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A love story: for 'Buddy System' research in the academy

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ABSTRACT

This article makes a case for a 'buddy system' approach to research and scholarship, or a kind of 'caring with' our colleagues, as feminist praxis and as an intentional, politicized response to the neoliberalization of the academy. Through autoethnographic writing on our travels together into farmed animal auction yards, we explain the buddy system as a mode of caring, solidarity, and love that differs from collaborative research, focused as it is on caring for and about our colleagues and their research even (or especially) when we have no direct stakes in the research being conducted. We contribute to three feminist conversations with this approach: feminist care ethics in geography; emotional geographies; and critical perspectives on the neoliberalization of the academy. We advocate the buddy system as an extension of feminist care ethics, enriching how feminists think about 'doing' research. We draw on feminist geographies of emotion and our own emotions (grief especially) experienced while witnessing processes of nonhuman animal commodification to politicize the act of researching and to develop a more caring way of inhabiting the academy. This is particularly important, we argue, in the context of deepening neoliberal logics that turn the academy into a place where care and love become radical acts of resistance and transformation.

Una historia de amor: por una investigación con el 'Sistema de compañerismo' en la academia

RESUMEN

Este artículo promueve un enfoque de 'sistema de compañerismo' en la investigación académica, o una forma de que 'nos importen' nuestrxs colegas, como práctica feminista y como una respuesta intencional y politizada a la neoliberalización de la academia. A través de la escritura autoetnográfica sobre nuestros viajes juntas a las subastas de animales de granja, explicamos el sistema de compañerismo como un modo de cuidado, solidaridad y amor que difiere de la investigación colaborativa, centrada en que nos importen nuestros pares y en dar importancia a la investigación de lxs colegas, incluso (o especialmente) cuando no tenemos nada en juego en la investigación que se lleva a cabo. Contribuimos a tres conversaciones feministas con este enfoque: la ética del cuidado feminista en geografía; las geografías emocionales; y las perspectivas críticas sobre la neoliberalización del trabajo académico. Promovemos el sistema de compañerismo como una extensión de la ética del cuidado feminista, enriqueciendo cómo lxs feministas pensamos sobre el acto de 'hacer' investigación. Nos basamos en geografías feministas de la emoción y nuestras propias emociones

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关键词

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(especialmente el duelo) experimentadas mientras presenciamos procesos de commodificación de animales no humanos para politizar el acto de la investigación y desarrollar una forma más comprensiva de habitar lo académico. Esto es particularmente importante, sostenemos, en el contexto de profundización de la lógica neoliberal que vuelve a lo académico en un lugar donde el cuidado y el amor se vuelven actos radicales de resistencia y transformación.

一个爱的故事：致学术中的‘伙伴系统’研究

摘要

本文提供支持研究和学术的‘伙伴系统’方法的理由，以及‘照护’我们的同僚作为女权主义实践和对学术新自由主义化的刻意、政治化回应。我们透过共同进入养殖动物拍卖场的自我民族志书写，解释‘伙伴系统’作为不同于共同研究的一种照护、团结和爱的模式，聚焦照顾并关心我们的同侪及其研究，即便（或特别是）我们并未直接参与该研究之时。我们以此方法对三个女权主义的对话做出贡献：地理学中的女权主义照护伦理；情绪地理；以及学术新自由主义化的批判视角。我们倡议伙伴系统作为女权主义照护伦理的延伸，丰富女权主义思考‘从事’研究的方式。我们运用有关情绪的女权主义地理，以及我们自身在见证非人类的动物被商品化的过程中的情绪（特别是悲伤），以此政治化研究的行动，并发展以更为关爱的方式栖身于学术界。我们主张，这在愈益深化的新自由主义逻辑脉络中特别重要，因其将学术转变为照护与爱成为抵抗和变革的激进行动之地。

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, we entered a farmed animal auction yard in the Pacific Northwestern US and witnessed the highly efficient sale of so-called spent dairy cows for slaughter. We were at the auction together not because we were conducting joint research on dairy production practices, but because one of us (Katie) had asked the other (Tish) to come along to the auction, so as not to have to enter her field site alone.

