

Toronto Aces & Aros Discussion: Queerplatonic Relationships January 4, 2024 (7-9 pm)

Notes – attendance 12

Respect Guidelines

Land acknowledgment

Intros: names, pronouns, access needs (if not being met), and familiarity with QPRs

What are Queerplatonic relationships?

- Sherlock & Watson - very close and also no romantic aspect (unless reading into it)
 - Watson was married to a woman at the time

Past examples of relationships that might have gone in QPR direction

- E.g., close friendship with someone who was interested in getting married and then him dating other people
- Relationships bordering on QPRs as women with straight men who are married (and these relationships are not romantic or sexual in nature)
 - Very close, non-sexual yet sensual (couch cuddling while having deep conversation)
 - Missing people who
 - E.g., longterm childhood bestfriend and friends with his wife, when he visits, sleep in the same beds like when were kids (non-sexual! intimacy), emergency contact
- Situation of best friends between ace woman and gay man, “adopted sister/brother” relationship, very affectionate (non-sexual)
 - Maybe a little bit romantic on one side that is not reciprocated but that’s okay
 - Some people think they’re a couple and face some hostility from others for not conforming to social norms
- Frustrating that people use the word “intimate” for specifically sexual thing!
 - But intimacy can mean so many different things (many not sexual! and not romantic!)

Relationships where QP terminology is helpful within the relationships but not necessarily helpful to talk with other people about?

- Difficult to bring up with other, e.g., family
- New terminology– can be great when something is helpful, but then have to do the rounds of it explaining it to other people...
- Sharing about difficulties with what to call relationships and who to be invited where

Challenges around QPR or otherwise non-normative relationships

- Other people’s reactions and resistance to people being so close if they’re not dating!
- Changes in purity culture with more value on having lots of sex
 - Mind-boggling
- Resistance in the form of “this is wrong” vs. “this does not exist”

Positive reactions to these relationships from others

- Mother calling all people in social cloud “family” and always asks “how is your family doing?”

People / parents who don't really understand

- Talking with parents who seem worried? (i.e., “that’s kind of strange but as long as you’re happy”)
- Parents gave you a “dating for dummies” book, aunt asking if it’s because parents got divorced that you’re “a little bit broken?”

Having situations where people in QPrelationships started dating someone and the new dating partner is all “back off”

- When someone’s dating partner tells them to back-off other close relationships
- Interesting where who gets jealous in a relationship (including best friends, siblings, etc.) as an indicator of where a new relationship is fitting into someone’s life

Questions of monogamy

- Commonplace insecurity of relationships (e.g., as kids, this other friend is talking to someone I don’t like, are they still my friend?)
- Rant against structural monogamy and the way it is based on commodifying persons as resources
- Past experience of QPP dating someone who is super monogamous (and all friends)
 - This person okay with QPP and sort of okay with other partner dating other people because that’s what they want but not wanting to know about it
- Issues of qp relationships bringing up issues of monogamy (often in ways where the standard expectations don’t really fit)

Questions of “family”

- “chosen family” often not considered really “family” or the same status as family
- Someone not interested in forming nuclear family but still wanting to be close with cousins, etc. but that’s not part of “norm” these days, with more focus on nuclear family
- Disagreeing with nuclear family as a thing that people are “supposed to do”
- Issues of communication and understanding in different ways of doing relationships

Positive things about QP relationships

- Relationship going really well—lots of resistance and misunderstanding from strangers but family understand and respect the chosen-sibling thing and feel fortunate to have the experience and at a point in lives of not caring what other people think
- Think family would be pretty accepting— they would prefer someone having QPr over being “alone”
- Positive experience explaining concept to a friend (in the concept of Dungeons and Dragons, and characters having QPR in the game)

Amatonormativity

- Especially when people haven’t had positive experiences in family-of-origin, especially important to find/build relationships as kinship in “non-normative ways”
 - “Chosen family” and history in queer spaces

Interested in “non-normative relationships”?

