



MOOD: 🤔 confused

## Anyone go through this?

Hi. I am new to this community. I got a question for ya. Here is a little background.

In my relationship has been majorly changing for the last two years. I am the mono in the relationship my husband and I have been married for 7 years, together for 17 and open for 15.

What has changed is not that he is in love with her, but he and her are primary. This has been very hard on me. I have always been top dog and number one. I feel if I don't accept this (her being his other primary) my only choice is to leave all together. He says he is not forcing me to accept his primary love for her. And to make her part of the family. That I can say no at anytime. BUT when I do say no, I feel as if they are ganging up on me, they say my reasons for saying no are not backed with a valid reason. That I need to evolve. How could one not get hostile after this. Back anyone in a corner and they will come out fighting.

He is poly, she is poly, I am mono. In some ways I feel like he has sprung this on me. I think when someone's emotions are at risk it is not fair to force this on to me. If this is what he wanted he should have expressed this a long time ago because if he had he probably would not be a part of my life. But non the less he is and now I am trying to make it work. And by making it work that means changing all of me. From top to bottom.

I do have a hard limit , and if that is pushed I can see me leaving. I also feel he truly does not realize what he is asking me to do. I have never forced monogamy on him. If I did I am sure he would have left this relationship long ago.

I do, and will try, to hang on and have what I can with him, and remain his wife. Being a mono my hard limit is no one lives with us. I think to some poly people this makes me too dependent on him and too demanding of him. I feel it grounds me and does not betray me.

I love him and will do what I can to make him happy. I may be able to be happy too. He is asking me to trust and have faith in her and I am trying. What he is asking of me makes me feel I am betraying my core beliefs, something I don't feel I have asked of him.

So I am letting go of my insecurities (as best I can) I am trying very hard not to lash out at her and direct all resentment to him for he is the one asking me to change not her.

Has anyone gone through this and any helpful advise.



[65 comments](#)



August 11 2003, 15:57:57 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I'm a poly person married to a monogamous person. I've had an OSO for the last couple of years, and we had to go through all kinds of trouble and pain just for that to work out and for the marriage to survive. I am in awe of you being in a mono/poly marriage for as long as you've been and making it work, actually.

I know other people's mileage may vary, but my viewpoint, even from my perspective as a poly person, is that if you are married to someone, they should be your primary. "Demoting" your spouse to a secondary without their agreement and cooperation is not something I'd personally put up with, and not something I'd do to someone either. If my husband and I reached a point in our relationship that I could no longer consider him my primary, from my point of view the marriage would be over and I should leave, in justice and decency to him. If my husband suddenly discovered his inner poly (unlikely) and found an OSO and told me I was now a secondary, I'd probably leave even if he didn't.

I wish you strength and wisdom and comfort, and the ability to see through the storm to the clear sky above. It sounds like you'll need it.



 [tacit](#)

August 11 2003, 18:18:45 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*"I know other people's mileage may vary, but my viewpoint, even from my perspective as a poly person, is that if you are married to someone, they should be your primary. "Demoting" your spouse to a secondary without their agreement and cooperation is not something I'd personally put up with, and not something I'd do to someone either."*

Speaking as the husband in this case:

Nobody is being "demoted."

I do not think of **Celeste** as a secondary. Rather, I believe that one person can have more than one primary relationship. What makes a relationship "primary" is the intensity of the relationship, the goals and expectations of the people in the relationship, and the nature of the relationship. A relationship in which there is ongoing involvement in everyday life is "primary;" a relationship is "secondary" if it is more casual.

Many people have the tacit, unspoken assumption that a person can only have one primary relationship. I see no reason whatsoever to believe this is true; it's very close, in fact, to saying you can *really* only love one person--an idea I categorically reject.

 [wondering...](#)

August 11 2003, 20:17:05 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

What about being married-- what does that entail, in addition to your definition of "primary"? To me, being married means, among other things, that my spouse and I each judge the other's interests and happiness as equally important to her own when making decisions, because we're a team whose fortunes must rise and fall together. (i.e., it feels very practical to do so; it's not just out of love feelings or generosity.) I don't get a sense of that here, so I'm curious about how you see marriage, distinct from primary/secondary stuff.



