SWAG : LESSONS IN
SEXUAL WELLNESS AND GROWTH

"THAT'S WHAT I LIKE": IDENTIFYING RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

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This lesson introduces participants to a discussion of relationship styles, dynamics, and values. Some of these relationship dynamics may be unfamiliar to participants, while others may be already engaged in them without being aware. Using both individual and large group activities, this lesson helps participants consider the wide range of relationship styles and standards available to them.

KEYWORDS	THEME	FORMAT	TIME
Boundaries Relationship Styles Relationships Sexual Negotiation Sexual/Relationship Values	Family & Relationships	Workshop	75 minutes

Interdisciplinary Sexuality Research Collaborative

PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

According to the United States Census Bureau *(census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2012/demo/SEHSD-WP2012-12_figures.pdf)*, **rates of singlehood have steadily increased among Black men since 1960, with present rates being nearly three times larger than their White counterparts. There are a number of factors that contribute to this phenomenon; however, a curious question exists regarding how this increase informs relationship experiences of Black same-gender-loving Black men, particularly in light of social advancements towards marriage equality.**

Many commonly used sexual health curriculum do not cover relationship values and relationship styles, and even fewer consider SGL Black male experiences. As a result, the only opportunity many Black SGL men have to explore or understand their own values relationship desires is through trial and error, which may increase their risk for experiencing undesired adverse effects. Identifying the types of relationships that Black men aspire to, along with the values that uphold these formations, could better aid them in sexual and romantic negotiation with future partners.

GOAL

Participants will increase their capacity to choose empowering relationship styles and interrogate their personal values regarding romantic relationships.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Discuss at least two ways that personal identity interacts with one's romantic and/or sexual relationship choices.

- Discuss and assess one romantic or sexual relationship style.

- Establish and discuss one strategy to use in negotiating ideal romantic/sexual relationships.

TIME

STEPS 1–7	Introductions and Opening Activity	15 min.
STEPS 8–11	Identity Activity	20 min.
STEPS 12–14	Relationship Styles Web Search	30 min.
STEPS 15–16	Closing Activity	10 min.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This lesson is written for 10–15 participants and one facilitator. It should not be used for groups larger than 16. Groups of less than 10 participants can be completed with a single facilitator.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

Facilitator should have a working knowledge of various types of monogamous and non-monogamous relationships.

MATERIALS

The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

☐ Writing utensils *(one for each participant)*

☐ Small notepads *(4"x6" or smaller; one per participant)*

☐ 11–13 sheets of plain 8.5"x11" paper

☐ Permanent marker

☐ Internet access for all participants *(optional)*

KEY TERMS

Adapted from futurescopes.com (futurescopes.com/types-non-monogamy/7664/various-types-non-monogamy)

Polygamy: a relationship arrangement in which one person has married multiple partners.

Polyamory: a kind of non-monogamous relationship where an individual has multiple romantic and/or sexual partners but is not married to any of them. Polyamory usually implies a more fluid and flexible approach to love and relationships, but still operates on a complex system of boundaries or rules.

Open marriage or open relationship: a marriage or committed primary relationship in which the partners agree that each may engage in extramarital sexual relationships, without this being regarded as infidelity.

Group marriage: a kind of non-monogamous relationship in which several people form a single family unit, in which all considered to be married to one another.

Ménage à trois: a form of non-monogamous relationship which is marked by a sexual, or sometimes domestic, arrangement involving three people. In contemporary usage, the meaning of the term has been extended to refer to any living relationship between three people, whether or not sex is involved.

Swinging: a practice where both partners in a committed relationship agree, as a couple, to engage in sexual activities with other couples recreationally. Swinging may be practiced in a number of contexts, varying from a spontaneous sexual activity at informal gathering, planned or regular social gatherings, or hooking up with like-minded couples at swingers' clubs.

Casual relationship: a relationship in which people share an emotional and/or sexual bond without being formally committed to each other.

Polyfidelity: a term used to describe a closed set of relationships, whether a triad, a quad or more. People in polyfidelitous relationships remain sexually exclusive with people in the relationship "system."

Sexually monogamous polyamory: refers to relationships in which two individuals maintain sexual monogamy with each other, while allowing space for partners to experience non-sexual love and/or erotic attraction with others.

