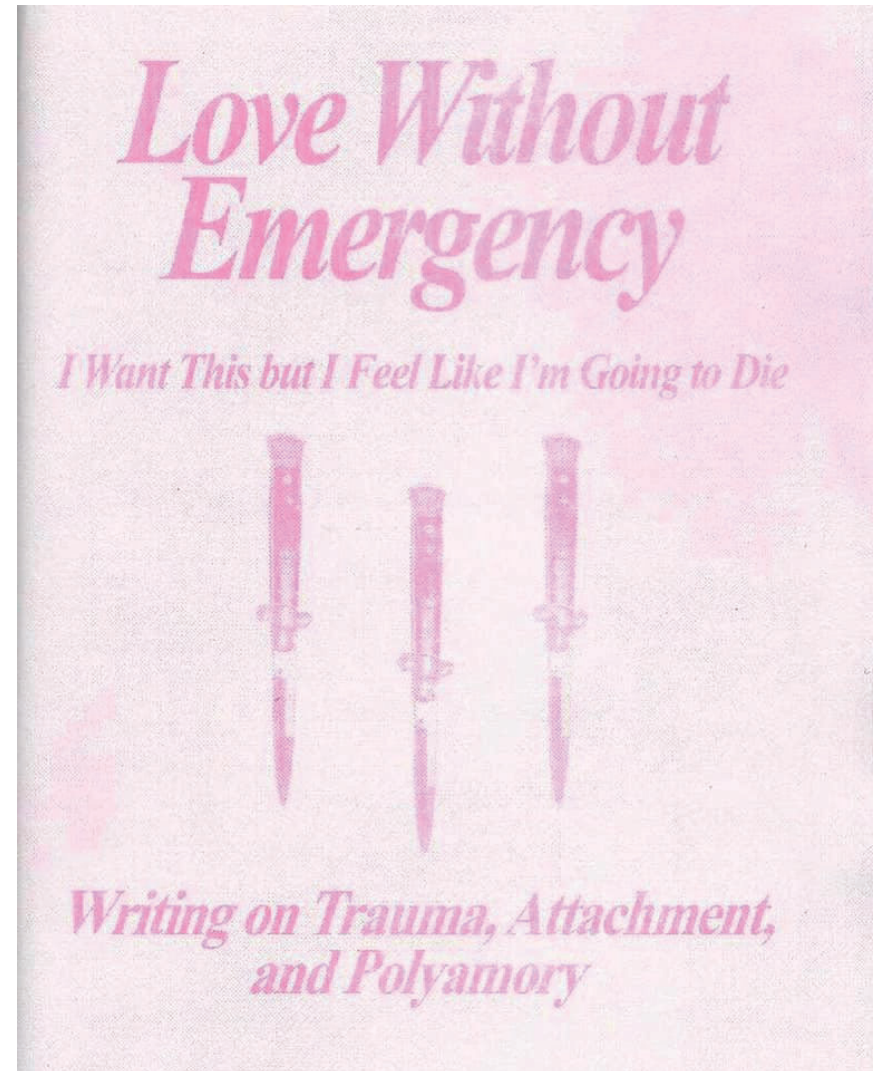


About the Writer

Clementine Morrigan is a writer, poet, rebel scholar, teacher, and working witch. She writes the zine *Fucking Magic*. They are the author of three books: *You Can't Own the Fucking Stars* (2018), *The Size of a Bird* (2017), and *Rupture* (2012). Her writing has appeared in *GUTS Magazine*, *Shameless Magazine*, *Prose & Lore*, *Soliloquies*, *Somatechnics*, *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, and *Knots*. They design and facilitate workshops on a number of topics, including the popular workshop *Trauma Informed Polyamory*. She provides trauma informed, queer and trans affirming tarot reading services under the name *ReEnchantment Tarot*. They are the creator of two short films, *City Witch* (2016) and *Resurrection* (2013). She writes, creates, teaches, and works magic engaging with trauma, sexuality, desire, love, healing, and relationships. All of their work aims to obliterate shame, cultivate compassion, and encourage enchantment. She is a white settler of Irish, Scottish, and English ancestry living in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal. They are a sober alcoholic and a practitioner of trauma magic. To stay in touch visit clementinemorrigan.com, become a patron at patreon.com/clementinemorrigan, or follow her on instagram [@clementinemorrigan](https://www.instagram.com/clementinemorrigan).



Love Without Emergency

I Want This but I Feel Like I'm Going to Die

Writing on Trauma, Attachment, and Polyamory

Clementine Morrigan

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my partner Jay for moving through all of this with me, for loving me well, for reading about attachment theory and trauma, for believing in me.

To my chosen family benni, Kelsey, Kelsey, Mack, Jordyn, and HollyJo, for teaching me that real love and real home are possible.

To all the people who have come to my workshops or written to me, sharing your own struggles and stories and successes and pains and joys. I have learned so much from you.

Special thank you to benni for the cover design.

Resources

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving by Pete Walker
Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies by Renee Linklater

Healing Sex: A Mind-Body Approach to Healing Sexual Trauma by Staci Haines

Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love by Sue Johnson

Insecure in Love: How Anxious Attachment Can Make You Feel Jealous, Needy, and Worried and What You Can Do About It by Leslie Becker-Phelps

The Jealousy Workbook: Exercises and Insights for Managing Open Relationships by Kathy Labriola

Content Warning

This writing covers a number of topics which may be triggering, upsetting, or disturbing. Some of these include: trauma, childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and physical, sexual, and emotional violence.

List of Essays

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I don't think there is enough written about the pleasure of learning real deep safe love. Especially for survivors. Especially for queers. Especially for polyamorous people. We know all about excitement. We know all about danger. We know all about fighting for the recognition that the ways we love are legitimate. Queer love, polyamorous love, love between addicts and traumatized people, this is real love. But we don't have a lot of space to talk about the staggering beauty of learning to feel safe. We don't have a lot of possibility models for longterm deep safe regulated nervous system love.

Learning attachment theory and polyvagal theory has helped me so so much in my journey of learning to love and be loved the way I deserve. I want everyone to have access to that information, which is why I do the teaching that I do. I lie in bed with my partner in the morning after a night of our bodies entangled in the sheets. I tell them I'm teaching another workshop tonight and we talk about that. I make us our morning coffees and we talk about our days.

they don't usually like to be touched when they are triggered. I am triggered too and part of me is dissociating and floating away. Another part of me is here. Another part of me understands what has happened, the way I got triggered and started living in the past in my body. There is a part of me who recognizes my partner, who remember my nervous system, who knows what's going on.

My partner and I talk. We talk about what we are feeling in our triggered bodies. They ask me to come closer, to touch them, and I do. This act of trust de-activates me completely. I understand that my partner feels safe with me, even in this threat to safety, even in this sympathetic nervous system situation, there is a part of them that recognizes me, that asks me to come close. We lie together, touching each other, trusting each other, remembering each other. Each time we are able to do this we move further into the present. The past has less control.

