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# Refusing a Spoiled Identity: How the Swinger Community Represents on the Web

Barbara Kreston  
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**REFUSING A SPOILED IDENTITY:  
HOW THE SWINGER COMMUNITY REPRESENTS ON THE WEB**

by

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**ENGLISH**

**OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY**  
August 2014

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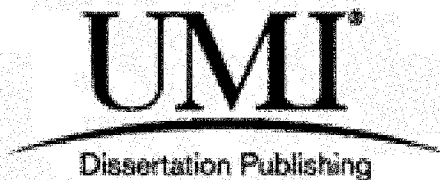
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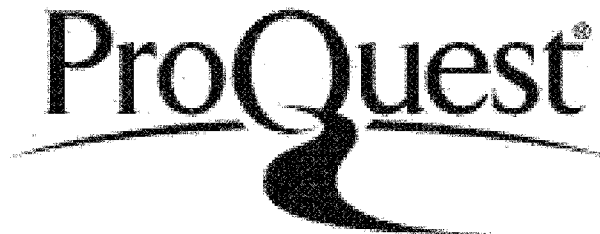


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## **ABSTRACT**

### **REFUSING A SPOILED IDENTITY: HOW THE SWINGER COMMUNITY REPRESENTS ON THE WEB**

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Old Dominion University, 2014  
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This dissertation examines whether and how Websites provide a way for the unique community of swingers, also called Lifestylers, to represent a new (and revise an old) deviant identity without risk to their social and employment standing. Unlike many marginalized social groups who publically rally, swingers have had to take advantage of virtual space to safely appeal to their audiences. The time period studied includes the history of the swingers “spoiled” identity via academy articles, newspaper headlines, and moral turpitude clauses from the 1950s to the current use of the Web to showcase swingers and their clubs. The study used visual and linguistic rhetorical analysis and swingers’ use of rhetorical refusals to examine one-hundred screen shots collected in 2012. One hundred Web pages from twenty-five swing club Websites served as a case study. Two analytical strategies were employed: (1) a qualitative analysis of five linguistic and 12 visual design characteristics and (2) a search for rhetorical refusals, both of the kind previously identified by Schilb and possible new refusal types. The analysis clarified the process by which a Web presence allows previously silenced subgroups to transform social structures and the constraints they face in doing so. In essence, this dissertation challenges the argument that subgroups remain shamed and private if they differ from standard societal behaviors. Some see these groups as detrimental to society’s well-being, but that power differential can be undone when counter public groups use the

Internet to publically challenge that presumption with an alternative perspective. The findings not only show swingers' deliberate, rhetorical efforts to entice new members through appealing Websites about the Lifestyle, but also demonstrate how such Websites can propel social change as swingers defy socially social expectations to remain invisible, frame themselves as good people, and take the opportunity to redefine desire, monogamy, and loyalty.

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I dedicate this work to my children, Clark Jr., Alexander, and Nikki with all my love.

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This page is a joy to write because it signals the end of a very arduous, but ultimately fulfilling trip.

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To my daughter Nikki, who, at 15 has only known her mother as a perennial student, to Marlin who has listened for eight years, to Diego, Dee Dee, Kai, Chase, Jack, and Jada who let me share their den, and to all my friends, students, and relatives, thank you for your patience and support.



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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION: A STIGMATIZED IDENTITY**  
**FOR THE “SEXUAL RABBLE”**

**The Swinger Ethos**

Because of their sexual choices, swingers are a unique marginalized group in the United States. As such, their efforts to resist socially embedded power structures offer a model of rhetorical action and critique of standard values that appears to be different from other, better recognized groups. The work of uncovering how swingers resist heterosexual norms can be accomplished by analyzing what this group is doing on their public interfaces, specifically how they use Website design and rhetorical refusals to craft an Internet identity. How swingers are communicating, though, is different from how academics have seen disenfranchised groups working before, and this quality makes swingers worth studying. Their stigmatization makes them difficult to locate and study. However, how they articulate their identities on the Web expands and complicates two rhetorical strategies that can offer similar sexually-different groups models to follow. The current model for challenging norms is evidenced by The Gay Pride Crusade and the Women’s Rights Movement in the United States, which outline some ways that the disenfranchised gain and/or recover their voices. Yet, as familiar as these social movements have been in the last fifty years, some groups like swingers have not reached, nor may ever reach, the critical level of a movement; instead, they still struggle to re-frame a pejorative identity that society gives them as social standards violators.

This rhetorical study of swingers continues the critique begun by queer studies into examining how heteronormative discourse disenfranchises sexual difference, forcing many sexually taboo groups into silence. The main research into unheard voices studies marginalized groups such as gays, racial minorities, and women who “opened up and (re)-created new ways of doing politics,” while queer studies focuses specifically on debunking the privileged and naturalized position of heterosexuality (Walters 838). The privileged position of heterosexuality covertly and overtly disguises rhetorically constructed social norms where difference becomes value-laden with stigmatizing language such as “homo,” “weird,” “gay,” “lesbo,” or “queer.” The standard formula for emerging, vocal dissenters has heretofore included grass roots public marches, speeches, and protests, but currently these acts are being augmented by “deconstruction, decentering, revisionist strategies, and anti-assimilation politics” (Gamson and Moon 49). The multi-perspective and critical tenets of postmodernism, added to the value that rhetorical analysis offers, provide another view on assumptive hegemonic positions. Theoretically, as standard “truths” become untenable, sexual norms such as heterosexuality and monogamy become vulnerable to assertions of so-called correct behavior. The results on one front are already evident as homosexuality has generally moved into mainstream American culture and been accorded some of the rights of the majority. However, that has not yet been the case for swingers or Lifestylers, the new terms for the wife-swappers of the 1950s. They are uniquely different from typical marginalized groups on other issues beyond a public vulnerability in that their stigma both fascinates others and adds to their allure. Thus, swingers have had to market

themselves to the American public in new and creative rhetorical ways as they create a community identity.

Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984) describes how identity issues have always loomed large for minority groups. Rubin comments that while every group cannot "emulate the success of homosexuals," they can follow other such sub-marginalized groups as bisexuals, cross-dressers, sadomasochists, transsexuals, and/or transvestites who engage in "various states of community formation and identity acquisition [because] they are attempting to acquire social space, small businesses, political resources, and a measure of relief from the penalties for sexual heresy" (156). New research in rhetorical theory and the latest Web technology have offered fresh ways and novel spaces for swingers to gain legitimacy as viable communities. This study seeks to understand how they articulate themselves as a product of their discourse stance.

Broadly, this dissertation uses scholarly literature and swingers' Websites to focus on how swingers finesse the tension they encounter in both norming and advertising their difference on the Internet and how they use rhetoric to argue against covert or overt cultural stereotypes constructed and maintained by institutions, big media, and social discourse. More specifically, this dissertation uses a qualitative, case study method to find evidence of how swingers use persuasive elements from Websites—both linguistic and visual--and rhetorical refusals to create an identity. The twenty-five geographically representative Websites were defined as a case study to minimize risk to individual swingers through the use of interviews or surveys. More discussion occurs in the Research Approach section.

Rubin's early 1984 work on groups that endured endemic social-sexual oppression captured a strong sense of the injustice that results from a society that seemingly coerces those who are different to accept that "deviant" status. Since swingers and many other communities still find themselves on the wrong side of the sexual hierarchy, they must continue to make these tactics visible in order to oppose them:

Popular culture is permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved, and a menace to everything from small children to national security. Popular sexual ideology is a noxious stew made up of ideas of sexual sin, concepts of psychological inferiority, anti-communism, mob hysteria, accusations of witchcraft, and xenophobia. The mass media nourish these attitudes with relentless propaganda. I would call this system of erotic stigma the last socially respectable form of prejudice if the old forms did not show such obstinate vitality, and new ones did not continually become apparent. All these hierarchies of sexual value—religious, psychiatric, and popular—function in much the same ways as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble. (150)

As a word, "swingers" entered the American lexicon in the 1950s, but as a group, they remain a growing subculture, yet one that still is set apart from the mainstream



culture. Staying outside of social norms as “other” may bring them an alluring cachet, evidenced by Hollywood’s profits on “tales of forbidden sex,” yet outsider-allure does not always negate a desire for legitimacy (Gould 98). As a result of this tension, swingers inhabit a rather distinctive place with regard to other sexual minorities who generally seek acceptance and the invisibility of normal. Resisting a pejorative characterization usually means taking the fight public as did Margaret Sanger, Oscar Wilde, Harvey Milk, Sister Margaret Farley, and Lady Gaga. And, although swingers generally have kept their hedonistic pleasures private, they have not really had many true options. Judith Butler defines this theoretical no-real-option concept when she argues that marginalized groups conditioned by social norms cannot imagine different choices because in an oppositional society of male/female, “certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’”; therefore, to say swingers *choose* to stay private for x or y reason makes agency problematic (*Gender Trouble* 24). For example, the “T” in the LGBTI community gave transgendered individuals an identity and refuted the standard two-gender-option, opening up options for understanding differing sexualities such as women lipstick lesbians, cross-dressers, and drag queens.

Even if swingers actually could “choose” an open lifestyle, social and employment pressures would foreclose this option since no underground sexual group has successfully carved out a legitimate social presence, leaving them no rhetorical role model to follow. But a more global world is changing that model. Not only is the swinger community growing and becoming a “national movement, millions strong...[and]...an economic powerhouse” that provides another version of a social-sexual narrative, the Internet also has given them an imagined presence and accessibility (*Nightline* Martin

Bashir ABC News Dec. 2012). Clubs still practice caution, keeping their members' names and pictures off the Websites unless given permission, making online applications necessary before they give clients party directions and mandating new couples' orientations that stress keeping low-profile and maintaining club secrecy. Choice is subsumed under an implicit sexual and moral hierarchy that essentially negates any transgressive action such as going public. Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* focuses on gender choices of course, but her concept also holds for sexual choices as well when she says: "The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture.... These limits are always set within the terms of hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures" (12). In other words, the strength of cultural norms means that making a choice may only be an illusion because the only choices allowable are ones constituted by society in a sort of catch-22. So, not only do employment risks pressure swingers to be silent, but language also constructs normative sexual narratives and constrains what swingers can imagine as a different way of being sexually, so they stay quiet, even if it *appears* that their invisibility is a choice (xxiii). In a later book, *Excitable Speech*, Butler repeats this claim; language echoes with social rituals that are "powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent, insidious, insistent, and insinuating" (159). As an example, Robert McGinley, one of the founders of the Modern Swing Movement and head of the North Atlantic Swing Club Association (NASCA) points out to Martin Bashir in that 2009 *Nightline* interview, "We would like people to be able to express themselves...without fear of condemnation or handcuffs." This desire for a livable sexual life manifests itself as a "cultural sense of the body and how the body comes to disorient

that cultural sense” leading to what Butler describes the “insurrectionary moment...the moment that founds a future through a break with the past” (*Excitable Speech* 159).

Because this study emphasizes the rhetorical means that swingers use for both legitimizing and presenting their difference on the Internet, John Schilb’s work on rhetorical refusals identifies an apt response to Butler’s concept of the “insurrectionary moment” for a group that cannot transgress as openly as other minority groups do. Schilb identifies his concept of rhetorical refusals as “an act of writing or speaking in which the rhetor pointedly refuses to do what the audiences considers rhetorically normal” (3). It is a specific, almost niche term, several degrees this side of simple stubbornness. As his first exploration on the subject, he admits the rhetorical refusal might have limited applicability. For example, he has only analyzed print work to date, but the refusals’ three criteria of (1) making a deliberate decision, (2) violating a social code and (3) taking on a superior position about that decision seems to match much of the identity work revealed in swinger Websites. These sites consciously make swingers public, are in direct defiance of an implied social contract to remain silent as a “deviant” subgroup, and take on a superior position that lauds sexual autonomy and inclusion over conforming to the rules of monogamy. These rhetorical, but somewhat defensive moves, allow swingers agency in developing their own characterization. By refusing to play the sexual hierarchy game on heteronormative terms, they can put their energy into strengthening their identity via the Web. The potential evidence for these criteria emerges from rhetorically analyzing their Websites’ language and images. Additional support for intentionality comes from reading emails, blogs, and online interviews with swingers from Kasidie.com and Erosophia.com.

The ability to craft this new identity rests on the familiar linguistic practices from the classical canons and the affordances offered by new technology for seeing new versions of these rhetorical practices in visual designs; the Internet's anonymity and availability has offered swingers a rich and productive space to collectively resist what Erving Goffman's (1963) work, *Stigma*, calls a "spoiled identity." This identity marks a person "with an undesirable differentness from what [normals] had anticipated," so the Web's anonymity provides sympathetic audiences a chance to sidestep the public peer pressure to rail against these non-conformists (5). Moreover, Goffman claims, "we tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one, and at the same time impute some desirable, but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast such as 'sixth sense' or 'understanding'" (5). This combination of discrediting, then, creates a mythic-fantasy around the stigmatized, who often rationalize society's behavior towards them as well as exerting social control by keeping them visible and named (9, 70). The Web became an opportunity for swingers to use this visibility to acquire agency in representing themselves as a way to "manage their stigma." But this work is on-going. Many contemporary cultural researchers such as Lisa Nakamura recognize that the democratic potential of the Web, despite a great hopefulness, has not yet become the great equalizer of all things marginalized (*Cybertypes 4*). Yet, in this space, swingers define their own set of norms and outline their differences as they employ the classical canons and parallel visual heuristics in crafting a Web identity. Furthermore, they learn about the affordances and limitations of the Internet as they balance being "othered" and purposely seeking that "othering." In a recent swinger blog from *Erosophia*, Sailorcrest addressed this difficulty:

being swingers...has brought about some fundamental changes in how we look at life, relationships, and other people. What we do find tricky is keeping our club friends and vanilla friendship separate. And, to restrain the urge to blurt out and discuss our adventures with vanilla couples.

We are not out to recruit anyone.

Swingers represent a different kind of marginalized community, one not necessarily dedicated or eager to publically challenge mainstream sexual narratives, yet whose choices should be accorded respect even if they do not (or cannot) openly seek social validation. Rhetorically, however, swingers' choices provide critical model strategies for other like-minded groups to follow in creating a self-made identity in opposition the stigmatized one that circulates today.

### **Definitions of Swinger Terms**

The term "wife-swappers," coined by the media in the 1950's, was retired in the next decade with the establishment of California's first swinging organization, the Sexual Freedom League. The anti-feminist term became the "swinging lifestyle," which became alternately "swingers" and "Lifestylers." The "Life" generally represents an older, white, middle-class group of couples who enjoy group sex, threesomes, girl-on-girl sex, voyeurism, or exhibitionism. However, swingers have become younger and more culturally and racially diverse over the last twenty years, following cultural U.S. trends. The old key parties are gone as swingers attend private house parties, monthly themed events in hotels, hard-site venues, conventions, cruises, and Lifestyle-specific vacation destinations. They believe strongly in emotional monogamy, which they define as having

sex with other partners while keeping the emotional health of the couple first. Most parties have an open door policy for couples and single girls, with a cap on single men allowed. At such hard sites as the *Green Door* in Las Vegas, anyone can attend, but single men pay a premium for the privilege. Hired security and circulating staff strictly enforce the “no drugs, no prostitution, no drunkenness, and *No Means No!*” policies. A new trend has begun favoring exclusive clubs based on one’s age, size, and “appropriate look” (i.e., the Barbie and Ken couple) and away from the “everyone’s welcomed” atmosphere as the Lifestyle community has expanded.

*Play* is the verb of choice for Lifestylers; it defines their view on sex as something to be passionately and frequently enjoyed. Some playcouples meet outside of the clubs, establishing long-term friendships; others prefer the once a month meeting at a hotel or club, just enough to put a little variety into their relationship.

*Co-marital* marks the focus of swing clubs, the married or partnered twosome. The term *polyamory* is more often used in the U.K., and it means that multiple partners live together. Polyamorists generally live together rather than hook up once a month. They look down on swingers as too hedonistic and irresponsible with their focus on sex over ongoing relationships.

### **A Brief Swinger History**

During WWII, as fighter pilots facing long and dangerous missions asked their fellow pilots to take care of their wives, both emotionally and sexually, in case of disaster. According to Gould, “they shared each other as a kind of tribal bonding ritual, with the tacit understanding that the two-thirds of the husbands who survived would look after the widows” of the men who did not (30). These “key clubs” spread from military bases to

the surrounding middle-class, white-collared professionals, added converts during the beatnik era, made it into Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, and were outed by the New York fringe media who broke the first story about "wife-swapping" in 1957 (Gould 32). By the early 1960's, twenty magazines had emerged for this market, devoting themselves to this non-monogamous lifestyle and advertising big parties. Wives generally objected to the original, patriarchal term, wife-swappers, but the story of how the term "swingers" took its place remains apocryphal, possibly owing something to the new swing dance craze sweeping the era (32).

It is hard to trace the world history of swinging before the mid-twentieth century because every culture views sexuality, erotic rites, or tribal ties differently; not all value monogamy or condemn having sex outside of marriage, so statistics cannot be compared easily. However, according to Gould, "as late as the 1940s an 'extra-marital liaison' was an approved custom in 39 percent of cultures studied through the world" (3). The growing number of swingers—3 million in 1996 with 300 hundred clubs belonging to North Atlantic Swing Club Association (NASCA)—demonstrates their fascination for the American imagination (32). Comprised of "grass roots heterosexual orient[ed]...mainstream couples" who were one third Republican, one third post-grads, and almost one half Protestant, they wrote a new and different sexual narrative that met a need in American marriage and relationships (4). California has a significant part of this population, but swingers clubs exist in every U.S. state with the same general motto as the popular New Orleans swing club, *Colette*: "A concept of an open mind, explore your fantasies...embrace your wildside." The demographics have changed from the predominantly white, middle-aged, suburban couple to include a wider socio-economic

and ethnic range. The average age used to be in the upper-thirties, but now younger couples also are attracted to the Lifestyle. The focus on couples has not changed, however. Some clubs, especially the Las Vegas hard sites (not a hotel and not a personal home), allow single men at a premium entrance fee, but still reserve part of the club for couples only. Kaye Bellemeade states in *Swinging for Beginners* that “single guys can be overbearing and really bring everyone down”; however, almost every private, non-profit club welcomes single females because they “add to the excitement” (137).

Ironically, despite their relative invisibility, media pop culture has taken an interest in swingers, introducing them as interesting media oddities. For example, the producers of *CSI* and *Law and Order* have used them as a plot device, and in June 2008, CBS launched *Swingtown*, a mini-series that explored the Lifestyle in the 1960s era of “make love, not war.” In 2011, The *Playboy* Channel consulted with the Kasidie Swing Club (the largest online club) for *Playboy*’s reality series, *Swing*. Hinting at the rarity of consulting swingers, Kasidie explains in a blog post (May 23, 2011) that the writers were open to hearing some authentic voices when as they created the show: “Yes, *Playboy* did script the show a little bit and they also edited it together the way they wanted, but it’s also fairly authentic and the people had a lot of leeway to do and say what they wanted...it was genuine in at least the sense that the couples really were all in the lifestyle.” Of course, the show concentrates on the erotic and sensual side of swinging within the confined context of the party house, but if the Kasidie members did have some say in their own portrayal, this is a step beyond simply using a Website to form the majority of their public face.



Swingers have not actively sought to conventionalize their underground lifestyle outside of their community because their outsider status also can function as the attraction for potential members. Defying the status quo speaks to many who do not like being told how to think, but defiance also has its own social risks. Swingers' seemingly competing goals of shunning stigma while embracing sexual difference is evidenced by the numerous books that explain the benefits of the Lifestyle, but these goals also imply that being sexually adventuresome is a positive quality. Knowing that their rebellious identity itself holds some attraction demands that swingers employ a synthesis of strategies for creating an identity that is not just rebellious to be rebellious. Thus, this study focuses on the rhetorical means that swingers use to both acquire a purposeful identity and advertise their distinctiveness on the Internet.

The notion of "normal" carries substantial weight in American society, but it is not always universally appealing, as Goffman discovered in his research. Some marginalized groups enjoy having a distinctly rebellious identity, which he identifies as "social deviants" (as opposed to in-group deviants). And, rather than be ashamed, such groups "flaunt their refusal to accept their place and are temporarily tolerated in this gestural rebellion, providing it is restricted within the ecological boundaries of their community" (*Stigma* 145). Schilb's work in rhetorical refusals, which describes a method of uncovering resistance to hegemonic discourse, dovetails with Goffman's view that many outsider groups enjoy their resistive stance. Most significant for this dissertation, social deviants such as swingers often express that "they are not merely equal to but better than 'normals,' and that the life they lead is better" (145). By reversing the usual offensive and defensive positions, swingers not only offer the public access to another

sexual possibility (lacking in the heteronormative narrative), but consider it an arguably superior one, which they support by demonstrating the statistics on adultery in American marriage. For example, recent studies reveal that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in extramarital sex at some time or another during their relationship (Atwood & Schwartz). For swingers, it is illogical to be in a moral relationship and cheat, so they choose to “stay ethically loyal while immorally exchanging spouses” (Gould 124). In fact, swingers view themselves as “actually having taken a step up” from an old moral code because “the ethical lust they cultivate with others [is] a plaything of their loving marriage” (124). Since both partners know and bless having sex with others, swingers feel their definition of fidelity is better; they are more loyal than the monogamous couple that cheats, meeting Schilb’s third criterion, acting on a higher moral plain, Lifestylers believe they can still love and care for a partner without going behind his or her partner’s back for sex, a logical position, which should resonate with reasonable audiences (134). An analysis of their Websites supports this third and most important criteria of Schilb’s rhetorical refusals in particular, as well as identifies the second criterion, which is how socially unexpected swingers act by claiming “permissible cheating” is not the betrayal that secret affairs are or cause such devastating harm as divorce does. By refusing to abide by an illogical convention, the refusal makes the discrepancy clear and visible to the audience. The first criterion, deliberation, generally speaks for itself as all the Websites go through a conscious, creative process that tells the audience swingers intend to fight back against society’s control of swingers’ identity. Given a generally swinger-curious audience, the refusal may not do more than remind newcomers that swingers are loving and reasonable; to

those who stumble upon the site, they may rethink old stereotypes based on this new swinger characterization.

This subgroup identity creation requires study, as swingers share similar, but not identical, issues with more vocal minority collectives. One important difference concerns cultural presence. For example, Joshua Gamson argues that gays and lesbians have been fighting their spoiled identity long enough that in-fighting based on belonging (who gets to say “we”) has de-stabilized their own collective identities from within, causing worry that division will negate any unified, political action despite the already unsteady identity (392). According to Gamson, aiming for cohesiveness (or the unflattering term “homogenization”) continues despite an inherent queer theoretical drive to un-work systems of domination by “blur[ring] and deconstruct[ing] group categories...to keep them forever unstable” (393). Although queer theory has come under attack as having few specific results from simply queering or troubling the status quo, it does keep the pressure on to recognize the invisible ways heteronormativity dominates the world (Sullivan 50). Swinger Robert McGinley, who founded NASCA, has led the trend since 1979 toward a political movement, albeit a California-centric one, moving slowly in the identity construction process presumably to avoid the previous mistakes of other marginalized groups who bicker over who can legitimately call themselves a group member (Gould 50). So far, the definition of swinger broadly includes most forms of open-couple sexuality, from “soft” swingers who may only observe to hard-core, full-swap swingers who are sexually active (with penetration) with other partners. Perhaps they are in the formative part of their identity timeline, where unity is the priority. Unfortunately, other groups who have moved past the solidarity of the coming out phase

have encountered the above identity issues. Lesbian women of color found themselves at odds with the white, middle class lesbians who did not face the same racial, cultural, and economic problems as they did. The same rift splintered homosexuals who claimed they were not all alike either. Unfortunately, and despite the caution of McGinley's rhetorical path, worrisome trends of swinger exclusion have formed already: The Syrens Swing Club in the UK "host[s] parties for young and beautiful swingers in luxurious apartments in Newcastle." Other clubs, similar in some ways, may not deny a heavier or older couple from coming, but they warn the "non-Barbie and Ken" couple that their members want their play-partners to look like them. However, the majority of swinger Websites continually reiterates what the Lifestyle Ranch (Ocala, FL) posts on their Webpage: "we are not looking for Barbie and Ken as they are just dolls anyway and we are not models and you need not be either." It is not possible to predict whether this pro-Barbie/Ken position will catch on as a trend, but given the experiences of other marginalized groups, it seems inevitable.

Despite the potential internal strife, at present this study considers how swinger communities might successfully revise their deviant label and *still* retain a naughty allure. Becoming mainstream deprives them of the public's fascination, so marketing themselves may require a different identity strategy like the strategic, iconoclastic deviant evidenced by celebrities as Liberace, Ru Paul, Boy George, Madonna, Lady Ga Ga, and even Katie Perry, who sings "I Kissed a Girl and I Liked It." And, since a rebellious but proud identity trope resonates with American values of independence, equality, tolerance, and Thoreau's different drummer, it is a strong strategic move toward keeping the tensions in balance. America's long history of approving rebels should support swingers' belief that

being sexually adventuresome can and should exist with sexual legitimacy even though the *sexual* aspect of rebellion may mar this argument. As mentioned earlier, Gayle Rubin's 1984 "Thinking Sex, Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," recognizes that the sexual negativity of Western cultures consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive force. A cultural endemic belief that "if marriage, reproduction, or love is not involved, almost all sexual behavior is considered bad," results in the "fallacy of the misplaced scale, [which] means sex acts are troubled by an excess of significance" (150). Her work then identifies the same issues still facing researchers today—all sex is politicized and new information that exposes the hysteria and bias of most sexual discourse in America needs to be interrogated, troubled, and queered.

Swingers face a myriad of tensions in their path to whatever goal they have in mind, making it necessary to identify and understand these strategies for other outsider groups to mimic, and through acts of social resistance, they open "access to pleasures and possibilities" according to Warner's *The Trouble with Normal* (7). Yet, even though these efforts often run into the same entrenched power structures, the effort to make visible how normative discourse can negate a subculture's choices continues.

The following examples reveal why this group is worth studying, why they are not out in public, and why it is difficult to get information on them. The two most salient reasons come from public institutions: newspaper headlines have audiences in the millions, so editors' word choices can create powerful norms and threats to those values (to sell a crisis), which are difficult for small groups to counter. Second, moral turpitude clauses allow employment contracts to define and name specific examples of "incorrect behavior" in a similar social campaign to control perceived sexual threats to the status

quo. This cultural battle, Warner explains, has thousands of ways for people to govern the sex of others—directly, through prohibition and regulation, and indirectly, by embracing one identity or one set of tastes as though they were universally shared, or should be...and [we]congratulate ourselves for doing it” (1).

### **Examples of Pejorative Headlines against Swingers**

Newspaper headlines underscore how a deviant swinger identity becomes knowledge. The continual media characterization, the deliberative crisis-mode word choice, and disconnect between the headline and the story do not offer an objective account of swingers in America. The general readers’ experience with prior texts suggests that newspaper headlines—a written medium of big, bold, and well-placed text—function to notify society of proximal danger; in fact, they warn of immediate danger since nothing else is more important than this news on this particular day.

- **HEADLINE 1:**“Texas: Judge Grants Dallas’ Request to Temporarily Close Sex Club Operating As Ministry. (Dallasnews.com.) (See Appendix A for complete article)
- **HEADLINE 2:** “Mitzelfelt Vows to Stop Sex Club from Opening.” (Mitzelfelt. 7 Mar. 2012. Web. 12 Apr. 2011.)(See Appendix B)
- **HEADLINE 3:** “W. VA. Commissioner Says Mason County Sex Club Has No License.” (Jones, Carrie.WSAZ.com 30 Dec. 2009. Web. 12 Apr. 2011.) (See Appendix C)

These headlines set up readers’ expectations, so when the audience reads, “Public Hearing to Outlaw Swing Club,” they “hear” an ideological story about an unnatural group of law-breakers, which also is heard in the passionate appeal from Mitzelfelt, who

“Vows to Stop Sex Club from Opening.” Metzfelt constructs himself as a David to the swing club’s Goliath. The quasi-neutral headline, “...Mason County Sex Club Has No License” does not meet a crisis threshold or perhaps sell many newspapers, but it still constructs the club as a lawbreaker. The vagueness of the words means audiences can interpret it as: the club could not get a license *because* it was a sex club, not that the club simply had neglected to get one. Not only do these headlines brand swingers, but they also represent this knowledge as truth, called “the objective news story,” despite the public’s experience with bias in the news. The editors’ decisions to constitute swingers as an unnatural menace to society may be less about social norms than selling newspapers, yet they inevitably contribute to framing “correct” and “incorrect” practices since monogamous people do not find themselves in the headlines for being monogamous. Furthermore, the repetition of such phrases as “illegal sex club” in many other headlines not listed also frames swingers as criminals. The public’s familiarity with headlines supports these conclusions as “truth” because the constant echo of words, phrases, genres, and the story’s plot logic form social reality; we expect to read about anomalous behavior, and that behavior quickly becomes laden with negative connotations with each succeeding headline (Johnstone 163). Even though headlines are not a genre, audiences are familiar with their ubiquity and can benefit from Carolyn Miller’s insight into genres, where she uses the word “typification,” to describe how fixed genres can contribute to how society maintains the fixity of ideologies and definitions of such words as “heteronormativity,” “monogamy,” and “fidelity” (183). The three headlines above and the language used in moral turpitude clauses in employment contracts typify the on-going and systemic problems swingers face such as the “unnatural” pairing of a sex club with

religion, the passionate use of “vow” implying that the district supervisor’s sacred duty is to stop illegal sex club’s from existing (which is really about not having a correct permit), and the apparent horror involved with a sex club having no license. In all cases, more neutral words would convey a less pejorative tone regarding alternative sexual behavior:

Big media texts rhetorically function as repeated warnings toward sexual difference and continually codify normal and correct behavior which trickles up and down discourse levels. From water cooler talk about the news, jokes, and serious conversations to Althusser’s concept of institutional ideological state apparatuses, crisis diction delineates an overt threat to marriage and morality from “those” people. This language contributes to swinger bias by strategically placing this especially powerful information in big, bold font on the top of the article, turning the headlines into apparent truths regardless of the validity or accuracy of the representation constructed. Michel Foucault’s theory on heteronormative ideology explains how easily the sexual binary legitimizes those who conform while disqualifying others, such as swingers, from sexual acceptance. Headlines write the story of how to view swingers, and swingers, up until the advent of the Internet, had little recourse in challenging these media truths. The post-constructionist view of language offers transgressive opportunities certainly, and those will be explored later, but even if swingers can act, the fear of being fired for violating moral turpitude clauses hampers any overt action, making them easily erased as legitimate social beings, except in the brief spaces that destabilize normative privilege.

### **Pejorative Language in Moral Turpitude Employment Clauses**

While headlines demonstrate a common, pervasive, and familiar discursive act, the lesser-known wording in employment contracts also serve as a powerful institutional



discourse that controls sexuality through legally sanctioned documents. Moral turpitude clauses in employment contracts spell out this incorrect behavior rather broadly, and the contract gives institutions full power to terminate, disbar, or deport the employee. Marka B. Fleming, Amanda Harmon Cooley, and Gwendolyn McFadden-Wade did considerable research into this area for the *Brigham Young Education and Law Journal* (2009) and found examples where employers used the broad scope of the morality statute to enforce a wide range of behavioral breaches. The authors focused on secondary and post-secondary educators, detailing inconsistent interpretations and application by private and public school boards across the county. Coaches, principals, and teachers were fired for such things as working weekends as a “bikini girl” on a fishing charter, being pregnant and unmarried, posing nude for a private art studio, or/and having racy pictures on their own Facebook accounts. In Broward County, FL, the following article in the *Sun Sentinel* lays out what swingers risk for their sexual choices:

### **Teacher Arrested At Club Resigns**

January 25, 2000, By BILL HIRSCHMAN Education

Writer

One thought haunted Broward teacher Tonya Whyte on Monday as she resigned from the school district that has tried to fire her since her arrest in a swinger's club a year ago. A month after the raid, "I was yanked out of my classroom. I wasn't allowed to explain to the students. I wasn't allowed to explain to my friends. It was all hush-hush. But the last image my students have of me is being

removed from the classroom," Whyte said with a catch in her voice."

A California teacher was fired for having an immoral homosexual *liason*. Fortunately, the court in *Morrison v. State Board of Education*...determined that the Board of Education could not characterize the conduct in the case as "immoral," "unprofessional," or "involving moral turpitude within the meaning of [the state's education code], unless that conduct indicate[d] that the [teacher was] unfit to teach" (64). This particular school district was unable to link the teacher's homosexuality to the unfit-to-teach criterion; however, other school districts have fired teachers for similar immoral behaviors without establishing the link to the classroom. According to Fleming, Cooley, and McFadden-Wade again, many school districts often ignore the 'rational nexus' between the allegedly immoral activity at issue and the teacher's performance in the school because such a "showing of a nexus is not a requirement in all states or courts" (82). Since school districts still have the will and power to fire for "immoral" behaviors, it is not only swingers who must be cautious about keeping their lifestyle choices to themselves (81, 83).

*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Law* (1996) defines moral turpitude as "an act or behavior that gravely violates the sentiment or accepted standard of the community." Almost two decades later, the definition has not changed; *The Essential Law Dictionary* (2008) uses remarkably similar words: "conduct that grossly violates acceptable standards of morality and behavior." According to [www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov), moral turpitude refers generally to conduct that is inherently base, vile, or depraved, contrary to the accepted rules of morality and the duties owed between persons or society in general

(See *Matter of Franklin*, 20 I&N Dec. 867, 868 (BIA 1994). Moral turpitude also has been defined as an act which is *per se* morally reprehensible and intrinsically wrong, or *malum in se*, so it is the nature of the act itself and not the statutory prohibition of it which renders a crime one of moral turpitude (see *Matter of Torres-Varela*, 23 I&N Dec. 78, 85 (BIA 2001)). These legal dictionaries and court views take a passionate stance against a presumed betrayal of the community, but these definitions also make clear how vague the parameters of immorality are, and—similar to pornography—how they are generally based on the notion that “We’ll know it when we see it.” Naturalized and invisible mores are difficult for disenfranchised subjects such as swingers to oppose and, even more disquieting, many find it hard to “distinguish their shame from its politics, their personal failings from the power of alien norms” as “we tend to impute a wide range of imperfections based on the original one” (Goffman *Stigma* 5). Employers certainly have broad authority in determining what frames both customary and deviant behavior based on society’s perspective on what is “intrinsically wrong,” therefore, using Websites to represent a different perspective challenges society’s right to define immorality or deviance.

Swingers’ sexual behavior constitutes an aberration because they deny monogamy and fidelity rules, which are key features of the normalized marriage contract supported by church and state. And, as swingers implicitly critique these rules by refusing to give up their lifestyle (evidenced by their growing numbers), they simultaneously put themselves on a higher moral plane by redefining the norms being violated. Swingers implicitly accuse society of arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and hypocrisy. This is one small strategy against the government’s role in constructing “a politics of shame [that is]

making sure that nothing challenging to the taste of the majority will be allowed to circulate” (Warner13). It is difficult for any marginalized group to fight this kind of endemic naturalizing discourse. Swingers must endure “silent inequities” and their actions are criminalized as threats to the social order according to Warner’s work on sexual ethics. He sees the tight control the state puts on sexual deviance as “rationalizations [that] obscure the intent to shut down sexual difference and all access to pleasure as well” (25). Although celebrating diversity has currency, these morality clauses discredit employers’ choices in celebrating “diversity” in sexual ways.

### **Swingers and the Web’s Possibilities**

The history of marginalized groups according to popular cultural analysts Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, is one where the “inequalities of power are produced, maintained, and transformed through culture” (3). When “wife-swappers” entered the American discourse landscape, it became a suburban cultural phenomena immortalized in the 1969 movie *Bob&Carol&Ted&Alice*. Although the movie was commercially popular amidst the 1960s sexual revolution, it did little to normalize swinger sexual practices, leaving swingers to retreat to the shadowy and private underground where communication with others was through personal ads in swingers’ newspapers and word of mouth. In their silence, institutional, legal, and everyday discourse continued to discuss, monitor, and legalize correct social-sexual behavior at odds with hedonism and pleasure. The cultural story seemingly ended with swingers having no choices, no strategies, and no voice in rebutting their “spoiled” identity.

When poststructuralists questioned culturally stable “sexes, genders and sexualities,” the ensuing politics challenged the old social order, and opened up “a critical

re-reading of heterosexuality...in the discourse of the marginalized” (Schlieter 545). As important as this critique became, these theorists were not the first to recognize how identity (e.g., as a function of dynamic relationships among culture, sex, race, gender, and power) functions as a critique of cultural pressures. In 1963, Kenneth Burke prefigured how a space opened up between “truths,” making visible the naturalness of the hegemony and allowing a new order to fix the disorder created by the gap. He offered a model of this on capitalism in *Attitude Toward History*, where he claimed that to beat one’s antagonist at his own repressive game, the critic “[could] cunningly appropriate capitalism’s language of domination toward his own end” (Lentricchia 23-4). This simple process works through the language to reframe subjectivities in new ways and takes advantage of the human predilection to essentialize qualities, which creates ambiguity in identification/reality” (*Grammar of Motives* 105). That reduction to basics, Burke argues, “opens up the possibility for rhetorical transformation; it is the divisions and conflict engendered by identification that functions as a compelling motive” because people struggle to create order and meaning in the world (105). Although the European poststructuralists did not build on Burke’s work specifically, his ideas foreshadowed the constructed nature of the world and a critique of dominate versions of normal and spoiled identities. Following his theoretical model, swingers and other minorities could re-order a sexual hierarchy into a more inclusive reality by making visible fallacious reasoning, inconsistencies, and assumptions that have become so natural as to make cultural standards not just unassailable, but almost invisible.

Burke’s optimistic (and perhaps naïve) view that the human desire for a perfect order and a perfect identification with others would transcend and heal conflict through

inclusivity rebuts a niggling worry that a re-ordering could become even more exclusive (*Rhetoric of Motives* 372). Given such global crises as WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam Conflict, the idea of an inclusive world has seemed remote. Then, in 1991, hope grew when the Internet gave all marginalized communities a new communicative venue and a new possibility for re-ordering a normative society. But thoughtful researchers, seeing both sides of the Internet's possibilities, questioned whether this new technology could really help this transcend-and-heal process along. Nakamura, for example, understands society's initial fervor that this democratic platform would "eradicate otherness," but she describes the actual reality for Internet identities: "'fluid' selves are no less subject to cultural hegemonies, rules, of conduct, and regulating cultural norms than are 'solids'" (4). Despite its limitations, Nakamura suggests its most compelling attraction comes from its "sensitive and ever shifting responses as a hybrid medium that is collectively authored, synchronous...interactive [and] subject to constant revision" (55). These traits make the Internet a fertile yet safe place for swingers to question and clarify how their sexual identities could be enacted and performed (55).

### **A Rhetorical Analysis of a Swinger Website: Example**

Swingers may revise their society-given identity through persuasive visual, linguistic, and refusal strategies as the classical canons provide an overarching framework for seeing familiar persuasive practices in visual forms, and rhetorical refusals may be identified from the resultant data. From *The Crucible Lifestyle's* Homepage, their pages indicate how the Website creators<sup>1</sup> balance rebellious traits with mainstream values

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<sup>1</sup> Both Website designers and Website creators might be considered creators of Websites. Indeed, Websites may be developed collaboratively, meaning that more than one person is responsible for the look and feel of a particular Website. To this end, in this dissertation these individuals are called *Website*

such as “broadening our sex positive community diversity.” This linguistic example highlights a commitment to inclusion while *L’Sota* (Lifestyle of the Adults) continues that motif with “[L’Sota] is NOT a ‘Ken and Barbie’ pretty-people club.” Both examples position swingers as conscientious contributors to the American cultural story of sexual and body-type tolerance. In addition, they also meet Schilb’s three criteria for a rhetorical refusal: deliberation—planning the Website, defiance—overt verbal statements of inclusion, and assuming a superior tone—a critique of the sexual conservative. This refusal is important to note because this strategy uncovers how hegemonic discourse works to silence outsider groups.

The second element of this analysis, visual rhetoric, can explain why *The Green Door* establishes a beautiful, sexy young girl as its Home Page centerpiece. The attractive-bias design element assigns goodness to aesthetics, so when the Web creators choose beautiful people to decorate their websites, the audience unconsciously links swingers to goodness too. In fact, the aesthetic bias is not solely a function of people; the page’s color scheme, arrangement, clarity, and balance attract viewers as well, lending swingers a positive ethos. The aesthetic portion of visual rhetoric such as the attractive-bias parallels the canon of invention’s use of emotional, logical, and ethical appeals to the audience. In both cases the rhetors try to positively influence the audience’s view of swingers.

Finding examples of the final analysis element, rhetorical refusals, especially visual examples, which have not been documented yet, would indicate swingers have another opportunity in this different mode to fight for their own self-representation.

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*creators*, a term that can encompass designers, club owners, and Webmasters, as well as the individual and the collective entities.

Together, the linguistic, visual, and refusal strategies work in concert to characterize swingers as sexy, open-minded, independent, good, and attractive people. In particular, the refusal shocks audiences into looking at the status quo more closely, and so breaks the tunnel vision that privileges monogamy.

Swingers also must negotiate their unique situation of trying to change their “spoiled” moniker, yet keeping their identity somewhat rebellious, as that rebellion forms some of swingers’ cachet. The tension between these two can be seen as *The Crucible* site argues for being seen as ordinary people who do not want to be rejected or judged as deviant, yet use their difference—nudity and fantasies --to attract: “Be kind, thoughtful, and sensitive. Swingers, couples, and single guys are people and have feelings too!! “If you aren’t comfortable with sex and nudity, don’t come!!!”

However, representing themselves online is not without complications given this special rhetorical challenge of maintaining their provocative, un-vanilla sexuality amongst evidence that swingers are just ordinary, nice people. Their visual design choices may reaffirm old stereotypes of sexism and immorality even as their Websites flaunt scantily clad women and promise hedonistic afternoons of group sex. And, although discourse and images are sites for transgressing normative ideas, they may inadvertently oppress others as swingers construct their identity. As Nakamura earlier indicates, fluid identities are no less subject to oppression than solid ones. For example, few swing clubs allow public displays of male homosexual behavior or include any such images; males are asked to keep this activity behind closed doors—behavior not exactly representative of a diverse community of tolerance they profess in other sexual areas. And, while worrying about one’s size, shape, or looks is continually discounted by club



owners on the FAQs pages, when the Websites abound with images of beautiful, toned young woman, these instances of sexuality seems to contradict the spirit of this open-minded, anti-Barbie and Ken community.

Although the Internet allows swingers to regain some agency, the complexity of both the Web as a communication framework and identity politics itself complicates how completely swingers can own their own identity and challenge stereotypes, given that Slack and Wise call into question the “progress story” of the Internet. Are swingers making progress toward tolerance and sexual choices? Indeed, the results of a mini-analysis of swinger Websites similar to *The Crucible’s* suggest that they employ both typical persuasive tactics and rhetorical refusals. By offering an open welcome to all, they take a superior position that inclusion is more civil than exclusion. This notice on *The Crucible’s* Membership Page makes it clear that they shun the norm and welcome all, in particular,

[p]eople who are members of an alternative lifestyle such as but not limited to, heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, BDSM, leather and transgender, [who are] looking for a mutually supportive community, [and/or] people who have not found a welcoming environment in traditional social organizations due to gender, sexual orientation or lifestyle choice.

Audiences should recognize the fairness of accepting rather than rejecting difference because kindness and open-mindedness constitute civil and appropriate behaviors.

New readers might expect pornographic images or shockingly risqué text on Washington DC's largest swing club *The Crucible's* Homepage because alternative sexualities have consistently been characterized as the province of pornographic fantasies. Instead, *The Crucible's* writers have provided a colorful set of announcements including the history of the club, current news, and a list of available activities such as First Saturday Events, *The Crucible* Tuesday Afternoon Delights, and *The Crucible* Lifestyle Meet and Greets. The Homepage text is boringly expository with few images: an empty bed and the ugly front of the club coupled with a wild light and sound show. The Website for California's *The Toy Box* is similarly plain, with silhouettes of three women centered between textual information about what swinging is and an invitation to join them with a take on Justin Timberlake allusive motto: "We're Bringing Sexy Back." Atlantic City's *Caligula* features only a young man and woman kissing. These spare images may constitute the first visuals that produce this group's collective identity, and because they do not appear prurient or shocking, Website creators in these cases appear to be challenging some negative sexual assumptions (e.g., orgies occur everywhere) with less dramatic visuals. Creating a more positive ethos is one such strategy. The future for swinger Websites includes a continuous negotiation of the multiple and often competing tensions that surround any sexual "deviant" group's identity construction, as analyzed in-depth in Chapter 4.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This dissertation outlines the rhetorical possibilities and challenges that the Internet—particularly a group's Website—offers the swinger community as they use cyberspace to frame their identity between competing and often contradictory pressures

and tropes. Three investigatory approaches are employed to identify and analyze swingers' rhetorical moves: (1) the classical canon provides an overarching framework of persuasive practices to analyze linguistic features, (2) design elements adapted from William Lidwell, Kristina Holden, and Jill Butler's *Universal Principles of Design* are meaning-making concepts that allow designers to create a self-made community identity, and (3) John Schilb's concept of rhetorical refusals permit swingers to deliberately violate the status quo and establish a higher/alternate moral plane by refusing to be shamed into compromise with social norms. This identity is balanced among ordinary people with particular sexual fantasies. The Internet space challenges the naturalness of standard social-sexual mores from a safe distance where swingers' continued Web presence models a quiet activism and a process of negotiating the complex pressures of the sexual outcast identity in the U.S.

### **Research Questions**

This study has several purposes as shown by the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and visual rhetorical tropes, conventions, tensions, and appeals do swingers employ in their Website design to position themselves as an interesting and opposing force to normative sexual ideals? How, if in any way at all, do they balance this goal with one of having allure and being exclusive?
2. Do swingers use rhetorical refusals as subversive practices on their Websites? If so, how do they demonstrate or execute this function?

3. In what ways, if any at all, do visual/design elements evident in swingers' Websites (as shared cultural codes) rhetorically revise a previously pejorative identity?
4. Do swingers use conventional sexual imagery in any way, and if they do, what might these tropes say about the way desire is characterized in the U.S.?

Without interview access to swingers, judging their goals such as revising their identity, attracting new members, challenging the status quo, and/ or managing conflicting identity traits rests on a rhetorical analysis of their Website presence. That analysis is reflected in the above questions.

### **Research Approach**

A three-part rhetorical analysis of twenty-five swinger Websites forms the theoretical basis of this qualitative study, which engages Judith Butler's queer theory on sexual/gender othering and Foucault's view of language as rhetorical power because they both highlight how cultural norms use biological essentialism to construct sexual difference as wrong. Specifically, the five canons offer a strong bridge for understanding similar work done by visual design features in multimodal texts such as Websites. In essence, the canons can be considered as part of both the visual and the linguistic process, and, as sets of practices, provide a way of recognizing analogous practices in images. These classical persuasive tools broadly inform useful visual practices and together these two modes provide the framework for a substantive analysis of these Websites. The third analysis unit applies Schilb's three criteria to the resultant data, which could yield new information about how rhetorical refusals, a new strategy of defiance, might aid marginalized groups, specifically swingers, in highlighting and resisting social-sexual

norms and using Web technology to create a community identity balanced between embracing their alluring otherness and seeking social legitimacy for this lifestyle. This project first chronicles cultural norming tactics that often result in stigmatized and silenced groups, and then it pinpoints identity-constructing strategies that swingers have adopted, which offer templates to other alternative sexual groups that also may enjoy a somewhat rebellious reputation but would prefer not to be labeled as social deviants.

Using standard rhetorical analysis of selected textual and imagistic elements in these Websites will provide an opportunity for a qualitative overview of swingers' own representation of themselves to the public. The linguistic and visual languages become two mediating elements between "structures of power and human agency" (Bucholtz and Hall 492). It was Burke's theoretical work in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that "disassociated rhetoric from its focus on speech in favor of a wider conception in which rhetoric is seen as a fundamental communication technique which varying media can use to reach an audience" (Joost and Scheuermann 4). Accordingly, familiar methods of rhetorical analysis can be applied to mass media because the intentionality of the Website creator's choices and the effectiveness of those choices on the public link the two disciplines. Moving theory into practice, Burke believes it is possible to change the dominant language by "surreptitiously...reframing the language of the culture;" in the case of swingers, doing so helps to identify swingers' actions as they reframe a spoiled identity by writing counter-narratives to monogamy and physical loyalty through their print and design choices (*Grammar of Motives* 449). Hence, the results of this dissertation's analysis will be especially helpful to similar groups who also need to negotiate a paradoxical identity (Warner 53).

## **The Classic Rhetorical Canon**

Aristotle catalogued his observation on how people argued in deliberative, forensic, and epideictic communicative situations. From his data he labeled categories, grouped them into five practices: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery, and taxonomized the art of persuasion forever. These five rhetorical canons label the primary steps of gathering and creating material for a persuasive interaction. As such, they remain viable and useful for describing rhetorical actions even though the last three decades has seen the privilege of print erode as multi-modal texts have proliferated and flourished. However, the canons retain applicability even to these new communicative forms because these rhetorical practices exist despite the technology. The canons thus represent a sufficient starting point for the initial analysis of swinger Websites, providing a solid grounding of persuasive practices before using Lidwell et al.'s five visual organizing categories and designs and Schilb's refusal criteria to code the data more precisely. Because the canon's five categories of practices have been expanded, limited, ignored, expanded again, and argued about since Aristotle's Athens, the following information clarifies the working definitions used in this research work, including the addition of *kairos*.

Janice Lauer chronicles invention since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through multiple iterations, and it is clear the century's influences such as critical theory, epistemology, imagination, subject position, hermeneutics, heuristics, and Stephen Toulmin's probabilities have changed the nature of truth, both finding it and interpreting it. Invention has reflected the contemporary discourse surrounding it with its layered blend

of generative, strategic, and socially constructed knowledge, which solves problems, is cross-cultural, context-dependent, and negotiable. This multi-layered, situated, epistemic, and creative view of invention is how this dissertation views the term in examining Websites. Looking at these sites as dynamic texts reveals how they can be several things at once, for example, transgressive and conventional. In addition, the artistic proofs, or *pisteis*, that fall under invention add three important strategies for text creators to ponder in this new light. In fact, researchers had already studied the limitations of these proofs or common appeals--*ethos, pathos, logos* to see if they too could be broadened into other areas. M. Jimmie Killingsworth's 2005 *Rhetorical Appeals: A Revision* considers the three modes of appeals too circumscribed, and claims that a 20<sup>th</sup> century lens can add layers to their work. Because the old definitions had not taken into account new mediums or social actions, Killingsworth redefines the appeals as genres that do rhetorical work (262). However, despite these new possibilities, this dissertation still uses them conventionally as appeals to reputation, emotion, and logical reasoning within a digital framework.

The Internet gives arrangement more flexibility as a persuasive, meaning-making strategy since the familiar, basic taxonomies such as cause and effect or compare/contrast organization might only give a partial-analysis of the text; for example, chronology has little relevance on the Web when audiences can read the site in any order they like. Yet, the premise behind arrangement—logical patterns that arise out of the argument to help audience understand the text's logic-- must still hold true. Therefore, such added design elements such as Color relationships and Signal-to-Noise Ratios are necessary to examine

and analyze the Websites more completely to account for the expanded role of arrangement on-line.

Style's strong role rests on its myriad options, but as with the other elements of the canon, technological modes require re-visiting style's function. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, instead of focusing on the cognitive function of persuasion, style looks at what the rhetor should say, with clarity being the uppermost goal. Aristotle writes, "Let the virtue of linguistic form be defined as being clear, for since the logos is a (linguistic) sign, it would fail to bring about its proper function, whenever it does not make clear..."(*On Rhet.* III.2, 1404b1). Style's long decline into prescription reversed itself in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now functions as meaning making—in the appropriately *kairotic* moment---within the new language of visual design in elements such as Figure-Ground Relationship and Aesthetic-Usability Effect, which highlight balance and clarity.

Classical Memory did not include the constructed-ness that the contemporary age takes for granted, so it is especially relevant to view this canon as meaning-making in addition to a data storage facility. Technology has repurposed oral and print practices into visual designs that help audiences both recall the information and easily return to the Website. In 1999, N. Katherine Hayles' work on the construction of knowledge in virtual reality, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, argues that memory is more than a location of information, more than the conventional presence/absence binary; in fact, presence/absence is not a particularly viable concept in cyberspace where the avatar and "the user [are] both in and not inside the screen" (27). The new perspective defines a kind of on-going, cultural memory where



swingers' continued Website visibility slowly embeds itself into the social genealogy of lived lives. After viewing the Website, audiences remember the information through the vessel that contained it; the media is not simply an innocuous transmission device, but a factor in constructing the memory (147). In Colin Brooke's, *Lingua Franca*, he also expands the presence/absence binary as he conceives of memory as pattern/randomness, analogous to the terms *chronos* and *kairos* where people organize the first quite rigidly, but can use the latter as a persuasive tool to retrieve memory if they can capitalize on the opportune moment (149). Brooke extends this *kairotic* concept as re-seeing or re-visioning, through media stories or images, previous pictures at serendipitous moments that change how one saw an event the first time (149). For example, he would argue that a "timely" moment might occur when the news brings us repeated videos of disasters. Instead of asking questions about what caused it, the relentless footage of the disaster could distort culpability if people, caught up in the tragedy, believe the event was just random bad luck. Brooke offers an example of the Challenger disaster, where NASA's safety record was discussed alongside repeated videos, giving the impression that NASA could not have foreseen this tragedy (150). In this same manner, swingers can capitalize on memory with attractive sites, sexy people, and clear information, keeping those images playing in the readers' memories when or until they are most attuned to hear and see them. This definition of *kairos* is not far removed from the original, which James Kinneavy investigated in "*Kairos: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric.*" In Roger Thompson's 2000 interview with the author, Kinneavy defines Aristotle's *kairos* as the "right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something;" however, he argues for seeing *kairos* as less general than Aristotle's definition, and more situated

in politics and ethics (the right measures) (76). This expanded version of the term is how this dissertation views, if not how it fully executes its possibilities. Capitalizing on elements such as Classical Conditioning and Picture Superiority Effect, Website creators can create a swinger identity that is easily and pleasurably recalled through both modalities of memory.

Delivery's original focus on oral speeches made the voice—its tenor, strength, and pitch a significant strategy, as was “dress, gesture, stance, gaze, and so on” (Prior 4). But, relegating delivery to physicality ignored more compelling ways to meaningfully engage the audience. In 1993 John Frederick Reynolds called for renewed attention on delivery with his *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, and by 2007, Paul Prior suggested re-mediating delivery by looking at it as a continuous circuit that requires “mediation, distribution, and audience reception” rather than simply looking at the producer (17). In this dissertation, that complete circuit is assumed as the Website creator must find ways to use visual design persuasively, distribute the product via differing technological platforms, and focus on the audience's emotions and meaning making regarding such elements as Color, Golden Ratios, Face-ism, and Attractiveness Bias. Delivery does not have a new definition so much as a more robust one.

