



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

Aging and (Open) Relationships

Guest: Kathy Labriola

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[00:00:19] - Jaï Bristow

Today I am delighted to be welcoming Kathy Labriola, who is an author of a number of books specifically on non-monogamy. Today we're going to be talking about her latest book, *Polyamorous Elders: Aging in Open Relationships*. Welcome, Kathy.

Kathy Labriola

Thank you. Delighted to be here.

Jaï Bristow

Delighted to have you here. The topics we're discussing today are two fantastic topics that I think don't get talked about very much - aging in relationships and open relationships. Now, for people watching, we're going to be talking about the intersection of both, but we'll also be going into detail about each one of those. Let's start, Kathy, by talking about sex and aging, because let's be honest, that's what everyone wants to hear about.

Kathy Labriola

Actually, a lot of people don't want to talk about that subject. They're very creeped out by the topic.

Jaï Bristow

Exactly. So let's talk about that. Let's talk about why is it so taboo? What is it that's scary about talking about it? Why is it taboo? Do old people actually have sex? What about having sex with multiple partners for those who are non-monogamous? Let's talk about sex and aging.

Kathy Labriola

Yes. Well, definitely old people do have sex, and polyamorous elders do have sex with multiple partners. I think it is a very taboo subject. For some reason, people do not like to think about the idea that older people are continuing to have a robust and healthy, happy sex life. Even though many medical studies have shown that having sex is healthy.

Having sex is good for your health in many, many ways. Older people who have an active sex life tend to be healthier, stay healthier, stay more physically active over time, and live longer.

[00:02:15] - Jaï Bristow

Fantastic. I'm guessing that for some people, their sex lives do decline as they age. Are you saying that you would recommend having a healthy, robust sex life as you age or just in general? It sounds like you think it's very beneficial for your health.

Kathy Labriola

I certainly think having lots of sex is healthy for younger people, middle-aged people and older people. It's a great part of life and does not have to decline as we get older. Certainly some people do stop having sex or have less sex as they age due to physical health problems, generally due to having arthritis and other pain syndromes that make it more painful to have sex. But most older people, even if they have pain or other physical health problems, adapt to having sex in different ways if they cannot have the same kinds of sex that they may have enjoyed so much at a younger age.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's great to talk about adapting sex. As someone who has a number of chronic health conditions, even though I'm very young, I sometimes have to adapt the sex that I have because, like you say, pain or different reasons that can get in the way.

I think it's so good to remember that being disabled, being older, doesn't have to impact your sex life if you want to have sex. Of course there are people who don't want to have sex or who are asexual or who don't have much of a sex drive, but it doesn't have to correlate. I'm glad we're talking about these taboo subjects now.

Kathy Labriola

Well, and I think it's very important for older people to recognize that the disability rights movement has been fantastic for identifying that disabled people have every right to a robust sex life. Disabled people, like elders, have been desexualized in our society and it's assumed that they're not having sex, or they shouldn't have sex, or they can't have sex.

Disabled people have been great role models for me and for all of us as elders to see that no matter what our health condition, we can have an active sex life if we want to and if we choose to. We should not allow anyone else to shame us. We shouldn't allow society's desexualized idea about disabled people and elders to keep us from having a fulfilling sex life if we choose to.

Certainly, as I mentioned, some people do choose not to have sex for any number of reasons, fatigue or pain or other things that make sex less enjoyable. For polyamorous elders, some people who have two, three or more partners, if one partner no longer wants to have sex, that's fine, because they have other partners. There's no pressure on anyone to have sex if they don't want to, and someone who wants sex as an elder can have sex with other partners.

It kind of balances out. If you're in a monogamous relationship and your partner no longer wants sex because of their age or illness or disability, you're just stuck because you're not going to have sex anymore. If you're in a polyamorous relationship it's very different, you have more options and more choices.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's so interesting. That idea that non-monogamy is super supportive as you grow older, to have that option and that choice to have sex or not have sex with different partners depending on the needs. It's true for younger people as well, but it's even more true, I think, as you age so that's excellent.

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I think it's so important what you were talking about that sense of desexualizing. How society tends to desexualize certain groups of people and over-sexualize other groups of people, and that both of those can be very harmful and that really society should just stay out of people's sex lives. And that it would be great if people can learn to tune into their actual needs and desires. There are many, many other fantastic conversations on this conference on that topic. So talking about sex as people age, but also about relationship priorities and how do those shift as people grow older?

