

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Winchester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: C23 Sociology</p>
<p>Title of case study: <i>The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love, and the Reality of Cheating</i></p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact Public and political discussion identifies monogamy as serving a litmus test of relationships – where cheating is deemed a violation of relationship expectations. Anderson has opened up this restrictive discourse in several countries and especially in on-line communities. Through his book, <i>The Monogamy Gap</i> and its extremely wide-ranging dissemination, Anderson has extended the range of public discourse and called into question the idea that cheating must cause damage. Reactions to this work range from the angrily dismissive to those that welcome such research as liberating. The intensity of this debate has significantly impacted perceptions of monogamy, its desirability and social function.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research This research was conducted solely by Professor Eric Anderson and published in a 2012 Oxford University Press monograph, <i>The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love and the Reality of Cheating</i>. Data for this research was collected between 2008 and 2011.</p> <p>It principally utilizes 120 in-depth interviews of straight and gay males from a cross-national sample of undergraduate men in multiple universities to examine the influence of monogamy on their lives. The sample included athletes and non-athletes, examining for the influence of masculine capital on cheating rates as well. Data was analysed using grounded-theory, and theorized with hegemony and cognitive dissonance theory. Transcripts were coded and 10% co-verified with another researcher. In addition to his empirical contribution, Professor Anderson augments this book with literature from multiple other academic disciplines: biology, endocrinology, psychology and evolutionary psychology, using 800 different references to make this a compelling, multi-disciplinary argument.</p> <p>In this research Professor Anderson highlights that a resilient cultural myth equates monogamy with a test of true love. Yet, despite this strongly-held cultural ideal, cheating is rampant. Whereas most books seek to cure men from their cheating malaise, <i>The Monogamy Gap</i> offers a far more radical idea: that men cheat because they love. In this ground-breaking research, instead of entering his research with a condemnation of cheating, he examines the purpose of cheating. <i>The Monogamy Gap</i> shows how, after the intense and passionate sex of the early relationship fades, cheating functions to keep monogamous couples together. Thus, Professor Anderson finds that men cheat not because they fail to love their partners, but in order to satisfy their sexual desires without desiring to disrupt their emotional relationship. Rather than break up with their lovers so they can have meaningless erotic sex, men cheat as a rational solution to the irrational expectations of monogamy. However, these men still want the cultural capital given to monogamous relationships, and they therefore find themselves living with competing emotional and sexual desires: wanting monogamy, but also wanting recreational sex.</p>
<p>3. References to the research 2012. Anderson, Eric. <i>The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love, and the Reality of Cheating</i>. New York: Oxford University Press. (Book – research monograph)</p> <p>2010. Anderson, Eric “At least with cheating there is an attempt at monogamy”: cheating and monogamism among undergraduate heterosexual men. <i>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships</i>, 27 No. 7, 851-872. (International journal)</p>
<p>4. Details of the impact The book resulting from this research, <i>The Monogamy Gap</i> is both the evidence of the research underpinning this case study and the primary vehicle for its impact. The book, although only just now released in paperback, has sold 1,500 copies and has been reviewed in numerous</p>

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mainstream media publications. Yet the dissemination of the research findings are much wider than just the traditional review. The research has been the subject of a number of feature articles in popular newspapers (for example in *The Sun* in the United Kingdom which has a daily sales circulation of 3 million and which according to the Press Gazette reaches a weekly audience of some 13.6 million through its printed newspaper and on-line versions). Anderson has also appeared on a variety of mainstream television programmes in the UK, USA and Australia. The following is a summary of the media outlets that have featured Anderson's research:

Television:

- 2012 ITV, *This Morning*, United Kingdom (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tt6AGxc7LBM>)
- 2012 Vox Africa
- 2012 BBC 1
- 2012 *Sunrise*, 7 Network, Australia
- 2013 ITV, *The Alan Titchmarsh show*

Other media outlets

- 2012 *The Sun*, United Kingdom
- 2012 *The Washington Post*, United States
- 2012 *The Daily Express*, United Kingdom
- 2012 *Inside Higher Education*, The United States
- 2012 *Open Democracy*
- 2012 *The Sunday Morning Herald*, United Kingdom
- 2012 *The Guardian*, United Kingdom
- 2012 *The Huffington Post*
- 2012 *The Good Men Project*
- 2012 *Thinking Allowed* (BBC Radio 4)
(http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/ta/ta_20120215-1720a.mp3)

The breadth and range of this dissemination is itself evidence of the impact of Anderson's work. However, it is clear from the tens of thousands of comments on the hundred plus webpages in which *The Monogamy Gap* is discussed that Anderson's research has impacted both the volume and the nature of public conversation about monogamy and the nature of relationships.

This public discourse suggests that norms, modes of thought or practice concerning the supposed value of monogamy are being challenged by Anderson's research. This is not to say that Anderson's research findings have been universally welcomed. Quite the contrary, many of the reactions amount to aggressive denunciations of Anderson and his work. His research, conclusions, and personhood have been subjected to a great deal of anonymous internet attacks. Such reactions both seem to demonstrate the hegemonic position of what Anderson calls 'monogamism' but also the degree to which Anderson is challenging such norms.

Alternatively, many of the public reactions to Anderson's research welcome his findings as both legitimating individuals' own non-conventional relationships and as liberating the public realm in which such relationships are discussed.

It is not possible to quantify the impact of this qualitative data. Ultimately it is hoped that Anderson's research may go on to practically impact on the levels of social inclusion around, for example, alternative routes to romantic relationships; namely, those in open sexual relationships. In using empirically driven data to highlight the relationship benefit to pursuing extra-dyadic sex, this research has the power to destigmatize sexual activity outside the primary relationship.

Those impacts are however much more long term. At this stage it is clear that *The Monogamy Gap* has helped open up a public space, often in new media, in which monogamy, cheating, and non-monogomous relationships are discussed and debated in ways that do not conform to existing orthodoxies.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 1) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vicki-larson/why-men-need-to-cheat_b_1170015.html - Article discussing Anderson's research, which contains more than 4,000 comments and points to the multidirectional dissemination using social media.
- 2) *The Sun* - <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/woman/4184908/Women-must-accept-that-men-cant-help-being-unfaithful.html>
- 3) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/01/monogamy-gap-eric-anderson-review?INTCMP=SRCH> – Review of *The Monogamy Gap* which received 148 comments between 1st March 2012 and 19th March 2012.
- 4) Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP [see list of contacts on cover sheet]
- 5) The following media contacts are also able to corroborate impact:
Author of *Guardian* book review [see list of contacts on cover sheet].
The Sun, 3 Thomas More Square, London, E98 1XY. 020 7782 4000. custserv@the-sun.co.uk
Sunrise, Channel 7, Australia. Email via: <http://au.tv.yahoo.com/sunrise/contact-us/the-sunrise-team/>