### **Visual Rhetoric**

The second analytical strategy for this dissertation—an analysis of design choices in visual products—is based on the very basics of rhetoric: “every decision regarding production is made taking into account its impact on the public” (Joost: Scheuermann 5). Quantifying and identifying the intuitive is a difficult task with print rhetoric, and that task is no less trying with Web design with which audiences have less experience

articulating and less jargon to use. However, Elam's foreword to Lidwell et al.'s *Universal Principles of Design* gives readers new words and explanations to use. She argues that design principles can be seen as "laws, guidelines, human biases, and general design considerations" that have proven records, supporting evidence, utility, or a high degree of misuse (12). Furthermore, if good design equates to effective design, then symbols, colors, and shapes that universally resonate with human instincts—the *gestalt* principles—or resonate within some special contextual frame are important to note. Even though much of design's emotional resonance has made it difficult for lay readers to express why a particular element such as Figure-Ground Relationship works, Elam argues persuasively that the logic behind the elements in Lidwell et al.'s book, backed by reason and research, can aid this struggle (11).

Moreover, design analysis has broadened how to understand the sexual mores of underground groups more thoroughly. Although design has always been rhetorical in nature, identifying the new language to explain it only began to take form in the 1980s with notables such as Richard Buchanan (1995), Victor Margolin (1995), and Gunther Kress & Richard Grusin (2000) who saw how design's intentions fit perfectly within Aristotle's classical canons, Buchanan's aesthetics, and Kress, Grusin, and Theo van Leeuwen's semiotics. Those authors build on an earlier claim by Gui Bonsiepe (1961) that design should be based on some rules and not just intuition or a mysterious genius (Joost, Scheuermann 4). After significant work on "rules," Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Material* (2001) articulates a warning still appropriate for current research: [despite] the proliferation of academic work, few guides exist to methods of interpretation and few explanations of

“how to do those methods” (2). So even though books abound on design exemplars doing exactly that, researchers and audiences must be wary of accepting meaning claims in the absolute. However, these books can offer analysis insights into the standard issues of cultural production, social practices, and power relations of identity, allowing rhetorical meaning to be attached to Lidwell et al.’s universal design strategies as they reflect the classical strategies of the canon and thus influence the audience’s reception of swingers.

Lidwell et al.’s book details 125 elements that will be trimmed down in two stages to the most viable for this dissertation, and the authors’ five-part organizational index suggests a logical way to begin the process. These five categories below repeat such persuasive words as appeal, influence, and teach, so it seems reasonable to appreciate how the five linguistic canons could closely parallel Lidwell et al.’s visual quintet as well as help weed out redundancy or irrelevancy.

1. how to influence the design perception (arrangement)
2. how to help people learn (memory)
3. how to enhance usability (style)
4. how to increase the design’s appeal (invention)
5. how to make better design decisions (delivery)

The five canons inform the five visual purpose categories above thusly: 1) The best arrangement methods should appear logical to the audience whether the choice is a chronology or a set of hyperlinks, no matter the mode the information must be clearly followed; 2) memory teaches by actively engaging the audience in thought. Elements such as rhetorical questions and meter aid recall just as a well-balanced Website can; both teach by making the information stick in the audiences’ memory; 3) audiences appreciate

an appropriate style; a well-chosen word, parallel constructions, a passionate tone all contribute to the audience's respecting the site's effort and competence. Even though the style canon might seem an awkward fit for the visual element of usability, those same linguistic processes resonate in the visual components of a well-balanced, practical site. Both modes keep audiences reading or looking at the text; 4) invention practices select the best ethical, pathetic, and logical appeals, whether linguistic or visual, to grab the readers' attention. Aesthetics, whether euphonic or sight-based, attract and keep audience satisfied and positively influenced. Attractive people and the Golden Ratio's pleasurable balance encourage readers to associate a good site with good people. In addition, Face-ism and Storytelling encourage a personal relationship between the reader and the designer/author; 5) finally, the delivery process metaphorically parallels how accessible/or inaccessible the Website is to the handicapped. Websites that suppose only able-bodied readers may need to rethink their delivery assumptions. Whatever the technology, delivery rests on getting the print or visual into the hands of the readers who wants the information.

Reducing the 125 elements to a handful relies on using the above five organizational categories that parallel the five canons. For example, Lidwell et al.'s first category (influencing a design) has 34 elements; not all of these will be important to the research questions. Knowing this category can be comparable to the print version of arrangement, it is possible to choose the appropriate visual elements that can explain the data gathered from the Websites. That work will be done in Chapter 3, and the results will give audiences and creators a common language for understanding how images work to create a swinger identity.

The canons, Lidwell et al.'s five purpose categories, and the final design qualities provided a viable, doable method for understanding the data set as applied to slightly more than one hundred Web pages. The new visual terms from the table link to the classical canon and make clear how rhetorical practices are embedded in the visual. After analyzing the linguistic and visual processes in Chapter 4, I will examine the data set, seeking examples of Schilb's rhetorical refusals.

### **Rhetorical Refusals**

The final lens, a niche strategy important to swingers' Web representation, is described in Schilb's *Rhetorical Refusals* (2007), where he argues that a shocking transgression, such as a refusal to do something society fully expects, can be an effective tool in uncovering social control. Schilb's work accordingly introduces a specific method of uncovering resistance to hegemonic discourse. Something as simple as having a well-made Website presence and refusing to engage in cultural debate to justify swingers' actions and/or lifestyle can make visible how swingers have been pressured to remain underground because they violate social-sexual customs. His term, the "rhetorical refusal," which he says may look like ordinary stubbornness, is defined quite specifically. It (1) challenges audience expectations, (2) is clearly deliberate, and (3) suggests that a higher principle trumps common rhetorical decorum. When swingers refuse to engage in the deviancy discussion, be shamed, or stay hidden, they reject the sexual monogamy/fidelity frames, do so deliberately, and view ordinary sexual rules as unimportant. In this rejection, swingers enact a sense of moral authority by refusing to be seen as inferior and believing that sexual autonomy is a higher principle than following social standards of morality that include a high adultery rate. These strategies give swingers belonging and

identity as a group in “collective denial” of the social order (Goffman 144). Indeed, according to Goffman, social deviants often believe “the life they lead is better...[and] provides models of being for restless normals” (145). Despite using the unpleasant word “deviant,” Goffman clearly understands the complexity of a society that houses multiple and intersectional groups, and he is especially insightful in identifying those who prefer their outsider status. Schilb’s work also identifies the outsider and investigates the rhetorical power of refusals to give the “outsider” a new strategy for transgression in any mode.

As noted before, Schilb’s refusals constitute a strong strategy that “can promote a more searching conversation” about the definition of fidelity or the right of individuals to have sexual autonomy for example (23). Refusals can also be described as civic stubbornness with a rhetorical purpose or more importantly, a defiant act against a wrong. Again, Schilb’s three criteria include: 1) refusing to do what is rhetorically expected, 2) deliberately breaking protocol, 3) assuming a high moral position for doing so. Once an event matches these criteria, more specific questions ensure that the refusal does rhetorical work such as illuminating how society and “the core elements of political order” may suppress and limit the rights of groups whose differences critique that order (20). Refusals are high stakes, so the extra questions keep the social consciousness the acts represent from becoming farcical. By using rhetorical refusals, swingers can define themselves as independent rule breakers who defy a social code of behavior that excludes many people from pursuing legal sexual lifestyles. American society has always admired the noble iconoclast, so it is likely audiences will recognize, and perhaps admire, swingers as a group whose existence models and fights for this interesting, if not for

everybody, Lifestyle. Thus, finding refusals in swinger Websites is important in rounding out their new identity in a positive way, questioning the monogamous “gaze,” and opening up the conversation on sexual biases. Independence and inclusion are both strong values that can attach to swingers as they resist society’s unfair representation of them. Table 3, Schilb’s criteria for identifying linguistic rhetorical refusals, which also provided the rubric for identifying imagistic refusals and/or categorizing new linguistic ones, will be discussed in Chapter 3. Schilb claims that refusals and their many types have been around for a long time; we simply have not been looking at them. However, “relevant cases were always emerging” because people were always looking for “innovative responses to opportunities for political discussion,” (23). These political discussions are viewed as identity issues of marginalized communities, requiring an analysis for egregious and deliberate examples of swingers refusing to do what society rhetorically expected. One of those innovative opportunities emerged from the Websites themselves, where a swinger community decides whether to be either seen or not. The other two criteria of rhetorical refusals include 1) deliberation, which rhetoric assumes, and 2) invoking a higher principle, which is identified for this community as sexual autonomy and self-representation, both of which trump exclusion and stigmatization. Schilb indicates that these two principles do not reflect self-indulgent motives, as might be argued, but reflect principled and reasonable responses to social standards that are exclusive and privileged (74).

Schilb has done significant work in identifying a host of different kinds of refusals and different examples of those types. A chart of his criteria give some indication of what swingers must have done in their Websites to qualify the act as a refusal (see



Table 3 again). It is possible the Website themselves constitute a refusal to stay underground and keep their “deviance” quiet. Applying these criteria to the Website data will allow for identifying those acts of defiance if they exist. The chart includes only linguistic refusals, so Schilb specifically calls for continued work on the “imagistic” form, a field he had not yet tackled with *Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences’ Expectations* (2003). This dissertation addresses the call, extending the search for this strategy in Web texts.

The three units of analysis, the rhetoric of print texts, images, and refusals work together to be “innovative responses to opportunities for political discourse” and “encourage[ing] greater rhetorical adventurousness in the discourse of civic life” (Schilb 23). These strong strategies are available to any group, so it is important to identify and make them available for those communities that must abide by social rules that do not support Judith Butler’s a “livable life.”

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

#### **The Possibility/Impossibility of the Strategic Identity**

Many scholars believe that the Internet has transformed representational politics, offering potential space where anyone, especially marginalized cultures, can have a voice. More pointedly for this research, Nikki Sullivan accurately summarizes the limitations of post-structuralist subjectivity when she says that, “identity is never simply a question of self-authorship...identities are open to debate, and through conceptual conflicts identities are continuously fracturing, multiplying, metamorphosing...always already haunted by the other, by that which is not ‘I’” (149). Seen in this light, swingers not only face difficulty in reframing a pejorative identity in the face of long held stereotypes, but they

must try to do so in an unstable world where essential identities, and therefore agency, seem impossible. Donna Haraway, an anti-essentialist feminist, comments on this vexing problem and concludes that only by “acknowledge[ing] that feminist politics must continue through coalition—affinity, not identity” can agency can be temporarily established (155). Haraway recognizes the theoretical versus practical issue when she acknowledges that a totally fragmented collective can get nothing done. Consequently, this dissertation assumes that a group identity of like-minded people, a practical if not theoretically faithful assumption, can advocate for sexual access, especially on the Web where mobilizing a group is possible. Even though an ascriptive group like swingers—those who choose to align voluntarily through a shared bond—can be “provisionally political,” Sullivan and other queer theorists wonder whether this political strength is possible (138). Can a strategic identity ever “be pure and unambiguous” beyond a theoretical moment? Could a sum of “anti-ideal” moments (the re-iteration of transgressive acts) constitute an identity that can act despite the unstable vectors that continually construct it (Sullivan 85)? Butler suggests that “signification (as multiplicitous, inter-subjective, and constitutive) and the subject’s inability to control signification makes subversion at once possible and unpredictable” (Sullivan 91). Brooke has introduced the term “ecologies of practice” to account for the multi-layered, multi-temporal, and transformative inter-dependence of rhetoric and technology that pushes new boundaries of rhetorical conventions in the new “interfaces” around us.

How is it possible to capture the identity of a community (a variant of “I”), which is apparently “both necessary and impossible” (Sullivan 149)? It is possible if rhetorically the *process* of identity-making counts more than producing a specific identity. As

Gamson argues in “Must Identity Movements Self-destruct? A Queer Dilemma,” these two “conflicting impulses will doubtless long remain in place—the logic and political utility of deconstructing collective categories vies with that of shoring them up; each logic is true, and neither is fully tenable” (391). Spivak’s concept of strategic essentialism embraces this internal binary of both an essential and a deconstructed identity. It recognizes and mitigates the postmodernism identity conundrum that concerns how unstable identities can have agency to do any work. Her theoretical terms allows swingers to purposely and temporarily posit a non-essential subjectivity so that their Websites can be read as deliberate acts of persuasion.

As Spivak moves among time, space, and geographical locals, she takes on malleable identities to suit the conditions, modeling how strategic essentialism can both “do things” and “uncover things” simultaneously (Gamson 403). This position “takes into account the postmodern project of destabilizing identities without consistently acting in the public sphere on the insights which the identity project has thus far produced,” according to Anna Marie Smith’s 2007, “Missing Poststructuralism, Missing Foucault: Butler and Frasier on Capitalism and the Regulation of Sexuality.” Swingers’ mere presence may therefore begin “doing things” such as uncovering naturalizing acts as a political collective and erasing old stereotypes. In other words, the theoretical meets practice—no matter how hypothetically complicated and/or temporary a stable identity may be, swingers make Websites, reach out to others, and represent themselves in public. Their entry into mainstream society pushes boundaries and causes a stir—as noted in those pejorative headlines.

Warner explains this latter goal more clearly in that “sexual autonomy...requires access to pleasures and possibilities, since people commonly do not know their desires until they find them” (7). Swingers’ virtual Web presence crafts a complex but defiant subjectivity that can do some lasting cultural work. Larger marginalized movements have passed this solidarity phase and now struggle] with the inevitable schisms that accompany the next stage. This change from an outward to inward look tends to weaken the collective by pointing out differences within and among members of their group. Smith explains how a Burkean concept may help swingers understand a potential future rift: “At the root of identity politics are shifting acts of identification among members of a collectivity, as well as acts of division which different groups must articulate in order to establish both external and internal boundaries” (10). In other words, Burke’s process of identification must begin with separating out those not like the others. However, the swinger community may be too newly conceived to separate who can or cannot call themselves a swinger. For example, at the beginning of a couple’s first party, the hosts suggest that the couple discuss what they are comfortable doing to avoid awkward moments. The hosts may suggest that they label themselves as soft swinger, bi-curious female, or bisexual, but no one is turned away for not playing, for not being swinger-enough. Based on their historical timeline on the Web and Spivak’s strategic essentialism definition, swingers seem to be focusing on an overarching swinger identity for a moment in time, which can both increase new memberships and slowly refute old stereotypes.

Analyzing swingers’ rhetorical choices adds to an on-going identity project by applying several analytic lenses to this unique, self-marginalized community—similar but not equal to other defiant communities such as sadomasochists. Using standard rhetorical

strategies in two different modes: linguistic and visual, plus the specific lens of rhetorical refusals, swingers have benefited from the Internet's multi-modal affordances to re-write/re-image a new sexual narrative for American audiences, specifically taking into consideration Terry Eagleton's definition of rhetoric-beyond-writing as a "form of power-laden performance" (Maciuika 72). Although swingers may seem apolitical because of their previous silence, their Web presence defines a cultural/political belonging, a defiant act less subject to heteronormative erasure than their previous silence. In this dissertation study, analysis will show that the Website creators have used the rhetoric of print and design as a placard of existence, profiting from the Web's anonymity to refuse their spoiled identity by being "virtually" concealed and visible simultaneously.

### **Conflicts in Identity: Cultural Tropes in Tension**

Swingers face the conflicting American tropes of rebellion, transgression, and daring with the opposing ones of duty, morality, and self-sacrifice. In 1959, Goffman explains how the spoiled identity is constructed through both formal and informal social control as "facts are inflated into a dramatic and newsworthy appearance and then used as a full picture" (71). The church, state, and citizenry have employed this sort of discursive power move, often making a single moment amount to a full crisis (e.g., a sex club down the street will destroy the neighborhood) to counter desire and hedonism. This disaster may be grounded in the selfishness inherent in indulging one's desires that may undermine the values of sacrifice and rule-following that ground monogamy and fidelity. As swingers engage in recreational sex, redefine emotional and physical fidelity, and shun sexual norms, the heteronormative majority finds these rule-breakers both alarming (breaching duty and morality) and fascinating (adventuresome and rebellious), so

swingers must negotiate an identity to appeal to both value systems simultaneously. However, problems abound within this schism. According to David Cole's work on the forbidden desire inherent in pornography, sexual expression laws construct "lines to transgress, inhibitions to abandon, and a 'normal' reality against which fantasies may be played out" (176). Swingers work on this conflicting premise; for example, non-swingers might fantasize privately about swingers' transgressive and erotic rebellious acts on their Websites, but publicly, non-swingers may denounce and stigmatize swingers for immorality as the safer, majority position. This inherent rift in American sexual mores can both help and hurt swingers because transgression in and of itself does not afford swingers much more than a temporary identity that does little for opening up long-term opportunities for respectful discourse on alternative sexualities. According to Cole:

The rules we impose on the expression of sexuality—  
whether legal, cultural, or religious—ultimately fuel these  
obsessions and channel our conception of sexuality into the  
very transgressive ideology, that, at least on the surface, we  
seek to suppress. We are caught, ultimately in a cycle of  
prohibition and transgression...enforcing a set of lines, and  
the illusion of danger, as the forbidden is eroticized....

(174-5)

This cycle seems to negate progress for swingers' sexual freedoms unless research makes visible the unconscious norms that stigmatize alternative sexualities within all modes of discourse.

Currently, however, swingers continue to hide because their different desires still constitute social trouble despite any curiosity or fantasies they may induce. Nonetheless, swingers may be making progress. A rebellious identity per se may never translate into social action if defiance is a state of being, when “doing things” turns into unreflected habit; however, swingers have not yet perfected their identity. The sexy images on their Websites imply extraordinarily adventuresome hedonists while much of the linguistic evidence reveals a mature, caring, parental side, evidenced in the Website data analyzed for this dissertation. Of course, leaning too much toward the wildly provocative runs the risk of becoming the latest media pop culture sensation *du jour*, and perhaps undermining their work as a legitimate, activist community--even if recruitment often supersedes social justice. Letting the media make swingers into caricatures would slow down their ability to offer an alternative sexual narrative for those in need of one.

Moreover, the tension between alluring and rebellious may become difficult to sustain with increased familiarity, a particular dilemma known only to those few communities built on this dichotomy. Warner suggests that swingers need not worry about diluting their allure because all sex is interesting to the public even if that notice comes with significant judgment: “culture has thousands of ways for people to govern the sex of others—and not just harmful or coercive sex...but the most personal dimensions of pleasure, identity, and practice (1). As their numbers keep growing, it seems that swingers’ niche hedonistic lifestyle is attractive, meets some needs, and is here to stay. However, their apparent dependence on this ambivalence may keep them in a perpetual state of instability, and it may be a difficult place from which to advocate for Warner’s ethical view of sexual autonomy. Despite these potential problems, understanding how

this group uses classical rhetorical strategies combined with consciously developed Web design that are repurposed for a Web identity enlarges the body of research in the field of sexual identity, resistance, design, and power.

### **Contributions to Research**

Focusing on the online identity construction of swinger communities opens up a discussion about the rhetorical strategies available to swingers and other uniquely marginalized groups so they may rhetorically manage an online profile. This work is done by understanding what this group is doing to both define and advertise their Lifestyle on the Web through their words and images. The online presence of swingers and their challenges are worth analysis as they broaden the scholarship on the rhetorical strategies of group identity, sexual freedoms, and the Internet as a space and voice for alternative sexual narratives. Although the different Websites of this study may promote different versions of the swinger persona, in general, this self-marginalized community brands itself as a viable, ethical group that cares for hedonistic happiness found through physical pleasures. Within Schilb's concept of rhetorical refusals, he identifies this kind of transgression as changing the power dynamics of stigma. In 1963, when the social majority could not force groups who "represent [ed] failure in the motivation schemes of society" to advance by complying with social norms, Goffman recognized no clear cut solutions (144). Perhaps familiarity might make them tolerable, but never accepted in the in-group, or they might be accepted as long as they do not make the majority uncomfortable (144). That was the limit of Goffman's "management" of the spoiled identity, a strictly defensive position. Yet, Goffman could not have foreseen the Internet and its potential for swingers to act proactively by reaching out to others. Perhaps today



this underground community can stand firm in their beliefs, ignore public disapproval, and protect itself from social and employment backlash through a Website presence. More importantly, perhaps its anti-normative position may allow curious others such as the Goth community or motorcycle gangs access to a new opportunity as swingers, consciously or unconsciously, take on the role of virtual activist.

This study contributes to the fields of identity politics, stigma, and visual rhetoric (a different modal version of the canons) as swingers address power issues through the rhetorical principles of language posited by Goffman, Foucault, Butler, Schilb and visual and Internet design by Buchanan, Nakamura, Lidwell et al., Cheryl Ball, and Charles Kostelnick. Goffman's early work on the spoiled identity and managing stigma underscores the power of the majority to control sexual behavior and the minority to live within these parameters. Foucault introduces the concept of taboo language and the need to know as two components of a power framework also designed to keep sexual behavior controlled through public discourse and information. Butler's theory of performativity and repetition naturalize monogamy and fidelity as correct behaviors, yet leave little room for rebellion given that these performances (or choices) are set by social mores. In other words, trying to enact rebellion, for example, may be socially granted, but in such a limited model that access to true transgression and other ways of viewing sex cannot really be envisioned. If audiences have limited access to possibilities by virtue of narrowed thinking, then a concept like swinging where the participants define monogamy and fidelity differently will not be available without a deliberate design by swingers to replace socially allowable performances with new ones. Ball's and Nakamura's insights offer possibilities for marginalized groups to use the Internet's anonymous space to try

out new identities and voices, the five classical canons provide a familiar structure for seeing persuasion in other modes, and Buchanan, Kostelnick, and Lidwell et al. invite an understanding of design principles and their conventions through a persuasive lens. Swingers' choices will inform researchers about how they create and balance being othered while also desiring that othering, which is a somewhat unique position. Perhaps constructing a hybrid identity, a term that critical race theorist Homi Bhabba describes as a place to be neither in opposition nor in alignment, rhetorically allows swingers to occupy a space between binaries, somewhere between "being Self or Other" that affords them both sexual freedom and cultural respect (Sullivan 73).

Finally and most importantly, observing swingers' Website design choices and identifying and analyzing the use of Schilb's rhetorical refusals as purposeful rhetorical strategies support an argument that swingers, while recruiting new members, are still actively challenging their "deviant and immoral" group label as they advocate for their Lifestyle. The refusal uncovers how discourse can muffle non-conformist ideas by refusing to abide by social rules. This is important for any number of groups or individuals who need more strategies that reveal how discourse works as a normalizing power structure. Within the public/private space of the Web, swingers can challenge their "spoiled" identity and represent themselves as a sexy, co-marital, friendly swinger community that functions morally and responsibly.

### **Scope**

Many interesting questions emerge regarding swingers. For example, one might wonder whether this outcast community disobeys cultural sexual mores because they like life on the edge, their defiance represents a backlash against their stigmatization, and/or

they like their unconventional sex life. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address such questions. The data collection is limited to swinger Website samples only, rather than on focus groups, interviews, or surveys. The choice of twenty-five varied geographical sites from New York to Atlanta, Texas to Washington, and Iowa to Denver mitigates bias toward perceived sexual openness or sexual repression endemic to different regions in America. California is represented two times because of that state's prolific number of clubs and because it is the birthplace of NASCA.

This is a rhetorical and not a sociological study, so the focus is not to understand why swingers choose the lifestyle or to analyze that decision's impact on their relationships. Instead, the research concerns understanding the rhetorical choices that this difficult-to-study group has available to them to establish a new identity and sexual narrative. It also concerns how swingers act as a model for other sub-groups who might want to do the same.

### **Summary**

This chapter has introduced a sexual subculture and their conflict with a heteronormative cultural narrative that has recognized them as a deviant underground group. This socially constructed "spoiled identity" emerges when Postmodern and Poststructuralist theories—specifically those of Foucault and Butler—are applied. The institutional power of discourse, big media, and the academy create essentialized "normal" identities through repetitive performances by the majority of "correct" behavior. Because of social hostility and employment contracts with moral turpitude clauses, swingers have not been able to risk public rallies to their cause as have the Gay Pride or women's movement. However, the Internet provides a safe space for a presence and a voice, so

swingers have capitalized on this platform to rally, representing a new identity through print and visuals on their Websites, refusing to go away or be ashamed of their difference and enjoying their Lifestyle. The chapters that follow look at how swingers are able to use the “digital capital” of the Internet to invest in an identity that allows them to show their difference as well as establish and model an alternative sexual narrative through persuasive practices.

Chapter 2 describes the scholarly and popular literature about swingers in the U.S. from the 1950s when rumors of “wife-swappers” and key parties began to circulate. Before the 1950s however, Goffman already had described groups that deliberately ignored some social rules as those with a “spoiled identity,” describing how they could survive by going underground. But once these “deviant” groups, such as swingers, were publically identified, they became the target of sociological interest, and were studied until the late 1970s when researchers assumed they would disappear following women’s liberation and the sexual revolution. Concomitantly, Chapter 2 also identifies examples of institutional stigma that constructs swingers as immoral because of their beliefs in non-monogamous and recreational sex. The rise of the Web explains how their underground life gives way to an anonymous, but public one that demonstrates a community identity in the making. A different strategy, the rhetorical refusal, gives swingers options in producing an identity that allows them to remain both strategically iconoclastic, yet also viable, an important difference from women and minorities who fought for recognition *and* cultural inclusion. In addition, new theories in Website design allow swingers the freedom to oppose old sexual viewpoints and create new ones. Unfortunately, because the Internet is not automatically free of hegemonic discourse, swingers often rely on

conventions that may not be liberatory. Chapter 3 details the rationale and methodology used: the canon, visual design elements, and rhetorical refusals. Chapter 4 provides details of the data analysis, synthesis, and meaning relative to the research questions while, Chapter 5 will present the findings, explain the contributions of this research, and discuss future work to be done for both outlier communities and rhetorical refusals.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LITERATURE OF SWINGERS ON THE WEB

This chapter reviews published literature from the academy, popular discourse, and multi-media to consider how swingers have come to be rhetorically known as a stigmatized community that is constructed in opposition to a “natural” and “correct” sexual narrative of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. These social elements stereotype swingers as deviant and immoral people without any swinger input, and their resultant stigma has made it risky for them to rebut this identity in public. In private, however, swingers have continued their lifestyle. The advent of the Internet and its relative anonymity has afforded them a safe space to resist their previous construction and begin to build their own identity. Ironically, that created identity has generated its own complications as the group’s core characteristic and allure rest on the very difference that stigmatizes them—their refusal to abide by the majority’s sexual rules. Additionally, the swingers’ implicit critique of those rules as old-fashioned may appeal to those who secretly wish for a swinger lifestyle.

Research into swingers by sociologists such as Gilbert Bartell (1970), Duane Denfeld and Michael Gordon (1970), Robert Bell (1972), Mary Lindenstein Walshok (1971), and Richard M. Stephenson (1973) started soon after swingers’ post WWII introduction to the American public. The research continued strong until the late 1970s when it was curtailed by researchers’ assumptions that the sexual revolution and women’s liberation would terminate the anti-feminist idea of “wife-swapping” (Denfeld and Gordon 98). Charles Varni, who wrote the 1972 “Exploratory Study of Spouse

Swapping,” was one of the few sociologists who did not agree, calling for more “understanding of this process of social change” as it could provide “impetus to our achievement of a basic humanistic goal, that of broadening the range of viable alternatives persons have to choose from in American society” (522). Indeed, even before the postmodern attack on the binary gender system, he demonstrated that one sexual way of living does not fit all. But thirty years later, Roger H. Rubin’s 2001 research (reported in “Alternative Lifestyles Revisited, or Whatever Happened to Swingers, Group Marriage, and Communes?”) finds few who responded to Varni’s call. In fact, after the late 1970s, inquiry into swingers essentially stopped (Bergstrand and Williams). Researchers did, however, show a burgeoning interest in other marginalized American cultures; most notably, this research addressed the sexual minorities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and drag queens from such researchers as Susan Krieger in 1982 (“Lesbian Identity and Community: Recent Social Science Literature”), Dwight B. Billings and Thomas Urban in 1982 (“The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique”), and Don Mager in 1985 (“Gay Theories of Gender Role Deviance”). Even though the swinger population had not disappeared, their own silence and the lack of scholarly work about them made researching them a challenge.

Most swinger studies in the last three decades come from journalists such as investigative reporter Terry Gould who, in 1999, wrote *The Lifestyle: A Look at the Erotic Rites of Swingers*. Although not scholarly, Gould’s extensive research contrasts sharply with early sociological studies of swingers and deviance the 1970’s in that he does not assume they were marginalized nor does he attempt to “pathologize the swinger” (Bergstrand and Williams 3). Gould initially assumed that swingers would be odd, but as

he discovered millions calling themselves Lifestylers, he wondered why society still called them deviants and “why were public voices still denigrating them in ways one would never accept if they were gays or lesbians...” (10). From that point, he began to express a “broader dimension to their lifestyle....about which the world had an incomplete understanding” (11). Richard Jenks’ 2001 *To Swing or Not to Swing* provides a short summary and review of Gould’s book. And, even though Jenks criticizes Gould’s lack of citations and use of some old research, he applauds him for the rest, especially his evenhanded treatment of swingers (172). Gould also predicts the Internet’s influence on swinging; he recognizes that the steady rise of Websites could allow “a safe way for couples to not only learn about swinging, but...to learn about the existence of clubs and other swingers in their own city or town” (173). Gould describes why swingers generally reject being shamed. Giving up their choices equals losing their difference. Blending into mainstream culture would mean sacrificing an ethical ideal that “urges individuals to live in a way that does not harm others and makes sense, whereas moral principles of right sex and wrong sex did not” (121).

Other pop culture books, written by experienced swingers instead of journalists, introduce curious readers to the swinger lifestyle. For example, Ed and Dana Allen’s 2001 *Considering Swinging* answers typical Lifestyle questions about the joys of swinging to encourage shy members to visit. According to one reviewer, these swinger authors also “attractively depict the variety of pleasurable experiences one can expect to encounter” (Allen). In the 2005 *Swinging for Beginners*, Kaye Bellemeade helps others avoid the awkward missteps she and her husband experienced: “I figured if I could



broach the subject with integrity and a lot of honesty, it might help couples...have more fun and less worry” (2).

Although society generally has become more tolerant of different lifestyles in the past 10 years, the risk in coming out still exists, so it is not surprising that swingers have remained generally silent. But, for some couples, hiding a facet of their identity has proven difficult. In 2008, CBS aired Oprah’s “Sexuality in America: The Lifestyle” (Part 3) where swingers Tina and Sam decided two days before the show’s airing to come forward stating that [swinging] “was nothing they [were] ashamed of.” Going public is also a powerful rhetorical strategy because establishing a swinger couple’s legitimacy means calling into question the majority ideals that deny personhood or group-hood to those “who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons (communities) are defined and [fail to conform] to the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality” (Butler 23-24). Butler’s work on marginalized sexual groups and their right to a livable life dovetails with swingers’ desire to live by a different set of sexual norms. How swingers choose and rhetorically manage specific print and visual strategies on the Internet forge this finely balanced identity and form the basis of this dissertation study.

### **Organization of the Chapter**

This literature review begins by addressing how swingers differ from larger, more visible, sexually outcast groups. It examines the historical marginalizing of swingers under the broader concept of Postmodernism where theorists link language and power to “naturalizing” heteronormative behaviors, a rhetorical construct that is not natural for everyone. In Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, he reveals how the increasing

sexual taboos and laws in Victorian society not only caused a split between sexual desire and pleasure, but also supported an emerging moral conflict between sex as duty and sacrifice as opposed to sex as indulgent and pleasurable. The latter notion of pleasure grounds swingers, “who were quite convinced that they had combined ethical living with hedonism. They were proud of their lives...” (Gould 115). Ironically, that dichotomy between duty and desire informs and complicates normative sexual behavior that past scholars have often explained within heteronormative language, producing both identifiable bias and ambivalence toward such sexual differences as hedonism, recreational sex, or co-marital relationships. The research locates swingers, predominately pre-Internet, as victims of specific sociological discursive events that illuminate the rhetorical effects an unfriendly climate has on communities that pursue counter-normative sexual experiences. Although swingers have been constructed as deviant and shunned, fighting back publically often entails significant risk. Of particular note is the negative diction and tone that underscores the early research of Bartell (1970), Duane Denfeld and Michael Gordon (1970), Mary Lindenstein Walshok (1971), and Richard M. Stephensen, (1973). More importantly, having academic credentials lends their conclusions a legitimacy that can be difficult for swingers to counter, leaving swingers to remain invisible and illegitimate.

To understand the rhetorical strategies that have been used against swingers requires thoughtful analysis. Swingers have been subjected to heteronormative ideals, which makes the story of how they were able to oppose and then recast themselves interesting. This chapter review considers the sociological literature on swingers from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Since little rhetorical work exists regarding swingers,

the bulk of the findings emerge from keyword searches of *deviance, stigma, sexual outcasts, wife-swapping, mate-swapping, spouse-swapping, group sex, social problems, deviant subcultures, American swinging, co-marital, sexual freedom, and rebellious behavior*. Such key-word searches have yielded journal articles and books in psychology, sociology, sex research, and behavioral research.

Second, this literature review also considers the Internet's role in offering self-marginalizing groups a forum for resisting their discursively produced representation and for crafting a "strategic identity." Spivak's term describes a rhetorical move that enables swingers to temporarily create a specific identity for a specific need, allowing swingers a provisional agency and identity while accepting that a permanent stable, essentialized group persona runs counter to the theory of the dynamic and complex postmodern /poststructuralist subject. Pop culturist Nakamura recasts the Internet's possibilities in much the same terms; images are sometimes stereotyped and sometimes they create a sense of "community and...identity online," but they are always dynamic (xiii). In addition, the Internet offers a neighborhood of shared values and community identity for distributed users. David Crystal imagines the Internet as a cityscape, a "metaphor that conveys the kind of comfort and intimacy necessary for users to create relationships, to participate in and share themselves with digital communities" (62). The Web's anonymity provides a virtual place for many marginalized groups to display their differences safely. Hence, it is essential to consider and understand its potential for creating communities who can work together, and, in the case of swingers, to oppose the natural construct of monogamy from a multi-media platform.

Finally, this chapter reviews literature on visual rhetoric since the Internet offers potential for interesting types of communication and potential social change. In 1996, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) passed a visual literacy resolution in response to the increasing popular view that the Internet's ubiquitous cultural images and their dense information far surpasses print, requiring research (Hill 107). Carolyn Handa's 2004 *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* provided a collection of essays in this new field by such scholars as Buchanan, Kress, J.L. Lemke, and Richard Lanham who argue that visual design is meaning making and rhetorical. Charles Kostelenick and Michael Hassett categorize visual conventions while Anne Wysocki, and Ball define elements of new media and document design. In fact, one of Wysocki's assignments asks her students to pay particular attention to how people visually construct, represent, and assert identity on Websites. These scholars document and theorize how the Internet has broadened global options and how its multi-modal design has increased the persuasive scope of discursive space. Many books offer visual analysis guidance, but this review specifically considers the visual and print choices behind Website design from Lidwell et al.'s *Universal Principles of Design* because of their clarity and detail. However, the authors do not subscribe to a "this has to mean that" position because these principles represent 125 researched design guidelines—not rules—of which twelve proved most salient for this dissertation. Because man-made texts in any mode are deliberate and purposeful, the design choices of swingers' Website creators say something important about who swingers are, what they value, how they help others, and how their anti-normative posture offers cultural critique.

In sum, this chapter examines the rhetorical research into four bodies of literature: (1) how swingers are different from other sexual groups, (2) how the Internet has become both an area for advertising marginalized groups' differences and norming them, (3) how the swingers would describe their use of the internet for identity-making, and (4) how rhetorical analytical tools are used for understanding Web pages.

### **The “Problem” with Swingers**

#### **A Brief History of Swinger-focused Literature**

Academic and cultural researchers appear to have ignored or to have been unaware of this silent, underground community until the late 1960s. Although swinging has been anecdotally documented throughout history, for this dissertation the focus is on the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century when sociologists Denfeld and Gordon, interested in the “wife-swapping” culture, conclude that three changes in America’s sexual record had a significant impact on the rise of the co-marital community.

First, their study of marriage manuals from 1830-1940 chronicles “a growing belief not only...that women experience sexual desire, but also that this desire should be satisfied most appropriately in intercourse resulting in simultaneous orgasm” (89). The idea that women have sexual desire increased the emphasis on “bedroom artistry” even though it was confined to a monogamous relationship. The authors also argue that prostitution lost some momentum during that period, citing the famous Alfred Kinsey et al. report (“Sexual Behavior in the Human Female”) of 1953, as men began to see their future wives as “recreational” rather than “procreative” partners and wanted to give them opportunities for additional satisfaction (90). Denfeld and Gordon also claim that spouse swapping provided a way for men to give their wives this additional pleasure and

concomitantly relieve monotony (92). The Kinsey et al. report even conjectures that pornography made a move from exclusively male domains to the bedroom, implying it fueled the concept of women's desire as well (88).

Second, the rise of more effective and less messy contraceptives, most notably the birth control pill and the intrauterine device (IUD), increased spontaneity and pleasure, so women could give in to the emotional moment without physical consequence. Carrying a condom or a diaphragm often implies planning to have sex while taking the pill in the morning distances women from the anti-romantic trope of calculated sex, something "good girls" do not do (Wood and Eagly 632). This spontaneous (romantic) sexual narrative can suggest ambivalence toward sex, which reflects in the relationship non-swingers have with swingers.

Third, these sexual freedoms paralleled new insights into the "safety-valve" model of deviance as it replaced the older sociological view that differences marked "disease[s] to cure" (Cohen 85). Albert Cohen asks his colleagues to see deviance as a "social process rather than a social disease" and looks at potential contributions from Kai Erikson's 1966 *Wayward Puritans*, which concludes that "in controlled quantities [deviance was] an important condition for preserving the stability of social life" (85-6). In other words, deviants define the identity of the normed group by difference and so render a stable social order when society accommodates, with a blind eye, minor and quiet excursions outside sexual norms. The safety-valve view suggests an understanding of human's peccadilloes despite a seeming intolerance for them. Denfield and Gordon claim that swingers provide a way to relieve marital boredom legitimately as "society will tolerate certain types of deviant behavior that support rather than undermine

‘monogamous marriages’” (92). Interestingly, although the authors conclude that swinging may have positive results, they never question the value or constitution of monogamy as normal. The rhetorical tenor of these articles characterizes the authors as concerned scholars bringing a social issue to peoples’ attention. This problem-solving attitude suggests the early construction of swingers as abnormal, but tolerated members of society (98). This social blindness can be understood through Goffman’s term “social deviants” or those who “lack piety...and represent a collective denial of the social order,” people who are temporarily accepted as long as they stay within the “ecological boundaries of their community” (145). He also theorizes that their significance might come from performing a rebellious, activist role that critiques a variant of the status quo. Nevertheless Goffman wonders whether those who voluntarily transgress social rules and refuse to “accept the social place accorded them and complicate how much their spoiled identity can be considered in the analysis of stigma,” which underscores the current dilemma that swingers face as they self-marginalize in the face of stigma (145-6). Goffman concludes that enough commonalities exist between the two groups (outcasts and social rebels) to consider the latter as having a “spoiled identity,” but it is possible, in light of Butler’s identity performance theories, that swingers “voluntarily” transgress normative rules because they have no other choice.

Bartell’s 1970’s presentation of “Group Sex among the Mid-Americans” to the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex also characterizes swingers as different, but their minimal danger to society results more from their educated and white, middle-class demographic than their silence. During his research interviews, Bartell “eliminated individuals from the inner city, Blacks, and Latin couples to keep [his] sample restricted,”

so his data are incomplete (113). Despite this missing information, his work is important because little empirical information about swingers existed prior to 1960. In fact, Stephenson had trouble even finding historical data before the American key parties of the 1950s despite evidence of fertility festivals and erotic rites since ancient Rome. However, Stephenson dates an “upsurge” in swinging to 1963, amidst the Make-Love-Not-War, anti-establishment, Woodstock decade (177). Walshok’s “The Emergence of Middle-Class Deviant Subcultures: The Case of Swingers” (1971) concurs and suggests that the Lifestyle community also grew because monogamy became stale, and “a growing pattern of sexual deviancy through organized groups was fomented by rebellious identity-formation against a bureaucratic life of powerlessness” (495). Rebellion, the a natural reaction to “routinized standardization” coupled with the new saliency of sexual behavior in the Age of Aquarius, found sexual play groups to be a natural result for swingers (494).

When sociologists had attended to swingers in their research, they established swinging as behavior that violates social and consensual norms; however, a close reading of the literature suggests some potential language bias. One such example is the following phrase: “co-marital sexuality suggest[s] more hedonism than commitment,” which connotatively construct swingers as mere pleasure seekers rather than responsible citizens (Walshok 494). Yet, some articles such as Varni’s 1972 “An Exploratory Study of Spouse-Swapping” describes swingers as independent rather than deviant, as advocating for a changed society, and working toward “a basic humanistic goal...of broadening the range of viable alternatives persons have to choose from in American society” (522). This sentiment is echoed in Butler’s advocacy against a gender binary in her 1999 Preface to *Gender Trouble*, where she describes the book as part of a “collective



struggle that has had, and will continue to have, some success in increasing the possibilities for a livable life for those who live, or try to live, on the margins” (xxviii).

Four years after Varni’s article, Betty Fang’s “Swinging: In Retrospect” rebuts the common perception that the swinger lifestyle destroys marriages. She claims there is:

no deceit, shedding of sexual inhibitions, sharing of and mutual involvement, giving the marriage paramount loyalty, relief of sexual monotony, revitalization of marriage, improvement in body image, increased sexual interest in the spouse, increase in perceptual awareness and appreciation of the mate, improvement of sexual performance, increased circle of friends, physical but no emotional involvement, and a feeling of warmth, acceptance, and response not found in other social contexts.

(230)

One constant thread woven through these articles is an apparent tone of surprise the researcher’s conclusions engender. Discovering that swingers have “conventional lifestyles” and “acceptable behavior” and are “ordinary,” “conservative,” “middle-class,” “normal” “suburbanite conformists” may have seemed at odds with the researchers’ initial hypotheses. For example, Denfeld and Gordon argue that the swingers they studied were raised with the typical values of the 1940s and 1950s that included the “importance of sexual fidelity and guilt following sexual infidelity” (45). However, they seem surprised these people became swingers since they “do not fit the stereotypical image of deviants” (45). This surprise regarding the participants’ apparent normalcy in every way

but sexual suggests that swingers are oddities to be studied; moreover, the perhaps unconscious surprise that “married, middle-class suburbanites [who] avowedly support the institution of marriage as well as other conventional values” may voice Denfeld and Gordon’s dawning recognition that sex and desire cannot be relegated simplistically to deviant others, but that they coexist in ordinary married relationships.

In 1985, Jenks explains in “To Swing or Not to Swing” that not only are people taken aback by the thought of a normal individual engaging in immoral acts, they also generalize this deviance so that “practically everything about that person becomes odd or immoral; the actions and ideas of the person are reinterpreted once it is known that he or she is a swinger” (199-200). In Jenks’ surveys, most non-swingers consider swingers to be non-white, exceptionally liberal, too tolerant, in need of counseling, and frequent users of drugs” even though study after study finds them only “odd” in the one area of sexual preference (204). Jenks continues to study swingers even after the 1980s when other sociologists conclude that feminism would end the “wife-swapping” phenomena, assuming women would rebel against objectification. However, that rebellion did not happen; women found space in Lifestyle conventions and clubs to fulfill their fantasies within a relatively controlled and safe environment of like-minded people. As a result, swinger communities proliferated almost *because of* women, initiating a swinger aphorism that “men may start the adventure, but women continue it” (Gould 244).

Roger H. Rubin wonders about the void of swinger research in “...Whatever Happened to Swingers, Group Marriage, and Communes?”; he finds that “explanations ranged from a lack of research funding and academic reward to the assumption that fear of AIDS curtailed these behaviors” (711). Other researchers suggest that sex is not

worthy of academic interest for disciplines outside of medical ones. However, once the field of identity politics grew and included sexual oppression, sex again became a viable topic of study. From the *Electronic Journal of Sexuality* came such titles as “The Swinging Paradigm: An Evaluation of the Marital and Sexual Satisfaction of Swingers” in 2009, and a year later “Today’s Alternative Marriage Styles: The Case of Swingers.” These titles are reminiscent of early psychological studies, minus the word “deviant,” but the lens is still social/psychological, not rhetorical. However, even though rhetorical studies on the construction of gender and identity were growing, and queer theory began investigating sexuality and desire in large social groups, relatively little research was conducted with smaller, sexually stigmatized groups, especially those that had kept to keep silent.

### **Sexual Counter-Normativity and the New Rhetoric**

#### **The Discursive Power of Language in Defining Sexual Norms**

Once social norms were recognized as social constructs, language became a focal point of previously received knowledge. Part of this recognition began with Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* in which his work questions the belief in a repressed Western sexuality; instead, he argues that discourse about sex proliferated in the 18th century and operated as an apparatus of power and control. In “Discourse on Language,” he challenges the cultural myth of Victorian sexual repression by identifying three discursive forms of power that regulate (and naturalize) behavior: prohibited words, the division of madness, and the “will to truth” (219). The will to truth, which Foucault locates in all social institutions and is so deeply buried as to be unrecognizable, controls sexual desire not by repressing it, but by talking about and making sex (the truth) known

via preachings, laws, and confessions (219). This view undermines the common belief that Victorians rigidly and tightly controlled sexual desires through secrecy and fear (219). In fact, a constant talking about sex belongs to the circumscribing of sex via a “science of sexuality” that works to constantly monitor sex in all of its forms (*History of Sexuality Vol.1* 113). However, this project is most concerned with how the Victorians managed to change an open, pleasure-seeking atmosphere into one where the “single locus of sexuality was acknowledged [to be] a utilitarian and fertile one: the parent’s bedroom” (3). As procreation became sanctified and aligned with church teachings, sexual desire was transformed from the corporeal to the abstract through discourse about sex. Talk rather than deed enabled a detachment from feelings where “analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself” (23). Foucault notes that the increasingly popular Christian pastorals (pastor’s duties) of the time were expressions of this effort to master desire through discursive genres such as sermons and confessions (17). Consequently, when the sinner is encouraged to confess his or her waywardness, especially about sex, Foucault suggests that “the mere talking about it has the appearance of deliberate transgression, [and]...places [one] self to a certain extent outside the reach of power” (6). And, although the congregants may relish this power to violate the silence of sex, they are now under judgment to control said desires, transforming pleasure into guilt-as-pleasure. By mastering desire through words, this detachment allowed the body to be negated for a sacrifice conceived as “blissful suffering from feeling in one’s body the pangs of temptation and the love that resists it” (23). Not only did desire move into the bedroom, but sacrifice and suffering now defined love. Foucault’s most notable

theoretical contribution to this dissertation goes beyond just the medicalization of sex, but underscores how language creates hegemonic value systems difficult to unseat.

When Foucault identified the power hierarchy inherent in cultural discourse as social norms invoked by taboo speech and stigma, those for whom sex was pleasurable rather than dutiful were relegated to a subordinate position in society. These groups had no voice of their own, but were talked about, rendering them visible and easily monitored. Thus, prostitutes and homosexuals became known, scrutinized, and proscribed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through this cultural “incitement to talk about sex” and so society kept watch over sexual disobedience (23). Most notably, the irregularities came under the auspices of new discourses like medical science, psychology, and pedagogy, which all served to rationally objectify sex, stripping it of its secrecy through this newly conceived control (35, 45). Rather than silence, as the repressive hypothesis claims, Foucault sees how the will to truth (i.e. authoritative knowledge) compelled an examination of every form of sex by dissecting it, parsing it, and knowing it intimately. When Foucault rejects the repressive hypothesis, he challenges prevailing notions, specifically calling into question whether repression functions any differently than openness, or whether, as his work suggests, repression and taboo really are effects of a “regime[s] of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world” (11). In other words, how and why sex is “put into discourse” is a function of power that needs to be studied (11).

Social sex talk was instantiated only in the fertile and utilitarian “parent’s bedroom” as a way to displace desire into discourse where its visibility allowed its control (*History of Sexuality Vol. I*, 3). Society voiced a vested interest in knowing what

was happening with its citizens' sex lives, so "sex became an issue and a public issue no less" (26). Therefore, sex enters into language, constantly in the spotlight with utterances proliferating around laws, confessions, documentaries, proscriptions, taboos, talk shows, and definitions, all of which support a scheme, controlling sexual behavior by inspection and open discussion. Once in place, this discursive "science of sexuality" enabled society to stigmatize sexual differences, which marked swingers as they first became known to America in the 1950s.

### **The Spoiled Identity**

Goffman's 1963 *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* introduces three general responses that the stigmatized could adopt to the normative predicament: (1) one could support a norm, but realize he/she was not in the relevant category to realize the norm, (2) one could alienate him/herself from society (even in small bits, but all the time), or (3) one could sustain a patina of normality, taking strategic control over his/her image while audiences tacitly agree not to talk of the "secret" (130). Moreover, the "normal deviant," as Goffman defines him or her, refrains from pushing claims for acceptance "much past the point normals find comfortable" (130). Goffman discusses consequences to both the person and society from these predicaments, but most notably, he focuses on the role-playing nature the stigma necessitates. Goffman lays the foundation for Butler's performativity within his own concept of framework or "schemata of interpretation" when he argues identity is surely a cultural performance with social identities temporarily worn in "categorization schemes that arise in particular social contexts" (Goffman, *Frame Analysis* 26). While Butler lobbies to make visible the gap between binary identities through "gender disorder," swingers attempt to open the

gap between “acceptable” and “immoral” desires, just as transgenders destabilize the binary of gender identity (*Gender Trouble* 24). Discourse analyst Barbara Johnstone notes that having a durable identity and a meaningful life can involve “having a coherent life story to tell,” but she wonders whether the two roles satisfy as well when part of one’s identity is not of one’s own making, but a result of others’ characterization (155). Butler’s *Gender Trouble* warns that not all identities are even available given the discursive frames or “the regulatory practices of gender formation” set up by a hegemonic discourse that prescribes the right choices (xxx). However, other postmodern scholars such as Foucault and Warner (*The Trouble with Normal*) have offered strategies to broaden all identity categories to include alternative sexual desires.

Difficult as it may be to move beyond their deviant label (assuming that Lifestylers want to), the questioning of gender construction through a queer theory lens and the function of discursive processes has helped outcasts dismantle and un-work what Kenneth Burke calls a cultural imperative to contain threats (disorder) through stigma (*Rhetoric* 264). When language invokes the negative in “thou shalt not,” it also makes possible a hierarchical social order. Burke contends that the term “law and order” really describes the inherent human motivation for attaining the next level on the social ladder, with the goal being the ultimate, abstract perfection of total identification, the perfect unity (the universal order) (333). In Burke’s “dialect of the scapegoat,” when swingers violate the social order by identifying with the normative group, they are stigmatized and sacrificed for the good of mankind. Those who are left re-identify with each other, but need redemption for victimizing and scapegoating the violators, and so start the process of identification again (where there is a possibility for new orders to arise) (*Rhetoric* 187).

In parallel lines of thought with Burke, Butler discusses how this order is shrouded in mystery, hiding the constructedness of “normal.” When the majority group sacrifices swingers to the myth of heteronormativity, they do so under the guise of mysterious, ontologically-based social laws that appear clear, right, and unassailable (*Rhetoric* 266,326). When Butler asks, “What does ‘transparency keep obscure?’” she critiques that same mysterious process of naturalizing a sexual hierarchy (*Gender Trouble* xx). By challenging the hierarchy, outcasts can highlight these mysterious constructions that make social norms appear natural and correct. Butler’s example of “drag” demonstrates how men-who-dress-as-woman deliberately flaunt their difference as a method to un-obscure and re-invent by transgressive, broader sexual narratives.

Stephenson’s 1973 “Involvement in Deviance: An Example and Some Implications” explains what it means to violate the internal controls that deviance suggests. While normative behavior may suggest safety, seeing norms transmitted is not proof that “their maintenance is assured” (183). Nineteen years before Butler, he argues that examining external pressures to conform such as the “reinforcement of internalized norms over time” would unveil the construction, rather than naturalness of reified behavior (183). His work also critiques the social hypocrisy that values innovation in technology, science, management, fashion, art, and literature with adjectives like *avante guard* and Postmodern, but uses “deviance” to describe that same experimental spirit when it manifests itself in “sheer pleasure, intimacy, adventure, novelty...” (186). The shadow of the Puritan forefathers informs this dichotomy given that pleasure and desire have been threatening historically to social order and were policed conscientiously and sometimes violently. Burke’s scapegoat process consistently exemplifies how mankind’s



fear of disorder is employed to counter every example of difference with enmity. Yet, swingers' disobedience does not have to be seen as jeopardizing the moral order; instead, it could be seen as expanding its scope to include sexual autonomy. Nevertheless, not all deviance is considered bad, especially when transgression includes the seeds of rebellion or adventure. Therein lay the contradictions and the ambivalence that taboo sexual desires engender.

In 2003, a newer, more complex explanation, deviance regulation theory (DRT), proposes that individuals do not always respond in a sort of flight-or-fight mode, but could actually prefer counter-normative behaviors to normative ones because "good" difference is more alluring than sameness (Blanton and Christie). An "attractive difference" becomes a way to weaken the stigmatization process somewhat when being ostracized has no impact on the groups' spoiled identity. In fact, rebellion might constitute an attractive difference, given the strength of the lone-wolf trope in American culture. Discovering all the qualities that would enhance one's self-esteem rather than degrade it is work that moves into psychological scholarship not within the scope of this research project; however, it is the goal of this dissertation to describe how cultural discourse creates marginalized identities and what rhetorical and design strategies "deviant" communities might enact to ignore, destabilize, enhance, and/or embrace their difference/s. If positive deviance can replace a heretofore negative one, how is it constructed? And, can any part of being different be maintained or will attractive deviance inevitably become ordinary? Some of these answers seem unknowable at present because of a lack of research. Yet, analyzing the rhetorical practices of big media, private and public sexual discourse, cultural ideologies, and swingers' Websites can

discover what matters to this groups' subjectivity formation amidst the postmodern theories of performativity, rhetorical refusals, and multi-modal meaning-making.

Not surprisingly, Goffman understands that sometimes the spoiled identity refuses to embrace normal, identifying this group as "social deviants" (as opposed to in-group deviants). Rather than be ashamed, this collective "flaunts their refusal to accept their place and are temporarily tolerated in this gestural rebellion providing it is restricted within the ecological boundaries of their community" (*Stigma* 145). Once again it seems the rebellion motif models a deliberate and strategic characteristic of this group. As a precursor to Schilb's rhetorical refusals, which delineate "a higher moral" purpose as part of their identity, Goffman also understands that social deviants may believe "they are not merely equal to but better than normals, and that the life they lead is better" (145).

