

So you've been reading my column for a couple of weeks now and have decided that you too might be interested in getting involved with your local swinging community. And hey, why not? When entered into with the right frame of mind, swinging can be a very liberating and profound addition to anyone's life: it pushes your boundaries, makes you more self-aware, can bring couples closer together, and definitely ups the amount of hot, kinky monkey-ass sex you have. I definitely recommend swinging to anyone who feels like they're ready to add it to their already-existing sex life.

But what exactly do I mean by "ready for it?" And why do we hear about so many people who have had terrible swinging experiences? Because, like everything else when it comes to sex, swinging is neither for everyone nor for certain people at certain times in their lives. If humans were more like the rest of the animals on this planet then swinging wouldn't be that big of a thing - after all, most dogs' and cats' lifestyles are much like a typical sex club, roaming random alleyways until they find someone they can jump on top of long enough

SO YOU WANNA BE A SWINGER

to stick it in and do their thing, then be on their way. But we humans aren't like most animals - sex for us is intricately tied to a whole variety of complex emotional and mental issues, including love, romance,

compatibility, jealousy, power and submissiveness. Sex for us hairless apes is about a lot more than just rubbing various body parts together very quickly until sticky stuff comes out; it's a reflection of who we are, what we stand for, and what we think about the world and our fellow humans.

So, before you ever put up your first personal ad, take some time and really think about what it is that you actually want out of a swinging experience. Are you looking to have a series of short-term, random encounters with people you're not expecting to hang out with again? A smaller amount of likeminded individuals who you hope to have long-term sexual relationships with? A possible romantic mate? If you're straight, are you looking to explore homosexuality? If you're gay, are you looking to explore heterosexuality? What about fetishes? Are you a top? A bottom? Master? Slave? Sir? Boy? Dyke? Lipstick? Are you looking for someone to pee on you? Would you be up for someone choking you while they're fucking you?

You owe it to yourself to answer all these questions and more before even starting to get involved with your local swinging community. For already-established couples the situation gets even trickier - in fact, this is mostly where we hear about swinging experiences going horribly wrong, because the couple in question never really sat down and discussed what they were both looking for before just jumping into bed with someone. Adding a third person (or more) to our sex lives is an awfully complicated thing sometimes, especially for a society that has chosen monogamy as the conventional norm. Jealousy, power games and half-hidden truths are some of the many issues that can suddenly descend upon a couple in the middle of a swinging experience; if you're serious about staying together with your current romantic partner, you can do yourselves both a world of good by having a series of frank, brutally honest conversations about these issues before starting to contact potential swinging buddies.

In very general terms, swinging can be broken up into three specific categories: "soft" (where the goal is mostly that of exhibitionism and voyeurism - i.e. having people watch while you and your partner have sex, or a single person attending a masturbation club); "hard" (what we typically think of when we think of swinging - i.e. full sexual interchanges among a variety of people); and "fetish" (where the goal is to explore a very specific topic in sexuality, like bondage or fetish clothes or water sports). The more you understand about which type of swinging you're specifically interested in, and which specific activities within that type you're interested in exploring, the better off you'll be...and the better off you'll be when it comes time to find a swinging partner as well, because you'll now be armed with a pinpoint understanding of what exactly you're looking for in the people you meet up with.

So just how do you find those other swingers, anyway? Whew, that's the age-old question, ain't it? Getting involved with a local swinging community used to be a much tougher proposition even just ten years ago - one that involved post office boxes and grimy magazines and snickering Fotomat employees and lots of second-guessing and missed opportunities. Now, of course, we live in the fabled Information Age (at least, that's what Al Gore keeps telling me) - and, while hundreds of companies have gone bankrupt trying to find a way to turn a buck on the information superhighway, it's definitely become a boon for those trying to meet up with semi-strangers for regular sexual encounters.

There are all kinds of websites out there devoted to the swinging lifestyle, most of them charging money in one form or another. In addition, most traditional dating websites (including match.com, lavalife.com, nerve.com, peoplefishing.com and craigslist.com) have a section devoted to swinging as well, usually labeled

something innocuous like "casual encounters" but not really fooling anyone. And let's not forget the reliable standby - namely, your local arts-and-entertainment weekly newspaper, if you live in a large urban area. For many years this was the primary way for swingers to meet each other, and in many cities these ads still produce great results. Chicago residents, for example, should check the "None of the Above" section of the Reader; New York residents would look in the back of the Village Voice; and I'm sure Ilana can stick in a recommendation here for a London publication that serves the same purpose.

