

U-HAULING: A FANTASY OF QUEER CODEPENDENCY?



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the trope of lesbian u-hauling to understand the discursive factors underlying its historical influence and continued circulation within popular culture and on social media. The author analyses the affects and desires that stick to the figure of the U-haul as a symbol of queer attachment, and observes the affective similarities between lesbian merger, fantasy bonds and codependency that feature prominently in the story of lesbian u-hauling. Critical perspectives on the psychopathological construct of codependency are reviewed to interrogate its limitations through a trauma-informed and dialectical lens that theorizes queer codependencies in the context of systemic trauma. Using an interdisciplinary framework that draws from feminist theory, psychology and social work, the author argues that the story of lesbian u-hauling represents a fantasy of belonging that is related to desires for nationalist forms of inclusion, and that is sustained through addictive attachments at both micro and macro levels.

KEYWORDS

addiction, codependency, fantasy, psychoanalysis, queer, lesbian

“If shame will bring us together, it is also the case that it can,
will, and does tear us apart”

—Heather Love, *Feeling Backward* (2007, 14)

There is a rich archive of queer histories imbricating the pain and trauma of queer shame with the euphoric experience of romantic attachment and emotional connection. As a queer person with a history of codependency, I connect to this historical record and find a sense of belonging in what seems to be a queer tradition of love that is commingled with pain and hardship. A few years ago, while steeped in the mixed feelings of my own recovery from codependency, I often questioned the romanticization of painful experiences of love and attachment represented in queer love stories. One such story is that of lesbian u-hauling, which is a trope that conveys both shame and pride through self-deprecating humor. This persistent narrative circulates in the form of an archetypal joke about lesbians bringing a U-haul to the second date, which was popularized by comedian, Lea Delaria, in the 1980s. It refers to a romance that begins with rapid enmeshment, followed by an emotional whirlwind of infatuation that quickly deflates into disconnection, disappointment and separation. I recently discovered a number of queer meme accounts on Instagram that prominently feature the U-haul joke, which led me to the hashtag #UhaulLesbians, used affectionately on posts of queer people pictured with a moving truck and a partner in tow. Further down the rabbit hole, I noticed my own experience of codependent relationships was similarly characterized as a queer stereotype on social media. It became clear to me that what is called “merger” or “codependency” in psychology literature is part of a story about lesbian relationships, which is often told with an air of satirical reverence, and whose influence may be felt across a variety of subcategories of queer identities and queer relational configurations. This story invokes gender essentialist logic, as we will see, but queer people across the spectrum of gendered experiences may share its relational affects.

The experience commonly referred to as lesbian merger is informed by the history of psychopathology, which has perpetuated the idea that love between women is dysfunctional because of the tendency to merge, and that this is due to a lack of emotional boundaries between women. The construct of codependency has

also been used to pathologize and undermine the role of caregiving in family dynamics. Feminist and critical theorists have challenged the psychoanalytic constructs of both codependency and love between women by critiquing psychoanalytic theories that impose a hetero masculine ideal by positing individuation as an indicator of maturity. In spite of these efforts to intervene into the psychopathological theories that undermine queer relationships, an attachment to the U-haul stereotype and to the story of lesbian merger prevails in its influence on our intimate relationships and identity stories as queer people. Hegemonic discourses like psychoanalytic theories that are employed to uphold normativity through the pathologization of queerness invoke shame around the experience of queer desires, expressions, and modes of identification. Feelings of shame promote self-sabotaging behaviors, like those that accompany and sustain addictive attachments (Potter-Efron and Efron 2002), because these kinds of coping methods tend to offset the felt experience of the negative affect (Wiechelt 2007, 403). As such, queer codependencies may be informed by the shame that is produced by systemic forms of trauma, and that are enacted through the discursive violence of psychopathology.