Re: wondering...

 tacit

August 12 2003, 06:34:34 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*"What about being married-- what does that entail, in addition to your definition of "primary"?"*

There are many things about a marriage which set it apart from a dating relationship.

Some of these are practical: I share a mortgage with **Celeste**, I share day-to-day living with **Celeste**; we have built a financial life as well as a romantic life together.

Some of these are emotional; **Celeste** and I share a bond formed over the last seventeen years of our relationship, which can not be replaced under any circumstances by any other relationship.

Some of these are matters of goals and accomplishments; we each want what is best for the other, we each plan to remain committed to one another, we have made excellent companions and lovers for nearly two decades and intend to be central in one another's lives for the indefinite future.

*"To me, being married means, among other things, that my spouse and I each judge the other's interests and happiness as equally important to her own when making decisions, because we're a team whose fortunes must rise and fall together."*

That seems reasonable.

*"I don't get a sense of that here,..."*

Which is to be expected. What you see here is less than two hundred words written about one specific facet of one specific problem. It's not reasonable to expect to get a sense of a seventeen-year-relationship from that.

However, if you would like a better sense of the situation from another perspective, I strongly suggest you read  **Amber's** journal. She is the girlfriend, and her journal is largely dedicated to matters pertaining to this relationship.

I think where a lot of people--even a lot of people who self-identify as polyamorous--go off the rails is at the notion of "primary." Many poly folk accept implicitly the idea that a person can only have one primary relationship; and even those who don't, do still seem to have an unspoken assumption that you can't "really" be primary unless you're effectively married.

For me, a primary relationship is a relationship that is ongoing, deeply committed, and emotionally intimate. It has no implicit exclusivity, and no overtones of marriage. I use "primary" to distinguish the relationship from, for example, my relationship with my other girlfriend , who I have been seeing for approximately four years now. . and I see each other about once a month, have very little sharing of our day-to-day lives, and do not expect or demand much at all from one another.  primary relationship is with her career; she and I do not depend on each other for emotional support, do not make room for one another in our daily lives, and so on.

A person becomes "primary" in my life when that person is someone with whom I can ask for and expect emotional support, can be called on to give emotional support, and can reasonably be

expected to have emotional needs from. Nothing in this is, I think, hostile to the idea of marriage at all.

Because I am married, any ethical relationship I engage in must be a relationship with is inclusive, not exclusive, of **Celeste**. I am not seeking to demote her, I am not attempting to exclude her in any way from any part of my life.

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**Re: wondering...**

 **tacit**

August 13 2003, 21:29:50 UTC  CHECK COLLAPSE

*"Considering the above, THAT is what I might call a "primary relationship," poly or no, and what you are calling "primary" is a lesser relationship that I would be inclined to call secondary."*

In that case, you are going to need yet another word (tertiary?) to describe relationships that fall below the emotional level of what I call "primary," but are not "fuck buddies."

My relationship with  is not a relationship of a "fuck buddy" or a "friend with benefits." She has relationships like that--two of them--but they are different in fundamental, qualitative ways from my relationship with her; for example, they are not described on either side as a dating relationship (whereas she will describe me as "her boyfriend," language that is not used with any of her FWB relationships); they have neither explicit nor tacit expectations of commitment, time together, or emotional connection, whereas her relationship with me has explicit statements of all three; and so on.

But this kind of convoluted language ultimately becomes silly, because it's all to defend a philosophical ideal that I don't feel holds water in the first place. I do not believe there is any evidence to support the assertion that someone can only have one "primary" relationship, where "primary" is used in the way I have defined it here.

Now, many people find that idea very threatening. Indeed, many people in the poly community find that idea very threatening. The tacit, unspoken assumption is that "polyamory is a couple plus someone else they add," and as long as the couple stay together, the relationship is a success, regardless of how many "someone elses" are hurt in the process.

I propose a different idea: People are human beings and deserve to be treated with respect and compassion. Even if they are the "somebody else."