There is such pleasure in love. Real, trust worthy love. Love where I don't have to be perfect. Love where I my grey hair and my messy room and anything I'm feeling insecure about is not a threat to my extreme worthiness. Love where I am known, and known, deeper and deeper as time unfolds. And I am still loved. Love where we change, we each become more of ourselves, and we are still loved.

I love feeling safe and loved. Omfg I love it. I can't even explain the pleasure of safety, the way my very bones sing with it. Learning to move through conflict with my partner, learning to move through my nervous system and return to my window of tolerance, finding myself in safety breathing against my partner's breathing body: there is nothing more beautiful than this. Real love. Safe love. Recognition. Remembering who I am, who my partner is, where we are, what year it is.

Introduction

I have been on again off again polyamorous since I was a teenager. I also live with complex ptsd and I'm a sober alcoholic. When I got sober and developed my first serious partnership in sobriety we started off the relationship intentionally polyamorous. Much to my surprise I found myself spiralling into debilitating c-ptsd symptoms. Even though I deeply wanted to be polyamorous, I found that I felt terrified, hypervigilant, desperate, helpless, angry, and that feeling which literature on polyamory so often invokes, 'jealous'. I was having severe suicidal ideation, nightmares, and panic attacks. I was unable to regulate my moods and my relationship was suffering. I was ashamed of myself for being so bad at polyamory. I poured shame and contempt all over a situation that really needed my compassion. I was in deep crisis and my partner and I made the decision to temporarily close our relationship so that I could get a hold of myself.

I did a ton of soul searching, lots of therapy, and read everything I could get my hands on. Over and over I discovered that resources on polyamory felt way too simplistic, rarely if ever mentioned trauma, and often had a slight judgemental tone. So, I started to write the things I needed to read. I wrote a few articles which I posted on the blog I had at the time. The articles were called: *Jealousy is a Teacher if I Will Let it Be*, *Can Crazy People be Polyamorous: On Polyamory and Madness*, *The Cuteness Matrix // Jealousy, Polyamory, Femininity*, and *Love is a Limited Resource: On Trauma and Queer Utopias*. These articles blew up on the internet. They were the most popular articles on my blog. Much to my surprise, my most secret, shameful feelings, my feelings about failing at polyamory, about being unable to align my emotions with what I wanted, about feeling 'jealous' and crazy and out of control,

these feelings were resonating with lots and lots of people. Saying these things out loud was like a dam breaking.

I went to Halifax to do an artist residency. While there I went into Venus Envy, a bookstore/sex store in Halifax, and the people working had read my articles on polyamory. They asked me to do a workshop at the store. It was crazy to me that I was being asked to teach a workshop on polyamory when I had clearly failed at polyamory. But, apparently I was saying things that people needed to hear and opening up much needed conversations. I agreed and designed a workshop called *Complicating Polyamory*. The workshop sold out and was a success and I was still baffled that anything I had to say on the topic was helpful. People needed space to talk about how hard polyamory could be, how crazy they felt, how ashamed they were of how crazy they felt, and how much they still wanted and hoped they would be able to be polyamory.

Fast forward a few years. The relationship I was in ended because it wasn't a healthy relationship. When I was ready to start dating again I decided that I wanted to be polyamorous and started dating from an intentionally polyamorous place. I had a few more years of therapy under my belt, I had done a ton of reading and soul searching, and I was ready to try. I still have complex ptsd. I still have a lot more difficulty managing my emotions and navigating relationships than many people. I'm still pretty fucking crazy. I still experience distress sometimes that makes me feel like I'm going to die. I am also successfully and happily polyamorous.

I practice a type of non-hierarchical polyamory in which everyone is free to develop multiple serious, committed, loving partnerships. I am partnered to someone who is also partnered to someone else and I am

Nervous System Love

From *Fucking Magic* #9.

I am in the bath, my body lying against my partner's body. The hot water enveloping us. My partner holds open the science book we are reading together. They read to me about molten magma in the earth's centre. They read to me about the earth's magnetic field. Their voice is familiar and soothing. We are slippery and wet and warm. Our nervous systems are in sync. We are regulated. Our bodies, alive. Hearts beating. Breath moving.

I have spent most of my life in the electric danger of the sympathetic nervous system. I always thought love meant those cataclysmic surges of adrenaline, that racing heart panic. Even now, two years into a safe and secure relationship, I need to practice the work of regulation. I need to remember and remember again how to feel safe.

There is nothing more frightening than finding danger where I expect safety. There is nothing more frightening than misrecognizing my partner, seeing in them not the person that they are but the terror of my past. Every time these misrecognitions happen, every time some miscommunication or conflict activates my sympathetic nervous system, I have to find a way to come back. I have to realign with the present moment, with my body here and now, with my partner's body, with the person my partner is. I have to find the courage to return to safety, to trust the safety that is here.

After a conflict that sent both of us out of our windows of tolerance I lay next to my partner on their bed. I'm not touching them because I know

How can I build and develop skills for responsible communication?
What helps me to feel safe during conflict or distressing conversations?
What helps my partners and metamours feel safe?

How can I practice, encourage, and develop interdependence? Does anything shift inside me when I think of my metamours as ‘on the same team’ rather than as competition?

friends with my metamour (a metamour is the partner or date of your partner or date). I’m also dating and have had a number of other relationships along the way. I’m open to another serious partnership when I meet the right person. I love the network of intimate relationships that polyamory makes possible. Both my partner and I are pretty slutty, and I navigate polyamory from a trauma informed perspective.

When I was doing my book tour recently I went back to Halifax and Venus Envy asked me to do another workshop. I designed the *Trauma Informed Polyamory: Building Safety and Security* workshop. It sold out and I have since facilitated it many times in different cities to sold out groups. I have received a ton of positive feedback and really learned how needed these conversations are. I have been asked many times for resources on the topic and there just isn’t much out there. I created this zine as way to disseminate some of this information and pull together my writing on the topic in one place.

I spend a lot of time working on my own healing, reading about trauma and attachment theory, talking about these things with lots of people, grappling with my pain, regulating my nervous system, and now, writing and teaching on these topics. I’m not an expert. I’m a traumatized anxiously attached polyamorous person who has come a long way in learning to regulate my emotions and develop loving, secure relationships. I offer this writing as part of my own process, in the hopes that it will be helpful in yours.

‘Jealousy’ does not do justice to the extreme embodied distress that people can feel when they are traumatized and/or attachment injured and trying to navigate polyamory. Trauma and attachment injuries are embodied experiences, not simply cognitive ones, and they require and

deserve a compassionate response. Normalizing the fact that this shit is hard and can be really painful goes a long way in creating the space we need for healing. In my workshops just being in a room full of people talking honestly about this stuff without the judgemental or shaming tone that can be present in polyamorous literature is so powerful.

