

Handout: The Wild Hunt for Belonging - Models of Queer Brotherhood & Community

Alternate Relationship Models

Queer Relationship Models:

Queer men, throughout history and into the modern day, have devised a rich tapestry of relationship models that challenge and expand beyond heteronormative conventions. These models have often been shaped by societal pressures, legal restrictions, and the need for survival, but also by genuine desires for connection, intimacy, and shared lives.

Here's a look at some of these alternative relationship models:

Historical Queer Relationship/Family Models (Pre-20th Century & Early 20th Century):

- 1. Pederasty (Ancient Greece):** A relationship with an educational and mentorship focus, often involving an age differential, existing within a broader social context that valued male bonds. This was a socially accepted form of relationship between an adult male (the *erastes*) and a younger, often adolescent, male (the *eromenos*). While it had an erotic and sexual component, it was also considered a pedagogical relationship, where the elder man would mentor the younger in civic, intellectual, and martial virtues. These relationships were not exclusive and often existed alongside marriage to women, which was for procreation and social standing. The *eromenos* was expected to eventually marry and have children.
Disclaimer: *This type of relationship is considered taboo in modern society and may also be illegal based on age-of-consent laws which can vary by country, state, and/or locality. Relationships of this type between consenting adults of different ages, regardless of orientation, might also be looked down upon, especially if there is a huge age gap, but are not necessarily illegal. In some countries, homosexual relations are still illegal.*
- 2. "Friendships" of Passionate Intensity (18th - 19th Century Europe/America):** In periods where explicit same-sex relationships were heavily condemned or criminalized, men (especially those of the educated or artistic classes) often formed intensely emotional and sometimes physically intimate bonds that were publicly framed as "friendships." Letters and diaries reveal deep affection, shared households, and lifelong commitments, even if the sexual nature was carefully veiled or unspoken. These were publicly labeled as "friendships" to avoid social censure.
- 3. "Mateships" or "Partnerships" in Frontier/Single-Sex Environments (17th - 19th Century, e.g., Early American Colonies, Maritime/Military Contexts):** In heavily male-dominated environments like early colonial settlements (e.g., Jamestown, Maryland), frontier towns, on ships, or in military units, men formed close bonds for survival and companionship. Some of these evolved into romantic or sexual partnerships, often referred to as "mateships," where men would live together, share property, and provide mutual support.
- 4. "Discreet Partnerships" in Urban Subcultures (Late 19th - Early 20th Century):** As cities grew, so did hidden gay subcultures. Men would form relationships, often meeting in underground bars, clubs, or private gatherings. These partnerships were often kept secret from mainstream society due to the threat of legal prosecution and social ostracism. Some men lived together, pooling resources, while others maintained separate lives for appearances.
- 5. Wakashudō and Nanshoku (Edo Period Japan):** Similar in some ways to Greek pederasty, *wakashudō* (the way of the *wakashū*, or adolescent boy) was a widely practiced form of same-sex relationship, particularly among the samurai class, Kabuki actors, and priests. It involved an older man (*nenja*) taking a younger man (*wakashū*) as a lover and mentee. *Nanshoku* was a broader term for male-male sexuality. These relationships were often institutionalized and held a recognized, albeit distinct, place in society.
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- 6. Formal Unions in Ancient Rome (e.g., Hadrian and Antinous):** While traditional marriage was for procreation, Roman men were free to have sexual partners of either gender as long as they maintained the "active" role. There's

evidence of formal same-sex unions, sometimes referred to as "marriages" (though their legal status differed from heterosexual marriage). Emperor Hadrian's public and profound relationship with Antinous, including deifying him after his death, is a prominent example of a deeply committed male-male partnership that transcended mere sexual encounters.

