



a zine about  
polyamory

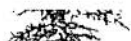




## Introduction

Poly Oly Oxen Free! #1, October 2010

Why hello there! I present to you my first zine! I've wanted to create my own zine for years, and the upcoming Madison Zine Fest prompted me to get going already and make it happen! Polyamory is something that I am passionate about, and I'm excited to share my enthusiasm, contemplations, and experience with the masses. I feel that there is a dearth of accessible information in the [radical/DIY] community about polyamory and nonmonogamy, and yet a lot of friends and comrades are in the thick of it, trying to navigate complex relationships. I've also noticed a lot of misconceptions circulating about polyamory, and I'd like to dispel some of that negative attention. My intentions are to create something half-informational, half-personal, and easy-to-understand. I want to explain the basics of polyamory to folks new to the idea of open relationships and present things to think about for tried-and-true polyamorists. Really, I think a lot of the advice in this zine is important for any relationship, whether you're monogamous or not. Ultimately, I would like to promote dialogue with other voices, delving deeper into various aspects of polyamory, so you'll see a call-out at the end of this issue for submissions to a more collaborative POOF! #2.



I would like to take this moment to mention that my relationships have been primarily heterosexual, and that my lovers/partners have been cis-gendered (that's the opposite of trans-gendered, or in other words, my male partners identify as dudes). So, unfortunately, I'll be broadcasting an image of heteronormativity, and that's crap! So please keep in mind that although I'm talking about my own hetero experiences, there are all sorts of relationship styles and partnerings involving all genders and sexual preferences in the spectrum. I should also mention that I often stumble over labels like *partners*, *lovers*, and even *relationships*. I use these terms interchangeably and without much discretion throughout the zine, although they do have different connotations for different people.

I hope you enjoy the zine, and that you consider collaborating on future issues!

↑ops

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## Polyamory 101

Nonmonogamy is no new concept. As long as people have been in relationships, there have been open relationships. In fact, there is evidence that humans are evolutionarily hard-wired to be nonmonogamous, but that's beside the point (check out "Sex at Dawn"! ). I thought I'd introduce nonmonogamy, and specifically polyamory (a type of nonmonogamy), by answering some basic questions below. Please reference the glossary at the back of the zine if you get tangled up with any of the nomenclature/terms.

### what is polyamory?

Polyamory is a word derived from both Greek and Latin, meaning "multiple loves." It's a term used to describe the desire for or the practice of maintaining multiple significant, intimate relationships simultaneously. These relationships could involve love, commitment, friendship, sex, emotional intimacy, affection, romance, spiritual connection, and more. There is no single way to be polyamorous and each relationship or pairing is unique.

### who practices polyamory?

Anyone can (but not everyone should)! The most successful and healthy polyamorous relationships involve individuals who are honest, open, and communicative, with a deep level of self-awareness and a willingness to listen to and respect others' needs as well as their own. Unfortunately, we're not all that together all of the time, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try, especially if we have honest intentions. From my experience, good multi-taskers make good poly partners!

### why polyamory?

There are all sorts of reasons to prefer polyamory as a relationship style, with many folks' main reason involving personal fulfillment. Check out the list a few pages forward for more details.

### how does polyamory work?

How a relationship (or two, or three) works is up to those involved. In any healthy relationship, each individual should share their needs, desires, fears, and intentions with their lover(s), and construct a partnership based around those things. In my experience, a polyamorous relationship is not much different from a monogamous one as far as feelings of love, intimacy, commitment, jealousy, and envy go. The most difficult tasks in maintaining healthy poly relationships are often time-management and making sure all parties (including yourself!) are being well taken care of emotionally and physically.



## Myths and Misconceptions

Sometimes I get this creeping feeling that some folks got polyamory all wrong. So below, I'd like to showcase some of the myths and misconceptions I've picked up on over the years.

### **Myth #1: Polyamory is inherently destructive, and someone always gets hurt.**

This is a big one, and so I thought I'd put it first on the list. Just as some wounded souls think relationships in general are "the suck," there will be people out there quick to judge polyamory because perhaps they themselves or someone they knew were involved in poly relations ruined with unchecked jealousy, cheating, concealment, or even verbal or physical abuse. Polyamory doesn't have to be like that, and most people can agree that every relationship, every individual is unique and different.

### **Myth #2: Being polyamorous is not being faithful.**

A true polyamorous relationship requires the consent of all those involved. Cheating involves lying, deception, and breaking commitments previously made. Polyamory has its own unique definitions of what it means to be faithful, based on the agreements made by all parties. It's not cheating if everyone's agreed to the arrangement.

### **Myth #3: Polyamory is for folks who can't commit.**

This is simply untrue. Many polyamorous individuals may stay with one or more of their partners for years, even the remainders of their lifetimes, sometimes buying homes, raising children, or entering into marriage.

### **Myth #4: Polyamory is just a phase; they'll settle down eventually.**

When I came out to my parents as poly, they were perfectly fine with it. "So you're just shopping around, dating multiple guys at the same time." Uh... kinda? But I'm not "shopping" with the intent to "buy!" Most if not all polyamorists never intend to settle down with one person for the rest of their lives. That would be monogamy, duh.

