

FOPE NKWOCHA

## Situationship

*How to Stop Breaking Your Own Heart*

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*To my mum, thank you for scanning everything I wrote as a child  
and making my writing feel like important work. Thanks for  
bragging about me to your coworkers and giving me my first fans!*

*To my dad, for hovering over me and making sure I did not fall  
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# Introduction

This whole thing started out being about me.

I pride myself on being very self-aware, and I can usually point out my flaws before others see it. However, in 2017, I felt like I had been making the same mistakes with my relationships or, more accurately, situationships. What was even worse was that it was not one situationship. Instead, it was a series of situationships - which in retrospect, had a pattern to them - that I did not recognize. So much for being self-aware! Things changed at the beginning of 2018 when I was single-single, that is, not talking to anyone in any shape or form. Graduate school had just gotten done, and all the job-leads I thought I had, had fallen through. So, what does a single-single, unemployed person do? Think deeply about her life! Yup that is what I did.

I started to reflect on the last situationship I got into and how messed up it was. It was the kind of situation that had the potential to make me the topic of gossip on social media - if word about it had spread. It was embarrassing that I had agreed to be strung along by a guy who had no specific intentions stated. This guy was your typical nice-church-guy, the kind that appeared super harmless and holy on paper. He served in church and had a very humble vibe to him. He spoke in tongues with a lot of confidence and talked about his many spiritual achievements (which I now realize is not a meek holy thing to do). Everybody liked and respected him. It was these characteristics that made



the end of this story more unforeseeable. We will call him Not-So-Angelic. I let all my guard down around Not-So-Angelic because I guess when you think you are around someone holy; you throw caution to the wind.

Everything seemed nice. I enjoyed our growing friendship, spiritual conversations, and positive vibes. To be honest, if I had been more vigilant, I would have noticed that some things were off about our interactions. Not-So-Angelic was evasive in his responses to my questions. Instead of providing a straightforward answer, he would opt for a long story that never quite answered the question. On my part, I preferred our budding undefined relationship to the loneliness of singleness. I was struggling with finding my tribe – people I got along with and who could provide me with a sense of love and belonging. I figured I would focus all my energy on finding the love that I assumed would cure my loneliness. This story with Not-So-Angelic ended with me finding out that I was the other option he was considering while he awaited “confirmation from the Holy Spirit” about his real Girlfriend. It turns out, Not-So-Angelic’s holiness did not stop him from pursuing me as plan B in case his primary relationship did not work out. And my cowardice and quest for love did not allow me to demand better. I could not summon the courage to ask questions to define the relationship. I will leave that story now and focus more on why I wrote this book.

In 2018, when I had my awakening about situationships, I decided to journal about it. I hoped that planning to avoid situationships in the new year would help make it a reality. Spoiler alert: it worked! I titled my journal entry: “How Not to Break Your Own Heart in 2018 & Henceforth: A Guide for Fope by Fope”. It is still somewhere on my Instagram highlights

(yeah, I shared it). One of my four rules for preventing future heartbreak was “thou shall not be thirsty.” It was an idea that came from me realizing that I had been so thirsty for love that I was too quickly accepting random guys into my life. So, in one sense, it was my fault that I was ending up in unhealthy relationships. I realized that meeting random people was not my fault. However, accepting them into my life and camping with them certainly was a decision I was making (or at the least, it was a result of my negligence). So, I owned up to my faults and wrote out my plan to do better.

During this season of reflecting, I realized that I had some lousy beliefs about love. I believed that I was incomplete. I was also scared of ending up alone. I felt like I was running out of time to find someone. Let me also add that I wanted to have sex. I felt like while saving sex for marriage was not the hardest thing, striving for sexual purity in what I thought and watched was getting harder by the day. I was barely 22 at the peak of all these emotions. But I strongly felt like I had to do something about my singleness; it felt like a disease that needed a cure. I was sure that I had to meet someone right away, or my window of opportunity would close.

