



Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships

Mark A. Michaels , Patricia Johnson

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Contemporary relationships are in a state of rapid evolution. These changes can and should empower people with the opportunity to develop partnerships based on their own sexualities, understandings, and agreements. This makes it possible to create what Kenneth Haslam, founder of the Kinsey Institute's Polyamory Archive, has called "designer relationships."

Designer relationships may encompass: people who bond emotionally but not sexually; people who agree to be non-exclusive; single people who have occasional lovers or friends with benefits; couples who consciously choose to be monogamous; multiple partner configurations where long-term bonds exist among all or some; partnerships in which people are kinky and that make room to explore kink.

The possibilities are limitless, and thinking about a partnership as something people can craft allows for flexibility and change. Relationships can open and close or have varying degrees and kinds of openness as circumstances demand. In the context of a designer relationship, decisions are made mutually, consciously, and deliberately.

Designer Relationships will show you how to create the relationship that works for you, based on:

- Free and enthusiastic choice.
- Mutuality in defining the relationship and its structure.
- Permission to consider all forms of relating.
- Dedication to maintaining radical regard your partner(s).
- Transparency about sexual history.

Best-selling authors and nationally known relationship experts Patricia Johnson and Mark A. Michaels are exemplars of this life choice. This book explains exactly how you and your loved ones can design your own life and love.

Editorial Reviews

Review

"Michaels and Johnson's latest book on Designer Relationships takes my book, *The New Monogamy* one step further, past communication skills about monogamy agreements and into new ways to be transparent about all types of revolutionary forms of commitment that will take us forward into the 21st Century. Where my book left off, theirs continues and includes all the information any couple could ever want or need to create loving, open partnerships. Where most books only offer history and data, Mark and Patricia give practical advice and ground rules for trust, empathy and intimacy for collaborative non-monogamous relationship. We all need a book like this that integrates good tips and techniques and the words to define

what we want from a partner; the freedom to choose. Whatever you are looking for, it is in this book. Written by a couple who really love one another and are committed to their work, this book comes at the perfect time, I am convinced it will help a lot of people."

—Dr. Tammy Nelson, Author of *The New Monogamy and Getting the Sex You Want*

"Thoughtful, honest and powerful! Reading this book is like rubbing a lamp to get your own Genie – but instead of magic, you'll get practical guidance on how to create the relationship that's ideal for you. Mark Michaels and Patricia Johnson speak from experience, lead from the heart, and open a space for true sexual freedom."

— Ricci Joy Levy, Executive Director, The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance

"Patricia Johnson and Mark Michaels explore far beyond one-size-fits-all coupling to a rainbow of choices, showing us all that the only ways our relationships are supposed to be are the ways we choose with one beautifully stated guideline: "Keep kindness as your touchstone.'"

— Dossie Easton, Author of *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures and Radical Ecstasy*.

"How would you live and love if society, religion, and the media weren't constantly "shoulding" all over you?" — Jenny Block

"*Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships* by Mark Michaels and Patricia Johnson is an insightful read into the different types of sexual and romantic relationships, It debunks the myths that tell us there is one type that works for everyone. It also imparts wisdom on how to navigate relationships for whichever type you find yourself in. I found this book to be a great starter guide for designing relationships that work for you."

—Dr. Martha Tara Lee, author of *Love, Sex and Everything In Between*

"I would highly recommend *Designer Relationships* to any couple who wants to explore opening up and wants to strengthen their relationship."

—Shervon Laurice, MS, LCPC, LPC

From the foreword:

"*Designer Relationships* is a guidebook for these changing times and what is now available to anyone with a computer, a modicum of curiosity, and the willingness to take a risk and explore."

—Ken Haslam, founder, Polyamory Archives of the Kinsey Institute

Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships Details

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From Reader Review Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships for online ebook

Louisa Leontiades says

(Star rating 3.75)

There is little else more fun than being the author of your own life and whilst I adore Tolkien, he reserved his authorship for elves, hobbits and wizards. As much of a stupendous achievement Lord of the Rings is, I've gotta admit; I want to live that magical life... not just write about it.

The buzz around The Law of Attraction proves that people have a deep desire to truly design their own lives. And last week riding gracefully on the back of this popular concept and into my delighted hands, Mark Michael's and Patricia Johnson's new book with foreword by Ken Haslam, arrived in Sweden: 'Designer Relationships – A guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory and Optimistic Open Relationships.'

