

A Bouquet of Lovers

Strategies for Responsible Open Relationships

by Morning Glory Zell-Ravenheart, 1990

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*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 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 poly-amorous 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 Hogamus-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 STDs. 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 STDs, then 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.

Recommended Resources and Reading:

The single best resource is *Loving More* magazine and its associated website: www.LoveMore.com.

Here's a few other Internet resources: poly@polyamory.org; The [news:alt.polyamory newsgroup](http://news.alt.polyamory.newsgroup); www.polyamory.org; Sacred Space Institute, www.lovewithoutlimits.com; Glendower: A Panfidelity Newsletter, polyfi@aol.com.

You can also type in the keyword "polyamory" into your search engine and find many more sites and references.

There are also a number of good books addressing this topic, both fiction and non-fiction. The great classic fiction is Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961)—as well as most of his subsequent books, culminating in *To Sail Beyond the Sunset* (1988). We Ravenhearts also highly recommend Donald Kingsbury's *Courtship Rite* (1982). See also Robert Rimmer.

For non-fiction books, see Deborah Anapol's *Love Without Limits* (1992) and Polyamory: *The New Love Without Limits*. See also *The Ethical Slut* by Dossie Easton & Catherine Liszt.

Appendix: Great Examples of Polyamory in the Bible

Solomon

What could be clearer than the Song of Songs, celebrating Solomon's love for a new woman? Verse 6:8 tells us that at the time Solomon was celebrating love with this woman, he had 60 wives and 80 concubines and "young women past counting." Concubines were often for breeding and the other young women, too numerous to count, were also available for his sexual pleasure. Eventually Solomon ended up with 700 wives, 300 mistresses and never a word was spoken that there was anything wrong with having sex with all these women.

In OT times concubinage was an official status. God rebuked Solomon not for polygyny and the concubines, but for the fact that many of his wives were non-Hebrew and these foreign wives brought idols in for worship from their pagan cultures, which was contrary to God's teaching.

Esther 2:17 - "And the king loved Esther above all the women (concubines), and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." (his disobedient wife)

David

One of the greatest figures of the bible, King David, not only had a multitude of wives but many concubines as well. And he was considered PERFECT in "all" things by God. Not some, or most, but ALL. His many sexual partners was not what was meant by adultery back then.

1Ki 11:4 - "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."

What is interesting is that David was "perfect" yet he did commit adultery with Bathsheba but only because Bathsheba was married. She was not one of his own women. The other seven wives and 17 concubines that David was sleeping with were given to him by God as a blessing!

It keeps amazing me how people can claim adultery or sex with singles is Biblically wrong. Clearly adultery only applied to married women and never to a married man. It was a property issue—the man owned his wives and their sexual rights. Women had no such sexual rights over their husbands. Today women simply have the same right of sexual enjoyment and options that men have always had. This is certainly in line with Christ's teaching that the only "rule" is the rule of love. Today polyamory relations are based on love and equality between men and women—clearly Christ would very much approve.

Liberated Christians

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Greetings... I recognize your name and your contributions to poly. Somewhere I recall I referenced the origin of "polyamory" to Morning Glory and Green Egg, but not sure where its buried in our 350 pages!

As Pagans its great you don't have all the garbage that Christians often carry based on the traditions of sexual repression, even though to us it clearly has no Biblical basis.

Yes, preachers sure like to wave the Bible around, with its mistranslations of what was originally said as understood in the culture in which it was written. While I am extremely heterosexual the false teachings hurt so many gays/lesbian/bi's and to me is one of the biggest shames of Christian traditions.

You may have found the article "When Marriage Between Gays Was a Rite" which is quite interesting at <http://www.libchrist.com/other/homosexual/gaymarriagerite.html>

I have also written about the difference between the ownership right of biblical polygamy vs polyamory which is much more in line with Christ's teaching of love, not ownership and legalism. My article, "Is Marriage Needed Today?" is at <http://www.libchrist.com/bible/whymarriage.html>

<http://www.libchrist.com/bible/polygamy.html> discusses our view of Polyamory vs. Biblical Patriarchal Polygamy.

