

MOVING BEYOND RELATIONSHIP HIERARCHIES TO COMMUNITY CARE WITH RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY

THE ACE AND ARO ADVOCACY PROJECT

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Content warnings: This presentation mentions sensitive topics such as discussions of sexual violence, racism, and other forms of bigotry and violence

USEFUL TERMINOLOGY

- **Compulsory Sexuality:** the assumption that everyone has or will eventually have sex, is interested in sex, and considers it important.
- **Amatonormativity:** the assumption that a committed monogamous romantic relationship is the highest form of interpersonal bond that everyone aspires to and considers central to life.
- **Relationship Hierarchy:** the notion that certain kinds of relationships are inherently more important than others and deserve more attention and care. Capitalistic, western society places romantic couple and nuclear family units at the top of this hierarchy.



In our society, romance and sex are both seen as key life milestones; inherently good and enjoyable; essential to human experience, fulfillment, and happiness; and biological inevitabilities. These attitudes are described by compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity, and they directly support rape culture and undermine principles of consent.

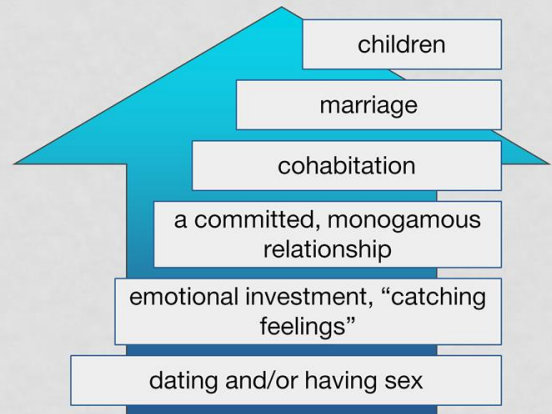
- **Compulsory sexuality** is the sociocultural assumption that everyone has or will eventually have sex and is interested in sex. This involves stigma and stereotypes against people who don't have or haven't had sex, such as that they are frigid or immature. People who are not interested in sex are either not believed; told they will eventually mature and develop a desire for sex; or considered sick, broken, or inhuman. Sex is often seen as a biological and/or familial responsibility - as part of couplehood, "having a family," and continuing family lines.
- The term **amatonormativity** was coined by Elizabeth Brake and refers to the disproportionate focus on romantic relationships above all else and the widespread assumption that finding romantic love is a universally shared goal. It describes the systemic way in which these sociocultural ideas and norms are upheld - this includes the formal institution of marriage and the thousands of legal benefits it confers. Amatonormativity dictates that couplehood, and marriage in particular, is a special site of morality and a sign of maturity. People who do not get married or form nuclear family units, even when they belong to marginalised groups that have in fact been legally prohibited from doing so, are presumed immoral. And people who are not interested in romance are either not believed; told that they will eventually mature and develop a desire for romance; or considered heartless and inhuman, and they

are vilified for any sex they may have.

- These intertwine in that people are expected to form romantic-sexual coupled relationships, and sex is often held up as a special expression of romantic love, so people who do not want to have sex are often told that they cannot be a good romantic partner. People are also assumed to be open to potentially being a sexual partner, and if they are not in a relationship, they are more likely to experience sexual harassment.
- Expectations of sexuality differ significantly by gender expectations and stereotypes as well. They are both heteronormative and cisnormative, intersect with stereotypes of other identities, and can have the effect of denying people agency over their romantic and/or sexual behaviour.

THE RELATIONSHIP ESCALATOR

- Coined by Amy Gahran
- Progressive hierarchy of relationships
- Each step creates progressively higher exit barriers for the relationship
- Encourages increasing co-identification, life merging, and possessive dynamics
- Assumes lifelong exclusive commitment and the formation of a nuclear family unit to be the ultimate goal, always



TAAAP

The relationship escalator describes the progressive hierarchy of relationships prescribed by patriarchal societies. It is progressive in that each step is presumed to **inevitably follow** the "lower" rung and hierarchal in that it sets a standard by which the **importance and seriousness** of relationships is judged. These expectations steer people into couple-units and nuclear families. Each step creates progressively higher exit barriers for the relationship, restricting consent by making it more difficult to revoke. Descending steps is stigmatised as shameful. Ascending the escalator encourages increased co-identification, life merging, possessiveness, and control over & entitlement to one another.

