

[Databases selected:](#) Canadian Newsstand

## **Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice... Carol & Ted & Bob & Alice; [Final Edition]**

Sondi Bruner. *The Vancouver Sun*. Vancouver, B.C.: Feb 14, 2004. pg. F.1.Fro

### **Abstract (Summary)**

Color Photo: Photo illustration/Vancouver Sun / (Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice...); Graphic/Diagram: (Polyamory 'requires a lot of discussion -- it's not easy')

### **Full Text** (3300 words)

*(Copyright Vancouver Sun 2004)*

Sean has a wife. He also has a girlfriend. His girlfriend has another boyfriend. That boyfriend is dating Sean's wife.

But this isn't some tangled mess of adultery and deceit found during sweeps week on your favourite soap opera or in the pages of a romance novel -- here, everyone knows who's sleeping with who. And they're all okay with it.

Sounds complicated? It is.

Particularly in sticky situations such as last summer, when Sean was asked to be the best man at a wedding, but could have only one date at the head table. The groom, unsure of who to ask, left the decision up to Sean. But when you're in a serious relationship with more than one person, how do you choose between them?

Sean, who like others in this story preferred not to share his last name, practises something called polyamory. It's a relationship style based on the belief that a person can be more fulfilled by having committed, loving relationships with multiple partners. So whether it's family dinners or Christmas parties, Sean, his wife and his girlfriend are a package -- take it or leave it.

Polyamory, also known as "poly," is based on the philosophy that human beings are capable of loving more than one person at a time. Poly relationships, when they work at least, are founded on trust, intimacy, honesty, openness, communication -- and, of course, love.

Polyamory is not wild, kinky sex between free-loving hippies. Polyamory is not swinging. Swinging is casual sex that places little to no focus on establishing connections. Poly, meanwhile, concentrates on building relationships that are caring, fulfilling and loving -- and the sex is just gravy.

Though multi-party relationships aren't a new concept, the term polyamory is. Coined by Morning Glory Zell Ravenheart in the early 1990s (she, along with her primary partner, Oberon Zell Ravenheart, are considered by some to be the matriarch and patriarch of the poly movement), polyamory is derived from Greek and Latin roots and means "many loves."

And though loving more than one person at a time has occurred for centuries, the advent of the Internet has made it easier for polyamorous people to find one another. The fact that today's social climate is more open to sexuality helps too, producing more honest discussions about what people are really feeling and doing behind closed doors.

Unfortunately, even the most evolved humans among us have not yet fully managed to dispense with age-old emotions such as jealousy and possessiveness. Polyamorists deal with a complex network of lovers, which results in an exponential increase of challenges they have to deal with over people in monogamous relationships.

Picture the ups and downs of a relationship you've been in, and then imagine having those with two, three or four people at the same time. Harmonious love and intimacy between multiple poly partners, though a nice ideal, isn't necessarily so when played out in reality: human beings are the ones practising it, after all.

Polyamory is complicated all right. Very complicated.

---

You want to know how it will be

Me and her, or you and me

You both stand there, your long hair flowing

Eyes alive, your minds 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?

-- David Crosby, Triad

Non-monogamy is something that has occurred from ancient to modern times in both humans and animals. Most animal species are not monogamous. Not even birds, once thought to be loyal to their mates.

For people as well as animals, "monogamy has always been a myth," says Pega Ren, a board-certified sexologist in Vancouver. Monogamy, says Ren, is like a story about Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy or the Easter Bunny: a lie that is told with good intentions, but a lie nonetheless.

And very few of us nowadays are monogamous in the traditional sense of the word, restricting ourselves to one sexual or marital partner throughout our lifetimes. Many of us practise what's known as serial monogamy, where we have a series of long-term monogamous relationships.

"Most people do poly -- they do poly in a sort of chronological way," Sean says. "It's only when they consider them [relationships] overlapping that it becomes wrong."

Deborah Anapol, a clinical psychologist and author of *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits*, points out that serial monogamy is no certified success.

This certainly seems true when you consider that almost 50 per cent of marriages end in divorce in North America. Statistics Canada shows that more than 70,000 divorces were processed in Canada alone in 2002. Our culture has deemed monogamy as the social and moral norm, but forgets there are some people who simply don't subscribe to this ideal.