-- davephx@primenet.com (Dave in Phoenix AZ)

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS re Polyamory

by The Ravenhearts

1-Q: *Is it correct that you coined the word “polyamory?” If so, in what year did you come up with the term, and how? (Is there a small tale behind the coining of the word? For example, what, if any, were some of the terms you initially considered, and why did you subsequently abandon them?)*

1-A: It was our senior wife, Morning Glory, who officially coined the terms “polyamory” and “polyamorous.” This was in an article she wrote for our Church magazine, *Green Egg*, which was published in the May, 1990 issue. The article was titled “A Bouquet of Lovers,” and it was written in response to a request from Diane, our third partner/wife of the time. Morning Glory was always referring to “The Rules” of such relationships, and Diane, who was at the time Editor of the magazine, asked her to set them down in writing so everyone would know what they were.

During the process of composing the article, Morning Glory needed a simple term to express the idea of having multiple simultaneous sexual/loving relationships without necessarily marrying everyone. This sounds so obvious, but strangely, there had never been any such word. Since “monogamy” means, literally, “marriage to one,” the obvious corollary would seem to be “polygamy,” meaning “marriage to many.” But people can be very sloppy in their use of the language, and they often use the word “monogamy” even to refer to steady dating, which might be more properly described as “monamory” (“love of one” – Oberon’s term).

Other people had tried to tackle this semantic problem before. In the ‘70s, Geo of Kerista coined the useful term “polyfidelity” (“faithful to many”). Polyfidelity actually meant (most of the time) a sexually fidelitous group marriage of co-equals—all equally bonded to each other member. The specific social contract that defined any particular “polyfi” group marriage could vary on all other variables, but not these points. (In Kerista, this also meant equitable rotational sleeping schedules, and no same-sex lovemaking—all set down in a book of 86 elaborate rules.) These days many people who find loyalty to their group marriage a key shared value still use the term polyfidelity, but with this altered definition.

In the mid-‘80s, Darca Nichol森 coined the term “omnigamy,” which means, literally, “marriage to everyone.” (We’ve never been sure just what she meant by that, and we haven’t seen this word in use since MG came up with “polyamory.”)

Loving More magazine (first a newsletter, then the magazine) began in 1984 and used the term polyfidelity for those doing that specifically, and “open relationships” or “intimate networks” for those doing other variations of multiple-adult committed relationships. In *The Polyfidelity Primer*, published in 1989, these terms were defined (and reprinted in Anapol’s *Love Without Limits*). *Loving More* started using polyamory as an umbrella term for the wide range of styles of group relating as it became more well-known, mostly via the online poly community.

Around 1990, Deborah Anapol was using the phrases “non-monogamy” and “intimate networks” to describe the idea of having several simultaneous ongoing lover relationships, without

requiring exclusivity or commitment. Deborah was one of the first authors to pick up on “polyamory,” and she reprinted Morning Glory’s 1990 article, “A Bouquet of Lovers,” in the first edition of Deborah’s book, *Love Without Limits* (1992).

Around the same time, Michael Aluna coined the word “panfidelity,” meaning “faithful to all,” which he proceeded to define most eloquently in a series of articles (which we published in *Green Egg* in 1993-94), in terms very reminiscent of how we have been discussing polyamory.

What we were all trying to come up with was an inclusive term that encompassed ALL forms of multiple love/sex relationships—and, perhaps most importantly, of being the kind of person capable of romantically loving several people simultaneously. We were NOT trying to define another exclusive lifestyle or specific pattern for such relationships, other than to emphasize openness and honesty in their practice. We needed a word that simply meant “having multiple lovers.”

Morning Glory and Oberon had both studied Latin in high school, and know a smattering of Greek as well. When we need to coin words, we naturally look to Greek and Latin roots. However, the Latin for “loving many” would be “multi-amory,” which sounded awkward; and the Greek would be “polyphilia,” which sounded like a disease.

In discussing this whole semantic dilemma, Morning Glory had the brilliant insight to combine both Greek and Latin roots into “poly-amory.” This sounded just perfect. So she used it in the article. And the rest, as they say, is History...

2-Q: *What, in your view, is the essence of polyamory? How does it differ from swinging?*

2-A: Here is Morning Glory’s current definition, which she gave to the Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* when they contacted her to enter the term:

“Polyamory: 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.”

