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**Exclusive video: On mono / polyam dynamics**

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*Automated transcription by Otter.ai*

Good morning and happy Sunday. I hope that you're having a beautiful day. I am a bit sick so you might hear that in my voice but the show must go on. So let's talk.

I've been getting requests to discuss mono polyamory, where a polyamorous person and a monogamous person are in a relationship with each other. The monogamous person can at any time also participate in polyamory, they just don't have a desire for it. As well, they don't have their emotional security depending on their partner being monogamous to them. But when the monogamous person feels reluctant, doing it for the partner or the relationship, when they feel coerced or backed into a corner or given an ultimatum to participate in it, if there is anything of that sort (or if there is any sort of silent expectation like this will be a phase and then the polyamorous person will come back to monogamy) that's where it gets murky. And that's where it could really start to fall apart. So let's talk about all of that, to the best of my ability, hopefully, it will be helpful for you.

So probably the simplest way that this comes to be, is when a polyamorous person and a monogamous person start their dynamic in that structure. And it's an agreement upfront. I think something important to consider is – okay is the monogamous person expecting hierarchy? primary status? a certain set of anchor commitments, any exclusivities? that needs to be parsed. Because not all polyamorous dynamics are adaptable to that. And so even if a monogamous person doesn't need their partner to be monogamous to them, if they need other kinds of structures, that might still be incompatible. It's more than just one conversation. It's a series of conversations to see if you are both aligned on how this will actually play out.

But a lot of times the structure emerges from a duo that was originally monogamous, and one of the people needs a new dynamic. And the monogamous person agrees. Now let's talk about how that can go down.

It can come from addressing that there's a mismatched need or desire. A lot of times one partner feels less sexual, one partner has a bigger sexual appetite. And there can be this negotiation of “okay, I would be relieved if you had other people that are interested in doing that with you. So that pressure is not on me.” But it's not always for sexual reasons. Sometimes a partner will travel a lot or have big work commitments and is less emotionally available. And their partner might be interested in forming other emotional support connections that can have fluidity,

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that can maybe have forms of intimacy. And so that can also be a reason that people want to expand their romantic and sexual network as well.

Sometimes mono / poly emerges from a long distance connection of like, “we will be in different countries for a full year. And we understand that we’re not going to be able to meet each other’s needs. So I feel comfortable with you dating other people or sleeping with other people.” In that scenario, it needs to be really defined. Is there a time limit on this? I want to be proactively transparent about what I’m doing and who I’m doing it with, that kind of rigorous communication to avoid heartbreak or betrayal.

So is the polyamorous person coming out in a sort of abstract desire? Like “I’ve been thinking about this, I’ve seen this around, and I think this might be me.” just sort of from a self exploration standpoint, which does not actually involve acting on it yet? Or is the polyamorous person saying, “I realized I’m interested in somebody”? And it gets even more tricky if the polyamorous partner cheated with that person, right? Then you’re starting out with some deception, with some lies, demonstrating that you can’t really be trusted. To say, “Now, I want you to trust me in polyamory,” and maybe even continue to keep the person you cheated with around... that’s harder.

I, if I’m being real, I haven’t seen that go great for anyone that I’ve met. And I’m not saying never, I’m not the end-all-be-all resource of all possible situations,. but to start on a foundation of broken trust, it is the most amount of work to rebuild. because in addition to your partner breaking your trust, maybe the metamour knew and the meta has demonstrated the capability of participating in things that would hurt you, like both of them withholding. there can be just so much there that has to be worked through. And so to keep the person that you cheated with in the mix, that is a lot of work. That is a lot of talking. that is a lot of demonstrating that you’re doing it different, and proving your partner’s fear wrong consistently. And that, I mean, if somebody has the capacity and willingness to cheat, they could still cheat in non monogamy. You know? non monogamy is not a solution to cheating. No, cheaters – sometimes they just want to get away with something. Sometimes they just like the thrill. Sometimes they are fundamentally incapable of being transparent with you, they just lie. And in those cases, even if you are hypothetically comfortable in mono / polyamory, if the polyamorous partner has those traits of demonstrating deceptiveness or lying or selfishness, and they’re not doing anything about it, then it might not work for that reason. And it doesn’t mean you’re incapable of mono / polyamory; it means this connection does not feel safe, period.

