

# The Arc of the Polyamory Movement

by Pepper Mint



# Outline

Introduction

Polyamory History

The Non-Monogamous Moment

Diversity Issues

Progress and Future Challenges

# What is the Polyamory Movement?

An identity

Various practices

A large number of communities

An idea

Resistance to monogamous conformity

Books

Internet forums

A series of relationship tools

# Polyamory Pre-History

## Non-monogamous movements of the 60's and 70's

Free love, swinging, open marriage

Commune-based non-monogamy

Gay men's casual dating culture

Lesbian-feminist communes' experiments

## Cultural backlash and AIDS in the 80's

Stark reduction in numbers, communities go underground

Changes in sexual practices

Focus on communal arrangements, group marriage, polyfidelity

# Early Polyamory

## Group marriage roots

Kerista

*The Polyfidelity Primer* in 1984, by PEP (Ryam Nearing)

## Coining the word “polyamory”

*A Bouquet of Lovers* by Morning-Glory Zell Ravenheart, 1990

Jennifer Wesp founds alt.polyamory, 1992

## Early publications and expansion in the 90's

*Love Without Limits* by Deborah Anapol, 1992, revised 1997

*The Ethical Slut* by Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy, 1997

Pulls in new age non-monogamy, open relationship folks, non-monogamous queer women

# Spread and Success

## Growing and diversifying communities

- International spread

- Spread through alternative and sexual subcultures

- Becoming a well-known word

- Sheer numbers growing quickly

## Media (relative) success

- Increasing numbers of stories

- Focus on human interest and coming out

- No focus on crime

- Worst problem are misrepresentation and lack of diversity

Acceptance among feminists, queer folk, lefties

# A Non-Monogamous Moment

Queer rights movements fairly successful

- Opened up discussion about sex and relationships

- Provided a sexual minority template

- Continue to draw the fire of the right wing

Safer sex well-established and inculcated

- STI risk feeling more manageable

The internet

- Easily accessible information on alternatives, communities

Backlash against monogamy

- At the endpoint of the economic marriage to love transition

- Men's resistance to newly enforceable monogamy

# Women and Non-Monogamy

## Gains in equality

- Relatively near income equality

- Recent general independence, financial and cultural

- Advances of feminism

- Significantly increased ability to negotiate in relationships

## Increased agency in non-monogamy

- Polyamory largely defined and led by women

  - Focus on trust, negotiation, reciprocity

  - Self-help style in books, forums

- General relaxing of the double standard in non-monogamy

  - Non-monogamy flourishes in a truce



# Issues Around Diversity

Visible history of polyamory is white and middle class

But actual non-monogamous people are diverse

Coming out takes privilege, especially in the media

A problem of visibility more than populace

Seems to cause selection issues in research

Language of polyamory reflects privilege

Need to focus on diversity

Arrange diverse representations in media

Translate language and concepts away from privilege

Speak to more than just poly: open, swingers, etc

Support less privileged non-monogamy activists

# How Sexuality Movements Decline or Fail

## Moral panic

Around STIs (like drug-resistant gonorrhea)

Right wing backlash

## Competitive memes

Open relationships

“New monogamy”, “managed monogamy”, monogamish

Sexist polygyny, traditional or renewed

## An inability to remain relevant

Failure to cross borders and become or remain diverse

Not continuing to provide a needed service

Assimilationism

# The Speed of a Movement

Social progress can move quite fast

Fueled by coming out, social and media visibility

Legal and political progress is very slow

Only follows social progress

Requires the voting public on your side

Takes an incredible amount of money and effort

Agenda driven by the right wing

For example, same-sex marriage

Poly marriage not happening any time soon

Small victories like custody fairness much more doable

# My Stuff

Non-monogamy advice and theory writings at  
<http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/>

OpenSF Conference in 2014:  
<http://www.open-sf.org/>

Come talk with me afterwards!