

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY IN SWINGING

by

Felicia M. Brown

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Meredith Dye, Chair

Dr. Jackie Eller

Dr. Vicky MacLean

I'd like to dedicate this work to all the women that have ever felt they didn't have a voice, were shamed for their sexuality or body, or ever had an experience that made them feel that they weren't enough simply for existing as a woman. Hearing your everyday experiences is what motivated me to write about women's worlds.

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they will become a part of sociological studies, women's studies, deviance studies, and perhaps one day, the *herstory* of swinging.

ABSTRACT

For the first time in decades America is debating over marriage as an institution in combination with sexuality and the onslaught of what it means to people's identity (Adam 2003; Brandzel 2005; and Poirier 2008). Swinging combines traditional marriage with the nontraditional sex typically associated with casual dating. Women's historical redefinition of marriage makes swinging distinct enough to discover how women experience their sexuality in an environment that encourages sexual exploration while operating from a traditional framework that embraces family and emotional monogamy. I apply a social constructionist approach using the concept of sexual fluidity to explore women's navigation of their sexuality within swinging, and as such, gain an idea of their perceived empowerment through that process. I discuss the social construction of women's sexuality and swinging including the debates that arise in combination with their contribution to feminist theory, then I compare these to my interviewees' own words.

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time since the women's movement in the 1970s, America is debating the meaning of marriage as an institution on a large scale. At the center of the debate is the question of sexuality and the onslaught of what it means for people's civil rights and individual identities (Adam 2003; Brandzel 2005; and Poirier 2008). While the current debate focuses on same-sex marriage and gay rights, my research seeks to examine women's sexuality and sexual fluidity in the context of "swinging." What is academically most intriguing about swinging is its roots in traditional marriage while the nontraditional or socially deviant sexual behavior is typically associated (albeit still frowned upon) with casual dating (i.e., pre-marital sex and fornication). When mixed with an historical context that has treated women as commodities traded by men, swinging is a topic primed for study to parse out how women experience their sexuality in an environment that encourages sexual exploration that is not defined as adultery or cheating, but in a context that still embraces the notion of family and emotional monogamy. This study seeks to examine the following questions. (1) How do women experience their sexuality within the swinging lifestyle? (2) Do women experience/perceive swinging as exploitive or empowering? and (3) How are the rules for women within the swing club enacted?

To explore these research questions, I apply a social constructionist approach to the ideas of marriage, family, and sexuality. Using the framework of sexual fluidity rather than fixed identity, I explore women's sexuality as experienced in the swinging lifestyle. Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews, I asked questions related to how women entered into the swinging lifestyle, how they experienced themselves relative to their

interactions with both same and opposite sex partners, and if/how they exited the lifestyle. These questions were intended to flesh out whether women feel autonomy within swinging as well as if they feel the experience has allowed them to either explore or change their sexuality.

In the following pages, I provide an overview of the social construction of women's sexuality as well as the debates that arise from the competing views on sexuality. I also review the literature on swinging in order to establish why this context is an ideal avenue for exploring women's sexuality. Then, I outline the methods employed in the study along with characteristics of the study participants. This section is followed by a discussion of the findings. Last, my discussion and conclusion section summarizes the main themes regarding women's sexuality in swinging, how these findings compare with prior research and theory, and the limitations and directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

Historical and Theoretical Background on the Social Construction of Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality

Before the late nineteenth century, women in the United States were defined less as individuals and more as components of the unit that is a marriage and/or family; hence the lack of rights to own/inherit property, earn income outside of a husband's/male relative's business, and suffrage. As such, marriage was a procreative and economic partnership to ensure survival more than it was a means through which to experience emotional and moral support, as we have come to expect in modern day marriage. As a result, women were expected to form their closest emotional ties to other women (Smith-

Rosenberg 1975). However, were these relationships to become sexual, women were not viewed as “lesbians” because of their same-sex activities, nor were they viewed as “bisexual” because of their simultaneous partnerships with men, but as “women” because of their familial relationships with men and children (Rodríguez Rust 2000). It is this exclusionary labeling that renders female bisexuality invisible under the premise that anything that conflicts with idealized versions of masculinity and femininity cannot exist.

As noted by Rodríguez Rust (2000: 206):

The paradox lies in the fact that the same nineteenth-century beliefs in the mutual exclusivity of womanhood and manhood and in the inescapable importance of gender that produced concepts of gendered eroticism also produced the belief that sexual attraction must be directed towards *either* men or women. If one is attracted to a man, how can one simultaneously be attracted to a woman who is everything a man is not and nothing that he is?

This dichotomy has in turn, confused rather than clarified both sexuality and gender. In fact, masculinity and femininity as separate forms of ideological existence may have developed as a way to simplify the idea of gender and sexuality via conflation, yet in doing so, it managed to convolute the two (Butler 2011 and Diamond 2008).

The responsibility for distinguishing and theorizing on the two has fallen largely to feminist thought.

“One is not born a woman, but rather, becomes a woman” concluded Beauvoir (1973: 301), and with that, she began to examine the social construction of gender as a slowly developed identity rather than a biological assignment. In doing so, she built the foundation for Catherine A. Mackinnon’s *Sexuality* (1989) and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997). These works informed my research by providing a feminist lens to view social constructionism

and deviance as it relates to women, sexuality, and swinging. MacKinnon defines the feminist approach to sexuality as a theory that “treats sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender” (MacKinnon as quoted in Nicholson 1997: 159). In this work, she refutes the essentialist definition of sexuality as an innate and unconditioned drive divided along a biological line and centered on heterosexual intercourse. In doing so, she illustrates how compulsive heterosexuality as a common discourse can, and arguably does, directly contribute to women’s oppression at a macro level (MacKinnon 1989).

Historically, however, women have been portrayed as possessing fundamentally different traits from men in a strictly dichotomous way, especially when it comes to sexual objectification and the media (Holland, Romazanoglu, Sharpe, and Thomson 1998). Mulvey (1975) first coined the term “male gaze” within film. She surmised:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact... A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude (1975: 11-12).

Holland et.al. (1998) produced a similar terminology, but the term “male in the head” did not take root the same way as did “male gaze”. Nevertheless, they provided a more thorough connection to heteronormativity and its relationship to power and oppression:

...we can no longer see masculine and feminine as oppositional categories. Femininity is constructed from within heterosexuality and on male territory, yet this territory can only exist with female consent and collusion... Young men are not responding to the surveillance power of femininity; they are clearly living heterosexual masculine identities under a male gaze. Young women are living feminine identities, but in relation to a male audience—measuring themselves

through the gaze of the ‘male-in-the-head’... Men are routinely accessing male power over women, whether or not they know this, or want, or intend to exercise such power, but they are also constrained by the construction of adult heterosexuality as masculinity (10).

When we procure our definition of what it means to be feminine under the umbrella of masculine heterosexuality and even a pervasive compulsive heterosexuality (Rich 1980), we are relegating women’s sexuality to a narrow scope which other researchers (Diamond 2008) suggest may not be necessary.

In partial response to MacKinnon’s study, Butler (1997) critiques the tautology present when assuming that systematic sexual oppression is the root cause of global gender inequality, and points to the hypocrisy of denying women agency in the same way it is claimed men so frequently do (1990 and 1997). Furthermore, she discusses the problem of defining what it means to be a woman using a hegemonic heterosexual dichotomous approach that continues to ignore the temporal existence of an identity derivative of performance. According to Butler (2011:7):

...the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes.

Here, Butler suggests that we problematize the categorization of gender in the same way we problematize sexuality, particularly when we are examining women, because despite feminist efforts, existing as a woman who expects equitable treatment to men is considered deviant in respect to America’s current and historical environment.

Sexual Fluidity

One of the most cited studies on sexual fluidity was that of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* (1948 and 1953 respectively). Kinsey gathered the sexual histories of 18,000 people via structured interview surveys, and with that information devised a scale that measured sexual behavior and desire. The scale ranged from zero-six with zero being completely heterosexual and six being completely homosexual. His data clearly demonstrated that human sexuality exists on a continuum rather than within a binary. His findings also disputed the notion that sexual orientation was a fixed identity--most participants identified as heterosexual, yet, also fell somewhere between one and five on his scale (as summarized by Drucker 2010: 1106 and 2014: 112). Despite writing one of the first canonized studies concerning fluidity, Kinsey omitted African Americans completely; and while a little under 6,000 of his participants were female, he did not examine women's sexual fluidity specifically,

One of the researchers to address this omission was Joan Dixon (1984 and 1985) in her study of bisexual activity in swinging married women. Dixon conducted fifty interviews with the requirements that women were (1) at least thirty years old; (2) married; (3) enjoying sex with men; and (4) had no history prior to age 30 of a sexual attraction to females. Change in sexual orientation and activity, she concluded was primarily influenced by men. Movement from a heterosexual to bisexual identity was a shift that:

... involves a *broadening* of sexual interests and an *addition* of a gender which one finds acceptable as a sex partner. In this broadening and adding process, the

gender of one's previous sex-object preference may, and perhaps usually does, remain unaffected (Dixon 1984: 85).

This finding is important, as it provides the foundation for determining and defining sexual fluidity beyond behavior.

