

Compulsory Monogamy as a System of Power

by Pepper Mint

Disclaimers

Moving fast

Will use anti-oppression activism theory shorthand

Questions are good, but please keep them short

Referring to the ideology of monogamy

No issue with the actual practice of monogamy

Similarly, addressing macro-level oppression

Not saying anything about particular poly people's situation as oppressed or not

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

Questions

What makes monogamy largely compulsory?

What does mono-normativity have in common with systems of oppression: racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on?

Is mono-normativity itself a system of oppression?

Mono-Normativity

Legal: anti-polygamy, adultery, custody

Practices: discrimination, disowning,
disavowing

Stigma: shaming, de-authorization, othering,
negative associations

Assumptions: media hegemony, couplism,
infidelity, entitlement to monogamy

Conditioning: jealousy, insecurities, guilt

Ideological Base: ...

Mono-Normative Ideologies

It is impossible to love more than one person.

Sexual monogamy is a pre-condition of love.

Monogamy connotes trust, respect, and
commitment

Love and sex are scarce commodities.

Jealousy and monogamy are biologically
inevitable.

Monogamy is a pre-requisite for getting
married or having children.

Mono-Normative Ideologies

Anything other than monogamy is infidelity.

There is nothing between monogamy and out-of-control orgies or sexual addiction.

Non-monogamy is temporary and unstable.

Free sexuality is dangerous.

Non-monogamy inevitably results in disease.

Source of Mono-Normativity

Historically in Western nations, based in men's ownership of their wives

Only recently has monogamy been stringently applied to men, due to women's economic independence

Maintained via cultural inertia and an ongoing urge for control within relationships

Commonalities

De-authorization of non-monogamous people

Othering (as infidelitous, sluts, insane, etc)

Stereotyping

Invisibility (social, in media, etc)

Hostile conceptualizations

Love, relationship, commitment, “meaningless sex”, etc

Conceptual appropriation

Discrimination and reprisals

Differences

Somewhat more mobility in and out of non-monogamy

No full-on disgust or fear reaction

But, lots of defensiveness from monogamous people

Less mobilization of government apparatus for anti-nonmonogamy purposes

Violence: ...

Violence

No polyamory equivalent to:

Queer-bashing

Mass arrest or incarceration

Jim Crow

anti-abortion laws

But

Jealousy is a prime factor in domestic violence

Violence against sex workers?

Oppression?

Is mono-normativity a kind of oppression?

Well, sort of:

- Not as well-targeted or as attached to bodies

- More mobility in and out of the minority group

- Not as vicious or violent overall

- Protected by privacy/closeting and cultural acceptance of adultery

- But still much stronger and more pernicious than most would imagine: particularly stigma

Positioning Mono-Normativity

Personal take: mono-normativity can be considered a major sub-system of sexism

Due to its history of being gendered

Women take more damage from it, but not all

Mono-normativity intersects oppressions

Mostly through accusations of promiscuity

Examples: “promiscuous” gay men, “unstable” African-American families

Questions?

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www.freaksexual.com

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