

Glossary of Relationship Structures (UPDATED 2022)

We have compiled a list of the most common words, terms, acronyms, abbreviations, and definitions used within the sex-positive community to describe various relationship structures. This list has been compiled from the amalgamation of various sources, but we are aware that this list may not be exhaustive and that it will be ever-evolving.

While these words and definitions may be common across various communities, we are mindful that different people may have different interpretations and many consider some terms to overlap. The words and definitions listed here may not be how you wish to describe yourself, your relationship(s), and/or your partner(s). We understand that how and whether you choose to label your relationship(s) is a personal choice that may or may not evolve and change over time.

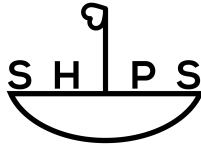
DISCLAIMER: Since this glossary was first published, discourse on non-monogamy has progressed and there is better awareness of the power of language on how non-monogamy is viewed. The use of the words *ethical* and/or *consensual* when discussing non-monogamy “may subtly reinforce harmful stereotypes and negative moral judgements about [non-monogamy]” ([Ansara, 2020](#)). Both non-monogamy and monogamy can be ethical and unethical. Therefore, the qualifiers *ethical* and *consensual* have been removed from this updated version.

Anchor / Anchor Partner: A term used to describe a partner within an *open relationship* structure who is regarded as being a central figure in one’s life. It can signify cohabiting or commingling responsibilities, such as finances or children, or it can signify that the partner is an “anchor” to lean on. However, it does not necessarily imply a *hierarchy* or priority over other relationships; it is often used in *non-hierarchical* relationships for someone’s equivalent of a *primary partner* in a *hierarchical* setting. Also known as a *nesting partner*.

Arrow Polyamory: A term used to describe a *quad polyamory* relationship where one person is romantically and/or sexually involved with three separate individuals but none of those three individuals are romantically or sexually involved with one another. *Complex quad, double V polyamory, full quad, N polyamory, and plus one polyamory* are other different types of *quad polyamory* relationships.

Chosen Family / Chosen Kinship: A term used to describe and identify “non-traditional” relationships without reinforcing cisgendered, heteronormative *monogamy* as the centre or norm. It can also signify a group of people whose bond and structure are akin to a biological family, and it is sometimes referred to as *my people* and *poly-family*. It is also predominantly referred to in the kink community as a *leather family*.

Closed Relationship: A term used to describe a relationship where all participants agree to not add any additional romantic or sexual partners to their existing relationship network. This can be used for all relationship structures, whether there are two or more people in the relationship. However, *closed relationships* involving more than two people are sometimes also referred to as *closed polycule relationship, polyfidelitous, poly-fidelity, or polyfi*.



Closed Polycule Relationship: See *Closed Relationship*.

Comet: A term used to describe a partner that one has limited or irregular contact or communication with (usually due to distance or other priorities) but who makes time to connect with them when they are in “orbit”.

Complex Quad: A term used to describe a *quad polyamory* relationship where person A, person B and person C are in a *triad*, person A, person B and person D are also in a *triad*, but person C and person D are not romantically or sexually involved with one another. **Arrow polyamory, double V polyamory, full quad, N polyamory, and plus one polyamory** are other different types of *quad polyamory* relationships.

Constellation: See *Polycule*.

Couple’s Privilege: A term used to describe a couple’s subconscious or consciously assumed privileges over other relationships or people in their relationship network. Examples of these privileges include the assumption that holidays will be spent with the *primary partner* or that the *primary partner* will always be the one invited to social and family events. This can highlight the social, cultural, and personal prioritisation of a relationship with a *primary partner* over other relationships either person might be in.

Cowgirl / Cowboy: A term used to describe someone who willingly enters a “non-traditional” relationship but then behaves in a way that suggests that they wish to “rope” their partner into a *monogamous relationship*, usually through manipulative or demanding behaviours. There does not appear to yet be an ungendered term to describe someone engaging in this behaviour.

