Sexuality’s monster is often thought of as incontrollable and revolting desire. It is there in our everyday life, a lurking reminder of how dangerous and tiring life would be if we for a minute stepped out of the safety of decent and normal behaviour. In this paper I discuss some concepts of Swedish/Western normative good manners, or call it power relations of gender and sexuality. Jealousy is one of these concepts, fidelity is another. Whereas jealousy is often enough a disgraceful performance, fidelity is celebrated. Nevertheless, their coexistence is inevitable alongside ideas of freedom and equality. Drawing on bisexual women’s experiences I find these cultural norms operate in contradictory and sometimes unpredictable ways for bisexual subjectivity, eroticism and politics.

**BISEXUAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

Bisexuality is a category under negotiation. Under the reign of androcentrism and homophobia, bisexuality has been represented as a passing phase or a temporary desire. In her recent book *Bisexual spaces* (2002), Clare Hemmings points out that bisexuality has always been represented as a sexuality in between the binary poles of homo- and heterosexuality, and in between gender oppositions of feminine and masculine, and thus, rarely as a sexuality or a subjectivity of its own (Hemmings 2002:2). Recently, however, as homosexuality acquires public recognition as a result of legislation on gay marriage passed in Sweden, in several European countries and and a few others, bisexuality appears as one among many alternatives to continue the production of sexual criticism.

Epistemologically, bisexuality is marginalised in the historiography of sexuality and desire. The overriding dichotomy of homosexuality and heterosexuality, highlighted by the critics in queer studies and gay and lesbian studies, has resulted in that little attention has been paid to bisexuality. Bisexuality emerges recurrently in 20th century’s sexology. Historian Steven Angelides claims that bisexuality has had a central function in the production of gender dichotomies and the binary opposition of homo- and heterosexuality, but marginalised and repeated as the blind spot of science (Angelides 2001:15). The paradox
in the construction of bisexuality is the simultaneousness of centrality and absence as it occurs in Angelides study. He compares this double destiny of bisexuality with two opposite but common discourses about bisexuality: either the universal assumption, e.g. in the phrase: "everybody is in fact bisexual", or as a contingent desire, expressed as "bisexuality is only a phase, it does not really exist". In early psychoanalytical theories, as well as in the sexology of fin-de-siècle and in the beginning of the gay movement in the early seventie's, bisexuality was an active category, which would shed light on the mysteries of sexuality. Throughout the century, there has been a pattern of bisexuality having a (universal) purpose in the initial stages of the production of each field of knowledge but, as time passes, the erasure of bisexuality becomes central in these paradigms to the advantage of the emergence and cementation of hetero- and homosexual dichotomy (Angelides 2001).

European sexologists as Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis had the idea of “primordial bisexuality” as a significant part of our evolutionary inheritance explaining differences both between sexes and sexuality (Angelides 2001:191). At the same time, bisexuality did undermine sexual taxonomy and had to be excluded as a whole, as a universal function in what Angelides calls "the present tense" -- or the Here and Now in Benjamin Walters’s words-- in order to avoid crises of meaning in the dichotomies man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual.

British sociologist Merl Storr demonstrates that in Krafft-Ebing's and Havelock Ellis's works the binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality was not as rigorous as we understand it today. The taxonomy was also gliding in the definitions of sexuality and gender. Furthermore, Storr shows that a closer investigation of bisexuality gives an insight in not only the co-construction of gender and desire in the beginning of the 20th Century, but also the intersection of “race” is vital for the understanding of bisexuality (Storr 1997:75).

