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Rethinking Intimacy: Liberation Through Decolonial & Queer World-Making

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RETHINKING INTIMACY: LIBERATION THROUGH DECOLONIAL & QUEER WORLD-
MAKING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES

BY

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The really unique thing about women's studies and gender studies academic inquiry is that it values the personal experience of its writers. As someone who identifies as queer, my emotional and social attachments have always been abnormal. Something always felt off, and as a result, I felt there was something entirely wrong with me.

This thesis is in dedication to my ever-evolving chosen family who, for the first time in my life, told me it was okay to be myself. Unlike the nuclear family structure forced upon me at my physical and social birth, my chosen family is comprised of other abnormal people who understand what it feels like to crave belonging while knowing that they will never belong in a normative sense. My chosen family continuously teaches me to exist in and accept the between-ness of the normative and non-normative social, political, and cultural institutions that structure our lives. Without them, I would not be the person I am today.

Additionally, I would like to thank my co-advisers, Dr. Cristina Lombardi – Diop and Dr. Héctor García – Chávez, who have been my advocates throughout this entire process. Despite the onset of a global pandemic, they have always believed that I was capable of completing my research. They have continuously supported my ideas and challenged me to dig deeper when necessary. I would also like to thank Dr. Susan Grossman for her much-needed check-in emails throughout this past year and her genuine care for my physical and mental health as a graduate student at Loyola. Her kindness fueled me through some particularly agonizing nights of writing.

For all of my fellow affect aliens. May you always seek love in the ways you need to and not in ways you are told to.

Intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress “a life” seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability.

- Lauren Berlant

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RETHINKING INTIMACY: LIBERATION THROUGH DECOLONIAL & QUEER WORLD- MAKING

Relationships play an important role in both the private and public spheres of our lives. If we understand our bodies to be the vessels through which we interact with all other objects, we come to understand the process of world-making as a summation of our relationships. Intimacy is the prevailing structure that helps assign meaning to these relationships. Different disciplines in the academy have attempted to assign descriptive definitions to intimacy as a means to better understand human relations and social phenomena. Even if we subscribe to one of these descriptive definitions and assert we know what intimacy is, we are often left wondering how intimacy is *done* and what intimacy *does*. For the purposes of my inquiry, intimacy can be understood as a social phenomenon comprised of the attachments that we make to objects throughout our life. It is a framework through which I will analyze affects that govern the varying forms of attachments and relations we make and how we construct their meaning.

Intimacy binds together unfixed spatial and social relations that stretch across time and space. Drawing from Rachel Pain and Lynn Staeheli's analysis of intimacy-geopolitics, intimacy is comprised of three intersecting sets of relations. First, intimacy is a set of spatial relations. In feminist analysis, intimacy examines the way bodies interact with each other. Second, intimacy explores the interconnectedness of personal and global relations. Affect theorists have analyzed how our emotions and interpersonal relationships "reflect, resist, or shape wider power relations" (Pain and Staeheli 345). Finally, intimacy sustains a set of practices that apply to, and connect

the body with, things outside of it (345). Understood intersectionally, intimacy is an investigative tool that helps us discern our emotional attachments to social, political, and cultural relations. Of particular importance is the way in which our emotions traverse interpersonal, intuitional, and national relations. In other words, intimacy allows each of us to probe the structuring of emotions and institutions fluidly rather than linearly. In doing so, we are able use intimacy as a deconstructive tool and source of liberatory, political engagement. By formulating intimacy as a set of unfixed spatial and social relations, we are able to question the seemingly innate structuring of power relations and social hierarchy. Furthermore, we are able to denaturalize the universal narratives that alienate and rob many of any sense of social, political, or cultural belonging.