What began as a casual invitation has evolved into an intentional approach to research practice (and academic praxis more broadly) motivated by a need for shared experience, a recognition of relationality and vulnerability in the research process, and an understanding of how our research trajectories are theoretically linked. This active going into the field together (and our processing of what we saw) worked well, at least in part due to our shared ideologies and theoretical framing and perhaps otherwise may not have been possible. What began as Tish accompanying Katie into her research site, over the years, has evolved in such a way that our research geographies have come to overlap and now involve accompaniment into each other's field sites.

We present here a case for what we've affectionately come to call the ‘buddy system,’ developed through our close friendship, our care for and about one another, and our ongoing concern about the emotional toll wrought by solitary research about violent systems and their embodied effects. Indeed, there are many practical and methodological reasons to engage in buddy system research: different ways of seeing can generate unique insights; field sites (especially highly masculinized spaces) can be unsafe for a woman to enter alone; and fieldwork can be a lonely endeavor, as can the subsequent thinking, processing, and writing. While this coalesces with conversations on collaborative research praxis (Gilbert and Masucci 2008; Mountz et al. 2015), we each continue to have our own distinct research agendas and projects on very different topics.

This article intervenes in three feminist geographical debates: geographies of care; geographies of emotion as politics (grief, in particular); and responses to the growing neoliberalization of the academy. We draw on these ongoing conversations in feminist geography, as well as our own experience in the field, to argue for a feminist methodological approach that centers researchers' shared emotional experience as a kind of ‘caring with’ in our research, scholarship, and lives.

We employ an autoethnographic method to close the artificial distance presumed to inherently propel so-called rational research. Autoethnography draws on researchers' own stories in order to bridge their personal experiences and/or with theory (Doan 2010). Indeed, this is as much a reflection of our experiences in the field as it is about extending that reflection into the culture of research, not as a confessional, but as an intervention into masculinist frames of 'doing' research (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010; Sparke 1996; Sundberg 2003). This is not merely a case of an 'inward looking and self indulgent' centering of ourselves as subjects of research (Bondi 2009, 328), but rather, a critical response to the often closed practices of geographic research and the confines of what constitutes 'the field' (cf. Cuomo and Massaro 2016; Hyndman 2001).

We have organized this article into several sections – some pieces written as individual reflections, some through shared writing. To frame our intervention, we each offer our individual memories of the moment we decided to go 'into the field' together, as well as reflections about how it has changed our research. Two key themes have emerged that inform and are informed by our approach: we theorize the role of witnessing, grief, and emotion in the process of *caring with* as research practice; and, we argue that this approach can be an intentional and careful way of rejecting the neoliberalization of the academy through greater practices of care in institutional and interpersonal encounters. This is a project of 'thinking-aloud together' that disrupts the highly individualized nature of research itself.

Going into 'the field'

Katie

When I first began crafting my research design for a multispecies ethnographic project on the commodification of cows, I envisioned myself traveling to, conducting observation and interviews in, and inhabiting, my field sites alone. I had an image of an ethnographer as a solitary figure – in communication with 'research subjects,' certainly, but ultimately I envisioned a lone researcher. And certainly, I did end up having independent days and nights. But my research wasn't all solitary and the companionship and solidarity Tish offered me has made me reflect on how I conceptualized my research from the outset.

In my research design, there were many things I did not consider, particularly the emotional toll of the research I proposed or my safety in the field. Much education on research design and the ethics review process are both (importantly) concerned with how researchers' work impacts research subjects. Not once during my research design and Institutional Review Board (IRB) review process was I asked about the emotional difficulty of my proposed research (and my plans to maintain my own mental and emotional health through this process). I did not consider these things until much later when, for instance, I was alone at the public World Dairy Expo and a bull semen salesman sidled up to me, touched me too intimately, and communicated in highly sexualized innuendo. Or when, years later, my students asked how I cope with the emotional difficulty of the work that I do, and I broke down, crying, realizing jarringly that I had not actually been coping at all.