While Kinsey was crucial to bringing sexuality as a complex issue to the forefront of people's minds, and Dixon examined women's sexual behavior specifically it was Lisa Diamond (2008) who was one of the leading modern forces responsible not only for describing those experiences in a reflexive way, but theorizing and defining a new concept that had been hinted at, yet never fully explored. In Diamond's ten-year longitudinal study, she interviewed 89 women every two years to probe their experiences and interpretations of their own sexuality. She first defined sexual orientation as "a consistent, enduring pattern of sexual desire for individuals of the same sex, the other sex, or both sexes, regardless of whether this pattern of desire is manifested in sexual behavior" and distinguished it from sexual identity, which "refers to a culturally organized conception of the self, usually 'lesbian/gay,' 'bisexual,' or 'heterosexual'" (2008: 12). Using this framework, she boils down sexual fluidity as "situation-dependent flexibility in women's sexual responsiveness" (Diamond 2008: 3).

All too often "science" and public sentiment has worked under the assumptions that: 1) same-sex attraction is an outlier, an extreme deviation, or simply a sampling error; and 2) there is an end point of the developmental stage that dictates a woman's final sexual orientation with the implication that people are unchanging (Diamond 2008). However, when it is assumed that sexuality is purely situational, as is the commonly referenced jailhouse lesbian (Giallombardo 1966 and Rodriguez Rust 2000), we fail to

acknowledge the complexity of individuals as well as reconfirm the idea that one would only act in a homosexual way in certain settings, which could easily be applied to heterosexual behavior. Of course, this approach sparks a great deal of questions (e.g., Why bother creating this term in the first place?).

The reason studying women in sync with sexual fluidity is appropriate is because Diamond (2008) finds women display a more discontinuous pattern of same-sex sexuality than men, meaning they report more changes in sexual attractions and behaviors over time. Women are also more likely to report sexual behaviors or attractions that are inconsistent with their primary sexual orientation. A common theory for why this may happen is because women already suffer disenfranchisement simply from being a woman—that is, the problem of women being viewed as inferior is further exacerbated by the objectification of their bodies, both of which leads to an effort to control women's sexuality. It seems that women being more likely to report their same-sex attractions and behaviors may be due to the override of homosexual stigma by the sexual objectification of women's bodies, that they are too uncomfortable to claim full heterosexuality as suggested by Adrienne Rich's piece on compulsory heterosexuality (1980), or simply that women feel more empowered about their sexuality overall. On the flipside, are men simply underreporting their same-sex behavior due to the enhanced threat to masculinity that homosexuality poses? This may all be rooted in the turmoil that is identity politics.

Identity is an abstract idea that most people are familiar with, but for which few have a concrete definition. It is typically mentioned when it is perceived as negative, missing, or unstable (Lawler 2014). The true definition of identity lies in how one thinks about it, and can reference roles, identity categories, and “the more personal, ambivalent,

reflective and reflexive sense that people have of who they are” and how they all intersect (Lawler 2014: 7). Norbert Wiley (1994: 131) ascertains that “the politics of identity is the struggle over the qualities attributed, socially and institutionally, to individuals and grouping of individuals.” Most pertinent to this research are the politics of identity that manifest as a result of policing the boundaries of norm violation and stigma as it relates to women’s sexual behavior and sexual identity within what is considered a deviant context. People do not exist in a vacuum devoid of historical context and other human influences and thus, neither does identity. Identity is *always* political (Calhoun 1994 and Lawler 2014) and therefore must be addressed in the realm of sexuality.

Sexuality and Deviant Behavior

The social construction of women, sexuality, and swinging as a subculture, is also framed by the literature on deviance and stigma. Among sociologists, sexual deviance has been studied with the intent of understanding why it is considered deviant behavior, and how deviance is constructed (i.e., homosexuality, bisexuality, polygamy, swinging, fornication, pedophilia, sadism and masochism, incest, and sexual abuse) (Adler and Adler 2012; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Pfohl 1994; Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 1995). What is considered deviant in lay man’s terms is often what is labeled as “immoral” or “wrong” and is devoid of meaning without the context of time and place. Deviance is defined by Smith and Pollack (1976) as violations of the norms associated with sin, crime, and poor taste. Most sociologists, at least constructionists, define social deviance based on violations of social norms that result in a negative social reaction (Goode 2016). While swinging is not explicitly a crime, it is in direct violation of the Christian version of marriage as monogamous and heterosexual (Mueller 1995), lending

itself to the deadly sin of lust, a decision made in poor taste, and is accompanied by a negative social reaction (Fernandes 2012).

These negative social reactions result in stigma for those who are either known or have a potential to become known as swingers. Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* situates stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and reduces its bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (1963: 3). A social constructionist definition of stigma includes the following: "a characteristic of person that is contrary to the norm of a social unit" where a norm is defined as "a shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time" (Stafford and Scott 1986: 80-81). These definitions assume that being contrary to a norm(s) of society results in becoming discounted and that this in turn is negative to the person(s) experiencing such; furthermore, it focuses primarily on individuals as something that exists as an attribute rather than as a complex web of interactions between those with stigma and "normal" society. I will reference the definition by Link's and Phelan's (2001: 367), which incorporates these components:

Stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them." In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. Finally, stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination.

Essentially, stigma is the result of the violation of social norms and is subject to those that have the power to regulate the boundaries defining both the established norm and the

violation of such (Hendershott 2002). Nevertheless, it is up to the bearer of stigma to either resist/reject their stigmatized status “by forming subcultures or collectivities of persons who share their characteristic, and to treat their difference from the majority as a badge of honor” or internalize it by holding “the same negative feelings toward themselves and their disvalued trait as the majority does” (Goode 2016: 316). In the case of closeted swingers, internalization is suggested merely by their aversion to being identified. For others, immersion in the “lifestyle” is a way to manage stigma.

According to Goode (2016: 248) sexual deviance is defined by (1) The degree of consent; (2) The nature of the sexual object; (3) The nature of the sex act; and (4) The setting in which the act occurs. For example, premarital sex and adultery have been frowned upon in American culture as they violate cultural and/or religious norms for when and with whom sex is approved (Jesús Fernández-Villaverde, Jeremy Greenwood, and Neziuh Guner 2014 and Goode 2016). In addition, Day (2013:50) refers to the “committed relationship ideology” that works under the assumption that almost everyone has the desire to: (1) Get married; (2) Engage in monogamous sexual partnership; and (3) Have children. Even so, there are competing norms and situational context that dictate how serious the transgression is perceived. Premarital sex has no laws against it except the legal age of consent which varies from state to state, it is prevalent in the population, and in most mainstream contexts not considered deviant (Odem 2000). In contrast, adultery, which still illegal in 21 states (Rhode 2016), is not acceptable among Americans. According to the General Social Survey “sex between a married person and someone other than one’s spouse, has not only *not* become more acceptable over time, it has declined from 4% in 1973 to 1% in 2012” (Goode 2016: 237). Considering how

these terms and competing norms can be so diversely defined, it is no small wonder how time and the situation at hand could further modify the public's judgments of a certain behavior, particularly when we consider the traditional monogamous marriage compared to an "alternative" such as a swinging lifestyle.

The act of swinging is defined as "the agreement between husband and wife to have sexual relations with other people, in contexts in which they both engage in such behavior at the same time and usually in the same place" (Walshok 1971). Swingers attempt to manage norm violations and perceptions of stigma by emphasizing sexual practices and behaviors between consenting adults in a setting designed for that purpose (Fernandes 2009). Traditionally, the rules of swinging were based on an established, committed, heterosexual couples who engaged in sexual behaviors with other couples without added emotional requirements or the perception of adultery. Still, swinging has been considered deviant sexual behavior, which is not approved by mainstream society and results in stigma (Jenks 1985).

Jenks' (1985) research focused on the perception of swingers by non-swingers. Using a quantitative survey 342 swingers and 134 non-swingers, he found that swingers were judged as having had more counseling or having a higher need for counseling and were using drugs at a higher rate than was actually reported, both of which lend itself to a deviant label. As history has generally demonstrated, the first to rise to liberation in a revolution and the least likely to be judged harshly for doing so are the white middle class; if only for the fact that they often are not held to the bureaucracy that both old money and political clout entails as well as the lack of economic inhibitions that prevent lower classes from getting involved to the same extent. Indeed, the sexual freedom

movements of the 1970s, such as the women’s liberation movement, gay recognition, and Civil Rights movement lent themselves to an increase of typically white, middle class, swinger clubs (Rubin 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW: SWINGING

Since roughly the 1950s, there has been a barrage of different names for “swinging” behavior from the more sexist term *wife-swapping*, to the more egalitarian *mate-swapping*. While there is a myriad of terms for swinging—spouse swapping, partner exchange, and co-marital sex (Fang 1976)—today, it is referenced as “the lifestyle.” As defined by the North American Swing Club Association on their website’s frequently asked questions, swinging is:

Social-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. The activity may occur at a swing party, a couple-to-couple encounter, or with a third person in a threesome. Though single men and women are involved, it is primarily an activity of couples. It progresses from referencing women as possessions to be traded by their husbands upon their entrance into marriage to something more egalitarian, and more of a consensual agreement between partners (NASCA 2017).

Notably, lacking from this and other definitions of swinging, but suggested by journalistic pieces on swinging and, in comparison, polyamory, is the relationship between sex and emotions (e.g., jealousy and romantic love).

