

# A Bouquet of Lovers

von Morning Glory Zell, 1990, der "Urtext" zur Polyamorie, leider nur auf Englisch zugänglich

*You want to know how it will be,  
Me and her, or you and me.  
You both sit there, your long hair flowing,  
Eyes alive, your mind still growing,  
Saying to me: What can we do,  
Now that we both love you?  
I love you too. I don't really see,  
Why can't we go on as three?*

"Triad" by David Crosby

Let us begin with the *a priori* assumption that the reader is either currently practicing or firmly committed to the concept of Open Relationships as a conscious and loving lifestyle. If you are not in that category then this article will probably not be of interest to you. If you are full of curiosity about the potentials of Open Relationships, there are resources which deal with such soul-searching issues as jealousy management and theories about why the whole lifestyle is healthy and positive. Some of these resources will be given at the end and herein there will also be found considerable points of interest.

The goal of a responsible Open Relationship is to cultivate ongoing, long-term, complex relationships which are rooted in deep mutual friendships.

What elements enable an Open Relationship to be successful? Having been involved all my adult life in one or the other Open Marriages (the current Primary being [at the time the article was written] 16 years long), I have seen a lot of ideas come and go and experimented with plans and rules to make these relationships work for everyone involved. There is as much variety in what different people require in a relationship as there are people involved in them. However, there are some sure-fire elements that must be present for the system to function at all and there are other elements that are strongly recommended on the basis that they have a very good track record. Let us refer to them collectively as the "Rules of the Road."

## Rules of the Road

The first two are essential. I have never met anyone who has had a serious and healthy Open Marriage that omitted these first two principles. They are: **Honesty and Openness about the polyamorous lifestyle**. Having multiple sexual relations while lying to your partners or trying to pretend that each one is the "one true love" is a very superficial and selfishly destructive way to live.

There are marriages in which one of the partners will state: "If you ever have an affair, I never want to find out about it." I suppose some folks take that as tacit permission the same way a child will connive when the parent tells them "Don't ever let me catch you doing such-and-so!" Without complete honesty, especially about sexual issues, the relationship is doomed. Some Open Relations have an agreement not to discuss the details of their satellite relations with their Primary partner or vice-versa, but there still must be the fundamental honesty and agreement that other relations do exist and are important to maintain.

The next principle mentioned is equally fundamental:

**All partners involved in the Multiple Relations must fully and willingly embrace the basic commitment to a polyamorous lifestyle.** A situation where one partner seeks polygamy and the other one insists upon monogamy or strongly politics for it will not work, for this is too much of a fundamental disagreement to allow the relationship to prosper. Sooner or later someone has got to give in and have it one way or the other. The truth is that people usually do have a strong preference.

## **Hogamus, Higamus, Men Are Polygamous Higamus, Hogamus, Women Monogamous**

The only reason such mixed marriages have actually worked has been because there was an all powerful church/state taboo enforced on options other than monogamy. In a patriarchy, men's deviation from that norm is ignored and women's is punished, often by death. The first recorded gender-specific law, in the ancient code of Urukagina from 2400 BCE, was directed against women who practiced polyandry, specifying that their teeth be bashed in with bricks. Now that the social codes are being challenged, even though the state maintains laws against legal plural marriage, both men and women are more free to explore alternative preferences and relationships are conspicuously in a period of flux.

When I first met and fell in love with my present Primary partner, I roused myself sufficiently from my bedazzled emotional state to say: "I love you, but I hope that we can somehow have an Open Relationship because I am not really suited to monogamy and would be very unhappy in a monogamous relationship." Fortunately, Otter was delighted to hear this as he had been too afraid of losing the new-found bliss to broach the subject first.

Many a relationship has foundered on the rock of Higamus-Hogamus. Nevertheless, the sooner it gets dealt with the better chance for the relationship to survive. It also means a quicker and kinder death to a romance if this basic agreement cannot be reached. Honesty and willing Polyamorous Commitment are the basic building blocks all partners must use to build a lasting Open Relationship.

Once over that hurdle, next comes a set of ground rules for conducting the relationships. Any relationship profits by ground rules, even a one night stand. Nowadays, the state of sexuality being risky, such considerations are more than a politeness; they can be a lifesaver.

Never put energy into any Secondary relationships when there is an active conflict within the Primary. This has to be bedrock or the Primary will eventually fold.

The difficulty with this rule is that if both partners are not equally committed to the openness of the relationship, it can be used as a gun in their disagreements. By deliberately picking a fight just before Primary A goes to see a Secondary sweetie, Primary B can control her spouse and prevent him from ever having successful Secondary relations. This behavior is fraught with dishonesty and secret monogamous agendas; if it is persistently indulged in, it is symptomatic of a fundamental problem with the basic principles.

If Partner B plays this game with Partner A's satellite assignments while continuing to pursue his own, B is an out and out hypocrite and needs to be called on his bullshit in no uncertain terms!

Nevertheless, this rule is the safety valve for sanity and preservation of Primary relationships and should be followed with scrupulous integrity. It is a good idea for Primary partners to have an agreed upon set of signals or a formally stated phrase to politely request their Primary to postpone or cancel the secondary assignment so that the energy can be put into the Primary relationship for fence mending or bonding. This ritualized request can be structured so as to avoid loaded terminology and

to decrease the negative emotional charge. Frivolous use of this signal is very destructive of it, as is refusal to participate in healing when access to the Primary partner has been obtained.

