



## **Definitions: Social Structures & Relationships**

### **Heteronormativity:**

Heteronormativity is the culmination of compulsory heterosexuality, homophobia and heterosexism. It is the system of power that privileges heterosexuality, heterosexual romantic-sexual love and/or marriage as normal and necessary. It structures society around the (heterosexual) “nuclear family” as the basic “consumer unit” in a capitalist society. It also constitutes and enforces the socially constructed binary gender system and associated gender roles: the idea that there are exactly two genders— man and woman; where men are supposed to be “masculine” and women “feminine”— and where men and masculinity are prioritised over women and femininity.

### **Compulsory Heterosexuality:**

Compulsory heterosexuality is the patriarchal presumption that heterosexuality is the normal and necessary default of all individuals in society. It imposes a “heterosexual lens” on all individuals throughout all aspects of life, beginning in early childhood. This system imposes the coercive violence of homophobia and heterosexism in order to “make people” be straight (or try to be straight, regardless of personal feelings). [Heterosexism takes heterosexuality as the taken-for-granted “ideal” while implicitly or explicitly devaluing other ways of being.]

- Note: The term became popular after Adrienne Rich’s 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence” which focused on women’s experiences.

### **Compulsory Sexuality:**

Compulsory sexuality is the set of social expectations, ideologies, institutions and practices, etc. that hold that:

- all (“legitimate”) people should desire and have sex (and especially sex of the “right kind”—be that heterosexual, married, monogamously partnered, etc..)
- having and wanting to have sex is a form of personal empowerment
- participation in sex is an expected and required part of a (fulfilling) romantic relationship, which undermines consent (e.g., you might be able to say “no” initially— to delay sex until the relationship reaches a certain level of commitment or marriage— or to say “no” on occasion generally, but you can’t say “no” forever)

Compulsory sexuality plays out in specific intersectional ways and is related to compulsory heterosexuality— it doesn’t just affect aces, and various marginalised groups are uniquely affected by it. It doesn’t mean “everyone must have sex now!”.

- **Compulsory sexuality means that everyone is “required” to do the sexuality that is “socially appropriate / expected for them”** (whatever that means for their social location and cultural context).
  - Note: While “compulsory sexuality” is a relatively new term, Black feminists were naming and opposing the simultaneously sexist, racist and classist violence of forced sexualisation & rape specifically targeting Black women (in the US) decades before ace communities existed (e.g., the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1978).

### **Homonormativity:**

Homonormativity is the social pressure to “assimilate” into heteronormative society and to become the ideal of the “mainstream gay” or “respectable queer”. It is the approach of broadening heteronormative institutions very slightly to integrate (some) LGBTQ+ people, instead of fundamentally challenging those institutions. By doing that, it upholds heteronormative social structures like nuclear families, the gender binary and gender roles, etc.. Under homonormativity, “same-gender” partners face the same expectations that govern heterosexual partners, and some trans people can be validated by conforming enough to society’s strict binary gender expectations.

- Recognising homonormativity draws attention to how white privilege, capitalism, sexism, transmisogyny and cissexism affect who is “socially acceptable” and who is often left out of the conversations. [“Cis” or “cisgender” people are those whose gender identity straightforwardly matches the one assigned at birth.]

### **Amatonormativity:**

Amatonormativity is the set of social expectations, ideologies, and practices, etc., that prioritise romantic relationships as the superior relationship type. It ascribes inherent value to romantic partnerships, promoting the idea that all (mature) people should want, have or be actively seeking out a romantic relationship and that these relationships are the most “normal” or “intimate” way for adults to do primary relationship. Amatonormativity devalues friendships and other important platonic relationships. Within cultural contexts where marriage is linked with romantic love, romantic relationships are seen as the bedrock of the nuclear family (i.e., the main “consumer unit” in a capitalist society), and are privileged by governments and society more generally by way of legal and social recognition, acceptance and rights. Amatonormativity is tied in with heteronormativity.



## **Definitions: Social Structures & Relationships**

### **Monogamy:**

Monogamy is a relationship structure where romantic/sexual relationships have two partners and these partners are expected to receive all romantic/sexual and/or intimacy needs solely from each other. Monogamy is supported by (and supports) amatonormativity and heteronormativity, as both rely on monogamy as part of their expectations. Monogamy upholds relationship hierarchies (romantic/sexual relationships as top priority) by protecting the “One Important Relationship” from “threats” that might be imposed by other (“less important”) relationships. It does this by limiting partners' behaviours toward other people and viewing each partner and their social/emotional resources as the “property” of the other partner. This includes the construction of people's bodies as “property” of their partners—wherein they might “owe” (or be “entitled to”) sexual access to their partner's body: monogamy supports compulsory sexuality and undermines a culture of consent. Outside the context of romantic or sexual relationships, the idea of “monogamy” makes little sense (i.e., people are expected to be “allowed” to have more than one friend).

- Note: Monogamy may be structurally coercive, but it is not alone. Non-monogamy may also be coercive, and various non-monogamous relationship approaches still view partners and their resources as “property”.

### **Non-Monogamy and Polyamory:**

Polyamory is an umbrella term where (romantic and/or sexual) partners might have multiple (romantic and/or sexual) partners (with the knowledge and consent of their partner or partners). There are many ways of being consensually “non-monogamous”:

- Could focus on a primary relationship with some “open” romantic and/or sexual boundaries...
- Could include closed units of more than two people
- Could include open networks of multiple partners
- Many configurations and different “rules” and expectations

### **Polynormativity:**

Polynormativity represents an emerging set of norms, especially under the polyamorous umbrella, of “respectable non-monogamy”. It is the normative model of non-monogamy that is focused on a couple at the top of a prescriptive relationship hierarchy which is maintained via rules (e.g., one partner having “veto power” over what another partner does). Similar to monogamy, polynormative approaches to relationships treat people sort of as their (primary) partner's property.

### **Relationship Anarchy:**

Relationship anarchy stems from the application of principles of anarchism deliberately applied to personal relationships. It therefore focuses around:

- a strong critique of marriage (and monogamy), as well as state regulation of personal relationships
- an emphasis on voluntary, free association, with opposition to structural & interpersonal coercion
- an approach to commitment as a form of communication, and not a form of restriction

Relationship Anarchy therefore involves:

- approaching all relationships authentically on their own terms for whatever they will be without imposing on them any pre-determined expectations (which means choosing commitments freely on an ongoing basis)
- valuing all love equally; challenging *prescriptive* relationship hierarchies— and rejecting polynormativity.

### **“Queerplatonic / quirkyplatonic” Relationships (QPRs):**

QPRs describe a range of “non-normative” relationships that are not in the “romantic” box and that also do not fit the “friendship” box properly— even if the relationship is or includes friendship, the word / concept of “friendship” does not express it properly or adequately. Often, we call a counterpart in one these relationships our “zucchini”.

- QPRs are all different from each other. And they can range in significance (just like every other kind of relationship).
- QPRs often bring up issues related to monogamy/non-monogamy and commitment (whether or not the participants also do romantic/sexual relationships and/or are into monogamy generally).
- QPRs represent a “meta-category” of relationships outside of existing categories and expectations.
  - Note: Because of the issues with both the “queer” and the “platonic” parts of the word, the specific term “queerplatonic” doesn't work in practice as an umbrella term for all these relationships, and neither do any of its alternatives like “quirkyplatonic”. Unfortunately, there are no viable alternatives that work for everyone to articulate the concept of QP relationships. Sometimes “QP” *is itself* the umbrella term.