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**Re: wondering...**

 **Amber**

August 14 2003, 20:15:21 UTC  CHECK COLLAPSE

*Do you not believe that those things in your marriage with **Celeste** elevate its importance to a position beyond your relationship with bandage. If there is even "one that comes before," then "primary" seems a poorly chosen term.*

I have no idea why I'm jumping into this conversation at this point.. Perhaps I just ran out of work distractions :).

I think one of the fundamental things that is trying to be conveyed by Franklin by calling me primary is that **Celeste** is not always the most important in all cases. So long as **Celeste** holds that card, I cannot have a deeply intimate relationship with Franklin without being completely miserable. Tied up with the idea that **Celeste** is always most important, is the idea that I can only have needs if they are convenient. Now, I would hope that anyone paying attention would realize that I'm a very reasonable person - I don't wish to divide Franklins time up evenly, I don't wish to move in if it makes **Celeste** uncomfortable - I keep my distance and try to give them lots of couple time - for petes sake I moved to another city! The only thing the term 'primary' really changes is the idea that Franklin can make modest commitments to me which are not conditional on what **Celeste** wants.

Now this idea may seem unacceptable to some.. perhaps the idea is painful to **Celeste**. I have given Franklin two choices, either help me back out emotionally so I can care less - or carve out some space and some definition - give me something I can hold onto and count on - give me the ability to ask for what I need.

I think he's made a very reasonable compromise. But this changes one of the fundamental agreements between he and **Celeste** and that is that she is not under all circumstances the most important.. sometimes she's \*as\* important - and my feelings count too.

So this really isn't about language, you can't really solve the problem by changing the language - because the word primary is only serving to impart a real idea that I can see, with sympathy, is very scary to **Celeste**.

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 **Re: wondering...**  
 Amber  
August 18 2003, 19:06:30 UTC  CHECK COLLAPSE

*You may say, "But this is not a mono relationship."*

Yeah.. in fact that's exactly what I would say.

*Yes, but one of the people in the married part of your relationship is mono. What's more, she seems to be only complying with the poly aspects and not really wanting them. She self-identifies as mono.*

Which doesn't in any way, shape or form change the fact that this is a poly relationship. You can't do a relationship that is half monogomous and half poly. If there are multiple relationships, it's poly *by definition*. There are ethical ways to approach a poly relationship - and not so ethical ways. There are flexible ways - and not so flexible ways. Callous ways - and compassionate ways.

The fact is, **Celeste** made a decision to be in a poly relationship. She is not a victim. She chose to be in this relationship with Franklin - and if she wants to continue

to be in a poly relationship (which she does, because she makes that choice - \*nobody\* is forcing Celeste to do \*anything\*), I think it is reasonable to ask that it be done ethically, flexibly and compassionately.

*You and Tacit seem to be telling her that her house would be lovely if only she'd get rid of that nasty cement slab it's resting on.*

That's an interesting analogy - The foundation on which the house is built is a foundation meant to support something as close to monogomy as possible, and leaves Franklins partners outside. Considering this is a poly relationship that Celeste has chosen to be a part of - and franklin and I are also a part of this poly relationship, it seems reasonable and in fact \*ethical\* to at least consider extending that foundation to include me.

If we are going to argue ethics, I would be more in favor of arguing the ethics of whether Franklin should be poly at all.. Perhaps the right thing to do would be for him to be mono with Celeste because that's what she is and that's what she wants. Who knows.. But considering the poly line has already been crossed, there are a whole set of additional considerations - none of which can be erased just because Celeste identifies as mono.

*But for your part, you certainly deserve happiness and a position that is not second best. If you were my closest friend I would tell you in the kindest voice I could muster that here is not where you will find that.*

Ahh.. well, happiness has never been the main point. This relationship helps me grow, makes me a better person and gives me a sense of intimate recognition, understanding and connectedness. None of these things are erased by the discomfort. And I would never be one to trade a relationship that makes me grow for a relationship that makes me comfortable and content.

Still, there's nothing wrong with at least struggling to find a compromise that makes all of us a little happier.

