



Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 54

“2021 Most Downloaded! What Open Relationships Can Teach Everyone”

December 23, 2021

What kind of relationships do you want to make? Our most downloaded episode of 2021 is a real conversation for ALL relational styles: ethical nonmonogamists discuss relationship structures, communication skills, trust, jealousy, and the work of getting to know ourselves. Plus Karen’s Sermon on the Pubic Mound on sexual abundance.

Host: Karen Yates

Guests: Gabrielle Smith, Maile, Cooper S. Beckett

[music up]

Gabrielle Smith

I think one thing people who are in monogamous relationships can take from ethical nonmonogamists is that you can make your own relationship the way you want to make it. And I think a lot of people have these ideas, and are told that relationships are supposed to be a certain way.

Maile

Nonmonogamy brought me back to a sense of self, because I had to really evaluate what's important to me as an individual — not to me as a wife, not to me as a mother, but what's important to, and what's going to make me feel fulfilled.

Cooper Beckett

Everyone is obsessed with the idea, "Oh, I need this person." We don't need this person, and need is a difficult emotion. Choice is a wonderful thing, because you're actually deciding, "I'm going to put in the effort to be in this person's life."

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation or relationship style, based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week, I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity. You'll

hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates. Today, our panel talks about ethical nonmonogamy, and the big "ahas" that anybody can use to make their relationships better. Keep listening.

Hey folks! Welcome to the end of year episodes. The end of 2021 is in sight. Do you feel cheerier now than you did at the beginning of the year? You don't have to answer that.

I was really surprised that this episode turned out to be the most downloaded of 2021 - not because I didn't think it was a fantastic conversation - I did! In fact it was one of my personal favorite panel conversations of the year, and I guess you thought so too!! Everyone on the panel did an amazing job - thought-provoking, incisive information brought to us through this conversation - So without further ado: on to the episode!

Nonmonogamy and open relationships. It's in the air. We're definitely in a zeitgeist, as more and more folks have stopped dismissing the idea of seeing more than one person at once. People are questioning monogamy, or at least the constructs of monogamy that they have been adhering to most of their lives. Roles, assumptions, cultural standards, one person "till death do us part," what we truly believe about the relationships we have, and what we ultimately reject. What we want for ourselves, and what we don't want. Now, as I point out in this panel discussion, this is not about saying that nonmonogamy is better than monogamy. Certainly, more people than not will never try an open relationship. The conversation today is about what our nonmonogamous panel learned about relationships and how to make them better after they became non monogamous. And when I say nonmonogamous, I am referring to ethical nonmonogamy, or ENM in the short form, where both partners in a relationship are up front and aware of the nonmonogamy —[aside] How many times can you say nonmonogamy??— whether or not both people practice it. Some forms of ENM include swinging, being "monogamish," a phrase coined by Dan Savage, and polyamory. You can be ethically nonmonogamous whether or not you're even in a relationship at all, which is considered solo polyamory. Got it? [laughs]

So today, we'll be talking to Gabrielle Smith, sex and relationship writer and ethical non monogamy advocate; Maile, Director of Product at #open, the dating app for ethically nonmonogamous people and their partners; and author and raconteur Cooper S. Beckett. Enjoy.

[to interviewees]

Well, folks, thank you so much for being here today. And I'd like to go round and welcome each of you. Gabrielle Smith. Welcome.

Gabrielle Smith
Hi!

Karen Yates
Maile, welcome.

Maile
Hello. Nice to be here.

Karen Yates
I'm happy you're here. And Cooper Beckett. Welcome.

Cooper Beckett
Hello, hello.

Karen Yates
So, I wanted to have each of you talk briefly about where you are right now with ethical nonmonogamy in your life. What does it look like? And Gabrielle, why don't we start with you?

Gabrielle Smith
Okay. Well, I've been ethically nonmonogamous pretty much for as long as I've been dating. When I was 18, in my first relationship, we opened it up. And now that I'm 25, it's been eight years. And right now I identify as, like, solo poly in the non-hierarchical sphere. I have one partner who is married, and things are going well.

Karen Yates
Awesome. Maile, what's your experience right now?

Maile
So, I am with a nesting partner, my husband. We opened up our marriage just about two years ago. Definitely been exploring. I consider myself polyamorous at this point. I do have a partner outside of my nesting partner, and I'm dating as much as I'm able to in the corona times.

Karen Yates
Cooper?

Cooper Beckett

Been ethically nonmonogamous for 12 years now. I started out as a swinger, but I'm more striding the line between swinging and poly. I'm not doing a lot of anything during the time of Coronavirus, but I do live with my primary partner and she and I have a girlfriend. And we're about to be celebrating a fifth anniversary, and we're really hoping we can actually get together for that.

