

For Immediate Release

For an advance copy of the book
or an interview with one of the authors,
please contact Dottie DeHart,
DeHart and Company Public Relations,
at (828) 325-4966 or dottie@dehartandcompany.com.

Are You Ready for a Designer Relationship?

Six Reasons Why It's Time to Take a Fresh Look at Non-monogamy

There's nothing wrong with monogamy, say the coauthors of Designer Relationships—but many couples have discovered the benefit of a more “open” style of relating. Here, Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson share some surprising truths about monogamy, non-monogamy, and how to move from one to the other.

New York, NY (July 2015)—Perhaps you can relate to one of the following scenarios:

SCENARIO 1: You've been married for a while and truly love your spouse. Problem is, your sex life is almost non-existent. Your spouse just isn't interested. You'd like to venture outside the marriage (and even have a partner in mind) but hate the thought of cheating. Is there a solution?

SCENARIO 2: You and your partner regularly hang out with the same group of friends. While some light flirtation between couples has always gone on, lately it has escalated. You suspect that things might soon move to the next level. Would it be a terrible mistake to join in?

SCENARIO 3: You've always been sexually adventurous and so has your boyfriend. You've dated for a while and the subject of marriage and children has come up. You're interested but are not sure either of you can guarantee sexual exclusivity. Is an open marriage a viable solution—especially if you do have kids?

Most people, if they're honest, will admit they've at least fleetingly thought about a life unfettered by monogamy's “ties that bind.” If not acted upon, these thoughts are typically dismissed as wishful thinking, slightly guilty fantasies, or even deeply regrettable lapses from the moral straight-and-narrow. More and more, though, say Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson, people are asking, “Does monogamy have to be the only way?”

“The answer is ‘Absolutely not,’” says Michaels, coauthor along with Johnson of [*Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships*](#) (Cleis Press, September 2015, ISBN: 978-1-627-78147-3, \$15.95, www.michaelsandjohnson.com). “We are in the midst of a new sexual revolution, and the

assumptions we hold about relationships are falling, one by one.”

“A decade ago, it was almost inconceivable that marriage equality would be the law of the land and that most Americans would support it,” adds Johnson. “It also would have been hard to imagine that *Time* would feature a transgender television star on its cover and call the trans movement ‘America’s next civil rights frontier.’ Well, a similar shift is taking place in cultural attitudes toward alternative relationship styles.”

Consider that a recent Gallup poll showed that the percentage of people who think “polygamy” is not morally objectionable increased from 7 to 16 between 2001 and 2015. Michaels and Johnson, who are nationally known sex educators as well as a nonexclusive happily married couple, see this trend as deeply empowering.

“Shifting social attitudes free people up to develop partnerships based on their own sexualities, understandings, and agreements,” says Michaels. “In a ‘designer relationship,’ you are the designer, along with your partner or partners, and it’s up to you to create a relationship that works and to redesign it when and if appropriate.”

The forms of open relating being explored in 21st-century America are almost entirely unrelated to polygyny as practiced in patriarchal societies such as Islam or the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Thus, the authors suspect the Gallup poll results would have been even more favorable if a less loaded term—consensual non-monogamy, open relationship, or polyamory—had been used.

Designer Relationships looks at the practical, political, and emotional aspects of non-monogamy in all its diverse forms. Open relationships work best when decisions are made mutually, consciously, and deliberately. Michaels and Johnson explain exactly how readers can create positive relationships that will work for them. Here are a few insights from their book:

Designer relationships take many different forms (including monogamy, if it’s consciously chosen). The term “designer relationship” is inclusive. It may encompass people who bond emotionally but not sexually; couples who consciously choose to be monogamous; people who agree to be nonexclusive; single people who have occasional lovers or friends with benefits; multiple partner configurations where long-term bonds exist among all or some; partnerships in which certain kinky activities take place outside the primary relationship.

The authors want to be clear: They are not anti-monogamy at all. They are simply against accepting monogamy merely by cultural default.

“People (and we have done this ourselves) often enter into monogamous relationships without

defining it for themselves as individuals or as a couple,” says Johnson. “This lack of clear understandings often leads to dissatisfaction, both emotional and sexual, with various forms of cheating as an upshot. We invite you to move beyond the binary thinking that deems monogamy and various forms of consensual non-monogamy to be irreconcilable opposites.”

Monogamy was not the dominant model until very recently in human history. Even after the development of agriculture, human societies have evidenced a vast array of sexual and social arrangements, few of which have treated lifelong sexual exclusivity between two people as the ideal. In the Western world, monogamy became the rule only during the early Common Era.

Jews practiced polygamy until at least 1000 CE in Europe and for considerably longer in other parts of the world. Christianity did not fully reject it until the early modern period, and some African Catholics have supported it in recent years. During the Reformation, Martin Luther granted exemptions allowing for polygyny (one man and multiple wives). Certain Protestant sects, including the Anabaptists, openly practiced polygyny during the 16th century, and while it’s disputed, some Protestant elders in Germany may have accepted polygyny involving up to 10 wives as late as 1650.

“Understanding monogamy’s place in human history can be helpful for many people who worry that veering from it is somehow unnatural or anti-religious,” notes Johnson.

Non-monogamy is NOT the same as cheating. Designer relationships are based on egalitarianism and mutuality, not on proprietary thinking. From this perspective, if people decide they will have multiple partners, the approach is the antithesis of cheating. In the conventionally monogamous model, each party owns the other (a modern variation on the more antiquated view of woman as property). In designer relationships, each party voluntarily owes the other transparency, some measure of emotional loyalty, and a determination to abide by agreements.