Wherever you are in your own journey, I offer my compassion, and these words I wrote along the way.

their windows of tolerance? Can they ask to pause communication when they are moving out of theirs?

What is my attachment style? How does this affect my experiences of distress in relationships? Do my partners know their attachment styles? Do my metamours? How might knowledge of this assist our communication?

What is my 4F response style? How does this affect my response to experiences of distress? Do my partners know their 4F response style? Do my metamours? How might knowledge of this assist our communication?

Can I identify when I am having an emotional flashback? Do I have strategies for care when I am in an emotional flashback?

What role does fear of abandonment play in my distress? What support do I need to address my abandonment trauma? What strategies for healing this are available to me?

What role does a sense of shame or humiliation play in my distress? What support do I need to address my shame? What strategies for healing this are available to me?

Can I cultivate compassion for myself? Can I ask for compassion from others? Can I cultivate compassion for others?

What grounding or mindfulness practices work for me? Am I aware of strategies that don't focus on the body or the breath if I find those too stressful?

Questions to Consider

From the *Trauma Informed Polyamory* workshop.

These questions are designed to spark reflection, dialogue with yourself and within your relationships, and to encourage further searching and researching. They can be divided up however you want. You might want to try answering a set of questions in your notebook each week. Take your time with them and be gentle with yourself.

Before opening up questions about your history and experiences of trauma, be sure you have a strong container for this work. Having a therapist is a great idea if you can access one. Crisis lines can also be supportive. You can check in to see if you have friends who can offer some support. You can read books and articles (including Pete Walker's 13 Steps for managing Emotional Flashbacks). Make sure you have resources available to you before diving into trauma work.

Where am I in my trauma recovery journey? How can I begin to access support for my trauma? How can I deepen or expand the support network I currently have? What is in my trauma toolbox?

Why am I polyamorous? Why do I choose polyamory? What excites me about polyamory? What makes the hard work of polyamory worth it for me? What do I desire about polyamory?

Am I aware of the warning signs when I am moving out of my window of tolerance? Am I willing to pause and take care of myself when I am moving out of this window? Can I ask to return to communication when I am back in the 'green zone'? Are my partners and metamours aware of

Jealousy is a Teacher, if I Will Let it Be

Being polyamorous, and a survivor of sexual violence, and a human being living in a world that consistently defines love as monogamy, and a femme living in a world that consistently defines my worth as my ability to be (the most) desirable, is difficult. I have to be honest and say that it is difficult. Yet, in my bones, it is what I want. I want to love and desire freely. I want my love to love and desire freely. And so I write this to explore this thing called jealousy.

Jealousy has wound me up, spun me around, sent me hunting for someone to blame, sent me down into the deep. Jealousy, that most ugly of emotions, is confusing because I know, I really do like who I am. I surrender to jealousy as teacher, I writhe under the pressure, I feel uncomfortable but I do not escape my jealousy by denying it, avoiding it or by trying to control their desire. I let it all be what it is. And I discover some things.

I am jealous of her desirability, yes, but I am jealous also of their desire. My desire is caught, like a word in my throat, like a bird in a cage, like a shoelace in a bikechain, it's bad news. My desire is a mangled mess, a language unspoken for so long its pronunciation feels strange on my tongue. My desire is a dead thing, a rotting corpse, a caged animal, a lost cause. I am so out of touch with my desire. And yes, I am jealous of her for inciting desire in them, but more than that, I am jealous of their ability to desire.

I have not allowed myself to be free. I have not allowed myself to spill over and explore and be curious and act. I have been ashamed of my desire. I have punished and hidden my desire. I have been terrified of my

desire. I have converted my desire into the tidy need to be desirable. An endless, never-quite-fulfilled occupation to make myself into the most lovable or fuckable thing. But deep down, below the surface, is my want, my want to want, my want to act, my want to desire.

I am writing this right now and I am not trying to make it make sense. I am following the twisting turns of emotions and letting it lead me. When I let go, when I open my heart and let the jealousy flood through me, I see that I am utterly whole on my own. I am afraid, yes. Afraid of being abandoned, of not being good enough, of being taken for granted and compared. I am resentful, yes, of every single person who seems to want, and lust and desire and crush so much more easily and freely than I do. I am resentful, yes, of every person whose introduction to sexuality was not child abuse. That is the truth.

I am afraid of not being seen, not being important, not measuring up. I am afraid of being left behind. I am afraid that what matters to me won't matter as much to you. I am afraid to own my own desire. I am afraid to admit what I want, to even know what I want. It touches on some deeply buried place of shame. As a child I learned that sex was inherently dangerous, invasive and out of control. And now, to desire feels dangerous, invasive and out of control.

I wish I could write this in a clear, chronological and organized way but I can't. I hope it makes sense. What I have learned is that I am whole. My fear is my own. My resentment is my own. My history is my own. My judgment is my own. My assumptions are my own. My jealousy is my own. My journey is my own. My desire is my own. What I have learned is that no other person holds the key to my happiness. No other

- Feeling your partner or date freely choosing you over and over again
- Finding your own ways to build and show each other commitment and security
- Knowing that your partner or date has their own freedom and autonomy and so do you
- Knowing that your partner or date has other people to take care of them when they are unwell and so do you
- Sharing responsibilities
- Building deep commitments and communities

Come up with your own answers, and take ones from this list that resonate with you. It's okay if you only have a few reasons or if you have many. The important thing is that you know what you love about polyamory to help counterbalance what is hard about it, and to remind you of your own desire and consent. There are reasons why we choose this and why we do all this hard work. Write down all the reasons the work is worth it for you.

- Networks of care, more people to depend on
- Autonomy, more freedom to choose your own life
- Never being expected to meet all of someone's romantic/sexual/emotional needs/desires
- Being able to have your own needs met by different people, not having to depend on only one person
- Opportunity to develop strong communication and relationship skills
- Friendships with metamours, shared vulnerability with metamours
- Being able to fall in love with someone else without sacrificing your current relationship
- Exploring sexual desires that a partner doesn't share
- Dating different types of people who you are compatible with in different ways
- Getting to know yourself in different contexts and in relationships with different people
- Prioritizing working on your healing and your growth
- Different types of relationships can happen simultaneously or the option is available, including play partners, friends who have sex, live in partners, partners who don't live together, long distance partners, dates, queer platonic relationships, etc.
- Creating chosen family
- The joy of watching people you date become friends with each other
- Intentionality in developing relationships
- Opportunities to be brave and lean into vulnerability
- Option for relationships to shift into different types of relationships without ending
- Honesty and transparency

person could ever love me enough to fix any of this. This is a journey I must take on my own.

I am laid bare by jealousy. I am brought face to face with my naked, shuddering, powerful humanity. I am brought face to face with my grief, my rage, my terror, my power and my desire. I let the clawing, twisting, aching happen. I watch my desire like a wolf with her leg in a trap. I watch her struggle and growl and eventually release herself. Injured, she limps off, but she is free.