1. People are expected to step onto the first rung because of **compulsory sexuality**. It is assumed that everyone will have or want to have sex and that dating is the "proper" way to go about this.
2. Second, people are taught that **romantic attachment** is an inevitability of having sex. This is an amatonormative misconception. Consenting to sex is not consenting to romance, and vice versa.
3. Then people are expected to **commit to a monogamous romantic relationship**, involving planning a long-term shared future together, policing each other's behaviour & desires, and raised exit barriers. Increased co-identification as a couple-unit instead of individuals means greater insularity, putting all eggs in one basket by expecting on only one person to fill all social needs. Wellbeing becomes codependent because of the reduced social support network to fall back on outside the relationship.
4. **Cohabitation** implements even higher exit barriers and couple-unit identification, including shared finances and other life merging. Life merging leads to logistical separation barriers. Amatonormativity &

singlism create social punishment where ending of relationships is seen as personal failure (didn't work on relationship/communication enough, didn't work on self enough, chose the wrong person, etc.). Relationship preservation is given utmost importance above the quality of the relationship itself/the wellbeing of the people in it.

5. The next step is supposed to be entering a **state-sanctioned marriage contract**. Exit barriers are now instituted by the state, so withdrawal of consent to the relationship is made extremely difficult (legally, financially, and socially) because the relationship is governed by the state instead of free association. Fully free consent must be revocable at any time, so the relationship is no longer voluntary (or, the restriction of free withdrawal of consent renders voluntariness moot). There is also an expectation to have children.
 6. Finally, this results in replicating the ideals of **patriarchal property law**: home ownership, raising children, conformity to societal ideals of nuclear family, family wealth consolidation and inheritance, and reproduction of class.
- This + toxic masculinity's discouraging of emotional closeness outside of romantic relationships + gendered imbalance of domestic, emotional, and reproductive labour within hetero relationships due to patriarchal norms = men often especially dependent on romantic relationships as primary/only source of all forms of care
 - For same reasons, women are often less dependent/have other support networks/are the ones nurturing the couple's social relationships/are more accustomed or prepared to do household labour, etc. and are therefore not only more disadvantaged by the patriarchal nature of marriages but also more resilient after losing them
 - Mythology around marriage that married people are so much better off & happier than single people is untrue; research shows otherwise
 - Statistics are skewed for marriage propaganda by grouping divorced & widowed men with always single men to compare men who are vs. aren't married
 - Men who lost marriages often struggle because they did not maintain other sources of support; always single men are doing just as well as or better than married men (therefore, becoming married could be considered to have in fact have had an ultimately detrimental impact on men who were divorced or widowed)
 - Research also shows any increased happiness/wellbeing married people have compared to single people is insignificant (e.g. not a substantive/meaningful difference in reported life satisfaction) *and* is only elevated for a short term before reverting to baseline levels, often decreasing over time

Ways for people to step off the relationship escalator

Ex: not dating, not having sex, casual sex without escalating to a relationship,

having sex with friends, nonmonogamy, couples living apart and not merging finances (always have an exit strategy!), childfreedom, communal child raising, chosen families, maintaining individual identities instead of co-identifying as a couple-unit, prioritising friends as much as or more than romantic partners, normalising/destigmatising breakups & divorces, remaining friends with ex-partners

AMATONORMATIVITY CAUSES ISOLATION

- Devalues nonromantic interpersonal relationships and erodes community
- Teaches us that we're not complete on our own, can't have fulfilling lives without being part of a romantic couple unit, and are better off in an unsatisfactory or even unhealthy relationship than single
- Engineers artificial scarcity around romance, sex, physical affection, emotional intimacy, support structures, and other forms of care
- Directly supports sex-negative attitudes and gender role stereotyping
- Western cultural hegemony that falsely universalises patriarchal and white supremacist ideals



In our society, romance is treated as intrinsically better and more valuable than other forms of interpersonal bonds. People commonly assume that committed monogamous romantic relationships are a **universal and natural** norm and goal, but the norm of monogamy was **deliberately created and imposed** by patriarchal societies, and marriage has been selectively promoted or prohibited for marginalised groups throughout history as a form of social control for enforcing white supremacy. We will expand on this in slides to come.

