

Compersion: A Masculine Phantasy

Juana Cavaliere Silva

*Compersion*¹ is the ability to feel joy when your partner experiences joy with someone else. It relates to the Buddhist term ‘mudita’ and it was coined by the Kerista Commune of San Francisco who practiced free-love in the 70s.² According to Chambliss – a polyamory love coach – “[c]ultivating compersion [...] means recognizing that love is not a finite resource to be hoarded but an infinite wellspring that can nourish multiple connections without diminishing any one bond.”³ According to this definition, love is in excess, and one should free themselves from jealousy by trusting the strength of the multiple bonds that can exist simultaneously. So, is this a way to avoid painful loves after all?

In an era of “Liquid Love” as described by Bauman⁴ we can see how this phenomena of love without boundaries takes place. The author discusses the denizen of our liquid modern society where “whatever works” when it comes to engaging with others but none of these bonds are guaranteed to last. Moreover, they must be tied loosely so that they can be untied again, quickly and as effortlessly as possible, when circumstances change.

If we account for the suffering that undoubtedly accompanies love, compersion is an imperative trying to disguise not just jealousy but pain. Lacan states: “[...] the supposed value, for example, of feminine masochism, as it is called, should be subjected, parenthetically, to serious scrutiny. It belongs to a dialogue that may be defined, in many respects, as a masculine phantasy.”⁵ Later on, in Seminar XX: “on the side of man [...] the subject never deals with anything by way of partner but object *a* inscribed on the other side of the bar. He is unable to attain his sexual partner, who is the Other, except inasmuch as his partner is the cause of this desire. In this respect [...] this is nothing other than phantasy.”⁶

Is compersion a phantasy of all partners in relationships taking on a masculine position? It tries to grasp the non-rapport by the reinforcing of feminine masochism, spiced by the capitalist discourse that has turned love into a commodity. Women (and men) in the feminine position are ever more subjected to this, especially via the algorithm of dating apps, which promote fetishism as a mode of jouissance. Jealous or *compersed*, lovers still face all the difficulties arising from the non-rapport of the sexual relation.

¹ *Compersion* n. the opposite of jealousy, positive feelings about your partner's other intimacies. [definition retrieved 26-02-25 from <https://www.kerista.com/herstory.html>]

² Kerista Community website found here: <https://www.kerista.com/>

³ Chambliss, K., *Loving without Boundaries*, available online here: <https://lovingwithoutboundaries.com/2024/06/18/a-little-something-about-compersion-you-may-find-this-interesting/>

⁴ Bauman, Z., *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.

⁵ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, London: Hogarth Press, 1977, pp. 192-193.

⁶ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI, Encore*, trans. B Fink, London/New York: Norton, 1998, p. 80.