



Institute for
Relational Intimacy

EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP STRUCTURES

This exercise will challenge you to consider the potential benefits and pitfalls of a wide variety of relationship styles. You'll be challenged to think beyond your personal experience and consider the reasons why someone might choose a specific relationship structure for themselves.

- Why might some choose a monogamous relationship? List as many reasons as you can think of. Think about reasons that relate to belief systems, preferences, fears, dreams, desires.
- Why might someone choose to have multiple concurrent sex-only relationships? List as many reasons as you can think of. Consider people you have known, thoughts or feelings you or your partner(s) have had, and books you have read. Why might someone want to hook up, swing, or otherwise have sex with more than one concurrent relationship or person?
- Why might someone choose to have multiple concurrent love/romantic relationships? List as many reasons as you can think of. Again, reference people you have known, thoughts and feelings you or partners have had, books you have read, and anything you can imagine.
- What do you think are the potential pitfalls of monogamy? List as many as you can.
- What do you think are the potential pitfalls of open nonromantic relationships? List as many as you can think of.
- What do you think are the potential pitfalls of polyamorous or romantic open relationships? List as many as you can think of.

Take a moment to consider whether the things you listed under reasons to choose various relationship types actually correlate with the desired outcomes. For instance, say you answered “to feel secure” when considering why someone might choose monogamy. You would then ask yourself if monogamy actually provides security. You might also ask yourself, “Does opening a relationship

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preclude security?”

Next, move even further into the exploration. Ask yourself, “How could a person structure a monogamous relationship to create emotional security? How could a person structure a nonromantic open relationship to create security? How could someone structure their polyamorous relationship to create security?”

Let’s look at another example. Say that, under reasons for having an open relationship, you put “sexual adventure.” Ask yourself, “Does an open relationship actually provide sexual adventure? Does monogamy prevent sexual adventure? How could a person structure a monogamous relationship to support sexual adventure? How could a person structure a nonromantic open relationship to enable sexual adventure? How about a polyamorous relationship?”

For each answer you gave, take some time to question it. Remember, this is not really about any choice or decision you will eventually make; it is about questioning your assumptions and getting clear on how you are connecting thoughts or ideas.

If you proceed from the assumption that all of the benefits—and all of the pitfalls—that you listed are possible in any type of relationship, with any relationship structure, what difference might that make in your life and relationships? In your ability to support others in their relationship?