

Beyond Non-Monogamy

BY DIAN MUELLER

I never had a coming out party when I announced that I was bisexual 20 years ago. My lesbian friends tended to think I was copping out of saying I was a lesbian, or that I was really a heterosexual trying to gain entree into their community; worse yet, that being such a young woman, I simply hadn't made up my mind what I was. My straight female friends reacted nervously at best, immediately putting up their guard against unwanted advances, and my straight male friends just found it sexually titillating. But I was not hiding, or undecided, a sexual predator or an exhibitionist. I'd known since before I knew there was a word for it that I loved women and men with the same sort of passion and desire for intimacy.

For years, I knew only two other bisexual women, both friends from high school who came out to me after graduation. I discussed two burning questions with these friends: Does being bisexual automatically mean that you're non-monogamous, and what is a better word for this way of loving? The older of the two friends gave a resounding "no" to the first question — she was a "serial monogamist" — and so didn't give much thought to the second. I was surprised that my friend wasn't also non-monogamous, but later found this to be more of the norm. My subsequent experience taught me that bisexuals are predominantly monogamous with a primary partner, but occasionally have love relationships with others — usually of the opposite gender to their partner's — at the same time. If they are open and honest about it, this is non-monogamy; if not, they're just cheating.

But what about this word, "non-monogamy"? I never liked it because I didn't care for the

constant comparison to some supposed norm, just as lesbians and gay men don't call themselves "non-heterosexual." Yet, this was the word I was stuck with for many years. The alternatives polyandry and polygyny went out the window from the get-go, because they refer to a multiplicity of exclusively husbands or wives. Polygamy didn't apply to my situation, either: Although it now means having more than one spouse at a time, it still tends to mean that those spouses are exclusively of the opposite sex, and it usually refers to a man having multiple wives. I am not a man, I don't want to marry every person to whom I'm committed, and my lovers aren't all of one gender.

I read through all the "poly-" entries in my Webster's and found no term suitable to describe a person maintaining multiple committed relationships that didn't assume gender or marital status. In a way, this was a good thing. It fed my love for words and I tried to invent one to cover my definition. I never landed on one that was satisfactory. It was also a good thing because it furthered my philosophical debate about the nature of non-monogamy and whether it was necessary to involve marriage in order to express a relationship's level of commitment.

And so I fumbled along, experimenting over the years. I watched friends of mine who said that they were monogamous, but who either weren't or were cheated on by their partners. I read the statistics of how many men cheat on their wives and vice versa. I once heard an anthropologist say that we are, on the whole, serial monogamists, which of course is not true monogamy in the sense of having one lover throughout life, the ideal of the white wedding dress and church bells sort of marriage. It disturbed me that

people were claiming to be monogamous when they were not, and it disturbed me more that people were getting hurt because their partners couldn't admit to not being the monogamous type. I was most disturbed by the sense of ownership that goes along with standard monogamy: You are mine and I am yours, and I'd best not see your eyes stray.

Without meaning to degrade the experience for couples who are truly monogamous and happy that way, what sort of love is it that is so possessive? It seems to me that it is a fearful sort of love, one constantly worried that the love shared isn't strong enough to stand up to other loves entering the picture. It also strikes me that this sort of love places far too much dependence on one relationship to be the be all and end all in meeting our emotional needs.

I came to the conclusion that polyamory — loving multiple people — is the natural and best way for me to love. Yes, I finally found the term that covers my definition. It is not without its challenges, but it fosters relationships where the partners come together on their own secure footing, not being overly dependent or possessive. It requires honesty and a letting go of jealousy, an acknowledgment that no one other person can satisfy all of my emotional needs, and an acceptance that allowing my lovers to fully express their love with others does not detract from but deepens the love they share with me. And in this age of increasing personal isolation, what better cure can there be for alienation than a treasuring and nurturing of bonds which expand love beyond the bounds of a closed, nuclear unit into a wider circle of intimates?


dining

Michael's
Seafood
and Steak Tavern
LUDLOW'S PREMIERE DINNER HOUSE



Route 103 • Ludlow, Vermont • 802-228-5622
Visit Our Web Page: <http://www.rovers.net/~seafood1>

(802) 524-6135



FRESH SEAFOOD, LUNCHES, DINNERS, SPECIALTY FOODS, CATERING
65 NORTH MAIN STREET ST. ALBANS, VT 05478

community groups

Golden Threads



Discreet Contact Publication for
Lesbian Women over 50,
and younger

<http://members.aol.com/goldentred/index.htm>
Sample Copy \$5 email: GOLDENTRED@aol.com
P. O. Box 65, Richford, VT 05476-0065

Triangle Ministries ▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲

A Center For Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development

Individual, Couple & Group Counseling
Commitment Services, Workshops & Retreats

Rev. Christine S. Leslie, M.Div.
14 White Birch Lane • Williston, VT 05495
802-860-7106 • Email: revcls@aol.com
<http://members.aol.com/revcls>

The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of Ethan Green

by Eric Orner

Ethan Green's
CHAOS THEORY OF LOVE

JASON CHANG LOVES JIM & CARLOS. JIM & CARLOS, HOWEVER, LOVE BUCKY.

