



CHALLENGING AMATONORMATIVITY

Digging Deeper

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Definitions

Below is a list of useful definitions. The source link is embedded in the term.

- Ableism: 1) the discrimination and prejudice against disabled people; 2) a system that values bodies and minds based on normality, intelligence, excellence, desirability, and productivity
- Aphobia: discrimination against or fear of asexual or aromantic people
- Cisheteropatriarchy: a system of power based on the supremacy and dominance of cisgender heterosexual men through the exploitation and oppression of womxn and the LGBTQIA+ community
- Colonial sexuality/ Settler sexuality: a white national heteronormativity that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects
- Desirability politics: the methodology through which the sovereignty of those deemed (conventionally) attractive/beautiful/arousing is determined
- Endogamy: marriage within a specific group (e.g., racial-ethnic group) as required by custom or law
- Kyriarchy: the social system that keeps all intersecting oppressions in place; the set of connecting social systems built around domination, oppression, and submission
- Lookism: prejudice or discrimination based on physical appearance
- Sanism: the assumption that there is one way for human brains and human minds to be configured and to function and that there is something wrong with those who deviate from this
- Western colonialism: the political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world
- White supremacy: beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or 'white,' human races over other racial groups



WHAT IS AMATONORMATIVITY?

Amatonormativity is the “the assumption that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types. The assumption that valuable relationships must be marital or amorous devalues friendships and other caring relationships.”

- Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage* (2012)

In other words, amatonormativity is the cultural belief that a relationship that is **romantic and sexual** is the most important type of relationship one could have, that this relationship should be **long-term and monogamous**, and that **everyone wants and should have** a romantic-sexual relationship.

Digging Deeper

In [Part 1- A Beginner's Guide](#), you began your journey on challenging amatonormativity. You learned what amatonormativity is, the various forms in which it manifests, and how it can be harmful. That was just the beginning.

Amatonormativity is deeply embedded in our culture, institutions, and society, but it does not act alone. It's part of a web that underlies our society, intersecting with other oppressive systems. Much like the often invisible fungal networks that support and sustain forests, this web of cultural hegemony supports and sustains much of our current norms and structures, affecting how we think about, among other things, relationships, who deserves access to care, and even who is "granted" humanity or not. Amatonormativity is therefore a part of the kyriarchy, the social system that keeps all intersecting oppressions in place. Until we dig deeper, the tangled and deeply rooted web remains largely invisible and unchallenged.

Content warning: This guide will address topics related to different types of oppression, including racism, sexism, and ableism, and there are mentions of (sexual) abuse, transphobia, and dehumanization. Each section will contain the appropriate content warnings. If you have lived experience with these and find it distressing, please proceed with caution. For those with privilege, this isn't an invitation to hide from difficult topics, however.

Each section will contain an approximate reading time, except for the exercises.

Amatonormativity and Its Intersections

Reading time: Approximately 1-2 minutes

The following topics will be discussed individually, but they should not be considered independent. As part of the kyriarchy, these systems overlap and feed into each other and are rooted in each other.

When thinking about intersections with amatonormativity, a few things may come to mind first. Heteronormativity, homonormativity, singlism, and compulsory sexuality have clearer connections with amatonormativity. Perhaps the murkier intersections lie with white supremacy, colonialism, ableism, and capitalism. Additionally, these can merge to enable desirability politics, which are often cisheteronormative, racist, classist, and ableist. The focus on these intersections will be on how they impact how we as a society do relationships and define care. This guide will therefore cover five topics: 1) white supremacy and colonialism, 2) cisheteropatriarchy, 3) ableism, 4) capitalism, and 5) desirability politics.

Afterwards, you can engage in a series of exercises to further examine and reflect on how these intersections show up in your life and in society around you and how you can continue to challenge this.

Disclaimer: This guide is not a comprehensive explanation of these systems as it focuses on how these intersect with amatonormativity.

Amatonormativity and White Supremacy/Colonialism

Reading time: Approximately 4-8 minutes

Content warnings: Racism and colonial impacts, mention of forced sterilization

White supremacy and colonialism have significant impacts on many social systems and structures, including norms around relationships, care, and desirability. One could argue that white supremacy and colonialism are the root of amatonormativity rather than an intersection. One could further argue that white supremacy is the root of all, if not many, of the oppressive systems addressed in this guide, which is why we start with it. A facet of white supremacy and colonialism is colonial sexuality (also known as settler sexuality). White supremacy enforces the amatonormative ideal that romantic-sexual relationships should be long-term and monogamous through colonial sexuality. It also places romantic-sexual relationships at the top of the hierarchy as exemplified through marriage while delegitimizing other ways of relating.

Colonial sexuality is therefore inherently amatonormative. It's tied to being productive, in the sense of reproducing and having biological children, the nuclear family, and privatization of property, all of which are often ideally accomplished within a marriage. As such, colonial sexuality was originally heteronormative. However, gay folks (and other same-gender-loving folks) are now increasingly integrated into colonial sexuality and amatonormative standards through homonormativity as gay people gain access to and fit into this norm of getting married (or having long-term partnerships or civil unions), having children, being home owners, and so forth.

