

Polyamory and Kinship in Finland

Negotiating Love, Equality and the Self

Jesse Matilainen
University of Helsinki
Faculty of Social Sciences
Social and Cultural Anthropology
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<p>My graduate thesis looks at polyamory, or consensual parralel relationships through the study of kinship in anthropology. I concentrate on Lévi-Strauss' ideas about structural exchange in relation to David Schneider's ideas about kinship substance and Marilyn Strathern's ideas about gender. I look at how the study of kinship has been formed by the connecting of love with sex in Western discourse and how polyamorists question this connection in their practices. My aim is to understand polyamorous sociability through it's own terms.</p> <p>I studied people identifying themselves as polyamorists in Finland. My study consisted of 12 interviews and a survey with a take of 76 respondents. My fieldwork was done in the summer of 2011, in the three major cities of Finland: Helsinki, Turku and Tampere.</p> <p>I found that polyamorists constituted a distinct group that differed from what has been statistically studied as the Finnish norm. They were mostly feminists, non religious urban adults. In my research I found that polyamorists were using consensuality to actively create their relationships and themselves as individuals. This was done in opposition to marriage, but it was in relation to a specifically Finnish ideal of relationships being based on equality. In their attempts to recreate equality in parrallel relationships through consensuality, polyamorists were at the same time adhering to ideals as they were changing the normative forms of relationships.</p> <p>I found that polyamorists were creating relatedness not through sexual intercourse, but through a particular discourse of love where love. This love was expressed as negotiationand agreements, which became central in how polyamorists defined themselves as individuals in their relationships.</p>		
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Introduction

Polyamory is one of the new models for organizing sexual relationships in the West. It is a form of non-monogamy where the ideal is to have multiple parallel love relationships. My study will concentrate on defining and outlining polyamory as it is practiced in Finland and how it relates to kinship studies in anthropology.

Western forms of non-monogamy not based on marriage systems were first mentioned by Gayle Rubin, in her 1970s study of San Francisco gay leather culture *Leather Menace* (1982). In the last decade polyamory has become a more researched field in several countries, with a number of studies specifically looking at polyamory (see Barker et al 2010). In Finland, polyamory has been discussed as a theoretical point in queer studies, but has not previously been studied empirically (see Jokila et al 2007).

I will define the social characteristics inherent in polyamory as a system and the meanings and social dynamics inherent in consensuality as a practice of relationship organization and legitimation. I will look at polyamory through anthropological discourse on kinship and try to define polyamory in relation to it. My purpose is to look at polyamory in Finland as a culturally specific understanding of both polyamory and Finnish relationship ideals.

The study of kinship is by its nature the study of human social organization of sexual practices and of social relatedness. I will look both at how symbolic and structural anthropology has been understood and can be applied to create an understanding of how kinship is culturally constructed and then used in social settings, and I will compare this to the ethnographic data on polyamorists that I have gathered in Finland.

I look at kinship through the relationship of the symbolic to social action and argue that they are created in tandem. I look at Lévi-Strauss's ideas of exchange in *Elementary Structures of Kinship* and compare them against David Schneider's ideas in *American Kinship* on kinship substances to look at how a symbolic understanding of what people are made out of affects social action (see Lévi-Strauss 1969, Schneider 1980 [1964] & Carsten 2004). I argue that neither the social nor the symbolic aspects of kinship can be dealt with separately.

I further look into how gender and sexuality can be understood in kinship theory and what consequences this has for ideas about exchange and substance by

dwelling on ideas put forth by Marilyn Strathern in *Gender of the Gift* and also on Butler's assessment of Lévi-Strauss in *Undoing Gender* and *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1999 [1990]; 2004, Strathern 1988).

My thesis will consist of two parts. The first two chapters will be looking at polyamory and kinship from a theoretical perspective. First I will define polyamory as a concept and then move on to the theoretical discourse on kinship. The latter part of the thesis will deal with the context of Finnish polyamory and how polyamory was actually constituted and lived out by the people I studied.

In my theoretical framework I am concentrating on how sexuality and gender are looked at in kinship studies and how polyamory relates to those and on the other hand how cultural differences are simplified in contemporary studies of Western sexuality and gender just as sexuality and gender are often simplified in anthropological studies on kinship. Here I position myself between anthropological theoretical discourse and the study of gender and sexuality referred to as queer or gender studies in an attempt to identify how polyamory is culturally unique.

I argue that polyamorists do not conform to prevalent ideas about Western sexual relations and sexuality and that they actively create their own alternative way of understanding their relationships and themselves in the process. Ideas about polyamory and the different terms and viewpoints relating to it are largely communicated through the internet,

I do not argue for a universal system on kinship, but that a symbolic order is needed for cultural recognition of social action to make actions meaningful. Instead of marriage or sexual intimacy, polyamorists look to negotiations and consensuality to define not just their relationships, but also themselves as individuals. I do not posit that polyamorists live only through this discourse of consensuality, but that it is present at the same time as other symbolic orders in defining their relatedness to the people around them. I argue that consensuality is in itself similar to a marriage system, but which is defined by an alternative symbolic order relating to gender and sexuality.

I will also look at the context of Finnish polyamory in particular, looking at how the word took root in Finland and how a particular identity and community were formed around it. I will also look at how multiple partners or sexual relations are seen and treated in contemporary Finnish culture and how this relates to polyamory in a particular way.

As the people I studied self-identified as either polyamorist or poly, I will

refer to the people I studied as polyamorists. Many of my informants made a distinction between *poly* and *mono* people¹. Polyamory was not seen as just a relationship form, but as an inherent trait of a person. I will look at this more closely later.

My field research dwells on how polyamorists use the concepts of polyamory and love and what factors and substances polyamorists see as holding people together as the social force. I look into the dynamics that are present in multiple parallel relationships.

I will look at these in relation to monoamory and the inherent values in the different concepts relating to love and relationships and how polyamorists understand being alone in the sense of being without partners or with having disproportionately less partners than their partners have. I will also look at polyamorists through ideas of social networks and how they as well are constituted by polyamorists in a specific way and how all these relate to certain underlying shared ideas about sociability and ownership.

Methods

I did my fieldwork in Finland, the country I live in. Doing home-field study brings with it the need to assess one's position in relation to the object of that study. In many ways I found myself to correspond to those I was studying, in terms of the average age, social values, political views and ways of life. I was in many ways similar to the people I was interviewing, but at the same time I studied polyamorists as 'others'.

Polyamorists were in the same cultural settings as I was, but I realized that how they constituted those settings was in many ways different from me. Urban anthropology often has to deal with the problem of the city, of a place that can really open up and close up in completely different ways to different people. In studying polyamorists, I saw myself as in some ways becoming aware of a different world, or indeed multiple worlds that were gleaned over in the surroundings that we were in through public displays of how people should think, how they should be related and who they ought to be.

I knew some polyamorists beforehand and many of my friends and acquaintances were a huge help in collecting my field data and finding informants. Most of my informants were people I did not know prior to doing my field study, but just

¹ *Poly* referring to polyamorous and *mono* to monoamorous - or monogamous as it is more commonly understood.

knowing some polyamorists personally let me be more sensitive to how and what I was asking. This allowed people to be more open than they otherwise might have been. Many of my interviewees were used to being questioned and saw my study as helping them politically by making polyamory recognizable. All this made my fieldwork in many ways easier than it would have been in a place where I would have been lacking such intimate knowledge of shared cultural practices. On the other hand I recognize that because of the rapport that I could establish with informants, many aspects of their similarity with me were left unaddressed in this study. For example questions of race, class and political outlook would in themselves merit further study, but these have been left out as secondary topics as I concentrated on understanding the differences in relationship formation that had in the first place led me to study them.

I knew and understood to some extent the community and relationship practices that I was studying. On the other hand, as polyamory has not been studied much, I had to rely more on this personal experience in understanding polyamorists than anthropological discourse on the subject. The earlier studies I had found concerning the field proved inadequate in understanding polyamory in Finland, as well as my personal, at best general knowledge of the subject. For this I am glad, since my naivety allowed me to understand not just polyamory but also larger relations between sexual and social practices from a new viewpoint.

I sent out calls for interviewees through Facebook and polyamory internet site and got about 15 responses of which I ended up interviewing 13 people. After doing the interviews I also made a survey to test some of the findings on a larger group of people. I sent the survey through the same channels as well as to my informants telling them that they could send it on to people they knew. The survey was answered by 76 people in all.

I will compare some of the findings in my survey to Osmo Kontula's studies about Finnish sexuality (Kontula 2009). In an urban setting the environment itself is made up of other people and in particular anonymous others and the sum of their social practices. With my survey data I could show how polyamorists formed a distinct group with certain boundaries and test my hypothesis based on interviews on a larger group. Although these did not correspond to the boundaries of a village, or island or nation – as in much of classical anthropological studies – they did correspond to people and practices and could be fathomed if with nothing else, then at the least with statistical data. For example, I found a huge difference in how polyamorists related to

religion and Christianity compared to the Finnish norm. Polyamorists were a mirror image of their social surroundings in the sense that 80% of Finnish people are Christian while those I was studying were almost all non Christians (See Käärinen 2011: 155).

The interviews were largely open ended, although I did ask certain questions from all my informants. I recorded the interviews and analyzed them later. In this thesis I will concentrate on the interviews, only using the findings of the survey to show the numerical extent of my own findings. The survey looked at both personal information and asked questions about values and social relationships to figure what kinds of social clusters were more common than others.

To protect the anonymity of my informants, personal data that could be used to identify individual informants has either been left out or changed in quotes and analysis. I have not provided full transcripts of my interviews for the same reason. Also, to not provide information that could be used to identify individual persons I will not look at anyone just individually or elaborate on individual life histories. I will use pseudonyms and approximate ages to ease placing quotes in relation to each other.

Both the survey and the interviews were conducted in Finnish. I have translated quotes from the interviews into English and used English words when applicable. When the meaning of a word could not be translated in its full meaning I have given both the Finnish word and the approximate translation with explanations of differences.

My interviewees were a very heterogeneous group with ages from a little bit over 20 to over 40, with or without kids, with different numbers of partners, past relationships, different kinds of relationships, life situations, sexualities, outlooks and class backgrounds. Commonality seemed to be present in certain ideas and viewpoints, but not in practices or situations.

Polyamory as a Concept

“ Well, [polyamory] was something that came into my life before I even knew about the word. At some point people started using the word, but I had heard it before since I had looked into it. Personally it means a way of life that suits me better than strict monogamy ... and maybe also a predisposition.”

– So kind of like a sexuality?

“Well, yes, sexuality is probably at it's center. But all this other stuff as well, like ideas about romanticism. Like there are people who like to give the impression that they can only have romantic feelings towards one person at a time. That when a new person comes along, the previous relationship has to end. To me this is a very alien way of thinking.” (Interview 6.)

Polyamory by definition is put in opposition with monogamy by equating the difference of how many simultaneous relationships a person is able to have under these arrangements, but as the above quote shows, polyamory is actually much more complex phenomenon than just how a person organizes their sexual relationships. It is not dependent on a marriage system, thus it is not the same as polygamy. Polyamory also brings very different terms into play in defining important relationships.

In this chapter I will look at how polyamory is conventionally defined and what implications this could have for understanding all human relationships, including the ones studied as kinship.

When asked, almost all my informants said that polyamory was their way of life. Love was also marked as a defining concept, which is no surprise as the word itself includes the word *amor*, love. Another major theme was responsibility towards one's partners. All that happened had to happen with some prior knowledge and a sense of consent from all partners.

Most had looked to the internet to find information on the concept. So I as well looked to the internet to find how polyamory was defined in relation to other relationship forms. What I found was that polyamory was defined as consensual and

responsible non-monogamy². For example, on Wikipedia it is defined thus:

“[. . .]the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved.

Polyamory, often abbreviated to *poly*, is sometimes described as *consensual, ethical, or responsible non-monogamy*. The word is occasionally used more broadly to refer to any sexual or romantic relationships that are not sexually exclusive, though there is disagreement on how broadly it applies; an emphasis on ethics, honesty, and transparency all around is widely regarded as the crucial defining characteristic.” (Wikipedia contributors: 2.1.2012.)

My informants had echoed many of the ideas present in the above quote although they did not necessarily use the same words. For one, many used the term to express something that they had chosen before even knowing it existed. It was a word through which they could show their actions as moral and with which they could defend their standpoint. How people actually organized the relationships that were termed polyamorous was not as uniform and simple as the above quote would lead one to believe.

In *This is My Partner... And This is My Partner's Partner* Meg Barker states that the term polyamory originated in the 1960s, although it has become popular in the last couple of decades with the advent of the Internet. She places it as one of the new forms of personal politics of transcending of relationship and lifestyle norms. In many ways polyamory is just one of many identities forming to explain and create collective awareness of non-normative choices in relationships and sexual politics, sometimes bundled under umbrella terms like queer³ and non-monogamy. (Barker 2005: 75-76, 78.)

Polyamory is referred to as responsible non-monogamy. I categorized the range of non-monogamy through three different elements, which are implicit in the definition of polyamory. These are consensuality, the differentiation of sex from love

2 Non-monogamy is often used in discourse concerning polyamory because it does not define a set of norms or practices concerning sexual ties that are not monogamous.

3 Queer originated in North America as a slang term for gay men, but can also refer to any non-normative sexual or gender orientation (see de Lauretis 1991).

and an orientation towards the future with words like responsible.

Consensuality requires that all partners are aware of the nature of the relationships taking place and are not coerced into relations with each other or into accepting a partner's relations to others. The discourse on polyamorous consensuality is reminiscent of a similar discourse in other queer identities, for example BDSM⁴ – where violence is put in opposition to BDSM practices through the use of consensuality.

Consensuality is used to make an opposition between polyamory and cheating where all partners are not aware thus not in agreement on having multiple relationships. At the same time it is also to make a distinction between polyamory and the practice of polygyny – where all partners do not have equal rights in relation to each other to define the relationships.

Also, as polyamory has to do with relationships that are not identified through marriage, it must be separated from polygamy as well. Consensuality replaces marriage agreements as a similar, but differentiated term for social sexual arrangements. Unlike marriage agreements, consensuality must be re-established over time and in new contexts.

Another element that non-monogamous relationships are categorized according to is the opposition of sex and love. In *Polyamory and It's Others* – a study on polyamory in the UK, Klesse points out that polyamory is often put in opposition with swinging, open relationships and queer promiscuity, where the emphasis can be more on sex and sexual pleasure. This opposition is created through the word love or *amor*, putting the emphasis of polyamory more on creating long term love-relationships. (Klesse 2006: 572-575.)

In my fieldwork I did not find this opposition. Most of my informants were not just polyamorous but in open relationships and many identified themselves as queer or LGBT. On the other hand in my survey, swinging was virtually a non-practice, which supports Klesse's idea that polyamorists are looking for love rather than just sex in parallel relationships (ibid). The people I studied in Finland did not place the same value on closed relationships as those Klesse studied in the UK.

4 BDSM stands for Bondage, Domination, Sadism and Masochism – with the combination used as shorthand for either people or communities of BDSM. It can constitute a sexual identity, but also groups, practices, habitus, discourse relating to sexuality and lifestyle choices. BDSM culture revolves around fetishes related to the name, but maybe more essentially around the creating of a culture where such practices are safe and not antisocial.

The future is also an element of non-monogamous relationships, which is already inherent in words such as *love*, *responsible* and *relationship* which adds an emphasis on future oriented actions. This is used to make an opposition against serial monogamy which is probably the prevalent relationship form in Finland – emphasizing a preference for nurturing more long term relationships, although polyamory does not necessarily mean lifelong partnerships.

A polyamorous relationship is thus conceptualized from the point of view of creating social ties that are enduring and with the emphasis on love over sex. Endurance here also takes up a new meaning. Polyamorous relationships are enduring over different transformations in close relationships, for example the addition of new partners. Polyamory can thus be seen to be more enduring than monogamy.

Polyamory differs from polygamy in emphasizing consensuality over marriage agreement, and the fact that no other norm is present as to the make-up of the relations included nor set roles based on gender or age.

The fact that polyamory has formed in opposition to marriage is largely due to polygamy and polyandry being illegal in countries like Finland where polyamory, poly or *monisuhteisuus*⁵ are used as identity markers to single out multiple partner relationships instead, regardless of the marital status of participants.

Polyamory is a concept inside non-monogamy. Although the meaning of polyamory is also a social practice, many of my informants used it as a word more akin with sexuality, putting it with clearly defined non-monogamous practices like swinging, for example. The word polyamory is more about ideals than any set form for practices. There is no one way of doing polyamory, nor does it refer to a single relationship dynamic.

So what does it mean in anthropological context? What is its relation to terms like polygamy or monogamy? Marriage is at the center of traditional studies of kinship. For example, in *Small Places, Large Issues*, Eriksen defines marriage as something that “transforms the status of the participants”, “alters the relationships among kin of each party”, “perpetuates social patterns through the production of offspring” and last is “always symbolically marked in some way” (Eriksen 2001 [1995]: 264-265.)

Relationships created by consensuality can have all the hallmarks that Eriksen names as social markers of affine relationships created by marriage.

5 *Monisuhteisuus* literally means a state of multiple relationships.

Negotiation, having kids, defining those who are kin and perpetuation itself over time can all be present in polyamorous relationships and all relationships change other affine relationships that the people in question are involved in.

But not all polyamorous relationships can be categorized under such terms, which creates a conundrum. For example, not all relationships are formed for the express purpose of having kids. At the same time the creation of new relationships is a continuation of the social pattern of polyamory. Instead of this happening through consanguineous relationships, it happens through the addition of affine relationships.

If sometimes polyamorous consensuality means a marriage in an anthropological sense and sometimes it doesn't then how can polyamory be categorized within social systems? It cannot be seen as friendship, nor does it fit the accepted definitions of kinship relations.

Despite not fitting into existing models of kinship, polyamory creates enduring relationships and through them networks of people connected in different ways. This conundrum is of course not limited to polyamory. Many theorists have taken up this larger problem in the field of kinship and next I will turn to them to define kinship in a way that can help us in understanding polyamorous networks and how they work.

Kinship and Polyamory

One of the major questions in understanding polyamory, is understanding how it relates to theories of kinship. In the last century, kinship studies went through many radical changes, with the advent of theories that question the viability of many of the categories that had until then been thought of as a natural part of the world.

Lévi-Strauss is one of the major thinkers who changed the ways how kinship was understood and seen. In 1949 his *Elementary Structures of Kinship* was published, where he made his universal theory of kinship by placing incest as the central taboo defining all creation of relatedness. He argued that kinship was formed as sets of social relations that were governed by rules of endogamy. What differed culturally was who was seen as part of the whole governed by the taboo of incest. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 9-11.)

Later, in the field of cultural anthropology, David Schneider, in *A Critique of Kinship*, showed how kinship patterns were formulated from culturally specific ideas about human relationships. He showed how these structures were often transcended in everyday life and how differently people actually saw kinship from the categorizations through which they were understood. (Schneider 1984.)

In *American Kinship* he identified “*diffuse enduring solidarity*” as the hallmark of family and thus kinship relatedness (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 52-53). His ideas in turn inspired others to look for the cultural formation of new kinship patterns and gave rise to concepts like Kath Weston's *chosen families*. Schneider's ideas about kinship substances were further elaborated on by Janet Carsten whom I will also return to later.

In *Gender of the Gift*, Marilyn Strathern took ideas about cultural definition further, questioning implicit beliefs about gender and ultimately what humans are made out of. She showed how social practices were used to create people and were influenced by what humans were seen to be. She looked into how the actual manipulation of cultural symbols through social actions from specific structural positions was the very locus of their symbolic creation. Strathern created a link between how cultural ideas and social action were formed in a culturally specific way and showed how these would always be misunderstood when placed in the context of Western ideas of human agency and kinship. (Strathern 1988: 320-325.)

All criticized earlier ways of conceptualizing human action and thus kinship through Western ideas about human relatedness. Lévi-Strauss showed how social agency could have structural similarities at the same time as he showed how these mechanics of kinship took on culturally specific meaning. Schneider questioned the implicit order of blood relations in showing how people could organize their social surroundings based on very different symbols (see Schneider 1984). Strathern showed how humans and gender itself was the product of a culturally specific social action and vice versa (see Strathern 1988).