Studies of swinging (Bartell 1970; Jenks 1985; O’Neill and O’Neill 1970; Palson and Palson 1972; Peabody 1982; and Varni 1972) are located mostly in the 1970s and mid-1980s, as the women’s equality movements struggled through the debates of birth control, the confines of marriage and divorce, the discussion of the nuclear family, and the acceptance of *alternative lifestyles* and families in response to the typical family

model. Most pertinent of these changing views were those of women's sexual rights and sexuality (Denfeld and Gordon 1970). Some of the most commonly quoted works include Varni's 1972 article "An Exploratory Study of Spouse-Swapping", Bartell's 1970 article "Group Sex among the Mid-Americas", and Jenks' 1985 article "Swinging: A Replication and Test of a Theory". Varni and Bartell's research established the basics of swinging as well as some core statistics on the general characteristics of the swinging population: white, middle class, and aged 30-40. A survey in 1982 by Richard Jenks established that roughly 93% of swingers were white and the mean income was approximately \$37,309 a year.

More recent statistics reiterate that the average swinger is white, with the average age of 39, two years of college education, and hold professional jobs, matching a middle class or above socio-economic standing (Fernandes 2009). Something that seems to have changed over the years is that previous research (Jenks 1985) has suggested that swingers identify politically as Republican; however, Bergstrand and Sinski (2010: 24) found that swingers were "very middle-of-the-road on a liberal/conservative continuum but distinctly less racist, less sexist, and less homophobic."

While the traditional idea of swinging is based on heterosexual and heteronormative standards, homosexual behavior is present in swinging, and swingers identify across all sexual orientations. Bartell (1971) recorded that any time two couples would swing together, 75% of women would engage in sex with other women, and that percentage would rise to 92% with those in large party settings (131-132). In a similar study, Gilmartin (1978: 262) reported that 68% women engaged in sex with other women. Dixon (1984) studied women in swinging and their bisexual activity, but she did

not require that they explicitly adopted a bisexual orientation to participate; however, each of her 50 participants identified as bisexual when asked. She also concluded that men are much more anxious to participate with or mention an interest in other men due to rampant homophobia among men in the lifestyle, which is consistent with Popplewell (2006), who asked women if male bisexuality is accepted within the community (2006). Most recently, Fernandes (2009: 24) reported that one-fifth of men and two-thirds of the women in his sample (n = 1,379) identified as bisexual while less than one percent were homosexual.

Academically speaking, many of the alternative lifestyles including single-parent families, non-marital heterosexual cohabitation, homosexual relationships, open marriages, dual career families, singlehood, stepfamilies, communes, and multiple relationships (Rubin 2001), were being fervently studied instead of swinging (Bergstrand and Sinski 2010). Due to the stigma attached to swinging (Fernandes 2012; Jenks 1985; Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moores, and Rubin 2014), it is difficult to obtain reliable information on the precise number of swingers in the United States. Swinger clubs still exist, but their prominence is often dictated by region (North American Swing Club Association 2017 and Gould 1999). By the 1990s, swinging had become somewhat less institutionalized, however the North American Swing Club Association still exists today as a way for swinging couples to meet and vacation together. Websites like Craigslist seem to have replaced magazines and newspapers for ads produced by individual couples along with other sites specifically for swinging couples (See also Griffiths and Frobish 2013).

Swinging and Healthy Marriage

The primary debate in the swinging literature has been whether it is conducive or destructive to a healthy marriage. Research from the 1970s and 1980s (see Jenks 1985; Walshok 1971; and Varni 1972) typically describes swinging as destructive to family values, or at least labels the practice as something only immoral people engaged in. Despite the popularity of swinging at the time, this stigmatizing label defined swinging as a departure from the moral values of the dominant population, particularly in the realm of infidelity.

In Varni's (1972: 510) exploratory qualitative study on 16 swinger couples, he concluded, first, that swingers rejected the label of adulterer, "...they see themselves as having transcended the perceived pettiness, hypocrisy, immaturity, and dishonesty of adulterous affairs engaged in by the majority of married couples," and second, that swingers all go through the process of creating a competing norm by redefining the meaning of sex, namely rejecting the double standard that sex without love is wrong for women, but not for men. A more informative, albeit anecdotal look at swingers and the history thereof comes from a book written by journalist Terry Gould called *The Lifestyle* (1999). Gould was one of the first journalists to give an overall inside look of how swingers reconciled traditional values, their lifestyle, and relationship emotions (e.g., love, marital and sexual satisfaction, etc.). Gould openly participated and advocated for the practice of swinging as a way to enhance the marital relationship by renewing sexual interest and encouraging more honesty between the committed couple. In fact, literature (Bergstrand and Sinski 2010; Gould 1999; Varni 1972) suggests that swinging is a

developing and strengthening process for couples. For example, Fernandes' (2009) online survey suggested overall high levels of marital satisfaction in over a thousand participants, with men scoring significantly lower than women. Furthermore, the same held true for sexual satisfaction, which was correlated with marital satisfaction (Fernandes 2009; Frank, et al.1976; and Hite 1976).The double standard is a norm that women have had to actively move against in their everyday lives, but do not find as much difficulty doing so within the swinging community as a whole; both railing against the double standard and being more honest and open about their personal desires seems to have an empowering effect on women (Poppewell 2006; Bergstrand and Sinski 2010). This is contrary to Palson and Palson's (1972) participant observation research which found that women only stayed active in the swinging life style (i.e., "wife-swapping") for their husbands.

The basis for this assertion most often rests with the consistent finding that male partners initiate participation in swinging. Henschel (1973) reported that of the twenty-five women she interviewed, most (68%) indicated their husbands initiated swinging. Fernandes' (2009:30) survey of 1,376 men and women also showed that two-thirds of the men introduced the idea of swinging to their spouses.

In contrast, research design has severely restricted the amount of information available on swinging failure and/or exiting the lifestyle, as samples are typically snowball and relegated to active swingers, thus leaving no accurate number of those who dropout (Denfeld 1974). To partially address this gap in knowledge, Denfeld (1974: 47) surveyed marriage counselors that had treated swinger drop outs to determine the primary causes of leaving the lifestyle and found that out of those couples, women initiated

dropping out 54% of the time in comparison with the husbands (34%) and with the remaining 12% being mutual. The top three reasons for dropping out were jealousy, guilt, and [swinging being a] threat to the marriage.

While men are the primary initiators of entrance into the lifestyle and women are the primary initiators of exiting the lifestyle, it appears that those within the lifestyle are martially and sexually satisfied, suggesting that it is perhaps more egalitarian than previously thought. The underlying question revolves around power dynamics in swinging relationships. Focusing on men's initiation of this process could be interpreted as oppressive to women or a heteronormative behavior produced from the expectation of women as gatekeepers of sex rather than initiators of it (Vaillancourt 2006). The positive sentiments associated with those that are still in the lifestyle could be a result of sampling only those still participating and willing to speak on the issue. With the initiation of exit coming from women, my question is whether the power to initiate and the power to veto is in fact a difference in power at all. However, it is equally important to inquire whether women *feel* empowered and how or when this feeling takes place. According to Ramey (1972), power is more egalitarian after swinging begins. The women Gould (1999) interviewed reflected this sentiment when they discussed perceiving an increase in their power within their relationships after the commencement of swinging because of their contribution to the decision-making process as well as their ability to approve or reject potential partners.

Thus far, the research on swinging most relevant to my study is Vaillancourt's 2006 qualitative dissertation on the swinging experience and Popplewell's 2006 qualitative thesis research on women in swinging. Vaillancourt interviewed seven

couples on their experiences with swinging and found that power within a couple was entirely mediated by what each partner's interpretation of what power meant; furthermore, she established that patterns of initiation and the double standard that encourages women to engage in bisexual acts while discouraging men from doing the same reinforces heteronormativity within the lifestyle. While this is valuable, it still leaves room for women to be influenced by male partners in their responses by interviewing couples as opposed to just women, which is why Popplewell's research is so crucial (see also Henschel 1973). Popplewell recruited female swingers through becoming a member of several swinger sites and then conducted in depth interviews about their experiences via instant messenger. Her overall findings were that women found swinging to be empowering in that they were allowed to explore their sexuality. She also found that when speaking as to whether swinging made them feel objectified or not they were split down the middle; however, few of them implied that this was negative, because those that said women were objectified, said they were such because they wanted to be and they viewed this objectification as a source of power. Those who did view swinging as an occasional negative occurrence compared it to the objectification that happens to women outside of the swinging world and stated that it was no different.

Despite the interesting findings, a sociological and feminist critique (Butler 2011) of this work centers on Popplewell's (2006: 16) framing of her main research question: "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?" I find it problematic to reference sexual instinct when we are talking about women, especially with regard to the research

on sexual fluidity. To me, this has the potential to inadvertently put essentialism at the forefront, stripping women of their autonomy. I also find it problematic to suggest that the swinging environment is stigma-free. If this is the case, then why is it so taboo for men to commit homosexual acts? Beyond this, the research is very insightful as to what the women interviewed perceived as the normal behavior and expectation for women swingers. For example, most of the women interviewed believed men had been the initiators into the lifestyle, regardless of whether they had a different experience personally. Furthermore, twelve out of sixteen agreed that women were the ones in control of the swinging experience/environment (Poppewell 2006). This study encouraged me to look at women's sexuality with a lens that situated fluidity and power as an intersecting contextual concept with women as the primary interpreters to gain a more complete and complex picture of women's experience than what has already been provided.

