

ANARCHY



AGAINST

MONOGAMY

Version 1
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RAWBENZ.gay

Why you can, and should be, applying
anarchism to your relationships

DEFINITIONS

Mono-normativity: the constant normalization of monogamous culture in society, seeing it as the “normal” and other structures as the “deviant”.

Nuclear family: a family structure of a husband and wife and their 1 or 2 children.

Heterosexism: discrimination against non-heterosexual people.

Monogamy: a relationship structure that expects an exclusivity between two people in a romantic relationship, based on societal and cultural norms.

Polyamory: the need, want, or capability to feel (romantic) love for more than 1 person.

Relationship Anarchy: a political and philosophical lens for interpersonal relationships that rejects monogamism, **coupledom**, and other rule-based forms of relating, and instead emphasizes the importance of communal and mutual support and care, rather than codependent perspectives that are frequently encouraged in rule-based relationships, both in monogamous and polyamorous relationship structures. (Source: therelationshipanarchist.com)

Coupledom: the state of being an exclusive couple. Similar to monogamy, but in broader definition to include states of (co)dependency, for example.

FURTHER READING

Practical Anarchism: A Guide for Daily Life by Scott Branson

The short instructional manifesto for relationship anarchy by Andie Nordgren (The Anarchist Library)

A Green Anarchist Project on Freedom and Love by Mae Bee (The Anarchist Library)

Relationship Anarchy channel on YouTube

<https://www.therelationshipanarchist.com/>

<https://relationship-anarchy.com/>

RAD (<https://sites.google.com/view/radcommunitylibrary>)

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INTRODUCTION

This zine is about relationship anarchism. While I will do my best to explain concepts important to the zine as I go, to make sure this zine doesn't get incredibly long, here is a list of assumptions I'm making about things I believe you may already know. Some buzz-words are defined in the back of this zine, but some of those will also be defined throughout the zine. You will find these buzz-words written in **bold**.

I'm going to assume that you are an anarchist – or some other kind of radical, grassroots leftist – and are familiar with its concepts. For example, I'm going to assume you understand why hierarchy is a bad thing. And I will assume you hate cops, and have compassion for (other) Queer people. You know, basic stuff.

I also will not be doing a super in-depth explanation on how to practice relationship anarchy, partially because I'm lazy, but also because there are quite a few resources on it out there by people who probably know what they're talking about. I'll be listing some of them at the end, though I won't have read all of them – so don't take it as me definitely 100% agreeing with the resources listed!

Furthermore, I want to thank the people proofreading this zine and giving me feedback. Anarchokat for designing the sick cover. All the people who I had deep conversations with about feelings and our thoughts on this. Those who disagreed with me and forced me to rethink my logic and wording. The people that let me yap on about this subject over the past while (including my mom!). And all my previous partners and connections – in a way, even that one horrible one – and my current ones, for giving me experiences that made me grow and continue to make me grow to this day.

Much love!

FINAL WORD AND THANKS

First of all, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to read this. I can very much imagine that if you have struggled with relationships in the past, or consider yourself monogamous, this zine can feel quite confronting.

That is in a way my goal with publishing and spreading this zine; I want to lovingly confront my comrades and make sure we're all continuously trying to question things, learn from it, and grow not only as people, but as a movement. I believe that being an active anarchist, so to speak, is the only way to be an anarchist.

This is also the first zine I've finished. I'm very proud of myself for having the perseverance, since finishing (especially creative) works is something I struggle with quite a lot. However, this also means there's probably stuff I could have done better, and maybe you have some ideas I could improve with. Or maybe you completely disagree with me, and want to tell me really bad! In any case, if you wish to contact me with feedback or compliments, you can e-mail me at purplefire@riseup.net.

DEFINING MONOGAMY AND RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY

WHAT IS MONOGAMY?

This is something that I thought I completely grasped before writing this zine. I understand what monogamy is, out of lived experience and what I guess you could call “general vibe-sensing” or “being an empath” – but defining something is a whole different question altogether.