The Structures of Relatedness

The way Lévi-Strauss changed ideas about kinship in the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, was that he argued that humans were all similar in the structural way they created relatedness. That there was no evolutionary system on kinship organization, but instead all kinship was ordered on the same mechanics although those mechanics were culturally understood. (Lévi-Strauss 1969.)

Lévi-Strauss posited structural relationships between symbolic positions at the center of kinship in *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. He argued that structural formations of exchange created kinship groups over time and these exchanges were mandatory because of an incest taboo, which was prior to culture but part of culture. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 41, 50-52.)

What is central to Lévi-Strauss's system of kinship, is that some people will be defined as being the same – thus inside the incest taboo and some will be defined as other – thus outside it. In this a culturally specific order emerges, in the definition of what is the place of the socially defined primary difference and sameness between humans. Another part of his system was that women were exchanged by men, creating another field of difference and sameness, that of gender. These were structurally present differences that created humans in different social positions. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 29-41.)

The existence of groups that were defined in relation to one another and of specific genders with specific unchanging roles makes Lévi-Strauss's structure of kinship universal. Kinship was elaborated on from a very different viewpoint by those looking at the symbolic substances that were at the heart of the culturally specific ways that kinship was understood through.

David Schneider was also elaborating on the way on the sameness and

difference between humans. In *American Kinship* he argued that kinship is based on cultural constructs of nature and culture. He argued that what made people the same or different was an idea of kinship substance. These elements took the form of blood-relations and law-based relations in his study of Americans. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 23, 27.)

He argued that blood, although also a natural category that could be empirically tested, was a cultural construct, one which people actually used freely in different contexts. Blood, in his study, was the substance of kinship in cultural discourse, although less central in the actual everyday workings of networks of care based on kinship. Blood as a substance took on cultural meanings and forms as seen as being part of nature. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 24-25.)

He posited that cultural ideas of blood are based on biological truths, real natural substances that can be empirically discerned. But as Carsten showed in *After Kinship*, these truths are actually continuously changing even in the West. There was no natural substance, but a cultural discourse that created those substances as existing. (Carsten 2004: 112-114.)

Earlier, in his book *A Critique of Kinship*, Schneider had made a compelling argument against ethnocentric assumptions about kinship. He argued against taking the view that kinship was based on biological reproduction as it was a cultural order and did not actually work through biological facts. He noted that not all kinship relations would be recognized in doing so nor that all kinship systems were predicated on models of biological reproduction. (Schneider 1984: 95-97, 99-100.)

In *American Kinship* Schneider showed that the symbol of blood had a natural referent, but was ultimately a cultural product. It was a symbol that had a place in a symbolic order and the marker was actually the blood 'in nature' and not the one in thought to which it was used to refer and elaborate. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 107-111.)

The relation of nature and culture that Lévi-Strauss was looking at as a universal problem was shown by Schneider to actually be linked to a Western understanding of kinship. While nature is something that in other fields of life is put in opposition to being human, in kinship it is nature that is seen to define the very existence of man. But what this nature is, is a culturally constructed place in relation to which humans create themselves. The laws of nature are the end product of human understanding. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 107-109.)

Another aspect of Lévi-Strauss's universal model was universal gender-

relations. While Schneider had concentrated on how substances related to kinship and to kinship groups, Marilyn Strathern took on gender in relation of biological to cultural order in *Gender of The Gift*. Trying to understand what humans, in an anthropological sense, are actually made of, Strathern showed how Western gender relations and sexuality are taken for granted in classical anthropological studies. She argued for the study of gender as a cultural category, rather than a biological one noting that to assume the fore one from the latter is to essentialize gender and miss how it is constructed in culturally specific ways. (Strathern 1988: 68-69.)

Schneider had argued for the culturally specific understanding of kinship substance, but leaving the analysis of gender out of it. Strathern looked at gender and found that ethnocentric ideas about what people are constituted from were being used to analyze peoples who understood themselves in completely different terms. Taking her cue from feminist understandings of the sex and gender divide, she found that gender and sexuality were seen as natural categories when they were actually actively constructed and culturally specific in their content. (Strathern 1988: 68-76.)

Seeing gender and sexuality as natural categories creates the Western discourses of kinship as part of nature. Blood in *American Kinship* was the process of gendered and sexualized production that Schneider argued against as being taken at face value in *A Critique of Kinship* on the basis that it did not actually fit in with how non-Western people understood kinship relations. (Schneider 1980 [1968]; 1984.)

Strathern showed that gender in the Trobriand Islands was actively created through the giving of semen. She argues that to Trobriand Islanders blood is not substance but form. What constituted relatedness is semen. Semen passed from older men to younger men, from them to women and from women to children in the form of breast milk. Semen was thus not originating in anybody, but was passed on through different relations, creating people as gendered entities in their relation to the chain of this life creating liquid and what they could do with it. It created relations where everyone received and gave on semen, which grew babies inside women and babies into children and then later on, children into adult men and women capable of creating new babies. (Strathern 1988: 235, 237-239, 246.)

Strathern showed how gender was the culmination of how people themselves were understood to be created and what they were seen to be. Studying the Trobriand Islanders, she argued that gender was actively created and its basis was not the naturalized view of gender binary prevalent in Western societies. In the Trobriand

Islands' cultures gender was not created into a locus, or a self, but through sets of relations. These relations were both oppositions and continuations in terms of gender. She showed how men and women were also being created through same-sex relations. Men became men through other men and women and vice versa. Gender was created in relations to others, as an ability and an inability to do and to take part in social production and collective action. (Strathern 1988: 182-184.)

Strathern's argument is that Western anthropologists had looked at the Trobriand Islanders through their own ideas of two binary genders as part of the natural world that were created in an opposition to each other as naturalized entities. Gender was not just opposition, but also sameness, becoming, competition and difference. It was defined through culturally specific ideas of what differentiable entities were capable of, what they were in a sense. (Strathern 1988.)

The ramifications of Strathern's argument for understanding kinship are obvious. Lévi-Strauss's cultural order was based on naturalized gender categories, by placing women as objects and men as subjects of exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 52-68). Also the systems of both natural and cultural symbols that Schneider was looking at in *American Kinship* had deeper roots. Gender worked in his theory as a natural entity in the culturally created relations of Western ideas about nature.

What Strathern argued was that the functions of humans that were seen as natural, were culturally created and understood and that those human substances were used in creating people as gendered beings. The substances that were seen to create people had ramifications on what those people actually were as actors in relation to the creation of those substances. (Strathern 1988: 182-184.)

Janet Carsten summed up this problem about blood relations in *After Kinship*. She argued that blood was not the only substance that could create kinship. The actual substances were culturally specific and how those substances were understood and seen to be created affected what properties people believed existed in those substances. (Carsten 2004: 109-135.)

She noted that Schneider believed the substance that created kinship, blood, creates a self that does not change. Blood does not change, it is created at birth and the person created is the same all their lives and thus always in the same relation to others. They are not renewed, nor recreated in their lifetime. Their substance is created as not just blood, but also as what Westerners understand blood to be like. (Carsten 2004: 114, 122.)

Carsten continues, that at the same time the substance that was the basis of kinship could be transmutable. It could change and be manipulated through social action throughout a person's life. Substance did not have a universal state, it was culturally specific and even Western blood was prone to change and manipulation. (Carsten 2004: 128, 161-162.)

This understanding, showed Carsten, is under continual reconfiguration that takes those same properties and gives them different meanings in different contexts. These processes do not always place blood as central to understanding who a person is related to, even in a western context. (Carsten 2004: 107-109.)

Both Strathern's ideas about gender and Schneider's and Carsten's ideas about the substances of kinship are looking at what people are actually made of and how they create people. Gender as an ability is the ability to create new humans, to create kinship substance. Kinship substance is the socially recognized primary thing that those humans are created from and as.

The relation of substance and gender to Lévi-Strauss's structural order shows how problematic it can become when certain assumptions about gender are not made. Gender is fixed into the creation of kinship substances. Since gender is not universal, it cannot create kinship in the same structural way of exchange all the time, as the exchange of women by men which Lévi-Strauss positioned in the center of kinship creation (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 52-68).

How we are the same defines who are seen as related. In the cultural recognition of how humans are created, also gender is created as a position of creation. It is an ability in relation to cultural understanding of human creation. The very structural differences that Lévi-Strauss was relying on as universal differences are actually culturally specific.

Schneider and Strathern showed how relatedness is symbolized by concrete substances like blood or semen, which in turn shape how people understand the cultural symbolic order through which they see themselves as being created from. Strathern showed how gender is the ability to manipulate such substances and thus create relatedness. (See Schneider 1980 [1968]; Strathern 1988.)

Humans are culturally created by the movements of substances that are not just symbolic of what we are created from, but those ideas actively produce those substances as existing entities. What humans see themselves as ultimately being made out of creates the ways in which they in a way 'build' themselves and others. Just as

Western ideas about blood could be used to recreate one's self through begetting a child, Trobriand Islander ideas about semen were used to grow a person into a fully fledged adult. (See Schneider 1980 [1968]; Strathern 1988.)

The symbolic understanding of kinship was also always talking about social patterns. Symbolic substances were creating social systems. The creation of the reality around us through social action concentrated on the manipulation of ideas through objects in the world. All these relate to a sort of structure of human social phenomenon as being created through meaning.

In an opposition to the discourse on culturally specific substances that I have outlined above, Lévi-Strauss (1969) made an argument for what humans have in common in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. His central argument was that the underlying mechanisms that created kinship systems were actually always the same and were based on the taboo of incest. As cultural understanding of who constituted kin differed, this underlying mechanism created different results which he categorized in a series of marriage systems. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 459-499.)

Lévi-Strauss, Schneider and Strathern were all tackling with the same problem in one sense, which is the relationship between nature and culture. Schneider placed blood as both a natural and cultural category (Schneider 1980 [1968]). In a similar way Lévi-Strauss positioned the incest taboo as the link between nature and culture: as a law that was at the same time cultural and a law of culture, prior to culture (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 25-26, 32).

Commenting on Lévi-Strauss much later, Judith Butler (2004) took up this divide and the incest taboo in *Undoing Gender*. As a post-structuralist, she argues that in taking up the incest taboo as law, is in itself the creation of that law. In saying that it exist, one is actually actively creating it. A theory that uses “the very authority it describes to shore up the authority of its own descriptive claims”. Taking up Lacanian theories, she argues that Lévi-Strauss was creating a symbolic order as law and placing social practice as simply variations of the law. Lévi-Strauss himself was actually the creator of the symbolic order that he was studying. (Butler 2004: 46-47.)

“One can certainly concede that desire is radically conditioned without claiming that it is radically determined, and one can acknowledge that these are structures that make desire possible without claiming that those structures are timeless and recalcitrant, impervious to a reiterative replay and displacement.” (Butler 2004: 47.)

Schneider had also argued that there wasn't a universal symbolic order and that people actively did kinship wrong in the view of any symbolic order. The categories of kinship were not universal but the mechanics through which they worked were actually particular. (Schneider 1980 [1969]: 100-101, 105-106; 1984.)

The problem of the relationship between nature and culture is exactly about this. In understanding desire as part of nature, the cultural creation of those desires is placed in a system of nature as well and thus a universal system. As Schneider noted, this was a Western paradigm. Kinship is grounded in ideas about blood relations and cross-gender relations because understanding those as culturally specific is actually taking apart the symbolic order through which Western life and the life of researchers is governed. That symbolic order is placed as part of nature, which is used as the authority to shore up its claims of authenticity. It is placed as universal, because to imagine it otherwise would be the rejection of one's own system of kinship that is legitimized precisely with claims of universality. (Schneider 1980 [1969]: 107-111.)

Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* can be criticized for having as its base Western gender ideas and also naturalized kinship collective structures. These were criticized by both Strathern and Schneider. Gender and clearly defined kinship groups were central to Lévi-Strauss's argument about universality. Another central tenant was exchange between different entities as the creation of the groups defining people. Lévi-Strauss argued that the incest taboo was universal, but what differed culturally was who was seen as being part of the self in the sense of being part of the same group. He posited that these were not genetically determined, but culturally. The relations of sameness and difference were social in nature just as he placed the incest taboo in the threshold between nature and culture. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 29-32.)

So what he is saying is that the collective network of relations understood as kinship is a culturally specific thing in itself, even though it works through universal mechanisms. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 28-33.)

Butler noted that these symbolic orders need not be universal either. Even incest is in the realm of possible. It is only taboo in relation to a specific symbolic order that is created through the opposition of incest to itself. (Butler 2004.) The taboo is the rule that marks the boundaries of what Lévi-Strauss could recognize as relatedness. It was created in concepts of sameness and difference and these concepts had the quality of sameness not mixing, for some culturally specific reason. What could

be posited as universal to culture is the existence of some symbolic order that creates social structures in which social action takes place. Just as substance did not need to always have the same culturally specific qualities, why would the symbolic orders always have incest as so central?

In Lévi-Strauss's model, women were exchanged by men as being part of the same substance, but having set gender roles of subject and object. What made people and thus kinship groups were the ideas about gender as universally the same and the basis for a universal mechanic of exchange. Lévi-Strauss was holding on to more than just incest as prior to culture: with the idea of incest he was bringing along his own ideas about gender relations and sexuality as well. (Lévi-Strauss 1969.)

Strathern's model was also built on exchange as well. The moving of substances of life in one direction created exchanges of other stuff in the other direction. Strathern showed that these exchanges could happen between individual humans and that the exchange thus being both systemic and culturally specific, created kinship through not the exchange of women between men but through exchange bringing together the right circumstances for the creation of humans. All this depended on what humans were seen to be made out of and grow from. (Strathern 1988: 237-246.)

So kinship might not always be about creating something new and individual, but continuing something unchanging in changing circumstances, as Carsten noted. What is constituted as changing and unchanging, and in relation to what is culturally specific – it is through the symbolic order that ideas about the relations of things in the social world are understood. (Carsten 2004: 128, 161-162.)

I have shown how ideas about kinship actually relate to ideas about gender and ultimately what humans are made of. In Western cultures gender is closely related to sexuality. What people were seen to be made of was shown by Strathern and Carsten to create the ways in which people did to create kinship. The substance of people was created, grown and exchanged in ways that fit cultural understanding of that substance and this in turn affected how gender was constructed, which created structural positions as culturally specific. (Carsten 2004: 109-135; Strathern 1988: 182-184.)

So how does all this relate to polyamory? To understand polyamory, I must look at a culturally specific form of exchange, which depends on what people see themselves as being made out of. As polyamorists have a different model of relationships, I can defer from this that they must be linked to culturally specific ideas about what they see themselves to be made out of.

As I showed in looking at the concept of polyamory, the thing that set polyamory apart from different forms of polygamy or monogamy is doing away with marriage as the marker for legitimizing relatedness. The defining element of polyamory is consensuality, since without it a relationship cannot be polyamorous, but instead parallel relationships would entail cheating.

Another aspect that polyamorous relationships differ in is that opposing genders are not a requirement for sexual relationships as is defined in terms like polygamy and polygyny. In these categories exists a specific understanding of gender relations that polyamory does not entail. As I have shown, a specific understanding of gender is needed for a universal system of exchange based on gender positions. I will now turn to look more closely at gender and its relation to kinship substances.

From Gender to Sexuality

“Individual sexual identity is a cultural issue in Western society. Preoccupation with sexual performance, heterosexual or homosexual, turns erotic behavior into significant source of self-definition. Yet the notion, for instance, that homosexual behavior might involve an exclusive orientation of one's own sex would seem to be comparatively recent in Western Europe.” (Strathern 1988: 59.)

In the previous chapter I looked at how culturally specific substances were part of the underlying mechanisms through which people created themselves as human beings. I showed how this related to ideas about gender and through these universal systems of kinship. One of the ways in which gender is looked at is a binary set of relations to gendered others. To look at sexuality and gender one must look at what they are used for. How they are formed in the culturally specific logic, how they are performed and how they create and conceptualize social relationships.

Strathern for example takes up gender as a divide between man and woman, where the concept of woman emerges in societies out of the problem of woman as something different from the norm (Strathern 1988: 29-36). However, she does not take into account that gender is usually further differentiated as the problem of not just bodies and their abilities, but also interests in those bodies differ within this binary concept of gender be it in the form of sexuality or gender manifestation. As Butler puts it in *Undoing Gender*:

“Gender is the apparatus by which the production and

normalization of masculine and feminine takes place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes. To assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance” (Butler 2004: 42.)

This differentiation becomes central when looking at the ways in which polyamory is created in the realms of gender and sexuality. If polyamory affects gender in that it is not necessarily produced in the sexualized relationship between masculine and feminine, but in relating sexuality to something else, then gender itself cannot be left unaffected but must be created in a new symbolic system.

The way in which sexual practice and gender are related in Western discourse is through sexuality. Sexuality is most often understood on the axis of heterosexual vs. homosexual, with bisexual between and lesbian as the word for female homosexuality – and here I came to a disjunction between how sexuality is understood in kinship studies and how the people I was studying understood sexuality.

Most of my informants fluently used polyamory as a marker for sexuality. The explanation went that as they had tried to be monogamous, they would end up cheating on their partners and that although polyamory was a choice made in a relationship that existed and could be revised – it was also something they were as people in and of themselves. It was a choice, but something that could also be seen as inherent in the person.

Polyamory was just one of the terms used in such a way. Also queer, BDSM, lesbian, gay, kinky, etc. were taken up in the same way – as something beyond any single personal relationship, although they were manifested in relationships. The most common sexual orientations that I came across were bisexual and pansexual.

In my survey, the sheer heterogeneous way in which sexuality was understood and identified made gender something secondary in understanding polyamorist sexuality. The divide of heterosexual – homosexual sexuality that Strathern referred to in the quote at the beginning of this sub chapter was not how polyamorists identified themselves (Strathern 1988: 59).

Thus their ideas about gender were not created through the same

opposition of genders as was explicit in ideas about sexuality. This was seeing sexuality not through gender relations, but as something different.

In the same way monogamy or monoamory was used as an inherent trait of some people. Many said that new partners might try polyamory with them for a couple of months, but it was “not in them”. Or that they just could not do it, their urge to own other people was too strong. So the explanation was that some people were monoamorous or *mono*, others were polyamorous or *poly*. If one was *poly*, one would find it just as difficult to be in a monogamous relationship as someone who is *mono* would find being in a polyamorous relationship.

Polyamory was an unseen form of sexual preference, as one informant said it: “You might have an interest for polyamory, but if you do not have the people with whom to actually try it out, then nobody can see it. Unless of course you go running around reporting it to everyone you meet!”

Mono and *poly* became a kind of binary that was cross referenced with *hetero/homo* and *pan/bi* and which were further intersected with other groupings like the sexual constellation of *vanilla*⁶ and *kinky* and *BDSM*, etc. All of these terms were used in referring to sexuality. Thus the way in which the people I studied identified their sexuality was a much larger system that could not be explained as a binary gender system, nor even mapped out on a two-dimensional grid.

Sexuality was thus created in a different symbolic order than that of the heterosexual-homosexual divide which relies only on a relation to one or two genders that are in a binary opposition. For example, the category heterosexual does not imply the actual sexual desire of all entities of the opposite gender, although the term is summed up as a desire for the opposite sex.

The way my informants were identifying their own sexuality was not used simply to navigate on the axis of man – woman. What sexuality referred to was an understanding of how a person wanted to perform their sexuality in a social setting. It was a way to express a social mode of being.

Foucault pointed out in his *History of Sexuality* that in the 19th century when sexuality became a topic of science, Western sexuality was created in the field of nature. Sexual acts were categorized as individual sexual perversions and those in turn

6 Vanilla (or vanilja in Finnish) refers to seeking sexual pleasure from activities not viewed as perverse, for example not using outer devices for sexual stimuly or taking up roles, or even negotiating sexual activities, etc.

were categorized according to natural and unnatural sexuality. Sexuality became a life history of an individual. (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 36-43.)

Where Strathern showed gender being created culturally, Foucault was showing how modern Western sexuality was manufactured through discourse. This discourse labeled some practices as unnatural and some as natural. (Foucault 1990 [1978].)

This divide is also present in Schneider's argument on blood substance and Lévi-Strauss's law of the incest taboo. The idea of natural practices, social relations based on nature was identified by Foucault as the mechanism by which some were placed as marginal and asocial by the idea of sexuality (Foucault 1990 [1978]). In the same way ideas of blood are manufacturing some relationships as kinship and others as not. By taking up care-relations as defined by Western ideas of kinship based on nature, it becomes impossible to recognize new formulations or even correctly identify ones that work through similar but not identical formulations. Only the specific heterosexual relation inside marriage was one that could create Western kinship. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 42-44.)

