

Sex Geek

thoughts on sex and life

10 realistic rules for good non-monogamous relationships

Posted on [June 10, 2007](#) by [sexgeek](#)

“Polyamory is grad school relationship. It’s for grownups only. If you can’t yet bring yourself to communicate honestly with your partner about everything that goes wrong....and don’t wait too long after it goes wrong, and don’t lay on guilt when you bring it up, then don’t do it. Stay monogamous. Polyamory is not the place to work out your neuroses, any more than running a marathon is the best way to exercise your recently-broken and healing ankle.”

– Raven Kaldera, “[The Polyamory Contract \(http://www.scarletletters.com/current/021403_nf_rk.shtml\)](http://www.scarletletters.com/current/021403_nf_rk.shtml)”

So I spent the bulk of this weekend in Ottawa, and one of the things I did there was teach a polyamory / non-monogamy workshop at Venus Envy. It was cool! Great turnout (22, woo-hoo!), thoughtful people, and a wide range of experiences – from total non-monog newbie to lifetime poly folk. Very interesting.

Normally when I teach, I really like to make things really interactive. But I’ve noticed that sometimes that’s not satisfying to people. For a lot of folks, when they show up to a workshop, they really want to come out of it with concrete, practical tools that will help them incorporate a new philosophy or practice into their lives. Now, telling people how to live their lives is kinda obnoxious, in my humble opinion, so I’m usually loath to approach a topic as though I have the monopoly on know-how. Especially when it comes to relationships, things work differently for pretty much every single person out there. Who am I to pretend I’m qualified to tell people how to run their lives?

That being said, once I started thinking about it and having conversations with various brilliant friends and colleagues, I began to realize that I actually do have pretty strong opinions about what needs to happen in order for non-monogamy to be a healthy and happy experience, instead of being a hornet’s nest of drama and pain. So for the first time, I actually sat down and wrote out the elements that I believe to be essential to doing good non-monogamy. It’s not so much a question of the specifics – how many lovers, how often to see them, etc. – as it is of the approach. I used my ten rules to re-create my poly workshop, and tried out the new formula for the first time this weekend.

Every time I teach, I learn; I think maybe this time I tipped the balance too far in the direction of instruction. Next time, I’ll try to strike a stronger equilibrium so people get to talk more. But teaching technique aside, I stand by my rules... so I figured I’d post ‘em here, in case anyone’s curious.

If you want to quote them or link to them, by all means feel free. Please acknowledge where you got 'em from by linking to this or quoting with my name, is all I ask. Thanks!

10 Realistic Rules for Good Non-Monogamous Relationships

by Andrea Zanin

(Please note I said *good* poly. Anyone can do poly badly, but I don't advise it.)

1. Know yourself. For starters, be brutally honest with yourself and answer the following questions. I'm not kidding about the brutal part. Sugarcoating will not help you here. Also, remember that the answers to these are never final... you change every day and with every experience you have, so it's worth revisiting these questions over and over throughout your lifetime.

- What kind of person are you?
- What are your core values?
- What are your life priorities?
- What are your needs within relationships?
- What are your shortcomings within your relationships?
- Why have your past relationships ended? Are you able to articulate what part you played in that?
- How do you deal with conflict and anger?
- How are your communication skills?
- What kind of people are you generally attracted to? Are there any predictable patterns in your attractions? Are they positive or problematic?
- What do you have to offer a partner? What sort of partner, lover, friend are you?
- What does your life look like? Your schedule, your energy levels, your health, your obligations, your stresses, your joys? What would you like to change?

2. Love yourself. Okay, so this sounds like the greatest cliché known to man, but it's actually the basic ingredient for good non-monogamy. It's the macaroni in the mac & cheese. You gotta take care of yourself. If you don't have this one down, you will simply never be able to fully enjoy healthy love relationships with others. Lots of people try to ignore the basic and all-pervasive importance of self-love, and that's why many people have messy love relationships. You wanna try that with multiple love relationships? Believe me, you will sink fast.

If the answers from the questions you just asked yourself show some areas that may pose challenges, love yourself enough to take up those challenges before you start exploring elsewhere. Go get therapy, take up a meditation practice, start writing in a journal, get more exercise to boost your mood and self-confidence, or attend to your spiritual life. Not taking care of yourself is not an option.

