

Open Coupling: One Step

by Ryam Nearing

Among individuals who decide to pursue an option other than society's standard serial monogamy, open marriage or open coupling is a common choice. At its simplest, an open marriage is one in which both partners consciously decide to maintain more individuality and personal choice. In many cases this merely means that each pursues activities and friendships without having to necessarily include the other. Of course, for most people being open also means they can and will become involved emotionally and sexually with someone(s) other than their original spouse or partner.

On the positive side, this type of relationship allows a person to maintain an already developed good relationship while including the possibility of forming more. It is a way to permit each person to pursue her/his desire for nonmonogamy honestly—as a conscious and mutually agreed upon choice between partners—rather than the typical hidden affair. Also, compared to group marriage, it's a smaller and therefore easier step for most people to take in moving beyond a one-to-one closed partnership.

Since in an open couple the two partners are still sole primaries, any other relationship which is entered into will be secondary or less in importance. In this manner, many folks can have a lover and still maintain the emotional security of having a partner/spouse with fewer of the usual fears of loss. Also they have a superior position on the relationship hierarchy to any newcomer: that of primary, partner, spouse. For those taking the big step away from societal approval of them as a standardly wholesome couple, it is also easier to still live and function as a twosome. At work parties, biological family gatherings for holidays, and neighborhood chats over the fence, it is socially smoother to simply look like a good 'ol couple. No explanations needed.

Even within many open couples the agreement is to

keep the outside relationships separate and apart—for example, not bringing them home, seeing them only on scheduled nights, etc., as a way to keep these relationships manageable, secondary, and nonthreatening. Of course, many people want a more inclusive approach and instead agree to be friends of their partner's lovers if at all possible. For them it can work well to spend time together as a group, hiking, dining out, or sharing weekend work projects. Most who choose this closer contact find themselves feeling less fear by knowing the other lover(s)—a real person is generally less scary than an imagined one.

Some couples choose an open marriage because it seems most similar to the familiar practice of dating when single. Both individual partners only have to locate a person who s/he finds attractive; there is no special need to match the new lover to the primary partner, unless their agreements include this provision. It can also feel less taxing to come home to only one person, while still having outside relationships to enjoy. For individuals who desire a quieter homelife, or more alone time, just one live-in and primary partner can be more than enough daily intimate contact. People whose highest priorities are their work (or their art, sport, children, etc.) may prefer to keep their other lovers at this less demanding and greater distance.

“The biggest difference between a polyfidelitous group marriage and an open couple is the equality factor.”

Of course, some people choose to open their couple/partnership because they simply desire new sexual connections. For these, an immediate openness to sexuality with any newcomer or, more specifically, swinging is the plan. Again, this can be seen by the participants as a non-threat to the original primary partnership. People choosing this option may pursue it individually or as a couple seeking only other couples to exchange with. In these days of AIDs,

(Continued to page 4)

More PEPCON Details

For those of you who have never attended PEPCON, it's a great way to spend a weekend (Friday evening through Sunday afternoon) among other PEP members. Folks who attend range from those who are curious about the lifestyle to those who have been part of polyfidelitous families for years. The workshop sizes vary; some are small cozy groups, while others are attended by everyone at the conference.

An important aspect of our gatherings is variety and choice. PEP emphasizes voluntary participation and social tolerance. The workshops are facilitated by members who want to share their experience or special interests. Topics this year include men's and women's issues, shared parenting, values clarification, bisexuality, and peer counseling within the family. One workshop series will give you an experiential taste of family life in its various phases.

PEPCON is held in a comfortable, old building near the University of Oregon campus in Eugene. Close to downtown, restaurants, and shops, it's a convenient location, within walking distance of several moderately priced motels (one used by many members last year was the Timbers: 503-343-3345) and not too far from the Hilton (800-445-8667) for those with richer tastes. Camping is outside of town, and therefore a bit of a drive, but still available. Call the Chamber of Commerce for a complete information packet on the Eugene area: 503-484-1314.