This thesis will examine the three intersecting sets of relations involved in intimacy as a means to deconstruct heteropatriarchal order and highlight the multiplicity of attachments and relationships that we each experience throughout our lives. The first few sections of my paper give a historical account of the naturalization of heteropatriarchal order in the U.S. and show how power and violence are used to maintain a social hierarchy. Next, I will discuss the role of identity in U.S. social, political, and cultural belonging and how alienation exists for anyone who cannot conform to the ideals of normative, heteropatriarchal society, i.e. all those who feel alienated from heteropatriarchal ideals of happiness. Specifically, I will analyze the power relations that have bound violence to black bodies and how these relations continue to fracture a sense of black belonging in the U.S. Examining the continued brutalization and murder of black bodies by institutions of power, I will explore the potential for intimacy to be used as a liberatory

practice of activism that binds our every-day life to the realities of institutionalized U.S. social, political, and cultural violence.

Undoing Intimacy: Decolonizing and Queering Heteropatriarchal Narrative

As I mention above, intimacy can be understood as a social phenomenon comprised of the attachments that we make to objects throughout our life. I will use intimacy as a framework to examine the affects that order the attachments and relations we make and how we form their meaning. Drawing substantially from María Lugones' *Coloniality of Gender*, I would like to decolonize hegemonic constructions of intimacy situated within the heteropatriarchal paradigm. Following Lugones' understanding of colonized gender, I would like to propose that U.S. conceptions of intimacy are inherently colonized because intimacy hinges on gendered notions of sex and procreation rather than pleasure, desire, or closeness. Intimacy has conventionally been assigned to private spaces rather than public ones because colonization, and in turn heteropatriarchal culture, has assigned sex to the domestic sphere. Exploring colonial intimacy and queer intimacy, I will examine the ways in which intimacy operates to reinforce or subvert dichotomous power relations.

I will begin my analysis by giving a historical account of the naturalization of dichotomies in Western, Eurocentric thought. In her essay "The Man of Reason", Genevieve Lloyd explains how rationality naturalized dichotomies, and, in turn, all relations became positions by which power was either assigned or denied. From here, I examine María Lugones' essay "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" to stress the importance of gender in relations of power. Next, I explore Ann Stoler's essay "Rethinking Colonial Strategies" in order to emphasize the importance of including intimacy and intersectionality in

analyses of imperial and heteropatriarchal power. After Stoler's account of colonial intimacy, I analyze Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's essay "Sex in Public" which complicates the public/private sphere dichotomy, especially as it relates to intimacy. Furthermore, their conceptualization of counterpublics deconstructs the ways in which our heteropatriarchal social system separates the public and private spheres as a means to maintain power.

I. Dichotomies in Modernity

Equally important in writing women into the social, political, and cultural order is acknowledging how women were excluded from that order in the first place. Beyond even the division of men and women, it is important to acknowledge who was even considered a woman within the Eurocentric epistemological project. Genevieve Lloyd's essay "The Man of Reason" refers specifically to white, European women because they were the only women mentioned in the rationalist framework. In a later section, I will address the intersection of race and gender within rational thought. Lloyd's essay presents the position of [white] women throughout European history. She begins by recounting Aristotle's claim that a woman was "an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female" (Aristotle 727a15). The incapacity Aristotle refers to in this text is an inability to fully develop the rational soul. This becomes important to rationalist or "modern" thought more generally because it positions men as rationally superior to women. Aristotle splits the rational soul into two groups: the passive intellect and the active intellect, the active intellect being the fully developed soul. Women were labeled "impotent males" by Aristotle because they were unable to possess or develop the active intellect component of the soul. Men on the other hand, were capable of such a quest and were

therefore distinguished as superior in their ability to reason. Aristotle further claimed that reason was what distinguished humans from animals. Since men could practice active intellect, they were considered superior and therefore embody reason better than women. This was the first time that women were reasoned to be inferior to men, by nature itself. It was also a way to subtly reinforce that women were less distinguished from animals than men. Aristotle's writings began the naturalization of men as superior beings. However, it is important to note that Aristotle does not situate men and women as opposites, nor did he assert that women were irrational. Rather, he created a hierarchical relation by which men ruled over women and all other components of society and culture (Lloyd 24).

