

# Polyamory in Liberal Religion

Written by:  
Harlan White, M.D., M.P.H.  
Seattle, Washington

## Who are you?

We are Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness (UUPA), a national organization that provides information and support to Unitarian Universalists who are interested in *polyamory*.

## So, what is *polyamory*?

*Polyamory* is the philosophy and practice of loving or relating intimately to more than one other person at a time, with honesty and integrity. Here we'll define "love" as an intimate, romantic, stable, affectionate bond which a person has with another person or group of people. This bond usually, though not necessarily always, involves sex. Other terms often used for polyamory are responsible, ethical, or intentional non-monogamy.

Polyamory (or "poly" for short) is a general term covering a wide variety of possible relationship styles, including group marriage (sometimes called "polyfidelity"), open marriage, line marriage, expanded family, intimate network, tribe-building, and some kinds of intentional community. The essential feature of all these styles is the realization that it's possible to have multiple simultaneous love relationships in a context of openness, honesty, and integrity. True polyamory is a conscious and consensual choice for everyone involved. Poly is not cheating or adultery; it is a genuine philosophical alternative to monogamy.

## Why have a Unitarian Universalist poly organization?

The contemporary polyamory movement got started around 1990 and by all indications has been growing rapidly—through books, magazines, conventions, local and national support groups, web sites, newsgroups, and e-mail lists. In the midst of all this growth and exploration, some of us made an interesting discovery: many of us who are polyamorous are also Unitarian Universalists.

It is natural, we think, that the UU values of individual choice and responsibility, and honoring diversity, should be attractive to polys. It's inevitable, probably, that Unitarian Universalism will soon be aware of a growing number of openly poly people within its congregations.

Like monogamists, polys tend to feel that their love lives, their sex lives, their family lives, and their religious lives are closely intertwined. Our organization was created to provide information, support, and advocacy for polys who seek a spiritual home in Unitarian Universalism.

## How do polys feel about monogamy?

Most polys have a "live and let live" attitude. They are happy for those people who have found happiness in monogamous relationships. It is difficult, though, for polys not to resent our society's glorifying monogamy as the only valid, mature, responsible, or sacred kind of love relationship.

In the minds of polyamorists, monogamy and the nuclear family represent only one in a broad spectrum of options from which people ought to be able to choose.

## Do polys believe in "free love"?

Polys believe in freedom of choice. They acknowledge that real love is in no way free. Intimate relationships, monogamous or polyamorous, are complex and challenging, and success requires maturity and hard work.

Polys are taking on the added challenge of trying to do something that is unsupported by our society and has no established guidelines or rules. We are literally making up our own lovestyle, much as many UUs make up their own personal religion. This is one reason why poly support networks are so important, as is the support and acceptance of our religious community.

### **What about children?**

Many polyamorists are parents, and across the country there are children who are growing up happy and healthy in poly families. Of course, such children experience some unusual challenges and advantages in having more than two significant adults in their lives, but all in all the experience need not be much different from any other close-knit extended family.

The biggest problem many children of poly families face, as do many other children of minorities, is discrimination by the larger community.

### **How do you become poly?**

It's a matter of personal choice what lifestyle you adopt. Some people learn about polyamory from friends or loved ones or by reading books, fiction or non-fiction, about polyamory. Some people belong to religious groups which allow and/or encourage polyamory. Some come in contact with national or local polyamory organizations. Of course, many people discover their polyamory totally on their own.

### **What kind of people are polys?**

The polyamory movement is fairly new and hasn't been studied much, so this question is not easy to answer. Very unscientific impressions would suggest that polys tend to be professionals, artists, academics, and other fairly highly educated people, including a lot of computer and health professionals. Interest in science-fiction is common amongst polys, many of whom are inspired by authors like Robert Heinlein and Marian Zimmer Bradley. Polys range through all age groups, genders, religious beliefs, and sexual orientations.

One trait inherent in being poly is a high regard for the values of honesty, open communication, and integrity. Adultery, cheating, broken promises, manipulation and coercion are no more welcome in poly relationships than in monogamous ones.

### **What does UUPA do?**

UUPA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, non-profit corporation registered in Washington State. We have a Board of Trustees and official by-laws, and we hold annual membership meetings. We have a national e-mail list, and an expanding list of Local Chapters and Contact Persons. We provide information and consultation to the UUA. We make presentations and lead workshops at UU and poly conferences. Our Mission Statement charges us with "providing support, promoting education, and encouraging spiritual wholeness regarding polyamory."

### **How can I learn more?**

For more information on UUPA, including how to become a member, contact us at:

UUPA  
18305 57TH AVE NE  
KENMORE WA 98028  
uupa@uupa.org  
www.uupa.org

UUPA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.