I applaud the authors' ambition to write such on such vast topic matter; yet depending on your point of view, it either serves as a good introductory text, or has not the length to adequately cover such a broad subject. I'm going to go with the first perception and authors' own aim to have an 'airport read' and reduce it to my favourite quote.

"Designer relationships allow people to consider a broad spectrum of possible relationship styles and craft an approach that suits their circumstances. What works—not what's supposed to be divinely ordained, natural or normal—is optimal." – Designer Relationships, Michaels & Johnson

Designer Relationships is a gentle, compassionate read which presents the subject in a most decorous and acceptable light, yet this also means it is not dramatic or compelling enough to encourage a dubious reader to finish it. This is not a book which will persuade those without an already open and curious mind. However if you are interested in the subject matter – as I am – you can devour it in one sitting. The particular strength of this book is its supporting research, albeit it from an America-centric perspective. Footnotes, data and references pepper the text and specifically quote from much of the excellent polyamorous literature and more open-minded relationship blogs out there, debunking many unconscious monogamous myths.

On the downside, I feel that this book is derived a little too much from the authors' own experience (accumulated during their glorious partnership of 17 years) and is therefore necessarily skewed with their own beliefs and interpretations. For example, in the one descriptive paragraph covering fluid bonding, the authors state,

"There is an important emotional and symbolic component to the decision to stop using barriers and become fluid bonded."

Not necessarily. Just as with anything else, the importance of such a decision will depend on your own narrative. Such a decision could perhaps be neither emotional nor symbolic. It could be simply a logical step (hopefully after testing) because you both hate condoms. Attributing such importance as a default, only supports the narrative that fluid bonding is reserved for special deeply intimate relationships. Designer relationships, by definition, should be built on a neutral foundation.

Finally, before writing this review, I watched them both talk about their book in Sarah Arlen's new series Polyamorous People (episode 2). It is clear that these two people have co-created a beautiful long lasting relationship where they express their non-exclusive inclination – in their own words – via erotic friendships whilst emotionally, they choose to be monogamous... This alone makes their book worth reading in my opinion. Whether I agree with it or not, for many longevity in their relationship is an ultimate goal for many. Patricia and Michael have accomplished this with their own designer relationship and that means their book brings a lot of 'walk the talk' value to open-minded, but emotionally monogamous people who are desperately searching for better alternatives to the Hollywood scripts we are fed on an interminable basis.

Kelly Hogan says

A very good read. They aren't advocating any particular relationship style, but the idea of mindfully choosing what works for you and those you love. Although they don't completely avoid their own biases, they do a good job of addressing many different perspectives without judgement, and with respect.

Sylvia Simioni says

Three stars well deserved. Both the title and the chapter on relationship skills for everyone, whatever their color or stripe, are on their own worth five stars. Would recommend to anyone interested in thinking critically of our more common relationship models, including but not limited to monogamy. Would recommend to lovers, friends, strangers, and anyone interested in cultivating their capacity for profound interest. Go read the damn thing.

Annie Frazier says

I would recommend this book to people that are in monogamous relationships, and are thinking about opening up (or are thinking about staying monogamous, honestly). Other than that, it's a little too broad for folks already in open relationships (which, to be fair, they make pretty clear at the beginning). I did like the beginning section on monogamy (funny enough), because I thought it was a great relational point to demonstrate that every relationship has both monogamous and nonmonogamous aspects to it (and that that's perfectly okay). The section on 'Relationship Skills For Everyone' was also good. The rest was way too fluffy for my taste/ where I'm at.

Anna says

This book reads like a very brief cheerleading session for open relationships. While the last two chapters had some good advice and a few good questions to discuss in any kind of relationship, most of the book was spent defending open or non-traditional relationships from misconceptions which could be plucked from a Fox News talking head. I think most people who pick up this book they will be beyond that already. I felt the book mostly passed over the difficulty inherent in non-traditional relationships. This might be a good book for someone looking for a push to convince them to open their relationship, but if you are already there and looking for help managing the realities of that decision, I would look for something more in depth.

Andrea Goldston says

The book, as many of these books do, spends a lot of time talking about outsider stereotypes of what the authors call "Designer Relationships" and other nontraditional relationships look like, but don't, to my taste, spend nearly enough time discussing the positive and negative elements that are unique to these relationships. Perhaps this is always the problem of reading work designed to introduce outsiders into a realm of thought.