In July, all those who have registered will receive a packet of information, including maps to the site and schedules for the weekend. August in Oregon should be sunny and beautiful and the conference should prove stimulating and lots of fun! Please join us on August 17-19.

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**Deadline for our next issue is Sept. 1, 1990.
We crave articles, questions, comments...**

PEP (Polyfidelitous Educational Productions) is a non-profit educational corporation. We publish learning materials and information about polyfidelity. Our materials describe direct experience and the ideas and theories which have developed from it. (See back page for publications.) Networking is another one of our functions. *Peptalk* is our official newsletter and is published quarterly. Return postage must accompany all submissions if they are to be returned, and no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. All rights in submissions, letters, and questions sent to PEP or *Peptalk* will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and are subject to our unrestricted right to edit and comment editorially unless prior agreements are made in writing. Corporation headquarters located in Eugene, OR. Published in Hawaii. © Copyright 1990 Editor—Ryam Nearing Layout—Barry Northrop

Yes! I/we want to attend PEPCON
in Eugene — August 17-19

Name(s) _____

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Before coming to PEPCON, we ask that you read *The New Faithful: A Polyfidelity Primer* if you haven't done so. We think it heightens the value of attending. You may order below. Price includes postage for attendees.

To complete this form, check your membership type by looking for the one-letter code after the date on your mailing label: f=Full; s=Supporting; a=Audience. Non-member fee includes Audience membership.

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Make checks payable to PEP and mail to:

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Link Up With New Friends

PEP's *Network* is a quarterly listing of members who want to link up with new friends. To participate you must be a supporting member (and pay \$5 fee) or a full member (no fee) and send in a maximum 75 word self description. You will not receive a copy of the *Network* until your own ad is published, so pay attention to deadlines (always the same as those for *Peptalk*). *Networks* are mailed out each quarter along with your copy of the newsletter.

So, put pen to paper and take this moment to send in your entry. Come on, give it a try!

The Structure of Love

by Anthony Blokzyl

"So," you ask, "now that I've broken away from the garbage cluttering up our society's view of love and interpersonal relationships, why would I want to clutter things up again?" With any luck, this article will justify some degree of clutter to you, and help you to determine how much you need.

THE LEGALISM OF MARRIAGE

Functionally, marriage has nothing to do with love. In the West, it exists to protect the couple, their families and offspring.

More than a thousand years ago, English Common Law made provisions for automatic recognition of marriage under certain sets of circumstances. One such set might be intercourse and a spoken intent to marry; another might be simple public acknowledgment of plans to marry. This automatic recognition not only protected each party from the other playing games with words of betrothal, but protected property rights should fate intervene, as in the form of death, before the marriage could be legitimated by priest or magistrate.

If you have dealt with contract law, you will recognize that common law marriage is nothing so much as an implied and/or verbal contract, with legitimated marriage providing the full, detailed contract. The marriage license can be thought of as the "short form."

With this in mind, much of the legalism surrounding marriage can be easily interpreted. For instance, a common charge in divorce courts is "alienation of affection," usually referring to one spouse spending time, elsewhere than home, in an adulterous situation. This is obviously a breach of the marriage contract's exclusivity clause, and the judge is being asked to assign guilt, declare the contract null and void, and assess damages (alimony and fines) or even a jail sentence, though this latter has fallen into disuse. Similarly, paternity suits are used to establish either an implied contract (if brought by a woman) or a breach of contract (if brought by a woman's husband).

Another interpretation of marriage is along the lines of a partnership agreement, or even a corporation. In this vein, the above adultery case would be seen as a conflict of interest on the part of the adulterous partner, action damaging to the well-being of the

company, with the judge voiding the partnership agreement, etc.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

The considered opinion of great legal minds of the 19th and 20th centuries, including a couple of Supreme Court justices, is this: marriage in the United States is for the protection of children. No hearts and flowers. Even the more conservative derive two points: a marriage should not exist unless it is expressly to produce and raise children (a baby factory franchise); and if protection is thus guaranteed for children produced by or brought to the marriage, then anyone would be allowed to marry legally, regardless of the gender, sexual preference, or number of the partners. Obviously, these legal minds are ahead of their time.

