

THE FUTURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

APRIL 2022



WHAT WILL
RELATIONSHIPS
LOOK LIKE IN
2040?

**GET IN BED
WITH VED**

AND FIND OUT
HOW HE'S
ENDING THE
MEET MARKET

MEET THE
**POLYAMOROUS
FAMILY NEXT DOOR**

**MY HAPPILY
EVER AFTER**

FLYING SOLO

**KEEPING UP
WITH THE
CONTRACTS**

TO SIGN OR STRAY

Looking Forward

THIS FORESIGHT PROJECT EXPLORES THE QUESTION: WHAT WILL CONSENSUAL AND MUTUALLY SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES IN 2040?

INFORMED BY TREND SPOTTING, SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT, AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING, WE HAVE CREATED A PICTURE OF WHAT RELATIONSHIPS MAY LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE.

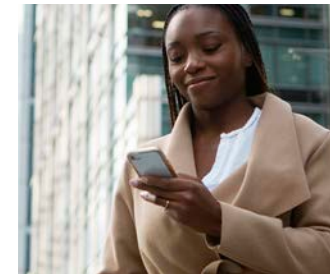
We would like to acknowledge the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

As we take you on a journey into the future of relationships, we ask that you also consider the past. How colonialism might have impacted Indigenous relationship structures and how it continues to factor into values and stereotypes around relationships today. How might we make space for Indigenous perspectives on relationships as we work toward decolonization.

CONTRIBUTORS

Aisha K
 Alex Jaworiwsky
 Janine Stowe
 Nafeha Khan

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Editorial Letter

While putting the finishing touches on this semester's edition of *The Future of Relationships*, we reflected on pluralism as the theme of our class work as a whole. Pluralism, generally being the coexistence of opinions, identities, and experiences that may be different from those we share community with, is a tricky theme. It gets trickier when you examine a concept as emotionally charged and hard to define as relationships. What does it mean to hold space for the way each person will define not only their relationship, but also themselves within that relationship? How will relationships exist in 2040 and what are the trends we find overtly impacting relationships? And what about the societal structures that often go unacknowledged until we peel back deep layers and myths, like late-stage capitalism and a patriarchal society?

Although these questions are not easily answered, we do hope you find the ways we've explored them insightful, surprising, but also plausible. Whether that plausibility is something you embrace or hope to change in your own work, is up to you.

Before we send you off into the work of our editors, Aisha, Alex, Janine, Nafeha, and Ved, we ask you to consider the relationships you hold near and dear. These may be relationships with partners, past and present, but also intimate friendships. As you reflect on these relationships, ask yourself:

1. How many people have a vested interest in this relationship and is it equal?
2. How do I communicate my needs in this relationship?
3. Does this relationship happen in the physical world? The digital world?
4. What social, technological, political, economic, environmental, and value systems impact my relationship?
5. How do you choose your people and how do you think they choose you?

And, because our work is meant to inform future content for media companies, ask one final question:

6. When I look at popular media, do I see my relationships represented in meaningful ways?
We hope so.



Audience

The audience for the following futures work is a fictitious media conglomerate called Nethulu Plus. Media holds a substantial amount of power in framing what a society deems normal or taboo and how different relational practices are depicted. Representation in the media can either reinforce stereotypes or be a catalyst for change, opening viewers' minds to other ways of being and new perspectives.

Diverse representations of relationships in the media could advance pluralism by setting the stage for acceptance. In our vision, we are informing the Netulu Plus group on the future of relationships to aid them in future programming. We want our audience to consider what reality shows, romantic comedies, and dramas may look like if the relationship structures were polyamorous, or if the goal wasn't to find your one true happily ever after. How could media start shifting how family, romantic love, and connections are shown and how might the narrative change considering the scenarios we present?

Scanning

The trends outlined in this section are drawn from the collective work of the Foresight Studio (SFIN6021-001; Winter 2022) students in the Master of Design, Strategic Foresight and Innovation program at OCAD University. Each class member was assigned to contribute at least three trends using the STEEP-V Framework (Rydderch, 2017). Approximately 22 students in our class researched trends and associated drivers that were related to Social, Technological, Economical, Environmental, Political, and Values based factors. Each individual framed a definition of pluralism and explored the implications of the chosen trends with the lens of pluralism to help us understand the impact on society and systems.

Analyzing these collective trends has helped us in sensemaking and pattern finding from the various factors that shape our worldview and are indicative of probable

futures. By combining everyone's work, we have chosen trends that are relevant to the systems and behaviors associated with the formation and evolution of relationships. The selected trends have been updated to better align with our topic. The team members have also added additional trends that are directly related to the concept of relationships to have a more holistic

understanding of the future of relationships. Cited work is attributed to the original author of the trends.

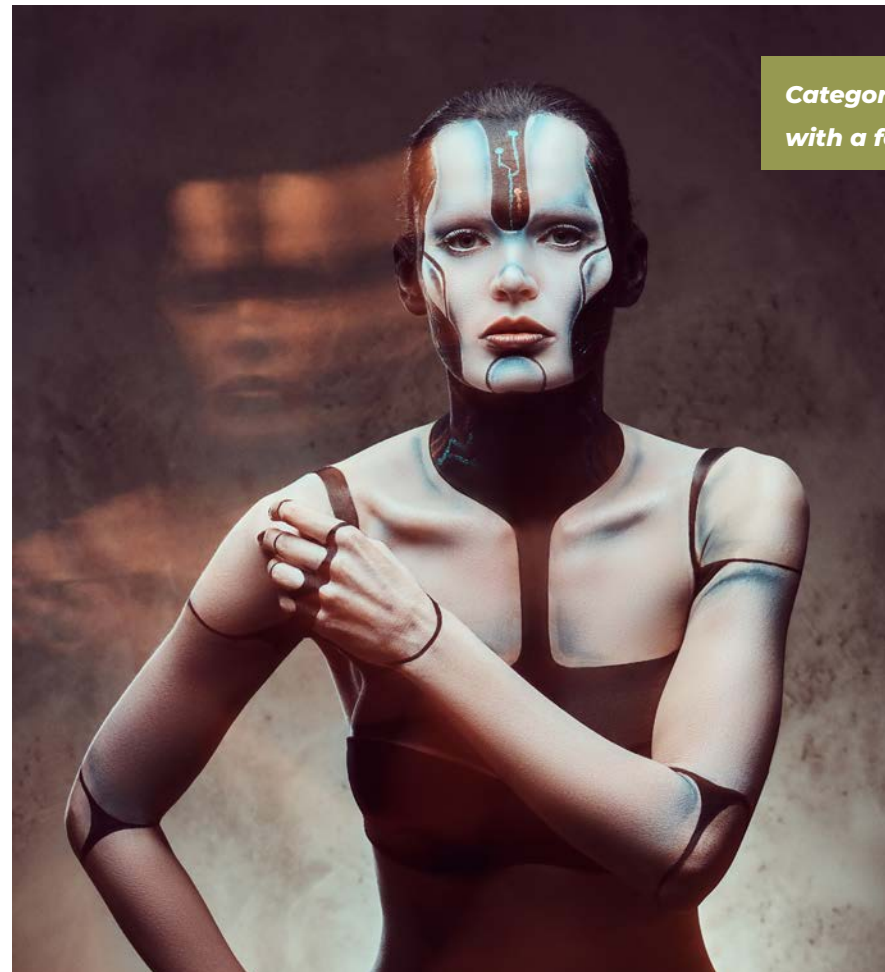
The trends in the following section have been used to inform our scenario development as well as gain a better understanding of the systemic and strategic implications that impact the future of relationships.

TRENDS

- Gender of Robots
- Changing Face of Breakups
- A Move Away from Marriage
- Importance of Platonic Relationships
- Polyamory and Open Relationships
- Relationship Contracts
- Rise of Narcissism

CITED TRENDS

- Notable Increase in Intimate Partner Violence
- Post-Covid Religion: Persevere or Perish
- Using Dating Apps to Make Friends



**Category: Technological and Social,
with a focus on Technological**

BRIEF

Robots are being assigned gender, intentionally and unintentionally—both supporting and combating gender stereotypes and how we view gender.

Gender of Robots

DESCRIPTION

We have lived in a very gendered society for most of human existence. There has often been a tendency to assign gender to objects—calling ships by female names for example. As robots become more human in their appearance it's natural for people to want to relate to them in a way that's familiar and for many of us that means assigning a gender. We are seeing a tendency for those creating and/or interacting with robots to assign a gender based on the appearance of the robot or their purpose. For example, those with larger shoulders or in a security role are viewed as male, while those with a narrow waist and in a healthcare role is viewed as female. Yet there is also an opportunity for gender norms and stereotypes to be counteracted by intentionally assigning gender in a non-traditional way.

SIGNALS

- Fictional robots in pop culture have often been assigned a gender—C-3PO in Star Wars had a male voice and the Rosey the robot maid on the Jetsons had a female name and characteristics.
- Gender cues may be embodied in social robots in multiple ways (Kittmann et al., 2015). Even a single, minimalist gender cue can trigger a gender interpretation along with normative expectations of behavior.¹
- Robot designers have the opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes in ways that can lead users to rethink gender norms.¹
- Gender cues can be subtle. SoftBank refers to its robot, Pepper, as “he,” although the cinched waist and skirt-like legs suggest a female. SoftBank advertises Pepper as the “first humanoid robot capable of recognizing the principal human emotions and adapting his behavior to the mood of his interlocutor.” Emotion is often considered a female-specific domain; in this instance, the robot creators have countered cultural stereotypes by gendering Pepper male.¹
- Machines and technology increasingly fill more and more human functions. According to researchers, society's gender roles affect the development of robots and artificial intelligence, but technology may also shape ideas about gender.²
- The article, *It's Time to Talk About Robot Gender Stereotypes* (2018),

discusses findings of people assigning gender to different types of robots. A study done by Washington State University (2022), found that people are more comfortable talking to female rather than male robots working in service roles in hotels. Proving that while robots cannot in fact experience gender, they are being assigned gender—and its deliberate in some cases.⁴

- People are more comfortable talking to female rather than male robots working in service roles in hotels, according to new research. The study, which surveyed about 170 people on hypothetical service robot scenarios, also found that the preference was stronger when the robots were described as having more human features.⁵

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM

- As we move as a society toward a greater understanding of gender as a social construct separate from biology and sexual or romantic orientation, robots may help propel the pluralism of gender forward by helping us question stereotypes.
- Intentionally gendered robots also have the potential to set us back—instead, reinforcing gender stereotypes.

EXTRAPOLATIONS/ RELATED TRENDS

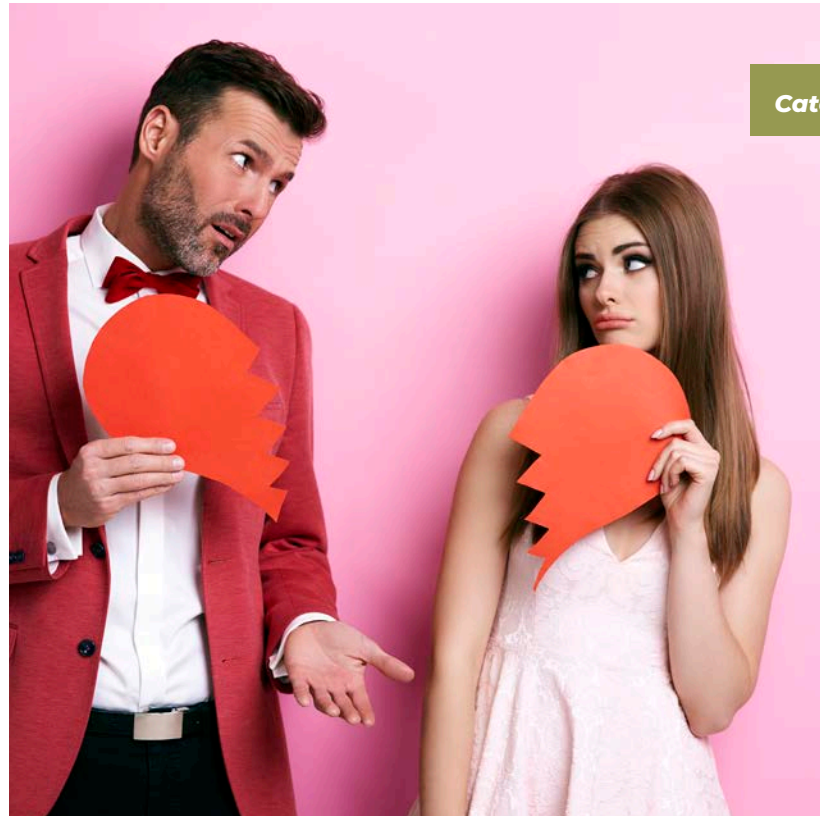
- We have seen a trend toward acceptance of gender as a social construct and something that is personal and individual as opposed to being tied directly to biology. With a younger generation at the helm, there is a

push back against gender norms toward pluralism.³

- Within the next decade or two, humanoid robots will likely be part of our society and how we treat them and interact with them will reflect our own humanity. We have an opportunity now to question the gendering of robots and what that means.

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Category: Social

BRIEF

Breaking up is hard to do. With relationships getting more complicated and more casual—particularly after a global pandemic—the conversations around breakups are changing to include a broader definition of what a break up can mean and how they can be better mitigated.

Changing Face of Breakups

DESCRIPTION

The end of a relationship is a hard thing for most people. Although “ghosting” is more common for casual flings, divorces, and friendship break ups are usually a more drawn out and personal affair. Divorce experts of today are cautioning couples to really look at their relationships before significant commitments (like marriage or having children together) and remember that no one plans to get divorced, but sometimes differences are irreconcilable, and you will likely have this person in your life forever. If couples aren't discussing their finances, their hopes for children, or their expectations for their lives before the marriage, this could lead to significant problems down the line—and lawyers are much more expensive than therapists! Prenuptial agreements are also on the rise, but not just to protect assets. These agreements also protect partners against their spouse's debt and liabilities.

SIGNALS

- “Ghosting,” or cutting off contact with someone without telling them why, is on the rise and not just in romantic relationships. Friends are ghosting friends, too.²
- There's a question of what relationships with exes should be like. Some people want their partners to cut off contact, others want to maintain relationships with their exes because the friendship is valued even when the romantic relationship experienced break down.¹
- Prenuptials are on the rise with lawyers noticing an uptick in millennial marriages signing prenups but not to protect assets. Prenups are more common because partners are also protecting themselves against their partners' debts.⁶
- COVID brought out the “cracks in co-parenting” as different parenting and lifestyles came up against public health measures followed to different degrees by each parent.⁷
- Psychology Today illuminates the grief and emotional upheaval that occurs in the family when parents over 50 divorce. Breakups affect people at all stages of life, not just those with young children.³
- Some experts say that COVID is speeding up a 50/50 co-parenting split for divorced couples while online courts mean agreements are easier to hammer out quickly and without the need for couples to be close geographically to work things out.⁷

- Breakups aren't just for romantic relationships anymore. Break up language is being used to describe the dissolution of friendships, too, while acknowledging the grief and the confusion that often comes with a breakup.⁵

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM

- With prenuptials on the rise, we may start to see more contractual agreements for different types of relationships forming as a means of protection as well as for keeping things honest.
- Conversations around breakups may become more expansive with mental healthcare and lawyers coming in to play for friendship dissolutions or platonic life partnerships that are no longer for life.
- Ghosting is reducing conflict but leaving people more confused than ever on where they stand and if they will ever see a person again. Without closure, the pain of an ending relationship can become more acute.

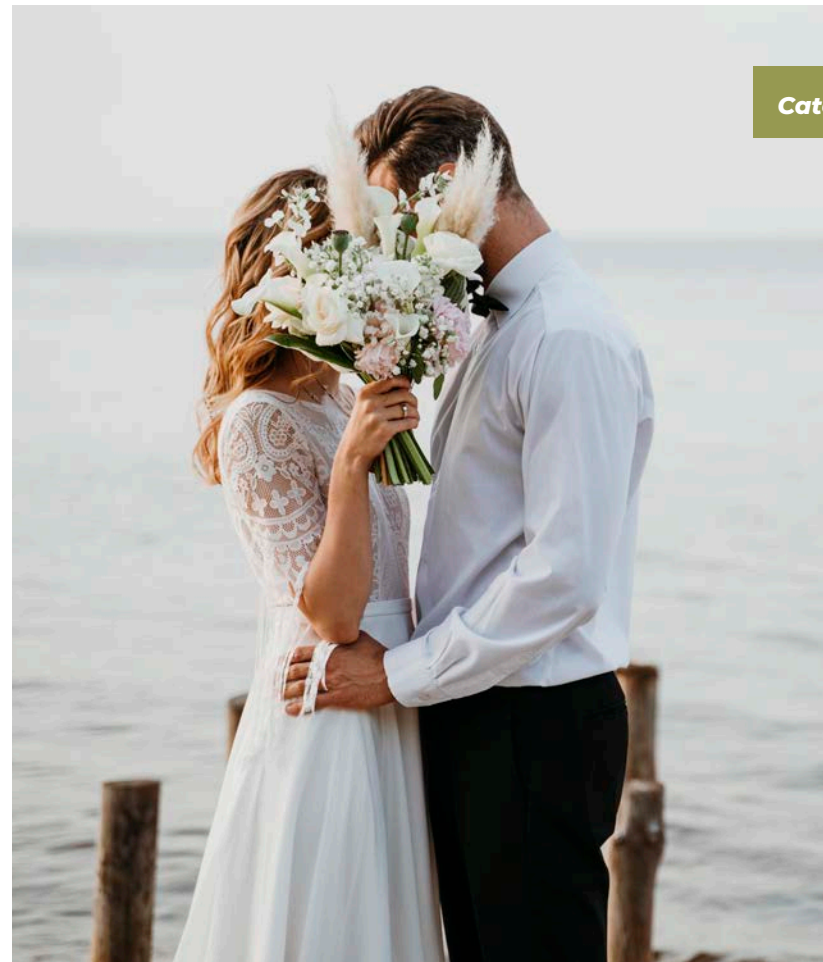
EXTRAPOLATIONS/ RELATED TRENDS

- With contractual agreements expanding, different types of lawyers will likely be required. Although some divorce experts say that divorcing couples shouldn't treat their lawyers like therapists,⁴ this may change.
- If ghosting continues, it will likely mean that people are looking for more ways to disappear from someone's life without the

messy and emotional conflict of telling people how they feel honestly. Dating apps may seek to address this by eliminating the need for dating altogether and attempting to provide the perfect match.