Amatonormativity harms everyone by promoting **isolation and unhealthy relationship views**. The belief that committed romantic relationships have special value leads to the overlooking of other important interpersonal relationships and the erosion of community. For example, sociological research consistently shows that people become more insular when they get married, regardless of whether or not they have children. They become less likely to spend time with or help their friends, parents, siblings, neighbours, or community organisations, and they have less friends than people who stay single.

Amatonormativity is also intrinsically linked with **sex shaming** because it pushes monogamous romantic commitment. When we're expected to get all our social needs met by an exclusive romantic relationship, it creates a scarcity mindset around physical affection, emotional intimacy, support structures, and sex.

That artificial scarcity is then accompanied by inherent sex shaming, **gender role**

stereotyping, and the idea that romance and sex are some kind of zero-sum game and power struggle, all attitudes which support rape culture. People are wrongfully taught that all women want is romance and all men want is sex, so they have to exploit each other in order to get what they want. These toxic norms encourage emotional manipulation and discourage open communication. For example, women are taught that they should "play hard to get" and that being "too easy" is a bad thing, and men are taught that making persistent romantic advances, even after being rejected, is not only acceptable but desirable and expected behaviour to "win" someone over. Even though this is just as inappropriate as repeated unwanted sexual advances, our society doesn't really have concepts of romantic harassment or romantic objectification. People whose romantic boundaries are violated often get vilified if they don't "give the person a chance."

Moreover, sex without romance is condemned as immoral and harmful while romantic sex is pedestalised as a special expression of love, dehumanising people who do not conform to amatonormativity. The way love is put on a pedestal and conceptually tied with humanity and morality results in love being used to excuse or mitigate things that should be inexcusable: domestic abuse; child abuse; spousal and intimate partner violence, including sexual violence; so-called "crimes of passion"; marriage trafficking; romantic harassment; stalking; and so on. In fact, the majority of violence against women is committed by their current or ex husbands or romantic partners, and most murders of women are committed by intimate partners or family members.

All of these beliefs and norms act to stifle authentic interpersonal relating and shoehorn everyone onto the relationship escalator.

MONOGAMY IS A SOCIAL CONTRACT OF PATRIARCHAL PROPERTY LAW

- Monogamy was not a norm for most of human history
- This norm was created and imposed by patriarchal societies to control women's sexuality in order to ensure patrilineal property inheritance
- Before and outside of such societies, neither sexual exclusivity nor long-term/indefinite commitment were normative expectations of romantic relationships, and child raising responsibilities were typically shared across the community or extended kin
- Marriage was rebranded as an avenue of love and personal fulfillment so that the imposed norms could withstand women gaining legal personhood and rights, legalisation of no-fault divorce, free love, and other civil rights movements



People often think of monogamy as a relationship style or preference (more specifically, the default and superior preference). We call it a social contract here because it is an agreement by people in a relationship to forgo autonomous relating and abide by rules of amatonormativity dictated by a society that confers legal, financial, and social benefits in return for their conformity.

The belief that monogamy is a universal norm, a beautiful solemnisation of love, and a core part of human nature is **cultural hegemony** sustained and perpetuated by amatonormativity. Before and outside of patriarchal societies, neither sexual exclusivity nor long-term/indefinite commitment were normative expectations of romantic relationships, and child raising responsibilities were typically shared across the community or extended kin.

The norm of monogamy did not exist for most of human history; it was created and imposed by agricultural patriarchal societies to control women's sexuality in order to ensure **patrilineal property inheritance**. Marriage was not related to romantic love. It was, and still is, a tool for assigning property rights and control over children; a vehicle for family wealth consolidation and forming strategic alliances; and a way to generationally reproduce socioeconomic class. Women were exchanged as property, and property law-rooted norms persist in the form of possessive and controlling behaviour in relationships. It is also why people who aren't in (or pretending to be in) a relationship are more likely to experience sexual or romantic harassment – men's "ownership" is more respected than women's bodily autonomy.

Today, marriage has new window dressing: It's been rebranded as an avenue of

love and personal fulfillment, and the norm of monogamy is applied to control everyone's sexuality, not just women's. This shift was to enable the imposed norms to withstand women gaining legal personhood, rights, and economic opportunities; legalisation of no-fault divorce; free love; and other civil rights movements. These positive trends have resulted in people worldwide are marrying less and later and divorcing more. Nuclear families were only the majority of US households for about 15 years. Today in the US, around half of adults are single, and around half of young adults do not even live with romantic partners. And a 2020 Pew survey found that half of single people are not interested in romantic relationships or even casual dating.