My reasoning behind looking at all of the above within the context of swinging is because of its ties to marriage as an institution, its history of being a patriarchal activity, its stigmatized label, its reputation for creating an environment where women engage in bisexual activity, and the relatively sparse modern day research. Typically research on the swinging lifestyle has fallen into the deviance or the more tactfully labeled "alternative" category and has focused primarily on description and the rules of swinging in comparison to traditional, monogamous, heterosexual relationships where sexual exclusivity is expected and deviation from that is considered adultery or "cheating." I examine sexual exploration within swinging as a form of sexual fluidity, especially for women. This study seeks to examine the following questions. (1) How do women

experience their sexuality within the swinging lifestyle? (2) Do women experience/perceive swinging as exploitive or empowering? and (3) How are the rules for women within the swing club enacted?

METHODS

Methodologically, my research uses an exploratory, qualitative approach to understand sexual fluidity among women swingers. Due to limited access to the group, physical distance between myself and the participants, and the comfort level of each participant when it came to talking about sensitive topics, I interviewed women by phone, skype, online messenger, and in person. Outside of Joan Dixon's (1984) research on bisexuality in swinging women and Popplewell's (2006) qualitative interviews of swinging women, previous researchers have interviewed couples as one unit, rather than examining the difference in gender experience within swinging beyond initiation (Henschel 1973). By using qualitative interviews, I asked the women to define their relationships and experiences. I used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) to ensure my main questions were addressed; however, I adjusted some of my questions according to what participants were focusing on at the time of the interview. I did not ask specifically whether their sexual orientation had changed primarily because of swinging. I did not want to lead them. I wanted to focus on what was important to them in their process, and allow that to speak for itself.

After collecting data, I transcribed each interview verbatim and removed all identifying information. I replaced the names of each participant with a pseudonym in my transcription files and in the cases of those who participated in online interviews, I erased

the original conversation and made note that they should do the same if anonymity was a concern. I also removed any names used in the interviews of partners or specific clubs/locations to further protect identities.

Once data were collected, I used Tesch's (1990) eight steps of coding to read through each interview and determine some general themes. I then went line by line and established subthemes. Once this was finished, I searched for some of the main words used both in questions and responses across interviews to compare and bring meaning to both the large themes and the subthemes. I then examined my remaining notes that were relevant but not common enough to substantiate through this particular study, and considered these as study limitations or as themes that needed to be further researched.

Via snowball sampling within the swinging community, I conducted 12 qualitative interviews with women ages 25-38, who had participated in swinging, either currently or in the past. To be included in the study, each woman must have attended a swing club or party and/or participated in the swinging lifestyle for a minimum of one year. Of the participants, two were single, four were in long-term relationships, and the rest were married. Lifestyle participation length ranged from four to 14 years. (See Table 1). Future research could benefit from taking a more standardized approach to obtain a more representative sample to gauge prevalence and even measure up against the original Kinsey (1953) scale, since little less than 6,000 of his 18,000 interviews were women and none included African Americans. Furthermore, it would be useful to gain an idea of whether lifestylers are still statistically white, upper-middle class, conservative, and religious. The 12 interviews I conducted were unable to address these questions.

Table 1. Description of Participants

| | <u>Age</u> | <u>Marital Status</u> | <u>Current Relationships (#)</u> | <u>Sexual Orientation (Attraction)</u> | <u>Who Initiated</u> | <u>Years in Lifestyle</u> | <u>Exited Lifestyle as Main Status</u> |
|----------------|------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Megan | 28 | Married | 1 | Bisexual (Men) | Self | 2 | No |
| Fran | 28 | Married | 1 | Bisexual (Men) | Self | 4 | Yes |
| Amy | 31 | Married | 2 | Hetero-flexible | Self | 4 | Yes |
| *Kim | 25 | Single | 1 | Bisexual | Self | 2 | Yes (mono-gamous) |
| Kristen | 38 | Single/Co-habiting | 2 | Pansexual | Self | >10 | Yes |
| Rachel | 37 | Single/Co-habiting | 1 | Hetero-sexual | Male Partner | 3 | No |
| Cathy | 26 | Single | 1 | Hetero-flexible (Men) | Male Partner | 8 | No |
| Reba | 26 | Married | 2 | Pansexual | Self | 4 | Yes |
| **Tanya | 31 | Married | 2 | Pansexual | Self | 13 | Yes |
| Nicole | 33 | Married | 1 | Hetero-sexual | Male Partner | 6 | No |
| Chelsea | 31 | Single | 2 | Pansexual | Self | 14 | Yes |
| Jessica | 38 | Married | 1 | Bisexual (Men) | Male Partner | 14 | No |

Notes: *Kim's interview was broken up into two sections. In both, she had a partner and later wife, but her last swinging involvement was when she was single. Due to the fluidity of both relationships and orientation, I have labeled each woman per her last relationship status while swinging was taking place. **Tanya is a trans-woman with a wife, but began her swinging experiences presenting as a man in a relationship with a woman. I felt it was necessary to mention this for the purpose of context, as her experience is unique.

A Note on Outdated Terminology

One of the first discoveries I made upon beginning my research was that most people no longer used the term “swinger.” In fact, of participants that I already knew through the grapevine, who engaged in partner swapping behavior, identified as something other than a swinger. A few of the women approached me to ask if they qualified for the research “on swinging” considering their current relationship status and/or identity. Some of this seemed to be due to the ambiguity of the terms open relationship, polyamory, and swinging/swinger lifestyle.

I guess my first two relationships were polyamorous [sic] it was us and that's it. But at 23 I was just sleeping or whatever with married couples at parties with or without their partners. -Kim, 25, Single

I'm in an open relationship with a boyfriend and, um, consider myself polyamorous. Um, I don't know if you would put a label on it, but, you know, it's, it's open. The idea is for it to be open and ethical so. -Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

The remaining participants thought the term swinger itself was associated with the stigma. Most of this deals with the discourse surrounding the origin of swinging and the sentiment that it is outdated:

...you know swinging has like a history and I'm sure it's changed since I dunno, when it originated, probably 70s or something. Um, 60s... But, it just seems like such a lame outdated term, but I would say...we'd describe ourselves as swingers or “In the lifestyle ...-Megan, 28, Married

I never considered myself like, a swinger, you know what I mean? Cause swinger brings to mind, you know a certain demographic during a certain time period of like... I picture 1977 hideous clothing, and bad music, uh...you know with that term. -Tanya, 31, Married

When asked about her first club experience, one woman stated:

...Swingers were lambasted as the lowest of low. And, you know, the general nervousness of a new experience. -Fran, 28, Married

While the term “outdated” seems innocuous enough, it is still a negative connotation that is further permeated by the sense that traditional swingers are the ‘hit it and quit it’ type. To understand why this was a negative characteristic, I had to delve deeper into both sexuality labels and the types of swinging labels more commonly used.

Though the term “swinging” as an act is still recognized by all participants as something they have engaged in, they still have a tendency to use labels like “open”, “non-monogamy”, “polyamorous” or “lifestyler” over “swinger” unless they are explaining this to someone new or otherwise outside of the swinging community.

Overall, these other labels operate as tools used both for distancing from the stigma of swinging, and as a way to identify the different styles within the general subgroup. The terms non-monogamy and open relationship were the broadest blanket terms used to either cast the widest net when referenced in swinger/ matchmaking profiles or to ‘test the waters’ when meeting new people and deciding whether they were a match.

“Lifestyler” or “the lifestyle” is the newer alternative term for those that are swingers or participate in the swinging lifestyle as per the traditional definition. Throughout the results section I refer to terms used by the participants to describe their participation in swinging, but for myself and participants these terms were often used interchangeably.

RESULTS

In analyzing the responses, I identified three major themes regarding women’s sexuality in swinging. (1) women’s sexual identity/expression before, during and after

“exiting” the lifestyle. (2) rules of swinging and several subthemes including the role of gender in initiation, protected spaces, and the relationship of sex and emotion (3) modes and reasoning behind entering and exiting swinging. Throughout these themes I looked closely for indications where women perceived their experiences in swinging and sexuality as empowering, objectifying, or oppressive. From the women I interviewed, I discovered that modern day swinging has evolved in everything from the technology and labels used within the community to the role and perception of women within it. This study offers a first-hand account of how these concepts culminate to shape a woman’s experience of her sexuality as a member of that community and, for some, even after they have left the community.

Self-Defined Sexual Identity/Expression and the Process of Swinging

Upon discussing the choice to enter the swinging lifestyle and reasoning behind such, eleven out of twelve women mentioned either having been in non-monogamous relationships before their current one, or found themselves curious about sex with people outside of their current relationship. Each woman indicated having had sexual relationships with men. Only one participant knew she enjoyed being with women and specifically sought them out even while dating men. However, all the women interviewed described sexual contact with women either in their current relationships or during their time as a swinger.