Jealousy takes me to the place where I remember that despite my feminism and my queerness I am not exempt from a culture that treats femmes like objects. I have not escaped the social conditioning that my ultimate goal should be desirability. I have not walked away unaffected, unharmed. Jealousy renews my commitment to feminism, it reminds me why it is still necessary for me to actively unlearn my internalized misogyny. It reminds me that I must actively resist taking part in the objectification of other femmes, that I must actively resist a culture which encourages me to compete with other femmes for masculine attention.

My jealousy is rooted in trauma, child abuse, sexism, internalized-sexism, queerphobia, internalized-queerphobia and monogamy-centric scripts.

To witness them, my partner, desiring someone else is a spiritual experience, in the sense that it gives me a choice: grow or don't. I choose to grow. Jealousy is a teacher. And what a teacher. Just because I am uncomfortable, frightened, resentful, bitter and any other string of

emotions does not mean that I do not want my partner to be with others. When I look closer I find that these twisting feelings mean other things.

They mean: I want to desire freely and act on my desire. I am attracted to women and femmes and I want to act on that without feeling like a creep (this is my legacy of being victimized, of living in a culture that objectifies women/femmes and not wanting to be a part of that objectification). I want to relate to other femmes without competitiveness. I want to feel human and not feel like a sexual object. I want to feel special and important and loved by my beloved. I want to feel safe. I want to feel whole. I want to feel secure. I want to honour and heal the wounds of my past. I want to be honest. I want to be heard. I want to be comforted and reassured.

These things that I want are all within my grasp. Jealousy can teach me what I really want and give me the courage to seek it, work on it, ask for it. Pretending that I don't feel jealousy, that I am better than that, that I am beyond that, is a refusal to take a gift that is being offered to me. Denying my jealousy is shutting out powerful lessons that have the power to heal me. Jealousy is a teacher, if I will let it be.

Desiring Polyamory

From the *Trauma Informed Polyamory* Workshop.

Take some time to write and answer these questions. Afterwards you might want to ask friends, partners, and dates who are polyamorous what their answers are and see if those answers resonate for you?

Why am I polyamorous? Why do I choose polyamory? What excites me about polyamory? What makes the hard work of polyamory worth it for me? What do I desire about polyamory?

I start my workshop with these questions because it is important to centre our agency, our desire, our consent. When we have experienced trauma, anything that triggers us can feel as if it is something that is happening *to* us, something that is out of our control and a violation of our consent (even when it isn't). It can be hard to hold on to the reality of our own choice and desire when we are flooded with the feeling of being triggered. Therefore, it helps to get really deeply acquainted with that desire, to know it deeply and thoroughly. Writing down your answers and keeping them somewhere you can look at them regularly, especially when you're feeling triggered, can be really helpful. It can help remind you of why you are doing all the hard work of navigating emotions and relationships, why you choose this for yourself.

Some common answers that come up in the workshop are:

- Communities of interdependence
- Space to value friendship as just as important as romantic relationships

happy and to live my best life. Jordyn really shows me what lasting unconditional love looks like.

Jordyn recently got married to her monogamous partner. Her sister, who is also chosen family for me, is polyamorous and brought her three partners to the wedding. Afterwards I was telling her how meaningful it was for me as a polyamorous person to see her there with her three partners. She said to me “I love being in spaces that recognize different kinds of loving relationships, including queer platonic love like yours and Jordyn’s.” This was an unbelievably sweet and validating thing to say. She recognized that my role in Jordyn’s life held a place of importance like that of Jordyn’s partner. I believe that her polyamory is part of the reason why she was able to acknowledge and validate loves that fall outside of the sexual-romantic-monogamous couple framework.

Polyamory offers an opportunity to move away from scripts and build relationships that actually work for us. This means that we get to shape our commitments and relationships based on what we actually need and want, and that we don’t have to organize our lives around models that don’t actually serve us. Polyamory creates intentional space to honour love and commitment outside of the couple.

Can Crazy People Be Polyamorous? On Polyamory and Madness

My partner and I are polyamorous. We have been romantically and sexually involved with only each other for maybe seven months now. We started our romantic relationship polyamorous because it’s what we both wanted. We were both interested in dating multiple people. We both had some experience doing it, me more so than them.

I have been polyamorous on and off since I was a teenager. Often it has been a wonderful and rewarding thing for me. Ethically and spiritually it makes sense to me. I love the idea of loving freely. I love the idea of relationships based on freely given consent and honest communication, free from a sense of possession or ownership.

I am also a survivor of child abuse, sexual violence and intimate partner violence. I have complex ptsd. Before this relationship my experiences with polyamory were mostly dating multiple people but without serious feelings. In this relationship I have serious feelings. Also, most of my past experiences with polyamory happened before the abusive relationship I was in, which seriously fucked up my mental health.

To my surprise, despite my belief in and desire for polyamory, I experienced extreme, terrifying jealousy and fear of abandonment. I told myself not to worry about it too much. I immersed myself in polyamory literature, zines, books, message boards, anything I could get my hands on. I read about and practiced observing my fear and jealousy, sitting with it, exploring it. I read about and practiced good communication

skills, owning my own feelings without trying to control my partner's behaviour.

I believed I would get better at it as things got worse and worse. On top of my jealousy and fear was an intense feeling of shame. I was bad at polyamory. I was not doing it right. Despite all the work I was putting into it I was not able to sit with and observe my feelings. I was having panic attacks and thoughts of self injury and severe depression. Asking my partner to slow down on seeing other people felt wrong. Everything I read said that it was my responsibility to manage my own feelings without asking my partner not to do something they wanted to do.

I pretty much had a mental breakdown. I told my partner that I couldn't keep doing this. My partner was insistent that they wanted to do polyamory. I didn't think I could, as much as I wanted to be able to. I told them that my mental health was spiraling out of control. All my ptsd symptoms were extremely heightened: nightmares, dissociation, intrusive thoughts, panic, hyper-vigilance, depression, anxiety. The beliefs I had internalized during my abusive relationship, that I have to be perfect to deserve love, that I am inherently unworthy and flawed, were dominating my thoughts constantly. I was afraid of hurting myself or even relapsing (I'm a sober addict/alcoholic). My feelings were so out of control. I hated myself for it. Yet I had to admit, finally, that this was the reality of how I was feeling.

My partner agreed to take a break from polyamory. We didn't specify a time frame for this break. They talked to the other people they were seeing and told them what was going on. Fortunately, they were understanding. We took a break from polyamory and I took the time to work on my mental health.

Queer Platonic Love: Decentring the Couple

One of the things I love about polyamory is the opportunity to move away from couple-centric, relationship escalator models of relationships and to instead build relationships that feel right for the people involved, regardless of the shape those relationships take. It has the potential to create opportunities for a rich variety of relationships. For example, I don't live with my partner. I live with three really close friends who are family to me. Hetero monogamous scripts expect people to 'grow out of the roommate phase' and move in with a partner, and while there is nothing wrong with living with your partner, it is not the only possibility for building a loving home or a loving partnership.

