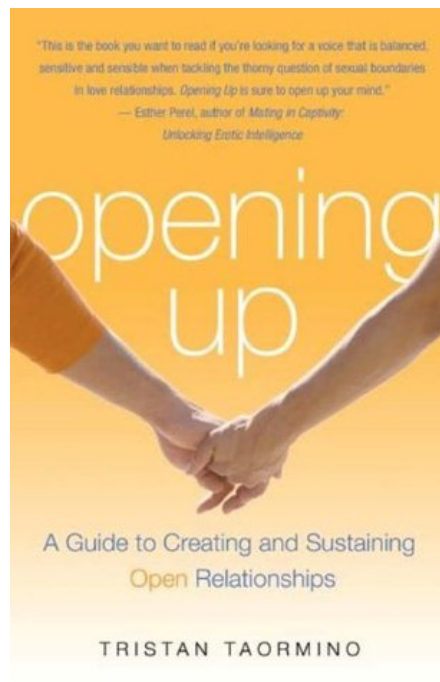




Opening Up: A Guide To Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships

Tristan Taormino

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Relationship expert and bestselling author Tristan Taormino offers a bold new strategy for creating loving, lasting relationships. Drawing on in-depth interviews with over a hundred women and men, Opening Up explores the real-life benefits and challenges of all styles of open relationships — from partnered non-monogamy to solo polyamory. With her refreshingly down-to-earth style and sharp wit, Taormino offers solutions for making an open relationship work, including tips on dealing with jealousy, negotiating boundaries, finding community, parenting and time management. Opening Up will change the way you think about intimacy.

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From Reader Review Opening Up: A Guide To Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships for online ebook

Zyriel says

Ultimately, this book is dated. Polyamory, as a general relationship model has progressed and an ethical foundation has been defined that is being adopted. This book is sort of training-wheel mode and I think could teach bad turns of thinking when applied to romantic relationships, rather than just erotic ones.

At the time of its publishing, this book was more current and, in my opinion, provided a better tone than Ethical Slut, even though the content of the two are very similar. However, at this point in time, it just can't compare with More Than Two by Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert. Opening Up is ethically pedestrian in comparison.

I'm going to start with the book's strong points:

- The details around swinging are well detailed and very accurate. Tristan's depiction of swingers and poly's are kind and positive and insightful. The description of polyamory, while a little basic, hits the point. Although I would argue the her initial definition of "sexual and loving" is hard to accept in the face of the burgeoning asexual community. Polyamory, ultimately, is really about an emotional connection, swinging about an erotic one. It's amusing that she does go into great detail about nonsexual poly relationships, but this didn't affect her definition.
- I appreciate the depth in which she discusses Mono/Poly relationships. She provides many examples with a great deal of variety, and tackles emotional and ethical issues surrounding this configuration that are valuable discussion points.
- The section on NRE is strikingly good.
- The chapter on coming out is pretty good, more detailed than what is provided in More Than Two, actually. In particular, some of the common questions or responses that one might receive when coming out as nonmonogamous. The chapter on coming out to children is also very good, detailed with a lot of examples.

Next, the weak points:

- The "One partner can't meet all your needs" motto that is repeated throughout the book really bothers me. It's not singular to this book, it's actually common poly phrase. However, for the reader coming to this type of book in search of help because their partner is saying they need a new option, other than monogamy, this statement is a slap in the face and it's BS. Ok, one partner can't meet all your needs, sure, neither can two, or twenty. Partner's aren't need filling machines. All you're saying to this person in search of help is "you aren't enough" which is the message they're already telling themselves, they need someone to tell them a new message instead.
- Suggestions that someone should "give up" one of their partners for another shows a lack of understanding that the feelings of everyone involved have equal value. It treats the partner to be "given up" as an object rather than a person and invalidates the feelings of the person expected to do the "giving up". Ideas of "Honoring your primary" relationship are similarly stunted thinking and lack universal meaning. This, in part, is where my interpretation that the book is focused on erotic connections outside of one single romantic relationship, is founded.
- In the chapter on Polyamory, the author discusses "Primary" and "Secondary" partnerships, prioritizing one relationship (person) over another as a default - ethics check, and suggests that because there is no established model for "Secondary" relationships that they must be defined and a consensus made. But I would argue that assuming a "Primary" relationship doesn't need that is a very traditionally monogamous way of thinking and is fallacy, and risks introducing problems to that relationship that could have been

avoided by approaching all relationships the with the same perspective. The examples given in the "Negotiations and Potential Issues" section of the Polyfidelity chapter are similarly ethically shocking with descriptions of people giving up their agency and rights to their partner's judgment.

