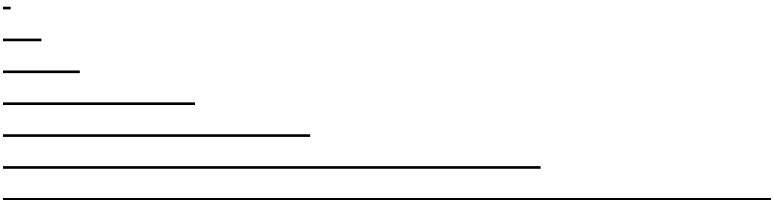


# Brutus' User Manual

First do no harm  
failing that  
have tried your damndest.



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**Relationship:**

1. *The way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected.*
2. *Yes, that includes friendships.*

# Brutus' User Manual, Version 1.0

–Last edited January 16, 2021

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# Introduction and a Disclaimer

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I have spent my life avoiding the question, “What do I want?” because articulating an answer articulates a metric for failure.

Low-expectations/wants means doors are open and all treasures are lovely. It also meant I rarely more than poked my head through the door, looked around and said hello, then wandered off. I assumed that anyone close to me would notice how I moved through the world and respond as they saw fit (they don’t call me princess for nothing). This was completely wrong and damaging to the people around me—particularly in my romantic relationships.

I have existed for thirty-two years as an independent and self-soothing entity wandering through the world.

The focus of this booklet will be two-fold: investigate where I would like to be, and identify where I am. As I’ve written parts I noticed some parts look like problem identification without solutions. At the time of writing, they feel like truths, whether or not they’re good or bad truths.

**Disclaimer** I’m not really the person to write this as I am very much inside my own experience. To that end, I expect a lot (especially in early versions) of the information here will be factually incorrect. But, it will be factually incorrect in accordance with what I think is reality, so that may at least be helpful.

Additionally, a large part of this work will likely be based in the negative, in what I am not and what I do not want. This has been a life-long trend in defining myself and is thus where I am to start. Hopefully future iterations will move away from this trend.

# Brief Notes on the Self via Origin

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My dad's mantra was "Go and play," which I did. I built ramps and skated after school at the pirate skatepark, tore motorcycles apart in the yard and sometimes put them back together, played video games when the battery held a charge, etc. One therapist called this childhood cold and distant, which is perhaps accurate. It made closer relationships feel smothering and that's more or less the space I still occupy.

My parents split when I was six or eight or so, and my mother moved further and further away from the house they'd lived in, which became my dad's house. She moved off the mountain to town (20 minutes away, but also closer to school and the grocery store), then San Diego, then back to her hometown in Indiana. My siblings (younger sister and younger younger brother) moved to Indiana and grew up with our mom, while I stayed in California with our dad.

Coupled with "Go and play," was the work of rebuilding the house, rewiring the solar system, and other projects around the property. The more accurate mantra of our existence was, "Do your thing until you need help, or I do." He built me a number of skate ramps, taught me how to help and I was able to translate those skills to the motorcycles and other projects of my own.

My dad's property was and continues to be the space for me and others to crashland: when I quit my first job and moved back because I could no longer pay rent, when I dropped out of community college, when I had nothing to do during summer breaks, when I dropped out of grad school, when the pandemic of 2020 hit. We just offered the cabin to a friend who seems to need to get out of their current space.

The available crashland is very spacial, rather than emotional. It took being checked into a psych ward by family friends for my dad to offer therapy and ask what I needed (which was immensely helpful and well-executed). Other times, my return was a hug hello, a warm bed and warmer food. Then back to work on whatever the current projects were.

Part of his usual offering on my return was likely my learned outward persona—I was fine, I was just here now instead of there. Life, school, jobs, rent were all just projects and if I needed help I

was to ask. If I didn't ask, I didn't need help.

How much of this shaped, reinforced or is merely coincidence is up for debate, but it does offer a glimpse into patterns that feel very true: self-soothing and an immediate focus on projects.

Projects around the property translated well into academia, where I spent most of my life and focus from 2006 to 2019. Time was broken into school years and divided into smaller chunks: semesters, homework deadlines, different classes etc. Deadlines dictated which class to focus on at any time, and likewise semesters dictated I focus on school until finals were over and I could go climb. I scheduled my life around classes to the point I'd have to tell myself out loud if I was going skip an assignment in order to focus on a different class. Looking back, the academic structure feels a little like a crutch to cling to while I didn't really know what else to be doing with my life (still don't). It was a structure I was able to choose, which is very important for my constant avoidance of rules and limitations.