Kathy Labriola

Well, in my experience and in my research and interviews that I did, older people's priorities do change, whether they're polyamorous or monogamous. Often as they shift away from careers and raising families, they, for the first time in their lives, often have the freedom to pursue things that they want to do that they didn't have the time, energy or money to do when they were younger.

For most people, particularly in today's modern busy world, are raising children and working full-time for 20 to 30 years of their lives. They're in that situation where they just have no time, no energy for anything else. It just barely can keep up with raising kids and having careers. Many people as they are aging and able to retire or start working part-time, they have time to either pursue doing political activism or working in a volunteer capacity to do something positive in their communities, to pursue art, music, writing or travel or other things that have been important to them but that they haven't been able to do before.

Often this shifts their priorities around relationships. They may have been much more focused, if they're polyamorous, on having two or three or even more relationships. They may and often do consolidate and say well, I have two relationships that have lasted for 20, 30, 40, even more years and I'm very happy with this. I don't feel any need or desire to pursue dating or any other relationships.

Other people have the opposite in that now that they're retired they have more time and energy. They may have been monogamous more or less by default because they just didn't have the time and energy to pursue more. They barely could keep up with one relationship. So now that they're retired, they have more time and energy and they do want to pursue sex, love and romance with multiple partners.

Jaï Bristow

Interesting. If we talk not just about the monogamy or the non-monogamy context, not just about dating more or less partners, what are some other relationship shifts in priorities as people age, would you say?

Kathy Labriola

Well, I noticed a particular trend amongst women that women as they age, they are not nearly as focused on relationships as they were when they were younger. Many women were focused at a younger age on finding a mate, a mate that will be supportive in raising children together and supportive in terms of helping financially. That's a huge priority for them in their twenties, thirties and forties.

But once their children are grown, their priorities shift. They don't need or even want a relationship nearly as much. They may want a very part-time relationship. I've talked to a lot of women, particularly working-class women, who now that their children are grown, they have the opportunity to go to college, which they never did when their children were younger and when they were just trying to make a living and support their children.

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Now they're going to college and getting a college degree or they are starting a business or they're starting a nonprofit or a charity because they have a particular passion for some unmet need in their community or something that they feel they want to contribute to the world.

They're much less focused on a relationship because they don't have nearly as much of a need for a life mate. They either have a life mate that they've had for many years, but they're not putting as much time and energy into that relationship or they're looking for or having a much more part-time relationship or no relationship. They just don't feel that that's such a priority for them as it was in the past.

Jai Bristow

Interesting. So what I'm hearing is that for a lot of people, maybe especially women, the focus goes from family and relationship with other more into relationship with self, and more into autonomy and independence and focusing on their own needs. Because after spending however long raising a family, looking after their partner's needs and their kids' needs and all of this kind of thing, then finally they have more time and space to focus on their own needs. It sounds like a wonderful relationship transition from the focus and energy going outwards to focusing more on oneself.

Kathy Labriola

Yes, and on achieving goals that they may have had since they were children or teenagers but which they never had the opportunity to pursue. This is particularly true for women that married and had children at a young age.

Jai Bristow

That makes sense. I guess as you grow older you have more resources, more capacity, hopefully more wisdom to be able to do those things as well. Fantastic. Talking of relationship transitions, let's go more into what are some other relationship transitions that can happen as people age.

We talked about this transition from an external focus towards self more and the opportunity to do things. But as people grow older, I'm guessing that the relationship dynamic can change partly through if they had kids and no longer having live-at-home kids, but also partners passing away or separations or divorces. And then also how would this then impact the monogamy or non-monogamy dynamic as well?

Kathy Labriola

Yes, well, certainly for couples that have been together a long time and had children, often when the children grow up and leave home it becomes very clear that they're no longer compatible. In many cases the children were the only thing holding them together. They had a joint mission or goal in raising children and that allowed them to feel very connected, but they may no longer have anything in common once that mission or goal is completed. The children have successfully grown up and launched into their adult lives.