Modern Queer Relationship/Family Models (20th Century to Present Day):

1. **"Monogamish" Relationships (Mid-Late 20th Century, Post-Stonewall onwards):** Particularly prevalent in gay male communities, "monogamish" relationships refer to primary, committed partnerships that allow for consensual sexual activity with outside partners under specific agreed-upon rules or circumstances. This often emerged in the context of increased sexual freedom post-Stonewall, but also as a way for men to reconcile desire for both intimacy and sexual variety.
2. **Open Relationships / Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM):** A broader category where partners agree to engage in sexual and/or romantic relationships with others outside their primary partnership. This is a common and openly discussed model within modern queer male communities. This can take many forms, from casual encounters to more involved connections, all based on transparency and consent.
3. **Polyamory:** This involves having multiple loving, romantic, and/or sexual relationships simultaneously, with the full knowledge and consent of all involved parties. Polyamorous configurations for gay men can include:
 - **Throuples/Triads:** Three men in a committed relationship where all three are romantically and/or sexually involved with each other.
 - **Vees:** One person has two partners who are not romantically or sexually involved with each other.
 - **Polycules:** A network of interconnected polyamorous relationships.
 - **Solo Polyamory:** An individual who has multiple romantic/sexual partners but maintains an independent lifestyle, not prioritizing any single partner or forming a "nesting" partnership.
4. **Chosen Family / "Queer Platonic Partnerships" (QPPs):** While not exclusively romantic or sexual, "chosen family" is a critical relationship model in queer communities, especially for men who have been rejected by their biological families. These are deep, supportive, and often lifelong bonds with non-biological individuals who function as family, providing emotional, practical, and social support. Queer platonic partnerships, while originating in aromantic/asexual spaces, can also apply to gay men who prioritize deep, committed, non-romantic, non-sexual bonds that go beyond conventional friendship.
 - **Chosen Family:** A network of individuals who provide mutual support, love, and a sense of belonging, often filling the role of biological family when that support is absent.
 - **QPPs:** Committed, intimate, and significant relationships that are explicitly non-romantic and non-sexual, but carry the depth, commitment, and often practical intertwinedness usually associated with romantic partnerships.
5. **Cohabiting Communes/Collective Households:** Particularly prominent during the counter-culture movements of the mid-20th century, and revitalized in various forms today, queer men have formed communal living arrangements to provide mutual support, share resources, and create safe spaces. Multiple queer men living together in a shared household, pooling resources, and fostering a communal, supportive environment. These are often rooted in anarchist or socialist ideals, or simply the pragmatic need for affordable housing and community.
6. **Being Happily Single:** This can mean being celibate, providing one's own sexual stimulation, or seeking sexual and romantic gratification outside of formal relationships.
7. **Serial Monogamy:** Serial monogamy refers to the practice of engaging in a series of exclusive, committed romantic relationships, one after another, rather than remaining single or engaging in casual dating between relationships. It

involves forming monogamous relationships that may last for varying lengths of time, but with the absence of a partner between relationships.

Here's a more detailed explanation:

- **Successive Relationships:** Serial monogamists have a pattern of entering and exiting monogamous relationships, with each relationship being exclusive and committed.
- **Not Simultaneous:** It's crucial to distinguish serial monogamy from polygamy or polyamory, where individuals may have multiple partners at the same time.
- **Common in Modern Society:** Serial monogamy is a widely accepted relationship style in many societies and can be seen as a natural progression from traditional monogamy, especially with increased divorce rates and changing social norms.

8. **Together but Separate:** "Together but separate" typically refers to the concept of Living Apart Together (LAT), where a couple maintains a committed, intimate relationship but chooses to live in separate residences. This differs from traditional relationships where cohabitation is expected and can be a deliberate long-term choice.

Here's a more detailed explanation:

- **Commitment without cohabitation:** Couples in LAT relationships are romantically involved and committed to each other, but they maintain separate homes.
- **Variety of arrangements:** LAT relationships can involve couples living in the same city, different cities, or even different countries.
- **Reasons for choosing LAT:** Some couples choose LAT for reasons like valuing personal space, minimizing conflict, prioritizing individual growth, or navigating different career paths or lifestyle preferences.
- **Not a temporary situation:** Unlike a temporary separation before divorce or reconciliation, LAT is often a chosen and sustainable way of living for the couple.
- **Benefits of LAT:** Couples in LAT relationships may experience benefits such as increased autonomy, enhanced intimacy, and more intentional time together.

