



Chapter Ten: When Jealousy is the Root Cause of a Break-up

Surprisingly, jealousy is the least likely of the four poly-related causes of poly break-ups. This is at least partly because the first three causes usually destroy a lot of poly relationships long before jealousy does. Being a polyamorist in a relationship with a monogamist, being in a relationship with someone who wants an incompatible poly model, or having inadequate time and energy management skills or taking on too many partners, all cause such intense unhappiness and dissatisfaction that these

relationships often collapse fairly quickly. Jealousy is present in all four of these doomed scenarios. However, in the first three, jealousy is a symptom, not the cause of the break-up, whereas in the fourth scenario, jealousy is the key reason that the relationship ends.

Jealousy as “the three-headed dog from hell”

When jealousy destroys a polyamorous relationship, one or more of three factors are to blame. First, people generally are not very good at cooperatively sharing ANY resource, never mind sharing their lover or spouse’s affections. Secondly, most cultures train people to believe they are entitled to their partner's sexual and romantic fidelity, and they are expected to feel outraged, betrayed, and mistreated if their partner has other partners. As a result, most people have internalized that programming and it can be very tough to override. Thirdly, most people have at least some amount of insecurity, self-esteem issues, fear of abandonment, and some lingering doubts about their desirability as a spouse and sexual partner. After all, who among us is such a perfect mental health role model that we are totally confident about ourselves and wholly convinced that we are a fantastic life partner and lover? Any of these three factors is likely to generate intense jealousy. Frequently, all three conspire to create such a toxic mix of anxiety, anger, and despair that the relationship will fall apart.

One woman called these three components of jealousy “the three-headed dog from hell that ruined my life.” She said, “Homo sapiens totally suck at sharing, and no one teaches us how to share our lover with someone else. And our culture encourages jealousy and everyone assumes that you are entitled to monogamy and should be outraged if your partner has sex with someone else. And everyone is vulnerable to the curse of comparing yourself with the other lover and deciding that you’re a total loser in comparison.”

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for all three of these factors to feed on each other and destroy a relationship. If only one component is affecting the relationship, it may do a lot of damage, but with time and effort, often the relationship can survive. If two of them or all three are activated, it is often fatal to the relationship.