Karen Yates

Awesome, congratulations. So today, we're going to be talking about what you all have learned from being ethically nonmonogamous. And what wisdom can you offer people who are in monogamous relationships? So basically, it's like, what has being ethically nonmonogamous taught you about relationships in general? And has it fundamentally changed the way you actually have relationships with lovers, and intimates, and partners, and all of the people that you're involved with? So Maile, you are the person who's been ethically nonmonogamous the shortest amount of time. What has come to you, as you and your husband opened up your relationship?

Maile

Well, I know, the cliché is that it has broadened and strengthened our communication. I think that's what everybody says. You know, I know we're going to talk a little bit more about jealousy, and some of the emotions that come up with non monogamy, but it really has kind of made it so we have to really talk about those emotions as they come up — the good, the bad. And in that way, just seeing each other, kind of understanding each other and how we handle our emotions. We're very different in the way that we process. And learning to respect that in how we interact with other partners has been — it's still a learning experience for us. I would say we're still, like you said, we're pretty new to this. And we're still figuring out as we go, what that looks like for us.

Karen Yates

Yeah, so communication. Gabrielle, what do you have to say about communication and being ethically nonmonogamous?

Gabrielle Smith

Yeah, I would echo that. Communication is something I think a lot of people don't really have emotional intelligence regarding. People don't know how to just even be like, "Hey, I didn't like that." And you really have to communicate things to death when

you're ethically nonmonogamous. And you also have to figure out worst-case scenario before you get there. So you have to also be pre-emptive. Like, okay, what if you go on a date with somebody else and I get jealous, and I don't want to do this anymore? Where do we go? So I think that teaches you a lot.

Karen Yates

Cooper, I heard you agree.

Cooper Beckett

The funny thing about communication is, we don't have to, in a lot of monogamous relationships. Because without complexity, and without exploration, there's no real need to communicate desires on a regular basis. You can survive by going through the motions. And that is in no way to disparage monogamy, of course. But given the ability to communicate, given the practice, to communicate before things become the argument that they would in a lot of situations — because if you don't communicate early, then it all comes out in a blowup, usually. So nonmonogamy teaches us to say, "Okay, I felt this little thing, I don't expect you to do anything about it, but I felt this, and I needed to mark this moment with both of us so we can talk about it." You know, ethical nonmonogamy throws you in the deep end of communication, and forces you to learn how to do it. Because if you don't, you're not gonna make it.

Karen Yates

Okay, so, I love where this is going, because what I'm hearing is, there are aspects of monogamy — you know, you're with someone, boom, you're done. It's almost like it's a fait accompli, right? You know, you don't have to do anything. Once you're starting to move into a more long-term relationship, there's an assumption that, oh, I've got this person in my life now, I can coast. Now, whether you're married, or living with someone, or moving into more of the committed — seeing someone three days a week, or four days a week, there is this assumption that we don't have to engage at a deeper level, or that everything's gonna work out somehow magically. Poof, you know, we wave the magic wand and everything's fine. Let's dig into that a little bit, about what is that asleep-at-the-wheel kind of thing? What's going on there, and how does nonmonogamy really change all of that?

Gabrielle Smith

I think what Cooper said reminded me of one of the most important things that I try to emphasize. When you pursue ethical nonmonogamy, you return to your sense of self. So you break that kind of coupledness. And in that, it gives you a sense of self responsibility to regulate your own emotions. So, if you're feeling jealous, that's not just

something your partner is doing. It's something you have to figure out within yourself. Whereas, I think in monogamous relationships, we often focus on, like, why is this happening? Like it's a group project, when oftentimes, it's you and the group. Like, it's all those facets of communication,

Karen Yates

Right? It's sort of like in monogamy, it can become like an echo chamber. Where it's the other partner's issue, and I am not at fault, it's that person's issue.

Maile

Yeah. I think to build on that, that's something that I've experienced is being able to regulate my own emotions rather than, like you said, putting it on my partner. You have to be able to communicate what you're feeling, rather than use those passive-aggressive ways of trying to signal to your partner that, hey, I'm uncomfortable with the way this is going. But I think that a lot of people don't get to that point where they feel like they can communicate that clearly. Or maybe they have truly never been taught the skills. And like Cooper said, you have to really build those skills to enter this lifestyle.

Karen Yates

Part of it is, you know, this sort of "all or nothing" thing that happens when you are in a monogamous relationship, that it's either, "If I state a desire or a need, and you reject me, this relationship will be over." Where, I think with polyamory or ethical nonmonogamy, it does allow you to see, "Oh, wow, there's other choices." And it's not to say, make the partner you're dealing with less — it's not that they're inconsequential. It's just suddenly you don't realize it's deprivational.

Cooper Beckett

The thing about ethical nonmonogamy is, in its crassest form, is outsourcing emotion.

Karen Yates

What do you mean by that?