For some couples that is a relationship transition where they realize we no longer have a lot in common and we don't really have a strong reason to stay together. However, for some of those couples, they decide at that point to become non-monogamous because they still have enough in common in terms of loving each other and having a shared history. They enjoy living together, they enjoy the family they've created together, the home they've created together, the friends they have together. They want to stay together, but they also want to pursue love and romance with other people as well.

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For some couples that's a natural progression that they don't have to lose everything they have as a couple and as a family. They really do love each other and have a lot of strong emotional and romantic connection, but they need something more as well. So for a lot of couples, that is an opportunity to pursue that. For some couples, however, they decide to separate and divorce and start new lives. In some cases, that involves moving on to a new relationship or marriage. For others, they're happy being single, being separated, divorced and being single.

Jai Bristow

Do you have any advice for navigating some of those transitions? I can imagine if you've spent decades in a partnership with someone or someones that it can be quite a shock to go through some of those transitions.

Kathy Labriola

It is because you've created a life together, it's hard to really change that. Whether that's expanding into a polyamorous relationship and staying together, or whether that's separating and divorcing. I think my first piece of advice would be is to do all this on your own. Don't talk to your friends and family members about it until you've really made your decisions and are already well on your way to this new phase of your lives. You're going to get a lot of pushback and criticism and people telling you you're all wrong and you're doing this wrong and you shouldn't do this.

When you're feeling very vulnerable going through a transition, you don't need that external critique of what you're doing. Trust your own judgment, trust your gut, trust each other and try to get through that transition just as a couple, and then tell other people what you've done after the fact when they can't really discourage you or try to prevent it.

Jai Bristow

Interesting.

Kathy Labriola

You're doing something that is, whether you're going into a non-monogamous relationship or whether you're divorcing and separating, you're doing something that other people don't want you to do. You're doing something that you're not supposed to do and that society doesn't approve of. You need to keep your own counsel on that and don't let other people influence you or shame you or guilt you or anything.

Jai Bristow

Yeah, that makes sense. Let's talk a bit more about this transitioning from a monogamous relationship into an open relationship or a polyamorous relationship. Can you say a bit more about that? It's not something I've actually come across or heard much about, how that can happen. I know a lot of non-monogamous people, but often much, much younger. I'm curious to hear more about that transition.

Kathy Labriola

Well, a fair number of these couples have been non-monogamous in the past, usually before they had children. They are resuming a lifestyle that they paused for many years because they had children and they didn't have the time or energy to do anything like this. Now that the children are grown and gone, they're able to resume that.

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Many of these couples either were, quote, swingers when they were much younger, when they were first married for a number of years, went to swing parties or had sex with other couples or were polyamorous and each had other lovers or partners, but they put that on pause when they were busy with careers and raising children. So they're resuming that.

For those couples, it's a much easier transition. They've done it before and now they're trying to go back to it. It certainly still has its aches and pains. There's always some pain in that transition when you've been used to monogamy for any number of years. But for some couples they have always been monogamous and this is a very new thing. It's pretty important for them to sit down and make some agreements about how to proceed.

Some couples make agreements like, well, let's start out very slowly, just see one other person and maybe see them once a week and don't bring them to the house. Let's not tell people about this yet. Let's just keep this private for now until we work out any problems that come up. So I usually do advise couples to start off slow and see how it goes and then expand if they feel comfortable doing so. Make certain agreements that make each person a little more comfortable with this transition since it's so different than what they've been doing for many years.

Jaï Bristow

Absolutely. If people are interested in delving more into the topic of transitioning and opening up relationships, transitioning into a non-monogamous relationship and creating these agreements, then I also have a fantastic interview with Martha Kauppi that I recommend people check out.

Kathy Labriola

Great.

Jaï Bristow

I'm curious, Kathy, you've written an entire book dedicated to this topic. So why this topic? Why talk about aging in polyamorous relationships?

Kathy Labriola

Well, for one thing, because most of the couples and individuals that I have talked to in my private practice as a counselor as well as interviewed, and people I've met through polyamorous groups and in the poly community have been very successful at polyamory and at open relationships. I believe they have a lot to teach other people about it.

Many people have been in polyamorous relationships for 50 years or more and so they have a lot of experience and could tell people a lot about what to do and what not to do. A lot of people said, gee, if only I could help other people avoid the mistakes I made, avoid some of the problems I created by not knowing what the heck I was doing.

