

The rise of polyamory

Culture

Posted by:

Posted on : 2015/10/22 20:51:22

Why should you care? Because polyamory's growth in popularity could shake up the dating world.

By Melissa Pandika, for OZY, Oct 22, 2015 Jen Day and her boyfriend of 11 years, Pepper Mint (yes, that's his real name), live together with their cat in a whitewashed house on a narrow, leafy street in Berkeley, Calif. They kiss and nuzzle and have date nights, like any other couple. Just not always with each other. Day has another boyfriend. Mint has another girlfriend — and just began seeing two other women, too. The couple practice polyamory: They have multiple committed relationships at once, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved. There's a shaken belief [leading to] more openness to seeing what works rather than believing in some tradition. Yes, it's Berkeley, but also? Apparently more people across the country are getting on the big-love bus. Large-scale studies tracking the number of polyamorous (aka "poly") individuals don't exist, but evidence from polyamory groups, relationship therapists and dating websites suggests that figure is rising fast. University of Michigan psychologist Terri Conley, for instance, estimates that [5 percent of Americans are involved in consensual non-monogamous relationships](#). Why are we embracing more than one partner? Skepticism of monogamy plays a part. Roughly 20 percent of U.S. marriages end in divorce. "There's a shaken belief" leading to "more openness to seeing what works rather than believing in some tradition," says San Francisco clinical psychologist [Deborah Anapol](#). And, in general, people have grown more open to alternative lifestyles. Of course, it's also possible that interest in polyamory has remained stable — but people just have more opportunity to take part. Thanks, Internet! Still, the poly-curious should think hard before making the leap. Polyamory might sound like free love, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Maintaining multiple *healthy* relationships takes McKinseyian time-management skills and grace dealing with jealousy. Skeptics worry about the welfare of children in polyamorous families. The stigma hasn't quite worn off, either. "A lot of people get into this relationship style and don't really have the tools to do it ethically, so people get hurt," says Michael (last name not given), who organizes polyamory events in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay Area, Calif. "People are like, 'I dated this guy who was poly and was a sleazebag.' It gives the lifestyle a bad name." Polyamory has existed in most cultures, but the term "polyamory" didn't emerge until the 1990s in San Francisco (natch), where group marriages and open relationships from the free love and queer movements coalesced into the modern polyamory movement. Since then, polyamory has taken on a variety of forms. "If you ask one person what their definition of polyamory is, it will be totally different from somebody else's," says Maryland-based sex and kink educator [Cassie Fuller](#). To wit: Fuller and her husband practice polyfidelity, in which all members are considered equal partners who remain faithful to one another. Mint and Day form intimate networks, labeling their lovers as "primary," "secondary" and "tertiary" depending on the level of commitment. Michael and Yi-Ling (last name not given) practice relationship anarchy, participating in open relationships without ranking partners. In relationship anarchy, "you don't refer to your

partners as partners or lovers or cuddle buddies or dating,” Yi-Ling says. “All this terminology is thrown out the window…. There are no expectations…. They don’t really think of you as a partner, but as a human.” For complete text, link below:
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