

This article defines and describes polyamory.

Let me preface this writing by saying this: I don't favor monogamy or nonmonogamy. I do favor approaching new ideas with openness and curiosity, and nonmonogamy is best approached with an attitude of curiosity. It's important to note that most cultures and religions favor monogamy. Thus our expectations of relationship may be predisposed toward monogamy. Perhaps in considering other relationship structures you might learn something you can integrate into your existing or future relationship/s that will result in a more fulfillment. Those attached to marriage and monogamy may find this article surprising or alarming. Approach with curiosity.

What is Polyamory?

What differentiates between polyamory and other kinds of nonmonogamy is that the assumption is that there will be multiple relationships that are both sexual and *emotional*.^[1] This means multiple significant relationships are simultaneously maintained. They usually contain characteristics of an important partner or lover—friendship, romance, emotional intimacy, spiritual connection, commitment, or love.

Polyamorous folks are “thinking outside the box” of monogamy.^[1] For polyamory to work, partners have to be willing to incorporate personal growth into relationships. It's unlikely that one can do the same old patterns of relationship or coast on autopilot with more than one simultaneous relationship.^[1] This is often part of the appeal for polyamorous people, not only the novelty of a new structure of relationship, but the assumption that to handle what arises in a polyamorous relationship, one (and one's partner/s) will need a strong commitment to personal growth.

There are two different kinds of polyamory:

Non-Hierarchical Polyamory^[1] means that lovers/partners are not ranked, as in both or multiple relationships are of equal importance. Courting/dating multiple lovers or potential lovers could be called the beginning of non-hierarchical polyamory. This is sometimes called playing the field or simply dating.

In monogamy usually this initial dating of potential partners ends when the best fitting and most attractive partner is selected as a primary lover/partner. In non-hierarchical polyamory, the relationships would not be dismissed because they weren't “the best.” Relationships multiple relationships continue, and no relationship is identified as a primary partnership.

Hierarchical Polyamory^[1] means that relationships are ranked by importance. The main or highest ranked relationship is called the *primary relationship*. These are sometimes called an *open marriage*, *open relationship*, or *open couple*, because a primary relationship or marriage is “open” to other relationships.

Couples that decide to open their relationship are not necessarily polyamorous. Partners in an open couple may only be looking for other sexual partners (commonly called *swinging*) or may have strict agreements that exclude deep emotional intimacy in other relationships.

You can work with your therapist to explore:

- what you are wanting from your relationships and what kind of structure would be most fulfilling for you or your current relationship
- how to create the relationships that give you the depth of connection, intimacy, freedom, and growth you want
- using couples therapy to prepare for future issues that might arise specific to you or your relationship
- using couples therapy to navigate conflict, insecurity, or fears that arise in a polyamorous relationship

1. Taormino, T. (2008). *Opening up: Creating and sustaining open relationships*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.