

Polyamory

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Polyamory (from Greek πολύ *poly*, "many, several", and Latin *amor*, "love") is typically defined as the practice of, or desire for, intimate relationships where individuals may have more than one partner, with the knowledge and consent of all partners.^[1] It has been described as "consensual, ethical, and responsible non-monogamy".^{[2][3][4]} However, the meaning of polyamory is also an issue of ongoing debate.^[3] For example, although polyamory is typically defined as a relationship practice or approach to relationships,^{[1][5][6]} some believe that it should also be considered an orientation or identity (analogous to sexual orientation or gender identity).^{[7][8]}

Polyamory is sometimes used in a broader sense, as an umbrella term that covers various forms of consensual multi-partner relationships, or forms of consensual non-exclusive sexual and/or romantic relationships. Polyamorous arrangements are varied,^[9] reflecting the choices and philosophies of the individuals involved, but they tend to emphasize certain themes or values, such as love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, communication, and commitment.^{[3][5]} As of July 2009, it was estimated that more than 500,000 polyamorous relationships existed in the United States.^[10]

People who identify as polyamorous typically reject the view that sexual and relational exclusivity are necessary for deep, committed, long-term loving relationships.^[6] Those who are open to, or emotionally suited for, polyamory may embark on a polyamorous relationship when single or already in a monogamous or open relationship.



Supporters of polyamory at a Gay Pride march in Madrid

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Terminology

The word *polyamorous* came to prominence in an article by Morning Glory Zell-Ravenheart, "A Bouquet of Lovers", published in May 1990 in *Green Egg Magazine*, where it appeared as "polyamorous".^[11] In May 1992, Jennifer L. Wesp created the Usenet newsgroup *alt.polyamory*,^[12] and the Oxford English Dictionary cites the proposal to create that group as the first verified appearance of the word.^[11] The words "polyamory, -ous, and -ist" were added to the OED in 2006.^[13] In 1999, Zell-Ravenheart was asked by the editor of the OED to provide a definition of the term, and had provided it as *The practice, state or ability of having more than one sexual loving relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved*.^[14] Polyamory is a less specific term than polygamy, the practice or condition of having more than one spouse.

No single definition of "polyamory" has universal acceptance. Although many individuals would define polyamory as a relationship practice or form, some believe that it should be classified an orientation or identity (like sexual orientation or gender identity).^[7] Most definitions of polyamory center on the concepts provided by Ravenheart's definition. Areas of difference arise regarding the degree of commitment, such as in the practice of casual sexual activities, and whether it represents a viewpoint or a relational status quo (whether a person without current partners can be considered "polyamorous"). Polyamorous relationships can be open in which the committed partners agree to permit romantic or sexual relationships with other people, or closed, in which the participants do not engage in relationships outside of the defined set of committed partners. The practices of engaging in closed polyamorous relationships is sometimes called polyfidelity.

The terms *primary* (or *primary relationship(s)*) and *secondary* (or *secondary relationship(s)*) may be used to indicate a hierarchy of different relationships or the place of each relationship in a person's life. Thus, a person may refer to a live-in partner as their primary partner, and a lover whom they only see once a week as their secondary partner, in order to differentiate to the listener who is whom. While such

labels can be used as a tool to manage multiple relationships, some believe that such a hierarchy is unfair, as all the involved partners deserve equal standing and consideration. Another model, sometimes referred to as an *intimate network*, includes relationships that are of varying significance to the people involved, but are not explicitly labeled as "primary" or "secondary". Within this model, a hierarchy may be fluid and vague, or nonexistent.

Forms

If non-monogamous relationships practice; ethics, honesty, transparency and mutual respect then they can also be considered polyamorous. Forms of non-monogamy and therefore potentially polyamory include:

- Polyfidelity, which involves multiple romantic relationships with sexual contact restricted to only specific partners in the group (which may include all members of that group) (e.g. group marriage).
- Solo Polyamory, in which one polyamorous person, usually living alone, communicates ethically, to the people they date, their polyamorous lifestyle.
- Hierarchical Polyamory, which distinguish between "primary" and "secondary" relationships (e.g. many open marriages). In 1906 H.G. Wells presented a defense of this sort of polyamory in a utopian novel titled *In the Days of the Comet*.
- Triads, Three people romantically involved. (Often an established couple dating a third.)
- Quads, Often relationships between a couple and another couple (Quad).
- Polygamy (polygyny and polyandry), in which one person marries several spouses (who may or may not be married to, or have romantic relationships with, one another).
- Group relationships, sometimes referred to as tribes, and group marriage, in which all consider themselves associated to one another, popularized to some extent by Robert A. Heinlein (in novels such as *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Time Enough for Love*, *Friday*, and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*). Also works by Robert Rimmer, and Starhawk in her books *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) and *Walking to Mercury* (1997). A domestic partnership consisting of four people who are all married to each other features in Vonda N. McIntyre's *Starfarers* series.
- Networks of interconnecting relationships, where a particular person may have relationships of varying degrees of importance with various people.
- Mono/poly relationships, where one partner is monogamous but agrees to the other having outside relationships.
- "Geometric" configurations, which are described by the number of people involved and their relationship connections. Examples include "triads" and "quads", along with "V" (or "Vee") and "N" geometries. (See: Terminology within polyamory.)
- Open relationships/open marriages, where participants may have sexual liaisons with others not within their core group of partners. Some open relationships may be open only sexually, while exclusive emotionally.
- Swinging: Traditionally there has been a cultural divide between the polyamorous and swinger communities, the former emphasizing the emotional aspects of plural relationships and the latter emphasizing the sexual activities of non-monogamy. It is possible for a person with polyamorous relationships to also engage in traditional Swinging and other open relationships. Those in polyamorous relationships who take part in casual sex often see it as separate from the emotional bonds they share with their polyamorous partners. However it is also possible for swingers to develop deep emotional attachments with those they have sex with, and thereby find themselves in