However, this changed once René Descartes established Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes attempted to discover the essence of things by deducing them into their basic components and then placing those basic components into sequences of relations. Lloyd further emphasizes that Descartes' method was an "attempt to encapsulate it [reason] in a systematic method for attaining certainty" (21). He does this by divorcing bodily sensations from the rationality of the mind. Descartes emphasizes the space between "ideas and the material world, between the structure of the mind and the structure of the reality it attempts to know" (23). This space is closed by the existence of a "true" God; this "true" God gives an individual access to pure reason through the exercise of the mind and the dismissal of the body. By separating the sensuous, emotional, and imaginative, we are left with stark polarizations such as intellect versus emotion, reason versus imagination, mind versus matter (24). Through these polarizations, Descartes furthers Aristotle's original claim that women are inferior to men. Lloyd points out that Descartes' method no longer allows both men and women to be rational. The power

relations that Descartes' method creates are dichotomous – that is, they assign sociopolitical power to one object while treating the “other” as a negation of that object. In other words, Cartesian metaphysics solidified a cultural hegemony by which rationality and hegemonic masculinity reigned over all other people and knowledge-seeking projects. This included the social positioning of men over women. Furthermore, men were associated with other favorable hegemonic traits that further naturalized their powered position over all others. Therefore, women became associated with emotionality rather than intellect, and imagination rather than rationality. These polarizations made it possible to further naturalize the subjugation of women and assign tasks of the body to women and tasks of the mind to men. The materiality associated with women's bodies created a recognizably gendered division of labor. The polarizations popularized by Descartes' metaphysics have had lasting effects on our approach to reason and the formations of our social, political, and cultural structures. While Descartes' ideas were eventually criticized and morphed into new ideologies, the way in which he situated objects as dualisms has persisted. These dualisms, or polarizations, have further naturalized male superiority, and continue to affect the way that women and all other “others” are represented socially, politically, and culturally. Additionally, these dichotomies have erased most other epistemological projects, including intimacy. Our current hegemonic intellectual and social practices are rooted in rationalist thought and dismiss nearly all sensuous, emotional, and imaginative experiences from our cultural lexicon.

While Lloyd's essay gives a great historical account of how rationalism created and sustains Euro-male domination through modernity, her essay addresses a universal “woman” common in Western, Eurocentric analysis. That is, Lloyd's analysis does not account for the

complex and interlocking components of identity that produce often different and complicated narratives of what it means to be a woman in the first place. Lloyd's analysis misses the intersectional approach necessary to truly begin deconstructing the dichotomies naturalized through rationalist thought. María Lugones begins to unpack gender in this regard when she theorizes that coloniality of gender.

II. Coloniality of Gender

In her essay "Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," María Lugones offers a framework to analyze heterosexism and its role in fusing gender and race in the functions of colonial power (186). Drawing from Aníbal Quijano's idea of the "coloniality of power," as well as the intersectional analysis of race, gender, and colonization employed by women of color feminists, Lugones conceptualizes the modern/colonial gender system by deconstructing and highlighting the significance of race and colonization in our conceptualizations of gender (189).

Lugones begins her analysis by recounting Quijano's coloniality of power. She empathizes the importance of understanding universal social classification of bodies and people in terms of the idea of race (190). The creation of race is a crucial turning point in discerning relations of superiority and inferiority instituted through domination. Quijano cleverly establishes that race is a fictional category disguised as a naturalized distinction. In doing so, he deconstructs any biologically justified link that situates race relations as superior or inferior. This allows him to deconstruct colonial domination more deeply by exploring the idea of coloniality. Quijano notes that:

coloniality does not just refer to racial classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations. (172)

In other words, coloniality controls all relations of sex, authority, and labor. Coloniality works alongside modernity to assign power and continue Eurocentric domination. Modernity and coloniality provide an intricate understanding of the way in which labor is organized (Lugones 192). Quijano utilizes these two axes of power to account for the way that race and gender intersect. Through these intersections, we are able to undo the categorical dichotomies instilled by Eurocentric rationality and dismantle European domination.