Many people who seek to preserve patriarchy and its norms fearmonger about the decline of marriage and the rate of so-called "failed" marriages. This fearmongering is dangerous and often has a racial aspect, which we'll get into in our next slides. In truth, higher divorce rates are a positive thing reflecting a **greater ability to leave harmful relationships**. The legalisation of unilateral, no-fault divorce has consistently resulted in significantly lower rates of domestic violence, women committing suicide, and women being murdered by spouses.

[Note from Wikipedia: "**Cultural hegemony** is the dominance of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society—the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, values, and mores—so that the worldview of the ruling class becomes the accepted cultural norm. As the universal dominant ideology, the ruling-class worldview misrepresents the social, political, and economic status quo as natural, inevitable, and perpetual social conditions that benefit every social class, rather than as artificial social constructs that benefit only the ruling class."]

INTERSECTION WITH WHITE SUPREMACY & SETTLER COLONIALISM

- Patriarchy has been a tool used by societies to increase birth rates and assign men control over their children
 - Treats women as reproductive tools, the construct of virginity as a form of currency, and children as extensions of their fathers' bloodlines
- Western colonial heteropatriarchy is a tool meant to increase "white" birth rates specifically to protect white supremacy
 - White settlers view men of other races and ethnicities as a threat to white supremacy and the "purity" of white women
 - Colonial sexual violence impacts how certain bodies are viewed
- Marriage law & sexuality used as a way of colonizing and controlling people to enforce white supremacy



increasing birth rates for various purposes such as drafting armies or using child labour to support "corporate families"

- Historical immigration restrictions that wouldn't allow Asian men to settle or marry → Asian men not seen as legitimate romantic or sexual partners in Western culture
- White settler women forming relationships with Black and Native men instead of white men → Black and Native men being hypersexualised and stereotyped as uncivilised sexual predators, imagined as a threat
- Sexual violence perpetrated via WWII military occupation of eastern Asian countries, marriage trafficking and sexual tourism → Asian women assumed to be ultra-submissive to the sexual desires of men
- High rates of violence against Native and First Nations women, settler governments wishing to erase them → Native and First Nations women fetishised as "exotic", large numbers of missing women ignored

One way that white supremacy has sustained itself is through oppressing and controlling people through sexuality. Here we're using the word sexuality to refer to a variety of romantic and sexual and other intimate interactions, although we recognize that not everyone uses the term this broadly. A variety of ways white supremacy and racial oppression have been perpetuated through sexuality, including selective promotion or prohibition of marriage for certain groups, tying citizenship status to ethnicity or status of marriage partner, rape and sexual violence, separation of families and couples through slavery, indentured

servitude, and immigration policy, tying ability to own property to marriage, legally defining certain people as impossible to rape, forced prostitution, forced marriage, fetishization and sexual objectification, pathologization, forced medical treatment, denial of sexual agency and desires, and other violent acts not named.

MARRIAGE IMPOSITION: EXAMPLES

- Colonisation and cultural genocide of indigenous peoples, coercing assimilation into white settler cisheterosexual norms and forcibly removing children from their extended families
- Legal marriage mandated for Black people under tenant sharecropping regimes and to receive many federal or church services
 - This coercion was in retaliation for their rejection of white patriarchal family structures and deliberate building of diverse relationship structures and community care ethos
- Criminalisation of sex and/or cohabitation outside of marriage



Many fornication, adultery, and sodomy (nonreproductive sex) laws still on the books

Sodomy laws currently unconstitutional under *Lawrence v. Texas*, one of the court opinions that Clarence Thomas implied should be contested next following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* – more than enabling the criminalisation of gay sex, this would open the door for **coercing reproductive sex** (the *Lawrence* decision overturned *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which had upheld a law that criminalised all sodomy without regard for participants' gender)