The meaning and purpose of sexuality for those early sexologists were ultimately about procreation and the species’ or race’s survival and preservation (race and species were used in ambiguous ways and without any relative order), which implies that “race” is an organising principle for sexuality (Storr 1997:78). Bisexuality in particular becomes fully understood in reference to the racial notions of the time (Storr 1997:79). Sexuality is thus explained as the key to the survival of the species or race, and sexuality also explains the distinction of normality and perversion. Bisexuality is understood as something latent and hidden, that lurks within each sex. Havelock Ellis made a difference between hermaphroditism and bisexuality, seeing hermaphroditism as an anomaly in the development of the individual (ontogeny) and bisexuality as the originary state (phylogeny) for this anomaly. This locates bisexuality not only as a developmental possibility for the individual, but also at the origin of the entire ‘species/race’ (Storr 1997:80). Krafft- Ebing describes bisexuality as a state of origin for the genitals and the development of the separate sexes, man and woman, indicates a higher and more 'pure' stage of the development of the species.
Krafft-Ebing adds that among "civilized races" sexual difference is greater than among "less developed races" (Storr 1997:80).

The significance of bisexuality in our time might seem at first glance to be very different, but several patterns are currently reproduced. In the early days of the gay and lesbian liberation, as the American sociologist Paula Rust has shown, bisexual identity did not achieve autonomy, but represented an utopian end that would be reached the day we had cast off the yoke of sexual hierarchies (Rust 1995:195). Bisexuality was thought of as an underlying capacity in the human being, to be able to enjoy sexual response towards both sexes. Once again bisexuality had the role of the universal, future desire, but soon enough the homo-/heterosexual dichotomy grew more important and the gay community had to abandon bisexual utopia and become more univocal in the struggle of meaning.

In the article "Postmodern Bisexuality", Merl Storr asserts that bisexual theory arises, especially in the US and UK, within the frame of postmodern theory (Storr 1999), which she means has led to facing away from cultural and social reality. Even though bisexuality has been interpreted differently during the course of the last century, it is mainly after the 90's queer movement that bisexuality is conformed into a more independent identity politics. The bisexual narratives generated today are an effect of the gay and queer movements’ political positions which accompany the epistemological expressions in post-structuralist feminism. The problematisation of the gay movement has also allowed specific bisexual expressions (Storr 1999:316). Thus, bisexuality has placed itself as a challenge to current western dualism.

I mean that this challenge is an essential part of bisexual theory, but which risks to point to and illuminate dualism’s effect and thus uphold the implicit ambiguity, instead of deconstructing the inner workings of double meanings.

**MONSTROUS DESIRE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

In this paper I investigate the relationship between hegemonic monogamy and bisexual desire, and western concepts such as jealousy, fidelity and freedom. I present parts of my project and field-work, mainly interviews with bisexual women in Sweden, as well as some material analysis.

I have interviewed 16 self-identified bisexual women in Sweden, in order to collect their own stories on bisexuality. Most of the interviewed women consider the complexities and contradictions in desire, irrespective of desire, as signifying sexual identity, erotic experiences, pleasure or sexual politics. The experiences of bisexual women might produce a political platform for different inquiries and requests, as bisexuality is inscribed in certain significations, expectations and resistances that provide different perspectives into cultural images of desire. For instance, most of the interviewed women were critical, to different
extents, of twosomeness or monogamy as the only option for the expression of desire in a relationship.

I intend to deconstruct hegemonic twosomeness as part of my thesis and the reason I will attach a bisexual perspective in deconstructing twosomeness owes mainly to the experience of "double" desire among bisexuals. The "doubleness" of gender preferences in bisexual desire has an effect on the expectations of bisexual practices. This sometimes leads to situations where bisexuals are questioned on their reliability within monogamous relationships. Let me add that bisexuality does not automatically provide for a polyamorous lifestyle and sexual freedom. Some of the women I interviewed were concerned that bisexuals constantly were assumed to have many parallel partners, preferably one of each gender.¹ I will return to these assumptions in my thesis, but again, these assumptions have made the women to actively take stand on questions of relationships, inquiries that are not necessarily incorporated in homo- and heterosexual subjectivities.

From this outline on the construction of bisexuality I will now introduce some of the bisexual women and their stories.

