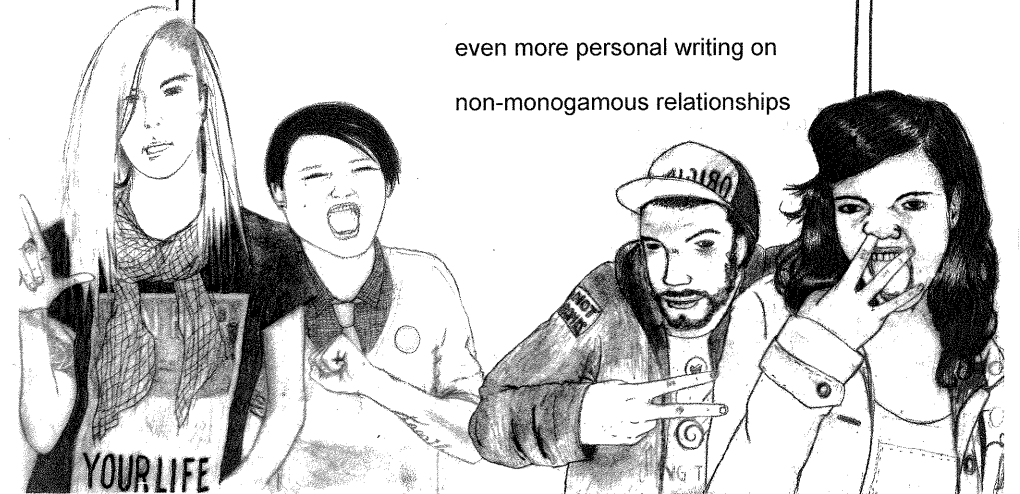


3

JUGGLING THE RAINBOW

even more personal writing on
non-monogamous relationships



Aotearoa / New Zealand

MORE RESOURCES:

With Open Hands (important things for poly beginners):

<http://www.twinoakscommunity.org/paxus/calta-power.html?start=8>

The Usual Error (why we don't understand each other and 34 ways to make it better):

<http://usualerror.com/ebook/The%20Usual%20Error%20ebook.pdf>

Juggling the Rainbow # 1 & 2: www.jugglingtherainbow.wordpress.com

Zines to be downloaded from www.qzap.org:

This is about more than who we fuck # 1 & 2 (morethanfckng@gmail.com)

Coming out (zine) by Amanda (fornever45@gmail.com)

SPECIAL DEDICATION OF THIS ISSUE GO TO:

Wai who is such a dedicated writer for Juggling the Rainbow
All my friends!



cover by Laura

Aotearoa / New Zealand March 2013

WELCOME

Hello again - we are back and we are more!

It doesn't seem that only a year has passed when the last JTR came out. Again lots of people have put their energy into reflecting on their lives and stories of modelling relationship beyond the mainstream. Despite hard work and occasional desperation, we are celebrating love and the quest for it here on every page. (And by saying "love" we mean many forms and expressions).

It is a bit of a struggle to balance how much private information one feels comfortable sharing with an either unknown audience – or a well too familiar one, our friends, ex-lovers, members of the wider queer scene etc. I would like to thank everyone who has decided to publish their story and also everyone who decided that at this point they had to step back. A friend of mine said to me his piece might be ready for issue 17 – a happy toast to that: May this zine continue to live!

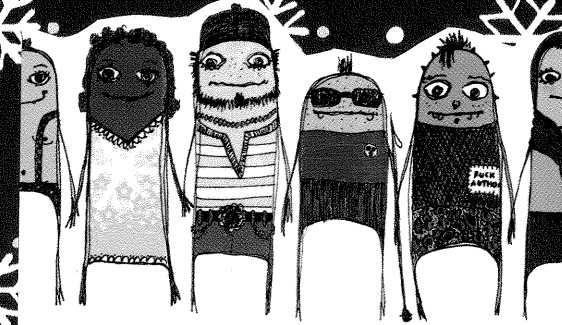
Multiple loving, as we all know or suspect can be messy, exciting, painful and rich just like anything else. In this issue there is a wide range of topics addressed – parenthood, jealousy, culture, asexuality, gender, the unknown, breakups, passion, boundaries and considering monogamy.

I wish you an enjoyable reading experience and that your curiosity to learn will never end.

CONTACT: jugglingtherainbow@gmail.com

I'm With

Them



Trouble X

I KNOW THAT I AM POLY

by Kathryn Fischer; aka mad kate www.alfabus.us

I know that I am poly because I am looking for networks, for the connections, with anyone that I can find them with. I am devastated and my musical partner makes me a lunch and gives me a massage. Then we improvise together and we express our sorrows into our music. I want to be kissed with rough passion, I want to gaze into hungry eyes, I want spiritual and metaphysical interaction, blood-binding connection, political debating—I go to my lover. I want to laugh hysterically and complain about my day, unself-censored—I go to my partner. I want to be dominated, I go to my friend who does this in just the way that I want—and beforehand we have an intellectual conversation lasting hours before I say, so, are you going to tie me up now? I want friendship and feminism and intellectual sparing—I go to our informal queer porn group. For creative inspiration and laughter and occasional beating, I go to Sadie. For a long letter or smart gmail chat—Jessica. Sometimes, all those roles are intertwined. Sometimes, I don't know what to expect.

I know that I am poly because I love the way that ze touches my back, and the way that her hands are on my hands. I am willing to let myself be taken care of in this way. There are other people that I will take care of. I do not have to do that for everyone. I cannot have everyone do that for me.

I know I am poly because I have many sites of home. I want to sleep alone; I negotiate with my partner some nights at the apartment. I want to write; I retreat to my studio, my old friend waiting for me with silence. I live on the road with my band-mates; they become a site of home, a site of family. I need to move under the lights of the stage, I sweat out my anger, my frustration, my passion, there under the heat of the lights, the adrenaline of myself and the audience. The stage is a site of home. I want the camaraderie and understanding of the flesh and of our bodies without shame, I go to the backstage. We are all there, half-naked. I want the joy of sexual exploration through our queer bodies; I collaborate in a queer porn. What has not been made before, what we want to see more of, we attempt to create for the first time. We are never the first, there are always others. Others who want and others with whom we can form sites of home.

I know that the kind of poly that I am can include but does not have to include sexual interactions. The kind of poly that I am is poly in all the ways that poly can mean. Poly- collaboration, poly-sexual, poly-gendered, poly-playful, play-mated, poly-intellectual, poly in my musical and artistic collaborators, poly in my interests, poly in the networks that I find. Poly in the way that I imagine raising children, with many parents. At some points in time, what characterizes my poly is the many sexual partners I might have, while at the same moment, what characterizes my partner's poly practice is the multiple ways that he can imagine pulling fabric across the human body. At other points in time, what characterizes my poly practice are the multiple artistic collaborations that I maintain, while for my lover it may be characterized by the multiple ways that she imagines her multi-gendered body interacting with another body's multiple sites of gender.

I have not always been quite this poly, and I will not always be poly in just this way. Perhaps I will be more decentralized; perhaps I will devote more time to some sites of home than to others. I cannot speak of a balance because the way in which we form networks and bonds is not quantifiable. My poly practice hovers in a spectrum of centrality to decentralization (from one or two sites to many sites of home). Practising polyamory is a journey, a dynamic and changing sense of how I network with the rest of the world. I realize with time and experience that I have been looking for an increasing sense of poly and that it has taken me a long time to get to here. And I have much, much, much more to learn. What I can say is that finding sites of home and networks of bonding is a long and exciting process, one that requires me to concentrate on looking for the sites of home that can feed me in the way that I need to be fed, and to concentrate less on what some sites of home cannot provide for me. This is not easy—but it is a goal.

For nine years, I have been in an open partnership with one person. Especially in the beginning years, I thought of him as "primary." I thought of our sexual relationship as primary, our physical home as primary, and our emotional home as primary. I thought that no matter how many networks I formed, he was my first go-to, my first option, my first and most valued playmate. While this hierarchy did create a strong bond, it also had negative aspects that we wanted to unlearn, and that in fact we were naturally moving away from as we expressed our individual interests and desires and grew together and separately. What we have realized over the years together is that it is valuable and beautiful to have many sites of home that do not need to revolve around one "primary site." That primary site does not have to be tantamount to the site that offers sex. These sites of home can all be beautiful and valuable on their own. One site of home does not need to be better than

any other. We have been working and learning to expand and allow for many sites of home. We are learning to give and receive support and love to and

from multiple sites. This has a lot to do with polyamory but not always with sex.