Back in biblical times, men commonly practised polygamy. Solomon is rumoured to have had 1,000 wives; Abraham, Moses, David and Jacob engaged in polygamy, too. *Three In Love*, a book by Barbara Foster, Michael Foster and Letha Hadady, describes the multi-party relationships of numerous notables -- Henri II, Voltaire, Rousseau, Catherine the Great, Percy Shelley, de Beauvoir and Sartre, even Bonnie and Clyde. Today, polygamy is still practised by many, including tribes in Africa, and even here in B.C.: the community of Bountiful in the Creston Valley centres around it.

Polyamory distances itself from the tradition of polygamy which, according to Sean and his girlfriend, can have a negative connotation. But the long history of multiple-partner relationships shows that polyamory, while it seems rare and radical, is not new at all.

But just because it's not new, that doesn't mean it's easy.

--

If we recognize polyamory as a path for psychological and spiritual growth, then jealousy is gatekeeper on this path, for none can pass who refuse to confront this powerful force.

-- Deborah Anapol, *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits*

With so many people in the picture, it's sometimes difficult to coordinate schedules. Sean keeps a monthly electronic schedule, but even this doesn't always work.

"Scheduling seems to be more of a problem in poly than in non-poly relationships," he says. "It's an issue. I've never found a totally satisfactory solution."

Sean, his wife and his girlfriend are members of a Vancouver polyamory support group called Vanpoly (his wife is one of its founding members), which began in 1998. The group provides discussion and support about poly-related issues. Starting with only a handful of people, Vanpoly now has 150 people on its e-mail list. Sean, a computer software developer, moderates the list.

His love life is a little more complicated than that of most. For one, he shares the women he wants to spend the rest of his life

with -- his wife and his girlfriend, Tillie -- with another man. Then there's the scheduling issues: who to date when, and also where.

Sean's relationship is a "diamond" or "square" formation, composed of four "vees." A vee in poly is essentially the person in the middle; the two people on the outside have little intimacy with one another. That is, Sean is the vee between his wife and Tillie, and Tillie and his wife aren't in a sexual or romantic relationship with one another. And Tillie is the vee between Sean and her boyfriend (who, remember, is also Sean's wife's boyfriend). Tillie also has an additional lover.

Even Tillie's mom has recently become involved in polyamory, and though she and Tillie now share poly friends, they don't share lovers.

"Polyamory is based on the idea that not everyone can meet all of your needs, and it's your responsibility to get your needs met," Sean says. "Traditionally, if I needed something that I'm not getting, then my wife's at fault. In polyamory, that's not the case. I look after my own needs -- I could call on a friend or I could call on another partner. That's kind of what you do."

The most important method of survival in polyamory is to be honest, Sean says. "You can't do poly and lie. You'll be miserable. And it's so much easier to be caught when you have multiple partners to catch you."

But even in a relationship as open as Sean's, he is no stranger to insecurity or jealousy. One of the disadvantages to polyamory is that the person you love is dating someone else. To counter an attack of the green-eyed monster, Sean says he finds reassurance in the fact that if his wife didn't love him and want to be with him, she wouldn't stick around. He also combats jealousy by keeping busy with fun things rather than brooding at home, and talking things over helps, too.

Being poly, says Sean, has become a lot easier over the years. While watching his wife flirt with another man would have brought on a bout of jealousy years ago, now, Sean says, he probably wouldn't even notice it, much less be envious. Jealousy is all a matter of degree, and he says he's learned to deal with it through honesty and communication.

- - -

Woman wants monogamy;

Man delights in novelty.

Love is woman's moon and sun;

Man has other forms of fun.

Woman lives but in her lord;

Count to ten, and man is bored.

With this the gist and sum of it.

What earthly good can come of it?

-- Dorothy Parker, General Review of the Sex Situation

Maureen Marovitch was never good at monogamy. "I thought there was something wrong with me," she says.

So did her boyfriend, David Finch. He couldn't understand why she wasn't able to let go of her feelings for other people she had dated, and this resulted in arguments and several break-ups in the beginning stages of their relationship. Still, the couple loved one another and kept trying to work through their differences.

Then Maureen met someone who told her about polyamory, and what was once fuzzy began to come into focus. "She came to me and said, 'Does this describe me?'" David says.