Swinging as a predominately heterosexual couple’s activity offered women an opportunity to experiment by either acting on what they already knew was an attraction to the same sex, or by trying same sex interaction as a completely new experience. However, all of the women engaged in swinging with male partners, even those who self-

initiated participation in the lifestyle. Swinging provided a place that insulated women from rejection or judgment from participating in homosexual activities because it is an arena where sex between women is encouraged by the entire community and because their previously standing relationship offers guidance from male partners on how to interact with women. For instance, one woman expressed that she had trouble reading women at a swinging event and her partner helped her become better at it. She described the following situation:

[male partner] ‘She was hitting on you. She was interested.’ I was like ‘What?! No!’ Oblivious, like right over my head. ‘Oh! [nervous laughter]’ That still happens, but like, I was like ‘Pshhhh. Whatever.’ It’s hard for me to see that. It’s easier for him to see that cause they are used to picking out like, so, [him] ‘If she was directing that energy towards me, I would think she was hitting on me, so’... - Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

Another woman stated that she would rather have sex with a woman than have a romantic relationship with them, but that having her husband there helped her experiment physically with a woman because he taught her where to put her hands.

Since these stories suggested a difference in experience level with female sexual interaction, I asked whether participants had been involved with another woman before swinging. Because there is such a prominence in women’s bisexuality within clubs I also asked about attitudes towards bisexuality within the swinging culture as a whole. Three women had dated other women and considered themselves at least bisexual before engaging in swinging behavior and may have had a vested interest in joining the swinging community to further explore that within the sanctity of a committed relationship. The rest of those who identified as bisexual or pansexual (10 women) had at

the very least kissed other women, and for four of those, their first kiss with another woman was within a swinging context.

Six of the women identified as bisexual including two women who identified as heteroflexible. Of these women, five indicated they preferred men whether it be in the sense of a romantic relationship, the amount of sexual contact they ended up having with women in the lifestyle, or simply the fact that they were already in a committed relationship with a man. Two of the twelve still identified primarily as straight.

I don't consider myself bi, but the right situations, I mean, things are sexy, you know like... So, and women's sexuality is so much more fluid in general. Um, so, I mean, I've been...[exhale] He [her husband] would ... probably describe me as bi to other people when I'm not around... But when I'm around, 'She doesn't consider herself, but you know, just if the situation arises then yes.', but I still want to end the evening with a penis. [laughs]-Nicole, 33, Married, Heterosexual

The process of creating a sexual orientation identity was most succinctly expressed by a woman who had sexual contact with women before swinging and had an open relationship with a man before her current marriage. When asked about being in dating relationships with women before swinging, she said:

No, I haven't. And that's actually something I regret. Uh...[laughs] I uh, dunno. I've had like a few *long* relationships with men in my life. I never kinda had an opportunity to get a lady in there. I'd be open to it, but now you know, now I'm married...so...before swinging I...I made out with like...a *ton*...like I can't even count, like a *lot* of women. It was college, um. We had a lot of spin the bottle parties... And then maybe like um, oral sex twice or something. -Megan, 28 Married, Bisexual (men)

Later, when asked about current sexual orientation, she responded:

That's tough cause [long pause] I mean, I'm not straight, but...I kinda live a straight lifestyle. Um, you know I think that it's important to be honest, but at this point when I'm married, I don't really feel the need to *tell* anybody that I'm not completely straight just because, I mean, we're not taking about *dating* a woman. We're talking about... 'Hey, by the way, I have sex with other people outside my marriage!' You know that's a whole other book of worms ... So I mean, yeah if something happened and ... me and my husband um...like I really don't see this

happening, but got a girlfriend, like a mutual girlfriend and we're like serious ... but I might wanna tell my parents or my friends, but at this point, like, my parents don't tell me about their sex life and I don't you know? Like, I don't really feel the need to share that part of myself with anybody except for like maybe close friends... I dunno...I hesitate to say bisexual because like [long pause] Ah gosh...because I am attracted to women, but I don't really have sex with women very often, so I feel it's kinda like I'm...if I'm overstating it. I dunno, I guess that was it. I am bisexual, but definitely in general prefer men. -Megan, 28, Married, Bisexual (men)

While there were varying responses on the extent and order in experiences with other women, the consensus about bisexuality within the swinging culture was threefold. First, they agreed that almost every woman either claimed to be bisexual or engaged in sexual activity with both sexes. Second, they thought both the claim and the act of bisexuality was more exaggerated than authentic in women. Third, they viewed women's sexuality as more fluid than men's, and that men enjoyed watching women engage in that behavior, but not other men.

Further, women who identified as pansexual typically had a coming out story whereas most of those that identified as bisexual, heteroflexible, and heterosexual did not. While I do think swinging had an impact on their ability to act on attraction and discover some things about their sexuality, only two expressed that they would not have "tried women" if they had not entered swinging, and for the rest, sexual orientation as an identity did not seem to be a focal point. They gave the impression that women (including themselves) that labeled themselves as bisexual was less of an identity and more of a marker of openness to experiment within the community.

In contrast, married women and women in committed heterosexual relationships were more likely to talk about the fear of coming out as a swinger to friends and/or family as the primary reason for never coming out as bisexual in the first place. For those

women, the identity work that corresponds to a master status, such as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, was less evident than for those who had determined they were pansexual or bisexual before swinging. Instead, these women are engaging in (compulsory) heterosexual identity work in order to maintain their identity and manage stigma.

Norms of Swinging

Upon first discovering that swing clubs still existed, I visited a club in person out of curiosity and after signing a stack of paperwork promising to protect privacy, not bring any illicit drugs in, and not sexually harass anyone, I was granted entry. After walking in the door, I was given a tour by one of the “bar tenders.”¹ Each floor had a specific spread of rooms and rules. The main floor contained a dance floor with cocktail tables spread around the perimeter and long bar set up with stools. I was informed that singles were allowed by themselves in one private room. Single women and couples were allowed on the dance floor, and single men were only allowed to be in the singles room or the seated at the bar top unless approached by a couple. Women could be nude from the waist up anywhere on the main floor, but men were expected to be clothed at all times unless in a more private room. No one outside of a pair or threesome as the case may be, was allowed on the next floor. This floor was known as the “Anything Goes Area”. While we were not escorted in this area due to it being the primary space for people to engage in sexual activity in the open, it was stressed that men must stay close to their partners,

¹ The term bartender is a misnomer because there is no alcohol served by the establishment. Instead, there is an area set up as a typical bar setting (including a “bartender”, but with mixers that you would pay for to use with the alcohol you bring in yourself.

whether in a couple or threesome within this area, lest they be escorted out. Another woman I interviewed gave a similar description of her visit to a “nicer” club:

He [a regular] showed me everything. All of the “Here’s where the play rooms are. These are the general rules, like... if the door is open, that means you’re welcome to watch, but like, don’t go in, don’t touch, until you like... somebody gives you the signal that that’s what they want. In general, open doors mean you’re welcome to watch... there’s one room that had the like curtains so you could leave the curtains open and leave the door closed which is a clear indication. Yes, please watch what we’re doing in here. Uh, they had, they had a couple of different dance floors. There was ... a large double king sized play bed... The female would like call it the orgy bed or whatever. That’s a more open place where, you know, people are welcome to join in and to watch. It’s kinda on display... And like, pointing out like it’s ok to have alcohol in *here*, but in this area, there’s not drinks allowed... certain dry areas... in general, it’s ok for women to like touch men. Um, but not the other way around unless you have explicit permission. That’s again, to keep the predatory vibe low to non-existent. Like, don’t go groping. ... they had a play room or... it was couples only... men and women would gather and there were several different beds in the room so you could sit and watch other people playing, you know you could do your own thing, but it was a group “the couple room”. So, it was a very well put together area that they had. They had showers to go clean up... You could play in the showers too. Uh, and then they had an open buffet with the like... free coffee and tea um, the food was all complimentary. I think the alcohol was the only thing you paid for. - Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

Men’s Roles in Swinging: Bisexuality

Within this club environment, women were allowed more freedom of movement within the space provided, but what was striking to me personally, was not necessarily the prominence of bisexual behavior in women, but the absence of it in men. At first, I believed it to be something unique to the south, but as my interviews continued, I soon realized that this was not a regional phenomenon. None of my participants said they had seen bisexual activity commence between men within a club setting and all twelve not only had witnessed bisexual activity in women in those settings, but had sexual interactions with women themselves.

Several women commented on the lack of bisexual activity in men. Further they mentioned why they would feel uncomfortable if their male partner was to participate in any kind of homosexual activity in the club environment:

I saw one man who, at the very least, was acting flamboyant. At the club in ATL [Atlanta], the overwhelming sentiment was ‘men don't touch’. The flamboyant man only went dancing, and I did not see him participate in any encounter. -Fran, 28, Married

I mean there's less bisexual men in the swinging community. And if they are, they're generally pretty quiet about it because there's a lot of um, homophobia amongst men. There's a lot of like...discomfort with like, don't cross the strings or like, discomfort with inadvertently touching another man in the bedroom. - Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

So, um, I will say for *men* it's *extremely* looked down upon. It is *not* ok for men at all. I do know a couple of men who are bi in the lifestyle and I will say, um, like one of them, they had separate profiles. One with him being bi and one him not being bi and they said they get a *ton* more hits of him being bi. But it was kinda secretive. It wasn't like at a *club* or while they were out with people who would be like, embarrassed to talk about it in public? But privately, they were ok with messaging him... I feel like, um, especially in the state that we live in, um, it would not go well [men being bi in a club] ... At all. I, I think that you, know, especially since there *is* alcohol there, you know um, I feel like people would...aggressively not be okay with it. -Nicole, 33, Married

Another woman added:

[in reference to her trans-man partner] He's in a lot of danger, should he be welcoming to the wrong person. And there is substantial reason to maintain that waryness [sic] in the swinger community because they tend to be exceptionally queer phobic. -Chelsea, 31, Single

Whereas with women, there was an agreement that there was pressure to be bisexual and even hints that it was overstated in general, but despite this, there was a common sentiment that women were more fluid in sexuality in general in comparison to men.

