

Running Head: Ambivalent

My Ambivalent Relationship with Pomo

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Abstract

While “trying to be helpful,” therapists and therapists in training often struggle with competing claims for what constitutes “being helpful.” When embracing postmodern ideas and postmodern therapeutic practices, therapists often feel encouraged and supported in their efforts to be helpful in ways that are more meaningful to the clients than to a particular psychological theory or discourse. Postmodern theory and postmodern therapeutic practices specifically supports this interest. As with any discourse, however, the theory also makes its own demands. In a culture described as “modern” and influenced by “modernism,” this article humorously considers the struggle of therapists to hold postmodern ideas passionately in a “postmodern way” while struggling with and against and embracing “modernist” influences in a decidedly “postmodern way.”

It's Valentine's Day and I want to say how much I love Pomo. I'm thinking of expressing my feelings in a card and sending it with chocolates or flowers or something, but I can't decide. I worry I won't be able to say what I want, say it as well as I'd like, or that it'll be something that's already pre-printed inside a Hallmark card. Umberto Eco says, "I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, 'I love you madly,' because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland" (Eco, 1995).

I think of Pomo as *she*. I find myself particularly passionate about a externalized *her* in a way that I'm definitely *not* about *him*, but I worry that this heterosexual-influenced personalization is uncreative, politically incorrect, or marginalizes other genders or gender preferences.

"Pomo" is the name I prefer to "postmodernism" or "postmodern ideas." In some ways, "postmodern ideas" or "ideas influenced by postmodern thinking" might be a more "formally" postmodern way of referring to Pomo, but I like "Pomo." It's sassy and playful. It's brief and to the point, though I'm not sure that's really allowed.

If I gave Pomo a Valentine's Day card, it would say something like, "You are one of the greatest loves of my life." If Hallmark and I said this to my wife, she'd wonder about the *other* greatest loves and I would have to name names and

sleep alone on the couch. Pomo, however, expects there to be others and would leave me were I to exclusively dedicate myself to her.

The permissiveness of Pomo can be demanding.

In an effort to meet these demands and prove myself to Pomo, I dedicated myself to learning all her desires with a fervor easily described as fanatic, zealous and obsessive. I learned her "specifications" and "rules." I attended conferences, trainings, supervisions, and support groups to compete in *Pomospeak*, the recognized language of Pomo devotees.

Perhaps the name of my "Ode to Pomo" should be "My Ambivalent Relationship with Postmodern Ideas as I Understand and Appreciate Them at the Time of This Writing." If this were the title, I would, of course, have to footnote the title to qualify, clarify and situate the meaning of my words. Postmodern titles, phrases and thoughts are often long and full of qualifiers, locators and re-locators. It's not easy to reference everything reference-able, to make sure that you acknowledge, appreciate and describe in detail the etymology, genealogy and history of absolutely everything while focusing on something local -- like the word "ambivalent." I'd have to say something about what I think I meant by "ambivalent" because the word alone is not enough to convey my meaning. I'd need to suggest something about the different kinds of ambivalence I experience and something about the contexts that contribute to or constitute these different experiences. I'd also need to say something about the "movingness" of my

"experiencing" of "ambivalence" that is not, for me, adequately expressed in the word alone. This may require my turning a noun into a verb the way the word "language" is turned into "linguaging." Can I say something like, "I'm ambivalencing?"

Possessed by my love for Pomo and *certain* of her interests, I made it my mission to disseminate, infiltrate and infect others with my knowledge, to increase the territory of Pomo influence and to strengthen our tribe. We passed laws prohibiting birth control and marriage outside of our group. We developed esoteric practices like speaking in long incomprehensible sentences and using "rabbit ear" hand gestures every time we use words that don't really mean what they mean.

In my capacity as door-to-door salesman for Pomo, I found ways to summarize Pomo for quick presentation before a door was closed and the police were called. I found ways to reduce and systematize the ideas of Pomo and package them for easy consumption. I found ways to disagree with other people's understanding of, interpretation of and "truth" claims about Pomo. It became possible to not only be clever about Pomo, but to be *right*.

Were these the requirements for Pomo? Was she pleased by my efforts?

She was *indifferent*.

I got very, very nervous about this.

In my uncertainty, my confusion, my vulnerability, Pomo looked my way and gave me a great kiss full on the mouth, tongue and all. That's when I began to enjoy uncertainty as possibility, disorientation as movement, vulnerability as availability.

To embrace Pomo, I commit to non-commitment. I resist landing in one place for very long. I stay on the move, looking toward the future, playing with the past, reveling in the moment. I am certain about uncertainty and uncertain about my certainty. I am comfortable with my discomfort and uncomfortable when I become too comfortable. I remain permissive and promiscuous even when what I want more than anything is to stand still and *rest*.

Pomo appears to be full of contradictions, but contradictions require competing truth claims and an impossible "either/or" choice. Pomo prefers "both/and" and the ongoing tension and movement between. In this tension and movement, I'm feeling so *alive* and when I'm feeling uncomfortable, anxious or ambivalent, I must be doing something right.

I am ambivalent about my relationship with Pomo, and I am very satisfied that that ambivalence is the evidence of my love.

REFERENCES

- Eco, U. (1995). "*I Love You Madly, He Said Self-Consciously*. In Anderson, W. T. (Ed). The Truth About The Truth, De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam (pp. 31-33).