So in general, when assessing “is mono / polyam for me? is this something that I want? Is this something I can do?? Maybe the monogamous person, it’s not their

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dream to have a polyamorous partner, but do you feel like you are aligned with it, at least philosophically. at least intellectually, that you understand it. That the idea of it doesn't bother you. because every early non monogamous situation can be activating. It can bring up traumas and jealousies and fears. And a lot of times people think, "well, I can't handle this. I'm not right for this." Now, it is perfectly valid to say "I don't have time, energy or desire to engage with that work," you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. And, it is valid to say "I actually do want a partner who's monogamous to me," which can be a heartbreaking realization, but it is important to know about yourself. But the existence of activation or destabilization does not mean you can't do this, it is absolutely possible to work through it and get to a place of security and stability. As long as your partner is not breaking trust, as long as your partner is not being deceptive. If the partner is not a teammate, if they are being selfish or manipulative, or all of the above, that will make it impossible to feel secure. That will make it impossible regardless of how much work you do to feel safe. Because you aren't safe. I caution people who have the impulse to not only do their own work, but to try to do their partner's work for them – that's just not possible. you gotta have a teammate, you gotta have someone who's also committed to building something that feels stable.

So what are some challenges that can arise in this agreement – mono / polyam? so I've already touched on a few unique kinds of challenges depending on how the structure emerges, right? Immediately, when we make this agreement, we've got to discuss, is it hierarchical, non hierarchical? a lot of mono / polyam dynamics expect that the monogamous person is the primary, that they will get the most amount of time, attention, they will be higher status, they will be the number one. And that can be really tricky when getting consent from other partners.

What is consent? Somebody can say, "Oh, I agree to be a secondary, I'm fine with that". But what does that literally look like? Do they agree to veto power? do they agree that their date can be canceled at any time if the primary needs you? Play out some hypothetical scenarios, and what would happen in them? And that can be a better way to get actual consent from a secondary. they can actually think, "would I feel secure in this?" it's not just, "oh, I don't mind not being your wife." It's like, there's a lot more to it in terms of how the power dynamics play out. And sometimes friends with benefits or people who are not emotionally attached, sometimes a solo polyamorous person who has no time, there can be plenty of people that hierarchical power structure does not feel like it bothers them. But there's a lot of people who enter that power structure and think they'll be fine with it, but there's not enough communication. And so then they wind up feeling marginalized, because they do have less power. And so consent is not something that we just talk about once upfront, like, "oh, you agreed to this. So therefore, you should be fine with

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this treatment.” No – “I agreed to something that I didn't quite know how it was defined. And now that I'm seeing it play out, it feels bad to me.” you know? Just really having those kinds of uncomfortable conversations beforehand so that the secondary can be fully aware of what it is that they're consenting to.

For the monogamous person, we also want to define what hierarchy means. Does that mean there's any form of exclusivity? Like “I will be the only person that you have kids with, the only person you live with. there will be fluid bonding monogamy where you only don't use barriers with me,” etc? there can be a lot of expectation. I've heard a pretty significant amount of people say, “Well, it goes without saying, of course it would be like this” and I'm like, “No, it does not go without saying!” when we are designing a relationship from scratch, when we are defining what the pathways should be (because there's no roadmap provided to us), we need to say everything that we are assuming. There is a strong likelihood that there are points we disagree on, or points that we have not really thought about. If there is an expectation that it should be a certain way, everybody needs to know exactly what it is they're agreeing to on all ends of this kind of dynamic.

Another challenge that can arise from mono / polyam – and I know I'm talking mostly about challenges here, because I think that we need to be thinking about what could go wrong, or anticipating what we would need to mitigate or prevent problems. The good things, or the fun feelings I should say, like the feelings of relaxation or joy – that, in my experience, is a byproduct of having these real conversations about fears, shame, insecurity, which leads to more relaxation, which leads to compersion. so it's great if you feel that from the beginning, but these preventative conversations still need to be had and prioritized.

With that, another obstacle that can come up for mono / polyamory is shame. the polyamorous person can feel like “why can't I just commit? maybe I'm a bad person for wanting more? Am I hurting my monogamous partner? Am I being selfish?” Like there can be a lot of that going on in the person's head. The monogamous person can feel shame like, “why am I not enough? Am I a cuck? Or am I a fool?” judging themselves. There is a lot of religious conditioning for a lot of people, that it's a bad thing or it's immoral, or it's a sin. Or, “my monogamous friends are judging me, thinking I'm being abused, even though I'm consenting to this. they don't understand. And so I'm feeling ostracized or pitied even though I feel kind of fine in my relationships.” So there can be a lot of this social stigma and shame that comes with mono / polyamory specifically.