"Poly made sense to me," she said. So Maureen began to explore poly and became involved with two other men.

David, however, was a monogamist, and he couldn't wrap his brain around polyamory. "My first feeling was that poly was for people who had problems with intimacy," he says.

Maureen and David are both filmmakers, and Maureen thought a documentary about polyamory would make a great film, though David was not entirely convinced. But after performing some further research and getting a grant, they began working on the film in 1998.

The film, *When Two Won't Do*, documents the journey that David and Maureen take in order to understand how to "do" poly

and come to terms with their conflicting views on relationships.

The film allows viewers a no-holds-barred, intimate glimpse into their lives. But what's more interesting is that their intended vision for the film didn't even have them in it.

"The camera man said, 'What's going on behind the camera is more interesting than what's in front of it,' " David says. And so the movie's focus shifted from others' trials and tribulations to their own.

"There were times when we were arguing and I'd go, 'Wait, we have to do this with a camera on!'" Maureen laughs.

Polyamory seemed so simple and easy to Maureen -- but that idealism soon crumbled when she realized how incredible difficult poly life could be, in both other relationships and her own. As she got more involved with Wil, a married professor from Wisconsin, her relationship with Wil's wife Robin turned sour.

Things turned ugly on film when Robin and Wil travelled to Montreal to visit and vicious arguments erupted. The four of them worked it out and everything seemed great, but two weeks later Robin committed suicide, an act that nearly halted the film.

And David still had to come to terms with Maureen's relationship with Wil. "Who's the little guy? What is this?" David recalls of his first impressions of Wil.

Eventually, their relationship as three grew and David became more comfortable with Wil and more accepting of polyamory.

"It wasn't that Maureen was rejecting me, it was that she was accepting other things," says David. "I didn't think poly was a huge deal when I realized it wasn't about a lack in me. The world doesn't revolve around me."

At the film's conclusion, it was Maureen who was still terribly conflicted -- she didn't know if she wanted marriage, if she wanted kids, she didn't know what she wanted at all.

Flash forward three years: Maureen and David are still together and just welcomed a baby girl into their lives.

"I kind of matured," Maureen says, breastfeeding her daughter in the couple's three-storey brownstone in Montreal.

"Both of us have softened our positions," says David. "She doesn't think monogamy is all that horrible and I don't think poly is all that horrible." Maureen and David plan to raise their daughter to be open-minded and accept other people's differences.

Maureen's still with Wil, though, who David describes as a "brother." When Wil comes to visit, he brings his tools and he and David like to work on projects together. "We're kind of boring now," David says.

Wil's dating another woman who also just had a baby (he was actually dating two pregnant women at once). "Wil has babies all over the place," Maureen jokes.

Wil was a little worried about the baby, according to David, thinking it might drive a wedge between him and Maureen.

"He was trying to sound happy about it, but I could tell he was kind of upset," David says.

But when Wil came to visit them a few weeks ago, he was absolutely taken with the baby.

"I said, 'Now she isn't so bad, is she?' " David laughs.

---

While most people hold a combination of perspectives, coming to terms with sexuality as a natural avenue of pleasure, both physical and sublime, is required for doing polyamory.

-- Ryam Nearing, *Loving More: The Polyfidelity Primer*

Graham and Amy (whose names have been changed) seem picture perfect. They have a loving marriage, a dog and a mortgage, and are devoted parents to two young children. They even volunteer at church. And they are the last people their friends would suspect to be sexually adventurous polyamorists.

"We come across as boy-scout, girl-scout people," he says.

Amy met their first shared lover at a mothers and babies parenting group. Though unsure about polyamory at first, after an immense amount of talking, they decided that being with another person had always been a sexual fantasy for both of them.

And so their sexual relationship with the other woman began. "It kind of happened one night," Graham says. "A night of

massage turned into more than that."

Now, their girlfriend is their best friend, though their relationship with her has been a constant process of evolution over the past seven years. While Graham has had intercourse with her a few times and the three of them are happy to engage in hours of foreplay, most of the time they just hang out.

"We love each other and we're friends," Graham says, "and we mess around together sometimes."

Graham and Amy have an intense curiosity about their sexuality, which they continually explore. They attended some events for swingers, but decided the swinging life was not for them because they were interested in establishing intimate connections, not having sex for sex's sake.