When I got the idea of writing about this subject, I started thinking about defining what monogamy and relationship anarchy are. To make sure I didn't end up with a definition that most people don't find fitting, or accidentally defining monogamy as something else that has its own word, I tried asking online for how people define monogamy and relationship anarchy. Unfortunately it wasn't very successful, as I got a mere single response. Either way, this is how they defined monogamy:

“Different structures of relationship culture that are predicated on principles of specific categories of relationships that have an exclusive nature between two people in a romantic relationship.”

Let’s analyze this.

I like how they say it’s “*different structures of relationship culture*”. I agree that monogamy and the culture around it is heavily imposed on us by society, which is often shortened to **mono-normativity**. There is also a lot of ways monogamy can express itself in relationships. Some people might be married, and have a **nuclear family**, while others might be long-distance, gay, choose not to marry, etc.

In my opinion, the most important part of the definition is: “*...that are predicated on principles of specific categories of relationships that have an exclusive nature between two people in a romantic relationship.*”

It’s telling us that, a) monogamy, or rather mono-normativity, pushes us into boxes, and forces us to adhere to specific principles (“...predicated on principles of specific categories of relationships...”); b) the base of monogamous relationships is that they are only of exclusive nature between two people (“...that have an

bad experiences dictate how you handle your relationships completely, you’re limiting yourself. You have to let yourself be open to grow and change. Only this way can you feel truly free in exploring all sorts of unique connections with all sorts of unique people.

I’ve been there as well. I have been in relationships where I was monogamous, switching between being “allowed” to have sex with others or not, codependent, scared to communicate. Where I’ve been super jealous. The only way out for me, that helped me learn how to communicate and find out what kinds of connections I want in life, is to keep asking myself questions. To be critical of my thoughts and actions. Why am I jealous? Why am I attracted to this specific trait? Why am I scared of this? Why do I want that? You have to trust yourself and let go of your presuppositions. Only by asking questions, can you find the answers you’re looking for.

incompatible with, as we define it here.

Being relationship anarchists means we give each other the freedom we deserve and need to thrive, as individuals, partners, friends, and in our community. It gives us the opportunity to grow, change, and keep our connections meaningful and free from (intended or unintended) coercion and codependency.

WHY YOU CAN BE A RELATIONSHIP ANARCHIST

Maybe you're reading all this, and agree – but you can't help but feel like it's not for you. Maybe you've tried to be non-monogamous, and it didn't work out well. Or maybe even left you traumatized. Maybe you're just more comfortable in monogamy.

I get it. It's not easy sometimes – but I'm going to tell you something that may hurt, but I hope you can read it as hopeful. You **can** be a relationship anarchist.

I'm not trying to tell you you have to start dating or have sex with more people. Like I said – I believe it's totally possible to be content with a single romantic relationship and be a relationship anarchist. But if you keep telling yourself you can't do something, or letting

exclusive nature between two people..."); and c) the relationship is of romantic nature. This gives us our ABC's.

Starting with point A: monogamy pushes us into boxes, and expects of us certain behavior. These boxes and their expected behaviors are determined by a lot of factors. Governments may push certain behavior to reach a certain demographic, or gain control over their population – like the US government pushing the nuclear family as the ideal relationships structure, to “fight against communism”, or the Chinese government imposing single-child laws to “prevent overpopulation”. (Western) churches also have a long history of imposing marriage on their followers, and pushing couples to have children. To shorten it, authoritative entities in society have coerced our society to become mono-normative, as a means of control.

Then I want to move on to the letter C – and yes, I know that's not in the correct order. The monogamous relationship is of romantic nature. This is quite funny to me, in a way. Before starting on this zine, I looked up monogamy on Wikipedia, and it made me realize something about how our definition seems to stray a little bit from the etymology of the word. Monogamy is made up of *mono* – meaning single – and *gamy* – referring to marriage. However, I feel like most people

would loosely define monogamy while focusing on the feeling – *amory* – rather than the action of marriage. So maybe we should not be calling this monogamy, but *monoamory*!