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**Re: wondering...**

**tacit**

August 26 2003, 18:13:51 UTC

CHECK  COLLAPSE

*"Many poly people would claim that "swing" is not poly, yet there are multiple relationships. "Friends with benefits" certainly does not look like an equilateral triangle. Poly seems to be a drawer for many different kinds of relationships."*

A polyamorous relationship is somewhat akin to a BDSM relationship, in the sense that when you're outside such a relationship looking in, what you see is often very different from the reality of that relationship.

There are many different kinds of relationships that can all be described as "polyamorous," but the mistake many people make from that observation is to infer that any given relationship can be made to fit a particular mold.

One of the most common mistakes I see, and a mistake I have made myself, is to believe that a person can arbitrarily decide in advance what form his relationships will take: "I will only get involved in light relationships," and so on.

There is a saying, "Every problem has a solution that is simple, logical, elegant, neat, and wrong." It seems simple, logical, elegant, and neat to say "This is the kind of relationship I will engage in," but, as with the ideas of Karl Marx, you quickly discover that what looks good on paper sometimes translates poorly into actual practice.

The fact is, you cannot force a superficial relationship to be deep, and you cannot force a deep relationship to be superficial--not without doing significant damage to the relationship.

*"Celeste's decision seems to have been to be in a FWB poly relationship. She never really moved far from that."*

The rules and structures **Celeste** and I made were built when I was 22 years old. In the intervening fifteen years, both of us have learned a number of significant things about ourselves and each other; one of the most significant of these things is that a 22-year-old cannot possibly hope to understand how he will grow over time, and what he will want or need from his life down the road.

Indeed, this is a mistake that many people, monogamous or polyamorous, make: They meet, fall in love, and believe the fairy tale which says "happily ever after." They don't realize that growth and change are inevitable, and they don't make allowances for the fact that as people change, the relationship between them *must* change as well if it is to remain healthy.

Many people are unprepared to accept the fact that they and their partners will change, and are unwilling to revisit the premise of their relationship. In such a case, the relationship often fails.

No part of a relationship can be assumed to be static. Nobody can guarantee that he will not change, and the things he wants and needs will not change. The best you can ever guarantee is to do all that you can to change in ways that include, not exclude, your lover.

*"Over the years Franklin has brought **Celeste** from mono to FWB, and, it has had its snags but gone well for them. The snags seem to result from getting involved with people who don't want FWB."*

The fact is, I don't want FWB. Such relationships are not satisfying to me. When **Celeste** and I laid out the rules for our relationship, I did not know exactly what it was I was seeking.

Now, I do. It's not about sex for me. If FWB was enough, I wouldn't be poly; I'd be a swinger--which would probably be easier on everyone. Swingers, after all, get

more sex and less processing.

It's the drive and the need for emotional and romantic intimacy, not a need for sex, that defines me as polyamorous.

It's amazing what you can learn in fifteen years.

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**Re: wondering...**

 **tacit**

August 27 2003, 14:58:27 UTC  CHECK COLLAPSE

*"I don't think, I, personally made that error. I was merely pointing out that calling something a poly relationship does not exclude different brands of poly."*

You did not make that particular error in that particular pos, no. But the idea "Well, the solution to the problem is only to have FWB relationships" rests on the tacit, unspoken belief that any given relationship can be fitted to any given mold.

*"Are you saying FWB is not poly because the intensity of the romance is less?"*

No. I'm just saying that "I will have no relationships more involved than FWB" is occasionally unworkable. Sometimes, life surprises you when you try to set out in advance how your romantic life will look. Life is, after all, what happens while you were making other plans.

*"I believe, for example, a secretary can say to herself I find my boss attractive, but I will not become involved with him for reason x, y, or z. What's more, I have certainly seen many people put up emotional walls in certain areas because for whatever reason they chose to. And again, many monogamous people find themselves very attracted to others and yet still choose to remain faithful."*

True, true, and true.

The difference is, in the cases you mention, no romantic relationship exists.

You can certainly choose whether or not you will enter into a romantic relationship in the first place. However, once you've chosen to enter a relationship, you can't always choose the form that relationship will take.

*"I will, however, say that supposing you had two equally deep yet different relationships with different people, is it not possible that one could be sexual and one not?"*

Of course! But for me, sexuality tends to be an important part of emotional intimacy much of the time.