I'm 68 years old. For people in my age group, when we first became polyamorous over 50 years ago, there was no Internet. As much as that's hard for people to believe, there was no Internet. There were no books on polyamory, there were no classes, there were no therapists that had any clue about open relationships. There were no resources whatsoever. As one woman said, well, we were just stumbling along and making it up as we went along.

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That's true. We just had no help, no support. Most of us were doing it in secret because we didn't want to lose custody of our children, we didn't want to lose our jobs. There was so much more discrimination against any kind of nontraditional relationship at that time. All of us in the poly community know people who did lose custody of their children temporarily or long-term because of their polyamorous lifestyles. We know people that were fired and lost their jobs or were hounded out of their profession because of it.

It was a very different reality. So the things we learned and to be able to become very successful in long-term, committed polyamorous relationships were very hard won and we would certainly like to share those insights and whatever we learned with other people, younger people who hopefully will not have to repeat our mistakes.

I really always encourage people of any age to take advantage of the resources that now exist. I mean, there are amazing amounts of free classes on the Internet and free poly support groups live in your community and on Zoom and there are lots and lots of books and lots and lots of zines and pamphlets and magazine articles and all kinds of resources.

Now a lot of therapists actually have the training, especially thanks to Martha Kauppi's fantastic book, now have the training to actually be competent in counseling people who are in open or polyamorous relationships. In the past that was not true. You could not find a therapist that had any kind of competence in working with poly people.

Jai Bristow

I really appreciate you sharing some of that. I think we have come a long way and non-monogamous relationships are still often very much on the fringes of society and seen as unusual. I think it's extra great hearing you speak about them and people like Martha Kauppi, because often the argument is oh, it's just young people going through a phase or it's this new trendy thing people are doing.

To hear that it's been going on for a really long time, it just had to be a lot more secret because it was harder because of legal reasons. It was also harder to connect with community because there wasn't apps online where people could just connect and share their stories and give advice and there weren't the same resources and books.

These days there are lots of books, like you say, there's online courses, there's support groups. There's these kind of conferences where we always make sure to include voices from lots of different perspectives. I really appreciate you bringing in this piece. I'm also aware that we're both quite familiar, I think, with polyamory and non-monogamy and open relationships, but that maybe some people who are watching are less familiar with the terminology. Can we just differentiate a little bit or define what we mean when we're saying polyamory, non-monogamy, especially consensual non-monogamy, and open relationships?

Kathy Labriola

Well, I use all three terms interchangeably, consensual non-monogamy, open relationships, and polyamory. Some people do differentiate between the three. My problem with that is that any person you ask will give you different definitions and they don't match. So that's why I just use all three terms interchangeably.

The key components of all three are that it's consensual, that everyone who is involved is consenting and wants to be in a relationship that involves more than two people that are having some form of sexual or romantic or loving relationship. Number two, that there is honesty involved.

That each person is being honest with their partners about what the nature of the relationships they are having with other people is.

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Those are really the two key components, honesty, transparency, and consent. All three of those terms, consensual non-monogamy, open relationships and polyamory involve those two components. Some people differentiate polyamory particularly because its technical meaning is many loves. Some people differentiate that term as meaning having more than one committed love relationship rather than more than one sexual or romantic relationship. But most people do use the terms interchangeably.

Jai Bristow

Fantastic. Thanks for clearing that up. I think it's so important that you brought in those two pieces, consent and honesty, because they're not the same thing. I've seen relationships where someone tells the other person what they're doing and is like, therefore I'm being honest, nothing wrong with it. But that doesn't mean that there's necessarily the consent from both sides. Again, Martha talks about exactly what that area of consent means and defines it in a very interesting way. I'm curious, Kathy, what would you say are the benefits of polyamorous relationships for elders in particular?

Kathy Labriola

Well, one that I've just mentioned briefly when we were talking about sex, because some people, a significant percentage of people, their sex drive, their interest in sex and their ability to have sex due to physical disabilities and health problems decreases as they age. A huge benefit of polyamory for elders is that each person can decide whether they no longer want sex or whether they want a lot less sex or if they want more sex. They have the option of pursuing that with other people.