White supremacy has also been controlling the sexuality and romantic-sexual relationships, including marriage, of Black, Indigenous, and people

White Supremacy/Colonialism

of color (BIPOC) for hundreds of years. Through colonialism, Western views of marriage, relationships and sexuality have been forced onto BIPOC, often violently. Interracial relationships have also been controlled, such as through endogamy to ensure the “purity” of Whiteness. BIPOC sexualities have been deemed “primitive” and European settlers and colonists viewed it as their mission to “civilize” them. As Gloria Wekker writes in *White Innocence*, “The complex sexual map... represents [the sexuality of] black people and other others... as one that needs to be controlled (6).” This desire to control BIPOC sexuality extended as far as forced sterilization. For example, Black women have been deemed unfit to be mothers because they’re “sexually indiscriminate.” Many Black women were therefore sterilized without consent. Additionally, as marriage and monogamy were (are) deemed to embody moral superiority, these were forced onto BIPOC as a way to “civilize” them.

Amatonormative standards, such as monogamy and couple-centrism, have therefore been universalized through Westernization and colonialism despite these not being the norm in other cultures. “People commonly assume as a result of amatonormativity that monogamy is the universal norm and that marriage is simply a natural expression and beautiful solemnisation of romantic love. **This is a false universality** ... In non- and pre-patriarchal cultures, the sexual exclusivity and long-term/indefinite commitment of monogamy were never normative expectations. Throughout most of human history, romantic bonds were commonly short-term and non-exclusive. Instead of couple-centrism, cultures without patriarchy ... commonly have extended caring networks and support structures where children are raised communally. Only about 17% of human cultures are strictly monogamous even today (1).”

Through the intersection of amatonormativity and white supremacy, non-normative ways of relating became deviant. This is especially so for

White Supremacy/Colonialism

BIPOC and/or those in non-Western societies. For example, polyamory may be considered queer in relation to colonial sexuality due to the amatonormative ideals it engenders, but in some Indigenous cultures, it's not considered queer as plural marriages were quite common- it was and is simply another way of being and relating. However, colonial amatonormative norms have been internalized through forced assimilation by some non-Western cultures, meaning that these norms can be perpetuated even within racial-ethnic minority groups.

Furthermore, non-White racial/ethnic groups are considered to deviate from the norms of desirability that govern romantic-sexual relationships and marriage. For instance, Asian men are desexualized. Black and Latine folks are often hypersexualized. Indigenous folks are considered heathens.* Any racial-ethnic group that has a relationship structure that differs from the amatonormative Western structure is considered backwards or primitive. Romance and amatonormativity are then used as tools for social control. If people engage in monogamous long-term romantic-sexual relationships, epitomized through marriage, they can be "saved." They can be considered respectable and worthy. Isabel Wilkerson writes in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* that closing off chances for interracial marriage and romantic relationships through endogamy impeded opportunities for White folks to build empathy for BIPOC (7). While endogamy certainly prevented interactions between different racial-ethnic groups and reinforced the place of White folks as the dominant group, we can also question why it is necessary to have marriage, romantic ties, or legal family connections for people (of the dominant group and in general) to have personal stakes in the well-being of others and to humanize them.

*Stereotypes on (de)sexualization of racial-ethnic minorities can be more complex through intersections of age, class, and gender. These are simplified examples.

Amatonormativity and Cisheteropatriarchy

Reading time: Approximately 4-8 minutes

Content warnings: Sexism and queerphobia, mentions of sexual harassment and violence

Note: Women and men are used in an inclusive manner here unless otherwise stated, such as with the use of “cis-woman.” Many of the sexist norms discussed in this section do relate to cisgender roles, however.

Amatonormativity dictates that we should all be engaging in monogamous romantic-sexual relationships while the cisheteropatriarchy dictates with whom and how we should engage in romantic-sexual relationships. Many expectations, norms, and behaviors around romance and romantic relationships are a result of amatonormativity, sexism, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity. Tied to colonial sexuality, the patriarchy decrees that romantic-sexual relationships should only be between cis-men and cis-women and that they have particular roles within these relationships. Indeed, dating and romance are full of rules and practices related to (cis)gender roles, and homophobic ideas surrounding romantic-sexual relationships and the gender roles within them are still pervasive. Although this is slowly changing, the norm is also that women should defer to their male partners and that it is the ultimate purpose of women to be solely responsible for meeting all the domestic, emotional, sexual, etc needs of their male partners.

Sexism and amatonormativity lead to numerous toxic and abusive expectations and behaviors around romance, many of which are deemed normal or even romantic. For example, the cisheteronormative idea that women should be demure and not be “too easy” while men should do all the pursuing leads to romantic harassment, such as men

Cisheteropatriarchy

who don't take "no" as an answer and are persistent in getting women to date them. Sexism and amatonormativity also show up in how women are more often expected to have their lives revolve around romance and their male partners. Women who decide not to pursue romance are often shamed whereas men might be able to remain single relatively unscathed because a greater portion of women's inherent worth is based on their ability to get a partner. Men's worth is also based on their ability to get a partner, but their worth is also determined by many other factors. Men are mostly still able to be whole, autonomous individuals without a partner while women are inherently considered incomplete or unfulfilled without a partner.