MARRIAGE PROMOTION: EXAMPLES

- Lack of scrutiny on international marriage "brokers" or marriage trafficking to import "mail order brides" (often Asian women) for privileged white men
- Legal discrimination against children born outside of marriage
- TANF funding of marriage promotion, prevention of "out-of-wedlock" pregnancies, and sex-negative curricula, instead of income assistance
- Midnight raids on single Black women receiving welfare to exclude them from benefits if they were sexually active and/or cohabiting with a man
- 1855 Naturalisation Act allowed foreign-born white women to naturalise through marriage and granted citizenship to children of US men with foreign-born women, in attempt to increase white birth rates
- 1922 Cable Act repealed marital expatriation for non-Asians only



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, welfare block grant

- Prevention of *unintended* pregnancies is not one of the designated goals
- Funds abstinence-only sex "education" and even Christian overnight camps spreading marriage & nuclear family propaganda
- Result of the racist "welfare queen" stereotype, assumptions that Black families in particular are not stable
- Stigma against single-parent households & assumption that a non-married or non-cohabiting parent is completely "absent"
- Ignores/devalues ways of relating outside the nuclear family and glosses over the mass incarceration of men of colour being a major cause
- Assumption that if a woman "has a man in the house" then he must provide for her; midnight raids primarily to inflict terror & coerce sexuality
- "Tough on crime" & "tough on welfare" rhetoric both racist dogwhistles – politicians of both sides compete on these metrics to win white voters, esp. working class white people to break interracial class solidarity movement building, preying on fears of socioeconomic insecurity, etc.

The granting of citizenship to children of American men with foreign-born women but not American women with foreign-born men was also used to **reify patriarchy**. It affirmed American men's paternity, or right to "their" children, whereas maternity was not similarly affirmed because the women's children were seen as "belonging to" their foreign-born fathers. The gender discrimination is a result of treating women as tools that men use to reproduce and treating children as extensions of their fathers' all-important bloodlines, and amatonormativity underpins all of that because it is the way in which people are steered into perpetuating this patrilineal system.

MARRIAGE DISCOURAGEMENT: EXAMPLES

- Exclusion of disabled people from receiving benefits if they get married or are suspected of "holding out as married"
- 1855 Naturalisation Act excluded foreign-born women from naturalisation through marriage if they were racially barred from immigration (barriers not all lifted until 1952) and refused citizenship to children of US women with foreign-born men
- 1907 Expatriation Act stripped citizenship from US women who married foreign-born men, permanently expelling them from the country if they were racially barred from naturalisation (e.g. Asian American women)
- 1922 Cable Act further made foreign-born women ineligible to citizenship if their husbands were Asian American



"Holding out as married" often assumed of roommates, blocking off more ways for disabled people to pool resources

Assumption again that one person provides for the other in a couple, "male breadwinner" ideals

MARRIAGE PROHIBITION: EXAMPLES

- Laws against interracial marriage (not overturned in all states until 1967)
- The Page Act of 1875 (first US law restricting immigration based on race) effectively barring all Chinese women and girls from entering the country to prevent Chinese families from settling
 - Their gendered racial identity was hypersexualised; they were assumed to be migrant sex workers and considered a threat to the white settler state
- Kinship ties and bodily autonomy of Black people not recognised under slavery and colonial codes



Legal moralism also used to attack **sex worker rights** (e.g. SESTA/FOSTA), **internet privacy and Fourth Amendment rights** (e.g. EARN IT), **reproductive rights** (e.g. targeted restrictions on abortion providers), **sex outside of marriage** (e.g. fornication, adultery, and sodomy laws; mandating of abstinence-only sex "education"; discrimination against "illegitimate" children), predominantly **poor communities and people of colour** (e.g. voting restrictions, targeted immigration restrictions, the "war on drugs"), and many other individual rights and marginalised groups.

Around time period of Page Act, Asian (mostly Chinese) men viewed as bachelors/sexually deviant for not settling down & establishing nuclear family units (as they were legally prohibited from doing so)

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

- The state assigns & privatises relationship authority, rights, and responsibilities according to the nuclear family
 - Couple units, marriage contract, next of kin
 - Caring based on obligation
 - Caring based on rights
- The placing of state-sanctioned nuclear family at the top of the relationship hierarchy discourages or obliterates obligations of care outside of the family
- The nuclear family reproduces class, compulsory sexuality, amatonormativity, and gender roles



