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CULTURE REVIEW

CoDP

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Codependency is a behavioural condition in a relationship where one person enables another person's addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement. . . . The term is less individually diagnostic and more descriptive of a relationship dynamic.

Wikipedia

It is hard to argue with Wikipedia, particularly if you regard it less as a source of popular knowledge than an ever-evolving 'structure of feeling' of the type to which cultural studies has long been attracted. Like the literary and fictional film texts from which Raymond Williams drew his influential concept, Wikipedia sometimes frames a tacit truth that we are not yet able to own in more legitimated discourses of knowledge production, such as research articles or the scholarly monograph. Just as Williams was drawn to cultural forms in which the conventions by which we know ourselves are still emergent, we find ourselves drawn to the grant application, a genre that is often held in low esteem by academics who experience it as instrumentally aligned to the managerial discourse of performance. Call us immature, irresponsible and underachieving: still, we want to propose that the grant application is as good a place as any for working through the dynamics of knowledge as they are lived and shared beyond the individual.

In our recent Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project (DP) application, for instance, we addressed the vexed issue of the couple and its social durability, or the idea that there is some relationship between intimate companionship and collective belonging of the kind in which the state might have a political or economic interest. Writing in the wake of the Australian marriage equality plebiscite, which saw the passing of same-sex marriage into law, we proposed to interrogate theoretical and popular investments in the couple by looking at a number of contemporary literary, cinematic and performance texts in which any meaningful distinction between gay and straight, happy and sad, successful and floundering couples is hard to maintain. We hypothesized that the contemporary field mapped by these popular texts,

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all of which self-consciously engage theoretical ideas around coupled sexuality while being aimed at a mass audience, is deeply marked by sexual inclusiveness and diversity but also yields abundant evidence of the non-reliability of intimate attachment as a ground on which to build social structures of any kind.

Our idiosyncratic archive of couple texts—Bruce Miller’s straight-to-streaming adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*; Miranda July’s *The First Bad Man*; Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick*; and Nat Randall and Anna Breckon’s Cassavetes-inspired, 24-hour endurance piece, *The Second Woman* (for our take, see Jagose and Wallace 2018)—all explicitly engage the sexual attachments and substitutions that confound most socially endorsed relationship models. The relationships these creative artefacts profile are by conventional lights inappropriate, obsessive, unsatisfactory, professionally damaging, or banal to the outsider. They are also highly familiar to anyone with any experience of long-term coupled love. As we declared to the ARC College of Experts, we count ourselves among such people and have concertedly built this experiential perspective into the research design of our current project, a point we then demonstrated sentence by jointly authored sentence. (For more on the theoretical madness in our method, see Jagose and Wallace, forthcoming).

We also took the opportunity of our ARC application to address what anyone who has ever been in couple counselling knows, namely that the biggest inhibitor to new knowledge creation is all the old knowledge with which you are saddled. In ARC speak, this intellectual baggage is called ROPE, or Research Opportunities and Performance Evidence. Uploading our individual CVs in this context provided the occasion for us to reflect that, like so much else in our mutually implicated life, knowledge building is not a solo affair but often leads to claiming your other’s output as your own, as with children (or Career Interruptions, as they are typically framed in this context). As everyone knows, a DP application is not a bushel under which to hide your light. Or lights, as the case may be. And so we concentrated on showcasing our academic bona fides (Achievements and Contributions) and their unusual degree of bibliographic entanglement (Publications).

While the Expert Assessors could see at a glance that we had formally collaborated on previous academic projects, we made sure that they did not miss the full extent of our codependent pathology since it was crucial to our coupled claims (or Aims, as we now think of them). We persuasively evidenced the informal creative alliances that exist between our traditional and non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) and their sources in our personal relationship (Conflict of Interest). Our first novel, *In Translation* (1994), we declared a *roman-à-clef*, a fictionalization of the circumstances in which we first came together and, briefly, apart. We also noted that the meticulous archival research we had conducted into the 1830s same-sex sexual scandal that embroiled the missionary, Reverend William Yate, substantially informed both a chapter in our monograph (Wallace, 2003) and also our third prize-winning novel (Jagose 2003). To date, we said, this mutual indebtedness has been signalled through the usual scholarly protocol of footnotes and references, with the addition of more oblique personal thanks in other paratextual matter such as dedications and acknowledgments, all of which constitute what Kate Lilley might call our ‘scholarly coming out’ as a lesbian academic couple.

But since the ARC is just as interested in upward trajectory as track record, we made the case that our proposed engagement of the first-person plural would make our research both theoretically and empirically stronger in an inventive instance of what Anna Poletti, following Eve Sedgwick, has dubbed the ‘queer periperformative.’ As evidence of this we gave our recent essay, which toggles between a standard scholarly address and an autoethnographic inquiry

into our coupled raising of a dog (Jagose 2019). We also declared our forthcoming monograph to be a book-length meditation on our experience of serial reattachment across the near three decades we have been together, just in case the reviewers mistook it for a more conventional intervention in same-sex marriage debates (Wallace 2020).

Determined to evidence our critical fitness for the task ahead (Feasibility), we spelled out the somewhat obvious point that our project involves not just scholarly collaboration but a coupled collaboration about coupledness (Quality and Innovation). And since the best innovation does not stand apart from influence, we argued that, just as there is an established performance art tradition in which couples perform together—most famously the so-called ‘relation works’ of Marina Abramović and Ulay—there is also an established but under-remarked queer and feminist tradition in which the blurring of the personal and professional has been core to the advance of academic knowledge and creative production (Koestenbaum, Lord, Miller, Sedgwick).

Fast approaching our page limit, we noted that in feminist and queer studies there have been some field-transforming contributions that have taken non-traditional formats or melded traditional and non-traditional formats, many of which deploy the personal to rethink the political or social. As joint Chief Investigators, we said in our singularly plural voice, we have built this element into our Research Design and Methodology from the very beginning, including into this application for funding (DP 190101539). This project, our peroration went on in tones appropriate to those parts of the application that might attract a Minister’s notice (National Interest), thus presents an opportunity for the creation of a new form of collaborative research writing that will transform the study of intimacy and other forms of relationality, such as gay and lesbian domesticity, that were once considered notoriously ephemeral and difficult to capture quantitatively or qualitatively but, in the current historical moment, are now celebrated as a measure of social and emotional advancement for all.

As part of their compliance requirement, we duly acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council in relation to the larger project of which this piece forms a part: ‘The Couple: Commitment and Durability in the Era of Marriage Equality.’ More importantly, we also say thanks.

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