It often seems that life delivers what we imagine it can. When we begin to imagine a different reality, we open ourselves up to the possibility of that reality manifesting in our lives. So by the time that I recognized how much I wanted to push myself towards poly-partnership rather than just primary partnership with many "other" partners, I was already moving in that direction naturally. But the change couldn't and wouldn't just come overnight. In fact, the change won't ever even be finished.

One of the things that helped me manifest the change in my life was actually the physical movement of traveling as a performer. In terms of "numbers" (which is an interesting way to look at reality), I was sleeping in a lot of beds, with a lot of sleeping partners. I had a lot of temporary homes, beds, places. Locations. My reality was becoming increasingly poly-bedded. Not primary, as in one steady home that I would sometimes leave, but increasingly a situation that was no longer primary—not one bed with many temporary beds, but sleeping time increasingly shared between my studio bed, my home bed, my bed with my new lover, and the many many tour beds—the many beds in many hotels, the bed on the tour bus in which I might spend two weeks at a time. The beds of people who would offer accommodation in their home and that I might even revisit three, four, five, six times.

This is one of the lenses that I was beginning to understand polyamory, and remarkably, it really didn't have to do with sex. Nevertheless, it was hugely educational. The increasingly ubiquitous internet was enabling me to communicate with people who weren't "physically" with me. Those that were physically with me were also becoming my family members. My sexuality was being fulfilled where it could me, but those were just a few beds. I did have and I do have a rock of support in my "primary partner" and yet increasingly that rock was about trust rather than about seeing in the physical. This trust made me realize how many rocks of support I have in my life—rocks of support that I don't have to see, persons that I don't have to have sex with, sites of home in people that I don't even have to talk to all that often. They are there and they are multiple sites of emotional home.

This past year of my poly journey has provided a massive learning curve for me. Besides the ways that touring was beginning to bring about the idea of many beds and many sites of home into my life, I began to think a lot about how motherhood could be compatible in the kind of life I and my partners lead. I always had the feeling that giving birth was an important spiritual and emotional rite that I wanted to experience. But I also knew and know that, while being a birth mother is really important and unique in a child's life, the

other fathers and mothers and parents that surround that child can be just as special. Perhaps, I began to think, I don't "need" to experience birth-motherhood if I can experience fatherhood/co-parenting/motherhood.

I began to think about whether or not my life partner was the same person with whom I wanted to be a co-parent. This was an important line of thinking for me because I had never really considered that he wouldn't be. But giving myself the permission to imagine and dream about what my ideal co-parents would be like, or could be like, how we would share similar philosophies and spiritual goals surrounding the birth, helped me understand that I didn't need to simply assume that my life partner would also be a co-parent. This further helped me understand our relationship not as primary but as poly. While I wouldn't rule out the possibility of co-parenting with him, I also gave myself permission to imagine a wider community that I could collaborate with in co-parenting.



Again, the universe sometimes delivers what we begin to imagine. In this case, I experienced a challenge that I hadn't exactly expected, but that I saw as a real gift. I found out that my partner, whom I had seen as "primary," would be the father of his lover's child. At almost the same moment, I found out that one of my artistic collaborators and friends, one with whom I share many goals about co-parenting, spiritual and orgasmic birth, was also pregnant and due at around the same time. I knew instantly that I wanted to father my friend's child. And I knew that my partner would also be a father. I would not, at least in this moment, be the birth mother.

While the news was shocking and also hard to take at first, my partner and I committed to real communication about the change in our lives. We talked about how, though neither of us had foreseen these children coming into our lives, they were opportunities for us to further make poly our relationship and to further delve into parenting in a poly-parental way. We could either fight the change, or accept it fully into our lives.

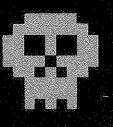
We have decided together—me, my life partner, my life partner's girlfriend and my artistic collaborator—to welcome this patchwork family into the world. We know that we are poly and want to raise our children with poly parents. We know that the bonds that we share between us cannot be quantified and are not the same. We know that this journey won't be easy. The patchwork family inevitably involves our other partners as well. We need their love, support and blessing. But we know that we are poly and that we choose this journey and that we are right in the middle of it.

POLYAMORIST aSEXUAL ANONYMOUS

by Nana Queer

I have tried to write a bit about being polyamorist and being asexual, and not having much luck. I find the polyamory easier, in terms of this zine, where it seems pretty socially acceptable and not out of the ordinary. Being asexual is seen as more freakish and weird and kind of the opposite of sex positive polyamorous culture. On top of that, I'm not really either. I am not and never have been in more than one relationship at a time and do occasionally have sexy feelings and do sexy things with my lover (and on my own). So why do I describe myself using these words? Am I just kidding myself?

I use "polyamorist" and "asexual", because they are useful labels. They explain something about who I am, what I want and what my needs are. Being polyamorous means for me being open to the possibly of falling in love and being in loving relationship with more than one person. It means talking with my lover about boundaries and what they would need to know, how they can feel supported, loved and listened to. It opens communication lines and starts really useful discussions that add to the health of our relationship. In practical terms, it means I get to share my many crushes with my lover knowing that they will speak out if they no longer want to hear it, or fear their rejection. We have the ground work for a functioning polyamorist relationship if any of my crushes develop into something more. It helps me feel free and happy, and all this comes from me simply telling my lover that I identify as polyamorous! Great eh?



Being asexual describes me at times and it's important to me that whoever I am in a sexual relationship with understands and accepts that part of me. It means anticipating that I may not feel like having sex for a whole month at a time, even though there are times when I'm feeling like getting sexy three days in a row. It means we get to talk about consent, and how I like ALOT of snuggling, but this will not always lead to sexy times. It means exploring a million different ways to love and be loved that do not include sexual arousal. It means understanding that my lover may feel rejection if I do not feel like sexy times when they do, and at the same time respecting that I am not responsible for that feeling. What will happen if I start a sexual relationship with someone else? Will rejection and jealousy combined – with my little sexy times spread too thin – destroy our relationship? Or will our amazing communication skills, refined over the years, keep us solid? Stay tuned for the next instalment in a future Juggling the Rainbow zine to find out!

"Polyamorous" and "Asexual" are really useful for me, and I identify with both, despite not really being either. I am a strange one... but it works for me!

IT'S NOT ABOUT NON-MONO GAMY

by Nine (www.jinxremoving.org)

My previous experiences of non-monogamy were generally positive, but they mostly took place in pretty casual or undefined relationships, all a considerable time ago. This is the first time I've been the primary partner, and you'd think that might instil some degree of confidence, but actually I've had a lot of anxieties to work through which weren't present when I had non-monogamous partners to whom I didn't feel all that strongly attached. I had to take a step back and recognise that I had developed a generalised fear of non-monogamy and that the fears underlying it weren't really about non-monogamy at all. Additionally, both K and I have seen friends hurt in non-monogamous relationships by partners who were inconsiderate towards them, and we don't want to replicate those patterns. Here are some things I/we have figured out which have helped me to feel good about where we're at together.

It's about communication

It's routinely stated that communication is key in non-monogamy, but this isn't always easy to put into practice. You need to feel safe if you're going to say how you truly feel, but maybe your partner doesn't know the specific things that need to be in place before you feel safe enough – maybe you can't even describe those things without already feeling vulnerable! Or maybe you don't feel safe because your fears are just so big that you don't dare raise them. For months I actively avoided discussing anything to do with non-monogamy, leaving it to K to bring up, which didn't enable me to properly address the things that I was worried about. I kept bottling things up and letting those worries grow, focusing on the worst possible interpretation of every throwaway comment, then only blurting things out when I was /excessively upset, escalating tense conversations that never had a hope of being approached from the right angle. It also meant that his own attractions and desires were framed only in terms of whether and how much they hurt me. Finally we kind of broke through this barrier of communication – it was that or break up – and I discovered it wasn't actually so scary to talk about things after all. In fact, it enabled me to clarify how we both felt, and I felt much better knowing how things really stood. Sometimes I still need to encourage myself before I dare to talk about something, but increasingly I'm able to communicate more calmly and to feel safe, listened to and understood.