The lasting emotional burden of research is important to reflect on – especially so because of how many people studying violence are impacted in real, embodied ways by their work. Tish and I regularly engage in conversations inside and outside academic spaces about these effects: researchers being assaulted in the field, academics suffering from PTSD following their field research, and researchers reliving primary and secondary traumas while trying to write and publish (see for instance the Special Issue edited by Drozdowski and Dominey-Howes 2015). A neoliberalized academy does not create room for working through these experiences; indeed, there is a tendency to pathologize these responses, framing researchers as 'emotionally unstable' or 'unhinged' when they can't or won't quietly and efficiently resolve these feelings.

My research involved going into spaces I felt intimidated to enter, especially as an outsider, especially by myself. And so I asked Tish to come along, in large part as a response to my panic at facing the 'field' alone, and because she is my closest friend and colleague and it felt natural to ask for her companionship.

But once we embarked on this process together, I realized just how important and transformative it was in terms of how I (and we) thought about and inhabited the research process.

Auctions are public spaces where the efficient commodification and sale of farmed animal lives and bodies is visible. In increasingly secretive and hard-to-access US animal agriculture industries, the auction yard is one of the few remaining places open to the public where the lived experiences of animals and the consequences of their commodification are starkly visible. For those involved in animal agriculture, auctions are mundane, everyday spaces – necessary nodes in the commodity circuit that moves animals among farms, auctions, feedlots, and slaughterhouses. As a researcher attuned to the normalization of violence in farming and exchanging animals, I inhabited the auction yard as a witness to the embodied effects of commodification for the animals whose lives and bodies form the foundation of the meat and dairy industries.

Right away, I noticed that going into the field with Tish was about much more than companionship. We both took copious notes and photographs when permitted (Tish generously offered to take notes to document the experience from her perspective); later, we discovered our individual notes and photos were at times very different, reflecting our distinct perspectives and ways of seeing, enriching the tangible record of these site visits and the scholarship produced from this research. Perhaps the most noteworthy thing to me, though, was what it felt like to share the emotional burden of entering these spaces. Some might find it odd to think about entering ‘livestock’ auction yards as being emotionally fraught; indeed, the normalization of what are violations of the cow’s life and body contributes to these actions not being seen as violence; it contributes to this violence being ignored or dismissed; and it pathologizes or dismisses emotional responses and recognition of this violence (grieving) in spaces of animal use (Stanescu 2012; Taylor 2008). As Stanescu (2012) argues, this unintelligibility of grieving for nonhuman animal life is an isolating and alienating way of being in the academic and nonacademic world, where this emotional response is often not taken seriously.

Thus, entering these field sites with someone who was empathetic and open to seeing the violence of commodity production *as violence* produced an intensified form of care and love between Tish and me, in and beyond the field site. Embedded in an academy still widely hostile to taking the lives and labors of nonhuman animals seriously, acknowledgment and recognition of this violence and its implications for human and nonhuman forms of sociality and care is a political statement on its own. But Tish’s generosity of time, energy, and spirit enabled her to not just *care about* the research I was doing, or *care for* me as a friend and colleague during (and in the aftermath of doing) the research, both of which feel like enormous gifts. The act of *caring with* that emerged from our entry together into these spaces produced a shared way of feeling and thinking that brought into intimate conversation our critical perspectives, our emotional inner worlds, and our political motivations as feminist scholars.

Tish

My own academic research is one step removed from violence and its after-effects. I work in archives tracing historical lineages of racialized violences in the name of humanitarianism. I also examine the ways in which people and their lives are discursively constructed, uncovering histories of the present unfolding in real time. But my own grief is far removed in relation to others; particularly Katie’s, my closest friend and colleague. Her research has continually brought her into physical proximity to everyday violence.

I’m not sure what made me say yes – whether it was from sheer curiosity or simply to support my friend in her research – but I didn’t hesitate. It seemed to me to be the natural thing to do. But the act itself was anything but ‘natural.’ We fretted over what to wear, hoping to blend in and not arouse suspicion. We discussed, at length, the tiny details of how we might go about doing our research. Is an auction yard a public space? Can we take pictures? Would we look odd taking notes? Can we be expelled?

