Women in the Lifestyle: A Qualitative Look at the Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences of Women Who Swing

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WOMEN IN THE LIFESTYLE:
A QUALITATIVE LOOK AT THE PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES,
AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO SWING

A Thesis
Presented to
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Master of Arts

By
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WOMEN IN THE LIFESTYLE:
A QUALITATIVE LOOK AT THE PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES,
AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO SWING

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The study consisted of a qualitative analysis of female swingers’ perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to their participation in the Lifestyle. Using feminist standpoint theory and pro-sex feminist theory as the theoretical framework, in-depth interviews were conducted via the Internet using instant messaging with sixteen female swingers. The women were asked questions regarding their attitudes and perceptions about swinging as well as their experiences in the Lifestyle. Findings were compared with previous studies from the 1970s as well as with common feminist thoughts and potential misconceptions about the Lifestyle. The results showed that although demographically the female swingers were similar to past studies, much of the previous research data was outdated and incorrect. Furthermore, the study provides evidence to support the idea that women can overcome gender stereotypes and cultural indoctrination.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is interesting about deviance is not what it is but what people think it is.
(Becker 1928, p. 341)

If I were to ask you to describe swingers, how much of your characterization would be based upon facts and how much would be based upon preconceived judgments? How often do we close our minds to anything in society that we do not perceive as “normal.” When we hear the term “swinging,” do we really know what it is about?

I am a graduate student in sociology; and until just over a year ago, I was naive regarding the world of swinging. It was not until I randomly picked up a magazine, which contained a story based on a swinger party, that I became intrigued with this lifestyle known as swinging. My mind, at this time, was empty to the knowledge of this subculture. I had stumbled across a subject that I knew nothing about and to which I had had no exposure. Therefore, I decided to open my mind and step into this subculture that many people would not dare to be part of. This research is a compilation of my findings based on interviews and observations from entering the world of swingers.

Today, my knowledge and perception of swinging are significantly different from what it was when I was first exposed to it. Swinging (or mate-swapping as it was once referred to) occurs all over the world. Its participants include those from all walks of life. They are average, everyday people who do not consider swinging a hobby but rather a
Yet how different would we react to them if we did know?

Our society has created these morals and standards for how we are to behave, and everything and everyone who does not fall into this realm is labeled wrong, immoral, or deviant. What is even more amazing is how these stigmas are learned and adopted by everyone else despite of whether or not they have ever had any personal experiences with something or someone who has been stamped with one of these labels. We are told from the beginning what we are to believe is right and wrong, both legally and morally. Therefore, I am not shocked that many people find this topic of study to be wrong, immoral, and deviant. Nevertheless, the founder of eroticguide.com and current swinger himself once offered me some words of wisdom before I began conducting this study. He said, “One bit of advice I will give you is to learn to trust what the people in the Lifestyle tell you and don’t try to filter it through your own preconceptions” (Booth 2000, para. 3). I have never forgotten his words. Therefore, my goal for this study was not to place judgment on an already socially stigmatized group. My goal was to learn about the lifestyle from those who live it.

After a year of researching the swinging lifestyle and conversing with some of its members, I decided to focus my research upon an area of swinging that has lacked attention in previous studies. The area that I have chosen and, thus, the focal point of this research, is the role that women play in the realm of swinging.

Although researchers in the past have touched on issues concerning women’s involvement in swinging, no one has yet looked specifically at the woman’s role in this activity. Not only has no one ever specifically researched women’s role in swinging, no
one has ever looked at it from the standpoint of women swingers themselves. Thus, this
is the perspective I have taken for studying the role of women in swinging using feminist
standpoint theory and pro-sex feminist theory as the foundation.

Gaining insight on the role of women who swing, specifically from the viewpoint
of female swingers, cannot be done adequately through quantitative measures. Therefore,
I intend to study women swingers from a qualitative perspective. Specifically, I will
conduct in depth interviews in swinger chatrooms via the Internet as well as doing non-
participant observations at a local swingers club. Using the combination of interviews
and direct observations will allow me to gain a more eclectic and accurate understanding
of female swingers.

This research is not just important in understanding women who swing. It is my
belief that we can learn a lot about women and the society in which we live by looking at
the role of women in swinging. Our society has created sexual scripts, roles, and
stereotypes to which the sexes are to adhere. Those who do not act accordingly to these
standards are labeled as deviant or different. As a result, gender has become socially
created.

In the swinging environment, however, seeing “women acting on their own
natural impulses, devoid of much of the cultural conditioning that normally inhibits their
sexuality” is common (Booth 2000). These women have overcome social expectations
and embraced a new lifestyle—one in which they are liberated from the conventional
taboo of society and free to act upon their natural instincts. Therefore, based upon the
actions of these women, what does this tell us about our sexuality? What insights can we
attain by studying those who have subdued “social indoctrination” and are exploring alternative lifestyles influenced only by their instinctive nature (Booth 2000, para. 2)? If it is true that women are not born sexually inferior or passive but rather are just as sexually vigorous and carnal as men, then what presumptions can we make about the society in which we live? By studying these women who are not submitting to the sexual norms prescribed by society, we can not only gain new perspectives on female sexuality but begin to understand it as well. A review of past research and literature on swinging will follow.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

*Humanity has been playing a little game and its cardinal rule is: Do it if you have to, but make sure you feel bad about it and make sure you don’t tell anyone.*  
(Bianchi 1996)

Swinging has been defined in a variety of ways throughout its history. In the article “What is the Swinging Lifestyle?” swinging is “the sharing of sexual pleasure with a person or persons we are not legally married to” (Sez 2000, para. 2). According to this definition, most of people today are swinging without evening knowing it (Sez 2000).


a form of recreational social sex between consenting adults, most commonly consisting of male/female couples meeting other male/female couples for sex and/or ongoing intimate friendships. (Society for Human Sexuality, para.1)

Others have defined swinging as being a “social-sexual relationship oriented recreation among men and women. It is a couple oriented activity but single men and women are sometimes involved” (James and Sharon’s Swingpen’s… 1998, p. 3). The North American Swing… states:

swinging is social and sexual intercourse with someone other than your mate, boyfriend or girlfriend, excepting the traditional one-on-one dating. It may be defined as recreational social sex. (2000, para. 1)

No matter how you define the subculture of swinging, it may be one of the most commonly stigmatized groups in our society today. Often seen as “unhappy,
stand a chance of being accepted into a society that readily stamps people with negative labels based on their own morals. It is estimated that only about 10 percent of the swinging population is completely out in the open about their lifestyle (Sez 2000). It is no wonder that swingers, like homosexuals, are hesitant about “coming out,” even in today’s more liberal society.

The History of Swinging

The term “swinging” came about because of a minister’s sermon when he stated that people were swinging from bed to bed like monkeys (Booth 1999; Sez 2000). It has evolved over time through different styles and practices. Judeo-Christians’ perception of sexual conduct is that it must be kept within the boundaries of a holy marriage union between a husband and a wife (Noonan 1979). Swinging actually dates back as far as Biblical times, when having more than one wife for wealthy men was common. Many European and Asian countries still practice polygamy, which could be considered a form of swinging (Sez 2000). Only 135 societies out of 554 that have the custom of marriage practice monogamy (Pines 1998). That is only 24 percent! Anthropologist Clellan Ford and psychologist Frank Beach in 1951 found that, of the 139 cultures they studied around the world, 39 percent practiced approved adultery (Gould 2000). It is even the belief that such famous leaders as Queen Marie of France and Benjamin Franklin practiced forms of swinging (Haitsche and Haitsche 2000; Sez 2000).

Swinging as we know it today first started in the 1950s when people began placing ads in newspapers to meet other swinger couples (Society for Human… 1998). Initially when wife-swapping occurred at “home parties,” it was meant for couples only.
There was no denying that swinging was dominated by men (Sez 2000, para. 9). In the 1960s The Sexual Freedom League, in Berkeley, California, was the first institute to go public about swinging. NASCA soon evolved to provide accurate information about swinging to the nation (Society for Human… 1998).

Swinging Today

Swinging is now more commonly referred to as “the Lifestyle” (Society for Human… 1998, para. 2). Swingers became known as Lifestylers in the 1980s. They wanted to escape the taboos originally associated with swingers because “more and more ‘straight’ couples were attending their events and they wanted to be freed from the snappy terms that made them into media fast food” (Gould 2000, p. 4). It has been estimated that roughly two and one-half to eight million couples practiced mate-swapping more than three times a year (Breedlove and Breedlove 1965). That was between 2.6 and 8.4 percent of the population in 1964. If the percentage has remained constant, it can be estimated that between 7 and 22.8 million people were swingers in the 1990s. This figure is roughly the equivalent of every man, woman, and child in “Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Montana, Nevada, North and South Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia” (Haitsche and Haitsche 2000, p. 8). Robert McGinley, founder of NASCA, says that according to club memberships and attendance at various types of swinger parties, there are approximately three million people who participate in swinging today in North America (Gould 2000). From the late 1980s the number of swingers had increased by one million. McGinley estimates that there are about another million or more swingers around the world who actively participate in the Lifestyle
Previous Research on Swinging

Although swinging is in existence today more than ever before, very little research on the subject has been conducted since the 1970s, and virtually no research has looked specifically at the role women play in swinging. Jeff Booth (1999a), author of the website “Jeff & Kris’ Guide to Swinging” states that most of the research conducted on swinging in the past twenty years is out-dated, inaccurate, or mainly negative. He states that much of the research is conducted either on small samples using questionnaires or by nonparticipant observers who filter information they receive through their own preconceptions after attending just one swinging event. Often information on swingers is gathered from marriage counselors or psychiatrists. This information is often biased because they work only with troubled couples. Therefore, ideas such as “swinging leads to divorce” (Booth 1999b, para. 7) or swinging is controlled by men (Booth 1999b, para. 8) are simply misconceptions.

Research on swinging began to be published in the early 1970s. Most of the studies I found looked at the demographic characteristics of swingers that when compared with the most recently published study in October of 2000, do not appear to have changed much since the 1970s. Swingers range in age from 18 to 60 with the majority being middle-age (Bartell 1970; Bergstrand and Williams 2000; Jenks 1985, O’Neill and O’Neill 1970; Varni 1972). Most swingers are white and fall into the middle class (Bartell 1970; Bergstrand and Williams 2000; Gilmartin 1975; Jenks 1985; O’Neill and O’Neill 1970; Palson and Palson 1972; Varni 1972), with many having some college
Gilbert D. Bartell (1970) produced one of the most popular studies ever carried out on swingers. Bartell conducted a participant observational study using 280 single or married swingers over the span of two years. The swingers he interviewed seemed to view swinging as a “way of life” (p. 124). They consistently reported boredom in their marriages (p. 125). Although Bartell found both positive and negative aspects of swinging, he stated that he felt swingers were not getting the full benefits of swinging because they were not understanding the human relations aspect. Rather, they tended to focus on the sexual relations as the main goal (p. 129).

Bartell’s study is a prime example of research that is inaccurate and outdated. According to Booth (1999b) swinging is not just about “impersonal sex.” He says that although this perspective is sometimes still the case, it is not the norm. Swinging is a social activity for growing and making friends, not just for obtaining many sex partners (Booth 1999b). The only information in Bartell’s study that still may be accurate is the demographic information he obtained and the knowledge that swinging is a lifestyle for those who participate.

Other researchers conducted more in-depth studies on the personal characteristics of swingers, some of which conflicted with Bartell’s findings. For instance, Bartell (1970) claimed that shallowness in personalities and jealousy are the primary motivations for sex being the main goal in swinging (pp. 129-30). Palson and Palson (1972), on the
other hand, found sex to be the primary goal only among beginners simply because they wanted to satisfy their curiosity about people (p. 30). The Palsons were able to find couples who either had or wanted to have some type of emotional connection and lasting friendships within the swinging lifestyle (p. 29).

Homosexuality among men was very uncommon. However, female participation in homosexuality was much more common, even encouraged (Bartell 1970; O’Neill and O’Neill 1970; Palson and Palson 1972). The issue of impersonal sex, as well as homosexuality, is discussed in “Jeff and Kris’ Guide to Swinging” (Booth 1999b) which, consequently, supports the Palson’s and the O’Neill’s findings on this issue.

In comparison to married nonswinger couples, married swinger couples differed in only a few areas. Swingers were more likely to hold liberal attitudes concerning sexual topics, report a greater level of marital satisfaction, and have wives who work (Bergstrand and Williams 2000; Gilmartin 1975). Nonswingers were more likely to be educated, attend church, and report happier childhoods and closer family relationships (Gilmartin 1975). Nonswingers tend to have several misconceptions of swingers on issues of sexual behavior as well as other nonsexually oriented issues though past research has found swingers to differ from nonswingers only in the aspect of swinging (Jenks 1985). Thus, there is a possibility that swingers might be “accept[ing] and internaliz[ing] a deviant role” due to being labeled as deviant by nonswingers (Jenks 1985, p. 205).

Another study looked specifically at the process of becoming a swinger and how one can internalize the role of a swinger. According to Charles Varni (1972), becoming a swinger is associated with altering sexual meanings. It involves “giving up” one social
reality and “taking on” another one (p. 510). He defined a social reality as a

collection of social meanings...[which] function as a mechanism of social control
in that behavior which departs from that prescribed by the social meanings may be
thought of as immoral and, therefore, deviant. (p. 510)

Thus, new swingers must learn new social meanings for sexual activity and “deal
with the ‘old’ social meanings of sex” (p. 510). The most common social meaning of sex
that swingers have to escape is the typical sexual double standard that implies that
recreational sex and sex outside marriage is wrong for women but is okay for men.

In 2000 Terry Gould published one of the most compelling books about the
lifestyle of swingers. Gould spent many hours at swinging events talking with modern-
day swingers, who now call themselves Lifestylers. They spoke out about what swinging
is today. Phyllis, a Lifestyler Gould spoke with, said the essence of swinging was simple.
“It’s that everybody wants that family connection. They want that feeling of being
desired, wanted--and not just in a sexual way--socially and otherwise” (p. 64).

Gould’s work contradicted the findings by such researchers as Bartell that
swingers place primary importance on the sexual relation aspect of swinging. Another
female Lifestyler commented to Gould that

men and women who cheat on their partners are addicted to dangerous romance.
In the lifestyle we’ve grown out of that immaturity. Straight people think we spoil
the fun. Actually, we don’t threaten morality--we threaten immorality. (2000, p.
11)

This statement provides evidence supporting the notion that swingers respect and
hold sacred their marriages to their partners. Gould also found that the sharing of
partners is a far more popular trend among swingers than orgies are (p. 73), which
provides evidence that supports Booth’s list of popular myths mentioned in “Jeff and Kris’ Myths about Swinging” (Booth 1999b, para. 12).

Gould also spent time with NASCA founder Robert McGinley. In his Ph.D. thesis, McGinley stated that “all evidence points to swinging as a natural desire. It is not new, only its ready availability is new” (Gould 2000, p. 372). McGinley went on to say that

you can be responsibly married and free to responsibly enjoy your dreams with your partner, if that’s what you want; and here’s where you can do that and be safe. Just look how we’ve grown. Just look how we can grow. Doesn’t that tell you something? (Gould 2000, p. 56)

Women and Swinging

Women’s involvement in swinging has been a controversial area from the start. Despite the roaring of sexual freedom and women’s rights in the ‘70s, women were still bound to the sexual roles and stereotypes of society, which still exist today. It was considered almost immoral for women to be sexually aggressive, much less engage in recreational sex. Therefore, imagining how women could be participating in swinging at their own will was hard for society.

Booth (1999b) mentions several misconceptions about women who swing in “Jeff and Kris’ Guide to Swinging.” He commented on Judith Long and Pepper Schwartz 1977 book entitled “Sexual Scripts.” Long and Schwartz stated that swinging is always initiated and controlled by men. Booth says that according to the authors, “swinging events are not for the women’s enjoyment; they just go along with it,” claiming that women involved in swinging act according to the same sex role scripts as nonswinging
women do (para. 8). Booth says that this statement is not true. Men and women who swing share a sense of equality. Furthermore, there is a saying among swingers that “men get women involved, but the women keep them involved” (para. 8). According to Booth the role of women in swinging disproves many stereotypes placed on women in our society. It is a common misconception that women are “naturally monogamous” (para. 6). However, women, compared with men, have a much larger sexual capacity. When society’s stereotypes and expectations for women are removed, as they are in the swinging environment, women are given the freedom to express their sexuality and experience the pleasures of many partners just as men are free to do (Booth 1999b).

Swinging seems to have emerged because of the drastic changes that have taken place in the role of American women and, more important, in the changing views of “female sexuality and female sexual rights” (Denfeld and Gordon 1970, pp. 88-89). The idea of women yearning for sexual gratification may be growing. Not only is this idea growing but the sexual role of women is moving from the purpose of procreation to recreation (Denfeld and Gordon 1970). Women are forming new perceptions of themselves and defining sexuality for themselves. They are realizing that they, too, have the right to be sexual and to express themselves sexually (Noonan 1979). A new perception of women’s sexual roles as logical and satisfying, along with the increasing use of birth control, is likely to have encouraged women to look for sexual diversity outside of marriage, as men have always done. Therefore, because swinging tends to be closely associated with monogamy, it is a likely alternative. Thus, mate-swapping may, in fact, “support rather than disrupt monogamous marriage as it exists in this society.”
(Denfeld and Gordon 1970, p. 98). If this revolution in sexuality continues, it will soon be defined as to both men and women rather than being as it is now—exclusively men (Noonan 1979).

Some studies found women swingers to be sexually aggressive and experimental. One such study noted that 60 percent of female swingers said that they had experienced genital contact with another woman (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1970). In another study women swingers reported that during an average swinging party, they participate in sexual activities with about three or four different partners while swinger men usually have only two or three partners. More than half of the swinging women reported sexual activity with other women, while none of the swinging men reported sexual activity with other men (Gilmartin, 1975).

Other studies, however, tend to support Long and Schwartz’s accusations that women are controlled by men in the swinging environment. The Palsons (1972) stated that many women stay involved in swinging because their husbands want to rather than because they want to themselves. This statement, however, does not mean that women never enjoy their experiences in swinging. According to the Palsons it is the woman’s initial desire to please the man. After time she realizes that she, too, is desirable and must refuse some men. At this time she must figure out her own preferences.

Another study (Varni 1972) found that swinging was a mutual-consent activity in which they engaged only as a couple—never alone. However, except for one couple, the men introduced the idea of swinging into their marriages with initial opposition from the women. The most common problem that women had with swinging was their inability to
separate love and sex. This idea contrasts with the findings of the O’Neills (1970) who stated that the ability to separate sex and love was a common theme among the swingers they studied. However, according to Varni’s study, few women allowed themselves to entertain pleasant thoughts about swinging. Out of 16 women in the study all but two said that they consented to at least one swinging experience just to satisfy their husbands. The study concluded that the two most important factors in determining whether or not women will be positive about swinging were the way they perceived their marriages and their personal, swinging experiences (Varni, 1972).

Women’s Role in Swinging

Despite such publications as the ones produced by Gould (2000), as well as Bergstrand and Williams (2000), the issue of the role of women who are involved in swinging today has still not been researched. We currently know the basics based on articles produced by swingers themselves. In the article posted by Denise and Leigh of the Australian Swinger club (2000), they state that many women who are now involved in swinging were first introduced to the scene by a man they know. They state that women tend to like the swinging environment because it allows for them to be sexually experimental without appearing to be unfeminine. Both women and men can eliminate sex role stereotypes and experience each other in nontraditional ways. Women tend to find the swing clubs to be an attractive alternative to common clubs and bars. They go on to say that women often find that in situations in which there are two couples involved, having contact with another woman is unavoidable. Commonly, however, women find the sexual emotions they experience to be pleasing and want to pursue that type of
activity more.