Hindsight grants us the privilege of clarity, so I also want to be fair to my younger self. It is indeed much easier to make new friends and go on new dates when you are young and in school because you are surrounded by people of similar ages and mindsets. It is also a legitimate desire to want to meet someone and to prioritize being in a relationship. I talk about these desires a lot in this book, both by describing how to find more date-worthy people, and by discussing being proactive about your search for someone awesome to do life with. But at the same time, it is essential to realize that we do not have total

control over this process of getting into a great relationship. We cannot deny the hand of God in orchestrating time and chance. Neither can we forget that you still need someone else to do their part to make things work. My eagerness to meet someone and being anxious about not seeing things happen on my preferred timeline did not help. It only led to me welcoming everyone that seemed like a “potential” date without really screening them. Thankfully, I was shielded by God’s mercy from many of the consequences that could have come from my unwise unguided desperation. All I have to show for that season of life are unpleasant memories of mistakes I did not have to make, and stories about people like Not-So-Angelic. But it could have been a different story.

You will meet all kinds of people, but you do not have to accept all types of people into your life. You can avoid many love and relationship problems by becoming more aware of your problem areas, setting appropriate boundaries in relationships, and desiring and working towards better relationship outcomes. This book is for you if you believe in love that lasts and want it. It is for you if you desire marriage and are tired of investing your time and energy in people who do not mirror the same effort. This book is also for you if a part of you is confident that there has to be more to love! You know that love could be better: more profound, more satisfying, more growth-inducing, less casual, less selfish...more heaven-like.

I am a Christian. This means my understanding of the Bible and its teachings about life, have significantly influenced my perspective on everything, including relationships. There is a chance that you will find some of this book preachy. Hopefully, you will not just feel preached at, and you will be able to resonate with the message. Deep down, I hope you will agree with the

principles in the book, and that some of it will stick with you. It will make sense to both your head and your heart. This book will leave you with a desire for better outcomes in relationships and equip you with the skills to achieve these outcomes. Let's get into it!

I

## What is a Situationship?

*It is like a relationship, except that it is not.*



# 1

## Things are Fuzzy.

When Facebook came out with its relationship statuses, it had “It’s complicated” as one of its options. It made a lot of people chuckle, but it also gave a name to what people had been experiencing but were unable to describe. Situationships fit right here, under the “it’s complicated” status.

The “situation” part of the word helps capture this idea that it can be difficult and confusing to describe what exactly is going on in a situationship. It truly is complicated. But what exactly is complicated? Is it that whatever is going on has never been defined? Or was it defined at one point, and then one party did not keep their word?

There are a lot of ways that situationships can be complicated. We will start with my definition of what a situationship is:

A situationship is the **blurry space** between being in a clearly defined romantic relationship and being just friends. Mismatched words and actions create this lack of clarity. One party or both parties **act as though they are in a relationship, while actively claiming not to be in one**. Finally, **one party is more**

**committed or more ready for commitment** than the other.

You might want to read that definition again, as it will set the premise for what we will be exploring throughout this book. But I will be breaking it down a bit more, so you get the most out of it. There are three critical parts to this definition, and we will explore them in the first three chapters.

In a situationship, you know that something is off. It may be many factors that come together to create this off feeling, but the feeling is undeniable. You know that your relationship could be more explicit, more defined, and less ambiguous. These are some of the familiar ways in which people get entangled in the web of situationships:

- He might make confusing moves, like ignoring you when you are in the same room but messaging you at the end of the day about how much he misses you. It is actions like these that leave you questioning his motives: is he bored, is he horny, or does he genuinely miss you? These actions might very well also have you questioning your sanity and why you choose to endure this kind of inconsistency.
- Everything might feel like a relationship. You think you are the only girl in the picture. When he talks about his future wife, it is pretty much you who he is describing. Still, he never uses absolute terms to describe your relationship. This style of dating is a scam that defrauds you of your time. You are either friends or more than friends. The in-between stuff that makes up situationships is just stressful.
- She might tell you that she does not want to be in a relationship because she is not ready. She might include heartbreaking stories of how much her last boyfriend hurt her. There might also be details about how she needs time



to heal. However, her unhealed heart has not stopped your emotionally and physically intimate friendship from blooming for over two years. For some reason, you both thought it would be okay to occasionally make-out since you are both single, you know? But yeah, you are still just friends, tongues interlocking notwithstanding.

One of the worst complicating factors is that situationships are never explicitly defined. Do you know the highly meme-d about “what are we” questions that everyone seems to dread asking? They are officially called questions that help you define the relationship, also known as DTR. Why does it seem old-fashioned to want a more defined relationship? Why is it “expecting too much too quickly” to want to understand what months of just talking mean? Why does modern dating thrive on ambiguity? The thing is, old-fashioned or not; it would save you so much time and energy and potential heartbreak if you choose to be honest about your needs from the beginning.