Stephenson's "An Involvement in Deviance: An Example and Some Theoretical Implications" notes another management skill swingers employ: bringing group sex into the open can attenuate some of the negatives of a topic shrouded in secrecy and rumors. However, while scholarly work and discussions may lend "swinger deviance" some legitimacy, the many and repetitive acts of public scrutiny often produce reifying judgments that can prove difficult to counter (177). The negative tenor of early scholarly work speaks to this problem as does the tone and assumptions in the survey questions researchers have asked: "Do you fear disease? Discovery? Divorce? Disappointment? Jealousy?" After Bartell ends his two-year ethnography with an aside that he and his wife would never do anything so "repugnant," he concludes that swingers have "mechanical interaction rather an intimacy of relationships" (130). His "repugnant" comment has weight and authority from the robust and permanent "writteness" of his scholarly work,

which constructs a stereotypical and visible identity for swingers. Coupled with the concreteness of mainstream publications like newspaper headlines, they increase the epistemological function of these multiple discursive events. Most people do not know what a swinger is because society's vilification forces swingers to live "secret dual lives," so they are known only by others' view of them (Gould 227).

Interestingly, swingers' actions challenge the definition and legitimacy of fidelity as anything but natural. While sociologists generally attribute co-marital interest in sexual variety as a way to keep the marriage strong, they rarely question the naturalized state of monogamy. Statistics on infidelity are high, but with an assumption that only a monogamous marriage is good, it follows that alternative sexual desires become seen as abnormal. While newspaper headlines consistently call swingers' morality and normality into question, Gould's work claims that swingers do believe in monogamy, just that it is differently defined. Emotional-monogamy rests on the basic premise that although swinging is exciting, the couple's partnership comes first: "they tell you they swing in part because it makes them hot over each other. They do it for a lot of reasons—sexual, egotistical, social, play acting—but they also say they do it for the marriage" (Gould 228). Gould paints a positive picture of swingers, highlighting the very vocal Bob McGinley and his wife Geri who founded the Lifestyles Organization (LSO-1995) in California to subvert the media's "good evidence that swingers were violating community standards" (51). McGinley and his wife organize, proselytize, and take their Lifestyler name and mission from Jack London's words, "The proper function of a man is to live, not to exist"; their goal is to help people combine "an emotionally monogamous married life with a sexually-sharing swinging life" (Gould 48, 45-6). Lifestylers captured this concept on

their logo (i.e., “an apple with a bite out of it”) and their motto (i.e., “For those who want more than just one bite.”) for the NASCA. In solidarity, Edgar Butler, the chair of the sociology department from the University of California at Riverside, joined as co-director of the Lifestyles conventions because he, too, was “offended by the way swinging couples were maligned by the press” (Gould 50). Meanwhile, applications to swinger groups that put the “playcouple philosophy” into action rose exponentially, and by 1980, three hundred swing clubs existed with over three million members from the U.S. and Canada (33). In 1998, the number of swing club grew to four million with another million overseas (76). In 2013, according to one of hundreds of statistics found on the Internet, over 50 people million are active in the Lifestyle, and Adult Friend Finder, the oldest and largest swinger dating site on the Web, has over thirty million members while Kasidie.com, “the largest social network for swinger couples,” suggests that number is but a fraction of the total global swinger population (Purcel). Despite this growth, the visibility of NASCA, which publishes *Etiquette in Swinging* to grow the Lifestyle membership and a business and travel empire that brings millions in revenue to Lifestyle convention cities, still suffers stigma. Negative headlines from the past ten years construct the group as wicked and immoral: “Dole Aide Quits in Sex Scandal” (Associated Press 2004). The loaded phrase “sex scandal” alludes to the aide’s attending a swinger party. In the second example, “Plans Nixed for Feared Swingers’ Club in PA” (ABC.com, 29 June 2010), readers could infer the danger of unrestrained sexual behavior.

Typical scholarly titles during the 1960s-1970s foreshadowed a similar construction of certain sexual behaviors as deviant and /or abnormal: H. Becker’s 1963 *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Walshok’s 1971 “The Emergence of

Middle-Class Deviant Subcultures: The Case of Swingers,” Stephenson’s 1973 “Involvement in Deviance: An Example and Some Theoretical Implications,” and Carolyn Symonds 1971 “Sexual Mate-swapping: Violation of Norms and Reconciliation of Guilt.” However, other researchers use swinger-neutral titles: Denfield and Gordon’s 1970 “The Sociology of Mate-swapping: Or the Family that Swings Together Clings Together,” Varni’s 1972 “An Exploratory Study of Spouse Swapping,” and James Ramey’s 1972 “Emerging Patterns of Behavior in Marriage: Deviations or Innovations?” Most interesting are the titles that convey the tensions explored in this dissertation study. As early as 1948, Nelson N. Foote foresees the swingers’ view on swinging in “Sex as Play” while in 1966, Matt and Kathleen Gallant call swingers “Sexual Rebels.” In 1970, Lynn and James Smith note similar rebellious thinking with “Co-Marital Sex and the Sexual Freedom Movement” while Jayand Mae Ziskin apply the adjective “adventuresome” to “Three in a Bed: the New Thrill Seekers” in 1973.

As mentioned, Fang’s “Swinging in Retrospect” reviews the major articles on swinging with a focus on the demographics of who swings and why—a common impetus for sociological interest—and “suggest[ed] that swinging [was] on the decline and may indeed be an activity of the past” (220). Although the tone of the latter titles imply a more tolerant atmosphere, it is a moot point as the research into swinging literally halts at the end of the 1970’s because sociologists apparently assumed that (1) bad economic times would cause “sexual frivolity” to decline, (2) group sex and bisexuality would be the standard middle class morality within the next ten years, and (3) the rise of feminism would curtail the role of woman as object (236). Moreover, in 1974, *Time* magazine reported statistics that reveal a supposed decline in swinging; so, for all intents and

purposes, swingers were supposed to have disappeared. Meanwhile, however, swingers and swing clubs continued to grow.

### **Naturalizing “Correct” Behavior**

Despite a dearth of research on swingers, the explosion of postmodern concepts regarding multiple subject positions, transgressive representations, alternative sexualities, silent activism, and even design theories allowed researchers to study swinger populations rhetorically rather than just sociologically or psychologically. Additionally, Foucault’s theories on the “polymorphous techniques of power” undergird social-sexual discourse given his assumption that language constructs the truth (*History of Sex Vol.1*, 11). It is important to “locate the forms of power” that thread through society’s quotidian activities and identify who has permission to speak, on what subject, and containing what values (11). In his “Discourse on Language,” Foucault names three common procedures “whose role is to avert [the production of discourse], to avert its powers and dangers” (216). These social control mechanisms are the rules of exclusion: prohibited words, the speech of the madman (masked truth), and the will to truth (authority based). Foucault sees how the latter fomented and persisted in making a science of sexuality through authoritative pronouncements on morality (*History*). These “instances of the discursive production of the production of power of the propagation of knowledge,” often causes society to circulate mistaken beliefs or systematic misconceptions about sexual subcultures in efforts to curb their “untamed” sexuality (11-12). Once deviance is named, doctors could look for a cure. However, Foucault’s theories of power circulation in language also permit disenfranchised people opportunities for resistance and transgression, allowing swingers to create their own subjectivities in oppositional acts.

The Internet provides a place to both reveal and hide. Foucault's theories make visible the "naturalizing" power of social discourse and the social impetus to talk about sex so it could be monitored (18).

Foucault's theory that "sexuality is always situated within matrices of power, [and] that it is always produced or constructed within specific historical practices" can provide a starting point for discussing Butler's work on queer theory and constructed gender identities (*Gender Trouble* xx). Her gender and identity theories derive from the French feminist, Luce Irigaray, and Butler is concerned about the "pervasive heterosexual assumptions in feminist literary theory" that "restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity" and whether gender categories could be more inclusive rather than view them in rigid, binary norms (viii). Butler ascribes her motives for unseating these "habitual and violent" intentions that foreclose "what is possible in gender life" to the feminist theme of inclusion (viii). She sees that the discursive production of the subject "woman" only appears able to represent herself in the language of the power regimes that produced her. So, too, swingers are produced through normative discourse, which leaves them few language options for reversing their stigma. Even though swingers can disguise their private lives easily, being forced to remain silent out of fear of social and employment reprisals aligns them with homosexuals and women who also have little input into the systems of power that produce them and who have suffered, as Heather Love comments in "Dwelling in Ambivalence," the "difficulties of subjects who live in a world that precedes them and is not of their own making" (Love 18). Swingers routinely live semi-closeted lives out of both necessity and choice although this notion of choice is problematic for Butler. Even if swingers profess to prefer

anonymity, is their self-marginalization a true choice? Perhaps, as Butler suggests, “the account of agency conditioned by the very regimes [of regulatory sex] cannot be conflated with volunteerism or individualism...and in no way presupposes a choosing subject” (*Bodies That Matter* 15). Because swingers’ single “choice” arises from the limited categories of politically constituted naturalized identities, these constructions might seem opaque and unavailable for interrogation, yet the task is difficult though not impossible for those “who live, or try to live on the sexual margins” (*Gender Trouble* xxviii). *Gender Trouble* makes clear that as with gender categories that are regarded as “false, unreal, and unintelligible,” a spoiled identity is a mutable reality (xxv). Thus when swingers employ the Internet to disrupt the sexual hierarchy and explode identity choices for “unreal” communities, it must be noted that any intended subversive performance is by nature ambiguous, unpredictable, and open to multiple meaning, so categorizing their rhetorical choices as effective or not is problematic (Sullivan 92). Nonetheless, despite the lack of predictive results, Butler claims the act of challenging their “spoiled identity” is a transgressive enough act in itself.

Alison Bailey offers another theory on identity: privileging the invisible subject position. She assembles Sandra Harding’s three knower-archetypes: the disembodied spectator, the outsider within, and the traitor. Initially used in race theory, the “outsider within” (e.g. the black house slave who knew her white employers “secrets”) also describes a feminist viewpoint where knowing comes from always being politically and socially contextualized; thus, the outsider within is privy to two worlds simultaneously, supposedly claiming a more objective viewpoint. Swingers, a cultural hybrid, do know both worlds, “for who [they] are in at least two places at once: outside and within, margin



and center,” and that position, whether they act on it or not, confers on them the power to refuse their characterization and find opportunities for subversion even if that refusal is not public or vocal (29). One of those ways to fight back is to know one’s enemies; another way is to refuse to engage in a verbal power struggle, which echoes in Schilb’s rhetorical refusals. Bailey recommends reflecting on this oppression, on the nature of their insider privilege, so they can use their marginalized sexual position to serve as an epistemological epiphany and claim a superior position to heteronormativity (30).

### **The Trouble with Normal**

Warner’s 1999 *The Trouble with Normal* and 2002 *Publics and Counterpublics* continue and broaden Foucault’s argument by questioning the right people have to place their own morality on others. Warner finds it odd that:

anytime it seems necessary to explain away other’s peoples’ sex as [immoral, criminal, or pathological] the premises of one’s morality could just be flawed. What looks like crime might be harmless difference. What looks like immorality might be rival morality. What looks like pathology might be a competing form of health.... (*Trouble with Normal* 5)

Warner adds an ethical component to the power struggle between normative construction and abnormal construction of valuable identities, arguing that people often believe it is their moral duty to police other people’s sex lives against a standard (1). That standard results from daily repetitions, the “embracing [of] one identity or set of tastes as though they were universally shared” (1). For example, the idea that marriage must be between a man and woman evolves from one perspective of marriage in movies, TV, daily talk, and

jokes where audiences only see men and women married. The stereotype, supported by worldwide statistics, implies correctness and naturalness to this concept. Not only does Warner's work question the ethics of not allowing for true sexual autonomy, it indicates that sexualities and their attendant shame are not primordial but constructs within a cultural and historical period (11). If society questions the construct of an essential gender, new sexual knowledge becomes available to people who may find a name for a desire that fits them. Butler's identity performance theory frames how reality results from a select list of acts grounded in multiple iterations of a standard rather than any naturalized correct one: "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (*Gender Trouble* 190). Society has allowed certain identities to exist, and only those get performed; for example, the media portrays heterosexuals, and more recently homosexuals and bisexuals, with certain traits that get repeated and thus become a "reality" while transgendered (i.e., she-male) or swinger talk is less available. To enlarge the repertoire of identity choices means giving the public access to the she-male or swinger story to see that these identities exist. Clarifying how the hegemonic discourse hides the constructed nature of normality allows groups to challenge repetitive and "sustained acts of social performance" disguised as truths (*Gender Trouble* 192).

For Warner, desires are not always innate. To make sexual autonomy work then, people must [make] "room for new pleasures, new identities, new bodies—pleasures once imaginable only with disgust, if at all, become the material out of which individuals and groups elaborate themselves" (*Trouble with Normal* 12). Laws have generally supported the status quo, inferring that majority decisions are right decisions and others

are wrong, immoral, shameful, or illegal. To avoid problems, swingers initially went underground, their view of sexual autonomy has its own particular limits. Many clubs seek to control male-to-male homosexuality, limiting those encounters to behind closed doors when female-to-female contact is embraced: “virtually all women [at swing parties] define themselves as bisexual” (Gould 241). The British-based journal *Sexualities* describes how swingers also are in conflict with other non-monogamous groups.

Polyamory has been one American synonym for swinging; however, in Britain at least, bisexual men and women (polyamorists) deny the right of Lifestylers to be categorized as completely polyamorous. According to Christian Klesse, author of “Polyamory and its ‘Others’: Contesting the Terms of Non-Monogamy,” “The prevalent definition of polyamory as “responsible non-monogamy” usually goes hand in hand with a rejection of sex-or pleasure-centered forms of non-monogamy, such as ‘casual sex,’ ‘swinging,’ or ‘promiscuity’” (565). This British “multi-heterosexual” narrative describes a familiar stigma against pleasure and hedonism, which Klesse sees, as does Warner, to be an impediment to “a truly pluralistic sexual ethics that may embrace the diversity of non-monogamous sexual...practices (566). Ironically, the British basis for excluding swingers from their movement rests on believing swingers put too much emphasis on sex rather than love, calling them “non-responsible polyamorists” (568). The implications imply that having sex and emotional intimacy is mutually exclusive and that having multiple sex partners is irresponsible. Again, the normative narrative reveals stereotypical thinking that precludes a more holistic or nuanced way of “undoing all forms of structured and institutionalized domination, coercion, and control” (Shannon and Willis 433).

Warner views the same-sex marriage fight as another normative narrative, incongruous as that seems at first. In viewing the debate as only about the institution of marriage, his anti-assimilation stance argues that advocating for gay marriage has worthy intentions but sees any normalizing action as shutting down other choices (144). According to Warner's perspective, lauding same-sex marriage would be no different than valorizing heterosexual marriages since both acts would undermine the doubly marginalized; instead, Warner would rather see that people like transgenders, for example, be included to "present a broad[er] range of sexual lives as moral" rather than just arguing for gay marriage (*Trouble with Normal* 86 ). As a doubly-marginalized hybrid (i.e., socially and self-marginalized), swingers' very public presence on the Web can represent a critique on heteronormativity, but their interesting-ness must remain anti-normal if their core identity depends on an adventuresome and taboo-breaking sexuality. Warner would like to end what Cole, a Georgetown law professor, calls the domination of people's sexual lives with an obsession for transgression and taboo (a vicious cycle, in effect). Cole's work on pornography and the law discusses how breaking a taboo is a necessary element for sex to be sexy and informs the dilemma that faces swingers who might want to be activists for their lifestyle if they could keep their rebellious/provocative status intact to do so. Even if swingers who were so inclined cannot safely lobby for the swinger life in public, *Publics and Counterpublics* supports presence as a viable tool for winning converts to the lifestyle, but Warner has done no research on how the identity laboratory of the Internet might aid swingers to be public and private, transgressively exciting and normal.

## Identity Politics and the Internet

The Internet has made choosing a temporary identity possible for anyone, but especially for bodies that had never mattered much to society. However, researchers have already retreated from initial hyperbolic claims of its potential. Lisa Nakamura, Elizabeth Heilman, Michael Ross, Colin Clifford Brooke and other cultural researchers comment on the problems associated with that original starry vision. The Web initially promised solutions for looking at conflicting or alternative options in “the most familiar aspects of social and sexual life” (Nakamura 342). However, the potential for quick resolutions to social problems devolved into a “maddening bipolar [where] either the Net changes everything or the Net changes nothing” (Heilemann 138). Yet, while the Internet’s anonymity offers an interesting opportunity for swingers and others to enjoy a potentially liberatory and safe place to interact, Nakamura notes that subgroups may employ some stereotypical tropes and images in doing so. The Internet still makes use of language and thus is subject to Foucault’s concept of the transgressive/oppressive reality of discourse. However, more meaningful for this dissertation, Nakamura makes an interesting distinction between majority and outcast users of avatars that complicates underground groups’ rebuttal of their outcast status. Since Postmodernism layers fragmentation and disorientation on identity construction, swingers must now contend with “systems of significance that frame them in multiple and often contradictory ways” (xvi). In other words, they cannot make choices that are free from cultural values potentially antithetical to their message. And, with the Internet as one such framing system of contradictory identity building, it important to study and understand whether or how the new venue changes how this niche group does identity work.

As they represent themselves in the technology, swingers/Lifestylers launch a self-made, collective persona through the user-to interface narratives of Web portals (Nakamura xiv). More significantly, cyberspace contributes to the fluidity and power of multiple, diverse, “intersectional” identities by providing opportunities for “public and private selves to be meshed,” as noted by Kayla Hales and Lynette Kvasny in “Identity (Re)evaluation in Cyberspace” (2010). They explore how the Internet enables marginalized groups to invigorate their identities by reaching out to like-minded people. Because of the possibility of having both true and hidden selves, sexually marginalized communities can use cyberspace as a “social-sexual location” that enacts strategic identity positions online grounded in their real lives, a particularly salient feature for swingers whose sexual meetings require their physical presence, but who sometimes need anonymity (2). Having real-life sexual encounters significantly changes the typical view of the Internet as a space between fantasy and action where a “person can *type* without *doing* or *do* without *being*” and thus not have “to face the dissonance or stigma of actually being, or having a spoiled identity” (Ross 344, italics in original). For swingers, their persona must be as advertised, an ironic twist of sorts. More important, using the Internet to construct an identity that will be viewed in person can mitigate the negative connotations that often attaches to those who employ sexual cyberspace (349). The Web may function ultimately as a virtual space in which to play act and perform, and a place that could also represent a more complete and “unspoiled” identity” and one that is a parallel social space, not an underground one. In addition, Hayles and Kvasny’s work on Web relationships can be applied to swingers who have a different sense of solidarity from racial or diasporic groups who use the Internet to form alliances across geographical

boundaries. For swingers, the Internet offers comfort and an uninhibited milieu that can assist...in strengthening their actual offline identity...to rethink their identity and rediscover themselves” (3). As users begin to shape technology, moreover, swingers’ “heavy sexually-related use of the Internet may spur future technological developments” that favor their community identity (Ross 349).

Butler’s work on alternative sexualities gives impetus to the critical practice of queer theory (troubling), while identity politics alters ways of knowing, social/sexual relations of power, notions of oppression, and rhetorical praxis. Carl G. Herndl and Danny A. Bauer in their 2003 “Speaking Matters: Liberation Theology, Rhetorical Performance, and Social Action” take these Postmodern theories and turn them into practice, grounding their work in the confrontational rhetoric of liberation theology where marginalized groups can effect some change in the face of social oppression (559-60). For example, New Communication Technologies (NCTs) often allow “bodies that do not matter” to enter public space as legitimate agents (559). Swingers, for example, presumably want to be recognized as a swinger community since they have created Websites advertising their existence, something not seen until the Web’s existence. The tenor of their language indicates a sense of pride in their group’s anti-normative stance. For example, this statement of *New Horizons*, “The Pacific Northwest’s finest adult social club,” proudly announces they have been around over 30 years, which arguably can affect society’s acceptance of swingers’ presence in increasingly more tolerant times. Given that one goal of identity politics includes valuing those who have been denied their difference, through the Internet swingers might accrue legitimate recognition as members of society as the public sees swingers through their own perspective.

The 1960s anti-establishment climate offered new perspectives and goals for disciplines like New Rhetoric to broaden what counts as text as well as to uncover ethnocentric, patriarchal, able-bodied, heterosexual, and/or middle class practices of norming, excluding, and policing difference. Sometimes simply uncovering oppression is enough as many researchers such as Nakamura argue. Additionally, the queer outlook, along with feminism, has infused rhetoric with an ethical responsibility to act, to ensure a space for sexually marginalized groups to live. In that spirit, swingers use cyberspace to invite interested audiences to see the Lifestyle product and welcome them to join. In that inclusive endeavor, design theorist Buchanan's 1992 "Rhetoric, Humanism, and Design" also comments on the rhetorical (and humanistic) aspects of product design, which opened up conversations theorizing how design within social, political, and philosophical contexts makes meaning. Twenty years later, society generally takes this fact for granted; however, an increasingly cross-disciplinary world now compels other fields to learn how design principles work. For example, Buchanan argues that when groups design public interfaces, their choices reach far beyond the surface of the page and the variables have long range effects that touch core values and launch expectations, not just on one viewer but on whole social narratives. The words and images on any "designed" page convey more than just surface information, but should put forth "harmony and balance [to] serve the ethical life of human beings" such as fairness, ethics, and honesty (252). Buchanan's work recognizes that any designer such as Website creators may be unconsciously aware of a grander scheme of critique and advocacy for their lifestyle, and thus, some of their choices for the "flatland of the screen" may resonate with conventional ideas. Their designs may simultaneously promote a legitimate and counter culture group identity, yet



their presence alone advocates for a discussion of sexual norms. Like Spivak's "strategic identity," Buchanan recognizes identity as a strategic product to be viewed in terms of a group's social existence, and so having multiple and perhaps antithetical vectors leave swingers with a complicated and unique public representation to maintain, one made more complex as swingers can still face social backlash.

In a slight philosophical and ethical twist, the German Romantic Walter Benjamin also suggests that there should be more to the aesthetics of the "page" than the immediately visceral. He wants audiences to see and feel the history behind the page. For example, he proposes that European viewers of Indian exotica today have an ethical responsibility to conduct "rescue operations" or make clear how audiences today must redress past prejudices and biased behavior. He is speaking specifically of recouping racist portrayals of Indian and black women in English colonial art, but his idea merits ethical consideration for rescuing swingers from their "deviancy" charge simply by accepting their (or any adults') consensual sexual choices as legitimate (Rajan 55). Benjamin theorizes that through art, audiences "imagined them (natives) as immoral, so they must be saved from this 'image' from the past that legitimately expects to be delivered because we have a debt to it" (Rochlitz qtd in Rajan 55). For Benjamin, art "imagined them (natives) as immoral, so they must be saved from this 'image' from the past that legitimately expects to be delivered because we have a debt to it" (Rochlitz qtd in Rajan 55). Once the stigmatized voice is heard, the wrong must be righted. In fact, rhetoric and queer theories implicitly advocate for these same rescue operations, holding "normative" society accountable for robbing outlier groups of the opportunities for and benefits of a political voice and a fair representation in art/culture. In fact, because of the

rise of such areas of investigation as Postcolonial Studies and Women's Studies, Benjamin's theory of ethical responsibility means "we are entrusted with the responsibility of demanding accountability in the creation of visual culture such that images that demean...be judged inappropriate or unappealing visual images and unavailable for approbation" (Rajan Abstract). Benjamin directed his accountability toward "enlightened postcolonial women" because they should understand the insidious nature of sexualized difference and thus owe it to the damaged image of the racially and sexually marked body to make it discursively whole again. The Internet's strengths for identity building may be a way for swingers or any marginalized group to start performing their own rescue operations and asking the audience to do so, too.

One key issue that this dissertation considers is how the fragmented, unstable, and decentered swinger subject, as a result of pejorative media talk, can acquire temporary agency through the Internet as swingers advance such new concepts as recreational sex and emotional fidelity. Websites give unlimited access to swingers' philosophies and the time to become comfortable with them. Swinger Website creators provide a mixture of adult fantasies and practical information, so potential members can envision these alternative sexual fantasies within the rhetorical choices of the screen shots before committing to a personal encounter.

Ross views the Internet as a "sexual medium, an intermediate step between private fantasy and actual behavior," where he recognizes the power it has to offer alternatives to monogamy" (344). Ross' claim implicitly rests on anonymity as helping the stigmatized gain safe access to audiences. However, Hales and Kvasny, in "Identity (Re) Evaluation in Cyberspace," discuss the fallacy of assuming that one can know how

anonymity influences identity performances (7). Shelley Turkle's 1995 *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* highlights how the Web's fluidity allows people to mask discriminatory markers and explore new identities. Several decades later, however, others working with racial identities find that online identities actually are relatively stable and continuous with offline selves and that New Communication Technologies (NCT) are not [just] neutral tools; they reveal aspects of the real world self' (7). Similarly, up until recently, swingers' presence on the Web was limited to word of mouth and underground newspaper ads, but now, swingers can enjoy the anonymity and safety of a Website devoted to their lifestyle. Being part of a unified collective with a quiet, but insistent Web presence forces the conflict, allowing them to fight back in identity-confirming and meaningful ways and hoping others will be more accepting of difference when the images, color, and text construct a different, but meaningful, alternate sexual story.

Michael W. Ross's 2004, "Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet" argues that the Web's anonymity can help perpetuate a fantasy life as audiences respond to the sexual tropes and cues on the sexy Homepages. However, because swingers meet in person instead of using cybersex, any false, cyber-sexual identity will be discovered; thus, Lifestylers' rhetorical choices are less about disguise and more about information, desire, and reassurance. Unfortunately, for a group reliant on pushing both sexy and exclusivity, Ross also suggests that "the rapid expansion of the sexual market, particularly for uncommon and stigmatized sexual behaviors" will cause swingers to lose their cachet, and that these groups will soon be normalized as "the Internet provides a new social niche for sexual expression" (351). Currently, the Internet gives them space to

craft a group persona carefully balanced between these two competing connotations of American cultural tropes: independence versus deviance and sexual pleasure versus sexual duty. There is no guarantee that they can maintain their exclusiveness given language and technology's role in shaping sexual cultures (351). Nakamura also questions the assumption that identities can be freed from community norms under the guise of anonymity, saying that society has already forgotten that Web pages and design choices are politically charged communication events (101). Whether the predominately white, middle class, middle-aged swingers can ever produce an identity free from standard fantasy tropes will be difficult to measure given their limited visibility and vocality. Moreover, according to Turkle's *Life on the Screen*, if pure racial categories "are much more serviceable to cyberspaces's current ideologies than are racial identities that challenge notions of purity," then pure sexual identities like dominatrix, submissive, sadomasochist, or swinger might also erase a hybrid one where hedonist and minister could exist in one body. Because swinger Websites are rather new at this identity construction, it is smart to heed Buchanan's warning that sometimes design as a means of social change often become a means for simplifying a complex world through ignoring conflicts or accentuating unity rather than understanding it (Buchanan, Doordan, and Margolin 286).

Analyzing such complicated concepts such as identity has become exponentially more difficult with multi-modality. To that end, Brooke's 2009 *Lingua Franca* discusses how the rhetoric of new media demands a shift from print to interface theories, since "we must have a framework that enables analysis without discounting the overlaps and dynamic relationship among interfaces" and as a framework to understand "new

developments in discursive technology” (xvii). His theory and new terminology—“an ecology of practices”—suggests another re-purposing of Aristotle’s rhetorical canons to account for the wider array of new technologies that the print language cannot adequately analyze. Brooke’s scholarship informs the qualitative nature of this dissertation with new areas that have few stable models to follow. Although he recognizes the power of J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept of remediation, Brooke points out that marking the similarities and differences among media requires a relatively stable text. Dynamic Websites then could borrow a phrase from Burke by addressing interfaces that produce a kind of “medial moltenness” rather than static texts (*Rhetoric of Motives* 21, 25). In other words, Brooke imagines the interface as an ecology of simultaneous practices and describes a book or an essay simply as a specialized moment of stability. He wants the focus to be on the continual process, the variability, rather than a product; thus, he argues that rhetorical theory must develop to account for it. His theory seems to parallel Spivak’s concept of strategic identity, which also allows for a stable identity to coalesce for a moment in time to accomplish a task. This current discussion of swinger identity recognizes the temporariness of community persona that emerges from the analysis of the swingers’ 100 Web site interfaces in Chapter 4.

#### **A Conceptual Framework for Studying Swingers’ Use of the Internet**

This literature review has examined theorists whose ideas address the identity making of the swinger community. Such theorists do not, however, provide any insight into how one might read a Website for understanding how a marginalized community might safely have a voice, how swingers might self-represent in opposition to the current deviant label that stigmatized them, and/or how swingers might extend their reach as

silent activists for similar subcultures. For this reason, the final part of this chapter addresses Website analysis from the perspective of techno-rhetoricians who study the rhetoric of multi-modal media and the Internet. Mary Hocks, Lisa Nakamura, Richard Buchanan, Cheryl Ball, William Lidwell et al., Charles Kostelenick and Michael Hassett, Anne Marie Wysocki, Collin Gifford Brooke, and other techno-rhetoricians represent important voices who have addressed multi-modal Websites and design. Their work is helpful in understanding the uses to which swingers have put the Web.

Hocks' "Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments" describes the digital creations of Websites as dialogic hybrids constructed by a "dynamic system of strategies employed for creating, reacting to, and receiving meaning" (632). She delineates some of the first discussions on how to create and read the languages of Web design. According to Hocks, goals of successful Website design requires focus on building a strong relationship between the audience and the creator in three distinct ways. First, the Website developer should establish a strong ethos, one that encourages audience participation with hyperlinks, navigational buttons, and interesting graphics that are well done. Second, the designer must develop a transparent, easy to understand document, which, at the time of the article's publication in 2003, meant using familiar print conventions such as linearity; such conventions represent a difference from the current conversation on the rhetoric of multi-modality. Finally, designers show audiences the affordances and restrictions of using conventional versus novel techniques for constructing "multi-faceted identities" (632). A discussion of these strategies provides an opportunity to understand the rhetorical nature of identity creation for a new swinger audience. Moreover, as this dialogue reveals the construction of identities, gender or

sexual norms become more conspicuously “un-natural,” opening a door for seeing stigma as a value-laden construction. Of particular interest for this dissertation is Hocks’ attention on the shared culture between designers and audiences. Technology has allowed immediate feedback from both sources, so a Website that is responsive to its customer base will increase its appeal and ethos. These two traits inform the site’s stability and legitimacy, important characteristics for giving non-normative groups a public place to create a virtual community identity.

Identities continue as a theme for Nakamura, author of *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. She states that technology’s greatest “promise [was] to eradicate otherness,” but identity liberation becomes complicated when identities—racial, sexual, or economic—simply moves into a different medium, not a different set of ideologies (4). Indeed, Nakamura describes how the “technologizing of the body...continues to work as a distinctive feature of networked, postindustrial societies” as the visual culture creates both “normative and resistant discourses” (132). She reveals wariness about techno-wonder, while she recognizes the possibilities of a common location that is “collectively authored, synchronous, interactive, [and] subject to constant revision” (55). One could extrapolate from Nakamura’s statement a model that swingers and other subgroups might copy: changing their technological practices through constant monitoring and tweaking to achieve tangible purposes such as using attractive design to keep readers on the site, Adding such options as Twitter, blogs, Facebook, and/or Skype, or attending to responsive design could position the community and/or Website creators as savvy techno-communicators who create an ethical stance by fulfilling their audiences’ needs.

Such a responsiveness mirrors Buchanan and Margolin's view that Website creators are essentially trouble shooters, who, according to Nigel Cross in "Discovering Design Ability," constantly "redefine the problem through means of solution/conjecture" (108). Consequently, Website creators need skills in both art and critical thinking because the Website is a new rhetorical "vehicle of presentation." Website creators also must pay attention to the warp speed of Web information flow to keep up with audience expectations for the latest trends in features and the newest topical issues. A Websites' reputation can rest on creators' abilities to monitor and adjust designs quickly, giving the audience both the pleasure of agency and of being listened to by the designers the (635). Hocks also suggests that the audience's involvement with a multi-modal product challenges readers' expectations by allowing them to "imagine themselves as more thoughtful about designs or even capable designers themselves" (638).

An audience involved in a well-designed Website can see itself as a community, according to Christine Boese's 1998 dissertation "The Ballad of the Internet Nutball: Chaining Rhetorical Visions Form the Margins from the Mainstream in Xenaverse." Her study focuses on a marginalized, online culture's identity, and her goal is to

explore the constellations of social forces in cyberspace, which have led to the success of a non-commercial, highly trafficked, dynamic cultures or what is sometimes, called a "community"....[her] research examines how the rhetorical visions of this culture are used to write the narrative of its ongoing existence in a way that is increasingly independent of the dominant narratives...." (qtd. in Hocks 639)



As Boese's work suggests, design and text production construct new knowledge as audiences bring a critical eye to old and new technologies, conventions, and power hierarchies that are now "subjected to a distanced, analytical scrutiny to reveal the rules of their constitution" (Kress qtd. in Hocks 644). For these theorists, design is a transformative process (for both the community and society) that is both rhetorical and epistemic in nature. However, rhetorical strategies—whether print, visual, oral, or sound—may be learned easily but why or how some designs "resonate" relies on understanding the "subconscious instincts, perceptions, and influences" of human motivation (Elam 11).

Seeing scientific determinism in design would be contrary to Kimberly Elam's claim in her foreword to *Universal Principles of Design*, and both Buchanan and Ball, among other scholars, caution against believing in strict meanings for art. On the other hand, Elam argues that design principles are not guesswork "because they are based on sound research and they work" (11). The basis for this "sound research" is informed by a practical, cross disciplinary approach to design, which allows lay designers access to specialized designs and generates the editors' 125 choices in Lidwell et al.'s *Universal Principles of Design* (12). Together with understanding why designs appeal to human nature and making thoughtful choices, Website creators can increase the "probability the design will be successful" (13). Kostelnick and Bassett's *Shaping Information* describes some cognitive approaches that explain how "the mind organizes [visuals] perceptually by storing and processing visual information" such as how habits, *Gestalt* principles, and memory create expectations and interpretations (2). However, they find these explanations not as satisfying as understanding the socializing function of discourse

communities as they shape, and are shaped by, the common codes of representation. As with verbal language, the process of making meaning shifts between understanding/using conventional patterns and knowing when a deliberate, rhetorical change points to something meaningful. Kostelnick and Hassett also rebut several popular myths about conventions. First, they indicate that conventions prompt rather than stifle inventions; because they guide rather than prescribe; standards invite designers to consider audience and purpose. Second, they suggest that conventions pervade all forms of design; because multiple standards might be mixed together (e.g., a logo or serif font). Readers may not recognize them as conventions, but rhetorical analysis can unearth them to inspect the embedded meanings at work. Third, even though conventions operate in social contexts where users control them, this statement does not negate the validity of Lidwell et al.'s 125 universal designs; instead, it recognizes that these designs are shared knowledge constructs that respond to the audiences' needs. Finally, Kostelnick and Hassett indicate that conventional practice is intrinsically rhetorical in that Website creators must make informed decisions as they select, adapt, and integrate "standardized" designs although they cannot always predict how a reader or viewer will interpret their choices (6). The above four "suggestions" ground the Kostelnick and Basset belief that making meaning is knowing when to use and/or interpret rigid, stable symbols as well as choosing the *kairotic* moment for idiosyncratic digressions from the standard. Experienced designers know the dilemma well: breaking the format may "give readers more interpretive slack but may also entail greater risk" (173).

Anne Marie Wysocki's 2004 "Opening New Media to Writing: Openings and Justifications" accepts the social nature of visual language, but she understands that

analyzing how “visual arrangements both carry values and shape our relations with texts and each other” is just as necessary in a tech-heavy world as it was in a print-biased one (6). Interfaces are not neutral even though readers may not think of the Website creators as pushing a particular worldview on their Homepages. Keeping that non-neutrality in the forefront of audiences’ minds compels them to recognize how they are part of “other, already existing, structures and practices” (1). Moreover, using conventions and the materiality of the text also works in reverse by “writing” the creator’s identity (8, 6). Wysocki sees a new media audience as one whose identity is shaped by the making of an interactive media text, not just through “the reactive lens of critical/theoretical reading” (Brooke 15). Certainly, a valid reading of a communal Web identity is rhetorically possible within the framework given above, but now the process is reflective and transformative, affecting how the Website creators view themselves. Working with a stable, fixed text is problematic in this post-Internet world, so understanding that meaning-making first derives from a complicated, overlapping interconnectivity of social forces is one of the first paradigm shifts needed in confronting screens instead of pages (23). The second shift is accepting the interface as a dynamic product, a temporary fixed text we can read, but a text that will dissolve and re-evolve over and over with each new reader, context, and material condition (25).

Brooke’s *Lingua Franca* describes how this fundamental “rethinking” of new media means finding new strategies—such as rhetoric refusals—has generated the term “ecology of practices,” as noted earlier in this chapter (28). This “ecological perspective on rhetorical practice” captures the dynamism of the interface, its momentary stability for analysis, and a “reframing” of the classical canons’ analytics as social (environmental)

epistemology (28). One of the new strategies that might expand the rhetorical canons— invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—is Schilb’s definition of rhetorical refusals.

Although Schilb’s work centers on written texts, he fully expects other researchers to move into the visual field. In fact, he asks: “What might rhetorical refusals look like when they take imagistic forms?” (10). Even as he confines himself to “refusals expressed in words,” he opens the door to this future work (10). Accepting Schilb’s term as a specific verbal/linguistic strategy which can be moved into the visual language realm adds to the conversation about how identity can be self-represented in a social world where big discursive voices drown out small ones. That situation requires flexible thinking about solutions that Schilb seems to have found. If a taboo group’s disdain for social norms becomes a compelling attraction to others who previously shunned them, that result might support the legitimacy of rhetorical refusal as a new identity strategy that challenges old ideologies about deviance’s purpose in society.

Buchanan and Margolin’s 1995 view that the investigation of design as a subject of “social, cultural, and philosophic investigation” makes it possible to examine Website discourse within the scope of visual rhetoric, where design is intentional and thus “a fundamental communication model” (Joost, Scheuermann 5). The Web’s anonymity and vast array of design choices facilitate the creation of a collective identity in safety .That swingers have taken advantage of the Internet to revise their stigmatized identity intentionally makes studying them a timely (and unique) addition to the field of identity studies via Website analysis.

Chapter 3 identifies the researcher's assumptions about knowledge claims through a pragmatic, problem-solving qualitative study. Investigating the strategies that swingers can use to represent themselves against a cultural stigma helps to identify what they have done and how they have done it regarding their Internet identity. This chapter introduces the rhetorical analysis method and discusses why it is an appropriate choice for analyzing the visual and linguistic language in swingers' Website artifacts, how Schilb's strategies expand the rhetorical analysis repertoire, how and why the artifacts for this study were chosen, and how a combination design/linguistic analysis can answer research questions regarding the Web-based identity presentations of cultural sub-groups.

### CHAPTER 3

#### RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter I describe the rationale and methods used in analyzing the rhetorical strategies that stigmatized groups may employ when crafting an online identity. In particular, the swinger community uses cyberspace to frame their identity between competing and often contradictory pressures and tropes. An analysis of these strategies helps to understand how their methods work for them and perhaps for other similar groups who also want to resist the many dimensions of hegemonic discourse. The constructed, dynamic nature of identity posited by postmodern identity theories assumes that swinger Websites as social texts can create a community persona by using multi-literacies: linguistic, audio, kinetic, and visual languages. However, no one Website node, image, animation, or graphic is rhetorically meaningful by itself. Such meanings are fused within a cultural-historical activity moment that does not give primacy to language over full semiotics (Prior 18). Together, people “open a space for change” via rhetorical activity where they learn and develop (Prior 18, 21). Because social texts are considered rhetorically purposeful, the author’ choices say something meaningful about their ethos, identity, and value systems. As such, close reading strategies applied to any text consistently afford readers and researchers the opportunity to parse the authors’ choices and make probable, yet sound interpretations from them.

In this methodology, I begin with the canons, using them as linguistic bridges to see how these persuasive strategies are manifested in visual form. By fleshing out the design principles that are aligned with our understanding of classical linguistic concepts,

the new becomes familiar. I will also uncover evidence of Schilb's rhetorical refusals within the visual and verbal data resulting from the rhetorical constructions of identity on swinger Websites.

When Website creators expand from oral discourse and print text into visual or multimodal texts, the canonical "guidelines" continue to function as broadly persuasive and as meaning-making practices that become cross-disciplinary. Invention, style, arrangement, delivery, and memory can broaden persuasive appeals in digital frameworks to include the visual. Thus, this re-birth or re-recognition of the classical canons, expanded to include new theories and technology, operates in this dissertation as a general organizing tool for closely reading the Websites under consideration using such visual categories of Sexual Images, Space, Color, and Non-sexual Imagery and linguistic categories of Diction/Tone, Point of View, and Figurative Language. The resultant data are coded by the primary taxonomy of Lidwell et al.'s five categories of design principles. The data collected from the design and linguistic analysis, as they suggest community characteristics, also are analyzed to extend Schilb's concept of rhetorical refusals.

Looking at the visual design elements may allow me to discover whether or not Schilb's criteria for rhetorical refusals can be found in imagistic form as well. Those criteria: challenging audience's expectations, deliberately breaking rhetorical protocol, and suggesting a higher morality) can develop both the visual and linguistic strategies available to underground groups who might want to use Websites or other multi-modal products to shun old stereotypes as they self-represent. Understanding how persuasion is embedded in other modes broadens the ability of these groups to challenge language and images of cultural stereotypes. In addition, since using the refusal "deliberate[ly] break[s]

rhetorical protocol” and defines a transgressive, bold characteristic, it seemed that finding examples of this strategy in swinger Websites would show a clear intention of having a community persona of their own making. Indeed, applying Schilb’s criteria to the visual data results in identifying additional kinds of refusals, which has deepened support for this analysis and has demonstrated that Schilb’s strategy can be useful in another language form.

### **Why Rhetorical Analysis?**

Although scholars like Paul Prior and Collin Brooke suggest that the five classical rhetorical canons do not meet the needs of today’s world, the canons offer an initial point of departure for identifying and using Aristotle’s “means of persuasion.” These canons of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery retain power as means for classifying parts of rhetorical message development and dissemination. In addition, rhetorical analysis allows researchers to draw conclusions when subjects are difficult to access for interviews, surveys, or focus groups. In particular, this method enables a researcher to analyze Websites as potentially representative for understanding the online persona, motivations, context, and purpose of those represented by the Website.

Relatively few researchers have studied swingers, yet with the broadening of rhetorical and identity theory and the online space of the Web, it is important and interesting research to understand how such outlier groups take advantage of these changes to advertise their presence. Qualitative textual analysis as a method has some limitations including researcher bias, one’s own knowledge of the topic, and the restrictions on this participant researcher in understanding the motivations or goals of a group; however, these limitations can be mitigated somewhat by a thorough analysis—



many examples and many strategies--of two of the Website languages: linguistic and imagistic. Together, they offer strong support for understanding how this marginalized group is developing an online relationship with its audience. Because swingers and other sexual sub-groups face potential discrimination among those who do not belong to the group, technology and its anonymity change the previous public-private power relationship that forces groups with a geographically limited membership and presence to remain underground.

The classical rhetoricians such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian were interested in the contextual nature of “truth,” and that debate has ebbed and flowed over the years. This debate considered whether “Truth” exists as a clearly definable event or subject or whether “truth” is relative, contingent on context and circumstances. A debate regarding the nature of truth took shape in 1967 with Robert Scott’s “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic,” and the discussion has continued with such scholars as James Berlin, Andrea Lunsford, and Richard McKeon arguing that author’s choices in making new texts would create new perspectives and that those new views could be counted as new truths, new ways of knowing. In another scholarly strand, feminists such as Andrea Lunsford, Patricia Bizzell, and Cheryl Glenn examine both a women’s way of knowing and the issue of historiography. “Who writes history” has become a significant question for women and marginalized groups who had been viewed previously through an historical lens unfocused on their particular experiences and given identities not of their own making. Consequently, contemporary scholars such as Bolter and Grusin, Nakamura, and Kress and van Leeuwen have added to these new perspectives by identifying the increasingly complexity of language—beyond oral and written text—and showing how

New Media offers transformative or transgressive positions on conventional meanings. Concomitantly, the analysis of texts coming from other disciplines (e.g., architecture) or multi-modal products (e.g., YouTube Works) also have become more complex. Although scholarly discussion still fluctuates between the two classical sides regarding the nature of truth as obtainable or contingent, this dissertation assumes a belief in the ontological nature of rhetoric and from that position theorizes that design choices make meaning.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions provide the impetus for the linguistic and visual analysis of swingers' Websites in an effort to understand the opportunities for, and obstacles to, revising a "spoiled" identity:

1. What rhetorical tropes, conventions, tensions, and appeals do swingers employ in their Website design to position themselves as an interesting and opposing force to normative sexual ideals? How, if in any way at all, do they balance this goal with one of having allure and being exclusive?
2. Do swingers use rhetorical refusals as subversive practices on their Websites? If so, how do they demonstrate or execute this function?
3. In what ways, if any at all, do visual/design elements evident in swingers' Websites (as shared cultural codes) rhetorically revise a previously pejorative identity?
4. Do swingers use conventional sexual imagery in any way, and if they do, what might these tropes say about the way desire is characterized in the U.S.?

### **Data Collection Methods**

In the beginning of this study, the plan was to interview swingers in a local geographical area, and the goal was to discover whether they had plans to address their negative characterization in the media. However, the Old Dominion University (ODU) Internal Review Board (IRB) ruled that interviews presented a small, but unacceptable risk of harm to the participants. The next plan for finding and interviewing swingers was to query members of the NASCA; a “SurveyMonkey” ten-question survey was emailed for distribution to their members. Unfortunately, receiving only two responses negated this data collection method as viable. Finally, understanding that the public came to know swingers through their Websites, the decision was made to develop a case study of swingers’ Websites and to analyze selected one as a useful venue for researching community identity. Assuming that swingers’ response to their sexual marginalizing might manifest itself in their print and design choices, it seemed possible that a group persona might emerge from a rhetorical analysis of specific linguistic and visual features on these sites.

Data collection began with twenty-five geographically representative, swinger Websites over a two week period in July 2012. Screen shots were made and saved as files in order to keep the Websites co-contemporary and useful for analysis. The Websites—which became the field sites for analysis—were chosen randomly for geographical variability to avoid any assumptions about the sexual habits of different regions of the U.S. California is represented twice, which seems reasonable given the size of the state and its predominance within the swinger community; it has at least sixty-one listed swing clubs, and it is home to

NASCA. With no central oversight, there is no consensus on how many swing clubs exist in the U.S; however, NASCA, the closest model for a governing body, estimates that over 5 million swingers play in the United States.

SWINGLIFESTYLE.com provides a self-reporting listing of clubs by state with a number exceeding five hundred. Having reviewed almost all of the five hundred sites and noticing many similarities among them, it was determined that twenty-five sites would yield enough initial data about identity traits and rhetorical refusals to offer preliminary responses to the research questions and still be manageable.

From each Website, four common pages were examined—in a few instances five--making a total of one hundred plus individual pages for analysis. In order to make the categories valid across all the sites, these four typical pages were chosen as a stable base for comparison and contrast because these pages generally seemed to display common conventional features; in several instances, Gallery Pages were used as they seemed relevant, but in the end the data from them was very meager. The Homepage, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), Rules, and Calendar pages appear consistently, with minor variations, in each of the twenty-five swinger Websites. Categories and pages were omitted that appeared idiosyncratic or that provided little design data because they simply had blank forms, applications, or MapQuest pages (e.g., Links, Membership Application, and Directions). Screen shots were made and saved as files.

### **Developing a Coding Process**

The decision to treat the twenty-five swinger sites as a case study emerged from a need as well as the IRB's desire to protect individual swingers from public interviews. Even a remote chance swingers could be associated with an area or even with the researcher prompted very limited contact opportunities. John W. Creswell's *Research Design* defines a case study as exploring "in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, of one or more individuals" (15). Describing the set of Websites as a swinger community resulted in an appropriate artifact to analyze for some insight into this underground group. The act of building a Website reflects an on-going process that can illustrate how swingers view themselves in society; therefore, this case study did not look at Websites as "a self-contained system," but as a public and social opportunity for recognition" (Denzin and Lincoln 10). In addition, triangulating the data among the canons, Lidwell et al.'s universal design categories and elements, and Schilb's rhetorical refusals allowed for a richer and more developed analysis of the swinger persona than attempting to do so from a single method.

### **Literature Relevant to Data Coding Methods**

Because the five canons function as a model for reading the same persuasive processes in images, they need to be clearly defined first. Then I detail the link between the canons and Lidwell et al.'s five purpose categories, and then I show how both the canons and the five purpose categories informed the selection of the final 12 design elements that became the basis of this Website analysis.

### **Classic Rhetorical Canons**

Aristotle taught and observed the practices people used to succeed in deliberative, forensic, and epideictic communicative situations, and then organized invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery into a taxonomy of rhetorical practices that have defined the art of persuasion since 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. These five rhetorical canons label the primary steps of gathering and creating material for a persuasive interaction. As such, they remain viable and useful for describing rhetorical actions even though the last thirty years has seen the focus on print language give way to a focus on the visual. The “layered, laminated histories of people, context, and semiotics,” has moved theorists to apply/expand/redefine/or specify new terms to account for “persuasion” in the digital age (Prior 18). The canons retain applicability even to these new communicative forms because these rhetorical practices exist despite the technology. However, Prior may be correct that some changes must occur to understand completely how visual and digital communication can be understood. In fact, Prior, who strives to remap the canon, argues that even in Aristotle’s Athens, the rhetorical elements of the canon “offered only a partial map of the rhetorical and political worlds of Ancient Greece” (3). Nonetheless, the canons represent a sufficient starting point for the initial analysis of swinger Websites, providing a solid grounding of persuasive practices before using Lidwell et al.’s five organizing categories and specific designs to code the visual data more precisely.

The canon's five categories of practices have been expanded, limited, ignored, expanded again, and argued about since Aristotle's Athens, so the following information clarifies the working definitions used for invention, delivery, arrangement, memory, and style in this dissertation, including the addition of *kairos*. Janice Lauer chronicles invention since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through multiple iterations, and it is clear the century's influences such as critical theory, epistemology, imagination, subject position, hermeneutics, heuristics, and Stephen Toulmin's probabilities have changed the nature of truth, both finding it and interpreting it. Not surprising, invention's complexity makes it hard to write a "true" definition, which may be a telling definition in itself. Invention has reflected the contemporary discourse surrounding it with its layered blend of generative, strategic, and socially constructed knowledge, which solves problems, is cross-cultural, context-dependent, and negotiable. This multi-layered, situated, epistemic, and creative view of invention is how this dissertation views the term in examining Websites. Looking at these sites as dynamic texts reveals how they can be several things at once, transgressive and conventional for example. The artistic proofs, or *pisteis*, that fall under invention add three important strategies for text creators to ponder in this new light.

In fact, researchers had already studied the limitations of these proofs or common appeals--*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos* to see if they too could be broadened into other areas. M. Jimmie Killingsworth's 2005 *Rhetorical Appeals: A Revision* considers the three modes of appeals too circumscribed, and claims that a 20<sup>th</sup> century lens can add layers to their work. Because the old definitions had not taken into account new mediums or social actions, Killingsworth redefines the appeals as genres that do rhetorical work (262). However, despite these new possibilities, this dissertation still uses them conventionally

as appeals to reputation, emotion, and logical reasoning within the technological framework.

The Internet affords arrangement more flexibility as a persuasive, meaning-making strategy through images, movement, hypertext, and layout, but despite the mode, audiences rely on common sense and logical patterns that arise out of the argument to help them follow clearly the author's reasoning. Because readers can move through the Websites pages rapidly, in any order, designers must consider design elements such as Legibility, Color, and Signal-to-Noise Ratio as necessary to slow them down and remain on the page. It is crucial to examine and analyze the Websites to account for the expanded role of arrangement in its new multi-modal role.

Style must have a new language to account for the visual, but the basic concept of a indicating a strong voice or personal flare remains the same. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, instead of focusing on the cognitive function of persuasion, style looks at what the rhetor should say to build a recognizable and appropriate ethos that appeals to the audience. Long ago Aristotle claimed, "Let the virtue of linguistic form be defined as being clear, for since the logos is a (linguistic) sign, it would fail to bring about its proper function, whenever it does not make clear (whatever it is the sign of, sc.)—and neither banal/mean/flat (*tapeinên*) nor above the deserved dignity, but appropriate (*prepon*)" (*On Rhet.* III.2, 1404b1). Although rhetoric was once defined too narrowly by style alone, rhetoricians gave it new attention in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it now functions as meaning making in linguistic and visual texts.

Memory is especially relevant now because technology has repurposed its practices from oral speech work to how a design helps audiences both recall the



information and easily find the Website. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hayles' early work on the construction of knowledge in virtual reality, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, argues that memory is more than a location of information, more than the conventional presence/absence binary; in fact, presence/absence is not a particularly viable concept in cyberspace where the avatar and "the user [are] both in and not inside the screen" (27). This new perspective defines a kind of on-going, cultural memory where swingers' continued Website visibility slowly embeds itself into the social genealogy of lived lives. After viewing the Website, not only can audiences recall and retrieve the swing club pages, but also visit the club itself.

Brooke also re-conceives of memory more widely as well, seeing pattern/randomness as analogous to the terms *chronos* and *kairos* where people organize the first quite rigidly, but can use the latter as a persuasive tool to retrieve memory if they can capitalize on the opportune moment (149). Brooke extends this *kairotic* concept as re-seeing or re-visioning, through media stories or images, previous pictures at serendipitous moments that change how one saw an event the first time (149). For example, he would argue that a "timely" moment might occur when the news brings us repeated videos of disasters. Instead of asking questions about what caused it, the relentless footage of the disaster could distort culpability if people, caught up in the tragedy, believe the event was just random bad luck. Brooke offers an example of the Challenger disaster, where NASA's safety record was discussed alongside repeated videos, giving the impression that NASA could not have foreseen this tragedy (150). Thus, swingers can capitalize on memory with attractive sites, sexy people, and clear information, keeping those images playing in the readers' memories when they are most attuned to hear and see them. This definition

of *kairos* is not far removed from the original. In Roger Thompson's 2000 interview with the author, Kinneavy defines Aristotle's *kairos* as the "right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something;" however, he argues for seeing *kairos* as less general than Aristotle's definition, and more situated in politics and ethics (the right measures) (76). This expanded version of the term is how this dissertation views its possibilities.

Delivery's original focus on oral speeches addressed the voice's strength and pitch as significant strategies, as were other physical attributes of "dress, gesture, stance, gaze, and so on" (Prior 4). But, relegating delivery to physicality ignored more compelling ways to meaningfully engage the audience. Following the pattern of the other canons, in 1993 John Frederick Reynolds called for renewed attention on delivery with his *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, and by 2007, Paul Prior suggested re-mediating delivery by looking at it as a continuous circuit that requires "mediation, distribution, and audience reception" rather than simply looking at the producer (17). In this dissertation, that complete path is assumed as the Website creator must find ways to use visual design persuasively, distribute the product via differing technological platforms, and focus on the audience's emotions and meaning making regarding such elements as Classic Conditioning, Framing, The Rule of Thirds, and Storytelling. Moving from orality, to linguistic, to visual has given the five canons a more robust set of practices to draw from.