3. Be happy ALONE. Yes, that's right. *Alone*. All alone. No partner. Married or otherwise partnered already? That's fine, but you still need to have this one down. If you approach your relationships with the idea that they'll make you happy when you can't make yourself happy, you will inevitably be disappointed.

Very few relationships actually last a whole lifetime; it's wonderful if they do, but let's be realistic. You can't base your entire concept of love and relationship around an ideal that a small minority of people actually achieve. Not to mention that longevity is not an indicator of happiness – some relationships should last a few months, some a few years, some a few hours. This is not an indication of failure, it's an indication of reality.

Be happy alone first. Then add one or more partners to enhance, deepen and enjoy that happiness with you. But do not make your happiness dependent on someone else's presence in your life or your bedroom, let alone two or three people's presence. That's not relationship, that's codependence. It also gets real complicated if your honey has three partners and you don't – unless you are (ta-daa!) happy alone.

4. Communicate. Honestly. Now comes the time where you take all that brutal honesty with yourself, and translate it into brutal honesty with your partner(s). Good poly happens when things are put on the table. Are you jealous? Say so. Are you scared, worried, angry, upset? Use your words. Are you happy, in love, admiring? Spread the joy! Is there something on your mind that you don't want to tell your partner? MAJOR warning bell... this is almost a guarantee that you should be telling them!

I absolutely promise that if you keep shit to yourself, you will run into problems. If you have the first three rules down and drop the ball on this one, your poly is still going down the tubes. Buy self-help books. Go to joint therapy. Take an active listening workshop. Read up on jealousy and other issues to see how best to deal with them. Whatever it takes, improve your communication skills. You'll thank yourself for it!

5. Know what you want. Here's another list of questions for ya. (Hint: Rules 1 to 4 come in real handy before you get to this one.)

- What would your ideal polyamorous relationship look like?
- What joys do you think polyamory will bring to your life?
- What challenges do you think you will face? Do you think you're equipped to handle those challenges?
- Do the benefits you want match up with the kind of room do you have in your world for multiple partners?
- Do the benefits you want match up with what you have to give in return in terms of time, energy, availability, etc.?
- What do you think an incoming partner might want from you? How might she or he feel about your situation?
- If you have an existing partner, do your values, desires and abilities match up well? Are you looking for the same or compatible sorts of polyamory?
- Are you open to a range of options within the range of polyamorous arrangements, or is your interest very specific? If it's specific, why? What do you hope to gain from that particular form?

6. Go for content, not form. Once you've answered the questions above, you might have a form of poly in mind that you feel would be perfect for you. If so, the next step is to ask yourself what that form means to you... and do a reality check. Two girlfriends = never lonely? Think again. Two couples in a quad = excellent balance? No guarantees. "Middle-aged married couple – he's heterosexual, she's bi-curious – seeks hot young bisexual woman with double-D boobs who likes giving head, available every second weekend and the occasional Wednesday night." Does this sound familiar?

Lots of people have an idealized vision in their minds. We often get caught up in the packaging without remembering that relationship is about what's inside. You and your honey might spend years seeking out the ideal couple to form the perfect quad, while your best friend and her boyfriend have been working up the nerve to ask you out for months. You might want your wife to have fun with a cute gal for your entertainment, when in fact that guy she met at the BBQ last week would make an amazing addition to your world for years to come, loving her deeply and being a wonderful friend to you... and maybe you should try dating that woman you met at the gym.

Think of polyamory as a state of openness to love in whatever form it comes to you, and then take responsibility for managing that abundance when it arrives... rather than sticking with a particular formula you believe will be ideal. See rule #10 for more.

7. Be nice. Polyamory is not about the technicalities. It's the spirit, not the letter of the law that counts. Polyamory is not all about you getting laid. In fact it's not really all about you at all. It's a philosophy of moving through the world that's about plurality, generosity and giving, and guess what – it goes way beyond your Friday-night date. Love is not tit for tat; it's not a pie with only so many pieces to go around; and it's not there just to beef up your ego. So...

- Don't date someone else's partner behind that person's back just because it's not "technically" your problem.
- Keep an eye out for the people you get involved with to make sure they're all right, and doing poly for the right reasons, even if that's not "technically" your call to make.
- Know your boundaries and respect them; watch out for other people's boundaries too, even if that's not "technically" your job.