The relations that were created from sexual practices that were imbued in it, were seen as natural just as relations that were created from sexual practices that were seen as unnatural were pushed out of the discourse of social relations. The realm of nature, that David Schneider placed blood relations in, was actually created in creating individual heterosexual sexuality as natural and all other sexuality as unnatural. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 42-44, 116-117.) In the formulations of perversion that Foucault studied, a person's relation to this naturalized kinship became their self – their whole life history, their sexuality and in the case of the wrong kind of sexual activity, their sexual perversion. (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 36-43.)

Janet Carsten (2004) noted in *After Kinship*, that both the substance of kinship and the acts that create those substances are in a constant state of change and recreation. Carsten attributed the idea of substance as something that was recreated in different cultures in different ways to explain the force that kinship has in many societies despite being culturally unique. This force, she noted, was actually a feeling, a bond that was given concrete formations as it was identified in coming to exist in social actions. (Carsten 2004: 62-66, 109-136.)

I am looking at the way people form bonds that are meaningful and important to the people involved and which are enduring and diffuse. As I have shown

above, kinship theory that binds a certain practice and certain gender configurations as central and others as peripheral is actually recreating ethnocentric categories on people who these categories might not apply to, even in places where those ideas act as normative, governmental ideology that produces people as citizens.

A good example of how this relates to polyamorists is one of my informants whom I asked she thought of as her family. The list included the mother, siblings, past partners, current partner and a few friends. She specifically said that she did not consider her biological father to be part of her family, as he had never really been part of her life. On the other hand, neither did she see her past partners all the time, but they were “a part” of her in some way and would always be her friends. There is a model of categorization behind the list. To place it as marginal, would be to forfeit the anthropological journey before even starting on it.

David Schneider placed blood ties as central to forming cultural ideas of substance in Western discourse on kinship – through naming it as central he also placed heterosexual coupling at the center of the whole of kinship in America and all others as secondary through the idea of the unchanging nature of substance. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 42-44.) But as Butler argued, the other ways of being are always part of that same configuration. Their very expulsion is the part of the creation of the very system in which they do not exist. (Butler 2004: 42-43.)

The gender binary is created through the expulsion of other possibilities. Foucault showed how some were removed from what was identified as social through ideas of natural and unnatural (Foucault 1990 [1978]). Only in the natural part of sexuality, new social relationships can be created in the realm of blood, marking them as part of nature and thus forming kinship.

The unchanging substance at the center of kinship makes marriage and the different bonds formed around it take on a very certain shape where not just a fixed sexuality creates legitimate kinship in the eyes of researchers, but also fixed ideas of gender, gender relations and social units, where some relations are seen as more fundamental than others for social structures and symbolic orders. In a governmental society, marriage is the system of regulation of these relations. It is the actual way of creating the system that is seen as part of nature.

This system, in placing heterosexual relations as more fundamental than others creates a real problem of categorization in polyamorous networks. For polyamorists who have relations with differently gendered people at the same time the

categorization of some relations as central and others as peripheral based on gender creates a dissonance to actual relatedness.

Their relations and the importance of different relations might not fit into this model of kinship as mainly through oppositional gender relations. A woman's girlfriend might be more important to her than a boyfriend, for example. Janet Carsten referred to the feeling of important relationships as central to understanding of how kinship substances are formed (Carsten 2004: 109-136). The feeling in polyamorous relationships is a radical force because to acknowledge it, it must change how polyamorists understand the very order through which relatedness is formed.

Gender and sexuality are intricately linked to ideas about kinship. I have argued against taking these ideas for granted even in those cultures that uphold them as some form as the norm. I will now move on to the understanding kinship substances and how they form what can be seen as relatedness and what cannot.

How Substances are Created

The substance of kinship that Schneider and Carsten wrote about, is at the same time what people are seen to be made out of and what is seen to bind them together. Those substances are seen to be created by human actions. (Schneider 1980 [1968]; Carsten 2004.) To reflect the ways in which my informants understood the concept of polyamory, it was a mode of creation in that it existed in their selves as well as practices independently. Polyamory was a way of being, from which certain ideas and goals can be discerned that took form in practices. These practices formed relationships that were different from the monogamous relationships that the surrounding world were engaged in.

The creation of kinship substance depends on what is seen as the socially paramount substance. Even though food or blood relations can be important in many contexts, it is only in some that they become central to discerning social relations. If food is paramount, then eating becomes the socially central moment of creating family and sameness between family members. If blood relations are central and the most important feature of blood is seen as genes, then the act of insemination becomes central. (See Carsten 2004.)

Even these substances have culturally specific meanings that can be taken up in very different social practices, because substances are not universally understood as having the same features or being created the same way (see Strathern

1988).

This does not mean that other forms of deepening social relationships are not recognized, it simply means that those relationships are culturally structured through certain symbolic substances as being central. The social acts that are seen as the moment of creation of those substances are the ones that people will look to recognize relationships. Other ways of relatedness become proof of the power of those primary substances.

So for example to become a legitimate father in Western societies, one need some proof of insemination be it marriage or DNA-tests. This was identified by Schneider as coming from the centrality of sexual intercourse in defining family. One may be a good father, a bad one, and absent one or an overbearing one – and still be a father. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 43, 49, 59, 77, 81.) The central element discerning relatedness is seen as blood-relation, although this does not mean that families are actually based on blood relations as Carsten found (Carsten 2004: 109-116).

What are understood as families are relationships chosen out of the networks of blood and marriage relations that surround a person. They are not always the same because the sets of relations one is surrounded with is not the same thing as the choices a person makes within those networks. The symbolic position of relative is never the same thing as an actual relative, as Schneider noted in *American Kinship*. Relatives are chosen not just based on kinship (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 61-62, 74.)

Schneider noted that the difference between friendship and kinship is that the one is seen as something you can choose and the other as something you can't although in both cases people choose the relations they engage in. They are relations chosen from networks working through different principles. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 68-70, 75.)

I argue that systems of kinship create the networks from which families are created. So the question of choice is not just one of choosing who one relates to, it is a question of what is the primary organizing force of the network inside which families are created. The families he was studying were actively chosen and this choice was expressed through a code of conduct that equated romantic love with sexual intercourse and the love of other relatives as cognatic, non erotic. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 34-39, 50, 66, 100.)

The moment the substance of those relations is brought into question, so is the social role that is dependent on it. I note here that I do not posit that relationships

are only one dimensional – often enough no single substance can really explain what creates family or kin, as Carsten found (See Carsten 2004).

If blood ties and marriage were the way to differentiate family and kin from friends, then logically polyamorists should not have any friends since they cannot differentiate family or loved ones from friends based on marriage or blood ties, nor on sexual intercourse. As this is not a conundrum to people who practice polyamory, it must then be one to the researcher trying to understand the underlying systems through which polyamorists create their families by looking at them through assumptions based on a different system.

A central question to understanding polyamory must be what is the substance that people who practice polyamory see as binding them together. What things do they place as central to discerning relationships and in what way is this done in a state of multiple sexual relationships. Because what makes people the same, is also a question of in what moments do they become the same, what acts create them as the same and how those moments set them apart as social units and differentiate the people around them.

Strathern was studying this point in *Gender of the Gift*. Strathern's ideas about culturally specific ways in which relationships are used to create people helps to understand differing relationships formations. To understand what is exchanged and why in the creation of social relations, one must understand how people see themselves being created. The creation of substances is linked to what those substances are and how they relate to feelings of relatedness, what creates some substances as socially powerful. (See Strathern 1988.)

In Finland, as in a larger Western cultural sphere, sexuality is seen as part of the essence of a person and the major factor in determining who one creates sexual relationships with and what the potential social significances of those relationships are. This essence was shown by Foucault to be created in the medication of sexual practices, it was in the discourses of people's inner selves that sexual intercourse took the center stage in defining how people are and should be related to others. (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 36-43.)

As I showed before, my informants used the term polyamory to refer to both as an attribute of a person as well as to a relationship. This was done in specific moments of talking about relationship formation. Relationship choices were seen as coming from within, from internal forces and needs that polyamory created an outlet for

that monogamy had not. They had chosen polyamory, because they were – well, polyamorous. So two levels of polyamory can be discerned, that of internal force and that of social relationships. This inner self was not mainly created in the production of children as sexual intercourse, which is the center of Schneider's account of Western kinship (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 107-109.).

What the inner self and the social world have in common is that one begets the other in terms of choice. Sexuality is the potentiality for certain social relationships and those social relationships reinforce the internal choice. In the Western world, as Strathern noted, gender is created as a binary and sexuality follow suit. One's gender is created in cross-gender relations and sexuality is the center of the individuality that maps out a person in relation to gender categories. To be a man is not to be a woman and vice versa. Although as she showed – this need not always be the case. (Strathern 1988: 29-36, 59.)

So as gender is acted out as relational, sexuality as well is taken from this cultural understanding of gender, as a relation to a symbolic gender. To take up a sexuality is to take up a set of relations that mark one's gender in those relations. Sexuality is the relation of the self to the defining instances of one's gender. The substance of the self is created in a gender configuration, it is actualized as choice in sexuality.

Gender in itself is inherent in social activities and like Strathern noted not just in cross-gender relations. One does not become a man or a woman only in relation to someone of the opposite gender. One is gendered in all situations where gender becomes a defining context for social action. (Strathern 1988, 29-36.) Sexual relationships become central to being adult, when sexuality is linked with relatedness.

As Schneider argued, in blood relations heterosexual sexual intercourse is the defining marker of relatedness. The idea of blood creates only certain roles and social relationships as sexuality, which is taken up as identity in the moments of gender formulation. To be heterosexual is to take up a certain position in relation to what is perceived as the opposite sex, but also a position in relation to those who are deemed the same sex. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 38-40, 108.)

Sexuality is defining the self in relation to a symbolic idea about gender and gender is performance of gender only until it reaches a moment when it is seen to create something else. Gender is suddenly something that does and this was one of the points that Strathern made. She noted, that gender was an active position of creation. It

was not a naturalized category, not a passive place where people were. Gender was an actively created position that did something, was defined by its abilities. She argued that in Western discourse this position takes on the form of the individual active agent that is studied as subject. (Strathern 1988: 225-269.)

Gender positions are actively created, just like Butler noted in her study of gender as performance in *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]). But Strathern went further in some ways, since she looked at how gender was the way in which action took form in a culturally specific setting. It was created, taken up, for a purpose – and that purpose in the Trobriand Islands was the creation of children, of daily life, of the social world. The performances that created gendered beings gave those new beings abilities to come into existence, to grow, to grow more children, those very things that link Western ideas of sexuality and gender to kinship. But they were done through a different logic, the gender ability was reached through different acts. Strathern was arguing that in defining gender through duality, the opposition of man and woman, the relation between genders was expressed as an asymmetry. (Strathern 1988: 72, 108-132.)

Judith Butler looked to the Western world to redefine gender by going beyond the logic of opposition. In *Gender Trouble* she looked at how gender was created. The individual self at the center of Butler's theory did not exist in Strathern's study as it was culturally specific to the Western world. Butler found that although gender was seen as innate, as part of the essence of a person, at the same time it was continually actively created in performance of actions that represented gender. (Butler 1999 [1990]: 10-33, 175-180.)

Strathern's viewpoint, that gender is the ability for social action, can be elaborated on with Butler's (1999 [1990]) ideas in *Gender Trouble*. Her argument was that although gender is seen as innate it is actively created as performance of actions recognized as gender opposition. The performance of gender is the making of those specific potentialities recognizable to others. The ability to perform what is seen as the ability of gender is that which is the innate part of a person expressed outwardly. Both performance and ability are in relation to a symbolic gender. (Butler 1999 [1990]: 10-33, 175-180.)

For example, a woman might be barren, but still be a woman through performance of womanhood. She is barren, because her relation to being woman is one of lack which is marked by the word barren. But this does not make her a man. It is the symbolic gender that has the ability, that is performed in everyday life. One does not

need to have children to be a woman, but one does need to be able to stake a claim on womanhood to be recognized as one. It is in the performance that the ability of gender is constructed as existing. (Ibid.: 10-33, 175-180.)

Sexuality as a relation to gender is a positioning of a person in relation to a system of symbolic gender positions. It is not the desire for all who are gendered in a certain way, but to people that are recognized to fit into the symbolic understanding of their gender. In this it marks potentiality for social relationships. In Western discourse, these potentialities are graded in relation to ideas about natural and unnatural sexuality, which is based on a very specific configuration deemed as proper for the creation of relatedness. (See Foucault 1990 [1978]; Schneider 1980 [1968].)

Some social relationships build family and through family a self that is substantiated by those social relations. To become a parent is to create the substance of child, a substance that is written in the social relationships around the child and becomes the identity of the child. But the ability to become a parent rests on a culturally defined gender. If being a parent is the creation of new genes in the form of blood, then it will entail certain sexual or technological relations. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 43- 59; Carsten 2004: 163-178.)

They require other people, social relations and those relations are formed and categorized through ideas about sexuality; sexuality that marks a position in relation to symbolic gender positions, not to actual people but the symbolic order that is a kind of blueprint of how humans are created. (See Schneider 1980 [1968] 38-40, 108; Butler 1999 [1990] 10-33.)

Most of the polyamorists I interviewed had moved away from this view of sexuality as created as a relation to this naturalized binary system of gender. Sexuality was used to explain a myriad of personal desires. This had to be made explicit in speech acts, since their desire was not explicit in existing notions of sexuality.

Sexuality as a desire to take up social bonds is central to understanding how the mode of exchange of kinship substance is defined in Western discourse. Sexuality is central because it determines what kinds of gendered relationships a person will take part in and those in turn are in relation to the system of kinship that is inherent in kinship explained by blood ties. As Foucault noted, in Western discourse sexuality has social significance because it refers to how people will act, how they will create their lives and relate to those around them in terms of sexual relations. (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 36-43.)

For a mode of relationship or potentiality to be understood as sides of the same coin, their connection must be made explicit, since they are usually compounded in individual sexuality. Polyamorists have to make these explicit in explaining the relationship between sexuality and relationship form because individualized sexuality does not differentiate between the actual systemic ways in which relationships are constructed, nor the gendered ways in which they are seen.

In a world where one sexuality is linked with only a few relationship forms these constructions are seen as part of gender oriented sexuality. But this does not work when sexuality and sexual relationships cannot be linked together so seamlessly in one individual. Sexuality as a concept does not work when it does not point to the socially significant differences between people, when it does not relate how that person relates to the symbolic order through which they are created as part of the social world around them. The very expulsion of different possibilities from this configuration of gender creates the need to create new ways of understanding of relatedness. (See Butler 2004: 42-43.)

For example, as one of my informants, a self-identified heterosexual, said: her [male] partners completed each other in relation to her. This was echoed in other interviews as well. The idea of complementarity was seen as subjective and different partners often had complementary roles in people's lives. The sexuality that connected her to her partners was differentiated, they played complementary roles in relation to her sexuality.

When looking at Western romantic ideas of finding the One, the perfect match in someone who completes an individual, polyamorists seem to be thinking about love on a completely different plane. Love as a concept is central to how people choose their families inside the networks created by ideas of kinship substance in Western discourse. As Schneider puts it in *American Kinship* :

“[. . .] The second set of implications which love has for how relatives should behave toward each other can only be summed up in the most general of all guides to action: enduring, diffuse solidarity.”
(Schneider 1980 [1964]: 60-61.)

And this enduring, diffuse solidarity, he continues, is expressed through a myriad of acts defined by sexual intercourse (ibid.). But this works only when the socially significant act is sexual intercourse. In looking at polyamory as a concept, I noted that non-monogamists do not identify sex with love. They form two distinct

realms and need not be in connection. Polyamorists place love as central, but it is not defined through sexual intercourse.

The essentialism of gender has been brought into question in anthropological debate by the likes of Butler, Carsten and Strathern successfully. Ideas about gender as part of kinship creation is linked with sexuality in Western discourse which creates some forms of relatedness as outside the realm of kinship. (See Strathern 1988: 59; Schneider 1980 [1968]: 42-44.)

I have done this to show how polyamorists in redefining sexual practices are actually also touching upon ideas about gender and through these ideas about relatedness. These concepts are central to understanding kinship as kinship is the forming of systems of care and intimacy and the creation of humans. I now move on to how gender and substance creation relate to one another by looking at the configuration of love and sex in kinship discourse.

Love and Sex

The connection between romantic love and sexual intercourse was identified by Schneider as the center of that *diffuse, enduring solidarity* that is the mark of kinship relations. In marriage it takes the form of a couple having exclusive sexual relations with each other which on the other hand is forbidden between relatives who are seen to be created from the same or similar substance of blood. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 60-61.)

The relationship between love and sex in discourses on non-monogamy take on a different view. For example, in *Polyamory and its Others*, Christian Klesse in studying bisexual polyamorists, identifies the separation of love and sex as one blurring the boundaries of sexual partnership and friendship with friendship becoming more central in defining intimacy. The placement of love as central is a rejection of non-monogamies that include relations based on sex instead of love. (Klesse 2006: 566-567, 571-572.)

Klesse identifies 'promiscuity' as a marker of a dispute both within and outside polyamory about relationship ideals. Responsible non-monogamy opens the question of what is responsible and what is not. Klesse sees this as a place where an attempt is made to create polyamory inside the sphere of normalcy. He likens this attempt with much of LGBT-politics, where queer promiscuity is also used by middle-class gays and lesbians to distance themselves from queer lives and culture in the hope

of being seen as normal, or normal enough. (Klesse 2006: 573-577.)

In *American Kinship* promiscuity takes on a very specific meaning as well, but of a totally different kind. Sex is the field of moral discourse, not the opposition of love and sex.

“ . . . of all the forms of sexuality of which human beings are capable, only one is legitimate and proper according to the standards of American culture, and that is heterosexual relations, genital to genital, between man and wife. All other forms are improper and held to be morally wrong.” (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 108.)

Schneider's idea of the connection between love and sex was that in heterosexual intercourse kinship relations or blood were being symbolically created and they could not be created by any other kind of sexual practice. Based on this he argued that kinship must be unchanging, and that kinship is created before a person is even born, out of cultural facts about nature and human nature. Heterosexual intercourse in being linked to biological legitimacy, was creating enduring solidarity as something unchanging, beyond human manipulation. (Ibid.: 60-61, 108, 114-117.)

In this nature had to take on a very specific form, out of all its possible variations to be recognized as legitimate at the same time as it was the very source of legitimacy for that specific formation. What it also created was a culturally specific understanding of not just promiscuity but of endurance. Enduring meant here something that was beyond the control of the person thus marked by their blood. (Ibid.: 60-61, 107-117)

In *After Kinship* Carsten found that substance – or the stuff that stands in for the feeling of kinship, does not always have the same nature. Schneider's attempt at placing a clear marker for that which is shared as something unchanging and transcendent over time, becomes problematic in contexts where substance is in essence changing and a place of transformations through which kinship relations are born and created. Enduring does not need to always mean the same thing. (Carsten 2004: 113-114, 132.)

Substance can be created in very different cultural practices and symbolic moments which are dependent on cultural understanding of what links people together in the bond that we recognize as kinship. (Carsten 2004: 115, 136, 138.)

As Meg Barker points out, polyamory questions heteronormative discourse by dismissing the dyadic relationship at its center (Barker 2005: 76-78). It is

not in the opposition of one kind of sex to another that polyamory creates its own legitimacy since polyamorous love is not being symbolically produced in sexual intercourse. (Klesse 2006: 566-567.)

Carsten noted that substance has the connotation of intimacy in relationships. Substance can be something shared and left in the other through social processes, or it can always be present in a person since conception and innate thereafter. It can be accorded by laws, nature, religion, etc. Substance is what is shared between people, it is a social force that connects in solidarity. (Carsten 2004: 132.)

When sex and love are placed in opposition to each other, it is in identifying the feeling of relatedness not through sex, but through something else. Kinship in an anthropological sense is not the study of nature in the form of genetics or even sexual relations, it is the study of cultural and social practices that create relatedness. Sex in itself does not create kin, but a cultural categorization of diffuse enduring solidarity as sexual intercourse does. (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 107-109.)

Placing love at the center of social creation and sex at the periphery is the restructuring of the very ideas of kinship formation. It marks a different way in which relatedness is understood. The symbolic is legitimate only when it relates to the way people live their lives. The symbolic is powerful because of its social significance.