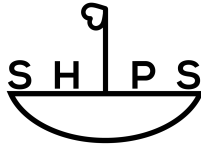
Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) Relationships: A term used to describe a relationship where one or all partners have agreed to be involved with other people but will not ask for or share information about their or their partner’s other relationships. There may sometimes be a clause about the sharing of information around basic sexual risk and safety. *DADT relationships* are thought to be more common in formerly *monogamous* and *hierarchical* couples. It is considered by some to be an extreme form of *parallel polyamory*.

Double V Polyamory: A term used to describe a *quad polyamory* relationship where person A and person B are each in separate romantic and/or sexual relationships with person C and person D, but person A and person B are not romantically or sexually involved with one another, and person C and person D are also not romantically or sexually involved with one another. **Arrow polyamory, complex quad, full quad, N polyamory, and plus one polyamory** are other different types of *quad polyamory* relationships.

Dyad: A term used to describe any committed romantic and/or sexual relationship between two people.

Extended Polycule: See *Polycule*.

Friend with Benefits: A term used to describe a sexual relationship between people in which there is an emotional but not a romantic connection.



Full Quad: A term used to describe a **quad polyamory** relationship where all four people in the relationship are romantically and/or sexually involved with one another. **Arrow polyamory**, **complex quad**, **double V polyamory**, **N polyamory**, and **plus one polyamory** are other different types of **quad polyamory** relationships.

Hierarchical Relationship / Hierarchy: A term used to describe an established ranking of partners where one has priority or primary status over others (i.e., time spent together, decision-making, future planning, etc). It can be descriptive (the terms “**primary**” and “**secondary**” are used) and/or prescriptive (the ranking is intentional and enforced). See **non-hierarchical relationship / non-hierarchy** for the term used for the opposite approach.

Hinge: A term used to describe the shared partner between two people who do not have a romantic or sexual relationship with one another. The term refers to the shared partner being at the centre of a V relationship structure (i.e., the point the triangle *hinges* on). Also, hinges can open and close, which is considered to be a metaphor for describing the relationship between **metamours**. Also known as a **pivot**.

Inherent Hierarchical Relationship / Inherent Hierarchy: A term used to describe a relationship where there are cohabiting or commingling responsibilities, such as finances or children, with a partner or the relationship with this partner has existed for much longer in comparison to others in the relationship network. **Non-hierarchical relationships** may not necessarily be immune from *inherent hierarchy* but can still be considered *non-hierarchical* in nature.

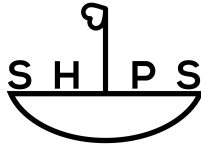
Kitchen Table Polyamory: A term used to describe a type of **polyamorous relationship** where integrating all of the different relationships within the relationship network into one life or group is prioritised. Close emotional relationships between **metamours** and/or **telemours** are strongly encouraged or required. The term refers to the idea that there is a supportive and accepting atmosphere throughout the relationship network, and all of the participants are able to sit with one another around the physical and metaphorical kitchen table harmoniously.

Leather Family: A term used predominantly in the kink community to describe bonds between two or more people that adhere to a prescribed structure, protocols, and rituals. See also **Chosen Family / Chosen Kinship**.

Meta / Metamour: A term used to describe a partner’s partner(s).

Monoamorous Relationship / Monoamory: A term used to describe a **monogamous relationship** that does not have the implication that marriage is a goal. This might be considered an outdated term in societies where marriage is no longer the predominant goal in relationships.

Monocorn: A term used to describe a person who considers themselves to be **monogamous** or **monoamorous** but who is also comfortable with being in a relationship with a **non-monogamous** person.



Monogamous Relationship / Monogamy: A term used to describe a relationship structure that includes two people who are committed only to each other emotionally, romantically, sexually, and logistically (i.e., cohabiting, commingling of finances, co-parenting, etc). Similar to a ***monoamorous relationship*** but with the goal or presence of marriage. This might be considered an outdated term in societies where marriage is no longer the predominant goal in relationships.

