

The Jealousy Workbook

Exercises and Insights for Managing Open Relationships

Kathy Labriola



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Exercise Two: Clarify your relationship orientation

This exercise will help you assess whether you are likely to be satisfied with a monogamous relationship or not. Are you polyamorous or monogamous by orientation, or somewhere in between?

Step One: What is your experience in a monogamous relationship?

Think about each of the monogamous romantic relationships, if any, you have been involved in throughout your life. Answer the following questions:

- Did you feel safe and secure due to sexual exclusivity in this relationship?
 yes no
- Did you experience deeper intimacy? yes no
- Did you feel more comfortable in this relationship? yes no
- Were you able to be very honest with your partner about your feelings and needs? yes no
- Did you feel sexually satisfied in that relationship? yes no
- Do you believe that your partner was honest with you about their feelings and needs? yes no
- Did you find yourself being more focused and productive in your work and other life activities during this relationship? yes no
- Did you feel that you and your partner were a good team and became more effective and creative through the synergy of this relationship than either of you had been on your own? yes no
- Did you enjoy spending most or all of your free time with your partner during that relationship, and spending very little time alone or with other friends? yes no

Give yourself 10 points for each “yes” answer. If you scored more than 40 points, you may be more naturally inclined towards a monogamous relationship than an open relationship.

However, answering the following questions will help you make a more complete assessment:

- Did you struggle with sexual and romantic desires towards other people while in this relationship? yes no
- Did you feel bored with your sexual relationship? yes no
- Did you want more romance and excitement in your relationship?
 yes no

- Did you long for more emotional intimacy than your partner could provide? yes no
- Did either you or your partner “cheat” and have sex with someone else During the course of this relationship? yes no
- Did you ever feel suffocated and try to create more distance, saying things like “I need more space,” “I need some time alone,” “I feel too controlled,” or “I want more privacy”? yes no
- Did you sometimes feel there was some important component missing from the relationship? yes no
- Did this relationship end because you lost interest in your partner after a short time and wanted to pursue a new relationship with someone else? yes no

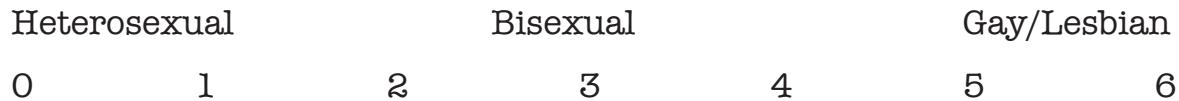
Give yourself 10 points for each “Yes” answer in this section. If you scored more than 40 points, you may be more oriented towards an open relationship.

Step Two: Where do you fall on the relationship orientation scale?

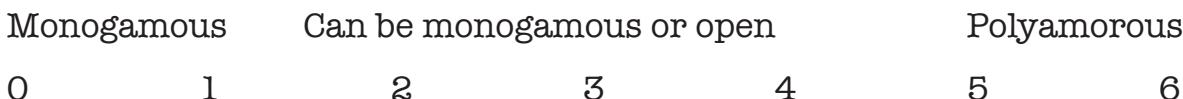
What if you scored high on both tests?

If you scored above a 40 on both of the tests in Step One, you may be somewhere in the middle on the monogamy/polyamory spectrum. Usually, this means that there are some things about a monogamous relationship that really work for you, but some things about an open relationship that are very appealing to you. This indicates that you may be happiest in a monogamous relationship with the right person, the right circumstances, and during a particular period of your life. However, you may be just as happy in an open relationship, depending on the partner or partners, your life situation, and the specific developmental stage of your life.