If some sexual relationships hold no emotional significance then sexual intercourse alone does not have social power in itself to transform the lives of the people involved. Sex does not always have the power to bind people together. When this is the case, the binding substance must be created elsewhere.

As love becomes the locus of the substance that binds, sex becomes secondary and not just secondary but an empty act – a vessel devoid of substance. Substance is the stuff that makes people not strangers, but family. It is the cultural understanding of what makes people stick together, in diffuse, enduring solidarity.

Similar considerations on who is tied by what substance are important alike for queer non-monogamous people, for swingers and those in open relationships as well as for those who are polyamorous – but a difference is made in that polyamory brings to the fore the creation of multiple love-substance relationships over non-monogamous binary love-relationships.

For example, a swinger couple will still be a couple even though they have sex with other couples – they as well see that sex alone cannot bind people together (or break them apart). Polyamory then, on the other hand, opens up the concept

of couple through the idea of love. To place these in opposition is to miss the reality that they can coexist in any relationships and are actually just different choices in a shared understanding about the symbolic relationship between love and sex.

Klesse comes to the conclusion that since promiscuity is considered in the UK as being negative, the attempt to differentiate polyamory from before mentioned groups through the use of love has to do with a need to identify one's self to the norms of larger society. (Klesse 2006: 573-577.) But in fact polyamory is part of a larger discourse of non-monogamy, where the position of sex as the center of relatedness is questioned. Polyamory is differentiated against other forms of non-monogamy by making multiple love-relationships as central, rather than multiple sexual relationships.

Responsibility is central to the idea of polyamory, and as such creates it in a moral field which one often views through the lens of 'good' vs 'bad' and the hierarchy of morality. Viewed as such it is a site of critique for more sex-positive views, where the idea of good and responsible through love is seen as negative towards sex and more casual sexual relations. I argue against this, saying that the meaning of polyamory is created in the opposition of love and sex in an attempt to explain the essence of polyamory in different terms than those used to explain Western monogamy.

As the word polyamory and its meaning is contested, I will not take the view that either people in more open formulations of non-monogamy or queer people would be excluded on the basis of 'promiscuity' or moral ambiguity as Klesse took. Doing that would make most of the people I interviewed not polyamorist, as most were in open relationships as well, or queer.

The word polyamory in itself is shorthand for many kinds of relationships, but as it is created on a moral field, arguments over meaning will take place through that field. As it is an identity, the problems of identity will be prevalent, as people will argue for a general meaning that they can use to explain their own choices against those of others.

The substance that binds is made apparent by opposition against casual sexual relations. The bond that creates family and kin in the context of polyamory is not the mixing of sexual fluids. As those practicing non-monogamy will note, sex in itself does not create the bonds that are rife in contemporary monogamous discourse, where intimacy is fashioned through sex and sexual encounters – be it in a legitimate relationship, secret affairs or past relationships. (Klesse 2006: 567-575.)

“Sharon: 'There's definitely a sort of emotion involved

and . . . pretty much however you define or act on polyamory, there's emotion in it, whereas a swinger, whom I talked to about this, said the whole point is [that] there is no emotion. It's just about bodies and sex. It's like give her sex, give her a wank. Not really . . . that turns me off completely. ” (Klesse 2006: 575.)

Klesse takes the above argument to place polyamory against swinging – precisely because of the idea that a thing can be in one state at one time. Polyamorous people can also be swingers. The above quoted interviewee herself did not care for swinging, but it does not mean that some in polyamorists can not also practice swinging and still have polyamorous relationships. Polyamory was identified in opposition to swinging in explaining the meaning of the word, but that does not necessarily place it as an opposing cultural practice.

As this substance is created through moral practices, adhering to those practices is where shared substance is renewed. Schneider called practices relating to kinship a *code of conduct* which was one of the ways that relatedness was identified, although it was understood to exist through the sharing of blood substance (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 63).

The nature of the substance thus created – as love, as friendship, as responsibility endures the choices and changes that would rip apart a monogamous relationship. It is recognized in this way to be more enduring than monogamy. Endurance is a cultural concept, it is a relationship toward time and time is always relative to how it is understood. It can be counted in lifetimes, but it can also be counted in changes, in the number of times a person falls in love, for example.

The ideal of the enduring bond, of a chosen shared substance that is created over time is what places polyamory inside kinship. Carsten writes that it is also this substance's fleeting nature that makes it one that can be broken and also forgotten as it must be always recreated over time as in other discourses of chosen family (Carsten 2004: 144-145).

Polyamory, as an ethical standpoint is an ideal of relationships and love and family that is striven towards through a code of conduct, consensuality and debated through the differing views of what polyamory means and should mean, and who it should and should not include.

Stasch talks about how being other creates societies in *Society of Others*. How the recognition of another's difference is a major part of how societies are formed.

Sociability is, as he calls it, a “disjunctive synthesis of intimacy and otherness”. (Stasch 2009: 11-14, 16.)

This synthesis is the moment when people can find something in common, that for a moment transcends all the differences and otherness. Schneider's idea of kinship as substance is what is used in many Western cultures to create a sameness that can overcome all the other differences to create a feeling and sense of collective existence and enduring bond. But like all other substances, even blood can be forgotten and left unrecognized, for which reason laws and records become important. Carsten notes that this is not because those relations are biological, but precisely because substances are cultural (Carsten 2004: 153).

I argue that certain acts can create a sense of sameness that can transcend all the ways in which we are others. In this kinship comes to exist. When we can link each other through bonds that others recognize, we can rely on those bonds. But the power of these bonds is in their recognition. The symbolic is all powerful when it can in some sense foretell the solidarity of others.

As Carsten states, as such bonds are culturally created, they are in a constant state of being reworked (Carsten 2004: 154). Substances are in a continuous motion of being stabilized in to set relationship norms and narratives and being taken apart to form new identity-formulations where the norms and narratives are reworked and recreated in novel ways. The debate over what is polyamory is also such a process of formulation and reformulation where a set of popular narratives create norms and ideals to overcome and contain the substance of emotion that is fleeting to attempts of cultural binding.

The opposition of love and sex is an interesting one and it has many parallels in discourses on human relations and could be pursued even further. I have focused on using the idea of substance to link polyamory within a wider range of anthropological discourse on kinship and I have tried to show how substance can take many forms and that although they can be constituted as material and natural, they are indeed cultural creations.

Conclusions

Lévi-Strauss's system was not based solely on the difference of kinship substance, but also of gender position. The configuration he held to be central to determining kinship exchange was that of a double difference: that of gender and that of

kinship substance. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 52-68.)

In this chapter I have shown how kinship is created as a gendered process. Gender is a human position through which kinship is created. In blood based kinship ideas this is produced as female and male as they are seen to produce the substance that humans are made out of. In this configuration, sexuality is the individual or personal relation to this process of human creation. Gender and sexuality are thus relations in a symbolic system, in a cultural process. This process is seen to create humans and thus creates humans with differentiated positions, marked as identities in Western discourse. (See Strathern 1988; Butler 1999 [1990].)

In Western discourse sexuality is the relation an individual human takes towards this process of creation. Sexual purpose towards gender is configuring a person in to the symbolic system that is placed at the center of blood based kinship. So thus talking about sexuality as something towards an abstract gender is logical since it is not about wants in relation to actual everyday humans, but a relation to this symbolic system that is seen as creating humans. (See Schneider 1980 [1968].)

As Butler pointed out, taking the dyadic relationship of gender as given is to recreate the norm through which it is created. Here I remind that gender is a much wider term than just the sex of a person, it is the whole cultural creation of gender. The “hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative” that Butler names as the constellation of gender is present in the configuration of positions in the binary relationship that is at the center of kinship based on blood. (Butler 2004: 42.)

Nevertheless, these are positions of relationships, the very things that Lévi-Strauss was looking at. They are structural positions, but as I have shown they are created in culturally specific ways through how humans are seen to be created and what they are seen to be made out of, at least in a socially meaningful way. To remove specific words like man and woman from the configuration, the meaning of gender becomes more evident: it is the position in a relationship of difference, just as kinship substance is a position in relation to others as well. These two together form a person's position in relation to the process of kinship. Difference is always in relation to the acts that are seen socially significant in creating sameness. (See Butler 2004; Schneider 1980 [1968].)

These relations are wholly dependent on each other. They are created as a system and are all product of the very process that they are used for, the process of creating humans as Lévi-Strauss found. I argue that this is the essence of kinship, the

systematic creation of humans through the substances that they are seen to be made out of. It is the social hold over processes that are seen as part of nature, but which are actually created as a cultural system that is manipulated with the symbolic positions created in kinship. (See Lévi-Strauss 1969; Schneider 1980 [1968].)

Understanding relatedness is the understanding of how humans are seen to be created by different substances. What substances become primary to understanding the relatedness between humans is culturally specific to what people understand themselves to be most importantly be made out of. (Schneider 1980 [1968].) Applying Strathern's ideas of gender, I have argued that these substances are the product of active social practices. In these active practices the formation of binding substances are culturally specific, just as the practices themselves are grounded in culturally specific ideas about humans. (See Strathern 1988.)

I have argued that polyamorists reject the ideas of blood relations as the most fundamental substance humans are created from by rejecting the centrality of sexual intercourse in defining intimacy. There must be some other system of relatedness at work in how polyamorists work out who they are. Studies of kinship place marriage as central to defining relatedness. Polyamorists place consensuality as a central defining element of relationships and their social aspects.

Lévi-Strauss noted how kinship is embedded as structural relations of different social positions. I have problematized his inherent ideas on blood, gender and sexuality but I have not argued against his model of kinship as sets of structural relationships that can be discerned into human models of exogamy. Exogamy is the formation of a group in relation to everyone else. Lévi-Strauss noted that these groups are culturally specific. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 29-69.)

How people who practice polyamory define and differentiate people into categories does not follow the ideas inherent in blood-based kinship. But their identities, their relationships and social life is defined by structural differences nevertheless. For example, in the opposition between *poly* and *mono* people, but also in opposition of those who are part of their network, or family, and who are not. I now turn to look more closely at my own findings and how polyamory was being constructed by the people I studied in Finland.

Polyamory in Finland

Before I move further, I want to give a picture of the context that polyamory is placed in Finland. I have defined polyamory and the theoretical framework with which I study it, but I want to show the context of polyamory in Finland in particular. Finland has specific lingual and governmental systems in place for the cultural and social creation of both kinship and marriage relations. But more than that, it is a specific cultural context in which polyamory has emerged.

Finnish Sexuality

In this section I will look at the study, *Between Sexual Desire and Reality, The Evolution of Sex in Finland*, by Osmo Kontula (2009) to give some cultural context to the practice of polyamory in Finland. The study looks at the changes that have taken between three different Sex Surveys in Finland, one in 1971, one in 1992 and the last one in 2007.

Concerning non-monogamy, the survey asked in the 1971 whether a person should tolerate a wife's or of a husbands infidelity, but in the latter two surveys the wording changed to tolerating a “parallel relationship” in marriage. Very telling about attitudes in Finland towards non-monogamy is that in the study Kontula (2009) continued referring to infidelity in the findings of the latter studies despite the change in wording in the questionnaire. Kontula also notes that the question is also problematic in that marriage is not the most common relationship form in Finland. (Kontula 2009: 70-72.)

The study found that views on non-monogamy had hardened since the 1970s and 1990s. In 2007, 13% of men accepted parallel relationships of a husband and 14% accepted parallel relationships of a wife. The percentages for women were 7% and 8% respectively. Especially young people found parallel relationships unacceptable, which Kontula noted was in a clear contrast to other views on sexuality where younger people were usually more radical. (Kontula 2009: 72.)

The question of who would want to have multiple simultaneous partnerships gave similar answers, with 21 % of men and 10 % of women wanting to have multiple simultaneous relationships. In a cross reference to other European countries, Kontula found that Finnish attitudes towards multiple relationships were not

just the most conservative, but a lot more conservative with average percentages of acceptance in other EU countries hanging somewhere between 20% and 55% depending on age group. (Kontula 2009: 72, 74-75.)

In the study Kontula attributed this paradox of Finnish negativity towards non-monogamy especially for young people to the fact that since both men and women in Finland are expected to be economically independent, love and sex become central markers of relationships. This also meant that Finnish respondents mostly saw sex as getting better as relationships progressed. According to Kontula, parallel relationships create the danger of losing a partner's love and sex to someone else. (Ibid. 2009: 73, 76.)

What is built into this argument are ideas about love and sexuality that place monogamy as the natural and primary model for sexual relationships. I have earlier argued that this idea explicitly misconstrues other relationship forms as marginal or exotic. To understand the status of monogamy in Finnish culture, one must look deeper at what love and sex mean in the Finnish context. I will return to this in the next chapter.

The sex survey of 2007 also had a list of different acts that the respondents could mark as sexual perversion. The list had been created from an open ended question asking to list sexual perversions in 1992. Of special concern to this paper, the list included group sex and partner swapping (ie. swinging) and also sexual preferences like sadomasochism and bisexuality as they closely relate to the field in study. These were seen as perverse mostly by religious people and in the case of bisexuality, by men (over 50%). (Kontula 2009: 77-79.)

Most of my informants were not openly polyamorous in workplaces and did not look for partners in contexts like work or hobbies, unless those had to do with visual arts or explicit non-normative sexual communities. The danger of being stigmatized because of sexual practices was seen as greater the less polyamorous friends informants had. Experiences of being moralized, questioned, badgered and criticized by friends were more common among people whose friends were not polyamorous.

All in all, polyamorists in Finland have to in some way face the fact that surrounding relationship norm is one that is very negative towards parallel relationships. But polyamorists were dissimilar from Finnish norms in other ways as well.

A Finnish Polyamorist

The dissimilarity of polyamorists did not end with their preferred sexual relationship model. Polyamory seemed to be finding popularity within a very specific group of people.

In my survey, the average age of respondents was 29, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest 43. Most of the respondents were women, which does not correlate with Kontula's finding that Finnish women are less likely to want parallel relationships. Men and women comprised 96% of the respondents, with 4 % identifying in different gender terms, such as *neutral* or *other*.

The relatively mature age of polyamorists might be said to correlate with the conservatism in young Finnish people in relation to parallel relationships. Polyamory is not a youth culture. Many were students, or working in the IT-industry. But all in all the field of work and study was very varied and no real class distinction was present, everything from security guards to doctors, the unemployed to farmers to software developers were represented in the small survey.

On the other hand, some distinctions were obvious in the data. The relationship to Christianity was almost a mirror image of the Finnish norm, with 84% not considering themselves Christian although about 80% of Finnish people are part of the Lutheran Church even as the figure has been steadily dropping over the last 20 years (see Käärinen 2011: 155). I will return to the relationship between polyamory and Christianity in the next Chapter.

The predominance of what Finnish people would consider sexual perversity, in the form of bisexuality, sadomasochism, homosexuality, open relationship practices, etc. being major life factors set polyamorists at odds with mainstream society, at least to some extent.

Half of those identifying themselves as men said they were heterosexual (50%), with a few more referring to themselves as hetero-flexible. Women and others were much more varied and also more specific in how they saw their own sexuality and more likely to be bisexual or pansexual. Such a stark contrast implies that polyamorous men do not need to redefine their sexuality in new and novel ways as women and others do.

Another possibility is that Finnish men have less room to maneuver in terms of sexuality, a finding echoed by Jenny Kangasvuo in a study of bisexuality in

Finland (see Kangasvuo 2011). Especially since identifying as heterosexual did not actually necessarily mean that those men were solely in heterosexual relationships. This male heterosexuality actually correlates with Kontula's study in the sense that since most Finnish men view bisexuality and homosexuality as sexually perverse, identifying as either one connotes a sexual and thus social stigma, at least when relating to other males. This might also explain why more women were interested in polyamory.

As Strathern pointed out, gender relations are never just cross-sex relations. People are also created as gendered in relation to people of the same gender. (Strathern 1988: 182-190.) Sexuality works this way as well as it defines a person's relationship to people of the same gender disposition as well.

The people who took part in my survey were mostly women and those women were referring to their own sexuality in ways that are not recognizable through normative Finnish culture, as Kontula has expressed it. One must question gender and sexuality as something created solely through cross-sex relations – where heterosexuality is the majority, and all other sexualities are a minority or peripheral.

They are peripheral and perverse to a specific understanding of sexuality. But sexuality is actually created by that understanding. Sexuality, like power, explains the culturally recognizable relationships and dynamics between gendered individuals. In that it must be taken apart to be understood.

The majority of polyamorists lived in the bigger cities (90%), in apartment buildings (79%), mostly with a single partner (43%), but also relatively often in communes or shared flats (21%) or alone (26%) which would be expected of Finnish city dwellers, but also students. Communes and shared flats are not in line with the nuclear family model. The social setting that polyamory took place in was a relatively dense urban one.

In relationship terms, most considered themselves polyamorists or were interested in it, and 34% were in open relationships (not excluding polyamorous relationships). Swinging was by far less popular at less than 1%. Of the respondents a tenth also considered themselves a *suhdeanarkisti* which roughly translates as relationship anarchist. In the survey 5% considered themselves as living in the closet, so most polyamorists are likely to be relatively open to at least their close friends about their relationship practices or sexual preferences.

Of the respondents 17% had a relationship centered around BDSM practices and only 19% considered BDSM to not relate to themselves in any way. Of the

people surveyed 28% also took part in community activities relating to BDSM.

Words like BDSM and queer were well known. Of the respondents 22% considered themselves queer, most were interested in it, and 25% considered it not relating to them. Queers were pretty active in the community, with 47% of those who were queer identified taking part in queer community activities, which meant that most of those considering themselves as having something to do with the term also took part in activities centered around it.

Queerness proved to be seen as different from *sateenkaariväki*, which could be translated as the people of the rainbow and is a common term for LGBT-people in Finland. Only 17% of those taking the survey did not identify with *sateenkaariväki* in any way, with 64% considering themselves as *sateenkaariväki*, but only 36% of those taking part in community activities considered to relate to the term. Being queer correlated largely with those in the *sateenkaariväki* that were active in the community.

Most were also interested in visual arts and a majority took part in events relating to it. Polyamorists were mostly feminists, with 53% considering themselves as such and 28% taking part in activities to do with feminism. On the other hand 30% considered feminism not to relate to them. This was one of the largely gendered questions, with over half (55%) of men considering feminism to not have anything to do with themselves. This strong difference might reflect larger polarization of the term in Finnish society.

Another question that marked polyamorists as different was food, with 47% being either vegetarian or vegan and 21% being interested in vegetarianism/veganism.

All in all, polyamorists expressed knowledge and identification with terms that are not largely known in Finland. Queer is a relatively unknown term in Finland, unlike in Sweden for example (see Kulick 2005).

Also as Christianity was something forsaken by polyamorists, *sateenkaariväki*, feminism, queer, vegetarianism and veganism could be seen as part of alternative ethical systems. Polyamorists were not just non-Christian or just in alternative relationships, they also had alternative values concerning many different aspects of life.

The polyamorists that I studied were clearly different from mainstream Finnish society in terms relating to sexuality and in religious beliefs, ethical values and

relationship practices and they were often active in communities that related to those differences.

I have used statistics to show this difference, to make clear that the group I was studying is a distinct social group in the setting that I found them in. The relationship between polyamory, urban life and adult culture would merit further study in itself. Here I have simply used statistics to sketch out a picture of how polyamorists differ from the Finnish norm, as it has been elaborated by Kontula in his studies on Finnish sexuality.

Polyamorous Community

As I have elaborated earlier, polyamory as a word is used with a double meaning. One being a term for a way to organize sexual relationships, another being an inner inclination. Through these two meanings the term has also created in Finland a community of polyamorists.

Klesse identifies polyamory in Britain as a relatively new relationship term, compared to the United States. In Britain polyamorous groups have started to form from existing social groups dealing with sexuality and social organization:

“However, for a few years, seeds for a movement have originated from within the intersections of a range of subcultures, including the bisexual and BDSM scenes, the Pagan and new age movements, computer enthusiasts, the Science Fiction Fan scenes, and political or countercultural groups committed to communal living.”
(Klesse 2006: 566.)

In Finland, polyamorous community seems to be building along the same lines. The term polyamory came to Finland through the internet, most likely coming from the United States, with many informants referring jokingly to polyamorous hippie communes.