### **Visual Rhetoric**

The canons parallel Lidwell et al.'s purpose categories and vice-versa—seen in Table 2 below—and again clarify how rhetorical functions are not limited by a change to technology or mode, but are manifest in any man-made text. These categories also helped

trim down the 125 design elements to twelve. Developing this coding process began with an iterative procedure that enabled a pilot coding of a few Websites as a sampling for the rest. From that initial coding, the taxonomy developed iteratively according to sound evaluative principles. Addressed in Chapter 1, Lidwell et al. suggested the following five practical categories for initially grouping the full 125 design qualities:

1. how to influence the design perception
2. how to help people learn
3. how to enhance usability
4. how to increase the design's appeal
5. how to make better design decisions.

These categories use familiar persuasive works such as appeal, influence, and teach, so it seemed logical to accept that the five canons would align with Lidwell et al.'s five goal-based categories, enabling audiences to see their close, rhetorical parallels. As logical and practical as that appears now, initially I ignored these categories, studying all 125 alphabetical listings. However, that decision was a mistake; too many elements were irrelevant or redundant, so eventually I selected twenty-five qualities that seemed salient in terms of helping the audience see an identity emerge and answering the research questions. For those two reasons, a variety of qualities that seemed relevant such as Picture Superiority, Framing, and Legibility were chosen. Several qualities were discarded (e.g., "Anthropomorphic Form," which suggests that audiences respond positively to human looking shapes) because swinger Websites have few shapes on them, tending toward real people instead. The same irrelevancy happened with the "Cathedral Effect." Ceiling height affects audiences' perception by promoting either abstract or

concrete thinking, but ceiling height was not present to study. Many others design qualities relied on engineering or math concepts (e.g., “Propositional Density”) unrelated to this dissertation topic. One with potential applicability was “Baby-Face Bias” (round faces and big eyes suggests helplessness and vulnerability), but given the sexual context of swinger sites, that link seemed to be a stretch. Table 1 provides the twenty-five design qualities that initially appeared to be most relevant to this study. A final iteration of the analysis reduced these 25 elements to 12 (those with an asterisk). A discussion on the final 12 design elements appears after Table 2.

Table 1

Twenty-five Design Qualities Pertinent to Swinger Websites.

*Color	*Classical Conditioning	*Aesthetic Usability Effect	*Attractive Bias	*Accessibility
*Signal-to-Noise Ratio	*Picture Superiority Effect	*Figure-Ground Relationship	*Face-ism (Body-ism)	Proximity
Priming	*Legibility	Scarcity	*Framing	Expectation Effect
Mnemonic Device	Alignment	*Rule of Thirds	*Storytelling	Factor of Safety
The Five Hat Racks	Expectation Effect	Cognitive Dissonance	Highlighting	Readability

As noted above, the classical canons offer a conceptual umbrella under which we can see how they can be considered as part of a visual design as well as a linguistic process, so this next discussion explains how the five linguistic canons inform the five visual purpose categories in Table 2: 1) The best arrangement methods should appear logical to the audience whether the choice is a chronology or a set of hyperlinks, no

matter the mode the information must be clearly followed; 2) memory teaches by actively engaging the audience in thought. Elements such as rhetorical questions and meter aid recall just as a well-balanced Website can; both teach by making the information stick in the audiences' memory; 3) audiences appreciate an appropriate style; a well-chosen word, parallel constructions, a passionate tone all contribute to the audience's respecting the site's effort and competence. Even though the style canon might seem an awkward fit for the visual element of usability, those same linguistic processes resonate in visual choices of a well-balanced, practical site. Both modes keep audiences reading or looking at the text; 4) invention practices select the best ethical, pathetic, and logical appeals, whether linguistic or visual to grab the readers' attention. Aesthetics, whether euphonic or sight-based attract and keep audience satisfied and positively influenced. Pretty people and the golden ratio convince readers to see the site as good. In addition, face-ism and storytelling encourage a personal relationship between the reader and the designer/author; 5) finally, the delivery process metaphorically parallels how accessible/or inaccessible the Website is to the handicapped. Websites that suppose only able-bodied readers may need to rethink their delivery assumptions. Whatever the technology, delivery rests on getting the print or visual to the members who want the information.

Table 2

The Canon and Lidwell's et al.'s Organizational Framework with the Final 12 Visual Elements.

**Arrangement: Influencing the Design's Reception**

- a. Color
- b. Signal-to-noise Ratio
- c. Legibility

**Memory: Teaching via Design**

- a. Classical Conditioning
- b. Picture Superiority Effect

**Style: Enhancing Design Usability**

- a. Aesthetic-Usability Effect (1/3s)
- b. Figure-Ground Relationship

**Invention: Influencing the Design's Appeal**

- a. Attractive Bias
- b. Face-ism Ratio
- c. Framing
- d. Storytelling

**Delivery: Making Better Design Decisions**

- a. Accessibility

After testing the twenty-five qualities in Table 1 for their ultimate usefulness in the analysis, obvious redundant or data-poor terms were discarded, and I returned to the original iterative process to cull out more. For example, "Mnemonic Device" seemed to be a good design choice for branding swingers with a memorable identity, but except for some alliterative naming such as "Freaky Friday," it was used little in this data sample. Instead, "Picture Superiority Effect" and "Legibility" were prevalent and useful. The "Factor of Safety," or "the use of more elements than needed to balance unknowns," initially sounded promising for what seemed to be a secretive nature of swingers, but it was difficult to identify what might be the "unknowns" without a conversation with the

Website creators. Twelve principles (e.g., “Color,” “Storytelling,” and “Attractive Bias”) were selected to analyze the text with the goal of achieving rich and relevant results.

The visual qualities outlined in Table 2 address these conventional meanings as they inform the swinger community identity and provide a key for understanding an audience’s potential response to a Webpage.

Quantifying and identifying the intuitive is a difficult task with print rhetoric, and doing the same with Web design is little different. However, Elam’s foreword to Lidwell et al.’s *Universal Principles of Design* argues that design principles can be seen as “laws, guidelines, human biases, and general design considerations” that have proven records, supporting evidence, utility, or a high degree of misuse (12). Furthermore, if good design equates to effective design, then symbols, colors, and shapes that universally resonate with human instincts—the *gestalt* principles—or resonate within some special contextual frame are important to note. Even though much of design’s emotional resonance has made it difficult for lay readers to articulate why a particular element such as Picture Superiority works, Elam argues persuasively that the logic behind the elements in Lidwell et al.’s book, backed by reason and research, can aid this struggle (11).

For this analysis, the meanings attributed to these universal qualities are presumed to be situated within the particular circumstances and dynamics of swingers’ current Websites. Context is everything. However, Lidwell et al.’s designs offer some semi-fixed meanings associated with images. These image-based assumptions suggest something that the classical canons do not specifically address although people have always responded to images. The contemporary difference, according to Lidwell et al., is that studying design as rhetoric gives audiences and creators a common language for

understanding how images work. Not surprisingly they dismiss the notion that images are “mere pictures” because of the earlier discussion on the constructedness of memory. Although the following may sound redundant since I just linked the canons with the Lidwell et al’s five categories, the following considers how the canons also provide a conceptual umbrella for the specific visual elements under those five categories.

### **Rationale for the Final 12 Visual Elements in Table 2**

- I. A Good Arrangement Influences the Design’s Reception: The three features below focus on aesthetics, clarity, and attention-getting, so they may be typical across Websites whose groups want to establish a positive ethos with appealing and easily recalled text and visuals.
  - A. Color: People respond to color, which often evokes mood, but since there is no universal meaning for one color, choices are situation/audience specific.
  - B. Signal-to-Noise Ratio: The ratio of relevant to irrelevant information in a display determines clarity. A high ratio captures and holds an audience with crisp, precise, and germane features and information so the message stands out. Clarity also makes the site memorable enough for audiences to return to for more information.
  - C. Legibility: The appropriate type, size, and font increases the ethos of the site as creators respect the audience and give them clear, easy to read information.



- II. **Memory Functions to Teach the Audience via Design:** This category assumes that an expository function is included with the aesthetic, so audiences will recall the information.
- A. **Classical Conditioning:** Underpinned by behavior psychology, the repetition of design/images creates triggers that invite a specific response from the audience, such as feelings of fun and naughtiness. As a behavior modification strategy it encourages audiences to respond to a stimulus, such as a pretty girl. Her smiling face is easily remembered, which can segue into a long-term relationship with the product or ad itself. The tendency to dismiss the visceral effect of images as temporary versus the long-term staying power of words because they appeal to logic generally has become outdated. Another example shows how a constant playfulness with language (e.g., the use of puns such as “Cum as you are!”) can suggest to viewers a playful swinger community, which cannot simultaneously be deviant and immoral.
- B. **Picture Superiority Effect:** One of the major reasons authors choose images for their Web texts rests on the theory that pictures are remembered better than words for concrete ideas like sexy French maid outfits, rather than abstract ideas. The seminal work---from Alan Pavio’s “Why Pictures Are Easier to Remember than Words” (1964)—is based on the old cliché that a picture is worth one thousand words because “mere pictures” can be an arguments in themselves.

Naturally, situations usually do not require one or the other; the synergy that comes from using both together generally leads to a more effective outcome (Lidwell et al. 184). Both practices rely on a rhetor/audience relationship and an expectation that a way of seeing “truth” as relative can be massaged to change perceptions.

- III. **A Well-Chosen Style Helps Increase a Design’s Usability:** An attractive, easily read and navigated site demonstrates a professional craftsman at work who also values and respects the audience’s time. These two qualities keep an appreciative audience on the site and wanting to return because the information is clearly and beautifully displayed.
  - A. **Aesthetic-Usability Effect:** When the first impression of a design looks easy to use, it will be used. More important, the ease of use fosters a positive relationship with the site and keeps audiences there. This, in turn, increases audience loyalty to and fondness for the site, and forgiveness of minor design flaws.
  - B. **Figure-Ground Relationship-**elements are perceived as either the focus or the background, and a strong contrast helps clarify what is important and what is not, not forcing an audience to try and guess what to remember in a busy site.
- IV. **Appropriate Invention Choices Increase the Designs’ Appeals:** As the foundation for most ads, designers want audiences to remember the site/product with positivity, which increases the chance for new swinger memberships. Invention practices select the best ethical, pathetic, and

logical appeals, whether linguistic or visual to grab the readers' attention. Framing swingers as attractive family members and using aesthetics, whether euphonic or sight-based pull in and keep audiences satisfied and positively influenced. Pretty people and the golden ratio convince readers to see the site as good. In addition, fac-ism and storytelling encourage a personal relationship between the reader and the designer/author

- A. **Attractiveness Bias:** This bias assumed attractive people are viewed more positively, biologically and aesthetically.
  - B. **Face-ism Ratio:** Focusing on faces implies a spotlight on intelligence, whereas body-ism focuses on the physical/sensual, which gives swingers an appealing sexual allure.
  - C. **Framing:** The presentation of information influences audiences to accept an interpretation the creators want, and when swingers align themselves with beauty and goodness, audiences see that reading.
  - D. **Storytelling:** Audiences love a good story, so a design that engages the audience sets up a conducive learning environment, especially when the audience sees itself in the story.
- IV. **Effective Delivery Methods Encourage Making Better Design Decisions:** Websites are dynamic texts and being responsive and accessible to all audiences increases customer loyalty.
- A. **Accessibility:** Designs should be usable by as many diverse users as possible without modifications.

Web design rules do not change much from the linguistic ones; a rhetor also must select the best options available to get an intended response from the audience. To this end, the secretive nature of many subcultures makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of their strategies, but their artifacts can be viewed as reflections of their identity and mirrors of the persuasive methods employed to deliver their message. The specific goals of this dissertation in the contemporary Internet/technology era are to determine what linguistic and visual strategies a stigmatized group may use in creating a new identity via the Web and how these strategies, based on design theory, might act on an audience.

Combining the canons, Lidwell et al.'s five purpose categories, and twelve design qualities provided a viable and efficient method for understanding the data set as applied to slightly more than one hundred Web pages. The new visual terms from the table link to the classical canon and make clear how rhetorical practices are embedded in the visual even if the terminology, such as Attractive Bias and Signal-to-Noise Ratio, seems foreign or even unimportant. After analyzing the linguistic and visual processes, I can examine the final data set, seeking examples of Schilb's rhetorical refusals.

### *Schilb's Rhetorical Refusals*

As noted before, Schilb's refusals constitute a niche strategy that "can promote a more searching conversation" about the definition of fidelity or the right of individuals to have sexual autonomy (23). They can also be described as civic stubbornness with a rhetorical purpose. Again, Schilb's three criteria include: 1) refusing to do what is rhetorically expected, 2) deliberately breaking protocol, 3) assuming a high moral position for doing so. Once an event matches these criteria listed in column one in Table

3 below, more specific questions ensure that the refusal does rhetorical work such as illuminating how society and “the core elements of political order” may suppress and limit the rights of groups whose differences critique that order (20). By using rhetorical refusals, swingers can define themselves as independent rule breakers who defy a social code of behavior that excludes many people from pursuing legal sexual lifestyles.

American society has always admired the noble iconoclast, so it is likely audiences will recognize, and perhaps admire, swingers as a group whose existence models and fights for this interesting Lifestyle. Thus, finding refusals in swinger Websites is important in rounding out their new identity in a positive way, questioning the monogamous “gaze,” and opening up the conversation on sexual biases. Independence and inclusion are both strong values that can attach to swingers as they resist society’s unfair representation of them. Table 3 presents Schilb’s criteria for identifying linguistic rhetorical refusals, which provided a rubric for identifying imagistic refusals and/or categorizing new linguistic ones.

Table 3

## Taxonomy for Determining Rhetorical Refusals in Swinger Websites.

Criteria: Is the act a refusal?	Purpose: What good does it do?	Recognizing types of refusals:	Evaluating: How is a refusal "good" or "bad"?
Does it challenge audiences' expectations?	Questions key aspects of societies' governing frames.	Refusing to see what one criticizes.	Consider its precise discursive features.
		Refusing to be shamed for being different.	
Does it deliberately break with protocol?	Exposes the shakiness and vulnerabilities of American traditions.	Refusing to debate (Holocaust deniers)	Consider its differences from other conceivable members of its category
		Stonewalling	
Does it invoke a higher principle that trumps rhetorical decorum?	Challenges or complicates terms, concepts, & practices central to present U.S. culture.	Refusing an award (i.e. Marlon Brando)	Considers the position, explicitly/implicitly, it takes on various philosophical issues.
		Suspension of social agreement (personal space).	
	Illuminates and contests dynamics of power.	Speakers refusing to follow a published agenda	Consider its role in advancing the interest of larger groups.
	Expands rhetorical repertoires...people may accept power relations they should probe or resist.	Refusing to follow a disciplines' conventions.	Considers its relations to matters of politics.
		Violating frames of etiquette (Meursault's not crying for mom.)	
		Refusing to adhere to social conventions (i.e. criticism of the dead at an elegy)	
		Agreeing to debate and then belittling the opponent.	
		Breaking established genres (i.e. too much personal in a professional paper).	

Column 1 presents the three main criteria of a refusal while column 2 examines the purpose more specifically, making sure the refusal did not arise from petty jealousies or anger for example. If the example in question passed these two hurdles, it was categorized under a refusal type in column 3. For example, an act might resemble something such as a critic refusing to see what scorned the trend of “victim art,” a theoretical term she espoused about Bill T Jones’s play *Still/Here* despite never having seen or even intending to see it. As a professional, Croce was accused of inventing a new critical credo--critiquing but not bothering to see, being Stalin-esque, or seeking extra publicity, but Schilb concludes her act “belongs to a larger ,rhetorical corpus” that has been neglected (2). By violating protocol, she taught her audience that “‘victim art’ isn’t art at all” (3).

If the category did not exist in column 3, then a new refusal type had been found. If there was already a category, then Schilb’s print categories could be expanded, especially if it was a visual example, fulfilling Schilb’s call for new research at the end of his book. Finally, the last column enabled an evaluation of the refusal’s worth in the larger schema of civic and political discourse. A refusal must do some good.

Schilb claims that refusals and their many types have been around for a long time; we simply have not been looking at them. However, “relevant cases were always emerging” because people were always looking for “innovative responses to opportunities for political discussion,” (23). These political discussions were viewed as identity issues of marginalized communities, requiring an analysis for egregious and deliberate examples of swingers refusing to do what society rhetorically expected. One of those innovative opportunities emerged from the Websites themselves, where a swinger

community decides whether to be either seen or not. The other two criteria of rhetorical refusals include deliberation, which rhetoric assumes, and invoking a higher principle, which is identified for this community as sexual autonomy and self-representation, both of which trump exclusion and stigmatization. Schilb indicates that these two principles do not reflect self-indulgent motives, as might be argued, but reflect principled and reasonable responses to social standards that are exclusive and privileged (74).

*Websites: A New Type of Rhetorical Refusal*

When swinger communities still draw pejorative newspaper headlines and individuals identified with those communities still risk their jobs, then staying underground might sound like a safe choice for them rather than creating a public Website. Yet, swingers choose to do so, defying those who set sexual, legal, social, or moral standards. Schilb's criteria of deliberately breaking protocol for a higher principle is met specifically in these Websites because society expects "immoral" sexual communities to stay out of the public view; the old fashioned idea of public and private implied a "hierarchy in which the assembly is given special importance...and being in public is a privilege that requires filtering or repressing something that is seen as private" (*Warner Publics and Counterpublics* 23). Negative newspaper headlines attest to how vehement neighborhoods feel about having swingers owning or using private residences for their swing parties. Yet, a passionately framed public presence offers interested audiences a choice in their own sexual decisions. These are decisions that matter, ones that belong to the individual, and ones that "don't support the status quo" (Slack and Wise 151). Additionally, going public for stigmatized groups also means refusing to be shamed for celebrating their "private" desires. However, these desires are only private in



the context of social standards because there seems to be no expectation that bachelorettes or bachelors will hide their upcoming parties, which often involve strippers, drunkenness, and illicit sex. Warner would call swingers “counterpublics” rather than subgroups because they are “defined by their tension with a larger public” and are fully aware of their own subordinate status. That awareness “enable[s] a horizon of opinion and exchange” based on discerning how privacy is publically constructed and by transforming shame and disgust into something “publically relevant” (56, 62; see also Travers’ “Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics in Cyberspace”). However, going public should not be done without the chance of transformative action even if the out-group’s goal gives out conflicting messages or media bias distorts that transformation. In other words, swingers use the Internet to establish/transform their identity, but since the Internet is not be neutral in its forms, swingers send a mixed message when they use sexy young women on their Websites to support a transgressive stance against sexual norms. Additionally, by defining physical cheating differently, swingers also challenge the standard sexual narrative through what Warner calls “an invisible presence” (*Public and Counterpublics* 7). A swingers’ Website constitutes an artifact that says, “Hello, public” to us and makes us recognize them as part of our world; they cannot be ignored (7). Of course, being on the Internet as a community is a much safer transgressive act than going public individually, so one might claim that swingers are not being egregiously defiant; however, their employment risk still exists, so this move constitutes a beginning defiant step.

*Five In-Depth Criteria for Swinger Website Rhetorical Refusals*

As Schilb carefully parses the difference between stubbornness and a purposeful refusal, he provides five criteria to employ. The explanations below reveal more specifically how swingers might meet any one of these five parameters.

1. *Questions key aspects of societies governing frames:* Certainly swingers, consciously or unconsciously, question who has the right to define desire for anyone else or who decides whom can be seen. By living heterosexual public lives, in general, and multi-sexual private lives, swingers are bridging a gap between a normal, paired world and a queer one that creates personal intimacy outside of normal domestic space (Warner 201). In other words, swingers move in a world that defines couples, loyalty, and monogamy much more expansively. Sexual liaisons, friendships, and even foursomes can be defined as new personal intimacies that broaden sexual choices and offer autonomy in making decisions that affect their lives.
2. *Challenges or complicates terms, concepts, and practices central to present American civic culture:* Re-defining definitions of monogamy and infidelity complicate how society conceives good and bad behavior. Laws have never upheld criminal charges against consenting adults in America or Canada, but the stigma is still strong, so transforming both terms makes visible the public construction of them and the implied “correct” values they uphold. In fact, Warner suggests the term “criminal intimacy” as the only kind of intimacy “good folks” believed possible for fringe sexualities (Warner *Publics and Counterpublics* 201). When intimacy is defined by normal heterosexual

relationships, then non intimacy or promiscuity is left to describe marginalized sexualities (200). Following this logic, swingers needed to constitute themselves in new ways, segregating themselves from normal discourse by calling their parties and relationships such things as “play,” “hedonism,” “bi-curious,” or “fantasy sex.”

3. *Exposes the shakiness and vulnerabilities of American traditions:* When the swinger community is growing every year, when a TV show called *Swingers* runs on mainstream networks, when marriage rates are declining and adultery rates are climbing, and when states are finally allowing gay-marriage, it appears that marriage, desire, and loyalty as defined by social norms are not meeting people’s needs.
4. *Illuminates and contests dynamics of power:* Power relations have underscored this dissertation study. Swingers have the right to make decisions that matter, own their own representation, and use Websites to represent themselves on their terms—whatever they are. As counterpublics, swingers challenge what groups, behaviors, or words are “allowable” in public. More pointedly, these websites publically display responsible adults enjoying consensual adult activities, so they challenge the implicit taboo and accompanying risk that prevents them from going one more step and publically talking about and taking pride in their lifestyle. An inclusive society would value swingers’ various unions as complementary to the marriage bed, not antithetical (195). Challenging the worth and dominance of monogamy contests the power of the majority to decide on what normal and legitimate sexual lives should look like.

5. *Expands rhetorical repertoires...In seeing a rhetorical situation to address, people may be empowered to probe and perhaps resist standards and conventions.*

Little evidence exists that swingers resisted their identity as deviants before the Internet because they stayed underground, using only word of mouth and personal ads to meet one another. By refusing to remain an invisible subgroup, they have modeled a technological blueprint for presence if not vocal defiance.

At the end of his book, Schilb specifically calls for continued work on the “imagistic” form, a field he had not yet tackled with *Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences’ Expectations* (2003). This dissertation addresses the call, extending the search for this strategy in Web texts.

### **Coding the Data**

To code the data, a matrix was created; it listed the twenty-five swing club names down the left side of a chart and added five columns across the top: Homepage, Calendar, FAQs, Rules, and Gallery (used only once). Each chart was labeled with one of Lidwell et al.’s twelve design qualities: “Color,” “Signal-to-Noise Ratio,” “Classical Condition,” “Legibility,” “Picture-Superiority Effect,” “Aesthetic-Usability,” “Figure-Ground Relationship,” “Attractive Bias,” “Face-ism,” “Framing,” “Storytelling,” and “Accessibility” (See Appendix D for an example of Figure-Ground Analysis). The visual data points emerged from the five general practices organized by the rhetorical canons, as explained earlier in this chapter. The same kind of chart (twenty-five Websites times four categories) was used to collect data on the linguistic section of the Website. Even though all

five rhetorical canons are represented in each of Lidwell et al.'s five purpose categories, only one canon was chosen to keep the data manageable and keep the focus on the visual. One linguistic element and two to four visual elements were selected as sufficient for analysis. From Table 2, the following linguistic and visual techniques were connected:

1. Invention (i.e., ethos, logos, pathos): Influencing a Design's Appeal
2. Arrangement: Influencing the Design Reception
3. Style (i.e., diction, tone, point of view, figurative language): Increasing Design's Usability
4. Memory (i.e., ease of recall): Teaching via Design
5. Delivery (i.e., print and visual) for Making Better Design Decisions.

These linguistic features were included because they also are common to all of the sites, and their rhetorical importance and familiarity aid readers in interpreting meaning in a multi-modal design.

For the imagistic coding nomenclature, it was anticipated that the twelve design elements would contribute to an online identity through familiar, shared, social conventions and audiences' expectations regarding both Websites and linguistic narratives. No strategies of sound, movement, or flashing lights were collected because they were nonstandard across the sites; however, some were addressed during the analysis of the sites for visual and narrative clarity. This five-part coding system became a rubric for counting how often and in what general form each element appeared across the one hundred Web pages. The results were collated and reduced to numbers. Colors influence mood, so choosing

colors that enhance the site's aesthetics and interest must be done with that effect in mind. The *Amore Club USA* site adopted a pink/white/red/Valentine color scheme while twelve other sites, such as the *Entre Nous* and *Tabu*, relied on sexy black or purple background colors. Black foils the pure, virginal white, so its popularity is not surprising in an underground sex club where the lighting is low, black lingerie dominates, and silky black sheets connote wild nights of passion. Yet, *More Club USA* breaks with this popular site convention, per observation in this study, not only with its pink hearts but also with its name "amore." Love generally is not a theme at these sexual playground Websites because the hedonistic, sex-as-play nature of relationships at swing clubs is not part of the same cultural narrative as love and marriage.

It is an interesting choice that *Amore Club USA* avoids any hint of sexuality on this introductory page. Perhaps the owners recognize the need to underscore intimacy and playfulness to lighten up the anxiety most newcomers have about sex. The club's long past attests to the owners knowing that this color scheme works for them, branding them with indelible pink. The rest of the site, despite the rosy colors and iconic hearts, has its share of sexy language and images, so they are not less alluring, just less seductive in their color scheme.

As a strategy, colors evoke mood faster than words, so when audiences see black and red or black and purple, they already imagine all the sexual media scenarios they have seen or heard to include, public sex, naughty costume, and threesomes, which entice patrons to visit and live out their fantasies. Other colors may resonate with less seduction, but be just as vibrant and successful.

Nonetheless, color choices generally construct savvy and experienced owners who meet member's expectations through insightful rhetorical decision-making.

*Visual Example 2: Influencing Design's Appeal with Attractive Bias*

Media ads already have made audiences aware of the connection between attractive people and positives traits. Attractiveness and looking well-kept is why alleged criminals wear suits and ties and get haircuts before sitting before a judge and jury. *Allure Couples* has capitalized on this bias by using the young and beautiful to advertise their next party. The pink letter and red lips synecdoche on their FAQs page evokes a sultry female lover and works subtly on the imagination. In much the same way as the latter example, *The Toy Box's* shadowy avatars sketch attractive and mysterious women, leaving an audience perhaps a bit interested to know more. However, it seems to avoid a sexy message with the silhouettes in ordinary pants and dresses; similarly, images of empty, ordinary-looking rooms neither invite nor inspire as the informational aspect connotes blandness rather than the sensuality one might expect at a sex club. The tally of clubs that used the attractive, sexy people option for their different pages was high. These data are analyzed more completely in Chapter 4.

*Linguistic Example 1: Style Increases the Usability of the Design*

As noted previously, the classical rhetorical canons provide the overarching persuasive concepts for the visual elements selected for analysis. Along with linguistic elements, the newer, visual data needed to be addressed for this project. For example, for style, diction, tone, and point of view (and some figurative language) were grouped. Syntax was omitted because a preliminary

trial of counting passive voice, sentence length, and calculating readability indexes did not appear to reveal helpful information. The other three elements, however, provided interesting information and highlighted how written language is complemented by and intertwined with the visual (as well as sound, texture, touch, smell, and the like) and vice versa. The linguistic data were collected and counted with the same chart template as mentioned before and seen below in Table 4—the twenty-five clubs on the left and the five columns labeling the Web pages in terms of their titles and/or focus. Table 4 also provides example data for this analysis.



Table 4

Example: Analysis Template.

Homepage	Calendar	FAQs	Rules	Gallery
<p>Carousel Couples Club, Manhattan NOW SWINGING IN MANHATTAN!!</p>	<p>THE CLEANEST LITTLE SWING CLUB IN THE NEW YORK AREA (AND COOLEST IN THE SUMMER). OPEN EVERY MONDAY &amp; WEDNESDAY 8PM TO 2AM FOR CPLS., SING. WOMEN &amp; SING. MEN. Group Areas, Lounge Room, Dynamic Atmosphere, Disrobing Not Necessary, No Pressure to Participate, Soda, Juice &amp; Ice Bar, Three Strict Rules: No Drugs* No Prostitution* No Means No!*</p>	<p>June 22, 2013 SATURDAY MASTER/SLAVE PARTY FOR COUPLES, SINGLE LADIES, &amp; SINGLE MEN. 10PM TO 4AM June 24, 2013 OPEN TONIGHT MONDAY NIGHT COUGAR PARTY FOR COUPLES, SINGLE LADIES &amp; SINGLE MEN 8pm to 2am.</p>	<p>Couples Erotic Contest every Saturday night. Lounge Area, Free Setup Soda Area, Professional music system, Ladies Changing Room, Voyeurs Area, See-through Exhibitionist's Room, Couples Dark &amp; Intimate "Conversation Rooms," Clean rest rooms and shower. A freshly laundered towel and personal item locker is provided upon request. You must be over 21 to enter &amp; arrive with your partner. No sneakers, jeans, short pants, hoodies, hats, or sunglasses please. The Carousel Couples Events has been the choice for almost 15 years by all discriminating swingers, voyeurs, couples, and single ladies who have chosen an alternate lifestyle. A typical night at the Carousel might consist of couples entering the event location and heading to the bar or lounge area for visual entertainment. The event starts to fill with attractive couples in sexy attire.</p>	<p>BYOB. Free mixes, cups and ice are provided. As usual, No Drugs, No Prostitution, No Sneakers, No Jeans, No Hoodies, or Baseball Caps. Couples must arrive &amp; leave together. Please, no loitering outside the event entrance. Keep to our simple rules and we will do our best to supply you with the finest erotic parties.</p>

In the above analysis of the Webpages, diction, point of view, tone, and figurative language were analyzed. This coding choice meant looking for such details as jargon, multi-syllabic or Anglo-Saxon words, allusions, and regionalisms. Common threads were collected, counted, and identified with outliers being notated as such. The tone of each Webpage followed from the analysis of word choice, and those also were collated with commonalities and outliers extracted. The research also required knowing at what point of view the Website creators or swing club owners decided to use in addressing the audience and describing the club. Would the relayed information be in the distanced third person or the more intimate first person? Would the audience be addressed with the informally stated or the generically implied second person? Figurative language often manifests itself as verbal play, so puns, metaphors, and personification were considered with the expectation that these stylistic elements might reveal some identity traits in the message(s) that the style choices created. The Homepage column alludes to the 1978 Broadway musical, "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" with its "cleanest little swing club in NY" and promotes an emotional mix of good, clean, sexual fun (if the audience is old enough). The word "clean" is mentioned twice and "fresh" once, tacitly responding to possible questions audiences may have about "dirty" sex clubs. Most of the figurative language usually appears on the Calendar page with its alliterative and playful theme names. *Carousel Couples Club* stayed with role-playing language, using Master/Slave and Cougar Party themes. These are positive connotations within the sex club arena, and they evoke a bit of edge and excitement. The Homepage's

usual purpose is to dispel any stereotype new audiences might harbor as in the reference to cleanliness above. By explaining “Disrobing not necessary” and “No Pressure to Participate,” the owners underscored the fun atmosphere over anxiety audiences might harbor over enforced participation. The FAQs page also describes its “Voyeurs” area, another subtle hint that it is all right to do nothing but watch, and its “See-through Exhibitionist’s Room” indicates that others will be happily performing. As performance anxiety understandably might be common to those who visit a swinger’s club for the first time—imagining orgies everywhere—so these announcements attempt to forestall that worry from the beginning. One is invited to think that a club with such attention to cleanliness, dress codes, and audience nerves cannot be too bad to visit.

In sum, the goal of this iterative, qualitative data analysis method was to identify how swingers represent themselves through linguistic and visual strategies on their Websites and to surmise what that community identity might be. For example, when red was used on the twelve Homepages, Lidwell et al.’s color category was applied to help interpret whether or how it may have helped swingers to influence their audience positively and what the influential trait might be. If red defines a “standard” or primary color, for instance, does that color choice imply that swingers are conventional? In another example, a poorly designed and confusing Calendar with tiny print, uninspired advertising images, or little figure/ground contrast may put off an audience, but does that inattention to design craft imply unprofessionalism, a lack of awareness of Website design, or simply one owner’s unique style? Interpretations are myriad, yet the universal

design categories carry common guidelines useful for drawing possible conclusions.

### **Identifying New Types of Rhetorical Refusals**

The primary goal of this dissertation has been to understand swingers' identity creation and persuasive tactics through their Website pages. Additionally, it considers whether rhetorical refusals operate as a specific kind of rhetorical strategy and whether a visual or linguistic act can be matched to Schilb's criteria; one goal has been to discover more types of refusals to add to those he has identified. For example, the analysis considered whether simply having a swinger Website constitutes a rhetorical refusal.

Questions include:

- Does it challenge audience expectations?
- Does it deliberately break with protocol?
- Does it invoke a higher principle that trumps rhetorical decorum?

Even though swing clubs have been around since the 1950s, they have had little public presence until the Internet, so their deliberately constructed Websites may have many goals, but challenging sexual norms based on a marriage and physical fidelity narrative seems a valid summary of one of these goals. It is possible to see the public nature of their Websites as critique and use that to attest to Warner's view that "not all sexualities are public and private in the same manner, [and] some "disturb deep and unwritten rules about the kinds of behavior and eroticism that are appropriate to the public" (*Publics and Counterpublics* 25). By Warner's definition, swingers have gone public, but swingers still can be considered "counterpublics" because they bridge the personal and the political, still in tension with the larger public, but working to "elaborate new worlds of culture and

social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived...” (57). From this quote, swingers’ implied reconsideration of a sexual status quo sells itself as a better, more flexible, and more open view than the public values it criticizes, meeting Schilb’s third criteria of rhetorical refusals by offering a higher moral principle. Indeed it adds, not a new type of refusal, but another example of complicating social terms.

### **Summary**

In sum, this dissertation uses a qualitative, case study method to find evidence of how swingers use Websites and rhetorical refusals to create an identity. The following list outlines the methods chosen and used in this dissertation study:

1. Twenty-five swinger Websites from over five hundred were selected as primary data, covering sites across the entire U.S. to avoid possible bias in connection with one part of the country.
2. The Homepage, Calendar, FAQs, and Rules pages (with one use of a Gallery page) were chosen for their commonality and collected during a proscribed two-week time frame. Screen shots of these pages were saved as files; a year later, the same process was followed for the Gallery Page (needed for examining the Picture Superiority category) located on eight of the same Websites.
3. The twenty-five Websites were defined as a case study to minimize risk to individual swingers.
4. To build the coding taxonomy, an iterative examination between the selected Webpages and Lidwell et al.’s categories was done, adding and subtracting from his original 125 designs to reach 25.

5. The classical rhetorical canons supplied an overarching set of persuasive practices for print and oral texts that were used to look at the linguistic language in the Websites. They also guided refining the twenty-five visual designs to the most salient, where twelve were chosen as pertinent to the research questions and feasible in terms of the data load.
6. The visual and linguistic data were compared to Schilb's three criteria for rhetorical refusals; the results added two new linguistic examples and one visual example for a category he had already established for print.
7. The classical canons, Lidwell et al.'s design qualities, and Schilb's rhetorical refusals were triangulated to provide robust data rather than quantitative validity.
8. A chart of twenty-five swing clubs was developed for reviewing the five Webpage types—one for each of the twelve features—in order to collate the number of sites using such elements such as “Face-ism” on Homepages, for example.
9. From these twelve features, the data were analyzed regarding conventional linguistic and visual meanings to develop an understanding of the group's public identity.

In Chapter 4 I will use the canon's overarching frame to gather and discuss the linguistic and visual details of the data analysis, synthesis, and meaning relative to the research questions asked within this dissertation. I will then use this data to examine identity construction and the possible presence of Schilb so other marginalized groups

have important strategies available if having a positive, public presence of their own making is something they desire.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research study. These findings suggest that although the postmodern concept of text indicates how slippery meaning-making is, people do make meaning from texts, assuming a strategic stability, which Brooke describes as the snapshot-effect of seeing Websites as “special, stabilized instances of an on-going process” (25). However, any analysis also must appreciate the dynamism of interfaces and digital texts, new visual conventions, seeing old print conventions in new ways, and the cultural nature of information in shaping the codes by which meanings are made. Altogether, these multiple properties allow for a qualified assertion of a swinger identity via the visual and linguistic language on their Websites and a study of rhetorical refusals as evidence of defiance. These data are derived from analyzing four common page types (Homepage, Calendar, FAQs, and Rules) collected from twenty-five geographically diverse swinger sites over a two week period in July 2012 within the coding parameters of the rhetorical canon, twelve visual design elements, and Schilb’s three criteria for rhetorical refusals. The swinger sites produced many, and sometime conflicting identity traits, about their community as they juggle conventional and non-conventional design choices. However, through their uses of verbal and visual refusals, swinger Website creators characterized themselves as a group who defied standard sexual mores in a particular and interesting way.



Website creators model how technology enhances the rhetorical tradition because “visual conventions are similarly shaped [as are print conventions] by the communities that imitate them” (Kostelnick and Hassett 74). In other words, the analyses described in this chapter suggest how swingers imitate the rhetorical tradition in designing their Websites for public viewing. However, a new group representation is only one byproduct of the Websites. Additional motives include clubs finding new members, advertising the lifestyle, building relationships, offering validation of the Lifestyle, enabling privacy, challenging the status quo, and/or highlighting acceptance of difference, all of which is supported by the Website information.

In this chapter, I show the evidence of Schilb’s rhetorical refusals within visual and verbal rhetorical constructions of identity on swinger Websites. To do this I use Lidwell et al.’s five purpose categories to organize how the canons are manifested in both linguistic and visual forms. By fleshing out the design principles that are aligned with our understanding of classical linguistic concepts, the new becomes familiar.

This multiple lens analysis of an interdependent “media ecology,” as Brooke defines it, reflects (1) Schilb’s work in rhetorical refusals as a deliberate act that highlights a group or individual’s deliberate non-compliance with a social standard, (2) the possibilities new media offers for using and/or violating conventions in support of this identity, and (3) attending to the ecology model where the interface is the site of the interconnected “quasi-social contract between design and readers,” that facilitates a temporary, interpretive framework for meaning-making” (Kostelnick 181). The classical canon underpins the general practices for analyzing persuasive strategies, guiding viewers to see, for example, what arrangement and style look like in visual language and

how those elements persuade. As the art of persuasion changes with multi-dimensional tools and representations, Brooks claims that the rhetorical canons' prescriptive, linear practices should expand and views them as "repertoires of multiple practices that shift as we move among different media" and into which scholars must tread carefully (Back Cover). By expanding analysis into the visual, a stance has been taken for identifying how specific rhetorical practices make meaning in a multi-modal project. This dissertation provides a preliminary venture into the complicated, rhetorical ecology of analyzing swinger identity as it is played out on twenty-five Websites.

### **Organization of Data Analysis**

Before proceeding, a review of Table 2 from Chapter 3, is necessary. I slotted Lidwell et al.'s twelve visual elements under the five organizing categories--Influencing Design's Reception, Teaching via Design, Enhancing Design's Usability, Influencing Design's Appeal, and Making Better Design Decision—which I will use to explain how Chapter 4 will be organized with respect to the data collection. Beginning with the first purpose category in Table 2, I introduce how each category works rhetorically to establish a positive ethos. Then, I examine, analyze, and summarize the data found under each of the specific visual and linguistic strategies as seen on the Home, Calendar, FAQs/Rules Page. This analysis allows an understanding of how swingers capture, influence, and train audiences to see an open-minded, independent, and friendly community. The canons provide language for an understanding of linguistic uses, and they are further fleshed out to apply to visual communications through the twelve visual elements. Finally, I summarize each category's purpose, linking to the research questions until the fifth is completed. After that final category. I applied Schilb's criteria to the

resultant data to identify whether the Websites would reveal new rhetorical refusals, either new visual types or new visual or linguistic examples. While various combinations of strategies might have been used to understand the Websites with respect to rhetorical refusals, this combination offers a strong triangulation of data.

One of the rhetorical canons aligned with each of the five purpose categories under which two-to-four visual elements were allocated, underscoring how persuasive strategies inhabit all delivery modes. Understanding what these rhetorical choices mean reveals how swing club Website creators can perhaps “juggle convention and invention” in shaping and framing an identity narrative for the curious, interested, or neutral parties who sought them out (Kostelnick and Hassett 42). The rhetorical canons also provided guidance in narrowing the visual design features from 125 to 12, a manageable number to investigate. Sound was not selected for investigation as such additional data would have complicated the initial analysis beyond its potential usefulness as a tool for others to use.

These two divisions, visual and linguistic, have provided a somewhat “unified interpretation” as Ball pointed out in “Designerly ≠ Readerly,” acknowledging that the multiple, shifting factors involved with establishing an identity are quite dynamic and complex (395). But, simply identifying strategies does not answer Ball’s “so what?” questions (395). This purpose question is answered by showing how “absent” communities can reshape a pejorative identity safely and make publically available another sexual lifestyle choice. This dissertation identifies one way underrepresented, marginalized, or stigmatized groups have established a self-made position in society.

First, a qualitative analysis of five linguistic features of the Homepage, Calendar, FAQs and Rules pages from the twenty-five Websites was completed. These five page

types were examined because while the study was more focused on the specific visual arguments used, I could not ignore the standard strategies located in print texts.

The second data set includes a qualitative analysis of the twelve visual design features on the Homepage, Calendar, FAQs, Rules, and Gallery pages from the twenty-five swinger sites. These included: “Attractive Bias,” “Face-ism/Body-ism,” “Color,” “Signal-to-Noise Ratio,” “Classical Conditioning,” “Aesthetic-Usability,” “Legibility,” “Picture-Superiority Effect,” “Figure-Ground Relationship,” “Framing,” “Storytelling,” and “Accessibility.”

The final data set includes a qualitative analysis of all the visual and linguistic data against Schilb’s three criteria for rhetorical refusals. From the linguistic information, new types of refusals were identified, and from the visual data, potential new refusals from the visual mode also were identified. Refusals appear to function as a specific strategy such as making long-held cultural beliefs visible and giving this marginalized community another choice for understanding how society constructed them as deviant and immoral.

### **Data Analysis Results: Visual Design and Linguistic Elements**

Website creators have a moment to impact an audience on their opening page, so they must consider color, clarity, and legibility when designing that positive first impression. The next steps are no less important as they must keep potential members on the page, provide ease of navigation, and emphasis recall moments.

The first page becomes a marker for the rest of the site experience, so this is where designers focus on influencing the design’s reception. “Homepage” was defined specifically as the page that opens to “Home” from the navigation button. Five of the

twenty-five selected Websites have landing sites that lead to legal disclaimer pages (e.g., “You must be 18 to enter”) about the frank content of the site; in such cases, it is necessary to see that disclaimer before moving to the Homepage. Because not all the Websites had legal disclaimers and because the Homepages themselves were deemed more important as representative of the swing club, such legal-disclaimer landing pages were not addressed in the analysis.

On the selected Homepages, sexuality is open, glimpsed, or implied through visual conventions that are familiar, if not iconic, to most American adults such as garter belted legs, nurse’s costumes, or stiletto heeled shoes. However, despite a few risqué photos here and there, the selected Website creators influenced audiences to see swingers predominately through three mild adjectives common to most of the twenty-five sites: friendly, adventurous, and open-minded. These self-selected adjectives sometimes belie the suggestive connotations from scantily dressed women that pepper the sites, but they do add an interesting element to a seemingly ambivalent identity.

### ***Influencing a Design’s Reception***

This section introduces the first purpose category and its individual elements. Colors can charm or bore, so they require careful consideration. Aptly chosen colors with high psychological value to new and seasoned swingers can increase anticipation and settle nerves, making this design element worth studying. Users also need clear, easy to navigate sites because confused readers who cannot get information will not return. A comparison/contrast linguistic arrangement focuses attention on the ubiquity of swingers, normalizing this sexual choice to some extent, as well as appealing to audiences’ desire for selecting the best swing club to meet their needs. The following qualities of color,

signal-to-noise ratio, and linguistic arrangement may influence readers to stay on the site, an important consideration for membership growth and increasing positive thoughts about the community.

### *Color*

Colors frame an aesthetic portion of a visual design, but they also highlight and reinforce meaning if done well. The basic color wheel fortifies decision-making with three principles central to understanding color interaction: complementation, contrast, and vibrancy. The first two terms are addressed by Lidwell et al. to include analogous color combinations (i.e., colors next to each other), triadic combinations (i.e., colors from the points of a triangle circumscribed on the color wheel), quadratic combinations (i.e., the four points from a square or rectangle circumscribed on the wheel), and complementary colors (i.e., direct opposites) (49). The eye typically finds balanced combinations to be restful. Contrast helps the eye distinguish among elements, a component of the figure-ground principle discussed later that prevents eyestrain and facilitates usability. Vibrancy derives from the cool or warm side of the color wheel. According to Thomas's on-line primer on Website design basics, exciting colors such as the reds can prompt that emotion in readers while the cooler colors such as the blues tend to be more reserved and professional, highlighting ethos over excitement. A constancy of color over all pages on the Website also is a design element and shows competence, two factors that can influence an audience that the community values a strong work ethic, a Puritan value linked to strong morality and goodness.

Logos and color branding are familiar to the contemporary media generation, so keeping all pages labeled, either by logo, color, or both is a linguistic equivalent of

parallelism and produces a coherent, consistent, reliable product. It is worth noting that Website color design is more difficult to get exact than print color because of varied screen pixilation and different screen sizes in the technological delivery (Kress and van Leeuwen 220). Those two issues limit what otherwise may seem like an excellent color choice. Website creators also must consider product delivery on multiple technological devices. As a final caveat, Website creators are advised to limit the colors in a design to less than five so the “eye can process them at a glance and those with color blindness can cope with the shades of this limited number more easily” (48). Color makes an immediate first impression, so designers that get this right will be rewarded with happy, and returning members.

### *Homepages*

Black was the most popular background color in the data set; fourteen of twenty-five sites chose black background as a dominant visual typically linked with seduction and hidden deeds and desires. However, while the intended mood might be sexy, for practical matters, black does not offer an easily viewable backdrop color unless colorful lettering contrasts well. White backgrounds give the cleanest contrast (three of twenty-five) while the dark red choice was most difficult to read (three of twenty-five). Light pink (two of twenty-five), light grey (one of twenty-five), and pale yellow (one of twenty-five) worked almost as well as white for clarity. Lighter colors do not have the strong sexual link that black and red do, but some clubs like to keep overt sexuality muted on the Homepages. One vibrant blue screen yielded legible results only because the lettering was white. The color schemes and motifs in the banners varied more as each Website creator shaped the site’s identity with distinctive motifs. Purple (four of twenty-

five), red (four of twenty-five), and multi-colored (three of twenty-five) choices dominated with a few blue, yellow, brown, and pink preferences. The navigational buttons also had colors, shapes, sizes, and arrangements on the page in typical patterns, but more importantly the Website creators matched navigational buttons to the dominant website color. It would be difficult to call a color egregious or wrong although an all-pink site might not be how most people would imagine a sex club. Other than pink, there were no dissonant color outliers. Finally, all but four of the selected sites chose to have their logo and navigational buttons in the same color scheme for every page, providing audiences a sense of continuity, increasing legibility, and enhancing the site's professionalism. *Sweet Desires* and *Club Discretions* had different colors for each page while *Club Cave* and *Leisure Time* used their unique color schemes only half of the time. These four sites exhibited individual flair and style, but that quirkiness and lack of continuity might prevent readers from feeling as comfortable or satisfied on their sites as with the other, more professionally accomplished ones.

In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Kress and van Leeuwen discuss low-saturation/high-saturation color coding from four social group perspectives. They suggest that scientists care little for color, the elite prefer the black and white simplicity of scientists, and ordinary society favors natural colors for public places (165). The authors introduce sensory coding, which emerges when “the pleasure principle is allowed to be dominant” (165). In other words, outside the laboratory, high color saturation is preferred in advertising and public venues because color is in itself a source of pleasure in areas such as food and fashion (165). The color palette for this latter group tends toward colors with high psychological value and may explain why the highly



connotative black color (with white, blue, red, or purple) was used in fourteen of these twenty-five swinger sites. Black (see fig. 1) provides a sultry, sexy, and promising background for the contrasting white and blue colors chosen, and audiences may take pleasure in feeling the sexual tension that the familiar black produces.



*Fig. 1. Colette New Orleans Home Page.*

### *Calendar Pages*

Almost all of the sites (twenty-three of twenty-five) repeated the color schemes of the Homepage, helping with continuity and aesthetics; two pleasurable feelings that keep audiences happy and persuade them that the swinger community cares for their well-being. Only two Website creators differed in their choices. As noted, *Sweet Desires* chose different colors for every page while *The Crucible* alternated between a blue and white color scheme, making the Calendar page white. While these pages were not consistent, the overall effect was complementary rather than discordant because the colors hues harmonized well.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

The FAQ and Rules Webpages, combined for discussion purposes because of their similar information-giving function, mimicked the same small color adjustments as the Calendar pages with none of the chosen colors signaling any strong meaning according to Lidwell et al.'s taxonomy. For example, *Sweet Desires* switched to purple and lime green, *The Crucible* changed back to blue, and *Red Rooster* created a special pink page for their Rules, seemingly because they could. However, these small differences appeared inconsequential, but without members' feedback, it is just as possible that they did matter.

In general, consistent and aesthetically interesting color choices appeal to audience expectations of rational, sexy, and pretty. Seemingly unexplained color changes appeared less about design continuity, which would help the audience focus on the information, rather than the color itself. Hue and tint choices should augment the message or the aesthetics, not disrupt it. A minor color change may not matter, but if the reader wonders about the Website creators' self-interest, such as playing with color or trying out a new skill at the expense of the audience, these choices might undermine the group's construction of a positive, audience-centered identity. Changing a "deviant" identity to an "unprofessional" one does not help their cause, whether it is gaining new members or crafting a strong Web persona. Then again, quirky and odd may have its own appeal.

### *Signal-to-Noise Ratio*

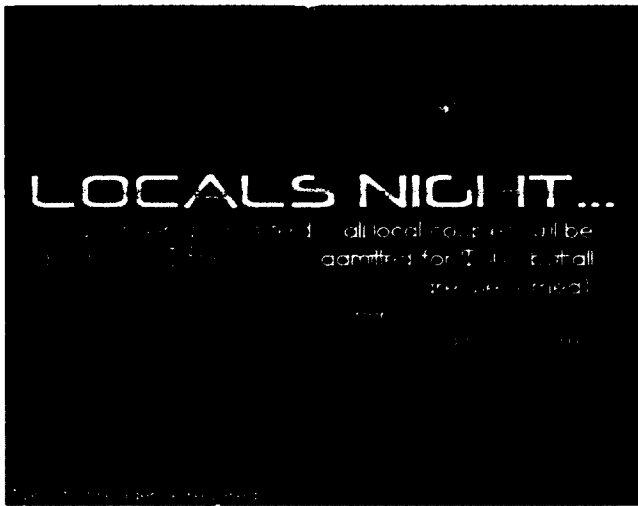
The signal-to-noise ratio metaphor describes how much relevant versus irrelevant information can be found on a Website page. A high signal-to-noise ratio indicates a clear message, while a low-signal-to noise ratio suggests visual chaos. Without a clear focus,

the audience cannot know what is most important to do or remember from the page. Sensory overload will not keep the reader on the site, and the commotion on the page will not be attractive or soothing as the eye looks for restful backgrounds. Research suggests that where Website creators want audiences to think well of the site and stay on it, the design should use white space to increase the attractive, legible, and informative natures of the site. Graphic designer Michael Bolton describes the tension between the designer who wants a legible palette and the client's usual view of whitespace as "empty space;" however, stuffing the page with information confuses audiences trying to focus on important information if everything seems important. Although white space could have been chosen to lower the signal-to-noise ratio on the selected Websites, only a few used it. *Carolina Friends* and *MAC* had the cleanest pages in terms of white space, but because white rarely is equated with sensuality or seduction, the sites' use of white space was low. However "white space" does not have to be *white per se* to provide low signal-to-noise ratios. Several of the sites chose light colors such as lavender (*Sweet Desires*) or pink (*Amore Club* and *L'Sota*) to accomplish that same task. Some of the Website creators appear to have intuited how audiences who wanted specific information, were surfing for interesting sites, and/or were curious about swingers might reject a confusing page by limiting excess information. Ensuring a good first impression requires some thoughtful choices about what to include.

### ***Homepages***

One third of the Websites (nine of twenty-five) had a low, or poor, signal-to-noise ratio, defined as having too many competing events (noise) on a single screen to see the message. For example, the *Green Door's* energetic, colorful page made it difficult to

know where to settle the eyes (see fig. 2). Over 30 different “messages” appear, each interesting or useful to the site, but in combination, chaotic. The single screen shot often produced this kind of information overload if Website creators did not carefully limit the information to just a few bullets (Lidwell et al. 224). Print modes handle “continued on next page” easily because of the conventional linearity of reading front to back. Without that same expectation for Websites, Website creators may fill the page with too much material, believing that readers who scroll or navigate away from the page may miss important information. Supporting that worry, readers may be “unaware of where they are in relation to the document, and thus are unable to achieve a sense of text” (Kress and van Leeuwen 85). The “emotive immediacy” of the colors may keep a reader persevering through the noise, but readable Websites should display crispness and clarity as in figure 3 below, which had only eight elements: logo, navigation bar, three columns of text, two pictures, and a membership invite (86). As a result of these details, the clarity and serenity of sites such as *Carolina Friends* or *Colette New Orleans* (fig. 3) may keep their readers longer on the page than the more hectic Figure 2 because it is easier on the eyes.