Kinsey Scale of Sexual Orientation



Relationship Orientation Scale



Some people believe that polyamory and monogamy can accurately be described as relationship orientations, similar to the sexual orientations of straight and gay. This is a theory rather than a scientific fact, and more research may clarify whether relationship orientation can be as fixed as being straight or gay. The Kinsey Scale for sexual orientation places heterosexuals at zero on the scale, with gay men and lesbians at six on the scale. However, many people are bisexual and may have relationships with people of all genders, and they can be anywhere from one to five on the Kinsey Scale. Similarly, many people can be attracted to both monogamy and polyamory, and may be capable of succeeding in both types of relationships. Sexual orientation can be situational for some bisexuals, and relationship orientation may be situational for many people on the mono/poly scale as well. While the truly monogamous people may be at zero on the scale and the truly polyamorous people at six, many others may be between one and five on the relationship orientation scale. To assess where you fall on this scale, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you found it difficult to remain sexually exclusive with a partner for two years or more? yes no
- Have you practiced what is sometimes called “serial monogamy”: being exclusive with one person for a period of time but ending each relationship in order to pursue someone new? yes no
- Do you enjoy the security and stability of a monogamous relationship but also long for more romance and passion? yes no
- Have you often found yourself in a relationship where one partner has a much greater desire for sex than the other? yes no
- Have you had one relationship after another where some components of the relationship are extremely satisfying but you experience a scarcity in other areas of the relationship, such as not enough time, not enough intimacy, not enough common interests, etc.? yes no

If you answered “yes” to most of these questions, you probably have what I call a “mixed relationship orientation.” This means you are likely to be able to be happy in either a monogamous relationship or an open relationship, depending on the specific situation.

Step Three: Examine your experience in open relationships

If you have already had some relationships which were consensually non-monogamous, looking a little closer at that experience can help you further assess your relationship orientation. Think carefully about the specifics of an open relationship you have been in previously or your current relationship if it is open. Answer the following questions:

- Have you felt a sense of freedom in this relationship that has been absent in previous monogamous relationships? yes no
- Does it somehow “just feel natural” to you to pursue friendships and romantic relationships concurrently with more than one person? yes no
- Have you generally made good choices in picking emotionally healthy partners? yes no
- Do you feel able to manage your time and energy in meeting the needs of more than one relationship? yes no
- Are you able to be honest with your partners about other relationships and meet their needs for disclosure of important information? yes no
- Have you generally succeeded in keeping agreements you have made with your partners? yes no
- Do you experience a spiritual component of having multiple relationships, and do you feel enriched spiritually by practicing polyamory? yes no
- Have other people mentioned that you seem to thrive and be happier when you are in an open relationship? yes no

Give yourself 10 points for each “Yes” answer. If you scored over 50 points, you are probably oriented towards having open relationships, and you have a reasonably good skill set to succeed in such relationships.

If you have determined that your relationship orientation is monogamous, then you are unlikely to be happy in an open relationship, and you would be wise to avoid anything outside of a sexually exclusive relationship. This may seem like a ridiculously obvious “no-brainer.” However, in my counseling practice, I see people every day who have ignored this basic advice and entered into an open relationship even though they know that their orientation is firmly in the monogamous camp.

Sometimes this happens because they have become hopelessly attracted to or even fallen in love with someone who is polyamorous, and they could not resist the intense draw towards that alluring person despite their best intentions. They often say things like “He is the perfect man for me, except that he won’t be monogamous,” or “We’re completely compatible in every way, except she’s poly,” “We are just meant for each other, we’re soul mates, but he’s married to someone else and won’t leave her.” Someone in the throes of this type of passionate love may not hear the irony in these statements, which are a lot like saying “We’re perfect for each other except that we are completely incompatible.” They are so intent on making it work against all odds that they cannot see that the relationship is doomed to failure by this most basic difference. They may spend years trying to change themselves to be able to accept polyamory or demanding that their partner change to

become monogamous. Only after long periods of intense suffering and turmoil do they grasp that polyamory and monogamy are mutually exclusive.

Other times this mistake occurs accidentally, because one person doesn't realize that they are oriented towards monogamy, or the other person has not yet realized that they are polyamorous by nature. When their relationship orientations and world views collide, they may spend years creating pain for each other before one or both people realize that they are hopelessly incompatible because one partner needs an exclusive relationship and the other needs an open relationship.

In the worst cases, one person is well aware of their orientation but deliberately deceives the other about it until the partner is already hopelessly invested in the relationship. One partner may lie about their need for monogamy because they are so attracted to this partner that they hope one of them can change. Or the polyamorous partner may hide their orientation because they hope their partner will be able to adapt to it once the relationship is firmly established. When the deceived partner discovers the truth, they are so engaged in the relationship by then that it is very difficult to leave. And trust is destroyed by this dishonesty, adding to the feelings of betrayal.

The wisest advice is to avoid getting romantically involved with someone who does not share your relationship orientation. However, even with the best of intentions, we can find ourselves falling for someone who will not be compatible. Once smitten, we usually put each other through hell before someone has the good sense to end the relationship and seek a partner who is more compatible.