I also found it helpful to read *The Usual Error*, which is a queer-friendly book about communication, particularly in relationships. You can read it online for free at usualerror.com

It's about timing

One reason why I've felt the need to tiptoe around communication is that I'm aware that many different things can affect my feelings, things that are liable to fluctuate and which may not be directly linked to the issues we need to talk about. Things like PMS and deadlines and other stresses in my life and maybe how much time is available for us to talk together before we're interrupted. These make it harder for me to gauge how I might react to something or to trust that I will feel the same way about it, say, a day after we talk about it. I was also afraid that if we talked online while we were in different countries about something that might upset me, I might be left feeling even worse because he might not read cues that I needed more support. All of these things made it really appealing to just indefinitely postpone communication about potentially difficult topics, but we've already seen that that doesn't help. It's good to recognise that these factors are present, but the solution is to let K know about them and trust him to take them on board. Having finally achieved that, it's become a whole lot easier for me to feel that we can talk about new concerns whenever they come up, rather than leaving them to fester.

It's about boundaries

We talk about being able to play a 'wild card', to be able to say "I am really not comfortable about you being with that person, please just don't do it" and have it be respected. Neither of us has ever needed to play it but I feel safer knowing that I will be taken seriously if I ever do. The thing is, K and I do hookups differently and we have different comfort levels both in terms of what we expect to do with other people and how we feel about each other being with someone else. I tend to have impromptu makeouts with people I've just met, and don't really take it much further. He tends to get to know somebody over time, flirt a lot, and be able to tell me in advance that it looks like a sexual encounter is on the cards. There are certain things I'd feel uncomfortable about him doing with other people, and he is fine with abstaining from those things. (Again, within reason! This took a little negotiation and I figured out what was actually okay versus what I really couldn't deal with.) Early on, he reassured me that just because he feels okay about me being with other people in general, it doesn't mean that my feelings about him being with other people have to be completely identical.

It's about different approaches

I've found it hard sometimes to properly tell K about someone else I've been attracted to. I knew that he was likely to be interested and keen to discuss it, rather than feeling threatened, but I was afraid that if I talked about my attractions freely and with no real filter, he might talk about his own attractions in exactly the same way, and I might not always feel secure enough to handle that (see above). My motivation was to protect myself from some hypothetical future angst, rather than to talk about my feelings at the time, and this was contributing to a misleading image of myself as someone who wasn't interested in other people at all. It's actually fun to talk about crushes and action together, now that I feel more secure about our own relationship, but it was important for us to recognise that we're coming at this from different perspectives and that our comfort zones are not the same.

It's about checking in

I really appreciate that K asks me how I feel about any new developments. If I say something like, "This sounds basically fine but I feel a little weird about it but I should just get over that," he'll remind me not to chastise myself for not feeling the way I think I ought to feel, and encourage me to tease out the reasons why I might feel weird about it. He might suggest different ways that things could progress that might make me feel more comfortable. I feel like we're working through this stuff in partnership, which feels really good.

It's about dominant cultural messages

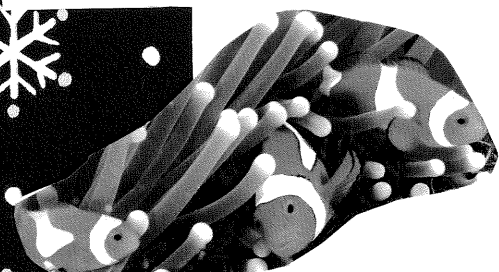
One of the reasons why I felt anxious about non-monogamy was that I'd somehow absorbed the notion that there was a finite amount of love and attraction to go around and that if K was interested in someone else it would mean he was not interested in me anymore. I already knew this didn't make sense – I know that I'm perfectly capable of having crushes on, and being with, other people while still loving my partner – but when I'm feeling insecure, I forget that the same can equally go for K. I am struggling against a culture that promotes monogamy as our default setting and the most desirable form of relationship, and it's not surprising that unlearning that message is an on-going battle. If I am feeling low I need to actively remind myself of this take on things.

It's about gender

In general, I've felt more comfortable with the prospect of my boyfriend (previous boyfriends as well as K) being with another man than with another woman. This feels like a fairly obnoxious double standard and I don't think

it's reasonable, but emotions are not always reasonable so I've been trying to just work with what I've got. Over time, I've managed to unpick my feelings about this somewhat. A large part of my anxiety here was a feeling that pretty much any other woman would be better at being a woman than me and therefore they would all be more appealing partners. This doesn't make sense – obviously he's into me, otherwise we wouldn't be in a relationship. It's also clear that he is attracted to all kinds of different people, and although our stupid patriarchal society may promote the idea that men always prefer very feminine women, this is evidently not the case for him. Also, really I just need to explore my own issues about femininity, so that, even if it's not something I identify with, I don't see it as some kind of threat or competition, which is a really fucked response to patriarchal bullshit.

Another good way for me to deal with this issue is to reframe it, placing myself in a different category. If I don't exactly see myself as a woman then I don't need to measure myself against other women.



It's about addressing underlying issues

My biggest fear about non-monogamy was that K would start seeing someone else and prefer them over me. My biggest fear in general, which is what this is really about, is of being left and feeling unwanted. This is based on a whole bunch of shit that already happened to me before I even met K. In order to deal with these fears, I don't need him to not sleep with other people, I just need reassurance that he still loves me and wants to be with me, which is a pretty reasonable thing to want and a pretty easy thing to get. These are, however, still very big fears and they need to be handled with care.

It's about self-esteem

Because of a series of romantic disappointments over the last several years, part of me developed an irrational belief that no one was going to be interested in me again and I was doomed to heartbreak and loneliness. I've been struggling to find a more healthy way to process things should my present relationship end: break-ups suck anyway, but I don't need that level of despair! And on the flipside, this take on things also seems to be impacting my scope for exploring hookups or relationships with other people. Platitudes about non-monogamy being great because of all the love to go round have

rung hollow to me: it was hard enough to find one person I was into who returned my feelings, shouldn't I be content with that? But increasingly I'm seeing how much fun and how affirming it could be to act on my attractions to other people, while continuing to build a great relationship with K.

I've kind of lost my ability to pursue people, though. After my last break-up, I made a conscious decision not to try with people any more. To some extent, this was actually kind of healthy, because I needed to take a break, stop being so opportunistic and try being more discerning. But I have not managed to come out of that zone with an entirely healthy perspective. Part of me has still given up. Any time I wonder if somebody is interested in me, I immediately rationalise that there could be a perfectly innocent interpretation of it, and I'm not going to do anything unless it is absolutely 100% obvious that they're keen. (That, or I'm going to make a totally anti-suave pass at them at the end of a drunken night, and feel mortified when I sober up.) I'm pretty much the polar opposite of who I used to be in this respect, and I am not yet in the place I want to be.

Conclusions

After feeling so insecure about the prospect of K hooking up with anyone, I've been pleasantly surprised to find that every time it's happened it's been okay with me. I also discovered that it particularly helps if it's with someone I already know and like, and it's good to hear some details about how it went. Increasingly I'm able to understand it as something hot and fun, rather than something that threatens my place in our relationship. I still think it's best for me to process things on a case-by-case basis, though, because my self-esteem is still a bit fragile. And although I'm really happy about how our non-monogamy is going, I have some work to do in terms of exploring my own adventures in it.



EMPTY

by Wai Ho

So there's that whole thing about the glass being half empty or half full. The metaphor being about an outlook on life, whether you choose to see things in a positive or negative light. That kind of thing.

I would sometimes suggest with a poly practice, to approach things as half empty, even totally empty.

Maybe it has to do with me being Chinese, and my pop knowledge of 'Eastern' things. Being born and raised in contested Aotearoa, a land settled and colonised by the 'West'.

There's a whole Chinese trope of 'The glass is useful because it is empty'. Because space is potential, and once filled, the potential is exhausted. I think one of the Chinese characters for student, is a hollow bamboo. The meaning behind being that you can learn stuff if you aren't already full of preconceived ideas and assumptions.