My best friend Jordyn is my queer platonic life partner. We don't live in the same city anymore, but we continue to have a deep and committed friendship. Every time I visit Toronto we get together and catch up and it's a beautiful thing. We have that capacity to pick up right where we left off no matter how much time has passed.

Jordyn and I both have a lot of attachment trauma. We actually met on an okcupid date but we ended up becoming friends. Our friendship developed slowly and persistently, both of us making space for rescheduling, for introversion, for spoonie life and cross disability solidarity. Over the years we developed a really strong, deep bond, a first lasting secure attachment relationship for both of us. When I decided that I wanted to move cities Jordyn was my number one supporter. She cried but she also told me to go, she wanted me to be

Shame is an invitation to do inner child work, to do nervous system work, and to move with gentleness and compassion into the practice of unconditional self love. Love yourself through the shame. Let others love you through the shame. Attend to it with care. And remember, its ultimate purpose is to keep you safe. Keep showing yourself that you are safe, keep refusing to attack or abandon yourself, and shame will begin to transform.

Now, seven or so months later, I have checked in with my partner a lot about my process and about their feelings about going back to polyamory. I never expected the break to be this long but I am grateful for it. My partner says it's no rush and that I can take my time. They also recently told me that they still need time to work on their own stuff regarding polyamory and communication. This no pressure break has given me the time I need to reflect. I'm still not the perfect picture of mental health but I am no longer having a mental breakdown.

Now that I'm not in crisis, I've become aware of something. Every single resource I have found regarding polyamory assumes as a given that the people involved do not have mental health issues. The advice to sit with and observe emotions may work for people who do not have mood and personality disorders, but for someone like myself who has c-ptsd, it's not that simple. My emotions include symptoms like panic, hyper-vigilance, severe depression, nightmares, suicidal ideation, dissociation and other things which are not so easy to manage.

At this point, I am hopeful that polyamory will once again be a part of my life. Yet I also don't know exactly how that will work or what it will look like. What I do know is that the current picture of polyamory is ableist and leaves no space for polyamory people with mental health issues. What I do know is that I'm not a failure, or selfish, for having c-ptsd. What I do know is that I'm worthy of love and that I deserve a partner and a community who are willing to make time and space for my particular mental health needs.

I long for resources and discussion on polyamory that include mental health issues. I want to talk about how polyamory intersects with trauma and madness. I want to talk about c-ptsd panic attacks and jealousy,

hyper-vigilance and fear of abandonment, depression and your partner's other partners. I would like to imagine a polyamory that makes space for this, partners and metamours who make space for this, community that makes space for this. I want to imagine a polyamory that honours interdependence instead of the neoliberal idea that everyone is only responsible for themselves and their own feelings. I want to dismantle the idea that asking for what we need is shameful.

I also believe that by being honest about my own experience I may be able to start a dialogue. I invite conversation. I hope that we, as mad/crazy/survivor/disabled people, can support each other, listen to each other, bear witness to each other, share advice and stories. I also hope that sane/normative people can begin to understand that mental illness is not a personal failing and that managing the feelings polyamory brings up is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking. I want to imagine a polyamory that mad/crazy/survivor/disabled people can be included in.

become a secret belief that we hold in the centre of us, orienting us in the world.

Polyamory can be particularly activating if we are living with shame. This is because we live in a culture that tells us over and over that if our partners really loved us they would only want to be with us. Emotionally we can use our partners' love or desire for other people as evidence that we are not 'enough', and this message is emphasized by a culture that insists on monogamy as the only true form of love. On top of this, our shame can be compounded by a feeling of humiliation: not only am I 'not enough' for my partner, but everyone sees my partner loving and dating other people, so everyone knows I am not enough.

This is extremely painful stuff. It's deep. It's all wrapped up in our nervous systems and bodies and our earliest traumas. Even if we know we want polyamory, even if our adult selves know that our partners' other partners are not evidence of our own unworthiness, our traumatized selves may be flooded with shame.

Even worse, the fact that we are having these feelings can provoke even more shame: Not only am I 'not enough' for my partner, but I'm also a failure at polyamory! I should be experiencing compersion not jealousy! What is wrong with me!

Pouring more shame over distress is like pouring gasoline on a fire. If you notice yourself responding to polyamory with shame, humiliation, or other forms of distress the best thing you can do is pour as much compassion over this as you can muster. Be kind to yourself. These are deep wounds being activated and they are compounded by a culture that insists on a very limited imagining of what love can be.

On Polyamory and Shame

In my workshop *Trauma Informed Polyamory: Building Safety and Security* I explore different forms of distress that frequently get lumped under the heading 'jealousy'. I believe that 'jealousy' is an inadequate word to describe what is actually going on for distressed people in polyamorous relationships. Distress is about a lot of things, and a piece of it for some people is shame.

Shame is a deeply held, often secret belief that I am inherently flawed, that there is something deeply wrong with me, that if anyone really knew me they wouldn't love me. It's a belief that I am not enough, not worthy of love, always needing to hide this horrible truth down at the centre of me. Shame is *I am bad. There is something wrong with me.*

A lot of survivors of violence, especially prolonged experiences of violence, live with shame. Surprising as it may be, I actually understand shame as an attempt at control, an attempt at feeling safe. It works like this: if I am subjected to violence or neglect that is beyond my control, if I am powerless to access the safety and care I need, that is unbelievably terrifying and more than my nervous system can cope with. If I believe that the reason I am experiencing this abuse or neglect is because I'm bad, if it's my fault, if there's something wrong with me, then maybe I can fix it. If the problem is me maybe I can change, maybe I can find a way to become worthy of love and safety.

This strategy to avoid system overwhelm and to attempt to secure love and safety is a last resort in dangerous circumstances. But if we have lived with this shame can become embedded deep within us. It can

The Cuteness Matrix // Jealousy, Polyamory, Femininity

I've done a lot of thinking and praying and struggling and writing and reflecting and work on jealousy. I kind of just want to write jealousyjealousyjealousy all over everything, all over my face. I'm sick of pretending that I don't feel this or even that I'm some wise spiritual person who knows how to surrender to it and be transformed. Jealousy is one of my biggest issues. I've learned a lot from and about my jealousy but it still causes me a lot of pain.

Some context: my partner and I started our relationship polyamorous but have been seeing only each other for almost a year. We closed our relationship because I was having a mental breakdown from my jealousy. I have had a lot of shame about this and feeling like a failure at polyamoryor whatever. But a lot of my soul searching since closing the relationship led me to realize and then write about the ways my jealousy intersected with my c-ptsd. I wrote an article about polyamory and madness and the lack of resources within polyamory communities for people with mental health issues. The article took off and I got a ton of positive feedback. I realized I'm not alone and that jealousy, for people with mental health issues, is not always a simple matter.

