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Yes, we'll take that

Polyamory: What would you say if your partner had feelings for someone else as well as you? We meet polyamorous lovers as they prepare for their largest London gathering **BY HELEN CROYDON**



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You may think Matt Bobbu, 23, is a lucky guy. He's been with his girlfriend, Katy, for two years. With her consent, he also has a long-distance boyfriend, Mike. Mike is engaged to a girl who is dating one of Katy's friends. Meanwhile, Bobbu's flatmate is dating a girl who's dating Katy.

Confused? Well there are triads, quads, open networks, secondary partners and pansexual love affairs to consider too. This is the menu of relationships open if you don't believe in restricting romantic feelings to one person. Bobbu and his coterie of lovers will be gathering for Polyday this Saturday, at Dragon Hall near Holborn, London. It's a gathering with workshops, talks and social activities for anyone who follows, or is interested in, the romantic web of polyamory.

'The idea of monogamy has always been weird for me,' says Bobbu (pictured). 'Why can I only love one person and not others? Yet I can have a favourite book and still love other books?'

It sounds like a great way of getting lots of sex, doesn't it? A commitment-phobe's paradise. Imagine – I could have John for his conversation, Paul for his lothario bedroom acrobatics and Steve for his sensitive side... but apparently it isn't like that. Polyamory is about respectful and trusting relationships. Friends With Benefits it isn't.

Maxine Green, 29, is this year's organiser. 'People think of us as commitment-phobes,' she says, 'but there are many serious relationships going on. We're more like commitment-addicts.'

Green has one serious partner, one semi-serious and a few occasional lovers. 'It's not that I get one thing from one person and something else from another and therefore I feel complete,' she says. 'All of them are whole relationships.'

Polyamorous affairs take many forms. They can be closed or open, depending on whether the individuals keep amorous attention within a particular circle. Some distinguish between primary and secondary partners (the primary being a committed long-term partner). If it's three-way love, it's a triad. A more balanced four-way union is a quad. Some inflict gender-specific boundaries on partners, others set numeric ones.

Bobbu doesn't have any rules, which makes him, by definition, a relationship anarchist. 'I don't think polyamory would suit everyone,' he says. 'It takes emotional maturity to be polyamorous. The key to any relationship is communication.'

Alex Winson, 24, a software developer, has a 'primary' girlfriend of one year, plus a casual arrangement with a girl he sees monthly. 'Love is one of the few unlimited resources,' he says. 'I see no reason to ration it or deny it to people. I take both relationships seriously.'

But what about jealousy? Our competitive human nature thrives off feeling special, doesn't it? 'Of course I experience jealousy,' admits Winson. 'But it is always symptomatic of something. No one wakes up feeling jealous. You have to work out why you feel it. The majority of problems that creep up are because you date too many people and don't make time for each other.'

Bobbu is giving a talk at the event on Saturday in connection with his own



campaign group, Polytical, which is working to raise awareness of polyamory to counsellors and health professionals.

It's not all about serious talks. Other workshops include Poly Parenting and Speed Friending for those looking to network. For newcomers or the curious, there is an introductory workshop, Poly 101, explaining what polyamory is and where you can meet like-minded people.

The aim of the Polyday is for those interested in polyamory to meet and for the organisers to attract new people to their community. Green hopes to quash polyamory's bohemian image. 'There are poly people from all walks – solicitors, bankers etc – but when it comes to "coming out", it tends to be people from creative professions like artists.'

The day signs off with a bring-your-own-bottle party. But if you're thinking what I was thinking – free love and trails of underwear – Green puts that straight. 'People hear non-monogamy and think of people swinging from chandeliers,' she says. 'In fact, a polyamorous group are more likely to be sitting down and having a cup of tea.'