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## When Three's No Crowd

By: RACHEL BREITMAN  
10/25/2007



Togetherness was the watchword at the October 5 Cuddleparty at the LGBT Community Center.

Whether joining in a pajama-clad cuddle party at LGBT Community Center's purple and white gymnasium or spreading out picnic blankets on the verdant Great Hill in Central Park, the recent Poly Pride Weekend was all about sharing.

The annual event, hosted by Polyamorous NYC, celebrates the notion that having multiple committed romantic relationships may be as healthy and natural as monogamy. The weekend, held October 5 and 6, also serves as a chance for varying-structured relationship groups to learn about communication skills, examine their legal rights, and discuss raising children in multi-parent families.

The festive mood was set early, when the Friday night event hit record attendance for Cuddleparty, a three-year-old organization that holds workshops on communication and physical affection. Some 60 attendees cradled one another in the soothing non-sexual mood of a Lamaze class, more group therapy than orgy.

"Poly people love us because our workshop focuses on building better relationships, and that's their bread and butter," said Cuddleparty founder Marcia Baczynski, a relationship coach.

The following day, October 6, singers, writers, lawyers, and counselors spoke about the virtues and challenges of multi-love during a large Poly Pride Rally held in Central Park. Drag-king and -queen emcees Murray Hill and Hedda Lettuce kept party-goers in stitches with quips like, "Why are polyamorists so cheap? You would be too if you had six boyfriends to take out to dinner each week."

Many speakers highlighted the fact that as polyamorists, they didn't see themselves as adulterers or swingers. Instead, polyamory involves several simultaneous committed physically intimate relationships. Also, unlike polygamy, made famous by HBO's "Big Love," both females and males may have multiple partners.

Polyamory NYC hosts monthly meetings at the LGBT Community Center averaging about 40 members, with more than 1,000 visiting their Yahooogroup. Members often belong to other local



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sexuality networks, including Body Temple, Sexy Spirits, One Taste, and various bondage groups. Religious commitments vary from Paganism to Judaism and Unitarianism.

Most members like Normal Ellis, 45, say that monogamy is not a natural state for relationships. After his divorce several years ago, he found himself in a monogamous romance headed toward a second marriage.

"I did some soul-searching and realized that I just wasn't wired that way," said Ellis. He started meeting polyamorous women online and has dated as many as four partners at a time.

Many polyamorous couples have a primary partner, whom they may be married to or live with. They may then form a triad with a third partner, or one partner may take on a second lover outside the relationship. Sometimes a triad will share a home in a "polyamorous V," or both partners will take on a boyfriend or girlfriend outside the relationship.

Carin Cahn, 32, and Jon Webster, 46, live together in Connecticut but also have partners outside the relationship, including Cahn's boyfriend Shawn, 35, and Webster's girlfriend Elizabeth, 33, who requested that their last names not be used.

Elizabeth and Carin are friendly, sharing notes on Jon and going underwear shopping together.

"He's a better partner for me because he is with her," said Elizabeth.

As in the cuddle party, polyamorous relationship experts recommend establishing clear boundaries and rules through ongoing communication.

Cuddleparty founders Reid Mihalko and Marcia Baczynski spend a full hour clarifying the rules before each party, open to singles, couples, gays, straights, monogamists, and polyamorists.

They ask that cuddlers remain clothed at all times, receive verbal permission for all types of touching eat Altoids for fresh breath, and learn to say no without guilt.

Mental health experts recommend similar ongoing communication about levels of physical intimacy, scheduling of trysts, and use of sexual protection.

"Through this communication, polyamorous couples can address issues such as jealousy, time-management, resource-management, and their own specific requirements of each other," said Dr. Samuel Sharmat, a psychiatrist who treats both monogamous and polygamous individuals and families.

But the purpose of the pride weekend went beyond cuddling and coupling. For many, the politics of polyamory are fraught with discord. Justen Bennett-Maccubbin, the mohawked founder of Polyamorous NYC, said that there is sometimes friction between the gay and polyamorous communities.