- She confuses the terms V and Triad, choosing to call them a "V Triad". This might be a product of the age of the book and an evolution of terms, but a V and a Triad are two very different things.
- The chapter on Designing Your Open Relationship is a difficult read. The suggestions the author makes aren't about personal boundaries, many of them are around controlling your partners, and disregarding their partners as people. The implication is that you own your partner, your partner's activities and how they conduct themselves. The author also supports the fallacy that you can define a relationship, build a box for it, before it exists and that it will fit into that box and never grow and that it's not allowed if it doesn't fit into that box. It's a terrible way to approach relationships, emotional or erotic.
- In the jealousy chapter, there's a sense that "some people don't feel jealousy" that is a dangerous precedent to set with readers.

The author's unwrapping of the concept of jealousy is stunted and incomplete.

- This next one was shocking to me. I had to stop and look through the book to make sure I wasn't mistaken or jumping to assumptions. ... The story about Samiya on page 214 has a weird insertion of her race that most other stories in the book don't have, and is completely irrelevant to her story. Gabrielle's story on the next page depicts her race as well, again for no reason. I saw nowhere in the book where someone's story was describing them as white or Caucasian.
- On that note, Gabrielle's story on page 215 is a terrible example of moving from non-monogamy to monogamy. Or, actually it's a great example but the author used it horribly. This woman dumped her secondary partner so that she had leverage to make her primary partner dump the woman he was seeing, so they could become monogamous and rebuilt trust in their relationship. She complains that their poly community ostracized them for not being non-monogamous anymore. What both she and the author are failing to see is that she treated her secondary partner, whom she admits she had deep feelings for, as an object to be summarily dismissed rather than a human being with feeling who she (ostensibly) cared about. THAT's why they were ostracized, they demonstrated that they were unpleasant people and no one wanted to be involved with them.
- The chapter on STI's has some inaccurate information. Not out-dated, but wrong at the time the book was written as well. It's not wholly inaccurate, but has some inaccuracies sprinkled in. Suggesting that condoms protect against HPV but not completely against HSV is silly and odd. They are passed very similarly. Both can pass through infected or shedding sites not covered by a condom. Additionally, the author seems to be confused about the difference between HSV1 & HSV2, describing that a partner with an oral HSV1 outbreak can infect their partner with genital HSV2 by performing oral sex. They are two distinctly different viruses; that's not possible. A partner with an oral HSV1 outbreak could infect their partner with genital HSV1, but not with genital HSV2. The number does not indicate the location; it indicates which strain of the virus it is describing. The website her statement references does not appear to hold any such mis-information and is a herpes specific website so I can only guess that she misinterpreted what she was reading and read only one resource.

Eric says

Basically the Strunk and White of polyamory. One of the best, most comprehensive guides to the topic, from all angles. Extraordinarily great advice, filled with real world experience, and extremely easy to read.

Elevate Difference says

I've been waiting for this book for a decade!

I read *The Ethical Slut* by Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt in 1998, but found the information they provided rather basic. I've waited ten years to read something even more enlightening and instructive. Tristan Taormino has made my wish come true with *Opening Up*.

Foremost, I appreciate the writing style that Taormino choose for this book. Her writing is clear and incisive, not coy or sensational, and never obscene or vulgar. Her goal is clearly to educate, and she hits the mark throughout, making this book appropriate for people from a variety of backgrounds.

The body of the book is organized into twenty chapters in three sections. Several of the chapters include exercises or checklists to help readers explore boundaries, desires, and expectations. Some chapters have boxes with additional information. Comments from real people in open relationships emphasize many points made by the author. These quotes give authentic illustrations to the ideas the author is asserting and permit the inclusion of multiple viewpoints. Many chapters end with a profile of people in an open relationship, further allowing individuals to speak for themselves. I appreciated being able to witness the experiences of various people.

