

## The “Us and Them” Relationship Spread



This spread is an expansion of the 3-card relationship spread in which Card #1 represents Party “A,” Card #2 represents Party “B” and Card #3 represents the relationship between them. It brings in the idea that external people or circumstances (the “them” to our “us”) can have significant influence over the course of a relationship. These “others” can take the form of family, friends, ex-partners, co-workers, authority figures, etc, or of environmental demands involving any area of life. They are arrayed on opposite sides of the equation, showing their proportional impact on each partner individually; they don't have to be of like quality – her “Them” might be a family patriarch or religious figure, his could be an ex-partner. The “Me” and “You” can be read as any personal pronoun in any combination: “Him” and “Her,” “Her and Him,” “Him and Him,” “Her and Her,” or even, in the immortal words of Theodor “Dr. Seuss” Geisel, “Thing One” and “Thing Two” - the relationship can be between situational factors and not actual people.

This spread uses rank, facing and elemental dignity to determine the relative importance of each consideration to the overall status of the relationship. There are many possible permutations. (If Cards #1 and #2 are of the same rank, they start as equals.)

A Major Arcanum (“trump”) card as either Card #1 or Card #2 can show a lopsided relationship, with one partner dominating. A trump at Card #3 can define a relationship that may dwarf the individual contribution of its participants. A good example is a “First Couple” in government, who must always show an agreeable and harmonious face to the world regardless of their private differences. A King and Queen in positions #1 and #2 with a Page in position #3 can indicate a child at the center of a tug-of-war between parents. An identical or higher-rank court card of either gender can show a contentious figure at the heart of the matter, or possibly an arbiter or referee. A central minor card may reveal the interests or attitudes shared by the partners or, conversely, those that can drive them apart.

Elemental dignity adds another layer of subtlety to the picture. Three Fire cards in the middle can show a “hot-blooded” relationship that may burn out quickly, while mild Water cards surrounding a powerful Fire card can reflect a volatile emotional climate with frequent “flare-ups,” especially if the Fire card is of a higher rank. While mixed dignity between the three cards is often seen as having no effect on the middle card, it is just as likely that two friendly or unfriendly cards in a row will have a net effect on the individual involved in the pairing, increasing or decreasing that partner's “say” in the relationship to the detriment or benefit of the other.

The elemental nature of the “Them” cards is first compared to their adjacent “Me” and “You” cards as a two-card set to show whether that partner is strengthened or weakened by the effects of outside forces; the idea is that he or she filters or buffers the influence of external inputs by adjusting his or her attitudes or behavior accordingly, even if only to maintain interpersonal harmony or individual peace of mind. Secondly, the three-card sets (for example, “Them-Me-Us”) can be read as modifying that partner's position from both directions, a give-and-take between focusing on the needs of the relationship and on obligations to other interested parties. The partner with the most empowering combination is likely to be at an advantage in the partnership.

Finally, the concept of directionality or “facing” presents a further opportunity to shade the interpretation of card combinations. If Cards #1 and #2 both exhibit directionality and are facing toward one another, they are on the same wavelength regarding their connection; if one faces away from the center, he or she is most likely distracted by external circumstances; if both face away they may be moving apart in mutual disaffection. If the center card is directional and is of a higher rank than the flanking cards, it could be “casting its blessings” on the favored partner – one common example would be a judge in divorce proceedings. A court card in either of the “Them” positions could show an outside love interest, but if facing away from the associated partner card it could mean an unrequited or platonic level of involvement. Facing toward one another, this could reflect a new relationship forming at the expense of the old one. A lower-ranking court card might reflect a child-custody or single-parenting scenario. If neither card in a pair is directional, there is no particular bias in any direction, but there could also be no “chemistry” at work in the relationship.