No one who wants less sex or no sex is being pressured or coerced to have sex, and no one who wants more sex is being shamed or deprived of having sex. They're able to pursue that. That is a big benefit that monogamous people do not have. Another really big benefit that a lot of people have discovered but didn't really predict is having more - it's boiled down to its essence - having more people means having more resources.

Those resources include having more than one partner to take care of someone who becomes ill or disabled, having more than one partner to financially support a person who no longer can work or who has a very low income in old age. Most people in their old age are living on a fixed income and for many people that's a low income that they can barely live on.

Having more people in your polycule or in your poly relationship life can mean more financial support, more caregiving support, more support in general to do things like if you need to have someone drive you to a doctor's appointment and your partner can no longer drive. I mean, that's a big thing for older people, if you're in a couple, one or both people sometimes are no longer able to drive. If you have more than one partner, usually at least one person is still driving or can still help with those kinds of things or go food shopping for you, that sort of thing.

These are things that most of us never gave a thought to when we were younger, of course, because you never think you're going to get old and need that kind of help. I think when we were younger, most of us became polyamorous out of a desire for more love, more sex, more adventure, a transgressive form of relationship that didn't conform to the traditional monogamous model.

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For those of us who are queer, there was that desire not to conform to the heterosexual norm of relationship that never really worked for the heterosexuals anyway, but it certainly doesn't work for queer people. We went into this with much different motives, but we're discovering that there is a lot of benefit that we had never really imagined or never really thought about.

Jai Bristow

Fantastic. I think the key takeaways I get from what you're sharing is one around sex and the ability to have your needs met without shame or express your desire or lack thereof. And that there's way less pressure or less shame because there's multiple people involved, and so each person can hopefully have their needs met or express their boundaries or their limits much more easily.

The other key takeaway I get is around community support and not putting all the expectations or pressure or needs on one person, and that support when someone is incapacitated in some way or has limitations that develop. Everything isn't just on one person, but on community. I think those two key takeaways, even though the specific examples you were giving were maybe more relevant to elder people, I think those two key takeaways are applicable not just to younger non-monogamous people as well, but are something that people who are also in monogamous relationships could really learn from the non-monogamous community.

Because you don't have to become polyamorous to have that sense of community, to have that sense of close relationships that you can rely on outside of just one partner, whether that's friendships or all kinds of other ones. Whenever I interview someone on non-monogamy, that's always something that it's like what can people who are in more traditional relationships learn from these alternative relationships, even if it's not a relationship model that suits them? What are some things that people can learn? I think those two things are really important in that regard.

Kathy Labriola

Yes, I would totally agree with that. I'd like to add that this is particularly true for women, women of my generation, we were the first generation in the history of humankind that had a choice about bearing children because we were the first generation of women that had access to effective birth control and eventually to safe, legal abortion. We had a choice about whether to bear children. A small but significant percentage of women of my generation chose not to bear children.

That's significant in that it allowed us to pursue a very nontraditional lifestyle that we never would have been able to do if we were tied down with children. But it's also significant that in our old age we do not even have the delusion that we are going to be somehow taken care of by our children. I think a lot of people that have children have the belief that their children will somehow take care of them in their old age. It doesn't usually happen. But for those of us who don't have children, we can't even have that illusion.

We've had to prepare and to develop community that we hope will be able to be there for us in our elder years. We've also had to prepare financially by making sure, if we possibly can to put money away for our old age in case we do need care, either in a care facility or to hire someone to help us at home. So I think those are things that everyone should be thinking about, whether they have children or not.

But I think it's even more important because before my generation women had no choice about childbearing. They had no access to birth control. There was no effective birth control before the invention of the birth control pill and the IUD in the 1960s when women of my generation started to come of age and be sexually active. I think that's an important issue for people, whether you're monogamous, polyamorous or whether you're young or old.

[00:33:50] - Jaï Bristow

I'm so glad you brought that piece in, because when you were talking before about looking after each other, if someone gets ill, automatically my first thought was, oh, well, family can also do that for example. Because even though I myself don't want kids and I'm older than I look, I'm at that age where now most of my friends do have kids. It's something that is so ingrained in me that that was my first thought that crossed my mind. I think it's really important to explicitly bring this piece in and name that.