Section 1: Choosing an Open Relationship gives histories of different types of open relationships, tracing swinging to parties in Hollywood in the 1930s and gay bath houses as far back as the 1920s. This portion of the book also explodes the myths of nonmonogamy, offers numerous questions for self-reflection in order to help readers decide if they want to pursue open relationships, and gives ideas about what emotional skills and qualities are necessary for such partnerships to succeed.

In Section 2: Styles of Open Relationships, there are chapters dealing with partnered nonmonogamy, swinging, polyamory, solo polyamory, polyfidelity, and monogamous/nonmonogamous and mono/poly combinations. Each approach is considered thoroughly.

Section 3: Creating and Sustaining Your Relationships is the longest portion of the book. This section covers designing open relationships, jealousy and other intense feeling, common challenges and problems of open relationships, finding community, being open about one's lifestyle, change, raising children, safer sex and sexual health, and legal and practical issues, among other topics.

The book ends with a notes section so the reader can investigate the research used by the author. There is also an extensive resource guide which covers books; conferences and events; GLBT/Queer resources; local and regional organizations, online groups, listserves, and communities; international resources; magazines; national organizations; professional directories; research and activism; and spirituality resources. The only thing missing from this section is an index, which would be a huge help in finding a specific topic quickly.

All in all, I highly recommend this how-to guide to anyone considering an open relationship or just wanting to learn what nonmonogamy is all about. This book will answer questions, address fears, and help individuals decide how they really want to organize their romantic/sexual/intimate relationship(s).

Review by Chantel C. Guidry

Gabe says

Hand down this is the best book out there on open relationships. It contains none of the arrogance of *The Ethical Slut* and none of the useless (to me) tantric and self-help babble of *Polyamory: The New Love*

Without Limits. I don't want to define it by what it doesn't have, though, as the book is full of people telling their own stories about how they have made their relationships work. Tristan makes room for all sorts of relationship configurations, passing no judgment on any of them. She provides practical advice about everything from knowing your own boundaries to protection from STIs.

Tristan is a gift to the world, and I'm so thankful she wrote this book.

Neilina Corbeau says

I listened to this in audiobook format with my partner. It was a great experience and a great medium for discussion. Every time anything came up that sparked either of our interests, we would pause it and discuss the topic. This made for a pretty lengthy process but it was a very illuminating and beneficial experience for our relationship. We both identify as polyamorous and have since we began our relationship. It was great to see where our ideas of poly lined up, where they diverged and where they clashed.

It has been about 5 years since I read the Ethical Slut and I've been practicing poly ever since then. This book, however, seems to really be more accessible than The Ethical Slut (even in the title alone). If I had to recommend a "how-to" book on non-monogamous relationships to anyone it would certainly be this one. I would also recommend they read Sex At Dawn soon before or after this book.

The one major critique that I have (that my partner actually pointed out) was that there does seem to be some racial othering in the way the authour introduces subjects in the book. She introduces all non caucasians with their ethnicity as part of their short personal bio, whereas in many cases (which I'm presuming are caucasian) this information is not included (assumed to be the default/norm). I hope that this will be corrected in future editions of the book.

Other than that item, however, I highly recommend this book for anyone to develop relationship skills monogamous or otherwise. Even if you never plan on relating in any way other than monogamy, it is highly beneficial to hear other perspectives and possibly garner more acceptance for alternative relationship models.

Maria says

This book spends enough time and energy talking about BDSM that I wouldn't be comfortable giving it to my parents. Which is too bad, because it's otherwise a pretty balanced discussion of how different nonmonogamous relationships function. (If you flip to the stats in the back you'll discover that about 60% of her interview sample self-identified as kinky, so it's not surprising that it keeps coming up. I guess that's one of the problems with snowball sampling.)

Also, be careful in the safer sex section - she's working from secondary sources and repeats at least one incorrect statement about herpes (if you get a type 1 infection in your crotch, it is still type 1, it does not become type 2).

