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COMMENTARY 



Sex Drive

Commentary by Regina Lynn  

# Internet Pushes Polyamory to Its 'Tipping Point'

Regina Lynn 02.29.08

The internet is famous for hooking people up for everything from blind dates to political activism.

For people into [polyamory](#) -- a way of life in which participants engage in multiple intimate relationships simultaneously, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved -- the internet provided a handy label for their lifestyle and a launch pad for injecting the concept into mainstream consciousness.

"Around 1990, we found this nifty name to call ourselves, instead of 'responsible, consensual nonmonogamy,'" says Dr. Kenneth Haslam, a retired anesthesiologist and curator of the [Kenneth R. Haslam Collection on Polyamory](#) at The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. "About that same time, the internet came along -- and it was at exactly the right time. The internet is a tipping point for polyamory."

From its somewhat murky etymological past to 1992's creation of the alt.polyamory Usenet newsgroup, the term has swept to mainstream acceptance: *Polyamorist*, *polyamorous* and *polyamory* made the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) in 2006, and these days, polyamory (*poly* for short) is more visible than ever.

The *Washington Post* ran a [long feature on the subject](#) for Valentine's Day, while actress [Tilda Swinton's relationship status](#) -- she's part of a poly triad -- seems to have garnered as much press as her Oscar win.

While having multiple committed partners is not a new concept, many polyamorists have told me they felt lost, guilty, alone or freakish until they came across the word *polyamory* on the internet and for the first time had a context for the way they felt about love.

"You can argue that before the internet, the poly community didn't exist," says Franklin Veaux, author of [What, Like, Two Girlfriends?](#), a respected polyamory FAQ. "There's no question that the rise of the internet and the rise of polyamory coincided, although poly does predate the net by 6,000 years or so."

Geeks have not traditionally been viewed as relationship experts, yet as a subculture, we are open to alternative ways of life. We immerse ourselves in science fiction and fantasy, imagining other cultures and experiencing relationships not necessarily bound by puritanical traditions.

"I remember thinking that the fairy tale doesn't make any sense, because if the princess lives in a castle, why should she have to choose one of the two princes? Castles are big and there's room for all three of them," says Veaux, who was raised in a Nebraska town of 275 people, with not a poly role model in sight.

"I grew up in middle-class suburbia unaware of any alternatives but one, very negative: monogamy or slut," says Sharra Smith, one of Veaux's partners. "I tried to be monogamous and failed miserably; after a very bad relationship, I said, 'That's it, no more, I'd rather be a slut.' Then I learned there's a middle ground."

Cunning Minx, creator and host of the [Polyamory Weekly](#) podcast, says she's seen a significant change in

how the mainstream media treats polyamory in just the three years since her first episode.

"Poly used to be so alternative you had to adopt this entire different culture [to participate]," she says.

"While it's definitely still an emotional and spiritual upheaval for many people to shake off the paradigms of monogamy that are so ingrained in us, now you can meet poly people in a group and talk about it in a safe place."

Polyamory is just the kind of thing you'd expect in an era of love without borders, where time and distance no longer prevent us from finding true mates, and when no one has to live alone with their kink, desire, fantasy or love style -- because someone, somewhere shares it.

"A lot of people are trying [polyamory], but we don't have any models for this kind of relating," says Anita Wagner, author of the [Practical Polyamory](#) blog. "There's a tremendous demand for resources, information, guidance, help."

Wagner and Minx both praise [OKCupid](#), a mainstream dating service that has adapted its profiles to include polyamorists, and Wagner says [Meetup](#) has been invaluable in helping people find one another.

"Google *polyamory* and a city, and you find that major cities have sizeable poly communities," Wagner says. "In the vast majority of the country, it's very small still, but people are meeting each other in smaller towns.... Social networking has worked really well for poly people, who sometimes establish long-distance relationships because that's where the people are who they are compatible with."

Beyond the obvious benefits of online community, the language's internet-speed evolution continues to give polyamory a boost. When poly or poly-curious people stumble across the [polyamorous lexicon](#), the discovery can help validate their worldview.

"We need to get away from the idea that there's only one right way to live," Veaux says. "That idea has arguably caused more destruction and more damage to more societies over history than any other single idea you can name."

See you online,

Regina Lynn

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*Regina Lynn blogs at [reginalynn.com](http://reginalynn.com) and wishes you and yours a happy Leap Day.*