Kathy Labriola

I think that possibly younger generations are not thinking about that so much just because they've always had that choice to have children or not have children, but that wasn't always the case. That's a very recent development that people of all genders have the choice, whether to procreate or not. But I also think as queer people we have always been rejected by our families. I think the youngest generation of queer people now their families are much more accepting. But when I was in my twenties, thirties, forties, all queer people in general were completely ostracized and rejected by their families.

There was no hope on our part that we would be taken care of by any family members in our old age. For many poly people, their adult children have ostracized them because they're embarrassed about their parents being polyamorous or they're uncomfortable with the grandchildren being around the grandparents who are polyamorous. The adult children don't want to have to explain to their children about their parents being polyamorous. So often now poly people, we really need our partners, our partners' partners, our friends, our loved ones to be there for us in our old age because our adult children, a lot of them have ostracized their poly parents.

Jaï Bristow

It's so interesting how it can go both ways. We often think about parents rejecting their children, but then for children to reject their parents in that way as well, and just seeing how that can probably also be very retraumatizing for people who were rejected by their parents because they had an alternative life, whether that was through being queer or through being non-monogamous or both. And then to be rejected all over again by their kids that they raised for the same reasons.

I can imagine how that must be so painful. I'm also hearing how there is this sense of chosen family as well, this sense of community and support and that there's so many ways to build healthy relationships that don't necessarily involve people that we're related to or people that we're married to.

Kathy Labriola

Yes. One of the things I really stressed in the book and I want to stress to everyone is that it's very important to have the appropriate paperwork in place. Write your will. Write up your directive to physician that tells your doctor what you want done if you're in a coma or unable to make decisions, who you want to make decisions for you. Write your durable power of attorney for financial purposes which will designate someone that you want to make financial decisions for you and be in control of your finances if you're not able to be.

Because otherwise, if you don't have those documents in place, blood relatives who you may be completely estranged from are going to be in control of your life, and if you die, in control of your estate, whatever money or property or possessions you leave behind. These are things people don't like to think about, but these things are very important. Get these documents in place. Everyone, whether you live a traditional life or not, needs these documents. But people who are polyamorous or queer or in nontraditional relationships need these documents even more, because

the people that you want to be in control have no legal rights because they're not related to you by blood or marriage.

[00:38:14] - Jaï Bristow

I think that's so important. I think, like you say, everyone should be thinking about this to some degree and it doesn't matter how old you are because you just never know what's going to happen. But especially if you are closer to your chosen family than to your blood relatives or if you have alternative lifestyles or if you have multiple relationships and they're not all legally partners or whatever it is. I think it's really important to name that and to think about that.

That's something that so often is overlooked, especially by people with more mainstream relationships but also by people in alternative relationships. So I really appreciate you bringing in this really important piece. I'm curious, how would you compare poly relationships specifically with older people and younger people? What are some of the key differences? Would you say older people are more or less successful at polyamorous relationships? What are some of the specific differences between the two?

Kathy Labriola

Well, I would say older people are more successful at it only because they've had more years to practice and get it right. So older people, most of us, have made some mistakes and had some disastrous breakups and other things. But we've had more years to really practice and figure out what we want in relationships and to make better partner choices, to pick people that are more compatible with us and to work out and develop relationships that are happy and healthy for us.

But the other key difference, I would say, is that older poly people are much more likely to live in couples. Younger poly people are more likely to be practicing relationship anarchy or some other form of poly relationship that does not involve prioritizing a couple relationship. Most older poly people have been in a relationship as a couple for anywhere between 20, 30, 40, 50 years or more and they've lived together, mostly raised children or had a home together and been in that couple formation. Each person in that couple relationship generally has one pretty long-term, committed, successful relationship outside of the couple relationship. But most often the other relationships, the other people do not live with them.

The second most common form, which is much less common, is for older poly people to live together in a triad and in a few cases as a quad with like two couples that have merged together and become a family. But the one couple living together, creating family together, home together and then having long-term committed relationships outside of the couple relationship that are not domestic partners, that do not live with them full-time is the much more common form.

That's the overwhelming majority of older poly relationships is the form that most of them take. Younger people are more likely to be trying more experimental forms of polyamory, but a very significant percentage of younger people in their twenties, thirties and forties do live in more traditional couple formations.

They live as a couple, they have children together, they have a home together and they prioritize the couple, but they do have significant relationships outside that couple. I don't mean to imply that younger people don't do that. There's a very significant percentage that do that in a poly relationship, but for older poly people that is the overwhelming majority of people.