In a way, being poly is quite a lot like this anyway. Shuffling, however clumsily and toe-steppily we do it, away from set notions and un-discussed assumptions of what love, commitment and relationships are, look like and mean.

The longer I do poly, I'm realising how important it is to figure out where I'm at. Seeking out how to know what I'm into and not into, and what I can and can't live with. And probably most recently important, knowing what I don't know about yet, and being alright and communicate about that.

Sometimes when I talk to people newer to poly, their conversations and questions (logically so) are around

'Do we tell each other before we hook up with a new person or after?'
'Are long term lovers and relationships ok, or just one night stands'
'Should we get each other's OK on a person before hooking up with them'
'Is it OK to sleep over'

These are very important things to suss out. It's also really important to leave space for not knowing. Often I don't know how I'll feel about something till after it's happened.

♪ *Thought I'd find it difficult to hear all the details about one night stand hook ups. Turns out I usually love a good goss up.*

♪ *Thought I'd struggle with my partner having a weekend anniversary with her girlfriend. Not so much.*

♪ *Really found it hard when I discovered my partner had given her mother, the same photo of herself that she'd given to me. (I know right!)*

♪ *Got so upset and angry when another partner used my special coffee cup to serve his crush a coffee.*

♪ *Struggle with seeing photos on Facebook of my partner and her lovers, but fine with them in person together, even find it really lovely and warm fuzzy.*



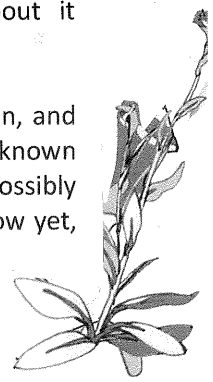
I've also been thinking about the value of being gentle and forgiving with ourselves. I've been thinking about it in terms of threesomes.

When I had my first few threesomes, I was disappointed. I felt really awkward and didn't quite know what to do.

Then I thought about it in terms of twosomes.

We probably wouldn't expect someone that hadn't had much twosome sex, to be awesome, competent and confident immediately. So when it comes to threesome sex, we can't necessarily expect to be confident about it immediately also.

So with poly, we can read all the zines, Ethical Sluts and blogs we can, and while that stuff is good stuff to think about and consider, the unknown terrain is likely to be larger than the known areas, initially, and possibly forever. And if we can be more realistic about the stuff we don't know yet, maybe we can be a bit better at the stuff we do know.



DISEASE OF ARDOUR

by Leander (32)

who lives with his wife and three children in Berlin, Germany.

Jealousy. For me an invaluable feeling. Jealousy is often misunderstood and demonised in our - so called - highly developed societies, which regard it as a state as undesirable as a bothersome head cold. Often it is expected that a person behaves in a way that does not generate jealousy. People do not want to feel this emotion. The anger. The unsettling feeling in one's stomach, because all of it is regarded as very unpleasant.

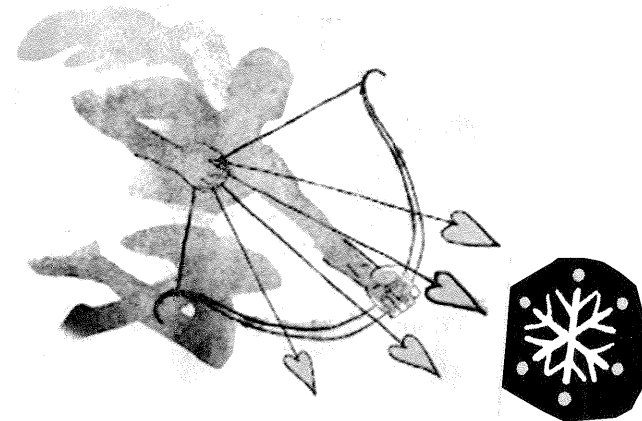
And that it is. At least partially. When I notice jealousy, the initial feeling is an unpleasant pressure in my stomach combined with a slight but steady fear to lose control over something or someone. Suddenly, life does not seem as certain as I usually manage to successfully deceive myself into thinking it is. But in reality, isn't it true that anything could happen any moment? Next time I leave the house; I could get run over by a bus or could find a lotto ticket that won the jackpot. The next man my wife meets could be the man of her dreams and my life as I know it now is no longer certain. Certainty is only an illusion, that I keep alive in order to navigate life in this space-time continuum on this planet that we call "our earth". Anything is possible at all times - not just hypothetically. That is why jealousy is like a Post-it in my day to day life. A Post-it to remind me: "Stop deluding yourself. Nothing is certain. Live every moment as if it was your last on this earth."

So far, so good in theory. Practice though is way more complicated and entangled. At a professional development workshop a few years ago, my wife Kristin met Christian, broad-shouldered, thick blond hair and a deep sexy voice. And wham-bam! she was in love. So what to do? Now, here we had *the* situation. The situation we knew would arise - eventually. The situation we had discussed many times before: "Let's just assume I would do ... this or that. You would surely be hurt and ... so on and so forth." Now the theoretical case had become tangible reality. I was jealous to such extent I hadn't even known I had it in me. But I did.

What did all this want to call my attention to? I thought of my Post-it: "Nothing is certain!" but it didn't help to think of it because I could so clearly feel how uncertain I was. It would have been just as helpful to stand in the rain and say: "Look out! Wet!" My first task had to be to examine my emotions closer. To look at what was hurting so much inside of me. To stay emotionally completely present and voice my feelings and subjective

perceptions honestly, in order to give Kristin the chance to relate to my inner process, trains of thought and feelings.

My primary fear was: to be insufficient. Not strong enough, not rich enough, not smart enough, not intelligent enough, not funny enough. Surely, Christian was much superior in all of these, so I thought. My common sense was telling me that I am the person I just am with all my faults and skills and that my flaws will neither stop nor encourage anyone to share their life with me, but my feeling of insecurity remained. A jealousy stayed which was searching keenly for all my fears - namely that I might not be the stunner I wanted everyone to believe I am. And now my wife might have also realized this because Christian would be able to give her all the things, I was lacking. He was stronger, wealthier, brighter and funnier than I could ever be, surely? I wasted a lot of time and energy on confirming my negative self-image. What was this eagerness that wanted to reaffirm my self-doubts? Firstly, I tried to look at it rationally and indeed, this analysis helped to untangle my inner chaos.



Where does the word jealousy come from? In German, jealousy is translated as "Eifersucht", which breaks down into "Eifer" - zeal and "Sucht" - addiction. The old words "Suht" for pest or disease and "Eifer" for bitter imply that we must be dealing with a bitter illness here. But "Eifer", the bitterness also stems from the Indo-European word "Ai" for fire and if we look at the romantic origin of the word "jealousie" (French) we get from the word "zeal" to the original feeling: "Ardour" connoting "to boil". So, etymologically jealousy is rather about the Disease of Ardour. Anyway, I felt the fire very clearly in my stomach. So what was the subtext supposed to be that this fire carried for me? I mused a bit more about my Disease of Ardour, while Kristin and Christian got to know each other better: If it is indeed a sickness, there must be a cure for it as well.

Alcoholics Anonymous' tried and trusted first step for healing is acknowledgement. The consciousness and acceptance of the status quo. There is a remedy for many diseases. An external medication – but only I am

capable to fully cure myself and to finish the true process of healing. So, my chance in this was to discern the situation and to learn. I realized that I had to face myself. Not just with myself but with everyone who was part of the situation and the ardour burring in my solar plexus.

I met Christian. We sat down and got to know each other. I talked very honestly to him about my separation anxieties, my injured pride, my confused feelings and my jealousy. During this brief conversation, I developed more respect for Christian, because he had been deprived of his mystery and also talked about his anxieties and insecurities. I realized that most of my fears had only really been in my head. He wasn't actually richer or funnier than me. Moreover, it was not important anymore because we had stepped outside of the arena of competition to meet each other as human beings. I got to know some of his qualities and began to understand what my wife admired about him and why he was lovable. It was traits and features I would never attain and never wanted to attain. For example, I am neither blond nor do I have a deep and sexy voice.

