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Hello, and Happy Sunday. I hope that you're having a beautiful weekend. So today's topic is: blurry lines on relationships. how do we set boundaries with explicitly named casual dynamics?

And we could go into a whole separate topic of how I don't really think there's a binary of casual or romantic, that a lot of friendships can include romance and sex. A lot of, "I just want to be friends" connections, actually there are strong desires or feelings there. And we're just putting it in a different box, you know? So I guess even using those labels can be limiting. But I do want to offer some kind of framework for how we have boundary discussions, when we have mutually decided that we don't really have strong responsibilities to each other.

That can be tough because boundary conversations mean that everybody involved has to be interested in doing that. And so sometimes that can seem contradictory to what you have both just agreed upon, but it's really not. Every dynamic from professional to friendly, to community, they all have bounds of what makes people feel respected, and what makes people feel secure. And so that can absolutely be an element of a "casual" connection. Let's get into it.

A quick note that there are actually quite a few monogamous people who are patrons. Hello, I'm glad that you feel comfortable here. I think it is important to note that norms in monogamous dating – at least in the cultures and circumstances that I've been exposed to – it's not normalized to have clarity every step of the way. And that clarification can be synonymous with getting serious. So you just might encounter friction or some misunderstanding. If somebody feels uncomfortable, or awkward or scared, that doesn't mean that person is incapable of doing it. It might just mean that you're the first person that suggested that notion to them. and then what they do with it from that point forward, you can decide how you feel about it. But in polyamory, if somebody buckles or bristles at the idea of having clarity, that's an automatic red flag to me, because I'm like, "that's what we're doing here, we're designing relationships from scratch." But if you are on a more traditional path, then I think it's not automatically a red flag. If someone is surprised or didn't think of it or has never done that before, it's not uncommon. It doesn't mean they're incapable of it. So yeah, I hope, I hope that helps.

First, I'm going to talk about "what is a desire for something casual?" What is that conceptually? Then I'm going to talk about one night stands or intermittent hookups, as well as the sort of liminal "friends with benefits" territory of "we are

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agreeing to not become interdependent, but we are agreeing to have intimacy." That is sort of how I'm gonna structure this video.

Let's start first with, what casual looks like on dating apps or what the request for no strings attached means. I've seen this a lot, of people "just looking for fun", or they want "no drama", or people want "someone who doesn't take themselves too seriously." And on its face, any of those descriptors sound fine, but in the context of a person expressly leading with that on their profile, what are they saying they don't want? What is "I'm just looking for fun"? I mean, like, what is "fun"? because I have plenty of fun with my platonic friendships. But if my dad dies, I want to be able to be having a bad day or cry on their shoulder and have them not be like, "we said we were just having fun. So I'm gonna go." I don't really think it is feasible to have a relationship with an entire person, and expect them to always keep it light.

I'll say – in case there has been any dropping the ball thus far, any lack of clarity on my part – it is fine to know you're unavailable. To say, "I only have one day a month, I cannot be expected to text with you every day, I cannot be expected to do some sort of relationship escalator development in your life with you." This whole video is about stating that, getting what you want and what you need, by having more specificity and more clarity. so that you don't try to tell somebody "I'm not available" but then three months into spending time with them, they suddenly flip it on you and they're like, "what? I thought we were dating". This is also to benefit the person who does not have capacity for something intense.

If we have said "these specific actions, I can or cannot do", then the minute that one of those things is pushed on, we know a boundary is being pushed. If we say, "I can't do sleepovers anytime in the near future." The minute that that person then says "oh, can I sleep over?" You've now outlined for yourself a boundary push, right? Whereas if we just said "I can't do anything serious," and they say "Can I sleep over?" have you defined if that feels serious to you? when we define what casual or serious (in general ends of a spectrum) feels like, looks like, then we can get them. Or if a person is trying to steamroll us and change our mind, we can know that sooner than when it reaches a point of huge conflict or blows up.

If a person is just not interested in having a boundary conversation at all, it is helpful to know that as early as possible, too. Because that is them explicitly being unwilling to hear your needs and your desires, which means they're unable to fulfill those needs and desires, they are unable to take care of you. And they're expressing a willful desire to not have that information of how to take care of you. We are grown. We can know, "they're not interested in a boundary conversation." And we can go in fully informed about their express willful ignorance of our boundaries. We can take

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that risk if we want. But I think it's helpful for us to at least manage our own expectations of how risky this is going to be.