"We like to have sex with our friends," Graham says.

Graham and Amy have only just begun their involvement with the poly community, which they have found to be as open to new things as they are. Recently, they've started attending poly events, meeting people and making friends.

"We're looking for people we could be friends with anyway," says Graham.

Amy and Graham establish non-sexual relationships with other people first before engaging in any sexual activity. They use their own careful screening process, getting to know and trust another partner or a couple before they let anyone into their bedroom. They get tested for STDs and always practise safe sex.

They claim jealousy never enters their realm of possibilities. Polyamory doesn't ruin relationships, they say, it only makes them better.

"Why not cultivate other relationships?" Graham asks. "Our love isn't diminished by the fact that we have relationships with other people. You can be honest with your partner and be honest that you're attracted to other people."

The relationship they have is completely open, Graham says, and communication and honesty with one another is key. And they expect the same from the people they date.

"We're not interested in being part of someone's dirty little secret," he says emphatically.

As for their elementary school-aged children, Graham and Amy try to answer their questions as honestly and appropriately as possible. So far, they haven't asked for details. They just know that their parents have lots of friends. And while they don't go out of their way to make their poly lifestyle known to their children, they say they don't hide it, either.

Very few friends and family know about their poly lifestyle: it's just not their business.

"My friends and family don't ask me how I like my wife to give me a blow job either," he says.

- - -

Polyamory is difficult, according to those who practise it, and most say they've honed their communication and conflict-resolution skills through their relationships.

"Poly requires a lot of discussion," David says. "It's not an easy thing. I wouldn't recommend it to people who don't want a lot of work."

"It's harder to hide behind something you are doing wrong," Sean says. "Poly increases the focus on self development and basically dealing with your s--t."

Even more challenging is dealing with the constant evolution that poly relationships inevitably undergo. Graham and Amy's relationships have altered within the past few weeks, with their girlfriend recently telling them that she was uncomfortable with a one-on-one relationship with either of them, particularly with Graham. He says she told them she had never thought of their relationship as poly and any one-on-one time seemed too intense, too much like a relationship.

Graham and Amy, however, have been getting cosy with another couple (who also have children). Their kids get along great, and Graham says that the other couple is already talking about the two families all living together in the same house someday.

While Graham said a few weeks ago he had never experienced jealousy, now he admits that since their involvement with this new couple, he has had a few jealous thoughts. "I can't help noticing, during foursomes, is he erect more often? Or is he having sex with my wife more times than I am?"

Graham says that so far, these thoughts have not become toxic because he is willing to acknowledge them and talk about

them to his wife, which makes him more comfortable about having them.

Polyamorists say that poly is definitely not for everyone. Due to the sheer nature and complexity of their lifestyle, polyamorists strive to achieve a delicate balance between the wants, needs, emotions, passions and aspirations of multiple partners.

"Relationships are complicated in general, and when you have more of them you open yourself up to more complications," Graham says.

And unlike the hero or heroine at the end of your favourite soap opera or romance novel, polyamorists don't always stroll happily into the sunset. But, like any of us a relationship, they desperately hope they'll get there someday.

#### [Illustration]

Color Photo: Photo illustration/Vancouver Sun / (Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice...); Graphic/Diagram: (Polyamory 'requires a lot of discussion -- it's not easy')

#### Indexing (document details)

<b>People:</b>	Crosby, David, Marovitch, Maureen
<b>Companies:</b>	Poly
<b>Author(s):</b>	Sondi Bruner
<b>Document types:</b>	Feature
<b>Section:</b>	<i>Arts &amp; Life</i>
<b>Publication title:</b>	The Vancouver Sun. Vancouver, B.C.: Feb 14, 2004. pg. F.1.Fro
<b>Source type:</b>	Newspaper
<b>ISSN:</b>	08321299
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	547976031
<b>Text Word Count</b>	3300
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=547976031&amp;sid=1&amp;Fmt=3&amp;clientId=26918&amp;RQT=309&amp;VName=PQD">http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=547976031&amp;sid=1&amp;Fmt=3&amp;clientId=26918&amp;RQT=309&amp;VName=PQD</a>

---

Copyright © 2010 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

