

Introducing *Relationshipape*

Relationshipape emerged from a shared desire of the authors to shape relationships in a way that focuses on the individual needs and desires of everyone involved, as independently as possible from any outside norms or hierarchies, while acknowledging that relationships are always subject to change as they evolve. These ideas are the foundation of our use and understanding of the term relationship anarchy.

In order to live in agreement with these values, we must figure out and clearly communicate the overlaps and potential conflicts in our understanding of a relationship. As there are so many aspects that can be relevant to forming consensual connections, we sought helpful communication tools to help us identify and define the scope of our relationships. Moreover, we wanted a framework that would motivate us to make a habit of regularly updating our agreements and reflecting on the changes in perception.

The following questionnaire was what we came up with and what we now call *Relationshipape*. It was inspired by Andie Nordgren's manifesto, the *Smorgasbord of relationship anarchy* (Lyrica Lawrence and Heather Orr, Version 5, updated by Maxx Hill 2019) and similar tools built on collective experiences of polyamorists and relationship anarchists. Further sources, for example, include the books *Polysecure* and *Polywise* by Jessica Fern, *More than Two* by Eve Rickert and Franklin Veaux, and countless other resources we have encountered over time. We believe *Relationshipape* will be most useful to people who are already actively working towards understanding themselves and their relationships better, and who are in the process of re-thinking the relationship norms and hierarchies prescribed to us by society.

The format is a work in progress. For example, the suggested default scale from "Need" to "No" does not apply well to all aspects, and the table format insinuates linearity and a hierarchy between the different categories (which is not what we want to promote, on the contrary). Additionally, the questionnaire format can perhaps seem a bit boring, and going through it in all length and detail in our experience takes a lot of time, introspection and communication. However, later adjustments get much easier once the tool becomes familiar. We are very pragmatic in this respect and don't interpret filling out a questionnaire as dry, but as an inspiring and important step towards laying a transparent basis for our relationships.

We particularly include aspects that specifically apply to non-monogamous and queer relationships, as these can be especially hard to navigate, with people looking for resources and guidance outside the norm. However, we are not immune to our own lifelong conditioning and exposure to these norms, which we have internalized and are still unlearning. Additionally, we are biased by our own identities and privileges, even though we constantly work on improving our awareness and allyship. Given this, and the intricacy of the topic, you are likely to encounter some contradictions, ambiguity, things you disagree with or that don't align with your lived reality, or things that are central to your experience, but that are not reflected in the tool. We are open to constructive criticism and feedback to help us improve, but at the same time believe there can never be a one-size-fits-all. We think the best way possible is for everyone to select from the tool whatever they feel applies to them, and then generously edit, add, delete and shuffle to make it fit your needs! We encourage the use of *Relationshipape* for any kind of relationships, be they romantic, platonic, kinky, sexual, familial, etc. You do not have to consider yourself a relationship anarchist and/or non-monogamist to use the tool.

We hope that *Relationshipape* can help capture the fluidity and uniqueness of each relationship and support people to form consensual bonds in the way that suits them. As the concept emerged from our personal experience and preferences, we emphasize that *Relationshipape* will not be perfect for everyone. It is always a work in progress, and we are open for adjustments as we keep learning. Already at this point we thank all the test users who have provided us with valuable inputs and feedback, and the many helpful discussions with community members.

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How to use *Relationshipape*

The questionnaire is ordered in a way that encourages a certain structure in the answers by giving pre-defined options to enable consistency. For this first version we decided on a simple table format for reasons of simplicity and editability, allowing users to customize their categories and list items as well as their rating system. Unfortunately, the linear form of a table inevitably creates an order between the categories. However, this is only due to the format, and we do absolutely not suggest filling the form “from the beginning” or in the order in which the categories show up, and we certainly do not imply a hierarchy by the grouping within the table.

In the following we share our thoughts behind the structure we chose and the way we have been using the questionnaire, knowing that there are many other options to go about this.

First of all, we suggest using a separate form for each person/relationship. For example, if you are part of a fixed group of friends, or in a triad relationship, you would fill in one form with each of the other members. We recommend working with printouts.

In terms of structure, *Relationshipape* is sectioned in many different segments that focus on various (potential) aspects of a relationship and that can easily be answered separately. Each section then contains a number of items that can be evaluated in terms of their significance or status within the relationship in question. The rating is quite granular, with seven increments from ‘No’ (I don’t want this/don’t agree to this) to ‘Need’ (this is of highest importance to me; if this cannot be fulfilled, I may want to re-consider the type of relationship and my boundaries).