Some people find indirect ways to ask questions to define the relationship, hoping to understand what their partner’s plans are. However, indirect questions still leave room for misinterpretation. Unfortunately, I find that those who are benefiting the most from a boundaryless relationship, find ways to evade questions that help define the relationship. The only way to clear the fuzziness, save yourself unnecessary stress, and become confident of a person’s intentions, is to ask precise questions and to clarify until you understand.

## Contradictory Words and Actions.

**T**he primary thing that makes situationships frustrating is that words and actions do not align. Instead, they are often contradictory. In situationships, both parties often act as though they are in a relationship while insisting on explaining the subtle differences between being a friend-girl versus a girlfriend. When you say one thing and then act in a way that contradicts what you have said, it is confusing. Can you blame your brain for the confusion about what to believe? On the one hand, you are growing in intimacy with the lovey-dovey activities. And on the other hand, you say you are just friends. Your words and actions do not match up.

Modern dating likes to imagine that the absence of boundaries frees people up to be their true selves. And that this lack of restraints must be somehow good because boundaries, like chains, are confining. This line of thinking is what birthed the “we are just hanging out; we do not need a title” style of poorly defined relationships. So, what is the fuss about titles? Why do we need to be explicit about what we know we both feel? Is it merely a sign of status? Is it so we can *officially* brag about

each other? Why is commitment so important? What if we are just having fun, and it works for both of us? What if it has an end date - like graduation day- and we both know it, so why bother committing? I have thought about how to answer these questions, but I would like you to come up with your answers now. Do titles matter? And if they do, why are they important to you?

Defining a relationship, calling it dating, and establishing what you are trying to do matters; because with it comes boundaries, responsibilities, and expectations. I think of a boundary as the line that demarcates the beginning or end of a property. We place protective measures around things that are valuable and important to keep: our time, our investments, our money, our mental well-being, etc. Boundaries in relationships protect us from fruitless investments of our time, emotions, and energy. Titles in a relationship are the most basic form of communication of what we expect from each other. Titles, at the very least, say: I am yours; you are mine, and we mutually consent to pursue each other exclusively. I can share deep things with you and expect that you will still be there tomorrow because we have committed to each other. Naming a relationship makes it less about going with the flow of how you feel about each other; it adds a level of dedication and loyalty. Ultimately, **titles are about commitment** and clarifying each party's intentions. Further defined expectations and boundaries will be required at some point, but a title is the starting point.

Setting appropriate boundaries with a partner should also include a conversation about the purpose of a relationship, which protects both of you from years of assuming that you were on the same page. Conversely, neglecting to set boundaries with each other means you have no basis for expected behavior

since all you have to rely on are your assumptions. Titles in relationships are boundaries, as they help keep outsiders out, reminding you that you are a unit, a team working together towards some agreed-upon end. You need to ask yourself this: when no boundaries exist, what am I doing? Am I only passing the time? Am I hoping things will figure themselves out? Or am I just waiting till my heart gets broken? I am convinced that situationships are only a waiting room, a place you wait till you become sufficiently frustrated by the inconsistency of a person's words and actions.

Inconsistency is very frustrating. It makes you want to yell, "Are you in, or are you out?!" Inconsistency in a relationship is even more frustrating because of how stressful and anxiety-inducing unpredictable behavior is when you have feelings for someone. It is almost like you are waiting for someone to decide what to do with you. Understandably, you may want to revel in your feelings for each other, but you are not sure you are *allowed* to have those feelings. Many days are happy and enjoyable, and you subconsciously start to imagine a future. Although that is not a luxury you can afford with your no-commitment, but profoundly intimate situation. A situationship is heartbreak in the making.

There is a fascinating twist to situationships. It would be different if situationships were one-sided, that is, if there were an apparent victim and a clear villain. But here is what is mind-blowing: in situationships, the victim is *also* the villain! As a person who recognizes the inconsistency in a situationship, and chooses to continue to allow it to proceed, you are actively contributing to your imminent heartbreak! You are the victim of your partner's inconsistency. At the same time, you are a villain in condoning and participating in the maintenance of the

mess. Is this not wild?

## Thanks for reading. Want to read more?

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