*Fig. 2. Colette New Orleans: A Low Signal-to-Noise Ratio Equals More Chaos.*



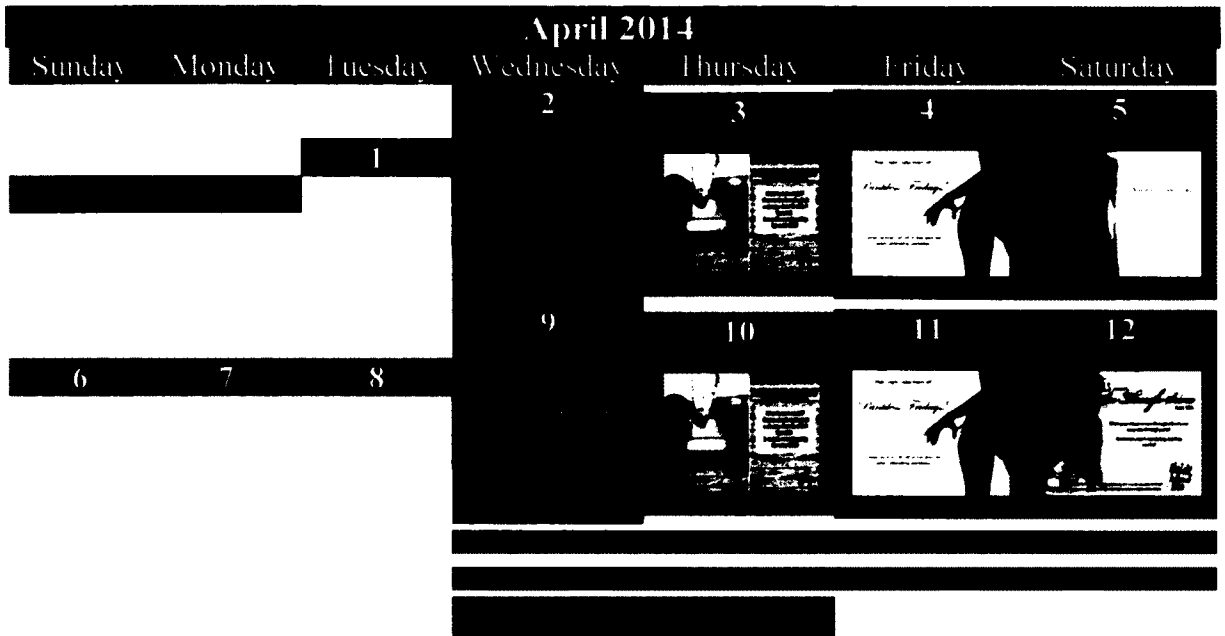
*Fig. 3. Colette New Orleans: A High Signal-to-Noise Ratio Equals More Clarity.*

### *Calendar Pages*

In viewing Calendar pages, greater clarity was expected with Website creators using the calendar's spacious and familiar look. Instead, a close look of the fifteen of

twenty-five sites revealed a visual and narrative combination, increasing the busy feel of the page. However, the high noise was mitigated by a more playful, personal tone in seven of fifteen as the Website creators used word play—“cumming soon,” inclusive pronouns such as “we” and “our,” and sexy women in themed costumes. Others, such as *The Red Rooster* addressed the noise level by hyperlinking images and information to the simple lists of dates. *TJ's Lasting Impressions* and *Colette New Orleans* controlled their large data offerings with boxed, balanced but long scrolls (see fig. 4). In the latter two cases, the Website creators chose a compromise of the information load while still managing the readability and clarity of the site. The rest of these non-calendar choices were simple lists of dates or multiple paragraphs of text, which lacked aesthetics, but were generally legible, and therefore gave members what they needed.

The nine of twenty-five clubs that used calendars did not max out their design capabilities; however, *The Crucible*, *L'Sota*, *Allure Couples*, and *Club Princeton* demonstrated clear, informative, and creative calendars. The combination of large spaces, clear text, and funny/sexy images might make readers linger and may lead to friendly laughter. *The Crucible* had an effective calendar exemplar, including instructions for how to read it, which helped decode information such as party limitations and recurring events such as *Afternoon Delights*. These sites displayed a concern for readers' time and success in reading the page, and they established practical and aesthetic reasons for audiences to revisit the page and visit the club proper.



*Fig. 4. Colette New Orleans Calendar Page.*

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

To calculate the signal-to-noise ratio on these FAQs and Rules pages, the number of questions/answers and rules were tracked. Those with long lists for either purpose of answering common questions or providing rules had two basic choices: (1) they arranged them all on one page and reduced the type size or (2) used the 12-point size and provided a scrolling document for the audience. Both of these choices decrease the signal-to-noise ratio, allowing more noise on the page. On the FAQs pages, only eight clubs managed to be brief, scoring a high signal count. Under the Rules category, five succeeded in keeping attention on the information such as the *Carousel Couples Club*'s short, parallel list of commands illustrates a good example of positive signal-to-noise ratio despite a poor color choice of black and purple. The longer FAQs lists, while tedious, could be understood as the communications of swingers excited to share their lifestyle, such as with *L'Sota* with

its abundance of helpful advice; however, sites that simply generated long lists of rules did not offer up that same passionate tone that would entice readers.

Website creators also capitalized on font size, capitalization, color contrast, and text boxes to keep several pages of important information from running together such as with *L'Sota* again. However, *L'Sota's* four Etiquette/Rules pages, no matter how clear, are probably too many for one sitting even though audiences might be somewhat forgiving of this difficulty after “hearing” *L'Sota's* enthusiasm for swinging. Unfortunately, the signal count on their Rules pages approached zero. These pages had only one line separating the question from the answers, but with no font, size, or color change at all. Readers may have accepted one of these pages, but four Rules pages (and 11 FAQs pages), despite *L'Sota's* passion, could not make up for its surfeit of its difficult to read purple-on-lavender information. *Club Discretions'* pages demonstrated another example of a low signal-to-noise ratio. When the scrolling is combined with poor color contrast of blue on black with two columns of bisecting red roses, the text becomes a blur of non-prioritized information. *Toga Joes's* had color contrast problems as well; white and yellow text on the blood red background thwarted any eye relief. Keeping the red mailbox icon on the right side column, an unnecessary element for this page, squeezes the rest of the information into the other two columns and forces readers to scroll through two pages of difficult reading; a white background, text boxes, and full lines would heighten the signal. *Sweet Desires* also reveals the low signal results of too many competing elements—a mint color, too many rules in black, white and red, small type size, and an embedded background outline of a woman. In sum, only eight of the twenty-five selected sites kept the signal-to-noise ratio high by using highlighting, numbers,



bullets, or parallel color changes and, most importantly, by keeping the information concise. The others failed to address this element of concision. How much that issue has influenced audience perception is impossible to measure, but given the predilection of Website viewers to read simple and clear Webpages, it seems possible that audiences might have migrated to more user friendly sites since there are several to choose from in any given geographical area. Kostelnick and Bassett describe how some Website creators shun conventions “because it threatens self-expression and usurps the reader’s interpretive power,” but imitating conventions can “create a stable landscape” as readers “rely on these well-worn paths for interpretive survival” (74). If the Website creators for the clubs that missed this lesson want to promote the Lifestyle, they would do well to keep the site legible so that readers will stay on the site and remember it. Diluting the information with redundant or useless elements dilutes professionalism, which may stop readers from attending a “non-professional” swinger party.

### *Linguistic Arrangement*

Choosing an appropriate, logical arrangement persuades because clarity and common sense imply that designers care about making it easy for the audience to understand and follow the the site’s information. Coupling clear writing with crisp images and rich background contrast doubles the Website’s power to reach audiences, a necessary precursor to teaching them about swigners positive ethos.

### *Homepages*

In terms of arrangement, or organization, the selected swinger Websites appeared to create an explicit comparison/contrast situation with other clubs. Thirteen of the twenty-five sites used the words “upscale” or “prestigious” in their opening

statements. First-time swingers may need this assurance that the site or club is highclass given the seamy scenarios with which big media often frames alternative sex activities as described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The hyperbole also may offer some legitimacy in the sense that a comparison assumes other clubs and, therefore, other people engaged in swinging. Being assured of going to the best club appeals to people's sense of deserving the best. Seasoned swingers might not be susceptible to this ploy, but given peoples' general desire for five-star hotels and restaurants, superlatives constitute a powerful draw. Three hyperbolic examples from the data set included: "*TJ's Lasting Impressions* is the **largest, hottest, and most luxurious** lifestyle club in Central Pennsylvania"; "*L'Sota*, the upscale, adult, members-only club with upscale accommodations and functions. You deserve only the finest"; and "You're with the best in Lifestyle entertainment for Chicago's Grown and Sexy... *ClubMeet4More*."

Three other important organizational strategies beyond comparison/contrast for the data set included a chronological history of the club, future promises of things to come, and a mission statement addressed to members. Chronicling the club's history was a popular choice in the home page; nine of twenty-five used significant detail, including their inception, problems, expansions, and great parties. This long, historical narrative lent them a *gravitas* unmatched by newer arrivals. The strong warrant among longevity, success, and competence might influence readers, especially newcomers, positively so that they might see the club as a good one to try. The *Red Rooster* provided a detailed account of their story because their motto was based on their being "Las Vegas's oldest and most well known Swinger's Party." Moreover, they made the club's history equal to owners Mike and Lady Chris's personal history, revealing that the Lifestyle is not just a

sexual choice, but a lifelong investment in swinging. This chronology was easy to read, and readers could enjoy the intimacy and implicit vulnerability as Mike and Lady Chris shared their and the clubs' trials and successes.

The second most prevalent type of arrangement was in the form of a direct address that included promises of good things to come. Twelve sites chose this intimate voice, which draped a friendly, trusting mood over the site. They promised they had “the same interests and desires as you” (*The Social Club*), they desired “to make new friends” (*New Horizons*), and they asked, “are you ready to be spoiled?” (*Allure*). Others promised “an unforgettable evening” (*Amore Club USA*) “an unparalleled lifestyle experience” (*Carolina Friends*), and “the life you’ve always dreamed about” (*Club Discretions*). This friendly, conversational tone tells audiences they are wanted, making them important and place power into their hands as they decided to accept or reject the club’s offer. Moreover, with this rhetorical strategy, the club puts itself in a vulnerable position—asking members to visit means that readers might reject their offer. However, this vulnerability, which did not appear to be feigned in the data set, could have mitigated some of the authoritative voice that marked the Website creators’ tone on the FAQs and Rules pages.

Third, five of the twenty-five sites used a strong mission statement to attract members. The business/institutional genre that these sites coopted may confer on them a business flavor that lends them some legitimacy. However, despite the familiar genre, these statements were presented in a heartfelt manner and not couched in standard business language. A typical example from *The Toy Box* included:

We are an adult club that is devoted to the lifestyles and people just curious about the lifestyle. These are people

from all walks of life, some are swingers others are everyday people [sic]. People with an open mind looking to spice up their life or please their curiosity [sic]. We offer a club with great atmosphere and good hearted fun loving people [sic]. Many great long term friendships have been made at these parties. We welcome you to join us and enjoy what we have to offer, make new friends, and have a memorable time.

These welcoming comments help revise swingers “spoiled” identity. Their actions constitute a community of friendly, happy people who may enjoy different views on sexuality, but who have common values, such as respecting others. Adding these values to their characterization helps influence their reception as good, if just a little quirky. Swingers’ strong commitment to establishing themselves, through constant but varied repetition, as positive, decent people will gradually replace any sense of the “spoiled” identity that might still exist.

### ***Calendar Pages***

As mentioned earlier, using the form of a calendar that has squares for each day occurred in only seven of twenty-five cases. Three chose simply to list dates and party names chronologically, and three did not even have a calendar (using the Homepage instead). The rest of the sites in the data set provided a narrative, usually attached to images, that included polite invitations such as, “Please join us to celebrate our 16<sup>th</sup> year of sexy fun” (*Club Discretions*). Simply listing dates, as did *Sweet Desires*, was a practical arrangement, but not one that establishes a caring relationship between the club

and the viewing couples as little evidence of detailed attention to outreach was exhibited. On the other hand, *Carolina Friends'* Calendar pages provided detail about the music, number of couples expected, its "great" sound system, and "fun" dance floor. The long narrative arrangement is not the best visual design, but offering helpful information may compensate for the length. Nonetheless, Kress and Van Leeuwen caution about using too much third person voice in a Website. According to their research, site authors establish the balance of power with third person voice because that perspective immediately makes the reader unable to talk back (142). That impersonal authority of "the club offers" tilts the balance to the club especially if they use the second person "you" as well, denying audience's reciprocity and acting as having "omniscient knowledge" even if that omniscience is only in the audiences' mind (142). Only a few sites chose the third person perspective, and most of them used it sparingly. Most, as noted above, used the first person plural "we/our" subject position, which can start a relationship not based on authority, but on equality; such a position may influence audiences more positively than the authoritative position, especially when the audience can leave with a simple click. Such a simple strategy as using "we" can have great psychological benefit when it becomes impossible for an audience to reconcile such a kind, friendly, family group with the deviant label they may have heard. In this manner, a community can sway their audiences to re-look and revise old information that no longer fits into a rational schema.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

Not surprising, a little more than half (thirteen of twenty-five) the FAQs, as information-packed pages, were arranged as questions and answers, such as in the

*L'Sota* Website shown in figures 13 and 14 above. This convention is familiar and comfortable, evidenced by half of the Websites using this format. Two sites omitted questions and simply provided answers, saving space on their pages, while the remaining ten sites chose to narrate details about dressing nicely, expecting common courtesy, or explaining what to bring rather than use the Q & A form. These pages contained a wide range of information; *L'Sota* provided great detail with their questions and answers while *Colette* used simpler language: "Dress classy." All twenty-five sites had a FAQs page, which attests to the popularity and audience's expectation of the FAQs page conventions.

Generally, Rule Pages appeared as numbered or bulleted lists, some longer than others, but all conformed to the same general standard. If using this common form offers some stability in an uncertain situation, then changing this arrangement would have been counterproductive for the club and confusing for readers without a good reason. Although conventions sometimes strangle creativity, audiences often expect them. Kostelnick and Bassett describe how novelty, especially in visual language with its myriad of elements, often is misinterpreted; even if the new design is better, habit plays a role in readers rejecting it (78).

Half of the sites in the data set used the command form in their rules, "Absolutely no controlled substances!!! (*Club Cave*) while others chose to personify the club, "We expect all of our guests..." (*Entre Nous*), or couched the rules in the conditional, "If you would please..." (*ClubMeet4More*). Americans value clarity and functional accessibility, according to Kostelnick and Bassett, suggesting that the Website creators may have catered to this desire (92). The Rules page, which outlined how one should behave at the club, accompanied twenty-one of twenty-five sites even though *Club*

*Discretions* tried to take some of the sternness out of their twenty rules by calling them "TIPS." In addition, audiences expect rules to be firmly stated; otherwise, members and other Website viewers might question the club's commitment to safety. Even though some clubs chose a narrative versus the numbered/bulleted list, that arrangement only seemed to soften the natural firmness of the rules, risking audiences' patience as that choice increased the amount of information to read. Perhaps some readers, as one adult to another, appreciate kindness over strictness. The Website creators of these pages were not risk takers, nor should they have been. These swingers sites had enough new information that changing an expected format may place a needless burden on new readers while the familiarity of these conventions offers members a sense of cohesion (Kostelnick and Bassett 74). So many elements make up a Website that choosing which will influence audience reception the most may be too difficult without reception studies, time, experience, and willingness to make the site better.

As might be expected, the Web creators seemed more self-assured in print. The familiar first person-point-of view creates a camaraderie that make people instant friends, which sets up a story line that culminates in a party to celebrate new friends. The warmth generated by these choices produced an overall friendly mood and a caring community excited about sharing the Lifestyle and concerned for the audience's well being. New members and the curious become comfortable and at ease on the Website, making the future party an especially hoped for erotic and comfortable event. Further practice in making visual choices as assuredly as linguistic ones will surely come in time.

*Summary*

Website persuasion requires keeping readers on the site and engaged with the text; to this end, this section has focused on the design elements that may influence new and continuing readers to stay on the swingers' Websites and to recall the information once they closed the windows. A professional, easy-to-use site demonstrates that the Website creators had mastered their craft while appearing to have respected the audience's time and worries. Both elements increase the trustworthiness and dedication of the swingers in the club and their Website creators. The temporary and elusive traits of Web information require that Website creators remember that readers must "rely largely on memory to connect the past and present" (Kostelnick and Bassett 161).

Colors choices derive meaning from context, audience's previous experience, and provide visual pleasure. Therefore, the sixteen of twenty-five sites that used a sultry black background color demonstrate a likely positive response to audiences' expectations for a sex-themed site. In addition, keeping the same color schemes, navigation buttons, and banners across the pages on those sixteen sites adds to cohesion and unity. Reduced eye-strain and a high signal/low noise ratio provide more formatting clarity. Website creators generally appear to have been professional and adept at understanding how strong Web design works, indicating they value their site, their club, and their members enough to produce a user-friendly and memorable product.

Although images and color dazzle more immediately than linguistic text, the print information in the data set Websites also appeal to both emotional and logical reasoning. By addressing the readers' anxieties about visiting a sex club, a comparison/contrast (linguistic) arrangement focuses attention on the ubiquity of swingers, normalizing this



sexual choice to some extent, as well as appealing to audiences' need for the highest quality club in terms of cleanliness, people, aesthetics, and safety.

Some of these elements may have more weight than others in influencing audiences, so it is incumbent on the designers to monitor blogs and solicit comments so that they can boost the good and omit the less effective strategies. Taking care of the site and how it is received bespeaks a competent and caring community, which will bring members in to stay.

### **Teaching via Design**

The second of Lidwell's categories incorporates those elements of persuasion that teach audiences how to respond to a design or image with Website creators possibly considering Ivan Pavlov's classical conditioning to encourage positive reader reaction to swingers. This imagistic oriented analysis explains how successful the addition of another sensory element can be in enhancing memory and framing the content a certain way. In the past, only personal ads in newspapers or magazines or word of mouth supplied the discourse medium, but the Web's availability of images, sound, and aesthetics has worked in swingers' favor. The Website medium also profits from the picture-superiority effect since the recall level for readers increases when both clear text and good quality images work in tandem. In accordance with the growing ubiquity of the Internet, the rhetorical canon of memory has been reconfigured in recent decades to include data memory and accessibility, which lend swinger sites more persuasive opportunities to be heard, seen, and remembered.

### *Classical Conditioning*

Pavlov introduced the world to the stimulus-response technique in 1927 with *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex*. Advertising businesses capitalized on its potential by associating images or behaviors with specific thoughts and feelings to bind the audience to a product, as evidenced by beautiful women draped over luxury cars. One of many potential goals of analyzing these swinger Websites was to identify whether swingers revised their stigmatized identity from immoral and deviant to playful and interesting; and, if they did, whether that allure would evaporate if they became too familiar and ordinary. This is probably a needless worry; sex is as interesting now as it has always been, so swingers should not fret that their kind of sex will become boring with more and more exposure (Gould xx). On the other hand, classical conditioning can change the audience's *acceptance* of swingers more easily, repetition and a link with goodness makes it possible to be wickedly "normal," but not deviant. From the words provided by an anonymous swinger below, it seems that audiences associate swinging with being sexy and exciting; yet, the practical comment about "no-pressure" suggests that swingers have realistic anxieties like everyone else. However, having normal fears of new situations probably will not reduce the audience's desire to be sexually adventuresome if the designers can make the reward trump anxiety:

After a few drinks and dancing, we were more than ready to go upstairs. There was no pressure and it was definitely the hottest night we've ever experienced. It was something we've been fantasizing about for a long time. LT more than

exceeded our expectations and we cannot wait to go back!!!

A.V.

As readers revisit the site, swingers can capitalize on this revisiting as a social act that conditions the audience to view them as sexy, exciting, and practical with each log-on.

Another important goal—perhaps most important one given that young, sexy women provided the main stimuli on all these sites—seems to have been that of attracting male viewers. Such viewers have been conditioned to frame sexy images through external influences such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines, X and R rated movies, and even *Victoria's Secret* models. The promises inherent in these fantasy tropes work as teasing foreplay, generally resulting in a site's initial contact coming from men who persuade their wives/girlfriends to visit; yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that women soon become the primary audience following the swinger motto: “men want to come to swing clubs, but women want to stay!” For this study, sexy images are defined as the “stimulus” to count because of their ubiquity and salience in attracting members, at least on the Homepage and Calendar pages of the data set. Based on sexual research by the NIH in 2007, these images, in the context of the Web page, stimulate both men and women. Studies on arousal to visual stimuli find that women spend more time looking at the surroundings, dress, and contextual elements than men, whose eyes gaze or rest predominately on the women's faces and bodies in any image (Rupp and Walen). When Website creators attend to the attractiveness of the women's bodies and the aesthetics of the site, they may provide stimulation for both sexes and condition them to appreciate swingers with a single page design.

### *Homepages*

Homepages provide the first opportunity for creators to sell audiences on the swinger character, so what response might the Website creators in the data set have wanted from the audience in terms of creating a swinger community? Judging by the diction in their mottos and the Homepages, they were modeling how swinging makes couples happy month after month. Couples visit, play, and have fun in an upscale, but no-pressure environment with sexy, like-minded, discrete adults and then return and do it again. The Website creators targeted not only a new desire, but desire and belonging, a twinned concept addressed by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's "Theorizing Identity in Language and Sexuality Research" that conflated the two concepts and further explained why nineteen of twenty-five Homepages contained young, sexy white women. These fantasy women stimulated sexual desire for, and belonging to, this group of sexual beauties. The increasing display of women's desire on shows such as *Sex in the City*, indicate that women's interest in sex (coupled with belonging to a social group) equals men's. Using the Websites to show women enjoying sex and being comfortable with their sexuality presumably keeps both men and women coming back. The girl-on-girl focus at swing clubs, a strong anti-hegemonic statement has been serendipitous for Website creators; knowing that men and women desire the same things allows for easier "stimulus" design decisions.

Bucholtz and Hall's claim that defining one's desire was not always a function of one's sexuality, but of belonging to an (attractive) social group; thus, a strong aesthetics allowed categorization of the swinger Websites themselves as stimuli (507). Club Websites apparently influence audiences to attach themselves to the identity of the

swinger community through beauty, desire, and belonging. This powerful tri-stimulus was articulated in the word choice from *The Toy Box's* Homepage, "...having fun with like-minded adults." If this association was the Website creators' goal, the six of twenty-five sites without any sexy images (showing, for example, empty club rooms) did not capitalize on a strong opportunity to link their club with a positive response. Ironically, for a club interested in alternative desires, the Website creators used only the standard sexual tropes to define what desire is. Only two sites picture several couples together even though much *was written* about multiple partners, BDSM, and public sex. Yet, keeping to the conventions can be explained as Website creators needing to think of a new audience and move slowly. Trusting standard images of schoolgirls (not Caligula-inspired orgies) and keeping X-rated pictures and language off its first pages, would seem to be the better strategies for addressing cautious newcomers. The Internet allows more latitude for sub groups to represent themselves than newspapers, but swingers face the same challenges when creating a new identity as all groups; even though new social customs have been made available, such as images of man-on-man sex, many of the old ones might still have a powerful grip or supply a rhetorical need and cannot be abandoned. Using conventionally young sexy girls accords swinger sites a standard, if cautious, stimulus to provoke "ordinary" desire. That caution seems to contradict the sexual daring swingers often declare themselves to have, but it tones down potential stimuli to accommodate the audiences' need for less wildness on these pages. As Website creators address the future and changing rhetorical situations, these images may become wilder or may demonstrate greater risk taking.

### *Calendar Pages*

Playing a strong role in grabbing the audience's attention, Calendar pages had the most iconic sexual imagery of all the pages because Website creators had more design freedoms in extolling the big events—the parties. Not surprisingly, Calendar pages such as *Allure Couples* and *Colette New Orleans* (see figs. 5 and 6) that showed sexy women (seventeen of twenty-five) were the main stimuli demonstrated. The conditioning behavior was to show scantily dressed women and let cultural tropes go to work. Although empirical scientific studies measuring the arousal from these types of pictures are scant, studies conducted on “automatic” arousals have concluded that few stimuli are inherently sexual. People are conditioned by mediated sexual images and personal experiences, and the main sexual images on these Websites attests to the sexual habits American heterosexual audiences have learned (Akins 247, Hoffman). Meeting readers' expectations with standard fantasy images can satisfy and tease, two pleasing emotions to associate with the site. The attempt to cement these pictures into memory suggests that Website creators know their clientele and use effective strategies that make them long to return.

SLS presents  
*Whitties & Whitties*  
June 14th

Ladies... come decked out in your sexiest high heels, garters and thigh highs for a night of decadent, erotic fun!



Fig. 5. Colette New Orleans Calendar Page: Iconic Imagery.



Fig. 6. Colette New Orleans Calendar Page: Iconic Imagery.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

One might assume that Web pages showing FAQs and Rules would not include many sexy images, but eleven of twenty-five clubs used this motif even though the images were toned down. In two of twenty-five cases, the FAQs or Rules were overlaid on an image, so the sexy girl was only semi-visible. *Scarlet Ranch* displayed the back of a girl's head, and *TJ's Lasting Impressions* showed a fuzzy black and white picture of two girls kissing on FAQs, but used an iconic policewoman in her dominatrix glory on the Rules page. *MAC* kept to a minimalist, yet sexy style, as noted before. Many sites (fourteen of twenty-five) chose to use pool tables or empty dining rooms, or they simply displayed their banners. The expository function of these pages seemed to be their primary purpose, and so these fourteen clubs omitted provocative distractions from the task of learning. Logic dominated the FAQs and Rules, while emotion permeated the Homepages and Calendars. This combination of appeals supports a logical and competent Website that continues to construct swingers' ethos as positive.

### *Legibility*

Some elements of Web page legibility such as color and clarity (signal-to-noise ratio) have already been analyzed; therefore, the discussion is limited here to formatting issues because these issues are more closely linked to this visual analysis. Left justification, centering, bolded headings, 12-point text size, and readable font contributed to the sites' ethos as they would to any aesthetically pleasing document. Kostelnick and Bassett call these qualities "storehouse[s] of energy" because when these "conventions are not deployed appropriately [and] reader expectations are left untapped, readers intuitively sense that something is rhetorically awry" (102). But when Website creators'



attach these conventions to expectations, any dissonance or uneasiness that may make an audience leave a site disappear. Sticking to conventional formats, unless the swing club Website creators had a strong reason not to, may have made users of the data set Web sites feel comfortable and welcomed because well-constructed conventions please the eye and the facilitate user friendliness.

In addition, the analysis addressed the uses of serif and sans serif text types, revealing that no pattern regarding the lines of formal/informal sites or East Coast/West Coast ones emerged; instead, there was an almost even split between them (twelve versus thirteen). According to Lidwell et al., the difference between the two types is negligible as long as a type size larger than 12-point is used, but using the serif font with smaller point type compromises clarity as the lines may begin to blur particularly for people with various eyesight conditions (148). Unfortunately, this blurriness occurred often when the data set sites included too much information, which impedes the audience learning about swingers in a positive way. For creators to tap the memory “energy” of the site and teach the audience via design, they need to keep familiar background features so that the important information to be learned stands out clearly and persuasively.

### *Homepages*

The Homepages’ messages typically were presented with clear, 12-point sized text, but less important ideas included in such things as parenthetical thoughts, apparently last minute ideas, and post scripts were relegated to smaller type size (and sometimes different colors) that did not use crisp, legible text. However, because users could always make the text bigger, font size became less significant a factor than signal-to-noise ratio, for example. The placement and look of the navigational cues for any experimentation

also were examined, but they all fell within the conventional range: all CAPS (eight of twenty-five), regular capitalization (seventeen of twenty-five), underlining (two of twenty-five), and slanted font (two of twenty-five). The navigation bar placement also remained within expectations: under the header, along the side, or at the bottom.

Although small, individual differences occurred across the sites, Website creators did not employ font/type/size/ for making a significant or dramatic message. No outlier fonts or sizes made the text unreadable although, as mentioned in some of these other categories, the background color or text color interfered more with the site being legible than these elements.

### *Calendar Pages*

The Calendar pages were of little note where legibility was concerned. The text size and type generally was the same as for the Homepages, and the pages were less information-filled. That fact gave the Calendar pages more white space even though sometimes the text size was smaller, particularly where Website creators provided text in the date squares. Again, no outliers were found, so it seemed that these pages were successful in establishing the designers as competent and professional.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

With the FAQs and Rules pages, the most obvious issue with legibility was the Website creators' overuse of the bolded, all caps "NO!" especially for these three common proscriptions: "NO PROSTITUTION!," "NO DRUGS!," and "NO MEANS NO!" This abundance of "NO's" would not surprise audiences who have been schooled in how rules look: numbered or bulleted, bolded or in caps, and sternly voiced. *Leisure Time* used "Please" in tiny red script before a big proscription against wearing jeans and tennis

shoes, but it was lost next to a large, booming NO! Some of these “NO!” warnings appeared on the FAQs pages such as *Club Discretions*, amid line after line of information, and then repeated again on the Rules page. These particular pages lacked clever, humorous, and interesting text, but they all simmered with forcefulness. However, the Website creators clearly understood one design rule: use standard fonts or audiences could not read or learn from the site. Any font play was embedded in headings and logos rather than the actual stated rules. *Entre Nous*, in keeping with its French theme, used a highly stylized and flowing script. Despite *Amore Club USA*’s penchant for hearts and cupids, their Homepage title employed a simple, but large, sans serif font that was a welcome contrast to the many elements on the page. Consistent issues that interfered with legibility on all the sites included (1) too much information, (2) poor contrast between the font color and the background color, and (3) potential eyestrain from overly saturated color backgrounds, which often made a site memorable for the wrong reason. Font choices can be interpreted to mean tone, so for the site to look professional or classy or fun, font must not just be legible, but, per page type, creators must meet their readers’ expectations: Home—welcoming and alluring; Calendar—wicked and sexy; and Rules and FAQs—concerned with safety, in order to construct the community as worth making the effort to know.

In sum, Web creators attended to legibility of the individual words, but often they neglected the overall effect. That could signal lack of experience, an acceptable excuse for a startup, but not if the Web creators do not eventually revise these errors. Presumably, members will chat and complain, so responding to those “suggestions” would be a wise move, giving owners a better Website and demonstrating they listen to their members.

The creators might enjoy a degree of the “forgiveness factor” of course, but consistently poor choices may eventually indicate a lack of attention to details in matters beyond the Website. When readers suspect the Web creators of not keeping up with technology changes, or, at least listening and revising the site, audiences can infer that the club is not well run, too busy, and/or uninterested in the Lifestyle they profess to love and want to share. The best sites can only help revise old stereotypes if swingers consistently present themselves in a competent light, taking advantage of even the smallest persuasive strategies. If swinger sites are to grow in number, they must teach their audiences about their competent and insightful natures. Competition will reward the most innovative and responsive sites with an increase in membership.

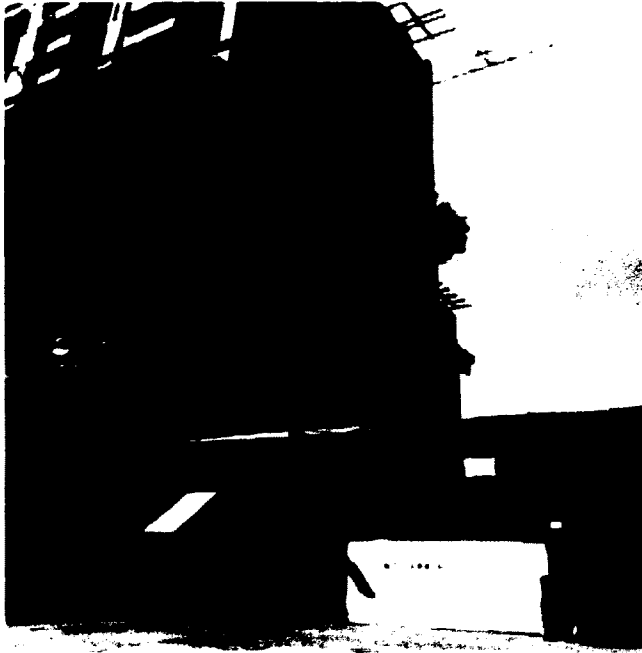
#### *Picture Superiority Effect*

Because previous sections detailed sexy images already this discussion is restricted to the sites where Website creators chose non-sexy images and described what they appear to have expected audiences to learn from them. The element of picture superiority effect cannot be reduced to something as simplistic as “pictures are better than words.” According to “Conditions for a Picture Superiority Effect on Consumer Memory” by Terry L. Childers and Michael J. Houston, within a 30-second window, readers can recall both words and pictures equally well. After that time, picture recall is greater, but only for concrete items distinct from one another, and only when people are casually exposed for short time periods (652). Typically, the picture-superiority effect works best in advertising when Website creators give audiences easy recall situations such as swinger sites where few complex, abstract issues arise. All but one club included both visual and linguistic text and took advantage of this principle to keep their club’s name in

readers' memories. When Website creators combined this effect with classical conditioning and attractive bias, abundant images of seductive, sexy young woman were embedded in the readers' imaginations to stimulate even when not on the site.

### *Homepages*

A few (four of twenty-five) Homepages avoided employing sexual images while *Club Discretions* used no images at all. *The Crucible* stands out negatively in this first group in that it portrayed their club building, a white garage door that resembles an old gas station instead (see fig. 7). The audience might remember *The Crucible's* decidedly plain edifice as unusual, but not because it attracts the eye. Even if *The Crucible's* Website creators chose to omit a sexy theme, the garage picture did not even meet a basic aesthetic standard. The Website creators might have mitigated this non-descript image with a sexy logo or mascot, but *The Crucible's* multicolored, strobe-lit banner eliminated any hint of what the club did (except in words). *The Crucible's* accompanying words to the building, "Yes, there's a sign on our building that says: "Treasury Department—US Customs Service" Yes, that's us, and not we're not getting rid of the sign. We think it's HOT" added a bit of satiric comment, but even with their humor on display, this picture probably was not the best one for readers to recall when choosing a club.



*Fig. 7. The Crucible Building.*

The *Amore Club USA* highlighted cupid, hearts, and the notion of love in a fairly memorable display for its cuteness and, perhaps, because it stands in sharp contrast to the myriad of sexy sites available. *Amore Club USA's* Website creators have not changed the site in the two years, so, seemingly, it must be serving its rhetorical purpose. Perhaps this image was meant to offer romance to offset a more hedonistic, physical environment. The love motif may seem like false advertising, but if such benign and familiar cupids soothe nervous couples, then the Website creators use the picture superiority effect well.

The *Red Rooster* has been in business since 1962, so the Website creators appear to have used that iconic figure on its Homepage. Perhaps in Las Vegas, where the *Red Rooster* is located, understated is more memorable amongst the flashiness of so many clubs and casinos, so it is possible that they chose to simply let their name speak for itself. The suburban house looks upscale and familiar, and the rooster adds a bit of pink-

flamingo whimsy. If the club's reputation rests on its big red poultry image, it would be an easily recalled icon.

*TJ's Lasting Impressions* displayed one of their new themed rooms, in black and red, which might be of more interest to seasoned swingers, but was placed appropriately on the Homepage for all viewers. This image teaches audiences that *TJ's Lasting Impressions* is innovative and creative as the club advertised its new—and maybe long anticipated—dance cage. A dance cage would not ordinarily trump a sexy woman for a sex club image since people generally respond to images of people before objects, but if the cage was somehow special, this image might be remembered as the result of owners' responding to members' needs. Giving members what they want reinforces a positive memory in the readers' minds because they have been heard and answered.

### *Calendar Pages*

Calendar pages were not presented in quite as seductive a manner, but assuming Homepages can be considered as introductory pep talks to the swinging Lifestyle, then the Calendar pages, if next on the reader's viewing agenda, might indicate that the designers consider the audience is interested enough to read further without added zest. Unfortunately, the Website creators seemed to have missed the *kairotic* moment on the eight of twenty-five clubs Calendar pages without any sexual. Six pages were dedicated to pictures of setting—Las Vegas, bars, pool tables, and dance floors—not an inappropriate decision, but given the opportunity to strategically advertise their next parties, it seemed a missed chance for Website creators to create another recall moment. As usual, *Amore Club USA* had its ubiquitous hearts and cupids while *Club Discretions*, always an outlier, chose two columns of red roses. The roses may have been memorable

as dissonance or irrelevancy, a viable advertising gimmick, but beyond that, it was difficult to discern why *Club Discretions* would have chosen this image. No mention of roses exists on the site, linguistically or visually, so perhaps the Website creators simply like how roses look, but that choice is at the expense of readers remembering them for their sexy women and/or clarity. *Club Discretions'* Website creators seemed entranced by novelty, but their designs show considerable lack of concern for the audience. Kostelnick and Bassett call Website creators' judgment into question when "the perceptual and rhetorical context of a document in which multiple conventions are deployed in close proximity" result in what is called "bungling" (207). Not only does bungling erode clarity, it erodes ethos (206). This inattention to design might not matter if they are the only swinger club within miles, but no one should use that as an excuse to treating paying customers so casually.

#### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

Only three of twenty-five sites had images on the FAQs and Rules pages that did not include a beautiful, sexy woman. *Allure Couples* closed its Rules page (it had no FAQs page) with an envelope imprinted by a pair of red lips and "SWAK-Sealed with a Kiss" This intimate sealed-with-a-kiss may have been chosen to lessen the stern tone of this page, assuring audiences that the hosts loved their members despite any rule-breaking they might have to enforce. However, was it memorable? Its size and placement might argue against that; however, its familiarity may be enough to overcome both limitations.

Kostelnick and Bassett also describe how the complexity of design programs, and their product expectations, can force new Website creators into experimenting without



the “skill, [or] design sensibility” (207). *Allure Couples* might represent this lack of skill, but *Amore Club USA*’s anomalous hearts and cupids motif may be a result of this lack of design sensibility. The last club on this list, *The Scarlet Ranch*, highlighted four beautiful pictures of its outside campus. This was the sole site that focused on such natural elements, suggesting that for this club, its unique quality and/or nature images soothe—a function of the Biophilia Effect where “environments rich in nature views and imagery reduce stress and enhance focus and concentration” (Lidwell et al. 36). To this end, the *Scarlet Ranch* effectively reached out to members with a nature-oriented attractive bias (Lidwell et al. 36). The serene setting and the teepee possibilities provide an interesting nature/sex combination that probably stands out positively from all the other sites.

#### *Gallery Tours Pages*

The extra page of Gallery Tours was chosen for examining the picture superiority effect because of the possibility that club owners might have showcased pictures of real members and real parties. However, only three of twenty-five clubs featured images from previous parties: *Carousel Couples Club*, *The Social Club*, and *Club Princeton*. Interestingly, these candid shots of the club members displayed the most provocative images of all the pages with lots of nudity (women only) and unabashed exhibitionism. The rarity of member pictures on the data set Websites might have been due to privacy concerns, but using a mask or taking only a body shot should have negated those concerns. The literature suggests that swingers generally revel in showing off their sexuality, so it seems interesting that more clubs did not use this persuasive opportunity. Instead of using sex, ten of twenty-five clubs highlighted their club amenities, making this page more of a tour than a gallery event. Two clubs introduced the club owners on

this page, *Red Rooster* and *Amore Club USA*, perhaps hoping that the personal images would capture the readers' hearts in some way. In fact, a common rhetorical design technique consists of making sure the site images look and act like the target audience, so an image of a "real swinger" as owner might have been the Website creator's purpose. Not many owners have their pictures, but of those that do, few, such as *Red Rooster*, match the age demographics (35-60). However, the 40-ish white woman owner of *Amore Club USA* matches the age, gender, and race demographics of most swinger sites, and probably establishes a stronger connection with her members. Candid shots probably help with this relationship since most new audiences feel anxious about looks and want examples of what real club members look like.

In sum, when the creators map images to words, audiences get a synergistic result, one that enhances attention and recall, two significant factors with on-line media where readers can click off and leave the site instantaneously. To forestall this departure, the images must be immediately interesting and relevant. Most of the sites attest to the Web creators paying attention to their audiences' expectations and satisfying them, increasing the audiences' positive experience with the sites. What is memorable is learned, and that learning replaces old characteristics, allowing swingers to have their pejorative identity subsumed by the constant positive ethos witnessed on the Internet.

### *Linguistic Memory*

The rhetorical canon of memory looks different now than it did in Aristotle's time when orators learned techniques for memorizing their speeches. This canon almost disappeared with the rise of a print based world, but memory has seen a new repurposing in terms of data storage and accessibility to accompany its recall features. Images offer

easier recall opportunities than print alone, as seen above with the Picture Superiority Bias. Of course, the ability to access information—Websites, databases—also weights memory more powerfully. The *Amore Club USA*'s Valentine motif has been discussed as being consistently different from that of the other Websites. However, viewed within this updated memory concept, the Website creator could have used the fluidity of the Internet, where memory “connects past and present,” to give the heart icons more power than merely the grip of convention for remembering the site. They may be choosing to negate the stereotype of a sexual hedonist with a strategic alignment with something sweeter and less overtly hedonistic than the other Websites. Perhaps the hearts also are more memorable because of their iconic strength, made ever more powerful by audience access to the heart motif's constant imagistic ubiquity in everyday life. By choosing memory coupled with convention, *Amore Club USA*'s Website creators may have chosen another path toward fashioning a swinger identity other than one based solely on typical sexual tropes (151).

### *Homepages*

In terms of memory, the data set typically Homepages relied on “stickiness,” using particular buzz words in the present moment to inhabit the future memory of its readers (Lidwell et al. 228). As noted later in this chapter, almost half the logos used the word “fantasy” in them, a highly connotative word that Website creators employed likely to reflect both what they believed the audience wants and what they wanted the audience to want. Multi-modality particularly suited this memory making, allowing readers to reconstruct thoughts based on how the Website creators framed them, or using “fantasy” to access the mind's Google storehouse. From the Homepage, readers have the first

pieces in a pattern of information on swingers, which could be added to if its follow-on pages were consistent and sticky enough (e.g. using logos, navigational button placement, color, and arrangements consistently across the pages). All of the data set sites had Homepages, and most showed evidence of good design choices built not for short-term memory alone, but to be considered, pondered over, and put into long-term memory as audiences make connections to this data (Brooke 166). According to Brooke, it is those connections that the brain eventually makes that cement memories into place, so images and print must be memorable to be learned.

### *Calendar Pages*

Readers already knew what kind of information Calendar pages outlined, so constructing memories was a less important task here. Instead, Website creators had to make Calendar pages accessible and legible so readers could keep up with the inevitable updates. For example, Website creators might have highlighted and described the next party in detail, but not the one after that, forcing readers to return to the site again and again and ensuring site hits. The use of the calendar template or a list of dates with images or hyperlinks was typical across the pages, but the least memorably significant was *Sweet Desires'* plain list. It consisted of dates, the name, "Official SLS event," but no clever party names, no sexy images, and no hyperlinks to more information. Website creator/owners used only half of memory's dimensions; for example, they used information storage and access, but failed to be memorable to teach their readers about the site information as it characterizes swingers as organized, pragmatic, and attuned to their members' needs.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

The FAQs and Rules pages generally met audience's expectations on these pages of conventional-looking and conventional-sounding rules. All of the sites in the selected data set contained "NO MEANS NO!" giving this term the highest stickiness quotient because it is repeated so often. Moreover, on Homepages, FAQs, and Rules pages, the Website creators frequently highlighted the phrase with CAPS, bolding, and exclamation marks. Website creators seemed to spend less effort making these pages creatively memorable in other areas besides the "NO!" using only the accessibility and storage side of memory. Of course, Website creators counted on readers' experience with rules and questions and answers to intuit a general sense of behavioral infractions even if the readers only vaguely remembered the design specifics. Website creators had many strategies for lodging an idea in memory, but the important teaching on a Website comes when the readers accesses that memory when it fits a pattern or they make a connection to it sometime in the future (Brooke 166).

In sum, the appeals to memory on the linguistic level come from distinctive, resonating words, and familiar warrants associated with exclamation marks, repetition, and restatement, which the designers used quite competently. Although not as exciting, print still resonates with audiences because of its sheer ubiquity.

### *Summary*

The Website creators of the sites in this study's data set used sexy images to condition readers to see swingers as a positive community. Strategies included using conventional aesthetic sites and provocative women to link into the audiences' prior knowledge of sexual tropes as promises that easily lodge in the memory. Website creators

also targeted men, who probably have acquired a more robust repertoire of conventional tropes aimed at them than women; however, women have acquired these same conventional memories that condition them to react positively to the playful nature of the sites' images. In addition, the Website creators employed the Calendar page to not only highlight images, but to bring the readers back to the site to gather new information on the next party. Both the sexy images and the aesthetics of some of the Websites constitute stimuli that aid in exacting a positive response. In addition, the constant image repetition replaces negative frameworks of seeing swingers, such as newspaper headlines, with more fun, exciting, and edgy ones.

Recall of sexy images results from the Picture Superiority Effect as the Website creators coupled almost all the images with text, which ensured a higher recall value than either image or text by itself. Technology has provided swingers the opportunity, on which they have capitalized, to create a presence that far surpassed their old discourse methods, relegated as they once were to oral and print communication modalities.

The canon of memory, with its expanded accessibility role in Webpages, has supported each of the elements above because now the pages can be viewed many times over. The combination of print and visual language doubles the recall value of either alone, especially in the product advertising venue, which describes not only how swingers are selling themselves to the public, but also how swinger sites get more chances to be heard, seen, and remembered as interesting members of society. Teaching via Design helps the swinger community teach all audiences about swinger values and character through well-chosen design choices.

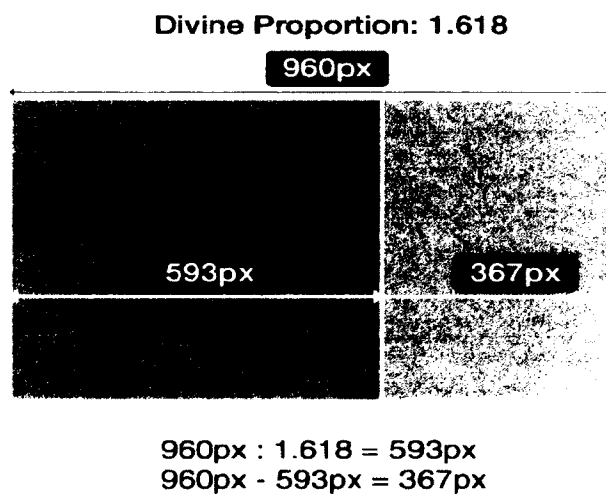
## **Enhancing the Usability of the Design**

In this third category, Lidwell et al. rest persuasive strategies on a having a low-frustration level with a site. Unlike print texts with standard fonts, type, and spacing, multi-modality demands that a site be easy to use, or audiences will not stay on the site. Symmetry and balance prefigure a pleasant and efficient information-gathering experience that enhances good memories about the swinger site, and by association, the community. Common sense issues rule in this category; people have little time, patience, or interest in wrestling with a poorly designed or written page. Audiences cannot be persuaded if they abandon the site in frustration. A beautiful site may get more leeway from viewers, but ultimately, the text must be legible, focused, and balanced; the style friendly and informal; and the information relevant and complete for the audience to remain engaged with the site. To this end, it was useful to study the aesthetic-usability, figure-ground contrast, and linguistic styles of the data set's Webpages.

### *Aesthetic-Usability*

The arrangement of space and the elements within a layout aims for proportion and balance that highlights usability and aesthetics because beautiful designs are considered easier to use than unattractive ones. One basic component of this aesthetic concept is The Rule of Thirds, a more easily applied derivative of the Golden Ratio. Found in nature, math, architecture, and art, this “divine” number describes a mathematical formula that uses the “naturally found” 1:6 ratio as the definition of beauty. Because this 1:6 ratio is found so frequently in nature, the majority opinion considers that human beings are innately drawn to “flower petals and galaxies” rather than being taught that the pattern is harmoniously pleasing (Lidwell et al. 94). Mark Boulton, editor of

*SmashingMagazine.com*, explains this concept more concretely in figure 8. His professors had explained that “one of the key components in the vehicle of communication is composition, and in design school, it is taught as something you should *feel* rather than create logically” (“The Personal Disquiet”). Bolton was not happy with such a fuzzy definition until he remembered the divine proportion simply rendered the number Pi (1.6180339887)—the Fibonacci sequence—into visual form. Because of the human preference for this balance, this proportion may act “from a more fundamental, subconscious preference for the aesthetic resulting from the ratio” than can be explained by a learned behavior, and should be used by Webmasters to add to their sites’ attraction (Lidwell 114).



*Fig. 8.* The Divine Proportion.

The rule of thirds is a simplified version of the divine proportion. Envisioning three equally spaced vertically and horizontally spaced lines, the four intersections mark



the focus points that please the eye as evidenced by the proportions of Notre Dame Cathedral in figure 9 (114).



*Fig. 9.* Focal points at the intersections: Notre Dame Cathedral.

### ***Homepages, Calendar, FAQs, and Rules Pages***

The “felt-ness” of the design can now be articulated and applied to all designs. For example, *New Horizons*’ big, beautiful site was a function of coordinating colors that matched their logo; usage of the divine proportion; including attractive people; making boxed, easy-to-read text; and using diction regarding the “most luxurious club...in the world,” “amazing romantic hide-a-ways,” “an unparalleled lifestyle experience,” and “a beautiful, safe place.” These features encourage audiences to stay on the site and bask in the warmth of a welcoming, and aesthetic looking invitation. *Colette New Orleans* (see fig. 10) also demonstrates a well-balanced site, giving a harmonious feel to the whole page. Strong emotional cues may make audiences want to establish a relationship with these people who treat them so well. In addition, audiences may be more forgiving of

problems if they are well treated from the beginning (Lidwell et al. 20). Finally, texts with multiple elements provide more opportunities to integrate them into organic, natural rhythms that have an additive, synergistic effect, potentially increasing audiences' good feelings about the site (20).



*Fig. 10. Colette New Orleans and the Divine Proportion.*

In this portion of the analysis, the layouts configured in four patterns that use the rule of thirds were counted (see the headings in Table 5). White or empty space plays a large role in this ratio as it is counted as part of the overall image and thus in the ratio. For example, in *Club Discretions*' homepage, the left two thirds of the horizontal page is somewhat blank (a "white space"), which mimics the proportions of Notre Dame in figure 9. In addition, because the difference between  $1/4$  and  $1/3$  is small, images or irregular sentence lengths can fool the eye into seeing the  $1/3$  balance even if the space is not mathematically precise.

Table 5 describes all the pages and shows a general trend of keeping to the rule of thirds across the entire twenty-five sites. However, for the more informational pages where the text might have seemed more important than the Golden Ratio, almost a third

of these pages used the entire width of the page (3/3). Although these pages did not offend the eye, they did not allow for the same eye relaxation that the golden ratio provides.

Table 5

Ways that Websites Were Divided with or for Text.

Versions of the Rule of Thirds pattern.	2/3 + 1/3	1/3 + 2/3	3 x 1/3	1/6 + 2/3 + 1/3	Outliers Misc.	Outliers Full Page Across	Totals
Homepages (25)	5	5	9	5	1 (4x 1/4)	0	25
Calendar (24)*	4	5	6	3	0	6	24
*FAQs (25)	5	6	4	2	0	8	25
*Rules (22)	4	5	3	2	1 (2 X 1/2)	7	22

*Note:* Some sites did not have FAQs or Rules pages, so these total less than twenty-five.

The most distinctive outlier, the use of the entire page, was not surprising because both FAQs and Rules pages have so much information to convey, so their formatting reveals the tradeoff between scrolling down to fit all the facts or breaching the Golden Ratio. However, as a whole, the Website creators seemed aware of the power of this design element and faithfully fulfilled audiences' symmetry and balance expectations, which may have increased readers' belief in the site's usability, which brings readers back and encourages a sound liking for the site (Lidwell et al. 2008). Of course, the Golden Ratio can be overshadowed by other design errors, as previously discussed, such as *Club Discretions* and *The Crucible* with too much information, poor color choices, small print type, and low Signal-to-Noise ratios. Boulton comments on Web creators' common ratio errors:

[D]ue to a suboptimal layout length, visitors are offered a suboptimal text length of over 90 symbols per line, [while]...comfortable reading lies between 60 and 80 symbols per line. The improvement of the layout would therefore lead to the improved readability of the content, too. That's a useful side-effect of getting things done according to the laws of nature. ("The Personal Disquiet of Mark Boulton")

*TJ's Lasting Impressions'* Website creators executed their design much better. The bottom section pleases the eye because the two black/blue pieces act together as the 2/3s unit. Even though the top proportion seems busy, the general balance of the site helps to give it the pleasing aesthetic feel that *Club Discretions* lacked. *Club Princeton* also reveals the classic golden ratio in a pleasing, well-balanced page.

Surprisingly, "pretty designs" although subjective, also can be defined within certain familiar frames in spite of missing the perfect divine ratio: *Amore Club USA's* cute hearts and cupids could charm those who liked pink; the grey/black and purple/black designs of *Carousel Couples Club* and *Entre Nous* might attract sexy and seductive connoisseurs; spare and neat sites such as *MAC* might appeal to minimalists' tastes; and *The Social Club* Website creators, with twenty semi-naked beautiful women on every page, might have assumed that was enough to define an aesthetic site. Several sites in the data set were busy, noisy sites despite their classic proportions, but only *Club Cave* stood out for its unsettling proportions. Fake-looking cave "rocks" insistently interfere with the balance of the design; a cognitive dissonance exists between the shape of real rocks and

these rocks, between the high center of gravity of the top versus the emptiness of the bottom half, and even between any warrant linking sexy women to caves. Additionally, the multi-colored text and small font make this site less visually appealing and memorable.

In general, Web creators paid close attention to the Golden Ratio, choosing to have well-balanced and proportional lengths that make people enjoy the experience of seeing them (see *gestalt* principles below) and want to return. Because of this ratio's universal emotional appeal, creators would take care to avoid a poorly laid out site, not wanting their members to feel any irritation, even if the audience could not articulate why the site did not charm or invite lingering.

#### *Figure-Ground Contrast*

Space is the two-dimensionality of the picture plane with objects arranged on it. The strong use of figure-ground contrast highlights the focus of the picture, using positive space within the negative space of the area around it. In other words, the focus should be on the figure and not the background. According to Lidwell et al., the figure-ground relationship comprises one of seven *gestalt* (universal) principles and "asserts that the human perceptual system separates stimuli into either figure elements or ground elements," which establishes an important sense of familiarity and stability for the reader (96). Giving important elements a definite shape not only may enhance the reputation of a Website, but also may increase the audience's ability to recall necessary elements. Forms that merge tend to create ambiguous designs that interfere with audience reception and memory. To that end, most of the Website creators for this data set created clear forms on quiet backgrounds to highlight important information. Yet, it would be a

mistake to conclude that on more “noisy” Websites, Website creators had nothing important to say; in those cases, readers simply would have had trouble focusing on salient points. Part of making figure-ground contrast work was legibility, most familiar to readers as a print term, which encouraged Website creators to use 12-point size, Times-New Roman font, and left-justification, but those elements must enhance, not muddy, the contrast elements. A good Website creator will choose complementary background colors, shadings, patterns, or textures that highlight the message. Too often, some Website creators in the data set seemed to want to use all the available tools at once (see Appendix E for summary of Figure-Ground data).

### *Homepages*

Of all the examples, twelve of twenty-five kept their Homepage spaces neat and minimalist with boxes, borders, lines, and few colors, focusing attention on their logo, their welcome statement, or a seductive image. The other thirteen of twenty-five spanned a continuum that saw Website creators add more and more information via text, such as fonts, boxes, colors, images, sound, blinking lights, and fade-ins at the expense of the focal points. Even though many of these sites have professional copyright notations, there was not a clear link between clarity and a professional label. When Website creators confuse the audience with too many elements or figure/ground fuzziness, the readers may have difficulty structuring or grouping the information (Kostelnick and Hassett 99). As discussed earlier, audiences rely on structural and stylistic cues to retrieve information quickly or at least efficiently, so headings, bullets, lines, boxes, and breaks hook into the readers’ previous experience and comfort level. Of course, Website creators must keep the audience’s level of experience and conventional expectation in mind, or users would

not be able to make sense of competing or confusing spatial language. *The Toy Box's* Homepage demonstrates a solid understanding of concise and stable use of space, balance, and legibility. The simple heading oversees a page divided into balanced thirds, organizing the information in clear categories with common navigation buttons, an obvious title, good contrast, and aligned text—all of which parallels readers' experiences with legible print text. The second example, *The Red Rooster* had a similar layout within the Rule of Thirds, but the center image of rooster the drives most of the site's focus, and the white heading, which was above the horizon line, became lost in the colored background. The focus was clear on the page, but the centered picture had too much happening. On the other hand, *The Toy Box* placed their figure element below the banner where the complementary colors stood out. Although *The Red Rooster's* homepage has some design problems, it generally seems appealing because it offers balance, an aesthetic component, and minimal irrelevant text. Web creators must understand the power of universal gestalt designs and attend to their importance or swingers risk losing an audience who may dislike a Website, for some unarticulated reason, and then associate swingers with that unnamed discomfort.