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Category: Values

BRIEF

Less people are choosing to get married; more people are opting to remain single, partake in non-traditional relationships, or lack the skills or availability to get married.

A Move Away from Marriage

DESCRIPTION

Marriage and relationships are evolving. We saw the legalization of same-sex marriage change the landscape, giving more folks the ability to legally marry. Yet there's a large percentage of people opting not to get married or are divorced with no plans to remarry. Non-traditional relationships such as polyamory are on the rise and child rearing is no longer a key reason to get married or stay married.

SIGNALS

- We are nearing a time when there will be more unmarried adults in the United States than married ones, a development with enormous consequences for how we define family and adulthood in general, as well as how we structure taxation and benefits.²

- Poor relationship skills are leading to low marriage rates especially among low-income Americans.³
- Theories for the declining marriage rates include wealth inequalities, the fall in religious adherence, the increase in education and income of women—making women choosier about whom to marry, rising student debt and rising housing costs—forcing people to put off marriage, and some believe marriage is simply an old, outdated tradition that is no longer necessary. However, Zagorsky writes, none of these factors alone can explain the trend.⁴
- The path to adulthood has slowed which could account for less people getting married.⁴
- Currently about 40% of Americans think marriage is obsolete as a concept. While the divorce rate sits around 50%.⁵
- “The United Nations gathered data for roughly 100 countries, showing how marriage rates changed from 1970 to 2005,” Zagorsky notes. “Marriage rates fell in four-fifths of them.”⁴
- Studies have shown that adults in the United States are increasingly postponing marriage, and that a record number of current youth and young adults are projected to forego marriage altogether.⁵
- People are embracing pluralism in their vision of meaningful relationships.⁶
- In the future, marriage will

- be defined by shorter, more renewable contracts, in five year increments, or smaller two year contracts with options to renew.⁷
- Cohabitation without marriage is more common among Millennials than Gen Xers across most racial and ethnic categories, as well as educational attainment.⁸
- “Women around the world are getting married later and part of that is because women are getting more educated and investing in their careers,” Sawyer says, noting a boost in the ratio of college-educated women to college-educated men. “They’ve invested a lot of time and money into college, so they’re getting a job and delaying marriage—if not opting out completely.”⁸

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM

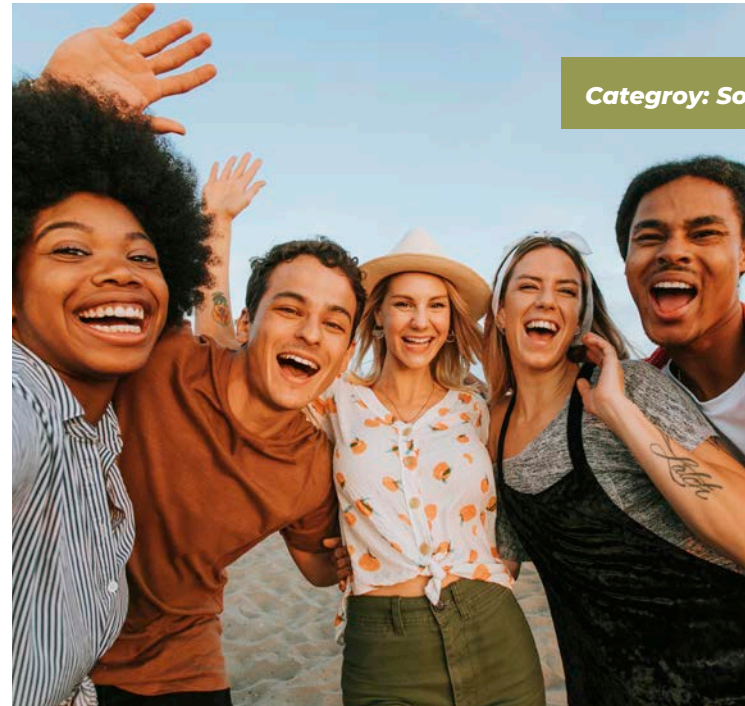
- Finding variations of relationships that work for the people rather than setting marriage as the gold standard that all people must fit into in order to find happiness and security is a more pluralistic approach.
- In the future people may create relationship constructs that are temporary and fluid. More people might opt for communal living arrangements and committed relationships could have broader definitions beyond two people in a legally binding agreement.
- Taxation policy would likely update to be more inclusive rather than favouring marriage and more government funded childcare programs would create security for non-married parents.

EXTRAPOLATIONS/ RELATED TRENDS

- Trend for people to wait until later in life to have children, having less children, or choosing not to have children all together, allows for more flexibility in relationships and creates less urgency to be married.³
- Over a lifetime, unmarried people can pay upwards of \$1 million more than their married counterparts for health care, taxes, and more.¹

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Category: Social and Values, with a focus on Social

BRIEF

Although romantic relationships are still the main subject of relationship columns across digital and print media, a growing space for discussions and celebrations of platonic love and friendships is opening.

Importance of Platonic Relationships

DESCRIPTION

Writers on platonic friendships discuss the pressures of romance that they see from entertainment media and the stories that we consume. For example, in the last ten years, \$2 billion USD 4 has been made telling stories of romance on the big screen but a shift coming. Where once we had stories only about couples and families (*Bewitched*, *The Brady Bunch*), now we are starting to see stories that center friendships as a family unit, like in *How I Met Your Mother* and in Disney's *Encanto*.⁴ If the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves is changing, then the way that we act on our relationships in our own lives is likely to change, too. We are seeing more and more people open about platonic life partnerships and people who choose independently of romance to have and raise children together.^{8 2} Although no one is claiming that romantic love should be tossed to the wind, the movement towards intimate friendships is pushing a growing sense of community and the belief that maybe one person can't give you everything you need for the rest of your life.

SIGNALS

- Until very recently, the term “breakups” would rarely call to mind the dissolution of a friendship, but that is changing. Particularly as we age, friendships become more and more important to our social beings, but many people get to a point where they realized they prioritized family and children over their friends.⁵
- Men are less likely than women to have long-term and deep friendships with other men – despite needing them, too! Relationships outside of the romantic relationships are important for personal growth.⁷
- Disney is starting to move away from the “happily ever after” fairy tale and is telling stories of friends and family love like *Frozen* and *Encanto*.⁴
- New trend of elective co-parenting is growing as friends commit to raise children together without the pressure of “keeping the romance alive.” Some of these partnerships are between friends, but some occur through matchmaking services.⁸
- There are now “dating” apps for friendships. These apps are not based just on proximity or sexual orientation like traditional dating apps but also include things like “mutual friends and data from in-app quizzes to test compatibility.”⁶
- Often neglected thematically, sitcoms are giving rise to friends-as-family units with “romantic partnerships are ancillary, funneling in and out” such as

How I Met Your Mother, *Friends*, and even *Community*.²

- Friendships are becoming more intimate with people finding far more support in their platonic friendships than in romantic ones.¹³

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM

- There may be a rise in legal needs for platonic life partnerships as well as friendships that serve a specific needs-based purpose for those in them (ie, raising a child together).
- We may start to see more conversations around friendship break ups and what kind of emotional toll that takes on those inside of them.
- Platonic friendships may be given similar societal rights (benefits sharing, housing sharing) as values shift to accommodate deep and meaningful relationships outside of marriage or romantic coupling.

EXTRAPOLATIONS/ RELATED TRENDS

- Contractual agreements for co-parenting, co-housing, or needs-based-arrangements may become more common.
- Dating apps for friendships will likely be on the rise, particularly for older generations in the coming years who find themselves with empty nests.

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Category: Social and Values, with a focus on Values

BRIEF

Conversations about polyamory and open relationships as a viable way not just to experience romance but also to share a family and life's great adventures with is on the rise and becoming more visible in popular culture.

Polyamory and Open Relationships

DESCRIPTION

Polyamory is the consensual practice of non-monogamy. This could mean that partnerships include three or more people, or two people in a relationship also participate in intimate and/or sexual relationships with other people. Often confused with polygamy, polyamory is secular and allows for all partners to participate in relationships to fulfill their emotional and sexual needs outside of a core partnership. Polyamory and open relationships can take many shapes and can involve raising a family together or adult-only fulfillment. Although we have seen some instances of polygamy play out in popular media (Big Love, Sister Wives) and there is a growing space in relationship advice columns and online communities, polyamory is mostly neglected in pop culture story lines.

SIGNALS

- A Canadian court in Newfoundland has officially declared three parents the legal guardians of one child, paving the way for more families to expand their definitions beyond the nuclear two parents with children model.²
- Dating apps are opening the polyamorous game. With special selections not just for sexuality but also for relationship styles, those interested in pursuing relationships with more than one partner are able to do so with people who are prepared for those conversations.⁶
- More relationship columns are involving the complicated and sometimes messy aspects of polyamorous and open relationships.^{3,4,7}
- Terms like "swingers" are falling to the wayside while language like "ethical non-monogamy" is rising to explain the long-term and consensual practice of polyamorous partners.

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM

- New legal formats may be required to help solidify polyamorous family units for equitable access to benefits, tax breaks, and housing access.
- Honesty is the best policy, and we may see more concrete forms of relationship definitions come out in the form of contracts or written agreements that explicitly state the contributions of each partner.
- We may start to see more stories being told that involve

polyamorous partnerships rather than traditional monogamous partnerships.

- Religious groups will likely form counter protests to any progress made for pluralistic relationships.
- Housing designs may change to be built bigger or be built with floor plans that accommodate several relationships and family units within one location.

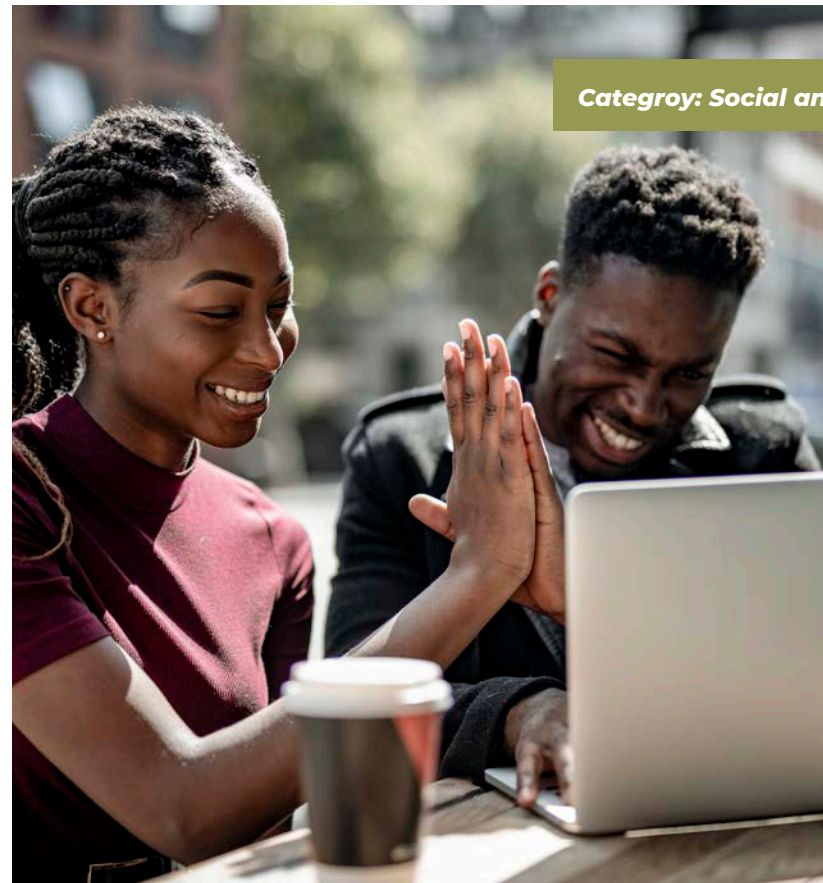


EXTRAPOLATIONS/RELATED TRENDS

- The definition of "family" will likely change to accommodate more pluralistic relationship and family styles that will require legal adjustments.
- Health systems may need to be adapted to ensure that sexual practices remain safe for society.
- There may be a shift in social values regarding sexual attitudes, parenting styles, and living arrangements. Traditional narratives around acceptable norms may be revised to be more accepting and non-judgmental.

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Category: Social and Values, with a focus on Values

BRIEF

Individuals in relationships have started to draft 'relationship contracts' as a tool to set guidelines for their relationship and to better communicate expectations to their partners.

Relationship Contracts

DESCRIPTION

Couples have started to integrate a non-binding contract into their relationships as a tool to set the tone and expectation of their relationships. The contract can range from being as simple as a checklist to heavily detailed mimicking that a legal contract. The aim and intention of these contractual agreements is to ensure that individuals in the relationship have laid out certain expectations of themselves and their partners in order to have a healthy and fulfilling relationship. No individual is perfect, and the contract thus highlights how partners in a relationship can support each other and make accommodations when needed. They also set themselves up for success in their relationship by providing structure around quality time, arguments, and tricky areas of a relationship. Open discussions and a written agreement about various aspects of a relationship seem to foster and craft the parameters of their own unique roadmap to a fulfilling relationship.

SIGNALS

- A relationship coach outlines the template for a relationship contracts that details expectations partners should have for each other.¹
- Setting boundaries in a relationship is important, especially if you're planning on keeping your partner around for a while and some rules are less obvious. Using contracts helps one define the concept of 'common courtesy' and solidify the base for a long and successful relationship.²
- Romantic relationships of varying degrees have been tested during the pandemic and continuing to evolve because of it. Some are emerging stronger than ever, while others are calling it quits as the distance and isolation has changed the dynamic for many.³
- Last year, a woman drafted a 17-page 'Relationship Terms and Conditions' for her tinder match after two weeks of dating that outlined boundaries, communication expectations and guidelines that they continue to uphold as their one-year anniversary comes up. They posted their 'terms and conditions' on TikTok, which went viral, prompting other creators on the app to draft similar documents for their relationships.⁴
- Gen Z are redefining romance in the age of digital dating. They're challenging the ideas from the rom-coms of the late 90s and early 2000's and exploring the multifaceted nature of romantic relationships.^{5,10}

- Wearable technology is helping couples elevate the communication in their relationships via their fitness watches. Certain apps can help couples send reminders and affectionate messages to each other on their Apple Watches, in addition to their regular communication via their mobile phones.^{6,8,9}

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM:

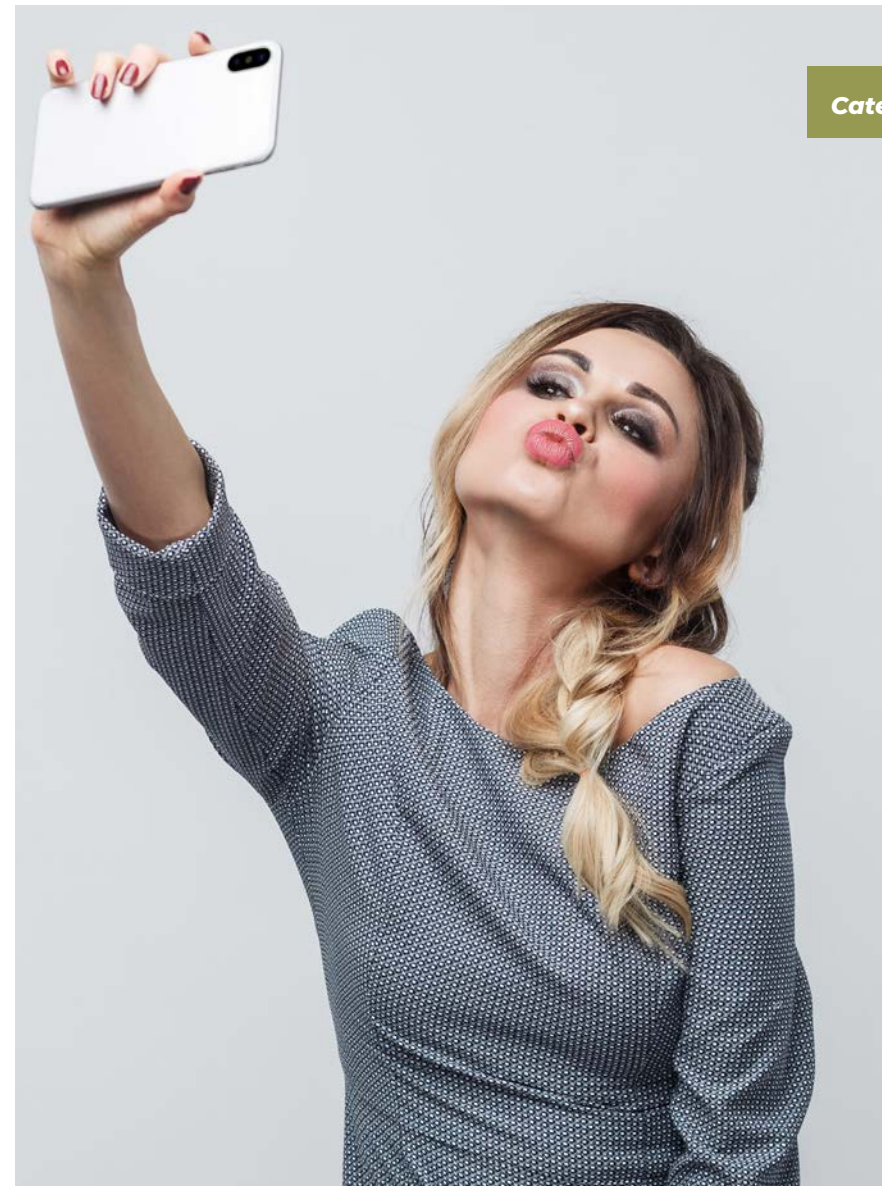
- Relationship contracts can support pluralism positively as unique individuals entering a relationship will not need to compromise their individual self for the sake of their partner's whims. Negotiations and accommodations can allow each individual to thrive in the relationship while also allowing the other partner to empathize and understand the other's needs.
- We may start to see the relationship contracts become more unique and specific to the different types of relationship they cater. Although they are not legally binding, they can be used as leverage to sway parties in the relationship.