To give an answer, the respective box can be marked with a cross or tick. For items where something can be done actively or passively, there is the option to differentiate the answer between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ and/or ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’. Example: If I like giving massages, but not receiving them, I may write the letter ‘G’ in the box belonging to ‘want/like’ and the letter ‘R’ in the box ‘No’. For the answer maybe/hopefully in the future a difference between ‘maybe’ and ‘hopefully’ can be marked by putting an ‘M’ or ‘H’, but this is again optional.

Before starting, choose a setting where you can feel comfortable and focused. Be aware that this process takes time and may bring up emotions, triggers and conflicts, old and new. Be mindful of your resources, take your time, plan for breaks and think about how you want to handle challenging situations (together and/or individually) ahead in time. Try to be grateful for your counterpart’s honesty and authenticity even in difficult moments and accept each other’s answers in good faith and with generosity. If you are unsure how to interpret their answer, ask them to clarify before jumping to any conclusions.

The mode we suggest as a starting point is the following:

1. Read the entire questionnaire without filling it out yet, ideally together with the other person so you are able to directly communicate.
2. Together, select the categories you think apply to your relationship and that you would like to fill out. Edit them as needed, add or remove items as per your preference. Probably this already initiates some discussions.
3. Calibrate your interpretations of the answer options, discuss what the implications of the terms are for you. The goal is that you have a common and nuanced understanding of the scale from “need” to “no”. You can adjust/re-name the scale as per your needs.
4. Take enough time to fill out the questionnaire separately in order not to be influenced by the other person’s views. This can be split up by category and completed in multiple sessions, e.g. filling out the "friendship" section, then move on to discussion, then go back to another section, and so on. Depending on your preference, completing the form can happen in the same room at the same time, or entirely independent. However, clarifying the meaning of any ambiguous term to you/each other before answering is an essential part of the process.

5. Share your answers with each other. We find it helpful to write the other person's answers into our own questionnaire with a different colour, and afterwards highlight points of strong agreement and discrepancy, indicating potential points of discussion and compromise.
6. Go through the answers, share your feelings with each other. If you have identified points of disagreement, talk about the implications, and how this may affect you in the present or future. If unsure, ask each other to elaborate what a certain answer means in order to avoid misalignment or misunderstandings. This is another chance to clarify terms if you haven't done so before and ask each other how you interpret and express them. Especially for broad terms such as "commitment" it is important to have a mutual understanding what this means for you, what you expect and how you express it to each other.
7. Take the new insights you have gained into your relationship/relationship practice and let it inspire you to continuously form agreements and better understanding of each other.
8. Go over the questionnaire in regular intervals (e.g. once every six months) and communicate to each other what has or hasn't changed, how your needs and perception of the relationship have developed, and what you think the implications are. Maybe you observe some trends over time and identify new aspects that matter to you.
9. Over time, modify your practice, add to the form and find your own way of using *Relationshipape* the way that works best for you.
10. Bonus Point: If you like, recommend *Relationshipape* to your network and provide us with feedback so we can continuously improve the tool. We are happy to receive fan mail and constructive criticism alike. As *Relationshipape* is a work in progress we rely on the community to learn more about experiences we have not yet considered, and to get a better idea of what works best for most people.

Enjoy the process!

Filled out by:	First walkthrough:	Second walkthrough:	Third walkthrough:

General connection practices							
Item	Need	Hell, yes!	Want/like	Open to it	Not really	Hopefully /maybe in future	No
Shared activities/interests							
Intellectual/philosophical discussions							
Political discussions							
Sharing ideas							
Sharing humor							
Playfulness							
Companionship							
Understanding							
Talking about everyday things							
Gift-giving							

Spending time together							
Going on dates							
Spend time with (mutual) friends							
Go to concerts, museums, plays etc:							
Do sports together, e.g.:							
Watch movies							
Watch TV-Shows							
Play video games							
Read books							
Listen to podcasts/music together							
Share/send art, music, poetry, memes							
Spend time in nature							
Eat out							
Learning sth new together, e.g.:							
Co-working							
Sparring/martial arts							
Dance							
Substances							

Creative (together)							
Visual art							
Craft, e.g.:							
Music							
Photography							
Comedy							
Writing/poetry							
Painting/drawing							
Dance							
Theatre							

Mutual social circles							
Cultivate mutual circle of friends Limitations:							
Introduce each other to own social group(s) Limitations:							
Introduce each other to family members Limitations:							
Keep social circles separate							

(Professional) Collaboration							
Teach, e.g.:							
Mutual projects, e.g.:							
Organize events, e.g.:							
Activism, e.g.:							
Found a business, e.g.:							

Belief and religion							
Shared ritual/prayer							
Shared beliefs							
Discussions							
Shared religious institution(s)							
Tolerance for other beliefs							