I asked my informants if they knew about books, films or famous people in relation to polyamory, but very few remembered any. In some ways I found this almost strange as I could personally point out many famous figures, literature and movies dealing with what could be termed polyamory. Nevertheless, the concept of polyamory did not seem to be expanding through popular culture, nor was it influenced by European models of parallel relationships.

The major impact of the term seems to have been through informational

internet pages and communities that are structured around polyamory on the internet, like IRC⁷ channels and forums. The internet provided a parallel cultural ecology where terms like polyamory were debated, mulled over and researched. The concept itself seemed to be the discourse through which community building around the term started. The relation of the internet and how it shapes actual practices could be further studied through a case study into the concept.

The first communal moments where polyamory was discussed or made explicit were LGBT and BDSM related gatherings and internet portals, which coincides with Klesse's findings. Mostly the idea of polyamory seems to have spread by word of mouth and knowledge gained through active searching on the internet afterward.

Some of my informants were polyamorous in practice before ever hearing about the concept, having used the term *open relationship* to refer to polyamorous relationship practices. Many explained how they had found the concept of polyamory and it had opened up new possibilities or had resounded with a personal understanding of love or partnerships.

I found that a kind of breakthrough of the term into Finnish discourse seems to have happened between 2003-2009, because it was in this time frame that most of my informants had found polyamory as a concept. One of the ways this took form was the founding of the Finnish polyamory IRC-channel to which some of my informants referred. Through this a second major shift of community building around the term started with meetings and activities organized through the IRC-channel..

Monthly meetings were organized first in Helsinki and Turku and later in Tampere. Also an association called *Polyamoria r.y.* was founded in 2010. The association is concerned with polyamorous politics and in the summer of 2011 it held the first national camp for polyamorists.

In the researchers experience, this way of organizing corresponds in many ways to other contemporary group-formations in Finland be it for peer support for minorities or grassroots political movements. Maybe the greatest difference is that usually web-forums have a bigger role than IRC-channels.

One of next political and cultural trends seems to be towards a call for being included in what could be termed pride politics as maybe a part of the LGBTQ

7 IRC is short for Internet Relay Chat and is a technology used for chatting online between any number of participants using an IRC client. An IRC channel is a sort of themed chat room where a person can easily return to at any point.

movements for public awareness and visibility and also the growing and strengthening of the community based around the term polyamory. In the last few years some newspapers and periodicals have done articles on polyamorous relationships (eg. see Pettersson 2010). The idea of inclusion into law in the form of number neutral marriage law seems to still be seen as unattainable in the foreseeable future, but it is a political goal that many identified with.

The major existing groups of self-identified individuals through which the polyamorous communities and self-awareness seem to have formed out of are LGBTQ and BDSM people. In some cases these groups overlap. Although there were also some people identifying with just polyamory and not with the above mentioned groups they formed two major cultural cores inside the community.

As polyamory is not identified in public discourse as a sexuality in itself, it is often left out of Pride politics that focus on established sexual identities rather than sexual practices. As my informants so easily combined the two distinct fields into one term, attempts at inclusion would require the established political institutions doing politics of LGBTQ Pride in Finland to change their views on sexuality.

Other groups of people or communities who were more likely to be aware of polyamory and other forms of non-monogamy were for example, role-players and those with Asperger syndrome. Also, as I noted in looking at the statistical data on polyamorists, those identifying as androgynous or not as male or female was much greater than would be statistically likely.

One more differentiation is in order. As polyamory can refer to people practicing polyamorous relationships, as well as to a desire to do so, it is hard to draw a clear distinguishing line as to how to recognize a polyamorist. Some may practice polyamory in some relationships and not in others. Some may identify with polyamory and not practice it at the moment, while some may be in polyamorous relationships without identifying themselves as polyamorist.

Most of the people I interviewed identified strongly with the term, often accounting years of multiple relationships and almost all saying that they would not be in monogamous relationships. I would not assume that the people I interviewed were representative of all people practicing polyamory, nor of those identifying as polyamorist. The community which has been created around the term is based on active identification to the term polyamory.

On Bisexuality

Meg Barker in reviewing studies on non-monogamy and polyamory, notes that bisexuality is identified as the prevalent form of sexuality of polyamorists. She also writes that BDSM practices and polyamory have been linked in the use of consensuality and negotiations in many studies. (See Barker & Landridge 2010: 757, 761; Kangasvu 2011.)

In my questionnaire I left the question of sexuality open ended, as I had noted while doing interviews that although many identified as bisexual, most actually used more than one word to identify themselves and many also had relationships with differing sexual practices that could not be made explicit with just the term bisexual.

Although bisexuality has been identified as the major part of polyamory, what struck me in my fieldwork was simply the great diversity in how especially women and others identified their own sexuality. The hallmark of identities was a specified language that is lacking in the heterosexual/homosexual axis of sexual identification.

For example words like open, switch, fetishist, polyamorous, curious, queer, nearly, BDSM were used in conjunction with more established sexual identities or even without them. Individual answers included statements such as “poly, bi, switch and picky”, “I prefer not to use any single term” and “open”. This did not mean that more traditional terms were not in use either, but that they were in no way the norm.

The most prevalent terms used were pansexual and bisexual. These terms are closely connected, but pansexuality itself has an openness and non-gender or even human dependent meaning compared to bisexuality. What was prevalent was the idea of sexuality as not concerned with another person's gender alone, but coming from within.

Also a certain sense of fluidity of heterosexuality was apparent, for example in identities like *heterohko* which is a compound word of heterosexual with the ending *-hko* meaning a bit of something – a way to make a word fuzzy or questioned by implication. Some could not explain their sexuality in even two or three words, let alone one.

This self-identification with sexual diversity and changeability and also a certain specificity was prevalent, more prevalent than any single form of sexuality. Obviously the categories of heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual could not fully relate how sexuality was understood by the people I was studying.

As I argued earlier, sexuality is a relation to a symbolic order. In the case of Lévi-Strauss's order of things, the identities of heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual suffice to make explicit the relationship of a person to the symbolic placement of man and woman as oppositions. But as polyamorists were obviously not identifying or identified in any meaningful ways using just these terms they had to be relating to something else.

Those identifying with a sexual desire for a single gender were a minority. But on that basis to conclude that bisexuality would be the prevalent form misses the great change in thinking about sexuality that is taking place in the minds of people practicing polyamory.

This shift makes it hard for polyamorists to enter the oppositional politics through which sexuality and gender are often constituted. This is because identity politics are actually taking place inside a very specific cultural order, simply because the sexual identities entailed are created in relation to that order. Gay identity politics⁸ only makes sense inside the symbolic order that places heterosexual relationships as primary. Polyamorist practices, in rejecting this primacy in personal relationships is diffused into a myriad of sexual identities that have little or no relation to the symbolic order from which gay identity politics emerged. This does not mean that polyamorists do not perceive or even live in the same symbolic order as well, but that how they are constituting their own sexuality is through a different symbolic system.

The relation of social practice to symbolic order that I have elaborated on earlier means that polyamorists are actually creating in their social organization a different symbolic order than the one that they are culturally surrounded by, or were brought up in. In this I do not think that polyamorists are unique, but looking at polyamorists through the normative identity markers of heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian and homosexual does not make explicit this shift in thinking.

The connections of BDSM and LGBTQ movements and practices to non-monogamy and polyamory have been researched in many studies (see Barker & Landridge 2010: 761). In my study too I found that these groups formed the backbone of the polyamorist community. Both BDSM practices and LGBTQ politics could be said to form a kind of cultural background through which polyamory has arisen and is

8 Here I must note the difference between sexual identity politics and sexual practices and politics of sexual practices and cultures. Gay as a sexual category and a cultural practice and/or identity are different things.

formulated.

Networks of Care

I asked about the people polyamorists depend on in their life, to get a rough idea of how polyamorists created networks of care. None lived with their parents, but most 48% occasionally asked for their help, siblings were also depended on, but usually no other relatives, with 49% never asking help from other relatives. Friends were actually much more important for polyamorists, with reciprocal relationships with friends being the norm (68%) and most of the rest (18%) relying on friends occasionally.

Most (58%) lived with their partners and most of the rest relied on them for support. Most also could rely on their past partners, at least if forced to with only 29% not relying at all on past partners. This correlates with what I found in the interviews that the dynamism of polyamorist relationships meant that the social role people played in each other's lives changed over time and often did not necessarily break at these disjunctions.

A distinct part of polyamorist networks are the partners of a person's partners. Although one's partners do not necessarily have partners of their own with 33% having one or more partner's partner that they considered close and the same amount having one or more partner's partner that they considered distant. Of those that relied on partner's partners it was about as common to have a close exchange of social help as to only rely on them if forced.

Only 4% lived their everyday lives with partner's partners which I believe has to do at least in part with the modern standardized building models of Finnish homes that were designed for either nuclear families or people living alone (see Saarikangas 2002).

Many people chose not to live with their partners at all, so their partner's partner would be pretty far removed from them. On the other hand partner's partners or even an ex-partner's partner were often linked to larger care networks through kids and the continued everyday negotiation of sleeping arrangements between houses. These arrangements created pressure for long term networks to try to become as close as possible.

As Finland is often considered a welfare state, with different social institutions creating care networks of their own into people's lives, I also asked how

polyamorists relied on different institutions for help. Most (48%) did not use commercial care services. The services provided by the state were much more popular with only 17% never using them and most (47%) using them sometimes. The same for schools and workplaces with most (51%) sometimes using services provided by them. Most (51%) sometimes used services found on the internet for social support with 19% never using such services.

In this chapter I have sketched out a portrait of polyamorists in Finland. Polyamorists were a distinct group in that they were non-Christian, mostly feminist and also mostly female with very distinct ideas about sexuality. Although organizing relationships is the subject of this study, I shown how polyamorists form a distinct group based on many different criteria. Next I move on to looking at the distinct ideas that polyamorists hold about relationships before moving on to how their social relationships are actually organized.

Love, Ownership and Equality

The two themes that seemed to perpetuate talk about love were ideas about ownership and ideas about equality.

In his study of polyamory in Britain, Klesse identifies friendship as the thing that creates sexual relations as enduring and ties together people who can become relatives of choice in a way, through participation in different relationship formations. He posits that because of this polyamorists saw purely sexual relationships as promiscuous and thus morally questionable. (Klesse 2006: 572.)

Although the Finnish polyamorists I interviewed did not make such a great deal about the opposition between sex and love, the ideas of friendship and love were seen as central to relationships. When asked on why long term relationships ended, the loss of a feeling of commonality – of a loyalty and of friendship was most often cited as the reason. When that feeling was gone, the relationship had ended although even then something of it could remain in the special status afforded to some past partners as something more than friends but no longer lovers.

Janet Carsten posited that kinship substance is important because it is the symbolic marker for the feelings of deeper social relations (see Carsten 2004). As polyamorists placed love as more important than sex in defining important relationships I will look at how ideas about love and sex were constructed by my informants. The problem of fidelity did not posit itself as central in my study, instead the problem of love not being recognized by non-polyamorists as real was what many of my informants seemed to be dealing with.

Recognizing Love

“...most have been pretty positive, but then there's always some who have a negative view and are like 'Well what do you do if you fall in love for *real*?’” (Interview 4.)

Polyamorous love differs from monogamous love. The problem of recognition is central to understanding this change in the actual meaning of the concept. When polyamorous love is left unrecognized, relationships are seen as secondary or as less real than monogamous ones. Some of the stereotypes that were identified, for example, were that polyamorous people would always be in open relationships, that

they were using or being used by their partners, that the relationships were fleeting or shallow, or that polyamorous relationships meant that men could have multiple sexual partners and even that polyamorists just could not get enough sex. What most of these had in common was, that polyamorists and their relationships were being overtly sexualized.

“Well, it's the thing that you can't own another person. The whole idea of 'I am yours and you are mine' makes me uncomfortable. It's filled with these old fashioned and nasty ideas [about relationships]”

“So you would define love in different way?”

“ Yes, I would never call it [a polyamorous relationship] a relationship of ownership. The thing that is important about polyamory is not built on this idea of 'me needing you and you needing me'. Instead it's like that 'Even though I do not need you, I choose you and I choose you again every day, because I love you.’” (Interview 4.)

Although the interviewee was talking about their personal view about love, many of the sentiments present were echoed in other interviews as well. Ideas about ownership were put in opposition with ideas about freedom. The reasons for choosing polyamory were linked closely with a rejection of the romantic ideas about fate and interdependence. Also the idea of the One was being rejected:

“So if I want a woman, and a queer and smart, etc. and if they are mono [. . .] so can I wait for someone who is perfect, who is everything I want? Because I don't believe that there are people like that, nobody could be everything to me. I can't be everything to someone else either. We all have our deficiencies and faults.” (Interview 7.)

The romantic ideals and ideas inherent in words like love are culturally specific and the way my informants were understanding this concept was at odds with the surrounding society. This was apparent in the way people referred to being moralized, not taken seriously and being criticized for their choices. Their relationships were being refused to be recognized.

It was not just love that was making problems for its lack of recognition. The moralization of polyamorous relationships also often had to do with a perceived imbalance of power, which hinted at a norm or cultural ideal of a balance of power in

sexual relationships, which should take the form of partners being in the same social position in relation to each other.

Polyamory broke this by creating situations where people had different amounts of partners, which was seen by outsiders as having a powerful position, although the length of prior existing relationships seemed to create more imbalance in new relationships than the number of partners a person had. People were not being criticized for having long term relationships.

Polyamorists sought relationships that they needed, sexual ones were of course central, but also relationships of mutual care and relationships of shared responsibilities were important. The idea of not relying on any single person was also a source of momentum to building larger networks of care not solely based on sexual relationships. This lack of single or 'ultimate' codependent relationship was often interpreted as a lack of love by non-polyamorists, but polyamorists did not see it that way as their very notion of love was not based on dependency, but choice.

People wanted to share their lives in very different ways and for this they often sought different people. Even being single did not always mean being alone, but more of a state where sexual relations were not infused with the deeper feeling of togetherness and solidarity that were seen as central to relationships. Also what differed were ideas about equality, which were so central to the criticism faced by polyamorists.

The Ideal of Equality

“– How do you achieve an egalitarian relationship?”

“– By communicating.”

(Interview 7.)

In Finland the ideal of equality is something that polyamorists have to face from a unique perspective. Many were moralized for their choices through ideas of promiscuity and perceived imbalance in power relations. This went both ways, but a common interpretation was that a person who had more partners was more powerful and was thus using partners. As a young man who's partner had another partner explained:

“I always defend my partner, especially since I'm the person whose partner is in [another] relationship and [thus] has two partners. You always have to listen to criticism, first it's usually 'that he's just using you!'” (Interview 4.)

This idea of abuse of power was quite interesting, the idea seemed to be that if another person had more in some sense, this was because they were more powerful in the relationship. Personal choice, or differing needs that were so central to how polyamorists saw themselves and their relationships, was creating situations that were seen as unequal. His own way of looking at the situation was quite different:

“I wouldn't even mind not being allowed to be with others so much as deprive the people I love of the possibility of love [with other people]. I even think it is likely that I will not have another partner – I don't actually like people very much. But I would never want to experience a situation that I would be preventing other people since love and these things do come along, because you can't *own* another person” (Interview 4.)

Instead of power imbalance being part of differing situations, ownership was in many cases identified with monogamy and inequality. Making agreements was a way to safeguard against the inequality seen as inherent in relationships that were less about individual choice than agreeing to societal norms of how relationships should be. All the possibilities that polyamory seemed to offer were put in opposition with the idea of ownership. I will return later to this theme of keeping relationships open to changes in looking at social networks and polyamory.

Inside polyamorous relationships sexual equality was recreated in a new way by creating good polyamory in opposition to ideas about people behaving irresponsibly and selfishly in relationships. As one informant put it:

“[With him] I had my first relationships that could be called love relationships, meaning that polyamory was there as the starting point and everybody was very honest and open to each other.

Not, you know, the kind of alpha male or alpha female clown stuff where 'I have such Huge needs that I have to have a lot of partners, but my partners can only be with me'.” (Interview 3.)

Polyamory was recreated in this way in the field of responsible and equal relations by putting it in opposition with relationships more akin to polygyny and polyandry through the use of the idea of love as the social force. Individual choice and agreements made in good faith and in pursuit of equality gave the blessing of equality to multiple relationships.

On the other hand many joked about hippies and their polyamory,

making another opposition with American idealism and the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s. Many informants' ideas about parallel relationships were grounded in Anglo-American discourse, but polyamory was very much taken into contemporary situations and one of the key questions that polyamorists faced in Finland was how to measure up to Finnish ideals about equality in sexual partnerships.

This meant that promiscuity was not a defining opposition (most of my informants were happily in open polyamorous relationships for example). Instead responsibility in terms of how relationships were negotiated and constructed became the way to define parallel relationships as moral. Morality required creating those arrangements not just in good faith, but in terms of equality and honesty and through the ideal of love as something shared by independent individuals.

Often failures of communication were explained through inability to work in the above mentioned manner. Failure in polyamory was more often identified with the lack of ability to handle situations in good faith or some people's monoamorous nature. Those relationships that lasted after a breakup, usually were identified through inability to reach certain agreements due to differing needs. Personality and needs were often enough sides of the same coin in discourses about the failures and successes of negotiations.

The problem of inequality was also identified in good polyamorous relationships as well. Even though people were striving for equality, it was not always easy or even possible as one woman who had been in a triad relationship noted

“Well you know more heads together the easier it is to solve problems, but there's a big danger with – so in the relationship that I was in it was all screwed. It wasn't anybody's fault, but [in the relationship] there were two people who were verbally talented and good at dealing with stuff through talking and then one who is like this very concrete and physical person who has a hard time talking . . . so without us intending it the situation became so that there were the two of us talking. I didn't realize it at the time but afterward I've realized that it was a very unequal⁹ situation and surely a very oppressive and difficult situation [to be in for the third partner].” (Interview 7.)

Inequality was seen as a bad thing, but what was identified as making relationships equal or unequal in terms of power were not parallel relationships. Many

9 The word *epätasa-arvoinen* used here refers inequality with a connotation of unfair

noted when asked, that a partner who had no other partners was often enough happy with the situation and this happiness was explained through referring to the person as an introvert, making the number of partners as an individualized taste that was beyond power relations. Or the problem was framed as a personal one, through either not being able to procure another partner, or of jealousy as something coming out of the person – not the relationship.

This individuality was the guarantee of equality, thus jealousy and ownership became the threats towards not just the individual but the very basis of the equality on which intimate relationships were seen to thrive in.

Being or not being in multiple relationships was not the crux of the problem, the attempt to control others was. This was seen through the concepts of ownership, greed and egotism – values that are upheld as virtues in the Western market economy. This control, even if unintended was seen as negative as in the case of inequality in communication.

Nevertheless the idea of inequality was at the center of the different ways in which informants reported being moralized by non-polyamorists. At the same time polyamorists created those same values again in their relationships through rejecting what was identified as an underlying notions of ownership in monogamous relationships.

What stood out was that inequality was not seen as a relationship between symbolic gender positions, for example in ideas like “men dominate women”. Inequality was elsewhere, which is why when talking about alpha males, one informant talked about alpha females as well. Fixed gender positions were not creating inequality, because those positions were no longer fixed – they were being negotiated.

Inequality was in the processes of ownership and control over other people's sexuality. It started in individual needs that were not negotiated and did not recognize the needs and boundaries of others. The relation of an informant to this could be gendered, but the understanding of inequality in relationships was not. Love was being defined as opposition to this precisely because what controlling others had in common with consensuality was the centrality of needs. Love was being defined as a way to deal with needs and feelings in relationships without controlling others.

This was talk about who was polyamorous and who was not – to be polyamorous, one needed to behave responsibly and pursue equality in novel ways. One also had to let go of the need to own others. Polyamory was a way to contain those

urges of ownership by placing them as negotiable.

Non-owning Relationships

– “I've always thought that a person cannot be owned and I've always wanted to be surrounded by many people I love [...]"

– “So when you're talking about not wanting to be owned, you're referring to the idea of owning in romantic love¹⁰?"

– “Yes.”

– “So do you see it as a bad thing?"

– “No, I don't see it as a bad thing. I think that people are different and it's something I don't want.”

– “So you don't want to own, or be owned?"

– “I don't want to be owned or own anybody else”

– “Which is more important [for you]?"

– “To [not] be owned. I want to be free.”

(Interview 11.)