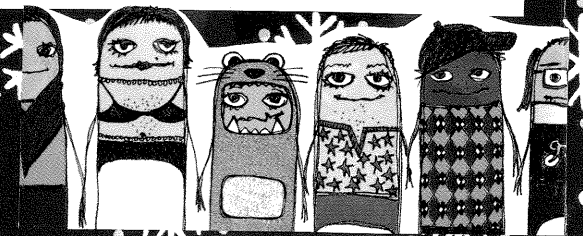
Even if I have feelings that are generally regarded as negative, it doesn't help if I run away from them because if I am really honest with myself and live in an honest partnership, I have to be aware of myself holistically and how I stand in the world. With all my negative and positive feelings and characteristics.

At the beginning of my marriage I decided to go down the path of honesty. I knew it would not be easy, but I hadn't anticipated that it would take me this close to myself.

Anything is possible, the good and the bad, at any time and yet I am not at the mercy of fate because it's my decision how I deal with the tasks life assigns me.

It is the life I have chosen and I decide how I position myself within it! Every moment, again and anew with zeal, with a new Disease of Ardour that carries me forward towards my own divineness.

[Translated by Luca & Britta]



VERTEBRA by VERTEBRA

by Seahorse

Beginning studies last year has very much changed my life style. For the first time in five years I have had a real home with all my things and I have spent most of that time there too, quite involved in my study material. Before this I was a traveller and a guest, sometimes shifting more often, sometimes less. In a way I found travelling a great companion when it comes to spontaneous intimacy and polyamorous loving, setting my focus totally on meeting and engaging with new people. It also complimented my open character, I guess. Commitment for work or staying in one place was only ever temporary and there was often a focus of living-high and kinda fast.

I do miss that.

At the same time I like to not have to worry about where I will be next month, with who, for how long and what projects I get involved in. Having stability in a home, friendships, residency status, studies and relationships feels very 'grown-up' and very comforting. It also enables me to keep a balance between my very own life and my life with each of my lovers – which doesn't mean there is not a lot to be negotiated around quantity and quality of time spend together.

Spending time with class mates at school has put me in the position to "come out" to some of them. Usually my immediate social environment – where revealing such information happens naturally and "being different" is celebrated – is made up of people who are familiar with multiple relationships, queerness and generally questioning white middle class norms in dominant/colonial culture. In ways relating to those things and also my "german" bluntness I feel quite alienated in my class. Yet, I have made a few friends and I have so far come out to three of them, one of which is queer. The first time I came out to my best-class-friend, it was about being a dyke. The second time was about being also straight because I am in a heterosexual relationship. The third time it was about being non-monogamous when she assumed I had broken up with my partner because I had met my lover. She seemed pretty baffled and I had to explain that we are all informed and committed to the openness. (Nowadays it feels normal to talk with her about it and she is asking about each of my relationships with genuine interest without questioning the form when things are tough). The other time I came out to a dyke about everything at once and created confusion because I refused to identify as bisexual (assuming there are only two genders). The third person – the only guy in class – was the least irritated.

Open channels: A queer party to go to together and potential hazards as well as potential one night stands... To be able to talk with my lover openly and considerate about those kinda things and attached feelings without fears, is really comforting for me, almost healing. I noticed how tense I am around naming anything that could arouse jealousy or fear because of my other partners past reactions. It has conditioned me to feel extremely insecure because no matter how careful I would bring up the topic of potential "other intimacy" or "sex with others", it would create so much fear, pain and unfiltered intense reactions. There have been a lot of situations where I felt I was tiptoeing around to carefully open a door and it got slammed shut.

In saying this, I am not totally innocent in creating the environment for that to happen. I have walked over my partner's clearly set boundaries, which I had initially agreed to. I broke his trust and a lot of other things and I don't think I have done a good job at rebuilding it by truly acknowledging his situation or hurt feelings. I was totally wrapped up in my own pain because I really really liked that other person.

[That was way over a year ago now and much learning has happened since].

Meeting my new lover has taught me a lot about myself – being confronted with having to negotiate my own boundaries, or acknowledging that I have them in the first place. My boundaries are not the same as my partners, which is obviously not the point. Yet, in me feeling that there are people who are too close to home (and for me it is literally my HOME, my house / the people I live with), acknowledging that my scope of openness is not unlimited, talking to my lover about it (who liked one of my flatmates) and then for me to not feel like "the poly person who failed poly", has been a huge step up in the process of honesty with myself.

Now I can say that I feel much clearer where I stand with myself. In retrospect I think the expectation to be too free in whom I live my desires out with, is not a healthy one. Being primarily concerned with my own freedom in action instead of considering my partners/lovers well-being is not sustainable. I realized when having really honest and mature conversations with my lover (and also with my flat mate) about boundaries and conditions under which a careful step ahead would be doable for me, that being actively involved in the process of happenings was the most important part. I felt heard and considered.

And I had done neither of those to my partner when he talked about his boundaries.

Earlier I had felt pretty intensely jealous, which was a sensation I had not felt for a lover in so many years, I believed I didn't have it in me. It was a bit of a shock to realize I do. At least I had good tools to tackle it – I was brave

enough to admit it to myself and my friends, I thought of the continuation of my other long term relationship, I initiated conversations with the people concerned. And I wrote down the points that came up for me, to get clarity:

- Fear of being inadequate (other people are smarter and more fun than me)
- Fear of the unknown (what do I do with my feeling of "losing control")
- Clash in interests (my boundaries versus her desires)
- Mistrust in other people's ability to go through with poly (past experience)

Having been assured my feelings were valid and considered calmed me down immensely (it made me stop hyperventilating with a panic of losing control of the situation). It made me open to being generous and allowing something to develop because I know passion for someone is not easily wiped out. Of course it doesn't mean it needs to be explored under every circumstance but I felt that if I aspire (and live) a very open lifestyle around relationships then it is only fair to explore how much I can support a lover's wish for the same option. My involvement and support in this has had various faces and with the acknowledgement of my limits and responsibilities, I felt good about it.

It also has turned out that I was and am absolutely likable for whom I am, that I am smart and funny in my own ways and that daring the unknown made me stronger. The clash in interest has been negotiated towards something all parties involved were comfortable with. I have not been left for someone new.

And now, a few months later, everything (between them) has changed again too.



My partner of five years broke up the relationship. This seemed, considered how we had spent over a year in quite unhealthy dynamics, not the worst idea but it was very scary. Letting someone (or something) I had been massively attached to - even if in unhealthy ways - go is a painful and intense process. That night I thought I would spend weeks on end grieving, unable to keep my pieces together. I did go through the different stages of grief like uncontrollable crying, emotional void, physical pain, denial, plotting a plan of action, reflection through conversation and then I just carried on with school. What sustained me in the end, besides my friends, was the reignited relationship to myself and how strong and independent I felt without having to constantly fight (the right thing in the wrong way) for that relationship to work.

I came to a point where I accepted it, knowing we could impossibly continue like we did because we were both unhappy, we were unable to understand each other's needs, the trust was damaged and our communication had

completely broken down. Actually stepping away from the emotional involvement of all that made me feel I had finally been sold the glasses my eyes had needed to be able to see clear. I began to like the feeling of relief – of not holding all these responsibilities, of not struggling so much anymore, of having grown beyond my own expectations. I did not need that relationship to hold my life here (in Aotearoa New Zealand) together; I had such supportive friends around me, direction in my studies and flexible weekends to spend with my goddaughter or friends. That was some sort of liberation process. I had been continuously involved in some sort of love relationships for so many years now, it's like I forgot what my relationship to just myself feels like. It feels so good to embrace myself again.

Someone inexperienced in polyamory said to me that surely the end of a relationship is not so painful if you are also in another one. It is not so; one relationship or person cannot be replaced by another. I am actually quite careful in how much I take the concerns of one relationship into the other and as I said before, maybe I have grown sensitive to not sharing "other lover stuff" with a lover because of the reaction. But also, it is not their prime responsibility to care for the wounds another relationship has created. Sharing the basic important information what is happening is still a must because I want my partners to know (roughly) what is on my mind and vice versa.

After a week the partner of five years returned – extremely awake. I felt confused because I had tried for weeks to "save" us: To reflect on my mistakes, to find us a counsellor, to give space and support as a friend, to figure out what I want and what I can offer, to keep in touch, to get things moving. To be broken up with on the phone with no participation neither in the decision nor in the way of closing it, felt like my dignity was taken away. The fact that I had created the same feelings about a different thing for him made me not feel any better yet I can empathise in retrospective. I can also understand why I feel and felt unsure of what I want or how much I can 'trust' what he said. I trust he is genuine about his love, the really honest reflections on his own behaviour and how he would like to work towards a real open relationship and all the qualities it takes for it to be sustainable. Yet I can feel that something has been damaged and it needs time to be fully repaired. (This is probably true for both sides).