My question is this: when taken out of the stereotypical “woman’s role” that society has established and placed in an environment where stigmas are not applied, will women act upon their sexual instincts rather than their prescribed roles? If, indeed, they do act on instincts rather than social norms, then what does this behavior say about women and our society as a whole? It is my belief that through studying women who swing we will be educating ourselves on women in our entire society. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical perspective I intend to use in studying the role of women in swinging.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

_We like men. We like sex with men. We love men. We love cock. We like looking sexy and we are not ashamed to do so—and we’re feminists._

_Feminists for Fornication (Roth 1996)_

Since the late 1960s radical feminists have lashed out at society claiming that women are being oppressed due to the norms associated with the creation of gender. They wanted to do away with this idea of “femaleness” and expand our definitions of sexuality by recognizing women’s desires for sexual diversity and gratification while exposing the dangers of prescribing sexual standards (Roth 1996, para. 2). By the time the 1980s hit, the sexual freedom debate had been restricted by the development of the cultural feminists. These feminists promoted the idea of a “‘female essence’ with its own sexual values, practices, and institutions” (Roth 1996, para. 3). The feminist position was molded even more by the introduction of the “antipornography movement” (Roth 1996, para. 3).

The cultural feminists soon became known as antipornography feminists claiming that pornography and the norms of men’s sexuality oppressed women. They rallied for censoring pornographic images protesting that it would abolish the “male power structure” and create “equality for women” (Roth 1996, para. 4).

For decades women have lobbied for equal rights -- to have the same
fight for equality has only intensified. Hardcore feminists are quick to attack any issue they deem as repressive toward women. Not only is pornography under fire from these feminists but so are issues such as commercializing a woman’s body (often supported by the phrase “sex sells”) and sex-related careers like escort services and strip dancing. Therefore, it is no surprise that many radical feminists might find swinging to be demeaning to women, for they believe that women are controlled in this environment and used by men for sexual gratification.

Some research, which was mentioned in Chapter II, supports this hypothesis. Other research, however, plainly rejects it, stating that women in the swinging community are free to define and explore their sexuality for themselves. Organizations such as Feminists for Fornication (FFF) fear that antipornographic feminists are creating stereotypes that will classify any woman who finds pleasure in sexually graphic resources as “deviant” (Roth 1996, para. 6). FFF developed out of this counter approach now called pro-sex feminism (Roth 1996).

Despite whether the issue is pornography or swinging, the only true way to understand what women feel and experience is to ask the women who are involved in these issues themselves (McClish and Bacon 2000). We must try to understand their standpoints rather than forcing our own preconceptions onto them. This concept is the essence of standpoint theory.

The feminist perspective on standpoint theory, combined with pro-sex feminist theory, provides the theoretical framework from which to study the lives of women swingers and the roles they play in the swinging lifestyle. Before we can begin to do this,
however, we must first understand the basic concepts that make up both feminist standpoint theory and pro-sex feminist theory.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory developed from the “Marxist position that the socially oppressed class can access knowledge unavailable to the socially privileged.” (Feminist Standpoint Theory 2006, para. 1). George Hegel, in 1807, originally constructed the concept of standpoint theory through his evaluation of the “master-slave relationship,” insinuating that the knowledge people receive is dependent upon the specific group with whom they are associated. Thus, the dominant groups control what knowledge the less powerful groups receive (McClish and Bacon 2000, point II-A; West and Turner 2000, point II-B). Sociologist Dorothy E. Smith was born in Great Britian in 1926. She had a profound influence on the feminist standpoint theory. Smith was credited with “extending the boundaries of feminist standpoint theory to include race, class, and gender” (Wikipedia 2006, para. 3). Smith received many awards for her advancements in the works of feminist standpoint theory (Wikipedia 2006).

Nancy Hartsock later merged Hegel’s theories with the ideas of Marx and Engles. Whereas Marx and Engles’ primary motivation was to explore the activities of men, Hartsock focused on all human involvement, specifically the relationships of women and men (West and Turner 2000). Along with the contributions of philosopher Sandra Harding and communication professor Julia Wood came the development of what is now known as feminist standpoint theory. A standpoint is “a place from which to view the world that determines what we focus on as well as what is obscured from us” (McClish
and Bacon 2000, point I-A). It also “refers to a location, shared by a group, within the
social structure that lends a particular kind of sense making to a person’s lived
experiences” (West and Turner 2000, point IV-A1).

Feminist standpoint theory, therefore, “examines the notions of sex (male and
female) and gender (masculinity and femininity)” (West and Turner 2000, point D) by
studying the “standpoints of women and other marginalized groups” (McClish and Bacon
2000, definition 4). Due to social inequalities, people in society do not share equivalent
cultural experiences (McClish and Bacon 2000). Thus, when you have two groups in
which one group serves to be more dominant and advantaged than the other, the
perceptions of the advantaged group can impose significant damage upon the subordinate
group (West and Turner 2000). We can see the result of this influence when we examine
the lives of men and women.

Historically, it seems that men have been the dominant group, controlling and
defining the women of the subordinate group. Men have created the social and sexual
norms by which women are expected to live. Yet although these two groups share the
same culture and society, could it be that their standpoints on society differ immensely?
Studying the unique characteristics of the lives and experiences of women is, therefore,
essential. The only way we can truly understand women’s experiences is to have them
clarify their experiences themselves -- not filter them through the interpretations of men
(West and Turner 2000).

It is my contention that women swingers have vastly different experiences from
all other groups in society. Their standpoints on life, as well as on social and sexual
norms, are going to be different because they do not share the same experiences as men or even other women in our society. Yet this group continuously manages to overcome the social norms imposed upon all members of society.

The fact that women swingers can ignore these norms raises questions regarding the behaviors that women have demonstrated throughout their lives. Are women born submissive, nonsexual creatures, or has our society, specifically men, bestowed upon them these standards for being female? If it can be proven than women’s instinctual sexual nature is no different from that of men, then it will show that women have been viewed and labeled inappropriately for years. Because women swingers experience the social realities of both common society and the swinging environment, they serve as a prime group to study in order to understand the behaviors of women. By looking at sexuality and the role of women swingers from the standpoint of women swingers themselves, we can learn a great deal about women who swing as well as women overall.

Pro-Sex Feminist Theory

Pro-sex feminism originally came about as a counterviewpoint to the antipornography theories created by the radical feminists of the 1980s (Roth 1996). Pro-sex feminist theory supports the philosophy of “a woman’s body, a woman’s right.” They hold that legal security, as well as respect, should be given to all women who make “peaceful choice[s]” concerning their bodies (McElroy 1998, para. 17). As applied to this issue of pornography, pro-sex feminists state that “sexism, not sex, degrades women” (Britton, Maguire, and Nathanson 1993, point 4). They claim that porn, instead, provides a means for women to experiment with their sexualities while encouraging sexual
independence and sexual gratification for women. Furthermore, it creates an outlet through which women can free themselves of the stereotypes associated with female sexuality and explore sexual alternatives “safely” (Roth 1996, para. 5). They state that sex as well as sexuality does not have to be seen as devices used to oppress women. They should be enjoyed. The fundamental element of pro-sex feminism is not to glamorize lewd sex. Instead, it encourages women to experiment with, discover, and find pleasure in sex and their sexualities (Yeager 1998).

When research on swinging was being conducted back in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist theories—whether they are pro-sex or not—were never applied to research. Even when studies touched on the issue of female involvement in swinging, feminist perspectives were ignored (Yeager, 1998). In the past decade, swinging has reappeared. However, most of people are unaware of its existence, or ignore it, because it is kept mainly underground. Current information on the subject is almost nonexistent because researchers have not bothered investigating today’s more modern world of swinging (Yeager 1998).

Therefore, it seems likely that women swingers today will hold a pro-sex feminist view on their roles and participation in swinging. They will not view swinging as a means for men to control and oppress women. Instead, they will see it as an avenue for exploring their sexuality while, simultaneously, relinquishing the popular stereotypes and taboos associated with women and sexuality. A synthesis of feminist standpoint theory and pro-sex feminist theory provides the theoretical foundation from which to analyze and interpret the findings from this research. This combination allows for the opportunity
to include feminist perspectives in the research of swinging and understand women’s role in swinging from the standpoint of women swingers themselves. By combining these two distinctive theories, we allow for a feminist pro-sex standpoint theory. This synthesized theory emphasizes allowing women the ability to decide for their bodies by their own choices, and not based on the preferences of the majority. A discussion of the research methods used to conduct this study follows.
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

The goal of any science is not willful harm to subjects, but the advancement of knowledge and explanation. Any method that moves us toward that goal is justifiable. (Denzin 1968)

In the first three chapters of this research, I have introduced the world of swinging, presented its history and previous research, and provided the theoretical framework that will serve to support the findings in this study. The following section describes the methods I used to conduct this study.

The purpose of this research was to examine the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of women who participate in swinging. To understand accurately their position, gathering insight from the women themselves was essential. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with female swingers using instant messaging via the Internet for obtaining the information for this study.

I conducted interviews with women swingers through the means of an instant messaging service that can be downloaded onto the computer from the Internet. I subscribed to three different swingers’ websites with forums designed specifically for communication about the Lifestyle: www.swingersboard.com, www.swinglifestyle.com, and www.swingular.com. I became a member of each of these swing websites for approximately one month. Notices were posted on each of the forums explaining the
study that was being conducted and asking women swingers for their participation in an
in-depth interview concerning women who participate in swinging.

Within the posting my identity was revealed as being a graduate student
conducting a master’s thesis on women in the Lifestyle. The anonymity of the
participants was assured as pseudonyms were to be used in the study instead of the
participants’ online names. The respondents were informed that their participation in the
online interviews were strictly voluntary and their participation, thus, granted the
researcher permission to use the information obtained from their interviews to write the
master’s thesis. No restrictions were placed on the type of women swingers who could
participate in the study. The only requirement was that they be female swingers and over
the age of 18. I felt it would be of sociological value to gain information from
newcomers to the swinging scene as well as from full-fledged Lifestylers and those that
have participated in the Lifestyle in the past but are not currently participating. Interested
participants were asked to contact me via an assigned email address specifically created
for the purposes of the study. Potential participants were sent via email an orientation
document to read (see Appendix A). If the women agreed to the information contained in
the document, they were instructed to respond to me via email to set up a date and time to
conduct the interviews.

The interview questions were specifically geared toward the female swingers'
involvement, feelings, attitudes, and experiences concerning the swinging lifestyle.
Questions were also derived based on the findings of previous studies conducted on
swingers in the 1970s. I compared variations in findings to previous studies. Other
questions were geared toward comparing women in swinging with nonswinging women
in society as well as investigating family upbringing and past abuse for correlations related to becoming a swinger. Demographic questions were addressed as well. (For the complete interview guide, see Appendix B).
CHAPTER V
RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter contains the findings, analyses, and interpretation of the in-depth interviews that were conducted with sixteen female swingers using online instant messaging and emails. The findings, like the interviews, have been broken down into specified sections. The following information presents the qualitative analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the interviews.

Demographics

The participants’ demographic characteristics were similar to those found in past studies by Bartell (1970), Bergstrand and Williams (2000), Jenks (1985), O’Neill and O’Neill (1970), and Varni (1972). See Chapter II. The participants ranged in ages from 22 to 62 years old with the average age being 39.5 years. All of the participants in the study identified themselves as Caucasian.

Twelve of the women in this study reported having children. Four stated they did not. Of the women stating they had children, two stated their children were stepchildren. Of the twelve participants reporting children or stepchildren, seven stated the children were still living at home with them. The other five reported having adult-aged children.

There were a variety of religious preferences and backgrounds in this study. Ten of the women in the study stated they were of a Christian-based religious faith. Two stated they were Episcopalian, one Baptist, and one Protestant. Four women stated they
were Catholics, with two of those reporting to be nonpracticing at this time. One participant reported she was a nonpracticing Methodist, and one stated she was a nonpracticing Protestant. Of the remaining six women, one stated she was of the Jewish faith, but was currently nonpracticing. Two women reported to be Agnostic, and one stated she considered herself a Pagan/Wiccan. Only one participants claimed to have no religious preference or practice at this time.

Seven of the sixteen participants felt they were of the democratic political affiliation. Three women stated they were republicans. One participant stated she considered herself to be an independent, one participant felt she was liberal and, one leaned towards being libertarian. Three of the participants stated they did not have a political affiliation.

Most of the participants (11) stated they had some college and/or two-year degrees. One participant had a high school diploma, two participants had bachelor's degrees, and two participants had master's degrees.

The participants in this study reported having a variety of occupations and professions. Four of the sixteen females fell into the occupation of an administrative assistant. Two women stated they were accountants. Two of the women stated they were nurses. Two reported being stay-at-home mothers. One female in the study stated she worked as an art administrator, one participant stated she was in sales and marketing, and one worked part-time at a university bookstore. One woman stated she worked as a corporate concierge, and one stated she worked as a mental health counselor.

The suburbs tended to be the most commonly reported living areas for the participants. Ten of the participants reported that they lived in what they considered to be
the suburbs of their cities, while four reported living in rural locations. Finally, two stated that they lived in urban areas.

When asked what they considered their sexual orientations to be, eight of the sixteen participants claimed to be "bi-curious" sexually, which means they considered themselves predominantly straight (sexually attracted to men) but sexually curious about other females. Seven of the women stated they were bisexual (equally sexually attracted to both males and females). One participant stated she considered herself only straight (attracted to her opposite sex). None of the sixteen females, however, considered herself to be a lesbian, or only sexually attracted to other females. (See Appendix C for complete descriptions of each participant).

Marital/Relationship Information

Denfeld and Gordon (1970, p. 90) stated in one of their studies on the Lifestyle that swinging is closely related to monogamy, and that it may “support rather than disrupt monogamous marriage as it exists in this society.” All thirteen women in the study, who were either married or in a current long-term relationship reported that swinging has affected their marriage in a positive way rather than disrupted it. Gina stated that, although she and her husband have not yet experienced a full swinging event, the decision to enter the Lifestyle has had a positive impact. Gina stated:

Deciding to enter the lifestyle has brought us closer together. We have excellent communication skills now. We talk about our fantasies with each other. We try to think of ways to make the fantasy a reality (Gina).

Although Emma stated that swinging has been good for her marriage, she states it was not swinging that made it better, but it allowed them the opportunity to make it better.
Just like buying a $2000 home gym won’t give you the hard body you saw in the commercial, neither will having sex with other people do anything for your marriage....Swinging is the gym that you take your marriage to. What you put into the workout and your attitude determine just how much success you’re going to see. In other words swinging didn’t change our relationship. We did....Our marriage is better and closer, and swinging was the opportunity that we used to make that happen. (Emma)

Increased communication with their partners, followed by improved sex life, and a stronger and closer marriage or relationship were the most commonly reported results of being in the lifestyle. Other responses included increased trust in the relationships, more openness, increased social life, increased honesty, and a great hobby for the couple.

Respondents made the following statements related to the impact swinging has had on their marriages:

Swinging has made my marriage stronger. The sex is a lot better, and my relationship with my spouse is better. (Jan)

It has made our sex life better, and we are more trusting of each other. (Ooggie)

We do not feel as constrained when discussing or experimenting with sex. The reticence to communicate our wants and needs has almost completely disappeared. We work harder to succeed and understand each other. (Abby)

It’s opened up the lines of communication and has improved our sex life, which is more varied and more frequent. (Pat)

Swinging has had a positive effect on our marriage. It’s like another hobby that we enjoy together. Our communication has improved, our social life is great, even just the “meeting Other people for a drink” part of it. Our sex life was great before and is still great now, no “same-old, same-old” sex. We have developed a great deal of trust in each other. You have to have that 110% to do this. (Isabella)

None of the sixteen women reported swinging to have any negative impacts on their marriages or relationships.
Entry into the Lifestyle

The women in the study were questioned about their entrance into the Lifestyle known as swinging. Past studies, such as Long and Schwartz (1977), have suggested that women were most commonly introduced into the Lifestyle by their male counterparts and that swinging was controlled by the men. Nine of the women in the study thought that women were mainly introduced to swinging by men.

Yes, I think that’s mostly true. Although I’ve heard stories from women who were the ones who initiated the conversation. I really don’t know the statistics on that as there is precious little reliable data out there on this sort of thing; but if there are more men than women who initiate swinging, I think it probably just has to do with the way men think. (Emma)

Yes, I feel that men are more sexual meaning they think of sex more than women do most of the time. (Oggie)

I would think mainly yes only because women are brought up differently than men. A woman is taught that sex is only for men you love. Sex is only for when you are married. Sex is more emotional for women than men. If women have lots of sex, they are labeled sluts or whores. Men are called players and horn dogs and such. It is more accepted for males to have lots of sex. I think that some women are afraid to say they find someone other than their spouse attractive. (Gina)

Three of the participants did not feel that men usually introduced women to the lifestyle.

Catherine and Meg said:

No. Maybe in the past but not anymore. Women are just as sexual as men and just as curious. I think I was the one in our relationship to bring it up as a serious discussion topic. (Meg)

No. I think that is a very common misconception from the outside world. I think more often than not it is women who explore it. I would guess that 80% of women in the lifestyle are bisexual, and that is one of the stepping stones into swinging. It is easier to find a bisexual female in a marriage than not. (Catherine)

Isabella and Lori both felt that it was more of a couple decision rather than one partner introducing the other to the lifestyle.
In our case it wasn’t that way at all, but generally, I think the couples might have “bedroom talk” about a third person, maybe another female, especially if the woman is bi-curious or has a really good-looking best friend--lol. (Isabella)

I’ve seen it both ways. I know of a few couples where the women were the ones who initiated going to the parties, and the men just looked uncomfortable. I’ve also seen it where the situation was reversed and the women looked uncomfortable. But overall, I think it has to be a decision by both people or you’re asking for trouble. I’ve had a partner before so I’m using that as my couple perspective. (Lori)

Dana and Katie both stated that they did not know whether mainly men introduced swinging or not. Dana stated:

I really don’t know. I do know that a lot of men are interested in “how to talk my woman into it,” which isn’t possible. You have to both be interested, or it will ruin a relationship. There is no talking someone into it. With us it was me that got us started. (Dana)

Katie made the following comment:

A woman introduced me, but I think that it is a common fantasy of men to be with multiple partners, and in this society men are “allowed” to act and talk about their fantasies while women are not. (Katie)

Although most of the women in the study did feel that men more often do introduce women to swinging, their own personal experiences suggest otherwise. Only four of the sixteen women reported being introduced to swinging by their husbands.

Three of the women stated that she and their significant others discovered the Lifestyle together, while three of the other participants stated they were introduced to the Lifestyle by a female friend. Two women reported being introduced by another couple, and two women stated it was their own idea to begin swinging. One participant stated it was a male friend who introduced her to swinging, and another woman stated she was introduced to swinging by some friends of a guy she was dating at the time. Therefore,
based on the reports of these sixteen female swingers, the majority were not introduced to swinging by their husbands or significant others.

Of the sixteen respondents, however, twelve stated they felt women were usually reluctant to try swinging at first if introduced to it by their male partners.

Yes, I think women are reluctant when introduced by their male partners; there is a lot of fear involved: “Doesn’t he love me enough to be with just me? What happens if he doesn’t want to be with me anymore if I say no? What happens if he doesn’t want to be with me anymore after he’s had this experience?” Plus, it’s not socially acceptable in the American society to have more than one partner at a time; women for the most part are more concerned with being accepted. (Emma)

Yes, they are reluctant because they are not sure about the jealousy issue. (Jan)

I think they are. There are a lot of jealousy issues with most American couples. (Dana)

Abby felt women were usually reluctant to try swinging if introduced to it by their male partners but that it was related to her generation.

I suppose that this is generally true for my generation and older, but I seriously doubt that applies to anyone over five years younger than me. As I mentioned before, we had all those rules about how girls and women were supposed to conduct themselves and what activities were dirty and sinful. It was just generally accepted that sex was disgusting, and women only allowed it to happen to get boys to like them or because it was their wifely duty to appease the husband’s needs and produce children. (Abby)

None of the women stated that she felt swinging was controlled by men, however.

Twelve of the women stated it was controlled by the women.

Women are in control. We have the power to decide whether or not to play and with whom. (Pat)

Women [are in control] due to the fact that typically they are the ones who are going to be the most active with all partners. (Katie)

Women [are in control] because we make the decisions. (Jan)

Lori stated that women are more in control because:
bisexuality in women is far more accepted than in men. And, lets face it, most men love to see two or more women together. The thought of two men together gives me chills, and not the good kind. Men are visual creatures, and they are so easy to please. Five inch shoes and thigh highs make men drool. (Lori)

Catherine and Dana felt that women were the ones who were in control in the swinging environment because men will do anything.