EXTRAPOLATIONS/ RELATED TRENDS

- Increased use of dating apps.
- Prevalence of hook-up culture.
- Declining rate of marriage and mistrust in the institution of marriage.
- Increased integration of smart technology into daily lives.

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Category: Values

BRIEF

Narcissism
defeats empathy.

Rise of Narcissism

DESCRIPTION

Although the roots and study of narcissistic traits can be traced back to 8AD—the proliferation of the trait today has transcended its ironically humble beginnings creating with it a plethora of body image issues, novelty-seeking behaviors and at times, dangerous fads.

SIGNALS

- The average person takes 450 selfies in a year.⁷
- Teens challenge one another to eat laundry pods.¹
- NASA's new space telescope has captured its first starlight and even taken a selfie of its giant, gold mirror.²
- Teens are becoming more narcissistic and more preoccupied with crafting their image on social media.³
- Teens who use social media over 3 hours per day are more likely to experience mental health problems.³
- 1 out of 50 people in the United States experience body dysmorphia and this statistic will probably worsen if our relationship to social media doesn't change.⁴
- The reality of narcissistic personality disorder is being distorted by the internet.⁶
- Narcissist may use tactics to try to manipulate romantic partners.⁸

IMPLICATIONS TO PLURALISM:

- A self-centered worldview creates an increasing propensity for intolerance.
- Ideals of beauty become uniform, not pluralistic.
- Discriminatory practices become widely accepted.

EXTRAPOLATIONS/RELATED TRENDS:

- Attention driven economies.
- Being famous becomes conflated with becoming unforgettable.
- Self-confidence and perceptions of self-worth are dependent on aesthetics.

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CITED TRENDS

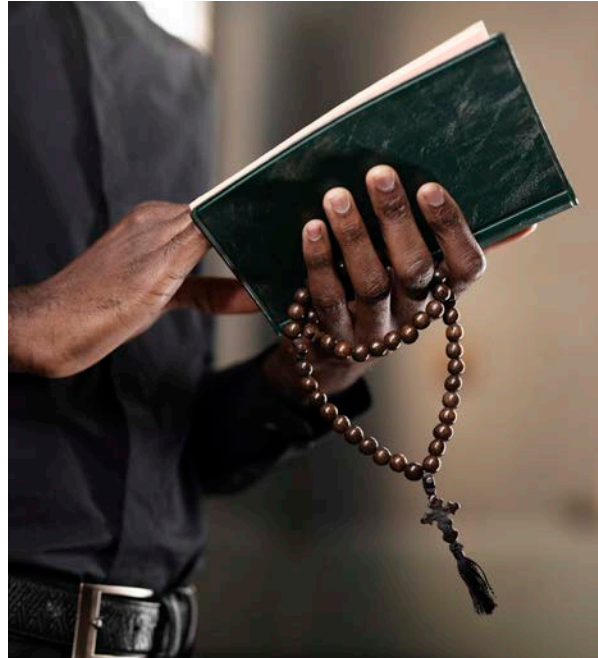
Category: Social

Intimate Partner Violence Increases

Shwenck, C. (2022). Intimate Partner Violence Increases. SFIN-6021-001 (Winter 2022) Foresight Studio. Project 1: Information Gathering. OCAD University.

BRIEF

Driven largely by government-mandated lock downs and self-isolation, rates of intimate partner violence have seen a dramatic increase in recent years. On top of the detrimental effects of self-isolation, trauma, and violence inflicted by those closest to us can be devastating, to say the least. This may preempt a dramatic increase in demand for both physical and mental health services, now and into the future, adding even greater stress to overburdened healthcare systems.



Category: Social

Post-Covid Religion: Persevere or Perish

Nambiar, R. (2022). Post-Covid Religion: Persevere or Perish. SFIN-6021-001 (Winter 2022) Foresight Studio. Project 1: Information Gathering. OCAD University.

BRIEF

Religions that don't emulate technology will eventually lose followers and will hang on a thin thread of existence. The major religions of the world will find themselves at a crossroads of integrating technology holistically into religious ceremonies or succumbing to alternate religions that offer hope to the virtual faithful. Given how science and technology have been kept away from religion for long time, this might shift paradigms and impact how societal structure may be shaped and what people might expect from religion.



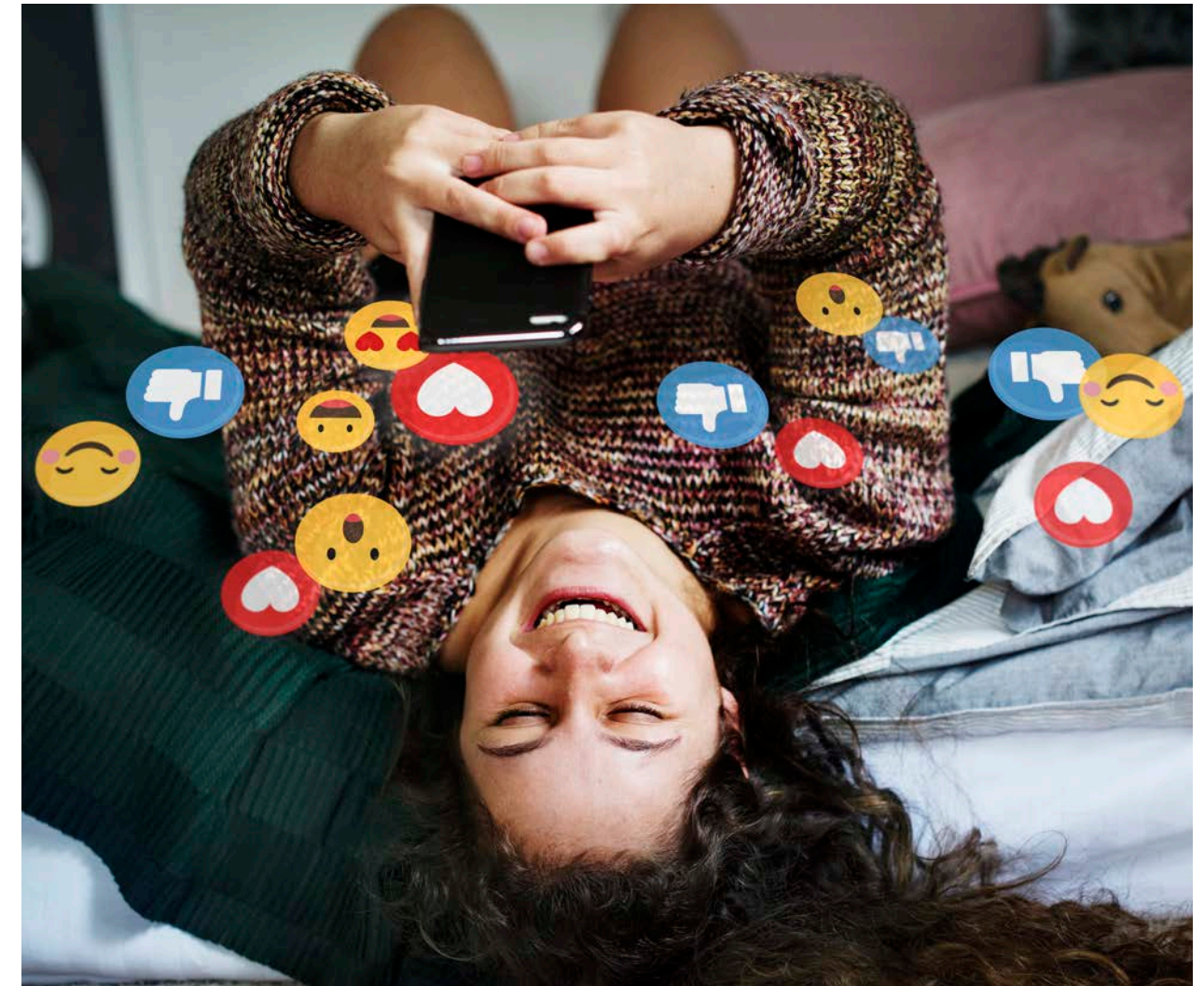
Category: Social

Always Room for More

Paano, C. (2022). Always Room for More. SFIN-6021-001 (Winter 2022) Foresight Studio. Project 1: Information Gathering. OCAD University.

BRIEF

Due to Covid-19 lockdowns, there has been an increased use of online dating applications to make friends as people spend more time at home. Making friends online has been the norm for most online gamers, and now it has expanded within dating platforms to have a separate feature that allow you to seek friendships. Matching with people that have similar interests so that they are able to form meaningful platonic bonds has helped many cope with the stress of the pandemic.





Alex
Jaworiwsky

Scope and Context

Defining Relationships

Relationships are evolving. Even semantically, the word “relationship” seems to be shifting, where once it invoked the idea of a romantic connection between two people, it may now mean a romantic relationship between more than two people, a close friendship, or a platonic life commitment.

For the purposes of our exploration and study into the future of relationships, we formulated our research question to move away from the idea of traditional romantic or long-term relationships, which often connote marriage and sexual intimacy, and into a definition that better suits the trends we identified. Our research question for our scenarios is:

What will consensual and mutually satisfying relationships look like in Canada and the United States in 2040?

The pursuit of love and the formation of chosen relationships is what makes us human, but there are layers of systems, worldviews, and unconscious beliefs that define what a relationship should be, and not often what we want it to be. What they can be ties deeply into the our definition of

pluralism. While religion and governments seem to take root in a “one true way” for relationships, and society has typically followed suit, there seems to be a societal shift in North American and Western culture in recent years. The consensual and mutually satisfying relationships of the present appear to be shifting towards a future where a relationship can be individually defined by the people in them and more accepted by the society these relationships operate within. Thus, for our work in relationships and pluralism, we defined pluralism as:

The freedom of individuals with diverse beliefs and lifestyles to define their own relationship values without fear of social or moral judgment, and to have these values recognized and represented in all aspects of societal structures.

Under this definition of pluralism and with our research question in mind, the audience we chose to address with our scenarios is media production companies to offer insights about their future programming with the goal of increased representation for different relationship styles.

The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) was chosen to drill down into deep myths. Relationships exist under layers of systems, worldviews, and values that we do not often explore and challenge. Using the CLA as our tool for scenario building meant that we could explore the deep myths that form these layers and build scenarios that pivot away from or build upon our trends.

As identified in our present day CLA, the deep myth we sought to challenge when crafting future scenarios was the idea of “happily ever after” being the primary goal of couples which often reflects that relationships should be exclusive and forever. Current findings supported this myth, even if we have started to see some movement away from it.

From the present day CLA we identified trends to explore in our future CLAs. These included inquiry areas like living situations, sex and sexual preferences, love, finances, timeframes and commitment styles, number of people, contributing technologies, as well as trust and respect.

LITANY THEMES

- Changing relationship definitions & norms: polyamory, technology evolution, new relationship milestones
- Marriage rates declining
- Living trends still focused on single family homes, but it’s evolving
- Relationship breakdowns still carry messages of failure

STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

- Traditional marriage is declining as divorce is getting easier
- Relationships are not necessarily following a traditional structure: Meet > Date > Move in > Marriage > Family > Divorce / Death
- Relationships viewed as partnerships rather than reliance on one partner over the other
- Relationship contracts with needs and expectations more prevalent
- Platonic friendships and romantic relationships being equally valued

WORLDVIEWS & VALUES

Traditional

- Patriarchal structures
- Women taking the backseat to men
- Family timeline pressures
- Marriage/relationships are between two people
- Must be married to have kids

Progressive

- Women and men are equal partners
- Romantic partnerships are not required for life fulfillment
- Sexuality, gender, and more people in relationships becoming more fluid

Trend Spotting

Although relevant trends had been identified during classwork that supported a shift in relationships of the future, one area of signals we chose to explore was relationship advice columns from the present day as well as from six or seven years ago. The differences helped us to understand where we may end up in another seven years, as well as in 2040. The columns from 2015 and 2016 focused primarily on marriage: whether people are ready¹, what divorce experts wished people knew², and whether equality would be best measured by women getting down on one knee³. One article⁴ did mention open relationships, but that there was only one way to make them work.

For contemporary trends in relationship advice columns, far more diversity in relationship styles is presented. Explainers on sexuality and gender are showing up as well as tips and tricks for the best dating app experiences. Another increasing trend seems to be open relationships and polyamory, with multiple perspectives on how these styles of relationships work for different people and their pairings⁵⁻⁸. Other headlines to note are about long-term and committed platonic relationships⁹ as well as single and straight friends who have chosen to have a child together¹⁰, demonstrating the shift in the definitions of relationships and families. The times are changing very quickly in consensual and mutually satisfying relationships which means that the future landscape of relationships may vary significantly from the present day.

Beyond relationship columns, we also saw articles and statistics about already declining rates of marriage^{11,12}, how relationships start through online dating¹³⁻¹⁶, and the changing nature of what makes relationships official.

**PRESENT DAY
DEEP MYTH**

**Happily
Ever
After**

The Present Day

Drawing on contemporary trends, we first identified some common themes within the litany of our present day CLA including declining marriage rates; changing relationship definitions and norms; living trends of relationships; how dissolution of relationships happens; and what dating looks like.

From there, we explored the systems that support these themes such as an easier path towards divorce; changing social expectations and timelines for relationships; a persistent inclination for building homes with a single family in mind; and the declining formal patterns of relationships

that have traditionally presented as Meet > Date > Move in > Marriage > Family > Divorce / Death.

At the worldview and values level, far more insight was gained. Here, we separated our ideas into three columns (traditional, progressive, and the middle ground of tension) while three rows were identified to further organize that included cultural, religious, and familial worldviews and value systems. This allowed us to organize opposing ideas within the same level and further drill down into the deep myths that supported them.

Ultimately, we identified the deep and pervasive myth to be that relationships should be exclusive and forever.

2040 Scenarios

Building from the present day CLA, we reversed engineered four additional CLAs to provide deep myths and key elements for possible future scenarios:

01.	02.	03.	04.
Flying Solo	Love Isn't Blind	Variety is the Spice of Life	The More the Merrier

Each of these scenarios would assist in developing programming for entertainment companies that inform changes for other significant value systems such as religion, work, care, and community that people expect to see depicted in their media.

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Aisha
K

Scenario One

Flying Solo

This future scenario stems from the deep myth of flying solo indicating a rise in individualism and a more self-serving orientation towards relationships. The current trends indicate that by 2040, the institution of marriage is socially obsolete.

The heteronormative marriage was centered around parenting children and raising a family. With the rise in alternative methods of pregnancy and more inclusive definitions of relationships, individuals find the traditional structure of marriage redundant and outdated. Birth rates and marriage rates are at their lowest in 2040. Having children is an intentional choice and individuals can make this decision without the involvement of a partner or social influences.

The expense on legal proceedings around child custody and divorce settlements far outweighs the benefits of retaining the traditional family structure. Individuals do not feel the moral or social need to commit to a marriage to be with another person. If there is a need for legal recognition of a partnership, there are several other more flexible options available.

Women prioritize their career and financial independence over giving birth. Settling down and having a family are no longer a priority and individual needs take precedence for most of the population. The wedding industry is replaced by the pregnancy industry and innovations in reproductive health are on the rise.

Gender roles and sexual preferences are fluid and relationship contracts are personalized to meet individual needs. The media representation of relationships is no longer the suburban “desperate housewives” but more like a diverse and inclusive episode of “modern love”. Those choosing to get married are a minority and continue to do so primarily due to their religious or moral beliefs.

Virtual relationships and living apart together is the norm in 2040. Individuals like to have their own space as it gives them the freedom to define and develop relationships according to their personal needs. All sexualities are represented in the mainstream media without any moral or religious judgment.