A discussion about the possibility of dysfunction in lesbian relationships has mostly been avoided in the critical discourse, which is, perhaps, due to the shame that circulates around this history and debate. This paper is a response to Kadji Amin's (2017) call to confront "the rub" in writing and theorizing queer histories. In *Disturbing Attachments*, Amin underlines the importance of "finding the rub" as a researcher of queer history, pointing to sites, subjects and materials that bring us discomfort, for the purpose of de-idealizing queer narratives and heroes. He writes, "Deidealization is not the wholesale destruction of cherished ideals, but a form of the reparative that acknowledges messiness and damage, refuses the repudiating operations of idealization, and acknowledges the ways in which complicity is sometimes necessary for survival" (2017, 11). Amin revisits the history of Jean Genet, the radical French writer, to confront the problematic aspects of his character and behaviors that are sometimes omitted from historical analyses in order to position him as a revered agent of queer liberation. Amin uses this analysis to highlight methodological issues within queer theory, and suggests that queer historians and theorists should work to acknowledge and interrogate the disturbing nature of our affective attachments to stories, subjects and frameworks. Arguably, therefore, there is 'a rub' in the history of psychoanalysis, feminism, and lesbian merger: are we ashamed to admit that some queer feminists might engage in dysfunctional relationships? What attachments are de-idealized when confronting the possibility of dysfunction, and what fantasies work to maintain them? I am interested in understanding the role of fantasy as a dissociative affect related to codependency that helps to mitigate queer shame produced by systemic

trauma, and that functions as a safeguard against disconnection by securing our attachments to ideas, behaviors, people and systems. Codependency and merger are examined herein in relation to queer affects; they are characterized by what Amin calls “commingled affects” of love and shame that comprise an affective lineage within queer histories and representations wherein love is consistently experienced in tandem with the sacrifice and disavowal of key aspects of one’s social identification with homophobic discourses, systems and people.

In this essay, I identify the commingled affects that stick to the story of lesbian u-hauling, and analyse the queer desires that circulate around the figure of the U-haul. I argue that the U-haul joke functions to uphold a fantasy of belonging that is related to desires for nationalist forms of inclusion, and that is sustained through addictive attachments at both micro and macro levels. I draw connections between psychology, social work, and feminist theory to illustrate how fantasies of belonging help to secure harmful attachments to people, ideologies and systems. I am employing an interdisciplinary framework because I believe there is value in understanding interpersonal relations at the intersection of trauma and mental health, within broader frames of political meaning, for theorists, clinicians and community members alike. I refer to affect theory to understand queer connections because it emphasizes the intensity of emotion as an organizing factor of experience that is inherently political, as it impacts and informs the quality of life of queer, racialized and disabled individuals and communities. Unlike psychoanalysis, affect theory does not seek to pathologize emotion, and thereby acknowledges the potential of our feeling states and their expressions to affect political action and personal transformation. I am using a trauma-informed, dialectical lens inspired by clinical approaches to care (Dimeff and Linehan 2008; Wilson, Pence and Conradi 2013) that acknowledge the influence of trauma on our mental health, relationships and communities, while creating space for the possibility of change, growth and recovery. Following Amin, what have we neglected to confront in the critical and feminist discourse deconstructing the psychopathological categorization of queer intimacies that might invite a more nuanced perspective on harmful relationships in our partnerships and communities? I think it is important to engage in this discussion because of the implications it presents for resistance movements and the quality of connection in our personal lives as queer people. Romanticizing something that is potentially harmful because it secures a “disturbing attachment,” whether to an historical figure, identity narrative, neoliberal state or romantic partner, keeps us bound to thought and behavioral patterns that undermine our worth, well-being and access to emotional connection and political transformation.

There are a number of feminist theorists whose work deconstructs the ways in which affective attachments can fuel the violent machinations of power (Ahmed 2004, 2006, 2010; Amin 2017; Berlant 2011; Cvetkovich 2003; Gould 2009; Puar 2007; Spivak and Butler 2007). In *Moving Politics*, Deborah Gould (2009) writes,

A focus on affect retools our thinking about power. Power certainly operates through ideology and discourse, but it also operates through affect, perhaps more fundamentally so since ideologies and discourses emerge and take hold in part through the circulation of affect. Even more, affective states, unfixed in their directionality, can be molded and manipulated and then harnessed to the desired objectives of a leader, the state, capital, or a movement. (28)