As part of relationship norms, the patriarchy and amatonormativity also influence how we as a society view sex and sexual relations. While this is changing, the prevailing view is that people should only be having sex in a committed romantic relationship and/or marriage, which again ties back into colonial sexuality. Those who don't conform to these sexual norms are often sex-shamed as casual or non-partnered sex are frowned upon or deemed as lesser, immoral, or not valid. Patriarchal norms and amatonormativity can also lead to sex entitlement and adversarial sex beliefs, in which it's believed that men and women are in competition for power in sexual relationships. Especially in romantic relationships, people often believe that they're entitled to sex, which can lead to sexual harrasment, coercion, and even violence.

Considering that the cisheteropatriarchy decrees that romantic-sexual relationships should be cisheteronormative, transgender, non-binary, and other queer folks who are alloromantic or engage in romantic relationships often have to deal with their relationships being delegitimized. In fact, any kind of queer relationships (including non-romantic or non-sexual ones) are delegitimized for not fitting into the norm. However, many queer folks and communities may end up being

Cisheteropatriarchy

hyper-amatonormative as a desperate attempt to assimilate into heteronormative society. As mentioned before, homonormativity brings queer folks into the fold of amatonormativity. Nevertheless, this is a false sense of acceptance and inclusion, seeing as queer folks are still valued on their attractiveness and ability to find a partner and how much they can measure up to cisheteronormative ideals.

This emphasis on attractiveness and ability to find a partner (essentially, the degree of how amatonormative one can be) can lead to transphobia, for example, as trans folks are only deemed worthy if they're attractive, which in reality means that they should be able to conform to cisnormative beauty standards and pass as cisgender. Amatonormativity and cishomonormativity can mean that passing trans folk turn against non-passing, which creates a wedge within the community. One extreme form of this is transmedicalism, which states that people not on hormones and/or not seeking surgery as part of their transition are not really trans. This is also something that can be leveled at non-binary folks. Another extreme example of the legitimization of cisheteropatriarchy are the so-called trans panic bills. In many ways, they reveal the true power of amatonormativity in the way that some perfectly natural identities are very clearly excluded from desirability and standard expectation. That there must definitely have been attraction until the victim's trans identity was revealed. That some people's reaction to having these expectations challenged can be as extreme as murder. And that a sufficient number of people in a wider society sympathize with this change in desirability and murderous reaction for it to be a law. Mainstream LGBTQ+ groups might end up reinforcing cisheteronormativity (and homonormativity) and amatonormativity- and in turn, perpetrating transphobia, polyphobia, and aphobia- because of the focus on pursuing normative monogamous romantic-sexual relationships.

Amatonormativity and Ableism

Reading time: Approximately 3-6 minutes

Content warning: Ableism, sanism, pathologization, and mention of eugenics, abuse, and aphobia

Note: Ableism here will also encompass sanism.

Amatonormativity and ableism also intersect to influence with whom we engage in relationships and to whom we extend care. Receiving care is often dependent on being loved or desirable. It also influences who we humanize and who we consider worthy of receiving care. Disabled and neurodivergent folks and those who defy amatonormativity (e.g., aromantics and non-monogamists) have to contend with being dehumanized and pathologized. Both are subjected to the idea that there is something inherently wrong with them and that they need to be “fixed” or “cured.” Oftentimes, the reason to “cure” someone is so they can become eligible for romance.

The ability to love is also considered a trademark of humanity by many. Some neurodivergent folks don't or can't experience love in socially-recognized and accepted ways*. For some, they may have experienced abuse “in the name of love” or love was used to absolve the abuser of their wrongdoing, and they therefore don't associate with the concept of love. For others, their conceptualization and experience of love don't align with normative standards. Additionally, aromantics and asexuals are considered mentally ill for experiencing love non-normatively (or not at all) even if not neurodivergent. Those who can't love or don't love (in normative ways) end up being dehumanized because according to amatonormativity, we should all engage in romantic love and relationships. It's what makes us human, society says, and if you can't

Ableism

love, then you must be a monster. This view ends up isolating and alienating many people and can prevent them from connecting with others. One shouldn't need to (be able to) love in order to form connections and relationships with others.

If we connect to colonial/settler sexuality from earlier, disabled and neurodivergent folks are considered undesirable according to amatonormative standards because coupling up and having children (i.e., being (re)productive) are tied to being a good citizen.

Neurodivergent and disabled folks are then viewed as "unfit" to couple up and reproduce. History, modern medicine, and sociopolitical policies are rife with forced sterilizations, eugenics, and control over romantic-sexual relationships of disabled folks to prevent them from passing on their "bad" genes and/or because of the view that they shouldn't be parents. Therefore, ableism automatically deems disabled folks as unable to meet amatonormative standards. There is also infantilization wrapped up in both ableism and amatonormativity that reinforce one another. Disabled people are viewed as child-like for needing different forms of care, and if they are aromantic or non-monogamous the idea that they are not mature enough to have a normative relationship furthers this stereotype. Additionally, disabled folks are further removed from amatonormative expectations through structural means in that they could risk losing their disability benefits if they get married or live with romantic partners.