While Quijano's work is influential and begins to decenter the dichotomies that naturalize power relations, Lugones argues that Quijano's analysis of gender equates to an analysis of sex, its resources, and its products. In other words, he did not distinguish between sex (biological attributes) and gender (social conditions) and thus, neglected the gendered/social conditions involved in relations of sex, its resources, and its products. Lugones pushes on this idea by accounting for intersexed bodies, who don't fit neatly into either end of the gender dichotomy imposed by Eurocentric modernity. From here, she asserts that sex assignment, and biology more generally, are social constructs of power established by Eurocentric modernity which further naturalize modes of domination and subordination (194). Lugones conceptualizes gender in the same way that Quijano conceptualizes race, dismantling Eurocentric dichotomies that naturalize power. Furthermore, Lugones argues that gender can only be understood intersectionally – within the framework of other axes of powers and identity. In doing so, she identifies that the knowledge produced within a rationalist framework is inherently gendered and that coloniality

works to further naturalize Eurocentric relations of domination and subordination.

After providing a more expansive definition of gender, she challenges the dichotomous relationship of men/women to articulate that the modern/colonial gender system has a light and dark side. Employing an intersectional analysis, she states the “light side construct gender and gender relations hegemonically, ordering only the lives of white bourgeois men and women and constituting the modern/colonial meaning of men and women” (206). The light side confines white women to the private, domestic sphere and away from collective authority, knowledge formation, and in turn, unable to have any control over the means of production. The dark side “was and is thoroughly violent” (206). Where the light side concerns only white people, the dark side is the reduction of people of color to animality; to objects rather than subjects to be used for labor exploitation in the name of capitalism. Thus, the dark side is not merely a control over sex, its resources, and its products. It understands and examines labor as both racialized and gendered, simultaneously (206). Lugones’ conception of the modern/colonial gender system seeks to “uncover collaboration and to call each other to reject it in various guises as we recommit to communal integrity in a liberatory direction” (207). In other words, Lugones’ coloniality of gender analyzes the way in which gender, heterosexism, and race continue to influence power and oppression. Furthermore, it reveals another key component of Eurocentric, hegemonic order: its capitalistic approach to forming and ordering social relations. In a society driven by capital and power, where might intimacy derive epistemological significance? The following section will explore the role of intimacy within networks of negotiation and exchange

in order to uncover capitalist ties to intimacy. Furthermore, it will begin to build a politics of decolonization that transcends both the public and private spheres.

III. Colonial Intimacy

Alongside Lugones, an array of feminist post-colonial thinkers began to decenter the dichotomous paradigm of colonizer/colonized and instead opted for an intersectional framework that analyzed race, sex, class, and gender together in order to better understand relations of power. In her article “Rethinking Colonial Strategies,” Ann Stoler employs an intersectional analysis that “depicts the heterogeneity of colonial society, the manifold interactions between European settlers and colonial subjects, and the various hybridities that resulted from these interactions” (Stoler 138). Through her analysis, women are placed within a larger script of national-imperial space, a “network of negotiation and exchange” where raced, sexed, and gendered bodies interact with each other, and in, systems of domination (Camiscioli 141). Stoler brought intimacy and intersectionality to the forefront of colonial analysis as a means to complicate dichotomous social relations and better articulate the complex relations of power and oppression that we embody individually and socially.

Colonial intimacy as a tool of analysis has relied on intersectional readings that marked bodies with race, class, gender, and sex to highlight how the categories of “colonizer” and “colonized” are not sufficient in explaining or dismantling hegemonic forms of power. Scholars employing this method of analysis have examined how bodies serve “as sites of regulation, surveillance, and discipline while also being embedded in networks of relationships ordered by social hierarchies” (Camiscioli 141). Using an intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, and

sex, colonial intimacy revealed compelling parallels between the organization and control of social institutions such as government and attempts to organize and control the body, sexuality, and domestic space (141). In other words, colonial intimacy works to articulate a space that transcends the binary of the public and private by highlighting how “affective ties, moral sentiments, sexual relations, and a nation’s demographic calculus were implicated in strategies of imperial rule” (143). The intimate is therefore a permeable space of experience and relationship, as well as a site of intervention. The intimate is a space where we examine agency, desire, and resistance in addition to regulation, anxiety, and prohibition (143). In embracing intimacy as something that transcends the dichotomies naturalized in modernity, we are able to acknowledge that national histories, empire, and individual experience are inextricably linked. Furthermore, intimate spaces, relations, and connections among social institutions, bodies, and history stress the affective qualities of social life while also encouraging a more nuanced account of colonial history (144). Queer theorists, alongside decolonial and post-colonial theorists, examine how intimacy is simultaneously confined to, and transcends, public and private spaces as well as social institutions. Similarly, to Camiscioli’s exploration of colonial intimacy, the following section will examine the way that sex, as an intimate relation, permeates both private and public spaces.