Trends and Drivers

In the recent years, we have seen societal shifts in North America that display that many people are opting out of the institution of marriage. As societies become more inclusive and diverse, individuals are gaining greater financial independence to make choices that serve their own goals.^{12,18}

Relationships are changing to reflect every individual's own needs and sexual preferences. Contemporary worldviews point to a greater shift towards individualism and rising subcultures of gender and sexual identities that do not conform to the traditional heteronormative idea of a marriage.^{9,16,21}

The pandemic has created a greater need for frugality as well as accelerated the digital transformation. As a result, there are shifts in the workforce that will have long lasting impacts. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023), many women and marginalized population groups were financially constrained. As a result, they delayed the traditional commitment of marriage as well as having children. This accelerates the already declining birth rate and marriage rate.^{6,11,17}

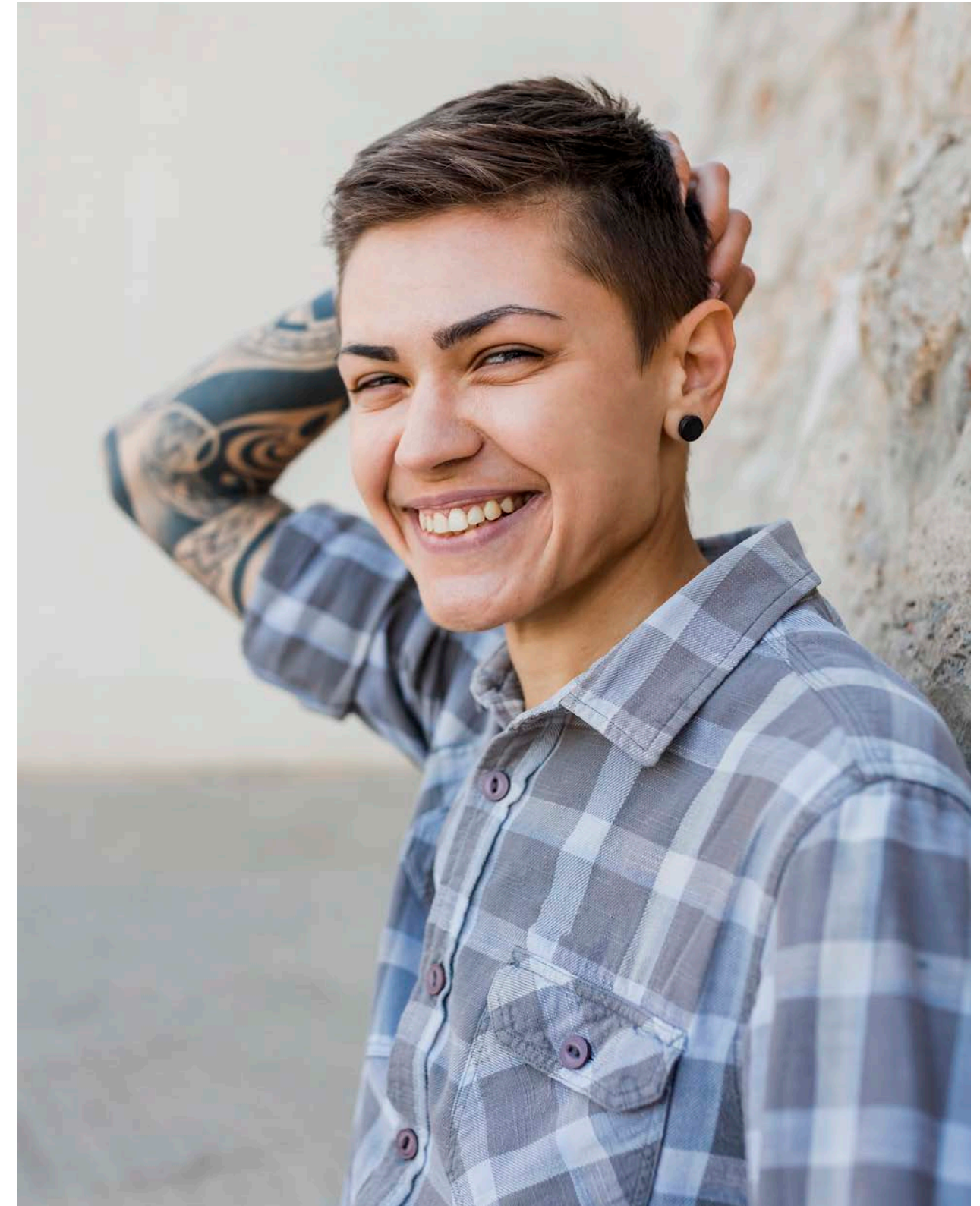
Scenario in the Context of Pluralism

While there is greater representation of diverse sexualities and gender identities which positively impacts pluralism, there is also a polarization in society in the post pandemic world. The trends point to greater income inequality in terms of affording children. The younger age group, racialized minorities and the lower income segment are the most adversely impacted by the pandemic in this regard.^{22,26}

There is also a clear divide between the religious segments and the conservatives who advocate the traditional institution of marriage and are distressed by the dissolution of the traditional family unit.²⁵

As families becomes more diverse, those who are not in a legal partnership are economically disadvantaged unless taxation laws and other economic benefits are reformed to benefit all individuals irrespective of their partnership status.²

The overall rise of individualism is also in contrast to a more collective idea of a pluralistic society.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

My Happily Ever After

DIANE WAS JOLTED AWAKE BY HER 5 AM ALARM AND HURRIEDLY TURNED IT OFF. SHE TURNED AROUND TO SEE IF THE WOMAN LYING NEXT TO HER WAS DISTURBED BY IT. SHE SLOWLY SNUCK OUT OF BED AND LEFT THE HOTEL ROOM QUIETLY.

As she drove home, she thought about how little they knew about each other despite numerous meet ups in random hotel rooms for casual sex over the last year.²¹ Even the names they used were fake. It occurred to her that she no longer found the sex exciting and last night wasn't particularly fun. She made a mental note that it was time to move on and look for someone new. This was beginning to seem cumbersome.

When she walked in the door, she checked in to see if Jake, her 12-year-old child, was still asleep. They were already up and in the shower. *I'm so proud I'm raising such an independent child*, she thought. Diane had adopted Jake ten years ago from a local adoption agency. *How time flies*, she thought to herself.

In the kitchen, Dev had left freshly brewed coffee. Her watch vibrated with a message from him. "You must be home by now. See you next Saturday. Love, D"

As she sipped her coffee and settled into the calm of her morning routine with a view of the snow-covered back patio and her brightly lit Christmas tree, she mentally ran through the presents she had to get for the annual family dinner. It was complicated as the list changed every

year with most of her cousins and even her aunts and uncles no longer in permanent relationships. She sent off a quick message to her assistant to consolidate an updated list and shifted her focus back to the relationships in her life.

Dev is such a blessing, she thought to herself. They had been "living apart together" for five years in an open relationship. The only commitment was to be together if they were both happy in the relationship. Dev lived with his partner Andrew while Diane and Jake made up their own family.^{9,16} Jake loved Dev and got along great with Andrew but understood that Diane was the only parent.

She was startled by a hug from Jake, who proceeded to grab a granola bar for their daily walk to school. "Grandma called last night. She said to say hi," Jake told her, heading for the door. "Bye! Love you!" Diane called back.

We should plan a vacation soon, she thought to herself. Jake will leave for college before I know it and then we will hardly see each other. She made a mental note to get the red skirt they wanted for Christmas. Jake liked mixing it up.^{9,16}

She thought back to her own childhood when heteronormative marriage was the norm and the life that she was living as a 45-year-old woman in 2040 would have been a far-fetched dream. Diane had grown up in a traditional, religious household where it was the expectation that she would get married and settle down one day. Then the pandemic hit in 2020 and she witnessed the financial struggles of the people around her.^{15,26} It

was then that she started to envision an alternate path where she could prioritize her own interests and wellbeing.^{6,12,18}

Jake's world was a sharp contrast to her own childhood. Nobody in their social circle was married.^{3,20} Jake wasn't burdened with any expectations of raising a family or settling down. Jake was free to choose the life they wanted without the burden of societal expectations. She

felt a slight pang of envy and wondered if her life choices would have been different had she grown up in the present times.

Her alarm went off once again and she was jolted out of her reverie. She was running late to accompany Sandra for her egg freezing appointment.^{11,12,24} She rushed upstairs to take a bath to start another day.



Insights from the CLA

DEEP MYTH

- Flying Solo

WORLDVIEWS & VALUES

- Individuals define their own family structures and relationship values
- My money is my money
- Gender roles and sexual identities are fluid
- My primary relationship is with myself

STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

- Decline in birth rates and traditional marriages along with an increase in divorce rates
- Families are varied and inclusive such as blended families, single parent families, living apart together
- Relationships are equal partnerships with fluid gender roles and sexual identities and are not limited to two individuals
- Permissive society for authentic sexual and/or emotional connection

LITANY

- Are we a family?
- Mutually negotiated values around commitment, finances, duration, living arrangements, and fidelity amongst other things in a relationship
- I will stay as long as I am happy with this arrangement



BACKCASTING

NOW

- Women delay marriage and children to prioritize career especially after massive job losses in the pandemic^{6,12,15,22}
- Surrogacy and alternative methods of pregnancy on the rise for the elite^{7,8,12}
- Decline in birth rates and marriages, increase in divorce rates^{1-4,10-12,14,17,18,20,24,25}
- Greater representation and rising acceptance of gender fluidity and bisexuality^{9,16,21}

2025

- More women gaining financial independence either through employment or entrepreneurship
- More public and private investments in childcare
- Lifestyle shifts towards economy after the pandemic
- Individuals questioning the status quo and their own priorities in the aftermath of “the great resignation.”

2030

- Social expectations and/or traditional values around relationships are on a decline
- Most children are born out of wedlock.
- Individuals do not need a partner to raise a child. It is a conscious and intentional choice to be a parent and not merely a biological need.
- Surrogacy and other methods of artificial pregnancies on the rise
- Living apart together is prevalent

2035

- Virtual relationships are on the rise
- Taboos and fetishes around sexuality are normalized
- Marriage and birth rate are at an all-time low, divorce rates keep increasing
- Gender fluidity and varying sexual preferences are normalized and represented in mainstream media

2035 (cont.)

- Single parent families or blended families are the prevalent family structure
- Communal living on the rise for singles

2040

- Marriage is outdated and obsolete
- Relationships are diverse, personalized and negotiated amongst multiple individuals
- Investments and innovations in reproductive health are booming as having and raising a child becomes a privilege⁷
- Relationships are formed and sustained to satisfy mutual needs without the influence of social or moral mores and norms
- Proponents of the traditional institution of marriage are a minority and marginalized³
- Society pushes to adapt taxation and other economic benefits to favor single individuals who are not in legally recognized partnerships²

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Scenario Two

Love isn't Blind, It's Better Assigned!

The following future scenario stems from the deep myth that assigned relationships are not only pragmatic but also superior to other coupling methods.

Whether it's McDonald's advertising the iconic McFlurry® on a digital billboard in the middle of a scorching summer day in downtown Toronto, or Walmart hiring Lockheed Martin to monitor and neutralize the threat of worker unionization, the present-day advancements in artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning have reinforced the ancient wisdom that knowledge is indeed power. Yet, when it comes to dating and finding compatible companions for long-term investments, the "meet markets" have failed to use this data in achievable large-scale advancements. The freedom-gorging West struggles with too much choice and decision fatigue while traditional expectations in the East rely strongly on cultural conformity. From teenage angst rebelling against bossy parents and lusting after bad boy characters in Europe and North

America to arranged marriages and forced or coerced dowry motivated child marriage in the Middle East and South Asia,² present worldviews on matchmaking vary in both cultural contexts and the degrees of assignment compatibility. Both extremes illustrate the universal truth in matchmaking: the function of control. Yet in 2040 these culturally entrenched extremes soften towards a more unified and pragmatic approach, where the choice of partner isn't in the hands of well-intentioned parents, or clueless teenagers but in algorithms and robust sets of data.

In early 2020 as COVID-19 forced millions into isolation, an environment of mental illness was able to flourish. Given its natural ability to break the spirit, loneliness has traditionally been employed as a form of punishment³ from sitting in the corner for mischievous childhood deeds to solitary confinement in some of the harshest prisons. Sixty years ago, less than 10% of households comprised of one person while more recently this number hovers between 25% and

60% depending on geographic location.⁴ Isolation meant people spending time mostly alone while gorging on streamed content, with human interaction limited through a screen on video chats and through social media engagement as the owners of these companies watch them closer than friends or family, and use their data to sell them exactly what they think they need.

In late 2013, data broker MEDbase 200 marketed and sold lists of rape victims, alcoholics, and those who suffer from erectile dysfunction for a mere \$79 per 1,000 names.⁷ Advertisers bought them up and preyed on the weaknesses of these vulnerable populations. Today, it's estimated that the data brokerage industry has roughly 2,800 data points on the average American. If this data can be legally used to sell you generic Viagra or a rape whistle, there's no reason why it shouldn't be used to find you a long-lasting relationship in which both the Viagra and the rape whistle ideally turn obsolete.

These signals are ones of both basis and alarm to the bigger trend that may lay ahead and suggest the collision and convergence of suppressed socialization, hyper individualization, and data collection may very well lead to a near and inevitable future of standardized relationship assignment, perhaps marketed as the only trendy and modern way to stay relevant and to couple. Shopping for your own groceries or choosing your own partner would be unbecoming of the modern 2040 consumerist West. Such simple and menial chores may be better suited for a growing lower class or the counter-culture fringe.

Author's Note: There are an estimated 4,000 data brokers in the world including Acxiom whom regulators forced into offering a portal that allows consumers to view the data collected about them. If you'd like to see what Acxiom knows about you, visit: <https://www.acxiom.com/caconsumer/relationships>. Increasing individualism and disdain of hookup culture creates the conditions that would encourage individuals to go into relationship arrangements with certain expectations in hand that would be structured around a firm set of rules and obligations.

Scenario in the Context of Pluralism

If assignment becomes the trend based on algorithms and data points, we may see the prejudices of AI¹⁰ drive relationship matchmaking as much as the things we shop for, like, and engage with. With a growing reliance on technology for facilitating and managing our relationships, we may see relationships turn into an explicit competition for "the best match" with factors that include money and socio-economic status while neglecting humanness in a partnership. As mentioned, this could increase class divide and racial tensions that drive people further into sameness and communities further away from each other as people.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

In Bed with Ved: Ending the Meet Market

QUESTION: AFTER YEARS OF CASUAL DATING, I FEEL LIKE MY THIRST FOR DATING ADVENTURES HAS COMPLETELY DRIED UP. I'M TIRED OF RE-HASHING MY LIFE TO STRANGERS ONLY TO REALIZE THEY'RE NOT A FIT. I'M IN MY LATE 30s AND I FEEL LIKE I MISSED THE TRAIN. MY PARENTS MET ON TINDER WHEN THEY WERE JUST 20 AND DIVORCED RIGHT AFTER HAVING ME. THE FEAR OF GETTING OLD ALONE IS CREEPING IN. I'M TERRIFIED OF A PERMANENT ASSIGNMENT, AND THE IMPLICATIONS IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT LIKE WITH MY PARENTS.
- LUKE

ANSWER: You've grown both emotionally and intellectually since your 20s and so have most of the people in your assignment range. We are complex and individual beings with needs, wants, fears and aspirations; our assignees ought to reflect all those factors. Perhaps consider reflecting on your casual dating spree as favoring breakfast cereal based on color and taste, and your assignment as choosing based on taste and nutrition. The algorithms and science of assignment have come a long way since the archaic days of swiping left and right on highly manipulated photos. The days of taking a thousand selfies for one good shot which you inevitably filter and FaceTune (look it up!) are behind us. So are the exhausting chores of ghosting, replying, setting up infinite meetings with zero guarantees and all the risk of emotional and mental turmoil that may follow. Therapy isn't cheap. Just ask the whopping 56% of divorced Canadian couples,

who cite incompatibility and growing apart as the number one reason for ending their marriages. The financial and emotional harms of these separations tend to add up quickly and can pose serious health and well-being risks to not just the separating couples but also their pets and their offspring – just ask your parents.

With machine learning, the formulas for calculating short, medium, and long term compatibility assignments consider over 3.6 million sourced data points such as characteristics, past behavior, personality traits, values, skills, preferences, and emotional health. Combined with the intake survey and the relationship ledger blockchain chronology these calculations can produce only one assignment: the right one. We then further validate the potential assignment by continuously monitoring and updating the data set over a period of up to 24 months with a series of proprietary regression analyses delivering a breathtaking industry first of 99% level of assignment confidence. Furthering this confidence level, the patterns of behavior are analyzed for changing trends and projected across your estimated lifespan. Within hours of an assignment adjudication, your file is automatically registered with the government assignment office and your golden envelope is sent to both yourself and your life-time assignee. Additionally, your tax and social benefits are applied retroactively to the date you completed your intake survey.

For the assignment seekers with inconsistent patterns of past behavior and/or low reputation scores, your matching potential no longer needs

to be adversely impacted with the optional AssignOne+ self-correction program subscription. Proprietary and tamper resistant evaluations are repeatedly administered and evaluated for gaps in your character. Successfully graduated seekers can achieve up to five years of adverse data amnesty from their assignment criteria, allowing for an even greater quality of assignment.

Additionally, mental health therapists and anxiety managers are accessible to you during and after your assignment – I'm happy to share this portion of the service has become progressively underutilized by our assignees. With these breakthrough advancements in evidence backed assignment and self-correction you can be confident that AssignOne promotes substantially

better romantic outcomes than both conventional and online dating methodologies. We know this from our rolling transparency report in which over 98% of assignments have chosen to remain in exclusive monogamous assignments since the launch of AssignOne roughly ten years ago. Luke, you wouldn't manually drive a fossil fueled car, so why date like a fossil? It's 2040. Stop dating and start living.

BIO: Ved is a techno futurist with training in behavioral psychology and strategic foresight. Ved and his assignee Matthew developed and patented the AssignOne assignment algorithm in the Super Ordinary Lab at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada.



Insights from the CLA

DEEP MYTH

- Love isn't blind, it's better assigned!

WORLDVIEWS & VALUES

- "Following your heart" in decline
- Trust in the system of technology for relationship decision making; decision fatigue declining
- Efficiency is valued
- Authenticity is expected

STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

- Robust personality testing available in adulthood
- Consent-based assignment mechanisms through AI/algorithmic technology and matchmaking app
- Assignment consultants growing as a career, similar to therapists
- Language shifts: "partner" has turned into "assignment"
- Diversity in relationships increases

LITANY

- People are writing in for relationship advice to magazines
- Assignments are cool and trendy; "free-dating" is growing out of fashion



BACKCASTING

NOW

- Hook up culture may be in decline after COVID-19 and social media boasts protect of one's energy⁵
- Companies are using more and more data points to cater to their customer's wants – but also to control and influence¹
- Dating app usage is up with 5 million more Americans expected to be using a dating app within the next two years and 30% of adults claiming they have used an app or website to find love⁶

2025

- Divorce rate increasing and marriage rate decreasing further
- Hookup culture has diminished and decision fatigue has significantly set in and people are searching for a long-term partner with less work

2025 (cont.)

