

Defining Relationships: Relationship Structures

Relationship structures are the ways in which people define the set-up of their relationship and create boundaries and expectations for their partner(s).

Monogamous AKA Closed Relationship

The 2 people involved in the relationship agree to only do romantic or sexual activities with each other and not with anyone else.

Ethical Non-Monogamy (ENM) AKA Open Relationship

A general term to describe alternative relationship styles- relationships that aren't monogamous. Ethical/consensual non-monogamy is based on honesty, consent, and respect.

Monogamish

A monogamish couple is mostly sexually exclusive, except for occasional "right place, right time" encounters, often shared together. If a partner travels frequently, they might engage in intimacy solo. To outsiders, they seem monogamous.

Polyamory

Being in or open to having more than one romantic relationship at the same time, where everyone agrees and is honest with each other. This sometimes involves a group of connected partners known as a "polycule".

Open Relationships: *Emotional and Romantic Exclusivity*

Couples in an open relationship who will date or have sexual encounters with people outside the relationship but don't make romantic or emotional connections with those other people.

Open Relationships: *Limited/No Information Sharing*

Couples in an open relationship who adopt a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, avoiding discussions or sharing details about outside interactions, as if they have no other relationships.

Hierarchical Polyamory AKA Primary/Secondary Relationships

A type of ENM or polyamory where the primary relationship is more important, often sharing living arrangements, marriage, or children, and generally holds more influence. Secondary relationships are less involved with fewer commitments.

Closed V

A polyamorous structure where one person (the "hinge") is romantically involved with two others who aren't involved with each other and are closed to new partners.

Swinging/Swingers

A type of ENM where committed couples engage in sexual activities with others socially/recreationally. Unlike polyamory, it focuses on physical intimacy rather than emotional connections.

Relationship Anarchy

A way of thinking about relationships that doesn't separate romantic and friendship bonds, emphasizing independence, complete honesty, and the freedom to decide what relationships mean beyond traditional ideas.