PUTTING THE "MARRIAGE" INTO GROUP MARRIAGE

Given these considerations, cluttering up the situation should seem like a good idea. If, say, your co-husband should die, who gets his insurance money, and who gets his credit card bills? The court, without a will to go by, may stick your group with the bills and give the benefits to his parents, former spouse(s), or siblings. Even with an explicit will, courts still decide that this group stuff is too complex, and follow the path of least resistance, shuttling the benefits elsewhere.

Then again, what if the sad time comes that one of your members must leave, or the group must split? Who owns the house? Who pays the mortgage? How will you divide the furniture, bank accounts, vacation property?

THE CONTRACT

Decide what the ground rules are. Write them down; revise at least once a year.

Does the whole group meet daily? weekly? monthly? Will the group live together? Is the group vegetarian? Are cats allowed? How are vehicles to be made available? What happens to shirkers? Will you have a joint bank account? Can the group loan assets to members?

If you can't come up with at least four pages of questions like these, then you're not trying. The book *Shared Houses, Shared Lives* by Eric Raimy has some excellent suggestions.

The answers you hammer out to these questions will contain a fair bit of etiquette, as well as ground rules.

(Continued to page 6)

Open Coupling continued from page 1

many couples advertise their disease-free status or engage only in soft swinging with shared erotic activities, but no exchange of body fluids.

Almost all people who decide upon group marriage as their lifestyle have spent some time in an open marriage...for the aforementioned reasons. Eventually for them, having tried it, the limits to the open lifestyle become clear and seem too unrewarding to continue with. However they also have experienced the rewards of multiplicity and don't want to give these up. In a bold attempt to live a life that includes the benefits, yet eliminates the negatives, they seek a group marriage.

The biggest difference between a polyfidelitous group marriage and an open couple is the equality factor. Equality in relationships is an important value for those choosing polyfidelity. From either side, as the primary in an open couple or as a secondary relating to them, the difference in status simply feels uncomfortable to them. It becomes an artificial distinction to love two men, yet to sleep each night, share money, and make major life decisions with one, but only "date" the other. Short term, while getting involved with an outside lover, the secondary status is easy and feels right, but as the relationship develops in intensity, tough questions arise. If your primary partner is always the highest relationship priority, how does it feel to give less to your other lover? Especially after you've really bonded and when you can see your lover especially needs your support. "Torn between two lovers?"

As someone's secondary, what does it do to your self-esteem, long-term, to always have to make your plans after your lover and her/his partner have finalized theirs? How does it feel to have her/him go "home" time after time to someplace other than your place? Sure these issues may mean nothing to some folks, but for others the inequality factor becomes virtually abhorrent, if not at the start, then after some difficult and heart-wrenching dramas unfold.

It's one thing to talk philosophically about how theoretically people should be able to understand that being a secondary is limited and how everyone will just stay together until it's no longer fun, but real people with real emotions don't often work this way. It may just not be human nature to easily enter and exit intense and loving relationships which were allowed to develop with no intention of going further than secondariness.

Time especially seems to be a factor. At first, many single people are simply happy to experience a positive connection with someone and many open couples find their outside lovers a small but enjoyable addition to the rest of their lives. Then time passes. The single person may begin to want more contact as her/his love grows; s/he wants whole nights, weekends or vacation trips, but these may prove quite difficult to schedule by the coupled partner who faces a different set of pressures. For them, while at first the additional lover was the icing on the cake, time passing can bring up the feeling of a divided loyalty between the separate interests of the lover and the original partner. Responding to the natural needs and desires of two (or more) loved ones can prove taxing, emotionally and logistically. With only so much time and energy, budgeting becomes necessary and scheduling for self, spouse and lover (in addition to work and children) may prove problematic.