9. **Friends with Benefits / Fuck Buddies:** a friend or acquaintance with whom a person regularly has sex without the expectation of a romantic relationship.

These alternative models showcase the ingenuity, resilience, and diverse desires within queer male communities to define relationships on our own terms, often pushing against societal norms and creating innovative structures for love, connection, and survival.

Historical Queer Models of Community

Blood Brotherhoods: Historical blood brotherhoods are a diverse set of cultural practices found in various parts of the world, where two or more unrelated men form a powerful, often ritualized, bond of kinship. This bond is typically sealed through a ceremony, sometimes involving the mixing of blood, and is meant to create a relationship as strong as, or even stronger than, that of biological brothers. These brotherhoods have historically served various social functions, such as creating alliances between different tribes, ensuring mutual protection, and establishing loyalty in a time of political instability.

While these historical practices are not directly related to modern gay identity, some of the underlying concepts have been explored as a model for community among gay men. The idea of a "chosen family" or "brotherhood" has long been a central theme in LGBTQ+ culture, especially given the historical context of rejection by biological families.

Wolf Warrior Bands: Ancient wolf warrior bands were groups of young, unmarried men who, in many ancient societies, lived on the fringes of society, often engaging in raiding and other martial activities. These bands were typically seen as a transitional stage between boyhood and full manhood, with members taking on the symbolic identity of wolves, a powerful and liminal creature.

Some scholars, such as Bernard Sergent and Walter Burkert, have proposed that these bands may have incorporated homosexual practices or rites as part of their initiation and bonding rituals. They suggest that the intense, all-male environment, combined with a period of social separation and the symbolic inversion of social norms, could have provided a context for sanctioned homosexual relationships.

Temples and Priesthoods: Temples were central to community life, dedicated to specific gods and goddesses. Priesthoods were often held by prominent citizens, not necessarily as a full-time vocation, but as a civic duty and honor. There was often a hierarchy of priests and priestesses, responsible for rituals, sacrifices, and maintaining the temple. Some ancient Pagan priesthoods involved or may have involved ritual homosexuality or gender variance, these include priests of the Norse god Freyr, priests of Adonis; the Gala of Inanna / Ishtar in ancient Mesopotamia, and others.

"Molly Houses" (18th Century England): These were private establishments or meeting places where men who engaged in same-sex sexual activity could gather, socialize, and sometimes cross-dress. They offered a clandestine social space for a subculture that was otherwise heavily persecuted.

Literary and Artistic Circles: Throughout history, queer artists, writers, and intellectuals often formed tight-knit circles, providing mutual support, inspiration, and a sense of belonging. Think of figures like Oscar Wilde's social sphere or the Sapphic salons of early 20th-century Paris.

Modern Queer Models of Community

Bear Community: The bear community is a subculture within the gay community that celebrates a specific masculine aesthetic. Bears are typically large, hairy, and often bearded men. The community values natural masculinity, body hair, and a rugged appearance, in contrast to some more mainstream gay aesthetics that may prioritize slender or hairless bodies. The subculture also emphasizes a sense of camaraderie and social connection.

Leather / Fetish / Kink Community: The gay men's leather, fetish, and kink community is a subculture focused on BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism) and other non-mainstream sexual practices. It originated in the post-WWII era, drawing on the aesthetics of motorcycle culture and military uniforms. The community is defined by its embrace of leather clothing and gear, which symbolize masculinity, power dynamics, and rebellion. Key values include honor, trust, and respect, with a strong emphasis on informed consent in all activities. This community provides a space for men to explore their sexuality and connect with others who share their interests, with a culture of mentorship and social events.