### **Myth #5: Polyamory is anarchy! No rules!**

Okay, I fooled you; this myth contains double misconceptions. If you know anything about polyamory or anything about anarchism, then you know that there are all sorts of "rules" and methods of self-governance involved in both. Both polyamory and anarchism are rooted in mutual aid, responsibility, and accountability. Successful polyamorous relationships are governed by verbal or written agreements made between individuals, establishing clear boundaries and rules. Ideally, poly relationships feature constant check-ins amongst all parties, as things will likely change over time and agreements will need to be restructured. ...Huh, just like how monogamous relationships should work....

### **Myth #6: If I am in a polyamorous relationship, then I need to have other lovers.**

From what I could understand of my last breakup-conversation, one of the reasons my partner was dumping me was because he didn't have time to focus on other lovers. This rang some alarms in my head. I've read about relationships made up of mono/poly combinations, couples in which one partner is monogamous and the other is polyamorous. Again, every relationship is different, and one mustn't feel compelled to date other people if their lover is doing so, even if you both consider yourselves polyamorous. (If you do feel forced one way or

the other, talk about it with your partner(s) and/or friends! Something fishy may be going on.) Plus, plenty of poly folks are happy dating only one person or even (gasp!) staying single during certain periods (or all) of their lives. That's the beauty of being poly—anything's possible!

**Myth #7: Poly people don't feel jealousy.**

It would be an awesome super-power indeed if you were unable to feel jealous. I would guess you weren't human. In reality, jealousy is a very common thing in most people, poly folks included. Introspective and reflective individuals are able to feel jealousy without letting it consume their entire beings, and these people are probably more open and able to practice nonmonogamy. There's a section on jealousy coming up in a few pages, so look out!

**Myth #8: Anyone can be poly if they only decondition themselves.**

Sometimes I feel like people are jumping on the poly bandwagon because, in theory, polyamory is consistent with their politics, morals, or personal philosophies. Some may be under the impression that society has conditioned us to be serial monogamists (which is partially true), and if only we can unlearn this learned behavior, then we'll all be poly. Nuh uh. I think it's pretty unhealthy for people (and their partners) to try and be poly when they're not. That's not to say a little experimentation isn't good if you're trying out nonmonogamy for the first time. On the other hand, if your poly partner is forcing you onto the poly bandwagon, that ain't cool, neither. I believe that some people really are monogamists at heart, and that's okay! You can be an anarcho-monogamist, and not be a walking contradiction!

**Myth #9: Polyamory is all about sex.**

Some folks may think that the purpose of being polyamorous is to have sex with as many people as you can. Although this may be a pleasant side effect for the horny toads amongst us, there are other polyamorists who have sex only with their most intimate and committed relations, as well as those who don't have sex at all. Some may argue that that's what distinguishes polyamorists from other nonmonogamists—the fact that our [other] relationships are about more than just sex.



**Myth #10: Sex with a poly person is unsafe; you're more likely to contract STDs/STIs because of multiple partners.**

Whether or not you or your current partner(s) has had sex with multiple individuals recently or in the past, you are not at any greater risk of contracting an STD than those in monogamous partnerships. Safer sex using condoms, dental dams, gloves, etc. is what protects you from STDs. Most poly or nonmonogamous partners have rules based on safer sex and protecting partners who may be fluid-bonded. Obviously, you put yourself and your partner(s) at greater risk of contracting serious diseases if you have unprotected sex with an individual whose STD/STI status is unknown or undependable.

**Myth #11: Polyamory is what Mormons practice.**

That's *polygamy*, or simply put, plural marriage. It's pretty close, although the fundamentalist Mormons who practice polygamy are coming at it from a completely different angle. Unfortunately, polygamy has earned a bad rep in our culture due to a fucked-up history of some Mormon polygamists using coercion, kidnapping, brainwashing, incest, and abuse in practicing this aspect of their faith.



## The Pros of Polyamory

People choose to practice polyamory for a myriad of reasons. Below are some reasons I've gleaned from readings and talking with poly folks. Others are my own additions.

### ♡ Sexual and Fantasy Fulfillment

Poly folks believe that one can't expect their every desire to be fulfilled by one person alone. Being able to find and play with multiple people allows one to express and act out their sexual fantasies, kinks, curiosities, etc.

### ♡ Freedom, Openness, and Honesty

Being polyamorous can create space to be completely honest and open about attractions, desires, and needs, and the ability to acknowledge and act upon those things. You have the freedom to never stop experimenting with or exploring the things (or people!) that make you feel whole.

### ♡ Sexual and Emotional Diversity

Through polyamory, one can explore different sexual or relationship dynamics. I find that my attitude and needs change over time, and so having several different intimate friends or partners allows me to choose the person that I can find most comfort with when dealing with some particular personal issue.

### ♡ Personal Growth

Polyamorous relationships, just like any kind of relationship, can be quite challenging! By learning from mistakes, working through issues, and discovering what makes so many different people tick, one can grow immensely. On a similar note, I find that being able to talk with metamours, or my lover's other lovers, can help when trying to figure out how to comfort, confront, or satisfy my partner(s)—I can get an "insider's look" at my relationship(s) from someone else who is deeply connected with my partner(s).