Social status or recognition also can become an issue. A husband may begin to feel deserted or overly exposed when his partner is seen in public by family or friends with her lover. A single person may feel used after months of providing much emotional support for his married lover while she deals with a difficult new contract at work. When she lands a big bonus for her success and decides to buy a new stereo system for her home, the lover may feel left out of the rewards of her labor, while the husband automatically benefits. The single may also find it hard to explain her status to friends or family who worry about her being "alone" when she feels she's in an important loving relationship. Of course she doesn't have anyone to sleep with each night or to eat dinner with after work or to bring home for Thanksgiving dinner, and these lacks can add up over time.

"They say experience is not just the best, but the only teacher." —S. Robinson

Ideally, society would accept and support any form of loving relationship, all secondaries would also have her/his very own primary, and Santa would bring everyone great gifts every Christmas. In the real world, open relationships can bring on many stresses and new situations. These experiences can be worked through successfully or can drive some folks into overload and even threaten their relationships, both primary and secondary.

Back to the beginning, people may decide to open their marriage or to start an affair with a person in an

open couple because of already existing problems. One partner in a marriage in distress may decide that taking on a new lover will make it all better. Or a couple, fearful of becoming too interdependent and committed to each other, may choose to stay open to keep from becoming mutually vulnerable, always keeping an outside lover as a back-up if their primary relationship collapses or becomes too intense. A single who has difficulty forming and maintaining intimate relationships may figure that a lover who already has a homelife and spouse elsewhere will not expect much and will thus be easier to satisfy. Obviously, entering open relationships with these types of handicaps makes the potential for successful relating much less likely.

When open relationships fail, couples break apart; lovers leave hurt; or all players give up, simply worn down by on-going unresolved stresses—many people decide that multiple relating just doesn't work. "It's too hard, an impossible dream." They may go back to serial monogamy, casual dating or even celibacy. Resourceful types sort out the experience to learn from it and decide if they're emotionally healthy and flexible enough to continue to pursue multiple relating and under which conditions. For some people, this is the point when a decision to pursue group marriage is made; for others, open relating continues but with new insights based on real experience.

A person, couple, or group who thinks through personal desires and needs in relating as realistically as possible, greatly increases the probability of successful relationships (those that are mutually satisfying from start to end). Values such as openness and honesty and a desire for growth are imperatives in moral multiple relating. Self awareness of those involved should not be assumed, but consciously explored to determine that everyone understands what they're getting into. Bottomlines about time, energy and levels of intimacy desired should be determined and discussed. Playing "what if?" at the start will deepen friendships and is useful at all stages in the relationships as new situations are encountered and possibilities develop. Instead of "how it should be," explore "how is it really?" for all involved—spouses, lovers, children, friends. Making assumptions can lead to major messes.

While idealistic goals are useful to aim towards, psychological, emotional and practical day-to-day concerns must be met. Also, past difficulties and errors make great fodder for analysis, reflection and new directions, new possibilities and successes. Learn, enjoy and keep on growing in love ♦

AIDS: A Radical View

by Allan Jensen

Last time I wrote about AIDs in the 1987 Spring issue of *Peptalk* I was rather blown away with the numbers of AIDs cases being projected that I was reading about. Since that time, I have kept abreast of the latest breaking horror stories and have looked into the whole subject area to find a well kept secret. A secret because what I have found is so radical.

What I found is that according to some sources, AIDs is curable and is not contagious. WOW! Yes, I know this sounds incredible. Just yesterday I read in my daily newspaper about researchers cloning a monkey AIDs virus and at the end of the article it said, "according to the Federal Centers for Disease Control, no one is known to have recovered from AIDs." Well, that's what I want to let you know—that people are getting over AIDs no matter what our lying federal government is telling us.