I've been successfully poly for years, and have spent enough time talking to other nonmonogamous people about their relationships that I didn't really get anything new or interesting from this book. I had a nice little chuckle about the ways in which I've apparently been doin' it wrong all this time, rolled my eyes at a couple of pet peeves (my irk with the whole "the reason I want other partners is to meet my unmet needs" thing is off topic for this review but man o man), and that was about it.

Had I read it when my partner and I were first opening up, I think it might have prevented one or two uncomfortable moments... but then again I think the emphasis on trying to figure things out in advance might have been bad for us in other ways. So, eh. I'm not going to go around pushing this on every n00b poly I meet, but I would definitely recommend it to someone who already knows that the "negotiate rules to address lots of hypothetical circumstances before they happen" approach is what works best for them.

Tiko says

I recommend this book to anyone thinking of starting an open relationship or anyone that has been doing open relationships for years. It's interesting, to the point, and covers all kinds of relationships while encouraging the reader to find their boundaries and choose the kind of relationship that is right for them. This is not propaganda for polyamory!

This is the first book on open relationships I've read. (I couldn't get myself to read something titled "The Ethical Slut"!)

I've been in open relationships in many different ways for several years. My current strong relationship recently went through a rough patch when we came across experiences we didn't think to put in our rules. This book was recommended to us then. This book lays out many different ways of having open relationships and gives lots of examples of what can happen and options on how to deal with feelings and situations. It showed me a few things I hadn't considered and made sure they got incorporated into our new rules. It also showed me that we were not alone in experiencing this difficulty and gave me new words to express what we were going through.

Jennie says

If you're interested in starting an open relationship or simply want to know more about the subject this book is an excellent and exhaustive resource. I read *The Ethical Slut* a while back and found myself somewhat disappointed. That book has excellent commentary on what works for a small group of people. It talks about the pitfalls of compulsory monogamy and the right to chose an alternative style of relationship. However, it focuses entirely on polyamory and doesn't consider the wide range of experiences under the umbrella term "open." Here I felt that Tristan really covered an amazing amount of ground and did readers a great service by discussing each type of relationship including its benefits as well as possible problems. The checklists and sample questions are sure to open up a really thorough dialogue between partners.

duck reads says

Tristan Taormino is one of the most readable sexuality education authors out there, so this book fairly flew by. It's a pretty straightforward introduction to some of the variety of nonmonogamy that exists, with practical tips and strategies for navigating it. The sexual health chapter feels tossed-off, which is really surprising given Taormino's experience in the field, and there's some creeping ciscentrism in the categorisation, but overall it seems quite a useful guide.

Katie says

Working in the counseling profession, I wanted to learn/educate myself on the topic of open relationships (something I knew hardly anything about), so I decided to read this book. While it was challenging for me to wrap my head around some of the complex issues connected to the subject of open relationships, I found this book to be articulately well-written and informative. I learned quite a bit and it challenged me to examine negative assumptions (based on my ignorance) I previously held about this particular subject. I still don't understand it completely, but this book helped me to know what it entails and how to help others (such as my clients) explore if it is a lifestyle they wish to pursue for themselves. Totally recommend this book to clinicians in the counseling field, as well as the everyday person who wants (or is curious about) open relationships. Having an open mind, however, is essential to reading this book. Prepare for your preconceived cultural perceptions of monogamy vs. nonmonogamy to be questioned, maybe even shattered....

Dawn Serra says

This book is for anyone looking for ways to make their relationships stronger.

Yes, the book is about open relationships, non monogamy, polyamory, etc. But, throughout the book Taormino has so many powerful suggestions and insights into navigating any kind of relationship - whether it's monogamous, non monogamous, or something else.

At several points throughout the book, Taormino does validate monogamy, as long as it's a conscious choice made by both parties in the relationship. That said, the book really pushes the ideal that open relationships are usually much healthier because you're forced to communicate more.

I disagree. I've known some people in very unhealthy, drama-filled open relationships; people who lacked self-awareness and strong communication skills.

That said, I do believe that with patience and practice, anyone can successfully explore open relationships, especially if they follow the advice found in this book.