And as far as *women* go, um, there's a lot of push to be bi. A lot, from men. You know, eyeroll. You know, like, I get it, it's hot to see us all together, um...I don't

consider myself bi, but the right situations, I mean, things are sexy, you know like ... and women's sexuality is so much more fluid in general.-Nicole

So, they have the women generally take the reins and ... uh, because if a couple's interested and another couple ... it like increases your market ... your marketability if you've got a bi woman because that's attractive to both men and women who are also bi. Guys wanna watch bi women with other women, uh, everyone likes to see the girls play ... gotta bi whoa them. Plus it's also to help guard against predatory dynamic that could occur, like, uh, say ... say I meet a couple for drinks and I'm getting the vibe from him that he's really pushing for this. It's gonna put me off more than if she was pushing for it. Which is not to say that there still could be an unhealthy dynamic if she's dragging him to do something that he doesn't wanna do. That's just as fucked up. But, it comes across as less predatory if they guy is like ... if the guy is letting her take the lead. And that is because of some male privilege ... you're gonna trust the women. It's like, 'Oh it's ok.'" The smaller female, the weaker one is taking the initiative and he is ... he is letting you know, uh, what's the word ...? Intend to cater down to the one who is least comfortable.-Kristen, 28, Cohabiting

A lot of people claim to be in really liberated from societal standards. And there's also a really ... uh, double standard when it comes to bisexuality. Almost *every* single women that you speak with and is in the lifestyle is gonna say that they are either bisexual or like bi-comfortable or whatever. *Every* guy you talk to is gonna say that they are straight. -Megan, 28, Married

There was no denial in these statements that bisexuality was performed under the male gaze; however, it was implied through discussion that clubs in particular were geared more towards performance and voyeurism in the first place and as such, were avoided by those that wanted a more "authentic" experience.

Men's Roles in Swinging: Single Men and Protected Spaces for Women

One of the most uniform rules in lifestyle events is that single men are limited both by entry fees and by rules controlling the amount of single men permitted entry. Single women are either free or half the price of a couple, and single men are charged as if they were a couple under the implication that this creates a balance in ratio meant to create a safer space for women to navigate:

They're really strict with single men at parties ... at events they will have, if they're allowed then there's only a limited number because they want to keep the balance. They want to keep the ratio favorable to people there ... women tend to be more comfortable when the ... when they don't feel like they're ... in a meat market, like ... being devoured by eyes and ugh. That's ... it's more favorable for couples looking for other couples when they're not competing with single men. They [single men] are often seen as less trustworthy... like who's vouching for you sir? -Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

Women are sexualized, so they pay less ... Men are more invasive. They have to be invited. -Fran 28, Married

The private parties held here are actually illegal by Utah's terms so everything is rather protected. Men are usually required to have a referral. Often single men aren't allowed at all. -Chelsea, 31, Single

The above statements are indicative of an underlying sentiment that men are an aggressive threat either to women or as competition for other men/couples and that in order to be deemed safe in this environment, single men must have a referral.

Furthermore, these men are stigmatized for being single in a sex club and referred to as "creepy" in a way that single women were not.

I dunno. There's nothing *wrong* with single men, but I feel like the *type* of single men that end up going to these clubs ... Like maybe there's a *reason* they're single ... because I mean if you're a single guy, then why aren't you just like, going to the club and like hooking up with someone? You know? And Um, so a lotta kinda creepy guys ... and then when we went to one of the like, couples only room and like the guard was like watching us have sex and I'm like ... this ... the kinda bouncer guy. And I'm just like "This is so creepy." ... we are always focusing on what the couples want and they don't want a ton of creepy guys just trying to bang your wife. Um, but at [Other Club] they actually ... First of all ... it's a lot more expensive I think for a single guy to go in themselves and then, also they *have to* sit at the bar. They can't leave the bar unless a couple or a lady approaches them and invites them to their table. So I think it kinda controls on the just kinda like, lone wolf ... prowling around so. -Megan, 28, Married

... if you're gonna be a single guy going down there, you have to pay more to get in ... Which, I understand, because you have your creepy guys, but at the same time you have your creepy women too, so, it's bullshit that you have to pay different prices or whatever ...-Cathy, 26, Single

Although most women recognized that this was discrimination, almost all felt as though it was for the best which was indicated by the use of “creepy” when describing some men in the lifestyle. The above quote was an isolated sentiment in its use of the adjective to describe both sexes. Begging the question as to whether these rules are a symptom of the patriarchal idea that women need protection and all men not connected to one are predatory or if this is just a new mode provided for women as insulation from rejection rather than benevolent sexism, ‘subjectively positive attitudes toward women characterized by a sense of protection, idealization, and affection for women’ (Hideg, 2016: 3)

When I asked more questions about objectification and “creepiness” discussion of clothing and consent quickly followed. Culturally, women are pressured more than men to be simultaneously stylish and sexy. Within the context of swinging, this difference is even further solidified.

... we went to a party and he [Her husband] kinda felt left out because um, at the parties there’s all these women dressed up in lingerie and dudes wearing like jeans and a shirt, and just kinda like all the focus is on the ladies, and ... my husband’s like “ I don’t know how to flirt. I don’t feel like I have any attention. And he’s a really cute guy!-Megan, 28, Married

Megan also added:

I just feel like it’s kinda like ... normal society ... like in the movie you see the girl like you know ... she’s taking ... she’s getting out of the shower and answering the phone like there’s some reason to put her nude or her somewhat nude in the movie, but guys never are. You know it’s kinda similar like, “Check out my wife!” Like women is [sic] something to be like *entertained by!* Or something ... like a product to be consumed. I dunno, which *really* bothers me and I do not dress up in lingerie because I don’t dig it and everyone else is like [high pitch] “Well why don’t you put on my little thing?-Megan

I mean it's flattering to be watched, but at the same time there are all these naked women and I get uncomfortable bc [sic] I compare myself and feel they [other women] are too? (When asked how she felt around men) ... The same ... like they

are shopping and comparing who they are attracted to. -Rachel 37, Cohabiting
[She went on to say she did not feel like men went through the same thing.]

While some women spoke about how they felt objectified in a negative way,
others found an empowerment through objectification:

But then, I mean, I can't put it all on them [in reference to being in an auction at a BDSM club] because I did dress like a slut and ... well, that sounds shitty, It doesn't really matter how I dress, but ...you know, I dress on the sexy end and knew it was gonna happen, so I can't be mad about it. That's what I went for ... And you know, I'm not gonna wear it on the street, obviously, but, you know I will wear it down there to be like "Oh, look at me! Look how pretty I am!" [Smiles] and you obviously get the same response of "Oh look at that hot piece!" and ... but I did it to myself so ... Can't be mad about it! [laughs] You know, that's the response that I wanted. -Cathy, 26, Single

When asked about whether she felt objectified, one woman explained:

I took a guy into the couple room at the club, so he could go, and he proceeded to tell me I had fake titties (thinking I would like it) and I said, um no. and was like, I need to go back out. [It] depends on the circumstance. If they are out and i'm [Sic]showing off, sure, oogle the goodies. But if I'm with my husband, not paying attention to you, don't walk up to me and start talking to my breasts. Easiest way for me to not be interested. -Fran, 28, Married

For both women, it was agreed that if they were showing off their body, it was fine to check them out or even make comments, but as mentioned in Fran's experience, sometimes that boundary of implied consent was crossed via body language. Despite this, she indicates that she still had the power to leave said offender behind and say no.

The last example of how clothing can work as a source of power is indicated by Megan. She discussed her distaste for the pressure to dress sexy by her peers and points to why men do not receive the same pressure because of their clothing:

Like usually, and this is what truly tripped me out is, usually people come to the party, like trying to look nice, um, like, you know, sexy dress or you know leather boots, whatever guys ... I just don't know how guys like, need to dress sexy ... because I feel like there's not a good way to do it ... You know women's clothes are *designed* to show off, you know, I guess. So everyone's dressed nicely and

then like, throughout the night, like I said, women will change into lingerie. -
Megan, 28, Married

Cathy's and Fran's responses indicated they dressed in more revealing clothes at events to gain attention, but quickly let men know if they overstepped their bounds. In contrast, respondent Megan clearly rejected the expectation and showed up in more modest and comfortable clothing, said she never felt like she was less sexy than the women that dressed more scantily, and that she was frustrated by the pressure to do so primarily by women, not men. Across the board, all women were quick to discuss that every club and party had the rule that "No means no" and if that rule is violated and someone continues approaching or harassing a couple or woman, they will be removed from the club. It would be naive to essentialize the objectification of women in a clearly sexual environment as solely a relic of patriarchy seeing as clothing, particularly lingerie, has been a source of resistance and empowerment for women who use it as a mode of showing their freedom to outwardly express (or not express) their existence as a sexual person. As Fields (2007: 3) explains:

Underwear, although worn next to the body and thus ostensibly hidden from outside view, is a crucial part of the gendered fashion system. Private and sexualized, yet essential to the shaping of the publicly viewed silhouette, intimate apparel ... is critical to making bodies feminine. Undergarments are especially significant to feminization of the body because they are associated with sexual anatomy often perceived as vessels of essential femininity.

