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Book Review: Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits

by Deborah M. Anapol, San Raphael, California: IntiNet Resource Centre, 1997

Designed to help people who are considering developing a polyamorous lifestyle, this book by Deborah M. Anapol explores a range of issues people can consider in their decision-making. Anapol is trained in Clinical Psychology, helping couples since 1983. Amongst other things, she writes about ethics, jealousy, the nature of family and when or whether to tell others. Her approach is thoughtful and well-researched. In fact the opening line in her acknowledgements says that while her name is listed as the sole author, she views herself more as "synthesizer" and "vision-keeper", "gathering inspiration and knowledge from a wide variety of sources" (pp. vi). Anapol encourages readers to question bias and prejudice about the idea of having more than one loving partner at a time and to reflect about how those biased ideas were learned (e.g. through family, religion, other social norms, etc.), and she seems to do this in a gentle but provocative way. However, she also appears to have a bias that suggests polyamory is a better, almost more evolved way of loving. While I entirely endorse the idea that people should be encouraged to love in the ways that feel most fitting to them, and to be connected, ethical and mindful in the choice of partner(s), it is important to view monogamy, non-monogamy and polyamory as *different choices*, not that one is better than another.

I have worked with non-monogamous and polyamorous (or poly) couples in my practice and always thought I was clear on how these ideas were defined. But a therapist friend challenged me to reflect about this and recognize that being non-monogamous or polyamorous has a variety of meanings for the couples who use that language, and that inspired me to read Anapol's book. In my view, a non-monogamous couple, also referred to as being in an open relationship, was one that decided to have sexual experiences with people outside the relationship (either with the two of them present - bringing another person or other couple into their own sexual life - or each having sexual experiences on their own, away from the partner) and had established ethical guidelines about how this would work for them. (In fact, several couples have come to meet with me specifically to negotiate those guidelines: Who? What? Where? When?) By contrast, in my view a polyamorous couple had opened the possibility to enter into *loving and sexual* relationships that were *ongoing* with people outside the primary pair. That could mean bringing a third person into their relationship (becoming a triad rather than a couple) or each individually having other loving relationships in addition to the primary connection. While Anapol seems to agree with my definitions, she coins the term "sexualoving" to describe these relationships because they are "both sexual and loving" to distinguish them from "casual, indiscriminate sport sex" (pp. 6). I would suggest that most of the couples I have met with who have open relationships would say they had "casual sport sex" with people they met. They would say it was mutual, ethical and respectful, but they would likely not say it was loving. The poly people would say that their sexual relationships *were* loving. I wanted to highlight this because I believe that people in open relationships maintain different boundaries in their sexual connections (and their primary relationship) than do poly people; poly folks will have a deeper emotional connection in their relationships. Reading the book helped me to view things with more complexity. Anapol says there can be primary, secondary and tertiary relationships for polyamorous people. A couple in a primary relationship would likely live together, share finances, parenting and decision-



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making. Secondary relationships also tend to be long-term, committed relationships but couples live separately and have separate finances. The other partner may take on a role similar to cousin, aunt or uncle in the extended family of the primary relationship. Tertiary relationships having a loving and sexual component tend to also have an intimate component, but the partners may see each other infrequently or for a shorter period of time. What I had not realized is that someone may have more than one primary partner, or that someone may have several secondary partners and no primary partner.

Chapter 5 on jealousy helpfully invites readers to self-assess whether they think their own jealousy would get in the way of feeling safe and nurtured in a poly relationship. Anapol labels different types of jealousy that can arise with polyamory (pp. 55-56), three of which I'd like to highlight:

1. Exclusion jealousy arises when the jealous person feels left out, not having enough time and attention.
2. Competition jealousy arises when someone feels inadequate and that the specialness of their relationship is not as special as what the partner is enjoying with another lover.
3. Fear jealousy arises out of anxiety that the partner will leave for someone else.

I found Anapol's use of the word 'maturity' as a necessary quality for successful polyamory was curious (pp. 4, 32, 34). Initially I misread her intention as only "more mature" individuals would be drawn to polyamory and could handle it (and by extrapolation, less mature people would settle for monogamy or have affairs). On second reading, I recognized my error. I realized in using the word maturity she was ultimately identifying that those who are most likely to be successful in poly relationships have good self-awareness and capacity for self-care. She is referring to a capacity for effective boundary-setting and an ability to be mindful and present (both as difficulties arise in relationships and also when discomfort, like jealousy, arises within oneself). I find that analysis sound and that suggestion for self-evaluation to be helpful.

Anapol highlights the importance of self-awareness, humility, respect, a balance of independence and cherishing the needs of the group, a balance of introversion and extroversion and interpersonal skills as significant qualities for anyone considering polyamory (Chapter 4, pp. 31-48).

Anapol provides us with a thoughtful, ethical tome to reflect about whether entering into polyamorous relationships is right for us, with a range of questions so we can assess this for ourselves.

My one concern with the book is a lingering motif of recruitment. I respect how Anapol invites those who are curious about poly relationships to let down their guard and be open to the possibilities, to have discussions with partners and to ask themselves challenging questions to see whether they truly would enjoy this way of loving. On the other hand, there is also a spirit of inviting people to "Join the Revolution!" (my words), to educate others about polyamory, to come out and be advocates for the cause. The tone at times suggests that the poly lifestyle is better, and as I stated earlier, more evolved. There is no doubt that for some people, it is a better, more fulfilling, more "right" approach to loving. For others, quite simply, it is not.