Amatonormativity also creates additional obstacles for disabled and neurodivergent folks. In an amatonormative society, much of care work is relegated to partnerships. The expectation is that a partner is (often solely) responsible for helping you meet your needs. For a disabled/neurodivergent person, this would also mean they're supposed to rely on a partner for help with daily activities. As a consequence, being unpartnered may be life-threatening as many disabled/neurodivergent

Ableism

folks may end up not being able to access the help or care that they need, whether it's because they are non-partnering or again because of the ableist notion that they aren't desirable as partners. Alternatively, they may be locked away in institutions where their rights may not be respected because they fail to meet the standards of "humanity" in an ableist and amatonormative society. "I think about the need for care that can be accessed when you're isolated, disliked, and without social capital—which many disabled people are (11)."

*Some neurotypical folks also experience love non-normatively. Neurodivergence doesn't therefore equate to not experiencing love, but they're most often impacted by normative ideas of love.

Amatonormativity and Capitalism

Reading time: Approximately 3-6 minutes

Note: Romance discussed in this section doesn't necessarily refer to romantic attraction but rather the social norms, behaviors, and expectations that surround romance and romantic love.

The way we view and do relationships is also influenced by capitalism, which enables and enforces amatonormative standards. Romantic love as we know it currently is largely a product of capitalism, which has commodified human emotions. Romance and capitalism work together to convince us to work hard for a future payout (i.e., falling in love and securing a romantic partner). This is why studying or focusing on one's careers are often considered valid excuses for temporarily not pursuing romance. In fact, we're encouraged to get a degree or a well-paying job so that we can be a good spouse and parent. We're led to believe that modern romance is natural, but in reality, it's something that we're conditioned to do. We exist in an economy that depends on romance, and capitalism relies on the idea that romantic love is natural, that anyone can fall in love, and that it's all we need. This idea that "love is all we need" leads people to ignore social issues and to place their own "happily ever after" over the safety and security of our collective future. As most people spend their time and resources pursuing romance and coupling, they end up spending little time addressing social issues. This puts a focus on our private lives rather than on community and global issues. It enforces the idea that we should abandon our communities in order to pursue romantic love. "Romance seduces us into privatizing our futures (13)."

This privatization of our lives goes hand in hand with amatonormativity, which is especially exemplified by couple-centrism and the nuclear family. The exclusivity and monogamy-normativity of amatonormativity

Capitalism

perpetuates the insular romantic couple form. Society is divided into smaller insular nuclear family units, and we are led to believe that we can only receive care within our small units, which is further enforced by our social and institutional structures. Most of the responsibility of care ends up being placed within romantic partnership and the nuclear family rather than on the state. In addition to care, each household is expected to be dependent on its own material resources, which results in capitalism benefiting from nuclear families living on their own. Kinship networks and communities are often left out of consideration as ideally, we should deal with and manage our problems within the household. Having to enlist outside help, such as having to use welfare or social assistance, may be viewed as a sign of failure, that you aren't sufficient or productive enough on your own (with the exception of upper-class folks who hire help for domestic labor).

This intersects with amatonormativity because we're often forced to couple up in order to meet our needs. Think about how expensive it is to be single and how many fears we have around being alone because who will take care of us when we're sick and/or unemployed? This leads to care becoming commodified: childcare, elderly care, domestic work. Even self-care and well-being have been commodified. Capitalism after all relies on our domestic labor (as depicted on a poster, "Capitalism also Depends on Domestic Labour") and care to ensure that we're well enough to keep working and producing. All of which is expected to occur within private and insular units. Rather than facing how our current social structures leave us vulnerable or focusing on developing communities and more expansive care networks, we are instead socialized to think it's natural to want to couple up and conform to the nuclear family and that we don't have to consider the well-being of those in our wider community who don't do this.

Amatonormativity and Desirability Politics

Reading time: Approximately 3-6 minutes

Content warning: Mentions of racism, ableism, aphobia, transphobia, and implied lookism

“Love is blind.” But is it really? According to amatonormativity, we should all be pursuing monogamous romantic-sexual relationships and that this is one of the most meaningful things we can do. As a result, people spend a lot of time making themselves attractive and desirable- whether physically, financially, or socially- when pursuing romance in order to find a partner. The desire to be seen as desirable is a strong motive in enforcing amatonormativity. “Romance is one of the most disciplining mechanisms in society, because it not only prohibits desire but also structures it (14).”