This term was meant to be inclusive, and in that context, we have never intended to particularly exclude “swinging” per se, if practitioners thereof wished to adopt the term and include themselves. As far as we have understood, swinging specifically does *not* involve “cheating,” and it certainly does involve having “multiple lovers”! Moreover, we understand from speaking with a few swinging activists that many swingers are closely bonded with their various lovers, as best friends and regular partners.

The two essential ingredients of the concept of “polyamory” are “more than one;” and “loving.” That is, it is expected that the people in such relationships have a loving emotional bond, are involved in each other’s lives multi-dimensionally, and care for each other. This term is not intended to apply to merely casual recreational sex, anonymous orgies, one-night stands, pick-ups, prostitution, “cheating,” serial monogamy, or the popular definition of swinging as “mate-swapping” parties.

Polyamory is about truthful communication with all concerned parties, loving intent, erotic meeting and inclusivity (as opposed to the exclusivity of monogamy and monamory). On

the basis of our own personal friendships with a few participants in the very large, diverse groundswell of human energy sometimes called the “Swinger’s Movement,” many—perhaps most—self-identified “swingers” do seem to fulfill our criteria of being polyamorous.

However, Ryam Nearing of *Loving More* says: “In all my talks with swingers it seems that the traditional (and most widespread) way of swinging is not polyamory as it is primarily sexual and specifically not relationship oriented. Some swingers and some locals allow for/choose more emotional connection, but they are the exception rather than the rule.”

3-Q: How does “morality” fit into the poly scheme of things?

3-A: The term “morality” is generally used to refer to externally-imposed rules intended to govern private behavior. This is a linear concept that relates to absolutes of “right” and “wrong.” We prefer the term “values.” The values of Polyamory are love, communication, truth, inclusively, and a positive embracing of the sexual aspect of human nature.

Most polyamorous folk tend to feel that their consensual relationships and behavior are really no-one else’s business but their own. Many of us identify strongly with the Wiccan “Charge of the Goddess” (written by Doreen Valiente), which says: “All Acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.” Thus, we sanction all loving and responsible relationships among informed and mutually consenting adults, whatever their number, gender, or practice.

Regarding “ethics,” which is more about one’s internal personal codes of behavior, there is a very strong foundational current in the basic concept of polyamory, and throughout the poly community, emphasizing honesty, openness, compassion, loyalty, commitment, kindness, decency, and in general, caring and taking care of each other. This is all summed up quite nicely in the phrase, “Be excellent to each other!” (from the movie, “Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure”)

4-Q: What is the greater social context in which the Ravenhearts operate?

4-A: The founding members of the Family have been significant founders, movers and shakers for decades in the emerging Neo-Pagan religious community, which is one of the fastest-growing religions in the Western World. Oberon and Morning Glory especially have helped define the very nature and values of this community. As a polytheistic religious movement, the Neo-Pagan community is dedicated to the celebration of diversity in all its myriad manifestations. Thus all forms of relationships and sexual orientations are honored in the community, though not necessarily personally embraced by all individuals.

Historically and mythologically, polyamory and polygamy have always been considered viable options among Pagan peoples, for those who so choose them, and such relationships are honored and supported today within the worldwide Neo-Pagan community, where approximately 50% of contemporary Pagans polled have stated polyamory to be their ideal relationship choice. And beyond the Pagan community, Liza is an organizational founder and highly-respected networker in the national grassroots, volunteer ecumenical sexuality and spirituality movement. We feel that having a larger social context which

accepts and supports one’s personal life- and relationship patterns is essential to living a healthy and integrated life.

5-Q: What is your vision for the role of polyamory in the world?

5-A: We believe that the first syllable of the word polyamory, “poly,” is a post-modern paradigm of great value; and that “Polyamory” is one expression of it. We live in a POLYmorphous POLYverse, in which even many scientists seem to understand that our world emerges out of chaos and the order we perceive feeds and thrives on the chaos that is beyond our understanding. Where one linear idea once lived in human culture, a diversity of notions have grown.

We believe that Polyamory is a very important new relationship option whose time seems to have arrived. Where once we thought every family should consist of a monogamous man and woman with their 2.5 kids, we now consider a family to be any small group of bonded people who claim that connection with one another. Most families no longer fit the conventional description. The much-lamented “breakdown of the American family,” and the need to reclaim “traditional family values,” are manifestations of the 20th Century’s transition from village life and extended families to the modern “nuclear family” units, which often reduce down to a single mother trying to raise and support children she hardly even interacts with.