Cooper Beckett

We have this unhealthy idea that one person can, emotionally and physically, take us for everything we need. It's this obsession that our culture has, it's obsession that the world culture has. But it's really unfair to expect 100% emotional compatibility with another human, because we are far more complex than that. And what I found is great about ethical nonmonogamy is the ability to have these emotional connections for

different levels of different importance with different people. Because you don't always need to have that "all or nothing," as you were saying. If one of my partners is overwhelmed with work, they don't need to hear about how stressed out I am about something else, because they've already got their shit going on. So, hey, I'm going to talk to this other partner over here who has the emotional bandwidth for me, or I'm going to do the same for them.

Karen Yates
Right.

Gabrielle Smith

Well, I think people who are in monogamous relationships, it's kind of set up for them. Like, this is how your relationship is supposed to go. And we could talk about the relationship escalator on this, if we want to, but—

Karen Yates

Yeah, why don't you take a moment to talk about the relationship escalator, because I think it's important.

Gabrielle Smith

Okay. Yeah. The relationship escalator is the idea that relationships should go a certain way. So it's like, you meet, you go on a date, you become sexually and emotionally exclusive, you get married, you have kids, you combine bank accounts and property. And the relationship escalator doesn't allow descending, it just goes up. So I think ethically nonmonogamous relationships are a lot more malleable. And we learn that because we have to create these relationships. I think one thing people who are in monogamous relationships can take from ethical nonmonogamists is that you can make your own relationship the way you want to make it. And I think a lot of people have these ideas, and are told that relationships are supposed to be a certain way. And that really hinders their ability to perform as a good partner.

Karen Yates

Yeah, it's really interesting. In the past month, I read online an article where someone and their nesting partner decided to have separate bedrooms. And then I was talking to someone recently about how she and her partner had separate apartments — that they had been nesting, I think, and then they had gotten into separate apartments. And this all flies in the face of, you know, monogamous relationships. But I think you are absolutely correct. Like, we do have the ability to create any kind of relationship that

we want if we're monogamous. But there's so many messages that it needs to look a certain way, you know?

Maile

Yeah, I think that idea of the relationship escalator is so prevalent, and it teaches us that we are linear people, and we're supposed to, like, hit these milestones, and that's supposed to be what we are all achieving. And it assumes everybody is on that path. And being able to break free from that and say, "No, I'm an individual who's changing and growing, and my relationships reflect that." I'm somebody who was married with two kids by the age of 25, and really felt that pressure as a young mom to say, "Okay, I'm a young mom, and this is what I'm supposed to do over the next couple years." You know, I'm supposed to now as a young single mom, find a husband, and then, you know, have another kid, and then get the house. And by the time I was 27, 28, I'm like, well, what's next for me? And you kind of lose your sense of self. Like we were saying, nonmonogamy brought me back to that sense of self, because I had to really evaluate what's important to me as an individual — not to me as a wife, not to me as a mother, but what's important to me, and what's gonna make me feel fulfilled now that I'm not just trying to get to these milestones, that I feel like I'm supposed to be getting to.

Karen Yates

Right. It's the labels. The labels are crushing sometimes, that get placed on us.

Cooper Beckett

I have a thought on the escalator. One of the major things we don't talk about in monogamy is that the ostensible end of the escalator is death. Because that's the only relationship that worked, is the one where one of you dies at the end. Because any relationship that ends otherwise, we have this idea that it's a failure. And nonmonogamy has also taught me to embrace impermanence in relationships, and accept the value that the relationships have brought to us. I have a lot of people who have come through my life in this time, and I look at the value of each and every one of those relationships. Whereas in monogamy, we're sort of taught that every relationship that didn't result in, let's be honest, death, is a failure. And we should feel bad about these relationship failures. And, as someone who's been divorced, as someone who's been in a lot of relationships that have ended, it's so good to be able to embrace the value, and embrace what those relationships have brought, to me and to the person I was in the relationship with.

Karen Yates

Wow, I'm so glad you brought that up. Because, you know, I got divorced five or six years ago, and the idea of existential dread came up for me, because no one does talk about this idea that monogamy is sort of a salve for the fact we're all gonna die. And if we have this great one relationship, it's somehow going to make everything worth it. And it's going to make the sting of death less intense. But actually, that's complete bullshit. We're all going to die. And if a relationship doesn't work out, then what do you have? Well, you still have the fact you're gonna die. Oh, I know, it sounds really serious. But I think a lot of times this is at the heart of it. And yeah, for me, ethical nonmonogamy has granted me a sort of allowance, or a detachment in the best sort of way — of like, wow, there is, as Gabrielle talked about, agency. I have agency with myself, and my own connection to self, or what I recognize as the divine, and that transmutes or transcends the relationship. I'm not looking to another person to try to fill that void, if you will.

Gabrielle Smith

Yeah.