- Interest in non-sexual and non-romantic physical and emotional intimacy
- Interest in more substantive community and networks of mutual aid and care
 - Resistance against “individualist” idea of “independence”

Focus on community relationships

- Mutual aid as aro activism
- From disability justice criticism of “independent/dependent” thing and Autonomy within the context of interdependence

Media

- Friend groups like on Buffy and Riverdale. Buffy especially where people are super involved in people’s lives and most people don’t have that
- Friends focus on friendship (but even that goes toward romantic pairings at the end)
- Seeing a QPR in an anime and someone is trying to push one of the people into a romantic relationship with someone else
- Good Omnes
- Our Flag Means Death
- Anime called the “100 girlfriends that really really really like you” or something like that
 - Set-up as a stereotypical harem anime but with interesting things to say about relationships (concept: whatever celestial being accidentally messed up and gave this person 100 soulmates after a lifetime of trying really hard to get people to like him without much success)
 - Is actually a nice person and actually tries to build these relationships with these people but also has to manage a group of people who are in love with him, so the people around him also have to like each other
 - Two of the girls who meet him at the same time are upset about it and want him to choose and side-gag that they’re also falling in love with each other but won’t say it (not even necessarily romantic love)

What do we mean by non-normative?

- Especially given that in some communities, it’s very “normal” for people to have networks / communities to have kinship relations outside “nuclear” family, e.g., aunties, etc.
 - Lots of systemic racism tied up with policing the “right way” of building and structuring families and using the concept of the “nuclear” family to pathologise communities that build families differently and to enforce racial hierarchies
 - E.g., part of the justification for Residential Schools, banning longhouses, demonising “Black woman-headed households”, etc.
 - Ongoing over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in CAS services and removing children from the communities instead of providing supports to stay in communities safely,
 - Especially over-representation of Black and Indigenous children in institutional care (where there are specific “pipelines” of criminalisation... for example, being late for curfew can land kids in prison with criminal records)

“Non-normative” as trying to carve out space to exist where people haven’t had space to exist before

- E.g., currently in the process of helping a QPR get permanent residence status in Canada and “prove” that the relationship is “real” (still intense process but less than applying for citizenship)
 - Very much performing a specific version of “normative relationship roles” for the bureaucracy to check the boxes to have application approved
 - Rarely take pictures but have to have pictures of the two together for immigration processes
- A lot of discretion up to the immigration agent and a lot of racial and class-based bias
- Ridiculous that a word about how people describe their relationship might not be enough in terms of the law

Other challenges

- Parents urging to have an arranged marriage (soon) and to have kids, but wanting a non-sexual relationship if any kind of partnership
 - Have to kind of pretend being aroace without outright saying it
 - Especially with expectations on an oldest child
- Scared for the future- unsure how family will react, especially 5-10 years from now if still unmarried
 - Worried about people wondering “what went wrong?”
- Some families coerce their kids to do that

Reflections of relationships and queerness among older adults (or in past generations of family)

- E.g., adults living with a “best friend” after splitting up from husbands (as code for queer)
- And great aunt who lived with another woman and friend she lived with described as a “lifelong friend” in the obituary
 - Possible it’s a QPR but also older generation that people didn’t talk about being lesbians
 - Cool to have them in life and see ways of existing

Questions:

- What are Queerplatonic relationships? (people’s familiarity with the term)
- Personal experiences:
 - when has it been useful to use the term QP?
 - Relationships where this might have been helpful to use QP terminology
 - What was “non-normative” about these relationships?
 - How were these different from other relationships / typical friendships?
- Other people’s reactions to QP relationships (and other “non-normative” relationships)
 - Changes over time? Different kinds of reactions over time?
- Amatonormativity?
 - QPR terminology created as a way of pushing back against amatonormativity
 - Amatonormative attempts to re-appropriate/reshape QPR terminology (assimilation)
- What ideas for “non-normative” relationships would you like in your life?
- Any negative experiences re: QPRs you want to share?
- Examples of QPRs in popular media (may or may not be named as QPRs)