Lately, another layer of my jealousy has become clear to me. This is about jealousy and misogyny. This is about my embodied experience as a femme (sometimes) woman who has been taught to believe that my worth and worthiness is tied directly to my desirability. This is about living in a culture that teaches me (and all of us) that feminine people are consumable and that we are in competition with each other.

I had this really amazing, healing, validating conversation recently with my friend Sabrina. We talked about the scarcity of decent dudes (for those of us who date/are into dudes/masculine folks), how there are so few guys who do not have serious issues with being misogynist and fucked up towards feminine people, and there is an overflowing abundance of cute, rad, bably, smart feminine people. And we, as feminine people, are expected to compete with each other for the attention of the few masc people who are decent. And then there's this pressure, that if we are less than perfect in any way, we can easily and readily be replaced. We called this phenomenon the 'cuteness matrix' in a half joking way. It was amazing to hear another person saying out loud the feelings I have had.

I don't feel like this phenomenon is specific only to those of us who are into masc people, but I feel like it's heightened there. Even those of us who have femme4femme leanings still live in a culture that imposes an objectifying and competitive climate onto feminine people. We are taught to regard each other with suspicion and fear, to perform our desirability the 'best', to have all the femme skills down from winged eyeliner to feminist politics to care work to acting like it all comes easily and naturally and we don't even notice that we're doing it. But we do notice that we're doing it and we do notice the femme skills of other femmes and instead of it just being a lovely and supportive femme4femme thing, it actually is far too often a stressful and terrifying thing about who is prettier and cuter and cooler and am I pretty, cute, cool enough?

I feel mildly embarrassed even writing these things. Because I feel like it's queer 101 that I should just love other femmes and never feel this level of insecurity and never buy into the masc-centric script that

anxious preoccupied freak out. Anxious preoccupied and avoidant people have very different attachment styles and reactions to feeling triggered, but underneath this is the same deep desire for security and safety in relationship. There is deep love there, and there are ways to get at those underlying feelings of love, vulnerability, and attachment needs without triggering another anxious-avoidant cycle.

So! If you are in an avoidant-anxious partnership, don't despair. Just get to work. Both of you. All of you. Learning the language of attachment theory, understanding each other's triggers, and communicating the true attachment needs underlying the conflict will go a long long way.

Good luck. Ily.

Third, one of the most fucked up mind blowing things I've ever heard came from Alan Robarge. I'm paraphrasing him, but basically he said that anxious preoccupied people are so caught up obsessing and worrying about our partners' availability or lack there of, and in that process, we are unable to be present to what is really going on. We are not being available!! So, it's not just the avoidant who is unavailable. We are unavailable in different ways.

Fourth, everybody has to do the work, but it helps a lot to know what the work is. Because anxious preoccupied are so, well, preoccupied with the relationship, it tends to be us who read a million books and stumble upon attachment theory. Once we have discovered this, it is helpful to share this knowledge with our avoidant partners (in a non-critical way). Having language and a framework for what is going on is so helpful! And yes, avoidants have work to do. A relationship won't work unless both people are doing the work, but it's totally possible for both avoidant and anxious preoccupied people to earn secure attachment. I highly recommend the book *Hold Me Tight* by Sue Johnson. Heads up that it's very hetero-monog normative and not perfect, but it offers a way of thinking about the anxious-avoidant dynamic that doesn't demonize either partner.

Fifth, and most important for the anxious preoccupied to hear, avoidants are not avoidant because they don't care! Avoidants are often avoidant because they care so much and their vulnerability scares them so they withdraw to cope! Learning this helped me so much. Avoidants actually often deal with a lot of fear of intimacy, of being hurt and they struggle with feelings of inadequacy and shame. They worry they are not enough for their partners and they feel triggered and overwhelmed by the

feminine people are in competition and easily replaceable and reducible to our ability to perform desirability. But the truth is that these messages are everywhere, they saturate the world around me, they are in porn and all over tumblr and in queer spaces and on the street and on instagram and at the local coffee shop and at the zine fair and everywhere. And I know that these messages have a lot to do with why I feel so jealous and I know that this culture causes me so much pain.

Another friend wrote me asking me about feelings of jealousy that are accompanied with anger and if I had any thoughts or advice on dealing with that. This is part of what I wrote in reply: "I find it helpful to note and validate the societal factors that contribute to my jealousy. Acknowledging that I live in a culture that pits me against other women / femmes, that defines my value through my desirability, helps to contextualize my anger. And honestly, this culture which treats women / femmes in this way is a reason to be angry. And it's not just like a personal thing to transcend and overcome but something that is beyond us that we deal with as best we can. I find that talking with my partner about this, once I have calmed down and done some work, helps. And especially I find it helpful to talk to other women / femmes who do polyamory and have a feminist analysis and can validate me and acknowledge the pain of living in such a culture."

The polyamory literature I have read does not address this shit at all. It does not address transmisogyny, racism, ableism and how these things affect the politics of desirability either. Mainstream polyamory lit just acts like we're all on the same playing field, that we have to 'own' our own feelings because they are ours alone. But actually, no. We are in community together. These power dynamics are not up to the individual to 'transcend' and get over. It is all of our responsibility to notice, name

and uproot these oppressive dynamics. It's up to masc people to own their privilege and notice the way they interact with feminine people and make space for the pain feminine people feel living in this culture. It's on all of us to complicate jealousy and polyamory and to acknowledge the complex factors that make our experiences of these things different.

Avoidants Aren't the Enemy

If you are anxious preoccupied like me and you've discovered attachment theory and realized that you are in a relationship with an avoidant you might be freaking out. A lot of the literature on attachment theory is really hard on avoidants and makes them seem doomed. Anxious preoccupieds are encouraged to leave the relationship and try to find a partner with a secure attachment style. If you are avoidant yourself and have decided to start looking into attachment theory you might be feeling pretty hopeless yourself. I want to share some perspective I've learned along the way.

I've dated a lot of avoidants. Surprise, surprise. Anxious preoccupieds tend to. And here are a few things I've learned. First, attachment style is on a spectrum, and it shifts and changes. I've dated people who are extremely avoidant and I've dated people who have mostly achieved earned secure attachment but who can shift into avoidant tendencies when triggered. It's also possible to have one attachment style in some relationships and another in other relationships. So, there is nuance here. There are shades of grey.

Second, both avoidants and anxious preoccupieds can behave in ways that are harmful. Anxious preoccupieds tend to be very focused on the ways we feel abandoned and harmed and it is harder for us to look at the way our own behaviour can be harmful. But it can be. And we are contributing to the avoidant-anxious dynamic as much as our avoidant partners are. So instead of framing it as good guys and bad guys, shifting to understanding that we are dealing with attachment injured people who cope in different ways is really really helpful.

love letter to you. For now I will say that avoidants aren't monsters (just like you're not a monster), and that their withdrawal is not a sign of lack of love. It is a protective mechanism. They respond to the vulnerability and terror of attachment needs by shutting down and withdrawing. They respond to the terrified attachment cries of their anxious preoccupied partner with intense shame at not being enough, and so they withdraw to protect themselves.

