Laura Boyle
@readyforpolyamory

THE RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY WORKBOOK

WHAT, HOW, & WHY OF RA

Resources to Build Intentional Relationships

And Some of My Mistakes So You Can Skip Them While Making Your Own!

Chapter 1:
Introduction

What is Relationship Anarchy?

Relationship Anarchy is a PHILOSOPHY of relating by which one applies the tenets of political anarchy to interpersonal relationships.

It is: pro-autonomy, pro-self-determination, anti-hierarchy, anti-government intervention in relationships, pro-community-determination. It applies not just to romance but also to familial and platonic relationships.

It is not: a strict set of rules of how one MUST relate. It ALSO is not: chaos all over the place, things on fire, and no commitments anywhere.

Some RA Basics

While there is not One True Way to be a relationship anarchist (that whole "self determination" thing means you get to choose your own adventure), there is a document that gives a pretty decent outline of the principles that I'll refer to often: the Short Instructional Manifesto for Relationship Anarchy ("RA Manifesto") by Andie Nordgren. This document is a formalization of conversations in anarchist spaces in person and online in the early 00s , and it's a short and concise statement of many of the guiding principles of relating in an RA manner.

What's in the Manifesto?

The statement of principles in the manifesto begins with a reaffirmation that there is no one way to relate - that there is no one set of activities or roles that go with any label (romantic or otherwise) and that we can design our relationships according to our wants and needs.

It continues through an exploration that connection with someone (even of long standing or intense entanglement) doesn't allow them to define our needs or our relationship to anyone but them, as an individual.

It leans into a view that we can build unique relationships defined by the individuals, rather than by cultural norms, even when this is hard. (and it affirms that this IS hard work, to deconstruct cultural norms around heterosexism, mononormativity, and more.)

The manifesto suggests strategies for doing this hard work in relationship and community - finding moments of the lovely unexpected together, when necessary faking it til we make it on some of the hardest deconstruction steps, and holding each other with support, including giving each other space.

It also reminds us that we NEED connection and commitment to build full lives, and that Relationship Anarchy is about relating and building full lives together. It reminds us to customize the commitments we make to one another, based on our essential values.

What is Relationship Anarchy to you? Have you read the RA Manifesto?
Write your answer here...

Chapter 2:
Dismantling Norms

Dismantling Norms

N.1

What are Norms?

Norms are just another word for standards and expectations - these are generally socially mediated and created. When we talk about relationship norms, we are talking about how society expects us to form pairs, families, and meaning within those. Relationship Anarchy calls us to question which of these norms are actually serving our relationships, and which aspects of them are things we follow "just because," and to enact only the former. It's not to always act in ways that are opposite of the norm, but to do things because it serves us rather than because "we should."

What are some of the most pervasive relationship norms we deconstruct in RA?

N.2

Mononormativity

"One and only one" - the social norm that says relationships are worth more if they're romantically and sexually exclusive between two people. It is also the assumption that monogamy is the prevailing culture, and that all people desire monogamy in some form. This is called out in the first section of the manifesto when it says that love is not only real if restricted to a couple.

N.3

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity assumes that heterosexual romantic and sexual pairings are the best, most natural and sought-after ones. Heteronormativity creates and upholds a social hierarchy based on sexual orientation and practice. It makes assumptions about gender roles, sexual behavior, and relationship behavior.

N.4

Amatonormativity

This term was coined by philosopher Elizabeth Brake, and it's the social assumption that everyone desires a central, exclusive, romantic relationship as a universally shared goal and that such a relationship is normative, or ideal, for human happiness. Amatonormativity generally devalues platonic relationships and people who don't seek to center romance.

N.5

The hierarchy of relationships

Depending on what your exact social context is, your personal internalized norms around which relationships "should be most important"may differ, but most North Americans have a monogamous romantic relationship prioritized above all other connections, then children or other dependents, then family, then friends, as a social hierarchy of relationships. Longevity of a connection can sometimes move people into a "higher" rank on the hierarchy, or differing social context can create new categories.

N.6

Polynormativity

Coined by Andrea Zanin, this term refers to the way media and cultural imagination present polyamory that is legible and palatable to the monogamous mind: polyamory that begins with a couple, is hierarchical, rules based, male-gaze driven, and heteroflexible. Relationship Anarchy as a philosophy does not require a particular structure but if you choose polyamory it will not be particularly polynormative polyamory in this philosophy.