Cooper Beckett

Yeah, it does give us a lot of reason to invest time in ourselves. And that can be seen as selfish in a monogamous relationship, when we focus on our own growth, versus the growth of the couple. But that's what allows for stagnancy. You know, when I was married, and ostensibly normal, monogamous, heterosexual, I thought I was done growing. I thought, "This is who I am for the rest of my life." And now, 12 years later, I'm a completely different person than I was then. And I'm a much better person. And that's not to say nonmonogamy is better, but growth is always better than stagnancy.

Gabrielle Smith

Yeah. I just think the importance of seeking yourself, and reclaiming that self, especially if you've been in a relationship for a long time, is what allows us to rejoin the collective. Because you learn more what you have to offer. In seeking yourself and preserving yourself, you can offer more to others. So it's this weird thing wherein — it's not weird. It's actually just taking care of yourself. Because if we're not taking care of ourselves in a way that is attached to capitalist value, how will we survive?

Karen Yates

Snap, snap, snap!

Cooper Beckett
[laughter]

Gabrielle Smith

But I say that because, in taking care of yourself, you can take care of others. And I think that's what I learn a lot here. And just to touch on the relationship escalator, I've been learning a lot more about the family structure. Because I think when you start pursuing ethical nonmonogamy, you start breaking down the ideas of relationships, and families, and living circumstances, which is, I think, valuable for everyone to do, because we see how intrinsically capitalist and colonialist our relationships actually are. And it goes back to the 1940s, where, like, the idea of the nuclear family — it's not real.

Karen Yates
Right? Yeah, yeah.

Gabrielle Smith

It was created so women who were working in factories could go back home, so men after World War Two could get their jobs back. And like, it was to sell the suburbs, and to create this structure where white cis men still had all this power, and there was a so-called order. But the nuclear family before the 1940s, 1950s wasn't real. Everybody lived with their extended family.

Karen Yates

Of course, of course. And then when you add the car in, as the suburbs also, you know, all these super highways, and things that have demolished us all. Side note! Side note away from ethically nonmonogamous subjects. Yeah, Maile?

Maile

I think, going back to what Gabrielle was saying, about once you have a better sense of yourself, it's easier to give to other people. And I think that's absolutely so true. It's like, if you're gonna get out there and start dating other people, you really have to understand, like, what are you looking for? What's going to fulfill you? Why are you pursuing this relationship? And that's what's going to make, as you're finding partners, what kind of really makes it feel like you're getting that experience, like Cooper said, of having other people who you can have for support systems, that you really want to surround yourself with. And you can't really do that unless you have a really strong sense of yourself.

Karen Yates

[to audience] You'll hear more from our panelists in a moment. Well, the Wild & Sublime coffee mugs have just shipped out to the folks who belong to our monthly Afterglow membership program on Patreon. Those at the \$45 a month and above levels will be sipping their favorite hot beverage from a mug graced with our snazzy logo of Apolline, the black cat goddess of sexy knowledge. At the \$45 a month level, you get the beautiful cup and a personal shout-out on the show, and all the benefits of the \$5 and \$10 a month levels — namely, bonus panel episodes every month, and the ability to hear your questions answered, watching our panel live on Zoom, plus bonus content, discounts, fun posts, and other neat things. You know, the neat things! But more than that, you are helping the message of sex positivity zip around the world. You heard the intro: this pod and show is about helping people become more free in their sexual expressions. This is not chips and salsa. This is the guac! So consider signing up as an Afterglow member on Patreon, or making a one-time contribution. Thank you. And now, back to our panel discussion.

[to panelists] Getting back to what Gabrielle was saying about extended families, you know, there is, in some ethically nonmonogamous circles, especially like polyamory, there are these kind of extended networks of people — there's community. There's a lot of community, because if you know your partner's partner — also known as the metamour — if you know the metamours and you like them, then everyone starts socializing together, and it starts forming a supportive web, which of course is wildly different than the monogamous model. I mean, not wildly different — there is extended family, obviously, in monogamy, but it's very community driven. And Cooper, I know you have a pretty extensive community. Do you want to talk about that?

Cooper Beckett

The thing we are all afraid of in hetero, monogamous society, is having our true selves exposed. So we're always putting on airs when we interact with other people. Our true selves, our true desires, our interests. Like, you can't compliment a friend's wife being sexy in monogamy. That's not cool. You may not be invited to the next potluck if you do so. The nice thing about non monogamy is it strips away the weird sexual tension that our entire world has, that sort of bubbles on the surface of everything, because we're all acknowledging that the main fundamental system is broken. And that system is the one that tells us that we should only be attracted and love one person forever. And at that point, if we're attracted to anyone else, that means we don't love them as much. If we're not jealous of them, we don't love them as much. So you're stripping off this toxicity that is [intrinsic] to monogamy. And once you get rid of that, you can start to have real conversations with people, because you're not afraid of what they might

think of you if you admit curiosities, interests, because that's what we all are. The reason people aren't having a BDSM relationship in monogamy is, they're afraid of what their partner will say if they say, "I'm interested in this." It's because we don't trust those people that we're supposed to be in this wonderful relationship with to actually judge us fairly and respectfully.