- Housing is still unaffordable for single people so coupling is being driven by living compatibility
- AI and algorithms progressing socially

2030

- Personal data collection proliferates to 2 million data points per person
- Dominant dating platforms splinter into specialty matching based on commonality
- Divorce rates accelerate
- People who grew up during the COVID-19 pandemic exhibit poor social skills
- A significant portion of the economically coupled seek more compatibility

2035

- Personal data collection proliferates to 4.8 million data points per person
- A psychology and surveillance based dating platform emerges with skepticism
- The gap between the rich and the poor widens and racism is reinforced along poverty lines
- Computer processing power reaches unprecedented speeds

2040

- The new dating platform becomes a tool for the rich and elite
- Assignment happening as a growing trend for those who can afford it
- Lasting love, housing and economic stability become exclusive for the rich
- The Canadian Government introduces a tiered tax benefit for assigned couples

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Nafeha
Khan

Scenario Three

Variety is the Spice of Life

This scenario evolves from the deep myth that variety is the spice of life. Reflecting on present day trends, it is supported by contemporary and evolving worldviews that relationships are best arranged under short-term contract, can be transactional and acknowledge that a supportive arrangement that works for two or more people doesn't need to last a lifetime to be considered successful. There is value in periodically evaluating one's relationships and deciding if it adds to one's personal growth or not. If, after the evaluation, a relationship doesn't seem like a good fit, it is acceptable to part ways with it, as one does with a pair of jeans they have outgrown. In 2040, relationship events, positive or negative, are celebrated as key milestones that add to the journey of one's life and enriches the experience of personal growth.

The structures in place are an outcome of the values of this transactional societal shift and include the creation of a new subset of laws in Canada and the United States that exclusively deals with relationship contract management and can include contracts for short term relationships

(between one and five years), co-parenting agreements, and co-living arrangements. Banking and financial services have introduced a variety of products and services that support this status quo. Other formal structures that would accommodate these legally binding agreements would include the tax agencies, pension planning agencies, social supports and child welfare services, healthcare, and the for-profit sector. Short-term contractual relationships would go beyond the current definition of what it means to be in a relationship and will likely pave the path for new systems and structures to support it, such as blockchain technology for non-editable agreements. Penalizing the breach of a contract and using the legal system to resolve any disputes would be a reality of this future.

Cultural systems that further normalize this scenario include 'collecting relationships or partners' like a hobby, as one does with coins presently. Extensions of this cultural trend also include drawing up a wish-list of partners that one may aspire/desire to have and choosing partners according to what may be trendy at that time of the year. For



instance, drawing up a month-long contract with a red-haired individual for the month of February. Although many people will likely choose to enter contracts for the traditional motive of love, the relationship would still be placed under a contract to support the couple through their expectations. We see this today with some relationship contracts (non-binding) that are already starting to take shape.¹

Events that would manifest in this pluralistic scenario in 2040 can span from the demise of the 'joint-account' in banks to reality entertainment content that centres around the ups and downs of being in multiple short-term contractual relationships. In this future, there may be a debate happening around the appropriate length of

contracts for different relationships expectations that could range from a month to five years, but not longer. People may find themselves asking if they should stick to their arrangement and continue to renew a contract with the same person every five years or they may take a leap of faith and enter an arrangement with someone else - after all variety is the spice of life!

North American society in 2040 will be in the midst of navigating the multitude of relationship arrangements available to them and as a result, challenges of contract breaches, multi-person independent contracts, signing a contract too early, contracts involving children, and many more would be the focus of the legal and socio-cultural systems.

The trends that inform this scenario originate from the current practice of partners signing relationship contracts that are not legally binding, to lay out their expectations from the relationship and of each other.^{2,3} As well, certain non-binding legal contracts are also used in the practice of consensual BDSM.⁴⁻⁶

These contracts are drafted up as a guide for what to expect from the relationship and/or arrangement. They are more focused on how to create and sustain a relationship, rather than create a legal prenup, which also deals with financial fallouts. Contracts allow partners of a relationship/arrangement to address areas of conflict before they arise and draw up a plan to tackle them. They also allow them to periodically evaluate and set certain metrics of what a successful relationship/arrangement looks like to them. Of course, there are potential drawbacks, and we could see more legal challenges, bankruptcy settlements, and people forming contracts that are one-sided in the event that an individual entering into a contract does not have the resources for a good

lawyer or who does not understand legalese and the implications of particular clauses. The obligation of tying down a relationship with a contract can be cumbersome and may discourage many from changing their arrangement or even entering an arrangement at all. This could have a negative impact on the people who are consistently avoiding entering contracts. As short-term contractual arrangements gain traction, traditional values may take a backseat causing personal dilemmas and familial turmoil. This in turn may manifest into mental health of those involved in conflicting arrangements to decline.

Another driver to this scenario has its roots in the decline in marriage rates and increase in divorce rates⁷ that are pushing individuals to re-evaluate their current mental models around long-term relationships. Increasing individualism and disdain of hookup culture creates the conditions that would encourage individuals to go into relationships/arrangements with certain expectations in hand that would be structured around a firm set of rules and obligations.

Scenario in the Context of Pluralism

The scenario has a significant impact on pluralism in the North American society as the government will have to adapt and accommodate a shift in the way the society has come to operate. With the increase in the number of short-term contractual relationships, the government will need to expand what its own definition of relationships is and recognize the legal and economic implications that stem out from them. It will have an impact on the healthcare and insurance policies, tax benefits, parenting and guardianship arrangements, banking, and living arrangements. As a society that is currently experiencing diversity in its way of life, this scenario will be a step in further facilitating a journey into a more pluralistic society.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

Keeping up with the Contracts

THE POPULAR REALITY SHOW “KEEPING UP WITH THE CONTRACTS” IS RAMPING UP FOR ITS THIRD SEASON, DUE OUT THIS FALL. IN ANTICIPATION I WANTED TO FIND OUT HOW ONE CAST MEMBER IS FEELING AS SHE PREPARES FOR NOT JUST THE SHOW, BUT ALSO A NEW RELATIONSHIP CONTRACT WITH HER SIGNIFICANT OTHER (SO). LILY MEETS ME AT THE DOOR OF HER TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT ON THE BAY-BLOOR AREA LOOKING PULLED TOGETHER IN THE TRENDS OF THE SEASON: AN EXTRAVAGANT KAFTAN THAT GLIMMERS NEW COLOURS IN THE LIGHT. SHE WELCOMES ME INTO THE LIVING ROOM WHERE TWO GLASSES OF WINE ARE ALREADY POURED. NOW IN HER MID-FORTIES, THE UPCOMING CONTRACT WILL BE LILY’S EIGHTH WITH HER SO, JAZ.

They had both been excited to go on the reality show and had confirmed as much in a mid-year special referendum to their original one-year relationship contract where their shared dog, Zuck, was added as a shared custody dependent and Lily put forward an opening of their relationship. The catch is that Lily and Jaz haven’t verbally confirmed their renewal yet and with filming starting shortly, Lily isn’t sure that Jaz is on the same page. The anxiety is building—will they renew or be going their separate ways?

“I don’t want Jaz to see my cortisol spike for this interview” she says with an embarrassed smile as she removes her smart ring connected to their shared SO account. I ask her how they met and why the first contract felt like a good fit for both.

“The stars seemed to align”, Lily shrugs. They met through their mutual relationship and arrangement contract lawyer, discovering shortly after that they also shared the same accountant. With financial security and similar expectations already outlined in the contracts they were using with other partners, they seemed like a perfect fit. Valuing the fleeting nature of relationships, they signed a one-year contract.

With formalized short-term relationship contracts gaining traction in 2030, many folks like Lily and Jaz have signed on the dotted line (and under the security of the blockchain) for years now. They’re attracted to the transparency and security the contract provides while also maintaining flexibility, honesty, and accountability with renewals.

“We liked that all our chips were on the table, and we had a clear sense of direction for our relationship.” Lily explained about their first contract. “And aside from a few edits here and there over the years, it’s remained relatively unchanged. And we’ve been happy!”

But things have changed for Jaz. While Lily is interested in experimenting with an open relationship and exploring what’s out there, she also feels an attachment to Jaz and the force of stability they’ve been over the past eight years. Jaz feels similarly but isn’t quite sold on multiple partners.

In a phone call with Jaz, they let me know where they’re at. “I appreciate her wanting to experiment and would encourage her to do so.

But more people means more complications. Call me old fashioned, but I appreciate the dedication of monogamy. I’ve heard too many horror stories of a meddling additional partner that results in a contractual breakdown,” Jaz explains. “And those get expensive, litigious, and exhausting. I love Lily. I don’t want to end up hating each other.”

Lily seems to agree on that point. “I get what they’re saying — I do. I’m not sure if I’m willing to concede either. I’ve drafted up a contract for an additional partner already, and every time I read it over, I know it’s the right thing for me. But Jaz is, too. It’s complicated in ways that contracts aren’t supposed to be!”

This sentiment is expressed by most people who enter into contractual agreements and there are people who have contracts with nearly everyone in their lives. On the upcoming season of Keeping up with the Contracts, there are friendship negotiations, co-living arrangements, and a

particularly complicated situation involving three adult partners and four children co-parenting agreements.

Lily’s phone buzzes. It’s a text from Jaz to remind her that the Keeping up with the Contracts producers will be by to set up the equipment as they embark on their week-long filming journey before next Saturday’s contract signing ceremony. She asks me to follow her to her bedroom so she can select a new outfit.

“I think I’m prepared for Jaz to walk away if I don’t change my mind. I mean, if I won’t change my mind, why should they?” Lily asks herself into the full-length mirror as she holds up different versions of the same dress she’s wearing. “But I love them, so I hope it works out.”

But hope is for those without contracts. It’s 2040, and relationships are all about the business end of human social needs.



Binge the new season of Keeping Up with the Contracts to find out what happens with Lily and Jaz on April 3rd only on Nethulu+.

Insights from the CLA

DEEP MYTH

- Variety is the spice of life

WORLDVIEWS & VALUES

- Partnerships need clear boundaries and expectations
- Relationships are sometimes only relevant for certain parts of life
- Divorce and break ups are important milestones and should be celebrated
- Relationships are fleeting and transactional

STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

- There are “relationship” trends based on desirable traits
- Contract relationship laws and lawyers are a domain of the legal system and include co-parenting agreements, co-living agreements, but also short-term “romantic” relationships
- Increasing couples counselling that is structure for personal relationships as well as legal protections

LITANY

- Contracts are hosted on the blockchain
- Some partners don't want to sign contracts, some do – what happens?
- Some relationships are surviving under contracts
- Setting up multi-person contracts is common practice for various relationship arrangements.
- People can be sued for breaking relationship contracts more easily
- Reality TV is thriving



BACKCASTING

NOW

- Starting to see relationship contracts that center around love, respect, and loyalty¹⁻³
- A hot Canadian real estate market is expected to cool and possibly crash⁹⁻¹⁰

2025

- Declining marriage rates sees a rise in co-living and long-term contract commitments instead
- The Canadian real estate market crashes which mean single people can confidently buy their own homes without needing a partner
- Online content including more relationship contracts examples and defining “supportive relationships” as those with well-established expectations

2030

- Lawyers and law firms are becoming experts in short-term and well-defined contractual relationships for partners, parents, and friendships
- Younger people are using “boundary” contracts in their friendships that establish when they are available to their friends as busy/hustle culture is still on the rise
- The first supreme court case sets a precedent for upholding financial damages after a spouse is caught having a non-contractual affair
- Dating platforms promote short-term contracts and begin matching people based on seasonal trends for partners

2035

- TLC launches the first reality TV show based on a family who has used contracts for their co-parenting and co-living agreements

2035 (cont.)

- Contractual agreements start to appear as tropes in sitcoms, dramas, and romantic comedies
- Advocacy groups start to campaign for equal access to fair contracts and expert lawyers as we see a rise in one-sided agreements become prevalent in the news
- H+R Block opens a firm that provides relationship auditing services. This leads to its stock price jumping up by 35% on Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX)

2040

- Keeping up with the Contracts launches and profiles people as they navigate contractual writings and renewals
- A new type of professional career is established that is a mix between a therapist and lawyer to help people sort out mutually beneficial contractual clauses for their relationships

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Janine Stowe

Scenario Four

The More the Merrier

This scenario explores the deep myth of the more the merrier and that plural relationships with multiple people is preferred and normalized.

In 2040 polyamorous and ethical non-monogamous relationships are common and normalized. The elected government legally recognizes many forms of partnerships including plural ones, and taxation policy is undergoing reform to better reflect this shift.¹ The government supports the rights of plural parenting, recognizing children as having multiple parents on a child's birth certificate as early as 2017.²

By the late 2030's, the first wave of poly-children are in the education system and families demand revisions to the curriculum to incorporate more plural relationships. Decolonized perspectives and stories continue to emerge that support plural relationships, polysexuality and non-binary gender norms proving these were not uncommon throughout history. Facing dwindling attendance and a call for inclusivity, some religious groups recognize plural relationships of all kinds.

Banks have updated lending criteria to account for multiple partners contributions giving the ability for plural families to access mortgages and have joint bank accounts. The housing market is seeing a rise in larger family dwellings as plural families openly reside together and multiple people are needed to support rising mortgage costs. Single condos that support autonomy of the individuals in the relationship are growing in popularity and short-term rentals support flexible dating arrangements are more popular than ever.

Day cares are seeing a decrease in attendance as multi-partner relationships combined with the continued flexibility of work schedules (that began during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2023) mean child minding can be shared more easily. Like the banks, vehicle companies now offer multi-person leases and automotive insurance companies have followed suit with plural insurance coverage. Life insurance that covers several significant others is common and many folks are updating their wills to accurately reflect their plural family members.



Dating apps include filtering options for plural relationships and several ethical non-monogamous specific platforms have cropped up. Mainstream media has embraced polyamory featuring several relationships in popular dramas, a hit Emmy-winning sit com, and many major box office hits featuring plural relationships as the core love story. Several celebrities have publicly declared they are in plural relationships and reality TV shows that follow the lives of polyamorous folk are numerous.

As a backlash to the hook-up culture of the early 2020's and in response to people's heightened health awareness post pandemic, many people are opting for committed multi-partner relationships that allow for flexibility and security.^{3,4} This may be why we see an increase in therapists offering multi-partner sessions with many specializing in plural relationships. Improved VR and immersive online spaces have resulted in virtual relationships gaining traction, with some folks only practicing polyamorous relationships in a virtual space and saving their in-person time for a single 'IRL partner'.

Traditional two-people monogamous relationships are still practiced, but there's been a shift in language so that most people use more plural terminology that encompasses all types of relationships to be more inclusive. Even though plural relationships are now generally a socially accepted way of being, there remains a section of the public who still protest. The "Bring Back the Family" movement of the early 2030's has mostly died down, but there are pockets of fundamentalists who continue to lobby for change.

Scenario in the Context of Pluralism

This scenario directly relates to pluralism. It outlines a future where people have more flexibility to love and spend time with whoever they choose and with as many people as they want. It emphasizes ethical non-monogamy and consensual multi-partner relationships where folks don't need to get everything from one person—this could promote honesty and self-acceptance. As roles move away from more traditional hetero-two-people relationships it's plausible that gender roles will pluralize as participants fulfill different changing roles in the polyamorous relationships and in multi-partner families—providing the skills they are best at rather than conforming to a specific predetermined gender or relationship role. Decolonization is supported as the long held western couple-centric, nuclear-family institution is dismantled and re-examined.⁵ Feminism is supported as women may pursue self-satisfying forms of love and sexuality that were taboo before. Plural relationships have in recent times been more common within the LGBTQ2S+ community, mainstream acceptance of plural relationships may aid in overall acknowledgment of non-heteronormative ways of being.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

The Polyamorous Family Next Door

I WOKE EARLY ON FRIDAYS. IT WAS MY DAY TO GET THE KIDDOS OFF TO SCHOOL BEFORE HEADING TO WORK. I SMOOCHED SAMANTHA AND NICK AND HEADED TO THE KITCHEN TO GET THE COFFEE GOING.

It had been just over a year since we formalized our relationship in a small ceremony in Samantha's parent's backyard. Since then, we had all moved into a large family home together with our two children. Luckily, with our combined income and savings from reduced childcare we were able to hold onto Nick's condo downtown which offered a cozy adult respite for date nights. Samantha would be making the trip to the condo tomorrow to meet a new person she'd connected with on ENM Amour, the same platform the three of us had met on. We all loved the city, but at the end of the week, I just wanted to curl up on the couch and binge watch "Popular Polys.", It was junk food television, but I loved it.

Samantha's would be the first date outside the triad that any of us had been on in a while. They say the first year of marriage is the hardest, and for us it was no exception. Add in the upheaval of a move, which meant a new school for the kids and new routines, and no one had much time for romance. A friend from the gym had recommended Dr. Bellows, a well-known counsellor specializing in plural relationships. With the therapist's help, we all felt more in sync lately, and I was relieved that the bill was covered between our three insurance plans. Nick walked into the kitchen and gave me a little pinch on the behind before filling his cup of

joe, with Samantha not far behind.

"Don't forget we all need to be at the bank at 2 p.m. today," he said. Nick is the calendar king of the household and always on top of everyone's schedules.

That's right, I thought, the joint bank account. We all shared a giggle that we still needed to be in-person to finalize paperwork in 2040!