As a poly person, your responsibility toward right relationship doesn't end when you have an orgasm or when you drop your date off at the door. So don't be creepy and go out cruising for what you can get out of love, or to see how much you can get away with. You're missing the whole bloody point if you go at it that way.

8. Have safer sex. This doesn't just mean use a condom. It means figure out how to talk about sex with all your partners. It means figure out what acceptable risk looks like for you. HIV is not the only risk out there, and condoms don't protect against everything. For example: if someone has oral herpes, will you kiss them? Will you let them go down on you? This answer might be different if, say, you see them only three times a year... if you have a compromised immune system... if you are healthy as a horse.

Here are a few questions worth thinking about. Remember, this isn't just about you. Conceivably, your sexual choices could affect dozens of other people... people you care about. Sex is awesome. Keep it that way.

- Are you informed about the relative risks of the various things you like to do in bed? If not, do you know where to find the information you need?
- Are you aware of how and when to use safer sex products like condoms, gloves, finger cots, Saran Wrap, dental dams, silicone toys, etc.? If not, do you know where to find the information you need?
- How much are you comfortable telling your doctor about your sex life? How will those limits affect his or her ability to provide you with appropriate care?
- Do you have access to STI testing? If so, how often do you think it's appropriate for you and your partners to get tested, and for what?
- How might you deal with an unexpected pregnancy – yours or someone else's?
- How do you feel about alternative sexual practices, like fisting or anal sex or BDSM?
- Do you have limits around blood play, bondage, penetration...?
- Are your limits different with different people or in different situations?
- How do you feel about your partner(s)' limits? Are they compatible with yours?
- Where are you willing to compromise, and why?
- What are your needs and limits around your emotional safety in sexual situations?
- What happens if you find out you have contracted an STI – who do you have to tell and what will you do?

9. Be strong. Make no mistake about it: choosing a polyamorous relationship style is a radical thing. It upsets people – some of those people may include your parents, your friends, your work colleagues, members of your religious or spiritual groups, your kids, and more. Just because we have an alternative philosophy about what makes us feel happy in our relationships doesn't mean the whole world will be on board with us. That creates pressures on everyone involved.

To handle this, it's really helpful to have strong friendships, a strong philosophy, an independent streak, a lot of self-confidence, a good sense of boundaries (other people's, not just your own), some well-articulated knowledge and words with which to defend or explain your choices (answering questions in this list can help with that, as can reading a few good poly books), and a community that includes other poly people.

Here are a few more questions to think about:

- Can you deal with the social pressures you will face because you've made a different choice than the mainstream?
- How, exactly, will you deal with this? What would your approach be for each of these situations I listed above?
- What do people need to know? How much are you comfortable telling them about your choices?
- Is it safe for you to come out to people about your multiple loves? Will this affect your child custody, your career, your community standing?
- Is it actually unsafe for you to come out to people about your multiple loves? Or are you internalizing social pressures and censoring yourself before even giving your friends and loved ones a chance to show their support and open-mindedness?
- How will you deal with it if you're perceived as a cheater, a slut, a greedy person, an immoral person?
- What will you do if people whom you didn't want to tell end up finding out?

10. Go with the flow. In other words, don't go out looking for anything. The best people show up when we're just going about our business, doing good things in life, being happy, and being generous. It's not that personals sites or matchmaking are a bad idea... it's simply that the joy of non-monogamy is in being open to the many things that may come our way, rather than gunning for any one thing in particular. Life is generous if we're open to receiving it, and it pulls away when we clutch at it...a lot like people.

□ Posted in [Uncategorized](#)

96 thoughts on “10 realistic rules for good non-monogamous relationships”

1. *Carsen* says: [June 12, 2007 at 10:52 am](#)
Awesome. I'm so glad you posted this! 

[Reply](#)

2. ***Genevieve Grenier*** says: [June 12, 2007 at 3:48 pm](#)

Andrea...I agree with you: the best teachers are the ones who still consider themselves to be students.

Your rules are not only practical but realistic! I would even go so far as to say that rules from #1 to #5 can also be applied for good healthy monogamous relationships.