The ladies always are [in control]. Men are more willing to do anything, “Yes, dear, whatever you say, dear, it’s up to you, dear.” The women need to be comfortable with the people and the situation. (Dana)

I think it goes back to if men want it, they will do anything for it. Men have bigger strike zones. Women are pickier. (Catherine).

Four of the women stated they felt it depended on the couple or the situation as to which gender was in control in swinging. Abby stated:

[it] depends on the couple. Everyone is different and is more comfortable taking the lead or following, just as in every other aspect in life. (Abby)

Although Gina had not had her first swinging experience, she felt that it depends on the couple as to who is in control in the swinging environment.

[it] depends. Always go as fast as the slowest person’s pace. If the woman is unsure, only go as far as she wants. If the man is unsure, only go as far as he wants. I have heard of people pushing partners into something. It never turns out well. (Meg)

Emma felt that is was more dependent on the situation. She stated:

It is recognized that the woman is at a distinct disadvantage where physical size is concerned. Men tend to defer to the women out of respect and care for her comfort and safety. This position does not condescend to the woman at all; it is made clear to her that these men are not her keepers or handlers but are in fact her guardians, and they have no problem defending a woman’s honor. (Emma)

Seven of the women reported that they felt there were times when it was necessary for one gender to be more in control in the swinging environment.
If the situation is threatening to anyone involved, then most always the male would assume control. Otherwise, guys are pretty much along for the ride. (Nancy)

It is the women who usually decide who the couple is going to swing with. (Jan)

Yes, I feel this is true such as in a situation where a lady is playing with more than one man. Some things are painful and uncomfortable, so she needs to make sure that the men will listen and not hurt her intentionally. (Oggie)

For self-protection. If I don’t feel comfortable with a potential playmate, I don’t play with him. (Pat)

Catherine stated she felt the answer to this question was no, but that it also depends on the couple.

I want to say no, but it depends on the couple, the swinger, the dynamics of the relationship. Let me put it this way. It’s the easiest way to say it. For risk of being crude, gay men aside, PUSSY RULES THE WORLD. Next to land, oil, and other natural resources, that’s it! Period. (Catherine)

Five of the women stated they did not feel that it was ever necessary for one gender to be in more control than the other while swinging. Abby even felt that this question was very unnecessary.

I have no clue what could possibly cause you to ask this question or imagine what scenario would create such necessity. (Abby)

Dana, however, stated that it was not necessary for one gender to have to be more in control because women are always in control. She stated:

With all the couples we know, as with ourselves, I tend to be in control. Our men are just so happy with us and our decision that they’ll agree to anything we say! Men are easier-going with just about anything. They’ll passively let us lead the way and make the rules. (Dana)

One respondent, Emma, stated that she felt it was sometimes necessary for one gender to be more in control while swinging
Occasionally, one partner will pull their veto power card depending on the situation. For example, the woman may be getting along famously with a potential playmate, and her husband gives her the signal that this date is a no-go. She is disappointed but respects her husband’s decision as he would do the same for her. Women will do the same, too. If someone is disrespecting her husband, she will immediately put a halt to that encounter and probably give the offender a piece of her mind. (Emma)

First Swinging Experience

Most of the female swingers in this study reported that they had enjoyed their first swinging experience.

We were all very nervous at first. [We] had all these "tapes" running in our heads like "what would our parents think? What would the church think?" Once we decided that it was ultimately our choice and we saw nothing wrong in what we were doing, the nervousness decreased. (Betty)

For the most part, yes, I enjoyed it. There were moments of discomfort and nervousness, but overall it was exciting and chaotic. The couple we were with were very nice and considerate. (Abby)

Yes, I absolutely enjoyed it. I have, for as long as I remember, been bi-curious. It seems like the whole thing was like a surreal dream. It was so amazing! (Nancy)

However, four of the women stated they did not enjoy their first swinging experience. One participant stated her first experience was “hideous.”

We had no idea what to expect, and we hadn't set any rules or boundaries beforehand. We went to the couple's house. The husband was very high pressure. He kept asking when I was gonna take off my dress about 10 minutes into our conversation. After the evening was over, we wrote them a thank you note and never heard back from them. (Pat)

Jan stated she had a bad first experience because the male she was with was “too rough.”

Another participant reported having a bad first swinging experience, as well.

The first time we actually had a date it was a disaster! The other couple got into a full blown fight! The first full swap was fun, but it happened so fast we were both a little surprised. (Catherine)
Most of the participants reported that they felt it depended on the situation and the participants involved as to whether or not a woman enjoys her first swinging experience.

I would hope that women enjoy their first experience, but that first one can be really tough sometimes. There may be jealousy issues, self-esteem issues. Just about anything can happen that first time. Sometimes how you think you’re going to feel and how you really feel once you're "there" can be really different things (Isabella).

I think a lot of women who do not enjoy it have tried to go too fast into the lifestyle. There is a saying, "Only go as fast as the slowest person in the group." A lot of husbands push their wives into the Lifestyle, and sometimes women go along with it just for the husband, and they don't really take the time to understand what it will mean for them to have sex with another man. (Felicia)

Meg and Lori made the following comments about first swinging experiences:

It definitely varies based upon the woman and the kind of relationship she is in. Swinging experiences can be thought of like dating experiences. Everyone has had a bad date. Every swinger will at some point have a bad swinging experience. It could be your first, or it could be much later on. I think all women are excited and a little nervous for their first time. It depends on how prepared you are and how you discuss it afterwards. (Meg)

I can only speak from a single female perspective, but it depends on how receptive you are to the situation. If you enjoy "anonymous" sex, then it'll probably be fun. If you need to establish a "relationship," then it may not be. (Lori)

Three of the participants stated they felt it takes time for a woman to enjoy swinging.

Two of the respondents made the following statements:

Feelings of jealousy on my part took some time to get through. Seeing my husband, although in front of me, with another woman took time to get over. Had to separate sex in our love relationship versus sex for fun. (Betty)

Generally, the first experience is a very nervous one because you are not sure what will happen. (Jan)
Five of the respondents stated that they felt women do enjoy their first swinging experience. One of them, however, felt that the women have to be swinging for the right reasons in order to enjoy it. She stated:

I did, but I know that I did because it was something I wanted to do. I wasn't doing it because I was trying to save a marriage, do something my significant other wanted to do, etc. (Katie)

Hester stated that:

I have not talked with women about this specifically, but considering that many women are involved on a continuing basis, I would think so. You don't stay with something if it is terrible just for the spouse. And, I have thoughts that some women want to experience sex with another woman but are basically heterosexual but socially bi. Swinging allows this. (Hester)

Only one respondent reported she was not sure if women generally enjoy their first swinging experience because she had not had her own yet.

Locus of Control

The Palsons (1972) supported Long and Schwartz’s (1977) theories that women are controlled by men in the swinging environment. They stated that women have a desire to please their men and, thus, stay involved in swinging for their husbands. But, over time, she learns that she, too, is desirable and has to decide her own preferences. However, only one woman in the study provided support for the previous findings and felt that when she first started swinging, it was about “pleasing the man.” Jan stated:

I did it to please my spouse. Then when I was in the lifestyle for a while, I did it to please me. (Jan)

The other fourteen participants reported that they did not feel swinging was about “pleasing the man” initially. Three of the women had the following to say regarding swinging being about “pleasing the man”: 
Not in our case at least. It is about mostly us and a little about all me. We have discussed this at length. I am looking for a female for me to experiment with. Once I am comfortable with her, then I decide if the males get to join in. If I want her all to myself, it stays just me and her. (Gina)

I didn’t feel that way at all. Our first swinging experience was ALL about me. I had two wonderful men pleasing ME. It shouldn’t be about one or the other. It should be about both. I got all the physical pleasure, and [Ken] was really turned on by watching another man appreciate me the way he does. In the end it has pleased [Ken] greatly because I have lost a lot of my inhibitions. I now live by motto “I’ll try anything...twice.” (Meg)

I felt equally as pleased as my husband. I never felt he was getting more out of it than me. In fact, I got more out of it than him, at least at first!! (Pat)

None of the women in this study reported that she got involved or stayed involved in swinging just to please her husband. Most of the women reported that they got into swinging to act out their sexual fantasies, explore bisexuality, have sex with others, and meet new people. A couple of the women reported they started swinging to increase their sexual experiences, explore their sexuality, and for the excitement and enjoyment that swinging has to offer them. Other respondents stated that they started swinging for pleasure, curiosity, to experience new things, have fun with their husbands, and feel desired. One woman stated she just did not want monogamy.

I’m not looking to be in a full-time, monogamous relationship, but I missed sex. Vanilla dating was/is an option, but you have to go through so much bullshit to get to the “good parts.” (Nancy)

Hester stated she started swinging for the excitement and enjoyment.

I am adventurous at heart. I view sex and love and intimacy as different things. And sexual adventure, flirting, dancing, pursuing, being pursued is all reminiscent of my youth or rather youthful feeling. (Hester)

Isabella, on the other hand, gave several reasons for getting involved in swinging.
It was to share ourselves and our sexuality with others, to meet new people, to have fun with sex in a safe and consensual manner with others and ourselves. (Isabella)

The Lifestyle

In this section the female swingers were asked questions regarding being involved in the swinging lifestyle. The sixteen women were asked how they deal with the issue of trust when swinging with a partner. Seven of the women reported that this is not an issue because they do trust their partners. Emma stated:

What trust issue? I’m not sure I understand the question. Trust, by its very nature, implies believing that which cannot be readily proved. If you believe that your spouse’s promise to not hurt you is genuine, then the rest is up to you. You either trust that he is telling you the truth, or you don’t. Our first full swap was a leap of faith. I was 99.9% sure that hubby would never hurt me by forgetting about me or lying to me or by encouraging me to do something that he knew would be somehow harmful to me. But there was that nagging .1% that I just wasn’t sure of because it had yet to be proved. So I gritted my teeth and took the plunge. We had sex with other partners, and nothing bad happened to us or to our relationship. It was at that point that we realized just how free this made us. No longer did we have to wonder if extramarital sex would steal one of us away from the other…All of the things that most people worry about every day we can just no longer relate to them. (Emma)

Isabella stated:

I tend to be a very trusting person, and I know that [Ethan] would never do anything to deliberately hurt me. He is my safety net. (Isabella)

Abby and Dana had the following comments to say about dealing with trust:

I trust my husband with my life, and he entrusts me with his. What petty thing could an orifice or sex organ do that could change that? It comes down to the simple fact that it is Us v. World and we got each other’s back. All else is ego and material. (Abby)

We have so much love between us, and friendship, that the trust is just there. I have no jealousy where my hubby is concerned, and I want everything in the world for him, including the right to be with any women he finds attractive. And I just trust that I’ll be the one he continues to love and go home with. (Dana)
Five of the ladies stated that they deal with the issue of trust through good communication.

TALK TALK TALK TALK and more talk. Never hide your feelings. If it bothers you, you need to tell him. If you are uncomfortable or it is beyond your comfort level, it must be told/known. (Catherine)

I know in my heart that my husband is not looking to replace me. We always tell each other what we did with our swing partners. We do not hide anything. Trust comes from being honest with each other, and I trust my husband with my life. (Felicia)

Two of the female swingers stated that they deal with the issue of trust by never swinging alone.

Hubby and I have a very strong relationship and have discussed many times that we would only meet others together....I know I am going home with him at night. (Oggie)

We would never play alone. That by itself solves a lot of the trust issues. We’re there. We see what’s going on. There’s nothing to question. People who are unable to trust their partner completely shouldn’t be swinging. (Meg)

Two of the respondents stated they can deal with the issue of trust because there is no jealousy in their relationships. Hester had the following comment to make concerning the issue of trust:

We are not jealous. We came together as mature adults, both with histories and lives, and are so pleased to have found each other and happiness in companionship and a shared home and life. Jealousy is just not on our list of feelings. If things happen to either of us that are good, we are happy and grateful. And we know in swinging that sometimes episodes are better for one of us or the other, and we know it will balance out. (Hester)

The remaining women reported a variety of responses relating to how they deal with the issue of trust. Responses included swinging in the same room, having no secrets, being on the same page, feeling secure in the marriage, and remembering that it is just sex.
The women reported a wide variety of spoken and unspoken “rules” in swinging. The most commonly reported rule in swinging that was mentioned by nine of the female swingers was the “no means no” rule. Still, there were many different types of rules that exist in swinging.

The biggest rule in the lifestyle is “No means No.” Some couples have rules like no single males, or that they only play with couples. Or the no kissing rule or the no oral sex rule. It really is a personal thing as to what your rules will be.

Felicia

“No” means “No” and there never has to be an explanation. You don’t join in a couple or a situation unless invited. I’ve almost had someone thrown out of a club because they couldn’t keep their hands to themselves while my partner and I were playing near them. If a husband or a boyfriend asks me to go off and play with them, I always ask the female if it’s okay with them. I never take the man’s word. They’ve been known to lie. (Lori)

Well, first and foremost is “no means no.” If you are uncomfortable with any activity and you express that to your playmates, they must abide by your wishes. Going along with that, I guess is that you never go where you’re not invited. If at a club or a party, don’t touch others unless you ask or are asked to participate. After that everybody has their own personal rules but those two are universal.

Nancy

There are plenty of spoken and unspoken rules in swinging. Some couples only want to swing in the same room. For some there is no kissing or sexual intercourse. The most unspoken rule is “No means No.” (Jan)

I think there are a lot of rules. WE don’t have many. Soft swing vs. full swing [is] spoken. Degrees of swinging, in the same room, different room, what sexual activities there are. Have met some people who have expensive rules [such as] man cannot caress the woman’s cheek. Only husband can. Each have to come back to table to tap table before dancing twice with the same woman. She cannot go off with someone unless HE has someone. Kissing vs. no kissing. Condoms vs. no condoms. It depends on the couple. And all are a little different, and I suppose some change over time. (Hester)

Rule #1: NO MEANS NO....Don’t screw around with others’ relationships. Contrary to common beliefs about swingers, we actually hold our relationships to be sacred....No excessive use of alcohol and no drugs. For practical reasons it dulls sensations and impedes performance....Plus, if you need to be loaded to talk yourself into swinging, you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place....Respect
others’ boundaries....Be honest. Don’t lie to yourself. Don’t lie to your spouse. Don’t lie to your partners....Educate yourself about your sexual health. Be fully aware of your risks where diseases are concerned. Have yourself tested regularly, choose your partners carefully and wisely, and use condoms. (Emma).

Eight of the sixteen women stated that they felt the rules for swinging were different for women than for men.

Although I can’t say I agree with it, women are given marginally more leniency where conduct is concerned....Women who can’t take a hint or boldly walk up to a perfect stranger and grab his crotch will, however, be tolerated. The men are actually at somewhat of a disadvantage this way because women’s complaints are taken very seriously whereas men’s complaints are not. (Emma)

Women control the swinging, as to how, what, where, and when. (Jan)

Well, let’s take touching for example. Women can probably get away with WAY more uninvited touching than men can. But the bottom line is that if something happens that is unwanted and that fact is expressed, then the person doing the touching/whatever needs to back off. I suppose the reason for the seeming double standard is that men usually don’t take offense or say “no,” whereas a woman (or her man) is more likely to take offense and say “no,” whether the unwanted gesture comes from a man or another woman. (Nancy)

Five of the female swingers in the study did not feel that the rules were different for men and women in swinging. Dana, Hester, and Emma made the following statements regarding rule differences:

In general, I do not think so. Usually rules are a couple thing, and who initiates them is not always clear. I do know some couples where swinging, which is open and fully disclosed, has turned into cheating and an affair, and the results was that SHE made the rules and HE followed them to a T. (Hester)

No, each couple agrees on what their rules will be before they start swinging and, if necessary, discuss them again before going to any lifestyle event or function. There are also single ladies and men that just do their own thing without the need to agree with another person on what their rules will be. Single ladies are accepted everywhere. Single men have a hard time finding couples. (Dana)

In reality, yes. Bisexuality is accepted with women in swinging. It is not accepted with men. At a swing club it is common for women to have sex together
and with other women and men watching. It is generally forbidden in any open areas of any swing club for men to engage in same sex activities. (Emma)

Two of the women felt that it depended on each individual person or couple as to whether the rules for men and women differed in swinging:

With us they [the rules] aren’t but we have met some couples where they are. (Oggie)

Rules are made based upon what each individual person is comfortable with. So, sure, sometimes they could be different for each person. And obviously the semantics are different (you can give him head vs. you can eat her pussy). I think it’s all about comfort. Rules will be different or the same based upon what each person’s comfort level is. (Meg)

Only one respondent did not have an answer to this question.

Fifteen of the sixteen women in the study reported that they or they and their partners have their own personal set of rules for when they swing. Approximately 29 different rules existed among the 15 women. The most commonly reported rule noted by six of the women in the study was that they must use condoms. Hester reported not having any specific rules but made the following comment:

No, just good communication, and I think we have an understanding that each of us has veto power with respect to the situation or couple. But we have never really exercised that. One issue we find occasionally is that the “he” is more interesting to me or us than the “she.” We laugh about “taking one for the team” but do not do it often. Earlier on we did, but it is a bore. (Hester)

Catherine stated:

Well, like I said, we used to have a lot more than we do now but #1, no exes. No swapping without the other knowing first. We don’t ask permission per se, just a FYI. We use to have a no anal rule, but my first male-female-male that got blown all to hell. Oh and another big one, no one takes one for the team! So say we meet a couple and he and I hit it off or she and she hits it off, or we hit it off with her but hubby is rude, we just don’t play. Simple as that. No one has sympathy sex. (Catherine)
Katie stated the only rule she and her partner have is not to get attached, while Abby stated she and her partner’s only rule was that if they have doubts, then they need to stop everything and communicate it so they can deal with it then.

Gina, who hasn’t yet had her first full swinging experience, stated that she and her husband do have some rules set into place for when they do begin to swing:

Starting out, we are soft swap only. That means no vaginal penetration at all. We only swing together. We are same room only, meaning we will only swing in the same room. Some of that is for safety for me, some for us to be able to see or touch each other, some so that the imagination does not get out of hand. (Gina)

Only Jan reported that she and her partner do not have any personal rules for swinging. When asked if they had any rules, she stated:

Not really, we just go with the flow and enjoy ourselves. (Jan)

The mostly frequently reported reasons why people feel that swinging is wrong, immoral, or bad were related to people’s religious beliefs and what they were taught.

Our society, as a whole, for generations upon generations have told us that. I could go into the whole patriarchal aspect—women’s bodies are bad, blah blah blah. But I think when it comes right down to it, religiously and socially, it is what most Americans are taught. I know I was. (Catherine)

I don’t think it is swinging per se that people see as bad. Any sexual practice that is irrelevant to procreation borders on the taboo. This is just ingrained in our psyche, and we strengthen the bias with our fears of retribution by society. Sex outside of the marriage bed is foresworn in the marriage vows. (Abby)

Most people think that a couple should be monogamous, and that’s that. I don’t think people were made that way, just like the other creatures on this planet. A lot of people that have asked me questions about how or why or what for generally agree with me on one thing: most people that don’t sleep with anyone except their spouse don’t do so because they don’t see anyone else in their life they would like to be with. They don’t because they don’t want to hurt the one they love. But if they could and their love wouldn’t feel hurt, they would do it. So if you could have that and give it in return, that’s swinging “baby.” (Dana)

Three of the respondents felt it was because people just do not understand the lifestyle.
I feel they think it is wrong, immoral, or bad for a few reasons, but essentially it all comes down to not understanding it. When they profess these things, that swinging will be the end of the relationship; that someone will fall in love with someone else; that swingers are sex addicts with boring, lifeless, or abusive relationships; that we are selfish and irresponsible; that we have no intimacy in our marriages; indeed that our marriages are obviously shams! After all, why would we get married if all we’re going to do is have sex with other people? I have to ask: is that what a marriage is to you? Is that how you define a successful marriage? A long life, lived together in perfect monogamy? Perhaps that is fulfilling for some but not for all. I refuse to measure my marriage by a yardstick born of a bodily function! What a silly and backwards system. No wonder so many marriages are allowed to fail! All it takes is the wrong penis in the wrong vagina. Suddenly the marriage is tainted-impure. It will never be good again. This is what happens in a marriage that is based on sex....The ignorance that I have seen and the aggression towards swinging is just unbelievable. I have had a self-proclaimed Christian wish AIDS on me. You’d swear I was Satan himself! They have told me that I am not a Christian based on my sexual choices, which really frosts my cookies. My spirituality is none of their concern, and it is not their place to judge it. (Emma)

Three of the women felt that people’s upbringings play a part in the way they view swinging.