Jaï Bristow

That's really interesting. I'm curious, why do you think that is? Do you think it's to do with age or to do with generation? Because as you mentioned there was a lot less resources around your generation. Is it do you think, based on the cultural expectations, that it was easier to hide by

having a more obvious primary relationship or nesting partner? That's what I mean by do you think it's generational.

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Or do you think it's to do with age, where when you're younger, it's more fun to experiment and play around with different ways of relating, or focus more on what's often known as solo polyamory. So where someone's primary focus is with themselves and then they can date lots of different people and have loving committed relationships, but can continue in a very different way than having a primary relationship. The only person they really need to check in with is themselves. Obviously, everything has to be consensual and honest in that case as well. Do you think it's to do with age or to do with generations?

Kathy Labriola

I don't think either one. I think it was more accidental. When my generation was in our twenties, the societal expectation was that you would mate with one person, marry, settle down, have children. I think a fair number of people did go along with that societal programming because there was not much alternative. I think as a result, most polyamorous relationships in my generation started with a primary couple because people were already married or living together, but not married, cohabiting and being domestic partners.

I think it just was a natural accidental outgrowth of that, that when people decided to become polyamorous, they were already living together or married, were already in a couple and had already created a home together. They naturally branched out. Even nowadays with younger people, most polyamorous relationships start with two people who are in some kind of committed relationship and then they decide to branch out.

They may not be living together or married, but it's a similar trajectory. I mean, to be polyamorous you have to start with one relationship and then decide to have another. So there's usually one pre-existing relationship and then another. It's very unusual for someone to start two or three relationships at the same time. But I think it was much more common when I was younger for people to already be living together or married when they became polyamorous.

As a result, I think if people were already happily partnered and happily living together or married, there was no reason for them to move separately or split up or do anything different than just add on an additional relationship. Some of those relationships became triads where someone, either one or both people in the couple, developed an outside relationship and then asked that person to join the family and become an equal partner and live together as a family.

Some of those relationships have been very successful and have been going on for many, many years. However, I certainly know of any number of people who tried that and the triad did not work out. Someone moved in with them and either the whole relationship blew up and all three people broke up or that person that had moved in with them and became part of the family, it didn't work out and they moved out.

Sometimes the primary couple broke up and the other person stayed. A lot of that happened, but there are certainly a fair number of successful triads that have been going on for decades that are people in my age group, the poly elders.

Jai Bristow

I think that's really interesting, just the different perspectives. For example, in my circles, there are a lot more people who identify as polyamorous and aren't necessarily in a committed relationship when they choose to open up. There has been, I think, a big shift. I'm in my thirties, so a little bit younger than you, about half your age, but it seems like there has been a big shift generationally,

but also, as you say, now that there's more resources, there's more openness about these topics, there's books about it.

[00:47:00]

People can read books and be like, oh, this resonates with me more, or they can see things on social media. I know a lot of people identify with being polyamorous or non-monogamous in the same way they identify with being queer. It's just part of who they are. So any relationship that they go into, they go into as a non-monogamous or a polyamorous person.

I think it's really interesting how things shift. I really wanted to backtrack a minute, when I'd asked you about the differences or you were talking about the success, I can't remember exactly, but what you were sharing about older people being more successful just because they have more experience.

I think it's true that older people have more experience in relationships in general and more wisdom. It's wonderful that for those of us who are younger, that we can learn from those who have been there, done that, or are doing that still, and have written the books, and that there's so much to learn from our elders.

It's so wonderful to have a community where there are elders, and that we're no longer having to make it all up as we go along. There are also things that shift culturally and generationally and all that kind of thing. Thank you so much for your time today, Kathy. This has been a really interesting conversation. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Kathy Labriola

I have a website and it's just kathylabriola.com.

Jaï Bristow

Fantastic.

Kathy Labriola

I have a lot of free videos and things of me doing workshops, and I try to put all of those on my website because people in some places do not have access to that kind of workshop. I really want people to be able to just get on the Internet and find that information when they need it.

Jaï Bristow

Brilliant. Thank you so much. I really appreciate your time today.

Kathy Labriola

Thank you. It's been a pleasure.