The writers are clearly smart, and may do great work, but this book was too focused on perception, perhaps the book was too short, or both. In any case, I think the book is not bad. It's a fairly quick read, and has several good points to make. For people who have read on the topic, or have lived it, I'd give it a three. For those who haven't, I'd give it a four. And due to the fact that this work is making points that are not made in many other places, I'll give it a four.

Rose says

I was a bit underwhelmed with this book. It has some good information in it, and I'm sure it will be helpful to a lot of people out there, but there's nothing in it that to me makes it stand out more than other books on similar topics available on the market right now.

There were times when it felt like the subject jumped very quickly, and sometimes even seemed incoherent, with quotes in places that didn't seem to have anything to do with the content of the rest of the book around it.

I know the authors said their intent wasn't to go too far in depth and for the book to be readable during a plane flight time span, but I felt like there was certainly a mix of more advanced ideas in there that shouldn't have been introduced if the authors weren't feeling inclined to flesh them out. This didn't serve well as just a beginner or intro book in my opinion at all.

I also would have liked to see a little bit less of hierarchical stuff in a book called "Designer Relationships." I was thinking the book would be pleasantly free from some of those tropes, and while I understand that "going as slow as the slowest person" is something that some couples need, it wasn't really addressed that the "slow person" could become toxic and obstructionist with their discomfort if they were allowed to do that indefinitely. That is probably one of those pieces of advice that I feel like shouldn't have come without a far more in-depth analysis and explanation of possible pitfalls.

Good because I like seeing more books out there about non-traditional relationships, but I likely wouldn't recommend it to very many people.

Martha says

You've probably heard of the saying, "We need to learn how to love ourselves before we can love another." The real question is what is love? Once we know the real answer to that question, we can begin to understand

how to truly love, and what to do when love shows up in different shapes and shades.

designer_relationshipsThe book *Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships* begins by explaining that there is a sexual revolution happening. This is a time when we get to decide for ourselves what kind of relationships work for us.

What has been common is monogamy by default, or going from one exclusive romantic relationship to another, otherwise known as serial monogamy. However there are many more relationship models; this may leave us confused. On one level, *Designer Relationships* is a field guide of what exactly is out there.

You've probably heard of friends with benefits, swinging and open relationships. How about people who choose to be single by choice, identify as Asexual, or choose to be non-sexual? The book also explains terms like monogamish (people who have occasional infidelities), polyamory (people with many loves), and swolly (people who feel they are somewhere between swinging and polyamory) etc.

The book goes on to debunk myths around mono-normative beliefs (monogamous relationships are the only way), as well as misconceptions around consensual nonmonogamy. It highlights the difference between cheating and nonmonogamy and explains more about jealousy. Authors Mark Michaels and Patricia Johnson, who are in a nonmonogamous relationship, make it clear that they are not advocating that all of us ought to be in nonmonogamous relationships, but rather are encouraging us to figure out what works for us as individuals.

As a sexologist who works predominantly with heterosexual couples who are monogamous, I found myself nodding my head at all the points in chapter five. It imparts a useful framework of the type of relationship skills all of us should have, regardless of relationship type or preference.

I liked how *Designer Relationships* not only had an easy and logical flow in its structure, but is also clear in its language. I happened to be running a group session on relationship as I was reading the book. So I decided to use its structure as a framework for my workshop, and incorporated several of the points in the book. It all went very well, which gave me a greater appreciation of the amount of work and thought that went into the writing of this book.

Designer Relationships does a great job of explaining what is probably alien to many readers, and talks about the process of opening up in chapter six. The last chapter covers ethical considerations in such relationships. I felt more emphasis needed to be placed on how opening up a relationship is not a substitute for saving one which is already on its hind legs; the triggers, complexities, vulnerabilities and challenges that would continue to come up; as well as the importance of ongoing communication. No one book can cover everything. I encourage readers to use this as a starter guide and delve more into this subject if inclined.

Justin Gayle says

By the time I finished this book I realized it was the future. *Designer Relationships* releases the tension around the taboo that is polyamory through the scientific lens and offers a realization in one's view of what a faithful or meaningful relationship is or can be. It has enabled and simplified a seemingly difficult conversation, and, is possibly one of the best guides for relationships today, in my opinion. Everyone should read it regardless of their preferential relationship. And especially those seeking the exclusive monogamous relationship!