IV. Intimacy in Queer Theory

In the beginning of her book *Intimacy*, Lauren Berlant posits that intimacy:

involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way. Usually, this story is set within zones of familiarity and comfort...Yet the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness. (2)

From the beginning of her book, Berlant argues that intimacy is relational and therefore exists in both the public and private sphere. The “public and private sphere” that Berlant refers to throughout her text comes from Habermas’s conceptualization of the types of spaces in which we operate on a daily basis. The public sphere refers to the cornerstone of democracy – the space where ideas are shared, exchanged, and discussed freely. It is “made up of private people gathered together as a public articulating the needs of society with the state” (Habermas 27). Birthed from the public sphere, the “public authority” dictates the values, ideals, and goals of a given society (28). The idea is that the will of the people will be expressed within it and emerge out of it. Furthermore, the public sphere is obliged to be inclusive of all participants, regardless of social status. The public authority must be focused on the common concerns of the people and act in a way that represents those concerns. In other words, the public sphere is the space where we exercise ideals of modern democracy such as politics, markets, trade, and law. In contrast, the private sphere is the space of family and domesticity, [supposedly] free from the influence of government and social institutions that make up the public authority. In this space, our responsibility is to ourselves and to the others in our household, separate from the market and economy of greater society (29). In a sense, the private sphere operates as a micro-society where we exercise our own authority and values, unhindered from the authority of the public sphere.

While the public and private spheres have been constructed as a dichotomy, they are in fact relational; that is, the actions and ideas in each sphere constantly informs the other. Despite being a relational and unfixed term, the expectations of what both the public and private spheres should be are greatly influenced by the initial creation of the public sphere. Following the

rationalist ideas that came out of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Enlightenment called for a public exchange of political and philosophical ideas. It was common practice for men to enter coffee shops or gather outside their homes to discuss the new political and social ideologies coming out of the academy. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, men were given the authority to engage in intellectual endeavors because they were deemed rational. With the creation of the Western public sphere came the solidification of the division of labor between men and women. Men were to enter the public space to discuss and create the public authority, while women were left to maintain the domestic space. This meant that men had the opportunity to participate in the creation of a market, values, and ideals that would then influence both the public and private sphere. Furthermore, men (consciously or unconsciously) became the public authority, meaning women were left isolated in their respective domestic spaces without a unified voice to influence the public sphere the way the men did. In turn, the private sphere became a reproduction of the goals and values set out by the public sphere, wherein the individual men participating in the public sphere governed their own private spheres (hooks 22).

However, the creation of the Western public sphere and its relation to the private sphere did not necessarily address all of the members of society who did not meet the expectations of Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal order. These members of society remain unaddressed in the present. All of those who do not fit neatly into the categories of white, cis-gendered, or heterosexual are denied access to either the public or private sphere. The cultural molds of reproduction by which “others” are expected to comply are often times not even replicable. Additionally, these “others” are immediately excluded from the public sphere and denied their

ability to influence the values, ideas, and goals of a society in which they must live because their raced, sexed, and gendered bodies are marked are by unwelcomed difference.