N.7

Deconstruction

The RA Manifesto says "Remember that there is a very powerful normative system in play that dictates what real love is, and how people should live. Many will question you and the validity of your relationships when you don't follow these norms. Work with the people you love to find escapes and tricks to counter the worst of the problematic norms. Find positive counter spells and don't let fear drive your relationships." Deconstructing these norms enough to figure out which parts serve us and which parts are "just because" is doing this.

Which of these normative systems feel like they have the biggest impact in your life? Why? Have you done work toward dismantling or deconstructing them already?
Write your answer here...

Limits to deconstruction

Not everything NEEDS to be taken apart entirely. Mononormativity includes a lot of assumptions about things like the Relationship Escalator (a lot of cultural assumptions about how relationships should go but most simply, the first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby rhyme we all learned as kids that assumes we're together forever) - and sometimes we want to build a life, including children, with someone for a long time! The manifesto covers this with a section called "Customize your commitments" that includes an explanation that life takes collaboration and that we may work together to do big projects, including cohabiting and raising kids. In so doing, we may pick relationships that look a bit traditional. Choosing things we and our relata want even if they "fit the mold" is not a lack of consideration of these issues.

Chapter 3:
Your Relationship Values

Your Relationship Values

The RA Manifesto has a section that says "Find your core set of relationship values. How do you wish to be treated by others? What are your basic boundaries and expectations on all relationships? What kind of people would you like to spend your life with, and how would you like your relationships to work? Find your core set of values and use it for all relationships. Don't make special rules and exceptions as a way to show people you love them "for real"." This principle of who you interact with and how you spend your time being how your life is, and therefore living in alignment with values is necessary to honest autonomous connection and community with others, is important to Relationship Anarchy (and honestly, healthy relationships in general. What are your core values?

Here are some examples of core relationship values. Take a look and identify your top 3 (ish). Have your partner(s) do the same. You can elaborate on what these values mean to you

Honesty	Respect
Communication	Integrity
Trust	Agency
Consent	Transparency
Autonomy	Inclusivity
Equality	Personal Growth
Boundaries	Accountability
Flexibility	Mutual Support
Empathy	Joy
Kindness	Compassion

Use this space to do some elaboration on what living according to these values in all your relationships (romantic, friendly, familial) might look like, or what you do to act in alignment with them:

Write your answer here...

What might it mean to live out of alignment with those values? What are examples where you acted out of alignment and had to bring yourself back in alignment?

Write your answer here...

Chapter 4:
Mistakes Were Made

Mistakes Were Made

Everyone has to make their own mistakes in relationship - but part of doing relationship education as someone in long term less traditional relationships is reflecting on my errors so that you can make different ones! While this is an ethos that underlies a lot of my writing and work, it's specifically the topic of the workshop Mistakes Were Made that I did with Annie Undone, Che Che Luna and Gabrielle Smith in October 2025.

The patterns or stumbling blocks I shared in the Mistakes Were Made: Relationship Anarchy Edition panel were 1) Having a habit of worrying a lot about how legible my relationships are to other people; 2) Feeling like a need for stability might be incompatible with my anarchist values of autonomy and decentering romance; and 3) Acting really unboundaried in my friendship NRE phase.

I'd like to give you some space to reflect on your own relationship patterns you've grown through / mistakes you've made, and then I'll talk through some of these with you.

What are some patterns you have changed over time or mistakes you feel you have made in relationships? How do they relate to RA and your values?
Write your answer here...

Worrying About What Others Think About My Relationships

When I phrase this mistake or pattern this way, it sounds really obvious. It's limiting and kind of counter-productive to want people who view the world entirely differently than me to understand my relationships, which are pretty non-traditional, and it will make me sad to seek external validation from them.

But, there is a lot of cultural pressure from larger society, and our smaller non-monogamous society to have others "respect your relationship" or "acknowledge your relationship." This urge can be internalized pretty strongly - it certainly was for me. Centering the understandings me and my relata have of our relationships and leaning into the comfort of knowing we are living our authentic truth is important.

This is especially important regarding relationships that are easily dismissed by other polyam people as well as mono people - queerplatonic relationships, expansive friendships, unlabeled relationships whose optics are "just friends" - because polyamorous folks writ large tend also to center romance and wonder out loud why you aren't - why you're prioritizing "just a friend" - why you're going out of your way for someone who isn't a partner, etc.