That is a sensational event in your life. It sounds like once more a small portion of humankind has opened up to life itself. In the sense of: Enjoying loveliness without mistrust or competition.

There is so much change in relationships. There is a constant though which is an inherent feeling of "this is what it should be" and it often only begins to make sense at a certain point. Like I was asking my journal why, so shortly after I fell in love with my lover and things felt so amazing, everything was so insanely crap when I felt jealous. Looking back I can see how that – and all the other situations – has taught me so much about me and the nature of my connection to other people. Stuff I don't like and a lot of stuff I do like. My friends and flat mates holding me when I was falling apart brought me closer to them and showed me how much they care about me. I had to reflect and confront my jealousy to come closer to a friend, a lover, a partner and myself. I had to let my partner go to find myself again and he had to break with me to realize how much he likes my openness. I like to think about experiencing all this as a "gathering of tools" that I carry around with me. It doesn't mean that the tools never fail me but I still know they are there and if they break, I know people who help me fix them.



Bad LUST

by George

So what happened was that I got pretty bad lust for someone, in a way that I completely did not expect. I didn't really know what to do to deal with this – my usual strategy of 'do nothing' was not helping and I was still thinking about it heaps, my brain ticking over how I wanted to pursue this person and what I should do about it. It felt pretty stink, actually, to not feel like I could just do what I wanted, and at the same time feeling guilty for not feeling completely content with my exclusive relationship.

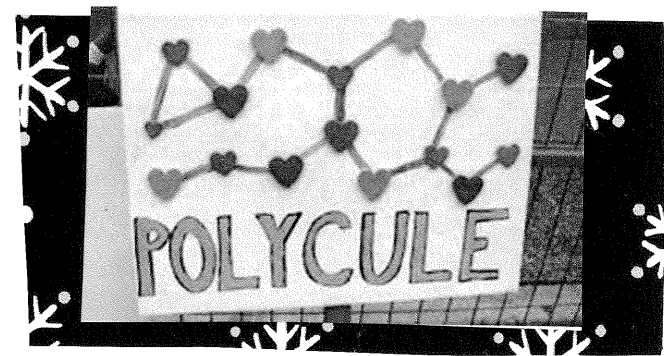
At this time I was also doing a crazy amount of shift work, where I would have shifts changing regularly from day to night to split shifts. I was already barely getting enough sleep, and having things on my mind threw this out even further. Science fact: Long term lack of sleep makes you way more emotional – in some ways like a cranky baby – but also your adrenal system doesn't know what to do with itself so also decides to make you more hungry and horny as well. It's a pretty potent combination!

I was very happily in a monog relationship, in probably the nicest relationship I've been in to date. We communicated really well, we loved each other, it was easy and fun and we trusted each other. It was pretty unfuckupable and perfect and healthy and good.

So I talked to my partner initially not too much about my crazy crush, but about considering changing the nature of our relationship. I argued that having an open relationship with room to negotiate in terms of relationships with other people was a potential way forward. In my shiny proposal, we would be happy, we could define the rules of our own relationship, we could have open and clear communication, we were going to be open to all the possibilities that the world could offer.

As I had expected she was a little bit wary, but she was open to discussing it, and over a period of weeks we talked around it and about it. Eventually, it was decided that I could meet this person and see how it went and then report back and then go from there.

So I did, had a nice time, other person also was in a relationship, it seemed like that is all that would happen. We would hang out as friends – which was good news for my girlfriend who had come to the conclusion that she would rather that I not have me run off and do my thing just yet.



But whoops, not long after hanging out as friends we ended up kissing in a bar. Up till this point the existence of a thing that could happen was purely speculative – it had just been something I had been working out in my head. But now it seemed like there were some mutual feelings! My head might have exploded. We talked briefly about how much shit we were likely to be in given that we were both ostensibly in exclusive relationships. We also discussed whether we could negotiate with our people to make this happen as an actual thing. His GF had been talking to him about open relationships, so maybe it could work out?

My girlfriend was really upset, shaken and angry. I had moved the idea of having an open thing from Possible to Urgent, was underslept and over emotional, still was convinced it would all work out, and really desperately wanted to be with her as well. We had a massive discussion culminating in the end of our 2.5 year relationship. Ended up having a brief thing with the crush which was pretty disappointing, and he told me not long after that he was 'really into monogamy' with his GF. So yeah, got pretty burned, screwed everything up, have the perspective now at least that it was a terrible situation and I had no clue how to get through it and that I was stupid to think that I could, as well as really stupid in the way I went about it.

Still I sometimes ask questions about what I could learn from this. What would it have looked like had we not broken up? I had no clear vision of what that might have been like, and still don't. I guess we might have muddled around and made it up as we went rather than knowing exactly the outcome of everything. How could I have dealt with it better? Was it a good idea to try and make life decisions when constantly tired? Was I being unreasonable? Was she? How do other people sort out this shit?

TROUBLE-X



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10:2007

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:

Personal Reflection on the Journey that is Polyamory

by Andre Fauxcault

We hold onto what we know as long as it functions for us – we let go and explore other possibilities when what we know ceases to. I'm not sure if I entered a polyamorous relationship on the right terms, but I knew that if I was to perpetuate the love I had built with my partner, it was the only way. My biggest fear: to do to the person I loved what I had had done to me; to use the openness of my relationship as a tool to manipulate and control; and to strip away the autonomy of my lover. Knowing how much she adored me, I was between a rock and a hard place, feeling like if I left her for her sake, I would take away her choice in the matter. I was fain to patronize her with ideas of 'knowing better'. But if I stayed knowing that she would stay, regardless of what I demanded; to me, that represented an unhealthy power dynamic.

I was nineteen and I decided that I would be more than happy with one person forever. I didn't need any other sexual partners (having had none previously). I built a world with a young woman who was everything to me. We committed, believing that things would never change; we would never stop loving each other. All of my vegan Easter eggs were in one basket. Which is why, when change did occur and our relationship imploded (no fingers pointed), so did my life and my conception of the world. I had built my life on an ideology that believed in forever and lived like forever would never come. Despite all logic and reason, my ability to construe forever – to give myself (and all of myself) to someone else, and to experience the full impact of that sensation where one person is your universe – was impaired.

In some ways, it was unfortunate that I fell out of one committed relationship and into another. In all ways, it was on the brink of impossible luck that I fell into the arms of the most gentle, empathic, and patient person I have ever met. Here was someone who loved me with all her heart and no reservation. I had almost forgotten what it had felt like to have so much faith in the feelings of others; to feel like my emotions were not privy to exploitation. However, my instincts were still raw. No matter how much I knew she would never hurt me, I felt my being recoil, my priorities focus inwards, and escape

paths clearly marked out. It was the love and understanding that my love gave me that slowly soothed my wounds and salvaged my reactionary mind-set.

Initially, we started off monogamous, but I was not long confronted by my 'relationship demons'. I felt I couldn't be committed or tied down by a relationship. I thought that our relationship would have ended when I told my lover this, but she swore she would rather be in an open relationship than without me at all. Perhaps you can see where my concerns lay.

But we tried it. My desires found me in relationships with women who inspired me – beautiful, strong women whose ethics resonated with me but made me question my own. Was this respectful? Feminist? Ethical? Was it okay if all members were informed, even if I recognized that I seemed to hold an odd balance of power in the dynamics? Did it make it okay if I communicated that and the respective parties continued as they were? What was the implication of my lover's interaction with these people? She ended up meeting every one of them.