*"Forgive me, but this sounds like the prelude to a discussion about divorce or something like it."*

Wow, talk about different perspectives! I don't think I can ever recall a time when you and I have looked at the same statement and drawn such radically different conclusions from it.

For me, the acknowledgement that relationships can and must change over time is a testament to the solidity of those relationships, not a prelude to a divorce! In fact, I would venture a guess that many relationships fail *precisely because* the people in those relationships adopt a "happily ever after" approach.

Many people don't realize that a healthy relationship is a growing, dynamic thing. They are not equipped to deal with changes in themselves or their relationships, they don't make a conscious effort to grow together, and when (as must inevitably happen) the relationship begins changing anyway, they panic. They have not developed the tools or the philosophy to revisit the fundamental assumptions they made when the relationship began. The relationship is not flexible; it cannot bend, so it breaks.

The key is in this part of what I said: *The best you can ever guarantee is to do all that you can to change in ways that include, not exclude, your lover.* Do that, and you need not be afraid of your relationship changing. **Not** doing this is what makes for a prelude to divorce.

*"Surely in all the uncertainties of life we can promise to steer ourselves in a direction that grows us together and not apart."*

Yes. Which is precisely what I said to begin with.

 **Re: wondering...**  
   
August 27 2003, 17:36:13 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*You did not make that particular error in that particular pos, no. But the idea "Well, the solution to the problem is only to have FWB relationships" rests on the tacit, unspoken belief that any given relationship can be fitted to any given mold.*

I'd say it rests on a different tacit, unspoken belief that the people involved have the ability to recognize when a relationship has drifted from the tolerances it was placed in and then, if they cannot return it to its necessary state, people can make the decision to terminate them. There's no necessary forcing here. If it can't be forced, then it can be let go of, leaving room to find something that more stably stays the way it should. The difficulty is when it's reasonably provable that the tolerances have been defined such that **no** relationship can stay within them. If those tolerances can't be moved, meaning that the people or relationship spawning them can't be forced, then the decision to cease that which produces the tolerances must be addressed.

At every point, the choice belongs to every person in the relationship.

No. I'm just saying...

But then the question is begged- "In which direction shall I err?" I make it a general rule to err on whichever side protects whichever things in the status quo I consider positive. In other words, Amy and I have an understood structure to our relationship. From time to time, things come up that might cross the lines, and we talk about them. If one of us isn't comfortable, I generally make the decision that my relationship with her, and our mutual well-being, is more important than things immediately in front of me. It's your right to choose which way to go on that, of course, but choosing a decision that induces stress, strife, or unhappiness tends, with other people, to leave you seeming responsible.

*For me, the acknowledgement... "happily ever after" approach.*

Given what I've studied on divorce, the "happily ever after" approach is a small part in much larger complexes that lead to the conclusion of divorce. "Precisely" may be too strong a word. What's important to understand, though, is that relationship change is an active process. Relationships change when those in them decide to change the relationship. For example, [REDACTED] and I started out in a relationship that we saw as one that was subordinate, in some ways, to our individual lives. We made a promise that we'd never sacrifice our own personal interests just to stay together. Later, we mutually and actively changed this. Now, we talk about how it'll be "her turn" to select our next home location when I'm done with graduate school. In other words, she found a way to follow me here and it'll be my turn to follow her next.

There's a lot of talk about [REDACTED] discomfort being part of some greater service of your relationship changing, and a lot of talk about it being something that "just happens", but there are a lot of choices to be made here, and not all of them are [REDACTED]. Many of them are yours, and I fear that this concept of passivity in change you're using is preventing these decisions from being made and made honestly.

*...relationship is not flexible; it cannot bend, so it breaks.*

Many people also view change in too passive a light, focusing on reacting to change instead of both causing and regulating it. At each point of change, there's the option to not change, and often the option to change in a different way. And there are also options to roll back bad changes and learn a different way. When people don't address this properly, the relationship bends in contorting ways, until it's not tenable or useable, and one or more people leave to find something more useful.

*The key is in this part of what I said...*

Well, there is a second part to that, which involves being noble enough to tell your partner when you're feeling the need to change in ways s/he doesn't like, and to have the honesty to know when the relationship has stopped being what's desired and find an equitable way to either roll back or move on.