polyamory. Such swingers in their new polyamorous relationships may or may not choose to continue swinging with others. Finally, both swingers and polyamorous people can engage in secret infidelities, but this is no better accepted by either communities than in monogamy.

Cultural diversity

"Polygamy" is more often used to refer to codified forms of multiple marriage (especially those with a traditional/religious basis), while "modern polyamory" or "egalitarian polyamory" implies a relationship defined by negotiation between its members, rather than by cultural norms. Egalitarian polyamory is culturally rooted in such concepts as choice and individuality, rather than in religious traditions.

Egalitarian polyamory is more closely associated with values, subcultures and ideologies that favor individual freedoms and equality in sexual matters – most notably, those reflected by sexual freedom advocacy groups such as Woodhull Freedom Foundation & Federation, National Coalition for Sexual Freedom and American Civil Liberties Union.^[15] However, polygamy advocacy groups and activists and egalitarian polyamory advocacy groups and activists can and do work together cooperatively. In addition, the two sub-communities have many common issues (poly parenting, dealing with jealousy, legal and social discrimination, etc.), the discussion and resolution of which are of equal interest to both sub-communities, regardless of any cultural differences that may exist. Moreover, there is considerable cultural diversity within both sub-communities. For example, egalitarian polyamory and BDSM often face similar challenges (e.g. negotiating the ground rules for unconventional relationships, or the question of coming out to family and friends), and the cross-pollination of ideas takes place between the two.^[16]

Religion

The Oneida Community in the 1800s in New York (a Christian religious commune) believed strongly in a system of free love known as complex marriage,^[17] where any member was free to have sex with any other who consented.^[18] Possessiveness and exclusive relationships were frowned upon.^[19] Unlike 20th century social movements such as the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s, the Oneidans did not seek consequence-free sex for pleasure, but believed that, because the natural outcome of intercourse was pregnancy, raising children should be a communal responsibility. Women over the age of 40 were to act as sexual "mentors" to adolescent boys, as these relationships had minimal chance of conceiving. Furthermore, these women became religious role models for the young men. Likewise, older men often introduced young women to sex. Noyes often used his own judgment in determining the partnerships that would form, and would often encourage relationships between the non-devout and the devout in the community, in the hopes that the attitudes and behaviors of the devout would influence the non-devout.^[20] In 1993, the archives of the community were made available to scholars for the first time. Contained within the archives was the journal of Tirzah Miller,^[21] Noyes' niece, who wrote extensively about her romantic and sexual relations with other members of Oneida.

Most of mainstream Christianity does not accept polyamory; however, some people do consider themselves Christian and polyamorous.^[22]

Kerista was a new religion that was started in New York City in 1956 by John Peltz "Bro Jud" Presmont; throughout much of its history, Kerista was centered on the ideals of polyfidelity and creation of intentional communities.

Most of mainstream Judaism does not accept polyamory; however, some people do consider themselves Jewish and polyamorous.^[23] One rabbi who does accept polyamory is Sharon Kleinbaum, the senior rabbi at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York, who has said that polyamory is a choice that does not preclude a Jewishly observant, socially conscious life.^[23] Some polyamorous Jews also point to biblical patriarchs having multiple wives and concubines as evidence that polyamorous relationships can be sacred in Judaism.^[24] There is an email list dedicated to polyamorous Jews, called *AhavaRaba*, which roughly translates to "big love" in Hebrew,^[25] and whose name echoes God's "great" or "abounding" love mentioned in the Ahava rabbah prayer.^[26]

LaVeyan Satanism is critical of Abrahamic sexual mores, considering them narrow, restrictive and hypocritical. Satanists are pluralists, accepting polyamorists, bisexuals, lesbians, gays, BDSM, transgender people, and asexuals. Sex is viewed as an indulgence, but one that should only be freely entered into with consent. The Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth only give two instructions regarding sex: "Do not make sexual advances unless you are given the mating signal" and "Do not harm little children," though the latter is much broader and encompasses physical and other abuse. This has always been consistent part of CoS policy since its inception in 1966, as Peter H. Gilmore wrote in an essay supporting same sex marriage:

Finally, since certain people try to suggest that our attitude on sexuality is "anything goes" despite our stated base principle of "responsibility to the responsible", we must reiterate another fundamental dictate: The Church of Satan's philosophy strictly forbids sexual activity with children as well as with non-human animals.