Skateboarding, climbing and punk rock are all very based in the individual, which fit me really well. They are also all inherently based in community—much more fun with friends who will pick you up from the floor of the moshpit, catch your whip and help you build ramps. The sum is much larger than the parts, *and* the success and failures are entirely your own. This is very different from futbol, which is fun but ultimately not as much fun for me due to the identity of the team over the self.

This independent identity certainly plays into the self-soothing, as does my focus on projects. Depression, failure, frustration etc. are problems for me to consider. In doing so I need to focus on them may need to drop some projects as I dropped assignments in school. Until I ask for help, additional people involved adds an additional problem for me solve: how do I figure out how this person can support me? Which, is basically my original problem repeated. To deal with offered support, I push away the problem to be “fine” in order crawl away somewhere and lick my wounds in private, which generally compresses the problem and makes it more difficult to deal with later.

# Overall Concept: Us as Individuals

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My introduction to polyamory was Burning Man and its definition was sex on the whim. It led to cis-het men avoiding accountability and communication. I ran into these stories from femme friends, and was reminded of them when I brought up this idea. So I'm attempting this, in this patriarchal reality and will have to keep that in mind.

To that end I've focused my resources on femme and queer authors. Femme authors because since I'm working to have better relationships with femmes, I should focus on listening to them, and queer authors because there is a mountain of research and thought and experience in escaping heterosexism.

I've pointedly skipped cis-het men resources because there doesn't feel to me anything inherently masculine in trying to have better relationships. The idea of reclaiming masculinity hasn't stuck to me, and Erin Innes articulates this pretty well in ref. 7. Ian Mack praises her article and invites her onto his podcast where he fails to address any of her points, and makes her rehash her article at him in ref. 8. I'm sure (and hope) there's a dude doing it right out there—lemme know if you find him.

That being said, my undefined needs and wants in previous relationships resulted in me leaving them suddenly without any articulation of why. I'd assumed my relationships would settle into a mutually enjoyed equilibrium with time—or we weren't right for each other. Articulating this pattern led me to noticing how shitty that was, and I'm sorry exes.

I came to Relationship Anarchy and Solo Polyamory because it seems to be the framework that fits me best of those I've seen. A friend of mine pointed me in these directions after we shook hands on a bro-ship. That's a relationship I very much like—identifying what we can offer each other and sharing what resources we have.

I work remote out of the van I live in and bounce around to climb and skate and whatever else I wind up getting excited about. I prefer squat on a rooftop, in the redwoods or in the van rather than live in a house, and have done so more than 80% of the time in the last decade plus. That doesn't leave a lot of room for stability and roots. It does on the other hand leave a lot of



room for flexibility and re-aligning my location or plan with the needs of the people around me.

As I mentioned in the Origin section, my life has largely been organized by sections of time (semester, classes, weather for climbing) and that continues to feel true. I'm very much "Here for now," because soon Joshua Tree will be too hot to climb in, Vedauwoo will be covered in snow, classes will be over and I'll be heading off to a different university for grad school.

I make a point to keep my relationships with people when I move, the relationships just change a bit. I still think of you as in my life, even if it's only over Instagram or text exchanges. In these times I particularly like bouncing questions back and forth: Resume edits? Why's the lean fuel code firing? Know anyone nearby to climb with? Anyone know how to scrape data from a javascript-heavy site? I guess the relationships transform into support networks and that feels very authentic to me.

I want to focus on us—I and you and people—as individuals. Individuals have needs, they're complicated and they're valid. So we'll have to communicate through our needs to come to an understanding, a mutual agreement for our relationship. No relationship may be the correct choice. I know there are some people who want a close bond with their other people, one that builds a relationship as a structure for shelter. That's 100% valid, and not an agreement I should enter into with you. As my past shows me, I'm wont wind up disappearing in the night with some vital support beam clenched in my anxious hands.

Implicit in my thoughts, which means I should explicitly say it, is I feel like a complete entity—at least within the context of feeling like an entity at all. I don't feel like my final form as an entity is within a structured partnership, but as a hopefully more articulate version of my current existence. I default to treating the people around me like this as well, and that isn't necessarily true. The cultural narrative I grew up in says I'll die bitter and alone, and I've accepted that. Likely, there are other options and I'm looking for them.

