close-seville-swingers-club-for-not-enforcing-social-distancing-restrictions_1579398-a.html.
62. Popplewell, M. (2006). Women in the lifestyle: A qualitative look at the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of women who swing. (Publication number 257) [Master's Thesis, Western Kentucky University].
63. Ritchie, A., & Barker, M. (2006). ‘There aren’t words for what we do or how we feel so we have to make them up’: Constructing polyamorous languages in a culture of compulsory monogamy. *Sexualities*, 9(5), 584-601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460706069987>.
64. Roberts, M. (2003). Related to bigotry: The repression of swingers in early 21st century Britain. *Sociological Notes*, 28, 1-82.
65. Rubin, R. H. (2001). Alternative lifestyles revisited, or whatever happened to swingers, group marriages, and communes? *Journal of Family Issues*, 22(6), 711-726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925130102200600>.
66. Schippers, M. (2016). *Beyond monogamy: Polyamory and the future of polyqueer sexualities*. Vol. 13. NYU Press. Scoats, R., & Anderson, E. (2018). ‘My partner was just all over her’: jealousy, communication, and rules in mixed-sex threesomes. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 21(2), 134-146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2018.1453088>.
67. Serina, A.T., Hall, M., Ciambone, D., & VoonChin, P. (2013). Swinging around stigma: Gendered marketing of swingers’ websites. *Sexuality & Culture*, 17(2), 348-359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-012-9153-2>.

68. Shaw, R. (2010). Neoliberal subjectivities and the development of the night-time economy in British cities. *Geography compass*, 4(7), 893-903. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2010.00345.x>.
69. Sheff, E. (2006). Poly-hegemonic masculinities. *Sexualities*, 9(5), 621–642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460706070004>.
70. Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (1986). Sexual scripts: Permanence and change. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 15(2), 97-120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01542219>.
71. Smith, J., & Smith, L. (1970). Sex and the Sexual Freedom Co-Marital Movement. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 6(2), 131–142.
72. Spauwen, L.W., Niekamp, A., Hoebe, C.J., & Dukers-Muijters, N.H. (2015). Drug use, sexual risk behaviour and sexually transmitted infections among swingers: a cross-sectional study in The Netherlands. *Sex Transm Infect*, 91(1), 31-36. <https://doi.org/10.1136/sextrans-2014-051626>.
73. Stinnett, N., Birdsong, C. W., & Stinnett, N. M. (1978). *The family and alternate life styles*. Nelson-Hall.
74. Stone, A. L., & Weinberg, J. D. (2015). Sexualities and social movements: Three decades of sex and social change. In J. DeLamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of sexualities* (pp. 453-465). Springer.
75. Tanner, A. (2007, August 20). Swingers are growth business for U.S. firms. *Thomson Reuters*. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/08/21/lifestyle-usa-swingers-dc-idUKN1335846020070821>. 22 Jan 2015.
76. Taylor, B., & De Vocht, H. (2011). Interviewing separately or as couples? Considerations of authenticity of method. *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(11), 1576-1587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732311415288>.
77. Vaillancourt, K.T., & Few-Demo, A.L. (2014). Relational dynamics of swinging relationships: An exploratory study. *The Family Journal*, 22(3), 311-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480714529742>.
78. Van Liere, G. A., Hoebe, C. J., Niekamp, A. M., Koedijk, F. D., & Dukers-Muijters, N. H. (2013). Standard symptom-and sexual history–based testing misses Anorectal chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhoeae infections in swingers and men who have sex with

- men. *Sexually transmitted diseases*, 40(4), 285-289.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0b013e31828098f8>.
79. Varni, C. A. (1972). An exploratory study of spouse-swapping. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 15(4), 507-522. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1388267>.
 80. Vaynman, M. J., Sandberg, S., & Pedersen, W. (2020). 'Locker room talk': male bonding and sexual degradation in drinking stories. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 22(11), 1235-1252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2019.1670864>.
 81. Vaynman, M.J., & Harviainen, J.T. (2022). Speaking with Swingers in Spain and France: Strategies from the Swinger World. *Sexuality & Culture*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-10006-6>.
 82. Wagner, B. (2009). Becoming a sexual being: Overcoming constraints on female sexuality. *Sexualities*, 12(3), 289-311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709103892>.
 83. Welzer-Lang, D. (2001). L'échangisme : une multisexualité commerciale à forte domination masculine [Exchangism : a commercial multi-sexuality based on masculine domination]. *Sociétés contemporaines*, (1), 111-131. <https://doi.org/10.3917/soco.041.0111>.
 84. Wilt, J., Harrison, M. A., & Cobi, S. M. (2018). Attitudes and experiences of swinging couples. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 9(1), 38-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2017.1419984>.
 85. Wolkomir, M. (2020). Swingers and polyamorists: A comparative analysis of gendered power dynamics. *Sexualities*, 23(7), 1060-1079. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719876845>.
 86. Wosick-Correa, K. (2010). Agreements, rules, and agentic fidelity in polyamorous relationships. *Psychology and Sexuality*, 1(1), 44-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419891003634471>.

APPENDIX

Guion de Entrevista Semiestructurada

1. Datos sociodemográficos

- a. Sexo
- b. Año de nacimiento/edad
- c. Lugar, país de nacimiento. Idioma materno. Lugares donde has vivido.
- d. Nivel educativo alcanzado. Tipo de estudios.
- e. Profesión, empleo. Breve historia profesional.

f. Estado civil: casado, soltero, viudo, pareja sin matrimonio

g. ¿Estás casado o vives en pareja?

h. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas casado?

i. ¿Tienes hijos/as? ¿Cuántos?

j. ¿Dónde se ha criado? ¿De dónde te identificas?

k. Educación religiosa.

l. Orientación moral y política.

m. Historia erótico-afectiva.

n. Descripción física de uno mismo (y de su pareja).

o. Historia sexual pre y postswinger.

p. Nivel económico.