Instead of trying to explain it all to you in this short space, here is a list of books you could read if this interests you:

- 1) *The Great AIDs Hoax* by T. C. Fry, available for \$14.95 from Life Science Institute, 1108 Regal Row, P. O. Box 609, Mancha, TX 78652-0609.
- 2) *Roger's Recovery* from AIDs by Bob Owen, available for \$14.95 and published by Davar, Box 6310, Malibu, CA 90265.
- 3) *Healing AIDs Naturally* by Laurence Badgley, M.D., available for \$14.95 and published by Human Energy Press, Suite D, 370 West San Bruno Av, San Bruno, CA 94066.

Check these out for yourself! ♦

Polyfide Telephone Consultation Available

Call on Mondays only, between 8 & 9 pm Pacific time, if you have a question or need some input. Answering your calls will be Ryam Nearing, PEP director, author of the *Primer*, and member of Syntony, a polyfidelitous family.

(808) 929-9691

Structure of Love continued from page 3

This document will also ensure that everyone, whether founder or junior member, has a good idea of what is expected. Little room should be left for "But nobody told me..." excuses, while protecting individuals from discriminatory and vague rulings being applied, consciously or unconsciously, by other members.

Each member should be given a copy, and everyone should sign the marriage's copy. Signing it in front of a notary public (and repeating this every time a revision is made) and placing that original copy in a safe deposit box would be advisable.

THE PARTNERSHIP

At the very least, if you have created the group contract, you will be considering some degree of formal agreement, especially if your group intends to share assets. Most groups have no need to incorporate themselves; exceptions include plans to set up large or complex businesses as a team, to invest group assets through brokerages, etc.

A formal partnership is neither terribly difficult nor expensive. It is recommended for all alternative families, including gay or lesbian couples and couples seeing traditional marriage as pointless; in fact, it is a good basis for the much ballyhooed "marriage contract" or "cohabitation agreement," and is much more cleanly businesslike than those suggested in popular literature.

Essentially, you will fill out a formal agreement as to what each partner brings to the partnership, how each partner is expected to support it, what profit each partner can expect, and an outline of how assets will be dispersed if the agreement is dissolved. Also included may be exactly how the partnership may be dissolved; you even have the option of setting a time limit on the agreement. Other topics you may wish to include are adding and deleting members; whether children are (or will become) members; are children entirely the group's responsibility, entirely their parent's (or parents') responsibility, or somewhere between; etc.

Many states have helpfully provided standard partnership agreements; you just fill in the blanks. If you're not so lucky, retaining a lawyer is strongly recommended at this point, and a wise investment in any case.

This agreement, perhaps with a few other forms, is then filed with your state government. (In Minnesota,

the filing goes to the Secretary of State.) Then, every year, your State's department of Revenue and the IRS will want to hear from your partnership, and each member will be required to file an extra tax form detailing profit (or loss) from the deal.

THE CORPORATION

Robert Heinlein is well known for his novel from the early 1960s, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which pops up in every discussion of modern communes or the evolution of group marriage. His more recent novel *Friday* follows the heroine through subcultures of the future. One of her stops is a group marriage with a corporate structure. With a twist of typically Heinleinian wit, such a group, apparently a common enough institution in his vision of the future, is called an "S-group."

Seems that our friendly IRS set up a structure which they call the Subchapter S corporation, a special case corporation where a group of less than 36 individuals holds all of the stock. In essence, an S corporation has almost all of a corporation's advantages, with substantially reduced paperwork. Because the group is automatically limited in ownership of stock and so on, the IRS is happy to share its eased burden. While simpler than a standard corporation, an S group should be set up with the help of both a lawyer and an accountant.

Unless your group wishes specifically to be a religious sect, there is no reason to even consider filing for status as a non-profit corporation. (In fact, even in such a case, you'd be better off setting the religious stuff up as a separate structure; at that, the IRS is blunt that the only good reason to incorporate a religious group is to reassure contributors.) If you look at the 14 page application, plus attached schedules and instructions, you should agree.

CONCLUSION

In sum, most relationships don't die because people grow apart, which is the only good way. Rather, the people involved live on too many assumptions, until the relationship collapses under their weight and inaccuracy.