— Magister Peter H. Gilmore^[27]

Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness, founded in 2001, has engaged in ongoing education and advocacy for greater understanding and acceptance of polyamory within the Unitarian Universalist Association.^[28] At the 2014 General Assembly, two UUPA members moved to include the category of "family and relationship structures" in the UUA's nondiscrimination rule, along with other amendments; the package of proposed amendments was ratified by the GA delegates.^[29] While this has encouraged UUPA's membership, the UUA itself has yet to take specific action towards assuring greater awareness and inclusion of polyamorous people.

Islam does not accommodate / approve of any such relations. If needed male can marry 4 women at a time given that he take cares for them at the same level, love them with same passion, as he will be questioned on the day of judgment if he wronged or misbalanced among his wives.

Marriage implications

In most countries, it is legal for three or more people to form and share a sexual relationship (subject sometimes to laws against homosexuality, and/or adultery if two of the three are married). About 25% of countries recognize marriages between a man and more than one woman, although with only minor exceptions no Western countries permit *marriage* among more than two people, nor do the majority of countries give legal protection (e.g., of rights relating to children) to non-married partners. Individuals involved in polyamorous relationships are generally considered by the law to be no different from people who live together, or "date", under other circumstances.



Start of polyamory contingent at San Francisco Pride 2004

In many jurisdictions where same-sex couples can access civil unions or registered partnerships, these are often intended as parallel institutions to that of heterosexual monogamous marriage. Accordingly, they include parallel entitlements, obligations, and limitations. Among the latter, as in the case of the New Zealand Civil Union Act 2005, there are parallel prohibitions on civil unions with more than one partner, which is considered bigamy, or dual marriage/civil union hybrids with more than one person. Both are banned under Sections 205–206 of the Crimes Act 1961. In jurisdictions where same-sex marriage proper exists, bigamous same-sex marriages fall under the same set of legal prohibitions as bigamous heterosexual marriages. As yet, there is no case law applicable to these issues.^[30]

Bigamy is the act of marrying one person while already being married to another, and is legally prohibited in most countries in which monogamy is the cultural norm. Some bigamy statutes are broad enough to potentially encompass polyamorous relationships involving cohabitation, even if none of the participants claim marriage to more than one partner.

Having multiple non-marital partners, even if married to one, is legal in most U.S. jurisdictions; at most it constitutes grounds for divorce if the spouse is non-consenting, or feels that the interest in a further partner has destabilized the marriage. In jurisdictions where civil unions or registered partnerships are recognized, the same principle applies to divorce in those contexts. There are exceptions to this: in North Carolina, a spouse can sue a third party for causing "loss of affection" in or "criminal conversation" (adultery) with their spouse,^[31] and more than twenty states in the US have laws against adultery^[32] although they are infrequently enforced. Some states were prompted to review their laws criminalizing consensual sexual activity in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Some social conservatives hold that the reading of Justice Kennedy's opinion in *Lawrence* is that states may not constitutionally burden any private, consensual sexual activity between adults. Such a reading would throw laws against fornication, adultery, and even adult incest into question.

At present, the extension to multiple-partner relationships of laws that use a criterion similar to that adopted in the UK, i.e., "*married or living together as married*" remains largely untested. That is, it is not known whether these laws could treat some trios or larger groups as common-law marriages.

If marriage is intended, most countries provide for both a religious marriage and a civil ceremony (sometimes combined). These recognize and formalize the relationship. Few Western countries give either religious or legal recognition – or permission – to marriages with three or more partners. While a recent case in the Netherlands was commonly read as demonstrating that Dutch law permitted multiple-

partner civil unions,^[33] this belief is mistaken. The relationship in question was a *samenlevingscontract*, or "cohabitation contract", and not a registered partnership or marriage.^{[34][35]} The Netherlands' law concerning registered partnerships provides that:

1. A person may be involved in one only registered partnership with one other person whether of the same or of opposite sex at any one time.
2. Persons who enter into a registered partnership may not at the same time be married.

When a relationship ends, non-consensual infidelity ("cheating") is often grounds for an unfavorable divorce settlement, and infidelity generally could easily be seized upon as a prejudicial issue by an antagonistic partner.

A detailed legal theory of polyamorous marriage is being developed. The "dyadic networks" model^[36] calls for the revision of existing laws against bigamy to permit married persons to enter into additional marriages, provided that they have first given legal notice to their existing marital partner(s). And some legal scholars believe that the US constitutional rights of Due Process and Equal Protection fully support marriage rights for polyamorous families.^[37]

Media coverage

During a PinkNews question and answer session in May 2015, polyamory rights activist and author Redfern Jon Barrett questioned Natalie Bennett, leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, about her party's stance towards polyamorous marriage rights. Bennett responded by saying that her party is "open" to discussion on the idea of civil partnership or marriages between three people.^[38] Bennett's announcement aroused media controversy on the topic and led to major international news outlets covering her answer.^{[39][40]} A follow-up article written by Barrett was published by PinkNews on May 4, 2015 further exploring the topic.^[41]

As a practice

Separate from polyamory as a philosophical basis for relationship, are the practical ways in which people who live polyamorously arrange their lives and handle certain issues, as compared to those of a generally more socially acceptable monogamous arrangement.