Over the years, I've had loved ones react like shocked pikachus to new relationships (even when they knew everyone involved was non-monogamous); friends suggest ranking of relationships because the person I do more kink with must be more important than others; and people in many roles in my life treat my long term relationships as less legitimate than ones that followed the escalator more closely.

t's human to want to be understood, my feelings are valid, but others haven't deconstructed everything we have.It can help to remember how big a process deconstructing these concepts was for YOU, when the going gets rough.

I'm really devoted to the idea of relating to people as whole people and leaving space to change our relationship over time as we both grow. This means the relationship might look dramatically different if we take a snapshot of it a few years apart - and it means we make and unmake it over and over. Instead of our relationship being a tree we plant that grows once, it's a Zen garden we can rake out and make new paths and patterns in as needed.

But if your relationship semiotics are the Escalator... it WOULD be pretty hard to understand. That doesn't mean I need to make myself fit the mono world view, but I see why I don't.

Even when it comes to centering romance or not; someone else telling me what my priorities should be does not actually change them. So as frustrating as it can be to have people misunderstand, reorienting to the relationships and our intentions as they actually exist has been the only path forward, and something I've gotten better at over time.

(I do still occasionally get mad when it's a really silly assumption or statement, though.)

Thoughts?

Stability is Totally Possible Within RA (as much as within any relationship)

It can feel sometimes with all the deconstruction of norms and expectations like having expectations or requests is "too much" in an RA network or relationship and that's just not true.

It's also a myth about Relationship Anarchy (and anarchy more generally!) that these relationships are less stable or more chaotic. When things aren't going well in life it can definitely be tempting to blame these stereotypes or our relationship structure for why. A few different tenets of the manifesto help us think about different ways to frame stability/respect for relationships/commitment/chaos - all of these entwined normative ideals that can lead to this fear that can drive us.

- The manifesto section "fake it til you make it" says we can take things at a pace that works for us, we don't need to change every norm all at once, and perhaps some of them don't need to be changed at all if they are working for everyone.
- The section "change through communication," and especially the reminder "Radical relationships must have conversation and communication at the heart — not as a state of emergency only brought out to solve "problems". Communicate in a context of trust. We are so used to people never really saying what they think and feel — that we have to read between the lines and extrapolate to find what they really mean. But such interpretations can only build on previous experiences — usually based on the norms you want to escape. Ask each other about stuff, and be explicit!" is a great reinforcement of the way that RA allows us to respect our relationships MORE, by changing them when needed, and considering how best to remain in connection with people important to us as we grow and change. The mythology in society is that relationships changing is a failure and RA lets us think more expansively about this.
- The same section as well as the reminder that Trust is Better both let us consider that we can be more, not less, responsible in these connections that have more customization.

Stability is Totally Possible Within RA (as much as within any relationship)

- The manifesto section "customize your commitments" can either give us permission to do escalator steps within an RA framework, or a reminder to treat the rest of the people in our lives as serious commitments as well. Stability gets built in relationships through alternatives to the escalator, usually, rather than via moving in together or marriage, but that makes commitments more important, not less. For me personally, as someone who doesn't live with my romantic partners that I consider life partners, it means being consistent in living up to our unique commitments. These commitments include things like minimum kinds of communication, holidays celebrated together (even if not on the right day, within a timeframe and in ways we've built traditions for), helping each other with moves and life events, sharing a vacation every so often, and more that make sense for us.
- As all of these considerations show – we need to really be open about our needs if we're going to be successfully RA and it's ok for that not to be easy. We are all just human. "Trust is better" reminds us that often people need space to withdraw while remaining in relationship. That is not always easy depending on attachment style (and our cultural norms - that we may or may not have agreed to move away from- tend to privilege secure and then anxious attachment strategies over avoidant ones) and other factors.

So from a "mistakes were made" perspective, this is a pattern that I have moved to a longer cycle on but may not ever come fully out of - I need to ask my partner(s) for reassurance that they feel stable in our commitments and that our connections can continue forward in time regularly. And when I don't, I have a big ol' crash out that the sky is falling in relationship and nothing will ever be ok, and that anything from a work schedule changing to a new connection might supplant me in their life. So I want to let you know that first, it doesn't mean you're bad at relationships if you need this kind of reassurance, and second that it does get easier to see these patterns coming, and then adjust your behavior accordingly.