**FREEDOM AND COMPETITORS**

Bella has a daughter with a man she sometimes meet. They are good friends, share the custody of their daughter but have no sex with each other. They live together periodically for practical reasons, but usually she lives by herself. Earlier on, she had a long-standing relationship with a woman. Bella prioritises several parallel relationships before firm ones, and at the time of the interview she had loose affairs with two men. She sometimes meets women too, but she says it is easier to meet men, even if she at times dreams of meeting Her. She has also had triangular relationships for shorter periods. Bella says:

“I often feel that when you have several different relationships it becomes so difficult to explain. I don’t know how I would react in such a situation. I haven’t been into one, but people are so different anyway. Even if I’ve got five people close to me, maybe not so as having a sexual relationship with every one of them, but that I have a relationship with them, it’s still five different people and it’s bloody seldom someone is competing with anyone else.”

¹ US sociologist Paula Rust raises this issue in an article about bisexual relationships and shows that relationship choices can be complicated by "prevalent stereotypes" about bisexuality (Rust 1996: 127). She continues: "One common stereotype is that bisexuals are promiscuous because of an inability to commit themselves to long-term monogamous relationships" (ibid). The Western dualist concept of gender locate bisexuals in a hybrid form of sexuality and "bisexuals are believed to experience conflict between their 'heterosexual desires' and their 'homosexual desires’” (Rust 1996: 128).
Competition is a recurring theme in the interviews. In twosomeness, both partners are exclusive for each other and other potential partners become competitors. Competition with others becomes the condition for twosomeness preservation. For that reason it would be a bit difficult to explain why different partners do not compete with each other. To choose both women and men suggests that twosome relationships are endangered and competition loses its sense. This is not a bisexual behavior, as both homosexuals and heterosexuals can have, and sometimes do have, several partners. Still, as Bella claims, it is difficult to avoid competition if competition is interesting for the other people involved. But her idea of having several partners does not mean to be unfaithful. The hegemony of monogamy spins around the conflict of competition and fidelity is a discipline to keep the conflict in order. In that sense a non-competitive way of having an open relationship overturns the significance of the twosome ritual.

Twosomeness is not, for all that, excluded from the interviewed women’s lives. At the time of the interview, Ellida was living with a man. For some time they had an agreement, or contract as she calls it, with each other to open the relationship to others. In practice, it meant that she met women on the side. She also says that for a long time she has been more interested in women, sexually, emotionally and intellectually. She points out that this contradicts her political ideas, as far as she endeavours to dissolve differences between women and men. Still, she has not been willing to meet other men and she says “I already have a man”. I ask her how she and her partner have talked about having a free relationship:

“What was your agreement? How did you talk about it? What did he think of you running off with girls?, I ask.

“It was more that I expressed a need of my wanting something more, I need something else, and how do we solve this? What would it look like? Then, there existed an openness confronting the possibility of both including other women. Even including other men, other people in our twosomeness, if I now may use that word, even if I think it’s like spitting on oneself. /.../ In those things we have in common there’s always been an openness for [other] people irrespective of gender. I think I’m quite attracted to threesomeness and non-monogamy and I have some kind of ideal of being three, two women and this man. I have had it as an image, which is not quite unproblematic, but we can get back to it.” (Ellida)

In Ellidas story bisexuality is the main reason for her negotiation for an open relationship, that follows the logic of double desire that requires two partners with different genders. Compared to the discourses of the 20th Century the cemented significations of gender and sexuality are struggling to keep within the frames of the common categories, which she both challenges and reaffirms. This is different from the previous knowledge production of
bisexuality as a category that at the first stage is considered to be universal, only to be erased from the historiography of dominant dichotomies of gender and sexuality. It is different in the sense that ambiguity is working within the discourse, but now exposed and situated in a (bisexual) context. To work against presumptions and simultaneously use them for strategic reasons becomes a political (in Ellidas case this is outspoken) and erotic practice to renegotiate gender and sexuality.

