

## Exchange program changes nothing – Except the lovers

# Relationship not meant to go the (long) distance

Dear Frank,

I have been casually dating a girl for five months. We see each other two to three times a week and speak regularly on the phone. We share great chemistry and it is always a pleasure to be around each other. We have never discussed being exclusive to each other, but it seems to have happened naturally as we enjoy each other enough to not want to be with anyone else. In two months she will be moving overseas to take part in an exchange program and will be away for six months. In your opinion, what is the best way to handle our current situation? Should we agree to be free to meet other people and perhaps pick up where we left off upon her return, granted we are both single? If we do choose that route, should we limit communications that would be difficult to begin with, given the time difference??

-Dave in NDG

Dear Dave,

I think you are assuming that you are exclusively dating because YOU are not seeing other people. Unless the two of you have actually talked it

over to make it clear that neither one of you gets to date others, then the expectation that you are "naturally" exclusive is all in your head. I do not mean to be harsh in saying that. I worry that you are making an assumption, and creating unreasonable expectations that the reality of your relationship, and your partner, may not be able to live up to.

Let me put it to you another way: If your relationship with her was as solid as you'd like to think, she likely might not have taken part in an exchange program for an entire six months. In other words, if your relationship were as naturally strong as you think it may be, the two of you would have made your exclusivity abundantly clear, especially after 5 months of dating.

Since you asked for my Frank opinion, I am going to give it to you straight. Your relationship with this girl as it currently stands did not merit the normal reactions for a couple that had found their future long-term partners and earned each other's commitment on top of



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your mutual affections. With that said, an overseas separation is not cause for making a commitment that would not have been prompted otherwise. If she weren't leaving in 2 months, would you even be wondering how monogamously committed you should be with her? I doubt it.

I think you both should be free to date others right now, since neither of you forced the issue to begin with. When she does leave, you both should be free to explore your options and find your respective potential soul mates. I would sug-

gest that you keep the communication light, depending on what you both can handle. Will you be able to handle hearing about the people she is meeting and the suitors she explores dating? Will she be able to handle tales of your love life? Some people really like to hear how their partners "get it on" with others. Their experience compersion which is a feeling that is the direct opposite of jealousy, where you share in the pleasure and joy of your partner as they engage with others. Other people crumble as their feelings get crushed. It is not for everyone. Stay in touch if you must, but be ready for potentially unpleasant emotions when one of you starts to explore new connections in the time you are apart. If you can handle that, communicate regularly up to the point where it does not interfere with either of you moving on. Once it surpasses that point, cut contact and move on. When she comes back, she will likely have life experiences that no one can foresee (that is part of the

thrill of an exchange program) and she may be a different person. Depending on the nature of how she changes (could be what she values), the nature of your current relationship may no longer meet her emotional needs. With that said, YOU may also go through life events in the next 6 months that will alter your own emotional needs priorities.

With all that said, the most ethical thing you both can do is set each other free, until you have a compelling reason to not do so. The fear of losing her to someone else, when you are not in a position to build a future with her at this time, is not such a compelling reason.

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If you have any love, sex, dating or relationship issues that you would like to see explored in this column of the West End Times, please send your story by email to:

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