When we arrived, it was clear we stood out – we were two urban women together in a space that is predominantly attended to by rural men: from the auctioneer to the cattle prodders to the purchasers and sellers. We were hesitant and smiling. We took photos of the cows, thinking ourselves surreptitious.

And yet we had not asked the right questions or worried about the right things. Our biggest ‘tell’ was our tears.

We wandered the catwalk, looking down at the animals huddled and splayed in blood, milk, urine, feces, and pus. Engorged udders slid to the side, as cows struggled to stand – their hoofs slipping in the morass of bodily fluids. They bellowed loudly, many clearly in pain. We watched as cattle were electrocuted with prods. A one-year old bull tried to escape. He ran frantically back and forth along the corridor. We were transfixed, rooting for the small bull.

We couldn’t look each other in the eye. Each time we did, tears threatened to pour down our faces. We looked, instead, at the carnage below us, occasionally looking up, out beyond the paddocks to the wide-open fields. It seemed cruel to see the fields so close to these lovely animals penned under a tin roof, wallowing and sliding on slick concrete floors.

The bell rang and we marched inside. Men stood around amiably chatting and relaxing. As we waited for the auction to begin, a cowhand let a one-day-old calf through the door early, his blackened umbilical cord still trailing. He nuzzled up to the handler seeking comfort. He laughed brashly, yelling, ‘I’m not your mother! Get!’ turning to the audience for approval and to share the laughter as he swatted the calf in the face with a rattling paddle. We smiled weakly in return, unsure of our role in that moment. He sought the bemused spectator. We were grieving witnesses.

Witnessing, grief, and ‘caring with’

Tish and Katie

As we sat and watched these scenes unfold – ‘spent’ cows collapsing from exhaustion, cows and calves sold apart and calling to each other across the auction yard, animals shocked with electric prods – we tried to intentionally witness the commodification process and its embodied effects. We were both witnesses, and Tish found herself in the added role of ‘witnessing the witnessing.’ These acts of witnessing prompted an overwhelming sense of grief over the suffering we were seeing. It was through this grief that we began to think about the role of care; in particular a practice of ‘caring with’ – both as empathetic response to the animals we were watching, and as a mode of empathy for and with each other. Thus, we outline in this section how we theorized and moved from witnessing, to grief, to caring with, as a research practice.

Witnessing the cow in the auction yard, and acknowledging the routinized suffering she endures, involves a politicized act of ‘feeling with’ or empathizing with the cow. Empathy is important here because it highlights the experience of the other and the way that our experiences are intimately entangled and co-constituted. Lori Gruen calls this ‘entangled empathy,’ which acknowledges that we are all already in relationships of power, violence, and care with other species, and that this relationality (or entanglement) can be a source from which to build a practice of empathy and love with our own and other species (Gruen 2015). Witnessing informed by empathy, as opposed to research that claims a ‘rational objectivity,’ enables a recognition of relationality of ourselves and our research subjects, it exposes our own implicatedness in the conditions that cause the cow to suffer, and it politicizes the relationship of care and power between the ‘researcher’ and ‘research subject.’

But the buddy system adds a layer beyond the understanding of witnessing as a process occurring between ‘researcher’ and ‘research subject.’ If Katie’s role is and has been the ‘witness’ in these spaces (there to acknowledge and document the commodification of the animals’ lives and bodies; see Gillespie 2016), then Tish’s role is both as witness to the animals *and* as a ‘witness to the witnessing.’ To be sure, this layered approach to witnessing is not about objectifying either the researcher (Katie) or the research subjects (the cows), as Oliver (2001) and Dave (2014) warn against; rather, this witnessing, and witnessing the witnessing, prompts important insights about being co-present with and without stakes in the research itself.

