MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Don't Know If We're Actually Together

How to Get Out of a Situationship Before It Reaches Season Three



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

You have been seeing each other for seven months.

You text every day. You sleep over at each other's places. You know how they take their coffee, which side of the bed they prefer, and that they become irrationally offended when a streaming service asks, "Are you still watching?" You have met at least one friend, possibly a sibling, and once attended something together that was technically a birthday party but emotionally felt suspiciously like a couples event.

There is only one small administrative issue.

You have absolutely no idea whether you are actually together.

At first, this seemed fine. Relaxed. Modern. Refreshingly free of labels. Nobody needed to hold a summit meeting after Date Three and sign a bilateral relationship agreement in front of witnesses. You were just seeing where things went.

And things went.

They went to dinner. They went to your apartment. They went on weekend trips. They went through two seasons of a television show and one minor argument about why someone disappeared for eight hours after reading a message.

What they did not go toward was clarity.

Now you are in a strange emotional country where the borders are poorly marked. You behave like a couple in private, but you are not sure what to call each other in public. You might be exclusive, unless exclusivity has somehow become one of those things people are expected to absorb through atmosphere. You have plans next weekend, but

asking about next month feels like requesting a thirty-year mortgage.

And somewhere in the middle of this, you begin performing relationship archaeology.

You examine messages.

"He said 'we' when he talked about Thanksgiving."

Promising.

"She left a toothbrush here."

Interesting.

"He introduced me as 'this is Emma.'"

Disturbing.

You start collecting evidence because nobody has provided an official answer. A heart emoji becomes Exhibit A. A delayed reply becomes Exhibit B. A toothbrush acquires the evidentiary importance of a signed treaty.

This is exhausting because uncertainty has a remarkable ability to turn normal people into unpaid detectives.

You do not want to be dramatic. You do not want to "put pressure on things." You certainly do not want to become the person who says, "So, what are we?" in a voice that makes both people immediately interested in studying the carpet.

So you wait.

Maybe the answer will become obvious.

Maybe one day, while making scrambled eggs, the other person will casually say, "As your committed romantic partner, I would like to confirm that our relationship has now entered the official phase."

This does not happen.

Instead, another month passes.

Situationships are not automatically bad. Two adults can absolutely choose something casual, undefined, flexible, temporary, nonexclusive, or unconventional. The problem is not the absence of a traditional label. The problem begins when the arrangement works mainly because nobody is saying out loud what they actually want.

That is when “keeping it casual” can become a polite phrase for “I am emotionally invested but terrified that asking a direct question will make the entire structure collapse like discount patio furniture.”

You may tell yourself you are being patient. Sometimes you are.

Sometimes you are avoiding information.

Those two things look surprisingly similar from the outside.

There are understandable reasons for avoiding clarity. Maybe you genuinely like the person and do not want to lose them. Maybe the connection is good enough that uncertainty feels preferable to a definite no. Maybe you have already invested months, feelings, weekends, screenshots sent to your best friend, and enough emotional analysis to qualify for a minor consulting contract.

You may also believe that asking for clarity somehow makes you needy.

It does not.

Wanting to know what kind of relationship you are participating in is not excessive. It is basic information. You would not rent an apartment for eight months without asking whether you are legally a tenant, a guest, or simply someone who has become very comfortable near the refrigerator.

Romantic ambiguity sometimes gets treated as sophistication. As if emotionally evolved adults float through life without expectations, needs, questions, or calendars.

Real adults have all four.

The goal of this book is not to force every situationship into a relationship. That would be ridiculous. Sometimes the healthiest outcome is becoming official. Sometimes it is staying casual—with both people genuinely agreeing that casual is what they want. Sometimes the answer is leaving because you have been waiting for a relationship that the other person has been very carefully not offering.

What matters is getting out of the fog.

You are going to learn how to tell the difference between normal early-stage uncertainty and an arrangement that has been undefined for so long it should qualify for historic preservation. You will learn how to stop treating mixed signals like a difficult puzzle that can be solved if you stare at enough text messages.