When asked especially about whether ownership as in to be owned or to own was seen as more negative, to be owned was seen as more negative by female informants. Male informants emphasized not wanting to own others. This placed a gendered position in relation to owning, where the idea was that informants were rejecting a model in which women were owned by men in sexual relationships.

This coincides with Lévi-Strauss's ideas of women being exchanged between men, in the sense that my informants were actively rejecting the symbolic order of men owning women even though their own partners might not even be of an opposite gender. Thus they were not referring to any actual relationship, but to their relation to a symbolic order in which they were gendered. They were rejecting the

¹⁰ Translation note: owning and devotion are very close terms in Finnish. *Omistautua* is to devote one's self to something. *Omistaa* being the Finnish word *to own*. The way the word *omistautua* is implies someone purposefully making one's self be owned by the object of the devotion. The “owning” I am referring to in the conversation is this idea of ownership that is seen as part of romantic love, not necessarily devotion although they are in some sense linked in Finnish thought: one can be devoted to a partner and thus be owned by them.

symbolic relationship between genders in personal terms by rejecting that position in their personal life. This was the active rejection of the gender position created in the symbolic order that Lévi-Strauss saw as universal. Love was seen as something quite different. As one male informant put it:

“I believe I will always be polyamorous, because monoamory does not fit into my idea of love. It would feel awful being the only one for some person. I think it's wonderful that a person I love has a lot of people who love him, who can give him things that I cannot, because it's impossible for one person to be able to give everything to someone.” (Interview 4.)

So just as polyamorists were rejecting the symbolic inequality of men and women in relationship, they were rejecting the way this relation took shape in social relations. Love was not something that could only happen between two people at a time. The symbolic order that placed one man and one woman at its center, was also closing the two in a cocoon of love that broke the possibility of other relationships as those would bring into question the primacy of that particular relationship. The rejection of ownership was actually a rejection of a gender position in a very specific symbolic order.

One of the debates that ownership was at the center was that of jealousy. Was jealousy an attempt to control or something else? Respondents had different views on this. Most simply said that no such feelings existed, but some talked about them more openly.

“[. . .] because usually when you mention jealousy people flip out. Jealousy is this big bad bogey . . . even if it's just a passing feeling. You're trying to explain to the other person that it was this passing small pain that went away. [. . .] People are afraid . . . they think that jealousy is about wanting to own someone, but it can just be a feeling of insecurity. Sometimes it's justified and sometimes it's all twisted, and so forth. It can be many things.” (Interview 5.)

The problem of jealousy was one of the central critical themes that divided people. Some simply said they felt no jealousy, while others reported that it was one of the hotly debated issues inside the community. Polyamorists valued equality and communication in relationships, so jealousy became problematic. On the one hand it was a feeling and as such could be taken into negotiations of need, but on the other hand

it could be seen as a feeling of a need to control as the above quoted woman had found which was against the very idea of not controlling others.

This created a conundrum. Some feelings were more valid in negotiations than others, at least to some people. When they were recognized as coming from a need to control other's sexuality, they were seen as socially destructive feelings.

Religion and Sexual Ownership

I have mapped out how polyamorists were defining love through a rejection of a very specific order where gender positions were fixed and created as a binary between a symbolic Man and Woman. They were rejecting the romantic idea of the one and the inherent beliefs of needs being perfectly met by one other person.

Here I will dwell on the role of the Finnish Lutheran church in defining sexuality, since the two most striking differences polyamorists represent with normative Finnish society are their non-Christianity and different sexual identities.

In Finland the Finnish Lutheran church takes an active role in questions relating to sexuality, with hot debates about marriage rules and same-sex couples usually taking center stage. But as homosexuality does not necessarily require a severance of faith, why does polyamory seem to require it?

The Lutheran church defines and represents socially acceptable and dominant sexuality. Through its role in marriage, child birth, naming practices, baptism and also education through school curriculum and religious youth camps it is major player in defining sexuality in a moral field.

Polyamorists were creating personal sexualities and social practices that were in opposition to those ideals that the Lutheran Church in Finland upholds. When I asked one of my informants who was from a religious background about love and her parents, she said that she did not want to have the same kind of relationships as her parents:

– “I think it's that monogamy is the only christian way of being in relationships [. . .]”

– “So would you see as this the man owns the woman as being part of Christianity?”

– “Yes.”

– “Do you see it as negative or positive?”

– “Well, it's just their way of life.”

(Interview 11.)

Ownership was one of the major themes that polyamorists did not identify with. Love and ownership were separated in talk about love and in action through polyamorous relationships and as the quote above shows, Christianity was seen as incompatible with polyamory.

Polyamory was also referred to as a way of life, bringing it into the same realm as Christianity. This strategy entailed a change in thinking about Christianity and practices relating to it as well – to think of religion as a way of life made it a choice among others, one that could be looked at through the practices it entailed instead of religious dogmas.

As in the case of the above mentioned informant, religion and ownership were seen as part of each other, through monogamy (although monogamy was not seen as necessarily a religious practice). Polyamory was something different, a relation of non-ownership. Polyamorists referred to themselves as both polyamorist by nature and practice, identifying polyamory regardless of number of partners and almost all identifying polyamory as a question that they would choose over any single relationship. There was a crucial difference in religion and polyamory. Christianity was a way of life, not part of individual nature.

Of the people I interviewed, many used differentiated ways to organize sexual and care oriented relationships. Polyamory had become an identity in that people would hold on to the ideal as a way of identifying their own goals, instead of using it to mean only how things in their lives were.

Most referred to polyamory as a way of life, which made sense since they had a way of life that was differentiable from the norm no matter what their relationship situation was. Christianity was pertaining a single model for relationships, polyamory was not. It was creating a way to arrange relationships in a myriad of ways and this was affecting how ideas about gender and love were formed.

Chosen Families

As I noted earlier friendship was one of those things that was socially important in maintaining relationships and that the lines between loved ones and friends

was not always very clear. One of the ways these relationships could be understood is as chosen families.

In her book *Forever is a Long Time* Weston notes that lesbian and gay chosen families consist of people of differing sexualities and ages who were in long term care relations, but not necessarily sexual ones. The studies of chosen families questioned the domain of kinship as biological and brought to the fore the problem of defining kinship based on Western cultural ideas inherent in 'blood'. (Weston 1995: 87-97.)

What both had in common was that the relations were marked by a *diffuse enduring solidarity* that structured the social lives of people involved. These relationships were formed spontaneously in what Weston herself characterized with a personal quote of "whatever works". She also noted a common preference for long term relationships to become central in chosen families. Chosen kin "were expected to be there", creating care as the enduring standard by which relationships were evaluated. (Ibid.: 87-97.)

In the same way, polyamory creates families and networks of care between people who are not related in the way that Finnish or most of Western law recognizes – through neither a marriage system nor a blood bond. Polyamorists could thus be classed into what are often termed chosen families in studies about Western gay and lesbian families as the idea of choice is central.

Polyamorist networks are not, however, based on the same kinds of choices as chosen families created by gays and lesbians. In most cases people do not actively choose their partner's partners, for example. The personal relationships that are formed are in relation to larger networks created by the practice of polyamory.

The creation of relations of care are negotiated inside these existing relationships. In the same way the chosen families that Weston was studying were created from existing networks of friends and lovers. Chosen families thus can exist within polyamorous networks, but they are not the same thing. Polyamory in itself is a systematic way of creating relationships, which do not necessarily mean that they will be close or intimate.

Nor were the networks I found similar to new families formations created by gays and lesbians to rear children, which seem to work in a totally opposite way from the chosen families studied by Kath Weston. Families chosen for the purpose of begetting children are much less spontaneous as social roles are defined in relation to

children rather than spontaneous friendship.

I found in my field study, that my interviewees all agreed on being polyamorists and on the basic meaning of what that meant that I have looked at in looking at polyamory as a concept. But how polyamorous networks were actually formed differed greatly, as well as how intimacy was defined. Also there was no easy way to systematically define who was family or part of intimate care relations and who were part of more diffused care networks and who were even outside these relations of care.

For example, one of my informants took care of a boyfriend's girlfriend's children and expected the girlfriend to likewise take care of her children. Both women further expected the husband of the informant to take care of both women's children even though not all were his in a biological sense, nor was he considered the father of those he had not begotten.

The relations of care had been negotiated to allow polyamorous relations and the solutions were created through existing polyamorous relations. The woman had neither chosen her husband's girlfriend nor her children, but instead had chosen to take care of those children since they were already there.

As the informant had recently found another lover, the negotiations of care were about to commence again, for the creation of a new relationship within the existing structure created a realignment of the positions that people held in the network. Together they created what could be termed a chosen family, but the chosen family in question was chosen inside a polyamorous network.

These relationships could be seen as spontaneous, but they had a specific systematic existence that could be found in other people's lives although the choices those people made were different. They were created by the practice of polyamory and their purpose was the perpetuation of that practice. The systems of care and love that I found my informants to be living in did not work in the same way that Weston has written about chosen families. They were distinctly polyamorous in their social structure.

Rather polyamory is a practice that creates the social structure from which chosen families can form, in the same way as Schneider in *American Kinship* showed how blood based kinship was the social structure from which people chose some of their close relations from (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 53, 67).

Polyamory is a practice which creates distinct structural positions, that of

partners and also partner's partners. These positions will exist regardless of what form polyamorist relationships take. So there will always be partners and partner's partners. These relationships will exist even in relationships where three or more people are in relationship with each other. Simply because one's partner will then also be one's partner's partner.

Conclusions

Relationships were formed out of an ideal of love that was non-owning. It was as much based on needs as monogamous relationships, but those needs were negotiated. Feelings were more central in organizing personal relationships than any set norms. Personal relationships were a journey to one's soul in a way.

Relationships differed greatly depending on the person. People had very different notions of how they wanted the new relationships that came with polyamory to be part of their life. All really came back to communication and the notion of relationships as agreements between individuals. The relationships and needs that required making agreements were not limited to sexual ones. Also this arranging spilled over to everyday life in that people were often part of larger networks of care and mutual aid, through which many also found their potential partners.

They were not confined to hold meaningful relationships exclusively inside the home, nor did everyone live with sexual partners. Life was built according to needs that were individualized and then negotiated. I will dwell on the importance of negotiation more later.

Negotiation could become a problem, when people were not evenly matched in relationships – prior existing relationships, new relationships, social skills and needs were often uneven and sometimes caused problems in the act of negotiation. But on the other hand, because needs were individualized, surrounding people also often moralized choices and arrangements based on cultural stereotypes of infidelity, of abuse of power and promiscuity even when arrangements inside relationships had been made in good faith.

Love was the ticket to happiness in relationships. The ability to negotiate in good faith, to allow as much as require were hallmarks of this love. Love was not a need, but a choice. And this marked its severance from sex. Sex was in the realm of needs, which were as negotiable as anything else. Love was not negotiated, it was a requirement for consensuality.

David Schneider defined sexual intercourse as the symbol through which love was understood in *American Kinship*. In his study, sexual intercourse was the symbolic act that defined relatedness. Love was expressed through acts relating to sexual intercourse because it was so central in defining kinship. A family is not quite a family until it consists of two parents and children. (Schneider 1980 [1964: 31, 33, 39-40.]

For polyamorists this was not the case. Love and sex were not the same thing, sexual intercourse was not creating relatedness. Love was the choosing of another person, not because of needing to but out of wanting to choose them. Love was expressed in the negotiation of relationships, because there the choice became apparent. As Schneider put it, no-one can be in a constant state of love, it must be expressed through ritual (ibid.: 51). The ritual that polyamorists were using to express love was negotiation, because in negotiation love was created as choice.

Love was connected to consensuality by polyamorists and through this their very ideas of relatedness were affected. It was the negotiation of relations that created intimacy between people in sexual relationships. In the next chapter I will elaborate on this idea of choice by looking at negotiation and agreements more closely.

Negotiations and Networks

“So we started talking about the boundaries in the relationship, which is not usually discussed in relationships. This started from my initiative. I don't see that there's anything wrong, for example in kissing other people. It was taking this thought further, of where to draw the line. We started talking about this before there even was a relationship as in the past there had been a jealous ex-partner with whom this idea of boundaries had never been discussed.

We were talking about this and realized that the boundary is not in sexual intercourse [with others], but in the planning of a future together with another person where the current partner is not present.”
(Interview 8.)

I have placed consensuality as the primary element of polyamorous relationships. I did this because, without it relationships would not be defined as polyamorous but cheating or mistreatment which I have shown my informants to have created a strong opposition with. What consensuality means in the use by polyamorists is not just agreeing to a preordained model of relationships, but the active creation of a model within which personal relationships are created.

Consensuality requires negotiation and I found in both my interviews and taking part in social activities that polyamorists were constantly negotiating. People negotiated matters together in groups and separately and even negotiated the way in which negotiations should take place. Often negotiation took on a practical form, with people negotiating sleeping arrangements, seeing each other etc. It was a way of handling social situations. This constant negotiation was so normal and sometimes even mundane that people did not seem to always be aware of it.

The solutions to deal with issues coming up were in this way were unique. These solutions were the actual organization of sexual relationships. There were so many ways to organize and maintain sexual relationships that it actually seems kind of misleading to talk just about polyamory.

Of the people I interviewed, many used differentiated ways to organize sexual and care oriented relationships. Polyamory had become an identity in that people

would hold on to the ideal as a way of identifying their own goals, instead of meaning just their current situation. Most referred to polyamory as a way of life.

The situations people found themselves in were created in active processes of negotiation. People had very different notions of how they wanted the new relationships that came with polyamory to be part of their life. For example, people were not confined to hold meaningful relationships exclusively inside the home, nor did everyone live with sexual partners. Life was built according to needs that were individualized and then negotiated.

Agreements

Agreements made in relationships dealt with everything from who would spend the night at which place, to who was “off limits” and thus not to be dated. Constant negotiation was the hallmark of polyamorous relationships and a symbol for love. Nevertheless, certain problems could arise in these negotiations. For example, a polyamorous network included more than just the partners, but also partner's partners with whom a person had to learn to deal with. This was keenly felt by one woman dealing with a partner's partner:

After she [boyfriend's secondary girlfriend] broke up with my boyfriend, she said that polyamory wasn't her thing [...] but this is the whole broken telephone thing – I heard it through my boyfriend. Anyway this ex girlfriend of his is at the moment engaged with a guy who has other relationships as well. So I think maybe before she had meant that she wanted to be the primary partner in relationships. [. . .]

The funny thing is, that if she had just come and talked to me about the issue we might have resolved it [...] Although we were on greeting terms, she wasn't talking to me more than that. I think that I could have given her the position of primary partner if we had talked the issue over. [. . .]. But usually this doesn't happen in relationships. People don't assume that it could happen, or they don't want to try it out.”

(Interview 5.)

She related other stories of problems in negotiating in these relationships of shared partner. Her own wish to create a polyamorous family seemed to be thwarted by a lack of negotiation from partner's partners. One of the issues was hierarchies. Many referred to partners through hierarchical terms like primary and secondary partner,

which meant that the secondary partner usually had less room to negotiate. The woman's own feelings on the whole issue of hierarchies in relationships had changed, as she related in another instance:

“[. . .] before I used to care more about who is the primary girlfriend and who isn't, but now I've kind of relaxed more and don't see the point of trying to put people into hierarchies through words like that.” (Interview 5.)

Primary partners and secondary partners were not always named as such. I am using the terms anyway, as in many cases this was expressed with words that in this context took on the meaning of primary and secondary. As one informant put it:

“I am married, so I use the word *puoliso* [marriage partner¹¹], which is a gender neutral term, that I use regularly. That [she/he¹²] is my *puoliso*... And then I might talk about *rakastajista* [lovers], or *kumppaneista* [partners¹³]. And sometimes, when it's difficult to use the word *rakastaja* [lover] because it has this connotation of cheating, then I just talk about *rakkaista* [loved ones].” (Interview 8.)

What was inherent in terminology to referring to partners was their position in relation to one another. Although partner's partners could also be equal, many were not. Another informant had problems as well with the hierarchies created by primary – secondary relationship formations.

“At some point I tried to organize my relationships in such a way [that I could have two long term partners], but it proved very difficult, because the parallel relationships I had didn't become very long lasting.

At some point I realized it wasn't going to work because of the assumptions that people make when you already have a very

11 Here marriage partner is used to translate the word *puoliso* which refers to the nature of the relationship, connotation being other half or a person marked by the word *puoli* meaning half. This often implies marriage as it is used here, but not necessarily. As the informant does not talk about a husband or wife, than I am left with the use of marriage partner as it is a gender neutral term.

12 Finnish does not have gendered pronouns like he or she, the third person pronoun *hän* is used here.

13 The literal meaning of the word *kumppani* is a companion, I use the word partner, but note that the difference between *puoliso* and *kumppani* is not necessarily one of being married, but a different connotation in the words: *puoliso* meaning two halves of a single entity and *kumppani* meaning two separate entities being together.

serious relationship. People will tend to think that they couldn't be in a very serious relationship with you [at the same time as another person].

[. . .] It's relatively easy to find a passing fling, but difficult to find a meaningful and serious relationship.” (Interview 6.)

This was not always a problem. In many circumstances the problematic dynamics that were created between some forms of primary and a secondary partner could be transcended. For example as the informant above had done, by forming a relationship with a person in another city who had other partners as well:

“At the moment I have my partner [. . .], but also a light *säättö*¹⁴. But it has lasted a lot longer than those very serious, deep frowns and big hearts -kind of relationships, which is kind of funny. We've been seeing each other now and then for over a year now. This woman is living in another city. It's more friendship based relationship but with something extra.” (Interview 6.)

This way hierarchies were not always clear cut. Relationships were not created through referring to only one person, but to a multitude of people. Secondary partners might well have their own primary partners elsewhere. Relationships could be and were created as hierarchical through how people lived in relation to each other. When this became a problem, its solution was achieved by living alone and thus removing the need to make distinctions between partners.

These networks of loved ones were always distinct, but were formed out of the same formula of finding solutions through negotiating. As a young man put it:

“Polyamorous relationships can be casual as well, but the thing is that they are all based on agreements.” (Interview 4.)

Relationships were created by the possibilities of negotiations, thus they were always limited by those taking part in negotiations. The people one negotiated with became the circumstances of a person's life in the sense that negotiations were possible but also limited by those taking part.

For example if two people were living together, it would be hard to form another equal partnership outside the home. A relation of primary and secondary partner could be established, becoming friends with partner's partners and doing things together

14 *Säättö* literally means *adjustment* and is slang for a fling or an affair. A relationship that is not defined as anything in particular by participants and is usually not very serious and has a connotation of being momentary.

as well or even living together in a group or all apart. Different combinations and solutions were created in everyday life as negotiations between people on how time and care should be divided inside the network.

What created the context for those negotiations were prior negotiations that created some relationships as the status quo. So new relationships had to be created within the confines of relationships that had already been negotiated, although of course prior relationships were also affected by new negotiations. Also relationships of shared partners were affected by the partner shared. For example if one were to become friends with a partner's partner, they risked losing a friend if either relationship collapsed.

The hierarchy of time was compounded in relationships of shared partners, as they were negotiated after the negotiations for the actual relationships had taken place, if they were negotiated at all. This was one of the major differences in polyamorous networks. Some happily negotiated with partner's partners, even becoming friends and spending time together. Others had more difficulty in this. Some preferred not to even see their partner's partners. Most were somewhere between these two poles.

Ultimately, dealing with partner's partners was a major issue that seemed to mark what the networks were like that polyamorous practice created. For example, in instances where people became closely entwined with partner's partners as well a situation of mutual care could be established:

“Well, for example, we three [partner, partner's partner] have this kind of deal that if one of us is in real distress then we call and especially since we all correspond to each other's different needs. So say I have a big crisis and my partner is with his other partner and they are not in a crisis and I call. Then it's self-evident that [my partner's partner] will let my partner come over and the other way around as well [. . .] and also if [my partner] has some distress or this kind of feeling, then he can choose which of us in this particular issue is better for him.” (Interview 4.)

When polyamory as a practice created social networks beyond separate relationships, negotiation had to transcend the idea of sexual relationships being based on negotiation. Negotiation in these instances required the acknowledgment of a relationship between a person's partners. Often enough, not just partner's partners, but close friends could also be included in this formation. These were in many ways the families of choice that Kath Weston talked about.

This was expressed through naming people into different categories, that could be overlapping:

– “I have just one partner, who I refer to as *kumppani* [partner] or boyfriend, because he is the only one I have. But it's really about agreements and I feel that I have a chosen family, but I only use *kumppani* to talk about my boyfriend. The other people I refer to as my *läheiset* [loved ones or close kin] or *perheen jäsenet* [family members].”