Taormino works hard to show the good, the bad, and the ugly of open relationships. With real people providing real examples from their own lives, you're exposed to a wide variety of relationships, problems, solutions, and personal obstacles, as well as how they are working to overcome them.

Throughout the book, Taormino stresses the importance of honesty, communication, flexibility, and patience. She is clear that there are many rewards and pitfalls to approaching relationships this way, but ultimately, having the freedom to grow and change within a relationship is the bottom line.

Opening Up is a fantastic resource full of real-world information that is down-to-earth, approachable, and wide open to interpretation. Each relationship that you have will require different expectations and rules, and create new experiences. What Taormino really wants everyone to understand is that it's up to you to negotiate what will make you happy in your various relationships - so get clear on who you are, what you want, and always allow room to change and grow.

None of us are stagnant. What we wanted 10 years ago probably isn't what we want today. Our relationships are the same way - they evolve and change as our experiences shape our reality.

Opening Up is a fantastic book for challenging assumptions, considering alternative approaches to common relationship problems, and exploring open relationship models in the real world.

cizi says

One of my long-term goals is to be a better human and an important part to making progress towards that is to broaden my understanding of topics typically classified under "Diversity & Inclusion"

Opening Up is a book about relationships, in particular: non-monogamous relationships. I would recommend it for people:

- * who want to become aware of and challenge their perspective on heteronormative and monogamous scripts
 - * who co-parent or know someone who is
 - * interested in having constructive conversations around the design of their relationships (romantic, platonic, whatever) by learning the gift of language to express your needs and desires as provided in this book (tools! checklists! and the author provides a notes section that shares the research she used to write this book); be proactive!
-

Win Scarlett says

May I start this review off with a somewhat snarky anecdote?

My friend Jenny and I were on the train and she started to read The Subterraneans by Jack Kerouac for about 2 minutes before she got frustrated and switched over to reading her NYS driver's instruction manual. We lamented over having a mutual distaste for the Beats and I joked: "At least that book will get you on the road".

Which is sort of how I feel about The Ethical Slut in comparison to Opening Up. The former was a great entry point in to the discussion of alternative non-monogamous relationships but it took reading Opening Up to realize how lacking ES really is. Where ES succeeds is in it's bravado: a tongue-in-cheek, lifestyle driven manifesto. However, Opening Up provides much more substantial material in putting the wheels on the ground and navigating non-monogamy in a pragmatic way.

I found pretty much every chapter crucial to opening up my understanding of the endless possibilities of relating to friends, lovers, casual playmates, soul mates and more. The case studies never became repetitive, but rather added various textures to the narrative voice. Personally, I have a strong dislike for self-help checklists and tables in a book, but I found the various inserts in each chapter to be relevant and user friendly.

I don't have much criticism about this book. It's been treating me well, and I'm glad I was recommended it.

Kaila says

I read most of this book before I was poly and it helped set some guidelines and asked questions that I

thought I knew all the answers to.

After my recent breakup (of my primary/anchor relationship, to use the parlance), I decided to start over and read the book again, with an eye for Shit I Want to Get Right Next Time. There was a lot of Shit, lemme tell ya. This book is not about changing your life philosophy, it's not hippy dippy or a soft touch. It kind of assumes you've already decided to open your relationship, and here's the Shit You Need to Know to Do It Right. My pet name for the book became "How to Project Manage Poly."

This time, I'll take more of it to heart. I know more about what I want in my relationship and what has no place there. It is ok to have boundaries. It is ok to want things. It is ok to have jealousy. It is ok to breakup when none of those things are being respected.

I'm not a bad guy. It's ok to hurt.

Cecily Walker says

Taormino provides a much-needed update to the subject. Unlike other authors who have tackled the subject of open relationships, Taormino makes the argument that polyamory can be non-sexual, and such relationships are as valid and important as those with a sexual component.

Clearly written without being dogmatic, instructive without being preachy, Taormino's book could possibly topple "The Ethical Slut" from its place as the definitive book on open relationships. Read it if you're curious, currently practicing, or just intrigued by the many and varied ways that human beings relate to each other.
