

Defining Our Own Sexual Liberation

By YK Hong & Ingrid Rivera



Ingrid Rivera and YK Hong

We believe it makes sense to live a life that allows us a right to enter into multiple intimate relationships. The notion of finding everything you've ever wanted in one person, whether a friend or lover, is a huge expectation for any person to ask for or fulfill. This is our story of how we met, found community and are building a vision together.

Ingrid's Story

I began exploring my non-monogamous sexual self after breaking up with a woman I had spent five years with. The last year of our relationship, we mutually decided to "open it up." Our life together had been very fulfilling, but we had come to the conclusion that our love for one another did not diminish the lust, attraction and need for other queer people in our lives. We embarked on a journey that most of our friends had only whispered about. It was a process that seemed natural to us but also unfamiliar. We struggled, and I believe our break-up had much to do with the lack of information and community support around this lifestyle.

Despite our foiled attempt at an alternative relationship, I was not deterred. I knew it would be difficult, but monogamy was a societal construct I did not want to be controlled by. I was called a "whore," and had my motherhood questioned because I was supposedly setting a bad example for my daughter. I was told I would get sexually transmitted diseases and eventually live a lonely existence because of my selfishness. Regardless of these roadblocks, I continued to explore. I ventured into other open relationships, being "single" and dating several people and experimenting with primary partners and swinging.

YK's Story

My relationships have always been unconventional in some ways, whether because of my queerness, my gender identity or my color. This is one of the reasons I began a self-evaluation process to find out what felt right to me outside of the limitations of what I was told to feel, think and do.

My personal exploration of non-monogamy came about as I began to recognize that my attractions for many people were not validated when I was in relationships with one person. I felt strongly that it was healthy to

name, express and pursue desire when I felt it. This desire was never limited to one single person, yet I was told by society and laws to limit myself to desire only one. Everyone was supposed to find one person. I had many different types of relationships that I cherish, that made me happy and taught me lessons. Yet through all of this, I realized society's constructs were limiting me by controlling my body, mind, sex and sexuality.

As a person who strives for personal liberation in all aspects of my life, who constantly struggles to grow and change, I want to find my own path, create my own relationships and define my own ideas of sex, sexuality, love and relationships.

Finding Community

When we met, we had been traveling our separate paths along an unwritten script of non-monogamy. As with any situation that is unknown, we had been learning through trial and error and self-exploration.

We met through our political organizing work and found that we had many things in common, including being queer people of color who are political in their non-monogamy. To us, non-monogamy is political because it strives to break from social constructions of what it means to be in any kind of relationship. It aims to break from the mentality of "I own you," which we believe comes from a capitalist idea of ownership and property.

What Is Polyamory?

Most people have many different kinds of friends—friends that are supportive, friends that you hang out to have fun with, friends that offer community and friends that give you love. We have many friends because we have many sides to each of us. Friends touch upon and access different aspects of our personality, background and experiences.

This is how we approach intimate relationships.

Even when you think you find someone that fulfills many or even most of your wants and needs, we cannot assume that person will never change, and we cannot assume

that you will never change. Growth is a natural process of life. We learn this as we find and lose friends, and as lovers come and go. We hope there is never a moment in our lives that we do not grow, learn or change.

Polyamory actually goes beyond non-monogamy. It is negotiated, ethical non-monogamy. Polyamory is the non-possessive, honest, responsible and ethical philosophy and practice of interacting intimately with multiple people simultaneously. It gives one the option of having relation-

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ships outside of social norms.

Polyamory is an umbrella term—it can mean many things, such as being in a triad (when there are three people who are intimate with each other), having a primary partner, or being single but having multiple lovers or relationships. To us, revolutionary polyamory means purging the seeds of oppression that try to corner us into ownership, control of our bodies and illusions of security through something outside of one's self.

Examining and coming into this philosophy is not an easy task.

Similar to coming out as a queer or transgender person of color in a homophobic/transphobic, racist society, we needed to learn the process of shedding the ways in which society at large has taught us how to live, love and navigate through this world. This means unlearning and challenging most of the information we are given on a daily basis. Even with polyamory, we knew that many models of intimate relationships were largely based on the dominant white culture.

Being polyamorous is not anti-love or anti-relationship, but simply thinking differently about relationships that were created for us. The government and state have always tried to enforce how we are supposed to use our bodies as queer people, poor people and people of color. Poor women of color going

through forced sterilization, past sodomy laws, sex work, abstinence until marriage policies and Bush's Healthy Marriage Initiative are examples of our bodies being controlled by others, not by ourselves.

A Revolutionstar Experience

Recently, we started Revolutionstar Experience as an effort to connect to our larger communities. It reflects our belief that oppression alters all of our existence and intimate interactions. Polyamory deconstructs and

dismantles within our most intimate lives the systems of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and other oppressions.

In trying to reach this radical vision, we hold workshops, a retreat called "Purge" to explore our bodies, sex and sexuality and a project called "OP3" (Oppressed People's Protection Plan) to talk about violence within our own communities. We also organize play parties, events where we offer space for queer, genderqueer and transgender people of color to express themselves without inhibition.

We aim to make our play parties spaces for people to think about and exercise sexual liberation without guilt, shame, judgment or single-mindedness. Our workshops have focused on the important intersections between politics and alternative ways that queer, poor people and people of color can begin to consciously use our own bodies. We not only emphasize the importance of sexual liberation but also how our sexual oppression has been tied to policies, politics, the state and laws. We try to address how sexual liberation is not just about the sex we have but how it is also hindered by the systemic control of our thoughts.

This is a lifelong journey. ■

Ingrid Rivera and YK Hong are the founders of Revolutionstar Experience (www.revolutionstar.org).