Feminist theoretical formulations that address the affects of structural violence, including Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" (2011), Sara Ahmed's discussion of "national love" (2004), and Jasbir Puar's theory of "homonationalism" (2007), explain the implications of affective investments in national forms of belonging for oppressed subjects and resistance movements. It is the yearning for belonging that interests me in each of these theories, because it is the desire to be known and accepted that is undercut by traumatic experiences that produce shame, including those categorized as acute, chronic, complex and systemic. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2021) defines trauma as, "the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event." Systemic oppression produces affects of systemic trauma, and involves the normalization and perpetuation of traumatic experiences caused by systematic marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation under neoliberal capitalism. Goldsmith, Martin and Smith (2014) define systemic trauma as, "the contextual features of environments and institutions that give rise to trauma, maintain it, and impact posttraumatic responses" (118). Systemic oppression involves the ongoing attrition of safety that is experienced through relentless and repetitive forms of state-sanctioned violence. As such, oppressed people may be particularly vulnerable to promises of belonging at both micro and macro levels. As queer people, our personal entanglements are necessarily imbricated with our trauma, and I am interested in the ways in which the story of lesbian merger may be informed by the trauma of oppression, its relationship to interpersonal and national forms of belonging, and the psychopathological discourse around addictive attachments.

What Does a Lesbian Bring to the Second Date?

The figure of the U-haul carries affective residue as it persists in its travels through the lesbian imaginary in forms ranging from dry jest to romantic fantasy. Along the way, affective adhesions that hold a distinctly queer ambivalence stick to the story of lesbian relationships. In this story, shame and desire combine to pro-

duce affects of longing, waiting and yearning, as well as disdain, ruefulness and resentment. The symbol of the U-haul is employed toward uses both romantic and sarcastic, as it carries the ambition of homonormative romance as well as the embarrassment of those who are critical of engaging too closely with homonormativity. The U-haul inhabits liminality as it travels between spaces, exuding transience and impermanence. While the moving truck may be fuelled by visions of commitment, security and home, it also embodies the instability of transition and the insecurity of displacement.

There is an unsettling ambiguity in the symbol of the U-haul. In some ways, it stands in for a wedding ring, and yet, it does not carry the same sense of security, much like a queer commitment that does not garner the same institutional support as a heterosexual marriage. So, although some U-haul lesbians may claim this practice as an act of 'queering' monogamy, representing commitment and the intimacy of co-habitation, others will decry it as homonormative and too closely associated with straight rituals of patriarchal ownership and toxic monogamy. It is a symbol that represents the dialectic between proximity to heteronormative standards of monogamous commitment and the inevitable queer experience of falling short of them. It is possible that on some level, both sides of this ambivalence work to mask the immense grief, shame and alienation produced by experiences of institutional and familial neglect. The word *U-haul* implies a self-inflicted and arduous effort to mobilize one's own weight. It symbolizes do-it-yourself, staunch and stubborn individualism that rejects and/or lacks community, family or institutional supports, as well as access to capital that might enable hiring movers or living separately. This underlines an 'us against the world' mentality that romanticizes alienation and resists being subsumed by the oppressive systems that exclude and undermine queer identities, expressions and attachments. Moreover, this mentality reflects emotional distance as a defense mechanism against shame and neglect.

Affects of longing surround the figure of the U-haul. Desires for connection, support and belonging circulate around this symbol of togetherness and queer commitment. Desires for emancipation from past traumas, failed attachments and oppressive systems are felt in the mobility of the moving truck, representing a flight from negative experiences of loss, lack of support, and marginalization. The story of lesbian u-hauling offers an escape route from our current oppressive reality, loneliness, and material insecurity, as it invites us to ride off into the sun-

set, and into the embrace of a new lover with whom we can split the rent. This escapism harbors a denial that our painful experiences might not simply disappear when we pack up and move away. In short, the U-haul represents a fantasy of belonging that serves to disguise the personal and political baggage that a lesbian brings to the second date.

The Emotional Baggage of Nationalism

The symbolism of a moving truck filled with housewares and personal items speaks to our domestic attachments: that which is worth holding on to, and that which informs our identity stories. The U-Haul brings with it a yearning for domestic stability, the comfort of home, and the emotional and material security that may be structurally inaccessible to marginalized queer people. It symbolizes a moment bridging past experience and future destination, in which the sense of yearning produces an attachment to the promise of a better life on the horizon that is almost there, but always just out of reach. This desire for the good life, as Berlant (2011) describes it, may be a desire for nationalist forms of belonging, which creates relations of cruel optimism within which subjects become implicated in addictive attachments to the perpetually unmet promises of capitalism. When u-hauling, the allure of the good life may prompt us to emulate heteronormative family structures in an effort to enjoy the benefits of state-sanctioned forms of intimacy. With dreams of a fresh start and idyllic visions of romance and family life, oppressed subjects may opt for forms of inclusion that masquerade as belonging, fuelling a capitalist system that benefits from our misplaced desires and missed connections, as it offers replacements for connection, love, and acceptance in the form of consumer goods and institutional inclusion. Not only are we coerced into normativity by the desire for belonging, but we are also attached to our partnerships because of the haven that they provide from the demands and violences of oppressive systems. The homonormative fantasy represented by the U-haul responds to the intersection of these attachments, as it encapsulates nationalist desires for coupledness, the autonomy of individual households, social and relational mobility, and attachments to commodities representing domesticity and family life.

