

The Myths of Polyamory

Don't believe everything about polyamory

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Poly people are "more evolved" or "more advanced" or "more enlightened" than monogamous people

Poly people have a different preferred relationship style, that's all.

I've seen monogamous people who are enlightened, passionate, caring, compassionate, wise, and benevolent people. I've met poly people who are selfish, inconsiderate jerks.

People are people. You can be wise or you can be a jerk, regardless of your relationship model. Being polyamorous does not automatically mean you're in possession of some secret wisdom or some special enlightenment.

**** Love is limitless ****

Love--at least, romantic love--is never limitless. It must always necessarily be bounded by time and energy and resources. There are six billion people on the planet, and it is simply impossible, for both emotional and practical reasons, to form meaningful relationships with all of them! For that matter, I've never met anyone who can manage sixty, or indeed even ten.

Love may be limitless in the abstract, but in the concrete world of work and conflicting schedules and finite resources, it's limited indeed. Put simply, there is a finite boundary on the number of people one can love, and spend time with, and a finite boundary on the emotional resources available to anybody.

Anyone can be poly, if they can just get past their social conditioning or their monogamous upbringing

This is quite probably true of a great many people, but it most assuredly is not true of everyone.

Not everyone is able to choose polyamory. Social conditioning aside, I've met many people who seem to be naturally predisposed to monogamy, and a few who seem permanently wired for it, just as I have seen many people who seem permanently wired to be poly.

"Being poly" and "being monogamous" is not really that binary. There is a continuum between people who are monogamous, and can't be any other way; through people who can, under the right

circumstances and with the right people, learn to be happy in monogamous or polyamorous relationships; through people who are poly, and cannot be any other way.

Some poly folk seem to believe that monogamy is an accident of social conditioning, nothing more; everyone would, or could, be poly if it weren't for a monogamous upbringing getting in the way. The reality is more complex than that.

**** Poly people don't feel jealousy ****

Anybody can feel jealousy, under the right circumstances. Being polyamorous does not make you immune to jealousy at all; poly folk are just as prone to it as those in traditional relationships.

Jealousy is merely a feeling; of and by itself, it's neither good nor bad. Jealousy is almost always a symptom of an underlying insecurity; the most effective way to handle jealousy is often to solve the underlying problem that creates it.

Anyone, polyamorous or not, can experience doubt, insecurity, and jealousy. People in successful polyamorous relationships often do not feel jealous in the same situations that might make people who are accustomed to traditional relationship models feel jealous, that's all.

Many polyamorous people will claim that they never experience jealousy. This may be true, but it's not related to being polyamorous; rather, it's more related to being secure in yourself and in your relationships. Monogamous people can be secure, and polyamorous people can be insecure; everyone has their own circumstances that may trigger insecurity.

A good goal in any relationship, polyamorous or not, is to strive to create a set of mechanisms for dealing with insecurity and jealousy. One technique for doing this is to recognize the roots of the feeling; another is to confront the feeling head-on, rather than attempting to dismiss it as "irrational" or "unjustified." Feelings are irrational by their very nature; jealousy is no exception. Dealing with it directly and openly, and acknowledging it for what it is, is often an excellent first step in isolating and addressing the problem underlying it.

**** Poly people are more honest ****

Honesty is often considered the cornerstone to a successful polyamorous relationship. I'd take it one step further than that, though; honesty is, I think, the key to any successful relationship, polyamorous or not!

The consequences for dishonest behavior in any relationship can be devastating. Polyamorous relationships are no different from monogamous relationships in that regard. Polyamorous people quite often make a conscious effort to be open and honest in their relationships, but they are by no

means unique in this regard, and being polyamorous of and by itself does not automatically make someone honest. Just as there are monogamous people who are open, ethical, and honest, there are also poly people who are deceptive, unethical, and dishonest.

The same values that make for successful polyamorous relationships--honesty, integrity, compassion, respect, trust, love, understanding, good communication and conflict resolution skills--also make for successful monogamous relationships. Polyamorous people don't automatically possess these skills, any more than monogamous people automatically lack them; and, like human beings everywhere, polyamorous people so not always live up to their own ideals.