Karen Yates

To reiterate, it's not necessarily that being in a committed, monogamous relationship is bad.

Cooper Beckett

Oh, no.

Karen Yates

Because most people choose to do that. It's simply that there are so many constructs around monogamy currently, that don't allow us to be our true selves. I love that you just spoke to that.

Cooper Beckett

Karen, I want to take up one thing you said there. "A lot of people choose to do that." That's the problem — most people who are monogamous don't choose to do it. They just do it.

Karen Yates

They don't see that there's a choice, more to the point.

Cooper Beckett

Yeah. Because that's what they've been shown. And the most valuable thing in the world is being shown that you can build whatever kind of relationship you want, as long as everybody on board is consenting to it. And so, choosing monogamy is a beautiful thing. But so many people don't. I didn't choose monogamy. I just didn't know there was another option.

Karen Yates

Right. It's interesting — I just had a guest on a panel a while ago who said yeah, that she and her partner have just chosen monogamy, and it's been an amazing thing, after being nonmonogamous for so long. And you know, she's doing it very consciously. Let's talk a little bit — because Cooper, the things you were saying that were making me think about incompatibility in a monogamous relationship. And I mean, one thing

that ethical nonmonogamy can do — say, if a partner has much different sexual desires or preferences — ethical non monogamy can answer that, because you would have more than one partner to fulfill, perhaps — like, let's say you are kinky, you could go down that road with one partner and not another. What do you all have to say for people in monogamous relationships who may have a type of incompatibility with their partner? What do you do? And I guess I'm going to frontload it by saying, I'm thinking about the fact that we think of intimacy and sex as the same. And there's a whole spectrum of choices.

Gabrielle Smith

Well, I think, like you said, we think of intimacy and sex as the same thing. Whereas like, I have deeply intimate friendships, friendships that have like, threatened monogamous relationships I've been in the past, where people are like, "What?" And I feel like intimacy is like, kind of, for lack of a better, less kitschy way to say it, it's like when your heart touches someone else's, or something? Or when you feel that sense of kindred-ness, or closeness. I think that's what intimacy is, and I don't think it's tied to sex. And we can get that from other people still. But in terms of incompatibility, I think, yeah, we know, our partners can't give us everything. And we can always meet in the middle, and talk about compromises or ways we can find that out if we're in a monogamous situation. If maybe my partner isn't into impact play, what are ways we can simulate that same feeling, or what that gives someone, without maybe the physical impact? Right? Like, there are ways to find the connection toward what people are asking. And then sometimes there isn't, and we have to accept that.

Maile

Yeah. In terms of incompatibilities, I know, when I was monogamous with my husband, that we're very different. Like we are, you know, a case of "opposites attract" in a lot of ways. And that, for me, built a lot of resentment, because I had a higher sex drive than him, and me wanting to be more sexual and not having outlets to do that built some resentment. And then outside of the bedroom, I'm much more social, I'm an extrovert, I like to be out and about doing things, and he's much more of an introvert that wants to be home. And again, that would breed resentment between us, because he didn't want to go out, I didn't want to stay home, and it leaves you kind of being like, when you don't have other partners, or you don't have outlets for that, it makes you kind of like, "I wish my partner was more like this. I wish my partner had these qualities." And since becoming nonmonogamous, I can actually look at my husband and say, "Oh, I really respect those differences now." I respect that, because there are some ways they really benefit our relationship. It's helpful that he likes to stay home sometimes, and wants to do those things at home, versus I enjoy having outlets. And now that he is

okay with me having those, and he really gives me the space to do that, that makes me respect him so much more. To be like, we're respecting each other as individuals, and that feels really good for our relationship.

Karen Yates

Right. So what I hear you say, especially for people in monogamous relationships, who aren't necessarily going to open up, is simply, number one, appreciating what your partner has to give to you. But also understanding that that partner — again, as we've said multiple times — cannot fulfill every single desire that we have. And it's our responsibility, basically, to find our own fulfillment.

Let's go back. You know, whenever I do talk to folks about ethical nonmonogamy to people who are monogamous, the first thing they say is, "I could never do that. Jealousy! The jealousy." And I'm always interested that the first thing they say is, "I could never do that." Like, as if "I've thought about it, this is the conclusion I've come to: I could never do this, because I'd be jealous." And we've talked a little bit about looking at self. Let's open up jealousy and introspection. Let's open up the jealousy journey. Cooper, why don't we start with you?