A quick note about the whole unavailable thing. It is not so uncommon for new relationship energy to sort of indicate the opposite. A person who's like, "Oh, I'm not available... but actually, oh my God, I've never felt this way about anybody before." that could be a sign of love, or love bombing, or it could be a sign of hyper fixation if they have ADHD, and You are the thing they're hyper fixated on, it could be this new relationship energy and they're swooning. That does not negate an expressed desire for something "not serious", right? That does not mean "oh, they said they didn't want anything serious, but now they're clearly acting differently. So I can change my expectations." I think that is a perfect scenario to bring up a boundary conversation. "Hey, you said this, but you're doing that. I just want to make sure that I'm not confused here." So those are my thoughts on the act of wanting something casual itself.

I'll start with one night stands or intermittent hookups. Now, implicit in that is sex. But I don't think that applies entirely. I think it can apply to non sexual dynamics, like a lot of people are on the ace spectrum, a lot of people are demisexual. So one night stands are not really interesting to them. But in those cases, if you have any spark with a person that feels very hot and cold intermittently, there is a lot of emotionality that can happen in a similar way or with a similar pacing. So this is not about sex, so much as it's about an instant (or a series of unpredictable or inconsistent instances) where you have a connection with somebody, and it feels very confusing. Let's talk about it.

There are some people that I can just see whenever I see them, have no expectation of when we'll hang out again. I have no problem just hooking up with somebody for one night, and then I don't know if I'll ever talk to them again. That might not be emotionally upsetting, depending on the person. But there are other people that I can do anything BUT that. Like, "oh, I clearly have a type of connection with you that I can't do this inconsistent, once-in-a-while thing. I can tell that that would be hurtful, or that would be confusing to me."

So I think the first step in finding out "what do I need in a situation like that?" is a self assessment. What do I know about myself that would help me anticipate what could hurt? Or what could help? we can look to our own track records for a lot of information on what those boundaries might be. And at the very least, if I don't know what I need, I can work backwards from what I know I DON'T want, right? what has gone poorly in the past? I work backwards from there and sort of reverse engineer a boundary from that. Like, "it really hurts when somebody leaves real fast the next day

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after we just cuddled or after we just had sex". So reverse engineering that, "Okay, if we stay over with each other, I need to have coffee the next morning or have conversation and have breakfast together. I need that sort of connection easing into the day." That can be at least a starting point. And then in practice, as we negotiate those things, "I think this is what will make me feel good" and we test it out, then we can keep fine tuning it. Because a lot of times our best idea of what will make us feel good in that kind of scenario, in practice, we're like, "Oh, ouch. I didn't expect to feel that way." Or "actually, that went better than expected", right? Actually experiencing the trial and error itself.

I also sort of do a scan of "am I generally feeling vulnerable?" Maybe in the short term, "I'm exhausted today. If one more bad thing happens today, it's not going to go great." or it could be something longer term, like an ongoing situation has been draining you or been really emotional. If it feels low risk, or if we're really horny and we want to just have sex, there are a lot of reasons to do that quick check in and still say "let's move forward". But if it feels higher risk, like, "if I don't have my needs met in this situation, I'm gonna be pretty not okay." Any version of that is just good information to know, prior to jumping into something.

I'll also do some vetting on the date itself. Because we don't always know if a one-off date or one night stand is going to be that, right? We just go out with somebody for the first time and we don't always know if we're gonna see them again. Or maybe we want to and then they don't want that. I will do some vetting – not just my normal vetting of "Who is this person? Do we share the values? do I feel safe with them?" but as well, getting a sense of "where are they in their life? are they able to clearly articulate what it is that they're doing and what they want? are they in a big period of transition, and they're feeling lost?" If somebody is unable to really pin down for themselves where they are and what they want, they will definitely struggle to offer me clarity.

It's not that we need to have answers for what they want for the rest of their life. We don't know what that is for ourselves. We don't know what we want with them yet, if anything. So that part would be premature. but are they able to name what they do and don't want from today, tonight, this week...? do they have clarity on the conditions which would make for a good time together? If somebody is fine with you staying over, but they would want you to be on the sofa, they won't want to share a bed with you. Then you can know that, and not make a plan to sleep over if that feels weird to you, if that feels unacceptable or would have some kind of emotional drop from being relegated to the sofa. A lot of times when people ask "how do I have boundary conversations on the first date?" It's about that shit. what are we doing today? tonight? basics of what you're doing together so that none of what unfolds

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winds up making anybody feel uncomfortable, or feeling not seen, or feeling injured in some way.