– “So what is the difference between a partner and a family member?”

– “[laughter]. Well, it's about agreements so I guess with my partner we've agreed to share more of our everyday lives together than with other family members and I don't have a sexual relationship with anyone but my partner.” (Interview 4.)

One of the members of the informant's family, was his partner's partner, but also certain friends were included. Relationships between the members of the group were heterogeneous and togetherness was achieved through shared activities, care and communication. That they were achieved through negotiation seemed to make them a bit different from Weston's very organic and spontaneous chosen families. At the same time as they seemed to be created out of spontaneous networks of friends and lovers, they were ultimately agreed upon through negotiation. They existed precisely because they were negotiated. Even this was sometimes not enough, as one woman accounted:

“Well, this lover who I've been with for ten years now is my marriage partner's friend or buddy. We have gone to many places together, with three adults and a pack of kids following [laughter].

Back then we used to live near to each other, so our relationships were very close and our social life intense. I regularly made food for the whole bunch. All the kids and adults that were part of this network were eating together.

But now, we all live farther apart, so it's not like that anymore. This is like the whole network's situation. In our extended family we still do things together, but it's more concentrated around me, my friend and our kids being all together.” (Interview 8.)

Solutions and agreements to everyday problems like eating that became

diffused over the whole social network was culminated in what could be termed extended families. As negotiation expanded its scope, it created new relationships which were not necessarily sexual ones but based on sharing the same people. It was what differentiated close relationships from distant ones, as it could create solutions that brought people closer together.

Negotiation also marked the difference between solidarity and animosity or rivalry. It was the social force for creating intimacy as well as for keeping people at a distance. It was the actual act in which relationships took form and expanded into the lives of people negotiating.

In the cases where negotiation had transcended sexual relationships, a different kind of networked life formed. These could be termed negotiated families as they were based on systematic creation of relationships through acts of negotiation.

As I wrote earlier, what defines polyamorous relationships is consensuality. Without a sense of agreement, parallel relationships become cheating. Also without the possibility to marry more than one person, consensuality and agreements become the way to assess relationships and their meaning. Negotiation thus becomes the ritual through which relationships are given a social and symbolic existence.

These negotiations were seen to create equality, even as at the same time they were held in the confines created by existing relationships and also of past agreements that might have been made with people who were not even present in negotiations taking place. Thus although the social positions were not equal, the act of negotiation could be seen to be.

This was elaborated even more strongly in a particular form of polyamory, *suhdeanarkismi*. As a woman explained it:

“For example there's this ideal of long term partnerships, or an ideal to get married, to be able to get married [with many partners]. This for example is something that many people want to be able to do. And it's a great thing, it's a good thing that people who wanted to marry to could do it.

Suhdeanarkia is more about [. . .] to me it's about not defining relationships through those traditional models. Instead for example that you can have a friendship where there is a lot of love and passion and still I wouldn't call it a partnership. That it's the friendship

that is the most important aspect of the relationship. And that I don't want to think that there is a better, worse, stronger or weaker [relationship], but instead that friendships can have this commitment and devotion even if it isn't established in any official way like calling people partners.

“In my opinion, polyamory has a little bit of this conservative bent that people want to say that they are like everybody else even if they have more than just one partner. So many people hold this ideal that those relationships should be as much like [traditional] sexual partnerships as possible.” (Interview 3.)

Identifying friendship rather than romantic love as the binding force of relationships was one of the ways in which networks could open up to become families as they had done in the case of this woman. Although *suhdeanarkismi* was only one of the ways in which this could be done, what made it work was that it made visible relationships that were not recognized by traditional relationships models. By making friendship the defining aspect of relationships, it opened up the act of negotiation into more and more relationships. One of these relationships was that of having shared partners. Friendship created relationships as potentially equal instead of hierarchical in the case of partner's partners as they were recognizable in and of themselves when friendship was the thing shared.

The social recognition of the relationship between partner's partners was the cornerstone of polyamorous families. *Suhdeanarkismi* was one of the ways in which this could be achieved, but the same possibility was present in all polyamory. In negotiating between partner's partners a new social relationship was formed and recognized. The social relatedness of a partner's partners was in the mutual recognition and acceptance of the other's relationship to one's own partner. This recognition created relatedness that could be nurtured into a deeper relationship.

Negotiation could enter relationships because people actively chose to negotiate with partner's partners, but often circumstances created a need to do so. For example polyamorous families were created in cases where children were involved and thus partner's partners could find themselves negotiating to some extent care over children.

In negotiations, people were defining what they wanted – their needs, wishes, sexuality and status took on social meaning and form in being intimate part of negotiations. People negotiating their needs became important as individuals in relation

to one another. Although all negotiations were context driven, even the most mundane negotiation took its form from the elaboration of individualized goals and boundaries.

Some of the things that informants seemed to spend a lot of time negotiating was who will spend the night with whom and where. In cases where people lived with some partners but not with others meant that these negotiations were done on a daily basis. This was achieved through the internet, with different chat clients and social network sites. This meant that people were in communication more with each other than actually physically together.

Another issue that created a constant need for negotiation was kids. As one woman mentioned, kids made polyamory more work but polyamory made taking care of kids a lot easier as there were always many care givers. Also personal needs could become an issue for the whole network. For example the need for time alone was one of the aspects that were negotiated in many relationships. Time alone became especially important when a person had many partners and thus required the negotiation of this time through the whole network.

Also when people shared a common social setting in some way, for example when people shared a network of friends or when they had chosen to see relations as a polyamorous unit, the negotiation of how to act in public or when all together became one of the issues that required recognition of relationship of shared partners. These negotiations were actively creating the networks of relationships as a social unit, instead of just a group of different partners

This was the same process that happened in single relationships. In relationships the negotiation of sexual practices were central. For example one woman explained that her partners held differing sexual roles as she herself did not want to be confined to be sexually to one single way of being. This was echoed in the survey where women's sexuality was strongly identified, as well as in many interviews. Sexuality became more and more elaborate as people negotiated their sexual practices.

As negotiations were limited by those taking part in negotiations, new relationships were a way of opening up new possibilities and thus a further elaboration of one's sexuality. The recognition of a need to have more than one partner was also the recognition that a person's sexuality could not be completely expressed in a relationship with one person. A single relationship was not the culmination of individuality in this sense, instead this culmination happened in multiple relationships.

Another aspect was care and needs relating to care. This was another

way in which people were individualized in relation to one another. The need for social contact, love and intimacy were personalized in negotiations.

Negotiations were actually creating speech acts that were creating the negotiators as individuals. As new needs are communicated and taken as social facts in relationships they at the same time become part of the person's self. They create a person's self as a socially recognized entity. They create an individual that can be known in relation to the other people in the same act of negotiation. The negotiation in itself is the moment of creating polyamorists as individualized others to each other. Negotiation creates those others in the act of negotiation as oppositions and similarities in relation to a self, as a self that can be identified through those relationships later.

Stasch dwells into the problem of otherness and kinship in *Society Of Others*. Stasch's idea is that the idea of a collective whole may be just an illusion and the different social practices that are used to create the wholeness of collective life are actually ways of dealing with the otherness of the people around us. People are strangers to each other and the recognition of this creates the symbolic construction of collectivity. (Stasch 2009: 1-23.)

This state of constant otherness, according to Stasch, happens in the identification of another person – to recognize another person, they must be recognized as different from ourselves and this realization is an emotionally strong one. (Stasch 2009: 14-15.) Negotiations are not just rituals through which relationships are created as consensual. They are at the same time acts of recognizing others and being recognized by others more and more intimately. More relationships mean more aspects of the self that can take up social form.

The importance of constant negotiation in polyamorist relationships is, I think, this same realization. Negotiation creates the people involved as separate entities and this process is brought to a close in the reaching of an agreement. The negotiation is a journey of self-discovery and self-creation as a process of differentiation of needs and goals. By recognizing the other, one is differentiating the self into being. The agreement then, creates a collective as the individuals created recognize that their individuality is dependent on the social process that it was first formed in. The *gemeinschaft* of Stasch is solidified in the understanding of the otherness of loved ones.

The self thus created in acts of negotiation is a shared self. An individual that is born out of social interaction:

“I believe that the conflicts come into negotiations

through that no-one comes into relationships as pure, except their first love and those relations are always horrible shit [laughs] Not shit, but you know, nobody knows what they're doing.

Anyway, people always bring their past relationships into a situation, the power relations in them and communications and the rest. So when I'm talking to a partner, I'm pretty aware or have tried to become more aware of what are the actual [social dynamics] that are talking in the situation.“ (Interview 7.)

This understanding of identity as past relationships is an awareness of the self in relation to the social history of the self. Through that recognition social relations are created as central to the creation of the self, of a concrete self that is different from others. The awareness of the effects of past relationships on the current self is also an awareness of the importance of the current relationships in creating the future self. It is a creation that is recognized as taking place all the time. Negotiation is the tool through which a person can try to control that process.

It was thus in negotiation that intimate relationships started. Here a woman talks about the beginning of a transformation of a sexual relationship into a love relationship that eventually became her primary relationship.

“So what actually deepened the relationship was that we started talking about these little feelings of jealousy and it's etiquette that you don't talk about jealousy in sex relationships and it was so easy talking about it that we just started to get along better and better [. . .]”
(Interview 5.)

Negotiation changes the perceived dynamics of social relationships. What sets lovers apart from friends, parents, etc. is the negotiation of sexual subjects. In this negotiation of sexual practices, a person takes up the tools of self-creation and becomes a self that is not just created in random social situations where power understood as ownership dictates the dynamics of the creation of the individual. The self is no longer at the whim of others but is the one in control, in negotiation with others.

At the same time the self is stuck in these constant negotiations, for to stop negotiating is to mark the end of the relationships as a relationship and also an end to an avenue of self discovery and thus the construction of an individual self. It is not the end of that construction, as it takes place in all relationships. But a person still has a

stake in social relationships through being created by them.

Talking about an ex-partner, a female informant talked about a negotiation of meetings as a symbol for something else:

“After I moved out I've taken him out to eat once and asked him over for the night once, but I'd like it if he took the initiative sometimes, but it's just not in his nature and that's what I'm waiting for that he would make the effort. Friends ask what the situation is with the two of us and I have refused to give them a definite answer. We have broken up, but that person is not completely out of the picture if he just showed a little bit of something”. (Interview 5.)

Negotiations require a person to position themselves in relation to others. The act of asking is also an act of making explicit a need and a want. The commencing of the discussion is the elaboration of positions in relation to the issue. A social dynamic is formed where both are active, and equal.

Polyamorists understand breakup through change. The relationship had changed – it was over, but this did not mean that the social relationship was necessarily over. The woman in question was hoping to continue a social relationship in some form despite the breakup. But to be able to create new ways of being together after transformations requires that both parties take an active role. As I have shown, this is done through negotiation.

Negotiation creates relationships and also transforms them. The act of entering into negotiation as the effort expected is the effort of building a relationship – it is always a symbol for a future act and feeling. It becomes ritual as it is the socially recognized way in which commitment is expressed.

It also changes the dynamics of breaking up – even though the breakup breaches communication on some levels, parts of it can just as easily continue until some form of resolve is found in a new relationship dynamic. For example, as friends, or flatmates, or co-parents. Polyamorous relationships could end completely, but what was more apparent was that relationships always had the potential to continue in some form.

Past relationships could even affect future relationships through shared animals, kids or property. The negotiation of relationships was in a way more constant than actual relationships. This was what marked the feeling of love and closeness. Also, as the woman quoted above noted, the lack of negotiation was something that could be

used to keep a social distance in partner's partner relationships:

“[My partner] always seems to want to talk to my other partner through me. He's like 'can you tell him that He should wash that fucking coffee machine and not just leave the coffee bag in'. They do talk together sometimes. But it's a bit annoying. On the other hand I do understand that they don't have that kind of relationship together, but I had hoped that it would have been this one big happy family thing, but they want to keep a bit of a distance and they use me as the go-between.”
(Interview 5.)

Negotiation marked the emotional and personal stake people had in the other person. It was used as a marker for deeper feelings and it was the act through which relationships became central to individuals. So to refuse negotiation was to deem a relationship as a non-relationship, as socially marginal to the person's individuality.

The lack of negotiation could be used keep partner's partners apart, but negotiation between partner's partners could create family situations as well. It created cohesive wholes that were recognized and could always be legitimized by referring to the negotiations through which they were created or destroyed.

Negotiations as a mechanism created oppositions, but it created sameness at the same time. Some could negotiate from a shared position, a person could negotiate for others and thus creating not an individual identity, but a collective one. This could be done by expressing past agreements, or agreements reached in other relationships earlier. Where negotiations was the elaboration of the self, agreements were the cementing of the relationship. They were the proof that the relationship was consensual and required the creation of separate individuals which was achieved through negotiation. These individuals could then come to an agreement forming a consensual relationship.

Negotiation was a ritual to express love, mutual solidarity, togetherness, friendship and comradeship. These same feelings were recognized by Schneider in *American Kinship* as what blood and romantic love stood for. These were expressed as the substance that bound people to each other as if by a force of nature and sexual relations between partners. These were compartmentalized as opposites in *American Kinship*: one was a substance, the other an act. One was there always and unchanging, the other was chosen, created through which the first was seen to have come about. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 31-39, 52-53.) These were based on a culturally specific

understanding of how nature worked:

“Human reason does two things. First, though it builds on a natural base, it creates something additional, something more than what nature alone produces. Second, human reason selects only part of nature on which to build.” (Schneider 1980 [1964]:36.)

Polyamorists seem to hold social experiences as the paramount substance that makes them who they are. Their personality, their individuality is what marks them as differentiable humans. They are constantly being created by their social experiences, thus they cannot choose to be created in this way. Negotiation is the social modification of those experiences, and thus it is the active creation of the self. It is a chosen act which has an effect on something that is constant, the creation of the very substance they as individuals are.

Social Networks

To understand this change in thinking more deeply, I will look at how polyamorists form their social networks and how those social networks affect their relationships. Social networks consist of friends with whom people do leisure activities and offer mutual aid. In this analysis, family is created as an inner world, where friends do not necessarily enter, or enter only fleetingly.

“[...] well, I do believe that there are social relationships that are kind of in this no-man's land. That there isn't terminology for them. For example ideas about friendship. Like often people start from the assumption that if you have a friend there is nothing sexual about your relationship and there never has been. But I've for example gotten to know a lot of people through first going to bed with them and then becoming friends.” (Interview 6)

Polyamory and the other forms of creating and maintaining relationships that my informants told me about, compounded these two different realms. Friends became lovers, became flatmates, became husbands and wives, became co-parents, or uncles and aunts, became ex-partners maybe raising kids together, friends with benefits or just friends – again to potentially become lovers again. The list of relationship transformations was endless and always as unique as the personal situations of my informants.

Relationships were in a constant flux, but people took on new roles as

lives changed and even those who left, in some cases, held on to the possibility of returning when circumstances were different. All these relationships were interwoven with others, people becoming part of each others lives and existing relationships in ways that fitted.

Eames and Goode talk about the dynamism of relationships in social networks in that they can easily be created and ended (Eames & Goode 1977: 121-126). The social networks that I studied had a different dynamism in themselves which in a way was more reminiscent of kinship networks where the roles of kin change as the circumstances of the ego are transformed. But the circumstances of my informants did not change in a uniform way. What was recognized as a circumstance was also different. Circumstances were always subjectively defined. For example a breakup could be a circumstance requiring re-evaluation of relationships. But so could a personal discovery, or a new partner or getting a dog, or even needing to live alone or move to a new city.

Polyamory created networks that were somewhere in between kinship and friendship or social networks, maintaining in some sense the spontaneity and egocentric quality of social networks, but creating circumstances where relationships could be transformed into many different forms with the same people.

Eames and Goode refer to Bott's study that found that the most significant element of highly connected networks is not the mutual exchange of aid, but that members of such networks tend to mutually know each other. They are no longer just egocentric networks, but are characterized by overlapping ties and frequent collective activity. It is also important to note here, that she finds that the type of network people are involved in is important in determining family structure and conjugal roles. (Eames & Goode 1977: 127-128.)

The high connectedness of social networks was apparent in forming the lives of many of my informants. This was made explicit in relations of mutual or one-sided aid in friendship relationships, but also in some relationships of shared partners. Polyamory has the potential of creating highly connected networks as it can create even closer bonds between people, but not necessarily through collective activity or gatherings, even though those could also be used to maintain ties.

Some maintained a separation between family members and lovers, but these boundaries often enough became fuzzy and could disappear all together, with lovers forming their own bonds with children, or with different partners becoming flatmates. The line between the home and intimacy was relaxed. The home was not the

central to defining family, nor was intimacy and care limited by living arrangements.

People brought their families and close ties into each other's lives and new ties were quickly formed, with their own tensions and forces that could eventually transform those relationships. It would also be hard to make distinctions with biological and non-biological ties in instances where families that were brought together this way might not have any biological ties holding them together, but were still held together in and of themselves, as families.

The networks created in this way actually had a force that set them against complete break-ups. It was not the state, religion, nor biological kin group that created social pressure for people to stick together, but the very connectedness of these networks that people had created through lovers, hubbies, flatmates, fuck buddies, friends and partner's partners.

When the falling out of two people affected all those around them and the relationships between them, the impetus was on maintaining relationships, or transforming them into different modes when they no longer worked in their current state as they had been for one reason or another. This was not just a question of friends becoming estranged, but networks of friends, lovers and care relations were affected around any single relationship. When these networks were closely knit together, the ending of a relationship did not mean that the social relation was gone. The relatedness that was achieved through a network of different relations still existed.

In the cases where persons had fallen out of these networks, they faced loosing not just a partner, but friends and a sense of social family as well. The loss of a closely knit network could mean a loss of a personally meaningful social life. This kind of end to a relationship could be a social catastrophe for the person involved. Or the destruction of one relationship could diffuse a network as it affected all the relationships that the people in the first relationship were also involved in. In these cases the impetus to continue relationships in some form was very strong.

Not all relationships were so close and some people held lovers at a safe distance from their personal lives for the sake of existing relationships. One would think that these were distinguished by the terms primary and secondary relationships, which refer to a hierarchy of close relationships but this was not always the case. The closeness or connectedness was not dependent on the perceived hierarchy or lack of it in relationships. Although those who preferred talking about family often had more connected networks than those who preferred talking about just partners.

Even those that held that secondary relationships meant something outside the field of everyday life, were not always safe from the potentially transforming power of the connectedness created inside polyamorous networks. Secondary partners often had other partners of their own, creating a sort of web of relations beyond any single person which influenced them and their relationships.

The culture of negotiation was a way to handle this dynamic form of social relations. As relations were in a more or less constant state of negotiation, dealing with transformation was not something out of the ordinary, but actually part of the ordinary.

Most of the people I interviewed were in long lasting relationships, ranging between 3-22 years, and also in shorter relationships at the same time. Those who had been in the longest relationships (lasting over 7 years), would state that polyamory was the reason for their relationships being long lasting. It had been the original transformation that had made a long term relationships possible. In a world of constant change, a relationship model that is built on change and handling transformations can be more solid than one that is built on solidifying social dynamics. This dynamic created *diffuse, enduring solidarity* in a novel way, where it was not dependent on any single relationship model, but instead was constantly negotiated in a state of almost constant social transformation that marked polyamorous networks.

In a way these networks were no longer egocentric since social forces were created that were beyond any person's control. They did not exist outside or beyond those relationships, but they were a constant in people's lives. Although people would relate their networks in an egocentric manner, the dynamics were not created in just dyadic personal relationships, but through linkages of multiple relationships into networks. Certain people might be at their center, but it meant that relations were marked by relationships to those who were central. These linkages took on novel forms and created instances that could not be clumped together under one set of rules or practices.

Ownership and Individualism

Polyamorists placed ownership as an anti-social force, one that destroyed solidarity. What is the role of ownership in the creation of kinship in kinship studies? Lévi-Strauss placed the exchange of women and thus their ownership by a collective group at the center of kinship formation. To be owned was a human state, created in the

order of social life. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 45-50.)