“We do not condone cheating,” says Michaels. “Strong relationships are built on honesty and trust. This does not mean sharing every detail of one’s sexual encounters with one’s other partners. It does mean transparency and openness around the guidelines both parties agree to—truthfulness always tempered with kindness.”

Despite popular belief, non-monogamous relationships don’t harm children. The authors suspect there are many potential advantages to non-monogamous relationship structures—psychological, emotional, and what some would define as spiritual. In many cases, there are educational and economic advantages as well. In a multi-parent household, both intellectual and financial resources can be pooled to benefit all involved. On an individual level, while all relationships present challenges, designer relationships provide an array of opportunities for growth and self-discovery that are not available to people who are reflexively living the cultural norm.

“In light of the fact that childrearing was a communal activity for most of human history, there’s reason to think that polyamorous arrangements might provide children with a more stable and nurturing environment than the nuclear family, since they become part of an expanded, emotionally intimate social network, and the burdens of childcare may be more widely

distributed,” says Johnson. “There can be no doubt that parents’ emotional and relationship satisfaction has an impact on child development and well-being.

“As our book notes, there appears to be a correlation between consensual non-monogamy and higher levels of relationship satisfaction, so it’s not unreasonable to infer that many children from non-monogamous homes would feel more secure than their counterparts from monogamous ones,” she continues. “While we’re not arguing that non-monogamy is necessarily superior, it may be so; at worst, there is no evidence that it’s in any way inferior to the monogamous nuclear family structure.”

The things that make designer relationships work also make traditional marriages stronger. Michaels and Johnson insist there’s no single structural paradigm that’s intrinsically superior. What works for some people will be disastrous for others. However, there are certain skills and attitudes that are valuable to develop regardless of your personal preferences. This means approaching your relationship with awareness and intention; it means being conscious; it means recognizing relationships as processes in which we dedicate and rededicate ourselves to one another. Monogamous couples can and should embrace these principles as well.

“Relationships are not static—they are not one-time commitments that we can expect to last a lifetime,” says Michaels. “Yet if people can mutually recognize and agree that relationships require ongoing care and attention in order to flourish, they are more likely to remain together, and happily so. While this requires flexibility, equanimity, and active engagement (rather than commitment), these are skills that can be developed.”

And then there’s the “adventure” factor that characterizes non-monogamous relationships. Yes, adventuring in a variety of forms—from exploring a titillating kink to mountain climbing to parasailing—can benefit the monogamous married couple as well.

“Studies show relationships in which the partners have shared adventures of any kind together seem to be richer, more enduring, and satisfying than relationships in which adventure plays little or no role,” says Johnson. “Adventuring strengthens and deepens bonds and provides a reservoir of common experience that can feed the relationship for years in the form of memory. This is also why people have more sex when on vacation—the change of scenery and departure from the everyday provide an erotic boost.”

It is possible to “open” your current relationship. So can you—and more to the point, should you—expand the sexual boundaries of your current monogamous relationship? Well, it depends. While almost every couple can benefit from becoming more sexually adventurous (even if it’s just sharing previously secret fantasies with your partner), not everyone will want to go so far as to interact with new people. If you think you might want to open your relationship, the authors urge you to start small and see where it leads.

“A first step might be social nudity,” suggests Michaels. “This is a fairly non-threatening way to start shedding your inhibitions, as sexual activity is almost universally frowned upon in nudist resorts and actually illegal on public beaches. And once you’re comfortable with that, you might take a couples sensual massage class or a sexuality workshop. Later on, if you’re so inclined, you

might visit a swing club and just observe.

“Choose carefully, based on your comfort level,” he adds. “Err on the side of the milder when you’re starting out, since pushing too far could produce emotional backlash and regret.”

One thing’s for sure: Whether you’re ready for non-monogamy or not, a strong, healthy relationship can only benefit from ever-so- gingerly pushing the edges of your sexual comfort zone. Relationships either grow or stagnate, and it’s always best to go for growth.

“Deliberately exploring and expanding your sexuality together will place you in situations that are optimal for growth,” says Johnson. “When this is done well and intelligently, it can strengthen your partnership and build deeper, more enduring trust, especially since trust is not only built but also earned.”

###

About the Authors:

Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson are the authors of the new book [*Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships*](#) (Cleis Press, September 2015). A devoted married couple, they have been creative collaborators—teaching and writing about relationships, sexuality, and Tantra—since 1999. In addition to *Designer Relationships*, they have written *Partners in Passion* (Cleis Press), *Great Sex Made Simple*, *Tantra for Erotic Empowerment*, and *The Essence of Tantric Sexuality* (Llewellyn). They are also the creators of the COVR Award-winning meditation CD set *Ananda Nidra: Blissful Sleep*.

Internationally known as experts in sexuality, Michaels and Johnson have taught throughout the United States, as well as in Canada, Europe, and Australia. They have been featured on television and radio and widely quoted in numerous publications. They are cofounders of the Pleasure Salon, a monthly gathering in New York City that brings together sex-positive people and pleasure activists from a variety of communities.

Michaels is a graduate of New York University School of Law and holds master’s degrees in American Studies from NYU and Yale. Formerly a playwright and translator, he has translated, adapted, and cowritten various works for the stage. Johnson is a retired professional operatic soprano who toured extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and South America. She currently works in turtle conservation; she is certified in reptile monitoring by the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation and is a New York state-licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

About the Book:

[*Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships*](#) (Cleis Press, September 2015, ISBN: 978-1-627-78147-3, \$15.95, www.michaelsandjohnson.com) will be available in September 2015 at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers.