

Book review –
opening up by tristan
taormino essay



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The book I choose to write about is *Opening Up* by Tristan Taormino. This book is about open relationships and what it takes to sustain them.

I admire Tristan for exposing a reality that a lot of people don't see as well as the people it took to show people a different way of living. I will show you what she talks about in her book as well as how it relates to Hock's *Human Sexuality* book. Then I'll explain how *Opening Up* has changed my life.

Tristan starts her book off with why people choose to be in an open relationship.

I enjoyed how she first went with a little history lesson. Guiding the reader into each step of how we have become a society with polyamorous people in it. I wasn't surprised to read about how personal growth was a factor in it. Personal growth truly is the foundation for all healthy relationships.

I appreciate the fact that Tristan talked about the myths about nonmonogamy because it shed light on concepts that people generally don't take into consideration. Next she addressed people who are considering choosing an open relationship. I love how she really tied down the typical thoughts people probably forget to take into consideration when people think of an open relationship. From here she dived into why people choose open relationships. I honestly can't think of a point she didn't address to explain the why.

However the part I like most about this section is that she reminds the reader that there is nothing wrong with people who choose to be monogamous. " My mission in sex and relationship education has always been to empower people to explore all their options, discover what works

best of them, and go out and get it. (Taormino, 2008, p. 29) Choosing an open relationship is no easy task, and Tristan reminds her readers of this. I have learned that in order for an open relationship to be healthy the people involved have to have effective human relations.

Tristan's method for explaining this is broken down into traits that she explains each one out with. Personally the three traits she states that I think are the most important are self-awareness, communication and boundaries because these traits play into each of the other one's that she discusses; those being commitment, trust, honest, and consent. She also points out that there are other good traits to remember: authenticity, generosity, respect, and freedom. Next up Tristan talks about six styles of open relationships; giving detailed definitions, positives, and negatives of each style. Starting off with Swinging which is what Tristan calls Partnered Nonmonogamy.

Anecdotally I would say this is the one style people can understand the most because you're swinging with your committed partner. Polyfidelity is another style she mentions, which has three or more people who are bonded to a group. Another style being one that involves a monogamous person who is with a nonmogamous person, which has been negotiated prior to engagement. Then there is Polyamory, where both partners are open to a wide variety of possible emotional relationships outside the primary relationship. An off-shoot from this one is Solopolyamory which entails more of a bachelor's lifestyle, meaning that there is no primary relationship.

Then Tristan goes into the core of her book; creating and sustaining open relationships. Monogamous relationships have a set of agreements that, so-to-speak form a contract between the couple. With open relationships that contract is much more extensive and Tristan lays out a detailed design. I believe the most important aspect that she addresses here is the negotiation phase because it is a phase that is returned to as a relationship continues.

Which is about hashing-out the details of who, what, when, where, and how the agreements change over time. Also the negotiation phase is where those effective human relations are the most important. Being in an open relationship is full of challenges. I like how Tristan says, "relationships are like cauldrons: ideal places to throw two (or more) people's issues together, and see what mixes, bubbles up, or explodes." (Taormino, 2008, p. 153) I couldn't agree more with her.

Jealousy being the most commonly asked about, was addressed first. Like her I agree that jealousy is more of a learned trait. There are people who struggle to overcome what they have learned and there are people who rarely feel it. In a later chapter Tristan talks about compersion as "the opposite of jealousy. (Anapol, 1997, p. 49) Tristan goes so far to say that "part of achieving compersion is letting go of any perceived control we have over our partners.

" (Taormino, 2008, p. 178) I love the way she says this because it reminds me that all too often we throw ourselves into this assumption that our partner is someone that can be truly subjugated. There are many other challenges that Tristan writes about throughout the last half of her book:

New relationship energy, pros and cons, as well as the recognition of what that means for your relationships. The importance of time management so that all parties can feel some sense of acknowledgement.

Overcoming miscommunications in addition to how to avoid them in the future. What it is to violate the contract for an open relationship along with options for what can be done. The last three challenges Tristan writes about she dedicated whole chapters to. Opening up again when something changes is a chapter in which she discusses how to “ Acknowledge and embrace the change that comes with your open relationship.