Cooper Beckett

Jealousy is the funniest emotion in the world. And funny, not "Ha-ha," obviously. You know, I used to be very afraid of jealousy. Especially in monogamy, because we're trained that jealousy means love. I started to realize that jealousy is like the "check engine" light on your car. Sometimes, it means the engine is literally about to fall out of your car. Other times — most of the time — it means you didn't tighten the gas cap enough. So if every time the check engine light comes on, you panic as though the engine is about to fall out of your car, you will have a very stressful time with your automobile. And if, every time the jealousy light comes on, you panic as though your relationship is about to implode, you will have a very rough time. So instead, it literally is an indicator light for you to check why you're feeling this. This has taken me a long time. But I've learned that when I feel jealous, usually it means that I have not put myself in a situation where I feel fulfilled. But it rarely is about what my partners are doing. It's usually about me. So like, I feel jealous at a party, because my partner is off having sex with someone and I'm standing in the corner. It's like, well, where's the fault there? It's not my partner's fault that she's enjoying herself. It's my fault that I'm not doing anything to further my own enjoyment. So, instead of seeing jealousy as a high-tier emotion, if you take it to, "it's just an indicator," then you can process it so much easier. And then you add in envy versus jealousy. And envy is "I wish I was doing that, too." Jealousy is, "I wish they weren't doing that." Most of our jealousy is actually

envy. And that, we can do something about. You know, we can go and do that thing also. It's about completely reframing it. And unfortunately, there's no real education in monogamy on how to do that. There is no compersion in monogamy. While there should be.

Karen Yates

Yeah. Explain compersion.

Cooper Beckett

Compersion is often called the opposite of jealousy. Compersion is taking pleasure in seeing someone else have pleasure. So if my partner is enjoying themselves, I am happy that they are enjoying themselves, rather than I'm angry that I am not enjoying myself. And the thing about conversion is, even in nonmonogamy, we tend to confine it to sexuality. But you break it down to regular monogamy, rather than being angry that my partner got to go to a movie last night that I wanted to see, and really enjoyed it, I should be happy that they really enjoyed going to see a movie. That is compersion at its basest form. And that is the most difficult and the most valuable muscle to exercise that I have learned from ethical nonmonogamy.

Karen Yates

For sure. Gabrielle, I see a lot of head-nodding.

Gabrielle Smith

So, I see jealousy in a similar way. I say jealousy isn't real: jealousy is a mixture of different emotions. Either you're feeling maybe insecure within yourself or your relationship, or you're feeling possessive, like, that person is mine and they shouldn't be doing that. So once you can unpack whether it's one of those three things, you learn so much more about why you're feeling this way. Like, oh my God, my current boyfriend, he used to date this beautiful woman, and she was just so well connected, and this and that, and I was like, why am I feeling all these icky feelings? And it was just because I felt like I wasn't where I wanted to be in life. And the closer I got to be where I wanted to in life, and where I wanted to be in that relationship, the less I felt those feelings. So it's really about fortifying yourself, 90% of the time. And then if you're feeling possessive, that's just really something you have to work on. Because we don't own people.

Karen Yates

Yeah, yeah. And so often, really, when it comes down to jealousy, if you examine yourself, it's simply like, just a handful of issues that continually you're cycling through.

And they're actually very specific. And I know for myself, I'm like, oh, okay, there it is. Okay, there's that. I see it, okay, check! Oh, right, this is my profile pattern. These are my triggers. I own them. I understand them. Yeah. And Cooper, I totally get what you're saying — both of you, actually — because as I find my life more fulfilling, as I fulfill myself more, it does come up less. It does come up less.

Maile

Going back to the idea of people who are in monogamy just saying, I can never do that, you know, too much jealousy, I think it's so easy for us to think about the worst-case scenario. And sometimes it's good, like Gabrielle was saying, sometimes we do need to think about that. But it's also good to sometimes think about, what's the best-case scenario? How could this really add to my life? And like, first thing, we don't think of the compensation piece of it. We think, "Oh, my God, that would cause so much jealousy for me!" But like, what about the other side, of "Wow, it might really be hot for me to see my partner with somebody else, maybe that's something that I would really enjoy." And that's not something that most people let themselves go down that path, because they are so afraid of jealousy. Jealousy is this emotion that, for most people, is this scary thing to deal with. So rather than dealing with it, we just kind of push those things away and say it's easier just to not deal with them, or not think about them.

Gabrielle Smith

I think the important thing about jealousy is getting past that gut reaction, where people don't really want to process their feelings. And, okay, you have this really negative reaction. If you do, and you're feeling bad, you need to let it play out. And then think about it and analyze it. I think that's where a lot of people stop. They're just like, this hurts, and I don't like it, so I'm just gonna stop. We should handle everything.

Maile

I had a mentor who said, you know, you sometimes have to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Karen Yates

That's my mantra.

Maile

Exactly. So like, sit with those uncomfortable emotions. And like Gabrielle said, you have to unpack them and really figure out where they're coming from. And then once you can get through that, it really is like this "aha" moment, of "Okay, now I know how to deal with the jealousy, so it doesn't feel so scary when it comes up."