Tema 1: ¿Quién? Perfilando los swingers

1.1 Perfil sociodemográfico

1.2 Perfil moral e ideológico: valores, ideologías, creencias, normas sexuales, problemas de género. ¿Qué es ideología 'liberal' en este ambiente? Explique en tus propias palabras.

Tema 2. ¿Por qué? Motivos y racionalizaciones para empezar y continuar con prácticas swinger. La evolución de personas swinger y parejas swingers según sus experiencias y autonomía durante el intercambio.

¿Cuáles son las razones principales que estas parejas y personas experimenten estas prácticas y sigan en ellas? Motivos principales son: monotonía en la vida sexual, necesidad de variación, ausencia de deseo o interés en la pareja.

2.1 Iniciación en las prácticas de intercambio

1. ¿Cómo empezaste en el mundo swinger?
2. ¿Con quién fue?
3. ¿Quién lo propuso?
4. ¿Dónde empezaste: reunión particular, encuentro organizado por web, club?
5. Elabora con detalles tu primera experiencia swinger.

6. Experimentar, probar
7. ¿Por qué empezasteis?
8. ¿Qué crees que te llevo a probar el intercambio de parejas?
9. ¿Fue uno de los dos quien lo propuso y estaba interesado/a o fue de común acuerdo desde el principio?
10. ¿Cuál es la razón principal por seguir en estos intercambios?

Tema 3. ¿Cómo? Los patrones, las estructuras, las normas y los acontecimientos ordinarios y extraordinarios de las practicas swinger.

La práctica del swinging

1. ¿Con que frecuencia participas en este mundo?
2. Dónde prefieres realizar estas prácticas (fiestas, club, playas nudistas, viajes, etc.)
3. ¿Qué tipo de actividades prefieres?
4. ¿Usas las páginas swinger? ¿Cuáles?
5. ¿Qué buscas en el club, la página o en encuentros? (hombres solteros, mujeres, parejas)
6. Cuando vas a un club, ¿qué buscas principalmente?
7. Puedes contar una experiencia sexual positiva, y otra negativa.
8. Sensaciones de peligro, *frisson*, *compersion* – ¿Habías tenido estos sentimientos y en qué situaciones?
9. La bisexualidad entre mujeres es algo aceptado (y deseable) en este mundo, mientras el juego entre hombres no lo es.
10. ¿Puedes comentar algo sobre esto según tu experiencia?
11. ¿Aceptarías juego entre una persona del mismo sexo que tú si estáis dentro de un juego de intercambio? Describe los detalles que definen y forman parte del juego. ¿Puedes contar algo sobre una experiencia sexual con una persona del mismo sexo?
12. ¿Exhibirse es importante para ti? Por ejemplo, ¿bailar en la barra, dar vueltas, tener sexo delante de otra gente, tener sexo en el cuarto oscuro?
13. Droga y alcohol entre swingers

Tema 4: Contextos swinger: Ambientes swinger o intercambio de pareja. Clubs, casas, páginas web, otros.

1. (Para los swingles, - ¿Si tuvieras pareja, ¿qué límites le pondrías en un club y fuera del club?
2. ¿Qué tipo de normas o reglas, implícitas o explícitas, existen en un club?
3. Rutinas, conductas ritualizadas
4. ¿Los chicos solteros saben las reglas del club o del mundo liberal, o necesitan que les enseñen y se encarga de esto?
5. Muchos swinger no quieren ´salir del armario´. ¿El mundo swinger, (el mundo horizontal) - ¿Es un mundo oculto para ti? ¿En qué aspecto y por qué?
6. ¿Para ti es una comunidad, una identidad, una subcultura? Elabora como lo ves y por qué.
7. ¿Te gusta ir a los clubs swinger? Explica por qué o por qué no.
8. ¿Quedas fuera del club con gente swinger o liberal? Explica.
9. ¿Qué club le gusta más? ¿Por qué?
10. ¿Qué le gusta de cada club?
11. ¿Qué parte del club más te gusta o te da morbo?
12. ¿Tienes relaciones en cuartos privados o delante de la gente?

Tema 5: Parejas, género y perspectivas: decisiones y dinámica de intercambio de pareja.

1. ¿Cuáles son las normas, reglas, límites, en tu relación con tu pareja respecto los intercambios eróticos/sexuales con otras personas o parejas?
2. ¿Qué límites establecéis?
3. Quién los establece primariamente, ¿tú o tu pareja?
4. Hacéis esto como pareja, ¿queréis conservar vuestra relación o no es eso prioritario?
5. ¿Qué normas o reglas o límites os imponéis para salvaguardar vuestra relación de pareja practicando swinging?
6. ¿Qué problemas os han surgido a este respecto?
7. ¿Qué procesos y eventos inesperados os han ocurrido?
8. ¿Ha habido alguna crisis en vuestra pareja por estas prácticas?

9. ¿Creéis que estas prácticas han mejorado/empeorado (o ninguna de las dos opciones) vuestras relaciones de pareja.
10. ¿Habéis tenido celos a causa del swinging?
11. ¿Te da morbo ver a tu amante estar con otras personas? ¿Puedes explicar por qué si o no? Puedes contar sobre una experiencia cuckold (o una experiencia de celos) - ¿Cómo se inició, y que hiciste durante, y como terminó...?