Added to the grief generated through empathy is a layer of frustration and grief derived from the inability to take any tangible action to alleviate the suffering we are witnessing (Gillespie 2016); Tish’s

bearing witness to Katie's witnessing, then, becomes about sharing the burden of this politically charged act, and in particular, of sharing the burden of these different forms of grief. This is one of the challenges (and perhaps, pitfalls) of the buddy system: the buddy system asks researchers to take on a double-burden of facing not only our own emotionally difficult research topic, but a second one as well, and this difficulty should not be dismissed lightly.

Grief was the predominant emotion we experienced during these acts of witnessing and so bears addressing here. We have thought about this grief as a catalyst for our own and others' personal and political transformation, as a politicized mechanism of care, manifested through the act of grieving the 'ungrievable' (Butler 2003, 2009; Stanescu 2012; Taylor 2008). But how does this grief help us to theorize care and, specifically, 'caring with'? What is it to 'grieve with' as opposed to 'grieve for'? And where does this grief belong in our research? Or does it?

Grief already underwrites much of our research – we research the things we do precisely because we care. While 'reason' and 'objectivity' are privileged within research, we argue with other feminist scholars, so too should be emotion (Ahmed 2004; Davidson, Bondi, and Smith 2007; Sharp 2009). Centering the researchers' emotional responses is a mode of politicizing the ways in which they reveal insights about the nature and form of the violent processes we study (Ahmed 2004; Woodward 2009). Or, as Probyn (2005, 135) insists, 'what hubris to think that the body's reactions to another's emotions and affects are strictly within the realm of the personal and therefore devoid of academic/scientific interest.'

Our emotional responses – grief in particular – emphasize that the subject we are studying has a life and death that matters – a life and death that is and must be grieved (Butler 2003, 2009). To 'grieve for' a life which is not framed as such is a political act of acknowledgment. To 'grieve with,' then, is at once emotional and political, further deepening and highlighting the ubiquity of relational entanglements. Grieving with (or alongside) the suffering animal (the cow and calf experiencing grief over their separation, for instance), and with each other in the research process, is one way to enact empathy, care, and love across species boundaries, within and beyond the walls of the university. We do not mean to suggest that our human grief in that moment did anything tangible for the cows passing through the auction ring, or that the cows would notice or care about our feelings of grief; rather, we refer to the ways in which grieving is an experience not limited to human emotional worlds, and that a recognition of both our own grief and the grief of others (cows) in that space was a site for better understanding the violence of human–animal relations in spaces of commodity production (for a more extended discussion of 'grieving with' across species, see Gillespie 2016).

Feminist geographers have pointed to the importance of collaboration, friendship, and caring within the academy, both as emotional support and in strengthening individual work and the relevance of the academy more broadly (Lawson 2010; Mountz et al. 2015; Pratt 2010). And yet research is still positioned as a very solitary thing. Indeed, the academy has made plain its near-disdain for collaborative work, as noted in productivity metrics and tenure and promotion reviews across the US and beyond (Castree 2006; Hawkins, Manzi, and Ojeda 2014; Radice 2013). Working together, and grieving with, is a form of caring that pushes back against the insistence of the autonomous researching–teaching–writing machines that we are expected to be. In conducting our research together – in sharing these emotional responses and honoring them as part of the research process – we are enacting a kind of caring that reaches beyond the realm of friendship and into a radical form of scholarship that takes into account the very lonely work done by academics even as we acknowledge how very relational and interdependent we are. This is not to presume we inherently know how to care for others (Held 2006; Robinson 1999). But as the academy grows increasingly neoliberalized and academics more deeply subjectified through these frames (Dowling 2008; Folbre 2014), concerns about the role of friendship and collaboration in the academy grow more pressing (Lawson 2007).