A little later in the interview I ask Ellida if her partner met other women:

“No, it wasn’t so current for him. He wasn’t so interested in [seeing others] at that time. It would have been precisely other women in his case. He’s not interested in meeting other men, even if I had been interested in his meeting other [men], he is not interested. /.../ He reasoned about [agreeing on having an open relationship] from some kind of bisexual point of view: ‘Yes, but you are like that. I understand you need [dating women] and it’s OK.’ So, even if there were restrictions... I don’t think we are enough done with different things that happen later. There probably was an idea of some kind of exclusivity, in spite of all. The openness for parallel relationships was probably more limited than what I had thought. It was alright up to a point, but there still was a romantic idea, a wish to be the most important, the first, a kind of primary partner, even if this kind of concepts wasn’t used then. That is, it’s maybe alright to have sex a certain number of times, but if it begins to develop into other things, in a situation with a difficult choice I don’t think he was ready to not be chosen.”

(Ellida)

Bisexuality is expressed here, from the partner, as a need, and desire is a thirst that must be quenched. Then, bisexuality becomes the idealised free zone where the norm of twosomeness can be overstepped and women and men can become equal. At the same time, freedom is a concept associated with individualism and liberalism that does not necessarily dissolve twosomeness’ framework, which also reflects Ellida’s struggle with the twosome and open relationship she is involved in. The ideal for her, a ménage-à-trois, would clearly imply other problems as she suggests, even if parallel relations already was troublesome. The fear of being left in favour of the other partner is at stake, more viable than in outspoken monogamous fidelity.

The social significance of twosomeness also implies that the couple is part of a larger social community, and solitude is seen as a failure. Every day, we meet a thick cultural context eulogising the couple. To be abandoned means not simply being betrayed, but it also reflects one’s own failure by not being sufficient, and entails alienation and isolation. Whether a relationship is monogamous or polygamous, the risk to be abandoned always exists, and monogamy per se has no guarantees of eternal fidelity, even if verbal and written vows of fidelity are culturally valuable. Nevertheless, there are other complex layers of power at stake. Ellida says that her parallel relations triggered a crisis in the relation:
“There’s some form of power imbalance. He understands the situation as if I have quite a few possibilities, partly that I may be good at staging or creating them, but also that I, more than he, move in contexts where it’s more casual and easier to get it on. So, even if we would have it now, he says that “it’s anyway only you who could take advantage of it.” That he could not do it to the same extent. That’s why it’s so difficult to handle that inequality. That is, inequality is not always bad, it maybe doesn’t always need to be equality to the millimetre, but I believe that I have the need for a feeling of equality in a larger context for my feeling comfortable”

Does equality prevent jealousy? As long as there are regulating assumptions about categories as gender and sexuality, twosomeness becomes the given form for relationships. Because these representations are based on an imbalance between women and men, coupledom acts supplementing and is the basis for making sexuality comprehensible. In such a structure, bisexuality becomes a clear disorder, as it implies doubleness. The presence of ambiguity in bisexual couple relationships does not undermine monogamy, but challenges exclusivity in twosomeness. Possession in monogamy builds on notions that several partners compete with each other. In Ellida’s story, competition among different partners and between her and her boyfriend became a vital part in the negotiation around the open relationship. The objective of Ellida’s contract was not to find someone better, therefore it is not competition in the traditional meaning of rivalry. Expressed as an imbalance of power between them, it is still interesting that her bisexuality confronts differences between women and men through the pleasure of the body. To search for partners outside the relationship becomes a variation of twosomeness rather than its deconstruction.

**JEALOUSY, THE BORDER GUARD**

Jealousy and in/fidelity belong together with the construction of monogamy. The Australian psychologist Peter van Sommers considers in *Jealousy* that "jealousy is a signal that exclusive affiliation is socially valued" (van Sommers 1988:182). And as we value property, we condemn the robber, he continues, because "We are jealous of intrusion and so assert the value of sexual love. Jealousy is the other side of sexual affirmation." (Ibid). Western society does not always approve of jealousy, but there are certain situations when jealousy is admitted.