Just Joking?

Lotta Linge's (2006) study about the function of humor in relation to shame illustrates how humor balances out the negative affects associated with shame (disgust, dissmell and humiliation) as a safeguard against low self-esteem. Linge cites the research of affect theorist, Silvan Tomkins, to argue that humor functions as a

“moderator” of other affects. Tomkins (1963, 1991) has theorized that there are two clusters of negative affects, and that shame–humiliation is organized under the second cluster, which concerns object relations, and involves the regulation of intimacy and autonomy. Linge’s (2006) study illustrates that humor may be used to secure connection and combat shame, and that the intrapsychic and interpersonal functions of humor support togetherness through the exchange and attunement of inner affectual states. From this perspective, the U-haul joke can be seen to support intimacy by neutralizing queer shame and related negative affects in that it uses humor to repair the damage of disconnection that is produced by experiences of systemic trauma. In this case, humor may serve a reparative purpose, but research into the functions of humor in romantic relationships has shown that humor can also be used to withdraw from connection through the deflection of conflict (De Koning and Weiss 2002; Heavy, Christensen, and Malamuth 1995). The joke about ‘U-haul lesbians’ functions in both reparative and detrimental ways by transmuted queer shame whilst also avoiding a direct confrontation with the potentially harmful effects of merger.

What is Codependency?

Codependency is a term employed within developmental psychology, family therapy, self-help literature, and social work clinical practice. It enjoys popular use as a colloquialism in online groups hosted by YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Codependency is defined somewhat ambiguously in the above-mentioned arenas, sometimes in conflation with alcoholism, in particular, and addiction more broadly. Broader still, it may be used to refer to relational dynamics involving any condition requiring non-reciprocal caregiving and uneven power dynamics in interpersonal partnerships and family systems. It is used interchangeably as a didactic tool, a psychological concept, and a feature of mental illness (Morgan 1991). The term has also been contested as unscientific and as lacking in “any systematic research basis” (McGrath and Oakley 2012, 53). Jeane Harper and Connie Capdevila (1990) suggest that “[c]odependency is so conceptually complex . . . that it would require four separate DSM [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] categories to contain it, combining characteristics found in Alcoholism, and the Dependent, Borderline, and Histrionic Personality Disorders, as well as an additional category made up of ‘associated features’” (289). Nevertheless, the working definition that I employ is akin to Michael McGrath

and Barbara Ann Oakley's (2012), who suggest that, "it might be better to conceptualize codependency as dysfunctional behaviors to identify, rather than [as] a disorder to diagnose" (54). For the purposes of this essay, I am interested in the affective factors that influence maladaptive behaviors contributing to relational dysfunction that may be categorized as codependent.