In our work together, we are engaging in a feminist research praxis that extends an ethic of care in which we move from *caring about* to *caring for* and, ultimately, *caring with*. It is here that we open the possibility for an extension of care ethics – to think through 'caring with' as pushing against the binary of care-giver and care-receiver toward a shared practice of care in which we both care for and care about together. In turn, and drawing from Folbre's (2014) articulation, care is both a verb, which is

‘cheerful and engaged’ and also a noun connoting ‘mental suffering’ and ‘grief.’ When we ‘care with’ we engage both forms together in witnessing, but also, extend what Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) has coined ‘thinking with.’ ‘Thinking with,’ she asserts, ‘resists the individualization of thinking,’ and at the same time, ‘relations of thinking and knowing *require* care’ (emphasis added; 2012, 198–199). In this way, we push beyond ‘caring for’ to imagine what it means to ‘care with’ – to hold space for each other even as we think aloud together – as an active sharing of the emotional burdens of encountering violence in the field.

In many ways, we see the buddy system as opening the field for radicalizing our work, and in turn, for radicalizing the academy more broadly. It is not enough to think through the ethics of the products we produce (and we use these capitalist frames purposefully, for as we are well-aware, our labor is deeply (e)valuated along metrics that stem from a neoliberalized accounting of what ‘counts’ as work worth producing). Rather, we must begin with the very relationships we forge in the academy. Thus, ‘caring with’ and ‘thinking with’ push back against the deepening neoliberal subjectification of the academic and puts into practice an engagement with and a troubling of interdependent existences (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012). This opens up transgressive possibilities in mobilizing loving friendships as an ethical ground for scholarship. ‘Friendship is important because it is a key aspect of patterns of sociability and the recognition (or not) of solidarities and communal belonging’ (Bowlby 2011, 605). While grief is a powerful tool in driving our research, friendship, care, and love are the very threads that rupture and disrupt these closed frames.

Beyond the ‘field’: Resistance to the neoliberalized academy

Katie and Tish

What might a buddy research approach look like beyond the ‘field’? An important dimension of this approach is considering how the buddy system works when ‘buddies’ do very different forms of research. For instance, Katie has been routinely concerned about reciprocity, often feeling like Tish is more a buddy for Katie’s research than the other way around. Thus, for those scholars who do not do ‘mud on the boots’ field research (or ‘manure on the boots’ field work, as it may be), we are interested in how a buddy system approach might be applied in non-‘fieldwork’ scenarios. In Tish’s case, she is a historical geographer whose research is conducted in physical archives, in online historical records, and through textual analysis. It does not necessarily make sense for Katie to accompany her into the archives, or to sit with her at her computer looking at artifacts online.

But it is equally as important, and possible, to extend the buddy system to be a more inclusive and wide-ranging feminist practice beyond ‘the field.’ Archival and textual analysis have their own unique emotional toll as many of the documents Tish reads and analyzes reflect deeply racialized violence and suffering. It is essential, then, to have someone with whom to process these findings. The depressing nature of both of our work has meant, for us, long, involved conversations about our research findings, the reading we are doing, and ultimately the writing we do. This is not just a nice feature of having a close friend and colleague; in fact, we have come to understand it as a way of surviving and embodying feminist practice in the increasingly neoliberalized academy. We argue, then, that the buddy system can inform a range of scholarly practices (even though we have primarily illustrated the fieldwork example in this article).

It can be useful to have a colleague to read and comment on our writing as we publish (and especially so as the accelerated pressure to publish plays out in real, tangible effects related to our marketability for jobs and career advancement). As colleagues and friends, we have read and commented on each other’s writing many times. However, the buddy system is important as a site for processing and thinking through our findings *before* the writing process begins, as we are doing the difficult and lonely work of facing what we have seen, read, and encountered, and as we move through our emotional responses, honoring, politicizing, and incorporating them into our work. In this sense, the buddy system dovetails with the growing movement for ‘slow scholarship,’ concerned as it is with how to infuse research and praxis with a greater ethic of care and a more intentional process (Martell 2014; Mountz et al. 2015).

This kind of processing and caring takes time. Emotionally fraught research takes time. It takes time to conduct the research, analyze it, and publish it, but it also takes time to work through the grief or rage or ways of being moved that are wrought by the research itself. Developing these relationships of love, care, and trust with our colleagues also takes time. In this way, caring with each other can be seen as a key feature of slow scholarship and a greater ethic of care in feminist praxis.