[Reply](#)

3. ***Kym*** says: [June 13, 2007 at 5:35 pm](#)

Hello!

I attended this class, and I just wanted to tell you, that though you may feel it was perhaps a little too instructional, it was, for me, exactly what I was looking for.

Like I had said, I had been doing the poly thing for most of my adult life, except for one relationship. After that relationship (and subsequent life altering events) I found myself really just... floundering, when it came to relationships. It actually took a leap of faith for me to get involved in the one that I have now. But still so many questions need addressing. And revisiting *The Ethical Slut* hasn't helped me much.

I know I could read other blogs, join more communities, read more books. But I've always preferred listening to someone speak.

This is where your class was a godsend to me. After reading your blog for the last little while, I've come to respect your opinion. It was wonderful to hear you speak honestly about what you thought worked. And you did it without an ounce of pretension.

I came out of your class feeling hopeful and very positive. It gave my Master/boyfriend and I food for thought and conversation afterwards.

So... thank you. Thank you for a wonderful class. I hope everyone else got as much out of it as I did.

[Reply](#)

sexgeek says: [June 13, 2007 at 11:40 pm](#)

Wow. I'm really touched at the kind words, from all of you – those present and those not! Thanks so much for the positive feedback! *feeling warm and fuzzy*

[Reply](#)

1. ***tigerdancer13*** says: [February 2, 2011 at 6:39 pm](#)

Just saw this today 2-2-11 really good article. WI would like more info about anything related to polyamory especially on communities and discussions around building poly relationships. There is a lot of talk starting around the Boston and Northeast areas but not a lot of info. This is still an area that rather recoils from these sorts of discussions. Thanks, MARK

[Reply](#)

4. ***Melissa*** says: [June 15, 2007 at 4:12 pm](#)

Dear Andrea,

I was the pansexual redheaded woman sitting next to you who is in a "semi-poly" relationship (i.e., definitely interested in poly, have some some experience, but it's still very limited). I asked the question about how to get to the level of compersion.

I wasn't sure what to expect but thought that the workshop would be done in a lecture style. I was REALLY pleased with the outcome. Workshops are much more useful and fun if people get to interact with others, even in a small way. I think the new format you experimented with and described in detail here is perfect. A lot of really important questions that newbies and veterans to the poly lifestyle should think about were brought up in the workshop. I came out of the workshop feeling that I knew more than when I had come in.

As a matter of fact, although no poly relationships are currently occurring with my partner and I, our communication has definitely improved and I like to think that your very simple rules helped.

So thank you for coming to Ottawa and giving us a fresh, new outlook on poly life! I'll be on the lookout for other workshops you'll be doing.

I have a hearing loss but you spoke articulately which helped a great deal. Thank you.

~Melissa

P.S. I've linked this on my own blog since I also have poly friends and as was brought up at the workshop, the guidelines work for monogamous folks too or can at least be modified to suit whatever relationship lifestyle one lives :).

Reply

5. **HellSea** says: [July 9, 2007 at 4:30 pm](#)

I adore you.

Reply

6. **HellSea** says: [July 9, 2007 at 4:32 pm](#)

Hmmm, I just realized I may not be obviously who I am under this name and the above comment will appear stalky.

Say the name out loud, it should become obvious. *grin*

Reply

sexgeek says: [July 10, 2007 at 2:42 am](#)

Stalking via hukt awn fonnix, huh? Love it. 😊

Reply

7. **Kit** says: [July 20, 2007 at 4:57 am](#)

Excellent common sense advice. I'm bookmarking it so I can pass it on to others. 📌

Reply

8. **ChatOmbre** says: [July 30, 2007 at 7:25 pm](#)

I think that these are important things to consider — not only for people in non-monogamous relationships, but also for people who *are* in monogamous relationships... and those who are single, as well. 😊

Thank you for sharing these.

Reply

9. **Charmaine X** says: [August 11, 2007 at 3:18 pm](#)

Thanks so much for the encouragement and wise words as I take my first steps in polyamory.

You sum it up beautifully: “a state of openness to love in whatever form it comes to you” ... “take responsibility for managing that abundance when it arrives”.

Perfect.

x

Reply

sexgeek says: August 12, 2007 at 12:54 am

Good luck with your journey! 