Codependency v. Interdependence

Codependency comprises a set of relational conditions (including self-neglect, caregiving and power struggle) that produces affects of emotional disconnection, and is differentiated from interdependent relations that otherwise facilitate emotional connection. Nicole LePera's (@the.holistic.psychologist, 2020) definition of codependency points to the theme of self-neglect directly, stating that "codependency is the chronic neglect of self in order to gain approval, love, validation, or self identity through another person." LePera's position builds on an earlier body of psychology literature proposing a set of diagnostic criteria for codependency, in which self-neglect is featured as the core concept around which related characteristics are organized (Hughes-Hammer, Martsof and Zeller 1998). Unlike interdependence, codependency prevents emotional connection through mutual self-denial in a sacrifice of individual experience for an image of togetherness. The problem is not necessarily the sacrifice or the caregiving, but the chronic self-neglect with which self-sacrifice and care are performed. Maintenance of a codependent bond requires at least one party who prioritizes the needs of others over their own, which produces the affect of psychic merger wherein individual needs are misrecognized. Codependency has been described as a relation of "compulsive caring" (Weegmann 2006, 36) in reference to John Bowlby's (1980a) writing on attachment and loss, in which a relationship between compulsive care and projection is implied. Bowlby writes, "Because a compulsive caregiver seems to be attributing to the cared-for all the sadness and neediness that he is unable or unwilling to recognise in himself, the cared-for person can be regarded as standing vicariously for the one giving the care" (156). Partners in a codependent relation are co-conspirators in the construction of a façade of intimacy. In this dynamic of relating we escape together, projecting our hopes and fears on to our love object in a vain attempt at connection fuelled by fantasy. This act of projection is a boundary violation that ignores the possibility of differences of opinion, values, ideals, goals, and even personality traits between partners. Boundaries enable emotional connection, and without them, we may be dating our own fantasies. Writing on psychoanalytic views of lesbian and bisexual women, Beverly Burch (1997) writes, "[t]he theme of merger is related to the theme of attachment and intimacy but has another dimension to it, the loss

of individual boundaries. Attachment and autonomy are not mutually exclusive, but merger and autonomy sometimes are” (91). It is important to emphasize here that merger and codependency are not always characterized as synonymous in the sense that merger is sometimes understood to occur in both helpful and harmful expressions. For instance, Burch uses the term “progressive merger” to refer to interdependent relating, which ultimately highlights the ambiguity of the trope of lesbian merger. Harmful merger is, therefore, closer to the psychopathological definition of codependency in that it entails self-neglect through the failure to maintain individual boundaries.

Codependency, Addiction and Fantasy

Codependency has long been characterized in self-help literature as a kind of love addiction or interpersonal addiction (Wright and Wright 1991). On this view, codependent relations can be understood to be in line with Robert Firestone’s (1993) formulation of addictive attachments and fantasy bonds, and particularly in relation to what he outlines as the second category of fantasy involvement, which includes individuals who

utilize real events as a means of reinforcing or ‘feeding’ their most prized fantasies, and value form over substance in interpersonal relationships. For example, in a destructive, addictive attachment, fantasy-bonded individuals place a strong emphasis on ritual or role-determined responses, such as the Saturday-night date, sleeping together, routine sex, and formalities such as remembering birthdays and anniversaries, etc. At the same time, they may treat each other indifferently or disrespectfully. Indeed, a fantasy bond is a destructive type of relationship in which elements of self-parenting are projected and reciprocated to the detriment of both participants. There is a desperate holding on to the other person, with a corresponding lack of genuine relatedness. (341-342)

Codependency is not necessarily experienced as an addiction to a person. Rather, a codependent relation hinges on addiction to affects in the service of self-neglect, as in mechanisms of fantasy, denial and projection. Likening codependency to pathological altruism, McGrath and Oakley (2012) write, “[t]he self-sacrificing individual accepts the psychological and/or physical pain he endures as a necessary part of the ‘helping- others’ equation. For the pathological altruist, perhaps the pain and suffering is the goal” (59). In my view, pain and suffering may be the unconscious goal of codependent love in the sense that codependency operates

around a belief that love requires self-neglect and the eradication of boundaries between partners. It is this commingling of love and pain that is captured in the symbol of the U-haul, reflecting a dialectical fantasy that allows the simultaneous romanticization and derision of merger. In this context, I understand fantasy to refer to a form of dissociation that protects a subject from the negative affects associated with trauma. In a fantasy bond, gestures representing intimacy function to distract from the reality of disconnection. Self-neglect works well to uphold the fantasy of intimacy because, not only is it viewed as a romantic trait, but it is also commonly thought to be a feminine virtue.

Boundaries—Navigating Sameness and Difference

How do we talk about boundaries and queer relationships without redeploying the oppressive function of psychoanalysis? Burch (1997) speaks to the history of the pathologization of lesbian relationships when she writes,

By the 1960s psychoanalysis had firmly fixed lesbian relationships in one stage or another of dire pathology. For example, Charles Socarides (1968) wrote that lesbian relationships are characterized by “hate, destructiveness, mutual defeat, exploitation of the partner and the self, oral-sadistic incorporation, aggressive onslaughts, attempts to alleviate anxiety and a pseudo-solution to the aggressive and libidinal urges which dominate and torment the individual.” (89)

A central feature of the psychoanalytic symptomology of lesbian merger that has effectively been used to delegitimize “same-sex” love is a lack of boundaries between partners. Traditionally, psychoanalysts have suggested that the recognition of difference is a condition for “real” desire, whereas same-sex relationships are deemed narcissistic and lacking in self/other boundaries on account of gender sameness (Burch 1997; O’Connor and Ryan 1993; Warner 1990). The dialectical fantasy of u-hauling that appeals to ambitions of heteronormativity whilst also commending queer failure draws from this discursive history as it both incorporates and rejects the psychoanalytic claim that lesbian “sameness” is characteristic of the failure to achieve heterosexuality.