Values

- **Fidelity and loyalty:** Many polyamorists define *fidelity* not as sexual exclusivity, but as faithfulness to the promises and agreements made about a relationship. A secret sexual relationship that violates those accords would be seen as a breach of fidelity. Polyamorists generally base definitions of *commitment* on considerations other than sexual exclusivity, e.g. "trust and honesty" or "growing old together".^[42]
- **Communication and negotiation:** Because there is no "standard model" for polyamorous relationships, and reliance upon common expectations may not be realistic, polyamorists often advocate explicitly negotiating with all involved to establish the terms of their relationships, and often emphasize that this should be an ongoing process of honest communication and respect.

Polyamorists will usually take a pragmatic approach to their relationships; many accept that sometimes they and their partners will make mistakes and fail to live up to these ideals, and that communication is important for repairing any breaches.^{[43][44]}

- **Trust, honesty, dignity, and respect:** Most polyamorists emphasize respect, trust, and honesty for all partners.^{[43][44]} Ideally, a partner's partners are accepted as part of that person's life rather than merely tolerated, and usually a relationship that requires deception or a "don't ask don't tell" policy is seen as a less than ideal model.
- **Boundaries and agreements:** Poly relationships often involve negotiating agreements, and establishing specific boundaries, or "ground rules"; such agreements vary widely and may change over time, but could include, for example: consultation about new relationships; devising schedules that work for everyone; limits on physical displays of affection in public or among mixed company; and budgeting the amount of money a partner can spend on additional partners.
- **Gender equality:** Many polyamorists do not believe in different relationship "rules" based on gender, a point of contrast with some forms of religious non-monogamy, which are often patriarchally based. Commonly, however, couples first expanding an existing monogamous relationship into a polyamorous one, may adhere to gender-specific boundaries until all parties are comfortable with the new dynamic, such as when a wife agrees not to engage sexually with another male at her husband's request, but may be allowed to have romantic and sexual relationships with women. Such terms and boundaries are negotiable, and such asymmetric degrees of freedom among the partners (who need not be of different genders) are more often due to individual differences and needs, and are usually understood to be temporary and within a negotiated time frame until further opening up of the relationship becomes practicable or easier for the parties to handle emotionally.
- **Non-possessiveness:** Many polyamorists view excessive restrictions on other deep relationships as less than desirable, as such restrictions can be used to replace trust with a framework of ownership and control. It is usually preferred or encouraged that a polyamorist strive to view their partners' other significant others (often referred to as OSOs) in terms of the gain to their partners' lives rather than a threat to their own (see compersion). Therefore, jealousy and possessiveness are generally viewed not so much as something to avoid or structure the relationships around, but as responses that should be explored, understood, and resolved within each individual, with compersion as a goal.

Sharing of domestic burden

Benefits of a polyamorous relationship can include the following:^[45]

- The ability of parties to discuss issues with multiple partners has the potential to add mediation and stabilization to a relationship, and to reduce polarization of viewpoints.
- Emotional support and structure provided by other committed adults within the family unit.
- A wider range of experience, skills, resources, and perspectives that multiple adults bring to a family dynamic.
- The ability to share chores and child supervision, reducing domestic and child rearing pressure upon adults' time without needing to pay for outside child caregivers.
- Greatly reduced *per capita* cost of living.
- Increased financial stability; the loss of one income is not the entirety of the family income (if only one parent works), or half the family income (if both parents work), but may be far less.

- Support for companion-like marriages, which can be satisfying even if no longer sexually vital, since romantic needs are met elsewhere. This acts to preserve existing relationships.^[46]
- More emotional, intellectual and sexual needs are met as part of the understanding that one person cannot provide all. Conversely, polyamory offers release from the expectation that one must meet all of a primary partner's needs.

Specific issues affecting relationships

The skills and attitudes needed to manage polyamorous relationships add challenges that are not often found in the traditional "dating-and-marriage" model of long-term relationships. Polyamory may require a more fluid and flexible approach to love relationship, and yet operate on a complex system of boundaries or rules. Additionally, participants in a polyamorous relationship may not have, nor expect their partners to have, preconceptions as to the duration of the relationship, in contrast to monogamous marriages where a lifelong union is generally the goal. However, polyamorous relationships can and do last many years.

Polyamorists cite the human tendency towards jealousy and possessiveness as major hurdles in polyamory, and also as personal limitations to overcome:^[9]

Possessiveness [*sic*] can be a major stumbling block, and often it prevents what could be a successful polyamorous relationship from forming. When people are viewed, even inadvertently, as possessions [*sic*], they become a commodity, a valuable one at that. Just as most people are reluctant to let go of what little money that they have, people are also reluctant to "share" their beloved. After all, what if zie finds someone else who is more attractive/intelligent/well-liked/successful/etc.. than zie, and decides to abandon the relationship in favor of the new lover? These sorts of inferiority complexes must be resolved, completely, before a polyamorous [*sic*] relationship can be truly successful.^[47]

An editorial article on the polyamory website *Polyamoryonline.org* proposed in 2006 the following issues as being worthy of specific coverage and attention:^[48]

- Helping children cope with "being different".
- "Coming out" as polyamorous (and explaining polyamory) to children.
- Polyamorous parental interactions.
- Polyamory social settings (involving children).
- Legal (parenting) issues.