A.

Reply

10. *wizzaq* says: September 5, 2007 at 11:32 am

These 10 points are not only highly relevant to polyamory but to all relationships in general. Well articulated! I shall also pass on the link...

Reply

11. *Pairedox* says: March 18, 2008 at 9:31 am

Excellent list of rules, and I love all of them but one. And I think it is a subtle thing, and I am seeking clarification. Since you are a professional, I am sorry to impose, and feel free to delete and ignore me.

Number Three is very tricky from my point of view. The point in red is very true. However, the reason people form relationships is that there are needs that the individual cannot meet on ones own, and things that are only gained through human interaction. So what exactly do you mean by being happy alone?

I wholly agree that one must be able to live with themselves, but that is part of self-loving. And being able to exist without a formal relationship is a valueable skill, but part of poly for me is that it teaches us that all loving relationships (family, friends, lovers) are loving relationships.

Also how does sex fit into number three, realistically? Masturbation is a lovely thing, don't get me wrong, but sex is different, and does require more than one person.

I am sorry to bother you with the same questions you must hear repeatedly. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Reply

sexgeek says: March 18, 2008 at 2:01 pm

Hey Pairedox,

I actually do believe that the ability to be happy alone – all the way alone, romantically and sexually and in pretty much every other way as well – is more than simply a valuable skill; rather it's a crucial ability that makes our relationship choices meaningful. If we see solitude as an unpleasant but survivable state that bridges the gap between our times in relationship, then we're never going to truly invest in knowing and experiencing deep happiness on our own.

In that sense, sex doesn't fit in; masturbation does, and so does celibacy, and if you stretch it a bit so would a one-night stand or two, but if one relies on repeated one-night stands to ease the pain of being alone, one is still missing the chance to learn to truly enjoy that solitude and discover what it

has to offer, what lessons it teaches, what pleasures it holds.

None of this is to say that relationships aren't an essential aspect of the human experience; they certainly are, and short of being a hermit there's no way to remove their existence from our lives entirely (nor am I advocating such drastic moves unless someone really needs it for some particular purpose). But common wisdom holds that we are somehow less than whole when we're not in relationship, that we must be sad and lonely and waiting for the right person to come along and make it all better. I'm advocating for people to own their solitude, make it active and powerful and positive, and see it as a state that can go on indefinitely rather than an inferior and undesired state that should be minimized or avoided.

I dunno if that helps... but there's my take on it! 

Andrea

Reply

12. *Pairedox* says: March 18, 2008 at 5:10 pm

That clarifies wonderfully. I like the stress on taking charge of ones personal experiences. I still think I disagree with you, but I feel that it is too subtle for me to put to words, and that it has more to do with world view. I thank you very much, Andrea. 

Reply

13. *medici* says: April 23, 2008 at 3:46 am

These are excellent guides to all relationships (friendships, too); I bookmarked it when I came across it a few weeks ago and worked through the questions for my own benefit. I'm keeping an eye open for a lover or two and intend to keep my skills sharp! Thanks for the posting.

And I love Rule Three (Be happy alone)! I see it as a particular case of the more general Rule Ten (Go with the flow). It's easy for me to transform keeping an eye out for a lover or two into The Search for Perfection – capital letters are such consuming, greedy things.

Okay, off to start another awesome day – this is a terrific blog: again, thanks.

Reply

sexgeek says: April 23, 2008 at 4:40 am

Wow, cool! Never thought of people actually working through this whole thing but that's totally neat. I'm glad you found it helpful. And yeah, I noticed after I started teaching about this that the vast majority of it kinda works whether you're poly or not. I guess healthy relationships can happen even if they're monogamous... what a thought! 😊 Nice to have you here, medici.

Reply

14. Pingback: Good Poly rules « Gorean Refuge - The Home of Travis Vaughan

15. *Travis* says: April 27, 2008 at 10:07 pm

Enjoyed the rules so much that I posted them on my own blog. Maybe the 15 people who read my blog will find something that they can enjoy.

Reply

16. *eboniorchid* says: May 25, 2008 at 5:01 pm

Hey! I just saw this re-posted on FetLife and it's fantastic! It's definitely a great mix of what I would hope would be common sense and what I think are truly enlightened insights into relationships in general (not just poly ones). Bravo! 