When I interviewed Miranda she was living with a lesbian woman. When Miranda was younger, she had had a longer relationship with a man, and in between, she had shorter relationships with both men and women. Miranda tells that she cannot be faithful, even though she loves her girlfriend. For her girlfriend, this is a condition of Mirandas bisexuality.
“What is it men have that women don’t?” Miranda asks this question early in the interview and gets back to it several times.

“How do you work out in relatikonships?” I ask Miranda.

“Badly!” We laugh. “Irrespective of its being with a man or a woman. Although it’s got better with the girl I’m seeing now. With whom I have an on and off relationship, whom I love. It’s the best relationship I’ve ever had, and the worst, because I’ve really got to struggle. She had big problems with my bisexuality and questioned it very hard. She’s quite a bit younger than me and hasn’t been out for so very long. It’s been tough. Again that: Why is it guys turn you on? What is it you turn on? What is it I lack that they have? Then you feel rotten. You’re not supposed to, but you do, really,” says Miranda.

“In what way?” I ask.

“That I can’t keep myself to one and I become more unreliable. It’s as well the image there is of bisexuals. /.../

“In what way do you yourself think you’re unreliable in the relationship?” I wonder.

“That there are so many more threats. There’s twice as many threats. Also, that you don’t quite know what the other turns on. That you want to know, in a monogamous society. You ask: What is it that turns you on? What makes you horny? When it’s two different genders, it becomes a bigger threat. You don’t quite have control. You still have this need for control in a twosomeness, which I also have. Sure! I’ve been thinking if it may be related to that, that you feel you don’t have as much control over a bisexual person,” says Miranda.

What is it men have that women don’t? Miranda gets the question from her girlfriend and asks it of herself too. What is double desire good for if you live together with whom you love, and why would the threat come from men and not from other women? In this line of reasoning, gender is formulated as a feminine shortcoming and as an explanatory model legitimating infidelity. Gender differences appear in the lesbian discourse as a distancing from heterosexual norms, whereas gender is an ambiguous instance of desire in bisexuality.

Monogamy is upheld in a power balance between trust and risk, marked by an inherent frailness, and the guarantee for fidelity is, in a way, temporary. In order to minimise the risk of being abandoned, divorced or betrayed, a series of limitations must be established to control both the partner’s and the own desire.

Infidelity is constructed out of the notion that couples belong together and that sex outside of the couple is a breach of contract or a source of jealousy. Jealousy is culturally approved if it is associated to infidelity. Jealousy is also about sexual humiliation, to be denied pleasure while another gets it.
While she, when we have problems, she has believed it’s about me not getting turned on by her anymore, that I’m tired of girls.” Miranda laughs a bit. “Absolutely not! She’s actually the person who can turn me on most in my life., with whom I’ve had the best sex life. I’ve never enjoyed [sex] so much. On the other hand, we’ve had our clashes about my bisexuality, so maybe she’s challenged me too. Maybe I’ve looked more at guys. I don’t know, I’ve just thought of this. Maybe. Yes, actually. It could be so. If you put things that way. /.../ I think all the time, what is it that turns me on? Why do I like men? He looks at me. Ok, men still make me horny. What is it? I feel my way, is it as good to kiss a man?” explains Miranda.

“Yes, I can understand what you mean. You cannot quite stop investigating that. Maybe because you are put into question,” I agree.

“Mm. Partly that, partly that. I have difficulties in being monogamous. Always been so.”

“Oh, yeah?” I say. We laugh a bit. “How do you see that? Why do you [have difficulties being monogamous] when so many seem to come to it so easily?” I wonder. We laugh.

“Anyway, that’s how they try to represent themselves,” I add.

“To be monogamous? I’ve always been impulsive. /.../ It’s terrible, because, at the same time, I am myself very jealous in a relationship. At the same time, I don’t believe in monogamy. I don’t believe one can only have one desire. I mean, you have different types of friendship. I see sexuality as an emotional condition, it’s about emotions. Why could you not have a desire for different kinds of men, when you have a desire for different kinds of people for friendship, for instance? Or other feelings, or intellectual exchange with several different people? I’ve wondered about that. Why should it be so very different for precisely desire? But it’s about control as well.”