Emotional intimacy							
Being vulnerable							
Mutual trust							
Openness							
Finding mutual communication style and tone							
Being interested in each other's inner life							
Sharing and communicating							
Mutual respect							
Quarrelling							
Call each other out on issues							
Talk about mental health							
Constructive criticism for things not concerning the relationship							
Talking about fears							
Radical honesty							
Reflect conflict patterns							

Physical intimacy (commonly not labelled as “sexual”) ¹							
Dance							
Cuddles							
Hugs							
Pets							
Massage							
Handholding							
Nudity							
Kissing							
Body contact							
Co-sleeping							

Sexual practices and kinks (notation: G for giving, R for receiving, x for both) ²							
Orgasms							
Genital touching							
Oral sex							
Anal stimulation (e.g. rimming)							
Vaginal penetration (with:)							
Anal penetration (with:)							
Discovering (together)							
Virtual sex							
Dom/sub dynamic							
Orgasm Control							
Bondage							
Age play							
Foot fetish							
Role play							
Voyeurism							
S/M							
Golden Shower							
Impact play							
Breath play							
Exhibitionism							
Pet play							
Rubber, latex or leather							

¹ What is or is not perceived sexual is of course individual and contextual and can be a separate discussion. However, physical and sexual acts are still listed as two separate categories, as nonsexual physical closeness is often also present in relationships where there is no sexual dynamic.

² This list is in no means meant to be complete and should, obviously, not be the only framework of consent you establish! However, we wanted to include a category of practices commonly seen as “sexual acts”, since it is an important part of many relationships. The practices were compiled based on various online lists of common practices and “kinks”, as well as user feedback.

Use toys together e.g.:							
Uniforms							
Group Sex							
Swinging							
Playfight							
Erotic massages							
Sex-positive events							
Outdoor Sex							
Safeword: _____							
Chemsex							
CBT							
Facesitting							
Sensation play							
Use dating app(s) together							
Watch porn together, preferences:							
Others:							

Caregiving (notation: G for giving, R for receiving, x for both)							
Physical (e.g. sickness)							
Emotional							
Reliability							
Emergencies							
End of life							
Support in fear/phobias							
Trauma awareness and support							
Longterm care (e.g. chronic illness, disability)							
Support with addiction							

Emotional Support (notation: G for giving, R for receiving, x for both)							
Listening							
Empathy							
Ask for advice							
Show up for each other							
Be present at important points/events							

in life							
Confidante							
Accountability partners/body doubling							

Romantic							
Cultivating uniqueness							
Emotional attraction							
“Being in love”							
Limerence/swooning over each other							
Expressing affection							
Verbalizing romantic feelings Preferred wording(s):							

Partner- and companionship							
Shared goals/values ³							
Shared understanding of politics/ethics/decision-making ³							
Find/keep routines							
Commitment							
Embrace change in and with each other							
Mutual growth							
Long-term planning							
Be involved in each other’s important life decisions							
Share lifestyle choices							
Embrace differences							

³ Perhaps, in a separate discussion, reflect on what these are

Exclusivity							
Sexual							
Emotional/romantic							
Social (e.g. only partner present in social circle)							
Structural (e.g. nesting)							
Flexibility/Changeability of Concepts or Structures							

Legal							
Power of attorney							
Marriage							
Civil partnership							
Business partners							
Emergency contact							
Inheritance/included in will							

Power Hierarchies							
Boss – employee							
Sponsor – sponsee							
Teacher – student							
Mentor – guide							

Systems of oppression (structural) and inequalities (individual) - note which apply, and reflect on asymmetries in affectedness) ⁴			
Racism	Ableism	Sexism	Classism
Skills	(Formal) education	Influence, social/political power	Citizenship
Financial/Possession	Sexual/romantic orientation	Queer-/Transphobia	Income
Lookism	Ageism	Colorism	Sizeism/Fatphobia
Nativism	Colonialism	Physical strength	Size/quality of social circle
Available free time	Relationship experience (within lived model)	Trauma biography/resilience	Age gap/life experience
Physical health impairments	Mental health issues		

Financial							
Shared responsibilities, e.g.:							
Property, e.g.:							
Support in need							
Regular payments							
Shared accounts							
Ethical spending							
Expensive lifestyle							
Frugal lifestyle							
Similar spending habits							
Share living costs							
Financial security							
Shared retirement funds							
Separate finances							

⁴ The terms are shuffled and no hierarchy/order is implied

Domestic							
Routines, e.g.:							
Chores, e.g.:							
Sharing a home							
Sharing a sleeping space							
Cooking together							
Sharing meals							
Shared preferences (cleanliness/tidiness etc.)							