Gay Bars / Bar Scene: For the LGBTQ community, bars have been more than just places to drink; they have historically served as crucial spaces for social gathering, community building, and political organizing in the face of widespread discrimination and persecution.

Before the modern gay rights movement, gay bars were one of the few places where LGBTQ people could openly socialize and be themselves without fear of immediate harassment. In the mid-20th century, anti-homosexuality laws and discriminatory policies were common, and police raids on these establishments were frequent. This created a climate where gay bars were both a sanctuary and a battleground.

Gay Baths: Gay bathhouses have served as a significant and complex hub for the LGBTQ community, functioning as sanctuaries for both social interaction and sexual expression, particularly during times when homosexuality was criminalized.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when public spaces for gay men were virtually nonexistent, bathhouses provided a relatively safe and private alternative to meeting in public parks or on the street. They evolved from being general-purpose

public baths to institutions catering specifically to a gay clientele. These spaces allowed men to meet, socialize, and engage in sexual activity without the constant fear of arrest or public humiliation.

Today, while not as prevalent as they once were, gay bathhouses still exist in many cities. They continue to serve as important spaces for some gay men to meet and socialize, often with a greater emphasis on safe sex practices and community building.

Gyms / Gym Culture: Gay men's gym culture is a subculture where fitness and body aesthetics are central, often intertwined with a desire for community and validation. Historically, gyms and physique magazines became some of the first semi-public spaces where gay men could express their attraction to the male body, especially when other forms of social gathering were prohibited.

Today, while gym culture remains a major part of the gay community, it is also a source of both connection and pressure. For many, the gym is a welcoming place to find friends, build confidence, and take care of their mental and physical health. However, the emphasis on an ideal, often muscular, body type can also fuel body image issues and a sense of exclusion for those who don't fit the mold.

Queer Interest/ Hobby Groups and Events: Interest and hobby groups play a vital role within the LGBTQ community, serving as crucial spaces for connection, support, and shared experience. While many people associate the LGBTQ community with activism or political organizations, these hobby and social groups address a fundamental human need for belonging and social interaction. They create safe, welcoming environments where individuals can be their authentic selves without fear of judgment, a need that is often heightened for those who may face discrimination or isolation in other aspects of their lives. These groups are incredibly diverse, reflecting the wide range of interests and identities within the LGBTQ community. You can find everything from LGBTQ-friendly sports leagues (like softball, rugby, or bowling) to book clubs, hiking groups, arts and crafts circles, and gaming communities. Many of these groups are organized around a specific sub-community, such as a group for transgender individuals, older adults, or people of color, recognizing that experiences within the larger LGBTQ community are not uniform.

Living in a "Gayborhood": "Gayborhoods," or gay villages, are urban neighborhoods with a significant concentration of LGBTQ+ residents, businesses, and cultural spaces. They provide a vital sense of community by acting as physical and psychological safe havens where people can live openly without fear of discrimination or harassment.

The presence of LGBTQ+-owned businesses, community centers, and social venues like bars and clubs creates a network where people can connect, find support, and celebrate their identities. Gayborhoods have historically served as hubs for activism and political organizing, providing a collective voice and a space for the LGBTQ+ community to fight for their rights and visibility.

Intentional Communities / Communes: LGBTQ+ intentional communities and communes are residential spaces where people, often in rural settings, live together based on shared values of queer identity, mutual support, and cooperative living. These communities are not a single type of organization; they can range from land trusts and co-housing arrangements to more traditional communes. They often emphasize self-sufficiency, social and political activism, and a strong sense of "chosen family."

LGBTQ+ Retirement Communities: LGBTQ+ retirement communities are specialized housing options designed for older adults who want to live in an environment that is explicitly welcoming and affirming of their identity. These communities address a significant fear among many LGBTQ+ seniors of having to "go back into the closet" or face discrimination and isolation in mainstream retirement facilities.

