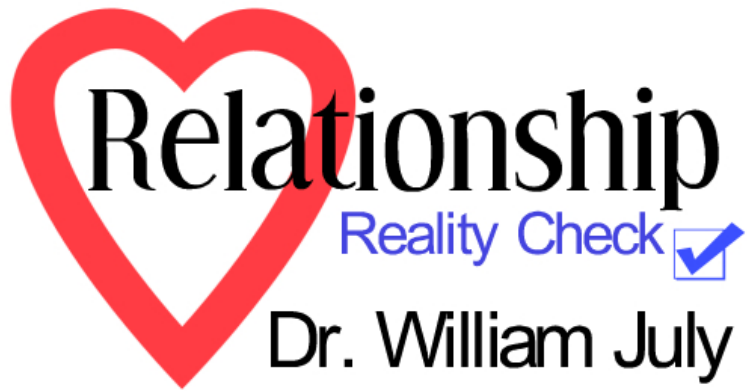


**Are You Sure  
You're In A  
Relationship?**

by Dr. William July



[relationshiprealitycheck.com](http://relationshiprealitycheck.com)



Other than love, there's probably no word more misunderstood and misused than the word "relationship." Ask several people what the word means to them and you're not likely to get the same answer. When I was a kid knowing the definition of the word relationship was simple. Although we didn't use a big word, as kids we had a formal understanding of what exclusivity meant. There was the old custom of asking a girl to "go with you." "Will you go with me?" was something you'd stammer in a nervous question after school. Or you'd go the written route and nervously scribble a note and rewrite it three or four times.

A few years later in high school things got a little more complicated. Where I grew up there were two definitions of a relationship in high school. One was, "we're just talking." "Just talking" was a deliberate signal you sent to other potential suitors. It meant, I'm interested in this person but we're not exclusive. It was a simple definition that everyone in school understood. If another guy was interested in a girl I liked and I had publicly stated "we're just talking" then he was free to pursue her and I knew that. The other publicly understood definition in high school was the attachment of the titles boyfriend and girlfriend; or informing everyone that you were "going steady." In that case, everyone knew you were a couple, no ifs ands or buts about it.

But when we get to adulthood things get much more complicated. For adults there's no simple definition for what a relationship is. In fact, it's down right confusing and frustrating. Short of marriage there's no real definition for a relationship.

### **But I Thought Since We've Been Dating So Much...**

"This is my girlfriend, Clarisse." Darryl said to a friend at a party. Clarisse grabbed Darryl by the arm and rushed him into the hallway of the suburban home a quick defining of their situation. "Look, I'm not your girlfriend so please don't tell your friends that!" Darryl was taken aback and insulted. After all he'd been going out with Clarisse frequently during the past two months. They didn't talk the rest of the night. Not even on the drive home. To some the word relationship means anyone they're dating repeatedly. Often one person is shocked to find out someone they've been out with several times considers them in a relationship. One person assumes that the frequent dating means they are a couple but the other is not on the same page.

### **But We Made Love...**

Others think a relationship becomes formal with sex, especially if it they are highly discriminating about sexual partners. But everyone doesn't see it that way. For example, Anna made that mistake. Anna and Charles had connected well on three dates. So they hadn't been seeing each other long when they lost all will power one Saturday afternoon on her couch. What was supposed to be a casual date turned into a couple of hours on the couch and the living room floor. A few nights later they had sex again. Then the same menu that weekend. Anna assumed she and Charles had a hot new love budding. But Charles didn't see it that way. Over the next week he became difficult to contact. He showed up again around 10:30PM one night and left disappointed when Anna didn't want to have

sex. After that he didn't call anymore and Anna was screened out on his call notes.

More than anything, assumptions get people into trouble in this area. We assume that because certain things happened or certain things have been said that a relationship is in progress. Wrong! The reality is relationships need to be given a definition. I know it sounds like I'm reducing romance to a business transaction but this is the only way to avoid confusion and heartbreak. We have to be real about relationships. The fact is that despite how much people love romance and the tingling feeling it brings, some aspects of it must be clearly defined to avoid disaster. Defining a relationship lays out expectations. It's a sort of contract between two people as to how they will behave. Maybe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we need a contract for relationships. A legal document with everything spelled out, duration, no sex or frequency of sex, cohabitation rules, time together, time alone, AIDS/HIV and sexually transmitted disease testing, a break-up clause, rewards for good behavior and longevity, penalties for not honoring the agreement and a clause prohibiting psycho stuff after the break-up.

But everyday people don't define where they are on the romantic map and leave it to chance. It seems we often expect the other person to be magically aware of when things are getting serious. But they may not. As Darryl and Anna have shown us, assumptions about exclusivity in dating are a prescription for trouble. Instead of leaving it to chance, have an honest talk about where things are headed when you feel the time is necessary between you and someone you're seeing. It may shock them that you were even thinking things were getting serious. Or, they may be relieved that you were thinking the same thing they wanted to say. But either way you need to get a clear definition of this very important area of your life. In this day of fast paced high stress living, AIDS/HIV

and sexually transmitted diseases you need to apply some sound management to your love life. Don't make assumptions.

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