

Non-Monogamy Nonsense: The SwingTowns Guide to Non-Monogamy

7 Common Myths About More-Than-Two

So you want to be non-monogamous. Maybe you've read about it, have a friend who is successfully living it, or maybe you're brand spakin' new - no pun intended - to the idea. Whatever the case, there's a lot of information to be found out there in the big, wide world - even more so on the world wide web - and not all of it is exactly accurate. Whether you yourself are new to non-monogamous relationships, getting involved with someone who is new, or just ready for a refresher course, here are seven common myths about non-monogamous relationships and the facts that disprove them.

Cheating represents a non-monogamous relationship

As I perused the internet in preparation for this article, I came across many a claim that cheating was, in fact, a type of a non-monogamous relationship. That, however, is like saying that stealing is a type of trade.

While cheating does indeed exist and the people who cheat may declare *themselves* non-monogamous, it is not a relationship style in and of itself, but instead a clear breach of monogamy and/or non-monogamy depending on what style is being practiced by the parties involved and what agreements have been put in place. Make no mistake - just because a relationship is non-monogamous *does not* mean that cheating is impossible. If a couple agrees to threesomes only but one partner makes out with a stranger in a bar? That's cheating. Four parties in a group relationship agree not to involve new partners before getting tested, but then someone does the deed prematurely? Cheating.

Non-monogamy is not something that takes place in dark corners and on password protected apps without the knowledge and consent of all parties involved. As do monogamous relationships, non-monogamous relationships require mutual trust and respect, while cheating undermines trust, respect and consent.

To wit, cheating may fit the criteria of non-monogamy to the extent that there are more than two. But if everyone is not on board? — It's not non-monogamy.

It's breach of contract.

Non-monogamy is easier than monogamy

Another idea that's floating around out there is that non-monogamous relationships are becoming so popular in our monogamy dominated society because monogamy is this challenging thing that takes time, dedication and hard work, whereas non-monogamy is...well...easy.

On the contrary, non-monogamy can be just as challenging as monogamy is, if not more so at times, as it introduces challenges into relationships that monogamous folks don't have to grapple with quite as much. For example...

Time Management

For one thing, it isn't as though non-monogamous people are suddenly granted more hours in a day, more days in the week, etc. We're managing jobs, friends, family, pets and even kids just like the rest of the world. Except...with multiple partners. Right away that necessitates a lot more planning than monogamous folk have to worry about. A simple, "*Just thought I'd swing by and surprise you for lunch,*" can be a wee bit awkward if you've already got a lunch date with someone else. You met a great girl at a café and she told you she's free this Thursday. Great! Except...you agreed with your primary partner that Thursday was *their* day to ensure your quality time. But café girl goes out of town for two weeks on Friday. Do you wait two weeks and risk the fizzle, or talk to your partner about making an exception?

When there are more than two, it gets a lot more complicated. Fast. Especially in modern society where traditional dating rituals are quickly being deemed old-fashioned and uncool, and people are more inclined to just go with the flow. Such a thing is not a realistic option with multiple partners, which requires a greater level of transparency upfront and necessitates constant communication. But scheduling is not even the most intense challenge that people who chose to practice non-monogamy find themselves faced with. The biggest challenge non-monogamous folks face is rather monstrous, in fact. And green...

Jealousy

Some may think that if you choose to be non-monogamous, it must mean you don't get jealous. That, or you're in serious denial about your emotions. As it turns out, neither is the case.

People who practice non-monogamy are more than aware of the existence of jealousy, and more than capable of experiencing it themselves. Rather than the absence of jealousy, non-monogamy relies on an acceptance of jealousy, with the ultimate goal of acknowledging it, unlearning it, and replacing it with *compersion* - a feeling of happiness in one's self derived from the happiness of another. In other words, when my partner is out on a date and I am at home with the cat, rather than stomping around in a jealous rage or torturing myself with what-if-he-leaves-me-for-her thoughts, I would aim to acknowledge my jealous pang as a normal feeling, but remind myself that my partner loves me, that they aren't leaving, and to be happy that they're enjoying themselves tonight and to enjoy my alone time with the cat. Or with Netflix. Whichever.