Residents can openly be themselves, connect with peers who share similar life experiences, and participate in social activities and support networks tailored to their needs. These communities offer a variety of living arrangements, from independent living to assisted and memory care, ensuring residents can age with dignity and respect.

Modern Pagan Community Models

The Coven, Grove, or Hearth (Small, Local Groups)

This is the most fundamental and common unit of modern pagan community, particularly within traditions like Wicca, Druidry, and Heathenry.

- **Structure:** These groups are typically small, with membership ranging from a few individuals to a dozen or more. They are often led by a priest/priestess, a chieftain, or a high priestess/priest.
- **Purpose:** They meet regularly for rituals to mark seasonal holidays (like the solstices and equinoxes), full moons, or other significant events. These groups provide a close-knit, supportive environment for shared worship, magical practice, and spiritual development.
- **Examples:**
 - **Wiccan Covens:** A small, autonomous group of witches who practice together.
 - **Druid Groves:** A group of modern Druids who gather for rites and study, often in a natural setting.
 - **Heathen Hearths or Kindreds:** A small, family-like group of Heathens who worship the Norse gods and practice ancestral veneration.

The Larger, Centralized Organization (National and International)

These are formal organizations that provide structure, resources, and a sense of collective identity for members across a wider area.

- **Structure:** They often have a central leadership, a formal charter or set of bylaws, and a network of local chapters or affiliates.
- **Purpose:** They serve a variety of functions, including religious recognition (e.g., for legal purposes or in military and prison systems), education, publishing, and advocacy. They also organize large gatherings and conferences.
- **Examples:**
 - **The Covenant of the Goddess (CoG):** An international confederation of covens and solitaires, particularly in Wicca. It provides a formal structure and legal recognition.
 - **Ásatrúarfélagið (Iceland):** A modern Heathen religious organization that has gained legal status in Iceland, allowing it to act as an official religious body, own land, and perform legal marriages.
 - **Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD)** - A prominent Druid organization with a focus on education and scholarship, it has a formal structure with local "groves" that are part of the larger organization.

3. Public Gatherings and Festivals

These are temporary, large-scale events that bring together pagans from different traditions and locations for celebration, education, and social connection.

- **Structure:** Organized by individuals or groups, these events can last for a day or a week and often take place at campsites, retreat centers, or parks.
- **Purpose:** They provide an opportunity for solitaires and small groups to connect with a wider community, attend workshops, buy spiritual goods, and participate in large-scale public rituals.

- **Examples:**
 - **PantheaCon (U.S.):** A large, long-running indoor pagan conference that brings together a wide variety of traditions.
 - **Beltane Fire Festival (Scotland):** A major public festival that draws thousands of participants and spectators, celebrating the ancient Celtic holiday of Beltane.
 - **Many local Pagan Prides:** Public events similar to LGBTQ+ pride but with a focus on pagan identity, featuring vendors, rituals, and educational booths.

4. Online and Digital Communities

The internet has become a crucial space for modern pagans to connect, especially for those who live in areas with no local groups or who prefer a solitary practice.

- **Structure:** These range from simple forums and social media groups to complex websites with educational materials and digital rituals.
- **Purpose:** They allow for a constant, global conversation about paganism, providing support, a place to ask questions, and a sense of belonging to a larger movement.
- **Examples:**
 - **Dedicated Forums and Message Boards:** Sites like The Witches' Voice provide a centralized hub for finding local groups and discussing pagan topics.
 - **Social Media Groups:** Thousands of groups on platforms like Facebook and Reddit are dedicated to specific traditions (e.g., Celtic Reconstructionism, Norse Paganism) or to general pagan discussion.
 - **YouTube and Podcasts:** Creators share rituals, educational content, and personal stories, creating a sense of community through shared media.

These models often overlap. An individual might be a solitary practitioner who connects with others through an online group, attends a large festival once a year, and is also a member of a national organization. This adaptability reflects the decentralized and diverse nature of modern paganism itself.