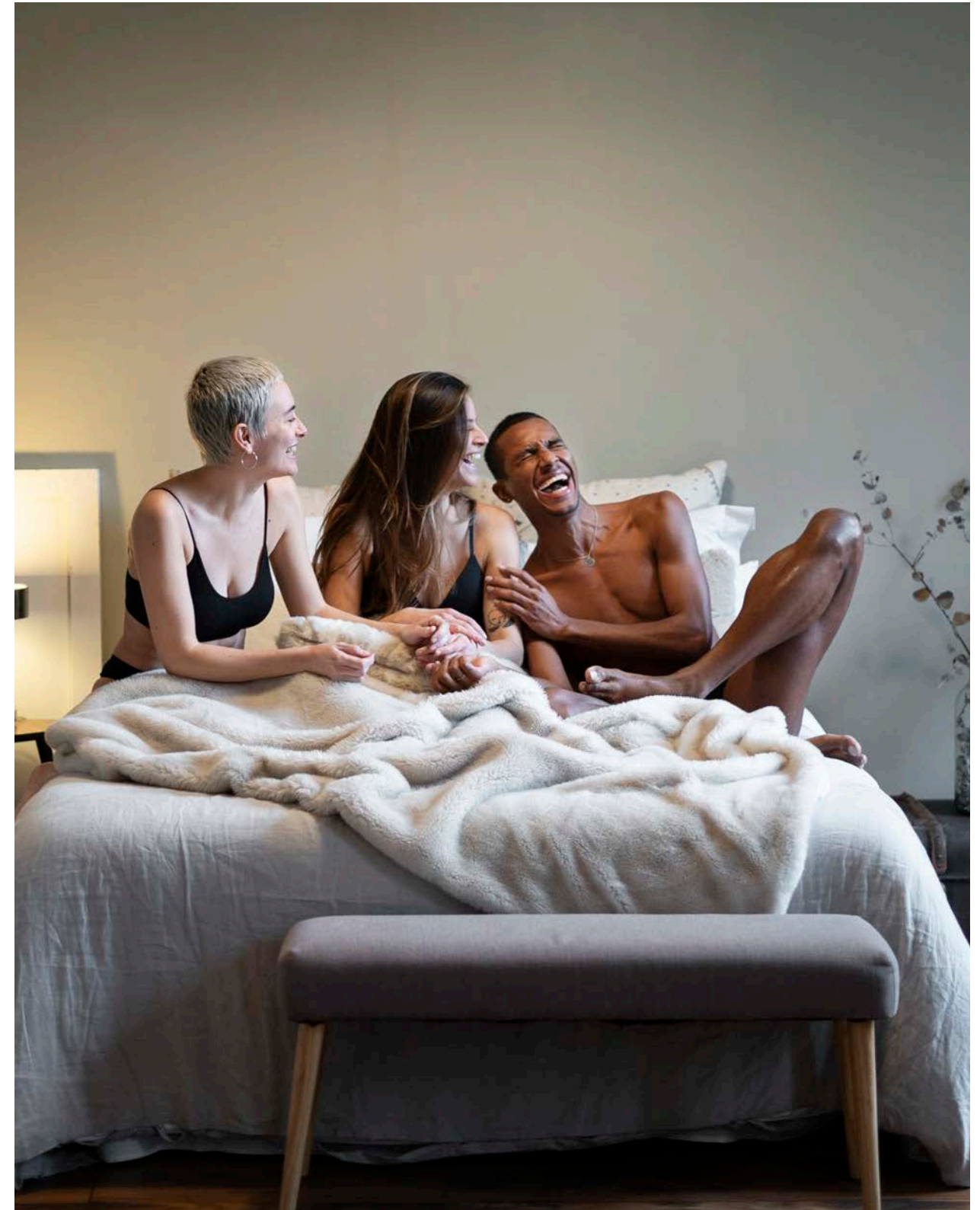
"And its parent-teacher meetings for Lucy and Jack tonight, Sam., I can drop you at the GO station afterwards." Nick continued.

We were eager to connect with the kid's new school. Unlike the last school, this one was operating on the new curriculum that offered a diverse vision of family aligning with the governments ongoing policy reform to better reflect plural lifestyles. It's funny to think now how much media time the 'Bring Back the Family' movement received just five years ago, and I wondered if they had finally taken down that cringe-worthy billboard that was on the highway west, proclaiming "God, asked Noah to put pairs on the Ark!" I was relieved that most churches had chosen to embrace plural relationships and that Nick's long-time pastor was able to officiate at their union.

"Hey babe, you're gonna be late," Samantha tapped me on the arm. I took a last gulp of coffee and gave Sam a kiss on the cheek.

"Love you. See you at 2!" Nick called out from the bedroom.

"Love you!" The other two replied.



Insights from the CLA

DEEP MYTH

- The More the Merrier

WORLDVIEWS & VALUES

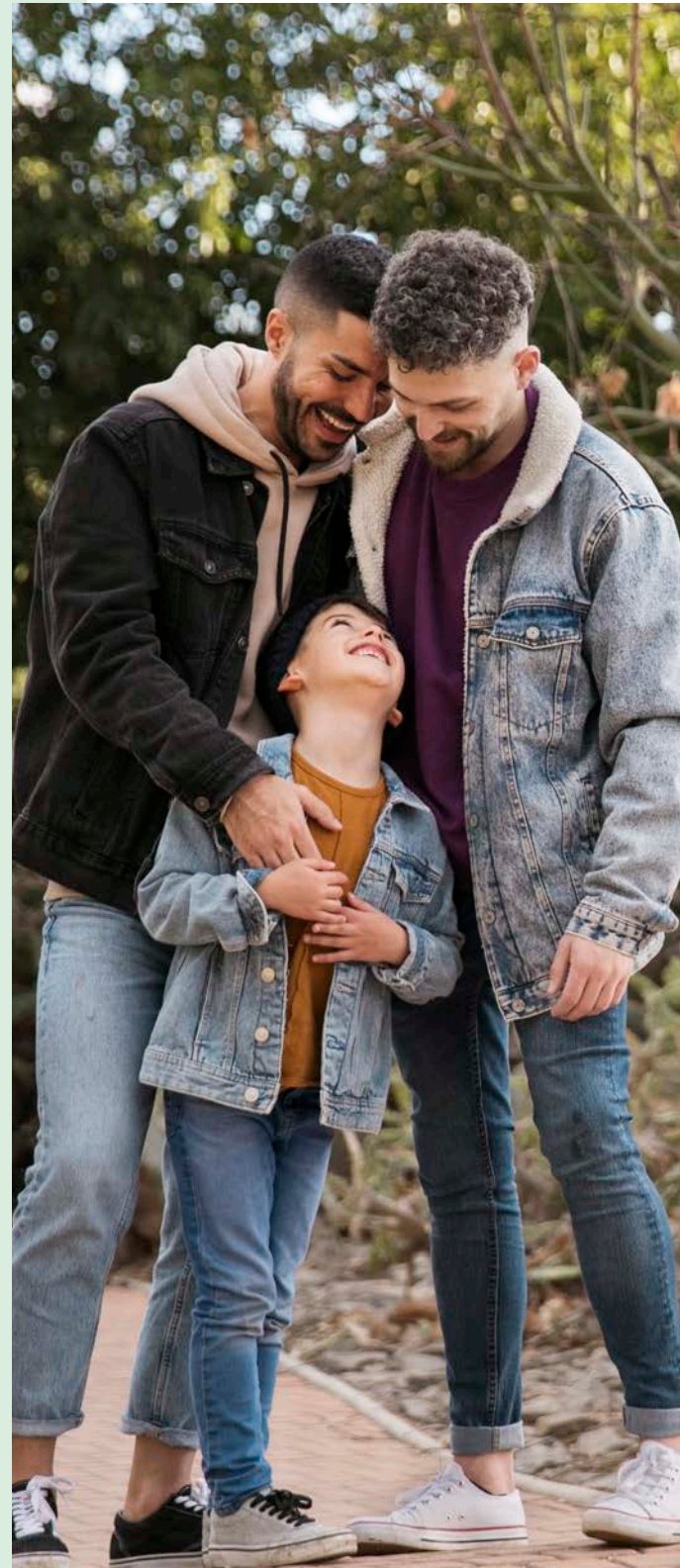
- Plural forms of relationships with multiple people are the norm
- Religion does not interfere with the way people choose to enter relationships
- Life is easier with more people in the relationship – no one person can give you everything you need
- Communal living is more accessible and supportive
- Gender and sexuality is fluid and non-binary

STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

- Taxation, insurance, and benefits better reflect plural relationships
- Dating apps and websites have new settings to finely tune what types or relationships people have and how many they want
- Parents and families are far more supportive of plural relationship
- Health care and mental health care better supports multiple people in one session

LITANY

- Declining “Bring Back the Family” movement
- People don’t change last names
- Changing real estate market and rental options – larger family/co-op homes are built but short-term rentals for dating are maintained by many
- Formal unions are growing obsolete



BACKCASTING

NOW

- Non monogamy and polyamory gaining popularity and coverage in media^{6-9,11}
- Polyamorous unions are starting to be legally recognized¹
- Three adults in a polyamorous relationship declared legal parents¹⁰
- People move away from the confines of religion and colonialism⁵

2025

- More people are adding additional partners to their insurance and wills
- Idea that gender is fluid and non-binary is more generally accepted by all
- Children have multiple parents listed on birth certificate on the rise
- Plural relationships are talked about more in various circles and with extended family
- Some celebrities engaged in plural relationships
- Some representation in media

2030

- Terminology is changing to reflect more plural arrangements—use of my partners, my village, and my people become popular. Communication departments/writers struggle to revise existing language across platforms and there’s public backlash by some couples
- In the face of dwindling attendance, some religious institutions adapt and embrace plural relationships
- Growing “Bring Back the Family” movement calls for a return to “traditional values”
- Housing market seeing a rise in both large family homes and smaller condos. Airbnb and VRBO more popular than ever
- Banks offer plural-relationship bank accounts and mortgages.

2035

- The recently elected government reflects more liberal views.
- First generation of plural family children are in school. There is a call to reform curriculum to reflect diverse family structures creating public division.
- Taxation policy revisited as it relates to plural relationships and families

2040

- Plural relationships and ethical non-monogamy are equally as common as monogamous couples
- Polyamory is generally accepted and politically correct to embrace, but there remains a group of fundamentalists who strictly resist and although less common, plural families are still targeted in certain communities
- Courts are seeing a rise in multi-person divorces, separation, and custody agreements

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Systems Redesign and Strategic Implications of the Scenarios

In our work, the future of relationships was primarily explored with the lens of a shift in societal values.

Some of the key themes that emerged in our work were a rise of individualism, a shift in the traditional family structure, a more transactional nature of relationships, as well as fluid sexual and gender preferences. While these shifts have already started happening as indicated by our signals and trends, our scenarios indicate that by 2040 these shifts may be normalized and integrated in mainstream society.

Culture is highly intangible but has deep implications on the formal rules and procedures that shape a social system. As a result, all the actors that shape the narrative of society are key stakeholders in these future scenarios. We foresee innovations in government affairs, legal practices, media narratives, and other societal systems that will serve to sustain these lifestyle choices. More importantly, our future scenarios point to a paradigm shift in the

mindset, goals and rules of the social system which is a high-level transformation.

Our chosen method for scenario construction is the Causal Layered Analysis to study the nuances in cultural shifts that impact the social system in a substantial manner. The lifestyle shifts represent a positive feedback loop in the system which is supported by existing structures. In the recent years, relationships and orientations that were considered marginalized have gained mainstream media representation

and voice. However, it is also indicative of a divide that is emerging amongst groups of society that may wish to uphold religious or traditional values and these voices may be the negative feedback loop to bring society to a state of a self-organized, negotiated equilibrium.

SOURCE

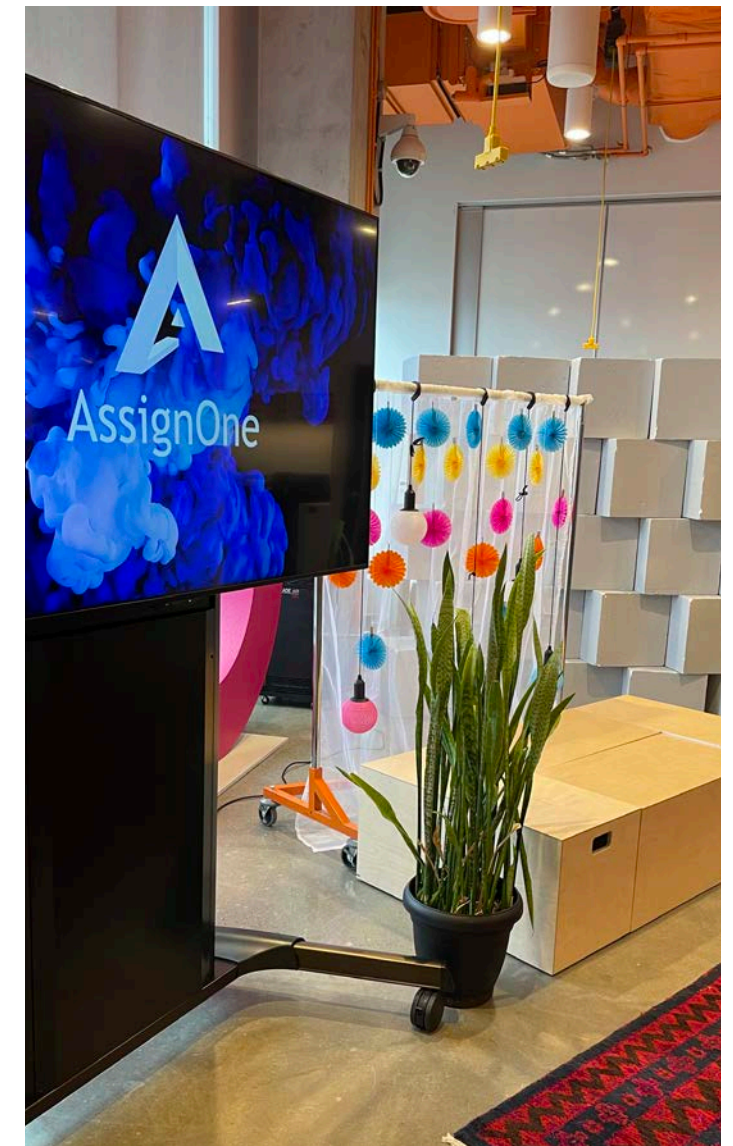
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Immersive Experience

Putting on a Show

After searching for signals, defining trends, and building plausible scenarios, our group built out a final immersive experience to share the implications of our findings on the futures of relationships in 2040.

The goal of our experience was to immerse our classmates and guests into the future of relationship contracts and matchmaking through data-based assignments in order to give them the chance to critically reflect on whether that future is something worth building towards or intervening in.



Playing the Part

When deciding whether our futures work would result in a performance or an experience, we felt that an experience would provide a more engaging take-away for relationships than a performance. Relationships are intimate experiences and although movies and television often portray meaningful relationship milestones and moments effectively, they do so with camera angles, soundtracks, and expertly trained actors that pull the audience in. For our scenario to work well, we determined learning outcomes would be best delivered if our participants played themselves rather than watching the team play who we thought they may be and how they might act in a contract negotiation with significant other(s).

As a part of the scene, we assigned a few of our guests the role of media executives. As the primary audience for our scenario development, we felt it pertinent to include



Ved plays host while our newly assigned partners work out relationship contract details, while the professors play the role of the Nethulu Plus media executives in search of their next stars of Keeping Up with the Contracts.

them in our experience as well. These media executives were given instructions to watch the contract negotiations unfold and write down moments that would make for good television.

As for our group members, in order to run the experience effectively, we had a few different roles that helped to define and advance the narrative in a short period of time. The first character our participants met was the executive producer of Keeping Up with the Contracts, our reality television show from an earlier scenario that follows people as they negotiate and re-negotiate their relationship contracts. Our executive producer set the scene, introduced the other group members as their characters, and explained to participants who they were in relation to one another and the scene itself.

Next came the host of Keeping Up with Contracts. The host was another scene-setting character who introduced new components of the experience to the audience. This included the matchmaking and networking component, the AssignOne data tracking algorithm, and the AssignOne CEO. The host also helped to move people from the matchmaking scene to the contract negotiation so that most of the time spent in our experience was active participation.

A brief but important character was Trip Callum Jr., the CEO of AssignOne, who appeared to our audience on video and was an unfamiliar face to everyone in the room. We hoped that this unfamiliarity would blur the lines between a classroom experience and a plausible future where people we do not know have influence on our lives and access to our intimate details. We also

encouraged our hired actor to perform his part in a way that made him seem hurried and a little odd to set him apart from the charismatic host.

The rest of our group played three lawyers from the Smitten Law Group who introduced the law clinic negotiation scene and also provided their services during the negotiations themselves. Not only did the lawyers help set the scene, but they also provided participants with the chance to ask questions and receive clarification on the contracts and the concepts of our future scenarios. This allowed us to collect insight on whether the experience was seamless or if there were areas where more could be done to explain how our scenarios may unfold in the future.

With all of these characters decided on, we aimed to set the scene.



Professional actor Jesse Lipscombe, was enlisted to film the message from the CEO of AssignOne, adding an element of realism and a little humour. To watch the video visit <https://youtu.be/ygKUsPTpbJM>.

Setting the Scene

The overarching narrative of our experience was meant to address our classmates and a targeted audience of media executives from Nethulu Plus who wanted to be on the cutting edge of future media narratives—and not on the cutting room floor. To set up the experience we arranged two distinct scenes, a matchmaking mixer followed by a legal clinic for contract negotiation.

Looking to popular reality television like ABC's *The Bachelor* or Netflix's *Love is Blind*, allowing time for contestants to interact with each other is crucial not only for finding love, but also as a place for narratives to build and the producers to find storylines that grip their audience. During this scene, participants received their colour-coded nametags, flutes of champagne, and gathered around a cozy space to hear from the executive producer, the host of *Keeping up with the Contracts*, and from the CEO of the technology company AssignOne, Trip Callum Jr. The matchmaking component of our experience was used primarily for people to get into the spirit of the storyline and identify their assignments that would be the premise of the next scene.