That doesn't feel exactly right though, since this zine argues in a way that monoamory does not really exist, and mono-normativity forces us into a behavior, rather than a feeling. Anyway, I think we can all agree that at least according to our mono-normative society, monogamous relationships are “supposed to be” romantic in nature.

Now we get to the letter B. Monogamous relationships are exclusive in nature. This part of the definition is key to what this zine tries to argue. Monogamous relationships are expected to be, and stay, between two people – and any change in this would mean the breaking of the monogamy. This almost always leads to some form of conflict in the relationship, and may even lead to the ending of the relationship.

For this zine, I'll be using the following definition of **monogamy**:

“A relationship structure that expects an exclusivity between two people in a romantic relationship, based on societal and cultural norms.”

WHY YOU SHOULD BE A RELATIONSHIP ANARCHIST

Branson also refers to the feminist slogan from the 1960's and 70's “*The personal is political*,” which is intended to challenge what we see as political. How we live our lives is what defines our society. If we continue to see our personal lives separate from our political, or activist lives, we will not be able to truly change society, and we will not be able to grow as people. So as anarchists, we need to apply what we believe in – anarchism as a tool to be flexible – to our personal lives, to our relationships. Funnily enough, Branson doesn't draw the same conclusion as me, and says:

“You can still enjoy being in a couple or monogamy while working to undo the way we have been taught that love means choosing a single person to meet all of your needs forever and losing the importance of other relationships.”

I actually think we agree with each other here, but that Branson's definition of monogamy is, I suppose, simpler? We totally should be working to undo internalized mono-normativity, and value all of our relationships. To me, that is exactly what relationship anarchy encompasses; and exactly what monogamy is

something new, something better, from the pieces.

Now, let's remember the definition of monogamy:

“A relationship structure that expects an exclusivity between two people in a romantic relationship, based on societal and cultural norms.”

As per this definition, monogamy is inherently not flexible – it doesn't allow for the relationship to fundamentally change without breaking apart. Because monogamy is exclusive, and expects the two people to stay together for as long as possible, it needs compromise. If you change and grow, but you grow in different directions, you either need to compromise, or break up. Monogamy is rigid – if it flexes, it breaks. So, since monogamy is inherently not flexible, and anarchism is inherently flexible, doesn't that make the two fundamentally incompatible?

WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY?

TLDR: whatever you want it to be.

But seriously, while I do really think this is the true answer, there are some traits that are generally attributed to **relationship anarchy**. There is a “*Relationship Anarchy Manifesto*” written by Andie Nordgren in 2012. The manifesto has these points as general guidelines for relationship anarchists:

Love is abundant, and every relationship unique	Love & respect, instead of entitlement
Find your core set of relationship values	Heterosexism is rampant, but don't let fear lead you
Build for the lovely unexpected	Fake it til' you make it
Trust is better	Change through communication
Customize your commitments	

Let's quickly analyze some of these. The points are straight from the manifesto, but I have changed some of the wording to be in line with what I want to emphasize here. I highly encourage you to research how others define relationship anarchy.

Love is abundant, and every relationship unique

Everyone is different from each other, and we're all unique people. A relationship anarchist believes that that means that all relationships between people are also unique. We have the capacity to love so many people in so many different ways. Love is not a limited resource! And if all relationships are unique, why would there be a need to rank them, put them in a hierarchy?

Love & respect, instead of entitlement

As anarchists, we need to respect each others' independence and self-determination. You are not entitled to make decisions for or command anyone else. Instead of creating rules for your relationships, which is a way of imposing control over each other, create boundaries, and respect each others' freedom. Give others and yourself the opportunity to change your beliefs, how you want to approach relationships, what you like and don't like, and who you are in your relationships. Not being entitled is the only way to have truly mutual relationships. Love isn't a compromise, it's mutual respect.