### ♡ Easing out of Relationships

Being poly means that you don't have to end one relationship to start another. For me, this means that break-ups aren't as harsh, as my partners and I tend to grow apart slowly, see other people, and no one's left with that soul-crushing, I-am-so-lonely-and-no-one-loves-me kind of heartbreak. ...In theory.

### ♡ Compersion

Compersion is the opposite of jealousy, or taking joy in your partner(s)' pleasure or happiness with other partner(s). I often feel compersion much more than I feel jealousy, because I get a sense of relief that I don't have to be "super-girlfriend," like the pressure's off of me to be that person's everything.

### ♡ Falling in Love

Falling in love, I think, is one of the most amazing feelings in the world. Yeah, I'm a bit of a New Relationship Energy (NRE) junkie. Being polyamorous, I'm thrilled to be able to fall in love with any one at any time. I don't feel stifled or restrained by my other relationship(s).





## Nonmonogamous Relationship Styles

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I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to some of the terms used to describe the many different styles of open relationships. Please keep in mind that these are not rigid definitions, but a linguistic framework from which one can build their own unique relationships. Tristan Taormino's book "Opening Up" has a chapter devoted to each of these relationship types, complete with benefits, challenges, and real-life examples of each.

### Partnered Nonmonogamy

Often associated with open marriage, partnered nonmonogamy involves lovers outside of a more committed, intimate partnering. These outside relations are often purely sexual and considered temporary, casual, commitment-free, and nonromantic. Play partners may be involved with either one or both members of the primary couple, and intercourse/penetration may or may not be included.

### Swinging

There is a unique history and culture associated with swinging, or the practice of having multiple sexual partners outside of an existing romantic relationship. Swinging is much like partnered nonmonogamy, although swingers have their own distinct identities and subcultures. Swing clubs and swinger communities play a large part of the swinger lifestyle.

### Polyamory

As described earlier, polyamory is the theory or practice of maintaining multiple sexual and/or romantic relationships simultaneously, with full knowledge and consent of all people involved. There are many ways to practice polyamory, some people prefer a hierarchy of multiple relationships, some reject primary partnerships for something more egalitarian, and some refuse to be tied down to any of these identities. Below, I describe a few types of polyamory, although the list is by no means exhaustive, and a person's relationship style may fit more than one of these terms.

### Solo Polyamory

Those who may call themselves solo polyamorists choose not to have a primary partner. This may mean that they're dating multiple people, none of whom they consider their primary. This may also mean that they choose not to date anyone, whether it be temporary or for an extended period of time.



### Partnered/Hierarchical Polyamory

When I hear the word "hierarchy," I cringe. If you do the same, try to ignore those images of oppression and genocide for the time being. Hierarchical polyamory is based upon a primary/secondary/sometimes tertiary structure of relationships. The members of a primary relationship often give priority to each other, maintaining the strongest level of involvement or commitment. Secondary partners fall outside of the primary relationship, and often maintain a level of romantic and/or sexual involvement of lower importance when compared to the primary partnership. It's important to realize that a primary relationship doesn't necessarily have to involve only two individuals; a person may have co-primaries as well as secondaries. Furthermore, within a primary couple, for instance, one person may consider the other their primary, while the other considers their partner a secondary, or chooses not to use such definitions. In other words, relationships can have varying hierarchical and/or non-hierarchical combinations.

### Nonhierarchical Polyamory

An individual who practices nonhierarchical polyamory tries to maintain a level of equality among their various relationships, not giving higher importance to any one of their partners over another. This doesn't necessarily mean that a person will divide their time equally among multiple partners, nor does it mean that every one of their partners will be treated exactly the same. Rather, a nonhierarchical poly relationship style removes the use of labels such as primary, secondary, and tertiary to rank partners, and focuses on ways to interact with each of their partners so that everyone is satisfied and having their needs met. It's a tricky balance to achieve, especially because individuals and relationships are constantly changing.

### Nonsexual Poly Relationships

Not all relationships have a sexual component. Some of these relationships may have begun with a sexual component, but the partners no longer have sex. I think it's important to point this out, as much of the existing literature on polyamory focuses solely on sex. Many of my long-term poly relationships start out sexual, but evolve into deep, intimate friendships that rarely or never include sex. But that's cool, 'cause I can get my sexual needs met by other people. Thanks, polyamory!

### Monogamous/Nonmonogamous or Mono/Poly Combos

A couple may decide to adopt a hybrid form of relationship, in which one partner is monogamous and the other is nonmonogamous. The relationship may have been established this way, or evolved to open up the relationship for one partner but not the other, according to each partner's needs. There are all sorts of reasons to be either monogamous or nonmonogamous, and kudos to those couples who have figured out how to honor each other's wishes when their relationship styles are so seemingly contradictory.