It’s probably the way they were raised. I had a very liberal-thinking mom who encouraged me to think outside of the box, and most people I talk to will “say” that it’s wrong, but you can tell just by looking at them or by the questions that they ask you later that they’re intrigued. I mean we’re all basically sexual creatures, some more repressed than others. (Lori)

The remaining women in the study reported a variety of reasons why they felt people viewed swinging as wrong, immoral, or bad. Their responses included people’s fears, seeing it as cheating, making up for a bad marriage, having a narrow perspective, feeling that it destroys a marriage, and their own self-doubt.

Gilbert Bartell (1970) reported from his study on swingers that they were not fully benefiting from the lifestyle because they were not understanding the human-relations aspect. He stated that swingers focused on sexual relationship as the main goal of swinging. However, according to Booth (1999b), this finding is not the norm among
most swingers. Booth stated that swinging was a social activity where friendships were made. In this study eleven of the women agreed with Booth—that sex was not the main focus or goal of swinging. Isabella stated in support of Booth’s theory:

I think that sex is the end result of swinging for us. We like the dating process, meeting new people with a big something in common, getting their opinions on the Lifestyle, their rules, their experiences. All that is what makes us click with a couple. Not everyone we meet do we want to have sex with. Some are just really fun people with a lot in common. Although usually if there is physical attraction and good mental karma, we will end up playing. We are “selective full swap,” which means we don’t go full just because we choose to invite you back to the hot tub. It all has to be right before we go there. (Isabella)

Other participants provided more information that supported the idea that sex is not the main goal of swinging.

For some “hard core” swingers sex is the main goal. For me and my husband that is part of it, but also making friends and spending time with each other is our goal. Because we tend to only go to swing clubs, we use that time to relax and just let loose and have fun. (Felicia)

I don’t feel that way. I think making friends has a lot to do with it as well as finding people you have common interests with. (Oggie)

Swinging is a part of it, but being good friends makes it better. (Jan)

I think it is connecting with other people. Some people use it just for sex, while others use it as a way to make friendships. (Katie)

Sex is a focus, but the social foreplay is great and the friendships and relationships we have made with couples and singles we have met as swingers are really great. In an earlier life, my friends were “profession”-related and my husband’s were family-, neighborhood-, and church-related. Now, we have friends from every walk of life who are good-spirited, friendly, sexy, and fun, and comfortable with themselves. (Hester)

Five of the women stated they felt sex was the main goal of swinging.

However, the social aspect of swinging was not ignored.

I believe that it is, but there are other good by-products of swinging, whether you’re a couple or a single. For example, for a couple I truly
believe that the increased and improved communication level they can achieve through reaching the decision to seek out the Lifestyle can bring their relationship to a whole new level of awareness, trust, honestly. For everyone, it’s just plain fun to be around swingers. We are uninhibited and know how to have a good time. (Nancy)

Mostly the people you swing with are really your living, breathing, walking, talking sex toys. When you first meet another swinger or couple, you know that they may end up in bed with you. It’s always a conscious thought. But it’s also about the people themselves. You meet friends. You can go outside and do “vanilla” things with them as well. You’ll find amazing people with wonderful personalities. Why spend all your time together naked? (Meg)

For us, it is. If friendships come, and it sometimes does, that is an extra benefit. We like the sexual variety that we can have with multiple sex partners. (Betty)

Other benefits of swinging that the participants reported were feeling desired, making their sexual fantasies come true, having fun, enjoying time with their partners, and social foreplay.

Issues Involved with Swinging

The women in this study were asked seven questions related to issues involved in the swinging Lifestyle. When asked if they preferred to be called “Lifestylers” or swingers,” eight of the ladies stated they preferred to be called “swingers.”

I prefer to be called a swinger. The “Lifestyle” can mean many things to many different people. Life is a lifestyle, swinging is a hobby. I’m a swinger. (Isabella)

It is just a word. I don’t really care what I am called. But I tend to refer to myself as a swinger, that I am part of the Lifestyle. So, I tend to use both. (Felicia)

Three of the women, however, stated they preferred to be called “Lifestylers.”

That is what we are. It is, indeed, a lifestyle for us. Our closest friends are also Lifestyle couples. Some we have known for several years. (Betty)
I guess I would prefer the term “Lifestyler,” mostly because the term swinger even though it was originally applied to singles, i.e. “swinging single,” has been co-opted by couples who think that there is only one way to swing, i.e. couple-to-couple. (Nancy)

Two of the women reported that either label was fine, but three stated that they did not prefer either.

No opinion on what title is more appropriate. They are both silly. (Abby)

Either one or neither. People need to call it something, I guess. But “the Lifestyle” sounds very vague, and “swingers” has such a cheesy, sleazy feel to it. Worse yet is “wife swappers.” Hey, I’m not a friggin’ baseball card! The only thing that would get swapped is my husband if he went into swinging with the chauvinistic attitude that that particular term conveys. Most people with experience in the Lifestyle, I think, find that one derogatory. (Emma)

The women were asked about the types of swinging outlets they use. Fourteen of the women reported using swinging clubs as social outlets, and eight reported using the Internet for connecting with potential swing partners.

The clubs are the best because you can sit and socialize, dance, hang out, and even play if you want to. Sometimes there is pressure to play at a house party but rarely at a club. (Pat)

When we go to the club, most people play separately (in separate rooms) so it is easier to hook-up with someone….At the clubs almost everyone there is ready to play so it is just easier to meet, talk, and if everything is ok, then you can play. (Felicia)

Five of the women reported that they used to attend swing parties. Three participants reported using hotels as their swinging outlet. Other responses involved attending couple dances, swinging conventions, “vanilla” bars, swingers’ houses, cruises, and one-on-one dates. One lady stated that she uses all of the outlets mentioned above.

Oggie stated she preferred meetings at bars. When asked why, she stated:

Because it’s a neutral place. That way, if there is no interest, you can go your way, and they can go theirs. (Oggie)
Eight women reported that they like to use the Internet to meet potential swinging partners.

The Internet ads are like resumes. After looking at a few thousand of them (yes, I said thousand), you start to pick up on patterns you either like or don’t like....We’ve found it’s an effective way to communicate and meet people. Plus, it affords you some discretion. (Emma)

We live so far from everything else, we don’t have a lot of choices. The club was a six-hour drive, and we didn’t care for it. Right now, our Adult Friend Finder profile is our only outlet. (Abby)

Profiles are easily available on the net. There are no clubs close, and we have a babysitting problem. (Gina)

With the Internet you get to know people a lot better than you would if you meet them at some noisy, crowded club with half-dressed people running all over the place. We’ve been chatting with two couples online for about a month now, learning about them and their lives and their preferences and guidelines. (Meg)

One woman stated, however, that she did not like to use the Internet to meet potential playmates:

We tried online dating sites, and it is very time consuming to set up meetings. Then some people want several meetings before play. (Felicia)

When the women were asked if they had ever experienced jealousy when swinging, nine of the women stated no.

It has never come up for us as we trust and love each other. (Jan)

Not really jealousy, but I do get envious when my husband is playing and I’m stuck at home or just sitting at the club. (Pat)

Personally, I think jealousy is the biggest waste of an emotion I can think of. And honestly, I have never felt it while swinging. (Nancy)

Five of the women stated that they have either experienced jealousy once at first; they did but not now.
I think everyone who is newer still experiences little twinges of jealousy, but you talk about it and work past it. [Ken] told me he wasn’t at all jealous watching me with another man. I don’t think I’d be jealous watching him with another woman because in the perfect situation, I’d be with the other man as well. I guess it’s a tit for tat. (Meg)

He did once in the very beginning. I have only once; but when I communicated my concern and feelings, it was resolved. (Catherine)

I have felt jealous one time. We were at a club, and my husband (who is tall) hooked up with this very tall, thin, red-head. I am short and big, a BBW [Big Beautiful Woman]. Just looking at her with my husband, they just looked so good together. But I took a step back and reminded myself that he married me and we have a 23-year-long relationship that can and will always stand up to any play partner that either he or I will ever have. (Felicia)

The only time I did was when my partner (of 6 months) stopped having sex with me but would still insist that we go to parties where he’d drag even damn big-boobed women over saying he wanted to have sex with her. But he didn’t with me. And he’d even get mad if I refused to be with the husband because that meant that he wasn’t going to be with the wife. That’s usually how most couples do things. And while I did occasionally “take one for the team,” I will never again. (Lori).

Gina was unable to comment on this question because she has not yet had her first swinging experience.

The women were also asked how they dealt with jealousy. Nine of the women reported that they did not have to deal with it because they did not have jealousy issues when swinging.

It never comes up for us as we love and trust each other. (Jan)

Not really jealous but I do get envious when my husband is playing and I’m stuck at home or just sitting at the club. (Pat)

I don’t normally get jealous. I know my relationship is very strong and that he loves me. Jealousy comes from being insecure in your relationship or insecure with yourself. I am very secure with my relationship. And, while I do battle insecurity within myself, everyone does. I just don’t let it get me down. (Felicia)
Six of the women stated they deal with jealousy by having good communication with their partners, sharing their experiences, working through it with their partners, and owning their own feelings.

Communication is the key. Talk through it always. (Meg)

By talking. It resolves most issues. (Esther)

I haven’t had any experiences yet. We have talked about the issue and agreed that if either one of us is uncomfortable at anytime, it all stops. (Gina)

Most of the women felt that sexually transmitted diseases were a concern in the swinging community. Only three did not feel that STDs were a concern in the swinging environment. The following reasons were reported:

Not a huge concern because people are smart and safe. There have been instances where people who swing have caught STDs, but it’s not commonplace. Many swingers are married and have kids and know they have so much to lose. Most people are very smart. Some even request medical records. (Meg)

I think, for the most part, people are as safe as they can be about it, and those who are not don’t usually want to be with the safe ones. So, I guess it works out. (Katie)

They do not seem to be a concern. Condom use is 50/50 as far as I can see. Most swingers are pretty middle class and pretty straight arrow, and have impeccable hygiene. And they do not use drugs. (Hester)

Fourteen of the women reported that they deal with the issue of STDs by using protection.

If engaging in any male-female activity, a condom must be used. (Katie)

We generally use condoms except with a few select couples that we have gotten to know over time. We know we are taking some risk but feel the risk is a small one. (Betty)

I have never had anything that I would attribute to swinging nor has my husband. We use condoms when expected but prefer not to. (Hester)
Three of the women stated that they deal with STDs by being selective. Jan stated:

We are very selective with who we meet and making sure they are STD free. (Jan)

Three of the women reported that they get tested for STDs on a regular basis. Catherine reported:

We always use protection, and get tested regularly. (Catherine)

Other responses included educating themselves on STDs, maintaining good hygiene, being honest, and using the “pull out” method.

When the women were asked who is typically responsible for providing the protection in the swinging environment, twelve of the women stated that both the men and the women bore responsibility for having condoms available.

Both are responsible, and it’s usually just the one that pulls it out first. One time my hubby pulled out a condom and the lady told him to hold on to that for a few minutes. And she ended up putting a flavored one on him using only her mouth. When he realized it was on, he put it away! I told him we had to go home and practice that because it was so erotic. I’m pretty good at it now! (Dana)

We always remember to pack the condoms. We have a cute, little, leopard-print, coffee table sofa-art (that holds our remote control for the t.v.) that has a secret compartment where we keep the condoms in our “playroom” just an arm’s reach away from anywhere. If our partners don’t have any, which has never happened, we will gladly offer “party favors” for them. (Isabella)

Everyone should be. If I think we’ll be swinging, I bring protection just in case because it’s the responsible, smart, safe thing to do. (Meg)

All persons are responsible for promoting safe sex. Condoms are not a big secret, and if someone runs out or forgot theirs at home, chances are your playmates have got a few to spare. It’s not quite like high school, where you convince your girlfriend to buy them for you because you’re too shy to do it. (Emma)
Three of the women stated that they felt the men were responsible for carrying the condoms during swinging. Oggie and Pat replied:

The males. I think most men just know that it is their responsibility. (Oggie)

Almost always the guy. (Pat)

Only one participant stated she felt the women were responsible for providing the protection but that men do help.

The women will carry them for the couple. But a lot of men carry them too. (Lori)

Lifestylers Versus Non-Lifestylers

Past studies have compared swinging couples to nonswinging couples (Bergstrand and Williams 2000; Gilmartin 1970; Jenks 1985). Gilmartin reported that nonswingers tended to be more educated, be more religious, report happier childhoods, and report closer relationships with their families. The female swingers in this study, however, did not support Gilmartin’s data.

The participants in the study were asked a variety of questions discussing the issue of swingers in comparison to nonswingers. The participants were asked how women who swing were similar to or different from women who do not swing. The most common responses given were that swingers were more comfortable with their bodies, more open-minded, and more comfortable with their sexuality:

“Vanilla” people are what we call non-Lifestylers. Women who swing are far more open-minded and easy to talk to. I am much happier in a club with Lifestyle women than I am at, say, at a soccer match with vanilla women. (Pat)

I think we are just more open to our sexuality. We still do “vanilla,” female things. We go shopping, we drink wine, we cry at romantic moves, we disagree with the men in our lives. All that’s different from our sex lives. (Meg)
Swingers are more comfortable with their bodies and relationships, and pretty happy and sexy but not necessarily Barbie dolls. In fact, many are pretty large or not t.v. personality looks. But their spirits are usually friendly and easy. (Hester)

However, there was a wide array of responses depicting how the women felt they and other female swingers differed from nonswingers.

Women who swing are more comfortable with their bodies and their sexuality as well as sex, in general. I would say that this translates over into their regular, everyday life. Women who swing are not as worried, if at all, about their husbands looking at other women or cheating on them. Women who swing are more interested in having sex as well as communicating what exactly they want to experience in their sex lives. (Abby)

We are just like other women except on occasion we have sex with other sexual partners than our husbands with their consent. We are probably more liberated, more sexual, more at ease, empowered, enlightened. But I gather those “non-swinging women” would just call me slutty. (Catherine)

I think that Lifestyle women are more confident in their relationships with their significant others, more confident in themselves, their own sexuality, their body image, their “place” in their own mind, and in their place in society. We have found that many female swingers are self-employed, in the medical, legal, civil service, and educational professions. Small world, huh? (Isabella)

I have a sarcastic sense of humor, and vanilla women don’t get it often. I find Lifestyle women much more interesting to chat with as well. Their lives don’t revolve exclusively around their children, jobs, husband, etc. They seem to have a lot more going on in their lives. (Pat)

Only one participant, Jan, felt that there were no differences between female swingers and nonswingers.

Past research has noted that female swingers were more sexually experimental and aggressive than nonswinging females (O’Neill and O’Neill 1970). Of the sixteen participants in this study, six of the women stated they felt female swingers were more sexually aggressive than nonswingers. Oggie and Felicia stated:

More. Some men enjoy more aggressive women, and women know what they want and enjoy sexually. (Oggie)
Society tends to frown on women who are sexually aggressive. They are labeled all sorts of things. But I think that women swingers feel that they are allowed to be more sexually aggressive women. I think that swingers are more open with their sexuality and that makes them more comfortable to be more aggressive. It is like in a vanilla bar. A lot of women tend to hang back waiting for the men to make a move. But in a swing club it is a lot more accepted for a woman to approach a man and ask for sex. But then again, there are some women who are sexually aggressive, no matter if they swing or not. (Felicia)

Three of the women in the study stated that they felt females who swing were not more sexually aggressive than nonswingers. Abby commented:

I am not sexually aggressive at all. Will I initiate sex? Sure. But I am never aggressive about it. I tend to prefer my partner to be aggressive. (Meg)

I would assume that they [female swingers] are less sexually aggressive. Aggression is used when you fear that others are going to [not] comply or reciprocate. Aggressive women either overcompensate so that men don’t see them as vulnerable or they overcompensate so that men see them as desirable. Women who swing are not in that position anymore where they need sexual affirmation of their worth. (Abby)

Two of the women felt that there was no difference in the sexual aggressiveness between women who swing and do not swing. Jan stated in her response:

We are not that sexually aggressive so no difference. (Jan)

Three of the women felt that the level of sexual aggression of swinging or nonswinging women depended on the situation. Hester did not feel it was “aggression” that was the issue.

I think women are sexually comfortable and not afraid to pursue and value their orgasm and love sexual attention. Aggressive? Not necessarily but comfortable. (Hester)

Nancy felt that the sexual aggressiveness depended on the woman. She stated:

You have your “bi-furious” women who just get out there and tear it up, and they don’t care with who. It’s not personally attractive to me. I think these women are probably women whose husbands brought the idea up, and they ran with it
determined to run the show. And often, at clubs and parties, you can i.d. these
gals’ husbands with a mere glance. (Nancy)

Two of the women had no opinion on this question, including Gina who has not yet
begun to swing.

Thirteen of the women, on the other hand, felt that females who swing were more
sexually open than females who did not swing.

Most definitely. There are always new experiences and new things to try when
there are so many in your life in a sexual fashion, even if they’re just your friends
but talking about sex in their experiences. There’s always something new coming
up, more minds to come up with new things. And we’re not afraid to try anything
that isn’t gross or involving pain. (Dana)

Women who swing are more sexually open because they’ve already processed all
the “do’s and don’ts” and “rights and wrongs” that related to having sex. I think
we’re more hedonistic and of the “if it feels good, do it” camp than the average
nonswinging woman. (Nancy)

Yes, if you overcome one bias, then that is the slippery slope that leads to
questioning other biases or prejudices. You may not change your mind in the end,
but you aren’t as judgmental as you were prior to swinging. (Abby)

Most definitely yes. If a woman is comfortable in swinging without trying to
please their man only, which is rare, then they have what it takes to be open about
their sexuality. It’s all about confidence. (Isabella)

Two of the women, including Gina, did not have a comment on this question either. Only
one participant stated she did not feel that female swingers were more sexually open than
nonswingers. Emma made the following statement:

No, not really. Swinging sex seldom involved fetishistic activities, cross-dressing,
“bathroom games,” or the like. Certainly not bestiality or pedophilia, as some
protestors of the Lifestyle have insinuated. It’s just good, old-fashioned sex.
Although I will say that, this being our hobby, we’re all definitely open to learning
new tricks wherever we can….Any competition that we experience is all healthy
competition and never intended to put anyone down. For a graphic example, two
women may offer one another a good-natured challenge to see who can fellate the
other’s partner to completion the fastest….This is “competition” in the Lifestyle.
(Emma)
Finally, the women were asked how they would compare a swinging couple’s relationship to a nonswinging couple’s relationship which relationship they felt was typically better. Again, the responses were vast. The most commonly reported responses were that swinging couples had stronger marriages and better communication. Catherine stated:

More communication, trust, and sex. But trust and communication are key. It’s like a friend said, “Swinging is the frosting on a cake. If the cake is lop-sided or crooked, no amount of frosting is going to fix it!” (Catherine)

Ideally, a swinging couple’s relationships should be better than the average nonswinging couple’s due to the increased communication alone. (Nancy)

Swinging doesn’t solve all problems, but it can strengthen the relationship and the resolve to find workable compromises to problems that don’t leave everyone angry. It makes us want to try harder in all other aspects of the relationship and not be so insistent on the last word. (Abby)

Our relationship is much more exciting than it ever was. Also, I think more swinging couples tend to avoid divorce court than vanilla couples because we don’t have to cheat! (Pat)

The only big difference I’ve noticed is that couples in the Lifestyle tend to be more intimate with each other and better friends to each other. We share on an emotional level with each other and tend to have longer marriages and stay in love longer. (Dana)

One participant felt that it was hard to say how the relationships differed or which was better.