You will also learn how to figure out what you want before demanding that somebody else explain what they want. This matters more than it sounds. Many people ask, "What are we?" without first answering the much more useful question:

"What do I actually want us to be?"

If your answer is "I don't know, but I would prefer them to want me very intensely while I remain emotionally mysterious," we have some work to do.

We will talk about exclusivity, expectations, inconsistent behavior, future plans, fear of rejection, emotional availability, and the famous sentence "I'm not ready for a relationship right now," which sometimes means exactly what it says and

sometimes gets interpreted as, “Please begin a six-month campaign to change my mind.”

Do not begin the campaign.

There will be practical conversations you can actually use. Not therapy-speak scripts that make you sound like you are facilitating a workplace conflict-resolution seminar, but normal sentences one human can say to another human while both remain legally conscious.

We will also deal with the most annoying possibility: you ask clearly, and the answer is still unclear.

Because some people are exceptionally talented at replying to a direct question with a cloud of words.

“I really like what we have.”

Excellent. What do we have?

“I don’t want to ruin it with labels.”

Labels have somehow been accused of crimes they did not commit.

“Why can’t we just enjoy the moment?”

Because the moment has lasted nine months, Kevin.

The purpose here is not to make you suspicious, cynical, or obsessed with extracting guarantees from another person. Relationships always involve uncertainty. Nobody can promise how they will feel forever, and no conversation removes all emotional risk.

Clarity is not certainty.

Clarity means you understand the arrangement you are choosing today.

That alone changes a lot.

You stop auditioning for a role nobody has confirmed exists. You stop trying to earn commitment through patience, flexibility, strategic silence, excellent sex, homemade lasagna, or pretending you are completely fine with things that are slowly making you miserable.

You stop asking your friends to interpret screenshots like a panel of forensic linguists.

Most importantly, you stop waiting indefinitely for another person to make the decision that you are also allowed to make.

Because that is the part people forget.

You are not standing outside the relationship office hoping someone eventually approves your application. You have choices too. You can ask. You can listen. You can decide whether what is being offered matches what you want.

And if it does not, you can leave before the situationship reaches Season Three, introduces several unnecessary side characters, and receives a renewal nobody asked for.

We have a relationship status to clarify.

Let’s begin.

Chapter 1 - The Relationship That Exists Mostly in Footnotes

There is a peculiar moment in an undefined relationship when you realize you know an impressive amount about another person and almost nothing about your actual status with them.

You know that they hate cilantro, sleep with the window open in February, call their mother every Sunday, and become oddly competitive during board games. You know which coworker annoys them, which childhood story they tell after two drinks, and which exact snack must be present during movies.

But if somebody asks, “So, are you two together?”

Your brain suddenly needs legal counsel.

“Well... kind of.”

That answer tells you something important.

The problem is not that every relationship needs a label immediately. The problem is that your behavior may have developed far beyond the level of clarity supporting it.

This is the first thing to understand: a situationship is not defined by the absence of the words boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner. Plenty of healthy relationships use different language, no language, or language that would make your grandmother quietly remove her reading glasses.

The real issue is mismatch.

You may have couple-level intimacy with stranger-level accountability. You may offer emotional support, physical intimacy, availability, loyalty, planning, reassurance, and

access to large pieces of your life while receiving almost no shared agreement about what any of it means.

It is possible to be very close to someone and still have no actual relationship agreement.

That feels confusing because humans are not particularly good at separating behavior from meaning. If someone acts romantically, we naturally assume romance has implications. If they spend three nights a week with you, check on you when you are sick, remember your presentation at work, and order your favorite takeout without asking, your brain reasonably concludes:

Ah. Relationship.

Then the same person says, "I don't really like defining things."

And your brain files a complaint with management.

Behavior Is Not an Agreement

One of the easiest mistakes to make is treating affectionate behavior as a substitute for an explicit understanding.

They hold your hand.

That means they enjoy holding your hand.

They spend the weekend with you.

That means they wanted to spend the weekend with you.

They tell you they missed you.

That means they missed you.

Notice what none of those statements automatically mean.

Exclusive.

Committed.

Building toward a long-term relationship.