## Communication

Communication is key in any relationship, but it's even more important when you're managing multiple relationships simultaneously. How individuals communicate depends on a number of factors, including their physical surroundings, relationship status, subject matter, experience, and perceived outcomes of the conversation. I find the challenge of learning and working with different partners' and friends' communication styles quite fun, and enjoy unveiling levels of honesty that may not have been exposed before.

An open line of communication is necessary in order to establish consent among individuals involved in nonmonogamous relationships. I believe that communication should be honest and uncensored, even if what you are saying may hurt the other person. I've been known to be brutally honest to the point of sounding mean, but I prefer band-aids to be ripped off quickly in order to avoid long-term pain. Of course, there are ways of telling the truth in respectful, considerate ways (check out the essay by Groundwork entitled "Criticism/Self-Criticism and Praise").

Since we're on the topic of honesty, I'd like to introduce the idea of Radical Honesty (yes, capitalized and all!). The concept was developed by a psychologist named Brad Blanton, and although I haven't read any of this guy's work, I like what I do know about Radical Honesty. Blanton believes that most folks in our society develop roles that they present to the world that aren't truly who they are inside. This results in dishonesty with loved ones about who they are, things they've done, and what they think, feel, and want. This lack of honesty leads to unfulfilling, unsatisfying relationships because the connections between people are based on behavior that is not genuine. Blanton argues that to achieve true intimacy, we must share everything, leaving nothing unsaid, and refuse to sugar-coat any of it. To practice Blanton's form of Radical Honesty, you must speak everything regardless of how the person you're speaking to may react. Some folks take issue with this extreme form of honesty, thinking it egotistical and confrontational, and believe sugar-coating is a necessary component of compassionate, honest communication.

In order to communicate your needs and desires honestly, you have to know what those needs and desires are. Self-awareness and introspection, and really knowing who you are and what you want, is necessary before entering any relationship, and even more important when you're juggling multiple relationships with different needs being met by different people. It may be a helpful exercise to write down some of your needs on a sheet of paper. I learned to uncover my needs through a Conflict Transformation workshop I attended. The instructor had us begin with a position, work through our feelings and assumptions concerning that position, and end with our underlying needs. Here's an example:

**Position:** What's going on here? I'm tired of never being told the truth.

**Feelings:** I'm feeling deceived, frustrated, and angry!

**Assumptions:** I assume that you're not telling me something, that you're keeping things from me, or that you're being dishonest.

**Needs:** I need to be able to trust you. I need our relationship to be authentic.

- We will check in with other partners about their last STD/STI checkups and sexual history before engaging in **safer** sexual activity. Trust is very important to establish.
- We have no boundaries when it comes to sexual play; all is fair game as long as it's **safe** and **consensual**.
- Fluid bonding will be discussed with and approved by all partners prior to engaging in not-so-safe sex.

#### WHEN:

- We have no established days or times reserved for each other, but we will be available to each other when needed.
- We have no limitations on time spent with other partners, but we will communicate our needs to each other if time spent with others seems excessive.
- Checking in with each other should be a daily occurrence or more, either in person or by phone. This may not apply to travel or vacation.

#### WHERE:

- In public settings where more than one partner is present, we will try to check in with all partners ahead of time about public displays of affection. If two secondary partners are in a public setting together initially, and the other primary enters the scene, we will default our attention and PDA to the partner we arrived with. When in doubt, no PDA!
- We will check in ahead of time if we plan to engage in intimate behavior with a secondary partner at home, especially if that partner is going to stay the night, or if that partner is new.

#### Other stuff:

- We do not hold veto power over new partners, but we prefer each other's approval.
- We will kiss & tell when asked, and share all information requested of each other, taking into consideration the emotional state of the other at the time.
- Our bedrooms are our safe spaces, and permission must be granted before entering, especially when the door is closed. An exception is when retrieving items left in the room when the occupant is not home.
- If a grievance must be aired, try to do so in a safe space with both parties giving their full attention. Vibes checks are very important.
- Coming out to family, coworkers, or friends is a decision that should be made by the person most affected. Discussion with partners beforehand is recommended.

the lists are silly or sexy, like "Top Ten Movies For a Rainy Day" or "Top Ten Places to be Kissed," and sometimes they're more serious, like "Ten Things I Can Do to Support My Lover When She is Travelling Apart From Me," or "Ten Things That Make Me Feel Better When I'm Angry or Sad." I tried to take this idea to my partner at the time, and we completed one worksheet together, but we lost interest pretty quickly. Some partners may really dig the Top Ten worksheet idea, and some may not.

I leave this communication section with one last piece of advice: Don't make assumptions! I know it's kind of automatic, but try to realize when you are making assumptions, and don't give those assumptions much cred until you talk it out with others. Speak your mind, ask questions, and listen to your partner(s) before judging others.



### Our Relationship Contract

We consider ourselves primary partners, although we don't like the hierarchical titles. This means that we default to taking care of and being available for the other, sharing our lives in all honesty. We will communicate openly and often about everything. We will share and plan future endeavors as long as our status remains primary.