We talk about love and attraction as things we just can't help or control. “The heart wants what it wants.” However, romance, attraction, and what we find desirable can be influenced by socio-political systems, and in turn, our desirability can be determined by our social position. This means that those with higher social status- in other words, those who are in the dominant or norm groups- are most likely to be considered attractive. “According to systems of oppression, the most desirable partner is one that fits in every single box, meaning they are White, middle-class and upward, straight or straight passing (because this can also apply to LGB people), cisgender, thin and able-bodied (16).” There is even a specific term for those who fit society's ideals of beauty and desirability: “conventionally attractive.” When romance and desire are treated as completely natural and innate, their socio-political and oppressive nature are ignored or buried. This is not to say that people don't or can't experience romantic attraction and desire naturally, but

Desirability Politics

that romance and what we consider desirable can be socialized to some degree. For this reason, even movements that should be more liberatory in this regard, such as the queer movement, only reinforce the hierarchical structure of desire in their goal of attaining the “freedom to love” because it uncritically defends the idea that people can’t help who they love or don’t love.*

Therefore, the intersection of amatonormativity with white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, ableism, capitalism all feed into desirability politics. Especially when romance and romantic inclinations are viewed as inherently pure, they can end up being oppressive and used to justify bigotry. Most people don’t enter romantic relationships with those outside of their class or racial-ethnic group. Disabled folks, people of color, and trans folks (especially those who don’t pass) are often not considered attractive or “partner material.” People will swear that it’s not because of racism, ableism, or transphobia but that it’s about compatibility. Additionally, people tend to view those who don’t want to date or play the desirability game with suspicion. For example, people might attribute aromanticism and asexuality with undesirability or an inability to get a partner. Thinking things like “you’re just aromantic because no one wants to date you” or equating asexuality with being unattractive, unwanted, and undesirable. On the flip side, aromantic and asexual folks who are deemed attractive are often considered a waste, as if they’re obligated to take part in dating, romance, and sex because of their attractiveness.

Underlying a part of desirability politics is a fear of undesirability. When you don’t fit the standards of desirability, amatonormativity makes you feel like you’re worthless because you can’t live up to its ideals. There is even a fear of being seen with someone who is considered undesirable as if undesirability were infectious. For this reason, a straight cis-man might not want others, especially other men, to find out that he had sex

Desirability Politics

with an “unattractive” woman because it could be negative for his reputation. People fear not being desired and losing desirability just as much as they fear not finding someone to desire. “At the very heart of romantic hierarchy – and the discrimination against those that must be deemed less worthy in order for it to exist – is the fear of losing one’s perceived place within that hierarchy (17).”

*Desirability politics should never be used to invalidate anyone’s sexual or romantic orientation, especially queer identities. Being critical of who we find desirable and why does not mean questioning the sexual or romantic orientations of others.

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

“Comfort and transformation do not live in the same house.”

Now that you are more aware of how amatonormativity interacts with other systems, you can begin to further challenge not only your own amatonormativity but also society’s amatonormativity. While it may not seem automatically obvious, all these systems interact to impact how we do care and relationships. Amatonormativity is one piece of the kyriarchy that is tightly enmeshed with other systems of oppression, which is why it’s necessary to challenge it in an intersectional manner. For deeper change, we have to not only change the way we think about relationships and care on an individual level but also drive change on a cultural and structural level.



Take your time to reflect and complete the exercises. You might have to revisit certain exercises as you further digest the information. As part of the exercises, make sure to take a moment to read the narratives listed under **Sources and Narratives** for further learning.

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

Pre-Reflection

Before starting the exercises, take a moment to reflect on how you feel after learning that amatonormativity is rooted in or intersects with white supremacy, colonialism, ableism, and capitalism. When confronted with the prejudices of a system deeply ingrained in our culture, we may experience and encounter difficult feelings that show up in our thoughts and bodies— perhaps guilt from realizing that you are complicit in a system that harms others, tension from being confronted with hard truths, and/or perhaps sadness from realizing how you yourself have been harmed. Sometimes challenging yourself can be hard, and that's okay.

What do you think about amatonormativity and its intersections? Do you experience any negative feelings, such as defensiveness, shame, tension, or guilt? Do you experience any positive feelings, such as recognition, release, understanding, or insight?

As you move through this, feel free to pause and re-examine where you are.



Challenging Your Amatonormativity

Exercise 1

An important way to challenge amatonormativity is by changing the way you think about and do relationships. In Part 1, you began this process, and now we will go a step further by examining how these intersections show up in how you do relationships, such as through desirability politics.

You can use the following prompts to start, but feel free to explore other topics:

- Are your most important relationships based on level of romantic/sexual attraction, such that you prioritize relationships with those you are most attracted to?
- Is the care you provide dependent on attraction, love, or the desirability of the care recipient?
- Do factors like racism, transphobia, and ableism affect who you care for and with whom you engage in (significant) relationships?
- In what ways could the manner in which you engage in relationships uphold the status quo or perpetuate oppression?
- How do systems of oppression affect your relationships, the way you relate to others, and who you view as desirable?

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

Exercise 2

Another important aspect of challenging amatonormativity is addressing the unrealistic or toxic expectations, norms, and behaviors around romance that amatonormativity can cause. Because romance is put on a pedestal and is made out to be pure, many behaviors around it which may normally be considered unsafe or violating are excused. Many people do awful things in “the name of love,” but some of these things have been normalized or co-opted to be signs of a true romance.