Bucky ONLY LOVES HANS. HANS, THOUGH, LOVES LAST NIGHT'S TRICK.

LAST NIGHT'S TRICK, AS IT HAPPENS, REALLY LOVES LEEZA...

BUT LEEZA, AS IS WELL DOCUMENTED, ONLY LOVES ETIENNE...

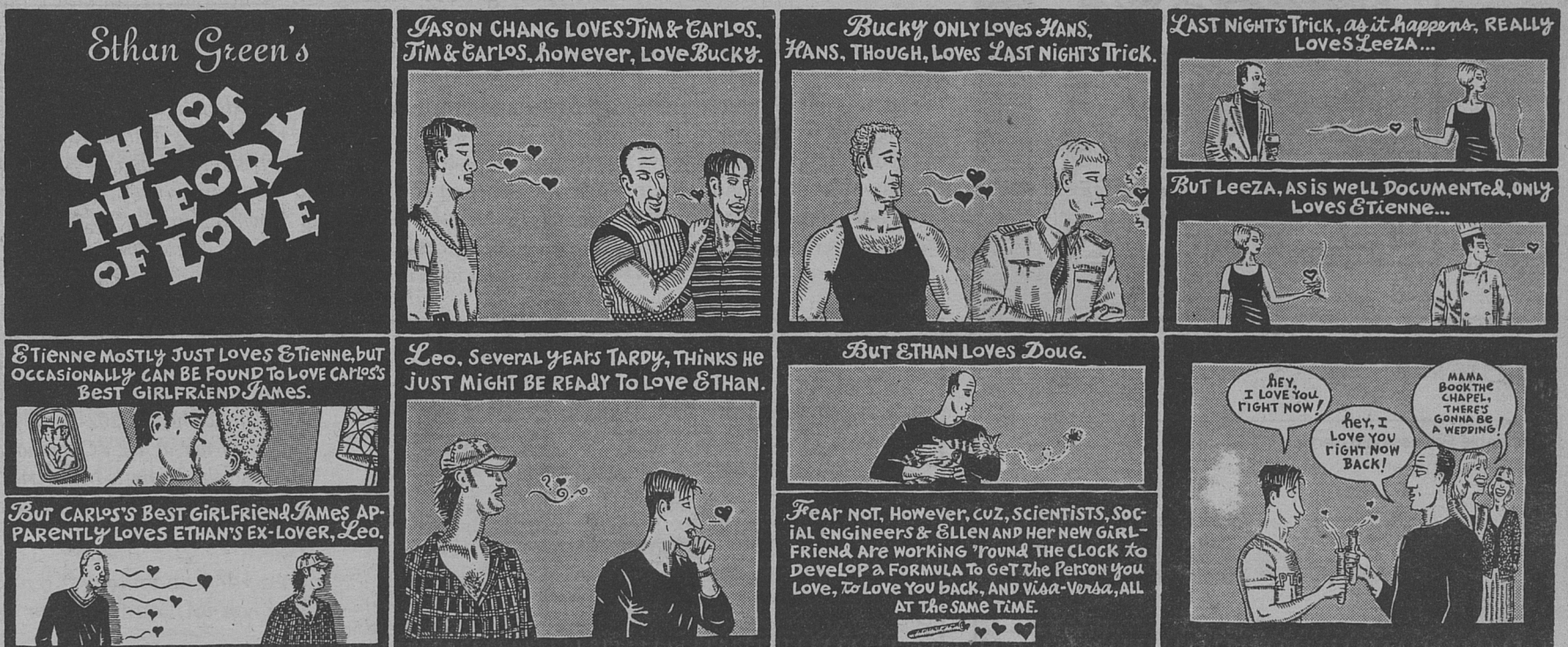
ETIENNE MOSTLY JUST LOVES ETIENNE, BUT OCCASIONALLY CAN BE FOUND TO LOVE CARLOS'S BEST GIRLFRIEND JAMES.

Leo, SEVERAL YEARS TARDY, THINKS HE JUST MIGHT BE READY TO LOVE ETHAN.

BUT ETHAN LOVES DOUG.

Fear NOT, HOWEVER, CUZ, SCIENTISTS, SOCIAL ENGINEERS & ELLEN AND HER NEW GIRLFRIEND ARE WORKING 'ROUND THE CLOCK TO DEVELOP A FORMULA TO GET THE PERSON YOU LOVE, TO LOVE YOU BACK, AND VISA-VERSA, ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

HEY, I LOVE YOU FIGHT NOW!
HEY, I LOVE YOU FIGHT NOW BACK!
MAMA BOOK THE CHAPEL, THERE'S GONNA BE A WEDDING!



<http://www.stonewallinn.com/ethan/> or eric@orner@aol.com