The legal clinic scene was meant to instill a possibility for conflict or story line progression that would give the Nethulu Plus executives a real taste of the possibilities for future-oriented programming and script development. Each table in our law clinic included copies of our contract outlines and a tent card inviting participants to connect in with the lawyers at Smitten Law Group if they needed more support during their negotiations. The lawyers and the host made the rounds and chatted with the participants about the sections that they were filling out while the executives made notes on their

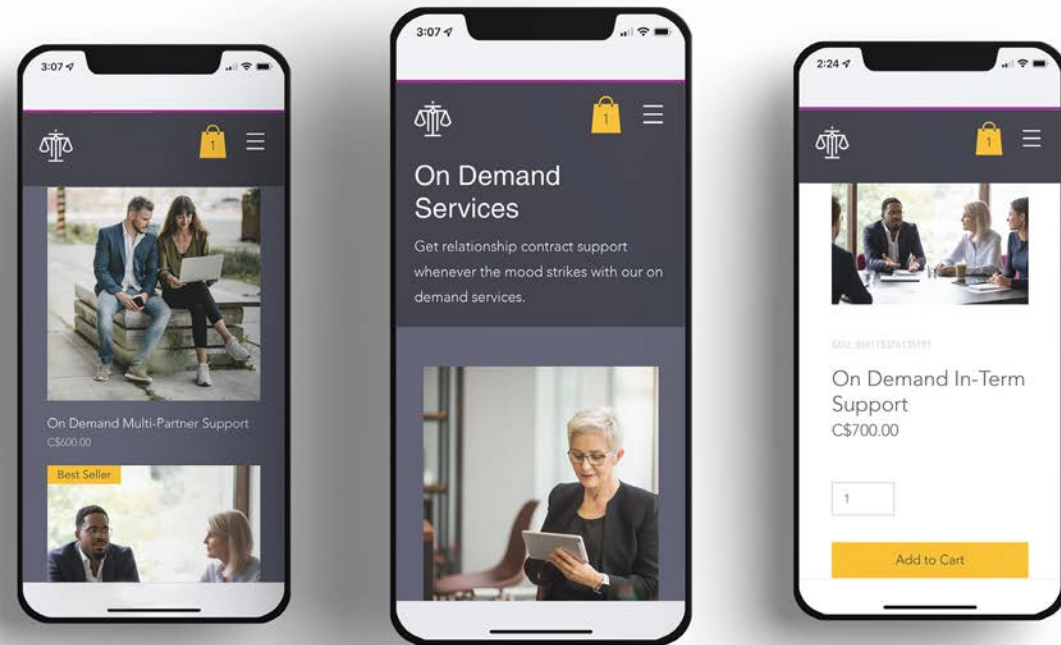


Aisha circulates the room assisting partnerships as they settle in for the legal clinic, as a Nethulu Plus media executive takes in the activity.

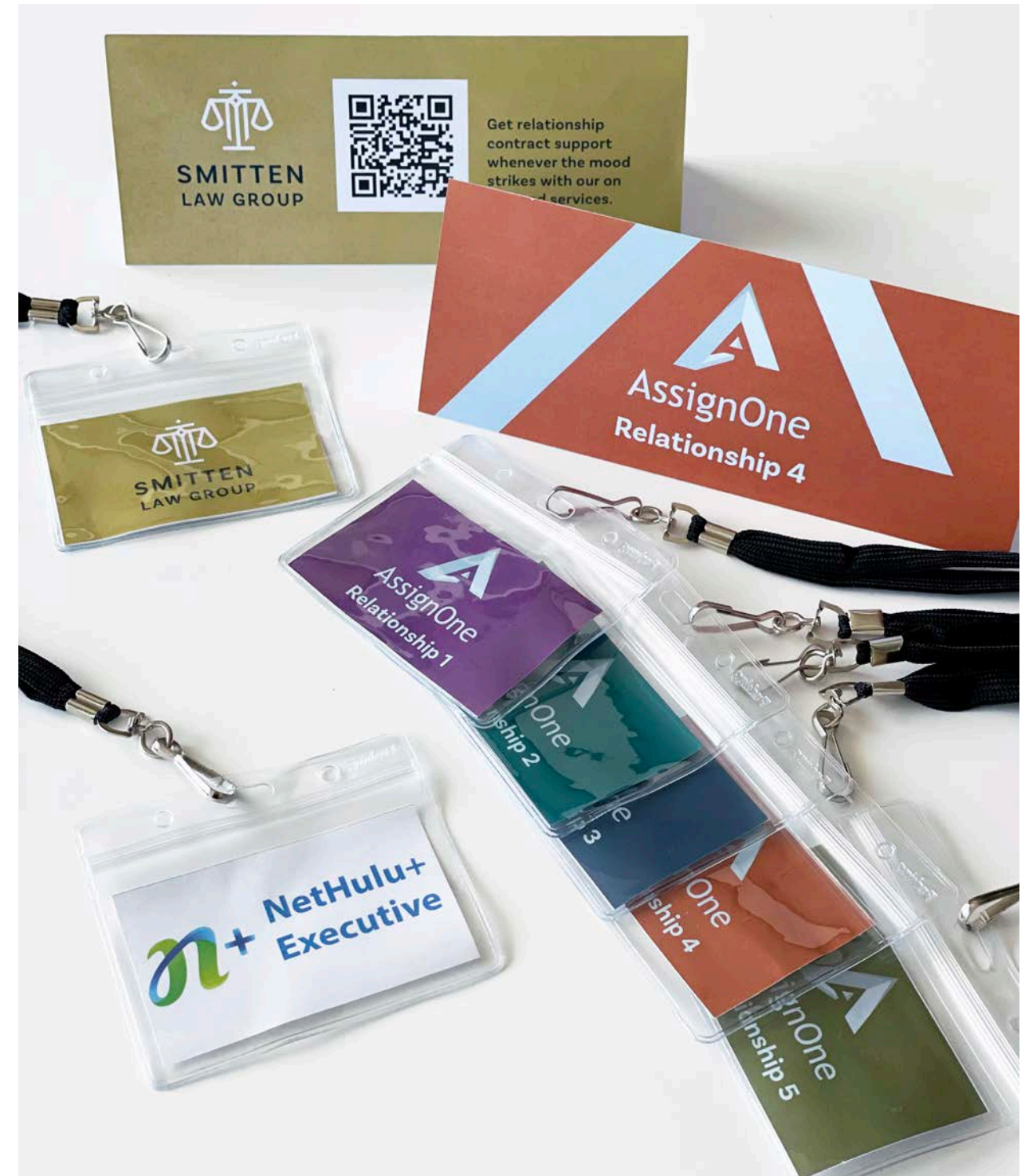
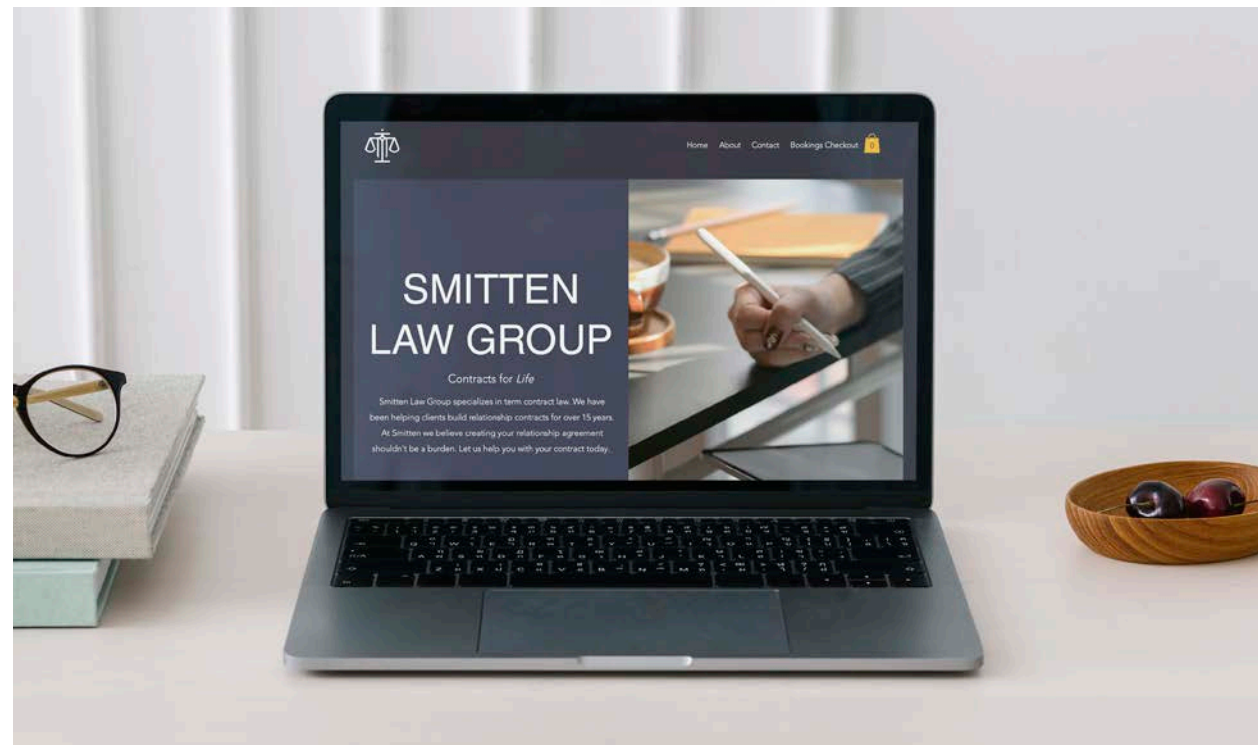
clipboards and occasionally asked questions of the participants.

Not just for the media executives, the contract negotiations were also the core of our experience to encourage our classmates to contemplate a future that will see their relationships defined not necessarily by love and a commitment to each other like marriage, but through the long and arduous process of contractual agreements. Although not exhaustive, we tried to hit on many popular relationship topics that required deep discussion for significant others to be on the same page and at times could conjure conflict. Our clauses detailed things like housing, finances, and children but also included hygiene, arguments, and intimacy with associated damages for any broken agreements.

Between the two scenes we aimed to have participants analyze the use of contracts in relationships and also hoped that they would find the contract negotiations difficult enough that they may begin to question whether a match based on assignment from 4.8 million data points is really something to look forward to in the future. Although perhaps not explicitly stated, we also tried to make the experience a reflection on pluralism by outlining the costs for additional legal services, calling into question the equity and power that may present within relationships involving parties from different socio-economic backgrounds with different levels of access to lawyers. For the Nethulu Plus executives, we hoped that they would find entertainment value in the conversations and contract negotiations that our experience inspired while also making note of possible storylines and the importance of inclusion when it comes to designing media narratives that fit a broader audience.



Participants could scan a QR code on their table tent card and be taken to the Smitten Law Group website where on demand services could be purchased in the future.



Inexpensive props such as branded nametags and tent cards not only served to identify roles but also helped make participants feel as though they were attending an actual event.

THE FUTURE OF RELATIONSHIPS
(Immersive Experience Script)

CAST:

Alex: Producer for Keeping up with the Contracts and Photographer
Ved: Host of Keeping up with the Contracts and AssignOne Mingle Event
Nafeha: Smitten Law Group Lawyer
Janine: Smitten Law Group Lawyer
Aisha: Smitten Law Group Lawyer
Jesse Lipscombe: Trip Callum Jr.

SCENE: WELCOME

Profs wrap up their introduction and we transition into our scenario, Alex as producer stands up.

ALEX

Hello everyone! Thanks you for joining us and congratulations on making it into the first round of casting for Keeping Up with the Contracts where we invite you to take a glimpse into what the Future of YOUR Relationships might look like.

Your beloved host Ved will take over in just a moment as we fully immerse you in a 2040 matchmaking experience, provided in partnership with AssignOne—everyone's only dating service. Although you did sign up for this, we recognize that you may not be fully invested in the show. You have the ability to opt out at ANY TIME. We also encourage you to channel any character you think would make really good TV – because isn't that what this is all about!

We will also be documenting the night with some photos. If you don't want your photo taken, please let me know as I make the rounds. Any questions? No! Okay great!

Helen and Zan as the Nethulu Plus media group executives, Nafeha will help get you set up! Everyone follow me – quickly!

Nafeha, Aisha, and Janine hand clipboards and badges out to executives.
[Aside] Nafeha as lawyer and executive liaison

NAFEHA

Hello Nethulu Plus executives, we are so honoured you could make it today! I know you will garner terrific information today, that will help inform and inspire your programming across your streaming platform. I think you will find some great relationships in this group to join your cast of Keeping Up With the Contracts for its upcoming season. Here's a clipboard for you to jot down any inspiration you have for future programming.

SCENE: MATCHMAKING

Ved as host [on stage]

VED

Hi everyone and welcome to our live matchmaking experience with AssignOne! Please help yourself to a drink. You will notice that your nametags are different colours—please mingle and find the person or persons with the same colour badge, because they are your AssignOne significant others!

[DRAMATIC PAUSE]

As your host, I'm excited to embark on this journey with you. I can tell you from experience that the tech behind AssignOne really works, because I'm not just your host, I'm also in a successful Assigned relationship! I will now direct your attention to the monitor for a special message from the creator of AssignOne!

Janine plays video

Jesse as Trip Callum Jr. [On video / eccentric tech mogul]

JESSE

Hello everyone, I'm Trip Callum Jr. I founded AssignOne with a single goal: to help everyone find love [pause].

JESSE (CONTINUED)

Our proprietary algorithm draws together the 4.8 million data points we have on you and the 114 million annual users who are looking for short term, long term, and casual relationship pairings. And this is your AssignOne matchmaking experience.

Although we work hard to find you The Ones, the way you negotiate your relationships is all up to you. As a part of your experience, we have invited Smitten Law Group to help facilitate your relationship contracts. I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to the fabulous media executives from Nethulu Plus who will be moving around the room and may be picking YOU and your partners to be featured in the upcoming season of Keeping Up With the Contracts – or on another new programming venture that is sure to be a hit. I'll let you carry on with your evening. Thank you so much again for joining us and using AssignOne to find your happily ever right now.

VED [STARSTRUCK]

Wow! Isn't he amazing! Ok, please make your way to our pop-up legal clinic with your matches and find the table with your corresponding badge colour!

Janine, Nafeha, and Aisha help people find their seats for the legal clinic. Tables have a coloured tent card with QR code to website. Printed Contracts and pens on the tables. Also included on the tables are the instructions for how to proceed.

SCENE: LEGAL CLINIC

JANINE [SERIOUS BUT FRIENDLY]

Hello, Smitten Law Group is here for you! Whether it's your first term contract or your tenth, we support you in building solid contracts that clearly outline expectations and consequences to create the foundation for a secure and fulfilling relationship. Don't forget to remove any bio-tech so if your heart rate gets a little high, your partners won't know!

AISHA [SERIOUS BUT FRIENDLY]

You each have a contract in front of you, please work through the highlighted sections only. If you're uncomfortable discussing any of the sections indicated, please choose another section to negotiate instead.

NAFEHA [SERIOUS BUT FRIENDLY]

We will be circulating the room to provide contract negotiation support. Our first 15 minutes of counsel is complimentary today, please use the QR code supplied to visit our website if you would like to purchase additional services.

Ved engages the media reps and poses with participants for pictures / Alex takes pictures. Janine, Nafeha, and Aisha acting as lawyers provide assistance to participants.

JANINE

Alright, thank you everyone! The complimentary 15 min of legal counsel are over. Please scan the QR code to transfer LitCoin for any additional services with Smitten Law Group.

ALEX

And that's a wrap! Thank you so much for being here. If you are selected to be the next reality star, you'll be contacted by the network with more information. We hope you've found love. Please return your contracts to the lawyers on your way out.

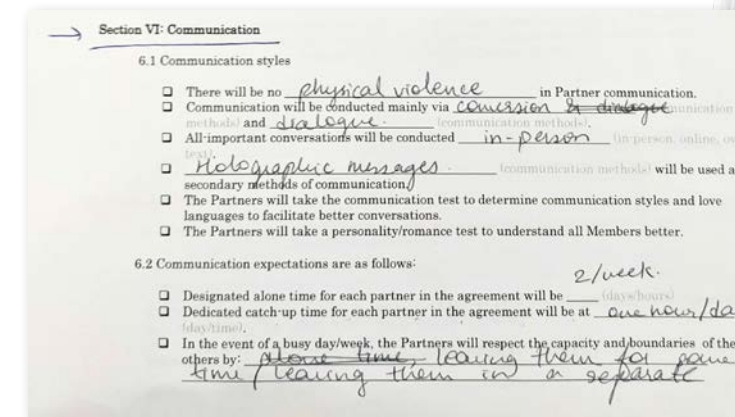
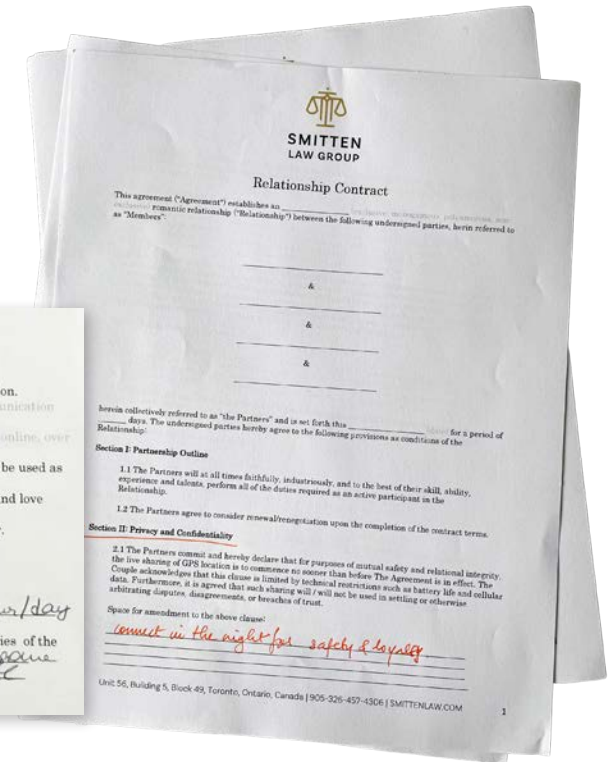
END OF IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE



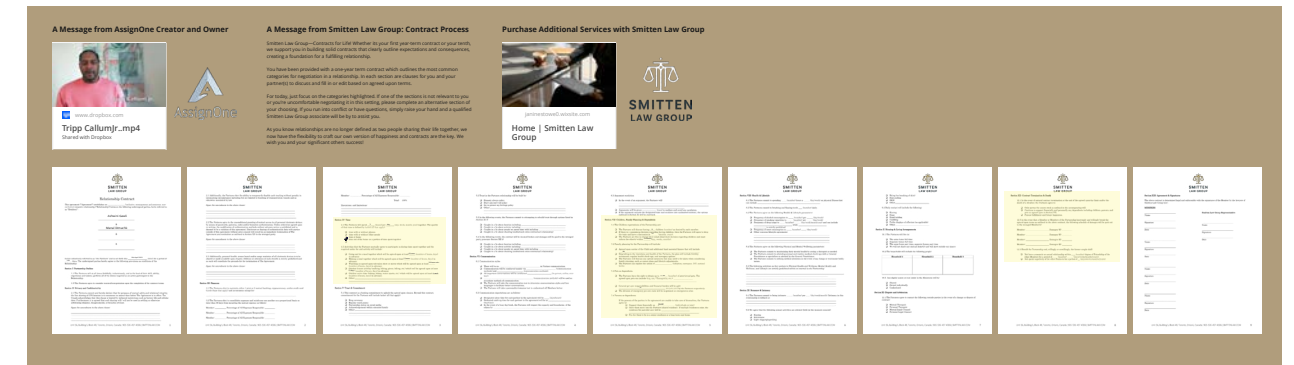
Nafeha, Ved, and Alex standby as the relationship groups work through their contracts, at times spurring heated discussions among participants that had the Nethulu Plus executives thinking this really would make for good TV.