The Website creators for the data set may have confronted a design conundrum in developing their Homepages, deciding among conventions that would not have satisfied a mixed audience with mixed agendas. If new converts to swinging were looking for a Website design that constructed the community as interesting and different, standard designs may not have persuaded so much. But an audience of curious new members who may be somewhat embarrassed or shy may not have wanted to be confronted with too provocative or outrageous a design. This dilemma describes a common tension

throughout the Lifestyle community as they construct a provocative group persona on one hand and a calm, comforting, and friendly one on the other. Not that these two traits are incompatible, but they may reveal why swingers' sites showed some mixed messages about their group identity. However, these Websites present an on-going process of trial and error for attentive Website creators confronting the complexity of identity making, so even though the Web sites can help identify swinger characteristics, some of those sites may be in the early stages of learning, giving tentative identity traits rather than certainties.

### *Calendar Pages*

Surprisingly, only seven of twenty-five Calendar pages had the conventional month-at-a-glance calendar layout, a logical and familiar structural cue. These seven were also accompanied by familiar sexual tropes, partially seen in figures 11 and 12 from *Colette*. Seven others chose a scroll down feature, which gave readers a larger, more information-packed visual field. *Tabu*'s slide show achieved the same larger view as the scroll down method, while the other sites generally used more conventional print choices, such as lists or a single page of data but with hypertext. The figure-ground contrast on these pages strikes a balance between three focal points: the image, the date, and the name of the party, establishing a clear relationship among them. The simplicity of these examples also helps with recall; the stark background places the images and text into sharp relief. Being able to see the whole at a glance and liking it constitutes one basic of design's *gestalt* principles. As the eyes move from one focal point to another, the latter point might fade into the background for a moment, but having a Website creator make interpretive order out of chaos tells the reader she is a master of her art, increasing the



reputational weight of the site. The two examples in figures 11 and 12 demonstrate how audiences perceive figures from ground through contrast with a clean white background for the first and a man's chiseled chest for the second; thus, adding prowess to their characterization as a professional and community.



Fig. 11. Example 1 of Figure-Ground Contrast on *Colette's* Calendar Page.



Fig. 12. Example 2 of Figure-Ground Contrast on *Colette's* Calendar Page.

All the examples in the data set highlighted the date and time plus the naming of each party, and more than half had images as well. However, the twenty-five calendar pages did not resemble each other beyond these three elements. Kostelnick explains that when a new genre's genealogy is evolving, readers can expect to see Website creators sample and mix conventions as seen in *Club Discretions'* Calendar page, which left justified a column of roses as a framing tool, has red text fading into the red roses, contrasts yellow print against a black background, and uses a blinking blue line separating the party descriptions. Most of the other Calendar pages had less apparent element-sampling going on, but it seemed that Lifestyle Website creators had not yet established any organizational conventions for their Websites. Nonetheless, the calendar itself is such a strong concept that audiences may not be confused by its many varieties. As the swinger community grows, conventions will be negotiated, and inevitably the genre will become more stable, and members may get a clearer, more conventional calendar page that is easy to use.

The grip of old print standards obviously plays a role in the genealogy of Websites even as the Web offers an "expansive, open-ended domain for designing visual language" (Kostelnick and Bassett 160). Kostelnick explains that since "perceptual shifts" come more slowly than technological ones, the initial Websites from new groups may seem jumbled (160). The confusing mixture of designs in all these Calendar pages attests to the veracity of Kostelnick's statement, yet one of the constants that held this page together was a fundamental chronological rationale demonstrated through visual and lexical cues. Giving audiences familiar and anxiety-reducing Website pages demonstrates swingers' reputation for knowing their audiences and taking care to make them feel

comfortable; people view that kind of attention with goodwill, which helps erase old stereotypes.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

Given the importance of FAQs and Rules as expository pages, the figure-ground contrast generally rested on lists of plain text, with bullets or numbers that spelled out clearly needed information. Only two of twenty-five sites did not include the FAQs page. Others (eight of twenty-five) had no Rules page even though the FAQs page often included some behavior-focused reminders. The lists and backgrounds came in a variety of colors, but the numbered list of black on white or vice-versa dominated the category. Some Websites had an attractive and memorable color scheme that provided coherence. Often the page names were capitalized, bolded, enlarged, or given different fonts as highlighting strategies. The following tables tally those clubs that had good figure-ground contrast (see table 6). Those sites with asterisks (\*) had poor figure-ground differentiation (see table 7). These also were busy sites—the higher the number of asterisks, the busier the sites. For example, in table 6, those sites marked with a plus sign (+) had small print and/or too much information that revealed a low signal-to-noise ratio discussed earlier. Too much information means the Website creators did not do the critical work of prioritizing what was important, leaving that job to the readers who simply may give up on a frustrating task and/or remember and associate that aggravation with swingers themselves.

Table 6

Websites with Strong Figure-Ground Contrast in FAQs and Rules Pages.

Black Lettering on White Background	White Lettering on Black Background
<i>Allure Couples</i> (San Diego)	<i>Collette</i> (New Orleans)
<i>Carousel Couples Club</i> (NYC)	The Toy Box (Temecula, CA)
<i>Midatlantic Couples</i> (VA)	<i>Tabu</i> (MD)
<i>The Social Club</i> (TSC) (Nashville)	* <i>ClubMeet4More</i> (Chicago) with a tinge of red
<i>Carolina Friends</i> (N. Carolina)	<i>Leisure Time</i> (Connecticut)

Table 7

Website Background Colors and Print for FAQs and Rules Pages (from most to least legible).

<b><i>Green Door</i></b> (Las Vegas) green, white letting on black
<b><i>New Horizons</i></b> (Seattle) lavender, purple lettering on black
<b><i>Club Cave</i></b> (Houston) brown lettering on black; not hard to read but unsexy rock motif
<b><i>Entre Nous</i></b> (D.C.) yellow lettering on black
<b><i>L'Sota</i></b> (Iowa) blue and black lettering on pink
<b>+<i>TJ's Lasting Impressions Lasting Impressions</i></b> (Pennsylvania) black on grey with turquoise headings
<b>+<i>Club Princeton</i></b> (Ohio) white lettering on grey
<b>*<i>The Crucible</i></b> (D.C.) red and yellow lettering on blue background
<b>**<i>Red Rooster</i></b> (Las Vegas) turquoise lettering on red
<b>**<i>Amore Club USA</i></b> (Florida) pink and black lettering on with pink hearts white background embedded
<b>**+<i>Playful Encounters</i></b> (Los Angeles) red, black lettering on grey
<b>**+<i>Sweet Desires</i></b> (Alabama) lettering on different colored pages, one of which has a woman's body superimposed on background (electric green, yellow, lavender)
<b>***+<i>Club Discretions</i></b> (Phoenix) red and yellow lettering on black background with handcuff aligned across and down the page

Using conventions that enabled legibility and strong figure-ground contrast added to the ethos of a site because the Website creators developed a relationship with the audience based on practicality and usability, saving readers' time. The Website creators also understood the universal human need for organizing data, and thus did their audience the courtesy of attending to a useable arrangement of content. An interesting color scheme might have sounded aesthetically pleasing in theory, but effective Website creators apparently understood that certain color combinations in a reading context could confuse audiences when variable delivery choices such as different operating systems may skew the color hues.

A notable feature about this analysis category for FAQs and Rules pages was the prevalence, placement, and highlighting of that most ubiquitous rule at these swingers' clubs: "NO, MEANS NO!" Fully sixteen of twenty-five included it, with many of them making this rule the first on the list. Of the nine who did not include this rule on this page, two of them had omitted the Rules page altogether. There was no geographic pattern, or any other discernible pattern, connecting the two clubs without visible rules. The clubs' effort to reduce anxiety and produce a positive member experience can be read clearly from these expository pages, revealing their compassion and problem solving skills.

In total, beautiful sites seduce readers with symmetry and balance because people are pleasantly susceptible to this natural occurring Golden Ratio, allowing them to remember a site with pleasure. The Rule of Thirds convention appeared in some manner in all twenty-five sites, and a strong figure-ground contrast added a "stable relationship" to this balance. Making clear what is important and what is not means readers may remember a site better because it gave them needed information (Lidwell et al. 96).

Website creators may use dissonance in a design for shock value, but this asymmetry is uncomfortable to read, and the message might be missed. Although all the Website creators apparently understood the balance principle, other facets interfered with a well-remembered site: poor color, little cohesiveness in format, and too much information packed in a small space. That happened too frequently in these pages, diluting the power of the sites' ability to keep readers comfortable and in place. Those Website creators should revisit the power of design to not only entertain the reader, but garner themselves good will.

### *Linguistic Elements of Style*

In conjunction with the previous imagistic strategies, familiar stylistic features give readers a relaxed, inviting, and informal setting, helping foreshadow a stress-free site visit, which characterizes swingers as interested in the saving readers time and frustration. In print, one arises from such elements of style as diction, point of view, and figurative language, and this holds true for multi-modal Websites if the Website creators conscientiously align the visual and linguistic characteristics toward a clear purpose. In this category, print elements were examined as they supported or complemented the sexy and inviting body and facial language covered earlier in this chapter. Specific diction, such as giving advice on the do's and don'ts of swinging etiquette (e.g., *L'Sota*), created a helpful, caring atmosphere. Website creators encouraged this good-hearted characterization of the club by discussing the "no-pressure" environment, providing FAQs pages to assuage any newcomer awkwardness or unease, giving new swinger orientations, and welcoming anyone who wanted to try the Lifestyle. This generous, fun, and adventuresome nature also was implied in their democratic and inclusive diction, fun

images of bacchanalian fiestas, and themed parties dedicated to exciting fantasies. The prohibitions against bad swinger etiquette commanded that everyone give and receive respect and generally focused on inclusion rather than exclusion (except for *Leisure Time* who explained they were not a Big Beautiful Woman (BBW) club). The sense of civility, freedom, and sex produced a club atmosphere that treated alternative desires as natural and exciting, not odd. Website creators' word choice, first-person point of view, and some playful figurative language established an adult summer camp tone: be happy, have fun, be safe, but respect and obey the rules for everyone's enjoyment.

“Hearing” tone in print texts rests on readers reasonably deducing the sound, body language, context, and facial expressions from language's connotative conventions. In addition, the audience must also “see” the speaker as Aristotle's good man/woman as doing his or her civic duty. Aristotle distills that goodness-as-persuasiveness down to three characteristics: wisdom, virtue, and goodwill, which Richard Buchanan echoes in his definition of design's function: “...to conceive products which express, and, necessarily, reconcile human values concerning what is good, useful, just, and pleasurable” (Buchanan, Doordan and Margolin 19). The swinger Websites in this data set consistently worked toward an inclusive, friendly, and kind tone through their linguistic choices, which in turn were supported by sexy images, a rather odd combination on the surface. However the attractive bias discussion that comes later in this chapter explains that attractive women lend an air of goodness to a site. The pleasure that the seductive images generated was part of design's purpose. Realizing a wise, moral, kind, and accepting community ethos forged another sexual story outside the monogamous couple heuristic as Website creators found a way to establish swingers as

non-threatening members of society. The words also were conversational, sometimes slangy, but never too pompous or too formal.

### *Diction*

Web site designers still use print text as familiar and necessary strategies, and close reading allows an analysis of how designers construct the swing community persona.

### *Homepages*

To understand how diction influenced tone in the data set Homepages, the nouns and adjectives on these pages (including the mottos) were highlighted. Nouns and adjectives provided the most repetition across the sites. Eighteen categories arose from the textual data as shown below. The numbers beside the words indicate how many time these words were found in the Homepages, including in the mottos themselves as they put people at ease.

- Play and/or fun (17)
- Erotic/sexy (14)
- Upscale and/or prestigious (13)
- Adults/swingers (12)
- No pressure (9)
- Welcoming and/or welcome (7)
- Fantasy/fantasies (7) (found only in mottos)
- Open-minded (7)
- Discreet and/or private (6)
- Like-minded people (5)



- Safe and/or secure (5)
- Adventurous and exciting (5)
- Clean (4)
- Respectful (4)
- Curious (2)
- Inhibitions. (2)
- Romantic (1)
- Attractive people/surroundings (1)

The kind and number of repeated words suggested an inclusive, exciting, and emotionally kind group of like-minded people. The linguistic emphasis on the Homepages highlighted neither orgies nor fantasies, but showed the hosts' interest in providing a serene and tranquil atmosphere for new party goers, a strong attraction for the nervous. The primary audience for Homepages seems to have been potential swingers because seasoned players already would know what happens at a swing club. Swinger virgins, however, may have framed swing clubs from big media, so their inferences likely would come from biased sources. The words above could answer unstated worries; in fact, of these eighteen categories, only two had a specific sexual connotation, and even those were not about performing, but about seeing and imagining, a less stressful scenario for the nervous. The other categories focused on hosts promising a good time over a sexual encounter and the club's ethos: "fun," "no pressure," "friendship," "welcoming," and "prestigious." The tone of these words has the potential to decrease the pressure of performance anxiety and unease in a new environment. With their less visceral, more logical properties, the words

mixed with the instant visual appeals of the inviting sexual images and created a layered message that both soothed and excited.

Homepages (seventeen of twenty-five) also took advantage of catchy mottos to add interest and hook their audiences. Even though the words “fantasy” or “fantasies” represented the most popular noun in this category, ironically fantasies were not alluded to in the body of the text; one might suppose that Website creators did not want to overuse the noun or the ideas it implies. Mottos are meant to be memorable, not to be contractual promises on which to deliver. The continued repetition of “play,” “sexy,” “discreet,” and “open-minded” constructs an identity that may rest on a hedonistic lifestyle of sex and fun, but also suggests a foundation of relationships that last more than one night. The welcoming, intimate, helpful tone describes people that become friends, not just sexual partners, which is a different perspective of swingers than has circulated in the media and in common conversations.

### *Calendar Pages*

The same kinds of words were counted on the Calendar pages; there, a distinct tonal change emerged as the theme names for parties led to more interesting and enticing language. Alliterative, sexy, innuendo-filled, and frank, these pages created a fuller picture of the entertainment to be had than on the Homepages. Party names spanned a whole gamut of standard tropes: “Red, Hot, and Booty” (*Entre Nous*); “Boobs, Beads, and Booze” (*Amore Club USA*); “Dungeon 101” (*The Crucible*); “Cougar Party” (*Carousel Couples Club*); “Naughty Gras Madness” (*ClubMeet4More*); “Bi-Bi Orgy” (*Amore Club USA*); “Heaven or Hell” (*TJ’s Lasting Impressions*); “Ladies in Red Interracial Party” (*TJ’s Lasting Impressions*); “Fetish Foreplay” (*Club Princeton*);

“Hedonism” (*Carolina Friends* and *Scarlet Ranch*); “Fantasy Friday” (*Club Cave*); “Slip-Tease and See-Thru Night” (*Entre Nous*); “GI Joes & Army Hoes” (*ClubMeet4More*); “Leather & Lace” (*MAC*); “Fellatio Friday” (*ClubMeet4More*); “Mocha Caliente” (*TJ’s Lasting Impressions*); “Naughty in N’awlins” (*Colette*); and “Thrift Shop Party” (*Tabu*). Often accompanied by images to model these events, the sexual elements were elevated as candid sexual words revealed what members realistically could expect at the next party. The fun, poetic quality of the words likely were intended to decrease anxiety at having sex in public or doing a subordinate-dominant act with strangers; it is possible, though, that these titillating words increased the excitement instead. All the alliteration and internal rhymes coupled with sexy images dangled a viable, alluring, and memorable foreplay carrot that might have been hard to resist despite any newcomer nerves. These words, coupled with a sexy image of a handcuffed nude women (*Club Meet4More*) or a beautiful page design that heightens the fantasy quotient could succeed in keeping the user on the site and coming back for more, which gains new members and constructs swingers as exciting and fun.

#### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

The FAQs and Rules pages revealed another tonal change from the Homepages and Calendar pages. The FAQs pages were generally helpful and friendly with the ubiquitous “No Pressure” being a highlighted concept. *L’Sota* had 30 navigation buttons to help members with everything from Orientation & Overview to Bi-Females and Swinger Myths. *L’Sota* was the most helpful club in that specific sense, but all twenty-five sites offered information designed to overcome any hurdles to the first-timer at a swinger party. For example, *The Crucible* addressed health issues, “We are very aware of

the scourge of the AIDS virus, and you will find a supply of condoms throughout the Annex.” Most clubs were not as frank about viruses as *The Crucible* except to say, “Practice safe sex,” but all of them exuded responsibility and kindness with their words. *Club Princeton* allayed performance fears, “No one in the club is pressured to do anything but have fun,” while *Tabu* alleviated ageism worries: “[the club] has a wide range of ages and is designed so that EVERYONE can have a great time!!!” Exclamation marks, by the way, were also popular, apparently underscoring the club’s excited willingness to help. *Carolina Friends* highlighted their professional security team (as did many others) while *Red Rooster* echoed, in slang terms, the sentiments of all clubs regarding behavior: “Honesty works! People that have been around the lifestyle have heard it all and see through B.S. in seconds.” Other sites gave Swinging 101 advice, wanted couples to “Dress for Success” while mandating a first time Orientation Class when attending the first party. Such concern even extended to outside the club. *Scarlet Ranch*, for example, underscored how most swinger couples who “take the journey into the lifestyle enhance their union and make their relationship stronger.” These pages revealed concern and caring, making the clubs, despite any problems with Web page designs, an approachable community that audiences could appreciate for their candor and willingness to help.

### *Point of View*

Using the intimate first-person point of view may have worked to the advantage of various clubs. This intimacy often was accomplished through Welcome announcements on the Homepage, the site’s catchy mottos, and a passionate love of swinging. An effusively positive tone likely did not do the Website’s ethos any harm

provided the designers kept hyperbole in check; however, readers might have expected that swingers would enthusiastically extol their lifestyle choices and demonstrate accordingly. Nonetheless, the more objective third-person point of view worked equally well in welcoming a larger, undecided or hesitant audience that was still gathering facts. Since the majority of the twenty-five Websites combined first and third person, this compromise maintained a tension between friendliness and helpfulness and gave the audience some neutral distance from the topic. The anonymity of third-person limited or omniscient enables personal space without the reader feeling crowded. In addition, when the party hosts talk to the readers with the informal, second-person “you,” the touch of conviviality might be persuasive to shy people who were thinking about visiting the party. Bolter and Grusin comment on the different power relationship between Website creators and users that technology has created: users can now “occup[y], explor[e], and travers[e] graphic space” as interactive digital media places a literal “point of view under the user’s control” (243). When readers chose their navigation route to the pages, their time on the page, and their returns to the page, readers gain an “empathetic occupation” of other points of view (247). Those different perspectives not only might make inroads on readers’ biases through immediate emotional ties to the narrative, but also might allow readers to “occupy” an exciting new space where they control their sexual destinies.

### *Homepages*

Almost every Homepage (twenty-four of twenty-five) used the first-person plural inclusive pronoun, with the “we/our/us” demonstrating a welcoming, intimate family versus club atmosphere. Only *MAC*’s Homepage used the third-person limited informational viewpoint with “Midatlantic Couples offers a fun evening,” but the relative

sparseness of this page would not have offered much intimacy even if they had used first person. However, *MAC*'s first navigation button, "About Us," invited the audience in with "We start the evening with our sexy couples mingling, flirting and dancing seductively." Although the rest of the site was friendly, waiting until the second page to do so might have been a rhetorical risk. Any group that sells community should not create distance or, worse, offend the audience by maintaining a formal relationship in what should be a friendly atmosphere. The consistent use of "we" in all the other sites attested to the Website creators' knowledge that gaining the audience's trust required open acceptance of the readers as family. The power shifted to the audience as they had time to think about accepting or rejecting the offer implicit in "our upscale club is ready to make your fantasy come true." Bolter and Grusin argue that when readers feel empathy for others, that position "involve[es] the viewer in reducing the abstract to the visible" (247). But swingers are unique in that committing to a party takes them beyond digital space to one more perspective, the physical—no longer a viewer, but a participant. The Cartesian mind/body split may be blurred on swing club Websites because the swinger identity synthesizes both sides as the group "participate[s] in the definition of the self," but in the physical space there is a meeting of both bodies and minds (254). This is not to say that having a virtual experience with the site alone is something less than an authentic experience, but examining that perspective is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### *Calendars and FAQs Pages*

The FAQs and Rules pages were usually the most similar in their qualities, but in the case of point of view, they were different. On the Calendar pages, for example, the first-person point of view was used about half the time with the other half employing the

third-person. For example, where the first-person point of view was used, the text included invitations for members “to join them (club owners)” at “our private home.” This invitation was personal, but since the Website provided distance, refusing or putting off the invitation would be easy for the reader to do without feeling rude or awkward. The third-person point of view, on the other hand, implies a less inviting, less personal atmosphere, but some people may prefer the distance and time to process the information about swinging. Both perspectives have their appeal, evidenced by the fact that both were used about evenly, and both allowed the readers to make the decision to accept or reject the offer on their own terms.

Eighteen of the twenty-five Websites used the first-person plural (“we/our”) pronoun while the rest used the more distant third person on the FAQs pages. Many headings included the metaphor “Swinging 101” as Website creators/owners offered their best advice for having a successful experience, including why swinging may not be a good choice for every couple, especially if the relationship was struggling. Swingers tend to adhere to the adage, “Swinging never made a bad marriage good” (Gould 246). Readers would accept this intimate level of sharing only if they felt cared for and valued. The requirement for a mandatory new couple orientation in all the clubs of the data set testifies to one way that readers are embraced. On the FAQs pages, experienced swingers shared issues regarding jealousy, moving too quickly, the club’s aphrodisiac effect, deciding how far to swing, and choosing to swing separately or together—all of which showed vulnerability and trust in the readers. The first person suits this kind of frank and experienced advice as club owners build relationships that encourage repeat business.

Fantasy and imagination draw attention, but a shared perspective builds group identity and unity.

### *Rules Pages*

The Rules pages were noticeably less personable and less empathetic to readers. Of the data set, nine of twenty-five used second- and third-person commands, creating a much sterner tone with the no-nonsense “you will” rather than the more polite, “we would like you to.” This abrupt change from the camaraderie and helpful guidance of the FAQs pages signaled a more authoritarian role, which could be appreciated by both newcomers and seasoned swingers. In an alcohol and sex environment, drama easily unfolds, so owners reassured members with clear, strong rules that promised safety. Unfortunately for some sites, the Website creators made some rhetorically bad choices: an acceptable stern tone often was overdone with too many prohibitions as with *L'Sota*. *Scarlet Ranch* avoided the problem by keeping the rules to one screen, but then they choose colors that interfered with the rules' legibility. Despite these visual mistakes, generally the rules were simple and similar across the sites beginning with the popular “NO MEANS NO!” and moving on to “No Prostitution,” “No weapons or drugs,” and “NO Pressure!” These top four mandates supported two readings: (1) the owners considered preemptive strikes as effective tactics, which could be defined as assiduously avoiding trouble and/or (2) because “NO MEANS NO!” and “NO Pressure!” were repeated so many times across the FAQs and Homepages, the owners were making sure members understood that they were cherished and protected by highlighting a strong stance against harassment. Audiences who know the establishment cares for them



respond positively and that sentiment would enhance the club's standing; seeing people as people, not clients, is a very persuasive strategy.

A few stated rules were frankly odd: The *Scarlet Ranch* requested that any law enforcement official let them know before joining, and *Club Cave* forbade "clove cigs," gum chewing, and flip flops, but allowed cowboy hats because "it's a Texas thang." Two sites warned that "there may be sexual activity and nudity, and if this offends you, stay home." *TJ's Lasting Impressions* had the strictest caveat: "*TJ's* in NO way promotes, condones, or encourages bondage & dominance or sadomasochism," because they must comply with Pennsylvania statues that states, "BDSM activity, even where clearly consensual, can be and frequently is prosecuted under state criminal laws dealing with assault, aggravated assault, sexual assault or sexual abuse" (Com. v. Morrell, 1986). Likewise, *Allure Couples* in California required members to sign a long, legal waiver while *The Social Club* not only warned about "No Prostitution," but also "No Joking About Prostitution." Virginia and Washington, D.C. had very strict ABC laws that forbade nudity/sex where alcohol was served by paid bartenders. Swing clubs have a wide variety of specialized rules because communities or cities scrutinize them for the slightest legal infraction. Swinging is not illegal, so those who consider the clubs deviant or immoral try closing them down on technicalities similar to those shared in the headlines presented in Chapter 1.

Some clubs softened their tone a bit with "please," or couched the rule in terms of making sure everyone had a good experience such as with *Carolina Friends*: "Please leave your personal issues at the door" and "Never Be a Nuisance." *Allure Couples* asked club members to "be respectful to our neighbors." These gentler admonishments and

language took a different persuasive route, appealing to the higher moral ground of its members and treating them as equals rather than children.

### *Figurative Language*

The analysis looked for playful, poetic, or sensual language within the written text that matched the images for a doubled effect. Clubs chose many varieties of moods: romantic, mysterious, silly, exuberant, cool, and exclusive. However, the verb “play” was a controlling metaphor across all sites, a new metaphoric convention that may, indeed, define the genre. The play metaphor captures many levels of the swinger identity to include the obvious playful trait, as well as friendly, fun, adventuresome, and even innocent characteristics. In addition, the Website creators used typical sound devices of alliteration, rhyme, and consonance, increasing readers’ poetically positive recall of the material through these standard linguistic cues

### *Homepages*

The majority of the figurative language on these Homepages came from metaphors, hyperbole, and puns. Hyperbole dominated, demonstrated thirteen times in examples such as *Carousel Couples Club*’s “cleanest little swing club in New York,”—with a bonus allusion to the play. Adult play, playground, and paradise metaphors were next most frequent. Finally, puns such as “‘Cum’ see for yourself” (*Club Cave*), “We’re taking sexy back” (*Toy Box*), or “Where Real Adults Cum to Play” (*ClubMeet4More*) described the extent of figurative language usage. Of course, sight imagery, even in the written text, was prevalent, but the visuals were so much more provocative than the words that audiences could easily overlook the standard clichés that populated these pages. Because words and images can be stronger influences on audiences’ memories

than either element separately, Website creators would have been remiss to ignore the traditional written text despite its often pedestrian content on these pages.

### *Calendar Pages*

Many clubs (seventeen of twenty-five) used Calendar pages to create the most imaginative metaphors. Coupling those comparisons with rhymes, assonance, and alliteration often accentuated the stickiness of the lively language. Some of the best examples included: “Down-N-Dirty Nights (*Allure Couples*); “She’s Got a Donk!” and “Thick Thighs and Sexy Wedges” (*ClubMeet4More*); “Fetish Bi-Orgy” (*TJ’s Lasting Impressions*); “Get Your Goth On” (*Club Discretions*); “Punany Poets, Kinky Nights, and Afternoon Delight”—deepened with the song allusion (*The Crucible*); and “Micro-Mini Madness” (*Entre Nous*). The language corresponded to themed pictures, so the rhetorical effect was doubled, potentially increasing audiences’ anticipation of bacchanalias to come. Typical examples included *Entre Nous*’ nod to New Orleans where a statuesque young woman is pictured wearing a voodoo dress and little else. The colorful, rich, sensuality of the body is memorable and enticing and the name “Annual Voo Doo Ball” (with its double entendre and internal rhyme) makes the playful language mimic the image.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

The no-nonsense FAQs and Rules pages generally omitted all poetic language. However, six of twenty-five clubs resisted simply listing rules, which softened the serious tone a somewhat. Of these six, the play metaphor was used three times and personification was used once. Slang was popular on these six sites, especially on the topic of excess drinking with four clubs making pointed comments about it. *Carolina*

*Friends* and *Amore Club USA* each told members, “Don’t be an ass, this isn’t a free for all,” a command repeated by *Club Discretions* as, “Don’t be an ass, don’t get sloshed.” *L’Sota* continued the vernacular with “few attend ...to drink like fish or get sloshed,” adding a clichéd simile. Sometimes, the owners choose plain speaking as a strategy such as reminding readers that owners and Website creators were real people who were tired of bad behavior. The Website creators’ uses of slang rather than more formal language demonstrated intolerance of drunks who ruined parties for others, implying that the clubs operate according to the Golden Rule. The other nineteen of twenty-five sites used clear, but more formal language to underscore how serious the Website creators were about expecting good behavior. Perhaps these clubs had not experienced any frustration with drunks or perhaps they had and they wanted to maintain a more civil or upscale image alongside firmness. Even though, as Nakamura comments, the Internet frequently is used as a space to idealize the workings of the world, a “corrective reenvision[ing]” to “prescribe a solution to its ills,” these Rules pages seemed frank and realistic despite the various methods used, and they characterized swingers as convincing care-takers of their members, re-styling their old identity with expanded persuasive strategies (98).

In sum, word choice matters, giving as it does insight into the value system of the creators by analyzing the warrant between the words used and the effect intended. Most Websites want to encourage the Lifestyle and their parties, so they will take care to construct themselves as competent engineers of successful, fun parties to bring new members on board and deliver on their promises. Most clubs effectively produce a warm, inviting, and open-minded atmosphere, which lays the foundation for a positive and long-term relationship with the club.

### *Summary*

A clear and plain speaking style shown in the data set of Websites provided sufficient, relevant facts for readers to make good decisions. Because the other pages had such a witty, fun-loving, and playful tone, the general lack of informal and playful language on these pages did not suggest curmudgeonly swingers. Rather, this dichotomy suggested a healthy attitude about understanding priorities. Rules and FAQs page are meant to keep people safe. Those that might conflate alternative sexual play with excessive behavior needed to be reminded of that fallacious reasoning before coming to a party. In addition, the informal, welcoming tone generated a caring, family-like atmosphere that provided new swingers with enough encouragement to overcome first-timer nerves in this new situation. These characteristics support a sense that swinger hosts/creators are were thoughtful and well-organized in tending to their parties. Most adults would appreciate this kind of attention to detail. Some of the Rules pages had just under twenty rules and the FAQs pages were even longer, which attests to forethought regarding any eventuality and learning from past mistakes. Those qualities attract and keep audiences who might assume intelligence and caring translates into great parties where new members are welcomed. Those qualities also support a changing identity for swingers as audiences likely remember what they have experienced more concretely than what they have heard, so they leave the site with positive thoughts of swingers' treatment of them.

### **Influencing Design's Appeal**

This fourth section of Lidwell et al.'s framework focuses attention on the more emotional aspects of persuasion: beauty and human interest stories. A genetic

predisposition for beauty and symmetry explain why advertisers use these qualities as the basis for capturing an audience's interest and goodwill. Website creators also profit from aesthetics in addition to framing swingers as convivial family members whose story can be told through familiar words and images. To this end, this section of the analysis addresses such qualities as attractive bias regarding facism/bodyism/non-sexual images, framing, storytelling, and linguistic invention (with an emphasis on logos, pathos, and ethos).

### *Attractive Bias*

Many studies conclude that attractive people are generally seen as more intelligent, competent, moral, and convivial than unattractive people. The 1972 seminal work in psychology, "What Is Beautiful is Good," by Karen Dion, Ellen Berscheid, and Elaine Walster, explains the innate attraction to vibrant, healthy people in terms of survival of the species (Lidwell et al. 32). Facial symmetry, average waist-to-hip ratios, noticeable sexual features, and white, evenly spaced teeth signal good genes and good health, which constitutes a biological imperative in choosing fertile sexual partners. Obviously, getting pregnant is not a swinger priority; yet, this attractive bias is a strong, unconscious force in choosing a partner as this predilection toward beauty is "innate across all cultures" (32). In August 2013, *The Boston Globe* referenced the work of Dion, Berscheid, and Walster in an updated look at the power of "lookism." Ruth Grahams's "Who will fight the beauty bias?" not only highlights how beauty is more powerful than initially believed, but sadly concludes, "Perhaps even more discouragingly, we tend to assume that beautiful people are actually better people—in realms that have nothing to do with physical beauty. Study after study has shown that we judge attractive people to be

healthier, friendlier, more intelligent, and more competent than the rest of us....”Using this bias to full advantage, the Website creators freely decorated their sites with sexy, young women who influence readers to link them to goodness, morality, credibility, intelligence and kindness. Seeing beauty as good is an easy (albeit lazy) mental link according to the authors above. Graham provides an example, “Since humans have limited cognitive resources, we use shortcuts, including taking something we know (Angelina is beautiful) and generalizing about something we don’t yet know (Angelina is kind and competent).” It is no surprise, then that beautiful women on the club sites reflect positively on swingers, potentially leaving audiences to see and remember swingers as morally good, desirable people. In fact, this attractive bias can counter the wide range of imperfections that is often imputed to a group—Goffman’s definition of a “spoiled identity” based on just one “poor” choice (being a swinger) (5). People tend to remember one negative and then attach that to all other aspects of a community unless they come to know that group more specifically, just as readers do with the “new” swinger identity.

### *Homepages*

*Playful Encounters, Allure Couples, The Toy Box*, and thirteen other clubs used conventional sexual images on their Homepages such as legs, garters, fishnets, and semi-nude women to identify themselves with the provocative foreplay that frames most people’s knowledge of swingers or is expected by swinger or swinger-curious audiences. To see naughty images on reputed sexual sites would not offend or challenge audiences’ values, but would have satisfied their expectations and increased the sites’ ethos for understanding these beliefs. At the same time, pornographic or vulgar images might have invited comparisons with prostitutes or hard-core sexual practices rather than with sexual

freedom, choice, and adventure. Yet, despite these probable sexual expectations, eight Websites omitted sexy images from their Homepages, staying with colorful logos that emphasize the fun and friendship aspects of the club or that maximize the expository function of the space. These Website creators may have sought to alleviate unspoken anxieties about the sexually unknown by emphasizing friendship instead of sexual participation, considering that one of the most frequent FAQs questions concerns joining orgies on the first day—especially if viewers were to see the Photo Gallery and Calendar pages, which often displayed the most adventurous images.

Realistically, only a few of the data set's Homepages showed hard core sex acts, and those did so with soft-focus lighting, veering away from pornography and highlighting the attractive qualities of sensuality and eroticism. These latter qualities characterized swingers more as artistic Bohemians with flexible sexual appetites than as people engaging in base activities that might occur in the sadomasochism room, for example. The Website creators also relied on the audiences' imaginative function, the teasing hints and peeks of attractive sexuality, which promised later delights. As argued regarding the attractive bias above, their inclusion painted a positive picture of swingers because readers may tend to link beautiful women to kind, moral people.

Three Websites revealed an interesting dearth of attractive people on their Homepages. Except for their logo, *Simple Desires* used only two other pictures: one on the photo page and one monochromatic graphic on its soft lavender, bright yellow, and vivid green pages with plain black text. This somewhat artful Website was not unattractive; it simply used a different, more understated aesthetic than most swinger Websites employed. However, *Sweet Desires'* modest style contrasted sharply with the



professional products of the other twenty-two sites and perhaps rendered it memorable for this reason. Choosing to use a penciled sketch of a woman and her floppy hat concealing all but her nose and red lips may have surprised audiences because the drawing does not exude sexuality; however, flouting an expected convention can garner interest for its understated promise, especially with the oral components of the red lips and lollipop highlighted with color. These visuals proposed a latent sexuality.

Additionally, understatement can suggest a slow, playfully seductive community that believes less is more. Aesthetically, the attractive and minimalist use of elements, ample white space, and small image suggest a light-handed design that is easy to read and follow, and perhaps is memorable for its artistic promises. No one would question the beauty of a well-executed pencil sketch as art, so it lends its goodness to *Sweet Desires* as much as sexy images might.

The second of the three Websites without attractive people on the Homepage, *Amore Club USA* was adorable with its pink hearts on white wallpaper, cupids, red hearts, and blinking hearts. Although *Sweet Desires* had a modicum of sensuality with big red lips and a lollipop, *Amore Club USA*'s paean to romance with its Valentine's Day colors, icons, name, and thirty-four exclamation marks made it decidedly less sexual and more amateurish than other swinger sites. Moreover, the club's love theme stood in stark contrast to mainline swingers whose national convention is called "Hedonism." More importantly, this site had no people on any of the pages except the Gallery page, so identifying the attractive bias was more difficult than with the pencil sketch in for *Amore Club USA*. Love is a "good" commodity, so even though swingers' goals are not the same as eHarmony's, the link to the attractive concept of love may stand in lieu of attractive

people. The attractive formatting, personalized logos, mottos embracing the love “fantasy” motif, navigation buttons, and club information matched the general characteristics of a swinger site, so the Valentines on the Homepage seemed even more startling. Yet, even though audiences could not necessarily reframe swingers into adorable lovers, the iconic hearts and cupids may have been enough for audiences to overlook this anomaly and to evoke warm feelings toward swingers since they “continue to meet readers’ expectations” about the swingers and goodness (Kostelnick and Hassett 152).

In *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock explains that Plato’s antipathy toward rhetoric rested on its “ability to overwhelm (and/or deceive) an audience through the ‘immersive quality of language...in a predominately oral culture’” (qtd in Brooke 118). At the current juncture between print and digital rhetoric, some Website creators may have been guilty of doing what Plato feared, which is overwhelming the audience with every Web mode available: sexual images, icons, colors, blogs, links, sounds, movements, and hypertexts. While enthusiasm for the new can be overlooked, sites without a coherent design make their readers suffer unnecessarily. Again, *Club Discretions* provides the example of such overwhelming visuals. The site displayed too many competing and irrelevant qualities that can ruin the readers’ focus: a black, handcuff-motif wallpaper, a striped logo, multi-colored printing, bullets, multiple fonts and sizes, and blazing fire.

The three previous sites compromised the rhetorical work that a well thought-out Website could achieve and potentially branded these clubs as less thoughtful, less professional, and less competent than the other twenty-two of twenty-five sites. Of course, those qualities do not really threaten the identity of the swinger community, and many audiences might ignore them, but if swingers are in the beginning stages of establishing

conventions for their community that reflects their persona, Website creators may do well to agree on some basic criteria for their Website designs that reflects well on them.

A sub-category of attractive bias for aesthetic images breaks down how audiences perceive not just people, but whether they see the face or the whole body. The face-ism ratio ties audiences' perception of intellect to a large face-to-body ratio and sensuality to a large body-to-face ratio. Surprisingly, not all the Website creators elected to decorate their sites with bodies alone; of the nineteen of twenty-five Homepages that used attractive women, fourteen presented images of bodies, but all nineteen also presented images of faces. By linking beautiful and sensual women to each club, they capitalized on the women being "more intelligent, competent, moral, and social" (Lidwell et al. 32). Even though the audience might be fully cognizant of their biases, according to a study by Judith Langlois et al., "attractive individuals on average were treated significantly better than unattractive individuals... evidence that ...attractiveness effects extend beyond mere 'opinion' of others and permeate actual actions towards others" (401). Swinger Websites' longevity potential and ethos grow because beautiful/swingers can be seen as moral and good through the principles of attractive bias. The fact that these beautiful women also often were nude might be at odds with audiences' core values of morality, especially in the U.S. where sex produces many ambivalent feelings. However, the sites generally balanced the two notions, and swingers seem to have an on-going process of characterizing themselves as good couples who also have sex with other couples. Some audiences may not see past this latter point and may retain negative bias against swingers, but that audience generally is not seeking out swinger Websites as possible places to locate play opportunities. Those who do visit probably are willing to

accept, or are intrigued by, the premise since the two notions of goodness and sex are not mutually exclusive.

In addition to studying faces and bodies, the kind of facial gaze presented also matters to the reader. In those nineteen of twenty-five sites with faces, thirteen showed women gazing directly at the audience, explicitly offering an invitation of availability and intimacy. Kress and van Leeuwen describe two kinds of communicative functions involving gaze. The first is the direct or demand gaze, which “creates a form of direct address...acknowledge[ing] the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual ‘you’ (117). This directness implies a demand to engage with the imaginary figure depending whether he or she smiles, gives a haughty look, or tenders a wink. On ten Homepages, the women gazed seductively at the audience, wearing sexual role-playing clothing that invited the viewer to come and play. As the gaze holds eye contact, the gazer implies the specialness of the recipient and tenders the promise of sexual delight. These direct gazes act as strong rhetorical inducements to remain on the site. Sometimes the demand gaze can seem overly aggressive, but women’s faces and expressions often mitigate this assertiveness, changing the demand into a coy, come-hither look. One of these overt gazes on the *Green Door* Website comes from a cartoon figure, but according to Kress and van Leeuwen, the key factor in making the gaze work emerges from the one-on-one interaction and not whether the gazer is human (117).

The other twelve of twenty-five examples employed the second type of communicative function involving gaze—the indirect or offer gaze. In this case the image does not directly engage the reader in eye contact and suggests an offer of connection between the image and viewer. This indirect gaze created a less intimate mood, but

permitted anxious or voyeuristic audiences the safety of watching from afar. Kress and von Leeuwen's research into the visual domain comments on the special power relations established when technology allows audiences to retreat from decisions making (120). Some Website creators shied away from creating a potential power struggle with their audiences, instead electing to build trust by maintaining a friendly, inviting tone without any pressure. A first step included using female images that are familiar and expected. Certainly, the Homepage was not the place for pictures of orgies or quasi-pornography. The anecdotal statistics on swingers indicate that men often push women into trying swinging, but the women are the ones who keep coming back. Therefore, if Website creators must hook heterosexual men first, they cannot deviate from young, sultry, sexy women or they risk disappointing their primary male viewers. Predictably, only a few of these sites cater to women who might want to see provocative young men in the pictures. In fact, the few pictures of men were never central figures, much less naked ones in thongs.

Offer gazes can be read to infer that the viewer is not worth engaging with, but swinger Website creators would hardly make their images haughty or arrogant; all the women seem interested and sexual. Some Website creators might have considered this more formal gaze too dispassionate or objective for such an intimate subject, but they should have known their Western audience's predilection for wanting information through objective formats, so it seemed natural to see Website creators choose this modest gaze (Kress and von Leeuwen 122). For recruiting new members, the element of non-interactivity would appeal. Audiences can safely look while perusing the Website information. If there were no immediacy or urgency in the images, then the audience

would be permitted the luxury of considered, rational thinking and/or the titillation of a delayed fantasy. Another reason for using the offer gaze may have been the strongest: no action occurs at the site despite the most aggressive gaze. Even if the images offer a seemingly tangible connection through a seductive pout, for example, the offer still must “take the form of an ‘offer of information.’ It must be represented. It cannot be enacted directly” because doing so is physically impossible (123). Given that the offer gaze consists of three layers of safety between just looking and person-to-person contact, it seems natural that half of the Websites used this type of gaze for a hot topic like sex.

Several images do not qualify as either the demand or the offer gaze, but the audience has no trouble understanding that these women are offering no-strings-attached play at *Club Cave* and *L'Sota*. A body shape or position also can produce an invitation, especially in a sexual context where playacting and costumes of the femme fatale, the girl-next-door, the school girl, and the like frame a certain action and/or response. These are not aggressive stances, but the invitation is certainly on the table.

Naturally, the Websites in the data set with high body-ism counts evidenced a somewhat lower face-ism ratio. When the body rather than the face took up most of the image, the focus of attention rests on the physical and sensual attributes of the person rather than on her intellectual or personality attributes (Lidwell et al. 88). Identified through early bias studies of the media, presentations of women’s bodies far outnumbered their faces while men had a high face count and were perceived as more “intelligent, dominant, and ambitious” (88). In fact, significant studies on face-ism in politics by Susan H. Konrath and Norbert Schwartz of University of Michigan reveal the same bias. Their data show that women actually had a larger head-to-body ratio in the

media than men, negating simple gender difference as a cause (439). Konrath and Schwartz hoped to replicate their data with research in Canada, Australia, and Norway where women also held high political office. However, while they saw increasing numbers of women elected to office, the face-ism ratio did not parallel that rise; women were still constructed as physical being first. Swingers and Website creators have a different agenda than taking a feminist stand against women as sexual bodies; in fact, women-as-sexual-objects constitute a central strategy in persuading others to join them in challenging the heteronormative story. Group demographics consist of middle-class, hard-working people who are not necessarily rebelling against gender bias, but against monogamous, dutiful sex. From that point of view, sixteen of twenty-five of the Homepages included images that aimed, not for witty conversation, but for seduction, the better to attract new members who want fantasy. Conventional sexy images might seem an odd choice for independent swingers, but conventional desire is characterized by conventional tropes because the common is familiar, comfortable, non-threatening, but still erotic and exciting.

Although Konrath and Schwartz claim that high body-ism ratios of men also reduce men to an ornamental status, Lifestylers appear to have held tightly to the female body as key to their hedonistic image. Only four sites included men, and these were always shown as skin-to-skin with women. The lack of “fantasy” men in these sites needs research, but it is not within the scope of this dissertation to do so. Nevertheless, it was clear that the emphasis on women as sexual objects for the mixed swing audiences corresponded to the abundant girl-on-girl play that the linguistic text encouraged in the club sites. Swingers seem to be caught between several competing issues: as a

stigmatized group they should know how it feels to be stereotyped, and so when they flout rules and standards such as making swing clubs “...ALL ABOUT THE LADIES” (*Club Princeton*), it is understandable. Yet, they also comply with such blatantly sexist social codes such as objectifying women as objects of desire. The swing club context itself may have given them some excuse in this contradictory position. For example, if their goal rests mainly on gaining new members, then choosing to transgress on only one front, their sexual lifestyle, is where they will aim their energies. As mentioned, the clubs’ Websites did not openly challenge many sexual mores except to explicitly market sexual alternatives to monogamy: swapping spouses and exploring situational lesbian encounters. Despite a blanket silence on male homosexuality, female “homosexuality” seems to have been placed in the forefront more often as owners may have noted the interest women express in experimenting with the bi-curious life. The surfeit of female beauties leaves no doubt that that in this community, women want to see other women and be seen by other women as objects of desire.

B.F. Skinner’s work on behavior modification and classical conditioning underpins the last of three bundled design elements because they all emphasize the body as stimulus. This familiar phenomenon happens when consumers find themselves fantasizing about owning a sleek, new sports car or *haute couture* stilettos because sexy models have stirred up their emotions and imaginations. For many people, beautiful, young, sexy bodies trigger a positive association with erotic or fantasy sex that is felt if not necessarily articulated. The Website creators use aesthetics to target the reward centers in the brain and condition audiences to respond to swingers pleurably, especially as this design element threads beyond the Homepages. Swingers rely heavily

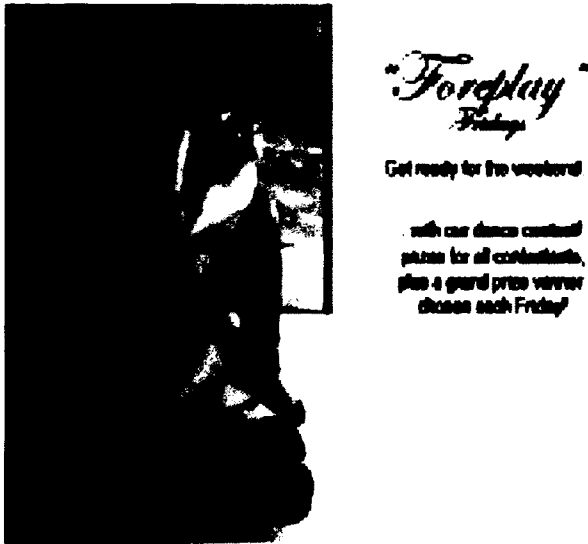


on conditioning (nineteen out of twenty-five pages contain sexy images) to align themselves with a particular kind of imaged sexuality that beckons to a clientele ready for an alternative sexual lifestyle.

### *Calendar Pages*

Because of the themed aspect of most parties, the Calendar pages offer some of the most provocative and stereotypical images of the four page types under analysis.

Represented below is one frank image from *Colette* (see fig. 13).



*Fig. 13. Colette's Calendar Page.*

The shift to more provocative poses from the Homepages to the Calendar pages seems to be related to the audience's deeper interest in the community. Most viewers would go to the generally exciting Homepage before navigating deeper into the site. After visually tasting these sexual treats, visitors might hope "more" sexual specifics would arise. That expectation would have been met with such stereotypical tropes as the naughty schoolgirl, the policewoman, the orgy, and/or the breast that clearly dominated

these pages. Conventional codes such as these are identity markers that shape not only how swingers clubs advertise for members, but also how they define their community (Kostelnick and Hassett 26). However, if Website creators have multiple goals, mixed designs, or unarticulated goals, audiences may see some dissonance in the Website creators' rhetorical choices. Having the dominant tropes on their Web pages likely does not mean that swingers approved of gender and sexist roles for women; it more likely means that they were in the beginning stages of identity making in a new environment. Trying to construct a professional image in a subject area filled with myriad stereotypical images almost guarantees a mixed message result. Yet, the concept of using young, sexy, beautiful people to act as avatars for audiences who not only want to try something different, but also imagine themselves through an attractive lens, may explain part of the mix-up. If swingers have to choose between sexist images versus creating images that indicate they are good people, they might do well to stay with the more-or-less sexist images. From their perspective, other groups can fight sexism, while swingers are fighting for their new identity.

In sum, the demand gaze accounts for only four of fourteen sexual images on any of the Calendar pages, mitigating the more suggestive and graphic natures of these photos with a less aggressive gaze and more distant view. The offer gaze again allows the viewers to just watch until they are "virtually" comfortable enough to act under their own control (243). Bolter and Grusin call altering one's perspective in three-dimensional space "achieving self-presence through a newly mobilized points of view [where] this freedom of movement is the defining quality of the virtual self" (243). Following this theoretical thread, Website creators can enlist this virtual movement theory by assuming

the audience will “sample” the multiple viewpoints the interface offers (346). The operator moves at her discretion, but Bolter and Grusin imagine a relational movement with the graphics, explaining that inhabiting another’s viewpoint creates a progress toward empathy, a result the Website creators may employ to lessen swingers’ stigma (346). This idea suggests that those biased newspaper headlines discussed in Chapter 1 may create not only an understanding of the “immoral” and “deviant” swinger, but also a view of the victimized and shunned Lifestyler. Thus, when a sympathetic audience visits the Website, they might turn that sympathy into approbation. In addition, the constant repetition of positive visual graphics on a site emotionally echoes far longer than the linguistic version given that a multi-sensory vision has more punch than the one dimensional print headlines (Lidwell et al. 184). When the sensory experience accesses emotions before the linear reading process, audiences primed by images may have an increased positive experience with the site. Swingers did not have this epistemic option before the Web, so more than just providing a presence and a voice, the three-dimensional quality of the Internet both affords swingers a chance for new audiences to empathize with their “plight” and to be tantalized by the topic (Bolter and Grusin 254).

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

Except for the logo/banner that repeated on almost every page, FAQs and Rules pages had few pictures because images unrelated to the argument for good behavior often prove a distraction for readers. Generally, these FAQs and Rules pages sustained a minimalist position focused on behavior with a notable, but irrelevant naked bather in a martini glass and a woman being kissed by two men. Two clubs successfully linked image to words regarding rules: a torture chamber provided a creative backdrop for the

rules and the “policewoman” was cleverly positioned next to another set of rules. The potential for combining images and words can succeed on pages that provide information and commands, but apparently many clubs did not choose to do so. The other two pictures provided interest value, but no witty link for the audience to enjoy. The expository nature of both the FAQs and Rules pages likely prodded audiences to attend to the important print information without significant distractions, a mark of a Website creator who knows when images are appropriate to the purpose and when they might interfere. In fact, Kostelnick and Hassett argue that minimalist displays, which purportedly increase objectivity, achieve more success than those multi-pictorial displays that aim for interest, accessibility, and credibility, but not necessarily clarity of information (207).

When Website creators structure information, they “impose a shared order on expository and pictorial text” necessary for readers to process the text (Kostelnick and Hassett 100). Two familiar patterns to readers include mapping a hierarchical order and clustering similar information, which likely increases swingers’ ethos as audiences move smoothly and competently through the material. Because these two patterns “comprise some of the basic visual idioms of Western rhetoricians,” they also emerged in the data set (101). In the hierarchical design, the FAQs and Rules pages were placed further “down” the navigation panel because rules are boring compared to the enticing information and pictures on the Homepages and Calendar pages. Even though audiences can choose to navigate in any direction, Website creators might have assumed that linearity dominates human nature and, thus, they ordered the navigation bar accordingly. Almost all the sites included the same ordering in terms of first listing the Homepage and then the Calendar, FAQs, and Rules. This positioning allowed readers to experience a

“wow” factor before settling down to read chunks of text that provide information about behavior and expectations. After the Homepage, fifteen of twenty-three sites (two had no Calendar page) placed the Calendar second, leaving FAQs and Rules to more distant third, fourth, or fifth spots, which revealed how Website creators arranged the data for the most effective rhetorical effect, banking on new audiences getting hooked on the site’s dessert before the dinner.

The familiarity of these structural cues them into near invisibility for the audience as do such stylistic cues as bolding, logos, or font. These fashionable additions support “credibility, emphasis, and tone,” and often deliver an expected, nonthreatening space (100). These design habits establish high expectations and equally solid interpretive schemes. While all twenty-five sites employed a distinctive logo on the first page, five of twenty-five did not repeat it from page to page. A close inspection of each page revealed some similar motifs, color, or navigation bars, but they did not have the professional coherence and aesthetics the other twenty of twenty-five clubs achieved. The five of twenty-five outliers—*The Crucible*, *L’Sota*, *Sweet Desires*, *Club Discretions*, and *Amore Club USA*—resulted in a jumble for readers to wade through. However, Kostelnick suggests that if the changes still do rhetorical work and do not misdirect, traumatize, or “unleash rhetorical chaos,” small changes or bumbles can be absorbed (104). In addition, the navigation buttons may prove stable enough to compensate for missing headers or logos, which may not be as important as the site itself. In other words, the fact of its being a swinger Website, something fairly new and surprising, may mitigate the less than professional face it presents. However, after the surprise wears off, the Website creators’ inattention to detail (see *Club Discretions* especially) may affect the sites’ credibility.

### *Gallery Pages*

As a place for showcasing parties, piquing interest, and proving a site has the “sexiest women in the Northwest,” one would think that more sites would have taken advantage of offering a Gallery. Only three clubs capitalized on this opportunity to advertise their very own sexy women and parties. *The Social Club* owners, Dale and Denise, introduced themselves in the Gallery while three other clubs showed their dungeon rooms, the hot tubs, and beds. Privacy is an important issue, but clubs do not take pictures of guests or post such photos unless they receive permission—it is part of the clubs’ standard promises; to this end, some of the clubs in the data group masked their members or cropped the pictures. Some Gallery pages resembled tours with static room displays, empty hot tubs, and dining venues, but the women in themed costumes dominated these few Gallery pages. *Amore Club USA* stood out because also it included pictures of male club members. Because so few owners used the Gallery feature, it must not be important to adding new members, yet, it does seem like seeing real people who are friendly and sincere might increase the comfort level for anyone interested in joining.