At the same time, we acknowledge that calling for this form of 'slow scholarship' may elide differential power relations within the academy and is perhaps more available to later-career academics – particularly those who already hold tenure – as early career academics are (still very much) beholden to metrics that deeply impact their career trajectories (Clark and Thompson 2015; Martell 2014). Further, engaging in slow scholarship, framed through an ethic of care as it is, may threaten or burden caring relationships and responsibilities 'at home' and add to an already-pervasive work-life imbalance (Evans 2016; Mountz 2016).

With this in mind, we expand the buddy system into a broader ethic about how we inhabit the academy together. We read this daily practice (because it is a *daily* practice, written into how we schedule our days, how we carve out time to be in regular communication with each other) as a broader form of resistance to the deepening neoliberalization of the academy and the academics who inhabit these spaces. This neoliberalization reflects broader trends in which we see the 'deepening of market relations [...] reaching into arenas where the social good should (but often does not) take precedent over profitability and the efficient operation of markets' (Lawson 2007, 1). In the academy, neoliberalization is reflected in shifting administrative structures, in measurements of academics' publications, service work, and teaching evaluations, and in diversification efforts that resemble accounting schemes rather than actual attention to what 'diversity' and 'inclusion' offer. In turn, these calculative technologies bear down on the individual academic, demanding that our 'subject positions [be] constituted and entrenched spatially through the discourses and material social practice' wrought through them (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003, 3).

To be clear, we are not suggesting that academics should or need to take up and take on a double work-load, but rather, we acknowledge the many ways we already engage in these practices and aim to make legible their significance. We are deeply concerned with the increasing trend of unpaid emotional and service labor within the academy (Barcan 2013). This is especially problematic among contingent faculty who are regularly expected to take on this kind of additional labor, despite the heightened precariousness of their employment status and exploited positioning within the university. Women and faculty of color, in particular, are routinely tasked with disproportionate service and undervalued work that detracts from the more highly externally valued research and publishing expected (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012). Further, we recognize the impossibility for those whose work is already deeply impacted by (dis)ability (Chen 2012; Hedva 2015). We are sensitive to these issues, and argue that this, in itself, would be an excellent area for further research and writing. We also recognize that the kind of buddy system we are advocating might add not only to the emotional labor we undertake as feminist scholars, but also to the increased economic burden of accompanying another researcher on field research trips. The neoliberalization of the university and competitive funding resources (distributed by foundations and grantors demanding results metrics and efficiency in the research process) makes it difficult, if not impossible, to fund buddy system research.

This is a difficult conundrum: advocating an approach that demands additional emotional and physical labor while being sensitive to the unjust nature of the devaluation and exploitation of care and caring work in the academy. Thus, this necessitates not only a practical shift in how we think about care and research on an individual and a relational basis, but it also requires a structural shift in how research and caring practices are conceptualized and enacted at the institutional level (Green and Lawson 2011). For instance, a more widely and equitably practiced buddy system would need to involve a reformulation of the IRB to incorporate an ethical consideration of how researchers are cared for and with during their research process. This might include creating a network of resources for mental and emotional health specifically geared toward researchers, among other tangible support systems. It also might involve a more caring approach on the part of funding agencies to fund companionship in the

research process as a possible (and probable) feature of good scholarship. As one reviewer helpfully noted, many researchers develop relations in the field (e.g. with research assistants, translators, and informants); however, we are arguing specifically for intentional accompaniment, for as many scholars have noted, relationships built at field research sites are often fraught and come with their own sets of ethical and emotional complexities that do not necessarily reflect a true ‘buddy’ in the field (cf. Browne 2003; England 1997; Hall 2009). In part, then, buddy system research requires a call for structural shifts in both the climate and practices across the university – departmentally, administratively, and in the availability of therapeutic resources.