That is a hard one to answer. Relationships involve many things so it is hard to judge which is better. (Oggie)

Meg, on the other hand, felt that swinging couple’s relationships were not, per se, better but just different. Meg commented:

Well, I’ve been in nonswinging relationships. I wouldn’t necessarily say swinging is “better”. It’s just different. Nonswinging couples have to focus on bringing
spice into their love life. Swinging couples have that automatically. Even if they aren’t actively swinging, they have fantasies that are okay to talk about and past events they can reminisce about. (Meg)

Overall, most of the respondents felt that a swinging couple’s relationship was different in more positive aspects than a nonswinging couple’s relationship and, thus, was typically better.

Women in the Lifestyle

The participants in this study were asked questions that related specifically to women in the Lifestyle to gain a better understanding of female swingers’ perspectives on the swinging lifestyle.

Misconceptions about Women Who Swing

The women were asked if they felt there were any misconceptions about women who participate in swinging. Overwhelmingly fourteen of them felt that there were definitely misconceptions about women who swing. Along with other responses given, thirteen stated that nonswingers tend to think that female swingers are promiscuous, sluts, “easy,” and whores.

Yes, that we are “easy”. I get lots of single guys “hitting on me” despite that our Internet profiles indicate we have no interest in singles/solo males. Some may view women like myself as “sluts” or without morals, but the opposite is the case. I have high moral standards of trust and honesty. (Betty)

That they will sleep with anyone, [are] sluts, dirty, have no boundaries, and their man is making them do it. (Katie)

Only two females stated they did not know if there were any misconceptions regarding women who swing:
Well, I don’t really know what “vanilla” people think about women in the Lifestyle. But we are every size, shape, color, age, status in life, religion, etc. Every personality type, laid back, rowdy, naughty. We just really love sex! (Dana)

I honestly don’t know. For some reason, I always think of the images of people at Studio 54 from the 70s. There are vague associations with drugged-out sex parties, but I have no idea if that is common or just my overactive and melodramatic imagination at work. (Abby)

The women went on to report a variety of reasons as to why they felt people had these misconceptions about women who swing. The most commonly reported reason given why they felt people have these misconceptions was that people outside the Lifestyle just did not understand it

Ignorance, plain and simple. I’d like to stress that ignorance is not the same as stupidity. Stupidity is choosing to remain ignorant. Ignorance is simply not knowing a thing yet. When people don’t understand a thing, they feel threatened by it. Swingers, they reason, are a threat to society because of their blatant disregard for monogamy, the mainstay of marriage. (Emma)

I think that some are just uneducated on the subject or just don’t understand it. (Gina)

I think that the vanilla public just don’t understand that women can have multiple partners, men and women, maybe all at the same time, all in one night [and] not just for procreation, not because they love their partners, just for pure pleasure. Hedonistic pleasure, just to orgasm and share that experience with others. Hey, the animal kingdom has random sex. Why not the human race? You know what, the word “slut” is a monogamous/vanilla word and doesn’t exist in the swinger lifestyle. True swingers love sex for the enjoyment and to fulfill their fantasies, not based on what everyone else thinks. (Isabella)

It’s the unknown factor, lack of knowledge about the Lifestyle. I mean, “no still means no,” and the fact that we admit that we love sex, will show off our bodies…most people would call us sluts and I hate that name. We just indulge in our fantasies without our limits of safety “within.” (Lori)

Others reported they felt that it was because of religion and society’s teachings.

Society has tried to show men as “macho,” that it is ok for themselves to have multiple sex partners, but for a woman to have the same thing is wrong. (Betty)
Again, indoctrination—the Judeo-Christian thing says, “One man/one woman,” and to a lot of people, that’s that. Anything else is obviously wrong. (Nancy)

Two of the women simply stated that they did not know why people developed the misconceptions about women who swing.

Positive and Negative Aspects of Swinging

The women were asked what they felt they gained as women by swinging. Again, the responses were many. Most commonly the women reported they felt they gained sexual pleasure, friendships, self-confidence, freedom, and experience by swinging.

Control of my own sexuality and my own pleasure and some damn good friends. (Nancy)

Pleasure experimenting sexually and finding new ways of pleasure. Finding other women who I enjoy being with sexually and otherwise. Making good friends. (Betty)

Fantastic, like-minded friends, first and foremost. Also, feeling 20 years younger, desirable, and able to enjoy the variety of sex partners. (Pat)

Other women had the following comments concerning what they felt they gained as a woman by participating in swinging:

I have gained a lot. I have a better understanding of what my sexual needs are. I have the confidence to express those needs better now than before. I also feel that I am a better lover for my husband. I have learned from every swinging partner I have ever been with, and I take that experience with me back to my husband. I am a lot more open with my sexuality, and that makes me and my husband happier. Swinging has also given me a lot of confidence in myself. I used to be very shy, but now I can look anyone in the eye and talk to them. That is part of the better communication that swingers tend to have than nonswingers. (Felicia)
An opportunity to live out all my fantasies. A group of women who are “like” me. I don’t have to keep my yap shut around them like I do around some of my other friends. (Meg)

More sexual freedom! No, seriously, most of us gain more self-confidence. Men at a Lifestyle function can approach you—compliment you, flirt with you—things that are frowned on in “normal society” and you gain self-confidence. You realize as a woman you are beautiful, not just to your husband. You are sexy, desired, and not just someone’s wife or mother. (Dana)

The women had various responses when asked about important perspectives they must keep in mind when swinging. The most common response was that swinging is not everything, and that it is for fun.

Partner/spouse/significant other—that is the utmost. The rules you have already established—safe-sex, “no means no”, and especially that “the Lifestyle” is not all there is in life. It’s a hobby, not an obsession. Everything else in life comes first. Swinging is not a priority. It’s a nice way to meet sexually liberated people who you can talk with about many topics that you can’t discuss with your best “vanilla” girlfriend. Safety is another important factor. (Isabella)

It is for fun. Take it as such. Our family and marriage comes first! (Catherine)

It’s only sex, not a commitment. It’s not love but you can have chemistry, and don’t get the two confused. And my favorite, one day my looks will fade and I’ll be too damn old to do this. I’ve encountered some couples that have been doing this for 20-30 years, and I don’t want to be one of those couples. I mean, what more can you do that you haven’t already done? (Lori)

Emma, however, commented on the importance of taking care of your "health and well-being" and the value of "love and respect" when swinging.

It is essential to be aware of how swinging is impacting your health and well-being. It can be enormously destructive if we allow it to be. The surprising thing about it is that if we are completely honest with ourselves, we will see that we are our own worst enemies. Swinging forces you to take a good hard look in the mirror, and face exactly who and what you are. I don't understand how people can blame swinging for what they see in that mirror! Yet over and over you hear, "We tried swinging, and it ruined our marriage," which is absurd. Swinging didn't ruin anything, honey. You did that yourself! So your priorities should be in this order: 1. Love and respect for yourself; 2. Love and respect for your spouse; and 3. Love and respect for others....In order to be able to
function as a partner in any relationship, you need to love and respect who you are as an individual. "Taking one for the team" is not something that is looked favorably upon. (Emma)

The women were asked what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of swinging. Again, the women reported a wide variety of responses. The most frequently reported positive aspect associated with swinging was the opportunity to explore their sexuality and sexual fantasies. Meg commented:

I get to act out fantasies. I get to have amazing sex with [Ken]. I get to do something not everyone does. (Meg)

Other responses included learning how to receive pleasure and pleasure others and the sense of empowerment and control.

Being closer to your partner sexually. Getting an extreme amount of pleasure with each experience you have, provided it is a good one. (Oggie)

Empowerment, control, things I've mentioned before. (Catherine)

Mostly positive for me. I have learned much about myself, my sexuality, my sexual needs, how to pleasure another woman or man, and receive pleasure back. (Betty)

There were not as many negative aspects of swinging listed by the participants as there were positive. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the most commonly reported response to the negative aspects of swinging was "nothing."

I can't really think of any negative ones. (Oggie)

Not negative aspects that I've noticed. There are always people interested in you that you're not interested in. And you want to say, "No thank you" without hurting their feelings. But it's "all good." (Dana)

Some negative aspects of swinging reported were the stigma and society's perception of swingers, the repercussions of being "found out," and safety.

Social stigma, vulnerable if doing it alone. (Katie)
The negatives are how vanilla people perceive you as a swinger, that even friends will not understand why I do this. (Felicia)

Always having to watch for and be concerned with my own personal safety. Having men think they can paw me without my permission. (Pat)

Negative is the worry of being found out and the negative repercussions. (Catherine)

Views on Swinging

Although swinging can be dated back as far as Biblical times (Sez 2000), its more modern version began back in the 1950s, when swinging was dominated by men. The first institute for swinging went public with it in the 1960s (Society for Human Sexuality 1998). In the 1980s swinging was reintroduced in the more common name known as the Lifestyle (Gould 1999). Therefore, the women in this study were asked if they felt the woman's place in swinging had changed since the 1960s and 1970s. Thirteen of the women reported that they did feel swinging had changed.

Oh certainly. Back then it was the dawn of feminism; the free love era; sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll; “if you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with!” Today, it's harder. We are expected to maintain the home, a job, the kids, the pressures. We are inundated with the Internet and magazines telling us what to look like, how to dress, what to wear. Society, as a whole, is branded by the marketing giants. We, in a sense, have more control but more worry, STDs and morality police. (Catherine)

It involves all education classes, class, etc. while previously, it was more segregated. (Katie)

I wasn't alive then, but it used to be referred to as "wife-swapping," which implied that the men were in control. They were the ones making the conscious decision to trade for another man's wife. Now, I think it's a balance. Both parties make the decision. And, any more, I don't think it's just straight up "wife-swapping." You get the wives hooking up and the men just watching (Meg).
Well, I was sexually open in the '70s, so I have some experience there. And then, I think I was in it for the intimacy and potential of a relationship and something long-term. Now, I have the relationship and enjoy the moment and the experience. And catch-and-release is just fine with me. (Hester)

None of the women in the study stated that she felt swinging had not changed since the 1960s and 1970s. However, three respondents reported they did not know whether swinging had changed or not.

I don't have a clue what it was like back then. Honest! My hubby's co-workers all know about our lifestyle. They think he's a "god" because of it, and are jealous. They want to know how to "talk their woman into it," which can't happen. They all think I'm amazing because of our lifestyle and my bisexuality and us living together. It's great! But my own coworkers don't know. (Dana)

The participants in the study were then asked how they felt about some of the feminist thoughts that women who swing are degraded and used by men. Fourteen of the women overwhelmingly felt that these allegations were simply false.

Ridiculous! I enjoy giving pleasure to a woman and receiving pleasure too, woman-to-woman, many times without men present. Women who enter swinging enter if, for the most part, very willing and find it pleasurable. Some of the feminists, with supposedly open minds, need to open them further to different viewpoints rather than just theirs. (Betty)

It angers me since I know all the experiences that I have had have been geared toward my pleasure. Now, there are some instances that I feel women are degraded, and that is when a woman participates in a gang-bang. (Oggie)

I feel that they are sadly misinformed. I think that they need to take the time to really learn about the culture and talk to the people in it. It wouldn't take them long to realize that Lifestyle women are strong, assertive, confident, and well aware of their sexual power....Most of the accusations I've heard hurled about, that men are degrading us, could not be more wrong. In my personal experience the Lifestyle encourages and enables women to own their own sexuality. This is, collectively, the loving gift of men to women. The women, in return, give men the same gift in kind, allowing them to "go play with other kids." (Emma)

That's just BS. I think that the feminists of the world need to get laid more
because the moth balls they stick up there have migrated to their brains. The feminist opinion is their defense to us poor, brainwashed souls that we are led around town and made to have sex with whomever her husband chooses for her. In fact, it truly is the woman who has more of the say-so in the Lifestyle, in general. [Ethan] and I tend to be more 50/50 in our decision-making, but we see all the time how a male of another couple has to check with the boss or will defer to her and say, "It's up to my wife." (Isabella)

Only two of the women in the study felt that there was some truth to the feminists’ viewpoints. However, neither of the responses was solely supportive of those thoughts.

I think they can be [used and degraded by men] if they are in that kind of relationship. However, that can happen in a nonswinging relationship too. (Katie)

I am sure that some of the women are being used by men. That is true in the nonswinging world also. There are always going to be men (and women) who will use others for their own agenda. As for feeling degraded, I do not feel as though I am degraded. I am sure there are some who think that just like there are people who think that porn stars, strippers, and the like are being degraded. It's a choice. If I ever feel like I am being used or degraded or disrespected, it is over. If there is a man (or couple) who do not agree to our rules or is rude or not respectful of me, then we will not go any further with them. (Gina)

The women were then asked why they thought that some people might view swinging as degrading to women. The most common response was that people do not truly understand swinging.

I think because they are just looking at the surface of it. Men and women have sex with people they are not married to. Perhaps we have grown so accustomed to seeing people who are in unhealthy relationships bickering and arguing, hurting one another, relationships with so little emotional intimacy, they can't understand how it would be possible to "share" with others. Aren't we supposed to keep our spouse all to ourselves? Lock them up and throw away the key for fear that they would run away if given the choice? Somewhere along the line they've been told it's bad and wrong and sinful to have sexual freedom, that sexual freedom means there is lack of love. This frustrates me because nothing could be further from the truth. What we do and the emotional risks we take seem so completely backward to them. You might as well tell them that the moon is actually the sun and the sun is the moon. To believe that it is degrading to have sex with other people means that one would have to believe that we are each owned by the other person. It’s true that we each have the privilege of “respectfully requesting,” but we do not
own each other. So, if we really want to take a good, hard look at just whose views are degrading to women, I’d have to say that our accusers should take a look in the mirror. (Emma)

The women were asked if they felt that female swingers were objectified or seen as sexual objects in the swinging environment. Their responses were split down the middle. Eight of the women stated they did not think women were viewed as sexual objects in the swinging environment.

No. Being objectified implies that it is a negative when it’s not. Everyone involved sees you as a person first and a sexual object second. (Meg)

I don’t think they typically are. However, there are some women where that is their desire. (Katie)

No, they’re not. Anyone who so disrespects a woman as to treat her like a piece of meat is going to find himself, at the very least, a lonely boy all evening. At worst, he’ll find himself out on the curb trying to stave off a bloody nose. The woman he’s treating like a piece of meat is, most often, another man’s wife. She’s nobody’s whore, and they’d better get that through their heads. Women are treated like ladies, and they call the shots. (Emma)

The other eight women stated they did feel that women may be viewed as sexual objects in the swinging environment. However, seven of the respondents did not feel that this was necessarily a bad thing.

Yes, and I love it! I want to be seen as a sexual object. I mean, come on. Most men want to please the women. I can’t tell you how many of my playmates have told me, “It’s all about the woman.” (Lori)

I am a whole person and, when swinging, I am a sexual object. But later, I am a thinker and a reader, and traveler and administrator, and artist and step-parent and so forth. Being an object for a short time is fine with me as long as he is focused on his object. (Hester)

Sexual objects? Since when is that bad? Someone decided that this noun had negative connotations. That is literary hijacking. (Abby)

Yes, some men will look at swinging women as sexual objects or sex toys, but that is true in the nonswinging world also. There are men out there, whether
they are swinging or not, that use women that just want to get laid. Everyone has or knows someone that has been used for sex. (Gina)

Only one woman felt that being viewed as a sexual object was a negative point.

Yes, I get the messages all the time, mainly from single guys about what a great “ass” or “tits” or other part of my anatomy that I have. They do not see me as a person but only see me as a sexual object for them. (Betty)

In relation to how women were viewed in the Lifestyle, the women were asked if they thought female swingers felt the pressure to the same extent as other women in society to be thin, pretty, etc. Again, the responses were split evenly. Seven of the women stated they did think swingers felt the same pressures as other women in society to look a certain way physically.

I think at first, yes. But I am a BBW [big busted woman], size 18, and I was so surprised at the acceptance level in the group. People are much more open and kind and friendly in the Lifestyle. But yes, we desire the same as any other women inundated by societal mass marketing made to make us believe we need to be/look a certain way. (Catherine)

Yes, perhaps even more so. Women in society that are in relationships have another person who loves them for who they are hopefully, regardless of what they look like. When you swing, you have to be appealing to people who don’t necessarily love you. I know that I lost some weight for the purpose of being more “marketable.” (Meg)

Eight of the women, however, stated they did not think women in the Lifestyle felt the same pressure as other women in society to fit into a certain physical mold.

All women want to be pretty, all over the world and in every culture. It is a biological imperative to be seen as attractive and acceptable. The adjective “pretty” means different things to different people, but I would say that swinging has nothing to do with that. We all want to be pretty no matter what we are doing. If you are referring to the physical characteristics that are required to be a model, then a resounding NO would be my answer. There is someone for everyone in the world of swinging regardless of age, weight, or appearance. (Abby)

There is some pressure I think but I find more women within the Lifestyle who are accepting of their own personal “package” and much more comfortable with their
bodies. But no matter your size, I do think there is a pretty high level of expectation to be extremely well-groomed (hair, nails, pedicures, make-up, tan) and fairly well-dressed (both streetwear and slutwear), especially for those who are way into the club scene. (Nancy)

For the most part, people in the Lifestyle are more accepting of women who might not be very thin. I am a BBW; and when I go to the club, I never feel like people are looking down on me because I am a larger woman. But walking in the mall I do get the feeling that people are looking down on me. (Felicia)

One participant felt that both women in the Lifestyle and in general society felt the same amount of pressure to look physically appealing.

No more than we do just living a “vanilla” life. In the Lifestyle is the same mix as in society, every shape and size. And you find the same thing, that the men tend to flock around the thin, pretty ladies. But then again, the bisexual women also find the thin, pretty ladies more attractive. (Dana)

With that being said, the participants were asked if there would be any types of women that would not be accepted in the swinging environment. Again, the responses were split down the middle. Seven of the women stated that there were some types of women that would not be welcomed in the Lifestyle.

Well, you have your types that the rest of us won’t go near: if they’re unclean or interested in things the rest of us find gross. One lady messaged me an AOL the other day, and it came out that she was interested in canine activity. I didn’t even reply, just put her right on my “ignore” list. Most of us stay away from the “bedpost notchers” too. We’re not interested in being someone’s nine-millionth quest. We’re interested in friendships with benefits. (Dana)

High pressure women and just plan mean women aren’t well accepted. (Pat)

Yes, overly aggressive women, who might cast the wife aside and play up only to the husband, even if she’s straight. Face it, if [Ethan] is going to play with a woman, I have to like her as well....A woman who seems like she has ulterior motives would be a no-no as well....One that seemed too man-needy, like she might attempt to contact [Ethan] separately. But those all go back to the respect issues that are paramount in the Lifestyle. Another type would be a woman who is disrespectful to her own husband. If she seems bitchy with him, I don’t want her near my man, or me for that matter. Again, respect. (Isabella)
Seven other women reported that there would not be any types of women not accepting in swinging.

I have seen everything: Race, age, physical anomalies, scars, size. (Hester)

If you are talking about body types, then no. Almost every body type can find someone who will play with them. If you mean personality type, then selfish women don’t do well in the Lifestyle. The woman who thinks that everything should be done for her and not give back to her partner will not do well in the Lifestyle. (Felicia)

None. There is someone for everyone. Just because I may not be one person’s ideal doesn’t mean I’m not for another. It really surprised me. (Catherine)

Nancy felt that it depended on the environment as to whether certain female swingers were openly accepted:

I think anybody can swing because there’s somebody looking for what you’ve got. However, in the club and house party environment, there does seem to be an overriding theme that you can’t be too unattractive or too big. Otherwise, you’ll be pretty lonely. (Nancy)

Gina did not have a view on this question. She stated she had not been involved in the Lifestyle long enough yet to form an opinion.

The women were then asked if anything would make swinging not enjoyable to a woman. The most common responses were being forced or doing it for their partners, being disrespected, feeling discomfort, and being with men who are too aggressive.

