

An adulterer run my pension fund? Fine by me

The outburst of self-righteous anger against a prospective Conservative MP and the Aviva boss is nonsensical

Antonia Senior



Monogamy is rare among beasts and birds. Swans, which mate for life, were long held up as the poster birds of romance until it emerged that they are surreptitious serial cheaters. Scientists in Australia discovered that during the day, publicly, black swans only have eyes for their mates; but come nightfall, they scuttle about the water enjoying others' mates under cover of darkness.

The City and Westminster have long echoed to the sound of similar scuttling. Adultery is part of the game. The roll call of the publicly outed is a long and distinguished one. I would list it, but I keep getting mentally stuck at John Major and Edwina Currie. I know, sorry: now you're stuck with that image too.

Being stuck with the image has its uses: it stops me dwelling on another newly outed adulterer — Andrew Moss, the chief executive of Aviva, a man who has admitted to an affair with his human resources director, Deirdre Galvin. When the story first emerged that a FTSE chief executive was to be outed as a love rat, few business hacks thought of Mr Moss, an unlikely lothario. More than one panicked PR department is believed to have scrambled the attack dogs, thinking it was their boss about to be outed.

Over in the Westminster village, Conservative Central Office is fighting to keep one of its favourite candidates, Elizabeth Truss, in place as a prospective MP. She faces an extraordinary meeting of her constituency party, some of whom are furious that she did not tell them about an affair that she had with Mark Field, a Tory MP. The affair was already in the public domain but Ms Truss did not volunteer the details when she was being selected as candidate for Norfolk South West.

Are we missing something? Is southwest Norfolk the last place in the country where adultery is a rarity? Do the swans of southwest Norfolk sleep curled in each other's wings at night, leaving the hanky-panky to their feathered friends in Suffolk? How could a long-dead, declared affair stop an

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otherwise decent candidate from standing for office?

Ms Truss ticks a lot of boxes for the modern Tory party. Female, tick. Clever, tick. Comprehensive education, tick. Obviously, affair with another Tory is not a tick, if you're a woman. Sexual continence has ceased to be a prerequisite for public office for men. John Prescott can survive an affair. George Osborne can survive being pictured with a prostitute. Mark Oaten can, just about, survive a rent boy. But a woman Tory MP cannot have a sex scandal lurking on her CV.

This is the old, familiar tale of

sexual double standards, but writ large on the political stage. The Tory old guard can just about stomach changing public attitudes to a man with a murky sex secret. But a woman? Drum her from the party, the hussy.

Westminster and the City may disagree on much, but when illicit lovers are outed it's normally the woman that gets ousted. It's no surprise that Ms Galvin left the company while Mr Moss stays on with the full backing of his chairman.

On Times Online, however, our readers were less forgiving than Aviva's chairman. The story received a deluge of comments from readers who thought lying and cheating to his wife disqualified Mr Moss from running a FTSE 100 company. But consider the skills needed to conduct an affair, and those demanded of a FTSE boss; successful adulterers make successful head honchos. They have to be able to attract a lover, despite already having a family. I'm yet to meet an uncharismatic chief executive; gossipy poles do not get climbed by shoe-shufflers and soulless time-servers.

Even in insurance, a sector not known for its sexiness, only the more charismatic number-crunchers reach the top. I've met Andrew Moss, and he fits the silver fox mode, just about. Besides, a £2.2 million pay packet is never going to be a passion killer.

Insurance, incidentally, is a bit of a hotbed of passion. Charles Thomson, the safe actuary brought in to rescue Equitable Life, left his wife for his secretary. When I was an insurance correspondent, rumours of affairs were rife in the sector. Even actuaries are frisky after hours.

The ability to dissemble



Andrew Moss: a £2.2 million pay packet is not exactly a passion killer

convincingly can only be of use in both the boardroom and the bedroom. "My wife doesn't understand me." "Prospects for the second half are looking up." Both statements are hard to pull off — they need a little panache and a lot of confidence.

Adulterers are risk-takers; so are good businessmen. Running a bit on the side takes planning, cunning and financial organisation. There are duplicate mobile phones to set up, receipts to hide, credit card bills to doctor, two birthdays to remember. It's not easy. Nor is the accounting system for an insurance company. Have you ever tried to understand the inner workings of a with-profits fund, or grappled with European directives on capital adequacy ratios?

Planning, cunning and financial organisation come to the fore again.

Yet most of us would not put "competent adulterer" on our CVs. Human resources departments are the new guardians of our workplace morality and would frown on such honesty. How delicious, then, that Mr Moss's partner in crime was a director of human resources. The bloated behemoth that is the HR industry has left our workplaces swathed in a red tape, couched in the language of equal opportunities.

We are human and social. We flirt over photocopiers and banter on e-mail. We wink at each other in corridors, get drunk and whispery in the pub on a Friday night. Intense working environments breed intimacy. Yet the rules of HR decree all of this as forbidden. Each rule, in isolation, may appear sensible. Taken together, they are a cheat's charter. No company can meet all the criteria necessary to comply while it employs humans, not robots. When someone is let go, there is always a way of claiming discrimination.

The women who unfairly claim harassment scupper their peers who have genuine harassment issues as well as those women who like to work in a liberal, human workplace — with all the flirting and foibles that entails. When even the HR director gets caught sleeping with the boss, the over-prescriptive rules all begin to look suspect.

I am not advocating adultery. It's a Bad Thing when a fevered work atmosphere spills into a fevered clinic. Adultery causes misery, breaks up marriages and hurts children. It does not, however, affect anyone's ability to run my pension fund or represent me in Parliament.