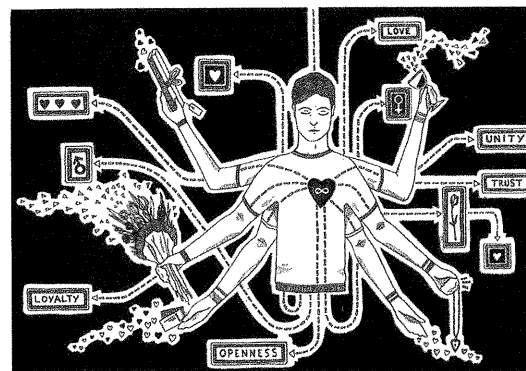
I knew there was an issue when, during one interaction, new infatuations were prioritized over my lover after we had expressed that we would be each other's primary partners. I saw myself hurting her and I did it anyway. I put my own selfish desires above the duties we had prescribed for each other. I apologized but I knew that this apology had to be matched by better communication, boundary setting, respect (actually reflected in my behaviour), and an ideological shift that turned me away from this self-absorbed individual I did not want to become. But this was new and we were learning – we both appreciated that.

The situation improved but, after a stint away, I experienced the sensation of tiring of the nature of our open relationship, as it was – clunky, tiring, and ill defined. Perhaps it had to be taken in chunks before it became functional but I knew that I was growing weary of having to process every situation as if I was underwater – images distorted, sound muffled, time slowed – so I came up for air.

We became absorbed in each other and I began to experience love as I once had. As my life plans formed, I began to feel as though my love should be in them. We had designed our lifestyles to complement each other and the bonds between us thickened and strengthened as we supported each other through easy and tough times. When I went away on a long overseas trip, I even insisted that I would have no issues resisting any temptation ahead of me. Starting again at lesson one: feelings change.

My first encounter was with an old lover who I had had a week with earlier in our open relationship. I met her for a day and the flirtation set in the moment we met. Confessions of my (monogamous) relationship status ensued with a hint of admission at my persisting attraction to my old flame. By the end of the night I was apologizing for my Machiavellian self-analysis, using her to test if I could resist. It was unscrupulous and underhanded and I detest the indirectness and gameplay that is unfortunately endemic to relationship politics. It was self-serving and hypocritical. One should always just express one's concerns honestly and openly.

With this realization, I was able to remain faithful to my monogamous status for another month, despite the temptation of many a spark with the wonderful individuals I met on my travels. It was not to last though, as I encountered a young woman in Brazil who turned a spark into a flame. After a number of days together, we admitted our mutual attraction and, just before I left, we kissed. That was it. And I knew that I had fallen out of favour with monogamy again. Knowing that I had betrayed my relationship did not sit right with me though and, knowing that my love had expressed that she did not want to re-enter an open relationship, I had thought I had best be honest about my infidelity so that she may choose to end it if she wanted.



So this is where I am at: in a polyamorous relationship; trying to communicate in the best, most honest way I can; and assessing and reassessing my situation at every crossroad. We have decided our love and commitment to each other surpassed the discontinuation of our relationship. Complications lie ahead – travel, other relationships, balancing affections – but we can only move forward one step at a time. The narrative is, of course, more complex than this brief history, but if you can take away a message from this, I would hope that it is an emphasis on honesty, acceptance, and openness to all the potential of polyamory, as well as its limits, or rather, your limits. Know thyself, know thy partner/s, keep exploring.

NOT RIGHT NOW

by D.

I wrote this first part some months ago, in the midst of writing an honours dissertation about queer theory and polyamory, and nearing the end of a four year long relationship. It's proven an interesting before/after exercise, that's for sure.

Part 1:

I am strongly committed to polyamory on personal, political and ideological levels. I don't agree with monogamy as a social institution because I see it as being integral to upholding patriarchy and capitalism, and I have never felt like I could limit my affections and desires to one person at a time. As a poly person who has made non-monogamy the subject of her academic focus, I feel like I should be something of an expert on polyamory *theoretically*. However, I do struggle with aspects of living polyamorously, and often feel like I have somehow failed because of this.

I struggle with jealousy even though I think it is a socially learned response that can be unlearned. It appears I haven't unlearned it, or learned to manage it well enough, yet. I don't experience jealous feelings towards my primary partner. I know that I am her number one, and she is mine, and I have no problems with her experiencing love, sex and affection with other people. I also know that her desire for other people does not affect her desire for me, or her investment in our relationship in any way. I do feel jealous towards other people I am attracted to though, particularly current or ex-lovers. I recognise that these feelings are not reasonable, but that doesn't make them invalid. They are valid because I feel them, and it's important to acknowledge my jealousy, then I can work towards unpicking it, and finally overcoming it.

I feel like a hypocrite because it's unfair for me to feel/think these things about the other relationships my (ex)lovers have. I wax lyrical about how every relationship is unique, how every intimate bond is valuable in its own right, and shouldn't be compared to the bonds we have with other people. I treasure the experience of kissing/fucking/talking with my lovers so much, and I don't compare each experience to any other (this might be a little lie). Why do I get so unreasonably jealous when I see my lovers sharing these experiences with other girls then? I think it is because I feel like I need to be number one in the eyes of each of my lovers. My primary partner loves and desires me more than anyone else, and that makes me feel special. I know

that my other lovers desire me as well, obviously, and theoretically I can appreciate that they can desire other people without it detracting from how they feel about me. In practice, however, it is a totally different story. I feel

ridiculous and hypocritical, because I strongly believe in the tenets polyamory is grounded in, and I also (like to think I) believe in dismantling hierarchies. Each relationship is beautiful and special to the people who share it, who needs a ranking system? Apparently I do!

Part 2:

I handed in my dissertation, I broke up with my girlfriend, I graduated, I've found myself in a heterosexual monogamous relationship. I so badly want to be in a polyamorous situation that works, and maybe I will be someday. Obviously monogamy isn't necessarily easier, but being a poly person falling in love with monogamous people is bound to come with some fucking painful shit. (Note to self – only socialise with pro-poly people so this never happens again). Having a long term partner and seeing two dudes simultaneously was a recipe for burnout. I felt like I couldn't manage one relationship properly let alone three. I spread myself too thin, I hurt other people and I wore myself down. I'm finding it really hard to imagine being monogamous for a long time though. I still love other people and think about the boy I stopped seeing to be with N. all the time.

I started seeing a therapist who seems to link everything to a) my father or b) my choice to be polyamorous. It's hard for me to accept her pathological view of my sexual/romantic inclinations because I so badly want to reject the notion that people choose to be non-monogamous out of a fear of commitment or need for constant affection/validation/whatever but sometimes I think she is right (about me). I know that it is okay that polyamory isn't working for me at this stage in my life, but it also really fucking sucks and sometimes I worry I won't ever be happy because I am always yearning for someone. I sometimes kind of wish I didn't believe in/feel poly, like it would be way easier and less painful.

I got my 22,000 coherent words about polyamory and queer theory out in October, and now I just feel drained. I'm burnt out on the theory and practice of polyamory. Warm, fuzzy, compersive thoughts to those of you who are managing and enjoying living polyamorously, I am envious.

Part 3:

My partner was very understanding; I could go to her with all my troubles about my poly things. She was basically the only person I could talk to. My involvements with other people were always less communicative than I wanted because they weren't with people who really "got" polyamory – they just wanted to be with me. I didn't feel like I could talk to friends because it seemed a bit gauche to rant about how hard it was to be seeing 3 people to

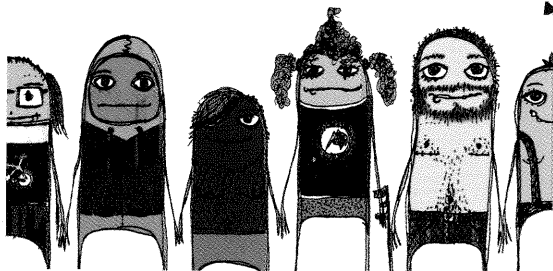
friends who were single and didn't want to be single. A support network of poly people seems crucial in this regard because people don't often understand unless they feel it themselves.

In order to deal with the jealousy and insecurity I experienced when I was in poly relationships I did a lot of self-affirming stuff: Telling myself that people loved me for a reason and also that I could be fine with just my own love (for myself). Working at a centre for survivors of sexual abuse also means I think a lot about self-care so whenever I would get down about poly stuff and feel that people weren't responding in the way I hoped for, I just tried extra hard to look after myself. I am the only person who can really look after me, so, baths, going for walks, listening to music and making time to be alone helped.

I think people who are poly often spend so much time nurturing other relationships that they easily neglect their own well-being. I need to keep reminding myself to think about whether I am doing things for myself or if I'm acting out of a desire to fulfil someone else's needs – I don't think it's always a good thing.

