

The Ethical Trigamist

Sven is 45 years old. He's average height with kind eyes, but this is not how he describes himself. "I'm paunchy and currently my hair is wildly out of control," he offers, when I ask for his distinctive physical characteristics. In assessing his character he volunteers that people think he is the life and soul of the party and he thinks he's overly kind. "I'm quite social and my diary is continually packed with social functions and social engagements and things I do ...and actually I would quite just like to have a quiet night in a couple of days a week," he says wearily.

Sven's social life is "out of control" but it's a beast of his own making. His inherent kindness sees his services in high demand. He's a shoulder to cry on, a plus one for weddings, a shopping assistant and an extra pair of hands. Being a knight in shining armour is never an easy feat – and it's harder when you're dealing with multiple maidens in distress.

Sven leads a polyamorous lifestyle, maintaining several concurrent, ongoing intimate relationships. How many? Well, he's not quite sure. "I think I'm currently trigamous – not monogamous, not bigamous, but trigamous," he says.

The three women – Jennifer, Meg and Catherine – are close in age and share interests in BDSM sexual activities but that's where the similarities end. They are physically distinct and geographically distant. They also share equal ranking in Sven's affections. "I would like to say that they each bring different things to my life," he says.

Sven hasn't always dabbled in this lifestyle. He was widowed a few years ago after a marriage of just under ten years. "I hooked up with Catherine within a couple of months of my wife passing away," he says. Some may see this as a quick transition. Sven is not so sure. "I knew for quite a while that my wife was very ill and was unlikely to survive. So maybe I got through some of the grieving process before...maybe I needed a shoulder to cry on and some emotional support."

His relationship with Jennifer began soon after. She was an old flame, albeit a casual one; older even than his marriage. They met at University and had their first fling shortly after he graduated. She is the most geographically distant so they spend a weekend together once a month.

Meg is his most recent relationship, joining the party only four or five months ago. Sven also knows her from his university days. "Meg and I got back in contact through Facebook. We did have a one night stand about 18 months ago and then she didn't contact me for a year. She'd been married, had just got divorced, was already in another relationship and still is. She is, like Catherine, interested in the BDSM sex scene," explains Sven.

Sven's polyamory is no secret. The women all know that he sees other women on an ongoing basis. "They know considerable details because in general I try to – and this is probably a mistake – be as honest as possible about the numbers," Sven says. "But I'm aware that one of them recently has gone through my diary which is uncomfortable for me. I think being honest about relationships is one thing, but having someone go through your diary because of your chosen lifestyle is dishonest. If she wanted to know she could ask me."

Honesty is the cornerstone of each of his relationships. "I enjoy sex with different people and in the past when I've been in one relationship I've always found that I've strayed. Therefore, if I acknowledge the need in me to have sex with different people, I think it's fair to be honest with those people and make sure they're aware that that's my intended lifestyle," he says.

While the women may be aware of his intentions, their reactions differ. "Jennifer, because she lives furthest away, is the most accepting and she's never been in the position of being the only game in town. Catherine is probably the person I see most frequently and we have gone through a continual cycle of her saying she can't cope with my lifestyle; that she's waiting for me to get it out of my system

to settle down with her; and then we break it off," Sven explains. The current status of his relationship with Catherine is a question mark. He believes it's platonic, but implies it may not stay that way. Their impending movie date may reignite the sexual side of the relationship, although he is beginning to wonder whether this is a good idea.

"I think ultimately I'm hurting her and I'm currently really questioning the lifestyle I'm leading and whether it's possible to continue doing what I'm doing, because I don't seem to be able to identify partners who would be comfortable in leading a lifestyle in this manner," he says with a frown. Here's the rub. Sven has admirable control over his emotions. The women less so. "I've been told that emotionally I have a different make-up to most people. I may be fooling myself, but I feel I can immediately switch off the emotion. I think that emotional attachment is like a tap. Turn it on, have a great time, go for a meal, watch a film, go to bed, have some sex. A day or two later, get up, walk out the door, turn that tap off, turn the next tap on."

There's a long pause when I ask Sven if he enjoys his time with the women. "Yes," he says without conviction. "It's fulfilling and I know I have a sex drive that needs to be met, but even when the sex has been and gone, I'll play cards or we'll watch TV or go and see films and these are enjoyable activities. I'd like to think of these relationships as friends with benefits or benefits where there's also friendship."

Sven is a thoughtful man. He's caring and supportive. Meg would testify to this, as she's been going through tough times and it's Sven, rather than her boyfriend, who's been there to pick up the pieces. As an example, Meg once told him she'd never had a man buy her flowers. Now she has. Sven's not oblivious to the consequences, though. "On reflection that's me giving a signal that's at odds with how I said the relationship will be and that makes her think it's moving in a different way, when in actual fact I'm buying her flowers because no other man has ever bought her flowers. I can see

that quite simply as being a nice thing to do which has no other meaning than that."

"We had quite a long conversation today where I've made it clear what I think the basis of our relationship going forward is, which is that I would like to see her less," says Sven before correcting himself: "That's not true actually. What has happened is that Meg has realised that she's not necessarily the primary relationship of the three, even though she's the most recent. Because we've discussed my lifestyle choices today I think she's now dealing with the fact that the relationship is not going to move in the direction that perhaps she was hoping it would."

The women seem to have difficulty separating the benefits from the friendship while Sven, despite valuing the friendships, is focussed on the sexual element. "I think there's definitely something in me that feels the need to be performing. There's something which is possibly lacking which means I see this as a critical thing," he confesses. Attempting to determine what percentage of his relationships is sexual, Sven's sense of humour returns. "In terms of time, probably very little," he chortles, "...and the older I get the smaller that percentage is."

Polyamory may not quite be living up to the ideal, but Sven remains committed to the lifestyle. At least for now. He's aware that this places him outside the mainstream. "From my point of view, I'm normal and society is abnormal, but by most people's definition of the word I think that I'm probably abnormal. I'm aware that the way I choose to live my life is not how others choose to live theirs," he concludes.