A few things would not make swinging enjoyable: If a woman is being pushed into doing something that she does not want to do; If a woman is doing this to make her partner happy and not doing it for herself. We call that “taking one for the team.” If a woman hooks up with a partner who does not respect her rules or boundaries would kill the fun. (Felicia)

Being “outed” by someone who didn’t understand what “discretion” meant. Being disrespected or taken for granted by your spouse. Swinging for the wrong reasons, such as boredom with the sex in the marriage, looking to replace one another, looking to prevent cheating, etc. (Emma)
If the woman did not want to do this, it certainly would not be enjoyable if you were just doing this to please your partner. (Katie)

Pushy swing partners. It's never cool to go in with a plan for what is okay and what is not then have someone pressuring you to do something else. (Meg)

I think it depends on the individual and how tolerant she is of others....An uncomfortable location, discomfort with the other couple for whatever reason, or fear of being discovered would also destroy the mood. (Abby)

**Individual Statements Related to Swinging**

A previous study by Charles Varni (1972) suggested that in order for a person to become a swinger, she had to let go of her current social meanings as she knows them and internalize the swinging role. Therefore, the women in the study were asked how they had overcome the cultural expectations of women in society, such as the stereotypes of how women are “supposed” to act. The most common response, given by four of the women, was that they had learned to be themselves.

I just try to be myself; and if people don’t care for me, then they don’t need to be around me. (Oggie)

Took time, a great healer, but have learned that life is short and just want to be myself and not be what others may have in mind for me as their “stereotype.” (Betty)

Other responses included reading a lot, embracing people, educating self, and pushing the limits.

I joined the Army. Seriously, it's an ongoing process. I read a lot, embrace differences in people, and I became a wiccan. I educated myself, and I learned how to defend myself with knowledge. Knowledge is power. (Catherine)

My father was a surgeon and a colonel in the Army, and I was supposed to act a certain way while growing up. He believed that things were either black or white, and I always wanted to, say, make out with boys and talked about it and just always step a little over the line. Now, I date men I meet online and fly off to places to meet them, date four or five at a time, and don't hide it. I think society
needs less apple pie and more of us “bad girl can I have some whipped cream on that” attitude. (Lori)

One of the women stated she does not defy the cultural expectations.

I feel like I need a refresher on the current cultural expectation for women. It’s constantly changing. I act like a woman. That’s what I am. Do I belch and scratch in public? No. Do I dress like a slut outside of the bedroom? No. I leave the house every morning reasonably dressed with an appropriate hairstyle and a classy amount of make-up. Swinging isn’t about overcoming cultural expectations. It’s about doing what YOU want. It has nothing to do with rebelling against the current cultural expectations. (Meg)

The women were then asked what advice they would give to a woman who was considering swinging. The most common response, given by almost half of the women in the study, was never to do anything that you didn’t want to do and to communicate with your partner.

Don’t let anyone talk you into it. This has to be your choice. Don’t do anything your uncomfortable with. Talk to your partner about everything. If you have no partner, BE CAREFUL! There are single/married men out there who will pretend to be part of a swinging couple to get you alone with them. (Meg)

Never do anything that you don’t want to do. Never agree to anything without considering all the ramifications of your actions and whether you are willing to accept the consequences and responsibilities. Learn to give up all your hang-ups and baggage. They’ll only ruin it for you. Teach yourself to listen to what your spouse is saying and vice versa. Don’t get pissed off if you don’t like what you hear. Communicate your love and trust. This is good advice for everyone, whether they swing or not. Swinging is not going to fix any problems you might have, especially sexual issues. (Abby)

In addition, the women were asked what advice they would give to a man who was considering swinging. Although many tips were given, the most frequently cited responses were not to push their spouses into swinging and to be respectful.

If wife or SO [significant other] says “no,” then don’t even think about pushing or doing it without her. If you aren’t fulfilling your wife sexually, then what makes
you think you can fulfill another woman? Patience, take it slow. Have standards. (Abby)

If the man is in a relationship, married or committed, don’t push your mate into swinging. If you talk to her and she does not want to go into the Lifestyle, don’t keep hounding her about it. Remember, the first rule in swinging is “no means no.” (Felicia)

Always, always, always be respectful of women, of other men, of couples and their relationships. Oh, and bring your own condoms! (Nancy)

Finally, the women were asked if they could say one thing to society about women who swing, what it would be. Many responses were given such as “don’t knock it until you’ve tried it,” “we’re not sluts,” and “it’s none of your business.” However, the most common responses given were “do not judge us,” and “we are like everyone else.”

That one shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. I suppose I have tried so many times, honestly, to argue my point to others on message boards and in chat rooms, but to no avail. You simply can’t change a mind that is closed or that doesn’t want to be changed. I particularly like this quote from a moderator from my usual swinger’s message board: “Swinging is a lot like riding a Harley. For those who understand, no explanation is necessary; for those who don’t, no explanation is possible.” (Emma)

Don’t judge me about what I do without understanding the Lifestyle. My husband did not push me into this. I did not start swinging because my husband could not satisfy me. My marriage is not in trouble. In fact, I can almost say that I have a stronger marriage than most vanilla marriages out there. And, just because it is not for you does not mean I should not do it. (Felicia)

We’re your mom and your daughter, your child’s teacher, or the hospital nurse. We’re your neighbor down the street or the gal sitting on the next pew at church. We buy things from you and sell you things. We’re empowered to enjoy our lives and embrace our sexuality. We’re everyday people with family, friends, and vanilla lives who just like a little spice on the side. (Nancy)

To the women in vanilla society: Give it a break. Everyone is different and likes things that you don’t like….For the men in vanilla society: I am a happily married woman. I love my husband and wouldn’t trade him for all the penises in the world, not even yours. I am not a whore, not a cheater. Can you say that about your wife?….For the politicians and priests: We don’t seek your approval or new legislation to accept our Lifestyle. We don’t want to file tax returns as a non-
profit organization. We practice safe sex just like the majority of people who are not undergoing fertility testing and artificial insemination in order to have babies. And we won’t produce unwanted children that the welfare system has to support now and the social security system has to support 65 years from now....For our parents and kids: We love you just like we always have....To anyone who will listen: We are happy! There, done! (Isabella)

Anonymity Concerns with Swinging

The women were asked three questions related to their anonymity concerns with being in the Lifestyle. Of the 16 respondents, 13 reported that it was a secret to most people outside the Lifestyle that they were swingers.

It is a secret as is all of my sexual doings. (Katie)

This is another major sore point with the antiswinging set: “If they’re so proud of what they do, why do they feel the need to hide it?” Well, it’s certainly not because we are ashamed. But just like most people don’t stand up on stage and describe, in detail, their sexual preferences, we just feel that what we choose to do with our sex life is no one’s business but our own. Plus, it’s quite obvious that our beliefs and practices would deeply offend some people and would cause some upset in our social circles....We wish we could be completely open about it with everyone, but out of respect for their comfort, we stay quiet about swinging. (Emma)

Three of the women stated that they are somewhat open to others about being swingers.

I am sort of half and half. There are some people in my neighborhood who know I am a swinger, but for the most part only close friends know. But we don’t go out of our way to hide it. We have face pictures on swinger sites. Even my step-mother knows. And if someone came out and asked me if I was a swinger, I am sure I would tell them the truth. (Felicia)

None of the women, however, reported that they were completely out in the open with everyone they knew about being a swinger.

The women were asked if they thought people in society would think less of them if they found out they were swingers, or if people who did know they were swingers treated them differently. Eight of the participants stated that they felt society would, in
fact, perceive them differently if it were known they were swingers or have treated them differently for being swingers.

Yes because they have been culturally taught that swinging is not an accepted practice in our society. (Dana)

My true friends have not changed how they treat me. However, we have lost friends because we are swingers. He just did not understand the Lifestyle, and accused me of some things that were not true. He has since tried to make amends, but it is a little too late. I have had a case where a vanilla man knew I was a swinger, and he wanted to cheat on his wife with me. He did not understand the difference between swinging and cheating. He kept saying that I was a swinger, so that meant I did any guy. Why not him? I am sure he would not have asked me to have sex with him if he had not known I was a swinger. In that case he thought, if a woman was a swinger, then she was a loose woman and wanted to have sex with any guy that came along. So, I think that is how society treats swinger women—that we are just loose women who will do any guy walking. (Felicia)

Four of the women felt that some people might treat them differently if they knew they were swingers, but not everyone.

Society, in general, I don’t think would give a damn. Family? There would definitely be some pockets of extreme difficulty with family. Some would come around; others would not. (Nancy)

There’d be a division on the two sides: one side would think it’s cool, and the other would think I’m going to hell. (Lori)

Pam felt that no one would think less of her but would definitely think differently of her.

Two of the participants stated that they did not feel anyone would think any less of them if it were known that they were members of the Lifestyle.

I don’t think so. I know that another person I’m friends with swings. I’m just not ready to tell him I do. And the people who do know, my mom and my best friend, don’t treat me any differently. My mom isn’t a “normal” mom. She’s pretty much cool with everything I do and is fascinated about the whys. And my best friend would love me if I ran up and down the street naked shouting that the redcoats were coming. She’s just cool like that. (Meg)

Only one participant did not have an opinion regarding this question.
Of the 16 women in the study, 12 reported that they had children and/or step-children. Four of the women stated that they did not have children. When the women were asked if they had told their children they were swingers or would tell their children if they had them, 10 of the women reported no, the children did not know, or they would not tell them if they had children.

I have a 17-year-old step-son who does not know about our sexual activities, and it is none of his business what we do behind closed doors. (Abby)

No children. But if I had kids, I would not tell them because it’s not appropriate info for children to have. I’m not a parent. I believe you tailor the answer to the question being asked and the age of the child asking it. I don’t see any problems being honest with teenagers as long as they have the foundation to process the information. And it would have to be a pretty specific question. (Nancy)

Five of the women stated that they possibly would tell their children that they were swingers but not until they were older and the children asked.

Yes [I have children ages] five and ten. Probably [will not tell them], not until they are older and able to understand that sex is something to be respected. I don’t want them thinking that it is okay to have sex with anyone they want. (Oggie)

No, don’t have children from our loins. We have four-legged, furry, spoiled children. I don’t think I would ever come right out and tell them if I had kids. But when they were at least, I want to say seventeen...I would admit it. We’ve been to a lot of clubs where the adult children help their parents run the dance. And hubby knows his father was a swinger when he was married (step-mom), and maybe still is after the divorce. But we’ve never talked about it with him. (Dana)

Only one participant stated that her children are aware that she is a swinger.

They’re 22 and 20, both girls. They said that as long as they don’t have to hear details about it and it makes me happy, that’s all that matters. (Lori)

Gender Issues in the Lifestyle

When analyzing the American culture, it is easy to see that men and women in our society are perceived differently: different roles, different standards, and different
stereotypes. But, do these same differences exist in subcultures of our society, such as the Lifestyle? The women in this study were asked a variety of questions related to specific gender issues in the Lifestyle. The women were first asked what they think is the woman’s role in swinging. The most frequent answer that tended to appear was simply, to have fun. However, other responses were often given simultaneously, as well.

In the couples I observe, I see the “leg work”—finding new potential playmates, correspondence, plan making—being done 75% of the time by women. Otherwise, in the playroom, I’d say our role is just to please and be pleased and have fun. (Nancy)

I think it goes two ways: You are there to have fun, but you also need to be giving others. (Oggie)

One participant stated she felt that it depended on the couple, while another respondent felt that women did not have a role in swinging.

[It] depends on the couple. Some couples, the woman “wears the pants.” Others, the boy is in charge. But on the whole, I think women are definitely more picky. Guys have a bigger “strike zone.” (Catherine)

I don’t think we have a role we have to play or live up to. We can do what we want with who we want or nothing at all. We know some women that go to the clubs who are not swingers but like to dress very sensual and not have any trouble come of it. (Dana)

The women were then asked what they thought the man’s role was in swinging. The two most common responses were, like the women, to have fun but also to provide protection and safety for the women.

Make sure their significant others are safe. (Pat)

To have fun and be yourself. (Meg)

To protect me. (Gina)
Catherine stated again that she felt the man’s role depended on the couple, and Dana stated she did not feel that, like the women, men had a role they were to adhere to in swinging.

The participants were asked if they felt that female swingers have any different issues to consider when swinging than the men do. Thirteen of the women reported that they do. Eight of the women stated they had to consider potential pregnancy, while four of the women reported safety as a different concern for the women than for the men. Other responses included the human pappiloma virus, menstruation, cleanliness, and penis size that might cause pain.

Well, a woman can get pregnant. I would hate to explain that, especially if her partner has had a vasectomy or is of a different rate than her partner. Women always have to plan around “aunt Flow’s” monthly visit. (Gina)

Yes, pregnancy and security issues. (Jan)

Definitely, pregnancy and periods. You lose the ability to automatically say, “My baby definitely without a doubt belongs to my partner.” And periods, they suck. Men don’t have to worry about that. We have to be concerned about contracting HPV and, of course, other STDs. There is the question of possible pregnancy, as well. (Pat)

Two of the women, however, stated that they did not feel that female swingers had any different issues to consider when swinging than the men did.

No, men and women have equally as much to gain or lose by swinging. Men and women tend to think differently and, therefore, it is more common for men to be the initiators and for women to be more reluctant or cautious. This could be due to any number of factors. There’s a saying in swinging that men get women into the Lifestyle, but it’s the women who keep the couple in it. The only issue that I can think of that might be of more concern to women is physical safety. (Emma)

One participant felt that it depended on the relationship as to whether or not women had different concerns than men to consider in swinging:
[It] depends on the type or relationship they are in or if they are single. The issues are the same for couples, but a single woman only answers to herself. (Abby)

Past research has found that male homosexuality in the Lifestyle was very uncommon while women participating in sexual activities with other women occurred more frequently and was often encouraged (Bartell 1970; Gilmartin 1975; O’Neill and O’Neill 1970; Palson and Palson 1972). The women in this study were asked if they found that lesbianism or female bisexuality was more accepted in the swinging environment than male homosexuality. The women unanimously stated they found this statement to be true. Women having sexual contact with other women was more accepted than men having sexual contact with other men.

This is true! Most couples are a straight male and bi-female, and the bi-females out there are very popular. Male homosexuality or bisexuality is still not widely accepted. Go figure. (Dana)

I think it’s true. A large majority of men wants to see their woman messing around with another one. As [Ken] says, “One is good; two is better.” But male homosexuality is still not acceptable with a large part of the society, swingers included. I never understood that. A man will have anal sex with his wife; then he will say men should not have anal sex with other men? It’s just people who have double standards. (Meg)

I think we, as a society, still have problems with bisexual men and gay men more than we do bisexual or gay women, and it carries over into the swinging world, too. (Katie)

The women in the study were then asked if the gender stereotypes were the same for men and women in the swinging environment as they are in society. Seven of the women stated that they did not feel the stereotypes were the same for men and women in the Lifestyle as they are in normal society.

They are different. Women control the swinging much more than they control the regular society. (Jan)
No, swinging allows women to be the unmeek sexual aggressors that society says they should not be. It also means that there are probably a lot of men who are in a room with another hard penis. Most nonswinging men that I know find that to be an uncomfortable situation. Swinging men just take it as commonplace. (Meg)

Yet, five of the women felt that the stereotypes were the same for women and men in swinging as they are in normal society.

Most women do not like to watch two men. I think it is fine. That is too big of a question for me. But I would say yes more than not. (Hester)

Yes they are. The men tend to be "dogs," and the ladies are emotional and need to feel the love and be assured. You have your men that are all octopus hands and grabby, and that's a huge turnoff, and they're just dogs. Man sluts! (Dana)

One of the participants felt that it depended on the stereotypes and environment.

It depends on which stereotypes you are referring to and what swinging environment we are talking about. (Abby)

Three of the women, however, did not have an opinion on this question and chose not to respond to it.

The women were asked what, if any, the gender stereotypes were for women in the Lifestyle. The two most common responses given were that the women in swinging were all considered "sluts" or "bisexual."

Because we are women who like sex, women who like sex equals slut equals stereotype. I could elaborate further, but you get the whole empowered woman thing. That is why. (Catherine)

The Lifestyle woman is seen in society by some as cheap, wanton, a slut, willing to lift her skirt and embarrass her husband at the drop of a dime. A prostitute that doesn't charge. (Isabella)

They are all bisexual. (Katie)

One woman pointed out that people usually stereotype female swingers to have flawless bodies.
[Society thinks] that we all have perfect bodies. We do not. We come in all shapes and sizes and from all backgrounds of intellect. (Betty)

Two of the women felt that there were no typical stereotypes for women in the Lifestyle, and three of the women, again, did not have an opinion on this topic.

In our society, men are usually considered to be more sexually aggressive than women. One previous study, however, found women in the Lifestyle to be aggressive and experimental (O’Neill and O’Neill 1970). Therefore, the women in this study were asked if they felt that in society men were considered more sexually aggressive. Subsequently they were asked if this perception were true in the swinging environment.

Overwhelmingly, fifteen of the women reported that they felt this perception was true in society, and one female swinger stated she thought that it would depend on the man. On the other hand, none of the women felt that men were considered more aggressive in the swinging environment. Eight of the women found that this statement was not true at all, while one participants stated that it can be at times. Five of the women, however, felt that in the swinging environment, aggression was equal between the males and females.

I think that this is still the case in society in general, except that the modern woman now feels the need to be more assertive than in the past, both in business and socially. I think that society has allowed men to be more sexually aggressive—the hunters, you know. In the Lifestyle I think that men are less aggressive than in society in general. Look at a vanilla club. The men have to be macho, sometimes pestering a single female or group of them until the females have to be rude....In a Lifestyle club...the men know the rules: no means no. They don’t have to be more sexually aggressive than the next guy to go home with someone. (Isabella)

It is true in society, but thanks to what I call the Britney Spears factor, I think the tide is turning. Many women in the Lifestyle are very sexually aggressive. Some women have met my husband and taken him to a room less than five minutes later! (Pat)
Yes, men are more sexually aggressive in regular society but not in the swinging environment. Women in the swing lifestyle do not follow the typical perceptions. They are usually more aggressive about what they want and usually go for it. (Jan)

Again, it depends on the area, depends on the man. They have testosterone and, yes, they want sex all the time. That is considered aggressive, I guess. I would say it is equal ground in swinging, but some men are stupid and go into it thinking right on, free game. They learn soon enough that is not the case. (Catherine)

I think there is that pressure for men to lead in sexual activities, but as time goes by men and women are being more equal. (Hester)

Personal Views on Swinging

Very few, if any, previous research has ever focused on obtaining the female swinger's perspective alone on the Lifestyle. Therefore, the women were asked a variety of questions that dealt solely with the personal opinions and experiences in the Lifestyle.

The women were first asked what they considered their favorite types of swinging environments and why. The most frequent responses given were their favorite clubs, house parties, and what they called “meet and greets” at “vanilla” bars.

House parties. Participants are all known to be players and fun, and the better the hosts are, the better the party will be. Better means classy, smart, educated, interesting, low drama. (Hester)

Clubs and intimate get togethers. Clubs for the variety, and the intimate get togethers for the close friendships. (Jan)

As for the public scene, I like the meet and greets in vanilla bars. These are “dangerous fun,” be a little bad in public but still maintain some decorum. It’s fun seeing the approving looks on the faces of vanilla husbands and the scowls and “tsk-tsks” of their wives, not to mention the bartenders! (Isabella)

Other responses included their own bed, own home, online, and hotels.
The women were asked what was their most enjoyable and least favorable aspect or part of swinging. The women most frequently reported that meeting new people was the most enjoyable part of swinging.

The most enjoyable part is meeting a wide variety of people, engaging in meaningful conversation, and then getting to fuck them. It’s fun and pleasurable! (Nancy)

[The most enjoyable part is] meeting new, neat people. (Hester)

[The] most enjoyable [part is] meeting with or without having sex with them. Just the social interaction with like-minded people always spurs great conversation. (Isabella)

The women reported a greater variety of least favorable aspects of swinging. However, the most commonly sited responses were finding couples that they liked, getting turned down, and having to reject other people.