The author, herself part of a polyamorous relationship with two other adults, comments that:

The kids started realizing that there were three adults in the house that they had to answer to. Then came the onslaught of trying to 'befriend' a particular adult and get what they wanted from that one adult. Another big shock when they found that it didn't work and that we all communicated about wants or needs of any given child. After this was established, we sort of fell into our patterns of school, practices, just normal life in general. The kids all

started realizing that there were three of us to care for them when they were sick, three of us to get scolded from, hugs from, tickles from; three of us to feed the small army of mouths and three of us to trust completely in. After trust was established, they asked more questions. Why do we have to live together? Why can't I have my own room? ... Why do you guys love each other? Why do I have to listen to them (non-biological parent)? We answered them as truthfully as we could and as much as was appropriate for their age. I found that it was more unnerving for me to think about how to approach a new kid and their parents than it ever was for the kids.^[49]

In a same-sex setting

Gay psychotherapist Michael Shernoff wrote that non-monogamy is "a well-accepted part of gay subculture", although "often viewed by some therapists as problematic",^[50] and that somewhere between 30%^[51] and 67%^[52] of men in male couples reported being in a sexually non-monogamous relationship. According to Eli Coleman & B. R. Simon Rosser (1996), "although a majority of male couples are not sexually exclusive, they are in fact emotionally monogamous."^[53] Shernoff states that:

One of the biggest differences between male couples and mixed-sex couples is that many, but by no means all, within the gay community have an easier acceptance of sexual nonexclusivity than does heterosexual society in general. ... Research confirms that nonmonogamy in and of itself does not create a problem for male couples when it has been openly negotiated.^[54]

In practice, most discussion of lesbian and gay polyamory occurs primarily within the context of relationship ethics. It should be noted that there is a broad spectrum of partner numerical and frequency profiles among lesbians and gay men, so that polyamorous ethical debates may be undertaken, but most legislative effort is expended on legal recognition of same-sex couples, whether through civil unions, registered partnerships or same-sex marriage proper. As yet, there is no movement for lesbian/gay 'polyamorists rights' akin to that for same-sex marriage or alternative forms of relationship recognition.^[55]

Celeste West was a lesbian polyamorist known for her authorship of books about lesbian sex and polyfidelity.^[56]

Parenting

Many polyamorists have children, either within the relationship(s) or from previous relationships. Like other elements of polyamory, the way children are integrated into the family structure varies widely. Some possibilities are:

- Parents are primarily responsible for their own children (biological, adoptive, or step-), but other members of the relationship act as an extended family, providing assistance in child-rearing.

- Adults raise children collectively, all taking equal responsibility for each child regardless of consanguinity.
- Parents are wholly responsible for their own children, with other members of the relationship relating to the children as friends of the parents.
- Children treat parents' partners as a form of stepparent or are told to think of them as aunts and uncles.

The choice of structures is affected by timing: an adult who has been present throughout a child's life is likely to have a more parental relationship with that child than one who enters a relationship with people who already have a teenage child. (The issues involved often parallel those of step-parenting.) The degree of logistical and emotional involvement between the members of the relationship is also important: a close-knit triad already living under one roof with shared finances is far more likely to take a collective approach to parenting than would a larger, loose-knit group with separate living arrangements:

Some poly families are structured so that one parent can be home to care for the children while two or more other adults work outside the home and earn an income, thus providing a better standard of living for all concerned. More adult caretakers means more people available for child care, help with homework, and daily issues such as transportation to extracurricular activities. Children thrive on love. The more adults they have to love them who are part of the family, the happier and more well-adjusted they are. There is no evidence that growing up in a poly family is detrimental to the physical, psychological or moral well being of children. If parents are happy in their intimate relationships, it helps the family. Happy families are good for children.^[57]

Whether children are fully informed of the nature of their parents' relationship varies, according to the above considerations and also to whether the parents are "out" to other adults.

In one possible case indicative of the law related to parenting and polyamory in the United States, the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court in 2006 voted 5–1 that a father in a custody case had the right to teach his child (age 13) about polygamy (and hence possibly by implication about other multiple partner relationships), and that this right "trumped" the anti-bigamy and other laws that might apply and was not deemed inherently harmful to the child. (Note: this decision was made in the context of religious freedom, but religious freedom would not apply if there was harm to the child.)^[58]

Custody ramifications

Parents involved in polyamorous relationships often keep it a secret because of the risk that it will be used by an ex-spouse, or other family member, as grounds to deprive them of custody of and/or access to their children. The fear is that it will be used in family disputes much as homosexuality has been used in the past.