A century ago, the typical American family consisted of three generations (parents, children and grandparents) living together in a large house, along with lateral relatives such as Uncles and Aunts, and even at least one unrelated live-in “servant,” such as a nanny, butler, cook or housekeeper. The “Traditional American Family,” in fact, looked pretty much like “The Addams Family!”

With each generation of the last century, we have become increasingly isolated and alienated. Ever-increasing numbers of American children are growing up with no brothers or sisters, hardly any parental interactions, and no adult role models for parenting or other relationships. Their interactions with other children occur in hostile environments, such as schools and the street, where they are subject to ever-rising levels of teasing, harassment, bullying and violence. They retreat to the world of television, video games, and the Internet—none of which provide real-life interaction with actual flesh-and-blood human beings.

But deep within each of us is our genetic ancestral memory of the Tribe, the Clan, the extended Family. Such rich relationships nurtured and sustained our ancestors from the dawn of time, and it was within that context that we became fully human. We require and crave such connections and relationships in our deepest heart-of-hearts, and we seek them in clubs, gangs, fraternities, cliques, parties, pubs, communes, churches, nests, covens, and circles of close friends.

And for an increasing number of us, we are learning how to create such complex and deep bonding relationships through extended networks of multiple lovers and expanded families. “Polyamory,” implying multiple lovers, is both a new paradigm for relationships and a vision for healing the pathological alienation of individuals in modern society.

We now know that the biodiversity we value in nature, as the biologist Bruce Bagemihl points out, is valuable in sexual and bonding behavior also. And although Dr. Bagemihl is talking about animals, we are also animals and this applies equally to us. Polyamory is not “the answer.” Diversity and choice are the

answers--and Polyamory is one of the strands in the decentralized network of diversity and choice with regard to human bonding, intimacy, and family.

6-Q: Do you find that American society in general these days is more accepting of alternative lifestyles such as polyamory, as compared to a generation or two ago?

6-A: We think the answer would have to be “yes,” in general. The increasing acceptance of various types of diversity has been a major thrust of US culture over the past few decades. This has been especially due, we think, to the efforts of such as the gay community, the Pagan community, the Black community, the rise of feminism, the “New Age” movement, the influence of Hollywood and TV (such as “Star Trek”), science fiction & fantasy literature, comic books, Harry Potter, etc. The entire “Cultural Creatives” phenomenon is a growing demographic that comprises something like 25% of all Americans, and includes many of the brightest and best-educated.

The international breakdown of the family and other community ties requires that we examine alternatives; and no human being is exempt from this project or its implications. For the last five years the Ravenheart family has been consistently newsworthy in the national media. People want to know about what we are doing, and how we are doing it. The more people know, the more they want to know. In our lectures and workshops on Polyamory, it is clear from the change in our audiences that more people are practicing Polyamory. Four years ago our audiences were mainly people who were considering trying it. Now they are mostly people who are immersed in this lifestyle and have practical questions.

Of course, there is also the inevitable backlash. Pat Robertson and other Fundamentalist Right-Wing Christians have declared that there is a “Cultural War” going on in the country for “the souls of Americans.” Clearly, they see folks like us as on the opposite side from them. But so far, we have not experienced directly much impact from this “war”... We really aren’t actually trying to make people “see the light” of polyamory. We’re just trying to make ourselves more visible and hence more available to those out there who would naturally identify with all this, and would be greatly relieved to know they are not alone. But in no way are we trying to “recruit” or “convert” anyone. We’re perfectly happy to leave everyone alone to follow their own bliss, just as we wish to be left alone to follow ours. We all have different needs and desires, and polyamory is certainly not for everyone!

7-Q: How many folks actually build healthy intimate families versus how many are creating just as limited and damaged relationships as they did in serial monogamy?

7-A: It is important to balance the positive vision that some have created in the polyamorous lifestyle with the difficulty and negative reasons and ways some folks who say they’re polywhatever do it.

