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## Is Sexual Fidelity the Most Important Part of a Relationship? Thoughts on Non-monogamy

by Tasha Fierce



Recently a new sex partner asked for my advice on how to deal with three women he was “seeing,” each of whom was



interested in having a monogamous relationship with him. Being as how we had just had “no strings attached” sex, I asked him if he was really able to handle truly being monogamous. His reply was (as I expected) a sheepish “No.”

It came out that he was more interested in one of the women than he was in the other two, but that she also had commitment issues. So I suggested that he consider an open relationship, one in which he did all the “girlfriend” things with this woman, but which allowed for both of them to still have the option of sex with other people—provided that there was no emotional involvement.

This was an apparently novel idea for him, and he liked it. I explained that they would need to negotiate the ground rules of their relationship (for example, he was okay with her having sex with other men as long as she didn't talk about it) and they would have to keep the lines of communication open. After he left, I wondered to myself: If we didn't have the expectation that our "committed" partners would be able to fulfill all of our sexual needs, could we be free to simply enjoy the closeness and commitment of a relationship based on emotional instead of sexual fidelity?

For me, the most important part of a relationship is the emotional connection you have with your partner. You trust them, you talk openly with them, they know your quirks and flaws and still love you for them. When you have this connection, it usually makes for better sex. But there's something to be said about having someone you can give your heart to and still remain free to engage in other sexual encounters. I'm talking about emotional monogamy. Sex is a pleasurable bonus in an emotionally monogamous relationship, and we can extricate sex from the relationship equation if we're willing to accept that one can love someone deeply and still desire and pursue other sex partners, without loving the primary partner any less.

Some people take the next step and choose to practice polyamory—multiple full-fledged emotional and sexual relationships. Books like *The Ethical Slut* offer a guide on how to construct working polyamorous relationships, touching on topics such as having a primary partner with whom you have unprotected sex and "satellite" partners with whom you use protection—but in ANY type of non-monogamous relationship safer sex is extremely important. This type of relationship arrangement is not for those interested in emotional fidelity, because, by definition, polyamory is participation in multiple LOVING relationships. Meaning, you're sharing your partner's affections—so if you're the jealous type, this probably won't work for you. But many people can and do thrive in a polyamorous relationship. Me, I need that emotional exclusivity. To each her own.

Lately, some men have been approaching me looking for another, more familiar type of arrangement, optimistically called, "friends with benefits." This is about one step up from "fuck buddy," in my opinion, and will usually either end up with you in an awkward, forced relationship, or with you minus a friendship. Remaining "just friends" while being involved sexually takes a level of emotional detachment that many women (and men, actually) aren't able to attain. As you become better friends, it's natural that you become more involved with them. Add sex to the equation, and the fact that when you orgasm with a partner a hormone called oxytocin is released causing the creation of strong attachment, and you've got drama if your partner doesn't get the same dosage. If you can pull this off, more power to you—but if you're the type that becomes easily love-struck, I'd suggest staying clear of this arrangement.

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Each of these non-monogamous relationship configurations—and I’m only touching on a few of the multiple possibilities—have their pros and cons. It is important to think carefully about what you need in order to feel comfortable. Do you want to “come home” to one person but have sex with many people, as in, an emotionally monogamous yet sexually open relationship? Can you handle knowing that your partner both loves and sleeps with more women than just you, as in, a polyamorous relationship? Do YOU want to love and sleep with more partners than just the one? Can you rein in your attachment and just be friends who fuck? Really, it’s up to you where the line is drawn.

But in any non-monogamous relationship, just as in monogamous relationships, communication is of the utmost importance. The minute that communication breaks down when one partner expects something that the other has no idea they want, things fall apart. I recently experienced a situation in which one of my sex partners had assumed that they were the only person I was having sex with. We had never talked about having any type of monogamous relationship, we had just hooked up and had fun. But because he wanted something from me that I didn’t know he desired, there was a bit of “reevaluation of the situation” on his part. Our “arrangement” didn’t end, but his ego may have taken a bruising.

Practicing non-monogamy doesn’t make you a “ho” or a “slut.” I know we are wary of the stereotype of the hypersexualized Black woman. I’m not suggesting that you pull on a pair of booty shorts and go hit up all the potential sex partners you see. What I am suggesting is that we shed the notion that there’s only one way to be in a relationship with someone, and embrace the spectrum of relationship configurations that include flavors of non-monogamy.

You might find ways to fulfill needs you didn’t even know that you had.



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