You can use the following prompts to start, but feel free to explore other topics:

- Have you ever felt entitled to being in a relationship with someone or having sex with someone because you had romantic feelings for them? If you haven't experienced this, then do you believe that romantic feelings entitle people to being in a relationship or having sex with someone? How come? What would be a better way to view this?
- Think about some of the toxic romance (and sex) norms mentioned earlier in the guide and how these intersect and relate to sexist and racist stereotypes. For example, which groups are most likely to be sex-shamed for having sex outside of committed romantic relationships? Likewise, which groups are less likely to be considered suitable romantic partners? Why do you think that is? How can you challenge that?
- In what ways have you noticed these norms show up in media or in life? How are they often portrayed? How could this be portrayed in a non-amatonormative way?
- What kind of adverse consequences are normalized by toxic romance norms? How can you confront these?

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

Exercise 2

Write about how amatonormativity can cause toxic romance and sex norms and how you can challenge these below.

A large white rectangular area intended for the user to write their response to the exercise prompt.

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

Exercise 3

Now that you have examined how these intersections influence how you do relationships, we will look at how to change this. This exercise introduces other ways of connecting to and being in relation with others. Redefining care is an important part of challenging amatonormativity, such as basing care on trust and respect rather than attraction. As such, redefining care also entails challenging capitalism, white supremacy, the cisheteropatriarchy, and ableism and centering marginalized ways of knowing and being as exemplified in disabled, queer, and BIPOC communities to subvert the norms created and upheld by these systems.

To begin, we'll introduce a couple of relationship and care philosophies and models.

Relationship anarchy (RA) is a relationship philosophy that rejects any socially mandated labels, rules, and expectations around relationships. Some central tenets include anti-hierarchy, lack of state control, non-prescriptionist, anti-normativity, and community interdependence. It also does not divide or rank between platonic, sexual, romantic or other forms of love and intimacies that exist in wider society. With RA, each relationship should be discussed separately from expectations, assumptions, or prescribed labels to determine the structure, boundaries, and agreed upon commitments. These principles pertain to any relationship, not just (romantic) partnerships, meaning that you can use RA for all your relationships if you so choose. Each relationship is unique and customizable. Below you can find the Relationship Anarchy Smorgasboard, which consists of activities and attributes that you and another person can mutually decide to include in your relationship.

Challenging Your Amatonormativity

You can view these as building blocks for forming your relationship. You don't have to do everything within a block. For example, if you want to have social touch in your relationship, you can choose to only include hugs and holding hands but not massages.

RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY SMÖRGÅSBORD			
Romantic Romantic love, courtship, dating (for some)	Platonic Friendship, playfulness, companionship, shared activities and interests	Domestic Sharing a home/dwelling, cooking together, sharing meals, chores/routines	Sexual Involving genitals, anus, orgasms, or erotic interactions
Social touch Hugs, holding hands, shaking hands, shoulder touch, massage	Life partner Sharing long term or life goals, embracing change in each other	Caregiver Giving/receiving care, including for illness, age, and general needs	Co-caregiver Of: Children, animals, plants, sick/elderly friends/family
Emotional intimacy Sharing, being vulnerable	Power dynamics Boss/employee, teacher/student, mentor/mentee, power exchange	Social partners Being seen together; events, friends, family, social media, work	Financial Sharing money, accounts, payment responsibilities, property
Emotional support Listening, problem solving, advice, confidant	Collaborative partners Presentations, teaching, projects, art, organizing	Business partners Creating, owning, sharing duties, decision making	Physicality Dance, martial arts, wrestling, sparring
Intimate touch Body contact, cuddles, hair play, massage snuggles, kissing	Communication Method/style, deep conversations, conceptual/philosophical discussions	Comm. frequency Check ins, full conversations, how often, how regular	Legal connections Power of Attorney, LLC, marriage, adoption, civil partnership
Face to face frequency Daily, weekly, monthly, annually, irregularly	Kink BDSM, fetishes, roleplay, power exchange	Spiritual Esoteric discussions, magic, shared worship, shared ritual/prayer	Labels Pet names, referring to each other, referring to relationship, when/how

[Alt text included in image]

Source: [Amatonormativity and Relationship Anarchy, TAAAP](#)

RA is inherently anti-amatonormative in that it is non-monogamist and does not place romantic relationships as most important. As such, RA doesn't (and shouldn't) only challenge amatonormativity on an individual level. Community interdependence is a key tenant of RA, exemplified by "community not couples," which challenges couple-centricity and coupledness, the nuclear family, and resists monogamy. These ways of

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relating lead to isolation and privatization of care, thereby leading to less support and increased vulnerability and chances of being exploited. Therefore, deprioritizing couples, partnerships, and insular forms of relationships while prioritizing community and extended care networks are imperative to being a relationship anarchist. RA isn't just about doing your individual relationships in different manner but about actively pushing for the resistance of the numerous interlocking structures of the kyriarchy that enforce amatonormativity, monogamism, the cisheteropatriarchy, and other assimilationist moves, such as homonormativity and hierarchical polyamory.

Community care and care webs are other important concepts in redefining care as they move support and care out of insular units (e.g., couples and nuclear families) into extended care networks. It acknowledges our interdependence and pushes us to take other's well-being and needs into consideration. This is counter to capitalism and the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" notion that we can be completely independent and self-reliant and only need to take care of ourselves. For this reason, it also challenges ableism as it normalizes asking for help and de-stigmatizes burdening others.