The Ravenheart Family are considered by many to be some of the idealistic, visionary leaders of the poly movement. Most people, however, are not. It is important to note that some people see this bigger picture of polyamory in the world; while others are just trying to fix broken relating in a very personal (and perhaps neurotic) way via their participation in expanded relationships. Some examples of neurotic approaches to

polyamory include: acting out sex addiction; trying to fix a broken marriage while really just adding more stresses; boredom or dissatisfaction with their mate; basking in “new relationship energy” (NRE) as a dyad instead of using it to strengthen all the relationships; etc.

For each of us Ravenhearts, on the other hand, polyamory is an essential part of our individual identities and choices as well as our group vision--as opposed to something just one of us wants and the others put up with.

Polyamory is no bed of roses or quick fix to those disillusioned by monogamy’s problems. Many people who are drawn to it in principle for whatever reason may not be able to manage it in practice due to lack of dedication to meeting its demands—either because they find it too difficult and demanding, or because they’d rather do other things with their time and energy. Folks who can’t handle the communication and relationship maintenance demanded in monogamy can hardly be expected to manage the even greater degree that is required by complex relating in groups.

8-Q: What does polyamory mean to you? What kind of freedoms has it brought into your life? What kind of problems?

8-A: What we have been emphasizing about polyamory which may distinguish this concept from so many others, is complete openness and honesty. It is specifically NOT about “cheating.” In fact, the whole point of Morning Glory’s original article, our workshops, and even the entire poly community, is to establish a cultural matrix and context in which such open and honest relationships may be sanctioned and thrive, for those who feel so inclined.

As for “what kind of freedoms” polyamory has brought into our lives, we would have to say, the freedom to be fully ourselves, according to our own intrinsic nature. And by our giving a name to it, other people who share that nature have also been finding that they are not alone. As we find each other, and develop a growing community of like-minded souls, we are able more and more to “come out of the closet” and live in full and open integrity.

The freedom of having more than one devoted bonded relationship is a joy that is almost impossible to describe to someone who has not experienced it. There is an inspiration to it and a security. To us it is a human triumph of communication skills, moxie, romantic inspiration, and flexibility. Another freedom is knowing that if one intimate is not available or able to meet our needs, someone else is. Conversely we are aware that someone else can meet our lover’s need if we are unable or unwilling. Theoretically many needs can be met by people we don’t have sex with, but in fact erotic bonding gives us deeper access to the nourishment another human being can provide.

We have long drawn an analogy between being polyamorous and being gay: just as many people are just naturally homosexual, so, we believe, are many people just naturally polyamorous. But in a culture in which being straight, or monamorous, is almost universally considered to be the only possible option (legally as well as culturally), people who don’t fit that pattern must conduct their affairs in shameful secret. Thus, if one is going to act on such inclinations, “cheating” is implicit.

What we are trying to do is just what the gay community has been doing over the past few decades: that is, present the reality and validity of alternatives to what has been so long regarded as “the norm.” And thus those who are truly poly in nature (just as

those who are truly gay in nature) may understand themselves not as some kind of shameful sickos, but as merely another variation in the delightful diversity of humanity. As in the fable of "The Ugly Duckling," we just have to find the others who are like us...

The problems basically revolve around over-stimulation and cascading episodes of stress. Sometimes it might be a flu or cold bug, sometimes an overdose of emotional intensity, sometimes one person has a crisis and in the middle of it another one has a crisis— What do you do then? The good news is you have many more resources to deal with these situations and if you need a break or even a change in lifestyle, the system is flexible enough to bend quite a bit without breaking. We don't have to break up with someone in order to change our relationship; we can stay in the intimate connection and change its form. We add new relationships to meet emerging need. So Polyamory is very evolutionary in that it allows a person to express and establish new bonds, interests, and ways of being while keeping the continuity of long-term deeply-valued bonds.

9-Q: How do the Ravenhearts deal with problems?

9-A: By sitting down and talking them through (several members of the Family are highly-trained and skilled mediators); by regular Family meetings and planning/scheduling sessions; and by intense late-night conversations in bed or hot tub. If we can't handle a problem within our own Family, we don't hesitate to call in outside mediators, or even, if we feel they can be helpful, see sympathetic professional therapists or marriage counselors.