Reply

17. **PatrickO** says: May 30, 2008 at 12:41 am

Just a thank-you for the recent Ottawa workshop. We're just dipping our toes in this world (we were the squares at the back of the group) and it was better than we could have imagined. Practical, but fun. And if there is anything Ottawa needs more than a dose of fun I can't think of it – so keep coming back!

Reply

18. Pingback: Fountain Pens and Handmade Paper » Blog Archive » links for 2008-07-22

19. **Lilac** says: July 31, 2008 at 8:02 am

Hi..loved this and would like to post it on the NZPoly.org.nz forum with credit to you of course.

Cheers

Lilac

Reply

sexgeek says: July 31, 2008 at 11:38 am

Lilac – by all means, go ahead. Glad you liked it! 

Reply

20. Pingback: Attic Tales » Blog Archive » If Poly wants more than one cracker, make sure they're healthy ones

21. **Imokon** says: October 7, 2008 at 1:31 pm

Perfect! Just what my husband and I were looking for. Couldn't have been more... concise and educational? Perfect for our whirlwind life!

Reply

22. **medici** says: December 15, 2008 at 8:00 pm

You know what? These rules rule. Just letting you know — I bet that I'm not the only reader out there who reviews these suggestions periodically. It's a maintenance thing. Thanks for putting these sane, no-BS rules in a public space.

Reply

23. **medici** says: December 15, 2008 at 8:01 pm

And look at that! My snowflake remains invariant!!! How unsnowflakelike. How pleasing.

Reply

24. **Jeff** says: July 17, 2009 at 1:15 pm

Hi,

Friends pointed me here – likely one or two must have attended your session.

The rules above seem great! Though I have to say, they seem like rules for any romantic/serious relationship – not just non-monogamous. I was hoping to see some very specific thoughts on what usually works for a non-monogamous lifestyle (and might not work in other-styled relationships).

Reply

25. **Sapphic Owl** says: August 17, 2009 at 11:43 pm

This is a very thought-provoking and useful list. Perfect for those of us considering being poly.

Reply

26. **mtngrl** says: October 8, 2009 at 10:10 am

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Was considering poly in the midst of a monogamous relationship crisis. Thank you for reminding me that I know it's not the right time. Reading this today was a real blessing.

Reply

27. *nell* says: [November 7, 2009 at 6:46 pm](#)

This is a great read, and I would argue that a lot of these rules apply to any meaningful relationship – polyamorous or not. Thank you for writing this up!

Reply

28. Pingback: [Being in the singular « an unassuming girl](#)

29. Pingback: [10 realistic rules for good non-monogamous relationships « Fountain Pens and Handmade Paper](#)

30. *Martin* says: [December 30, 2009 at 12:41 pm](#)

Deeply moved by reading this – I feel as if I get support in all the important places by this advice.

Reply

31. *Ken in MS* says: [January 5, 2010 at 7:40 am](#)

Really great article (and part 2, too). My partner and I have had sex with thirds on a very few occasions, and we are investigating making this a regular part of our sexual life. As gay men, it's just sort of expected! But I think for too many of us, the rules we learn to navigate this are like those locker room rules about sex that we learned in high school—not really applicable in real life! So it was great to see some honest questions and advice. And as to rule #3, one other reason that loving yourself is so important is that one never knows when one's health might just necessitate a solitary (at least, sexual) existence. That has been the defining characteristic of my life. As childhood health problems continue to multiply, my partner and I are forced to navigate new territory. And because I am the sick one, but also the one most able to be “solitary and happy,” it really provides a stepping stone for the next level of our relationship. Sorry so long, but obviously this article moved me. Thanks so much, Andrea.

Reply

32. Pingback: [polyamorös eller otrogen? « YONI – Jennie Rehbinders blogg om sex, kärlek och relationer](#)

33. *Poly_novice* says: [August 15, 2010 at 10:43 pm](#)

This is really good information about the poly lifestyle. It makes me think about my intentions as a single women wanted to explore with different loves however in a single (one on one privately) fashion instead of group. I'm sure the possibilities are there. Thanks again for sharing.