Monogamish: A term coined in 2011 by sex columnist, Dan Savage, to describe a relationship structure that is considered by both people in the relationship to be mostly ***monogamous*** and that allows for some romantic and/or sexual contact outside the ***primary relationship***. The interpretation of “mostly monogamous” and “some romantic and/or sexual contact” is agreed upon by those in the ***primary relationship***.

My People: See ***Chosen Family / Chosen Kinship***.

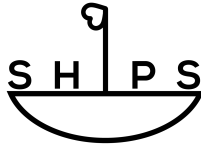
N: A term used to describe a four-person ***polycule*** where there are no ***triads*** within the relationship network. There is romantic and/or sexual involvement between person A and person B, person B and person C, and person C and person D. But person A is not romantically or sexually involved with person C or person D, and person B is not romantically or sexually involved with person D. Also known as ***N polyamory*** or ***Z***.

N Polyamory: See ***N***.

Nesting Partner: See ***Anchor / Anchor Partner***.

Non-Hierarchical Relationships / Non-Hierarchy: A term used when all relationships within a relationship network strive for equal autonomy and standing rather than prioritising one over another. All partners are given equal ranking and equal expectations, and all are involved in discussions of changes in rules or expectations within the relationship network that may impact them. ***Non-hierarchical relationships*** may not necessarily be immune from ***inherent hierarchy*** but can still be considered ***non-hierarchical*** in nature. See ***hierarchical relationships/hierarchy*** for the opposite approach.

Non-Monogamy: This term is often used interchangeably with ***open relationships*** and ***polyamory***. However, these terms are considered by many to represent different non-monogamous relationship structures. ***Non-monogamy*** tends to be a broad umbrella term used to describe a relationship structure wherein all partners consent to romantic and/or sexual involvement with other consenting individuals. All individuals in ***non-monogamous*** relationships hold consensus about the terms of their relationships. Regardless of the type of ***non-monogamous*** relationship, ***non-monogamous*** relationships share common themes of communication, honesty, and negotiation, with all individuals involved in the relationship structure being informed and aware and able to make informed decisions.



One Penis Policy (OPP): A term used to describe a firmly enforced rule that there can only be one penis-having individual in a relationship network. Usually found in relationships between a cisgendered heterosexual man and a cisgendered bisexual woman where there is an agreement that either of them can have relationships with (usually cisgendered) women but not with (usually cisgendered) men. Often considered by many in the sex-positive community as being transphobic, misogynistic, controlling, selfish, and/or unfair. The *OPP* usually denies the genders of transgender people, and it is considered to devalue relationships between women; it implies that same-sex relationships are "safer" for cisgendered men who impose this rule.

Open Polycule Relationship: See *Open Relationship*.

Open Relationship: A term used to describe any relationship that does not limit any of its participants from seeking and entering romantic and/or sexual relationships with others. *Open relationships*, *non-monogamy*, and *polyamory* are often used interchangeably. However, it is considered by many that they represent different relationship styles.

Parallel Polyamory: A term used to describe a style of *polyamorous relationship* in which each individual relationship exists largely independent of one another, and there is not an intentional focus on entwining the relationship network. There may be close relationships between some *metamours* or *telemours*, but there is no requirement for this. There may be little or no contact between some members of the relationship network. *DADT relationships* are considered by some to be an extreme form of *parallel polyamory*.

Paramour: A term used to refer to one's partner.

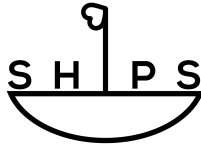
Pivot: See *Hinge*.

Platonic Life Partner (PLP): A term used to refer to a person one may have lifelong commitments and responsibilities with (i.e., cohabiting, commingling finances, co-parenting, etc), but the relationship is not romantic or sexual.