Because a mutually agreed upon polyamorous person dating another polyamorous person, people see that and say, “Well, I don't get it. But you're both doing the same

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thing.” People who see a monogamous person, where their partner is going out and dating and sleeping with other people, they see that monogamous person, and they'll project onto them any experience of when they were cheated on or deceived. It's not helpful, not supportive. Maybe you'll be lucky and people will get it. Or if they don't get it, they'll at least be like, “as long as you're happy.” But that is very real. And so when experiencing that kind of thing, we just have to look for people who understand.

Some of our friendships can be so beautiful, and also, I wouldn't ask them for financial advice, because they're terrible with money. you know what I mean? I'd find somebody who knows what the hell they're doing with finances. Same thing for this. I love my friends. But if they don't get what I'm doing romantically, they won't understand how to help me with romantic tensions or conflicts. they'll give advice like, “well, maybe you shouldn't do that anymore. Or maybe this isn't for you,” which can make you spiral with shame, or disorient you, and make you second guess yourself. so finding people who get it is really critical, when experiencing that social stigma, shame, etc.

It is possible as a monogamous person, that you consent to it, and intellectually you feel fine with it. And then in practice, you discover, “I really need my partner to be monogamous to me.” And that can be really heartbreaking, but it is valid. Discovering that from your own experience and from your own introspection is different than listening to the social scripts we've been given, or listening to people who would shame us. So we really just need to be mindful of where different messages are coming from. And is it coming from people that we wouldn't ask for advice on this? If yes, then maybe I won't take their shame because I don't want their advice. Or is the message coming from just a calm knowing, internally, that this is who I am and this is what I need? differentiating those can be a superpower.

Another challenge that can arise in mono / polyam dynamics is couples privilege, especially if the agreement is the monogamous person is getting more – more time, more energy, more commitment... it could wind up making anybody else that the polyamorous person connects with, feel sidelined. or that there are ceilings put on what they're doing that they didn't necessarily consent to. So I have other videos on my Patreon about couples privilege specifically, like what it is and how you can investigate it. So I would recommend doing that because we do want to make sure everybody feels welcome. it's a nuanced thing that really needs a lot of consistent discussion, especially as the polyamorous person's other relationships grow and change. Maybe they're fine with the situation when they first start but as it gets more intense or more passionate, if you're falling in love, that it needs to be continuously revisited. “how does this look now?” Because relationships are not just one fixed

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thing that we set it and forget it. relationships are amorphous and evolving and always breathing and growing. We want to minimize any harm that is preventable.

Some unfortunate things that can happen in mono / polyam... A polyamorous person might do what's called leapfrogging, where they open up the relationship and consciously or unconsciously they're looking for their next monogamous partner. but they don't want to be single in the interim. And that can be really fucking frustrating. I've seen that happen a lot, that happened actually to one of my partners, that their monogamous partner decided they would open up only to find their next monogamous partner. and that is betrayal, that is really a feeling of "I was a fool and I was played" and that can feel like cheating even. that can be really heartbreaking. And so, if you are the polyamorous person in a mono polyamory dynamic, there will be some real introspection, some honest looking at "is this really what I want, or am I currently dissatisfied looking for my next jump off? am I a polyamorous person? do I love in a polyamorous way? and am I happy in my current monogamous relationship?"

Because opening up a relationship will not fix it. if there are problems in a dynamic opening up is not a solution, it can complicate it more it can add more feelings and more complexity to the pile, you know and so, to really make sure that if you are opening up a relationship from monogamy to non monogamy – how are you two doing, are you good? Making sure that nobody involved is self centered. are your needs met currently? because there can be an exacerbation of existing problems, they can feel bigger, they can get worse when one partner is now adding other partners.