The psychoanalytic tendency to employ the language of sameness and difference to pathologize queer desire has been scrutinized by queer and feminist thinkers. Sara Ahmed (2006) discusses the “fantasy of lesbian merger” in *Queer Phenomenology*. She writes that “[t]he very idea of women desiring women because of ‘sameness’ relies on a fantasy that women are ‘the same.’ Such a fantasy is also played out in the psychoanalytic approaches to ‘lesbian merger’—in the idea that

women, when they tend toward each other as objects of desire, tend to lose any sense of difference” (95). Maggie Nelson (2015), in her autobiographical text, *The Argonauts*, comments in a similar vein:

One of the most annoying things about hearing the refrain “same-sex marriage” over and over again is that I don’t know many—if any—queers who think of their desire’s main feature as being “same-sex.” It’s true that a lot of lesbian sex writing from the ’70s was about being turned on, and even politically transformed, by an encounter with sameness. This encounter was, is, can be, important, as it has to do with seeing reflected that which has been reviled, with exchanging alienation or internalized revulsion for desire and care. To devote yourself to someone else’s pussy can be a means of devoting yourself to your own. But whatever sameness I’ve noted in my relationships with women is not the sameness of Woman, and certainly not the sameness of parts. Rather, it is the shared, crushing understanding of what it means to live in a patriarchy. (44–45)

The psychoanalytic rubric of desire that employs sameness and difference relies on an essentialist gender binary that falls apart when confronted with the countless possible expressions and experiences of queer identities, relations and desires. In “Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality?” Michael Warner (1990) critiques Freud’s assertion that homosexuality is a form of narcissism by interrogating the absurdity of the psychoanalytic claim that a subject has failed to distinguish self from other when they desire a member of the “same sex.” His critique identifies and problematizes Freud’s commitment to maintaining a categorical binary between identification and attachment that corresponds to subject and object, male and female. Warner’s analysis illustrates how the psychoanalytic record enforces the gender binary to pathologize queerness and uphold heterosexism. Ahmed (2006) further suggests that the psychoanalytic formulation of lesbian relationships as lacking by virtue of gender sameness serves to elevate “the concepts of separation and autonomy that secure the masculine and heteronormative subject as a social and bodily ideal” (95–96). It also secures interpersonal boundaries within the domain of normativity, which implies that functional relationships for women require a cis-masculine counterpart.

Psychoanalysis as a regulatory device might be understood as a vehicle through which autonomy, self-sovereignty (and by association, individual boundaries) are weaponized to uphold neoliberal societal values, with the effect of undercutting collectivist community building and feminist calls to widen the social safety net. Ranjana Khanna (2003) asserts the importance of understanding psycho-

analysis as a theory of nationalism rooted in colonial histories of anthropology and archaeology because this perspective “allows us to see it as an exemplary document of the modern European moment that gave rise to narratives of nationhood and selfhood that are today so much a part of internal imaginaries that colonials and postcolonials alike cannot think of selfhood entirely independently of psychoanalysis” (100). It is clear that separation and autonomy are upheld by psychoanalysis through the construction of selfhood and self-sovereignty. In this sense, boundaries are also, arguably, representative of whiteness and ability, as they are wielded against collectivism and horizontality. A firm boundary between white, heteronormative, able-bodied subjects and racialized, queer, disabled others maintains hegemonic white supremacy, individualism and heteronormativity. To divide and separate is the work of inflexible boundaries. However, a complete lack of boundaries may also present barriers to liberation for queer, disabled and racialized subjects, insofar as affects of self-neglect are produced in the absence of boundaries. We cannot be free if we are entangled in bonds requiring self-neglect disguised as love and care. Part of the problem with the psychoanalytic understanding of lesbian desire is that it genders autonomy, and, thus, boundaries as masculine and closeness, or merger, as feminine. If we are to refute the ways in which psychoanalysis maintains white, hetero masculine ideals, it is important to avoid any essentialist assumptions that conflate dysfunctional relations with the feminine. In other words, autonomy and closeness are not mutually exclusive, and boundaries can be used to disrupt connection as often as they may be tools that enhance connection. In the symbol of the U-haul, we can see the disruption of the possibility of interdependence in the implications of both rugged individualism and merger, producing affects that may cast the appearance of connection but that functionally facilitate escapism.