Planning, scheduling, time management							
Quality time together, frequency:							
Reserved time slots, when:							
Regular relationship check-ins, frequency:							
Relationship interval:							
Spontaneity							
Planning of time together in advance							
Shared calendar							

Family planning, contraception ⁵ (notation: G for giving, R for receiving, x for both)							
Condom							
Other barrier(s):							
Hormonal:							
Implant:							
Surgical:							
Cycle tracking/natural							
Morning after pill/emergency contraception							
Other contraception:							
No contraception							
Abortion							
Discuss behavior involving other partners							
Become (co-)parents							
Have genetically related child(ren)							
Adoption							
Becoming foster parents							
Support each other with children from other partners							

⁵ Note that sexual health/safer sex is a separate category

Safer sex and sexual health							
STI testing Schedule/frequency: Who gets tested: What gets tested:							
Protected sexual practices in this relationship, means of protection: Oral: Anal: Vaginal: Other practices/means of protection:							
Protected sexual practices with other partners: Vaginal Oral Anal Other practices/means of protection/specifications:							
HPV vaccination Me: You:							
PrEP Me: You:							

Co-Caregivers							
Plants							
Animals							
Children							
Parents							
Other people:							

Holidays together							
Taking/planning time off together							
(Long) weekends							
Day trips							
Week(s)							
Long-term travel/sabbatical							
Just the two of us							
With friends, who:							
With family, who:							
With metamour(s), who:							
In organized groups, e.g.:							
Abroad							
At home							
City trips							
Cultural travel							
Festival/Retreat							
Camping/Nature							
Road trip							
Beach							
Active/Adventure							
Cruise							
Luxury							
Wellness							
By (night)train							
By bike							
By bus							
By car							
By plane							
By ship							

Labels							
No Label							
Colleague							
Friend							
Partner							
Lover							
Affair							
Spouse							
Datmate							
Playpartner							
Flatmate							
Nesting Partner							
Sugarmama/Sugardaddy							
Other:							

Displays of affection							
Events							
Friends							
Family							
Work							
Social Media							
In public							

Means and frequency of communication							
In-person, frequency:							
Phone, frequency:							
Voice Messages, frequency:							
Text, frequency:							
Written, frequency:							
Other preferences:							

Relationship attachment							
Non-attachment-oriented							
Attachment-oriented							
Safe haven							
Secure base							
Comfort with ambiguity							

(Non-) monogamy Labels							
Monogamous							
Monogam-ish							
Swinging							
Polyfidelitous							
Hierarchical polyamory							
Group relationship							
Egalitarian Polyamory							
Solo polyamory							
Free/honest relationship							
Relationship anarchy							
Fluid							
Comet Relationship							
None							
Single							
Other:							

Cultivating (other) relationships/sexual/ romantic interactions							
Dating own gender Me: You:							
Dating other genders Me: You:							
Sexual Me: You:							
Romantic Me: You:							
Attachment-oriented Me: You:							
Non-attachment-oriented Me: You:							
Short-term: Me: You:							
Long-term Me: You:							
'One-night stand' Me: You:							
Kink-focused relationship Me: You:							
Dating mutual friends/acquaintances Me: You:							
(Solo) use of dating apps Me: You:							
Check-in about new relationships before entering Me: You:							
Discuss space/time allotted to different relationships, point of polysaturation							
Discuss asymmetries and (inter)dependence dynamics							
Reflect on jealousy together							
Everything goes							

Me: You:							
None Me: You:							
Veto power							
Hierarchical structures							

Communication about other intimate relationships (specify limitations if appl.)							
Don't ask, don't tell Me: You:							
Casually keep up to date about other relationships, (me/you, etc.):							
Share intimate details about other relationships, (me, you, etc.):							
Share details of this relationship to metamours – (me/you, etc.):							
Share experiences of being close (e.g. pictures of kissing) Me: You:							

Contact with metamours ⁶							
Casual irregular meetings with metamour(s): together alone							
Cultivate regular meetings with metamour(s) together alone							
Cultivate/prioritize “getting along” between metamour(s)							
Cultivate friendship/deeper platonic relationship between metamours							
Kitchen table polyamory Limitations:							
Intimate interactions between metamours: together alone							
Meeting in public spaces as a polycule Limitations:							
Introduce metamour(s) to own social circle Limitations:							

⁶ Metamour, usually refers to a partner’s partner. The contact to metamours is often a point of discussion and negotiation in non-monogamous romantic relationships, which is why this category is its own. However, depending on your relationship model, similar considerations could also apply to other labels or other people – e.g. your partner’s close platonic companion, a specific family member, etc. Adjust/add as needed.

Unique elements for this relationship (wishes, appreciation...)							

Important boundaries & limitations							

Other things of importance							

Wishes, Ambitions for the Future:							