**Re: wondering... [continued]**

**tacit**

August 27 2003, 15:00:40 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*"Seems there is more than one alternative to FWB, if that is decidedly what you do not want. For example, why not try getting involved with poly couples instead of singles?"*

Makes sense in theory. Many poly couples adopt this approach.

It almost never works. This is Common Poly Mistake [#2](#).

In fact, [Amber](#) even has a journal entry which discusses this approach. If you talk to people in the poly community, you'll discover that at some point or other, the overwhelming majority of poly couples has hit on this idea, and then discarded it when they find out how it works in practice.

There are a lot of reasons why this is, most of which are completely nonintuitive to someone who has never tried it. In fact, there have been entire discussions on exactly this topic at PolyTampa. was at one time an advocate of the approach you describe; now, he'd be more than happy to go into great detail about the problems with it.

*"Sounds more convoluted in some ways, but it might take some of the stress out of your relationship with [Celeste](#). For one thing, there will be more romantic resources to go around for the women involved."*

That's Common Poly Mistake [#3](#): Believing that relationship needs are attached to a person rather than to a relationship.

It makes sense. It sounds logical. It seems intuitive and reasonable. But when you're actually *in* multiple romantic relationships, you discover that each relationship carries with it a unique set of needs for that relationship. If you need more sex from person X, getting sex from person Y does not fill that need. Romantic resources don't distribute the same way that, say, money does.

This is a feature, not a bug. It lies right at the very core of the notion that people are not interchangeable. If [Amber](#) needs something from me, then she needs that thing *from me*; it's not a "resource" she can take from some other place. And likewise, the things I need from [Celeste](#) are things I need *from her*; I can't get them anywhere else.



**Re: wondering... [continued]**

August 27 2003, 17:48:44 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*There are a lot of reasons why this is, most of which are completely nonintuitive to someone who has never tried it. In fact, there have been entire discussions on exactly this topic at PolyTampa. was at one time an advocate of the approach you describe; now, he'd be more than happy to go into great detail about the problems with it.*

Honestly, the only problem I'd place on it is a quick and simple one- the people involved. Fin.

It's the same thing that tends to rupture any relationship, honestly. If the people involved can't keep it together, it goes south. Beyond that, I don't know that structural concerns matter all that much. Four people is more than three, yes, but if their minds are in the right place, it works just as well. Beyond that, I can either find or produce myself a set of essays explaining in great detail why virtually any poly structure won't work. They'd all be insightful, but woefully incomplete because no structural study looks at the character of the people involved with both enough generality and enough detail as to be authoritative. At least, none I've seen, even from minds I respect.

*That's Common Poly Mistake #3: Believing that relationship needs are attached to a person rather than to a relationship.*

Don't you think this glosses over the tendency for relationship needs to be a gestalt of the personal needs each member has?

*It makes sense. It sounds logical. It seems intuitive and reasonable. But when you're actually in multiple romantic relationships, you discover that each relationship carries with it a unique set of needs for that relationship. If you need more sex from person X, getting sex from person Y does not fill that need. Romantic resources don't distribute the same way that, say, money does.*

I agree to a small extent, but not much beyond that. You're still just describing personal needs. The relationship serves everyone when they get what they're looking for in it. As a result, when one person is unhappy, it's important to either find ways to make that person happy, invite them to have different needs, or invite them to leave. I see little here that's "poly unique". You go through the same process with friends, colleagues, etc.

*If AMBER needs something from me, then she needs that thing from me; it's not a "resource" she can take from some other place. And likewise, the things I need from Celeste are things I need from her; I can't get them anywhere else.*

Yes, this is often the case, but creative thinking, changing needs, etc, helps to mitigate this. In my personal experience, often when I need a "general thing" from a "specific person", it's because I have associated the thing and the person, leaving much room to work with.

Curiously, it seems to me that there are things Celeste needs from you and can't get anywhere else, and she's not getting them.