Depathologizing Codependency

Some theorists writing about feminist care ethics have espoused the values of interdependence by problematizing the dichotomy of individuation v. relationality, and refuting the traditional definitions of autonomy and care as mutually exclusive or oppositional (Gilligan 1989; Keller 1997; Meyers 1987). Jean Keller (1997) has advocated for the utility of dialogical thinking around this binary, explaining that autonomy depends on the development of self-respect, which emerges from positive social connections. Other theorists have refuted the pathologization of codependency by defending emotional intimacy as a strength and an indicator of well-being (Collins 1993; Granello and Beamish 1998; Malloy and Berkery 1993; Sloven 1992). These arguments attempt to construe codependency as a relation of emotional connection that has been needlessly pathologized in an

effort to rebut the misogynous implications of literature that blames women as the enablers of addicted spouses or that pathologizes their care as symptomatic but no less essential to the nature of femininity. Gail Malloy and Ann Berkery (1993) cite a paradigm of connectedness to argue for the Growth in Connection model, which emphasizes healing relational dysfunction through relationship rather than by denouncing empathy and self-sacrifice as pathological traits of codependency. Similarly, Barbara Collins (1993) uses self-in-relation theory to critique the concept of codependency, suggesting that this construct does not provide a useful framework for intervention because it is disempowering to women. Robert Weiss (2019) offers a critique of codependency as a deficit-based model for recovery for partners of sex addicts, suggesting a strengths-based model which he calls prodependence. He writes that, “Prodependence, as a strength-based attachment-driven model, views loved ones of addicts as heroes for continuing to love and continuing to remain attached despite the debilitating presence of addiction” (179). Weiss re-frames the behavioral characteristics associated with codependency as virtues rather than deficits. The above-mentioned formulations intervene into earlier psychoanalytic theories, like Freud’s (1949) theory of sexuality, which shame women for the attributes with which they are socialized. These are important interventions, and they may also, inadvertently, contribute to denial about the possibility of dysfunction in the ways connection can sometimes be pursued. In other words, a fantasy of belonging can be seen in arguments that frame codependency as intimacy, and self-neglect as heroic or virtuous. When advocating for the value of mutuality it is important to distinguish interdependence from codependency, lest our advocacy be leveraged in the service of denial and the perpetuation of harm. Codependency may be conceptually problematic as a diagnostic category, but we are gaslighting ourselves and others when implying that relations built on shame, fantasy and martyrdom are akin to interdependence.

Fantasy and Systemic Oppression

Relations that are upheld by escapist fantasy and self-neglect highlight a relation of what Berlant (2011) calls “cruel optimism” in the story of lesbian merger. Berlant suggests that the fantasy of ‘the good life’ perpetuates an attachment to an oppressive state by distracting subjects from the ongoing crisis of attrition produced through neoliberal policies and ideologies. There is an addictive quality in relations of cruel optimism, which can be seen in the pursuit of a harmful attachment de-

spite the ways in which it impedes our “flourishing” (Berlant 2011, 1). Following Berlant, subjects are, arguably, fantasy bonded to the state in cycles of addiction to self-neglect, bound by what Ahmed (2004) calls “national love,” an uneven power dynamic masked by the rhetoric of patriotism. Ahmed writes,

Indeed, the impossibility that love can reach its object may also be what makes love powerful as a narrative... Even though love is a demand for reciprocity, it is also an emotion that lives with the failure of that demand often through an intensification of its affect... So the failure of the nation to “give back” the subject’s love works to increase the investment in the nation. (130–131)

In the case of lesbian merger and codependency, attachment is intensified by systemic neglect, producing desires for state-sanctioned forms of intimacy. We may participate in the romance of homonormativity, as in, the act of u-hauling, while internalizing the neglect of family and institutional systems, and this produces ambivalence in our attachments at both interpersonal and systemic levels.