Reply

34. *Madison Bleu* says: [August 25, 2010 at 8:10 pm](#)

A friend on Facebook posted a link to this yesterday and I really, truly enjoyed it. I have challenged myself to work through all of the rules and the questions with the expectancy that once I have finished I will have a greater understanding of my romantic self and my wants/needs/ desires relationship wise.

Thank you so much for writing and posting this — its awesome!!

Reply

35. *Telzyln Marie Vosbury Garcia* says: [September 10, 2010 at 7:03 pm](#)

Lovely article, I thought. Please pause to realized I liked it a lot.

Can you guess what major mistake I've been learning from?

So, I was considering a rule number 11, maybe?

However logical, reasonable, and wise all these 10 rules look, check to make sure the people you are interacting with think so too. Using old cultural tapes, or otherwise not thinking poly through (even from otherwise wonderful people) is common, and surprisingly easy to overlook.

Reply

36. Pingback: [Resources for open relationships « an unassuming girl](#)

37. **'Blaze'** says: [November 22, 2010 at 9:19 pm](#)

This was pointed out to me on fetlife. I spent some time answering your questions from numbers 1 and 5. The answers were illuminating.

I've shared them on my Fetlife profile, along with a link to here.

Thank you!

B.

Reply

38. **mythicalc** says: [April 10, 2011 at 6:04 pm](#)

I was in a poly rels for 2 years and I have to agree with you 100% with the extra emphasis in the know what you want. My issue was in the end I didn't want poly, I had every thing else working but I didn't want it and by trying to stay because I loved them etc. just hurt everyone more in the end. Knowing yourself and knowing what you want and being brutally honest about it is vital. Great writing!

Reply

39. **M** says: [May 12, 2011 at 6:31 pm](#)

This article is exactly what I needed to hear right now. Thank you so much.

Reply

40. **Miss Anthrope** says: [August 17, 2011 at 10:44 am](#)

If one were overjoyed to be alone, what the fuck would they need polyamory for? Seriously.

I've spent a metric fuckton of my life alone. It's not fun. It's not energizing. And listening to somebody say, "Oh, you've got to be happy ALONE or you don't DESERVE to be in a relationship" ... feels patronizing. And painful and infuriating. I wonder how much time you've actually spent alone. Not "Oh, I have the whole apartment to myself for a whole WEEK, yay!" type being alone. I mean years and years of not having anybody else in the world give a shit that you're still breathing except in terms of you showing up on time to flip burgers or shelve books or punch code into a computer.

Persistent loneliness is not a normal human condition; humans are social animals. And those of us who are forced into it by bad circumstance and shyness are already made to feel like unwanted freaks by pretty much every segment of society. Try making it through a couple of holiday seasons after your family is all dead — no go on, try it. I'm sure you'll find it as happy-making as I do.

So, thanks.

Reply*sexgeek* says: August 22, 2011 at 2:11 am

Hi Miss Anthrope! I hardly know where to begin... I suppose I'll start by pointing out that I didn't write anything about anyone not deserving to be in a relationship, or about loneliness being somehow a good or desirable condition. And I'll add that you've made some pretty blasé and incorrect assumptions about my personal experiences in both the alone-ness and loneliness departments – though if you're looking to win the who's-most-miserable prize, you are welcome to have it, it's not one I'm particularly interested in competing for. But I'll also add that given your chosen nickname and your e-mail address, it sounds like you may have a lot of your identity wrapped up in your alone-ness, even if you didn't choose it in the first place and even if it does make you miserable now. And far be it from me to tell someone they should abandon their identity – though I do hope, if I'm right about all this, that somehow you find a way to minimize the misery nonetheless. Best of luck to you.

Reply41. *Telzyln Marie Vosbury Garcia* says: August 22, 2011 at 11:29 am

Dear Miss Anthrope,

I am so sorry it hurts to be alone, and I'm sorry that has been your experience so much more than you'd like. I think you have a point about general human psychology and social animals.

While I liked what I read of sexgeek's impression of good techniques (rules) to enhance polyamory, I would be very interested in what techniques you advise to counter loneliness. More positively, what do you consider effective to support/create good romantic bonds?

Sincerely,

Telzyln Marie Vosbury Garcia

Reply42. *Idiomagic* says: September 24, 2011 at 1:57 am

A friend posted this on Facebook, and I read it out of curiosity.