Living Apart Together (LAT): a term to describe couples who have an intimate committed relationship but live at separate addresses.

Social monogamy: a social living arrangement (i.e., shared use of a territory, behavior indicative of a social pair, and/or proximity between a male and female) without inferring any sexual interactions or reproductive patterns. In humans, social monogamy most often refers to monogamous marriage.

Sexual monogamy: an exclusive sexual relationship between two individuals.

Serial monogamy: a form of monogamy in which participants have only one sexual partner at any one time, but have more than one sexual partner in their lifetime. Serial monogamists often do not plan to have subsequent relationships while involved in each monogamous partnership.

FACILITATION PREP

The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

☐ If space allows, arrange participant seating in a circle or semi-circle. Avoid having any participant sit with their back to another participant.

☐ Write one label per sheet of 8.5"x11" paper:
- Age
- Education
- Looks
- Financial/Employment Status
- Relationship Status
- Political Affiliation
- Religious Affiliation
- Health Status
- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexual Behavior
- Physical/Mental Ability

Post each labeled sheet in a different part of the room. Make sure participants can clearly see each sign from their seat.

☐ Before you begin, create a 5"x7" note card for each of this lesson's Key Terms. Keep the complete card set out of sight from participants until the moment in the session when you are prepared to discuss them.

☐ For the Opening Activity, be sure to assess participant mobility ahead of time (and in private, if possible) to decide which version will be used. If pre-assessment is not possible, be prepared to do the alternate opening activity, if necessary.

☐ The Relationship Styles Web Search generally requires participants to access the Internet, which can be done through materials you provide, or materials they have on hand (i.e., personal tablets and cell phones). In the event that you nor your participants have internet access, use Facilitator Resource A, "Key Terms & Definitions Cards" to add more in-depth descriptions to your Key Terms notes cards *(see checkbox #3 at left)*. If you are unsure whether or not you will have internet access, prepare your cards in advance of the session.

☐ If applicable, prepare a list of referral services offered by your agency, and have copies of it ready to distribute to participants at the end of your session.

HANDOUTS

Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

☐ End-of-Session Evaluation
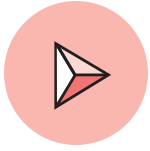
PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.

15 **Introductions and Opening Activity**

STEP 1 Welcome participants to your session and conduct brief introductions with the group as needed. Review all established group agreements and reaffirm consent from the group. If group agreements have not been completed, please create them at this time *(use the Community Agreements lesson, if necessary.)*

STEP 2 Instruct participants to find a partner in the room *(Note: If you have an uneven number of participants, the facilitator may participate.)* Once all participants have found a partner, instruct them to create two circles, one inside of the other, with one partner in each circle, facing each other. As each pair joins the circle, give each member a small notepad and writing utensil. Once all pairs have joined the circle and received a notepad, instruct participants to open their note pads, and number the corner of one page for every person in their opposite circle (e.g., an inner circle participant will number six pages of their notepad as 1 through 6, to represent six people in their outer circle).

STEP 3 Instruct participants to silently imagine what is most important to them in a romantic relationship. While it can be an idea, object, person, experience, or anything else they wish, instruct them to prioritize one thing over everything else. Instruct them to refrain from sharing this item with their partner.

STEP 4 Once all participants have imagined their item, instruct participants to take turns acting out their most important thing to their partner. Give each participant 30 seconds to act, then stop the group and give a 15-second window for each pair to switch to the other partner, who then acts for 30 seconds.

STEP 5 After the additional 30 seconds, stop the group, and instruct participants to write in their notepads what they guess their partner's item to be *(Remind participants that this should be done silently, without letting others know what they've guessed.)* Once everyone has written down their guesses, instruct the inner circle to move one person to the right.

STEP 6 <u>Repeat</u> Steps 4 and 5 until everyone has had a chance to interact with everyone else in their opposite circle. Once the inner circle has completed its rotation, <u>instruct</u> participants to return to their seats. <u>Invite</u> participants to share their guesses for other participants' most important item, and to verify or refute other's guesses.

Alternate Activity:
In the instance that the space is too small for this activity or you have participants with mobility issues, use a pad of flip chart paper or a dry erase board to have participants draw their responses versus acting them out. In this instance, you may choose participants to continue writing their guesses out, or to discuss each one out loud as a group, similar to a game of Pictionary.