**** Polyamory is a new idea ****

Polyamory as a social movement is relatively new, but polyamory as a practice has been around for a very long time indeed, even though the word "polyamory" has not. Conscious, ethical, deliberate non-monogamy is hardly a modern ideal; it's been around for as long as we have been civilized animals.

**** Polyamory is based on egalitarianism ****

Polyamory is based on what works for the people involved. It's a relationship model that provides a framework for multiple committed romantic relationships. Those relationships may or may not be given equal weight with regard to decision-making ability or other factors. One of the most common forms of polyamory is the primary/secondary model, for example, in which one relationship is considered "primary" and takes precedence over any other relationships that may form. This type of arrangement is not necessarily egalitarian, yet it may still meet the needs of everyone involved in it.

Egalitarianism is not a factor of the relationship model, it is a factor in individual relationships. Some poly relationships are based on egalitarianism, some are not, and this is not necessarily an indication of how ethical the relationship is. Non-egalitarian relationships are not automatically less ethical than nominally egalitarian relationships, provided that everyone involved in the relationship is happy; and in any event, history, personality, and other factors can make for a power imbalance even in a relationship that is egalitarian in theory.

**** Polyamorous people are more spiritual than monogamous people ****

This rather peculiar myth is quite widespread in certain segments of the poly community, but there's not a word of truth to it.

Polyamorous people engage in multiple simultaneous relationships; monogamous people engage in romantic relationships with one person at a time. A person may be spiritually enlightened or not

regardless of the number of partners he or she has. Having more than one partner does not make you spiritual, and having one partner does not make you unenlightened.

Spirituality and enlightenment are completely unrelated to your relationship model. Some of the most spiritual people I have ever met are monogamous, and some of the least spiritual are polyamorous. Polyamorous people, like monogamous people, come in all flavors, philosophies, and beliefs.

**** Polyamory is a cure for cheating ****

There is a profound difference between the mindset of a monogamous cheater and the mindset of someone who is polyamorous. While there are polyamorous people who cheat and monogamous people who do not, in general a person who cheats does not do so for the same reasons that a person who is polyamorous seeks multiple relationships.

Most often, attempting to "fix" a relationship in which one person is cheating by making that relationship polyamorous is likely to be problematic. A person who can't be trusted to behave with compassion and respect toward one person can't be trusted to behave with compassion and respect toward more than one; and on top of that, imposing a large-scale, far-reaching shift in expectations on a relationship that already has problems is likely to increase the stress on that relationship. Polyamory is best ventured into when your relationships and your relationship skills are already quite strong.

A monogamous cheater is not the same as a polyamorous person in a monogamous relationship. Cheating does not imply a polyamorous mindset or philosophy; it's the reasons that the monogamous cheater is cheating which are important.

That is not to say that it's impossible for people who have cheated to transition to ethical polyamory. Indeed, there is a Web site dedicated to the topic of transitioning from a cheating relationship to a polyamorous relationship. Sometimes, a person who is polyamorous by nature or inclination may cheat because he or she may not be aware that another choice is possible, or may not be aware that alternatives to monogamy exist. In such a case, it may be possible for the person who has cheated to adapt to an ethical framework of polyamory, once he or she becomes aware that the option exists; however, if a person in this position succeeds in keeping the partner he or she cheated on, it's likely because that partner is extraordinarily patient!

**** Polyamory is all about paganism or new-age spirituality ****

There is no direct connection between the practice of polyamory and the practice of paganism, new-age spiritual beliefs, or any other philosophical, religious, or spiritual system.

Some people associate polyamory with the practice of new-age religious beliefs, but the fact is, not everyone who is a pagan or new-age spiritualist is polyamorous, and not everyone who is polyamorous is a pagan or new-age spiritualist.

Many people who are prominent in the polyamorous community, such as author Deborah Anapol, also espouse a new-age set of beliefs. However, there is no direct link between these beliefs and polyamory, and not everyone who is polyamorous subscribes to such beliefs.

**** Poly people are kinky ****

Polyamory is a relationship style, not a sexual practice. There's no relationship between polyamory and weird, kinky sex; many people who are kinky are monogamous, and many people who are not monogamous prefer only unconventional sex. Being polyamorous does not even necessarily imply group sex! A person who has more than one sexual partner does not necessarily have sex with all of them at the same time...