What's Love Got to Do with It? Emotions and Sex

Some of the women, in particular those who identified as polyamorous, distinguished themselves from the swinging lifestyle by including a sense of commitment and emotional involvement between more than one partner. For the sake of clarity, in a polyamorous relationship, all partners can be romantically intertwined, though not

necessarily. While polyamorous people are not against casual sex, lifestylers were decidedly against romantic relationships outside of the original partnership. Despite these sentiments, whenever a woman described having more casual hook ups, they were very intent on mentioning they wanted to make a personal connection with those they slept with, whether that be friendship, or a long-term relationship.

As far as the rules for my marriage, we try to never be fully involved [with other couples] emotionally, but there is emotional attachment always with people you sleep with ... Me and my friend's wife are more emotional [attached], but I'm not as invested in her as a girlfriend per se.-Fran, 28, Married Bisexual (Men)

We aren't *against* other people being fast lane for us, I mean like, whatever, we just have a one night stand with somebody, but, we can't do it because I generally have to have... an intellectual connection with someone, I think it'd be ... it *rarely*, like if I knew I'd *never* see them again, maybe I wouldn't have to have that connection, but if I know I'd see them again and have to talk to them after? Then I'd still have to have that connection. -Nicole, 33, Married

These statements exemplify how convoluted labels can be. On one hand, women say there is no judgement for those that would like more casual sex, but on the other, there is a definite pattern in all of the interviews which emphasized how emotionality is indeed closely tied to sex. The line becomes blurry with the addition of levels of involvement, which were defined by some as not going on dates that separated the main couples involved, and others by something as mundane as being able to remember birthdays.

... we tell people that we are nonmonogamous and then when people, um, like don't understand that term, then we say swinger and they kinda get it ... We just like to make friends, so ... Not polyamorous, but, I mean, there are good friends that if they needed something we would help them out ... -Nicole, 33, Married

Overall, women expressed that they would at least maintain friendship with most couples they slept with if they had a good experience, though it is plausible that this is

due to the cultural expectation of women to be more emotional by nature as well as serve as a less intimidating social mediator, which is made more apparent when we look at women's role in initiation.

Entering and Exiting the Lifestyle

Patterns of Initiation

Historically, men have initiated swinging in more traditional cases (i.e., in heterosexual couples). For example, when respondent Rachel was prompted about being introduced into the lifestyle, she responded:

He had done it before he met me and told me that's what he wanted from his partner. I did not want it, but decided to try it. I needed to know if it was something I would be interested in after trying it. -Rachel, 37, Cohabiting

However, in these interviews, only four out of twelve women claimed their male partner was the first to suggest the lifestyle. All of these women identified as heterosexual or heteroflexible. The remainder of the participants either initiated the conversation themselves or there was mutual interest. Inquiring about initiation was meant to address both the interest level of women and to parse out whether there was unequal pressure from either side. Overall, there were equal amounts of pressure from both genders to enter the lifestyle, and while not all pressure was positive or negative, all choices were made with the underlying tone of exploration for both partners. As these women stated:

... we were dating and he basically just found a place online where he found in [name of city] that there's a place you could go to watch people have sex and that would be a great idea. And he brought it up to me and I thought he was *so fucking crazy* ... We started talking about it some more and then the next weekend I got off from work, and was gonna go hop in the shower and I was like 'Hey, did you wanna try out that club again?' And um, cause that couple really got us inspired about the lifestyle ... [laughs] And he was like 'Yes! What can I do for you? You

want some wine right now? Where do you wanna go to dinner? What can I ...?' [laughs] You could tell ... Like he *really* wanted to, but he didn't wanna be pushy about it. Um, so he was really good about letting me kind of make those rules and break them. Which is *good* because whoever's the least comfortable with the situation *should* be the one to break the rules and to, make 'em and break 'em. - Nicole, 33, Married

I don't remember who brought it up, but I was definitely more interested in it, so it *could* have been like, an effort for him to like ... "I don't wanna lose her, so if I look into this ..." But by his own word, he told me that ... it was something that he was interested in. Like, wasn't doing it just for me ... But I was the driving interest in that venture, so ... There is a possibility that he was *only* interested because I was. -Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

Exiting the Lifestyle

Of the respondents, seven out of twelve women exited the lifestyle. One returned to being monogamous with no plans of opening the relationship back up, another slowed down swinging with the plan to be active again later, and the rest identified as more polyamorous than a lifestyle. Kim wanted to exit the lifestyle to become monogamous with her wife, who is not fond of the lifestyle, so that they could start a family while Fran slowed down due to time constraints with her job and was also trying to start a family. She was not opposed to rejoining the lifestyle.

Despite not exiting the lifestyle, Rachel, who was cohabitating with her long-term boyfriend, expressed mostly negative feelings about her own participation in swinging along with jealousy issues between both herself and her partner. Rachel was aware before dating her partner that participation in the lifestyle was something he expected; however, she made it clear when asked that if she could be monogamous that she would "love that". While this did not appear to be a typical experience, her experience reflects almost all of Denfeld's (1974) reasons for dropping out of swinging.

Aside from the two previously mentioned instances, casual sex and/or infrequent visits to favorite swinger events was not unacceptable so much as it was not the primary way these women chose to interact with their partners. One of the main justifications for distancing from the swinging community is that their rules do not allow for sex to overlap with emotion, which one woman argues is hypocritical in its failure to acknowledge the complexity of relationships:

That's one thing I noticed that was, you know, mainly different from swingers was that um, whether they realize it or not, they're practicing in a polyamorous relationship by having 'favorite couples' they hang out with and go camping with, and play with. It, you know, they're developing friendships, so, you know, there's a stark divide I got ... No, no emotions [making fun]! You know, cause that will mess it up! There is a lot of cross over ... Even in the polyamorous community, like, they're fine with casual like recreational sexual relationships, that's under the umbrella ... So ... I do both, you know, so, I like what both have to offer. - Kristen, 38, Cohabiting

With this complexity comes the discussion of sexuality in general, and it is clear that male bisexuality was unwelcome which also implies that sexual fluidity would also not be welcomed. Two women commented on how polyamory was better suited for them and further explained how this affected the notion of consent, even though people in the lifestyle tout consent as one of their most salient rules:

If I had to pinpoint a reason that community-wise I'll never identify as a swinger again, it's the queer phobia and heteronormativity. The poly community is leaps and bounds ahead of all that bullshit ... it's very common for all the men involved to make very clear that they are not willing to be near any other dicks ... My [trans] bf has managed to avoid any physical abuses so far but if he were to make himself more vulnerable and pursue all his curiosities he might have a different story to tell by now ... not many people are going to be willing to use verbiage with him that is suitable, and respect his boundaries say ... if he is interested in sex but not in being penetrated, so on and so forth ... [Quoting Dan Savages] He posits that gay peoples don't actually have so much more sex than hetro people do. The difference is that if you were to meet an interested hetero

man at a club and said to him "I'm interested in you and would like to proceed to something more intimate, however I'm not interested in penetration this evening." his head would explode. however, if you were to say the same thing to a homo man the conversation would easily adapt into "okay, what are you into tonight? Do you like handies? bdsm?" so on and so forth. Because queer populations are so much more practiced at negotiations and consent their sex lives overall are personally stated as being more satisfying than hetero people, and also they consider more activities "sex" than many hetero people do. -Chelsea, 31, Single

A similar point was made by Tanya when she speaks on the communication requirements of polyamory:

I learned very early on to make decisions like that ... you know, just being able to tell and for things like consent becomes three times as important when there's three people instead of two as far as like, verbal, like and discussion of ... how things are gonna happen because you know ... you don't want something in your butt that you did not ... [mutual laughter] It's like things like "I'm not prepared for this!!" you know [continued laughter] I think that that communication becomes ever more important. I was never in a triad proper like that, but I've been in similar situations with certain people. -Tanya, 31, Married

Despite rejecting these prescriptions, those that identified as polyamorous did not object to casual sex, nor did they further insist that they were vastly different from swingers aside from the illusion that they were more introspective and tolerant as indicated by their sparse participation in some swinging events. Overall, expanding to become polyamorous was a form of rejecting the rules outlined by the swinging community. This was (1) to become more inclusive of the LGBT population, and (2) to welcome emotionality as it relates to sex and other relationships.

DISCUSSION

Upon discovering that the swinging lifestyle still existed, I set out to discover how women experienced their sexuality within it. In doing so I came up with three main

themes: (1) self-defining sexual identity in the process of swinging (2) establishing the norms of swinging (3) entering and exiting the lifestyle. As Lawler (2014) expressed, identity is a subjective and vastly abstract concept, but for women still in the lifestyle, it was something rarely acknowledged, unless explicitly asked about. Even when bisexuality was claimed (including those that identified as heteroflexible), there was an emphasis placed on preferring men without prompting, implying the distinction was important to them in their concept of self and reinforcing heteronormative values. Despite the lifestyle being a primarily heteronormative environment, the double standard coupled with the male gaze encouraged bisexual behavior in women and was consistent with previously established swinging norms as described by Popplewell (2006) and Fernandes (2009) on the frequency of bisexuality in the lifestyle.