GETTING DEEPER

THE ETHICAL PROBLEM WITH MONOGAMY

I'd like to refer to the book *Practical Anarchism: A Guide for Daily Life* by Scott Branson (just as a disclaimer – as of writing this, I have not yet finished this book). Branson sees anarchism not as a utopia, but as a tool. That we should see anarchism as a form of “breaking up”. I quote:

“Break up with your lover, your friends, your family, your job, your presuppositions! Only in the break can you imagine the right boundaries that allow you to engage with all of these types of relationships out of a position of autonomy and mutual care.”

Our capitalist society is much like monogamy in some ways. Just like monogamy, capitalism needs to be rigid: if it flexes, it breaks. The goal of capitalism is, like monogamy, to stay the same forever, or for as long as possible. As anarchists, we bend our society. Not to mold it to our own liking, like liberals, fascists, and some communists tend to do, but to break it, and build

DIFFERENTIATING POLYAMORY & RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY

Some people see relationship anarchy as a “form of polyamory.” I don’t really, although I also think it doesn’t matter that much. Let’s look at our definitions.

Polyamory means to feel love for multiple people. *Poly* means multiple, and *amory* means love. So I guess polyamory is the opposite of monoamory, or monogamy (argh, those pesky definitions again!).

One of the building blocks of relationship anarchy is that love is abundant, that all connections are unique, and we are therefore able to feel love for many people in lots of unique ways. However, when we say polyamory, we most often mean having or wanting multiple romantic relationships. Relationship anarchy isn’t only about romantic love, because all relationships are unique. This is also why I believe you can totally be content with one romantic relationship in your life, and still be a relationship anarchist. Some relationship anarchist say this as “you can be monogamous and a relationship anarchist.” But I don’t say that. I’ll get into why in the next chapter.

Find your core set of relationship values

Let yourself and the people around you discover what is important in your connections with people. What are your boundaries? Your needs and wants in life, and in each connection? How do you want to live your life, and how do you want your relationships to fit in it? Heterosexism is rampant, but don’t let fear lead you. We live in a hetero-, cis-, and mononormative capitalist society that tries to tell us how to define ourselves and our connections with people. This system judges us when we move outside of it. Trust each other, and help each other stay vigilant in not letting this society, and the fear it imposes on us, determine how we feel.

Build for the lovely unexpected

To me this may be one of the most important ones, and also important for the rest of this zine. Building for the lovely unexpected means to let yourself be spontaneous, and express yourself without fear. But to me it also means to be flexible. Allow for your connections to change through communication. Let your needs and wants change alongside yourself as you grow as a person, and allow for your relationships to change with the people involved in them. Relationships should help you grow, not hold you back.

Fake it ‘til you make it

Breaking societal norms is hard and can be exhausting. Cut yourself some slack. But something that may help, is the “fake it ‘til you make it” strategy. Think about how you would like to act in your relationships, and internalize it. Ask the people you care about for support. Let yourself feel your feelings as they come, but analyze why you feel these things, and learn from it.

Trust is better

Have trust in each other. Choose to assume the people you have care with are not out to hurt you purposefully, to stop yourself from needing constant validation in the relationship. Sometimes it’s all too much for us and we need to withdraw. Create relationships where we not only feel safe to do so, but are supported in it, and give each other the chance to express our feelings and talk to each other about them, without fear of judgment and to take responsibility.

Change through communication

Communication is the basis of all connections. It’s the only way to grow together and let your relationships grow along. It’s the only way to break with the norms society imposes on us. Communication should be a standard in relationships, and not only as an emergency measure when something comes up. Communicate in a context of trust: be explicit to avoid others needing to

“read between the lines” for what you truly mean.

Customize your commitments

Arguably the most important one. Ultimately, how you define your relationships and live your life, is completely up to you. I am not here to tell you what to do. But I do believe these principles are a healthy base for approaching relationships in a healthy way, no matter how you define them. Let yourself be open to changing your views. Be flexible.

There is a lot more to relationship anarchy than this. Check the last pages of this zine for more resources so you can do your own research. Don’t trust just my opinion on things!