Sarah Arlen says

I love that this book is really inclusive and helpful to the entire spectrum of relationship models, and offers experience-based wisdom to figuring out how to create the loving life that's right for you. It's accessible and practical, with action-oriented ideas. And the basis of the book is that we can collaborate creatively with our partner(s) while fully embracing ourselves. Refreshing, quick read that addresses elements of polyamory and relationships rarely discussed all in one book.

Elizabeth Wood says

Designer Relationships is an excellent handbook for anyone seeking to create intimate relationships that are mutually fulfilling, loving, and full of passion. Michaels and Johnson have created exactly what they set out to create: an accessible, quick-reading guide that works for just about any kind combination of partners regardless of number, gender, or sexual proclivity. It's not a guide for polyamorists, or a guide for same sex couples, or a guide for kinksters. It's a guide for lovers of all sorts who want to develop passion, love, and mutuality. Michaels and Johnson don't assert that one arrangement is better than another, but they do assert that fostering love, empathy, and passion is valuable no matter what.

One of the things I value about Michaels and Johnson as purveyors of sex and relationship advice is that they always ground their work in historical context, and they do this successfully even in a very short book like *Designer Relationships*. By offering a historical view of monogamy and by distinguishing types of monogamy from one another, they offer the reader an opportunity to consider the weight of social expectations about monogamy while understanding the development of alternatives. They achieve this without jargon or heavy-handedness, letting the reader discover that what is does not have to be, and that new exciting relationship trends have long historical roots.

Despite its small size, *Designer Relationships* is an advice book that doesn't shy away from difficult topics, and it offers comprehensive discussion along with little easily-digested tip sheets to help navigate those touchy areas. For example, Michaels and Johnson don't presume that honesty is always appropriate in every interaction, and they explain why one might temper one's honesty in a thorough discussion in Chapter 5, "Relationship Skills for Everyone," but they also provide a quick bullet-point guide that make it easy to remember when and how honesty is most beneficial in relationships. They address the complexity of taking pleasure in a partner's pleasure rather than focusing on "getting one's own needs met" but without falling into a pattern of self-denial. When they provide examples of agreements that partners might make about their relationship, they offer a wide range without judgment or assumption about the reader.

Designer Relationships is incredibly accessible without being watered down. If you've read *Partners In Passion*, a more comprehensive look at creating intimacy in long-term relationships, much of the advice in *Designer Relationships* will be familiar. But the books are really quite different. You might think of *Designer Relationships* as a field guide, where *Partners In Passion* is a desk (or bedside) volume. In addition, *Designer Relationships* places more emphasis on the creation and negotiation of relationship options where *Partners In Passion* places more emphasis on the work that needs to occur within many of our existing relationships. They are excellent companions, but if I had to purchase only one, I'd purchase *Designer Relationships*. Its small size, expansive scope, and widely-applicable advice make it remarkable.

Maya Reid says

Not much in this book felt "new" after having read a handful of the books they list in their "other resources" guide in the back, but in the authors' introduction, they said they wanted this to be the kind of book you could pick up in an airport and read during the flight and come away having learned something, and I think they succeeded in that effort.

Dan says

This book does a really great job talking about the conscious ways relationships can be structured around monogamy/nonmonogamy and the many facets that includes. I really appreciate how it breaks down some different kinds of monogamy and acknowledges that these are also valid options for relationships.

The book doesn't do as much to talk about all the other areas where people can design relationships to suit them, like choices about sex, marriage, children, and cohabitation. I've been looking for a while for one book that covers all the highlights on customizing relationships to fit the needs of those involved. *Sex From Scratch* and *Designer Relationships* have come closest, but neither is quite there. I'm a little relieved that this means there's still a place for me write the book I want.

Mixed into this book are also some really solid bits of wisdom and a few pieces of advice I personally thought were terrible. Similarly, their ideas are sometimes backed up with research and citations, and other times not supported by data or common sense.

Crys Jackson says

A lovely little book that made me think a bit.

Jacki Yovanoff says

There are more and more books all the time on relationship styles, polyamory, open relationships, etc. What sets this book apart is the authors are not endorsing one "style" over others. This book encourages us to go mindfully into whatever relationship we would like to have. They give us the tools to design our own relationships. What if we weren't told what kind of relationships we *should* have? It's a good way to spark some introspection.

This is a great smaller book. It is not overwhelming and succeeds in its goal of being a book you can "pick up in one airport and read by the time you land in another." I like that it's easily digestible and challenges some of the notions we may have about "radical honesty" and sharing "everything" with our partner(s).

It's a recommended reading no matter what style of relationship you are in (or not in) and what your dream relationship is.