Community care has been a part of human existence for a long time but has diminished as our society becomes more individualistic and privatized. Especially for many marginalized folks who can't rely on the state or nuclear family, practicing community care is embedded into daily life and necessary for survival. Alongside self-care, which has been commodified and co-opted by neoliberal individualism, community care is crucial for our (collective) well-being. "Community care is the foundation of togetherness; by cultivating it, we are better able to

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support our well-being and that of our loved ones (21)."

Community care can be practiced on a smaller scale through care webs or pods, which are networks or groups of people who help each other out, regardless of the type of relationship they have with each other. On a larger scale, it can be practiced through activism, including advocacy, voting, or volunteering. Because this kind of care isn't based on attraction or whether or not you love someone and because it challenges norms that it's only acceptable to rely on "significant others" (e.g., romantic partners, spouses, nuclear family), it engenders anti-amatonormativity.

Mutual aid can be another vital tool in dismantling and disempowering amatonormativity. Mutual aid is a structure and act of cooperation where aid is both given and received freely and the hierarchy between those giving aid and those receiving it is rendered obsolete. This can look like something as small as helping a neighbor shovel the street and getting gardening advice from them later on to something as broad as international networks of solidarity.

In amatonormativity, much of the care we need is expected to come from a romantic partner; emotional needs, housing, childcare, support during illness among a few examples. The isolation of care to amatonormative relationships serves to make living outside of amatonormativity more difficult for people. Mutual aid can act as a tool to support people and spaces outside of amatonormativity and serve to disempower the structural power it holds. It's important to note that mutual aid is not necessarily anti-amatonormative. Aid given and received in monogamous romantic relationships doesn't challenge amatonormativity. Even aid outside of that relationship

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structure can enforce amatonormativity if the aid is either implicitly or explicitly conditional on someone's conformance to amatonormativity. Mutual aid given and received outside of amatonormative standards and relationships can help build spaces beyond amatonormativity for people to survive and thrive.

Take a moment to reflect on the differences between the standard amatonormative relationship and care philosophies, models, and practices and the philosophies, models, and practices that challenge amatonormativity. What are some other examples you can think of?

Amatonormative Lens	Relationship Diversity Lens
Relationship types are strictly categorized into romantic, platonic, familial, etc... These divisions are considered inherent and natural.	Divisions between relationship types are dissolved. People customize and form relationships based on personal and mutual agreements without adhering to categories.


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Exercise 4

Taking what you learned from exercise 3, try to incorporate them into how you engage in relationships with others. Take one of these concepts (i.e., relationship anarchy, mutual aid, and community care/pod mapping), and apply it to your own life. For instance, sit down with someone important in your life and go through the relationship anarchy board to discuss your needs, create your own pod, or perform some mutual aid care for your neighbors/local community.

Once you've applied at least one of these to your own life, take a moment to reflect on the process.

- Have you ever done something like this before, especially with non-romantic/family relationships?
- Did you find any aspects of these challenging? If so, what aspects and why?
- How did you find the process? How did others react?
- Do you find yourself thinking differently about how you relate to others, engage in relationships, and provide/receive care? If so, what changed?



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Exercise 5

While addressing amatonormativity and its intersection in our personal lives is an important step, we also need to reflect and work on these things at the group and structural level for deeper change to occur. What are some ways in which these intersections show up on a structural or institutional level, such as in policies or laws? These can include outdated and historical laws and policies. For example, North American assimilation policies against Indigenous peoples were linked with prohibitions against polygamy and attempts to dismantle flexible marriage patterns and extended kinship networks. Take a moment to search for other examples and write your findings down.