Jealousy, while it can be worked with and talked through, is a natural emotion that even those of us who choose to take a non-traditional path still experience. Often. Especially when you've grown up in a society that equates love to possession, the work of dealing with jealousy is not easy. In comparison with monogamy, in fact, it forces a kind of work on trust that monogamous

relationships bypass via the terms of monogamy. Many take the trust experienced in monogamous relationships to be the epitome of the thing, but from another perspective, the "trust" experienced in monogamy isn't *trust* exactly, but rather dutifully carrying out the terms of a treaty. *You won't love or sleep with anyone else, and neither will I.* But non-monogamy turns that on its head. Once possession is removed, the love between two or more people is no longer defined by what they will not do with others, but by what they actually feel and have together. You are not being asked simply to trust that your partner will obey your mutually established rules, but instead to trust in your mutually established love. Trust that a casual tryst will not threaten your love. Trust that a new partner is truly an addition and not a replacement. Trust that even as a secondary or tertiary lover, you are still cared for and respected.

Not to knock the merits or challenges of monogamy, but where time management, jealousy and trust are concerned, non-monogamous folk have a bit of a fuller plate, if I must say so myself.

Do not be fooled into believing that the option to love and be loved by more than one human makes non-monogamy easy. It may feel like a more natural state of being, but nevertheless, as with all interpersonal relationships, hard work is not only expected but required.

Non-monogamous people can only date other non-monogamous people

If you're thinking about being non-monogamous, or you already are, you may worry that your dating pool has shrunk significantly as you can now only date other non-monogamous folks. While that does make logical sense, love knows not of logic, and as fate would have it monogamous and non-monogamous people can and frequently do find themselves involved, in love, and in relationships.

It isn't an impossible thing. Is it easy? Refer to myth two! It requires compromise and understanding. Perhaps the parties involved agree that the monogamous partner will continue to practice monogamy while the non-monogamous partner is free to practice a form of non-monogamy.

Example: I dated a man who was monogamous by nature, and was so with me, but was comfortable with my having a girlfriend in addition to our relationship, even though my relationship with her did not involve him [read: no threesomes.]

On the other hand, perhaps the parties involved will form a compromise that looks more like one partner converting over to the other's way of being. Perhaps a non-monogamous partner will attempt monogamy, or something *monogamish*, with wiggle room for the occasional flirt,

swingers party, perhaps with a verbal openness but with a look but don't touch clause. Similarly, perhaps an ordinarily monogamous partner will test and stretch their limits, agreeing to a *mostly* monogamous relationship with a swingers party here or a threesome there on occasion.

Again, these relationships aren't necessarily easy, but they are possible. At the end of the day we are all more than the labels we assign ourselves, and people who may seem unlikely to mesh on paper can and do attract. As long as trust, respect and consent are part of the formula, a mono and a poly can surely make it work.

Non-monogamous people cannot have committed relationships

To the monogamous world, two people who essentially belong to each other is the only kind of fathomable commitment in existence. Since non-monogamous relationships function without the ideas of possession in play, some feel that this means commitment cannot and does not exist.

This is not the case.

Commitment absolutely can and does exist within non-monogamous relationships. Take the earlier example. My boyfriend was committed to me. I was committed to him. I was also committed to my girlfriend. She was committed to me. She was also committed to her boyfriend. He was committed to her.

Conventional relationship ideals may claim this is ludicrous, but think of the structure of a family. Think of a mother who has more than one child. Does the arrival of baby number two mean that suddenly baby number one is getting tossed aside? Imagine a mother saying to her five year old, "I'm sorry, but I can only be mother to one child at a time. So it looks like this thing between us is coming to a close, as your little brother will be arriving in just a few short weeks. But it's been great. I hope we can still be friends."

The same way that the arrival of a second child does not undermine the relationship a mother has with her first child, a second or third partner does not invalidate the relationship a person has with the first. Multiple relationships can exist, all of them committed.

Which brings me to my next myth...

Serious non-monogamous relationships feature only two partners who are serious

Or in other words, if there is to be a commitment within a non-monogamous relationship, there must be a "main" couple.

This can be, but is not always the case. There are different types of non-monogamy, some where

all parties involved are absolutely equal - in terms of love and commitment, that is - some where they are not. The following are some (but not all) examples of non-monogamous relationships.

Open Relationship

Here, yes, there is a “primary” couple. These two people are committed to each other, and each other alone. The terms may vary, but typically it means that while the two can pursue physical thrills outside of the relationship, their loyalty lies with their respective partner alone.

Swingers Relationship

Very similar to an open relationship, there is a primary couple and they are loyal to each other alone. This can even be considered a type of open relationship, but it is characterized by the couple exploring pursuits outside their relationship together, if not always simultaneously. (i.e.: Going to a swingers party together, potentially finding an activity to participate in together, both parties participating in different activities, or one or both not necessarily partaking at all.)

Hierarchal Polyamorous Relationship

Unlike the open relationship, a polyamorous relationship allows for multiple relationships (multiple loves, if you will) at the same time. There are different types of polyamory, though, and a hierarchal version means that there is still one lover that is considered the “primary” partner.