**Continued part II: Timeline [was Re: wondering...]**

**tacit**

**August 27 2003, 15:15:18 UTC**

CHECK COLLAPSE

"Besides, you did not get married at 22, nor did you and *Celeste* decide to be poly at 22. Not according to the way you've told me the story."

I am 37. *Celeste* and I started dating 17 years ago, when I was 20. We first began exploring the possibility of a non-monogamous relationship 15 years ago, or two years into our relationship...when I was 22.

We did not get married when I was 22, but the foundation of our relationship was laid long before we were married. Many of the structures that exist today predate our marriage by seven years or more.



[August 12 2003, 17:46:34 UTC](#)  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

thanks for the response. :)



**Re: wondering...**



[August 12 2003, 19:19:11 UTC](#)  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

This is where the problem comes in, because the word "primary" *means* "first" or "most important". If you are using it in a different fashion then you are redefining the word in a way that other people will not be able to understand. While language is mutable, it must be a consensual mutation or it fails in its primary (there's that word again) function of communicating meaning.

You can rank your relationships however you want to, but there can only be one "primary" relationship because you can't have two positions being (to quote Webster's) "first in ... importance".

You may want to rethink your terminology if it's causing this much of a problem in the relationship that should be first in importance to you - that of the one with your wife. If that is no longer your primary (dictionary definition) relationship, it may be time for you to dissolve the legal bonds in order to cease causing pain to someone you love.



**Re: wondering...**

**tacit**

[August 13 2003, 21:04:46 UTC](#)  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*"This is where the problem comes in, because the word "primary" means "first" or "most important"."*

That's one of the meanings, yes. My dictionary (Merriam-Webster Unabridged) also says that it means "basic," "fundamental," or "important."

*"If you are using it in a different fashion then you are redefining the word in a way that other people will not be able to understand."*

Yes, that's true--which is why I have defined the word "primary" in the sense that I'm using it in this context, elsewhere in this thread.

However, ultimately what's being discussed here is a philosophy, and it's hard to discuss a

philosophy when you start arguing semantics. The language of relationships was not really well-designed for discussing polyamory, and as a result, we have to make do with the words that are available to us when we discuss poly relationships.

I attach words like "primary" and "secondary" to relationships, not to people; the word "primary" describes one type of relationship, the word "secondary" describes a different type of relationship whose features are qualitatively different in defined ways; the phrase "fuck buddy" defines still a different type of relationship.

By believing that a person can have only one primary relationship, essentially what you're saying is that you may have two relationships that have many fundamental things in common, but the word "primary" can be attached to only one of those two relationships--and if you have a third relationship which is much more casual and expects much less of the people involved, both it AND the second relationship get stuck with the word "secondary..." *even though the second and third relationship bear little resemblance to one another and the first and second relationship share many features in common.*

That does not seem like a reasonable or meaningful way to use language to me. It makes as much sense as saying "You can only have one type of 'bird,' and this feathered, flying animal is a 'bird,' but this other feathered, flying animal can't be called a 'bird' because there's only one 'bird,' so we'll put this other feathered, flying animal into the same classification as this dog."

Now, you can say that the words "primary" and "secondary" should not be used at all in this case, and I'd be inclined to agree with you--but they're the only words we have so far. Maybe you can propose a new set of words?

   
August 13 2003, 00:06:51 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*I do not think of **Celeste** as a secondary. Rather, I believe that one person can have more than one primary relationship. What makes a relationship "primary" is the intensity of the relationship, the goals and expectations of the people in the relationship, and the nature of the relationship. A relationship in which there is ongoing involvement in everyday life is "primary;" a relationship is "secondary" if it is more casual.*

I disagree. Given my strong experience with the establishments of primary/secondary relationships, the entire "primary/secondary narrative" is, in actuality, steeped in power struggle. A number of political rights and responsibilities, not the least of which is the notion of veto power, are at the core of what defines the primary/secondary structure.

At a minimum, primary/secondary describes priorities. The primary relationship is the first priority of the person making the primary/secondary distinction. The secondary relationship is second in priority. Most of the other relationship artifacts, including things like veto power, stem from this set of priorities.

*Many people have the tacit, unspoken assumption that a person can only have one primary relationship. I see no reason whatsoever to believe this is true; it's very close, in fact, to saying you can really only love one person--an idea I categorically reject.*

I'd say the etymology of "primary" is against this notion.

