

Managing Stress Arising from Sexual Relating

**How to handle same-gender sexual interests
occurring within an opposite-gender
non-monogamous couple**

by

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As most ethically non-monogamous / polyamorous couples find out fairly quickly in their relationship(s), there are absolutely no areas of sexual relating where stress and anxiety can't occur, or be very quickly created! This article discusses a relatively rare, but very significant context capable of generating deep insecurity, anxiety and resultant stress, within an ethically non-monogamous opposite-gender couple. I'm looking at where one partner has a strongly felt urge to experience sexual involvement with a same-gender or transgender person. When it's actually the female partner who wishes to experiment specifically with same-gender sex this situation seems to come up as a problem only very rarely. But what if it's a male partner who is curious about, or definitely interested in, engaging in sexual exploration with other men, and the female partner is not exactly over the moon about this?

There can be many reasons for this reticence, including some troubling perception that there is something wrong or even "unmanly" about this variation of sex. No matter how liberated we may think ourselves to be, we have got to face the fact that we develop our stereotypes of gender-appropriate sexual behaviour from a very early age. This process, beginning in infancy, is subject to the traditions and prejudices - and very, very often, the intense ignorance and bigotry - of those others who inhabit and dominate our world as we grow and mature.

We must first be able to recognise, and take ownership of, the existence of these stereotypes before we can challenge them and discard them from our minds, thereby removing a stressor from our life. And even when we genuinely wish to do this, such stereotypes are sometimes very difficult to self-challenge, or to challenge effectively in others. If you're a worried female partner you may harbour a fear, for example, that such a yearning in your man may indicate some latent overall *preference* towards same-gender sexual involvement. So, your real worry may be a possible future displacement of yourself as the primary sexual love focus, thereby becoming relegated to a less central loving place in his life. Even worse, a related, deeper and more sinister underlying doubt may also have begun to break the surface. Is this interest of his in experimenting sexually with another man a way of him now moving completely into something which he has always tended towards? Is his intention or leaning, in fact, towards eventually discarding female sexual partnering altogether? Put bluntly, might you eventually get dumped?

In honesty, whilst this does sometimes happen (both ways around, of course), and there are even some famous examples of such occurrences, it's relatively rare. It is much more likely that the man you love, and who loves you, is simply interested in experiencing another

dimension to his sexual being which, until now, he has perhaps not felt free to explore, or has been reticent to articulate. On your part, if you have worries along these lines it's probably not a sudden occurrence, but something triggered out of thoughts or doubts which may have already been in your mind at some level. This could be a residual from something read about or experienced, possibly a very long time ago by you. He might even feel a little anxious this way himself, yet still desire, or feel an urgent need, to explore this additional side to his sexual and, perhaps, emotional identity.

Both of you in these circumstances may feel reassured to a large extent by the unassailable fact that many men and women who would consider themselves firmly opposite-gender in their baseline sexuality, enjoy some sexual pleasures with same-gender persons. Yet, mostly they remain firmly and very deeply bonded to opposite-gender partnering as their central form of loving and relating. Broadening this out a little, it could be reflected over together that, if there is a fear of displacement as the primary love focus, there's still some important work to be done between you both as a non-monogamous couple. Why? Well, because, quite logically this displacement could happen also with the male becoming involved with another woman too! If one, or both, of you do have any doubts on this, it obviously needs much sharing and talking over together, and must not be left as an unexplored serious concern between you. To help you tackle this issue, before it becomes something larger than it really is, you might even feel it worthwhile spending time with a counselling professional or psychologically-based coach friendly to, and knowledgeable about, non-monogamous relating couples.

Outside of these latter worries, with the right mind-set, trust, and mutual understanding, if either primary partner finds them self wishing to explore a same-gender or transgender curiosity or need, this can be integrated as a legitimate and non-deceitful part of the primary relationship. This avenue is really important for many people because, on numerous occasions, two opposite-gender people meet, fall in love, and build a relationship which never feels complete, since one partner is afraid to reveal an existing self-identified need for at least some degree of same-gender sexual involvement. Or alternatively, they keep secret to themselves an unexplored and frustratingly repressed curiosity about trying out this sexual element. In these contexts, committing to sharing life, sex and love only in opposite-gender partnering leaves a very significant gap in their sexual and emotional experiences.

Even with the deepest possible love shared between two opposite-gender primary partners, it can feel very frustrating, barren and soul-destroying to live life always denying fulfilment to

this other, equally valid, area of one's emotional and sexual personality. Essentially, being stuck within this situation is tantamount to denying the very existence of a major part of who one is. Encouraging and supporting your primary partner in their exploration of this complementary side to their sexual or emotional needs is a gift of love and trust to him or her. It can act as a real emotional and sexual safety valve. Not only may it prevent deceitful, guilt-ridden and secretive same-gender sexual encounters; it can also add yet another deep and enduring strand of love, gratitude and understanding to the complex tapestry that forms your own, or anyone else's, primary love partnership.

So, what do you do to minimise stress, anxiety and insecurities between you both if either of you do have same-gender or transgender / polysexual curiosities or interests - or think that you might have? Well, as with all aspects of non-monogamous relating, to keep anxiety and stress levels low, and trust levels healthy, you'll find it essential to maintain an open and ongoing dialogue together on this. You'll need to make clear between yourselves exactly what areas of same-gender sexuality either of you is going to explore, then construct your boundaries accordingly. As always, deal together with any worries or insecurities as you go. And, most importantly, don't leave anything undealt with, or any minor nagging doubts ignored. Never let any doubts or insecurities build a wall of stress and non-communication between you. Stay jointly in control of your worries, together as a couple. Deal with insecurities, brick by brick, before any walls ever get built, since the latter in relationships are often very difficult, or even sometimes impossible, to demolish!

Focus initially on discussing, and reaching agreement together, about what it is *at this stage* that your curiosity or sexual desire seeks to explore, and what your immediate boundaries will be. Be honest and emotionally open with each other about doubts, insecurities and concerns. Then, having reached a level of understanding together that will maintain the trust and comfort levels of your loving primary couple relationship, go ahead and then, slowly, step-by-step, begin to enjoy the journey into new areas of your identity. And don't neglect to lovingly convey your thanks and gratitude to your supportive primary partner for the expanded and positive sense of self-identity, and pleasure, that you get from this new facet to your sexual life. Make her or him feel a treasured part of this shared new journey.

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