The norms of swinging include the regulation of single men's entrance and movements in club settings as well as a strict enforcement of consent. Because of these regulations, swinging acted as a pathway for women to explore their sexuality in an arena where they felt safe to do so compared to the outside world whether that meant sexual interaction with men or with women with the guidance of men. Considering the feminist discussion on the objectification of women's bodies and performed sexuality under the male gaze, I found that women were well aware they were being watched and pressured, but with that knowledge they chose to either embrace objectification as symbolic of their sexual power/freedom, or resist it by refusing to participate in hypersexuality regardless of environment.

Overall I found is that women not only used the lifestyle as a way to explore their own desires and relationships, they used it as a form of resistance to traditional social

scripts as women. Furthermore, those that exited the lifestyle recognized its reflection of the aspects of society they did not resonate with and redefined themselves in an even more expansive way to fit their individual principles. Changing one's personal identity to fit into the world is one of the most mundane recurrent acts we perform over our lifetimes, but most of these women changed their identity to fit principles not yet embraced by the general population in a way that deliberately rejects the notion that sex must be regulated to only two people in a relationship and that women have little to no say in the matter.

Although I did not directly ask questions about race or income, I can say that through casual observation and knowledge I had outside of the formal interviews that most women fit the traditional race and socioeconomic status of a swinger who was mentioned in Bergstrand (2000) and Jenks (1985) which agreed that the majority of swingers were both white and middle to upper class. The ages of those I interviewed ranged from 25-38 and the mean age was 31.5—slightly younger than the average age (35 years) of swinger women in Bergstrand's study, but still comparable to Jenks study of swingers whose average age was 39. While religion was mentioned several times in the context of initial attitudes towards sex and family, further development would be necessary to determine religious orientation and influence in comparison to previous studies. As my study was conducted primarily in the south, the frequency of religious discourse may be a regional bias that could be remedied in the future by gaining access to lifestylers in different areas for comparison.

In my study, seven out of twelve women were married, two were cohabitating, and three were single at the time of swinging. Of this sample, two women were currently

in relationships with other women and the rest were in relationships with men. Five women were currently seeing more than one person at the time of interview. No other studies addressed the fluidity of women's relationships within the context of swinging, which is something that deserves a closer look as a reflection of sexual expression and identity. I suspect this is due to the foundational heteronormative values in the lifestyle and the reinforcement of said values by erasure of the LGBT community. There is not enough conclusive evidence in my research to decipher whether the LGBT community engages in swinging behavior at all, or if they simply have separate spaces for this behavior, but it is worth a more thorough examination. I interpreted the complexities of my participants' relationships to be a mode of resistance by women of the traditional heteronormative scripts, particularly in reclaiming the freedom to choose whether sex and emotion were tied together. For those that enjoyed casual sex, swinging was for pleasure and variety without the double standard shame involved for sleeping with more than one person as a woman. For those that valued intimacy and regular connection, polyamory provided both sex and love. Both via swinging lifestyle and polyamorous, women displayed agency in redefining what a committed relationship meant to them individually.

In addition, previous research (Fernandes 2009; Henshel 1973; and Dixon 1984) indicated that men were still at the forefront of initiation into the swinging life and some of the research indicated that while men were the initiators, women ended up finding it more enjoyable by comparison (Bergstrand and Sinski 2010 :34; Fernandes 2009). I find that among the 12 respondents, this may no longer be the case, as eight out of 12 participants were self-initiated. It is reasonable to suggest that this is sampling bias because if a woman is willing to be interviewed away from her male partner, she may be

more assertive to begin with or those that would not interview with me may be the ones that did not feel empowered by their participation or were discouraged by their partners. However, of those who self-initiated all self-identified as bisexual. The remaining women who were heterosexual or heteroflexible orientations were initiated into the lifestyle by male partners.

I recognize that there is a difference between sexual orientation as an identity and homosexuality as an act, but I asked questions about relationships before swinging and during swinging to bring about a response that would shed light on what these women deemed important as part of my feminist approach. Throughout this research women showed time and again that they recognized that power and sexuality are both subjective and ambiguous and made decisions on how to move forward using their own interpretation of what that meant. They were fully aware that they operate in a world under a male gaze that is objectifying and oppressive in its rules, in a way that men may not. With this knowledge, they modified their behavior in much the same way that women do outside of these communities, but used the rules of swinging clubs/parties as a form of protection that strictly enforced consent in a way that is absent in the everyday world. Women that dress provocatively for a sex party are not entirely immune from unsolicited remarks or touches, but the lifestylers as a community would not benefit from women being uncomfortable and refusing to participate, and as such, they work against it.

These examples describe the perennial debate in feminist thought that questions why women must be protected by men, why a strict set of rules are needed for women's sexual behavior, and why empowerment must come in the form of relishing the freedoms women should already be granted as human beings. My response is that feminism is

something that includes the actions of both sexes and requires reformist *and* revolutionary action. The lifestyle in of itself considering its typical population of white, middle-aged, conservative, middle to upper class, married couples is an arena more receptive to reform than revolution when we address some of the core values of feminism—sexuality, sexual fluidity, and acceptance of the intersectionality within it.

The principles of this community are slowly changing, but those that fail to reconcile with values of the swinging found homes in polyamory, where gender/sexual fluidity, homosexuality, and the mixture of sex and emotions was not so heavily regulated. This provided women a more open space. Embracing polyamory without fully closing the door on participation within the swinging community allowed them to monitor their own exposure to swinger values while preventing an isolation that could easily mute progressive understanding between the groups. This choice is both empowering because the option exists, but disenfranchising because it is a freedom only chosen by those within what is considered even more of a deviant community than the lifestyle. Two respondents—Chelsea and Kristen—mentioned that they chose to simplify their sexual or gender identity to fit in or claimed single online on swinger site profiles instead of expressly labeling themselves polyamorous. I suspect this process is a common theme in the polyamorous community, but that the navigation of online dating and apps are deserving of their own separate study.

These transitions fall in line with women tending to change their sexual orientation in a way that is more inclusive and fluid, just as Diamond (2008) suggested in her longitudinal study. Although my findings are similar, they are different in that they also include a mode of expressing sexuality rather than just identity work. Those that

exited swinging said they would not necessarily identify as a swinger or embrace some of the implied values, but that they were not completely against swapping partners during casual sex or meeting people at some swinger events. This is overall indicative of what I perceive to be the postmodern wave of feminism (Tong 2009) where clear characterization of gender and women's oppression is rejected and the ambiguity that lies within is embraced in a way that demands individual navigation. This navigation is both oppressive given the labels that are presupposed for women, yet it is empowering in that they believe they have an option to adjust within the que or write-in a new answer. Each decision comes along with a choice as to how much resistance or rejection from various groups a woman is willing to face, but from their perspective, it is a choice, nonetheless.

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(<https://www.nasca.com/faq.html>).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND QUESTION GUIDE

Who was the first person to bring up the idea of swinging?

How long have you been swinging?

What is your relationship status?

Who gave you a tour of the club and what did they say?

Do you feel this has changed your committed relationship?

*Do you feel this has changed your relationships with family and friends outside of the club?

*What about personal romantic relationships outside of the club? How?

Some people use the terms fast lane swingers, soft swingers, or polyamorous -describe each. Have you heard of any other terms?

How would you describe yourself as a couple in reference to your swinging style?

*What type of swinger would you consider yourself?

Have you seen others participate in bisexuality in the club?

Can you describe that experience and how you feel about it?

How does your partner feel about it?

Have you had a sexual or romantic relationship with another woman before becoming a swinger? Describe?

Have you had a sexual relationship with another woman during swinging? Do you mind telling me about how that came about?

How does your partner react to these experiences?

Are they involved or do they just watch?

How do you feel about that?

What is your sexual orientation?

Do you feel that has changed at all since you began swinging?

Who typically makes the approach toward another potential couple or third person?

*Who typically approaches you for your participation? (the male or the female)

Is that typical in comparison to other couples (do guys still make the approach)?

*Who do you interact with the most before deciding to swing with a particular couple?

How do you establish rules of what can be done (sexually, approach wise, and from a same-sex sexual experience)?

*How do you navigate the rules of a particular couple? Who in the couple discusses those rules with you?

How do these rules differ between male-male interaction and female-female interaction? (trying to get at both club rules, unspoken rules for approaches, and how men interact with men during sexual interaction and females interact with females during sexual interaction)

How do you feel about the clothing rule differences between men and women within the club?

Have you been to any other clubs? If so, was it different?

Howso?

Do you typically use condoms or dental dams during swinging?

Who brings this up and/or provides contraceptives?

Do you feel empowered by your participation in swinging?

Howso?

Do you ever feel objectified as a female participant in swinging?

Can you describe that (those) experience(s)?

Do you feel that swinging has changed since the 60s and 70s?

What are the positive and negative aspects of swinging?

Have you had a period since you began swinging where you slowed down or quit?

if no Do you foresee anything causing you to do so? What about other couples?

if yes Was there a particular reason? How does one go about doing that considering networking and friends within the lifestyle? How did you reenter the scene? (if they did)

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



2/2/2016

Investigator(s): Felicia Brown & Dr. Meredith Dye
Department: Sociology
Investigator(s) Email: fmb2e@mtmail.mtsu.edu Meredith.dye@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: Women's Sexuality in Swinging
Protocol Number: 16-2120

Dear Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB or its representative has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for 30 participants.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. **Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date.** Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires **2/2/2017**.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Meeks DNP, RN, COI
Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University