Karen Yates

Yeah, I think there's a real fear that we're going to actually be destroyed by that emotion. Because it's a visceral emotion. We all know, it's very visceral, it feels like our guts are usually churning, our heart is squeezed, we have usually a physiological reaction, our breathing starts increasing. I mean, it can be very, very intense. But once again, to Gabrielle's point about like, we owe it to ourselves to actually, instead of just saying, "Eh, I don't want to deal with this," we owe it to ourselves to excavate this. Because, I don't know about all of you, but as I continue in ethical nonmonogamy, my journey with jealousy continues to evolve. It's not static. It's not where it was six years ago. It's much different now. And I think I'm a better person because of it. I feel way more calm.

Cooper Beckett

The fear thing that you mentioned, the "I could never do that," is a fear that allowing ourselves to be in a situation that gives risk could decimate this perfect relationship we have. So we sort of often look at monogamy as like, Saran-Wrap around your relationship. It's going to keep your monogamy in. It's going to keep your love in. And the moment you reach out and put yourself in the potential of finding someone else, or falling in love with someone else, you've decimated the relationship. But the secret is, anyone could leave at any time. Any one of our partners could leave, and there's nothing we can do about that, short of being the best person we can. And every morning when we wake up, we choose to remain in the relationships we are in. And that's a powerful thing, that choice. You know, everyone is obsessed with the idea, oh, I need this person. We don't need this person. And need is a difficult emotion. Choice is a wonderful thing, because you're actually deciding, I'm going to put in the effort to be in this person's life. And you do that daily. And you roll the dice, because that's what we're all doing. Like you said, Karen, we're all gonna die, whether we're in a monogamous relationship or nonmonogamous — we all have the same destination! So therefore, we are rolling the dice.

Karen Yates

Right. And I wanted to talk a little bit about the difference between commitment and exclusivity. And why I bring that up is, whether we're in a nonmonogamous or a monogamous relationship, we're committing every day to being in a relationship. There's a regard that we are giving to another person, or more than one person, every day. And I think a lot of times — back to your idea of Saran-Wrap, which I think is a great metaphor — we think that exclusivity is like Saran-Wrap, or Tupperware, or something. Exclusivity keeps it fresh, or it's going to keep it, I don't know, permanent.

Cooper Beckett

Because you're not letting your partner do anything that could lead to them leaving. It's desperate holding-on. Your partner could meet someone at work. They could meet someone at the grocery store. They could meet an old friend on Facebook. It's not actually helping your relationship. It's a desperate clinging to an ideal.

Karen Yates

Right. And really the antidote is simply deep trust. And the resilience in knowledge, or the trust that the relationship, monogamous or nonmonogamous, is resilient.

Gabrielle Smith

I think, in terms of commitment and exclusivity, if we're talking about especially things folks who are monogamous can learn from people who are ethically nonmonogamous is, commitment to me — it's not exclusive to exclusivity. It's that you and I are agreeing to continue this at this level until we no longer agree to. I have one partner. I have another partner who, we met during the pandemic, and we have decided our commitment to each other is just to show up, but that we can't commit to that sense of obligation that comes with a full-fledged relationship. And that's where I think the difference is, where you have to consider someone and kind of integrate them into your life. I think that's what commitment is to me. One of the things I wish more monogamous couples did was understand the terms of their relationships before they get into it.

Cooper Beckett

Or have them.

Gabrielle Smith

Yeah. Or what you can and can't give. A lot of people ask me, "How do I pursue, or how do I convince my partner to pursue ethical nonmonogamy?" Yes, I don't love the word "convince." And I always tell them, well, what are the bounds of your relationship right now? Because a lot of people don't understand where that cheating line is. Whether it's emotional, or like, oh, maybe you can still go out and flirt with others. Understanding the bounds of your relationship is going to help you understand what you can and can't do, first of all, and then what you already offer your partner, and agree to give them.

Karen Yates

And what I also heard you say is, being able to negotiate when relationships shift. Because one thing people are aware of in polyamory or ethical nonmonogamy is, a lot of times a relationship will be intense, and then it will stop being, or it will become more like friends with benefits, or it'll become more friendship-based rather than sexually based. Relationships are way more fluid when you're engaged in ethical nonmonogamy. But there's also a lot of times a communication that can go along with that. And the idea you just brought up of like, monogamous couples communicating that, is a very juicy idea. And not many people do that with each other.

Gabrielle Smith

Yeah, it's so important to just know what you are agreeing to. Some people go into a relationship thinking, "I'm gonna marry this person." And then the other person is thinking, "Ah, you know, we'll see." And that's not fair. Just to figure it out, like, what do you want? A lot of people are just like, "Oh, I guess we've been sleeping together for three months, we should do this..."