Rejection is never fun. (Felicia)

For me, with my tendency towards shyness, my least favorite is finding a way to approach someone to let them know I’m interested and doing it in a way that if the feelings aren’t returned, I don’t get my feelings hurt. (Dana)

The least favorable aspect is finding the right people. It’s tough. It’s hard for two people to click and get together. Imagine trying it with four people. (Meg)

[The] least enjoyable [is] getting 50 to 75 emails a week where I have to reply, “Thank you for taking the time to write today. However, I’m not interested. All the best in your quest.” Dealing with the idiots and assholes; although I guess if all of them were attractive, smart, and funny, I’d never have any time to eat, sleep, or make a living. (Nancy)

When the women were asked what aspect of the Lifestyle they might like to change, the most common responses included society’s perception, less drama, jealousy, and “nothing.”
I would tell people to relax and not treat it so much like high school. There is an incredible amount of drama between couples and within couples for some reason. (Pat)

I like things the way they currently are. (Jan)

The only thing I would change isn’t about the Lifestyle itself. It’s about society, about our acceptance in a neighborhood without being harassed by the police. We’re full-grown, consenting adults doing our own thing in private behind closed doors, and that should be that. (Dana)

Dana was then asked if the police frequently harassed her. She made this reply:

We were at a dance once that was busted by a whole squad of police in full riot gear swinging their batons on the palms of their hands to intimidate, and it was an awful experience. Other than that, we were harassed the other day as we were leaving, “What are you doing here? How do I get in? Let me see you license? Where are you going now?” (Dana)

When Dana was asked why she felt that the police target swingers, she responded with this statement:

Well, the bust was at a place that served beer without a liquor license. He had been warned by the city repeatedly. That was really the owners fault. But Fox 2 News was in there undercover with hidden cameras, and they showed footage on the news without consent, including AOL chat in our chatroom and private messages showing screen names. Shortly thereafter was the big bust at the dance. We weren’t wanted in the neighborhood. But then again, a popular “bath house” in Detroit has a lot of police in there as clients. (Dana)

Dana went on to state how the Fox 2 News retrieved various swingers’ chatroom messages and screen names:

They pretended to be couples interested in joining the Lifestyle and asked all sorts of questions. It’s made it harder for “newbees” because people are always suspicious now of answering a lot of questions. It made people nervous. (Dana)

Dana’s reflection of how the news station gathered personal information on the swingers through deception could shed some insight as to why stigmatized subcultures, such as swingers, may be reluctant to participate in studies such as this one.
Thirteen of the sixteen participants in this study reported that most of their swinging experiences had been positive, however.

All of our swinging has been positive, and almost all of the people I have met so far have been wonderful. (Meg)

Overwhelmingly positive, which I believe is due to two things: I have the right attitude because I did my research and due diligence and decided early on “why” I was swinging; and I have a very strenuous selection process. Only two times have things gotten to the face-to-face meeting point, and I’ve not wanted to have sex with the other person/people. (Nancy)

Most [of the swinging experiences have been] very positive. We have gotten to know some very nice couples and women, as we take our time to do so. So, it has been very positive for me. My closest female friends are other women who swing. (Betty)

Two women stated that most of their swinging experiences were partly positive and partly negative.

[It’s] about 50/50. The thing is we realized that any bad experiences we had were either our own fault or the fault of other people who were similarly unprepared. Shit happens. To be successful you have to stop thinking in terms of good and bad experiences, and just deal with stuff as it comes up. You learn. You progress. You grow. Some people, I’ve heard, have real horror stories about stalkers and crazy ex-spouses, losing their jobs because someone with a chip on their shoulder got wind of their activities. Even being drugged and raped. These are genuinely bad experiences, and, thankfully, we’ve never had any. (Emma)

Gina, who has not yet had her first, full swinging experience, was unable to comment on this question.

Finally, the women were asked why they felt they continued to swing. Again, the reasons were abundant. However, the two most commonly cited reasons why the women in this study continue to participate in swinging were meeting and making friends great, like-minded people, and because it is fun.

Love it! Love the variety of sex. Love to meet new people. [It] keeps me feeling young. Have made great friends, and love the experiences that I have had. (Betty)
It’s fun. (Katie)

Because I can, and it’s fun. (Nancy)

Because it’s satisfying. And once you get in, you find out that there are tons of people out there with the same mindset as yourself. It’s comforting. (Meg)

Other reasons listed were that they enjoyed it, loved the variety, and had good sex and experiences.

One woman, however, is not currently an active participant in the Lifestyle. The following statement was her response about being involved in the Lifestyle:

Right now we don’t [swing]. We’ve gone back to being monogamous and have happily been so for the last two and a half years. I’ve heard it alleged that once you’ve “gone swinger,” you’ll never be able to go back to monogamy again because you’ll get bored with your spouse. I can say with conviction that this is patently untrue. Do we miss it? Do we still want to do it? Sure we do! We both miss it a lot, but we miss it about the same as that really great car that you had when you first got married, then had to sell so you could add a nursery to the house. We’ll get back at it again in due time. It feels a bit like going on vacation, or dumping all your “adult” worries at the house and at work, going to a cottage, and running straight down to the lake to jump off the end of the dock screaming, “Yahoo!” Yup, it’s about like that. (Emma)

Personal Opinions on Other Sexually-Related Issues

Throughout the interviews the women consistently reported that they did not feel as if they were degraded in any way in the swinging lifestyle. Therefore, the women were asked their opinions on other sexual groups as to whether or not they felt the women in these subcultures were being degraded. First, the women in the study were asked if they felt that pornography was degrading to women. Nine of the women reported that they did not feel pornography degraded women.

No, there are men in pornography too. No one complains that they are degraded. (Pat)
No, I don't think pornography or prostitution is degrading to women. It goes back to what I've been saying all night. It's about choice. I've done porn, and I've worked as an escort, and I've been there because I wanted to be and have never felt bad about myself. (Lori)

Six of the respondents, however, felt that some of it could be degrading. It depended on the type of porn that was being portrayed, and whether the women were doing it because they wanted to do porn.

Not in general, I don't feel that way. Those women may not have great self-esteem, but for the most part they are making good money for what they do. I am basing my opinion on the standard porn and not the hard-core fetish porn that is out there. Some of the hard-core fetish porn is degrading to women, but the general population does not see that stuff. (Felicia)

No, not unless it is violent pornography. There are certainly scenes that are degrading like smacking of face, ejaculating on face, and extreme pulling of hair. (Katie)

As long as the woman being depicted is engaging in the activity of her own free will, I don't see the problem. If it is designed specifically to be violent or demeaning or humiliating for either men or women, I would have to say I have a problems with that....If it's used in a mature and responsible way, there's absolutely nothing wrong with porn. (Emma)

Some is, as the women posing are doing it for money for the most part. Most of it that I have seen is totally boring. (Betty)

The women were next asked if they felt that prostitution was degrading to women. Eight of the respondents stated that they did not feel prostitution was degrading to women.

No! Athletes and models sell their bodies. Why shouldn't a vagina be a commodity? It certainly has been used as a bargaining tool for millennia. (Abby)

No, if they are good enough to make money at it, more power to them. I think it is a choice. If they want to do it, fine. I would not. (Gina)

Three of the women, however, felt that prostitution was degrading to women.
Yes, but I guess some of those women in porn could be considered prostitutes. Getting paid to have sex on camera? But then the guys are getting paid, too. So that’s different. So, ok, yes on prostitution, no on porn. Whew! (Catherine)

Yes, I feel that most women are into it because of drugs, which is very sad. (Oggie)

Five of the women in the study, however, felt that different issues determined whether they felt prostitution was or was not degrading to women.

Like everything, there are all levels of prostitution. And really, the views from the levels involve economic status more than the fact that someone is trading sex for money. The woman who sells her body for crack is going to be and, perhaps, feel more degraded than the courtesan who travels to exotic places with rich men. (Nancy)

Yes and no. It should be legalized. It would be less degrading if legalized as it is in other countries and in parts of Nevada. Illegal prostitution makes it seem degrading. Some women enter prostitution for money for drug habits, etc. Legal prostitution would eliminate some of the degrading aspects of it. Make something illegal, and it is seen as immoral. (Betty)

The participants in the study were then asked what types of things they personally feel to be degrading to women. The list of responses, again, was enormous. Two of the most repeated responses related to unequal wages between men and women and beatings and abuse to women.

The saddest things I have ever seen are things that women do to themselves because they simply do not expect anything better for or from themselves. There are obvious things such as rape and physical abuse that are degrading to women. Also, such things as verbal and psychological torture. Expecting less of a woman based on nothing more than the fact that they lack a penis. But the thing is, I’ve gotten quite used to seeing men and women no longer as men or as women, but simply as people. The world doesn’t owe woman anything. Shit happens. It sucks that some men think so poorly of women, and it also sucks that they are physically bigger than we are and, thus, able to impose their will on us that much more easily. Does it make me angry? Hell yes! I am furious that I can’t do something as simple as take a walk alone at night to enjoy the night air without worrying at every moment that I could be attacked by an unseen assailant. But it’s pointless to take it personally. I just feel bad that these people have to live within the world that they’ve created for themselves. (Emma)
Being forced to be anything they do not wish to be or do. Working for unequal wages as a man doing the same job is degrading (Betty)

The biggest thing I find degrading to women is unequal pay for equal work. (Nancy)

Other responses included sexual degradation acts (such as master/slave sex acts and sex that involves bodily functions), oppressed women, media’s depiction of the need to be skinny, treating women as fools on television, and anything that decreases their sense of self.

Personal Information

The last section of the interview involved personal questions that related to the women’s backgrounds. The participants were asked what their childhoods were like.

Twelve of the women reported having good family upbringings.

[My] parents were divorced when I was 10. We were in the upper-middle-class with dad being a surgeon and in the Army. I took every kind of lesson imaginable when I was young. We visited my dad and stepmother wherever they were stationed overseas and lived with my mom and stepfather. (Lori)

Middle class upbringing with good parents who I could swear were swingers themselves. (Pat)

Normal, middle-class, post World War II, suburban New York. Two parents, four grandparents. No divorce in immediate family. Aunts, uncles, cousins—there were differences in family members but no great spats. Long time family friends, neighbors, religious, education, girl scouts, beach going, family fun, routines, sisters, playing, [and] lessons. Very fifties. (Hester)

Rural and bucolic, small town, all white high school. I think there were 61 people in my graduating class. Entrepreneurial, small-businessman dad and stay-at-home mom. Parents were fiscally conservative and socially liberal. Eldest of three children. Typical overachiever. AB student without cracking a book, involved in every possible extracurricular activity. Didn’t date much in high school but rather was the girl every boy discussed their girlfriend problems with. It wasn’t all smiley faces and roses though. Mother was/is bipolar since she was in college,
often hospitalized and away from home. Father was killed in a workplace accident when I was 23. Married and swayed from home. (Nancy)

The women were then asked whether they felt that their childhoods in any way influenced their decisions to become swingers. Nine of the women reported yes but in a positive way.

I'm pretty certain my parents were swingers, and they usually had porn magazines laying around. My dad was an artist for awhile and used the models in the pictures in some of his work. I think I was raised to be open-minded. So in that sense, I didn’t have any reason to look down upon swingers. (Pat)

Not sure if there is a direct correlation or not. I was always encouraged to be myself and to explore and learn and satisfy my curiosity….I think the freedom to be myself was the most important factor in my childhood that inspired the free-thinking spirit that I have now become. I suppose thanking my parents for these traits might not be so welcomed in this context, huh? (Isabella)

To the point that I was raised in a very open-minded home that encouraged individuality and freedom of expression, yes, I would say my upbringing played a positive part in my choices of today. (Nancy)

Three of the women stated that their upbringing did play a part in their becoming swingers but not because their childhoods influenced them positively:

My childhood was strict. I had a Catholic upbringing. Because I was controlled so much as a child, I decided to take control of my own life as an adult. (Jan)

It was kind of like being a preacher’s kid. All hell breaks loose when you get away from structure. (Lori)

The women in the study were asked if they had ever been sexually abused. Fourteen of the women reported that they had never been sexually abused. However, two of the women stated that they had, in fact, been through sexual abuse. One woman, however, did not care to elaborate on the experience.

Yes, I was raped when I was 17. We worked together at the Mall. I went over to his house for dinner. [That is where the rape occurred] (Lori)
When asked if being sexually abused played a part in the women becoming swingers, both of the participants reported that being sexually abused had no bearings on them becoming swingers as adults.

No, not at all. If anything, it would have kept me from becoming one. (Lori)

And for the last question, the women were asked if they felt safe in the swinging environment. All sixteen women unanimously reported that they do feel safe when swinging.

Yes, I trust myself, and I trust my husband. (Abby)

Relative to what? Dating as a single? I definitely feel much safer doing “tag-team dating” with my husband with other demographically similar, like-minded couples than I would as a single woman going to a “vanilla” bar and being hit on by immature sleazeballs who just want to screw you and brag to their buddies about it the next day. While it’s true that wierdos exist no matter where you go and the swinging lifestyle has its share of them for sure, you learn to pick out the crazies from the normal people pretty quickly. Plus, there’s two of you, and one watches out for the other.... You still may be wary. But generally speaking, there is more honesty, unapologetic bluntness, and decent, moral, thoughtful, intelligent, friendly people in the Lifestyle than any straight bar we’ve ever been to. (Emma)

Yes. I always have [Ken] to back me up. I haven’t had a negative experience. Maybe if I do, my thoughts will change. Everyone I’ve met has shown me that they are people too. They have families, hobbies, lives outside of swinging. It’s hard to feel threatened by a cute couple with a five-year-old son and a puppy. (Meg)
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Since the 1970s research on the subculture of swinging has been limited. Much of the research that was conducted in the past twenty years or more is now considered inaccurate and outdated (Booth 1999a). Women who participated in swinging tended to be painted in a negative light, speculating that they were controlled by the men in swinging and that the Lifestyle was not geared toward gratification for the women (Long and Schwartz 1977).

In an effort to either confirm or dispel past findings and potential myths about women who swing as well as women in general, the purpose of this study was to examine the viewpoints and personal perspectives of women who participate in swinging. The study was intended to be a descriptive analysis of women who swing from the viewpoints of the female swingers themselves. Therefore, using feminist standpoint theory and pro-sex feminist theory as the theoretical framework, this study has shown that many of the findings from past research may not be accurate in relation to today's female swingers.

Feminist standpoint theory looks at sex and gender from the perspectives of women and other subordinate groups (West and Turner 2000). Through the use of feminist standpoint theory, I was able to gain insight into the concepts of sex and gender in the swinging subculture by examining the standpoints of women in the Lifestyle. This analysis enables society to better understand the attitudes and experiences of female
swingers through their own interpretations and perspectives. Pro-sex feminist theory supports the idea of allowing women to make their own decisions about their bodies (McElroy 1998), promoting women to explore their own sexuality and find gratification in sex (Yeager 1998). Therefore, by combining these two theories, it allows marginalized groups such as female swingers to share their standpoints about the decisions they choose to make with their bodies.

This study demonstrates that not only do women participate in the Lifestyle out of their own free will but seem to be the decision-makers within the Lifestyle. Furthermore, evidence is provided to support the idea that women, in general, are sexual, assertive creatures who can enjoy sex without the bonds of emotional attachments despite cultural indoctrination and ascribed roles.

Sixteen women who either currently are or have been involved in the Lifestyle participated in in-depth interviews via the Internet. The respondents were obtained by posting requests for participants on three swinger websites. The women were questioned regarding their opinions, feelings, and experiences related to the Lifestyle. Participants varied demographically in age, religious preferences, marital status, education level, employment status, and political affiliation. Participants resided in numerous regions across the U.S. in rural, urban, and suburban areas. The only variable that remained constant was race as all the participants reported being Caucasian.

Although the sample size was small (n=16), the responses provide a great amount of insight into the world of swinging for female participants. Qualitative studies are not meant to provide conclusive findings. Furthermore, due to the small sample size, it is not logical to conclusively make generalizations across space and time. However, this study
was the conclusion that women did not participate in swinging out of choice but instead to please their partners. The women in this study, however, overwhelmingly reported that their participation in the Lifestyle was not only voluntary but that the swinging environment was, for the most part, controlled by and geared toward women. Furthermore, they did not feel oppressed or degraded in swinging, as previous research had suggested, but rather empowered and respected. The women went on to say that one of the main reasons why these misconceptions exist about women who swing is simply because people do not understand the Lifestyle, not to mention the moral and religious indoctrination that our society adheres to regarding monogamy. Therefore, most of the women in this study choose to keep their involvement in swinging a secret from most other people due to the possible scrutiny they might face as a result.

Despite past findings in research from the 1970s, the women did not feel that sex was the main goal of swinging. They tended to feel that friendship with other like-minded couples were the primary goal of swinging with sex as an enjoyable biproduct. The most commonly reported universal rule among the women who swing was that "no means no," insisting that this rule must be adhered to at all times in the swinging environment.

Although it was reported that STDs were a concern in the swinging environment, most stated it was not a problem as they required the use of protection during sexual activities. There was no one gender that was unanimously reported as being responsible for providing the protection, but most responses tended to implicate both genders as responsible.
does enable the readers to gain further insight into the perceptions and experiences of women who swing and the subculture within which they participate. In addition, not only can knowledge be gained related to women who swing but a deeper understanding can be obtained of how women, as a whole, can overcome cultural expectations.

In this study one of the only findings that remained constant from the previous dated research seemed to be the demographic information as the majority of the participants fell into the white, middle-aged, middle-class column. Opinions did not seem to correlate with regions in which the participants lived. Women who lived in rural areas were likely to utilize the Internet to meet potential playmates. However, it did not seem they were more likely than any of the other women in the study to participate in swinging via the Internet. Most of the women reported being married and having children. But responses did not seem to differ based on this factor alone. Most of the women reported that they did not participate in swinging prior to marriage and, if currently married, participate in the Lifestyle as a couple.

The majority of the women in this study, however, did report being bisexual or at the least, bi-curious. Many of the ladies reported having these feelings prior to swinging, and some noted that being bi-curious was one of the motivating factors to swinging. However, this finding did not seem to be a separating factor in the women’s responses. Overall, the women’s responses did not seem to be based on their age, religion, education level, or other differing demographic characteristics.

Most of the women in this study were not introduced to swinging by their male partners as previous research has implicated. Rather, the women reported often being the instigators to joining the Lifestyle. One of the most debatable findings from past studies
Although many examples were given by the women in the study as to how swingers differ from nonswingers, it seemed to be agreeable that women swingers are more sexually open but not necessarily aggressive. Overall, swinging couples’ relationships may be better than nonswinging couples’ due to the increase in communication and eliminating the need for cheating.

This study provided support that women who swing feel that society, in general, often misperceives them as being sexually promiscuous due to lack of understanding of the Lifestyle, teachings, and religious indoctrination. Furthermore, this study provided evidence to refute past findings that swinging was a way of life. The findings in the research indicated that women swingers do not feel that the Lifestyle dominates their lives but rather is just a hobby.

All of the women in the study stated that they felt swinging had changed since the 1960s and 1970s, which was when most of the research on the Lifestyle was conducted. Half of the women reported that they still feel the same pressures to look physically appealing in the Lifestyle as other women do in general society but reported being able to overcome society’s expectations of how women should act by trying to be themselves. The women unanimously reported having stronger marriages and relationships with better communication than most “vanilla” couples partially due to swinging eliminating the need for cheating. Most of the women in the study reported not having jealousy issues because of the level of respect, trust, and communication that existed between themselves and their partners.

Most of the women did not report having bad childhoods or poor family cohesiveness as past studies had suggested, nor was past sexual abuse frequently reported.
Rather, most of the women reported traditional upbringings and good relationships with their families.

Although the expression “Lifestylers” has become the more modern term used to describe mate-swappers, half of the women in the study still prefer to be called “swingers.” Women in the Lifestyle see themselves, for the most part, more sexually aggressive and sexually open than nonswinging women. The women in this study felt that in society men are seen as more sexually aggressive but this does not hold true in swinging for the most part. Furthermore, female swingers feel that swingers have stronger marriages and better communication within their relationships than do nonswinging couples.

Specific roles are not prescribed for the genders in the Lifestyle as they seem to be in “vanilla” society. Other than to just have fun and be themselves, the women in swinging may take on the role of leadership in making the decisions regarding what couples they will swing with as women tend to be in control in the swinging environment. The men, on the other hand, may act as the guardians for the women by providing safety and protection while swinging. However, some of the different issues that women but not men have to consider when swinging are pregnancy, menstrual cycles, and safety.