We have always accepted Robert Heinlein's definition of "love" (from *Stranger in a Strange Land*) as "That condition wherein another person's happiness is essential to your own." We genuinely care first and foremost about the happiness of our partners, however many there may be. Liza came up with the concept of a "Conspiracy of Heart's Desire." Thus our entire Family is continually engaged in a conspiracy to create the fulfillment of Heart's Desire for each other. And we truly believe that "With love, all things are possible." (1st Corinthians)

10-Q: How do you keep from hurting the feelings of your poly partners?

10-A: The guides to treating a polyamorous partner well are the basic principles of civility that apply to any human interaction. One may have to adhere to them more strictly and consciously in Polyamory and mistakes may have more dramatic outcomes. The game of human civility has higher stakes when more people are involved.

A commitment to openness and honesty in our relationships (absolutely essential in polyamory!) means that if our feelings are being hurt, we tell each other. And if we know that our lovers' feelings are hurting, we drop everything to take care of them, and do whatever is necessary. Often, feelings are hurt (and jealousy activated) when we feel we are not getting the attention we need. If that happens, then we make a special effort to give each other that attention. We take each other out to dinner and movies, have special romantic dates and evenings, bring each other flowers and little gifts, and in general try and shower each other with love and affection. This is made easier by having more people involved. As we say, sometimes it's necessary "to call in reinforcements!"

11-Q: Do you draw certain boundaries—stick to a list of do's and don'ts?

11-A: As to our boundaries, we have a notion of prioritizing our primary relationships if a conflict should arise. Primary partners have an ultimate veto over secondary relationships that they may feel are destructive or inappropriate to their relationship. We make a real effort to bring home prospective new partners and introduce them to the whole Family—usually inviting them to a special dinner and evening. We discuss prospective new relationships with our partners and get feedback and approval. We have our boundaries around safe sex issues, and have worked out parameters we are all comfortable with. We help mediate with each other when that's needed. We commiserate with each other over relationships that aren't working out. Basically, first and foremost, we're a tight-knit, loving Family, the members of which also have other "outside" lovers as well.

12-Q: What are your most precious joys?

12-A: Sharing our life and work together; wonderful committed friendships and partnerships; deep and abiding love; great sex; dinners, salons, parties, hot tubs; travels, adventures, explorations; walks in the woods and picnics on the beach; going as a group to concerts and new movies; attending Pagan festivals together and doing our Family panels; our creative work in Right Livelihood; introducing old and new friends and lovers to each other...

13-Q: What wisdom would you like to share?

13-A: First off, don't make rules; make agreements. Make your agreements based on what everyone actually WANTS to do, rather than what some people want others to do over their dead bodies. And if, over time, you find that the agreements you've made aren't working out, and people are finding them onerous or inappropriate, sit down together and renegotiate.

And don't try this at home unless you are prepared for total honesty and commitment! And unconditional love.

14-Q: Where can I learn more about Polyamory?

14-A: The single best resource is *Loving More* magazine and its associated website: www.LoveMore.com.

Here's a few other Internet resources: poly@polyamory.org;

The [news:alt.polyamory.newsgroup](http://news.alt.polyamory.newsgroup); www.polyamory.org;

Sacred Space Institute, www.lovewithoutlimits.com;

Glendower: A Panfidelity Newsletter, polyfi@aol.com.

You can also type in the keyword "polyamory" into your search engine and find many more sites and references.

There are also a number of good books addressing this topic, both fiction and non-fiction. The great classic fiction is Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961)—as well as most of his subsequent books, culminating in *To Sail Beyond the Sunset* (1988). We Ravenhearts also highly recommend Donald Kingsbury's *Courtship Rite* (1982). See also Robert Rimmer.

For non-fiction books, see Deborah Anapol's *Love Without Limits* (1992) and Polyamory: *The New Love Without Limits*. See also *The Ethical Slut* by Dossie Easton & Catherine Liszt.

Glossary of Relationship Terminology

(arranged conceptually rather than alphabetically)

Compiled by Morning Glory and Oberon Zell-Ravenheart

LOVE: That condition wherein the other person's happiness is essential to your own. (Robert A. Heinlein, SISL)

SEXUALOVE: The synergic fusing of love and sexuality into a single erotic emotion in an intimate relationship.

COMPERSION: Warm happy feelings experienced when observing ones loved ones enjoying loving relationships with others. (Kerista) The opposite of jealousy.