The best thing you can do is to learn about attachment theory, get a language for it, and then bring that language and understanding into your relationships. Avoidants also have a journey of attachment healing ahead of them, and you can't do that work for them, but you can share what you know.

In the meantime, dear sweet anxious preoccupieds, please work on not abandoning yourself. Please listen to your own attachment cries and respond with loving attention rather than shame and criticism. Be kind to yourself. Be gentle and generous. Read whatever you can on attachment theory and practice what you learn. Start finding ways to create a pause when you get triggered, work on grounding and soothing. Talk about attachment with the people in your life.

Be brave. I know you are brave. Take that deep capacity for love, take that strong drive and willingness to fight, and choose to love and fight for yourself. Decide that you are worth it, that you are going to heal. It's a practice and a process and it is work. But you've got this. Sweet, precious anxious preoccupieds, I believe in you so much.

Love is a Limited Resource: On Trauma and Queer Utopias

As a person who is queer and politicized and polyamorous (though currently with one partner) my newsfeeds on social media are frequently filled with statuses, tweets, posts and links which convey a particular message: Love is not a limited resource. Love should be easy and free. Jealousy and exclusivity are relics of an oppressive heterosexist capitalism. We can love, we should love, love is good and love will heal us.

There is implicit and sometimes explicit shaming of people who aren't polyamorous, who have failed at polyamory, people who are jealous, suspicious, closed hearted, people who do not love in abundance, who seem downright greedy and terrified and grasping for love. The internet announces over and over that love is everywhere, that when we are ready, it will arrive. There is no limit on love besides the limits we place on it.

But what if love really is a limited resource? I agree that it should not be. Clean water should not be a limited resource either, but it is. The reality is that what human beings need to survive and to thrive, whether it be water or love, are not freely available and accessible to all. Does it make me a capitalist to acknowledge this?

Those of us who grew up with child abuse and neglect know all too well that love can be a very limited resource. We know in our traumatized bodies, minds and hearts the desperate things we'll do to get a taste of

love. We know also that what passes for love often isn't, but we have become accustomed to taking what we can get.

The internet implores me to feel love and to feel loved, to allow it to flourish where ever it will. The queer, politicized and polyamorous communities I frequent cast suspicious glances at those of us who do not, or cannot, love so freely. If I am afraid of not being loved, if I hold on too tightly, if I am afraid to let go, I may as well be a hetero-capitalist. I am certainly not embodying the ideal of a queer utopia where love exists in abundance.

I read online today that love is a feeling. I have to disagree. I have to say that for me, learning that love is not a feeling was a hard earned lesson. As a child who was never given an example of real, safe love, I became an adult having no idea what love is. A culture that convinces me love is something I 'fall into', something that happens, something I *feel*, and my starving, deprived, hungry heart, make a dangerous combination. It has taken me so long to realize that the person who put his knee on my chest and wouldn't let me breathe, who oscillated between best friend and abuser, who blamed his rage and violence on his unbelievable love for me, did not love me.

I have to agree with bell hooks when she asserts that love is an action. I remember the tears that fell on the page when I read her words. She wrote "Without justice there can be no love." She wrote "Love and abuse cannot coexist." These words were utterly painful to read because they made me wonder if I had ever in my life been loved. But they were, at the same time, utterly freeing. They opened me up to the possibility of love.

up with complex ptsd. This means that love and intimacy are extremely activating for me. It means that my nervous system gets super hijacked, that I'm always on the look out for abandonment and betrayal, that I deeply and viscerally do not feel safe in love, even when I actually am safe.

There is a way out of this cycle. There is a way to find and rest in the feeling of safety. There is even a way to feel safe and secure in love if you practice relationship styles like polyamory and non-hierarchical polyamory. There are ways to calm the panic, to communicate about distress, to talk about attachment in your relationships. There are ways to earn secure attachment, as an unfolding process, as a deepening of intimacy with yourself and the people you love. There is a way to get control of and take responsibility for your behaviour, to meet your attachment needs without flying off the handle. It is possible. So breathe.

Be gentle with yourself. One thing I want to tell you, dear precious anxious preoccupieds, is that shame is not the answer. Hating yourself and beating yourself up for the things you regret, for the way you keep losing control, is like pouring gasoline on a fire. You need to find a way to love yourself and meet yourself where you are. It is from this loving and kind place that you can begin the work that will free you. Your love is powerful and brave, the depth and capacity of your feeling is a beautiful and good thing. You don't have to hate yourself for it. And you don't have to feel the way you've been feeling. Your deep capacity for love can transform from a source of panic to a source of strength.

If you love someone who is avoidant you will probably read a lot of distressing things about your relationship being doomed. Try not to panic about that. I could write a lot more about avoidants, but this this a

Love Letter to the Anxious Preoccupieds

The strength of our love is powerful and beautiful and nothing to be ashamed of. There are ways to embody this love that feel nourishing and grounding and safe. There are ways to move away from the panic and terror of emergency. There are ways to use our attachment style as a gift and a strength.

I know how crazy making it can be. And I know it can make us act in ways that we regret, ways that are not in line with our integrity, our values. The feeling of coming out of an attachment episode reminds me of the feeling of waking up hung over and full of regret. Things we said and did in the heat of the attachment fueled terror seemed necessary and urgent in the moment, they seemed like the only course of action. The blame and accusations we hurl at people we love, the desperate attempts at control, even the ultimatums or threats to leave when we don't want to leave. The desperate attempts to re-establish contact at all costs, the texts, the pushing when our partner is trying to withdraw. The panic at their withdrawal, the way this fuels the frenzy of attachment cries even more. And then after: the shame, the regret, the deep and heavy fear that maybe this time we have really ruined things for good. I've been there. I've been there and it sucks. I've hurt people I love with this behaviour and I have hurt myself with it too. I have felt way too ashamed to talk about these things, and I have felt way too focused on the ways I felt neglected and abandoned to take an honest look at my own behaviour.

Learning about attachment theory was wild. Learning about anxious preoccupied attachment style, and the anxious-avoidant feedback loop finally gave me a framework and tools to begin to understand what was happening to me. I have an anxious preoccupied attachment style, mixed

So I must hold on to these lessons. I must not let them be glossed over in a search for good feelings. Love is not a feeling. It is an action. It is a process. It is an investment in justice. It is an investment in healing. It is work. And loving a traumatized person, which so many of us are, is work. Loving as a traumatized person, which so many of us are, is work. Hard work.