If you're a cheapskate like me, though, and can't stand the thought of spending money just to meet people you could meet for free in other circumstances, then I highly recommend checking out the groups section of Yahoo. There are literally hundreds of thousands of free "clubs" sponsored by Yahoo, devoted to everything from science-fiction movies to John Grisham novels to model-train collecting. The dirty little secret of Yahoo, though, and the one they wish their advertisers would forget, is that there are thousands upon thousands of people there using the groups to meet and schedule get-togethers with likeminded swingers as well. It's completely free to become a member of the Yahoo group website, and easy as pie to maintain your subscriptions; you simply go to a group that looks interesting, click on the "join" link in the upper-right corner of your screen, then go browse the interior of the group's website to your heart's content.

It can be a little difficult to find Yahoo swinging groups for your particular area, given that Yahoo removed the categorized listings of their adult groups last year due to pressure from a couple of conservative religious organizations. Not to fear, though; all the Yahoo groups are still accessible through their search engine, which means that with a little bit of luck and patience you can still most likely find a group that specifically caters to you. Just go to the main Yahoo groups page [groups.yahoo.com] and start typing terms into their search box that might get you the results you're looking for - "boston+swinging," "essex+couples," "omaha+group+sex," just to list a few examples. No one said swinging would be easy - and take it from me, no one's just going to give you the opportunity to have kinky group sex, put it on a silver platter and drop it in your lap. If you're serious about getting involved with your local swinging community, you're going to have to put in a little legwork to make it happen.

Once you've found a group that looks like it might be a keeper, join it and take a couple of minutes to check out its content. Are there lots of real people leaving lots of real messages in the posting section? Is it being moderated to keep the spam out? Does the member section list people with their real photos and email addresses? Is the files section loaded with lots of hot little amateur photos of couples in action? You've found a winner! Be respectful, be proactive, and for God's sake, be polite - there's nothing in the swinging community that turns people off faster than rudeness.

So what's next? Why, it's time to let other people know a little bit about yourself and what you're looking for. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the absolute number-one way potential swingers screw up when it comes to getting involved with their local community - I can't tell you how many times I've seen it now, and I still don't understand why people do this, but for some reason most people seem to think that they all they have to do is write "horny guy in south suburbs looking to fuck" and then sit back and wait for the responses to come rolling in. No photo...no description...no nothing to let us know who they are except that they're human and they're looking to have sex.

Wrong! Oh, SO wrong! Just like everything else in life, we humans become proportionally more intrigued by other people based on how much we know about them, and swinging is definitely no exception. The quest for kinky-sex partners is a highly competitive one; there can sometimes be thousands of people at any particular Yahoo group, all looking to get laid, with only a couple dozen of them actually doing so on a regular basis. If you want the edge over all the rest of these people, you need to learn to swallow your shyness factor and to divulge as much about yourself as you can possibly stand to do.

At the very minimum your personal ad should include the following: 1) your age (in my case, for example, 34); 2) general location (in my case, the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago); 3) your height, weight, and general build (6'0", 150 pounds, swimmer's build); 4) your orientation (bisexual, leaning heavily on the straight side); 5) your marital status (single); 6) how long you've been involved with swinging (about a year); and 6) what you're looking for in potential partners (single men, single women and couples - single men must be under 30, punk-looking and androgynous, while for women and couples this is a bonus but not a requirement).

Your own personal ad, though, can and should include a lot more than just this minimal information. What do you like to do? Who are your favorite bands? What are your favorite movies? What has been your best sexual experience, and what made it so? Preparing a personal ad is much like meeting someone in a singles bar, in the fact that your goal is to seduce that person. In this aspect we can look at visiting a Yahoo group like sitting in the middle of a pub on a Friday night - the person in question that we're interested in is surrounded on all sides by eager, available, attractive people, and your job is to convince them why they should go home with

you, even at the expense of ignoring all those other people who are better-looking than you ('cause, let's face it, there's always SOMEBODY better-looking than us in that room). The more you can paint a picture in that person's head of what you're like, the more intrigued they're going to be by you. The more intrigued they are, the better the chance of them actually contacting you. It's just that simple.