Territorial jealousy has no place in a polyamorous agreement. However situational jealousy can arise over issues in the relationship when one or more of the partners is feeling neglected. Obviously the best cure for neglect is to focus attention on what has been neglected; the relationship will prosper when all partners are feeling strong and positive about each other. From that strong and healthy center it becomes possible to extend the love to others.

Consult with the Primary partner before becoming sexually involved with a new long term Secondary lover. The Primary partner must approve of the new person and feel good about them and not feel threatened by the new relationship. Nothing can break up a relationship faster than bringing in a new person that is hostile or inconsiderate to the other Primary partner. On the other hand, the most precious people in my life are the lovers that my Primary partner has brought home to become our mutual life-long friends.

The check and balance on this rule is how often it is invoked by the same person. If it is used all the time by one person, this is patently unfair and is symptomatic of a problem or need that must be addressed. This can be tricky and once again, if honesty is not impeccably observed, the rule can be abused. If a man has a hard time relating to other men for instance, he can use his alienation to pick apart every other lover his wife proposes on some ground or other, leaving her with no satellite relationship that is acceptable to him. The cure for this is for the person who has the problem relating to the same sex to seek a therapy group for people who want to overcome this alienation.

Different rules may be used to apply to one night stands or other temporary love affairs. One-night-stands are not necessarily frowned upon and can be a memorable experience, but some Primaries choose to not allow any such brief flings as too risky, while others feel that such happenings add spice and are especially welcome during business trips or other enforced separations. The "ask first" rule may be suspended for the duration of the separation.

All new potential lovers are immediately told of any existing Primary relationship so that they genuinely understand the primacy of that existing relationship. None of this hiding your wedding ring business! Satellite lovers have a right to know where they truly stand and must not have any false illusions or hidden agendas of their own. For instance, in a triadic relationship of two women and one man, there is occasionally a solitary satellite lover who wants to "cut that little filly right out of the herd." If satellite lovers are really seeking a monogamous relationship then they will not be satisfied with the role of a long term Secondary relationship, and it is better that they find this out before any damage is done to either side.

If a Secondary becomes destructive to the Primary partnership, one of the Primary partners can ask the other to terminate the threatening Secondary relationship. It is wise to limit this veto to the initial phase of Secondary relationship formation. After a Secondary relationship has existed over a year and a day, any difficulties with the partner's Secondary must be worked out with everyone's cooperation. If you are not all friends by that time, then you are not conducting your relationships in a very cooperative and loving manner. When all is said and done, what we are creating is extended families based on the simple fact that lovers will come through for you more than friends will.

An additional complication can arise with the variable of alternate sexual preference. A bisexual woman I knew who was partnered to a man had to terminate a relationship with one of her female lovers because the Secondary lover was a lesbian who objected to the Primary relationship for political reasons. Another bisexual couple had a system whereby they were heterosexually monogamous and all their satellite relationships were with members of the same sex. This elegant solution underwent considerable stress and eventual alteration with the advent of AIDS.

## Staying Healthy

Venereal diseases have been the thorn in the rose of erotic love for centuries, but recently the thorn has developed some fatal venom. If open relationships are to survive, we must develop an impeccable honesty that will brook no hiding behind false modesty or squeamishness. We must be able to have an unshakeable faith in our Primary partners and a very high level of trust with any Secondary or other satellite relationships. This demands a tight knit community of mutual trust among lovers who are friends. A recent study yielded some sobering statistics: over 80% of the men and women queried said they would lie to a potential sex partner both about whether they were married as well as whether they had herpes or other S.T.D.s. All it takes is one such liar and the results can be pathological to all. Nowadays, anyone who feels that total honesty is "just not romantic" is courting disaster and anybody unfortunate enough to trust a person like this can drag a lot of innocent people down with their poor judgment.

In order to cope with this level of risk, a system has been evolving that we call The Condom Commitment. It works like this: you may have sex without condoms only with the other members of your Condom Commitment Cadre. All members of the Cadre must wear condoms with any outside lovers. The Condom Commitment begins with the Primary relationship where trust is absolute. Long-term Secondary lovers can join by mutual consent of both Primaries and any other Secondaries that already belong. If a person slips up and has an unprotected fling then they must go through a lengthy quarantine period, be tested for all S.T.D.s, then be accepted back in by complete consensus of the other members of the Cadre. The same drill applies if a condom breaks during intercourse with an outside lover.

Adherence to the Condom Commitment and to the other Rules of the Road may seem harsh and somewhat artificial at first, but they have evolved by way of floods of tears and many broken hearts. Alternative relationships can be filled with playful excitement, but it is not a game and people are not toys. The only way the system works is if everyone gets what they need. The rewards are so rich and wonderful that I personally can't imagine living any other way.

I feel that this whole polyamorous lifestyle is the avante garde of the 21st Century. Expanded families will become a pattern with wider acceptance as the monogamous nuclear family system breaks apart under the impact of serial divorces. In many ways, polyamorous extended relationships mimic the old multi-generational families before the Industrial Revolution, but they are better because the ties are voluntary and are, by necessity, rooted in honesty, fairness, friendship and mutual interests. Eros is, after all, the primary force that binds the universe together; so we must be creative in the ways we use that force to evolve new and appropriate ways to solve our problems and to make each other and ourselves happy.

The magic words are still, after all: Perfect Love and Perfect Trust.