Jasbir Puar (2007) reflects on Ahmed’s discussion of national love to explain the concept of homonationalism, stating that

unrequited love keeps multicultural (and also homonormative) subjects in the folds of nationalism, while xenophobic and homophobic ideologies and policies fester... [w]hile the good (straight) ethnic has been... folded into life, for several decades now, the (white) homonormative is a more recent entrant of this benevolence (civil rights and market) that produces affective be/longing that never fully rewards its captives yet nonetheless fosters longing and yearning as affects of nationalism. (26–32)

Puar is describing the fantasy of a benevolent state that fuels the abuse of a neo-liberal agenda on racialized and queer others. Perhaps resistance mobilization is not unlike recovery from addiction and codependency in the sense that the ability to identify and interrogate our fantasies may have far-reaching political implications for resistance movements, as much as it may support interpersonal wellness. Moreover, the trauma of oppression produces affects proximal to self-neglect, like shame and worthlessness, in and between oppressed subjects as an affective safeguard that protects the hope for a better life.

U-hauling as a Queer Fantasy

Sara Ahmed (2010) writes, “[t]he obstacle to desire... performs a psychic function in preserving the fantasy that getting what you want would make you happy” (32). In the case of codependency, love is misrecognized as both happiness and self-neglect. In codependent relations, we think we desire what is actually the obstacle to our desire, and a relation of cruel optimism is the result. When u-haul-

ing, we may be projecting a fantasy of belonging without the awareness that it is, in fact, a fantasy. The figure of the U-haul carries the affects of this fantasy, and operates as a thinly veiled metaphor of codependency that contributes to undermining connection and well-being, interpersonally and collectively. This fantasy of belonging has become both the obstacle to desire and the desire itself, producing an experience of love commingled with relational trauma that reinforces a familiar experience for oppressed subjects: a lived reality of, what Berlant calls “the new crisis ordinary.”

For oppressed subjects, the crisis of attrition and state-sanctioned violence is a routine occurrence from which fantasies of belonging may provide a welcome distraction. I am suggesting that this fantasy extends from the macro into the micro, resulting in affects of interpersonal codependencies that produce emotional disconnection. The ways in which oppression can impact relationships between oppressed subjects has serious and far-reaching implications for collective struggles for liberation. Interrogating our personal and collective fantasies of belonging is necessary for both personal recovery and collective resistance. Fantasy can be adaptive, supportive and creative, but it can also be a dissociative mechanism that keeps us attached to dysfunctional systems and relationships that perpetuate disempowerment and compromise our well-being.

Conclusion

The stories of u-hauling, codependency, and lesbian merger continue to affect our relationships, communities and resistance struggles. In some ways, these stories affirm experiences of love at intersections of trauma, addiction, and oppression. In other ways, they may undermine these very experiences. In my view, the story of lesbian u-hauling represents a queer fantasy of belonging that encourages affects of self-neglect and contributes to experiences of codependency. Codependency produces affects related to fantasy, like projection and denial, as defenses against negative affects, like shame and worthlessness, with potentially detrimental outcomes. The affective complexity produced by systemic trauma that is woven into our queer love stories works to normalize the romanticization of painful attachments. Lesbian relationality should be theorized in a manner that attends to a dialectic between emotional attachments born out of resilience and the residual trauma these kinds of attachments may affect.

The psychoanalytic fantasy of lesbian merger and the psychopathology of codependency has been resisted by queer, feminist, and critical theorists. Critical approaches that interrogate the oppressive function of psychoanalysis often fail to adequately validate the potential detriments of fantasy bonds and addictive relationships, circumventing an important conversation about the impacts of systemic trauma on the quality of connection between oppressed people. A critique of psychoanalysis should acknowledge its contributions to queer trauma, whilst not discounting the effects of trauma on relational dysfunction and mental health outcomes. Those working to improve the lives of queer and marginalized communities in resistance, including theorists, clinicians and community workers, must resist the violence of hegemonic oppression that is realized through psychopathology, *and* work to address the affective reverberations of this oppression within our interpersonal relationships and communities. Wherever possible, we need to emotionally divest from that which impedes our flourishing as individuals and communities, and recognize that emotional awareness can function as a foundation from which to organize, mobilize and resist oppressive systems.

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