# Why Have What Relationships if all talk about is the individual?

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Because I looked up into the canyons from the Laguna Salada and imagined disappearing to watch the erosion year after year and never see anyone again and wouldn't that be the most amazing and slow existence? I was hit with perhaps the most intense feeling of loneliness I've ever felt and I damn near fell to me knees to weep.

Because Walden is a lie and the cabins in Northern California are parasites off the system they attempt to escape and despite all the times I've let depression convince me to never speak to anyone again—jokes are good and I like bars and I'm not actually as standoffish as I wish if someone interrupts my moping with words.

Because it's inevitable and I can either be a bitter bastard about it and let the world burn itself on me until it learns not to, or I can choose to give you this zine because I think I'll laugh louder with you around and the stars will shine a little brighter and the dance floors will be a little more fun and Tecate is getting me all sentimental and it feels nice.

So the "Why" is that I'm a sentimental goofball who can't stay away from people if I try, so will have relationships. The what is up for definition: an inspiring note from Relationship Anarchy in ref. 10 is that each relationship is unique. I feel this to be very true, and I also know I have tendencies and default behaviours. Those are the "What."

Here are a few statements that feel very important to me. They feel important and true, and new in their articulation—meaning I expect to mess them up and expect to still find them important and true when I do.

1. We are all unique<sup>1</sup> individuals deserving respect as such.
2. Relationships offer rather than demand and expect.
3. Commitments are communicated and agreed upon.

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<sup>1</sup>Or effectively unique in that even if we are soulless biological computers, the complexity of each of our systems is ineffable to another like system.

## A Few Models (Self-Diagnosis)

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*“These are models. They are not real,  
this is not what’s happening, it’s all in  
your head.”*

*– Dr. Orlando Raola  
Chemistry 1A, SRJC, circa 2010*

The models worked to explain what happened in our test-tubes and they worked for us to communicate about what we observed. So here’s a couple of models and my considerations of them, in case they are helpful in communication.

On the surface, they all seem to focus on romantic and sexual relationships, but they ring very true for me in my friendships as well. And, the main use of this booklet will be in understanding myself for my friends—they deal with me a ton.

### **Over/Under Functioning, ref. 1**

The premise of the model is that when things get rocky some people will jump into a flurry of activity in relationships, while others pull back into inaction—over and under functioners respectively. I expect I’ll over function for a time, as it does help soothe the anxiety and the quote “Easier to do than to feel,” feels to ring pretty true. The flip side, is that at some point I’ve seen myself give up into under functioning when over functioning didn’t help—to a feeling of helplessness. In both cases, communication is in order (I feel like this will show up a bit).

A tangential note from my time in academia, is that I’m socially prepped (cis-het white dude) to over function into speaking up more often. I’ve gotten better with this and plan to use the same technique of telling my impatiences to shut up and wait in relationships.

### **The Five Love Languages, ref. 2 & 3**

Here the premise is that interactions can be categorized into five labels: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. People do or do not like giving or receiving each category, and they don’t have to match. Someone

could like receiving gifts but picking out a gift could cause a horrible amount of anxiety.

## **Words of Affirmation**

The Words of Affirmation love language is saying nice things about someone: I'm proud of you, you look pretty today, I love you, etc.

I can receive rather mild words of affirmation, as long as it feels more in passing—a pause to notice before continuing. I get lost in the spotlight and don't know how to respond. Especially anxiety-inducing compliments are about my physical appearance, because I was born this way and how can I take credit for it?

I don't often give words of affirmation. I spent a great deal of my adolescence and previous adult life avoiding compliments about peoples looks on account of it being shallow, and completely missed that people like it—patriarchy be damned. I'm working on that. I do like giving out words of affirmation when I notice a change, such as someone learns to cut straight with a skilsaw, or learns to trust their sticky rubber climbing shoes. These usually mirror the words of affirmation I like to receive—not the most important thing going on at the time.

## **Quality Time**

The Quality Time love language is more than spending time together. It is also prioritizing time with the specific someone.

Similar to the Words of Affirmation, this puts me in a spotlight and I'm not sure what to do with it except feel uncomfortable. I like activities and projects with other people, but those experiences are the focus rather than me.

I can try, but I'm not sure I'm very good at this one. There's a good chance I'll focus too much on whatever we are doing with our quality time, rather than you.