In summation, the attractive bias has a long history of success because of the inherent biological bias for the healthy, and therefore fertile, mate. Most sites took advantage of this universal inclination with a myriad of young, beautiful women. Despite the dissonance between the demographics of the members’ ages and the young women in the pictures, fantasy and aesthetics trumps logical reasoning and advertisers depend on this bias. Again, it may odd for such a free-thinking sexual group to stick with conventional, iconic sexual images, but the priority is to attract and soothe new members,

and the familiar is still quite erotic as the media has trained American audiences' to a certain set of desires through repetition.

### *Images Other Than Faces and Bodies*

Website creators also included several photographs of outside settings, parties, themed rooms, and the amenities that aided in constructing a certain community persona. The principle of picture superiority argues that pictures do surpass words for recall, but that principle is trumped when pictures are accompanied with words. Strong Website creators have done their rhetorical due diligence in maximizing the positive and good nature of swingers through specialized techniques (Lidwell et al. 184). Mixing images and text that reinforced one another—naughty images and linguistic word play for example, has the potential to bring “brand awareness” to the lifestyle. Although each Website in the data set was different, the sites largely were variations on a standard rather than anything bold and dramatic. Three sites stood out for their elementary or inexperienced design, but all of them included some similar helpful and enticing features. Establishing a swinger genre and/or purpose seemed to be in process in these Websites.

### *Homepages*

Only nine of twenty-five sites omitted sexual connection—via images anyway—on the Homepages although three of them might be stretched to fit the sexy category. The *Green Door*'s logo included a green bikini-clad cartoon woman, *Allure Couples* showed people drinking and talking at a party (fully dressed) and *The Toy Box* used images of three ordinarily dressed women in silhouette. Compared to the typical bikini/lingerie/costumed-clad women, the casual party pictures, cartoons, and silhouettes seemed somewhat lacking in the attention grabbing nature of the others. However,

perhaps these three sites chose a “less is more,” Alfred Hitchcock-style approach and could be considered to offer “promising” images. Nevertheless, the other six club Websites clearly omitted swinging references—again via images—with pictures such as *The Crucible*’s parking lot in front of a warehouse, *Amore Club USA*’s hearts and cupids, and *Red Rooster*’s giant red rooster. These small foibles were unlikely to scare away readers, but still, it was a missed opportunity to link swingers with positive design elements such as face-ism or the Biophilia Effect.

### *Calendar Pages*

Roughly one third of the sites in the data set (nine of twenty-five) did not use the upcoming party calendar as a place to give their logos and promises a visual form. Pictures of pool tables, patrons drinking, an empty ballroom, roses, Las Vegas activities, hearts, and *L’Sota*’s peace symbol were some of the choices that seemed to miss the marketing purpose of the Calendar page. Images of the inside amenities might be better placed in a separate category and leave this page to tantalize viewers with upcoming fantasies, if their purpose was to increase club membership. With images evoking strong memories, it seems that some Website creators may have missed an opportunity to lodge visual foreplay into readers’ minds. Good design choices affect not only short-term memory, but are there to be considered, pondered upon, and put into long-term memory as audiences make later connections to this data (Brooke 166).

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

These pages do not seem to lend themselves to images, and only three had even ordinary pictures: *Allure Couples*: a letter with SWAK on it, *Scarlet Ranch*: inside and outside shots of the campus, and *Amore Club USA*: an empty box. The imageless pages



certainly focus readers on the serious linguistic content regarding behavior and expectations, but the lack of images often means audiences may not bother to read lines and lines of text, thus, designers lose an opportunity to combine the two for a memorable experience.

### *Gallery Pages*

Almost half the sites, thirteen of twenty-five, did not have this category at all, ignoring, as previously stated, an opportunity to highlight actual members and parties. Only three had sexy images and the other ten showed still shots of empty clubs and various rooms. The paucity of real member pictures and the club at full party mode implied that Website creators believed fantasy, utopian, and ideal women were better suited for their main purpose, which may include increasing membership over challenging the status quo, or, more practically, protecting privacy.

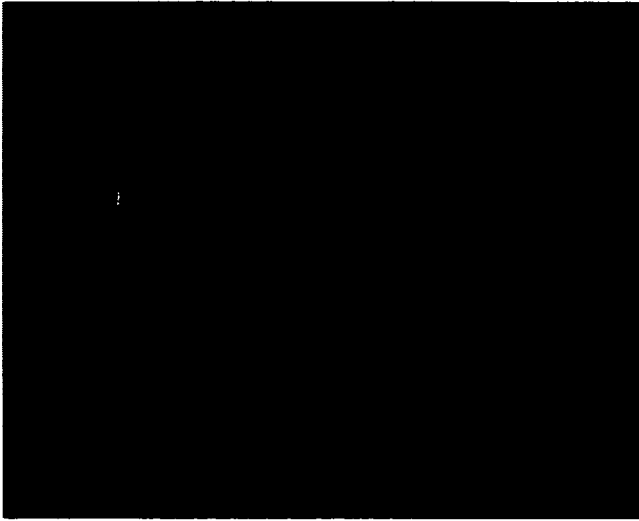
In general, designers will capitalize on the emotional appeal of beauty and harmony if possible because of the strength of this design strategy. These two elements help elevate feelings of pleasure, and so characterize swingers as beautiful and good. When creators fail in capitalizing on these persuasion opportunities, it is probably due to inexperience or other constraints, such as those privacy issues already mentioned, wasting an opportunity not only to attract members, but also to let them leave with pleasant thoughts. Redrawing an identity requires finding and using all opportunities to shed the “deviant” label and replace the monogamous narrative with another positive option.

### *Framing*

“Framing” is one way to explain the rhetorical power behind one image over another to influence and/or manipulate the audience to “see” things in a certain way. Framing works when the Website creator knows the audience and can choose an image, word, and/or context to manipulate people’s judgment and decision making (Lidwell et al. 108). Since the frame only contextualizes the main argument, it is often invisible as an argument to the audience. For example, former president Richard Nixon framed his decision to enter Viet Nam by pleading exhaustion from being up all night struggling with the dilemma of going to war. He knew his audience believed in the Puritan work ethic that valued hard work, and therefore linking difficult, hard decisions to making correct decisions. Whether a warrant exists between “struggles” and “correct decisions” was moot because Nixon knew his audience would accept it as true. He diverted attention to the struggle rather than the actual reasons for going to war. David Travis of *Smashing Magazine.com* calls Website creators—and speech writers—“persuasion architects” because they intentionally use subtle psychological and cognitive behaviors to make decisions in their client’s favor. When design was a “felt” thing, Travis argued, Website creators could not articulate why a technique worked. In the data set, when audiences might see swingers in a beautiful outdoor setting, Website creators would know—even if they could not articulate it—that readers may see ordinary good people like themselves. Once people are framed against something as intrinsically positive as nature, that sense of goodness rubs off on them. This persuasive technique may not even seem like a strategy, and this quality is what makes it so insidiously assuasive.

### *Homepages*

Positively framed messages encourage people to be proactive and take risks and vice versa (Lidwell et al. 108). The positive messages on the Homepages and Calendar pages have already been discussed regarding such elements as provocative and attractive images, a welcoming tone, the first-person point of view, beautiful page designs, and hyperbolic comparisons. These strategies may have encouraged readers to see swingers and the individual clubs as safe, fun places to enjoy their fantasies and make new friends. They also highlighted the risk taking involved in swinging, but emphasized the clubs as being safe environments. The number of club logos also worked in specifying how fantasies could come true at the clubs. The pictures prompt desire, and owners promise newcomers “you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.” Club owners walk a fine line keeping the audience intrigued, but not frightened away. In general, the Website creators appear to have succeeded in balancing the sites’ traits—ranging from the adequate *Club Discretions*—although exuberance may be persuasive for some audiences—to the excellent *Entre Nous* and *Colette New Orleans* and their slow, sexy, classy style (see fig. 14).



*Fig. 14. Colette New Orleans Homepage Example.*

### *Calendar Pages*

Many sites (twenty of twenty-five) capitalized on framing the clubs' personalities through their upcoming parties. The clever party-themed names and the images deliver one strong message: couples will have the night of their lives. By talking of only the fantasy and fun, the Website creators avoided raising any negatives ideas such as costs, sexually transmitted diseases, or any of the many "NOs!" Fourteen of the twenty-five sites continued the Homepages' sexy motifs with both words and images including *Club Discretions*' usual exuberant self, *L'Sota*'s typical form with its helpful Calendar, *The Crucible*'s Calendar reading class, *Amore Club USA*'s cuteness, and *Red Rooster* and *Carolina Friends*' self-portrayal as helpful owners. These varying positive framing techniques demonstrated a call to action, energizing couples to come to the party, or at least giving them facts in tantalizing language to help them make a decision. The other five Website creators showed less effort in drawing forth an audience: *Colette*, *TJ's*

*Lasting Impressions*, and *MAC* provided an empty calendar, a disappointment for audiences who may have wanted to attend but were less-than-encouraged to do so. *Sweet Desires* simply listed dates, a simple, boring, no-effort-expended expository page, and *Carousel Couples Club* showed an image of a plain, ugly bed. *Playful Encounters* did not even have a Calendar Page, just Homepages and FAQs, thereby missing this opportunity to frame a great experience on the key party page. This failure seemed an elementary rhetorical mistake for these five clubs.

Rather more successfully done, owners/swingers/Website creators characterized themselves as altruistic rather than business oriented. Their concern focused on members' enjoying themselves without worries, evidenced by a lack of advertising and money talk. Money only came up under facts about "donations" and "party fees." All twenty-five sites avoided treating the business of swinging as a business, but rather as a means for making new friends. Consequently, members framed the club as people-oriented, good places without necessarily intuiting that the non-commercial aspect of it helped with that construction. Even though swingers may have been selling a commodity, they avoided acting like money mattered. More practically, some clubs' insistence in calling the money "social club fees" and not speaking of money as dollars and cents may reflect a careful avoidance of connecting sex and money, a potential legal issue of prostitution.

Framing themselves as caring versus profit-motivated build their ethos and character as money taints most relationships, reducing friendship to commerce. This would be counterproductive for designers who work to build a community, or even a family of swingers.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

The expected conventions of the FAQs and Rules pages often left little room for creativity, and that held true for all twenty-five sites. The Website creators kept to the standard list of both rules and questions/answers, which framed a no-nonsense parental type of club owners. However, acting *in loco parentis* did construct the club as being responsible parents while the orderly, numbered set of rules assured audiences that bad behaviors would be monitored. Even though five sites had no official Rules Page, the Website creators inserted several rules onto the FAQs Page, giving members some guidelines to follow and upholding the frame of caring parents.

By framing themselves as friendly caretakers, and not accountants, on the Home and Calendar sections, swingers establish further support for the firm and tough-love tone the Rules and FAQs Pages take against rule breakers. Together the owners are seen as honest, moral, and friendly, but firm guardians. Audiences who buy into to this particular emphasis will eventually unseat more pernicious stereotyping, simply through the repetition of good character traits.

### *Storytelling*

This technique's persuasiveness stems from the inherent nature of human beings to tell stories. The parenting metaphor above naturally suggests a next step, which is seeing the members and the Club as a swinger family and not just a swinger community. Stories pass on knowledge and values, as oral storytellers did before print, while inviting the audience to engage, internalize, and/or respond to the events. Although the delivery methods have changed, with digital or multi-modal interactive opportunities to be a part of something, a successful story still needs the basic elements: setting, characters, plot,

mood, story progression (conflict), and the increasing invisibility of the medium (Lidwell et al. 230). Choosing to treat a swingers club as a close-knit family had the potential to invite newcomers and seasoned members to see themselves as more than merely swingers who may enter or leave the group at will. Characterizing members as a family allowed Website creators to capitalize on the loyalty, love, and support a family offers. These conventional beliefs secure a tighter allegiance and make it harder to leave the fold. The storytelling technique works more subtly than others such as color and sexy images, making it harder to actively resist its personal pull or see it as manipulation (230). The *Scientific American* article, “The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn” by Jeremy Hsu, examines this idea further, explaining that psychologists and neurologists are increasingly recognizing narrative’s power to influence beliefs, discovering how audiences analyze information and accept new ideas (1). Once the Website creators made the clubs’ stories multi-modal, as with the synthesis of print and images, the collective result increased the potential for influencing the audience’s acceptance of the family metaphor. In fact, as Lidwell et al. claim, “experiencing and recalling the events of the story in a personal way...is a phenomenon unique to storytelling,” and more persuasive (230). All the “storytelling” on these pages was done with both words and images that emphasized family relationships.

### *Homepages*

It might have been a reach to characterize the sexy images prevalent on the Homepages as the characters in a narrative, but site architects used these images tell a story that unfolds on the Website, yet is consummated at the party. Unlike many interactive sites with avatars, this fantasy party stood as a precursor for the real event.

The club provided the setting while the club members, hosts, DJ's, and staff—the characters—along with the Rules and FAQs pages helped to forestall possible complications to a successful night. As noted earlier, the nineteen sites that used sexy images on the Homepages established an “every story” common to swinger Websites. The attractive bias supported the imagination's foreplay, as did the Website creators who created sexual tension by using the time differential between viewing the Website and finally attending the party to prolong the desire. Because those six clubs did not show people, it was harder for audiences to flesh out the entire story; empty dance floors or dungeon rooms were perhaps provocative or interesting, but for a great story, people matter most. In addition, the linguistic component of the site, especially the first-person point of view, increased the storytelling influence because dialogue moved the story along and gave the “characters” dimension. Being addressed by the hosts as the narrators' voice cannot help but move the fantasy closer to reality.

Nakamura often warns of expecting too much from the Internet. More specifically, for swingers she says the Internet's opportunities are too often framed to make users mere tourists who “collect experiences of differences” on the uber-democratic Web. However, swingers' Websites are different since they allow the “tourists” to visit the actual place. They experience an identity-sharing experience with people who may well become friends; when fully realized, they are not just having a mediated experience from afar (Nakamura 89). One of the main caveats of the Internet is in its idealization of the world; Nakamura warns that fantasies can and do “sanitize and idealize” the story—every woman is young, sexy, and interested on the clubs' pages—yet, despite the Hollywood images, twenty-three of twenty-five club Websites in the data set welcomed all ages,



racism, and weights to the parties (89). That inclusivity added to the family metaphor, “Home is the place where they have to let you in.”

For whatever reasons, it seems unfortunate that two clubs, *Entre Nous* and *Scarlet Ranch* required a full body picture and a phone interview because their clubs were “not right for everyone”—a subtle comment on age. *Entre Nous*, for example, states on its Homepage that it “represents the youngest lifestyle party in America, as well as the largest percentage of single women at a lifestyle event in America.” The story these two clubs told on their Website pages revealed a not-so-opened-minded quality, at least for the over-35 crowd. Similar statements about looks and age have begun appearing on swinger Websites and in social networking as younger couples have begun to show interest in the Lifestyle—or perhaps are just bored with the club scene. Nevertheless, these limited views represent an unpleasant trend toward explicit ageism, a new challenge to conventional swinger behavior of open-mindedness. As other groups have discovered, a cohesive swinger identity may not be possible if this selectivity trend continues. After the initial solidarity of cultural sub-groups around their new voices, many communities have seen schisms and in-fighting such as between white lesbians and lesbians of color who have different needs or between gay men and drag queens over queens not being gay enough to be in gay clubs, which does not bode well for swingers’ characterization as inclusive.

### *Calendar Pages*

The party pictures on the Calendar pages added to the rising action of the plot, building excitement and desire for the story’s climax, which would be the viewer’s final decision to attend or not attend the party. While the provocative Calendar page photos

teased and urged couples toward the decision to go, the hosts' voices remained quieter on these pages, letting the images of the costumed women do all the rhetorical work; for example, a voyeuristic aspect emerged as the women were made centralized objects of the readers' gaze. The story's ending required the audience to segue from ideal to real as decision time came closer.

Irit Rogoff's discussion in "Shaping Visual Culture" explores how images come into being through "various, often contested, histories" such as the aesthetically perfect sexual partner the Calendar pages employ (389). One of the histories or frames readers may have brought to/or expected of the Calendar pages was the internal image of who is desired and what that person should look like. Even though swinger demographics include older couples, Website creators' consistent use of young, white, beautiful women reveals how strongly youth and health—as well as race—define desire in American culture.

### *FAQs and Rules Pages*

In the narrative, the FAQs and Rules pages function as the wise, but sexy, elders. Usually, information and behavior rules metaphorically "ground" fantasies in reality, bringing some practical sense to the sexual atmosphere. However, some of the questions were titillating and sexual enough to fan the fantasy flames even here: "Are pasties and G-Strings permitted as attire?" (*Carolina Friends*), "Do we have to remove our clothes and party with people?" (*Red Rooster*), and "Do you encourage public sex?" (*L'Sota*). The prohibition "Unfortunately, you may not get naked on the dance floor" seemed to send a mixed message since apparently it was fine to be naked somewhere else. A clear directive from the *Red Rooster* offers a permission one does not hear every day: "Women

may be naked anywhere in the *Rooster*.” The mood established by these pages, usually devoid of sexy images and filled with lists, generally did use a stern voice, but their playful and sexy diction added a bit of whimsy. However, the wise elders also provided an orderly overlay that gave boundaries to a wild and sexy setting that included alcohol, much as parents post rules for their children’s safety and protection. The Rules pages also would have been somewhat comforting because familiar artifacts in an unknown setting reduce stress. Website creators who know their craft appealed to both the pragmatic and emotional reader by assuring both with common sense and caring.

All of the pages encouraged audiences to join the “family” because that word has such resonance with people’s beliefs on friendship, love, and compassion. Creating this frame mitigates the worry about hedonistic sex as being too cold, too clinical, and too shallow. Friendship gives the Lifestyle verb “play” more significance as it erases bad connotations and replaces them with pleasurable ones, in both senses of the word, adding to a positive community ethos.

*Linguistic Invention (pathos, ethos, and logos)*

The rhetorical canon of Invention guides and explains not only how to choose the best rhetorical choices, but also how to select the best combinations that realizes the intended goal. Louise Rosenblatt’s work in transactional reading transfers easily to digital texts because the text is just ink and pixels until the readers make meaning by having a relationship with the screen, images, and words. Astute Website creators can be more effective if they realize they are not just addressing a binary audience of “efferent or

aesthetic readers,”<sup>2</sup> who focus only on ideas or an appealing experience, but readers on a continuum between the two (23-25). This transactional engagement includes the designer’s decisions, which influence and/or capitalize on the expectations that readers have when they come to the text.

Both ways persuade, but including a reciprocal relationship more likely guarantees that the swinger audiences would take action and attend the party as friends of the hosts. The rhetorical canon offers many *topoi* (topics) and strategies to choose from, but the familiar logical, ethical, and emotional appeals were used to analyze the Webpages in the data set, linking them to the family metaphor introduced under the visual storytelling technique above.

### *Homepages*

Each of the four pages told a different story. The Homepage, first by default, used ethical appeals when they started the family metaphor with an introduction to the setting of the club, the characters—usually the owners—and it used the first-person point of view in 24 of 25 club sites. The owners’ role as the party hosts made them the putative authority figures because the party is their house, so it is their party, their guests, and their responsibility. *Carolina Friends’* introduction typified how “parental” owners introduced and defused complications that might have interfered with having a good time: “If privacy is important to you, you want to enjoy an inexpensive night out with an incredible group of couples and enjoy great music, hot dancing and opportunity to make

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<sup>2</sup>Rosenblatt defines efferent reading as “the reader’s attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (23). She defines aesthetic reading as “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (25).

lifestyle connections, you'll enjoy our 100% no pressure events.” The story was already told, so the members needed to follow the template. Even though families are the center of much conflict, the idealization of the word “family” has a strong conventional connotation; they could hardly use “family values” in this sexual context, but the use of “like-minded” on so many Homepages reveals how the group/community/family was important to swingers who might feel like outsiders. Additionally, Website creators could reasonably expect the notion of “family” to persuade on a pragmatic level because families provide comfort, protection, and love—all of those implied with the caring attitude and promise of a fun-filled fantasy. The setting itself created that parental role, as new couples not only needed mentoring in this new situation but also needed encouragement. The club Website creators extolled the whole play experience, so their support and experience provided heightened emotional appeals because they came from the swinger family:

At our upscale private location, we provide a contemporary lounge atmosphere for sexually open Couples and Single Females to meet. Join our HOT and SEXY couples for socializing, dancing, friendship and intimate fun nights of sensual adventure. You will feel comfortable and welcomed at *Allure Couples*.

### ***Calendar Pages***

The Homepages analysis identified many ethical appeals as clubs established their reputations for longevity, caring, uniqueness, upscale quality, and safety. The Calendar pages, however, appealed more to emotions as well as operating as the narrative hook and

rising action to the Homepages' introductory information. The pathetic, or emotional, appeals were divided into five main categories, and for those clubs that had multiple appeals, the most prevalent were selected and are shown with an asterisk (\*) below. Only four clubs omitted this opportunity to persuade audiences to visit the club: *Playful Encounters*, *Midatlantic Couples*, *TJ's Lasting Impressions*, and *Sweet Desires*.

1. Appeal to relieve anxiety (e.g., "No Pressure"): *Allure Couples*
2. Appeal to exclusivity (e.g., "you must be on the list to attend our parties"): *The Toy Box*
3. Appeal to bestow Honor/Prizes (e.g., "We Honor Those Who Serve"): *Green Door*, *New Horizons*
4. Appeal to enjoying club amenities (e.g., dungeon rooms, pool tables): *Entre Nous\**, *Carolina Friends*, *L'Sota*, *Red Rooster*, *Club Cave*
5. Appeal to a personal invitation (e.g., "Get Wet, Get Wild, Get Naked"): *Colette*, *Scarlet Ranch*, *The Crucible*, *Carousel Couples Club*, *The Social Club\**, *Club Princeton*, *Tabu*, *ClubMeet4More*, *Club Discretions*, *Leisure Time*, *TJ's Lasting Impressions*, *Amore Club USA*

Relieving anxiety with "No Pressure Meet & Greet" has been a standard on the FAQs, Rules, and Homepages, and it also showed up twice on Calendar pages. New couples often shared a common urban myth that Lifestyle clubs required them to start swinging immediately on entry. Despite the clubs' valiant effort to erase this misconception, evidenced by the continual need to reassure people this was not the case on Homepages, through FAQs, and in new couple orientations, the continued repetition of "No Pressure" on all pages indicated this was a high anxiety point.

*The Toy Box* made an odd appeal, which stated, “You must get on the attendance list for each party.” The tone implied a good list and a bad list with the owners as gatekeepers over weight, beauty, age, or sexual appeal—any of which are common insecurities no matter the age or gender (Gould 258). *The Toy Box Website* creators might have thought that exclusivity would work as a persuasive tactic, but it was counterproductive if the club’s goal was having an accepting atmosphere and a well-attended party. Clubs typically appear to go out of their way to prove they are not a Ken and Barbie club because they understand women’s reluctance to wear sexy outfits or lingerie—collateral damage from Hollywood, TV, and the Website’s ideal images—and “...not deserving of the word erotic” (Gould 258). While Lingerie Night is a popular and common party theme, I personally know women who find the thought of attending both exciting and anxiety filled. The Calendar Page women are beautiful and voluptuous—yet female members often feel inadequate (by Hollywood standards) to be in competition with these images. The clubs that consistently seek to make women feel comfortable and sexy will assuage some worries. One might suppose that doing so can be accomplished in one party, where all the women are considered sexy by both sexes and where they are all surrounded, hugged, and admired by both sexes for some of those inadequate feelings to disappear. *The Toy Box’s* appearance standards may garner them a younger clientele, but until this clientele becomes the dominant demographic, those clubs without an appearance standard will get women to trust their own sexuality. *The Toy Box’s* appeal to exclusivity indeed might have undermined any approach toward the typical audience of 30-55 year olds.

As previously discussed, money was a non-issue on these Websites, but its very absence gave it some rhetorical power. Without an emphasis on profit and sales, clubs that offered discounts as respect for soldiers or door prizes as rewards seemed more sincerely offered, increasing the clubs' ethos as altruists rather than business people. Of course, clubs must be wary also of any talk that could link money to sex. A constant refrain on the Rules page was "NO Prostitution" because swing club opponents look for reasons to shut down a club on this basis. As *Club Discretions* put it, "No sex and money; this is a social club; it is NOT a brothel. Your entrance fee gets you into a social club; that is it!" While money often taints activities and people, having an apparently non-profit club reduced many complications that accompany the profit motive. Without "the love of money" driving these clubs, swingers can be characterized as a sincere, law-abiding community.

Five clubs discussed the kinds of rooms, square feet, pool tables, music, deejays, pools, or stripper poles they had, which seemed like another poor linguistic appeal given why members go to swing clubs. A stripper pole probably would interest many, give the promise of naked women, and some of this information may help attendees plan or fantasize about the night to come, but it seemed a rather indirect way to highlight the sexual component of club life highlighted by the other twenty clubs.

This last category dominated because the Website creators understood that sex and play were the focus of the party. By correctly matching members' wishes with invitations that beckoned to sexual fantasies, clubs could tap the imagination with suggestive invitations such as "Get Wet. Get Wild. Get Naked!" (*Scarlet Ranch*), "Ladies start your engines... Tonight we are having a Stripper Pole Contest" (*Club Princeton*),



and “Temptation will surround you...Come prepared to meet your destiny and shed light on the innocent *and not so innocent.*” (*TJ’s Lasting Impressions*). By knowing their audiences, these clubs capitalized on providing people with fodder for their imagination, which always is a sound rhetorical strategy.

### *FAQs Pages*

For this part of the analysis, the FAQs and Rules were separated into two categories even though they both functioned as additional complications to the family story. The FAQs pages largely gave audiences guidance on what they could be doing at the party, while the Rules pages explained what was forbidden.

The FAQs pages as a conventional genre fulfilled an audience need, and twenty-four of twenty-five sites used encouraging language to make the party the readers’ own. *Club Discretions* explained, “You may bring your own CD if there is something you want to hear” and *Club Princeton* advised, “If you want to join in the activities, great, but our members are at the club to have FUN. Enjoy the Club at your own terms.” Owners through the Website creators responded caringly to the questions and shared their expertise as seasoned swingers mentoring newcomers. Website creators used logic and common sense with “No, of course you don’t have to participate”; they also used an ethical stance, “Racial intolerance is never allowed at *ClubMeet4More* and we will promptly ban those who display this type of behavior”; and they demonstrated emotional awareness of their guests worries evidenced by *Amore Club USA*’s list of different levels of participation, from watching or exhibitionism all the way up to full/swap swingers. The FAQs pages were more detailed than the Homepages, but the appeals and the tone were similar—reassuring, kind, informative, caring, and passionate about the Lifestyle. In

fact, the passion expressed on the all pages of all the sites was a consistent pattern that encouraged others to share in the fun the club members were having. The willingness to share in something so special and fun creates a quasi-aphrodisiac itself, a pleasurable feeling for new members who will remember that.

*The Toy Box* was the one anomaly, providing two sarcastic answers that were not in keeping with the exciting sexuality present on the Homepages and Calendar pages. For example: “Question: What kind of people attend? Answer: Humans! This question should not be asked. We treat everyone as an equal and judge no one.” The owner/writers’ attitude was harsh and unforgiving, undermining his or her own comments on judgment. The answer to Question 11 was even harsher, “What do the people look like?” Answer: This is the rudest question to ask. If you are into looks only then this club is not for you as we look at everyone as equal.” While the questions may have been shallow, the tone of the answers was not in keeping with the spirit of the questions. The writer’s anger and intolerance for stupidity did not augur well for a positive, happy club environment since people often misspeak and these responses seem to view the questioners as ignorant at best and stupid at worst. Even though these were only two of *The Toy Box*’s eighteen questions, the other sixteen had some edge to them, too. Trying to influence the persuasiveness of the design required that images depict good times to parallel upbeat answers, so some other goal trumped the Website creators using this conventional practice.

### ***Rules Pages***

The repetition of “no” easily exceeded one hundred—mostly written in all caps; this number does not count such synonyms as “forbidden,” “against the rules,” “do not,”

“you must not,” and “won’t be tolerated,” to name only a few. Clearly this emphasis on the rules suggested how easily complications to the swinger story of having a good time could occur. Drinking, inappropriate touching, drugs, violence, prostitution, smoking, and attire choices were ways the clubs tried to legislate responsibility and respect. People, especially drinking people, combined with sex and rock and roll could be a volatile mix, so a preemptive strike implied rational, problem-solving, and competent club owners. Linguistically, this page was familiar in tone, layout, and meaning; rules were made for members’ protection. None of the clubs were offensive or rude, just strict. Almost all the clubs promised to rescind memberships, ban returns, refuse any refunds, and have security remove offending parties. Only two clubs mentioned security by name, but when a club promised that its “staff” would escort miscreants off the property, it was evident that they had hired security personnel. Several clubs tried to soften the rigid, commanding tone with “please” and direct address such as, “please be advised,” “you agree that you are not offended by nudity,” “you must wear proper attire,” and “Please dress with class and style,” any of which did not assume members would break rules, but simply reminded them to act like responsible adults. The second strategy, milder and less authoritarian, personified the club as a third person, which gave it a friendly, metonymic appeal. Four clubs had no Rules pages, but in three cases some rules showed up on the FAQs pages. Rules mean caring, so these pages add to a parental persona that comforts.

*Playful Encounters* in California had the most compact site with only five navigations buttons. No page except the FAQs was over half of a page, and they listed only ten questions on the FAQs page—none of which had to do with the standard rules except NO MEANS NO! They were the least “visible” of all the sites because their pages

were so short. It seemed as if they only catered to the seasoned swinger; it was a most unusual site in this data set. The majority of Website creators capitalized on guilt and fear while the rest appealed to the golden rule and empathy for others. Even though words and images were a powerful recall combination, few sites fielded images to emphasize the written rules, which seemed to be a lost opportunity for emphasizing swingers' commitment to their members' safety.

Aristotle's artistic appeals are familiar strategies, persuading audiences to see value systems that match their own. This identification, as Burke argues, is the basis of our commonality, our friendships, and our desire to be a part of something bigger. By choosing the proper emotional appeal such as fun, pleasure, or camaraderie, the designer can persuade audiences that the Lifestyle community is a positive, caring place and here to stay.

### *Summary*

The emotional comfort and peace brought about by balance, beauty, and symmetry are so prevalent on the Webpage data set that these universal elements can be reliably counted on to do their intended rhetorical work—capture the reader's emotional attention. The repetition of beautiful bodies frames swingers as good people, and the combination of images with words doubles the recall power. Most of the emphasis on the body occurred on the Homepages and Calendar pages, which tend to be the first navigational buttons used, so audiences encounter the hook of beautiful and sexy appeals before the logical, written ones on the FAQs and Rules pages. In addition to framing swingers as good and giving audiences the expected beautiful bodies, creating a family capitalized on another powerful rhetorical strategy: belonging. This feature was

particularly effective from a swinger point of view. The spotty history of swingers finding one another made belonging to a group of like-minded individuals a priority goal for the Website creators. The family metaphor emphasized a welcoming home and gave some structure to new members who would feel that belonging to a family conferred some legitimacy to the Lifestyle. This legitimacy in turn helps develop a positive swinger identity that remains with the audience even as they leave the site.

### **Making Better Design Decisions: Accessibility and Linguistic Delivery**

According to Slack and Wise, “technologies make assumptions about who will be using them and how they will be used” (149). Unfortunately, most Website creators in the data set forgot the handicapped and learning/reading impaired in their designs and assumed the ideal user of technology would be seeing, hearing, able-bodied, and affluent enough to buy a computer. Technologically, the Websites were accessible to many with special needs, and there are different delivery methods available to the blind and deaf, but the lack of images other than the able-bodied on swinger sites essentially made these people invisible (149). Making better design decisions would mean including images and words that included everyone, which would contribute to the democratic values of the Web. Regarding their advertised clubs proper, the entire swinger discourse appears to have addressed only “whole” members, thoroughly erasing all other categories of people who are able-bodied enough to have sex such as the wheelchair bound, the otherwise physically impaired, the homeless, the poor, or the undocumented. Clubs that used hotels as their party venue would already have American Disabilities Act compliance, so clubs could not argue that they could not afford to make the venue accessible, but private home party-site could use this argument legally if not ethically. Hard-site clubs never

mentioned having modified options, nor did the *Green Door* in Las Vegas offer handicapped access or accommodations. Specialized communities outside of swingers address certain fetishes, such as amputees, but in general, swing clubs seem to have assumed an ideal user with physically normal features. Acknowledging other audiences could add to their positive ethos and maybe even generate new members.

### **Data Analysis of Rhetorical Refusals**

The design elements found in these Websites provided most of the data for conclusions about swingers' strategies in constructing an identity and the community identity itself. The data also were examined for potential examples of rhetorical refusals. Using the refusal framework not only enabled adding defiance to their other traits, but it also expanded the working definition of the rhetorical refusal itself by adding one new type of visual refusal and two new linguistic examples to Schilb's previously named categories. This new category and these new examples are provided below with discussion following the three criteria for rhetorical refusals. The issue of defiance is discussed in a per Webpage manner, as with previous analytical categories.

#### **A New Visual Refusal Category**

##### *Challenging Society's Standards of Monogamy and Loyalty*

Since refusals reveal hidden power structures, they support the swinger community in a quest for sexual autonomy. The hegemonic language of monogamy defines normal and deviant, so making those decisions transparent can start discussions why sexual policing is needed. The first potential new rhetorical refusal is revealed in this question: Do swinger Websites challenge society's standard views of monogamy and loyalty? This query suggests a new category of visual refusals because Schilb only

studied print and oral language. Three criteria must be met: 1) the act must challenge audience expectations. Simply stated, since most audiences do not understand how committed couples would want to have public sex, girl-on-girl sex, orgies, or sex with strangers, swingers' public presence challenges the definitions of standard sexual behavior and desires; 2) the act deliberately breaks with rhetorical protocol. Stigmatized groups generally have a tacit contract with society to stay hidden or silent for the price of being left alone; yet, swing clubs have broken that tacit contract by having a visible presence on the Web; and 3) the act evokes a higher principle that trumps rhetorical decorum. In this case, the higher principle evoked by the swing clubs as represented by their Websites is that no group should be afraid of pursuing happiness because others do not like its definition of happiness. Their refusal reiterates that accepting difference trumps exclusion and name-calling. Hence, the swing club Websites can be said to challenge society's standard views of monogamy and loyalty, and, even though an implicit challenge might be harder to prove than an explicit one, making invisible power structures visible puts swingers on the "fair" side of the debate.

### *Swinger Websites*

Websites function as a public presence for the swinger group and constitute an overarching rhetorical refusal rejecting the majority power of monogamy and the attendant silence of "spoiled identities," and as such their sites qualify as provocative refusals. By refusing to stay appropriately stigmatized, contrite, and hidden, the Websites celebrate a different lifestyle that could also be categorized as "normal" if allowed to thrive. Of course, this revelation may shock many who believe a swinger lifestyle indicates immorality and sleaziness, but that is how this strategy works: bringing

transparency to the norming power of social conventions. For example, *The Crucible* offers a considerable menu of choices on their Calendar Page: Kinky Nights, Afternoon Delights, S&M Saturdays, and Threesome Party rooms. These descriptors might make monogamous couples blanch, but these choices define normal sexual appetites more broadly, challenging a “deviancy” moniker through the evident popularity of these events. In fact, all swing clubs have these same themed parties, so *The Crucible’s* sexy menu is not an anomaly. The Websites very presence argues that something so popular, and legal, should be a lifestyle choice for anyone who wants it.

On an individual level, many swingers hide their lifestyle from their friends, neighbors, co-workers, and children, but this action may not indicate belief that one’s behavior is shameful, but a logical reaction to risk and stigma. In discussing other marginalized groups, Warner argues that the “closet was built around them, willy-nilly, by dominant assumptions about what goes without saying...” (Warner *The Trouble with Normal* 180). These “tacit rules of what can be acknowledged or said in public” forced swingers onto the Internet where they clearly were not ashamed of their clubs or of supporting non-traditional sexualities (182). This is evidenced by *ClubMeet4More’s* passion for their offerings such as “July’s Freak Fest [where you can] Explore your wildest fantasies and fetishes.” Web communities took away some of society’s power for shaming, allowing the community to create a legitimate identity in a public place while still remaining anonymous and safe from those who would embarrass them. *ClubMeet4More* constructs their social value through considerate language and caring for their clients: “our goal is to provide a safe, friendly, and sociable for all who attend” and open-minded inclusiveness: “We cater to a wide variety of groups,



[and]...we always welcome other races who enjoy our company and style.” Previously rumors and big media usually only reported the salacious surface characteristics of swingers, leaving them, until now, without any viable recourse for proving themselves.

The beautiful visual and linguistic strategies previously discussed inevitably drew the curious who witness swingers as fun-loving and independent friends as well as potential play partners for other swingers. A group that provides safety, fun, and who welcomes alternative desires believes in a relatively inclusive, open-minded world, and that value system trumps one that frowns on sexual freedom and limits alternative desires and voice to cultural sub-groups. By discussing “forbidden desires” the refusal illuminates how prevalent these desires are and how easily they can be fulfilled without the emotional penalty incurred by the clandestine affairs and secret betrayals that often befall monogamous relationships.

The Websites also challenge society’s view of monogamy and loyalty because swingers have redefined these two terms to match a growing desire for alternative sexual narratives and sexual autonomy. A public declaration of their presence implies they will not be cowed into staying out of the public eye. As swinger sites challenged the definitions of sexual mores, they also challenged definitions of public and private where private usually connoted immoral or perverse pleasures to be hidden. By meshing the two concepts, swingers do valuable, if implicit, work in unmasking who makes sexual policing decisions and the reasons why. In addition, understanding the governing frames that surround the creating of “normal” sexuality, groups such as swingers advocate for a more autonomous and inclusive world as well as more voice in bringing that type of society to fruition.

## **A New Linguistic Example for the Category “Refusing to Adhere to Social Conventions”**

### *Violating Lingering “Miscegenation” or Racist Views or Fetishizing Race?*

The following questions suggest another potential new rhetorical refusal: Did or do swing clubs deliberately violate lingering “miscegenation” or racist views by promoting interracial sex parties? Or, in fact, are they just fetishizing race as a sexual aphrodisiac, where race is erased, not valued, and stereotypes are not broken, but reasserted? Unlike the first example of new refusals above, these questions suggest the difficulty in finding rhetorical refusals because interpretations often diverge. Bringing race and sex together opens a frank discussion about this rather taboo subject, yet challenging racism may not have been the swing club’s intent, and from anecdotal evidence from my observer-participant status, this is true. Nonetheless, the topic deserves scrutiny despite a lack of an “ideal” motive. Again, the first criterion challenges audience expectations. The Website data set provides evidence of clubs overtly promoting cross-racial relationships and friendliness among the races—as evidenced by Black/White parties, for example. One interpretation suggests the parties simply fetishize race, but it is possible to read the parties as swinger’s simply enjoying the sex and company of people they might not ordinarily see. How can we know the motivation for sexual attractions? The friendly and caring atmosphere these clubs demonstrate again and again could be seen as a critique of racism rather than contributing to racial-sexual stereotyping. Secondly, does the act deliberately break with rhetorical protocol? Although racism has not disappeared in mainstream society, the transgressive power behind promoting bi-racial parties may be taken as a challenge to the status quo. Putting together a community of multi-ethnic

people seems to encourage friendliness and tolerance even if sexual curiosity about other races might be an underlying motive. The swinger crowd tends to return time and again to parties, so by the second Black/White party, many of the swingers will have begun to know their play partners as friends not races. Finally, what higher principle could trump rhetorical decorum? The higher principle here suggests that people should be able to freely choose their own willing adult partners rather than take only those whom society deems acceptable. The forbidden is also compelling, so it seems impossible to simply separate fetishism and attraction. Hence, for swing clubs, as evidenced by their Websites, sexual autonomy would trump social-sexual policing of consensual desires even if those desires have roots in sexual-racial stereotypes.

Perhaps talking excitedly and provocatively about mixed race sex and desire may underscore a defiant refusal to keep quiet not only about racial tensions and a tragic unjust history, but also a refusal to keep the topic of sex and desire *because* of racial difference quiet. The Biracial Party became a rhetorical refusal whenever the first eponymously named party was held, and it probably was particularly shocking to the sixteen states that had just ended anti-miscegenation laws, if not attitudes. More importantly, celebrating bi-racial, bi-curious, bi-sexual, or bi-bi orgy parties meant advocating for choice in one's sexual desire, sexual partner(s), and even sexual position(s)—an intoxicating number of choices, but a more inclusive sexual narrative for consenting adults in a multicultural, global world, and one superior to the unequal power dynamic of the old ways. Unfortunately, another valid interpretation is less sanguine about race relations. If the attraction and desire rest solely on skin color, than perhaps this

party does not indicate progressive open-mindedness, but identity erasure instead, in the guise of open sexuality.

The opportunity for bi-racial encounters in swing clubs would be a good case for studying the changing circumstances of a rhetorical refusal, which is important to Schilb, who devotes a chapter to examining how different times and audiences affect that initial refusal. He recognizes that a refusal affects more than the moment of its invention, so discovering its “impact over time” would give data about the effectiveness of this strategy (114). Although swing clubs were around in 2001, no Website or other data emerged in this study to suggest they encouraged bi-racial couples then in contrast to the twenty-five Websites in the 2012 data set.

If some validity exists for seeing a rhetorical refusal in these bi-racial themes parties, then these three clubs stand out: *Amore Club USA* in Daytona Beach has an “Interracial Black and White Fun” Party while *TJ’s Lasting Impressions* in Pennsylvania hosts an “Ebony and Ivory Gala” and a “Lady in Red Biracial Party” as perhaps challenging a taboo and taking a stand for ignoring endemic racism that frowns on mixing races. Other clubs, although not as bold, did ask for respect from and for everyone, an example of resisting the taboo against name calling of anyone who is different. *Tabu* and *ClubMeet4More*, in particular, highlighted their ethnic diversity with the latter warning they will ban anyone who displays racial intolerance. With racial tension still with us today, the deliberate use of that tension to spur a sexual party may emphasize the intersection of sex and race at worst and be rhetorically ironic at best. This anti-segregation stance could also meet the criteria for taking a rhetorical high road,

essentially shaming, for example, schools that still have separate proms and sorority houses.

When race becomes the sole object of erotic gaze, people are reduced to simple and powerless agents. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that the clubs' emphasis on "racial" party themes is for fun, but, of course, that explanation does not negate that this emphasis could harm rather than support racial equality. Because of this inadvertent race stereotyping, perhaps these parties should not be categorized as direct challenges to the status quo, but a "lite" version instead. In any case, the rhetorical refusal opens discussions on race and sex, making transparent taboos that contribute to stereotypical thinking.

Tracing this rhetorical refusals' last twelve years could comprise another dissertation, but deliberately named bi-racial parties could contribute to swingers' general character of embracing difference even beyond the sexual.

### **A Second Linguistic Example for the Category "Refusing to Adhere to Social Conventions"**

#### *The Transgressive Nature of Banning Unaccompanied Males*

Another example of a potential new rhetorical refusal comes from a response to this question: Is banning or discouraging single, unaccompanied males from most swinger parties a transgressive act? If yes, then it demonstrates, not a new visual refusal, but another example of refusing to adhere to social conventions. Schilb consistently uses the refusal to open up discussions of invisible power structures, such as the implicit danger women face from men. The first criterion is satisfied because adult males, and their wallets, are generally welcomed at all venues, so limiting or banning them

completely from any mixed gender social activities constitutes an anomalous event, especially regarding sex. Clubs have ladies nights because the ladies attract the men to the event, so to keep single men away from ladies at swing clubs seems counterintuitive. Because it is so shocking, it invites discussion—the purpose of the strategy. Secondly, the act deliberately breaks with rhetorical protocol because social mores would criticize banning or profiling any group, yet swing clubs have done just this. To restrict single males based on their potential threat to couples and women constitutes an interesting new situation, and thus, it invites scrutiny. Finally, the higher principle that trumps rhetorical decorum in this case prioritizes the safety of women and couples over individual freedoms for single males. That doing so might lead to profit loss suggests that banning single males for safety's sake is more important to the club than money, suggests a moral high ground. Statistically speaking, men are dangerous to women, so taking pre-emptive steps to protect them is an ethically better choice than not doing so for the sake of keeping the single male population satisfied.

### *Refusing Single Males Entry into Swinger Clubs*

On the FAQs pages the outright ban on single males defied social convention. Refusing to allow men into a club constituted a rhetorical position on the worth of single men to a swing club's clientele and profit. In fact, one of *ClubMeet4More's* mottos claimed, "It's all about the ladies," which made the ban seem rather ironic on the surface. However, it was easy to imagine how a cadre of young men could disrupt the couples' atmosphere in all the clubs. *TJ's Lasting Impressions* treated the question about men caustically: "ONLY Attractive Couples and Single Women will be admitted. Single Men

are never admitted, nor are they ever invited.” *ClubMeet4More* echoed this assertive tone when asked whether single men were welcomed:

***No NEVER, we have a ZERO tolerance policy, and this is strictly enforced.*** If you are male and enter the "couples only" play areas, you are required to be in the company of a female partner, if she departs the party area and you remain, you both will be asked to leave the club (No Refunds). Any female who arrives to our party as a couple, then departs the premises without her male partner will be **BANNED** from attending all *ClubMeet4More* parties.

**Unaccompanied males are NEVER ALLOWED** to remain at our events and must depart with his female partner. Any male who remains after their female partner has departed for the evening shall be escorted off the club premises and banned from attending any future parties, your name will also be shared with other club owners.

The sexual hierarchy within all the swing clubs in this study attaches a higher value to couples and single females than to single men, which challenges normal social conventions. Usually men do not reside at the bottom of any social pecking order that includes males and females, so to do so highlighted a rhetorical break, a deliberate decision, and a sense of taking the higher moral ground regarding attending to women’s needs. Certainly the male of the swing couple may object to single males on a jealousy basis, so it is hard to make a strong interpretation without more data, yet, swing club

owners have an interest in keeping women happy as previously noted in *Club Meet4More*'s "It's all about the Ladies!" catch phrase. That strong position suggested that this stance might be a rhetorical refusal with its inherent critique of androcentrism. This might be another "lite" critique because the decision was not intended as an overt challenge, but the evidence supports keeping women and couples happy at the expense of single males. Indeed, nine of twenty-five clubs in the data set banned single males altogether while six of twenty-five had strict limitations such as making the male remain with the couple that sponsored them at *Midatlantic Couples*. *Sweet Desires* allowed a maximum of ten single men per party while *Club Discretions* allowed single men as well, but set aside private places for "couples only." *The Crucible* welcomed them single men as members, but added the caveat, "you must find a date to attend *The Crucible* Lifestyle events." Even with bouncers to eject annoying members, the ban demonstrates that males can cause trouble.

The other ten clubs claimed to welcome single men, but the entrance price said otherwise. *New Horizons*' semi-annual pass price for single females was \$850 and for single males was twice that amount at \$1695. *Carousel Couples Club* in Manhattan stated that it charged single males \$130 per night, but single females only \$30. Denver's *Scarlet Ranch*'s prices were similar: \$100 for single men and \$10 for single women per night. Not one club Website explained why this prejudice existed, so a newcomer to the site might be quite surprised at such an egregious rejection of the typically privileged, American adult male. One reason may reflect an implicit homophobia, but by whom? Not women who might see that ban as ridiculous. As Doris scoffed in an interview with Gould: "guys aren't even allowed to be bi at all. They call it 'bearing' like if one guy



makes a mistake and accidentally touches another guy,...she snorted beer through her nose” (Gould 143). If women do not complain and if “it’s all about the ladies” as *ClubMeet4More* insisted, why would club owners place restrictions against bi-sexual contact between men or single men, making them taboo? This male bias seems a rather interesting rhetorical move, but one must wonder whether it trumps a lesser moral position. If the club’s intent for excluding single males was because of homophobia, then certainly that motive did not reveal a higher moral ground or principle. However, if single males are perceived as aggressive and thus a threat to couples’ peace, as evidenced by the question a potential member asked about *L’Sota*, “...I am not wanting the few single males that do attend to think of my female partner as a ‘piece of meat,’ is that what happens when single males are at a dance?” If men are so perceived, then a couples’ bias does exist and certainly qualifies as a deliberate rhetorical challenge to the status quo.

Women appear to be the queens of the clubs—powerful and desired—as evidenced by their free or lowered entrance fees, open invitations, the interest of other bi-curious women, and a non-existent history of threatening behavior. The single-male danger also might come from jealous spouses and/or the potential for testosterone-fueled violence. *Sweet Desires*’ allotment of ten single men at one party implied they calculated a ratio of men to women that cannot be exceeded for a successful and/or safe party; keeping women safe means limiting the rights of single males. A party with more women per square foot probably feels more benign to women than the reverse ratio. If this reasoning from safety was the exigency for the rules against single men, then a rhetorical refusal was warranted.

In addition, older women are not always comfortable initiating sex because of dated social conventions, so a room with many men may restrict them from acting outside of gender stereotypes. Again according to Gould, once women found “a safe context, they took charge, as if it were the most natural way to them to express themselves” (242). More importantly, if clubs professed to give women the sexual freedom they had been fantasizing about, club owners would not have wanted to make women uncomfortable by overloading parties with single males. Men have always represented a significant threat to women who live constantly with news of rapes, murders, kidnappings, assaults, and domestic violence. A blunt commentary came from comedian Louis C.K.’s latest HBO special where he joked, “The greatest threat to women is men. The greatest threat to men is heart disease” (“Oh My God,” April 17, 2013).

This “joke” is an un-funny testimonial to the high statistics regarding violence toward women. I have not heard any outrage from this banned crowd of men regarding swingers clubs, but perhaps if they knew how unwelcome they were per the Websites, they might complain about this social slight. Schilb does not make clear whether there must to be a complaining group before an act can be defined as a rhetorical refusal, but it would surely count if someone recognizes the defiant stance swingers took in banning single men. In fact, the swing clubs’ rules show intentionality as they attributed a morality factor to single men’s basic characteristics, namely the potential for violence toward women (Schilb 90). The act of banning single men for safety reasons won over the unkind stereotyping of them as potential threats, and supports Schilb’s third criterion. Moreover, these club biases could have been tainted by economic factors in that single men may have hurt their profits, but as the data have shown, these clubs did not profess

to operate for monetary gain, but as places for members to have fantasies fulfilled. It would be naïve to assume economics played no role, but there was little-to-no evidence that money was an important motive for prohibiting single men from club attendance.

In sum, the rhetorical refusal can cause people to review common or invisible social rules with new insight, and that, in turn, can prompt discussion about the forces that form these rules. Swingers may not have overtly taken on the issue of racism and male hierarchy, but their actions, Black/White parties and the single male ban, brought these issues into conversation.

As mentioned earlier, Schilb's research recognized that a rhetorical refusal must be studied beyond its initial utterance/presence to see how it fared as it circulated amongst various audiences, times, and contexts (115). However, it is possible that this is the first time that the single-male ban has been attributed to a rhetorical refusal, and swinger sites have not had a long history, so this problem would be a compelling research topic for scholars.

### **Quasi-Refusals That Did Not Meet Schilb's Criteria**

In searching for rhetorical refusals, some interesting quasi-refusals emerged that seem worthy of discussion. Among these are a lack of what many people would consider to be pornographic images, defined here as close ups of vaginas, penises, or intercourse, and the refusal to adhere to immoral and hedonistic stereotypes. The latter is particularly interesting as swingers themselves are considered immoral by many outside the Lifestyle.

#### *Refusal to Use Pornographic Images*

Few visual or linguistic acts on the Homepages met the threshold for a deliberate and shocking refusal-to-do-the-rhetorically-proper thing; moreover, as researcher I had to

imagine what the audience would have expected since there was no contact with the swingers themselves. The target audience studied was imagined only as interested newcomers, those most susceptible to rhetorical strategies that would both entice and calm as well as well as erotically entice (Gould 375). Returning members may never look at these pages more than once, content to view only the Calendar pages for the next party. On the other hand, newcomers could expect sexy images on these Websites (and maybe more), and they may have been surprised, perhaps pleasantly, at how circumspect the images really were. Graphic money shots change swinging from a friendly community who indulges in their passion, to a tainted group who makes a profit from their actions. In addition, pornography often makes people feel awkward and uncomfortable outside an appropriate venue. The soft-focus lighting, beautiful women, and erotic costumes describe the Lifestyle much differently than pornography does. In explaining this dissertation topic to the many who asked, I answered the same question over and over, "Are people having sex right when you walk in?" And, a common question from the *Green Doors*'s FAQs page asked, "Do I have to get naked or participate in playing?" These two examples of curious questions attest to a first-timer anxiety that toned down sexual images might relieve. Perhaps club owners were tired of being asked that about their club and so refused to meet an X-rated expectation, at least on these first pages. Nevertheless, the absence of quasi-pornography does not constitute a refusal to act unexpectedly. In fact, these Websites probably have not had enough time online to establish a solid swinger identity or genre, so recognizing an egregious act proved difficult. Of course, the images on the Calendar pages were more erotic and more plentiful, yet they still seemed within the bounds of normal expectations of a sex-focused

Website. Only three of twenty-five sites included a graphic sexual image on the Calendar pages, and one of those was a cartoon. *TJ's Lasting Impression* showed a "gang-bang," but as a static, perhaps staged picture, it was not especially revealing. *Leisure Time* showed the most provocative photo of a man giving a woman cunnilingus, a bit of quasi-porn, but not necessarily shocking to swinger viewers. No other image stood out.

#### *Refusal to Adhere to Immoral and Hedonistic Stereotypes*

Of course, ideas of safety, eroticism, and a no-pressure atmosphere would have been welcome, not shocking, and the intimate, friendly tone on all the Homepages would have been rhetorically correct in a civil society. However, if the sites were imagined as representing a response to the larger social questioning of an immoral swinger character, as evidenced by media headlines and moral turpitude clauses in employment contracts, then five sites reversed that expectation by highlighting making friends over making sexual fantasies come true. Additionally, if society conceived of swingers as part of the "criminally intimate," then swingers who extolled the pleasures of friendship also might suggest a refusal to act in type, since many think that swingers only concerned themselves with their own physical desires, of being unfaithful, or of having gay-curious/bi-curious encounters. Yet, by using such a heavily weighted strategy friendship, which is invested by society with qualities of longevity, trust, respect, and love, readers would feel discord since these qualities do not fit comfortably within the frame of swingers as "immoral deviants." Perhaps that dissonance provided swingers an opportunity to refuse stereotypes. Friendship was rather an unexpected topic for these pages, but the surprise of friendship's appearance in the five examples did not seem to meet the criteria for a shocking event.

The Rules pages had many odd rules as noted before, but they seemed to be in response to idiosyncratic state statutes rather than as challenges to social power structures. For example, one rule made it illegal to encourage BDSM in Pennsylvania (*TJ's Lasting Impressions*) and another to have nudity in Virginia (*Midatlantic Couples*) or Washington DC (*Crucible* and *Entre Nous*) in banquet rooms where ABC liquor is being sold. California requires all players to sign a thirteen-paragraph waiver promising, among other things, that they will not perform “any act of sex termed illegal by the State of California in any way while at *Allure Couples*.” But these and the majority of the other rules such as no photos, no camera phones, no law enforcement personnel, or no drunkenness typify common sense prohibitions, not egregious transgressive refusals.