I'd also say that you really are missing the point of primary/secondary if this is what you think. Primality isn't nearly as much a concept of emotional experience as it is a statement of which obligations are most important. Almost invariably (in my experience), it's the primary him/herself who requests a primary/secondary structure be put in place, and the choice to break this structure without the primary's blessing demonstrates quite definitively that honoring agreements with the primary is no longer occurring.

   
August 13 2003, 02:51:11 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*What makes a relationship "primary" is the intensity of the relationship, the goals and expectations of the people in the relationship, and the nature of the relationship. A relationship in which there is ongoing involvement in everyday life is "primary;" a relationship is "secondary" if it is more casual.*

I couldn't agree more... but how can you make goals in a new primary relationship that are not consistent with the goals and expectations of the existing primary relationship? How does one create a new primary relationship that invalidates the first by the very nature of the expectation that everyday life is to be shared only with the first primary?

I feel sympathetic toward you because you're being placed in a position here in this post where you're being asked to defend yourself on an issue I was also recently asked to defend myself on, and I know how ugly it feels. I feel badly for both you and your wife, but I don't see a resolution to this, unless your wife discovers a newfound and genuine desire to make your girlfriend a part of *her* life, as well. In my case, that didn't happen, and while I tried to keep my two primary lives separate for awhile, it couldn't be sustained, and ended after a year. Please think carefully about what is important to you.

   
August 13 2003, 04:54:28 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*I couldn't agree more... but how can you make goals in a new primary relationship that are not consistent with the goals and expectations of the existing primary relationship? How does one create a new primary relationship that invalidates the first by the very nature of the expectation that everyday life is to be shared only with the first primary?*

These issues dance around the plain and simple fact that the nature of primary/secondary distinctions is not emotional intensity, but priority.

   
August 13 2003, 05:17:31 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

*the nature of primary/secondary distinctions is not emotional intensity, but priority.*

I'm afraid I must reluctantly agree with you. I still want to point out, though, that emotional intensity is part of what helps set the priority, right?

   
August 13 2003, 18:31:20 UTC  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I'm afraid I must reluctantly agree with you. I still want to point out, though, that emotional intensity is part of what helps set the priority, right?

That depends on the person, honestly. I tend to be a more emotionally muted person. When I enter relationships, I tend to size the prospective lover up with comparisons of intellectual makeup, shared goals, desires for the future, etc. It's like sizing up a company's financial statements prior to buying stock. I invest myself with greater priority in those I feel are going to be most congruent with my own goals and needs. Primality is based on an assessment of quality as a companion. Emotional intensity develops later on, for me.

So, for me, emotional intensity isn't a major factor for initial settings of priority. Later on in a relationship, after emotional intensity has developed, it becomes a factor that holds my priorities in their positions. This is evident in my preference for long-standing, intellectually-focused, compassionate relationships. More capricious relationships based on more short-term passions have a tendency to never climb my ladder of priority.

Your mileage may vary, naturally.

Of course, the point here is not so much about emotional charge but is instead about finding that a certain personal economics is at play. I've actually long held the belief that a mix of utilitarianism and game theory models (especially those used in monopolistically competitive markets) could be applied to predict behavior in polyamorous relationships, but haven't really fleshed things out.

   
[August 13 2003, 20:18:47 UTC](#)  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

When I enter relationships, I tend to size the prospective lover up with comparisons of intellectual makeup, shared goals, desires for the future, etc. It's like sizing up a company's financial statements prior to buying stock.

Dammit. \*slaps forehead\* I thought it was all about my ass.

   
[August 14 2003, 20:50:28 UTC](#)  CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I see where you're coming from, here. It's complex enough that I have to make it personal to understand it: For me, and my situation, my personal life goals didn't correlate well with my primary partner's. We'd been together three years, but I want a family and he doesn't. He also has an obligation to aging parents in another state while I have obligations to mine in this state. I met someone that I would have dated anyway, but, as it turns out, he's looking for the same things in life I am, and now he is my primary. We're to be married in February. That's the way it works.