#### Regarding Other Partners:

##### WHO:

- Coupled status of other partners is unimportant, but do respect partnered relationships.
- Familiarity is circumstantial; both prefer knowing the other's partners, although engaging in safer sexual adventures with strangers is okay.
- Please do not engage in sexual activity with each other's siblings.

##### WHAT:

- Interactions or relationships can include: affectionate and sexual activity, BDSM activity, socializing, friendship, flirting, dating, courting/romance, sleepovers, travel/vacation, emotional connection, love, and commitment.
- We prefer check-ins prior to sleepovers, both at home or at a partner's home.
- We would like travel/vacation plans with other partners to be discussed with all partners well ahead of time.
- With commitment, if either of us plans on sharing future endeavors with other partners, we will communicate that desire and renegotiate this contract.
- Flirting is okay when not intentionally focusing on each other.

**Examples of Needs:**

Autonomy  
 Celebration  
 Integrity  
 Authenticity  
 Self worth  
 Interdependence  
 Appreciation  
 Respect  
 Safety  
 Rest  
 Rejuvenation  
 Peace of Mind  
 Trust  
 Acceptance  
 Valued

I don't know if this exercise will help you to establish some of your basic needs; it kind of works better when dealing with internal or external conflicts. Perhaps you can reflect upon past conflicts and suss out your needs through that. Check out the example of basic needs on the left; you may find some of them more applicable than others.

Another necessary component of communication is the Check-In. Ideally, anyone in any kind of relationship has regular check-ins with their partner(s) about how each is feeling about their relationship(s), the future, or life in general. It's important to create space to air out any grievances, acknowledge the things working well, and give appreciation where deserved. For those of us managing multiple relationships on top of a busy work/volunteer/activist schedule, sometimes we forget to create this intimate space to share our thoughts. As the periods of time between check-ins get longer and longer, we may find it more difficult to recreate that comfortable space. This delay in check-ins may occur, too, when there is tension between partners. It's best not to let problems sit and fester; when we're dreading the check-in most is when we really need it. Rip off that band-aid, yo!

Check-ins don't gotta be all tough and strenuous. Make some tea, give each other back rubs, and talk about your feelings! (Or, if you're not the fluffy type, drink some bitter black coffee, help each other wheat-paste posters around town, and talk about your feelings!)

When checking in with your partner(s), it's important to discuss limits and boundaries. Some partners create "relationship contracts," or written agreements that outline rules and guidelines for various aspects of the open relationship. Perhaps you're fine with your partner hooking up with anyone, *except* your close friends. Perhaps you're in a BDSM relationship, and your submissive partner is not allowed to see any other Doms. Maybe you want to know every detail of a partner's interactions with their other lovers, or maybe you don't want to know that metamours even exist. It's important to talk and agree upon all of these things and more. On the next page, I've included an edited version of the relationship contract that a partner and I constructed when we considered each other primaries and were living in the same house. I hope it gives you some ideas!

When communicating needs and desires, time management is an important topic not to overlook. Depending on your relationship style, your partners' lives, and your schedule outside of your relationships, you can create a poly-timetable as loose or as structured as you need it to be. Shared calendars, like Google's, may come in quite handy for some people! I have operated around a pretty flexible schedule for most of my relationships, with partners checking in with each other a day or so ahead of time if they're going to be spending a certain amount of time with some partner in particular.

I tend to be an introspective and introverted person who enjoys writing in my journal and filling out those dorky worksheets and surveys that get passed around workshops or the internet. So when I heard about one couple's worksheet routine at a Sexy Spring conference in Minneapolis last year, I was totally psyched to try it out! Basically, this couple takes the time to regularly create, fill out, and share "Top Ten" lists about themselves and their relationship(s), to have fun and learn more about each other. As they explained it, sometimes



## Jealousy

The following section on the Theory of Jealousy Management was written by Franklin Veaux from [www.xeromag.com/fvpoly](http://www.xeromag.com/fvpoly), which is an amazing poly resource you need to check out right away! I would write my own essay on jealousy, but Franklin puts it so well. Online, this article is followed by the Practice of Jealousy Management, comparing relationships to broken refrigerators. Heh.

### The Theory of Jealousy Management

*Nobody is immune to jealousy, of course. It's like being immune to fear or hunger or anger. Some people may be naturally more jealous than others, but anybody can feel jealous. Jealousy, like fear or hunger, is just a feeling.*

*But jealousy isn't really a response to seeing your partner with someone else, at least not directly. It says more about your own security or insecurity than it does about the actions of your partner.*

*Jealousy is most common when somebody feels insecure, mistreated, threatened, or vulnerable in a relationship. If you feel secure in a relationship, you don't get jealous. Jealousy is not the problem; jealousy is the SYMPTOM of the problem. Address the insecurity or the things underlying the feelings of vulnerability, and you address the jealousy. So the trick to making a poly relationship work is to make everyone involved feel secure, valued, and loved.*

*A poly relationship depends much more than a traditional relationship on mutual security and trust. Even the smallest amount of insecurity in a poly relationship can quickly be magnified to the point where it can be lethal to the relationship.*