Other relationships, while they may indeed be loving, will not take precedence over the primary relationship.

Non-Hierarchal Polyamorous Relationship

Here there are multiple relationships but without hierarchy. One partner’s status is not elevated above another’s; one relationship does not limit or dictate the terms of another. The relationships may intermingle, they may not. Group relationships may form, they may not. And they may as well in hierarchal poly, I might add. But you won’t find rules here like *no kissing on the mouth* or *as long as I come first*. There is no first tier, second tier, third tier. All things being equal is the goal.

Relationship Anarchy

This form of non-monogamy is exactly what it sounds like. A sort of amorous chaos. It allows all relationships with others to be what they are, when they are, whatever they are, without operating within tiers of importance, defined parameters or preset expectations. The ultimate exercise in relationship freedom, it is living and loving without limits, and letting the relationship chips fall where they may.

This doesn’t include all relationship styles, as relationship are defined by the people within them, and often the wants and needs of the parties involved means that the relationship can be a version

or mix of these, falling in different places on the spectrum.

The important thing to understand is that committed non-monogamy is not necessarily just a version of monogamy with some casual sex thrown in here and there. Loving, committed relationship can exist outside of “primary couple” structures.

All non-monogamous people are kinky

I’m going to go ahead and directly blame the media for the assumption that, if you practice non-monogamy, you must also be deeply kinky. Can the two exist together? Sure. But not necessarily.

First, non-monogamy is not kinky in and of itself. But when people think of non-monogamy, their minds go to one place - fast. Sex! If monogamy is categorized by not having sex with everyone, then non-monogamy must be about *having* sex with everyone, right? It must be about threesomes, and foursomes, and group sex, and orgies, and swingers parties with fire breathing, leather clad jugglers in nipple clamps swinging from the chandeliers.

Um...no. The reality is often far more tame.

Non-monogamy simply means, as we’ve discussed, the ability to be with more than just one person. It does not mean that one is necessarily with multiple partners simultaneously. It does not mean that one is necessarily having indiscriminate sex. And it does not mean that one is, while having indiscriminate sex with multiple partners simultaneously, also strapped to the bed with leather cuffs in nipple clamps and a crystal butt plug.

Can one enjoy a non-monogamous relationship and a crystal butt plug at the same time? Sure. But one can just as easily practice relationship anarchy while being absolutely vanilla (or not-kinky, for those of you who didn’t read *50 Shades*) with all partners they get involved with.

The media would have you believe that we’re all leather clad in feather masks flouncing around at play parties cracking our riding crops (and okay, maybe some of us have been known to frequent play parties cracking riding crops) but nevertheless, kinky is its own thing, in its own right, completely separate from non-monogamy and, no, not every non-monogamous person is into “butt stuff.” Let’s just go ahead and clear that up right now.

Frankly, though sex is such a *huge* focus for monos looking in on non-monogamous lifestyles, it often isn’t the driving factor of the relationships people form. Which brings me to my final myth...

All non-monogamous relationships involve sex

Admittedly, this may seem a bit confusing. Isn't the whole point of non-monogamy to have sex with other people, one way or another?

Well...not necessarily.

Suppose, whether because of the heightened risk of STI's in today's world, or because one partner in a relationship is mono, or both, full on sex is not something that all parties in a relationship feel comfortable with. Still, they'd like to participate in a level of openness.

If you think this doesn't exist, think for a moment about emotional affairs. This occurs when people have relationships outside of their monogamous arrangement that, while they don't violate any physical boundaries between the couple, do violate other boundaries as monogamy carries the expectation that only the two involved will share other types of intimacy - ranging anywhere from flirting to love.

That being said, what if a couple could do things besides sex together, or with the consent of their partner, openly? What if, together, a couple decided that someone at a party was attractive, and they could both flirt with them, but agreed that things wouldn't go beyond that. Or perhaps kissing was okay, but only kissing. Maybe they play a game of strangers at the bar - 45 min of flirting with others, but then they "meet" and focus on each other.

Monogamish is a term that was originally coined with open relationships in mind, but it can also be an option for couples who want to avoid feeling stifled by their commitment without *completely* opening the relationship up. Hence the "ish."

Alternatively, maybe you're kinky, but your partner isn't, and as it turns out your kink has very little to do with intercourse. Maybe you've just got a thing for dirty socks, or maybe you really enjoy wielding that flogger. The freedom to pursue your sexless kink outside of your relationship with the consent of your partner could be another form of the, in my opinion, rather flexible *monogamish*.

So there they are, seven myths about non-monogamy - debunked. Spread the word, share the love, and stay informed.

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