From our own experiences, and in conversations with many of our colleagues, we have observed that a key feature of the neoliberalized academy is the prioritization of a certain kind of good neoliberal subject (Castree and Sparke 2000; SIGJ2 Writing Collective 2012). This subject is confident, outgoing, willing to jostle their way to the front of the stage, rational, unemotional, individualistic, and independent. This subject is not afraid to compete, nor are they afraid to bully others to get ahead (Farley and Sprigg 2014; Folbre 2014). But the academy is filled with many scholars who do not quite fit that description: those who are less confident, introverted, concerned more with their actual work than the recognition they receive for it, or uncomfortable with the increasingly self-promotional and individualistic aspect of the academy. For these people (and we count ourselves among this group), the neoliberalized academy can be a painful, at times hostile, place. There have been countless times when we questioned whether we belong in the academy, that the hyper-competitiveness, stress, and (frankly) unkindness associated with proving your worth (in grants, publications, etc.) has the potential to transform us into people we do not want to be. We have seen this occur where the stress of the job market, for instance, causes compassionate, well-intentioned people to engage in unethical (and un-feminist) practices to ‘get ahead’. As a result, we continuously process together the choice we make each day to stay on this academic path, despite our apprehensions. We have both often felt and noted that if it were not for the other we might not survive the neoliberalizing ethos of the academy.

A buddy system approach extends in important ways beyond the practice of research and responds to other dimensions of the neoliberalization of the university. While traveling into the field together may seem *extraordinary*, it is really just one small piece of a broader praxis of ‘caring with’ that includes supporting each other through the emotional rollercoaster that is graduate school, the academic job market, rejections (from journals and presses, jobs, and funding agencies), and so on. The buddy system offers not just support to one another through these experiences, it reframes how we inhabit and respond to these neoliberalizing academic trends and their intensifying emotional effects. It offers an ethic from which to build a more caring praxis and, hopefully, a more caring institution.

Concluding thoughts

The buddy system certainly does not eliminate the painful and difficult features of being an academic. It does not eliminate the trauma and vulnerability so many researchers experience as a result of the work they do. Our buddy system approach did not eliminate our physical vulnerability in the spaces we visited; it perhaps tempered it a bit, or at least lent to an improved *feeling* of safety, whether or not we were actually safer as a pair. The work we do is still devastating and traumatic and we often feel helpless to change the conditions we are studying. But at the same time, the buddy system has the capacity to make these experiences a bit more bearable – to lighten the load by sharing it, and importantly, it gives us someone with whom to process what we’ve seen and felt.

Through our friendship – through *caring with* one another – we have learned how to care and be co-present in new ways. The buddy system is really a kind of love story. Through following our instincts to care, and learning to do it better through practice, caring with each other through the research process and through our daily lives has taught us to *love* more fully. And this love is politicized as a way of being academic, increasingly so as love and care become less valued (or further obscured) systems of meaning in the academy.

We hope we have also highlighted the need for a more caring approach in the academic structures that we inhabit. In addition to the interpersonal possibilities for greater care, solidarity, and love among researchers, the buddy system informs the need to reformulate academic structures through enriching the ethics review process to consider the impacts of the research *on the researchers*, not just on those we study. It also extends to the need for state-funded and private granting agencies to more fully recognize not only collaborative work, but also the importance of caring work we do for each other that is fundamental to a feminist praxis.

In the last few years, our research topics and sites have begun to overlap in more obvious ways (ways which may actually justify more conventional collaborative research practices and, even, collaborative funding applications). Katie is working on a project that examines a multispecies analysis of plantation economies in and around the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Tish is involved in research on the co-constitution of race and disease narratives and their mobilization in the enslavement of people of African-descent. Theoretically, both projects explore how the categories of human/subhuman/nonhuman get made and remade as mechanisms of violence. Empirically, these projects bring us both to Louisiana (to the penitentiary, to plantation tours, and to archives throughout the state).

We have already discussed at length how we might coauthor work related to these conjoined research trajectories, and also how we might better support each other as we conduct our own separate research projects. We don't yet know how this experience might be different with overlapping projects, but as we move forward in our academic journeys, we are continuing to consider how the buddy system will evolve. As we have already seen in our experience thus far, what it means to 'care with' another person evolves as we grow as people and as we learn more about how to love each other in the most enriching, least harmful ways possible.

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