- **Medical care and estate planning** requires people to rely on others for support, normatively their nuclear family - kids rely on their parents, then spouses rely on each other, and eventually parents rely on their kids
 - Leaves people vulnerable to the **parental lottery**
 - Children rendered reliant on nuclear family for care
 - Nonconformity to cisheteronormativity, amatonormativity, gender roles, neurotypical expectations, etc. risks **familial rejection**
 - Youth with marginalised identities may be left **without support**
 - This is what we mean when we say the nuclear family reproduces class, compulsory sexuality, amatonormativity, and gender roles
- We say caring is privatised because when the state assigns care responsibilities to the nuclear family, it can wash its hands of responsibility for social welfare
- Nuclear family ideal is western cultural hegemony; recognise that multigenerational households/extended families & kin networks often the norm in other cultures and there are many other ways/scripts of living if we look outside that bubble – for example, only ~17% of human cultures are strictly monogamous
 - This upholds capitalism – isolation & lack of extended support structures means **less ability to task share & more money spent** (e.g. buying food instead of cooking, having to pay for childcare, etc.) & **less time/ability for community organising** (which means less solidarity,

movement building, ability to threaten oppressive systems)

- Reinforces view that parents are authorities over their children → children **denied rights to self determination**, less able to recognise abuse or enforce boundaries, taught that their consent does not matter around people who are more powerful than them

NEOLIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM

- De-emphasises the role of communities and leaders in providing for people
- Shames people into being highly productive and remaining silent on the ways this overwhelms them
- Discourages people from forming care networks or reaching out for help
- Encourages people to isolate and burn themselves out via The Grind
- Resigns communal connections to recreation only, draws stark lines between Work, Social, and Home Life



Neoliberal: favoring policies that promote **free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending**. Neoliberalism was popularized in the late 20th century by political figures such as Thatcher and Reagan and also by global financial institutions.

Neoliberal individualism refers to an expectation of complete **self-sufficiency and productivity**. Adults, whether single or within a nuclear family, are expected to be productive and completely able to financially, emotionally, and physically support themselves (and possibly any children). This leads to 1) any governmental body being able to step back and **refuse to provide basic needs** and 2) reliance on community is stigmatized and shamed. Thus, this **isolates** people and shame further encourages isolation. **Communal connections end up reserved for recreation**, meaning that friends are unable to help reduce the burden of work and household tasks, and workers are discouraged from socially connecting with each other in genuine ways and from organising with each other.

VOLUNTARY RELATING

- Full consent is:
 - Free and willing
 - Informed
 - Noncoerced
 - Ongoing/revocable
 - Specific
 - From everyone involved
- Boundaries create the space in which consent can exist
 - They can and should be established in every aspect of any kind of relationship (not just romantic/sexual)



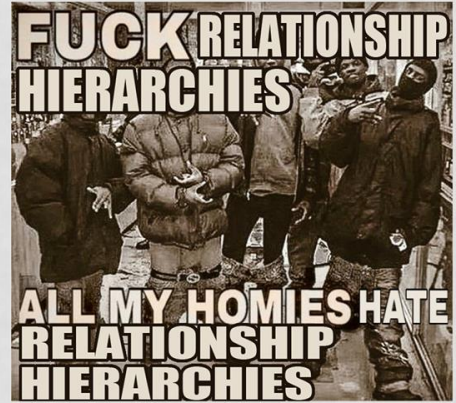
Building autonomous, voluntary relationships outside the restrictions of these norms

Build consent culture

Consent requires the freedom to say "no" without fear of repercussion, so boundaries establish what's a "yes" as well as what's a "no."

RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY

- The ideology and practice of deconstructing amatonormative relationship hierarchies, expected roles, and "traditional" concepts
- Explicitly based in anarchist theory and practice, not just a relationship style/preference
- Nonhierarchical & anti-authoritarian, opposed to insularity, entitlement, and domination within relationships
- Autonomous, authentic, voluntary relating



Relationship anarchy allows every person to define relationships and their importance individually, based on their own needs, desires, or circumstances, and the importance of those relationships does not have to be static.