Issues around jealousy would be easier to discuss with partners who have some understanding of non-monogamy. However, I was open with the dudes I was seeing about my insecurities, because I can't see how you could have a poly outlook and not be really aware of the importance of discussing all your feelings and problems.

I haven't even thought about how my monogamous relationship will work or what monogamy explicitly means in this context. Monogamy is not monolithic, but I assume that my boyfriend means it in the 'traditional' way – making out, fucking other people etc. are off limits. We've talked about how we both have feelings for old lovers. The fact that I'm leaving the country in a few months means I've kind of got blinkers on about it. I have no idea about what will happen with us in the future. I guess I would be tempted to cheat. I don't want to and it would not be fair but I know I have very poor self-control. That is a bullshit excuse and something that I need to get over asap/talk to my lover about since I've made the choice to be in a monogamous relationship. My anti-capitalist queer political beliefs make monogamy so anathema to me though that I really don't imagine not being poly in the future. Time, place and circumstance mean it's not right for me just yet.



care not alone we are not alone we are

FEMINORMATIVE WHITIST POLYCOMPLEXITIES

by Rougē

As a person of colour I find that doing poly with white cis women can be really hard, because white feminism gets to define the 'proper good feminist poly' framework, and transmasculine people get pretty slammed for questioning feminism based on gendered power differences... but it's as though when we speak of gender and power we are all assumed to be white.

In my experience, queer white cis folks who view everything primarily through a (cis) gender framework (feminism) have difficulty understanding how my world view and my culture influences how I live my life and do my feminism, including my relationships.

White feminism insists that I understand misogyny and thus place women's needs on top, while they can remain ignorant about how the histories of white supremacy actually affect <who> feels they have the right to make such demands in the first place.

Power in my culture is called Mana*. It's different from Pākehā concepts of power – it's kinda about earned respect and it's based on relationships. Demanding to be more important than others or have your feelings be put ahead of everyone else's feelings would damage your Mana. You would lose Mana if you took that attitude.

Individualism is a Pākehā cultural value.

I guess also this doesn't even touch the subject of who's culture patriarchy belongs to, and the connotations connected with and differences between wahine toa, mana wahine, and like... strong feminist women... and for that matter women and wahine, trans women and whakawahine, trans guys and whakatane, takatāpui and all matters of gender. Different world.

In Ngāpuhi, wahine generally have the first and last say and tane play supporting roles. Women are not strong in response to men's dominance, they are just strong fullstop. And men are aware of this. Plus in my culture, being a communal and an oral culture, some of the most important work is bringing communities together, feeding and caring for people, raising children, looking after elderly whānau, communicating and keeping our family histories and stories alive etc. Things considered 'women's work' in Pākehā culture are some of the most important and honoured things one could do in mine.

We have different ways of being in the world, different values.

Which isn't to say the gendered stuff Pākehā can see isn't valid or anything.

But we always acknowledge that it is, every time, and I find that white folks almost never understand that our stuff is valid too in all the subtle ways it plays out.

Saying 'solidarity with PoC' and hooking up with/fucking us doesn't make people good allies or understand our complexities.

In my experience white feminists often put responsibility or blame on their lovers (or lover's lovers) for stuff that they haven't yet realised is their own stuff - or they only see where they feel wronged (say, on gender basis) and not where they are playing out their own privilege, they don't see their own cultural lens.

For me it means considering whether to have a big conflict or just handle white people who think they are 'objectively right' with kid gloves a bit. Mostly this is what I do, but I couldn't be in a direct relationship with one who I had to do this with.

I think white feminism - in the very good intention to not victim blame - has taken the idea of being responsible for your own behaviour and made it include being responsible for each other's feelings.

This to the extent that some people think everyone but themselves is responsible for checking in, acknowledging their past histories, working out what they need and providing an easy and enjoyable experience for them. It's feminist words and ideals being wildly misused.

Like where someone might think it's misogynist for trans guys to only hook up with trans guys like 'it's all the rage and cis women are unradical now', but perhaps that may be a case of privilege and feeling entitled, which they haven't worked out yet.

Or maybe thinking that because you have a history with XYZ (for example, abandonment) that your lover needs to not go to parties if you can't go, or a history with people controlling you means you need to make all the decisions in your relationship from what kind of sex or attention you get from lovers to how they 'need' to cook the potatoes so you don't feel 'unsafe'.
True examples.

There's a whole bunch of ways that people misuse feminist language to avoid taking responsibility for their own process and feelings.

On a related note, I think the 'white feminist model of poly consent' doesn't treat people as self-responsible or autonomous.

No one needs to ask my permission to talk to my lovers about having feelings for them, and my lovers don't need my permission to have feelings for other people.

Each relationship is different according to what we want or need.

There's no 'One correct way' which is 'proper feminist poly'. There are a lot of different frameworks which are just as valid.

When I hook up with someone new I check with them that XYZ is within the boundaries of their own agreements. That's what I'm responsible for doing. They are responsible for doing their relationships with everyone else however they have agreed to. Everyone works out their own process, identifies and communicates what they need with their own lovers. Everyone negotiates their situation within each relationship. Everyone stands in their own power and holds their own responsibility, and everyone cares about everyone.

*Many Māori words have no direct English equivalent. Here's what they mean to me, in a way you can relate to:

Mana: Power, influence, strength.

Pākehā: White people living in New Zealand

Wahine: woman

Wahine toa: strong, capable woman

Whakawahine: trans woman

Whakatane: trans man

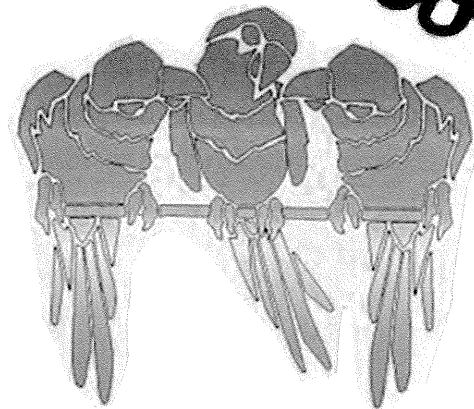
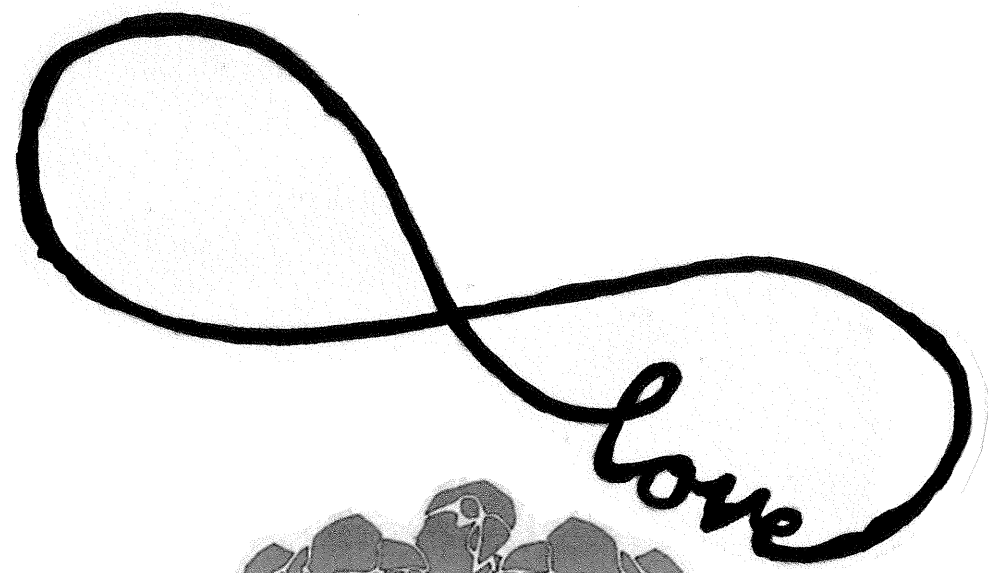
Takatāpui: LGBTQI+ people. No separation, all queer genders and gender identities under the trans* umbrella

Ngāpuhi: Māori iwi (tribe) in the far north. Ngāpuhi is the iwi with the largest population.

Tane: man

Whānau: extended family





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