### **Summary**

Finding fresh rhetoric refusals was not an easy task because Schilb thoroughly catalogued many types in *Rhetorical Refusals*. However, the Websites’ presence themselves seemed to constitute a new visual category, or rather the first visual strategy type examined as a rhetorical refusal since Schilb called for new scholarship in visual language. Additionally, the club Websites also fit with two previously named refusal types: refusing to be shamed and refusing to follow society’s conventions. The other two identified linguistic examples were not new categories either, rather two more types that Schilb has already delineated. The first one, refusing to accept miscegenation or racial intolerance, was less definitively a new refusal because of the historical situation. The miscegenation statues have been repealed for at least twelve years, at least with Alabama, so identifying a flagrant defiance of a past event seems a rather timid challenge, yet social intolerance for mixed race couples has not disappeared. Most clubs had comments like

this from *ClubMeet4More*, “If ethnic variety, and choice [sic] is what you’re looking for, our club is one of the most culturally diverse groups in the Chicago are” However, one might suppose that some clubs may say they welcome all races, but ascribe hypocritically to unwritten rules such as racial profile during the application process. If so, then this “refusal” would have additional contemporary support as another linguistic example of rejecting an immoral viewpoint, or a type of refusal that Schilb calls refusing to adhere to social conventions by “disrupting those schemas and forcing us to redraw them” (Schilb 6). Swinger Websites appear to have begun to redraw these schemas.

The second linguistic example of a rhetorical refusal is even more interesting. Single males do pose a general threat to women through violence and to older married men through jealousy. The clubs that do allow single men often have couples only areas, which prevents couples from being or feeling “stalked” by single males. No one should face rejection for a stereotype, but the swing clubs seem to be erring on the side of caution by banning single men. Is the refusal making a significant social point? Maybe not to the hyperbolic extent that they should be eradicated, but certainly if men had a reputation for civility rather than danger, they might have been more welcomed as singles by the clubs. This male-bias also constituted a club refusal to adhere to social conventions for the greater good of the members’ safety. This ban is meant to make any audience sit up and take notice as club owners “proposed another frame through which to comprehend the rhetorical scene” (Schilb 6).

### **Conclusion**

This study approached the swinger community with a theory that their Websites would celebrate their Lifestyle, criticize the status quo, and take a stand against their old

stigma. That hypothesis was based on the general pattern that marginalized groups have demonstrated when they have had the opportunity to break out of a culturally imposed silence. That trajectory almost always involves a growing sense of identity as the community grows and reaches out to others. Their increasing strength manifests itself in slogans such as “Gay Pride” that reflected defiance of mainstream mores and a move toward the inside rather than outside of society. Moving into the mainstream seems impossible for swingers at present because of the risk to employment. However, even if the risk goes away, their public presence likely would not diminish their role as sexual rebels or counterpublics as many people might reject this lifestyle for themselves, but still imbue the swinger life with a sexually enticing cachet.

Additionally, it was suspected the clubs might struggle with their new Web identity because they were new at both articulating an identity and doing so on the Web platform with its myriad strategies. What was not found was explicit anger, which was interesting because in *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines anger as being kept from one’s goal, and certainly swingers have been kept/are kept on the relative sidelines of a culture that polices alternative sexual lives and lifestyles rather rigorously. However, while overt anger was not visible, some of the linguistic text implied anger and frustration with vanilla America through swingers’ “talking back” to some of the prejudices against them. There were less visual challenges to standards, given the myriad of conventional images. Most of the challenges were linguistic, which have been explained within the rhetorical refusals perspective. The twenty-five Websites in the data set typically suggested a fun, caring, hedonistic swinger community identity where people played by standard cultural rules except in the bedroom—or bondage room, group room, voyeur room, and so on.



However, the Websites in the data set portrayed more simplicity than expected as the sheer complexity of identity politics has exploded the definition of identity into adjectives such as unstable, ecological, meaningless, strategic, and performative. Even though swinger sites are still in their infancy, Spivak's definition of a strategic identity allows swingers to be construct themselves as a caring, helpful, positive community that can continually respond to members' questions and concerns through Website updates, email, and social media interactivity.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and an assessment of how the research questions guiding this research project have been addressed and answered. It also reviews the limitations of the study, implications for the research, and considers future research possibilities regarding the rhetorical strategies of the swinger community identity in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary of the Study

This dissertation considers one way that visual and textual development of identity in a somewhat hostile environment, and, more specifically, it looked at rhetorical refusals presented visually. The study examined twenty-five geographically diverse swinger Websites from across the United States, narrowing the data field to four common pages: Home, Calendar, FAQs, Rules; at times, there was also a Photo Gallery for review. Those one hundred pages were collected in July 2012 via screenshots. From them, an iterative sampling was used to first identify if the Website creators used design elements from Lidwell et al.'s 125 *Universal Principles of Design*. The first iteration of the study piloted the analytical method with twenty-five designs, which yielded far too much redundant and sometimes irrelevant information. After another iterative inspection, twelve were chosen that represented the most salient Website features sufficient for managing the data and answering the research questions. A table was developed for recording the analysis as it unfolded. Lidwell et al. had categorized those 125 designs under five purpose categories (i.e., influencing design's perception, learning from design, enhancing design's usability, increasing the design's appeal, and making better design decisions), so the Table included those five categories under which the twelve final visual elements were distributed to the category they best matched. The five classical rhetorical canons used to analyze the linguistic features also were matched one to each of Lidwell et al.'s categories. Using the canons underscored how the classical canon still retains basic

rhetorical function through each new technology even though they often need to be re-contextualized to capitalize on the newest knowledge. The chart enabled an analysis of the rhetorical force that has always been embedded in visual language. Using these methods, this dissertation asked four questions regarding how Internet technology provides identity possibilities for self-representation of marginalized sub-groups through Webpages.

The first question considered which rhetorical tropes, tensions, and appeals swingers employ in their Website design to position themselves as an interesting and opposing force to normative ideals. This question recognizes that when marginalized groups publically represent, they have constraints on how they critique social standards. Thus, identifying their rhetorical choices provides a look at those limitations and how successful the Website creators are in choosing to keep or break specific linguistic or imagistic conventions. If they go too far in establishing their difference, using too many pornographic images for example, in the case of swingers, they risk tainting an interestingly sexy allure and/or scaring off potential new members, but if they are too commonplace, they also risk the same result.

The second research question posited the function of a particular approach, John Schilb's rhetorical refusal, and asked whether the Website creators took advantage of its rhetorical power. The refusal, a subtle, but subversive practice, is a niche strategy that encourages out-groups to resist being shamed and silent and reveals how hegemonic language wields power. The latter two behaviors are social expectations for "deviant" groups according to both Goffman's *Stigma* and Warner's *The Trouble with Normal*. However, swingers' public Web presence assumes a right to exist and be heard and

brings their “deviancy” into question. In addition, deliberately ignoring (and critiquing) social mores also positions swingers as critics and moral superiors to society’s exclusive behavior. Identifying swingers’ use of refusals characterizes them as defiant, albeit quietly so, and positions them as worthwhile members of society.

The third question addressed whether the specific images and designs of their Websites revise a previously marginalized identity, and, if so, how. Because the Website can be read and analyzed as an identity text, the designers’ choices represent an important comment on their characteristics and ethos. As a membership club, swingers’ main goal generally consists of gaining new members and not specifically or vociferously fighting their stigma. Yet, analyzing the design elements points out how it is possible to do both. The right to self-expression and sexual autonomy gives new sexual narratives value.

The last question considered the problems of texts presented in a new technological modality. Groups, whether subversive or mainstream, often use standard visual and linguistic conventions because of designers’ and audiences’ familiarity with these common forms—and because new forms may not have been invented or stabilized yet. The Websites’ new visual interface compels designers to hold on to some old conventions for meaning stability. Finding a balance between the “grip of convention” and creative freedom is the difference between a successful, coherent site versus one that is not. The sites show evidence of mixed elements typical of new genres, but they will gain experience to use Websites even more effectively as they continue their identity work.

## Findings

The findings regarding the tensions and tropes that designers used illustrate swingers' rather conservative nature. The Websites exclusively used such standard tropes of sexuality and desire as images of sexy young women grouped with other women wearing garters, black lingerie, nurses' outfits, and bikinis. The designers generally stayed within the "soft porn" range, rarely displaying wildly decadent or weirdly fetishized images; they did not use vulgar, salacious language, nor portrayals of the sex act. Certainly these idealized beauties make the Website appealing, but using young women alone produces an ironic tension as "young" does not represent the general swinger demographic. Nevertheless, media audiences are used to such unrealistic characters; every TV scientist is young, beautiful/handsome, a martial-arts expert, and a fluent linguist, and expert in all sciences as well as engineering, so few readers will question the use of the idealized sexy woman as swingers to attract new members. Even though their rhetorical choices are tamer than a club bent on proselytizing for their cause, they still manage to self-represent in opposition to society's portrayal of their deviancy while remaining sexy and enticing.

The findings also support Website creators' applying the rhetorical refusal in both visual and linguistic ways. The most significant is the Website's presence itself, which self-proclaims swingers' identity and social belonging by refusing to stay private—a private identity being society's putative place for the shameful. Schilb's three criteria are met easily with the Web: a Website's presence defies rhetorical propriety since deviants "should" stay silent, it is deliberately constructed to have a counter voice to monogamy and sexual policing, and it assumes a higher moral position than normative exclusivity.

Two other possible linguistic refusals arose out of the Website analysis and anecdotal data: First, interracial themed parties celebrate diversity in general even though they could seem to pander to racial-sexual stereotypes. Both interpretations have merit, but anecdotal data refutes any intended sexual fetishism. The purpose of the refusal is to bring power structures into view, so the controversy about endorsing diversity or supporting stereotypes may not be solved here, but the conversation has started. Second, limiting or disallowing single men's entry into swing clubs can be defined as a refusal on swingers' part to give men the unlimited freedom they are used to at the expense of keeping women, and all members, comfortable and safe in the clubs. This ban may not mean much to men, but the club's stance makes it clear that women's concerns are listened to. The owners, generally a traditional couple, make this decision based on the demands of its members, so it seems as if women and couples have considerable say in determining who is welcome and who is not. Certainly other interpretations exist: older men may be jealous, the owners do not want any trouble with police, or single men may not want to come (not my experience). However, by bringing the danger of men to women into the open and doing something about it, the ban does seem to function as a refusal.

The analysis of the twenty-five Websites through one hundred total Web pages found that the beautiful images, sexy talk, first person points of view, and a caring tone erased much of the "deviant" label that swingers have been given for their differing definitions of monogamy, fidelity, and loyalty. The rhetorical use of specific designs such as the Golden Ratio, attractive bias, framing, or classical conditioning presented swingers in a psychologically appealing light, making it difficult to sustain a belief in their

purported immorality and offer visual strategies that work to revise pejorative identities to other groups.

Finally, the last group of findings indicates that conventional images and texts dominate these sites even as they offer a new sexual narrative for audiences. Schoolgirl uniforms, master-slave parties, Cougar nights, and short-skirt-bare-bottom parties describe the themes typical of all the clubs. These names suggest fun, play, and fantasy, but nothing too bizarre such as sadism or auto-erotic asphyxiation. By keeping to standard fantasy themes, the Website remains grounded in familiar sexual tropes that excite the imagination rather than scare or repel. The young, sexy women in these sites probably do not pose a problem for audiences because they represent the ubiquitous and default standard for sexy, and they are so familiar that it is unlikely audiences will rebel against, or even notice, the irony manifest in a marginalized group marginalizing women. Even though inexperience with design may result in less than ideal Websites, these rhetorical choices offer a model for other marginalized groups, especially unique ones like swingers, to use in their quest to self-represent.

In apparent response to old stereotypes, rhetorical choices available in visual and linguistic languages enable the swinger community to produce a certain self-identity on their club Websites. Because swingers have dealt with and continue to deal with prejudice and bias against their lifestyle, choosing to publically represent on the Web made it possible to study their presence. Additionally, their use of Internet technology to represent themselves is significant for research in that such a study could inform identity studies and sexual autonomy in society. According to Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), many stigmatized communities believe in "the general

transformative power of 'coming out' as a typical trajectory to gain more public notice and power (31). The familiar Gay Pride parades and Black Power movements of the last decades, for example, compelled society to recognize that sexual and racial differences were not synonymous with deviancy and paved the way for potentially recognizing these groups as valuable members of society. Swingers also take pride in their Lifestyle choices as evidenced by the hard work in their Website construction, their apparent joy in sharing their Lifestyle, and the growing numbers of swingers; yet, unlike mainstream communities, swingers' fear of moral turpitude clauses and social stigma keeps them hesitant to celebrate their parties with anyone outside the community. However, the Internet affords swingers a way to be both public and hidden; on the Web, they challenge conventional definitions of adultery, loyalty, and monogamy in declaring their presence by bringing these words into public conversation.

The linguistic information from the one-hundred Webpages revealed few surprises in terms of shockingly risqué text or overt protest against swinger' social stigmatization. The lack of protest songs, banners, slogans, or armbands suggested that swingers assiduously refused the limelight, never demanding that society pay them attention and give them more rights. In fact, in the one-hundred Webpages under review, the topics of stigma or moral turpitude do not arise, except tangentially in privacy clauses and in the rules proscribing cameras in the clubs. But in terms of challenging a "social policy of shame," the active presence and proliferation of swing clubs and growing number of adherents of the Lifestyle testify that swingers are making headway for sexual autonomy by staking out a social space, advertising themselves there, and generally ignoring society's negative stereotypes of them. Societies have always tacitly accepted



underground groups as long as they stay underground. However, swingers have not abided in their “coming out” by those unspoken rules. Yet, as the Websites increase their membership, swinger cruises, hotel “take-overs,” and Hedonism resorts now advertise openly and often, establishing their own brand of legitimacy through sold-out events. A lack of overt protest does not mean swingers abdicate their right to choose their own sexual narrative; their very existence on the Websites attests to that. But, refusing to “beg” society for validity, swingers presume they have the right to exist, and their actions suggest a belief that difference should not automatically invite an immoral label. This mantle of confidence has the power to persuade through presence; by essentially going viral, they create a recognizable name for themselves, marketing themselves on their own terms. One might be surprised to learn, however, that those terms are somewhat tempered and tame as swingers seem to want to tempt but not scare away potential new members who generally may be nervous. It is important to allow all members of society access to happiness and autonomy, and swingers have taken a step toward validating their Lifestyle to the public. Although they may not want to become too “normal” as that might diminish their allure, they still demand the right to name their own community persona and be treated as valuable citizens.

The design element analysis revealed a strong predilection for aesthetics and young women, not unusual ploys for advertisers, but maybe a bit unexpected for swingers who profess to enjoy a rebellious social position regarding desire. However, the irony of the marginalized marginalizing others should not be unduly shocking. In addition, advertising hedonistic and fantasy-filled nights invites certain expectations that swingers must realistically fulfill; hence, it seems natural that they present a Website filled with

common tropes of seductive and tempting sexy images of beautiful young women. Audiences understand that sex comprises a staple for advertisers everywhere, so Web designers refusing to use this convention of advertising the swing club as a place of and for young women would show little common sense given that swing clubs' stated goal is to increase membership. However, the continued sexualization of the female form as a standard trope in art and design means there is little chance of emancipating her as "insistent signifier that embodies social values, cultural prejudices, and artistic ideals" Gita Rajan argues in "Pliant and Compliant: Postcolonial Indian Art and Postcolonial Cinema" (48). She bases her argument on Walter Benjamin's--the German critic and historian mentioned earlier--theory that it is the duty of present society to recuperate and rescue the oppressed—even if women may not think they need rescuing. Of course this theory means that "each one of us is entrusted with the responsibility of demanding accountability in the creation of visual culture such that images that demean femininity, disembody female subjectivity, objectify female pleasure and delegitimize desire be judged inappropriate, as incorrect or unappealing visual images and as unavailable for appropriation" (48). Clearly, swingers have continued to exploit and objectify women on their Websites and perhaps have even fetishized race, but their contribution to Benjamin's ethical pleas rest on bringing themselves into the public eye and offering interested people an alternative to the standard social-sexual narrative. Swingers may not be rescuing women from centuries of sexual oppression, but they generally try to rescue those stigmatized through sexual differences.

In addition to the visual and linguistic strategies that swingers have made to construct a new identity through their representation on swinger club Websites, Schilb's

concept of rhetorical refusals, a specialized persuasive strategy, was applied to the Website club pages to identify whether swingers used this defiant tactic to define their community as bold and aggressive against their stigmatizers. Images and linguistic text met the three criteria for recognizing a refusal: deliberate, outrageous, and morally superior acts constituted a cogent method for illuminating hidden power structures and cultural standards through swingers' refusal to abide by those social conventions that marginalized them. In addition to defining themselves, the data also located new forms of rhetorical refusals in visual language, something Schilb has called for in new research. The analysis of images potentially added two new examples of rhetorical refusals to the linguistic categories he had already identified and organized.

The linguistic and verbal rhetorical analyses laid down a foundation for understanding how American swingers may or may not be advocating for a sweeping change in the social-sexual power structure of monogamy. Through the rhetorical refusal lens—deliberate, provocative, and dismissive of the status quo—it seems clear that swingers' advocacy for themselves and others as defiant role models is a subtle, understated side goal to the very obvious interest they have in growing their Lifestyle membership. The Webpages that provided the data for this study, even though they are the first public look at swingers, opt for a less transgressive role than becoming leaders of a huge, sexual sea change. Some of that evidence emerges from their use of traditional sexual images, staid rules, and a friendly, welcoming tone more akin to summer camp counselors than party animals. The refusals come in little snippets and glimpses, such as refusing to abide by old miscegenation rules regarding racial mixing, refusing to privilege single males over women or couples, and refusing to defend themselves or engage in

debate on their right to engage in alternative desires. In addition, their Websites reveal a refusal to use a bounty of pornographic images to entice and tempt, perhaps keen to avoid traditional tropes of immorality that might be cast upon them. Some images were, in fact, quite explicit, meeting the expectations of certain audiences, but in general the images remained within a softer class of pornography. Although the Websites did not overtly debate social-sexual codes, the swingers' continued Internet presence chips away at old definitions of morality, monogamy, and adultery through the omnipresence of the Web life, and surreptitiously, as Burke says, "reframe[es] the language of the culture" (*Grammar of Motives* 449).

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

It became clear after the findings were collated that swingers were not overtly challenging the status quo through their club Websites as much as seemed possible given Butler's idea of the "insurrectionary moment." Unlike mainstream groups who organized against social standards, swingers generally developed their club Websites to attract and expose new members to their lifestyle. As such, anger and protests against social stigma, workplace worries, or social commentary were simply nonexistent. However, under a macroscopic lens, the swingers' very existence on the Web can be interpreted as a rhetorical refusal to stay out of the public domain. With this primary lens of defiance, all of their actions as shown on the Websites informed an implied protest against the social policing of sexual lives and a chance to "found a future with a break from the past" (Butler *Excitable Speech* 159).

The data gathered from the visual and linguistic analysis described a social group who are "normal," measured against every social standard except their alternative sexual

desires and Lifestyle. In developing their Website ethos and attaining a goal of adding new members, their racial and sexual open-mindedness, their concern for others, their enjoyment of their lifestyle, and their welcoming and often humorous Home Pages created a very positive group identity in direct opposition to pejorative newspaper accounts previously seen in headlines across America.

### **Research Questions**

In this section I will review the findings for each research questions: detailing the problems and successes of each.

1. What rhetorical tropes, conventions, tensions, and appeals do swingers employ in their Website design to position themselves as an interesting and opposing force to normative sexual ideals? How, if in any way at all, do they balance this goal with one of having allure and being exclusive?

“Sex is always interesting,” says Gould, so allowing the public a peek at the swinger Lifestyle through their Websites is a strong hook for anyone interested in fantasies or alternative sex. Even those who might not join a club still can be titillated by the seductive images and provocative party descriptions. Swingers appear to have capitalized on the design elements of the attractive bias and body-ism factor to compel audiences to linger on the site and begin linking beautiful images to swingers as good people. Both design elements appeal to the biological imperative in humans, which suggest that attractive means healthy, and thus these unconscious thoughts influence audiences to view swingers positively. Similarly, the framing technique—*influencing decision-making and judgment by manipulating the way information is presented*—works when the Website creators know the audience well. As such, designers choose the best

image, word, and/or context to positively affect the readers' perception and decision making because confidently framed messages intensify an appeal to the audience's risk-taking tolerance (Lidwell et al. 108). By generating a feeling of good-will, designers influence potential new members to take that first step, which is to attend a swinger party. In addition, since the frame only contextualizes the main argument, it often is invisible as an argument to the audience, so once Website creators frame the community as helpful, loyal, and good-hearted, readers may believe they have come to that conclusion on their own. Fighting against common swinger stereotypes does not require a frontal assault, but a more subtle campaign aimed at slowly replacing an "immoral" characterization with an appealing, friendly, sexually adventuresome one. Storytelling, coupled with the first person point of view, is a linguistic appeal used to augment the visual design. This mix engages the audience in the personal details of the club owners, a common rhetorical trope that lets readers see swinger and the owners as ordinary and trustworthy friends. Of course, part of the story includes somewhat wicked new vocabulary (e.g., Bi-Bi Orgies and Kinky Fetish Nights), but within a strong story line about good people, these tensions acquire a contextual normalcy as well as a frisson of excitement. The framing and storytelling together exert a powerful influence on audiences to see swingers as decent people while the sexual content, framed through beauty and youth, adds a universal, hard-to-resist appeal for those already interested in fulfilling their sexual fantasies in these ways.

Prior to this study, it has seemed possible that swingers would emphasize their exclusivity more boldly than they did, lauding their sexual autonomy as superior in every way to the conventional, divorced-filled, adultery-strewn American marriages. Being

independent, journeying on the “road less taken,” being “a rebel without a cause,” and resisting “the Man” have all played well for American audiences who relish the independent spirit. However, those identities are idealized versions of the American character, highlighted on global media screens. In reality, too much independence can interfere with groups attaining a common goal. Swingers may attract other members because they are different and iconoclastic, and swingers appear to take pride in their adventuresome, rebellious sexual lifestyle; however, swinger Websites are developed to grow their club base, so going slowly is a requirement especially when attracting newcomers to the Lifestyle. These Websites appear to create their allure through bold mottos, logos, and sexy promises of fantasies fulfilled, yet they balance that with common sense rules, friendly staff, and beautiful amenities that can calm nervous, new members. In addition, a well-balanced, legible, and usable Website design can convince audiences of their importance to the site. Swingers present themselves first as nice people before they reveal themselves as alluringly exotic, and audiences may see that these are not mutually exclusive traits. Audiences generally respond well to a combination of images and texts, especially beautiful pictures and well-written, first person point of view text, with more vivid recall than either one alone; to that end, all of the Websites use this mixture with the apparent intention of encouraging viewers to stay on the site and to remember it fondly later.

2. Do swingers use rhetorical refusals as subversive practices on their Websites?

If so, how do they demonstrate or execute this function?

The study reveals evidence that swingers do employ rhetorical refusals in three specific situations. The first and most significant includes swingers’ very presence on the

American technological landscape—the Internet—as discussed above. The other two refusals result from this overarching refusal, which also characterizes them as consciously defiant activists for sexual autonomy.

The second potential refusal, involves swingers refusing to abide by overtly negative racist thinking. That statement may seem odd in an era of increasing mixed race relationship and considerable work in multicultural tolerance, but the U.S. cannot claim that racism is dead when previous statutes against miscegenation were still on the books as recently as 2001(Alabama). And given that on the April 4, 2007 edition of MSMBC'S *Imus in the Morning*, the host referred to the Rutgers University women's basketball team (eight African-Americans and two white girls) as "nappy-headed hos," certainly some endemic racism still exists. Therefore, when swingers deliberately set up Black and White sexually themed parties, they knew that this was still a tension-filled issue even as they deliberately highlighted racial difference as sexually erotic. The parties offer wicked transgression, and these parties would not be a named "event"—*TJ's Lasting Impressions* "Lady in Red Interracial Party!"—unless it were somehow special. Whatever the motive, setting up a mixed race sexual "orgy" certainly might offend some Americans, and that deliberate defiance seems typical of swingers who defy other anti-normative forms of desire. Of course, a Black and White party would have had a stronger transgressive force before 2001; however, there is little evidence either way that swing clubs promoted these types prior to 2001. Nevertheless, these parties appear to describe a rhetorical refusal because they challenge such conventional messages as (1) races stick with their own kind, (2) race itself cannot be discussed as a powerful sexual aphrodisiac, and (3) mixed-race sex hints at an ugly history that may make people uneasy. When swing clubs not only



accept but, from anecdotal evidence, encourage racial mixing for fun and pleasure, their open mindedness could constitute a higher moral ground than the historical basis for miscegenation.

The third potential rhetorical refusal, the ban on unaccompanied, single males, opens up conversation on the invisible conventions within society's governing frames. The white male's sense of entitlement to go and do anything he wants is so pervasive as to be invisible; this refusal to allow single males into swing clubs except under very strict rules and limits has not sounded an alarm against androcentric thinking—yet. However, the data demonstrates that white, single males are perceived to present a danger to the club's activities. The club owners have articulated through this ban what generally has been known for millennia: men pose a distinct sexual threat to women. Swingers may have made a conscious effort to subvert the men's freedom by excluding them, but this prohibition against them is remarkable for saying what is usually never socially voiced in a mixed group of adults. This ban may never get any particular notice since these clubs represent a small percentage of the American fun and games scene, and even the men might understand how too many extra men unbalance the club's sexual dynamic. Nevertheless, the club's prohibition against single males makes a strong statement that should be heard by a society that seems continually surprised that men can hurt women.

3. In what ways, if any at all, do visual/design elements evident in swingers'

Websites (as shared cultural codes) rhetorically revise a previously pejorative identity?

When the data revealed that swingers were not intentionally taking on the public in a rebellious way, it became necessary to consider the primary goal of the Websites,

which was not to change swingers' identity per se, but to introduce the public to their club and continually add new members to spice up parties. Research suggests that most swingers attend club parties for variety and fantasy, so the natural primary goal of swinger clubs is to increase their membership to populate the fantasies.

Nevertheless, the linguistic and design choices created a new identity that did not quite meet the threshold for an overtly defiant community. In fact, outside of their different sexual practices, they are rather ordinary. The sites boasted attractive women, clarity and legibility, friendly banter, a welcoming tone, safety conscious rules, and genuine delight in the Lifestyle, but no rabble-rousing drama. In fact, inquisitive readers with pre-conceived notions from the media, discourse, and water-cooler jokes about swingers' immorality or deviancy may have been surprised to see a generally ordinary group of people who simply see desire differently than mainstream Americans. Those audiences who might visit without any bias may not have known that swingers were even resisting those negative social stereotypes because the Websites generally ignored the social stigma conversation. *The Crucible* offered one of the few pejorative remarks against mainstream clubs, "Here you can dance anyway you choose with your partner or partners. Do what you want on the dance floor with no one telling you "you can't dance that way at this club." However, this statement did not rise to any fever pitch of indignation. In fact, according to Bucholtz and Hall, if identity is "simply the act of equating or likening oneself to others," then the swing club Websites reflect a group of fun people who seem enjoy their quirky lifestyle and want others to join them in unleashing their fantasies (495).

Swingers' Web presence constitutes a repetitive act that makes meaning not through preaching, but slowly and surely through the epistemological dynamism of the interface where the audience hears and sees the public voices of swingers that challenge their heretofore immoral and deviant social identity. Technology's image production, both literally and figuratively, aid that challenge as the Web erases the distinct categories between public and private, and where Websites allow swingers, and other alternative communities, to occupy that space between. Ann Travers, in "Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics in Cyberspace," suggests that like feminists, swingers who construct and participate in modeling an alternative cyberpublic in middle of the mainstream public" take advantage of this unique quality of the Internet to model social change (231). Change comes through action, and the swinger Websites represent a consistent social arc of inclusiveness and morality, just differently defined via a virtual world.

4. Do swingers use conventional sexual imagery in any way, and if they do, what might these tropes say about the way desire is characterized in the U.S.?

The Web offers identity democracy only in the ideal as fluid identities such as those of swingers are still subject to "cultural hegemonies, rules of conduct, and regulating social norms" (Nakamura 4). In addition, the "vexed position" of women's bodies still makes the use of women as sexual objects unpalatable for most women conscious of the objectifying gaze. Seeing marginalized communities marginalize others in their own attempt to challenge social mores seems surprising; however, as explained earlier, that seeming "betrayal" usually can be explicated by examining the groups' goals. Swing club Websites exist to increase memberships to yield party variety, while feminists or LGBT communities focus on larger issues of social equality. This dissertation has not

studied the positions and stances of swingers on feminism or other alternative sexual relationships, but from the data on their rules pages, clearly swingers are open-minded as they vociferously welcome members with the Green Door's motto: "Let your inhibitions run wild!"

Even though swingers may objectify women, that action does not negate their ethos or vision: being an alternative to monogamy and challengers to the monogamous status quo still can be viewed as an ethical, if not perfectly executed, goal. Clearly, swingers do not have the same agenda as other marginalized groups, so using conventional sexual stereotypes that fuel American fantasies is not really a difficult dilemma for them, and the data illustrate how convincingly they use young, beautiful women to seduce members. It is important to remember that we can never perfectly know an author's intentionality, but swinger Websites should be given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to reifying old stereotypes; sometimes they just are not noticed.

### **Limitations of the Study**

For the initial research project, the major limitation was not having access to swingers for interviews or focus groups. The IRB expressed that any personal link between the researcher and swingers created too great a risk that readers might discover their identities through a search of social media or the researcher's name. Given the secrecy surrounding swing clubs and the potential risk of a swinger's name being made public, the IRB required a different data gathering plan. However, even with an anonymous surveymoney.com questionnaire, only two people responded. The dissertation study needed a third option, which was a close rhetorical analysis of swinger Websites.

This qualitative study was based on a linguistic and visual rhetorical analysis of one-hundred screen shots of swingers Websites from a randomized geographical selection. Because social texts are considered rhetorically purposeful, the Website creators' choices say something meaningful about their ethos, identity, and value systems. As such, close reading strategies applied to any text consistently affords the opportunity to parse the designers' choices and make probable, yet sound, interpretations from them. In addition, rhetorical analysis allows researchers to draw conclusions when subjects are difficult to access for interviews, surveys, or focus groups as swingers were. In particular, this Website analysis allows for understanding the online persona, motivations, context, and purpose of those represented by the Website.

Qualitative textual analysis has some limitations including researcher bias, one's own knowledge of the topic, and the restrictions for understanding the motivations or goals of a group as a non-participant researcher. Given such limitations, this analysis targets only linguistic (text-based) and visual qualities in swinger Websites to describe how this marginalized group is developing an online relationship with its audience. Because swingers and other sexual sub-groups face potential discrimination among those who do not belong to the group, technology and its anonymity has changed the previous public-private power dynamic that forced groups with a geographically limited membership and presence to remain underground.

### **Implications of the Study**

The evidence from this study suggests that constructing a Website as a reflection of an outlier group's identity is more complex than I expected, especially without direct swinger contact. The meaning of the linguistic section has to parallel the meaning of the

visual to avoid mixed messages that often accompanied visual design inexperience. Two of the Websites' confusing designs comes to mind: Club Discretions and Amore Club USA. Knowing when and where to use or break conventions requires experience that many underground groups may not have because 1) they may not have realized the rhetorical meaning of some of the design elements and 2) there is a lack of genre rules for swinger Websites. However, the Internet provides enough creative space that marginalized groups should take heart from those who have gone before. The present study makes one noteworthy contribution; having a Website presence is a significant first step for marginalized groups who want a public voice.

I was not surprised to find examples of Schilb's rhetorical refusals in visual language because rhetoric arises in any communication mode; however, I had expected to find more examples than the just the existence of swinger Websites as a refusal. I expect my lack of expertise in visual language played a role in that result. If I did this dissertation again, I would bolster my art background because while rhetorical strategies—whether print, visual, oral, or sound—may be learned easily, why or how some designs “resonate” relies on understanding the “subconscious instincts, perceptions, and influences” of human motivation, require some experience (Elam 11). The findings of two further linguistic models to add to Schilb's list suggests that print language is a more comfortable medium for me.

As university departments re-design their curriculums in the face of multi-modal texts requiring broader cross-disciplinary backgrounds, future researchers will be better prepared for close reading these kind of texts. Nevertheless, applying the rhetorical refusal strategy to visuals has implications for other outlier groups who need ways to

challenge the status quo, celebrate their group, construct a new identity, offer a sense of belonging, validate the group's importance, welcome similar others, expose marginalizing tactics, or simply come out of a social closet. Finding refusals in other modes increases the strategies available to accomplish these tasks.

This research provides additional evidence that Schilb's original work on linguistic rhetorical refusals exists in more than one mode, and predicts it will soon be theorized even beyond this work in the verbal to the other three senses. Next, I imagine someone will study, or is studying, rhetorical refusals in the language of sound; in fact, Deborah Tannen has already published work on how Native Americans use silence. I cannot envision defiance in the language of taste or smell yet, but someone will.

In addition, the refusal as a critique of the status quo dovetails nicely with Benjamin's idea of rescue operations; sub-groups who can safely self-represent can take on this task themselves. Occupying this kind of offensive position, rather than a defensive one, can only boost emerging communities' sense of independence and self-worth as they defy society's view of them. Other communities have also taken advantage of the Internet to represent, employing Schilb's refusal to stay underground and undercutting society's marginalizing power.

### **Future Research**

Several areas presented themselves as interesting research possibilities for rhetoric scholars who want to follow up on this study. First, as a new genre, swinger Websites are still establishing their rhetorical conventions. NASCA offers tips on building a Website, but the analysis of these twenty-five sites suggests that more work is needed in understanding such areas as navigation button placement, decisions about using

empty rooms rather than more party images, decisions regarding signal to noise ratios, improving color contrast to aid legibility, and standardizing pages for all sites. Second, the rarity of sexy men in any of the Website images presented an interesting lack given the rise of overt female desire as demonstrated through the popular Chippendale stripper shows and the novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This conspicuous absence seems at odds with the “It’s all about the ladies” motto that *ClubMeet4More* specifically and the clubs generally, and it suggests a need for rhetorical consideration of the use of female versus male images in swing club and other sexually “defiant” populations’ Web presence. Another area for future study includes understanding the rhetorical implication of the implicit ban on male-to-male contact in swing club publics. Anecdotal and interview evidence suggests that women would want to see men with men (Gould’s interview with Doris 147). This silenced facet of women’s desire reflects an odd dissonance in a club where open-minded people dress, party, and play in a myriad of fantasies. Do men in swing clubs who have contact with other men consider themselves gay? Women generally do not see themselves that way; bi-curious is the terminology for women who want to be with a woman for a fantasy night. It would seem that women could have some input into this decision since women are the more important group in swing clubs (“This club was designed for women and couples in mind” per *Club Princeton*). Scholars should consider the following questions: Are women’s voices being heard? Who is making this decision? Discovering the reasons behind the male-on-male stigma would be interesting in terms of identity issues and the power hierarchies in the club. Third, continued search for as-yet unidentified rhetorical refusals would expand Schilb’s work beyond the linguistic arena in which he focused his definitions and criteria. In an increasingly global



world, more refusals likely exist in the visual realm because there are so many sub-groups in risky situations that need new strategies of defiance modeled. Such refusals need to be identified. Even though the refusal may be considered a limited, niche strategy, a larger repertoire of defiant models for groups such as swingers who do not have or want too much public attention would allow for more choice in building a new or refuting an pejorative identity. Fourth, Schilb recognized early in his research that a rhetorical refusal must be studied beyond its initial utterance/presence to see how it fared as it circulated amongst various audiences, times, and contexts (115). However, this dissertation appears to represent the first time that the single-male ban has been attributed to a rhetorical refusal. Given that swing club Websites have not had a long history, this problem also would suggest additional research. Finally, in this research study, there were hints that the trend toward Ken and Barbie-type of “beautiful people” clubs are on the rise, as revealed by comments in *Club Princeton’s* Home Page (e.g., “not everyone who wants to join can”) and *Entre Nous’* FAQs Page (e.g., “[We are] not a BBW event. There are myriad BBW specific events and sites to cater to BBW’s and fans.”). Would such a focus on age and looks do damage to the swing club community’s ethos or would it increase its population? A rhetorical analysis of this trend could clarify whether swing clubs soon will be in the business of defining desire as the exclusive province of the young and beautiful.

### **Conclusion**

Swing clubs recently have used Websites to represent themselves as viable members of society, a direct antithesis to the deviant, immoral characterization given them from the 1950s to pre-Internet times. The Internet affords swingers and other self-

marginalized groups a forum where going public is possible with little risk. Rhetorically analyzing the visual designs and linguistic strategies of one-hundred of their Website pages enables rhetoric scholars to understand how the Website creators construct a community identity much different from those stereotypes previously given them via newspaper headlines, academic discourse, and social narratives that included strict definitions of monogamy, infidelity, and loyalty. Evidence of twelve visual design elements, the classical canon, and rhetorical refusals suggests that swing club Website creators have redefined those three terms and added positive traits of caring, open-mindedness, adventuresome, and defiant sexual rebels. The lens of rhetorical refusals, Schilb's strategy appropriate for those marginalized groups who prefer their challenges to social norms to be less publically vocal and less risky to their employment, catalogues part of swingers' defiance. In addition, differing goals for using their Websites can explain why a marginalized group may also marginalize others, an inconsistency that perhaps can be better understood through rhetorical analysis. This study's findings show how uniquely placed communities who cannot risk full public disclosure have rhetorical strategies available for constructing or revising an identity, however imperfect, which can alter the former exclusivity of public places, open up new conversations, and embrace a wider definition of sexual autonomy.

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**APPENDIX A****TEXAS JUDGE GRANTS DALLAS' REQUEST TO TEMPORARILY CLOSE  
SEX CLUB OPERATING AS MINISTRY**

Ron Heflin/Special Contributor

The doors to the Playground on Harry Hines Boulevard were padlocked Tuesday. A district court judge approved the city's request for a temporary shutdown of the business.

By JON NIELSEN

Staff Writer jnielsen@dallasnews.com

Published: 26 July 2011 12:08 PM

Updated: 26 July 2011 10:35 PM

A district court judge granted Dallas' request Tuesday to temporarily close a swingers' club operated by a man who says it's a religious outreach.

Dallas city attorneys asked Judge Ken Molberg to close down the northwest Dallas club known as the Playground after an investigation revealed it's an unlicensed sexually oriented business eluding the city's zoning laws.

The Playground is owned by Wyakie Glenn Hudson, who also operates an after-hours dance hall for young people that the city is also trying to close.

Molberg's decision comes about a week after another district court judge denied the city's request in a separate lawsuit to temporarily close Hudson's dance hall, called the Darkside, on West Northwest Highway.

The Playground, in the 11300 block of Harry Hines Boulevard, has a certificate of occupancy for a church, mosque or synagogue. Hudson, who operates NRG Mission, says he is an ordained minister.

Hudson said after the hearing that city officials are violating his freedom of religion because they don't agree with his outreach.

"Just because they don't agree with what we believe in, they want to throw it under the bus," Hudson said. "But can you throw the Catholic religion under the bus because of a few incidents with a few priests?"

City Attorney Melissa Miles said detectives found no evidence of spiritual or religious outreach during investigations of the swingers' club. They did find topless female dancers and pornographic movies playing on flat-screen televisions. Miles called Hudson's attempt to cloak himself under the guise of a ministry a "sham."

“There’s nothing that would indicate these businesses had anything to do with anything religious,” Miles said.

Last week, police arrested the manager of Darkside on suspicion that he groped a scantily clad 15-year-old girl who was dancing in a cage. He was charged with indecency with a child and sexual performance of a child. None of his charges are related to the swingers’ club.

Admission to the Playground ranges from free for single women to \$50 for single males, according to its website. For an additional fee, Hudson provides access to a VIP area in the Playground, where customers have access to beds, complimentary condoms and more pornographic videos, according to the lawsuit.

The website advertises themed nights — none of a religious nature, the suit points out — including one that promotes a special-attire night entitled “Anything But Clothes.” The club advertised stripper poles, cages, sex swings and showers. Photos showed leather couches and pool tables.

Hudson’s attorney, Grant Walsh, was not at Tuesday’s hearing because he was on vacation. Two attorneys from Walsh’s firm took his place. But less than two hours after Molberg’s decision, Hudson fired Walsh and his firm.

“We no longer represent him or his businesses in any capacity,” Walsh said in an email. “We represented Mr. Hudson a few months ago on business matters unrelated to the issues raised in the city’s lawsuits; we have never represented him in connection with the business or property at 11311 Harry Hines.”

Molberg also sought to transfer the swingers’ club case to Judge Emily Tobolowsky’s court, where a hearing regarding the dance hall was already scheduled for 9 a.m. Aug.



**APPENDIX B****MITZELFELT VOWS TO STOP SEX CLUB FROM OPENING**

March 07, 2012 5:35 PM  
Staff Reports

**OAK HILLS • (Victorville, CA) Brad Mitzelfelt, 1st District Supervisor for San Bernardino County, vowed Wednesday to stop a sex club from coming to Oak Hills.**

**“I will spare no effort to make sure this clearly illegal, inappropriate and frankly disgusting operation is not allowed to open,” Mitzelfelt said in a statement. “Oak Hills is a great family-oriented community where they treasure and defend their rural lifestyle and traditional values. This is an outrageous intrusion into a residential neighborhood where children and families expect to enjoy their lives free from this kind of vile incursion, literally next door to their homes.”**

**Organizers of erotic parties have bought acres of a residential property in Oak Hills to operate The Kinky Palace sex club that is scheduled to open in April.**

**A resident notified Mitzelfelt’s office over the weekend about “The Kinky Palace,” planned in a single-family home on seven acres along Duxbury Road. County Code Enforcement and top county staff were immediately notified and began in investigation, according to the statement from Mitzelfelt.**

**A website advertises the effort to convert the property into an “adult lifestyle club” with themed nights aimed at swingers. It’s marketed as an exclusive invitation-only club where applicants must go through a phone interview and then make donations through PayPal or credit card online.**

**Mitzelfelt said the county believes the club “clearly would be a business, which is prohibited in residential areas.” The county hasn’t granted any business license or approval of any sort, he said, and is actively working to make sure the club does not open.**

**APPENDIX C****UPDATE: COMMISSIONER SAYS MASON COUNTY SEX CLUB HAS NO  
LICENSE**

By: Carrie Jones

Updated: Wed 11:19 AM, Dec 30, 2009

APPLE GROVE, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A Mason County commissioner tells WSAZ.com that a sex club operating in Apple Grove is "definitely not" registered with the Secretary of State's office.

After WSAZ.com informed Commissioner Rick Handley about what The Riverside Club was advertising online, he checked to see if it has some sort of registration with the state office. He found that the owner of the club, Eugene Asbury of Fraziers Bottom, has not registered anything under that address, but has other businesses listed under the company name "Asbury Incorporated" -- including the Goodtimes Bar, which is located near The Riverside Club.

On its Web site, The Riverside Club calls itself a private "swinger's club" -- where adults can go to have sex with others.

Handley says all organizations, even non-profits and churches, have to register with the SOS office if any money is collected.

Handley also tells WSAZ.com that since photos posted on the The Riverside Club's Web site appear to show upgrades and/or improvements, he has asked the county assessor's office to re-evaluate the property for tax purposes.

There is no law or zoning in Mason County that would prohibit such a business, according to Handley. But he says he's checking the state code to see if anything applies there. The only law about sex or nudity on the books in Mason County prohibits nude dancing.

Handley is continuing to have the state investigate the licensing issue and says the county will not take further action until the results from this investigation are presented to the county.

When WSAZ.com tried to speak with the owner about the club on Monday, our reporter was asked to leave the property.

## APPENDIX D

## EXAMPLE OF FIGURE-TO-GROUND ANALYSIS

B  
Visual/Figure-Ground Chart 25 June 2013. *Increases Usability*

Clubs	Home Page	Calendar	FAQs + Rules
1. Allure, SDiego <i>+</i>	White space, borders, clear images.	Same boxes and borders.	13 Red rules; blk letters, white bkgd.
2. Colette, NOreleas <i>+</i>	Blk bkgd highlights images, colors, text lines, very definite focal pts. <i>+</i>	Each box filled.	Questions: 8 I and Rules in White Caps on black bkgd Rules #'d Centered
3. Playful Encounters, LA <i>Low</i> <i>**busy, poor f-g differentiation,</i> <i>5 TINY NAV</i>	Black printing in white boxes overlaying two pictures.	No page.	Red Questions, black answers on grey bkgd (their colors). <i>Over same</i> Centered. <i>pix as home</i>
4. Green Door, LV <i>Low</i> <i>NAV</i>	Black background with green, purple, red, aqua...very packed with info. Pixs, texts. Nav buttons, info....	Same colors, but long scroll-down menu of dates...	In white: very busy, colorful screen. No numbers, just pluses and minuses...click on + to get answers. Busy, but only 8 questions, in green, on blk, centered. Rules in green, bulleted white on black/blue
5. Toy Box, Temecula, CA <i>+</i>	Laid out well, balanced in thirds, music, white/brown on black bkgd <i>orange</i> . Header/footer.	Same layout in thirds...not too much info. Easy to read.	21 rules: small white lettering on blk...2 of the 3 "columns" used. 18 FAQs white on black with the answers under questions. Hard to differentiate and not in 1/3s.
6. New Horizons, Seattle <i>NAV</i> <i>+</i>	Rules of thirds. Nav/info/image	No thirds...pink/purple on black... Lots of sexy pictures in boxes...24x	Purple, fancy background for 18 club rules. Black on lavender, small bulleted, but centered. About the Club (FAQs) same format as above, but in paragraphs, not bulleted.
7. Scarlet Ranch, Denver <i>NAV</i> <i>+</i>	Red background with tiny white print...2 sides: print/images Red hard on eyes... <i>about 4 pix 5</i>	RED/Fuschia with white print...2 part Pix under text on first column...scroll down second col. For parties.	Red bkrnd, white, big, cursive font 14 FAQs. White Q above white A. Rules/white on red/two-sided. Red hard on eyes...small print too.
8. The Crucible, DC <i>f</i>	In Thirds. 25/50/25 Mostly b! with red	30-1 big calendar white spaces. Easy to read	5 Red questions with black answers on blue background. Small

	Home	Calendar	Rules/FAQs
	and yellow print on <u>black background</u> . <u>Busy, but not hard to read because colors, size, borders help separate info.</u>	because not full of text. Lots of white space.	print, but left justified, so generally easy to read.
9. Carousel CC, Manhattan C C club Navy Colors	Purple/fuscia on purple and black... White heading. <u>Hard to read bc of color.</u>	Plain white calendar with a lite purple header. Not much text, so easy to read.	Bulleed black text on lite purple background. Small and single-spaced to tight. <u>Left justified with ads on left.</u>
10. Club Cave, Houston Navy Colors	Fake rocks bracket the black space with multi-colored print. Less text than other pages, but hard to know where to look. NO Holiday w/	One long single column left justified in multi-colors on black background. Images interspersed, but no white space.	9 Rules, single spaced. Yellow, Green, Red, White, Blue on black background. Centered. Hard to read.
11. MAC, VA Navy Colors	Header (logo), black print on white background. Not much print so easy to read. Image of sitting naked women on left side pulls the eye.	Header, naked legs on left. Lots of white space with black print. Easy to read.	23 bulleted black print on white background. Single-spaced, so lots of text. Image of pretty women in police uniform also adds interest.
12. TSC, Nashville Navy Colors	Large logo with 20 naked women. Text is black, pink, red, purple on white background... rule of thirds works 25/50/25. Busy, but legible.	Big white calendar. One month, not much on it.	12 rules, black on white. Blue heading with response after. Tri-partite arrangement. Easy to read.
13. Club Princeton, Ohio Navy Colors	3 part arrangement; turquoise and grey. All info in boxes. Easy to read. White on grey background, but not overrun with info 30/40/30	Full text across, then bi-partite: 60/40. White text, squares of pix for the themed parties.	60/40 white on grey. NEAT 16. Questions and Answers on the first column, then just the questions on the second.

APPENDIX E

EXAMPLE OF FIGURE-TO-GROUND SUMMARY

	Home	Cal	Rules + F.A.Q.
<p>19. Club Discretions, Phoenix</p> <p>NAV - scroll down</p>	<p>Grey bkg w handcuff motif...busy.</p> <p>Club Discretions large block, slanted right. Burning fire lines to separate "paragraphs"</p> <p>Yellow, blue, white, red text.</p> <p>Long scroll down; 15 items of interest. Goes across page.</p> <p>No pix.</p>	<p>Roses bordering both sides.</p> <p>Long scroll down with info and upcoming parties.</p> <p>Flying dragons to separate items.</p>	<p>14 Faqs in Red with space then answer in red with yellow blinking lines between Background handcuff motif on a light black. Indented answers for eye relief.</p> <p>Q&amp;A span the whole width of pg.</p> <p>Rules: red roses for left border and black lettering on red page with blue blinking links between each. 15 Rules= Tips for a successful night...long scroll down /center justified</p>
<p>20. Entre Nous, DC</p>	<p>15 boxed sexy pix to indicate the nav buttons.</p> <p>One long scroll down.</p> <p>Sensual pix at top and bottom. White on blk bkground. Simple/classy easy to read.</p>	<p>Similar to the style of home page.</p> <p>Boxed pix on left to indicate parties etc. Clean and neat.</p> <p>Red text to introduce the events ...only color on page.</p>	<p>8 faqs. 12 rules.</p> <p>Left justified, small print, single-spaced. Not as attractive as Home page...</p> <p>Same home page bottom pix of woman.</p>
<p>21. Carolina Friends, NC</p> <p>NAV on top</p> <p>image</p> <p>+</p> <p>clear</p>	<p>Colorful log/pix of the people...blue stands out on the white/grey text.</p> <p>White background, grey text left justified against a pix of girl, but packed page.</p>	<p>Similar style.</p> <p>Highlighted title;</p> <p>White/grey text written across the page. Not much white space.</p>	<p>Same style.</p> <p>Lots of unrelieved text. More than the single page, so must scroll down.</p>
<p>22. TJ's Lasting Impression, Penn</p> <p>NAV</p>	<p>Everything boxed. Very professional. Packed info, but easy to read because separated. Blue/grey motif. 2 boxes at top/rules of thirds underneath.</p>	<p>No page. Just a tour.</p> <p>Same style.</p>	<p>Grey blue motif still with logo continued.</p> <p>Looks like a scroll with a modern twist. It's easy to read/professional looking.</p>

	Home	Cal	Rules / Tickets
<p>23. L'Sota, Iowa</p> <p><i>Simple font</i> <i>30 nav buttons</i> <i>Underline</i> <i>4 pix</i> <i>Buttons!!!</i> <i>in a grid</i></p>	<p>Lavendar motif with purple text, scroll down style. Text is centered with bolding and underlining for interest. 4 pix to break up the text.</p> <p>Attractive color, but lots of info. 30 NAV Buttons!!! In a grid.</p>	<p>Same style....rolling scroll with centered text and pictures. The calendar looks like one and is centered with white space on the side. Easy to read.</p>	<p>33 questions and answers that scrolls down 5 pages worth. Tiny print and lots of info.)</p> <p>Blue questions left justified.</p> <p>Pink answers the same. Lot of info.</p> <p>26 purple Rules are numbered and individually boxed. Starting with four or five bolded text that turns into regular text....pinkish background.</p>
<p>24. Red Rooster, LV</p> <p><i>Red Rooster</i> <i>Cheers</i> <i>Logo</i> <i>Busy</i> <i>Logo</i> <i>7 tiny nav buttons</i></p>	<p>RED background. Single pix centered under blinking logo. Pix a collage of stuff, busy and hard to read.</p> <p>Logo.</p>	<p>Centered text leading into a tri-chart with 52 dates, type of party, place (rr). Red background really hard to read.</p> <p>Logo.</p> <p><i>two more</i></p>	<p>17 Turquoise and blue rules on the dark red background. Centered and numbered.</p> <p>Logo on top...</p> <p>21 Fags in turquoise. Not numbered but separated by a space.</p>
<p>25. Amore Club, FL</p> <p><i>Now on</i> <i>in boxes</i> <i>Scroll</i> <i>Easier to read</i></p>	<p>White background with light pink hearts as the motif.</p> <p>Red and purple text with nav buttons on side. Centered and 2 boxes of info. Lots of white (heart) space.</p> <p>Cute, but not very sophisticated</p> <p>Blinking hearts....</p>	<p>Scroll down red text only with a space between each "paragraph"</p> <p>Nav buttons on side.</p>	<p>13 ?s and answers. Spaced, but on the same white/pnk heart background.</p> <p>Centered with lots of white space.</p> <p>10 rules with a pink star in front of each....same centered on white/pink hearted background.</p> <p>Med. Red heart on side</p> <p>Blinking lights on bottom.</p>

**APPENDIX F****PERMISSION FOR USING COLETTE'S WEBSITE IMAGES**

**Kreston, Barbara**

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**From:** melfi.john@gmail.com on behalf of John Melfi <john@melfi.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 19, 2014 10:04 AM  
**To:** Kreston, Barbara  
**Subject:** use of photos for dissertation

I give permission for Barbara Kreston to use the images of our Website, [coletteclubs.com](http://coletteclubs.com), for her dissertation.

John Melfi  
813.334.2237

## VITA

## BARBARA KRESTON

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## EDUCATION

**Ph.D. Rhetoric and Textual Studies, 2014.** Old Dominion University, Virginia  
Dissertation: *Swinger Identity and Rhetorical Refusals: A Linguistic and Visual Analysis of Website Design*

**M.A. English Literature, 2004.** Old Dominion University, Virginia

**B.A. Literature, 1976,** University of California, San Diego

**Defense Language Institute, 1987.** Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California.  
Three-month immersive language instruction in Italian

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Adjunct Professor & Mentor Teacher, 2011-Present**

College of William & Mary School of Education, Virginia

Prepare mentors to advise new teachers and M.A. students in the education field.

**Adjunct English Professor, 2005-Present**

Thomas Nelson Community College, Virginia

Teach English Composition 111 and 112, American Literature, and developmental English 01, 02, and 03

**Secondary School English Teacher, 1993-Present**

York High School, Yorktown, Virginia

Teacher and student mentor for grade 11 Advanced Placement (AP) and grade 12 International Baccalaureate (IB) courses.

IB Extended Essay Advisor and IB Senior Teacher, 2001-Present.

**Substitute Teacher, 1985-1990**

Ramstein, Germany and Verona, Italy

**Air Force Captain (Active Duty and Reserve), 1979-1990**

## CONFERENCES

University of Louisiana, Lafayette. Graduate Symposium. March, 2008.

“Taboo Identities: Swingers on the Web”

**Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, Alexandria, VA.** October, 2010.

“Swinger Identity: Theorizing Community Construction through Websites”

## GRANTS

York County Education Foundation, 2007 & 2009

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

International Baccalaureate Certification, ongoing

Advanced Placement Certification, ongoing