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### Open Minds and How to Swing It

Archie: “Swinging? Is that what you call it?”

Swinger: “Yeah, what do you call it?”

Archie: “Communism.”

And so Archie Bunker has just realized that a couple that his wife Edith naïvely responded to after finding their ad in the Swingers section of a magazine on the subway, is in their living room right now fully expecting an evening of wife-swapping. This *All in the Family* series episode, “The Bunkers and the Swingers,” aired in the fall of 1972 when the so-called “free love” movement was in full swing.

Narrated by a comical character who represents bigotry, *All in the Family* was creator Norman Lear’s groundbreaking show that took a straight forward, unflinching, yet humorous look at American socio-political issues of the 1960s and 1970s. Racism, women’s liberation, homosexuality, privacy rights, abortion, religion, rape, sexual mores, Watergate, and the Vietnam War were issues exposed and then explored for the first time in a weekly half-hour television program. Conversation and debate around the subject matter of the latest episodes ultimately influenced the country by opening minds and hearts. Exploring current socio-political issues helped in overcoming our fears about them.

“The Bunkers and the Swingers” opens with Edith Bunker (called Dingbat by Archie) talking with daughter Gloria about a married couple she’s met through a friendship magazine. It becomes obvious to Gloria that her innocent mother doesn’t understand that the husband and wife have made a date with the Bunkers to swing. Gloria’s husband, Mike (named Meathead by Archie), shows up and when he reads the advertisement in the magazine his sly smile tells us he’s imagining his conservative father-in-law’s reaction to this predicament. Since they’re late for the opera, Gloria and Mike rush out the door telling Edith that they’ll take care of the matter before swingers Mr. and Mrs. Rempley appear tomorrow evening. After their departure, the doorbell rings. The frisky couple has arrived! Although expecting them tomorrow evening, Edith is nevertheless gracious but slightly confused by their behavior. Meanwhile African American next door neighbor Louise Jefferson, whose husband George is the black counterpart and irritant for Archie’s attitudes about race, shows up asking to borrow a casserole dish. When introduced, Mr. Rempley says to Louise, “the more the merrier” which causes Louise to run Edith into the kitchen to find out what’s going on. Edith shows Louise the magazine and she’s told that Mr. and Mrs. Rempley are there to have sex with her and Archie. And on cue, Archie arrives home from work! The fun really begins as it dawns on Archie that this couple, bearing gifts – Cuban cigars

and Chanel No 5 – is anticipating a carnal exchange with the Bunkers. In another run to the kitchen, Archie chides Edith for her dimwittedness:

“Watch out for the Dingbat Catcher, Edith!”

Part of the brilliance of *All in the Family* is its ability to make us a part of the Bunker family in Queens, New York. We know the Bunkers live in a modest home because the set for the show displays the décor of well-worn furniture in rooms with muted, old fashioned wall colors and a comfortable, light-filled, active kitchen that viewers feel at home in. And what do you think? Don't we all know someone with close minded political, social and religious philosophies like Archie Bunker? But we can relate to a loveable Archie and Edith and we can also relate to their hippie daughter and her husband that serve as mouthpieces for the Woodstock generation. Part of the brilliance for me is that in revealing the younger couple, the Stivics, as being anti-war but pro-women, gays, social justice, the environment and civil rights, Gloria and Mike are portrayed as representatives of the hippie generation in an authentic way rather than as false stereotypical characterizations of dirty people who need to get jobs. “Hippies” with their ideology and funky clothes and long hair were actually responsible citizens who got an education, had jobs, raised families – and we never sold out to The Man! My husband and I did just that. Our hippie ideology molded us and our brothers and sisters in the movement into spiritual soldiers. Our struggle was for One World One Love. That spirit lives on in many of us as we recognize the progress that's been made in the past 45 years, and *All in the Family* created some of those changes in mindset that have allowed for that progress. As an example, the gay rights movement of the time brought homosexual men and women out in the open and the country was able to get to know them as human beings rather than oddities of nature. This led the way to the reforms and rights gays have today such as same gender marriage.

In the episode “The Bunkers and the Swingers,” Archie and Edith make a moral judgment about the swinger couple, which was a surprise to me even though I know the characters and their attitudes well. The Bunkers respond to the situation with disgust. Ordinarily controversial situations are handled with humor and so, eventually tension in the Bunker living room eases and allows the humor of the situation to reappear.

“I don't want no creepos, sexos or weirdos in my house. Get outta here!” Archie yells. Mrs. Rempley goes on to tell the Bunkers the reasons why the swinger life is the life for them. Archie gives the Rempleys no wiggle room but in *All in the Family*'s way of intelligently making a statement about the sanctity of marriage without preaching, Mr. Rempley responds to Archie in a good natured fashion:

“I may disagree with what you say, but I’ll defend with my life your right to say it.”  
Right on. I believe that Mr. Rempley’s statement furthers the conversation about tolerance and acceptance in a changing society which are facets of the overall objectives of *All in the Family*.

This episode reminded us then and reminds us now that in America we have the freedom to have diverse lifestyles and differing points of view as long as we don’t encroach on one another’s life space. In other words, if I want the freedom to live my life my own way, then I have to be willing to give that same freedom to others with whom I share this planet. For the overall psychological, mental and spiritual health of any society there must be a willingness amongst its citizens to understand that differing points of view don’t necessarily add up to I’m right and you’re wrong. Opening minds and hearts through confrontation and examination of societal issues and the use of humor -- there are many ways to swing it, baby!

Opening minds and hearts to the ongoing changes in society is the overall objective of *All in the Family*. As a reflection of the changing culture in America in the 1960s and 1970s, there is also an ever-evolving character development of the cast members of *All in the Family*. As one example, loveable bigot Archie becomes friends with his black neighbor, George Jefferson. Later on in the series Archie and Edith adopt a young girl who is Jewish. However in this episode Archie remains his predictable self:

“You, buddy, are undermining this nation here.”

To which the husband swinger replies: “You’re telling me I’m undermining this nation? I’ll have you know I attended the Republican National Convention.”

We cringe along with the characters. Some things never change.

#### References

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbrr14PB0QE>