If there is something more vulnerable and more intimate or more sexual, if there is something that you feel would require some level of emotional aftercare, we can negotiate that prior to doing it. I talked about this in my video “cutting short my abandonment cycle” – in the hookup, I knew the next morning I'm gonna need a text from this person, even though we've agreed we're not continuing to have any kind of continuity with each other. And so I asked at that moment, “do you need any aftercare?” And he was like, “No, I don't, I don't think I need anything. Do you need any aftercare?” And I said, “Yeah, I just need a text in the next two or three days, saying either that you had a great time, or that you never want to see me again – whatever is true – I just need that closure on this little experience.” and that completely can make or break, whether I walk out of a situation feeling cared for or not.

In my opinion, it's fine to ask for that. It doesn't guarantee that they will do it, unfortunately, people are still going to be people. But if they don't do it, you know that you've done everything within your power to take care of you. And, never again with that person. A lot of vetting and boundary talks are just me collecting information for how to keep me safe, or at least safer. And it's me collecting information to make sure any risk I take is an informed risk.

Okay, so let's talk about “friends with benefits”. in German, it's called “Freundschaft Plus”, Friendship Plus. I've heard some say in Spanish, “Amigóvio” – amigo and nóvio, friend and boyfriend. Most languages have some kind of word, or some kind of colloquial phrase to describe it. From here on out I'll say “Friends with Benefits” just for ease because I'm a natural American English speaker, but I'm encompassing all forms of what that could look like, which can vary dramatically culture to culture, and language to language. In general, this is an umbrella term that I think, in and of itself, needs definition, right? If we are explicitly saying “you are in this category of person,” what are we saying you ARE and what are we saying you are NOT? like what is it that we are not doing? what is off the table with that explicit agreement? What am I supposed to not want from you, supposed to not ask from you, supposed to not need in this?

As well, I like to get a sense of the power structures at play in the greater dynamic including other people. If somebody is polyamorous and has a hierarchical relationship, I want to know what that literally looks like in practice. Can we run through some hypotheticals? “If she were to feel really uncomfortable, what would you do? Can we not even have a friendship anymore?” You know what I mean? I like

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to run through hypotheticals, because people often will give a clear answer, if they are putting themselves in a specific hypothetical situation. then you can actually get a substantive idea of what they would literally do. I just want to know, what am I agreeing to with this “just friends” or “friends with benefits” thing? What power do I have, especially power in my own ability to negotiate what the two of us do?

And even in non hierarchies, or people who have anti hierarchical intent, this can still happen. I want to know, if there is fluidity in what we're doing and it is unnamed, is that communicated to everybody? Because I have been in a situation before where I was presented as a “friend”, which a person's partner took to mean that there was no sex involved. But myself and the other person absolutely include sex as a possibility whenever we feel like it, within friendship. And so I was not aware that had not been clearly communicated to their partner, that was not explicitly defined to them. And so even though everyone said we all feel comfortable with each other, the fact that sex happened essentially amounted to me participating in them cheating on their partner. And their ignorance to the fact that it was cheating, their lack of clarity on whether or not they were engaging in something that would violate a boundary, that's between them. But if they don't have clarity, if they haven't had those conversations, I am going to be a bit more wary. Because I don't want to participate in anything that is going to possibly hurt another person. I want to know, “what does friendship mean?” Because we use these words so freely, and we can all use them very differently.

It's not just a conversation that we just have once upfront in the beginning. We keep checking in. For example, if a holiday event comes up, and I'm invited to it because I matter to that person and they'd love to see me, great. but now I'm meeting their extended family. Now I'm hanging out with them and their kid. Does this still feel consistent with what we've negotiated? Or am now I starting to feel weird? This is not how we usually relate to each other. Are either of our expectations changing? How are you introducing me to other people? Are you closeted to people at the event about polyamory? Does your co-parent have any discomfort with me being there? There's so much that needs to be continually negotiated, especially if what we negotiated at the beginning starts to get more complex. or situations that we didn't really think of proactively start to arise. or we just want to see each other more often. “Hey I'd love to see you more.” Or we're hanging out once a week, instead of once a month.