The application of a little structured thought goes a very long way toward stabilizing any venture. We owe it to our loved ones to risk the loss of a little danger (popularly known as "romance") to protect their interests, and our own as well. For those relationships that fall outside of normal monogamous marriage, the structures provided for businesses, used properly, can duplicate its advantages. ♦

Readers' Forum

DEAR EDITOR,

My partner and I are having a wild and wonderful love affair with another couple. We've even begun fantasizing about a group marriage. The problem is this is all new to all of us and we have a million question. Please rush me a copy of your *Primer*. Thanks from all of us!

Colorado

■ *Hey! I love receiving letters like yours...full of high energy and a willingness to pursue an adventurous life. I hope the Primer answers some of your questions, please write/call again with any additional ones. (See page 5 for consultation line phone number) We wish you the best. ❖*

DEAR PEPTALK,

I have just recently learned of your organization, although I must admit the full extent of my knowledge is that "this is a group of people who are actually functioning as group marriages, who might have published a reference book, but definitely have a newsletter."

I am a member of a group marriage—2 legally married couples—who have lived together for 18 years. We have four children ranging in age from 13 to 5. I would be interested in learning more about your group(s). Please send any information you may have. I would also be very interested in learning of other groups, if they exist, in our part of the country to compare experiences. Thank you.

California

■ *Hello! We are always happy to hear from existing groups and would love to know more about your story. Please consider writing something for Peptalk*

PEP full and supporting membership dues and donations are used to send free introductory materials to folks (like you!) who write to us for information and support. As part of our educational and outreach activities, we advertise as much as we can afford to and contact many networking and self-help groups nationwide and more. In this manner we supply resources and networking opportunities to people who are in or are developing group marriages, or who are simply exploring their options. Thanks to all our members who help us share energy with the others on the frontier.

Please see page 2 of this issue for information on how to network with other PEP members and related groups. We keep all names and addresses totally confidential except through the voluntary participation of interested folks in PEP's Network. ❖

DEAR EDITOR,

I wrote an article in *Social Anarchism* about the pros and cons of various types of family organization, concluding that small group marriages would probably be best for most people for at least part of their adult life. I did not know of PEP until after this article was accepted; thus I would like to share some discussion relating to that article.

From the discussions I've read in *Peptalk*, it is evident to me that there are several idealized basic types of small group polyfidelitous relationships. Each best fits different personalities and situations. These types I will characterize as follows: A) The communal group: more or less equally treated partners who form a closely knit social, economic and/or sexual group; B) The cooperative group: more or less equally treated partners, each dealt with as an individual at the social, economic and/or sexual level; C) The incompletely fused group: one or more primary partners and one or more secondary partners. In addition, there is a fourth (Type D) which is rarely discussed in *Peptalk*. I call it a Linear Network. Each person may be polyfidelitous within the network, but there is no closed circle of mates. An individual's mates may be about equal in treatment or there may be primary and secondary ones. This type grades into the afore described Type C.

If everyone were completely honest, I think each of these types fits the actual or potential relationships of many people. Yet, we often think of Type A as being the flag carrier form of polyfidelitous relationships. Why? Because it sounds the most stable and emotionally secure, would seem the easiest to organize as a distinct group and most closely resembles the general public's vision of what group marriages are all about. Yet, we should recognize the other types as being equally valid polyfidelitous relationships which happen to fit the realities or desires of many people. The Linear Network would seem difficult to formalize. Surely, few existing ones are formalized and many should not be. Many involve a member of a married pair. Some sizeable communes offer the opportunity for informal Linear Networks within the commune.

For those who have an aversion to communes for other reasons or to the under the rug approach involving married pairs, another possibility presents itself, given a favorable legal environment. That is to allow each person to marry multiple mates, with overlapping marriage groups. Each person remains a separate economic entity, albeit with specified obliga-

(Continued next page)

tions and rights regarding income redistribution. Each person has a parental responsibility toward the children of their set of mates. Each person is liable only for themselves, their own property and property or offspring shared with other mates. This same approach could be applied to types B and C relationships. Here, distinct formal groups can be recognized, but the members of each group may wish to retain more of their individual or pairwise autonomy than is true in Type A groups or in standard nuclear family arrangements. However, we need to obtain legal support for this option before it can be seriously considered by most people.