Sometimes, discomfort from the monogamous person will lead to a request for Don't Ask Don't Tell. I personally don't recommend that for polyamory. some open relationships where it's just sexual connections or hookups or one offs, then sometimes Don't Ask, Don't Tell is fine for people in that. they don't feel bothered, they just don't really want to hear about who you've hooked up with. But when it comes to polyamory – if the polyamorous person is dating somebody consistently, and their monogamous partner says "I don't want to hear about it, I don't want to know about it," then there can be increasingly this feeling of a double life. where you have to hide something that took up a good part of your day, or a good part of your week, you have to hide that from somebody you love. and the monogamous person can feel at first like you're protecting yourself by not knowing things that can be really destabilizing or bringing up traumas. that can feel short term relieving, to not have to engage with that stimuli. But if the polyamorous partner is building and growing a relationship with another person, you will find out eventually. you will. that that can't be kept out of your life forever. there will be a birthday party that they want

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to come to, or there will be a text message or sext that you accidentally see. There will be some indication of a depth of a relationship that has been existing without your knowledge. And it can feel like cheating, right? It can feel like cheating to do it, where you're hiding from your partner. And it can feel like cheating to receive it, when you finally do accidentally get exposed to a piece of information. There's this feeling of deception, even if you've asked for it. There's this feeling of, "I don't know you." And it can be the easier path to engage with that information one piece at a time, rather than to have it all collapse on you all at once. If you're just engaging with it as it grows, you deal with it as it grows. And, your partner doesn't have to have this double life. That is usually a way to avoid any big sense of crisis or collapse down the road.

Sometimes the polyamorous person is concerned that the monogamous person will leave them. There is always that tension, at least for me, of, "am I going to be dropped?" because if this monogamous person decides that they want monogamy again, that feels very high risk to me, like I would then automatically be kicked out of their life. Now, if you're in a dynamic that opens up and you have commitment and you're already entangled in each other's lives, that's a different situation than newly dating. But still, the polyamorous person can get a lot of stress if the monogamous person is upset. If the monogamous person is expressing that their needs are not being met, the polyamorous person can say, "oh no, are they going to leave me?" And I think it's just helpful to talk about all those fears. Because when we're transparent with each other about what we're scared of, about what our buttons are, what our sensitivities are, then we can be mindful about our actions. "Are the optics of what I'm doing, could it be interpreted as 'I'm about to abandon you'?" then maybe "what could I do to offset that to make sure that that is not how it's interpreted?" Can we talk about what I'm scared of? Because that could lead to a conversation of how we don't even let that look like it's the case.

Beyond that, have regular check ins. that's usually a piece of advice I give to everybody, especially if they're struggling, or if they're going through a big change. it can help to have something on the calendar that you're definitely going to check in with "how are you doing? Updates?" because it can be hard to bring those up in the moment. it can be nice to know, "I won't go more than a week without talking about this with my partner." And that can be stabilizing, to have that kind of structure during a fundamentally destabilizing process where the ground underneath you is shifting. we need something to hold on to, some kind of consistency. some kind of pattern that can reassure us... at least, if you're anxious. if you're avoidant, maybe that's scary to have that pressure all the time. But I think regardless of how you respond to things, if there is big change, it's helpful to have a plan of how often you're

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going to check in about it. you're going to experience surprises a lot in the beginning.

I think we especially need to be mindful of resentment building. Is there a depression cloud looming? Is there a lot of reactivity? And if yes, are there resources, is there access to therapy? Is there access to people that get it? because without resources to hold you during this adjustment, it can feel like too much. So we just want to keep checking in. Usually, "I can continue doing this if I don't hate you for it," right? "I can continue doing this if I trust you, if I feel warm and fuzzy like I'm not being neglected." So what would not being neglected look like?

These kind of check-ins mean we can notice it while it's small. We can say "I really didn't like how you did that the other day," rather than it happening again and again and again and again. And then you blow up like "you always do this!" You know what I mean? If we can talk about it when it happens the first time, then we can prevent there being some big crisis.

And I've seen plenty of mono / polyam people be really happy, plenty of monogamous people be incredibly relieved. Like "I'm so glad I don't have to do that with them. I'm so glad you have a friend to go rock climbing with. I'm so glad you have a kink partner because I'm hella vanilla." There's so much stress relief from not having to be somebody's everything, especially if there's a lot of mismatch between the needs, desires and appetites.

So that's what comes to mind, based off of conversations I've had with mono / polyam people this week. I would love to know if there are specific scenarios that I didn't really cover, that I didn't touch on. Angles of this that I didn't see. I would be open to continuing to talk about mono / polyam specifically. I think most of the tools that I make could be applicable to that relationship structure. I don't think mono / polyamory necessarily means a bunch of unique tools for it. But there are considerations that go into it that don't really go into other non monogamous structures. So you're not alone. A lot of people are mono / polyam and enjoy it. Thank you for being here. And let me know what else you'd like to talk about!

xxx