To have consistent maintenance of managing expectations, especially if there is any asymmetry. If one person would love there to be a different kind of dynamic. If one person does feel romantic and sexual, and you don't, I think then there's even more imperative to be extra crystal clear on what the actions are communicating. Like

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“when I do this, when I invite you to this place, it is as ‘just a friend.’ And I won't be doing any public displays of affection. And I would rather you not really spend a lot of time with my kid.” If those terms were provided to me in their entirety, rather than just “Hey, you want to come to this event?” If how I'm supposed to exist or behave at that event is sort of fleshed out, and we think about it all the way through, then I can decide, “do I want to do that? or would that be awkward for me, would it not sit right with me?” and then I can avoid doing something that might create a conflict between us because we had different expectations going into this change of activity.

So I know, it's a lot of talking. I know, there's a lot of back and forth. But I just don't compromise about getting those clarifications. The reality is, when I am interacting with people who already expect that level of communication, already expect and see it as a green flag, that this is the kind of talking that is going to happen in our interactions – then it's quick. then it's like a single text or it's maybe a five minute conversation. It doesn't have to be these long drawn out things. We can clean up misunderstandings while they are still fresh, while they are still small. and then it doesn't build and build and build into a big explosion or a big rift. This is all about keeping this person in my life potentially, “how can I know them in a way that doesn't hurt me or them?” And of course, it's not always the goal to keep a person in our life, we can always add distance. I've got other videos about that. But ostensibly, if we are negotiating the situation with that person, we want to figure out how we can keep knowing each other. When that is not made transparent, that's when there can be major fallout.

We always have the option to forego those chats about expectations and boundaries. And then we accept that risk of “this could go poorly.” the less communication, the higher the risk that one or both of you will be surprised by what happens. And I don't know about you, but I don't love having that kind of surprise. I'm a fan of spontaneity sometimes. But I don't want spontaneous expectations like, “I thought this whole time we were moving towards living together,” like what? I thought we were on a totally different page. So when we don't have the practice, when it is not normalized, to keep checking in about “what does this mean? What does that mean?” Then we can set ourselves up for a rude awakening down the road.

I think I can close this by talking about the unexpected, or the surprises that vary from what we've discussed. I might unexpectedly notice some stronger feelings or desire for more frequent interaction. I might be taken aback by “oh, when I had sex with you, that didn't feel light to me. that felt very emotionally heavy to me.” and we can be surprised by those things. so I'll usually check in with that person, once I kind of have a grasp on words for what I'm feeling. I'll usually check in and say, “Hey, I was kind of surprised that I felt this way. I'm not asking anything differently of you. I just

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want you to know, this is how I'm feeling. What is your response?" Maybe they also noticed some heavier feelings, and then we negotiate a different kind of structure. Or maybe they say "I hear you, but I just don't share that same experience". Then I can decide, "do I want to step back? Do I want to not have sex with you anymore?" Because I don't like the feeling of desiring something that is not possible to have. It was fine before I wanted those things. But now apparently, I want those things. And so I need to change again, to restructure, renegotiate a new way of doing things. So when there is a surprise of an unexpected want, an unexpected emotion or reaction from ourselves or from people extended in the polycule – we can pause and reassess. Is this still working for everybody that's impacted by it? Should we tweak it in small ways? Should we change it in major ways?

The same could go for unmet expectations. And unfortunately, coming along with an inability to fulfill expectations, or set expectations even, that usually comes hand-in-hand with an inability to articulate that. Unfortunately, we might find ourselves in the position where we've done all of the talking, we've set all the expectations, and then we are confused. It could have something to do with "is this person able?" we can set our expectations from words, but then we have to pay attention to actions. I wish actions were congruous with words from day one. But people are people, people lie to themselves. People want things they can't do all the time. And let's not continue to put ourselves in situations that feel frustrating or feel confusing, based on words alone. I've only ever been a bitch to people when I felt like I had for too long been mistreated, you know? And so I don't allow myself to be mistreated anymore. The minute that I start to experience some mistreatment, I check in about it. I don't cut that person off entirely, I don't want to go too far in the other direction. Not every situation needs a hammer, there's a lot of other tools in the toolbox. But I do want to uphold a certain standard for when I'm saying "I need this. That's what I need."

It really does take a lot of knowing ourselves. And that can be kind of a longer road. Sometimes we find out the hard way. "Apparently I want that. Apparently I need that." Be gentle on yourself if you're not totally sure. You might stumble and learn some things through experience, rather than knowing it upfront. So those are broadly my thoughts on that. I'd love to know what you think, what you've experienced, if there are any angles to these particular kinds of situations that I omitted that I could do a follow up video about. Hope it's helpful. I love you and I hope you have a great week! bye.