Another finding from previous studies that seems to hold true in today’s more modern version of swinging is that male homosexuality is still not accepted in the swinging environment. However, female-on-female activity is widely seen. The women swingers seem to not only support a pro-sex feminist theory as it relates to swinging but also as it applies to pornography and prostitution, feeling that they, like swinging, are not degrading to women.
The findings from this study, although not conclusive, provide strong, contradictory evidence against past conclusions drawn from previous studies concerning women who swing. Based on the standpoints from the women who participated in this study, it is safe to assume that many of the findings from previous studies may now be outdated. But can it be determined that those findings were in fact inaccurate or even biased? Or could it be that swinging has evolved into this new loosely structured subculture now known as the Lifestyle?

Many of the common perceptions today about women who swing may actually be a far cry from the truth. Looking from the perspective of a pro-sex feminist standpoint theory, this study provides evidence for women, as a gender, that they can break away from the stereotypes and standards that society enforces upon them. They can explore a broader realm of themselves and their sexuality that society may deem as unacceptable by deciding for themselves what is right for them and their bodies.

Although women have advanced rapidly in our culture during the last century, the stereotypes still exist based on evidence from studies such as this one. The only way to dispel myths and misconceptions about taboo subgroups, such as women who swing, is to take the time to ask questions in an attempt to gain an understanding, the purpose of this study.

Future research in this area would be indicated and encouraged due to the contradiction of findings of previous studies in the 1970s. Obvious limitations to this study are the limited literature provided, the small sample size, and the use of only those participants who have access to and utilize the Internet. Therefore, future studies with larger, more varied samples are needed for a more thorough analysis of women who
swing. It would also be beneficial to conduct a future study involving in-depth interviews of the same nature with men who swing. It would also be beneficial to look at the evolution of swinging in determining how swinging as changed since the studies that were conducted in the 1970s. In preparing to do these interviews, it was commonly reported to the researcher by female swingers that their male counterparts were rarely questioned about their perspectives on the Lifestyle. A future study involving men who swing could further provide evidence to support or refute past research.

At this time the researcher wishes not to conclude this study at all but rather encourage others to continue in the drive to understand that which society has deemed unacceptable. We have only begun to break down the stereotypes and the walls that often divide the groups in our society. In closing, the researcher wishes to share an additional comment given by one of the participants in this study regarding monogamy, love, and the Lifestyle.

If a spouse could find someone attractive and could be with that person without hurting their spouse and especially if it actually turned their spouse on, they would do it! No one lives in a cave. We tend to be monogamous for our love, not because we want to be that way. Of course, that's not the case with every person, just the majority. Well as swingers, we get that and we give it. We get to be with who we want without hurting anyone; we give that to our spouse. And, in turn, it strengthens what we have between us. It's something shared that's very intimate and erotic and makes our own sex hotter! And now that we've had that, I couldn't imagine having it any other way! I don't think we are built to be with one person only for the rest of our lives. I think we're just like the other animals around us. It's just our intellect that says that we should be different; we should use our brains to control our basic instincts. And I think that's wrong, that holding back from really living. I do have to say that I live each day remembering that it could be my last or it could be my husband's last. A car accident, an accident at work, anything could end it all without notice. I want no regrets, no "what ifs," no "I should have or could haves." I want to do it all, but I want to do it all WITH the one I love. I think that if most people were told they will die in a month, or three months, or a specific number, they would change the way they live. I wouldn't have to! One lady had the best quote I've ever read. She swings alone with ladies,
with her hubby with couples, not at all with single men. She said, "A committed man is much easier to talk into swinging than a swinging man to talk into a commitment. What would I want with you?" (Dana)
APPENDIX A

ORIENTATION DOCUMENT

The purpose of this research project is to examine the experiences and attitudes of women who participate in the swinging lifestyle from the perspective of women swingers themselves. This project is being conducted in an effort to complete a Master’s Degree of Arts in Sociology.

Respondents will be asked a series of questions concerning this research topic via an Instant Messaging environment on the Internet. The participants will type out their responses to each question. All responses will then be printed from the computer. Although some of the questions may be viewed as personal, answering will not in any way affect the respondents’ reputations as confidentiality is protected by the researcher, Mindy S. Popplewell. Respondents’ identities will be known only to the researcher, and all real names and/or screen names will be replaced with pseudonyms at the completion of the data-collection process.

The content of the questions in the interview are very personal in nature. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours to complete. Participation is completely voluntary, and respondents may refuse to answer any particular question or discontinue participation at any time. By participating, respondents give the researcher the right to use any information in completion of her master’s thesis or for other publication purposes.
Although Instant Messaging services ensure the protection and privacy of their users as much as possible, subjects are still vulnerable to privacy invasions. Respondents should read their individual Instant Messaging service’s Privacy Policy. It is important that you understand these risks before participating in this online interview.

By participating in this interview, the respondents are agreeing to the following terms:

1. The respondent is a female swinger over 18 years of age
2. The respondent has read the Instant Messaging Privacy Policy and is aware of all potential risks involved with using Instant Messaging Services.
3. The respondent is aware that the information obtained during this will be used for the purposes of completing a master’s thesis.

The respondents may request further information by contacting any of the following people: Mindy Popplewell at (270) 566-4993 or via email at thesiswku@hotmail.com; Stephen Groce, Thesis Committee Chairman, at (270) 745-2920 or via email at steve.groce@wku.edu; or Dr. Phillip E. Myers, Director of Sponsored Programs, at (270) 745-4652 or via email at phillip.myers@wku.edu.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your religion?
5. What is your educational level?
6. What is your political affiliation?
7. Do you live in the north, south, east, or west region of the United States?
8. Do you live in an urban, suburban, or rural area?
9. Would you consider yourself to be straight, bisexual, bi-curious, or lesbian?

MARITAL/RELATIONSHIP INFORMATION:

1. Are you married? If so, how long?
2. If not married, are you in a relationship with anyone?
3. If married, did you swing before you were married? And if so, how long?
4. Has swinging affected your marriage or relationship? Explain.

ENTRE INTO THE LIFESTYLE:

1. How long have you been swinging?
2. How were you introduced to swinging?

3. Did you enjoy your first swinging experience? What was it like?

4. Do women generally enjoy their first swinging experience, or does it usually take time? Why?

5. Do you think that men mainly introduce women to swinging? Explain.

6. Are women usually reluctant to try swinging at first if introduced to it by their male partners? Why?

7. What were your reasons for getting into swinging?

8. Some people’s opinions are that when women first start swinging, it is about “pleasing the man.” Did you feel this way when you first started swinging? Why?

THE LIFESTYLE:

1. Do you swing alone or with a partner? Why?

2. If with a partner, how do you deal with the trust issue? Explain.

3. Are there any spoken or unspoken “rules” in swinging? If so, can you give some examples of each?

4. Are the rules for swinging different for women than for men? How would you explain the differences or similarities? Why do you think the rules are different or the same?

5. Do you, or you and your partner, have any rules when you swing? Could you please share some of these rules and why you have them?

6. Some people feel that swinging is wrong, immoral, or bad. Why do you feel people think this way about swinging?

7. Is sex the main focus or goal of swinging? Why or why not? And if not, what do you think the main goal of swinging is? Why?

ISSUES INVOLVED WITH SWINGING:
1. What types of swinging outlets do you use? (i.e., clubs, parties, conventions, etc.)

2. Why do you prefer these types of outlets? Explain.

3. Do you ever experience jealousy when swinging? If yes, how so? Can you please give an example or examples?

4. How do you deal with jealousy?

5. Are STDs a concern in the swinging community? Why or why not?

6. How do you personally deal with the issue of STDs?

7. Who is typically responsible for providing the protection? Why?

LIFESTYLERS VS. NONLIFESTYLERS:

1. Do you prefer to be called lifestylers or swingers?

2. How are women who swing similar to or different from women who do not swing? Can you please explain?

3. Are women swingers generally more or less sexually aggressive than women who do not swing? Explain.

4. Do you think women who swing are more sexually open than women who do not swing? Why or why not?

5. How would you compare a swinging couple’s relationship to a nonswinging couple’s relationship? Which relationships do you think are typically better? Explain.

WOMEN IN THE LIFESTYLE:

1. Are there any misconceptions about women who swing? If so, what are they?

2. Why do you feel that people have these misconceptions about women who swing? Explain.

3. What do you feel you gain as a woman by swinging? Please explain.
4. What are some of the most important factors for you to keep in perspective when swinging?

5. What do you think are the positive and negative aspects of being a female swinger? Why?

6. Do you think the woman’s place in swinging has changed since the 1960 and 1970s? If so, how and why?

7. How do you feel about some of the feminist thoughts that women who swing are degraded and used by men in swinging? Explain.

8. Why do you think that some people might view swinging as degrading to women?

9. Do you feel women in swinging are objectified or seen as sexual objects? Why or why not?

10. Do women who swing feel pressure to the same extent as other women in society to be thin, pretty, etc.? Why?

11. Are there any types of women who would not be accepted in the swinging environment? If so, what type?


13. How have you overcome the cultural expectations of women in society such as the stereotypes of how women are “supposed” to act?

14. What advice would you give to a woman considering swinging? Why?

15. What advice would you give to a man considering swinging? Why?

16. If you could say one thing to society about women who swing, what would it be and why?

**ANONYMITY CONCERNS WITH SWINGING:**

1. Are you open about being a swinger, or is it a secret identity to your normal life? Why are you or are you not open about it?

2. Do you think people in society would think less of you if they found out you were a swinger? Why? OR If they know, do you feel people treat you differently because you are a swinger? Why?
3. Do you have children? If yes, do they know that you swing? If you do not have children, would you tell them you are a swinger if you did have them? Why?

**GENDER ISSUES IN THE LIFESTYLE:**

1. What do you think is the woman’s role in swinging?

2. What do you think is the man’s role in swinging?

3. Do women have any different issues to consider when swinging than men do? Explain.

4. Which gender is most in control in the swinging environment? Why is this?

5. Are there times when it is necessary for one gender to have more control? Explain.

6. Some people think lesbianism is more accepted in swinging than male homosexuality? Have you found this statement to be true or false? Why?

7. Are the gender stereotypes for men and women the same in the swinging environment as they are in society? Explain.

8. What, if any, are the gender stereotypes for women in swinging?

9. Typically men are considered to be more sexually aggressive than women. Do you think this perception is true in society? What about in the swinging environment? Why or why not?

**PERSONAL VIEWS ON SWINGING:**

1. What is your favorite type of swinging environment? Why?

2. What is your most enjoyable and least favorable aspect or part of swinging? Why?

3. If you could change any aspect of “the lifestyle,” what would it be?

4. Have most of your swinging experiences been positive or negative? Explain.

5. Why do you think you continue to swing?
PERSONAL OPINIONS ON OTHER SEXUALLY-RELATED ISSUES:

1. Do you feel pornography is degrading to women? Why?
2. Do you feel prostitution is degrading to women? Why?
3. What type of things do you personally see as degrading to women and why?

PERSONAL INFORMATION:
The following 3 questions I am about to ask you are very personal in nature. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering the question, please let me know, and we will move on to another question. Thank you.

1. What was your childhood like? Explain.
2. Did this play a part in your becoming a swinger? How so?
3. Have you ever been sexually abused before? If possible, could you please explain?
4. Did this play a part in your becoming a swinger? If yes, how so?
5. Do you feel safe when swinging? Why or why not?
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARIES FOR PARTICIPANTS BY PSEUDONYMS

Abby

Abby is a 35-year-old Caucasian female swinger. Abby has been married for 3.5 years and lives in a small, rural town in the northern part of the U.S. She is currently a full-time student with two previous associate degrees but is now pursuing a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in geology and geophysics. She has a 17-year-old stepson but no biological children of her own. Abby has been swinging for approximately two months with her husband and did not swing prior to marriage. She considers herself to be “bi-curious,” insinuating that she is mainly attracted to males but has sexual interests in other females as well. Abby considers herself politically to be a “cynical independent” and agnostic in religious beliefs.

Betty

Betty is a 57-year-old Caucasian, bisexual, female swinger. She and her husband of 30 years currently live in an urban area in the western part of the U.S. Betty has some college education and currently works as an accountant. Betty’s religious faith is Catholic, and she considers herself to be a democrat politically. Betty and her husband have been participating in swinging for eight years, swinging both alone and as a couple. Betty did not participate in swinging before she was married. They have one adult
daughter, but Betty reports that they started swinging when her daughter was 14-years-old.

Catherine

Catherine is a 31-year-old Caucasian, female swinger who considers herself to be bisexual but “more on the straight side.” She has a high-school diploma with some college education and currently works as an administrative assistant/mortgage loan officer. She and her husband have been married for six years but have been together for eight years. Betty has been swinging for almost three years now and did not participate in swinging before she was married. Betty has three children, ages 15, 11, and 4. Betty and her husband swing mostly together as a couple but do sometimes swing alone but “only if the partner has set it up as part of role playing” called “missions.” Betty lives with her family in the suburbs in the western region of the U.S. She is of the Pagan/Wiccan faith and considers herself to be of the democrat political affiliation.

Dana

Dana is a 33-year-old Caucasian, bisexual, female swinger. Dana states she has been married since 1991 and did not start swinging until around 1997, after she and her husband had been married for several years. Dana has some college education and currently works as an administrative assistant. Dana and her husband swing together as a couple. She has no children. She and her husband live in what she considers to be the suburbs in the midwestern part of the U.S. Dana has no preference in religious or political affiliations.
Emma

Emma is a 31-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger. She and her husband have been married for 12 years, and she did not swing before she was married. She and her husband participated in the Lifestyle for 5.5 years but have been inactive for the last 2.5 years due to her husband’s career and “unrelated health issues.” Emma hopes to someday resume participation in the Lifestyle, however. Emma, her husband, and her two children (ages 9 and 11) live in the suburbs of the northern U.S. She currently has a college degree but plans to attend a university within the next year. She is now working in website management as a secretary. Emma states she considers herself to be “somewhat bisexual.” She states, “On the Kinsey scale, 1 being straight and 6 being lesbian, I’m about a 2.” However, Emma states her preference is for men. She is of the Protestant Christian religion and has no interest in politics.

Felicia

Felicia is a 43-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger. She is currently a stay-at-home mother of a teenage son. Felicia attended college for two years but did not graduate. She has been married for 23 years and did not participate in swinging before she was married. Felicia has been swinging for four years and only swings as a couple with her husband. Felicia and her family live in the suburbs in the eastern U.S. area. She is a Methodist by faith but states she does not attend church. She states she considers herself to be a democrat but has recently been leaning more toward the libertarian views. Felicia states sexually she is straight but has been labeled as a “lipstick bi, meaning that if I am attracted to a woman, I am not against a little playing with another woman in the
context of a threesome.” Felicia states, however, that she would never “play” with another female alone.

Gina

Gina is a 33-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger. Gina has been married for the last 10 years but reports they have been together for 12 years. Neither she nor her husband had participated in swinging prior to their marriage. Gina and her husband have just decided to enter the lifestyle of swinging but have not yet had their “first experience,” stating they are just meeting with other couples and getting to know them at this time. Gina states that she and her husband have discussed that she will only be able to swing alone with another female but all other swinging activities will be done together as a couple. Gina and her husband have one six-year-old son, and they reside in a rural area in the southeastern part of the U.S. Gina has some college education and is a small business owner as well as a registered nurse. She is of the Catholic religion and considers herself to be a republican politically. Although she has not been with another woman sexually yet, she considers herself to be bi-curious sexually.

Hester

Hester is a 62-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger who considers herself to be straight, although receptive to women. She has been married for the last two years and did not participate in swinging before she was in this relationship. She and her husband have been swinging together for the past three years and always swing as a couple. Hester has one stepdaughter, age 35, and one step granddaughter, age 16. Hester has a Master’s Degree in Fine Arts and works as an art administrator. She states she is of the
Jewish faith but is currently not practicing. She is mostly a democrat politically. She and her husband reside in an urban area in the northwest part of the U.S.

**Isabella**

Isabella is a 44-year-old Caucasian, bisexual, female swinger with stronger tendencies towards males. She has been married three times. Her first marriage lasted 13 years, and her second marriage lasted for six years. She has currently been married now for two years, but they have been together for 2.5 years. Isabella stated that she did participate in any swinging activities prior to ever being married. She reported that, when she was in high school, she had a “touchy, kissy, feely session” with one of her girlfriends and her best friend at the time, who is now a lesbian. She states she also engaged in some swinging activities with her first husband, as well. Isabella has been swinging with her current husband, Ethan, for 1.5 years now. Isabella swings only with her husband. She has a 24-year-old son and a 20-year-old daughter. Isabella is a nonpracticing Catholic and is a registered republican but states she “don’t do politics.” She has a two-year degree and “tons of nondegree credits” and currently works as an accountant. She and her husband live in the suburbs in the northeastern region of the U.S.

**Jan**

Jan is a 50-year-old, Caucasian, bisexual, female swinger. She has been married for the past 25 years and did not participate in swinging before she was married. Jan swings only with her husband, stating it is something they do together. Jan states she does have children. She has some college education and works part-time at a university bookstore. Although she reported that she grew up Catholic, she is not currently
practicing. She considers herself to be a democrat politically and lives in the southern part of the U.S. in the suburbs.

Katie

Katie is a 25-year-old, Caucasian, bi-curious, single, female swinger. Katie has not ever been married, and she is not currently in a relationship with anyone. She has been swinging for the last three years. Katie currently swings alone, but would be willing to swing with a partner if she found someone who was interested in the Lifestyle and a person that she could trust. Katie has no children at this time. She has a Master’s Degree in Social Work and works as a mental health counselor. She considers herself to be agnostic religiously and a liberal politically. She resides in the northern U.S. region in the suburbs.

Lori

Lori is a 48-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger who considers herself to be strictly straight sexually. She is not currently married but has been involved in a relationship for the past two weeks. She has been swinging for the last four years. Lori stated that, although she currently swings alone, she has swung together in the past with a partner and that she was planning to introduce her new boyfriend to the Lifestyle the following weekend. Lori has two daughters, ages 22 and 20. She has had some college education and works now as a nurse. Her political affiliation is democrat, and her religious preference is Episcopal. She currently lives in the suburbs in the eastern region of the U.S.
Meg

Meg is a 22-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger. She is not married but has been in a relationship with someone for the last three years. Meg has been participating in swinging for almost a year with her current boyfriend, Ken, and does not swing without him. She stated that she considers herself to be about 75% straight but is interested in being with women sexually, not emotionally. Meg is a college graduate and works as a corporate concierge. Her religious faith is Roman Catholic, and her political affiliation is democrat. Meg does not have any children. She lives in the suburbs in the midwestern region of the U.S.

Nancy

Nancy is a 41-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger. Nancy is currently divorced and is not in a monogamous relationship with anyone at this time. She did not participate in swinging before or during her marriage but rather started swinging after she became divorced. Nancy has been swinging now for 16 months. She started out swinging alone and currently swings alone although she participated with a partner for six months during this time period. Nancy does not have any children at this time. She has some college education and works in sales and marketing. Her religious affiliation is United Methodist, but she currently considers herself to be nonpracticing. Nancy reported that, when it comes to political matters, she is “middle of the road.” She reported sexually being “hedonistically bisexual.” Nancy currently lives in a small, rural town in the midwestern region of the U.S.
Oggie

Oggie is a 37-year-old, Caucasian, female swinger who considers herself to be “socially bisexual.” She has been married for the last 11 years and did not swing before she was married. Oggie has been participating in swinging for the last two years with her husband. Oggie reports having two children, ages five and ten. She has a high school diploma and is currently a stay-at-home mother. Her religious preference is Baptist, and politically she is a republican. She currently lives in a rural area in a centrally located area in the U.S.

Pat

Pat is a 40-year-old, Caucasian, bi-curious, female swinger. She has been married for the last six years. She did not participate in swinging before she was married and has been involved in the Lifestyle for approximately one year. Pat reports, however, that even though she is married and they both participate in the Lifestyle, she most often swings alone. Pat has two children, ages three and five. She is a college graduate and works part-time as an administrative assistant. Her religious preference is Episcopal and she considers herself to be a democrat politically. Pat currently lives in the suburbs in the northcentral region of the U.S.
References


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