Karen Yates

Yeah, one person may think, oh, this is my go to partner for everything. We're gonna go to football games together, and we're gonna go to this together, and we're going to do — and the other person's like, well, you know, I'll probably engage with you once a week on a social activity, I plan to be continuing this in my life... And that stuff really needs to be discussed, I think, pretty heavily.

Gabrielle Smith

I honestly think most couples really need to, for lack of a gentler way to say it, get a life outside of each other. Because most people, the longer they are in relationships, they don't have these friend groups, maybe they used to have or rely on, before that relationship. So you're doing all your hobbies with one person, and that's putting a lot of stress on everything.

Karen Yates

Yeah, for sure.

Maile

Yeah, even the idea of having multiple friends outside. I think so many people look at relationships having to be — I think I just heard somebody refer to as like, this zero-sum game, where it's like, you have so much love to give. You have to like [inaudible] in your partner. Versus the idea of love as a renewable resource. I think it's

easy for us to think as a parent, you can have multiple children, and you may have different relationships with every kid, but it doesn't take away from your love for the others. And it can be similar with nonmonogamy. It doesn't change my commitment to my husband because I have commitments with other people. It doesn't take away from that commitment. Actually, we've had to really negotiate — like you're saying, Gabrielle, you really have to negotiate, what are the terms of those relationships? What do I want to get out of my relationship with this partner? How is this other partner fulfilling me? And really kind of look at it from that perspective, so that it's not this idea of "Oh, I only have to have one partner, because how can I have that much love?" It's, like we said, a renewable resource. I love thinking about it that way.

Karen Yates

Yeah. What I'm hearing you all say is, it's really about being awake at the wheel of relationship. And so as we conclude this discussion, I would love to hear each one of you — if you could tell a monogamous person one piece of advice about living relationships more fully, what would you say?

Gabrielle Smith

I think I would say, a relationship is one aspect of your life. It's not the whole encompassing thing of your life. You have a job, you should have hobbies, maybe you have pets, maybe you have children, and your family, and that should create a fuller life for you. It's not just your relationship. I think we get stuck in that trap a lot. And that's where people really suffer.

Karen Yates

That's great.

Cooper Beckett

Man, the most important thing is exploration of self. And, you know, it goes along with what Gabrielle was saying about having hobbies, having things outside your partner. And that exploration of self can sometimes lead to, you know, scary things. And so, committing with your partner to being able to talk about anything — talk about fears, talk about growth, and changing — that's incredibly, incredibly valuable. And we are not done when we are monogamous. So, just waking up to the idea that you have more growth in your life is really exciting, and scary, and valuable, and all of the things.

Karen Yates

Nice.

Maile

I would say, going back to choice, I think it's so important, whether you choose to be monogamous or non monogamous, really understand the choices that you're making. And you know, if you choose to be monogamous, that's great. But if you're doing it because you feel pressured, and that's just what you're going along with, because you feel like you have to be on this relationship escalator, really start to think about that, and examine it, because you do have choices. And when we feel like we're empowered to make the choices that make us feel good, that, like Gabrielle said, leads to a fuller life. And you're going to feel like you're more in control. And that feels good.

Karen Yates

Thanks for all of the wisdom. What a great discussion today. Thank you, Cooper Beckett. Thank you Maile. Thank you Gabrielle Smith. I appreciate you being on.

For more info on Gabrielle Smith, Cooper Beckett and Maile, go to our show notes. Wild & Sublime is also sponsored in part by our Sublime Supporter, Chicago-based Full Color Life Therapy, therapy for all of you, at fullcolorlifetherapy.com. If you would like to be a Sublime Supporter, showcasing you and your business and supporting us at the same time, contact us at info at wildandsublime.com. And now it's time for my Sermon on the Pubic Mound®.

I thought it would be cool to read the passage from what is considered to be a classic book of ethical nonmonogamy, called "The Ethical Slut," by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy. This comes near the end, in a section called "Our Favorite Sex Fantasy: Abundance."

[reading] "We want everyone to be free to express love in every possible way. We want to create a world where everyone has plenty of what they need: of community, of connection, of touch, and sex and love. We want our children to be raised in an expanded family, a connected village within urban alienation, where there are enough adults who love them and each other, so there's plenty of love and attention and nurturance, more than enough to go around. We want a world where the sick and aging are cared for by people who love them, where resources are shared by people who care about each other. We dream of a world where no one is driven by desires they have no hope of fulfilling. Where no one suffers from shame for their desires, or embarrassment about their dreams, where no one is starving from lack of sex. We dream of a world where no one is limited by rules that dictate that they must be less of a person, and less of a sexual person, than they have the capacity to be. We dream of a world where nobody gets to vote on your life choices, or who you choose to love, or

how you choose to express that love, except yourself and your lovers. We dream of a time and a place where we will all be free to publicly declare our love for whoever we love, however, we love them. And may we all look forward to a lifetime of dreams come true."

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