“How so?” I wonder.

“You want to feel that you’re the only one. The object of someone else’s desire, which goes against the grain of my own reasoning. But it’s something you’ve been internalised and socialised to believe. It’s probably that all of us people need to have control over our existence. Thus we think the only way is to live monogamously. What is monogamy? I’ve thought a lot around desire. It’s just conceitful to believe that you’d only have desire for one only person always, and set up limitations for oneself. But Pernilla [her girlfriend] has a great need to have this monogamous bond, contract or whatever we’d call it. It’s very important for her. I get jealous because I know that it’s a projection from my side that I can’t quite hold myself faithful, so... I think I’m a worse person and got a lot of guilt feelings and bad conscience for that, because I may be interested in someone else, being turned on by someone else,” says Miranda.

Fidelity is an expectation from society and is defined as a vow, a boundary of happiness dictated by a century-old romantic heterosexual ideal. When bisexual love may call monogamy in question, it gets a relief of infidelity and betrayal. Miranda’s contradictory
position of meeting others but still being jealous herself seems in the first place to be a contraproductive strategy. According to van Sommers jealousy concerns what you have and do not wish to lose, while envy regards what you do not have but wish to possess (van Sommers 1988:1). That certainly marks the power relations of possession and freedom, but lacks a broader gender perspective on jealousy. From a western heteronormative perspective twosomeness is a repetition of gender organisation, man and woman as different and complementary genders, celebrated in sexual fidelity in the coupledom. But gender variety and sexual pleasure are not strictly formulated by a heterosexual cosmology (Butler 1990). The gender constructions that are renegotiated in the women's stories I have outlined here, are also a renegotiation of bisexual subjectivity, both in terms of gender and sexuality, an identity localised in the knowledge production that erased bisexuality from the central significations of gender and sexuality.

CONCLUSION

Miranda, Bella and Ellida found themselves in situations where twosomeness was renegotiated as a consequence of their bisexual subjectivity. In their narratives there are several tropes, e.g. jealousy, in/fidelity, unreliability and competition, which uncover the construction of hegemonic twosomeness. That is, romance, altruism and harmony conform to an idealised construction of couple relationship, whereas the operative elements appear rather to be conflict, competition and suspicion. In order to manage the conflicts of monogamy, exclusive sexual faithfulness has become the most effective principle in a cultural agreement, which also can successfully be reproduced in feminist politics as the same exigences of sexual fidelity being appliable to both women and men. The women I have interviewed call this principle of sexual fidelity into question, at the same time as they do not intend to betray their partners, even if it may be the consequence. The tension between betrayal and non-monogamy produces a discoursive space for negotiating what is sexual pleasure and sexual fidelity. The negotiation of sexual fidelity itself uncover the ambiguities (or maybe, empty spaces) in concepts like freedom, desire and equality.

If freedom is free, it is also freed from political action and the independence which could have been reached is paradoxically lost. Maybe the scariest monster of desire is freedom in the cultural context. Even threesomeness and polysomeness are in practice an extended twosomeness, if not publicly recognized. Parallel relationships become multiple twosomenesses instead of one. Parallel relationships include also twosomeness as a basal relationship. In Sweden, since a couple of years, there is a poly movement using concepts as primary partner, and has some of its roots in the swinger movement from the 70's, that is, partner exchange. In principle, parallel relationships do not imply a complete loosening up of twosomeness, which results in a rhetorical instability between the representation of sexual freedom and the significance of twosomeness as opposing values.
The women’s bisexuality is here the triggering factor that allows the negotiation and problematisation of twosomeness’ exclusivity. Bisexual desire is also accompanied by an ambiguity that allows no ready solutions, even though in the narratives there are ideals of bisexuality as a non-competing practice and of pleasure as liberation from social conventions

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