Plus One Polyamory: A term used to describe a *quad polyamory* relationship where person A, person B and person C are in a *triad* with one another, and person C is romantically and/or sexually involved with person D. *Arrow Polyamory*, *complex quad*, *double V polyamory*, *full quad*, and *N polyamory* are other different types of *quad polyamory* relationships.

Poly / Polyam / Polyamorous / Polyamory Relationship: A term used to describe a relationship structure whether there are multiple romantically and/or sexually committed partnerships. Some people may choose to have *non-hierarchical relationships* within their *polyamorous relationship*, or they may prefer for there to be a *hierarchy*. *Polyamory*, *open relationships*, and *non-monogamy* are often used interchangeably. However, it is considered by many that they represent different relationship styles.

Polyandry: A term used to describe when a (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) woman is married to more than one (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) man at one time. It is a form of *polygamy*.



Polycule: A term coined by Kimchi Cuddles creator Tivka Wolf to describe a network (via illustrated chart or otherwise) of interconnected **polyamorous relationships**. The term is inspired by a model of a chemical molecule that uses lines, circular shapes, or symbols to indicate bonds between atoms. An **extended polycule** includes the partner(s) of one's **metamour(s)** and may even extend to include the *metamour(s)* of one's *metamour(s)*. *Polycule* may sometimes be used to describe smaller networks of *polyamorous relationships* rather than using other terms. Also known as a **constellation** and **poly group**.

Poly-family: A term used to describe a network of **polyamorous** people who consider each other to be family. See also **chosen family / chosen kinship**.

Polyfi: See **Closed Relationship**.

Polyfidelitous: A term coined by the Kerista commune that describes romantic and/or sexual fidelity agreed upon by all within a **polyamorous relationship**. In other words, all in the relationship commit to limiting their romantic and/or sexual connections to those already in the relationship network. See also **closed relationship**.

Poly-Fidelity: See **Closed Relationship**.

Polyflexible: A term used to refer to a person who is equally content with being in a **polyamorous** or **monogamous relationship**.

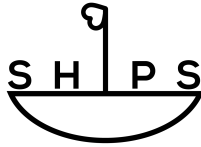
Polygamy: A term used to describe the practice of marrying multiple people. When a (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) man is married to more than one (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) woman at one time, this is called **polygyny**. When a (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) woman is married to more than one (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) man at one time, this is called **polyandry**.

Poly Group: See **Polycule**.

Polygyny: A term used to describe the practice of a (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) man being married to more than one (usually cisgendered and heterosexual) woman at one time. It is a form of **polygamy**.

Poly/Mono Relationship Mismatch: A term used to describe the discrepancy between the relationship structures desired by those in a relationship where one person identifies as **polyamorous** and the other person identifies as **monogamous**. This mismatch can often cause issues in a relationship, but not every *poly/mono relationship* is a mismatch, especially if there is open, honest, and empathic communication.

Primary Partner / Primary Relationship: A term used to refer to a partner in a relationship structure who is prioritised (in time, energy, etc) above others in the relationship due to intent or circumstance, such as sharing history, a certain level of emotional intimacy, or responsibilities (i.e., cohabiting, commingling finances, co-parenting, etc). The presence of a *primary partner* can sometimes be indicative of a **hierarchical relationship**. However, some people use the term "primary" without its hierarchical connotation and may have or are open to having multiple *primary partners*.



Quad Polyamory: A term used to describe a four-person *polycule* where all four people may be romantically and/or sexually involved with one, two, or all three other individuals in the relationship. *Arrow polyamory, complex quad, double V polyamory, full quad, N polyamory,* and *plus one polyamory* are different types of *quad polyamory* relationships.

Relationship Anarchy (RA): A term coined by Andie Nordgren that is used to describe a relationship style that has no labels or defined structures and avoids or rejects social constructs and expectations around relationships. People practicing *RA* tend to avoid making or accepting rules or agreements or having a *hierarchical* structure within their relationships. *RA* is similar to a *non-hierarchical relationship*, but it specifically applies anarchist principles of self-determination and lack of state involvement to intimate relationships.