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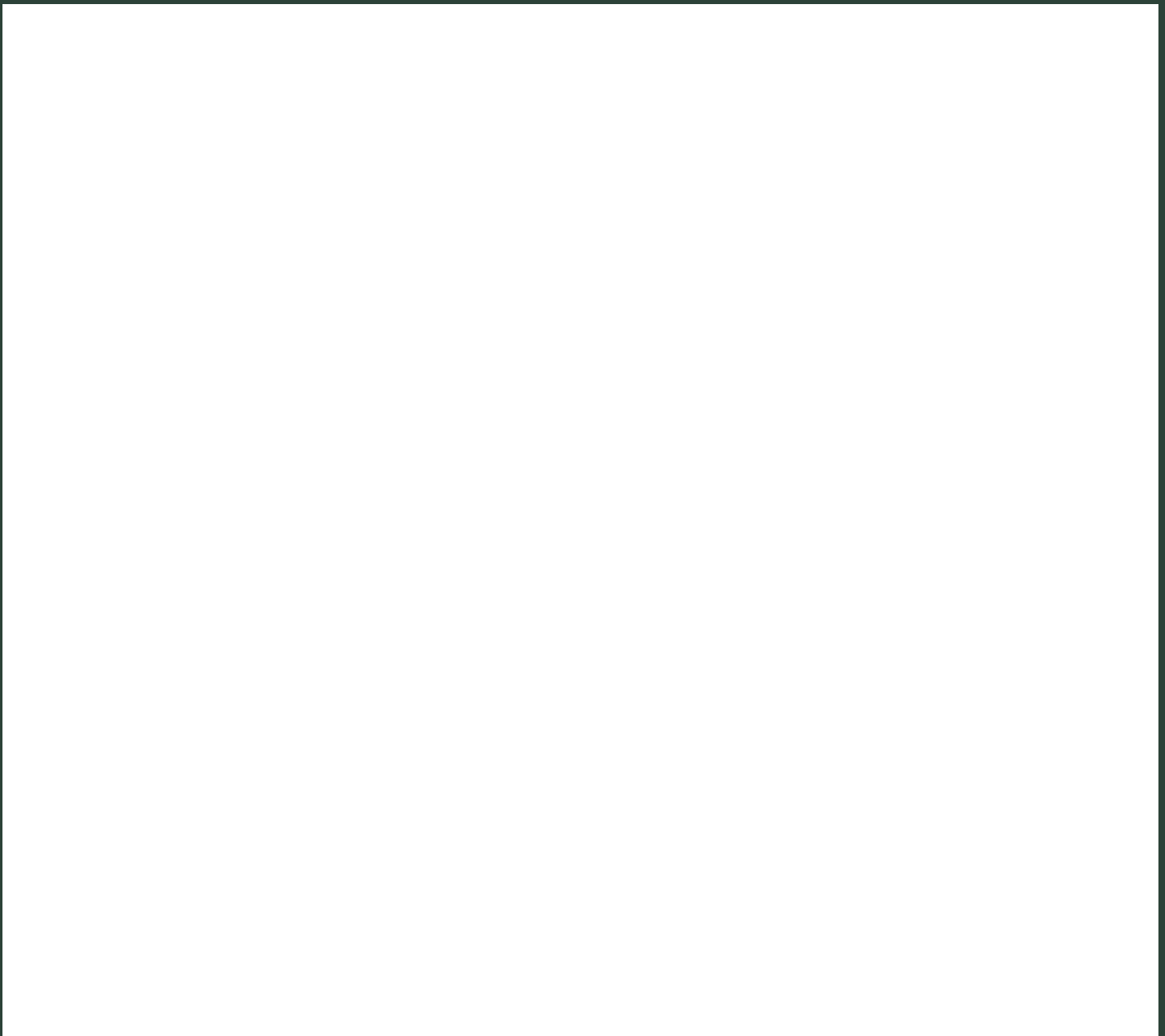
Exercise 6

To take it a step further, in what ways can you challenge amatonormativity (including its intersections with colonial sexuality, capitalism, desirability politics, etc..) at the group, structural, or institutional level? For example, you can push for extending the privileges that the nuclear family receives, such as being able to extend one's health insurance coverage to those who are not one's spouses or children or by ensuring that everyone can receive access to affordable health care regardless. If structural changes seem out of reach, what are the communities you're involved in and how can you challenge amatonormativity in them? After you come up with other possibilities, look up concrete avenues for you to take action.

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Post-Reflection

How do you feel now about amatonormativity? How have you started to see things differently? What are some aspects of challenging amatonormativity that you will include in your life? What are things that you still find difficult? What emotions did you encounter when going through the exercises? What are some ways that you can reduce or eliminate amatonormativity in your life and perhaps in those around you? If you completed [Part 1 - A Beginner's Guide](#), take a moment to compare your previous reflections to your current reflections. What growth have you noticed in yourself?



Sources and Narratives

Source link embedded in the title.

1. [Carnival of Aros March 2021: Intersectionality, Pt. II](#)
2. [If your Pride ain't antiracist we don't want it](#)
3. [Kim Tallbear: The Polyamorist That Wants To Destroy Sex](#)
4. [Settler Sexuality: Resistant to State-Sanctioned Violence, Reclamation of Anti-Colonial Knowledges & Liberation For All](#)
5. [Settler Sexuality](#)
6. [White Innocence by Gloria Wekker](#)
7. [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson](#)
8. [Aromanticism is inherently radical](#)
9. [I Am Not Voldemort: An Essay on Love and Amatonormativity](#)
10. [Disability Justice and Aromanticism](#)
11. [Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)
12. [Intersections: Neurodivergence, Disability, & Gender, TAAAP](#)
13. [Love, Inc. -- how romance and capitalism could destroy our future](#)
14. [Aromantic Manifesto](#)
15. [3 Reasons Dating, Attraction, and Desire Are Always Political](#)
16. [Desirability politics](#)
17. [Language and the Aromantic Manifesto](#)
18. [Amatonormativity and Relationship Anarchy, TAAAP](#)
19. [Carnival of Aros February 2021: Relationship Anarchy](#)
20. [Why It's Time To Turn Self Care Into Community Care for Deeper Healing](#)
21. [Beyond Self-Care Bubble Baths: A Vision for Community Care](#)
22. [Mutual aid not based on emotional intimacy](#)



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Thank you!

Thank you for completing this guide and workbook. Hopefully you have learned something new and will apply these to your life to challenge amatonormativity.