Schneider talks about ownership in defining the legitimacy of relations. Children must be born under certain conditions to be seen as legitimate – for kinship to form a relationship must be established by marriage and then in substance. If relationships are simply based on nature they are illegitimate, although still existing. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 27-29). He uses an example about Cinderella which mixes up substance and ownership:

“A woman's relationship to her own child is one in which she has an abiding love and loyalty for it; her relationship to her husband's child by his earlier marriage is one in which that child is someone else's child, not hers. What she does for her step-child she does because of her husband's claim on her.” (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 24.)

At the same time Schneider posits that “a blood relationship is an identity”. Blood creates common identity between people. It defines who they are. So as a child is owned by their parents, it is defined by them. The substance of blood is the force that is seen to create humans as individuals and that individualism has a shared basis but what is always unique as the creation of blood substance is an alchemy of mixing two unrelated blood substances. The legitimate ownership relation is established in the coming together of both a code of conduct and shared substance. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 24-39.)

Ownership has its own meanings and context that is separate from ideas about the economy and material exchange relations. It is in the sphere of relationship ethics that polyamory redefines these terms in relation to human relationships. Ownership is a relation where one in some way holds another's claim to identity.

In Lévi-Strauss's study ownership is established through a collective group that is the identity of all those who are seen to be part of it. For Schneider ownership is established in relationships that show how a person is related through a symbolic substance to a larger social group that marks his or her identity. These are created in opposition to other groups, people and relations. (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Schneider 1980 [1968].)

Polyamorists actively reject ownership in their relationships. Polyamorists, in making negotiation central to defining their relationships are actively refusing ideas about ownership in relationships. Their identity is formed from personal experiences. They are creating their identity in negotiation, because in that they are

neither owned nor own the other person that is always needed for the process of identity formation. It is the recognition of otherness that Stasch theorized as central to defining who we are (see Stasch 2009).

It is not the otherness of a different blood substance, or collective group, but the otherness of those near and dear that is creating polyamorist individuality. At the same time polyamorists are undermining those sources of identity formation and kinship ideals that are in opposition to their own. In opening up the creation of their own identity, polyamorists were creating a way to organize relatedness in new terms.

This had effects in their whole social life, not just sexual relationships. For example larger networks of care, love and sexual relations made polyamorists much less dependent on the market economy than those living in nuclear families. Mutual aid and care were often so infused in everyday social life, that it is no wonder that polyamorists talked about a way of life.

These networks could compound into familial units, or they could be more spread out. But what they all had in common was that they were created by people who looked for solutions to problems through many different social avenues rather than through consumption or blood ties.

In negotiations the *enduring, diffuse solidarity* was recreated. It was enduring because it could withstand transformations in relationships, it was diffuse because it could exist in many different forms that could be negotiated and it was solidarity because it created relationships based on love and care.

Negotiation could diffuse over networks instead of being held only in sexual relationships. This meant that single people often enough had sexual partners and relationships of care. These were simply friends and they themselves were integrated into larger networks of care. If a computer needed fixing, or money was short at hand or kids needed to be looked after there were always people to ask for help. People were not dependent on one sexual relationship.

To create that dependance in one relationship would be to reject the network of relationships around them. Ownership and dependance became forces that destroyed relatedness instead of creating it. This is why polyamorists did not identify different numbers of partners as a sign of inequality in relationships. It was in the act of controlling the relationships that a partner took part in that inequality lay, since that created dependance, not a different number of partners.

Polyamorists were still Western in the sense that they looked to social

relationships and processes to become differentiated, and this differentiation was created as individuality. The social history of a person was defining their individuality and was constantly growing in intimate relationships. What created a person as more was not having more relationships in the here and now, but having more relationships in the past and the present – or more time in different acts of soul searching, for which being single also had its place.

All this meant that blood relatives were important only when they had meaningful and personal relationships with a person, because then they had been part of the creation of that person as an individual. People were as much being created by relationships with parents and siblings as by friends or lovers. Although polyamorists did not question the idea of shared blood, they did not place it as central to the understanding of who they themselves were as individuals.

The negotiations I have talked about can also be looked at as a sort of exchange. In Lévi-Strauss's order, the exchange of people is the alchemy of creating social collectives. For polyamorists, the sharing of experiences is the alchemy that creates them as individuals. The same social process of exchange is present, but with people not seeing themselves as constituting something bigger, but instead seeing other people constituting themselves.

Polyamorists do not exchange a collective self, their substance is produced through interaction and is seen as strongly bound in individuality. Their collective social surroundings are expressed in ideas of individuality. But individuality itself is based on exchange of the very substance of people. They themselves grow bigger by growing others and taking part in active manipulation of the process through which people are seen to grow.

Many of my informants emphasized adulthood and maturity as being important in polyamorous relationships, but it was actually those relationships that were creating a sense of being an adult from a new perspective. Not the active, creative position of owning others in the sense of having children, but in taking an active part in the creation of their own self and those of others.

The self that is created in the act of negotiation is grounded in the relationships that make the negotiation possible. The collectives formed are created and expressed as agreements. Polyamorists do not negotiate marriage between kin groups, they negotiate the individual in relationships and just as surely, express the lack of binding ties through a lack of negotiation, or the lack of exchange.

Substances of the Self

My original question was what is the substance that polyamorists hold as meaningful in understanding the relations between people. I have looked at the different moments that create polyamorist relationships, set them apart and recreate them in time.

As I noted earlier, polyamorists often continued relationships in different forms after a breakup. Sex was not the differentiating factor in personal relationships since a sexual relationship did not necessarily entail an intimacy nor did an intimate relationship necessarily require sex. Continued negotiation became central to expressing love and a continued feeling of solidarity.

I identified this change in thinking about sex to the larger field of non-monogamy. As I have shown, the social forces governing relationships created love and feelings as central and the exchange of those was seen as happening in acts of communication of needs and wants.

Individuals created themselves through these social relations. They shared not just sex but the self in sexual relations. Creating sex in and around negotiations catered to creating people as individuals in relation to each other. As needs were individualized, negotiation became the point where the self became known, understood and constructed. Relationships became the locus of the self, a way to create a self that was in continuous expansion as it was created in new relationships.

This self is created through all past, current and future social relationships. It is a self that is seen to be in the past and present at the same time, by infusing earlier experiences into a current moment. A self that creates others and is created as something more through all relationships that it engages in. This self is actually in danger of being thwarted in the act of owning – in an act to freeze it into a moment and making the growth of the self something dangerous, as something disruptive and potentially destructive to some other entity. Owning actually placed the power of creating one's individuality in the hands of others, thus putting a person in a child like position.

The self was a social being, it was created in social interaction. Polyamorous thought saw social and personal transformation as a central function of relationships, not as something dangerous. Ownership was seen as the attempt to control the process of another person's self-creation. To be free meant the freedom to choose the processes of mutual creation of selves with others. Polyamorists understood people as

being in a constant state of becoming and this becoming happened in all relationships but most intimately in love relationships.

Sexuality is the potentiality for certain relationships, but it also makes certain exchanges of substances likely and possible. Sexuality marks the potentials inside an individual to create and bring forth social relationships. In the case of Western heterosexuality, this is seen as the potential to create kinship through begetting children. At the same time other sexuality formations create other substances and these create the people involved as something different to the normative heterosexual monogamous person. The self is related to the world and people around it through the system that created it.

The reason polyamorist women move away from this view of sexuality, is that it places cross-sex relationships as central and same-sex relationships as peripheral. The idea of kinship through copulation creates people as a substance to which cross-sex relations are fundamental. It binds them in social positions in relation to each other through how that substance is seen. That substance determines them and their social role as gendered and sexual entities.

Regardless of the chosen sexual relationships of polyamorists, they are created by a different substance. Their individuality is not based on blood-relations. Thus they look at their social relations through how their own idea of substance relates to them. Their individual self is created differently, so their sexuality and their relationships reflect that change in thinking about the self.

Since polyamorists have plural relationships, they evaluate those relationships through negotiation. The closer those negotiations bring two people, ultimately in the sharing of care, time, home, life and even children, the more they are the same and differentiable as individuals at the same time. The more they have at stake in a particular relationship, the more it creates them as individuals.

Ownership is put in opposition to this, because the control of sexuality in relationships is only important to a sense of relatedness that is created through sexual intercourse. The using of one's own sexuality outside a relationship is called cheating and creates illegitimate relatedness. It creates identities that have no legitimate place, the recognition of which destroys the primary place of legitimate relationships. This sacrifice of control needed to show love becomes a chain that destroys the creation of the self and thus also love in polyamorist discourse.

Normative Finnish ideas about the sexuality, of women especially, would

place some relationships as overriding others by default, of creating certain positions that the individuals in question cannot change or negotiate. When the self itself becomes illegitimate, through non-normative sexuality and relationship practices, the very concepts of the self and of sexuality must change.

On the one hand, to create dangerous sexuality as sociability, it must be rephrased. On the other hand gender is in the grip of the same situation. To let go of control, to take on the stigma of not being enough, which is the other end of the criticism of wanting too much is to let go of gender expectations. Both of which are instilled in the romantic idea of the one – the one that is perfect for another. To find the perfect partner is to know one's self perfectly. But a polyamorist thinks that is impossible, because they are never complete, never whole – they are always in a state of becoming. But to find many different partners, is to bring out many aspects of the self, it is to become more.

At the same time, in the act of communication, in the creation of individuality, a sexuality must be created that includes individualized needs that answers to questions that are centered in a web of relationships and a gender position that is not centered on the control of other people's sexuality. A sexuality that cannot be filled by any single point or person or act. A sexuality that is itself in a constant state of transformation and becoming. That sexuality expresses the way the self is related to the people around it. That is the realm of individualization and self discovery.

In this discourse jealousy is often taken as the ultimate evil. As the attempt to stop growth, to control others, to own others. To own is to set the limits of the growth of the self and on sexuality as part of the self.

The self that is created as experiences is the substance that is shared and as it is shared and recreated in different relationships, it grows more complex. In the act of negotiation, through creating individuals, others, people become connected in more and more intricate ways. The self is invested in these relationships precisely because it is created in them as a differing entity.

Polyamory requires an understanding of the self that is created in a kind of shattered social setting. To create a prism, out of the rainbow in a sense, sexuality is one of the end results of negotiations that dwell on individual needs and wants and the recognition of their social nature. The negotiation creates a pattern out of a seemingly chaotic social setting, that of the urban lifestyle with its streams and vortexes of social action individualized.

Conclusions

I have argued that gender is the position humans take in the process of creation of kinship substances. These substances are meaningful only insofar as they are creating those humans themselves. And what they themselves are is made meaningful in relation to others, be they collective or individual things. Sexuality is the relationship of a gendered human to the system through which this process of this creation takes place. As this system is symbolic in nature, I refer to it as a symbolic order.

I have argued that polyamorists create themselves through negotiations. Gender is a position from which a person negotiates. When I realized this I understood why some refrained from negotiations with one another and some did not. When gender is a position in negotiations that create the participants of those negotiations as different from each other, then gender becomes very dynamic at least in the aspects that are socially important. Gender becomes and is produced through social relations both in relation to people of a different and of the same gender.

Negotiations create humans as gendered in relation to one another. Their position is always relative to other people. This way gender itself is in danger of becoming a completely relational aspect of the self. Refraining from negotiations is the creation of a non-relationship. This non-relationship is extended at the same time to strangers and to those one wants to see as the same as one's self.

Earlier I used the example of a woman who had to act as a go-between for her two boyfriends. In taking part in negotiations together, they would have started becoming differentiated in gender positions. Polyamorous negotiations posed a problem to those who wanted to keep their gender in a stable position. They were creating their gender in a different system, one which did not entail them with a fixed gender.

A fixed gender position is established in a symbolic order that places two genders in opposition to each other, for example. No matter what people do with their own selves, their symbolic gender stays intact. But when that gender is a position in negotiation, it becomes relative to other people. It is indeed changed by one's own actions and becomes limited by those one takes up negotiations with.

As gender is created as positions in relation to others in these negotiations, it must inevitably be created as different positions by the same person. These different positions become the ever expanding self. The positions that one takes

up, thus creates a sort of freedom in creating the person as their own creator, even though that person must create themselves in relation to others. This they must do, as everything is only a relation to some other thing. To be something is to be a thing something else is not. It is always a relation, never an actual essentialized thing. A social meaning can only take form as a social relation, thus negotiation is the creation of those relations.

Sexuality, as I noted earlier, is the relation of a human to the process of creation of humans in a symbolic order. Foucault has documented how some individuals were left out and marked as unnatural in the creation of the woman-man produced humans. In this order gender was a fixed and unchanging relation, one that was established by power. In the creation of perversion, the sexuality that was created as natural could be thought of as universal because it was symbolic, not embedded in social contexts. Sexuality was a relation to these fixed gender positions, to a symbolic order. (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 38-49.)

Polyamorists defined their sexuality in a myriad of ways, their sexuality was created in the process of negotiation. What they expressed themselves as wanting, was what they became. How they identified themselves was created in relation to many different situations, not in relation to one single unchanging universal symbolic order or state.

Sexuality becomes highly elaborate just as gender becomes a relative opposition. It is part of the same whole that gender positions are made out of, as it is the reason why those relations are being created. Even the lack of a sexuality geared towards any gender becomes a purpose – something which can be understood not as emptiness or lack, but fullness, as desire that drives the creation of the self.

Sexuality is the way to express what relations one want's to create in the process of negotiations and what kind of self has been produced in those negotiations, just as gender is the position from which these goals are fathomed from. The more one negotiates, the more positions one takes to create a gendered whole and the more things one can elaborate in the field of possibility. The realms of masculine and feminine, man and woman, relate to fixed position, but in the case of negotiation they become a relation. If two beings who view their gender to be the same need to negotiate from differing positions, it must be deduced that they are no longer the same. Their positions are relative to one another. This relativity can be the opposition of feminine to masculine, or the opposition of something other in relation to those.

This is how polyamory is kinship. It is the systematic production of humans. It is the creation of humans through their perceived relatedness to each other. It creates unique relationships and it has its own ways in which people are created as gendered and sexual selves. People are created as subjects through negotiations that position them and their goals in relation to each other and thus create them as existing and meaningful beings in the world they live in. At the same time those negotiations establish their relatedness to one another. Negotiation is a ritual to express and in actuality to create *diffuse, enduring solidarity*.

This process is left unrecognized when evaluated from positions which are based on a different system of creation. Although the mechanics might not be that dissimilar, the understanding of what is the most important aspect of their humanity is.

This does not mean that those in polyamorous relationships do not understand their blood relations. Blood relations simply do not express their relatedness to the people around them. In taking up different symbolic system of an understanding of the creation of themselves, the self will in some ways become disconnected. They will have different selves in these different systems as they are created as different entities in relation to these different symbolic worlds. They might take up relations with blood-kin without negotiations, but they hold those negotiations as central in other relationships.

Butler argued that single symbolic order need not be universal even if it exists (Butler 2004: 47). People who take up consensuality as an alternative way to recognize relationships, take up a new system of creation of the self but this does not remove them from prior systems. They can at the same time be created from blood and from this negotiated individuality, a difference that can be traced to Western ideas about the discontinuity of body and soul that would merit more theoretical elaboration than I have room for in this study.

Polyamory creates people as positioned in new ways. In *American Kinship* Schneider theorized an elementary opposition of relationships of kinship with relationships of friendship. Blood based kinship creates positions through which people are the same: through having the same gender or the same kin substances. In the positions of difference, sexuality further elaborates relations to this process of symbolic human production. Friends are thus those people with whom one is not configured as the same through personal substance, but with whom one nonetheless is not creating new kinship substance. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 39, 44, 49, 52-53, 101.)

The relatedness of family is in shared creation of humans as related beings. Even when sexual intercourse is seen as central what defines families is not the creation of babies but the creation of their identity as babies. Children can be created without a family, but their legitimate identity is formed through the family. (Schneider 1980 [1964]: 38, 49-50)

When personal experiences are seen to be the substance individuals are made out of, then the attempt to control those experiences through negotiation becomes the active creation of the self. What then becomes shared as substance, the relatedness between people, is those moments that people are seen to be created from. Shared agreements become a connection to the very process through which people have become differentiated as individuals. Families are those who have a common stake in the self of a person.

In the model I have created for understanding polyamory, friendship is not in opposition to the creation of the self and thus its relatedness to those around it. Friendship was seen as an important part of all relationships by my informants and often the lack of a feeling of comradeship was identified as reason for breakup. Friends who one is not sexually involved with might take up negotiations as well.

Just like blood-based kinship, polyamory creates a way to socially mold processes that are seen as happening anyway, all the time. It is in the active manipulation of things that are seen as facts of life that culture is formed as social action. But what is seen as facts of life, as existing, is also created as cultural understanding.

In placing consensuality as central to relationships, polyamorists have done more than just created new social relationships. In using the idea of consensuality to identify their relationships, they have created a system through which they can engage in creating and understanding themselves. Polyamory is a change of cultural system through which people manipulate the social world around them and themselves.

To be free, to not be owned and to not own are explanations for why this system has been adopted. It is seen as a way to take control over processes that in blood-based kinship are placed as part of nature. A system which, Butler noted, displaced others while creating some at its center. This system displaced more than humans, it displaced social relationships. (Butler 2004: 142.)

This does not mean that consensuality does not create a system that does not displace some while centering others. The conventions and abilities required to be

able to successfully take part in negotiations is a divide which makes it hard or even impossible for some to become subjects through these social events.

Negotiations are not sheltered from gendered behavior either. It creates those with more relationships and experience as more able to negotiate and thus creates new ways in which power relations can become slanted, despite the well intentioned quest for equality. Negotiation also happens in the confines of earlier existing relationships, which creates a hierarchy of relationships.

Freedom is often understood through the dismissal of earlier social structures, and is part of what polyamorists seem to be striving for in the opposition of polyamory and monogamy. Consensuality and negotiation as social organization does not transcend existing social structures, it slowly creates new ones. It creates a symbolic order in which people can understand themselves differently, in relation to which they identify themselves in a new way.

The opposition not of woman and man, but of individuals as negotiators of relationships are dependent on placing a very different kind of substance as socially paramount. Needs, wants, experiences, memories, gender, sexuality and skills are created as a person through verbal acts in negotiation by recognizing the creation of those very things as happening in different place – in the realm of personal experiences. This symbolic order of negotiation creates difference as positions in relationships.

Negotiation is seen to be a tool that is used to socially manipulate a process that is seen to happen just as surely as the earth turning in space. But it is itself actually the process it is used to control. It creates people as subjects of their own fate, rather than objects.

The ritual through which networks take shape, is still a symbolic order, the seed of a social structure. This particular symbolic order places life experiences and personal preferences and understanding as central to being human. It is an order, because this process is seen to happen in the relation of two or more subjects. Just as what humans are made out is culturally recognized, so is the need to manipulate this process, to create a sense of control, of order.

Strathern noted that a person in Western formulations is an individual prior to society (Strathern 1988: 93). The individual that I am describing here is very much created in society. It is not created in nature, it is not inherently anything – or if it is, it is only in the social ritual of negotiation where that inherent trait becomes seen and takes on a meaningful existence. Just as polyamorists seem to take on an ultra

individualistic viewpoint on their relationships, they are actually recognizing individualism as something quite different from the one immersed in the world of natural.

Negotiations take place to control experiences that the present and future hold. In this process, the individual is created. At the same time, this individual is recognized as being created all the time, anyway. The process of controlling a chaotic existence, becomes the actual creation of a stabilized subject – of humans living in order. It is in this moment, that the world is created as a stable place just as it is being recognized to be anything but.

For consensuality to become a symbolic order in itself, it must transcend context, it must no longer be rooted in any single experience. It must create a sense of stability. The need to place it or any symbolic order as universal is but a step further. In negotiations the state of constant change becomes the constant, a stable state as the ritual of negotiation becomes universal in the experiences of a person. The stability is in the ritual that creates the world as ordered.

The word of polyamory is used to denote relationships, but how those relationships are formed is in the use of consensuality. People often enough transcended polyamory as such and used consensuality as a way to manage all kinds of relationships, not just sexual ones. Polyamory is thus not the concept at the center of polyamorous networks, but instead it is consensuality.

The symbolic world is followed by action in specific context to harness its power just as it is created in the social actions that are seen to derive from it. The relation of symbolic to social is this relation. They are in no way separate, but are part of a cultural process of stabilizing the world into something coherent and meaningful.

Creating negotiators as subjects, as a self existing in and through those relationships in ways that otherwise would be impossible centers people into social webs of self-creation. Inside the confines of the networks created, it creates a sort of social freedom, a negotiated freedom.

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