In 1998, a Tennessee court granted guardianship of a child to her grandmother and step-grandfather after the child's mother April Divilbiss and partners outed themselves as polyamorous on MTV. After contesting the decision for two years, Divilbiss eventually agreed to relinquish her daughter,

acknowledging that she was unable to adequately care for her child and that this, rather than her polyamory, had been the grandparents' real motivation in seeking custody.^[59] The Tennessee case is not necessarily normative for the entirety of the United States, since family law varies significantly from state to state. US state law is, of course, not normative for laws of other countries.

Compersion

Compersion (or, synonymously, **frubble**^{[60][61]}) is an empathetic state of happiness and joy experienced when another individual experiences happiness and joy, and the term is regularly used by members of the polyamory community in the context of polyamorous relationships. It is used to describe when a person experiences positive feelings when a lover is enjoying another relationship.^{[62][63]}

Polyamorous views on jealousy and compersion

The concept of compersive behavior is widespread within the polyamorous community, and was originally coined by the now defunct Kerista Commune in San Francisco.^{[64][65][66]}

It is common for people within the polyamorous community to state that jealousy comes with the territory of open romantic relationships.^[67] Compersion has often been referred to as "the opposite of jealousy".^{[65][68]}

In romantic relationships, thoughts and feelings of insecurity, fear, and/or anxiety over anticipated loss of a partner or of that partner's attention, affection, or time elicit both compersion and jealousy as natural reactions to perceived complexities of non-monogamy and are quite extensively covered in polyamorous literature.

Formal definitions

- PolyOz defines compersion as "the positive feelings one gets when a lover is enjoying another relationship. Sometimes called the opposite or flip side of jealousy." They comment that compersion can coexist with jealous feelings.^[68]
- The Polyamory society defines compersion to be "the feeling of taking joy in the joy that others you love share among themselves, especially taking joy in the knowledge that your beloveds are expressing their love for one another".^[64]
- The InnKeeper defines compersion as "A feeling of joy when a loved one invests in and takes pleasure from another romantic or sexual relationship. ... Compersion does not specifically refer to joy regarding the sexual activity of one's partner, but refers instead to joy at the relationship with another romantic and/or sexual partner. It's analogous to the joy parents feel when their children get married, or to the happiness felt between best friends when they find a partner."^[69]
- From *Opening Up*, Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio writes that compersion is, in part, "the ability to turn jealousy's negative feelings into acceptance of, and vicarious enjoyment for, a lover's joy". (p. 175)

Geographical and cultural differences

Social views on polyamory vary by country and culture. In a 2003 article in *The Guardian*, Deborah Anapol, an American and founder of the polyamory movement, was quoted as saying that the United Kingdom was "about 15 years behind America in its acceptance" of polyamory. A British practitioner of polyamory also quoted in the article expressed the opposite opinion.^[70]

Philosophical aspects

As with many non-traditional life choices, there is considerable active discussion about philosophical approaches to polyamory.

In 1929, *Marriage and Morals*, written by the philosopher, mathematician, and Nobel Prize winner Bertrand Russell, offered a strong precedent to the philosophy of polyamory. At the time of publication, Russell's questioning of the contemporary notions of morality regarding sex and marriage prompted vigorous protests and denunciations, but several intellectuals, led by John Dewey, spoke out against this treatment.^{[71][72]}

In Echlin's article in *The Guardian*, six reasons for choosing polyamory are identified: a drive towards female independence and equality driven by feminism; disillusionment with monogamy; a yearning for community; honesty and realism in respect of relational nature of human beings; human nature; and individual non-matching of the traditional monogamous stereotype. Jim Fleckenstein, director of the Institute for 21st-Century Relationships, is quoted as stating that the polyamory movement has been driven not only by science fiction, but also by feminism: "Increased financial independence means that women can build relationships the way they want to." The disillusionment with monogamy is said to be "because of widespread cheating and divorce". The longing for community is associated with a felt need for the richness of "complex and deep relationships through extended networks" in response to the replacement and fragmentation of the extended family by nuclear families. "For many", Echlin writes, "it is a hankering for community ... we have become increasingly alienated, partly because of the 20th century's replacement of the extended family with the nuclear family. As a result, many of us are striving to create complex and deep relationships through extended networks of multiple lovers and extended families ... Polys agree that some people are monogamous by nature. But some of us are not, and more and more are refusing to be shoehorned into monogamy."^[70]

Others speak of creating an "honest responsible and socially acceptable" version of non-monogamy – "since so many people are already non-monogamous, why not develop a non-monogamy that is honest, responsible and socially acceptable? ... It seems weird that having affairs is OK but being upfront about it is rocking the boat."^[73]

A sixth reason, a couple's response to a failure of monogamy, by reaching a consensus to accept the additional relationship, is identified by other authors.^[74]

Research

Research into polyamory has been limited. A comprehensive government study of sexual attitudes, behaviors and relationships in Finland in 1992 (age 18–75, around 50% female and male) found that around 200 out of 2250 (8.9%) respondents "agreed or strongly agreed" with the statement "*I could*

maintain several sexual relationships at the same time" and 8.2% indicated a relationship type "that best suits" at the present stage of life would involve multiple partners. By contrast, when asked about other relationships at the same time as a steady relationship, around 17% stated they had had other partners while in a steady relationship (50% no, 17% yes, 33% refused to answer). [1] (<http://www.fsd.uta.fi/english/data/catalogue/FSD1243/cbF1243e.pdf>) (PDF)

British artist Connie Rose was the first to create a film about polyamory consisting of interviews around the world including polyamory's leading academics, authors and sex experts, including Dossie Easton (coauthor of *The Ethical Slut*) and Christopher Ryan (coauthor of *Sex at Dawn*). Rose's film *Questioning Monogamy* was exhibited in London 2011 as an eight-foot installation for 12 people to lie in with ten screens.