Friendship NRE Without Boundaries

One of the reasons I know Relationship Anarchy appeals to me is that closer-than-typical friendships, or more entangled ones, or ones that have a romance-like introduction, have always been a fixture in my life. New Relationship Energy gets a lot of attention when it comes to romances or sexual relationships, but especially when I was younger, I really used to get entangled deeply with new friends in the rush of trying to learn everything about one another and spend all our time together, in an NRE-style way. Sometimes, this led to deep and close friendships. Sometimes, it kind of fell apart, because the rose-colored glasses would come off after a few months. Other times, my unboundaried push to lean into the NRE of this friendship would put off people who might have been better friends otherwise.

There isn't actually such a thing as "too much" even though lots of us have shadow around that – but there's definitely unboundaried and un-discussed behavior that oversteps the boundaries of people you're in relationship with. NRE and a wish to merge in NRE/limerence, plus my personal neurodivergent habit of making new people a special interest when I'm in that hormone soup with them, definitely makes me rush forward rather than consider my boundaries and theirs. Learning as a slightly older adult to have explicit conversations about what we might want, even in friendship, has really helped me avoid this step - OR inform people that I'm enjoying their company a ton and want to indulge this step – are they ok with that? If so, let's do it together!

Now I try to be more honest and deliberate about my thoughts and intentions in relationship (and ask what people want!) – whether some of this is simpler just because I'm older and have a lot more responsibilities at any given time, I'm not sure - people still become a focus for me conversationally and I try to be honest about how that doesn't last unless we turn out to also be compatible on a lot of fronts. This sounds common sense, I guess, but for me it was a big part of being more intentional in all my relationships and including my friendships in that, rather than just going "no one can say that I can't smooch friends!!" and leaving my escape from norms at that. Relationships built with consideration of everyone's boundaries work better.

Mistakes Were Made

What patterns have repeated in your relational life that you have changed over time and feel like you've learned lessons from? What are those lessons?
Write your answer here...

Do any of my mistakes and changes resonate for you? Which ones?
Write your answer here...

Is Relationship Anarchy for You?

Do labels have a high importance in relationships for you? Does calling a relationship a different name change your expectations of it? How?
Write your answer here...

Are there people who you think are owed more of your time and energy than others? Who are they and why?
Write your answer here...

Are you willing to share your inner feelings with those you trust? What can you do to help yourself do this when it's hard or uncomfortable?

How do you perceive relational conflict? Is it a chance for you and a pal to work together against a problem? Something between you to be overcome? A primary reason to communicate? Other?

Additional Resources

The Relationship Anarchy Manifesto by Andie Nordgren https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andie-nordgren-the-short-instructional-manifesto-for-relationship-anarchy

We have been referencing this throughout the workbook - This piece is a clear statement of the principles of RA. The anarchist library in general is full of great short pieces, available for free to read on these topics.

All About Love, bell hooks

One of the seminal texts on love as a series of actions and choices, not just feelings - hooks says love is "care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment and trust, as well as honest and open communication" and expands upon this for the duration of the text. A must-read for understanding love and loving community.

What Love Is and What It Could Be, Carrie Jenkins

A philosopher's look at the social and biological models of love, and why we might want to consider love as a serious topic.

Sad Love, Carrie Jenkins

A view of love beyond "Happily ever after" - what if the goal of love we seek is meaning and shared commitments? "Sad" feels like a misnomer to me, but a very intriguing read nonetheless.

Chapter 6:
Additional Resources

Suggested Reading continued

The Other Significant Others, Raina Cohen

Subtitled "Reimagining life with friendship at the center," this is a view of life in shared community built with friends and centering goals rather than centering romance.

Relationship Anarchy, Juan-Carlos Peres-Cortez

This is a monograph originally written in Spanish and it contains the best description of how political anarchy gives birth to a relationship movement. It also leans heavily into this idea of RA is NOT polyamory or particularly a form of nonmonogamy, but rather an entire philosophy or view of the world.

Expansive Love, Tuck Malloy

A personal exploration of RA through one person's lens; a really vulnerable book worth a read.

Classes and Recordings:

In general, I recommend following Ro Moed @unapolygetically, Annie Undone @annie_undone, Michelle Hy @polyamorouswhileasian, Gabrielle Smith @bygabriellesmith, and Tuck Malloy @intra_sensual for RA content on IG/social media. I've also got a couple classes & workshops, some in collab with these folks, that I recommend if you want more info, all of which you can find on my ko-fi store, in addition to Mistakes Were Made which is available at remodeled love's store.

- Anarchy! In Your Relationships (With Ro Moed)
- WTF is Relationship Anarchy (With Annie Undone)
- Deconstructing the Relationship Escalator (With Annie Undone)
- All available at ko-fi.com/readyforpolyamory/shop