And finally, a little word about photographs. Photos should ALWAYS be included in any personal ad you put on the internet; if you're not willing to let someone you're begging to have sex with see what you look like beforehand, then you have no business begging people to have sex in the first place. My much more serious point about photos, though, and the one I will spend the rest of my life trying to get across to people, is this: **never again do I want to see a photograph of someone's genitals without the rest of their body also being in the picture.** Believe me, it may be very thrilling for you to take a picture of your nasties and stick it on the web for God and everyone to see, but you're not doing a goddamn bit of good for those of us who are actually trying to decide who we want to contact. Like I said, no one claims that swinging is a walk in the park - if you're not courageous enough to post a photo of your entire naked self, then you need to seriously consider whether you're courageous enough to meet up with strangers in the first place and have sex with them. (If you're worried about privacy issues, just black out your face in Photoshop - it's the viewing of your entire body that's important, not necessarily seeing your face.) Please, please, for the love of God, no more disconnected pictures of pee-pees and wee-wees!

Posting your personal ad online is easy enough - you can include all this information, including photos, at your Yahoo profile [profiles.yahoo.com], which you have to fill out anyway in order to join most adult groups. If you maintain your own website, like I do, I highly encourage you to set up a special "secret" URL there with your personal ad instead - you can include a lot more information there, lay it all out on one page, and have total control over how it looks. (You can check out mine if you want at [jasonpettus.com/naked/].)

Everything about swinging after this is pretty much what you can already guess: check your groups and paid-membership websites regularly; contact those who look intriguing; make it easy for those who are intrigued by you to be able to get in touch. I will, however, add the following suggestions, just because I'm a columnist and feel like I should:

--Be patient. As a friend of mine once put it so astutely, swinging is a lot like being a salesman - you do a lot of cold-calling, and you deal with a lot of rejection. Take my own experiences, for example: last year, when I was writing my book *Slut Summer* and getting involved with the swinging community for the first time, I ended up having sexual experiences with a total of fifteen people in fifteen weeks. What a lot of people tend to forget is that I contacted a good twenty people for every one person who I ended up meeting...which, if you do the math, means that I responded to nearly 300 personal ads over the course of four months in order to have the experiences I had. I mean, granted, this number is fairly extreme, but I was writing a book, after all. My point is that you can easily expect the same kind of ratio in your own life, no matter who you are - the simple fact of the matter is that at least nine out of ten emails you send out to swingers will result in nothing, not even an email back thanking you for writing. You better get used to it now, because it never gets better (not even when you're a sex columnist for a prominent British magazine...sigh).

--Be nice! There are a hella lot of creeps and weirdos trawling all over the internet these days, looking for fresh victims, and today's swingers are more savvy than ever about sniffing such people out. Besides, nobody wants to have sex with an asshole. (A master, maybe, but there's a big difference between a master and an asshole, as any good BDSMer can tell you.) Be respectful of people's boundaries and be patient with people's personal comfort levels - everyone is nervous when they start swinging for the first time, and for some people it takes longer to get comfortable than others. You're not doing anyone a bit of good by pressuring a person to meet before they're ready - most of all, yourself. Relax, take a deep breath, and jerk off that night yet again - there's always time to meet that cutie another day.

--And finally, be sincere. When all is said and done, meeting up with a swinger is just like meeting up with another person in any other context you can name - it's all about feeling comfortable, having a good time, and making a real connection with the other person. This only comes from avoiding all the games and bullshit we humans are so quick to enact upon others, and instead just being yourself and presenting you to them as you are, warts and all. Don't worry about trying to project a sense of perfection to your potential swinging partners; as a wise man once said, it is the imperfections of a person that makes us fall in love with them. Again, relax! Swinging is supposed to be about having casual, laid-back, intense sex with people you barely know. If you find yourself stressed out and lying to the people around you, you're definitely doing something wrong.

Okay, that's it - now get out there and have some kinky sex, goddamnit. Especially with mild-mannered bisexual sex columnists from Chicago with swimmers' builds and big giant cocks. Yeah, ESPECIALLY them!