What would happen if we, as queer, politicized, polyamorous communities, as communities who claim to be committed to justice, acknowledged that love, very often, is a limited resource. Love, when we understand it as an action rather than a feeling, can unfortunately be very difficult to come by for many of us. And even when opportunities for such love are available, if we are traumatized it may take us a very long time and a whole lot of work to begin to open up to that love.

What would happen if we, as queer, politicized, polyamorous communities acknowledged the regularity with which violence happens all around us? What if we stopped gaslighting people who are (justifiably) afraid? What if we held space for the legacies of trauma that so many of us carry and named loving for what it is, a daring act?

What if we acknowledged that learning to love and be loved isn't easy, but that it can be done? What if we rooted out the shaming tactics from our writing and thinking on radical, anti-capitalist queer love? What if, instead of telling survivors that love is not a limited resource, we made the terrifying admission that it is? And we continued the work of love anyway.

Earning Secure Attachment in the Context of Non-Hierarchical Polyamory

I was going through my inbox and came across a long list of agreements from a past relationship in which I tried and failed at polyamory. The agreements were a desperate attempt at control, at feeling safe. I say that without any self-judgement, self-criticism, or shame. I also look at that list with a lot of relief that I don't do polyamory like that anymore. These agreements included things like always knowing when my partner was on a date, needing a check in before and after the date, knowing ahead of time about big developments in relationships, knowing ahead of time before a selfie with someone new is posted, knowing pretty much immediately about new crushes, etc etc. All these agreements were desperate attempts to feel safe and secure and loved in a relationship where I truly felt none of those things.

I still have c-ptsd and anxious preoccupied attachment and I am now polyamorous in a very different way. I do a type of non-hierarchical polyamory in which my partner has other partners who they share an equal amount of commitment with. I am not the only person my partner loves, shares future plans, deep intimacies, and big life commitments with. My partner also dates a bunch of people and I don't have a detailed play by play about what they're doing in a given week. These days the agreements are much simpler. There's an understanding that safer sex is being practiced all around. There's shared information about who my partner and I are dating, though not always ahead of time and definitely not in a real time way where we inform each other before and after an actual date. There's the opportunity to meet each other's dates and partners and to develop relationships there if that's wanted. And most

to be okay and safe to admit that love can be really scary. I want us to do the work and share the process and I want us to provide evidence to each other that change is possible, that we can love without emergency.

my partner is excited about a new date they still love me, our love is not threatened, it is not an emergency. (A beautiful powerful polyamorous secure attachment lesson I learned is that any changes in our relationship will always be internal to our own relationship, it's between us, and no other person can impact that.) When my partner is in a bad mood, distant, busy, or distracted, they still love me and it is not an emergency. When my partner is away traveling and I haven't seen them for awhile, they still love me and it is not an emergency.

Love without emergency is so strange to me. It's not something I'm used to and my bodymind always wants to revert back to emergency, because for so long that felt safer, and because it still feels really familiar. Love without emergency is disorienting. I made my therapist laugh when I told her that if I'm not anxiously preoccupied with my relationship, hypervigilantly scanning for threat, I'm honestly not sure what I will do with all that time and energy. My therapist laughed at this but it's really true. All that time and energy needs somewhere new to go, and it's a practice and a process of continually redirecting that energy. Like changing the course of a river, or forging new neural pathways. My attention wants to go where it has always gone, and to change directions takes practice.

The more that I crack open shame and honestly write about these experiences the more I realize that I am actually surrounded by so much community of people who experience love as emergency. So many people are living with trauma and/or anxious preoccupied attachment styles. So many people feel literally crazy and desperate and panicked about love. So many of us keep exploding our relationships out of this place of desperate terror, creating the very thing we are so afraid of. I want us to talk about this stuff and share what we are learning. I want it

importantly, there is commitment to each other, expectations about the level of commitment and intimacy and time that we share.

The way I do polyamory now is a lot more open and relaxed, and surprisingly, I feel a lot safer and more at ease than when I tried to have rigid control. Polyamory requires a lot of surrender of control. In fact, love and relationships in general require that. The way I do polyamory now is about building deep intimacy and trust, about knowing viscerally that my partner loves me and prioritizes our relationship (not over their other partner(s) but over some relationships and other commitments, yes), about trusting that new relationships and shifting dynamics are not a threat to the love and commitment my partner and I share. This is not always easy, and in fact it's a lot of hard work. But it has a sense of ease to it that the other way I tried to do polyamory didn't.

A huge part of this is focusing on our relationship with each other, rather than on my partner's other relationships. Instead of trying to manage a perceived threat, the focus is on whether my needs are being met inside the relationship. It is important to me that my partner really shows me that they love me, generously and consistently and they do. I have a folder on my phone called "I am loved" with screen shots of some of the many many times my partner has gone into detail about their love for me, and I look at these whenever I'm feeling triggered and scared.

In terms of my relationship to my metamours, I've shifted that from one of competition and attempted control, to one of solidarity and care. Being on good terms with my metamours is really important to me. Going for coffee once in awhile, knowing that good will and consideration are mutual and reciprocal, these things really help me to feel safe.

There is a way to do polyamory that is neither the neoliberal individualist bullshit of "everyone is always solely responsible for their own feelings" or trying to manage other people and their relationships through endless rules. There is a way to develop and nurture interdependence and trust, to cultivate vulnerable and intentional relationships between everyone involved, to be honest about when it's hard and to move through those feelings with care, with help, with community, with internal work, with therapy, with love. Earning secure attachment in the context of non-hierarchical polyamory is beautiful, hard, nourishing work.

Love Without Emergency

Living with complex PTSD, having survived intimate partner violence and child abuse, and living with an anxious preoccupied attachment style, means that for me, love usually feels like an emergency. I am used to hyper vigilantly scanning for threat. I am used to being on guard for abandonment or attack. I expect to be hurt and betrayed, even when I don't expect these things with my rational mind, I expect them with my body. I read and reread into things, looking for signs of danger. I pay close attention to body language, punctuation use, minor fluctuations in attention. I am used to feeling really stressed out by love.

I am only just beginning to get a taste of what love feels like when I am not in emergency. Through a combination of choosing a trust worthy partner, lots of therapy, lots of self psycho-education on complex PTSD and attachment theory, lots of talks with my partner, learning to ask for what I need, learning to think and feel love differently, I am beginning to feel love as this safe and steady, living and dynamic, non-adrenalized thing. It's crazy. This breath, this steadiness. I actually am having a hard time adjusting to it, integrating it. Because I am not used to it. I am used to love as emergency.

I've written about this before but I'm going to keep writing about it, saying it again and again in different ways until it sinks deep into my bodymind. Love is not something I earn by being "good", love is not something always under threat by outside forces. Love is freely given, loyal, kind. Love is generous, patient, steady. Love is trust worthy. Polyamory gives me lots of opportunities to feel through, integrate and deepen these lessons. When my partner is with their other partner they still love me, our love is not threatened, it is not an emergency. When