



## Chapter Fourteen: Handling the “public relations” of a poly break-up

Many people going through the end of an open relationship have been very unpleasantly surprised by the intense reactions of friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors. Because monogamy is the culturally-

approved norm, most people have lived their polyamorous lives with a “siege mentality,” constantly having to justify themselves and their relationships to everyone around them. Being in an open relationship is likely to provoke some disapproval by others. Since many people around you will not understand or accept your poly relationships while they are thriving, they are likely to have even more judgements about a relationship’s demise.

As Bennie put it, “Most people believe poly relationships can't work, or that they shouldn't work, so everyone is just waiting for us to fail so they can say, see, I just knew this would blow up in your face!” And Valerie said, “My mother kept saying that my husband would leave me because we were 'sleeping around.' So when our marriage DID end, even though our divorce had nothing to do with polyamory, she couldn't wait to pounce on me and remind me that she had predicted it, and she obviously felt vindicated.”

Justin added, “I had been married and divorced twice, and both relationships were strictly monogamous. No one ever blamed either of those break-ups on monogamy. And everyone was so sympathetic when I was going through a divorce, asking me out to dinner, and calling to see how I'm doing, sending me friendly emails and cat videos to cheer me up, even trying to set me up on dates with new women. Then I had a poly relationship that lasted twice as long as either of my marriages, and when we split up, everyone blamed that on the fact that we weren't monogamous. No one was supportive or caring, and a few friends even told me I got what I deserved for ‘trying to have two girlfriends.’ One female friend said she was ‘so glad that at least ONE of those women had enough self-respect to kick you to the curb.’”

While no one enjoys facing hostile judgment from loved ones for their relationship choices, it is especially difficult during such a painful experience of loss and grief. Managing the “public relations” aspect of a poly break-up can be challenging and draining. Many poly people have described feeling alone and isolated from family and friends, right when they need them the most. Because most people around them have never seen an open relationship before, it has been very challenging to explain these relationships even when everything is going great, and even more difficult to talk about the demise of a relationship.