*The problems are magnified even more if you try not to let your fears and your feelings show. One key to making the relationship work is to talk about your fears, openly and immediately, EVEN IF YOU THINK THEY'RE IRRATIONAL. Often, naming your fears, bringing them into the light, deprives them of their power.*

*Personally, I'm a big fan of empiricism. One of my favorite quotes is by Francis Bacon, who said "Your true self can be known only by systematic experimentation, and controlled only by being known." I believe that emotions, though they are not rational, do usually have a reason behind them--they are the ancient part of your brain, the part that does not have language, trying to communicate with you.*

*So, the question is, why are you jealous? Jealousy is an unusual emotion, in that it's a feeling that's often built out of other feelings, such as fear or anger or insecurity. What is it that triggers the jealousy, and more important, why? When you think about the things that cause you to feel jealous, what's the first emotional reaction that flashes through your head--Fear? Anger? Sadness? Rejection? Loss? What underlies those feelings--fear of losing your partner?*

*Fear of being insufficient? Anger at someone else moving in on your territory? All of these? None of these?*

*Since jealousy usually has its roots in some other emotion, such as fear of loss or feelings of rejection or insecurity or whatever, then often the only way to cope with the jealousy is to deal with the underlying emotions. If you find that your jealousy is rooted in fear, for example, the next step is to explore why you are afraid, and what you are afraid of, and if there's anything you can do to allay that fear. Confronting the jealousy head-on without addressing the things that lie beneath it is often an exercise in frustration.*

*Once you've identified the feelings beneath the jealousy, the next step is to ask yourself: what are these feelings serving? Are they serving a legitimate interest? Are they trying to warn you of a real problem, or are they serving only themselves? This can be very tricky, especially with an emotional response like fear--fear can serve as a legitimate warning of a valid danger, but fear also tends to try to protect itself, and if you're afraid of something with no reason, your fear will try to persuade you that it's valid and you have cause to be afraid.*

*One thing that's often overlooked, particularly in the poly community, is that there are times when jealousy is a valid and rational response to a situation. If there is a problem in your relationship, or if your partner is using a new relationship as a way to avoid dealing with issues in your relationship, then jealousy is a reasonable response. Separating the jealousy that's a warning of a real problem from the jealousy that isn't is not always an easy task, though.*

*Where you go from there depends on what you discover about the root of the jealousy. Fear, insecurity, and so forth are all feelings that can be overcome, though usually not without confronting them directly, and deliberately exposing yourself to the very things that make you afraid or insecure.*

### **My Experiences with Jealousy**

I, myself, tend not to be a particularly jealous person, at least by traditional social standards. I don't think about jealousy very often these days, although my high-school sweetheart was oppressively jealous. Perhaps experiencing his unhealthy expressions of jealousy helped to shape me into the polyamorous person I am today. (I mean, this guy would get hot-headed when I commented on the fact that Anakin Skywalker was a looker in Episode II; this was before I erased all memory of those horrid prequels...) After reading a bit about jealousy, one concept stuck with me in particular: jealousy is not the problem, but a symptom of the problem. Perhaps this idea is not so novel to you, but for me, it changed my perspective on jealousy and how to think of it.

When I have experienced feelings of jealousy, it's usually this sort of gut-churning inferiority complex I develop when I haven't met one of my partner's new love interests. For me, not knowing the "other" is really tough. If I haven't met them, I involuntarily imagine them to be the most amazing person: intelligent, beautiful, sociable, introspective, fun-loving, perfect. I really don't know why I do this, but I do. (I mean, it's obviously a





part of my own insecurities.) So I get all jealous and neurotic until I meet my new metamour for the first time, which is when I realize that they are human just like me. And they're usually pretty cool! Of course, if my new metamour turns out to be an old friend, I rarely have that horrible gut-reaction jealousy, 'cause I already know they're cool.

Several months ago, I had my first feelings of jealousy towards an inanimate object. (No, it wasn't a sex toy, which tend to be objects of jealousy for some folks!) It was an inanimate object that wasn't even created yet—a Master's Thesis. I was dating a graduate student engrossed in academia. I usually don't harbor much resentment towards academia, as I was passionate about my own research when I attended grad school for a year and a half before losing interest. However, my partner's thesis work, teaching job, and love for theory really started getting to me. He spent more and more time with his studies, and our conversations weren't so much talking *with* each other as *at* each other. I began experiencing a different kind of jealousy, one rooted in anger and self-righteousness instead of self-deprecation. My jealousy of his thesis work stemmed, too, from my own insecurities. However, in this case, I couldn't resolve my jealousy by "meeting the metamour," because I couldn't understand the theory nor why one would be so passionate about it.

On the other side of things, I'm sure I've contributed to my partners' feelings of jealousy when I am giddy, falling head-over-heels into a new relationship. This infamous rush of excitement has been coined New Relationship Energy, or NRE, a term commonly used by poly folks. When I fall, I fall hard, and I've had multiple partners remind me time and time again that they do not wish to hear about my intense obsessions over my new lover, shut up, Tops! Coping with NRE can be frustrating, and often the only way to keep your sanity is through patience. I find my partner(s) to be quite cute when they're high on NRE, and I feel happy for the elation that they're experiencing. Which brings me to my next topic...