## **Receiving Gifts**

The Gifts love language is the thought surrounding picking out items that is most important. Through simple items, people can show that they've heard and remembered off-hand remarks about favorite candy bars.

Yep, I'm running away from imagined spotlights again. I also live in a pretty small space (my van) and don't have a lot of

room to keep things. Necessary items can be great to receive, but I'm often already picked them up for myself—please check in first. That being said, the right non-surprise gifts can be wonderful! Especially second-hand things I need, yes that.

I try to be attentive to what the people around me say and pick up things for them when I notice something. I'm not sure how strong I am in this one.

### **Acts of Service**

The Acts of Service love language is based on spontaneous assistance—doing something above and beyond what the daily life has shown expectation to be.

I'll probably mill around and fidget if you do my dishes. I'm just not good at sitting still while other people are doing things, but I can accept this and figure it out.

I like this one to give out a lot. It feels like a nice support role that allows the people around me to get back to whatever else they were doing.

### **Physical Touch**

The Physical Touch love language is one of intimate physical contact. Not necessarily sex—holding hands, fingers run through hair, etc. all count.

I like physical touch when it is an addition to a good day, but find it distracting when I'm dealing with problems. It is not a soothing language for me usually. It is also possible for physical touch to feel like a spotlight, which will get me anxious.

I am happy to and enjoy offering this love language, though will have a hard time remembering to if I am withdrawn.

## **Relationship Anarchy, ref. 10**

The main point of the Relationship Anarchy essay is to treat each relationship as its own entity, rather than in relation to your other relationships. Each is unique, with a unique individual, and deserves its own place and definition. It also pointedly removes hierarchy between relationships, noting the importance of friendships and a reminder to not ignore them for the sake of a romantic relationship.

Relationship Anarchy, like political anarchy, is not the absence of commitments, rules or respect. It does not advocate for a free-for-all, but rather for specific, communicated and agreed upon commitments. It's not about avoiding responsibility, but rather defining responsibility between people rather than assuming nebulous social definitions of friendship, partner, etc.

What I like about this essay is the importance she places on the individuals. I've worried, and often played out, relationships in which the relationship became more important than any of the individuals. But the relationship doesn't exist the way the individuals do—it is just a model created in our mind.

So the individuals matter, and in order for that to make sense there needs to be a lot of communication to ensure everyone is on the same page and accepts the relationship. It sounds like a lot of work, but so is dealing with a crumbling relationship and the fallout of its collapse. I have been a pretty shitty communicator in the past, and the inspiration for this booklet is setting down my thoughts in order to communicate from with the people around me.

This also fits with my focus on individuality in myself and those around me. I think of the people around me as additions to existence (and no people around me is very lonely and I don't like it, so as a necessity as well), and consider myself the same to them. The addition is both for fun and enjoyment, as well as a support network for crisis, and crisis will always be more important than fun. The Relationship Anarchy model brings this idea forward to cherish all your relationships, which means prioritizing crisis for the people around me.

Treating each relationship as its own unique entity also pointedly removes hierarchy from relationships. I greatly appreciate this sentiment and expect it will be rather difficult to realize in practice. So how much no-hierarchy my relationships will actually have remains to be seen.

# Flags: Green, Amber and Red

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Here is a quick list of flags and how I respond to idea, actions and patterns in behavior. It is far from complete.

## **Green: I'm stoked on you and what we're doing**

1. Passionate about goals/ideas and active towards them.
2. Humor, I like laughing a lot.
3. Independence, I like to see people making their way, defining their way.

## **Amber: I'm pausing and gaining worry/anxiety**

1. Too many check-ins, too much info, directionless communication.
2. Rigid & full-time commitments, loss of independence.
3. Resistance to changing plans as new info arrives.

## **Red: I'm pretty sure you're not good for me other the people around me.**

1. Won't take accountability: We all fuck up and even a simple, "Yes, I did that and I am sorry," goes a long way.
2. Focused on problems rather than solutions, repetition
3. Dishonest: We can't even have a conversation because your words are meaningless.
4. Don't believe people when they speak.
5. Self-centered world view, esp. white people: The world is vast and we are very little in it. It feels very violent to operate in the world without that outlook and I don't want to contribute to it.
6. Skipping consent, anywhere: Entirely unacceptable and this includes changes to commitments and agreements without involving all parties.

# References

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For pdf versions, the websites are links to the actual article.

For print versions, hopefully the title and author is enough to lead you to the article.

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