Ex: kinkshame possessive behaviour & ownership-based language (e.g. "I'm taken," "you belong to me," "they're mine," etc.) in relationships, abolish the institution of marriage

Image description: fuck relationship hierarchies, all my homies hate relationship hierarchies

NETWORKS OF CARE

- Community circles of care/mutual aid networks - connect people in need of trustworthy advocates to people willing to show up for each other (and vice versa) in various ways
 - Being an emergency contact people can list with health providers, etc.
 - Health care advocates, particularly for marginalised people
 - Providing transportation to/from health providers
 - Helping with post-surgical recovery
 - Distributing care work so that no one person is overwhelmed
- Social needs can be similarly disaggregated and distributed



Care work is not easy when one person is a full-time caretaker expected to meet all of a person's care needs. Similarly, it's a lot to expect one person to meet every single one of our social needs. Romantic partners are commonly expected to meet all of their partner's care and social needs by themselves, but this is unsustainable and likely to lead to burnout. There are always going to be some things that one person might not be good at or able to do vs. other things that they find easier or are better at.

When social & care needs are distributed across a diverse network, it is not only easier but also more joyful to get those needs met. It makes it easier to ask for help and easier to give help. Think about the different ways you're able to show up for other people. Think about how different people can show up for you.

The author of this zine/article, from the Communities Not Couples relationship anarchy resource library, talks about how they made a care plan for their recovery from top surgery without relying on a romantic partner, spouse, or nuclear family member. They made a list of different things they might need help with afterward and asked their friends and community what they would like to help with so that each person could decide for themselves what they were willing & able to do and no one person would be overwhelmed.

<https://medium.com/@camxfree/top-surgery-recovery-in-community->

Post-surgical recovery help examples:

- Check-ins with the person
- Being on call at certain times if the person needs to reach out for help
- Meal prep/drop-off
- Care baskets
- Committing to stay with them after anaesthesia so that they can be discharged
- Transportation to/from the hospital
- Running an errand
- Personal care assistance

This article by Kitty Stryker, an acespec sex worker who wrote the book *Ask: Building Consent Culture*, describes a similar process for breaking down social needs into simpler individual actions so they can be distributed across your social network as well. Helping others feels good, but sometimes we don't know how to help, we aren't sure what kind of help we ourselves need when we need it, or we don't feel so good asking for it. Find some time to think about the different things that are sometimes helpful to you so that next time you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, sad, etc. you have an easier time reaching out for help or answering the question "what can I do for you?" Like a restaurant menu, you can look at your list and decide what sounds good right now and what doesn't.

<https://medium.com/consent-culture-a-conversation/what-do-you-need-a-practical-checklist-to-help-your-loved-ones-help-you-4be62265a6c9>

Examples of things you might need could include:

- A plan made (so, for example, if it's overwhelming to figure out a post-surgical recovery/care plan, this is a type of help you can ask for!)
- Advice
- Just listening & being there
- A distraction
- A hug
- A chore done
- A partner for some physical activity
- A check-in

This related article talks about reciprocity of showing up for each other, how that can be done in different ways, and reflecting on who and what you prioritise

making time for:

<https://kittystryker.medium.com/woof-yes-9240b521356>

ALTERNATE WAYS TO SECURE LEGAL RIGHTS

- Wills, living trusts, powers of attorney, healthcare directives, and so on can empower single people to understand and assert rights that are commonly tied to marriage
- Community support groups for:
 - Witnessing and/or notarising documents
 - Volunteering to act as power of attorney, will executor, living trust successor trustee, etc.
 - Being a beneficiary to financial assets
 - Mutual aid



- Medical and estate planning is commonly tied to marriage law, which is a big part of why people fight for marriage rights – it secures many associated care rights
- Some people are not able to leverage nuclear family connections for care, and single people in particular may not have any plans in place and may not know how to make them or what options are available to them
- Single & childfree people estranged from nuclear family may want to make sure their assets don't return to that family when they pass; people with spouses and/or kids may want to recognise other important relationships, give back to their community, etc. as well
- These things can create alternatives to default legal next-of-kin designations that follow the nuclear family structure

This is just basic overview information, not legal advice, but it's important to know these things exist and what they are so you can look into leveraging them. Regulations and requirements are jurisdiction-specific (e.g. state and potentially locality):

- Wills describe how you want your property distributed & the will executor is the person you designate to carry out those instructions
- Living trust (& successor trustee) are basically the same thing with a different method; property placed in a living trust can be passed immediately instead of having to go through probate court
- Power of attorney can be healthcare or financial, means someone designated to make [healthcare/financial] decisions for you in the event that you are incapacitated/unable to make those decisions for yourself