Relationship by Design: A process developed by Effy Blue for defining relationships that are unique and individualised based on clear expectations and communication of needs, structure preferences, and desires.

Secondary Partner / Secondary Relationships: A term used to describe partners or relationships within a *hierarchical relationship* who are not prioritised (in time, energy, etc) as highly as the *primary partner*. This may be due to intent or circumstance, such as not having a shared history, a certain level of emotional intimacy, or responsibilities (i.e., cohabiting, commingling finances, co-parenting, etc). There may be pre-existing rules or limits defined by those in the *primary relationship* that *secondary partners* may need to accept or may have limited power to change. Also known as a *tertiary partner* or *tertiary relationship*.

Serial Monogamy: A term used to describe a relationship style where a person engages in a series of *monogamous relationships* without taking a break between relationships to be single or to date casually.

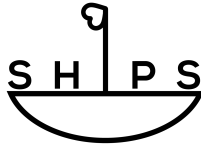
Solo Poly / Solo Polyamory: A term used to describe a person who identifies as *polyamorous* and chooses to be their own *primary partner*. The focus is on building connections without the assumption of there needing to be any particular progression within the relationship(s) (i.e., not cohabiting or commingling responsibilities, such as finances, with any of their partners).

Swinging: A term usually used to describe romantically *monogamous* couples engaging in sexual relationships with other individuals, couples, or groups in a recreational or social setting and usually for sexual exploration and/or variety. *Swinging* is considered to not usually involve emotional or romantic intimacy outside of the sexual encounters. However, romantically *monogamous* couples who engage in *swinging* may form emotional bonds of friendship that may or may not strengthen and develop into romantic relationships.

Telemour: A term used to describe the partner of a *metamour* who is not a shared partner. In other words, a partner's partner's partner(s).

Tertiary Partner / Tertiary Relationship: See *Secondary Partner / Secondary Relationship*.

Thruple: See *Triad*.



Triad: A term used to describe three people in a relationship who are all romantically and/or sexually involved with one another. In other words, there is romantic and/or sexual involvement between person A and person B, between person B and person C, and between person C and person A. Also known as a **thruple**.

Unicorn: A term used to describe a person (usually, but not always, a bisexual and cisgendered woman) who is open to joining, dating, and having a romantic and/or sexual relationship with two people in an existing relationship (usually, but not always, hetero and cisgendered). The usual presumption within the existing relationship is that the *unicorn* will not have expectations or do anything that may jeopardise the existing relationship structure.

Unicorn Hunters: A term used to describe a (usually, but not always, hetero and cis-gendered) couple who is specifically looking for a **unicorn**. There can be a lot of inherent problems associated with the concept of *unicorn hunting* due to the common unbalanced expectations set on a *unicorn*. These can include being expected to not date other people, to have an equal relationship with both people in the couple relationship, or sometimes, to occasionally operate as a pseudo-parent or housekeeper to support the couple's existing family structure.

V / Vee: A term used to describe a three-person **polycule** that contains two **dyads** and a **hinge** partner. In other words, there is romantic and/or sexual involvement between person A and person B and between person B and person C, but there is no romantic or sexual involvement between person A and person C.

Veto Power: A term used to describe a relationship agreement where a person is given unilateral power over a request that has to do with their partner's additional relationship(s). This may include saying no to a particular sexual activity occurring within their partner's other relationship or asking their partner to end a relationship with their other partner(s). *Veto power* is considered to occur more often in **hierarchical** relationships where a **primary partner** is given absolute or conditional power. Not all **non-monogamous relationships** recognise or permit *veto power*.

Z: See **N**.

Sources:

<https://www.readyforpolyamory.com/polyamory-glossary>

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<https://lgbta.wikia.org/wiki/Category:Terminology>