As men and women are gradually becoming more interchangeable in their roles, as people have increasing opportunities to move about and interact with diverse people, and as opportunities to engage in a diversity of leisure time activities have increased, it is becoming more and more difficult for many people to find sufficient fulfillment in the traditional family unit as a lifetime communal pair and their offspring. As people are having more complex and unique sets of life experiences, they feel more unique and may require several simultaneous or successive long term mates to be fulfilled or keep from being bored. With few or no children per family, friends, lovers and hobbies tend to absorb more of our attention. For some, this means more complex romantic relationships. Some people react to this state by wanting to compensate with a larger close knit family (type A relationship). Others welcome the increased feeling of uniqueness and may opt for a type B or D relationship or to go it alone as far as formal relationships are concerned. Western people have come to expect a wide variety of options in most other aspects of their life. It's time we validated some new options in polyfidelitous relationships.

Canada

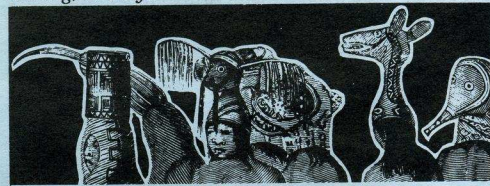
■ *First, thanks for your letter and sharing your interesting thoughts about nonmonogamous relationships. We certainly agree with your desire to legitimize differing forms of relating. PEP, as an organization, has a strong mission to support each individual's freedom to pursue any form of relationship that s/he desires with others who also want that relationship type. PEP encourages nonmonogamous folks to explore and discover conscious, loving and practical ways to manifest their relationship preferences.*

More specifically, the types of relationships (A-D) you have described are all equally valid relationship choices, but all of them are not polyfidelitous. Even the briefest definition of the word "polyfidelity" includes 1) fidelity (sexual and otherwise) to the group, and 2) all primary relationships among all partners. The other relationships styles you have

described fit under the more general terms group marriage or intimate network, which are usually applied to folks who share in less consistent ways (emotionally, sexually, financially, parenting, residences, etc) within their group.

I differ with your statement that a polyfidelitous group (type A) is the flag carrier because it "sounds the most stable, would seem the easiest to organize as a distinct group and most closely resembles general public opinion about what a group marriage is." Based on my experience, it is a flag carrier because it most clearly represents the ideal family relationship type for many people. Most people identify with a polyfidelitous group over other types of group marriages or networks because it best meets the very basic human needs for love and belonging, stimulation and companionship, mutual support, and commitment. It also provides benefits of a family and homelife.

Polyfidelity simply is a particularly desirable social pattern. In many cases people accept other less clear and more chaotic relationship connections as "better than nothing" or as a tenuous foothold towards a more rewarding relationship type. Similarly, many monogamous folks prefer and pursue their "soulmate," while typically achieving serial monogamy at best. Neither living alone with no responsibilities to anyone or living within a loosely defined grouping of friendships of varying levels will provide the same feeling of bonding and synergy that polyfidelity can, and, actually, most people would prefer this type of relating, ideally.



Back to reality, polyfidelity is one of the most difficult relationship types to actually achieve. It's always much easier to find additional partners when you're single or in an open couple (not to say that even then it is so easy) than to match compatibilities and sexual attraction as a group of all primaries. The complexities of forming and maintaining a polyfidelitous family make it a challenging lifestyle, but this is clearly balanced out by the benefits attained.

Nonmonogamy in general is given little social or cultural support and all attempts in this direction are best seen as positive steps toward more human and realistic family or relationship patterns, and very definitely as respectable options. ❖

DEAR PEP,

First of all I want to thank you for taking the time to

talk to me by phone last month. It was an important part of the process that I'm going through right now, and I wanted to let you know how I'm getting along. I haven't met any other people who consider themselves polyfides—and although I am not a practicing polyfide at the moment, I consider myself one by temperament.