"Polyamory is just as much an orientation as being gay," said Bennett-Maccubbin, who started his first polyamorous relationship when he fell in love with a gay couple at 19.

"But a lot of the gay community isn't down with it. In the last decade, they have made a lot of strides toward acceptance and normalcy, and they don't necessarily want to be associated with other marginalized groups."

Anita Wagner, a polyamory advocate and educator, said that right-wing politicians frequently use polyamorists as bogeymen in gay marriage debates.

"The marriage movement's agenda is to make traditional monogamy the standard for all," said Wagner, a representative on the Coalition Council of the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom.

"Conservative columnists like Stanley Kurtz from the Hoover Institution say that it is a slippery slope from homosexuality to multi-party marriage and polyamory. They're using us as a political football."

The issue of child custody can be particularly daunting for polyamorous families. Many speak with anger and anxiety of the 1998 case of April Divilbiss, a Memphis, Tennessee woman who lived in a polyamorous V with her two male partners and lost custody of her child to her mother-in-law after doing an interview about the relationship for MTV.

For children raised in a polyamorous environment, the fear of having their families exposed can be overwhelming.

Rebecca Reagan, 33, grew up in a polyamorous family in Pasadena, California, where her parents shared their home with another married couple. Subsequently, the foursome split up after both couples remarried the alternate partner.

"It's normal. It's not a big deal," she told listeners in Central Park.

But she added that the stress of keeping her family's relationships secret had been very hard for her younger sister, who told no one until she was 20.

Now a relationship coach for singles and polyamorous couples, Reagan advocates that couples "represent themselves truthfully" and allow children to openly discuss the family situation.

Most polyamorists argue that it is safe to expose their children to polyamory because having multiple partners fits with the notion that "it takes a village to raise a child."

Kyle Applegate, 44, occasionally baby-sits his Long Island boyfriend's six-year-old child when neither the boy's mother nor father is available to pick him up from the school bus.

Applegate also has a 12-year-long relationship with a boyfriend who lives in Brooklyn.

But many in Central Park on Saturday said that jealousy can complicate the family dynamic.

Lyndell Moore, a 36-year-old who was recently introduced to polyamory by her boyfriend, Simon Deacon, admitted she often is envious of his relationships with other women.

"I turn into a savage green-eyed monster," said Moore, who shares a West Village apartment with Deacon, a vortex energy therapist, also 36.

"So we copy by practicing radical honesty with rules like no penetration on the first date, and frequent tests for STDs," added Moore, a screenwriter.

"It's like being on a diet. Sure, I would like to eat all the cookies in the jar, but I don't," said Moore. "Sometimes I get so jealous, I want to end my relationship with this wonderful man, but I don't."

Armen Cooper, 33, an NYU graduate student, was more than a little dismayed when his wife of four years, Kristina Cooper, 22, moved from their Upper West Side apartment into her boyfriend David Wood's Roosevelt Island home. Now Moore, who works as a sex educator, divides her time between the apartments, but hopes that eventually all three will share a home and children.

But Cooper was able to come to terms with his wife's decision after taking part in a Landmark Forum group-awareness training program.

"It doesn't matter whether Kristina and I live together or not, as long as I get to see her," said Cooper. "I realized that my main goal in life is to be a good husband and eventually a father."

Wood says he isn't sure he is ready for children, but is content with his domestic partnership with Kristina, wherever it may lead.

"I worry that kids will threaten the relationship," said Wood, 39, a life coach. "But in the meantime we'll keep having fun, and maybe find Armen a girlfriend, too."

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Added: Friday October 26, 2007 at 11:20 PM EST

#### More gay poly coverage

Great article!

If you'd like to read all the coverage of polyamory in the gay press during the last 2 years, I think this is pretty nearly complete:

<http://polyinthemedia.blogspot.com/search/label/gay%2Fbi>

Cheers,

Alan

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Keep up with Polyamory in the News!

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Alan, Boston, MA

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