STEP 7 Once the discussion has ended, <u>proceed</u> through the following Discussion Questions:

1. "How did it feel attempting to complete this activity?"

2. "What reasons went into selecting the person, idea, thing, or experience you selected for this activity?"

3. "In what ways do you believe we communicate what's most important to us in our interpersonal relationships?"

4. "What kinds of factors do you believe make asserting our relationship wishes easier or more difficult?"

(20) Identity Activity

STEP 8 <u>Instruct</u> participants to direct their attention to the labels posted around the room *(see Facilitation Prep)*. <u>Read</u> each of the labels out loud, and then ask if participants if they need clarification about what any of them mean. <u>Answer</u> any questions about the terms, then <u>instruct</u> participants to move underneath the label they believe most stands out to others when meeting a date, sexual partner, or potential friend for the first time.

STEP 9 Once participants have moved to the label they have chosen, <u>instruct</u> them to discuss their reasons behind their move with others in their smaller group. *(If the smaller groups are larger than three people, have them break down into even smaller groups of two or three.)* <u>Give</u> participants 3–5 minutes to discuss their moves; <u>instruct</u> the group to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. At the end of the 3 minutes, <u>solicit</u> 2–3 reflections from participants regarding their smaller group conversations.

STEP 10 <u>Instruct</u> participants to now move to the label that represents a part of their identity that they believe people rarely see about them. <u>Repeat</u> Step 9.

STEP 11 After the activity has concluded, <u>instruct</u> participants to return to their seats.

<u>Proceed</u> through the following Discussion Questions:

1. "What was it like to do this activity?"

2. "What feelings came up as you were navigating the different prompts?"

3. "Was there anything said in the small group discussions that was enlightening or surprising to people? If so, what and why?"

4. "How, in your opinion, do choices like the ones made here impact social interactions?"

5. "Do you believe choices like the ones made and discussed here impact the type of relationship people want, or believe they have access to? If so, how?"

6. (*<u>Instruct</u> participants to look again at the various labels posted around the room.*) "Thinking about the characteristics you are personally attracted to, how would you navigate your attraction if you found those traits in more than one person?"

(30) **Relationship Styles Web Search**

STEP 12 Break participants up into small groups of no more than three people, and preferably with individuals who have not yet worked together during this session. Once all small groups have been created, inform the participants that they will now be responsible for performing a web search for information on a type of relationship style, and presenting on that relationship style for the larger group.

STEP 13 Using either desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, smartphones, or your previously prepared cards (see Facilitator Resource A, "Key Terms & Definitions Cards"), instruct the groups to find out as much as they can about their relationship style, and then use that information to answer the following questions, encouraging them to use their notepads to take notes as needed:

- "Describe three characteristics of this relationship style besides its general definition."

- "What would be at least one benefit and one obstacle of this relationship style?" *(If you have time, you may challenge the group to identify more than one of each.)*

- "What would you suggest are some of the values that someone in this type of relationship might hold?"

- "Outside of the information you were able to find out from your search, what additional questions do you have about this particular relationship style?"

- "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'Not At All Ideal', to 10 being 'The Perfect Relationship for Me', how would you rate this relationship style for yourself?"

STEP 14 Give participants 10–15 minutes to complete their web searches. Reconvene the group, and then invite each small group to report on their selected relationship style. After every small group has presented, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. "After doing this activity, how confident do you feel about your past or current relationship choices?"

2. "Can our values about what is important in relationship affect the types of relationships we choose to engage in? How or how not?"

3. "What new thing did you learn in your web search about your selected relationship style that you did not know before doing this activity?"

4. "What one takeaway could a person take away from this activity about their romantic and/or sexual relationship possibilities?"

10 **Closing Activity**

STEP 15 Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. Allow participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and collect them as they are completed. After five minutes, invite any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

STEP 16 Instruct participants to think about the entire session they just completed. Beginning with a volunteer, instruct participants to share one strategy that they will use to incorporate lessons from this session into their daily life. Once all participants have shared, thank them for their participation, and then adjourn the group.

KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS CARDS

Directions: See STEP 13 .

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