The Contracts

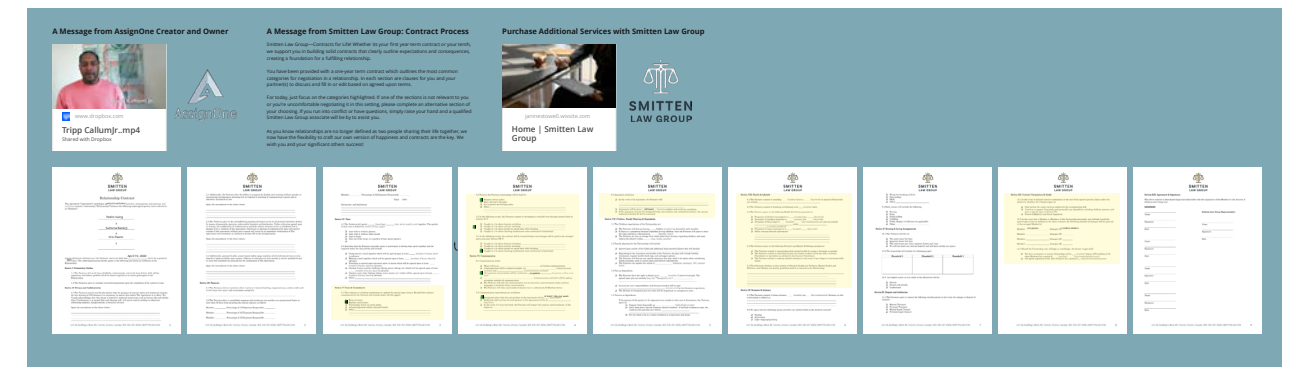
We supplied paper copies of the contracts to in-person participants and created a Miro board and used break-out rooms in Microsoft Teams to accommodate participants joining remotely.



Miro board one



Miro board two





Relationship Contract

This agreement ("Agreement") establishes an _____ (exclusive, monogamous, polyamorous, non-exclusive) romantic relationship ("Relationship") between the following undersigned parties, herin referred to as "Members":

&

&

&

herein collectively referred to as "the Partners" and is set forth this _____ (date) for a period of _____ days. The undersigned parties hereby agree to the following provisions as conditions of the Relationship:

Section I: Partnership Outline

1.1 The Partners will at all times faithfully, industriously, and to the best of their skill, ability, experience and talents, perform all of the duties required as an active participant in the Relationship.

1.2 The Partners agree to consider renewal/renegotiation upon the completion of the contract terms.

Section II: Privacy and Confidentiality

2.1 The Partners commit and hereby declare that for purposes of mutual safety and relational integrity, the live sharing of GPS location is to commence no sooner than before The Agreement is in effect. The Couple acknowledges that this clause is limited by technical restrictions such as battery life and cellular data. Furthermore, it is agreed that such sharing will / will not be used in settling or otherwise arbitrating disputes, disagreements, or breaches of trust.

Space for amendment to the above clause:



2.1 Additionally, the Partners elect the ability to temporarily disable such tracking without penalty in extenuating circumstances including but not limited to boarding of transportation vessels and as otherwise mandated by law.

Space for amendment to the above clause:

2.2 The Partners agree to the unconditional granting of mutual access to all personal electronic devices by means of passwords, patterns, codes and/or biometric authentication. Unless otherwise agreed upon in writing, the modification of authentication methods without advance notice is prohibited and is deemed to be a violation of this agreement. Disclosure or sharing of authentication data with parties outside of this agreement without prior consent will result in an immediate termination of The Agreement and restitution as outlined in Section XII to the wronged party.

Space for amendment to the above clause:

2.3 Additionally, personal health, sensor based and/or usage statistics of all electronic devices is to be shared or made available upon request. Deletion or alteration of such records is strictly prohibited and as such will constitute the grounds for the termination of The Agreement.

Space for amendment to the above clause:

Section III: Finances

3.1 The Partners elect to maintain either 1 joint or 2 mutual banking, cryptocurrency, and/or credit card (circle those that apply) and investments except for:

3.2 The Partners elect to consolidate expenses and reimburse one another on a proportional basis no later than 30 days from incurring the mutual expense as follows:

Member: _____ Percentage of All Expenses Responsible: _____

Member: _____ Percentage of All Expenses Responsible: _____

Member: _____ Percentage of All Expenses Responsible: _____



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Member: _____ Percentage of All Expenses Responsible: _____

Total: 100%

Exceptions, and limitations:

Section IV: Time

4.1 The Partners will spend _____ (hours) per _____ (day, week, month, year) together. The quality of that time is defined by (select all that apply):

- time with or without phones
- time with or without other people
- time at home
- time out of the house as a portion of time spent together
-

4.2 Activities that the Partners mutually agree to participate in during time spent together and the required notice for said activity will include:

- Going out for a meal together which will be agreed upon at least _____ (number of hours, days) in advance;
- Making a meal together which will be agreed upon at least _____ (number of hours, days) in advance;
- Watching an agreed upon television show or movie which will be agreed upon at least _____ (number of hours, days) in advance;
- Outdoor leisure activity (walking, hiking, picnic, biking, etc.) which will be agreed upon at least _____ (number of hours, days) in advance;
- Outdoor active time (hiking, biking, water sports, etc.) which will be agreed upon at least _____ (number of hours, days) in advance;
- Other: _____

Section V: Trust & Commitment

5.1 This contract is a binding commitment to uphold the agreed upon clauses. Beyond this contract, commitment for the Partners will include (select all that apply):

- Ring ceremony
- Regular touch points
- Partnership status on social media
- Acknowledgement within extended family
- Other: _____



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5.2 Trust in the Partners relationship will be built by:

- Honesty always policy
- Don't ask don't tell policy
- Lie to protect my feelings policy
- Other: _____

5.3 In the following events, the Partners commit to attempting to rebuild trust through options listed in Section XI if:

- Caught in a lie about location including _____
- Caught in a lie about activity including _____
- Caught in a lie about people we spend time with including _____
- Caught in a lie about cheating (undisclosed extra-contractual relationship)

5.4 In the following events, the contract will be deemed broken and damages will be paid to the wronged party pursuant Section XII if:

- Caught in a lie about location including _____
- Caught in a lie about activity including _____
- Caught in a lie about people we spend time with including _____
- Caught in a lie about cheating (undisclosed extra-contractual relationship)

Section VI: Communication

6.1 Communication styles

- There will be no _____ in Partner communication.
- Communication will be conducted mainly via _____ (communication methods) and _____ (communication methods).
- All-important conversations will be conducted _____ (in-person, online, over text).
- _____ (communication methods) will be used as secondary methods of communication.
- The Partners will take the communication test to determine communication styles and love languages to facilitate better conversations.
- The Partners will take a personality/romance test to understand all Members better.

6.2 Communication expectations are as follows:

- Designated alone time for each partner in the agreement will be _____ (days/hours)
- Dedicated catch-up time for each partner in the agreement will be at _____ (day/time).
- In the event of a busy day/week, the Partners will respect the capacity and boundaries of the others by: _____



6.3 Argument resolution

- In the event of an argument, the Partners will: _____
- Arguments will be given _____ (time) to mediate and avoid any escalation.
- If the argument exceeds the designated time and escalates into uncharted territory, the options outlined in Section XI will be exercised.

Section VII: Children, Family Planning & Dependents

7.1 The Children expectations of the Partnership are:

- The Partners will discuss having _____ children (number) as desired by each member.
- If there is a unanimous decision regarding having children, then the Partners will agree to drop the topic and have a discussion in _____ (months, years).
- The Partners are free to change their mind about their decision regarding children and must inform the other(s) within _____ (day, weeks, months).

7.2 Family planning for the Partnership will include:

- Agreed upon carrier of the Child and additional legal parental figures that will include _____
- Depending on the intentions and health of the Partners, the plan will include fertility treatments, regular health check-ups, and surrogacy options.
- The Partners will discuss any special measures that may need to be taken when considering family planning, such as career plans and lifestyle adjustments.
- The Partners can explore the option of _____ (adoption, surrogacy, IVF, natural birth).

7.3 Pets as dependents.

- The Partners have the right to obtain up to _____ (number) of pets/virtual pets. The agreed upon pets can include (dog, cat, *Tamagotchi, etc.): _____
- General pet care responsibilities and financial burden will be split _____ (x% | x% | x%) by the Partners respectively.
- The division of emergency pet care costs will be negotiated as emergencies arise.

7.4 Parents as dependents.

If the parents of the parties in the agreement are unable to take care of themselves, the Partners agree to:

- Support them financially as _____ (individuals or joint)
- Have them move into the Partners shared residence. If multiple residences exist, the residence for parental care will be _____
- Pay for them to be in a senior residence or a long-term care home.



Section VIII: Health & Lifestyle

8.1 The Partners commit to spending _____ (number) hours a _____ (day/week) on physical fitness that can include _____.

8.2 The Partners commit to brushing and flossing teeth _____ (number) daily.

8.3 The Partners agree on the following Health & Lifestyle parameters:

- Frequency of alcohol consumption to _____ (number) per _____ (day/week)
- Frequency of smoking cigarettes to _____ (number) per _____ (day/week)
- Frequency of drug usage to _____ (number) _____ (day/week/month/year) and can include _____ while _____ is strictly prohibited
- Frequency of meat consumption to _____ (number) _____ (day/week)
- Other concerns lifestyle agreements: _____

8.4 The Partners agree on the following Physical and Mental Wellbeing parameters:

- The Partners commit to maintaining their mental health by seeing a therapist as needed.
- The Partners commit to attending annual and routine medical check-ups with a General Practitioner or specialists as advised by the General Practitioner.
- The Partners commit to seeking medical attention in the event of any lumps or worrisome bodily issues.

8.5 The following activities as they pertain to Physical Health and Wellness, Mental Health and Wellness, and Lifestyle are strictly prohibited within or external to the Partnership:

Section IX: Romance & Intimacy

9.1 The Partners commit to being intimate _____ (number) per _____ (day/week/month). Intimacy in this relationship is defined as:

9.2 We agree that the following sexual activities are allowed (with in-the-moment consent):

- Kissing
- Intercourse
- Light slapping/spanking



- Biting (no breaking of skin)
- Hair pulling
- S&M
- Other _____

9.3 Daily contact will include the following:

- Kissing
- Hugs
- Hand holding
- Cuddling
- Public displays of affection (as applicable)
- Other _____

Section X: Housing & Living Arrangements

10.1 The Partners will live in:

- The same home full time
- Separate homes full time
- The same home part time, separate homes part time
- We will not share any mutual home(s) and will meet outside our spaces

10.2 The households will include the following people:

Household 1	Household 2	Household 3

10.3 Any digital assets or real estate in the Metaverse will be:

- Shared
- Owned individually
- Undisclosed

Section XI: Dispute and Arbitration

11.1 The Partners agree to contact the following outside parties in the event of a change or dispute of contract:

- Mutual Therapist
- Personal Therapist
- Mutual Legal Counsel
- Personal Legal Counsel



Section XII: Contract Termination & Death

12.1 In the event of natural contract termination at the end of the agreed upon day limit and/or the death of a Member, the Partners agree to:

- Only pursue the assets owed as outlined in the accompanying will
- Continue to support financially and personally any dependents including children, parents, and pets as agreed upon in Section VII.
- Pursue fulfillment and future happiness.

12.2 In the event that a Member or Members of the Partnership knowingly and willingly break the agreed upon terms as outlined in the above contract, the following schedule of damages will be paid out to the wronged Member(s):

Member: _____ Damages (\$): _____

Member: _____ Damages (\$): _____

Member: _____ Damages (\$): _____

Member: _____ Damages (\$): _____

12.3 Should the Partnership end, willingly or unwillingly, the former couple shall:

- Not have a romantic or sexual relationship within ____ (number) degree of Friendship of the other Members for a period of ____ (number) ____ (days/weeks/months/years).
- Not speak negatively of the other Partners for a period of ____ (days/weeks/months/years).



Section XIII: Agreement & Signatures

The above contract is determined legal and enforceable with the signatures of the Member by the lawyers of Smitten Law Group LLC.

MEMBERS

Name	

Signature	

Date	

Name	

Signature	

Date	

Name	

Signature	

Date	

Smitten Law Group Representative

Name

Signature

Date



Aisha and Alex address the participants while Nafeha (to the left) holds the laptop up to include those joining remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Keeping Up with the Contracts: The After Show

Generally, participants seemed eager to dive into the future world we had crafted. One participant was particularly struck by the participants' willingness to work through contracts without questioning whether a contract was really something they would want for their relationship. Although there is a certain amount of expected participation on the part of the class as the experience is a part of coursework, we did state prior to the exercise that participation was voluntary, and participants could opt out at any time during the immersive experience. Yet, all but one were quickly convinced of the importance of their relationship and jumped in to discuss and even argue over aspects of the contracts.

One group became involved in a heated debate over aspects of the relationship contract. Playing the role of Smitten Law Group associates, we offered suggestions for resolution. As several participants and observers noted, it was fascinating to see how invested participants got in building their relationship contracts. Even the one person who was not interested in signing a relationship contract played along, acting as a disgruntled AssignOne client who was dissatisfied with their matches. This added a fun and unexpected twist, and our AssignOne representative and host explained that while the algorithm is highly accurate, there is always a small possibility that your assignment may not be satisfactory and that a follow up AssignOne survey would be sent to assist with a more suitable partnership.

Keeping in mind that it may be inappropriate for professors and students to be discussing a relationship (even in theory), we gave the professors and any observers the role of Nethulu Plus executives tasked with finding the next relationship to feature in their upcoming show, *Keeping Up with the Contracts*. This allowed them to feel immersed in the exercise and it was clear they enjoyed walking around and listening to the conversations that each group was having about the contracts. They found it quite humorous and said that these situations and premise would make for good TV. They were surprised how invested people got about small and seemingly insignificant aspects within the contract. This observation affirmed our approach, proving that having different roles added layers and enhanced the experience for all.



Janine provides legal advice as a Smitten Law Group associate.

What We Learned

We learned that demonstrating futures doesn't need to be overly complicated to be impactful. Using minimal props and theatrics we were able to craft a plausible immersive experience featuring several key aspects from our future scenarios. While the overall approach can be simplistic, details, however, are important to making the story come to life. Branding for AssignOne, Nethulu Plus, and Smitten Law Group made the organizations more realistic. Creating a simple website for Smitten Law Group and a QR code for participants to access additional law services added an element of delight and solidified the feeling that this was a real law clinic. Contracts featured the Smitten Law Group logo and were written in a legal format that even had one layer in the group comment on its authenticity.

We also learned how an immersive experience can quickly shift ideals of norms. Three out of five of the relationships were polyamorous having three people of same and mixed genders. A few participants were a little confused and clarified if they were all meant to be in a relationship together. Staying in character, those of us playing lawyers assured them the match was correct and emphasizing the likelihood of a growing trend towards polyamorous relationships. This was all the explanation that was needed to have participants shift their mind set to the plausibility of their poly relationship structure and to dive into contract negotiations.



Strategic Options for Nethulu Plus

These scenarios and experiences offer rich content to Nethulu Plus that represent the future of relationships. We recommend using these insights from the trends, scenarios, and the experience in different formats (movie, books, television) as well as across media platforms. By appealing to media executives as our audience, we aim to encourage the notion that representations in media have immense power to shape and influence a social narrative and help accelerate system change through their influence on multiple stakeholders.

The insights from these scenarios also offer strategic options other than mainstream media programming. These are some of the avenues to explore:

01.

Develop content to raise awareness and acceptance about diverse sexual, gender, and relational preferences.

02.

Create immersive experiences with emerging technologies to experience an alternate relationship worldview.

03.

Use the content from the scenarios to advocate for change at a system level.

04.

Co-create with specific communities to further explore how cultural contexts interact with these themes.

Certain themes such as love, affection, admiration, hate, fear, and jealousy are constants irrespective of time or culture. These are story archetypes with timelessness and a near-universal appeal. As a result, content that includes these themes and highlights new forms of relationships will be highly marketable to a growing present and an expansive future audience.

Project prepared by Aisha K, Alex Jaworiwsky, Janine Stowe, and Nafeha Khan for Foresight Studio (SFIN6021-001; Winter 2022), Master of Design, Strategic Foresight and Innovation program at OCAD University under the supervision of Helen Kerr and Zan Chandler.