## Compersion

The Urban Dictionary defines compersion as "taking pleasure or joy in the action of your partner engaging in a similar romantic or sexual relationship with another person." Many view compersion as the opposite of jealousy, or feeling happy that your partner is having a good ol' time with other people. If you're absolutely not thrilled about your partners' outside adventures, some say that you can learn compersion through practice, patience, and the unlearning of jealousy, letting go of feelings of possessiveness, insecurity, and fear.

I'm a big fan of compersion, mostly because I have so many things on my plate at any given time, I feel relieved to know that a partner has other people they can go to for fun, comfort, or company. I also know that I can't meet absolutely every need a partner may have, and so I'm glad that other people can help provide that fulfillment.



## Coming Out

When I started becoming more and more committed to this whole polyamory idea, I hadn't even thought about "coming out" or navigating awkward situations in which my relationship status would come into question. Needless to say, those awkward situations did come up, and I had to choose between pretending I only had one partner (which was easy when I was committed to one primary), or whether I wanted to be true to myself and my friends, family, and/or coworkers about all of my loving relationships. And what the heck do I put for "relationship status" on facebook?

There are all sorts of pros and cons to coming out as polyamorous, and some people may choose to come out to certain folks, but not others. Being the radically honest person I am, it is hard to keep a part of me hidden, although I am slowly coming out as poly to more and more people.

It was easy coming out to my close friends and radical community members. No one questioned my future, and I'd actually get praise and pique curiosities when talking about my successful poly arrangements. I had opportunities to teach nonmonogamy to open ears. But bringing up polyamory to coworkers, family, and my partners' families? That just seemed pointless, ridiculous, and frightening. As I write this, I'm still not singing polyamory from the hilltops, but if someone were to ask me about it, then hell yeah, I'm polyamorous!

I did come out to my semi-conservative parents when they visited me this past spring. And it was HILARIOUS. At the time, I was involved with two great guys, and I wanted to share my excitement about both relationships with my folks. Up until then, I had navigated relationship questions by pretending I only had one partner at a time, and I was simply "close friends" with other partners. I had grown quite tired of this routine, and wanted to share my true self with my parents. Scary!

I was anxious to the max once I had decided to tell them, trying to figure out when to broach the subject. I chose a public setting: my favorite, crowded taquería. One partner, who had already met my parents, was having dinner with us. There was a lull in the conversation, and as my partner recalls, I just pulled the topic out of nowhere. I started off, "So, have you guys ever heard of polyamory?" They hadn't, and so I rambled about nonmonogamy and having multiple partners, looking apprehensively to my partner for assistance, and the whole time my parents just stared at me. I didn't think it was going well at all. Then, when I stopped my monologue, my dad asked, "So, you're having sex with multiple people at the same time?" I quickly dispelled his ideas of massive orgies, explaining, yes, I was intimate with multiple people, but not simultaneously. "It's more like dating different people at the same time." And my parents were cool with it! Now, I'm still not sure if they think this is some kind of phase I'm going through and that I'll eventually settle down, but I feel a thousand times better with it all out in the open. I later introduced them to my other partner, and all was good. I even think it gave my dad a little hope that I'd eventually settle down with his favorite of my Madison lovers, who I hadn't been as close to lately. Oh geez, Dad.



## How do you know if you're poly?

So how do you know if you're suited for nonmonogamy? My best advice is to test it out, do some experimenting (with tried-and-true polyamorists, if you can), or try opening up your current relationship. There are all sorts of resources like books, zines, blogs, poly support groups, and even people in your community you can talk to about open relationships. I urge you to learn as much as you can before jumping in, to minimize the risk of being hurt or hurting others. Remember that healthy relationships are built around consent, and it's important to reach an agreement with partner(s) as you try out other forms of intimacy.

I recall a time when I was most definitely monogamy-minded. Like most girls, I dreamed of the perfect wedding and marriage (of course, my dream wedding also involved kilts, tandem bicycles, and Stormtroopers—don't ask). I was nearly ready to settle down with one particular lover right before I left my hometown (and him) four years ago. And yet I was wont to cheat on boyfriends, crush pretty hard on multiple guys at the same time, and fantasize about other people while having sex with my monogamous lovers. Maybe this is common, but maybe these were little hints that I needed more freedom when it came to my relationships.

After I moved to Madison, I found myself in my first nonmonogamous relationship a mere six months after saying farewell to that boy I had dreamt of marrying. I was casually sleeping with a friend of mine when I started seriously falling for another guy, so our partnership really was open from the get-go. My new partner had just come out of a short-lived marriage, and he, too, had never experimented with nonmonogamy. I don't recall any major issues as we constructed our relationships with each other as well as other people, except on one particular matter that continued to be a strain on our relationship and eventually ended it. We had both started reading "Opening Up" by Tristan Taormino, passing the book around to our other lovers, and communicated openly and honestly with each other about everything. It was a pleasure to have such a good first experience with polyamory, and I don't think I could ever go back to the constraints of a monogamous relationship. Three years later, my former partner and I are *still* passing around "Opening Up" to our friends and lovers, although polyamory has turned more towards the solo/nonhierarchical versus partnered/hierarchical realm for each of us since then.