The article, *What Psychology Professionals Should Know About Polyamory*, based on a paper presented at the 8th Annual Diversity Conference in March 1999 in Albany, New York, states the following:

While openly polyamorous relationships are relatively rare (Rubin, 1982), there are indications that private polyamorous arrangements within relationships are actually quite common. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983, cited in Rubin & Adams, 1986) noted that of 3,574 married couples in their sample, 15–28% had an understanding that allows nonmonogamy under some circumstances. The percentages are higher among cohabitating couples (28%), lesbian couples (29%) and gay male couples (65%) (p. 312).^[75]

A study by Moors et al. examined "consensual non-monogamy" or CNM (which includes polyamory) in the context of attachment in adults, particularly with regards to *anxiety* (insecurity about a partner's availability) and *avoidance* (discomfort with closeness). The first sample was of exclusively monogamous individuals that were not told the nature of what was being studied, and found that those with high attachment avoidance tended to view CNM more positively as well as being more willing to engage in it (but had not *actually* engaged in it). The authors theorized this was "because these relationships promote distance from their partners and support their accepting attitudes toward uncommitted and casual sex." Individuals with high attachment anxiety tended to view CNM negatively, but no correlation was found regarding willingness to engage in it. The second sample was a targeted recruitment of individuals currently engaged in CNM relationships. This sample showed low levels of attachment avoidance, and no correlation related to attachment anxiety. The lack of correlation with anxiety in either sample with regards to willingness or actual engagement suggested it may have little impact on the matter. The large disparity in attachment avoidance between those willing to engage in CNM and those that actually engage in it could not be fully explained within the context of the study, but the authors offer several hypotheses. The study also had a few limitations, including that all subjects were heterosexual, the data was anonymous self-report and the second sample may have suffered from social desirability bias due to its targeted recruitment.^[76]

In a clinical setting

There is little research at present into the specific needs and requirements for handling polyamory in a clinical context. A notable paper in this regard is *Working with polyamorous clients in the clinical setting* (Davidson, 2002),^[77] which addresses the following areas of inquiry:

1. Why is it important that we talk about alternatives to monogamy now?
2. How can therapists prepare to work with people who are exploring polyamory?
3. What basic understandings about polyamory are needed?
4. What key issues do therapists need to watch for in the course of working with polyamorous clients?

Its conclusions, summarized, were that "Sweeping changes are occurring in the sexual and relational landscape" (including "dissatisfaction with limitations of serial monogamy, i.e. exchanging one partner for another in the hope of a better outcome"); that clinicians need to start by "recognizing the array of possibilities that 'polyamory' encompasses" and "examine our culturally-based assumption that 'only monogamy is acceptable'" and how this bias impacts on the practice of therapy; the need for self-education about polyamory, basic understandings about the "rewards of the poly lifestyle" and the common social and relationship challenges faced by those involved, and the "shadow side" of polyamory, the potential existing for coercion, strong emotions in opposition, and/or jealousy.

The paper also states that the configurations a therapist would be "most likely to see in practice" are individuals involved in primary-plus arrangements, monogamous couples wishing to explore non-monogamy for the first time, and "poly singles".

A manual for psychotherapists who deal with polyamorous clients was published in September 2009 by the *National Coalition for Sexual Freedom* titled *What Psychotherapists Should Know About Polyamory*.^[78]

The decision to explore

Morin (1999) states that a couple has a very good chance of adjusting to nonexclusivity if at least some of the following conditions exist:^[79]

- Both partners want their relationship to remain primary.
- The couple has an established reservoir of good will.
- There is a minimum of lingering resentments from past hurts and betrayals.
- The partners are not polarized over monogamy/non-monogamy.
- The partners are feeling similarly powerful and autonomous.

Green & Mitchell (2002) state that direct discussion of the following issues can provide the basis for honest and important conversations:^[79]

- Openness versus secrecy
- Volition and equality versus coercion and inequality
- Clarity and specificity of agreements versus confusion/vagueness
- Honoring keeping agreements versus violating them
- How each partner views non-monogamy.

According to Shernoff,^[80] if the matter is discussed with a third party, such as a therapist, the task of the therapist is to:

Engage couples in conversations that let them decide for themselves whether sexual exclusivity or nonexclusivity is functional or dysfunctional for the relationship.

Criticisms

Division of love

In *The Ethical Slut*, Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy (writing as 'Catherine Liszt') described an argument against polyamory that posits that when one's love is divided among multiple partners, the love is lessened. They referred to this as a "starvation economy" argument, because it treats love as a scarce commodity (like food or other resources) that can be given to one person only by taking it away from another. This is sometimes called a "Malthusian argument", after Malthus' writings on finite resources. This argument has also been characterized as a type of zero-sum thinking, whereby an individual views relationships as being like a zero-sum game such that one person's love gained would be another's love lost.^[81] Burleigh et al. found that zero-sum thinking about love was associated with greater prejudice against individuals who practice consensual nonmonogamy.

