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## Wedded to variety

### **POLYAMORY | One partner is not enough for those who practice 'responsible non-monogamy,' or multiple committed relationships**

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[Recommend \(3\)](#)**BY PAIGE WISER****[pwiser@suntimes.com](mailto:pwiser@suntimes.com)**

When Tilda Swinton won the best supporting actress Oscar for "Michael Clayton," there wasn't too much talk about what designer she was wearing.

But people were curious about her date.

Swinton, 47, brought along 29-year-old Sandro Kopp, an actor and artist she met while filming "The Chronicles of Narnia."

Nowhere in sight was playwright John Byrne, 67, her husband and father of her twins.

Both men know about each other. And both are OK with it.

You might call the arrangement "awfully messy." Or you might call it by its proper name: polyamory. That's the practice of having more than one loving, intimate relationship at a time with the full knowledge and consent of everyone involved.

"Tilda's relationship situation is exactly like the relationships of many people I know," says polyamory activist Anita Wagner. "Except for the fame and money."

Some people have the capacity to love more than one person, and somehow they have the energy to work at more than one committed relationship, too. Open marriages probably have been around as long as marriage.

It's not a higher love, says Cunning Minx, an Oak Park polyamorist who hosts a weekly podcast at <http://polyweekly.libsyn.com/>. Poly people get jealous just like everyone else. "It's not more evolved, it's just a little more complicated," she says. "People do this because it's an orientation. For some, it's a lifestyle choice."

Like most polyamorists, Minx uses a pseudonym because there's no legally protected status. In the poly community, especially in Chicago, people try to keep things quiet.

"You can be fired for it, and your kids can be taken away," Minx says. "We have a saying: In a divorce hearing, the first person to call the other person 'poly' gets the kids."

A recent poll on *Oprah.com* found 7 percent of women say they have an open marriage, while 14 percent of men do.

"Chicago is probably the least well-organized of the major cities in terms of having an active and well-organized polyamory community," Wagner says. "This doesn't mean that poly people don't exist, though."

There's a PolyChi Yahoo! group with more than 1,000 members, who meet once or twice a month. Sidekicks on Montrose and the Center on Halsted are common poly gathering places. "The Fox Valley area is very active for meet-ups and potlucks," Minx says.

She was initiated into the lifestyle when she fell in love with a polyamorist, Gray Dancer, who was engaged and later married. Without any rules to follow, the threesome sometimes had a hard time working things out. Her podcast started out as a way to ask questions and find others like her.

"The amount of communication and calendar shuffling involved can be daunting," Minx says.

Next she fell in love with a man in Atlanta who had a wife and a 2-year-old son. "His wife was quite lovely," Minx says. "She was happy that when I got bored, I would clean their house." They dated for nine months.

It's not the same thing as "swingers," she clarifies. "People always want to know about the sex," she says. "The word 'compersion' means a type of joy that you take in seeing your partner with somebody else. The British call it 'frubble.' It's when your wife comes home and she's all glowing from a date with her new partner, and she wants to share."

A few other famous "responsible non-monogamists":

Diego Rivera tolerated wife Frida Kahlo's relationships with other men and women (including Leon Trotsky).

Amelia Earhart had a prenuptial agreement that "I shall not hold you to any midaevil [sic] code of faithfulness."

Billionaire Warren Buffett was happily married to his wife until she died in 2004. He also had a long-term relationship with mistress Astrid Menks. They sent out Christmas cards signed, "Warren, Susie and Astrid."

After Jada Pinkett Smith was interviewed by Britain's Daily Mail, polyamorists rallied behind her marriage. "In our marriage vows, we didn't say 'forsaking all others,'" said Smith in the interview. "The vow that we made was that you will never hear that I did something after the fact."

"If it came down to it, then one can say to the other, 'Look, I need to have sex with somebody. I'm not going to if you don't approve of it -- but please approve of it.'"

Don't be shocked until you examine your own history, Minx says. "Think back. Was there ever an 'aunt' or an 'uncle' who visited your grandparents all the time? Or a couple they spent a lot of time with, or a 'good friend of the family?'"

Welcome to the club.

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The views expressed in these blog posts are those of the author and not of the Chicago

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