JEALOUSY: Neurotic anxiety over diminished attention from a partner one is emotionally dependant upon. In extreme cases, an obsessive fear of losing control over a partner one regards as a possession.

JEALOUS: Resentfully envious or suspicious of rival influences/attentions.

LOVESTYLE: Refers to the design of a sexualove relationship style. Like the term "lifestyle," it implies a conscious choice.

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT: (Greek *hetero*=different) A lovestyle orientation in which sexualove is experienced only between members of opposite sexes.

HOMOSEXUAL/GAY: (Greek *homo*=same) A lovestyle orientation in which sexualove is experienced only between members of the same sex.

BISEXUAL/BI: (Greek *bi*=two) A lovestyle orientation in which sexualove is experienced between members of both the same and opposite sexes.

MONOSEXUAL: (Greek *mono*=one) Desiring sex only with one sex regardless of whether it is the same or opposite gender to oneself. Not a bisexual.

DYAD: A sexualove relationship consisting of two primary partners.

TRIAD: The most basic and common form of multipartner relationship, consisting of three adult primary partners, usually two of one sex and one of the other.

PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP: A committed, long-term, sexualove relationship which most often (but not necessarily) includes marriage or shared economy and cohabitation.

SECONDARY RELATIONSHIP: An ongoing sexualove relationship in which the partners usually do not live together, and do not consider their relationship a first priority.

TERTIARY RELATIONSHIP: A friendly but casual sexualove relationship of an occasional or temporary nature.

OPEN RELATIONSHIP: A sexualove relationship in which the partners have agreed that each may independently form outside sexualove relationships.

CLOSED/EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP: A sexualove relationship in which the partners have agreed to have no other lovers outside of the relationship.

INCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP: An intimate sexualove relationship in which all partners have agreed to form a synergistic group and in which each dyad is secure. The existing relationship may expand to include more people with mutual consent.

MULTIMATE RELATIONSHIP: Similar to an inclusive relationship or expanded family, but all partners are primary, whether or not they are married.

MULTIPARTNER RELATIONSHIP: Any non-monogamous lovestyle.

CONDOM COMMITMENT: An agreement among all the members of any open sexualove relationship group that all partners be tested for sexually-transmitted diseases, and that condoms be used with any lovers outside of the group.

MARRIAGE: A contractually committed partnership, which may include sexualove, cohabitation, shared economy/property and mutual childrearing.

HEIROS GAMOS: (Greek) "Sacred Marriage." A sexual ritual in which the partners take on the aspect of God and Goddess, uniting in an act of holy communion and mutual worship of each other's divinity.

OPEN MARRIAGE: A marriage of two partners that is not sexually exclusive, but permits either or both partners to have other lovers outside of the primary relationship within the marriage.

GROUP MARRIAGE: (see "Polygamy") A marriage in which three or more adult partners are married to each other. A group marriage may be open, closed or inclusive.

PLURAL MARRIAGE: A term often applied to Mormon-style polygyny. All wives may live together, or each may have her own home.

OPEN GROUP MARRIAGE: A marriage of three or more adult partners that is not sexually exclusive, but permits partners to have other outside lovers.

LINE MARRIAGE: An inclusive group marriage designed to continue in perpetuity, as new members may be added by mutual consent of the existing partners, replacing any who leave or die. All members need not necessarily be "married" to all other members, but may become part of the family by marrying only one person in the group. (Robert A. Heinlein)

CORPORATE MARRIAGE: A group marriage that is legally structured and registered as a corporate entity, whether a DBA, Partnership, Trust, Corporation or other legal form.

CO-WIFE, CO-HUSBAND: Terms used to describe one's other partners in a group marriage.

FREEMATE, PARAMOUR, CONSORT, PARTNER: Terms used to describe nonmarried members of a multimate relationship.

MONOGAMY: (Greek *mono*=one; *gamy*=marriage) The practice or state of being married to only one person at a time. Sexual exclusivity is implied.

MONOGAMOUS: Inclined, capable and desiring of sexual exclusivity with a single partner. Marriage is implied as the ideal desired state.

MONOGAMIST: A person who is monogamous, or who practices monogamy.

SERIAL MONOGAMY: The most common lovestyle in the U.S. today. Consists of being monogamous with one partner at a time, with frequent changes in partners. According to studies, the average length of time with any one partner seems to run around three years.