Easton and Hardy reject the idea that dividing love among multiple partners automatically lessens it. A commonly invoked argument uses an analogy with a parent who has two children—the parent does not love either of them any less because of the existence of the other.^[82] Robert Heinlein expressed this in saying "The more you love, the more you can love -- and the more intensely you love. Nor is there any limit on how many you can love. If a person had time enough, he could love all of that majority who are decent and just."^[83]

Perceived failure rates and relationship satisfaction

Polyamorous relationships are often criticised as "not lasting". For example, Stanley Kurtz takes this as axiomatic when he says "... legally recognized polyamory [would] be unstable ..."^[84] Those opposed to polyamory argue it leads to decreased relationship quality in the long run.^{[85][86][87]}

The complex nature of polyamory presents difficulties in structuring research into the stability of polyamorous relationships. For instance, polyamorists may be reluctant to disclose their relationship status due to potential negative consequences, and researchers may be unfamiliar with the full range of polyamorous behaviours, leading to poorly framed questions that give misleading results.^[88]

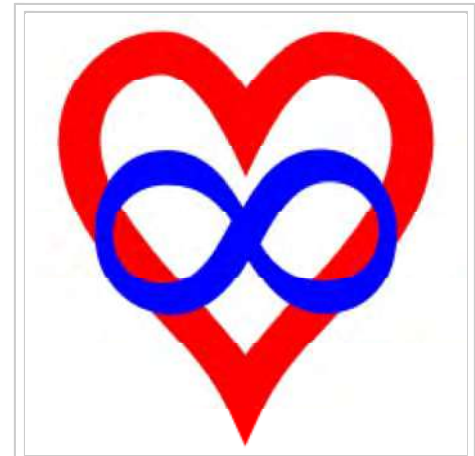
Symbols

A number of symbols have been created to represent polyamory. These include a parrot, since "Polly" is a common name for these birds,^{[89][90][91]} and the *infinity heart*. The infinity heart symbol is increasingly being produced on pins, T-shirts, bumper stickers and other media.^{[92][93]}

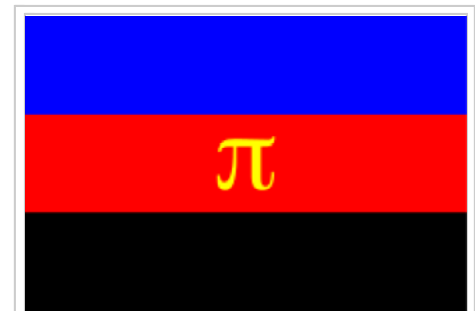
The Polyamory Pride Flag designed by Jim Evans has stripes of blue (representing openness and honesty among all partners), red (representing love and passion), and black (representing solidarity with those who must hide their polyamorous relationships from the outside world). In the center of the flag is a gold Greek lowercase letter 'pi', as the first letter of 'polyamory'. Gold represents "the value that we place on the emotional attachment to others... as opposed to merely primarily physical relationships."^[94] There is also a similar ribbon.^[95]

See also

- *Family: the web series*
- List of polyamorists
- Sociosexual orientation
- Ménage à trois



The infinity heart



Jim Evans' polyamory pride flag

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- Stewart, Kate. 2013. *The Open Relationship Handbook* (<http://katelstewart.com/books/>) ISBN 9781483501512
- Veaux, Franklin; Rickert, Eve. 2014. *More Than Two: A practical guide to ethical polyamory*, ISBN (paperback): 978-0-9913997-0-3, ISBN (Kindle/ePub): 978-0-9913997-2-7.

- Weitzman, Geri. "Therapy with Clients Who Are Bisexual and Polyamorous" (<http://www.numenor.org/~gdw/psychologist/bipolycounseling.html>), *Journal of Bisexuality*, Volume 6, Issue 1/2, pp. 137–64.

External links

Polyamory-related media

- TED Talk: Polyamory (<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Polyamory-Leon-Feingold-TEDxBus>)
- Polyamory (https://www.dmoz.org/Society/Relationships/Alternative_Lifestyles/Polyamory/) at DMOZ

Polyamory-related media coverage

- Polyamory in the News (<http://polyinthedia.blogspot.com/>) (2005–present)

Research and articles

- National Coalition for Sexual Freedom Polyamory Sound Bites (<https://ncsfreedom.org/component/k2/item/470-sound-bites-for-the-polyamory-community.html>) Includes some data on frequency of nonmonogamy and psychiatric health of the polyamorous.
- The Kenneth R. Haslam Collection on Polyamory (<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/library/haslam.html>) hosted at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction includes a wide variety of materials related to polyamory, along with research data.
- Polyamory Bibliography (<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/library/Pdf/Polyamory%20Bibliography.pdf>) from the Kinsey Institute.

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Polyamory&oldid=756896215>"

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