## Resources

This resource list is totally not exhaustive. I haven't actually read some of this stuff, but they've come highly recommended by others.

### Books:

"Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships" by Tristan Taormino

"Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities" by Dossie Easton and Catherine Liszt

"Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality" by Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá

"Redefining our Relationships: Guidelines for Responsible Open Relationships" by Wendy-O Matik

### Zines:

"Non-Monogamy: Doin' it and Doin' it and Doin' it Well?" by Shannon Perez Darby & Andie Lyons

"Friends of Polly" edited by Humaira Saeed

Queer Zine Archive Project at [www.qzap.org](http://www.qzap.org)

### Online:

Xeromag | Polyamory? at [www.xeromag.com/lvpoly.html](http://www.xeromag.com/lvpoly.html)

"Criticism/Self-Criticism and Praise" essay at <http://groundwork.ucsd.edu/criticism.htm>

(I'm not much of an internet-reader, so I'm sure there are TONS of good stuff out there that I don't know about.)

### Madison-based:

PolyOut polyamory discussion group with the Madison Area Polyamory Society: Meets at the Outreach Center at 600 Williamson Street on the first Friday of the

month, 7:30 to 8:30; more info at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polyout/>

The Art of Conflict Transformation workshops offered through Kathy Germann (Although these workshops can be cheesy at times, I find them very helpful to navigate all sorts of sticky situations. Google search her, or ask about her workshops through the Grassroots Leadership College at [www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org](http://www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org). She may host workshops through the UW, too.)

Don't forget local independent bookstores! If you're thinking of ordering books or zines about polyamory (or anything, really), please visit Madison's local shops, including Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, A Room of One's Own, and A Woman's Touch. Fuck Amazon!





## A Brief Glossary of Terms

**Compersion (noun):** Taking joy in your partner's pleasure or happiness with another romantic and/or sexual partner. Compersion can be thought of as the opposite of "jealousy;" it is a positive emotional reaction to a lover's other relationship(s).

**Fluid-bonded (adj.):** Describing individuals who engage in unprotected sex, in which there is an exchange of bodily fluids and/or barrier-free sexual contact. Presumably, each fluid-bonded individual has previously been screened for sexually transmitted diseases.

**Metamour (noun):** The partner of one's partner, with whom one does not share a direct sexual or loving relationship.

**New Relationship Energy (noun):** also referred to as NRE, a strong, almost giddy feeling of excitement and infatuation common in the beginning of any new romantic relationship.

**Nonmonogamy (noun):** Any relationship which is not sexually and/or emotionally exclusive by explicit agreement and with the full knowledge of all the parties involved. This is a blanket term that includes polyamory and other styles of nonmonogamy. Nonmonogamy often explicitly spells out the conditions under which it is permissible for a person to take on additional partners, and often includes some form of safer-sex agreement.

**Polyamory (noun):** A form of nonmonogamy, the state or practice of maintaining multiple sexual and/or romantic relationships simultaneously, with the full knowledge and consent of all the people involved.

**Polygamy (noun):** The state or practice of having multiple wedded spouses at the same time, regardless of the sex of those spouses.

**Primary/Secondary Partnerships (noun):** A relationship structure in which a person has multiple partners who are not equal to one another in terms of interconnection, emotional intensity, intertwinement in practical or financial matters, or power within the relationship. A person in a primary/secondary relationship may have one (or occasionally, more than one) primary partner and one or more additional secondary or tertiary partners. In practice, prescriptive primary/secondary relationships may create an environment where the people in those additional relationships feel unappreciated or insignificant, which is why some polyamorous people do not construct their relationships along enforced primary/secondary lines.

## Call Out for Submissions to Poly Oly Oxen Free! #2!

I hope y'all enjoyed my zine. I envision POOF! #1 as being a very simple beginning of a series of zines exhibiting voices of poly folks from all over this county (and beyond?). I hope to create space for dialogue delving deeper into the complex and exciting world of nonmonogamy. Below are some topics that may ignite your noggin, and I'd love for you to express yourself through words, art, poetry, fiction, or however you'd like to convey your thoughts in print form. You can send your submissions to:

**Poly Oly Oxen Free!**  
c/o the Madison Infoshop  
1019 Williamson Street  
Madison, WI 53703

Or via email at:  
[poofzine@gmail.com](mailto:poofzine@gmail.com)

I'd also appreciate your feedback and ideas after reading this zine, so feel free to send me any comments, questions, et cetera. I'll be sure to get your permission before publishing anything you send. Thanks for reading!

### Ideas for Topics to Explore:

- Jealousy and overcoming it
- Being a poly parent
- Navigating relationships with metamours
- Being someone's Secondary
- Intersections of polyamory and race, gender, sexuality, heritage, class, etc.
- Polyamory within queer culture, anarchist culture, activist culture, or your culture of choice
- Mono/poly combo success stories
- The process of opening up relationships
- Polyamorous communes
- Coming out
- Nonmonogamy in popular culture



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