NON-MONOGAMY: (see "Polyamory") As commonly used, any lovestyle which allows more than one sexualoving relationship at the same time. Of course, technically, this term would apply to any non-married relationships or lifestyles, including "steady dating," or even celibacy.

POLYAMORY: (Greek *poly*=many; Latin *amor*=love) The practice, state or ability of having multiple lovers at the same time. (Morning Glory Zell)

POLYAMOROUS: Inclined, capable and desiring of having multiple lovers at the same time. (Morning Glory Zell)

POLYAMORIST: A person who is polyamorous, or who practices polyamory.

POLY: Short for polyamorous, usually used as an adjective.

POLYGAMY: (Greek *poly*=many; *gamy*=marriage) The practice or state of being married to two or more partners at the same time. No limitations are implied as to the sex or number of the partners. The generic term for group marriages.

POLYGAMOUS: Inclined, capable and desiring of marriage with several partners at the same time.

POLYGAMIST: A person who is polygamous, or who practices polygamy.

POLYGyny: (Greek *poly*=many; *gyno*=woman) Polygamy in which one man has two or more wives at the same time.

POLYANDRY: (Greek *poly*=many; *andro*=man) Polygamy in which one woman has two or more husbands at the same time.

POLYFIDELITY: (Greek *poly*=many; Latin *fidelis*=faithful) The state or practice of sexual exclusivity among a group of three or more primary partners. (Kerista) A closed group marriage emphasizing equal primacy of all relationships.

POLYFIDELITOUS: Inclined, capable and desiring of sexual exclusivity among a group of three or more primary partners. (Kerista)

PROMISCUOUS: (Latin *pro*=forth; *miscere*=to mix) Engaging in casual sexual relations with many persons indiscriminately.

SWINGING: Sport sex for couples. A form of non-sexually-exclusive monogamy in which two primary partners agree to have casual sex with other couples or singles as long as there is no emotional involvement.

SWAPPING: A form of swinging in which two or more primary-partnered couples temporarily exchange partners for recreational sex. Referred to by practitioners as "Lifestyles."

FAMILY: A group of adults and/or children bound together by ties of mutual commitment, primary relationships, intimacy and shared lives, and regarding themselves as a family.

CELLULAR FAMILY: A multi-adult family whose structure allows new partners to be added to the family with mutual consent.

EXPANDED FAMILY: A lovestyle in which three or more partners consciously choose a committed, multiple, primary, sexualoving relationship. Rules about outside partners may vary, as may sexual orientation.

KIN: All those who consider themselves related to each other. "All my relations." (Lakota)

CLAN: A bonded kinship group, or extended family, including secondary and tertiary relationships, who regard themselves as a clan.

TRIBE: An affiliation of families and clans sharing common values, customs and traditions, and regarding themselves as a tribe.

INTIMATE NETWORK (INTINET): A web of lovers in varying degrees of intimate relationships within a social circle. (Deborah Anapol)

WATER-BROTHERS: Members of an intimate network who have pledged themselves in a water-sharing ceremony to lifelong mutual commitment.

NEST: A congregation of the Church of All Worlds, bound together by ties of intimacy and water-brotherhood.

WATERKIN: Members of the Church of All Worlds. (Oberon Zell)

DIVINITY: The fullest level of aware consciousness accessible to any living being, manifesting itself in the self-actualization of that being.

IMMANENT DIVINITY: The theological position that Nature includes Divinity; that Divinity is a quality, not a quantity, and may be found within rather than without. Expressed in the phrase "Thou art God/dess." (Robert A. Heinlein, SISL)

SPIRITUALITY: One's personal attitudes, practices, observances and relationships with Divinity and the non-material realm apart from any cultural context.

RELIGION: (Latin *religio*=re-linking) A body of expressions of sacred myths, metaphors, observances and practices in a given cultural context designed to connect individuals with Divinity and heal the alienation between dichotomized and polarized aspects of existence (i.e. spirit/matter, human/nature, man/woman, mind/body, etc.).

CHURCH: A body of adherents to the same religion.

PAGAN: (Latin *paganus*=peasant or country dweller) Of or pertaining to indigenous (native) pantheistic folk religions and peoples. A person who worships nature, considers life to be sacred, and identifies with others who accept the label of Pagan.