Expect it, so that it doesn't sneak up on you and catch you completely off guard. ” (Taormino, 2008, p. 19)The next challenge discusses coming out (or not) to your family or community describes the benefits and risks involved in addition with how to find or create a community for yourself. The last challenge being the benefits and risks with coming out to children as well as what to do if you do come out to them. The final pieces of Tristan's book reminds you of: The importance of sexual health and sexually transmitted infections.

What to take into consideration with how laws are designated these days. A realistic look at how relationships in our society are changing despite the binary choices that defines our social norms. As I've already mentioned a fundamental part of a healthy open relationship is effective human relations. In this, I'm referring to utilizing context that influences our culture, personality, emotions, perceptions, and social influences along with low defensive communication skills that leaves room for empathy and conflict

management. Without effective human relations love, intimacy, and sexual communications wouldn't be possible.

In Roger Hock's Human Sexuality book chapter four discusses love, intimacy, and sexual communication. Throughout Tristan's book she addresses the points from Hock's book. She routinely displays the importance of validating communication: " Be prepared to talk things through, listen with compassion, and process your feelings and your partners' feelings. " (Taormino, 2008, p. 38) and " Check in often to get a sense of how your information sharing is working for both of you.

" (Taormino, 2008, p. 143) Tristan clearly agrees with Hock on understanding intimate communication. " If you set a boundary and someone violates it, don't let it slide. " (Taormino, 2008, p. 6) Make it safe to connect, " be loving, be supportive, and keep an open mind.

If the shit hits the fan, no I-told-you-so's. " (Taormino, 2008, p. 139) Open doors to positive connections by negotiating " when you are clear-headed and feeling good about the relationship. It's a bad idea to negotiate and make decisions when you are fighting or don't feel secure about yourself or the relationship. " (Taormino, 2008, p.

134) Nurturing commitments in open relationships " are bound together by their faith in each other and by their daily words and deeds. " (Taormino, 2008, p. 9) In regards to Hock's sexual self-disclosure blocks Tristan provides a wide array of information about relationships, some of the embarrassing obstacles and insecurities others have faced, addresses a lot of myths people have about relationships, and gives resources of how to deal with

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other blocks people may have. Concerning why relationships fail Hock breaks it down into ten reasons, however I think it is just giving reason as to why intimate communication is important. Compared to Tristan's book, she states the comparison of these failures along the way throughout her book. The biggest point I believe she addresses over and over again is that relationships in general need effective human relations otherwise the relationship is bound to be an unhealthy one.

Personally I have found this book to be very enlightening. When I first picked it up I had been struggling with maintaining an open relationship. In general, counseling services truly have no idea what to do when discussing issues like this. Tristan did list quite a few resources, but to my surprise I have found little help in the Portland area. Sadly I feel like a lot of other people in open relationships feel the same way. The best resource I have had is her book while trying to read between the lines in other books.

I'm grateful that there are people out there like Tristan who are working towards bringing more awareness to the general public. It's a long time coming and there is still a long way to go. I have found it rather refreshing to hear people in class really trying to learn about ideas outside their perspective; even though it isn't quite about what I'd like to hear about. I hope people continue to look outside their perspectives. I know for me if I hadn't of learned to do that I wouldn't be alive today. All my life I have struggled with depression issues and when I was a teenager those were the worst years.

This was mainly because of the relationships that I had then. Being raised conservative catholic made being who I really am very hard. I engaged in partnered nonmonogamy at first and then found myself stuck when I felt the urge to be polyamorous. I loved two men equally so, but back then it wasn't right.

After expressing myself I thought it could never be better and overdosed on some pills. When I woke up in my bed the next morning I felt too angry at my failure to try again. If someone had been there for me to explain that who I am isn't wrong, I think there would have been a lot more happiness in my life. Instead I spent many years denying my feelings and therefore denying who I am. It brings a lot of happiness to me to see people like Tristan helping people learn other perspectives in regards to relationships.

Relationships are hard enough in itself, but then when you add in there people who feel pulled in a different direction then the norm, it gets even more complicated and painful. Even though I wasn't been able to find a counselor I needed to find a meaningful relationship to me, I was able to learn from her book and learned how to find the meaningful relationship I have now. I believe the path we are on as a society is paving the way for people like me to discover these points earlier in their lives. And perhaps if we are really lucky those people will eventually be accepted in society as they are.