I appreciate that my best source of people to talk to is to join the *Network*. You told me this personally, and a recent *Peptalk* editorial reinforced the importance of joining. But right now, I can't do it, and this is not just an excuse for inaction. It's basically because I'm trying to pace my connections with PEP to the slowest member of the dyad that I am now in. I feel that I have to prove to my partner that I'm serious about pacing things at her speed. I believe that this relates to the basic issue of power in relationships, and the way I understand it, equality of power is one major difference between polyfidelity & open relationships.

Relationship power seemed to me to be one of the principles implied indirectly throughout *The New Faithful* in the discussion of open vs. closed relationships; in the description of cautious courtship; in the suggestion that a six-month time limit be used as a benchmark for movement; and in Ann Klein Phoenix's description of Ken Keyes' "YES Path" technique ("Ask for what you want, accept the answer you get—at least for now—and always turn up the love.")

In most situations, when one member of a couple becomes involved with a third person, that member of the couple holds great emotional power and the other member of the couple feels completely powerless. The reason for this imbalance in power is that the first person stands to move from one nurturing environment to another, whereas the second stands to move from a nurturing environment to a vacuum. The first person therefore has many more poker chips to gamble with.

The only way a group marriage can be positive for everyone is if everyone has the power in the relationship to make the situation positive for themselves. It's the only way that it can be a mutual project, and without being a mutual project, any attempts to create a group marriage can't succeed. Since my partner is unwilling for me to list us in any way in the *Network*, I am, to an extent, giving her power. But I do not believe that I've given up ultimate power—for the long run. Perhaps I'll even have a draft of a nonthreatening entry to show her soon. I also keep hoping that if we visit some other polyfides she might understand

that most are quite a bit more normal than me.

I really did appreciate the chance to talk to you personally when I needed someone to talk to; it's very lonely out here for us un-*Networked* folks—and I imagine that some other people have similar reasons to mine for not joining immediately.

Now I have a question. In my life, I feel it is relevant that I became familiar with the conscious manipulation of the energy from the heart chakra (or heart psychic center) as an important early precursor to my interest in polyfidelity. In *Peptalk*, there have been reports about Tantra, Lyn of Phoenix describes the Kundalini workshops they teach, and one of the families interviewed uses the family name of Heartsun, an obvious reference to a heart chakra meditation. What percentage of the polyfide population uses heart chakra energy consciously? How important a tool do you see it as being?
Washington

■ *I'm so glad that our phone contact was helpful. Our phone consultation line is now mentioned in each issue to remind folks that there is a time and number they can use to connect with PEP. We are totally involved with polyfidelity as a lifestyle and are quite familiar with the issues it raises in transition and ongoing family life.*

As far as heart chakra energy, of course it is an important aspect of any relationship style if marriage is seen by the people involved as a spiritual union rather than a social convenience. Many people who do polyfidelity demonstrate awareness in this area, but I have no data on how many use it consciously. I invite readers to comment. ♦

DEAR PEP,

The following is the address of an organization which is fighting for the family rights of lesbian and gay partners. With a few simple wording changes, Lambda's lawsuits and proposed legislation could benefit polyfides, too. Please publish this address so PEP members can write urging them to broaden their constituency to include polyfides. Write to:

Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund, Inc.
666 Broadway
New York, NY 10012-9996

California

■ *We appreciate you sharing this resource and for suggesting all members take personal action to support polyfidelity as a viable lifestyle option. PEP, as an organization, has been contacting various other groups with letters and copies of our educational materials to try to heighten awareness of the legitimacy of marriages of more than two individuals. We encourage all members to do the same. ♦*

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- **PEP Network** \$5.00 one-time fee
(a quarterly networking directory to Supporting
for members—only available to members; free to
those entering themselves) Full members
- **PEPCON** See page 2
August 17, 18, and 19 in Eugene

To join or order, make checks payable to PEP and mail to:

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