

they get pleasure. By that I mean, if she was getting a lot of pleasure from someone else, it would make me happy. If you have strength in your relationship, jealousy doesn't come into it.

Alone in being curious

Some people are interested in swinging but have not yet taken the plunge. David is in his early twenties and has been with his girlfriend for three years. He now finds himself less attracted to her than he once was and they now have a sexless relationship. But for him, it's not just the frequency of sex he feels is missing. 'I have a high sex-drive and there's a lot of things I want to try out, be it with or without my partner. Finding the swinging site,

I have found like minded people to fulfil the things I want.'

David is on the verge of going ahead with his first meet. He says swinging has never been directly talked about in conversation with his girlfriend – just in passing comments after using his computer and noticing a link to a swinging site. Her reaction indicated it is something she doesn't approve of and isn't interested in. David feels swinging is one of those things you either love or hate – and she would most certainly hate it.

He fears his girlfriend would see swinging as a form of cheating, and a sign of him wanting to be with other people for more than casual sex – and that he doesn't love her. Asked if he had thought of any alternatives to fulfil his sexual needs, such as an affair or using an escort, he replies, 'I love the person that I am with deeply, so would not intentionally go out to have an affair. If I met the person of my dreams, who knows? But it's definitely not something I'd do intentionally. Escorts are something that just does not interest me in the slightest.'

If one takes the plunge

David would feel disappointed that his girlfriend wasn't able to know what it was he was wanting, what he enjoys – and must live out his fantasies with other people instead of her. If she did find out, he would be honest, seeing little point in lying any further.

'If it's something that I enjoy, then it's something of the person that I am. I'm a laid-back person – if she wants to join me great; if she knows I want to, and is fine with me doing that, also fine. If I'm able to swing alone and she never found out, then that is also fine, as at the end of the day everyone would be happy. Swinging will not change anything about my relationship with her, as I would keep the two completely separate. If she wanted to split up, then it's her decision, as it's an opinion I have on something that I enjoy and would want to continue. From what

I imagine, she would not approve and if she found out it would probably result in our splitting up.'

Another scenario

Not all partners in a relationship swing alone without their partners' knowledge or consent. Some couples choose to swing together and by themselves. One couple is currently deciding whether going it alone is right within their relationship...

Penny and Alexander were both single swingers who met on the scene and have been together as a couple for a number of months. Since then, they have swung together, and even though neither of them knew how they would feel about seeing someone they care about with another person, they've found no jealousy between them when they are together sharing the swinging experience.

They are now discussing whether

it is right for one or both of them to swing alone. As this is the only relationship with, and as, a swinger for both of them, they have nothing to compare their situation to and are finding it a minefield, deciding where the boundaries are for them as a couple and what would constitute crossing them.

The question is, how do they meet their needs while keeping their relationship intact?

Open relationship?

Alexander's perception of swinging alone is that they would effectively have an open relationship, which he doesn't want. Penny however believes that an open relationship is

one where nothing crosses the line because there are no boundaries – each party does as they please. And she firmly believes that they do have boundaries, even though all of them are not agreed on yet. Before getting together with Alexander, Penny was an active single bi-fem swinger and she's going through a transition – what she used to do may not now be acceptable within the remit of a relationship.

Some changes are subtle, some not so – but she feels staying overnight with someone else and going out for dinner are no longer appropriate – both have elements of intimacy more than 'just sex'. A boundary they have jointly agreed on is kissing - they concur that for them, kissing is more intimate than a blow job. For non-swingers this may sound contradictory, but their perceived intimacy of kissing someone else means neither of them will cross that line.

Finding a balance

They are now firmly in the grey area – what is left is not black and white, and they are getting closer to identifying where the line is crossed for them – but they still haven't made a decision about swinging alone.

Alexander has said he doesn't want to swing alone and has no desire to – he likes it when he 'shares' the swinging experience with his new partner. But he admits that if Penny swings alone, then his attitude will be 'fuck it, I may as well', which she perceives as some kind of revenge or retaliation – just doing something for the sake of it.

This assertion from Alexander makes Penny weary of deciding one-way or the other. In fact, Penny feels no burning desire to swing alone at this point in time, but prefers a 'never-say-never' approach. 'I don't want to commit to something that I might change my mind on later.'

The discussion is ongoing, and only time will tell what boundaries they decide are right for them but they feel lucky in that they can discuss things very openly and honestly.

** All names of interviewees have been changed*