- Healthcare POA is someone you are trusting to know/respect your wishes as closely as possible to make medical decisions on your behalf
- Financial POA is someone you are trusting with access to your financial accounts so they can, for example, make sure your bills/expenses get paid
- Healthcare directives – also called advance directives, living will, etc. – are instructions/guidance to help your healthcare POA make medical decisions for you, outline what you would want in certain situations, etc. so they can know/follow your wishes
- Assets e.g. life insurance, accidental death insurance, payable on death financial accounts, transfer on death property, any other assets not legally restricted to spouses and/or dependents
- Financial accounts can sometimes be made payable on death – this means it passes immediately to the person/people you designated, so you don't need to put it in a will or a trust
- Some types of property, usually big things like homes or cars, can be made transfer on death – similarly, this means the ownership title transfers immediately to the person you designate
- These things don't need to be a spouse, legal next of kin, etc. – it's up to your designation
- Documents often need to be witnessed and/or notarised; witnesses can be anyone who doesn't have a vested interest in the document so that could just be a community member

How else can we show up for each other?

CARING FOR YOURSELF IN THE FACE OF INDIVIDUALISM AND CAPITALISM

- Define what community, care, and connection mean for you
 - What do you personally need or desire from community?
 - What are your social needs and how can they be met by a diverse network of people?
- Remove yourself from hustle culture
 - Prioritise rest, care, and recreation
 - Don't shame yourself for being "unproductive" by capitalist standards
 - Don't associate your self worth with your capitalistic "value"
 - Time enjoyed is not time wasted; not everything should be monetised



Kinkshame overworking!

CARING FOR OTHERS

- Build stronger, intersectional community networks and solidarity
 - No favouring assimilation into oppressive structures
 - Avoid division from callout culture
- Learn to make time for people who are not romantic partners or legal kin
 - Community ethic of care
 - Mutual aid organising
- Think about ways you can show up for others when you are part of a network meeting their care needs instead of being a sole caretaker
 - Make care an aspect of community instead of relationship or wage labour; more egalitarian task sharing/delegation

**I Don't Know How To Explain
To ^{alloros} That You Should Care
About Other People you're not
romantically attracted to**



accomplices not allies, speaking up and not speaking over, no respectability politics, communities not couples

- Because of amatonormative relationship hierarchies and social norms, many people rely on insular romantic and/or familial relationships for support and care and to fill their social needs
- For nonpartnering and/or nonpartnered people, and for people whose families don't accept or support them, this can mean a lack of access to support and care
- Mutual aid is solidarity not charity, way to meet people's needs when the state and/or nuclear family does not

Image description: photoshopped Onion headline reading "I Don't Know How To Explain To Alloros That You Should Care About Other People you're not romantically attracted to"

THANKS FOR JOINING US!



More resources:

Minimising Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law by Elizabeth Brake

Making Kin not Population by Kim Tallbear

Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology by Angie Willey

Refusing Compulsory Sexuality: A Black Asexual Lens on Our Sex-Obsessed Culture by Sherronda J. Brown

Ask: Building Consent Culture by Kitty Stryker

The Book of Boundaries: Set the Limits that will Set You Free by Melissa Urban

Relationship Anarchy: Occupy Intimacy! by Juan-Carlos Pérez-Cortés

Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI by Jessica R. Pliley

Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire by Ian Tyrrell

Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatised, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After by Bella DePaulo

Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage by Stephanie Coontz

Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good by Adrienne Maree Brown

How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community by Mia Birdsong

No Thanks: Black, Female, and Living in the Martyr-Free Zone by Keturah

Kendrick

Stepping Off the Relationship Escalator: Uncommon Love and Life by Amy Gahran

Abolish the Family by Sophie Lewis

"To Abolish the Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development" by ME O'Brien

https://endnotes.org.uk/file_hosting/EN5_To_Abolish_the_Family.pdf

"The Case Against Marriage Fundamentalism: Embracing Family Justice For All" by Family Story https://familystoryproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Case-Against-Marriage-Fundamentalism_Family-Story-Report_040419.pdf

"Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" by Cathy J. Cohen

https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/LISCenter/2019%20Inequality%20by%20the%20Numbers/Instructor%20Readings/Strolovitch-1.pdf

In Defiance of White Supremacist Relationship Hierarchies presentation by TAAAP at MBLGTACC 2022 <https://taaap.org/2022/12/28/mblgtacc-2022-in-defiance-of-white-supremacist-relationship-hierarchies/>