Your perspective is interesting, and your rules seem useful for any type of relationships.

I DO find the quote you included at the top of your article problematic. You do realize how improper the tone of that piece is, right? How smug and superior? The implications of it are that poly is the only form of 'grown-up' relationship, that monogamy is something that should be grown out of.

I find that really insulting, and I think it undermines the basic message you are trying to articulate.

Reply*sexgeek* says: September 27, 2011 at 11:29 am

Hi Idiomagic. It's interesting – people tend to react one of two ways to Raven's "grad school relationship" quote. Either they think it's incredibly true and it resonates deeply with them, or it comes across as condescending in the way you describe.

In the four-plus years since I wrote this post, my perspective has changed, and it's partly because now I've spent a couple of years in actual grad school. Grad school is a ton of work, a level of time and energy commitment I didn't expect going in. It costs me a lot in every sense of the word. I also get a whole lot out of it – far more than I ever got out of undergrad or independent scholarship.

When I started graduate school, I was pretty terrified. I thought that only geniuses could do it – that way of thinking intimidated me so much that I didn't even apply for several years. I also thought that scholars had a sort of magical "way of knowing" or qualification to be able to make statements or come to conclusions that the general population does not. But I have come to learn that in fact you don't need to be a genius – you just need to be persistent and have a certain amount of resources (time, energy, money, emotional support, etc.) at your disposal. And scholars don't have a magical superiority over the general population – just a different perspective, and one that, while extremely rigorous (which I find appealing), in its own way can still be pretty limiting. (I fully believe in the validity and usefulness of high-quality scholarly research, but I also know just how flawed the premises of some research can be, and how easily that can still pass muster even at a highly respected institution. Not to mention all the sources of information that most research isn't equipped to handle, such as intuition, creativity, etc. Or the conclusions it can't reach, because the data is missing, even if those conclusions aren't any less true.)

So if you read the "grad school relationship" as trying to tell you that non-monogamy is a superior way of doing relationships and only geniuses can do it – which is how I originally thought about grad school itself – then you're right, it's problematic. But if you read it to mean that non-monogamy requires a ton of work, and a high level of time and energy commitment beyond what you might expect going in, but that you can get a whole lot out of it, and you don't need to be a genius to do it and you aren't superior to the general population for having chosen to do it, you just have a different way of doing things – well, to me, that's pretty accurate, and not particularly condescending.

Of course this begs the question of why I used it in the first place, even though it was potentially problematic, and my best answer to that is that despite the potential for it to be read as condescending, it's one of the few quotes I've come across that is really frank in its implication that poly is simply not for everyone. Most poly resources seem to approach non-monogamy with the idea that anyone can do it and/or everyone should do it, and I actually disagree with that idea quite strongly. Poly is not for everyone, and I think too many people try to do it because of their belief in its principles without considering their own emotional readiness or skill set (this is where the "broken ankle" part comes in). I wrote this post at the time precisely because I'd been seeing so many people dive into non-monogamy without thinking it through and considering their own emotional make-up, value system or well-being, and the results were disastrous.

I know some people have read this post as a message saying "if you aren't already 100% good at 100% of the things on this list, you FAIL and you shouldn't do non-monogamy at all!" That wasn't ever the message I intended with it, because we are human, and necessarily flawed, and on a journey toward our best selves (whatever those are), and there's no reason to be Certified Perfect before doing non-monogamy – that would be silly, not to mention plain impossible. But I do feel like there's room for cautioning people that to be happy in non-monogamy takes work you can often get away with not doing in monogamy (even though you should do it there too!), and I believe it does nobody any favours to pretend otherwise. Somehow there has to be a way to say this that does not create a hierarchy of value between mono and poly. This post was my attempt at that project. In some ways it's been incredibly successful; in other ways I'm sure it has failed. Hey, we all do our best. 

Reply

43. Pingback: [Let's See What's in the News Today: 10/02/2011 | Shaun Miller's Ideas](#)

44. Pingback: [Phoenix Living » far-reaching weekend links > Reesa Brown's homepage](#)

45. [rosesabala](#) says: [April 13, 2012 at 2:39 pm](#)

I love this post. It relieves me to see such healthy discussions going on around poly relationships. I