

## ‘Either Or’ or ‘Neither Nor’: Bi (Bye) Sexuality and *Gender Trouble* In *People In Trouble* By Sarah Schulman

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### Abstract

This article explores the either heterosexual or homosexual or neither heterosexual nor homosexual dilemma in bisexuality in the light of Sarah Schulman’s bisexual novel *People in Trouble*. It also investigates whether bi-sexuality is a bye to sexuality negating both hetero-sexuality and homo-sexuality. Sarah Schulman exposes queer lives in her novel *People in Trouble* and Judith Butler unravels the troubles in constructed gender in her work *Gender Trouble*. When one looks through western philosophy’s lens of binary opposites, there can be only two sexualities; heterosexuality and homosexuality. Binary opposites uphold the perspective ‘either or’ and not ‘neither nor’. Judith Butler’s performativity theory states that performativity decides one’s gender. In that case, when a bisexual engages in heterosexuality, s/he is heterosexual and when bisexual performs homosexuality, s/he is homosexual. In the light of Butler’s performativity theory, bisexuality is either heterosexuality or homosexuality. But Bi-sexuals say bye to the western philosophy’s idea of binary opposites and performativity theory, as these theories hold on to the principle of ‘either or’. Bisexuals hold the idea of ‘neither nor’. It means they are neither heterosexual nor homosexual but bisexual. Yin Yang philosophy, which holds that all things are made up of two divergent but inter-reliant and serenely coexisting parts, can spread some rays of solution to the dilemma in bisexuality. As the balance of Yin and Yang is believed to be natural and beyond question, the balance and coexistence of heterosexuality and homosexuality in bisexual can also be natural.

**Key Words:** Bisexuality, Binary opposition, Performativity, Yin and Yang, heterosexuality

This paper examines the ‘either or’ or ‘neither nor’ dilemma in bisexuality in the light of Sarah Schulman’s bisexual novel *People in Trouble*. It also explores whether bi-sexuality is a bye to sexuality opposing both hetero-sexuality and homo-sexuality. As a queer writer, Sarah Schulman successfully depicts the lives of queer people in her fiction *People in Trouble* and Judith Butler explores the troubles in gender construction in her non-fiction *Gender Trouble*. As Western philosophy is rooted in binary opposites, there can be only two sexualities; heterosexuality and homosexuality. Binary opposites endorse the belief ‘either or’ and not ‘neither nor’. Judith Butler’s performativity theory states that performativity decides one’s gender. In that case, when a bisexual executes heterosexuality, s/he is heterosexual and when bisexual does homosexuality, s/he is homosexual. In the light of performativity theory, bisexuality is either heterosexuality or homosexuality. But Bisexuals reject western philosophy's idea of binary opposites, as well as performativity theory, because both promote

the premise of 'either or'. Bisexuals believe that 'neither nor' is true. This indicates that they are neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but rather bisexual. Yin Yang philosophy, which teaches that each thing is formed of two contrary but mutually supporting and calmly concomitant parts, can spread some light on the dilemma in bisexuality. As the balance of Yin and Yang is considered to be natural, the equilibrium and coexistence of heterosexuality and homosexuality in bisexual can also be natural.

The term 'bisexuality' was first employed in 1859 by R.B Todd and It contributed to the rise of modern bisexuality. Though bisexuality existed in the world, the term was coined recently. In the novel, it is stated "They keep the wife and five kids back in the house in Shaker Heights and the boyfriend's in the townhouse in Georgetown" (86). Basically, bisexuals are people who have sexual orientation to both sexes. "An individual who identifies as a bisexual may only be making a statement about her feelings. If she has not formed sexual relations with people of both biological sexes during her lifetime, she is not making a statement about actions" (Colker 33). For everything, stereotypes are created by the society. Ruth Colker mentions, "The common stereotype of a bisexual person is one who always has at least two sexual partners" (27). Who can be a bisexual? "a bisexual can be a man or a woman" (Naylor 57).

In the novel, *People in Trouble*, a woman is bisexual. Kate, the bisexual character in the novel *People in Trouble*, engages in both homosexual and heterosexual relationship. Kate had homosexual relationship with her lesbian lover Molly. "They started making love again in violet haze" (153). Kate, the bisexual character, had heterosexual relationship with her partner Peter. "Then they made love. It was all physical" (154). Kate was comfortable with her bisexuality. "Two relationships, she'd noticed, required the constant application of triage. But mostly, the transition from Molly to Peter was natural" (25). Peter, the husband of Kate, had heterosexual relationship with his wife and homosexual relationship with a man. "Peter had once a gay affair. It was with a master electrician named Carl Joacobs" (36). As youngsters, all are informed, either implicitly or overtly, that all are heterosexual. One can only transcend beyond the bipolar category by a purposeful cognitive process.

As bisexuals involve in sex with both the sexes, the dilemma in bisexuality is 'either or' Or 'neither nor'. Bisexuality is misunderstood either as heterosexuality or as homosexuality. And bisexuals stick on to the view that it is neither heterosexual nor homosexual but bisexual. The bisexuals do not have a supportive system. "There is no healthy support system for bi's. Everyone wants them to be either gay or straight. Straights condemn bi's for being weird and gays condemn them for not following the feminist line" (Moir 5). Bisexual invisibility prevents the coming out process of bisexuals. "Bisexual invisibility pigeonholes individuals into gay and straight boxes" (Colker 15). It is vivid in the novel too. "You are not gay, are you? You are not bi or unsure or in transition? You are heterosexual, right?" (202). Bisexuals can have sex with both homosexuals and heterosexuals. "Three days was fine but then she needed a familiar body next to hers. Whose? Peter's or Molly's. Either one would do" (220). The temptation to classify oneself as 'gay' or 'straight' leads to some unexpected outcomes. "A bisexual perspective facilitates picking the 'choose not to label' category rather than the static and bipolar categories of homosexual and heterosexual" (Colker 16). By contrast, the terms 'gay' and 'straight' denote sexual exclusivity, meaning that a person may only have sexual intercourse with others of the same or opposite gender.

