

# Deconstructing Cultural Monogamy

by Pepper Mint

# Disclaimers and Notes

## Moving fast

Questions are good, but please keep them short

## Referring to the ideology of monogamy

No issue with the actual practice of monogamy

Plenty of power dynamics in polyamory as well

## This is mostly theory

In many cases lacking statistical backing

Generalizing heavily

Giving the mainstream viewpoint

# System of Power

The cultural forces and ideological mechanisms that deter people from non-monogamy and reward monogamy

Many names in literature: mono-normativity, compulsory monogamy, monocentrism, monogamism, polyphobia

Maintains itself with a micro/macro feedback loop between interpersonal relations and cultural ideology

# Questions

How does mono-normativity maintain itself over time?

How is mono-normativity personally advantageous to people?

How do monogamous power relations create a cultural zeitgeist, and are in turn supported by culture?

What are the weak points in mono-normative reinforcement mechanisms?

# Conformity Mechanisms

- 1) Jealousy
  - 2) Cheating
  - 3) Sex versus love
  - 4) Attached meaning
  - 5) Hegemony
  - 6) Couple-centrism
  - 7) Ownership / possession
- (not an inclusive list!)

# Prime Rule of Monogamy

“Don’t have sex with anyone else”

Visible in violations of monogamy: sex with others is always infidelity

Other acts are not always violations of monogamy, though are often related to the prime rule

Framed this way, monogamy is a restriction

# Jealousy

Jealousy is primarily a response to an embodied threat to the relationship

Jealousy makes perfect sense in monogamy!

Visible jealousy is also seen as a sign of weakness

Jealousy is useful to people

In averting threats to the relationship

Creating influence over partner via demands or incitement

As proof of love

# Cycle of Jealousy

Mono-normativity creates a situation where jealousy is advantageous

People use power mechanisms of jealousy, requiring / encouraging hegemony

Jealousy is conditioned as an emotional reaction

Jealous reactions prevent non-monogamy, making monogamy compulsory



# Infidelity / Cheating

A system as restrictive as monogamy inevitably has a decent failure rate

Cheating / infidelity is the expected failure mode of monogamy

These failures are spectacularized in culture for various purposes:

- Moral parable holding up monogamy as positive

- Punishing the infidelitous

- Corralling of non-monogamous urges into infidelity

- Maintenance of a false monogamy/cheating duality

# Cycle of Infidelity

Compulsory monogamy creates a certain amount of infidelity

Which is spectacularized to buttress monogamy, punish cheaters, and generally maintain control

Which creates a false duality whereby all non-monogamy is infidelity

Which makes it difficult to be non-monogamous, making monogamy more compulsory

# Love Versus Sex

“In love” and “just sex” are dichotomized views of sexual relating

Conceptual / cultural access to “in love” reserved for a charmed circle of normativity

Sexuality (“just sex”) heavily discussed, but as deviance, to reinforce normativity

Non-normative practices are sexualized in culture to maintain the charmed circle

# Love and Monogamy

Love requires monogamy as part of the charmed circle

Concepts of monogamy are built into the idea of love itself – monogamy preceded love

Non-monogamy therefore is seen as incompatible with love

Non-monogamous people seek acceptance by adopting the conceptual language of love

# Relationship Meaning

Not just love which is strongly associated with monogamy, but also:

Trust, commitment, morality, maturity, depth of feeling, health, naturalness, stability

Relationship, marriage, child-rearing, social acceptability

Non-monogamy is therefore the negative opposite of each thing

Non-monogamous people find themselves lost without the conceptual linchpin of monogamy

Build new words, reassign concepts, create new systems of conformity

# Hegemony of Monogamy

Monogamy functions as an unexamined norm

Rarely discussed directly

Instead, deviances from monogamy are endlessly critiqued: cheating, polygamy, etc

Monogamy is rarely defended on its personal merits

Cultural dominance of monogamy therefore depends on the lack of visible alternatives

Making viable visible non-monogamy highly threatening

But also very powerful and attractive, as dialogue on non-monogamy takes the conceptual field

# Questions?

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