The “coming out” process is very difficult for bisexuals. “The very mention of bisexuality is enough to provoke an argument” (O’Broin 18). The Christian right wing and lesbian feminists stigmatize bisexuality in their sexual discourses. A hint to it is there in the novel. “There was a man on Second Avenue wearing a sign that said I Hate Jesus Christ. I accept Jesus Christ as my personal enemy” (198). Disclosing a bisexual identity takes place in the context of a family system. Bisexuals are more likely than gays to conceal their sexuality. Acceptability of bisexuality changes over time. Kate came out with her bisexuality as she told to her partner about it. “One day Kate had told him that she had a lover, that it was a woman and the woman’s name. He had said ‘All right’ and had since tried to ignore it” (10). Biphobia and binegativity wreak havoc on bisexuals’ attempts to come out. Embracing a ‘bi’ identity generally entails rejecting or questioning the ‘normal’ qualities associated with one’s biological sex. Kate used to hide her bisexuality. She uses euphemisms to convey messages to her lesbian lover. “Kate dialled Molly’s number. I want to get together soon. Get together was her euphemism for making love” (19). Kate was afraid of her husband finding out her bisexuality. “Then Peter knocked on the door of her studio. I have to call you back she said into the receiver. Someone is walking in” (19). She also ignores her lesbian lover while her heterosexual husband is with her. “Molly said You saw me walking down the street Thursday and you pretended you didn’t know who I was. I had to Kate answered quickly I was with Peter. You know that. Kate said as long as he doesn’t say anything about it to me, everything will be easier for all of us” (20). “I couldn’t leave on time because Peter was hanging around. I would have had to say where I was going” (41).

Bisexuality is an opposition to binary oppositions. Peter Elbow mentions about a “dichotomous thinking of framing issues in terms of opposites such as sun/moon, reason/passion” (Elbow 51). Binary opposition had its starting point in structuralism. Bipolar structure of the dominant sexuality categories do not let bisexuality to come into picture. The problem with binary opposition is that it promotes the invisibility of the existence of bisexuality.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity holds ‘the either’ or view as gender is based on performance. At a time one can engage either in heterosexual or in homosexual performance not both. Therefore, It is ‘either or’. Many individuals learn how to distinguish one gender from the other simply by recognising it when they see it, which entails examining people’s mannerisms and how they dress or behave. Therefore, performativity theory negates ‘neither nor’ notion of bisexuality.

Yin Yang philosophy is helpful in suggesting a solution to the ‘either or’ or ‘neither nor’ dilemma in bisexuality as it suggests that “everything is composed of two distinct but interdependent/peacefully coexisting counterparts” (Ming 630). The Chinese notion of duality is symbolised by Yin and Yang. Both Yin and Yang are equal. The quality of an object of analysis does not determine whether it is considered yin or yang; rather, the context in which it is evaluated does. A woman in a marriage, for example, is normally the yin half of the pair, but a domineering woman might be yang as an individual. “To Chinese people, the balance of Yin and Yang is believed to be natural and beyond question” (Ming 631). “Ying Yang philosophy, although it has differentiation of dichotomies, proposes that opposites should be in harmony with each other, because they are interdependent. They even transform into each other” (Ming 631). There is a point of continuity in Yin Yang philosophy. Time is seen as an arrow in Western cosmology, but as a circle in Chinese cosmology. Everything in

the western perspective has a beginning or source, as well as an end or destination. As a result, the alpha and omega points in Chinese cosmology are not two. They are the link between two cycles. As a result, the cosmos is in a never-ending state of becoming or emerging. “Kate said to Molly the main thing that I have learned from being with you is that I am a growing, changing person” (178). This principle of continuance is reflected in the Yin Yang philosophy's symbol. In Yin and Yang, the fundamental elements of a process worldview are becoming, change, flux and creativity, disruption, and indeterminism. “The process of change can be fast or gradual, but it is unavoidable” (Ming 632). The Yin Yang principle encompasses duality, contradiction, unity in variety, change, and harmony, allowing for a comprehensive approach to problem-solving. The only frame that completely recognises and appreciates the coexistence of actual opposed components in the same location at the same time is the Yin-Yang frame. It also refers to adjustability of bisexuality in relationships. “He did not mind so much when Kate snuck home in the middle of the night as long as she was always there when he woke up. That was the kind of unspoken courtesy that must exist between husband and wife” (11). There was silent mutual understanding between Kate and Peter regarding bisexuality.

One of the concluding sentences in the novel is a quote by Mao Tse-tung and it seems to be appropriate sentence to end the paper – “you approach the world your way and I will approach it mine. Let a thousand flowers bloom” (167). Those who have biophobia, they try to place it inside the ‘either or’ fame work whereas bisexuals view themselves as bisexuals and hold on to the concept of ‘neither nor’. Yin Yang philosophy offers a solution by presenting the concept of peaceful co-existence of the opposites. If it does not harm the freedom of the other, let each one approach the world in their own way.

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