In their essay “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner explore this idea in more detail by examining how sex, as a relation of intimacy, is imbedded in the public sphere as well as the private sphere. Of particular importance to their essay is the role that heteronormativity plays in differentiating normative intimate relations from non-normative ones. According to Berlant and Warner, heterosexual culture situates the family (and all those activities and relations produced by the family) as the centerpiece of U.S. society. They assert that normative intimacy *is* heterosexual intimacy. As a result, heterosexuality refers to “relations of intimacy and identification with other persons, where sex acts are supposed to be the most intimate communication of them all” (Berlant and Warner 319). In this way, normative, heteropatriarchal culture makes it appear as though intimacy is done solely within the private sphere, between a man and a woman, since sex is what produces and binds the nuclear home to the capitalist production model of the public sphere. Berlant and Warner argue that intimacy can act as a form of social power when it reproduces and privileges the Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal social model in the private sphere. In other words, when linked to heterosexual sexual relations, intimacy is used to maintain control over individual and collective social meaning.

Berlant and Warner further assert that “heterosexual culture achieves much of its metacultural intelligibility through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy” (317). Intimacy is typically associated with the private sphere - the personal space where one escapes the public, political institutions of power that shape our social relations. However, Berlant and Warner argue that intimacy is in fact extremely public – it is interwoven into the very fabric of social life.

Heterosexual intimacy reinforces heteronormative cultural ideals while forcibly othering all those who do not fit into its paradigm. This is done by embedding heteronormative ideals into the capitalist framework of production. Intimacy becomes a mark of productivity (324). The more “intimate” a heterosexual couple is in their private sphere - the more bodies and ideas they replicate – the more social power they are granted as they reinforce production and progress as core social values. As a result, other forms of intimacies have developed with “no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation” (322). The affect aliens or “others” of society are simultaneously forced to exist in and be outside of normative institutions of intimacy; they are never able to quite occupy an intimate space the way that normative people do. As a result, affect aliens create counterpublics that support forms of “affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense that they are accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity” (326). While heteronormative culture is bound to the privatization of space and intimacy, queer counterpublics bind affect aliens to public and collective spaces. Nonnormative people are left existing simultaneously in public and private spaces – always influenced and informed by their institutions. By separating sexuality, subjectivity, and intimacy, Berlant and Warner cleverly deconstruct the naturalized assumptions of the metacultural intelligibility of heteronormative social, political, and cultural relations.

V. Decolonizing the Queer, Queering the Decolonial

Although decolonial and queer examinations of intimacy both employ an intersectional framework in their analyses, their philosophical commitments emphasize sociopolitical identities and systems of power in distinct ways. More specifically, decolonial intimacy places race/gender

at the forefront of its analysis, examining how race/gender, as an interlocked system of identity, produces affective ties and moral sentiments that are implicated in strategies of *imperial* rule. Queer intimacy is distinct in that it takes sexuality/gender as its primary point of examination and explores how sexuality/gender, as an interlocked system of identity, generates affective ties and moral sentiments that are implicated in strategies of *heteropatriarchal* rule. Both effectively complicate our sociopolitical commitments to heteropatriarchal hegemony and seek to deconstruct the power that it holds over society as a whole. However, their discussions could be enhanced if we further analyzed the lingering effects that imperial rule has had on building and sustaining the Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal social system that hegemonizes the way we live our lives in the present. By thoughtfully investigating the ties of imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and liberation, we can begin to uncover the myriad local narratives that arise out of the distinct, intersectional identities that inform each of our lives. In doing so, we will come to better understand the ways that normative constructions of the public and private spheres affect our lives individually and collectively. Furthermore, we can begin to recognize how intimacy functions in our own lives and how we might utilize intimacy as a source of liberation from heteropatriarchal hegemony.

One way to begin examining the relationship between imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and liberation is to introduce sensation, emotion, and imagination into intellectual thought. Recall from my previous sections that European modernity naturalized reason as the sole form of legitimate intellectual thought. However, a rational analysis of relations has continuously produced (and reproduced) dichotomies that do not address the complex, often messy, attachments we have to those relations, or why we experience those attachments in the first

place. The rigid formation of relations employed in rationalist thought assumes that concepts, objects, and people remain fixed, that they do not change. But we know that concepts, objects, and ideas do change because we observe their changes through time. As concepts, objects, and ideas change, so do the relations that we make to them. Therefore, in order to properly discuss sociopolitical relations, we must understand relations fluidly and grasp their capacity to continuously change through time. Affect theory further develops this line of inquiry.

Affect theory explores the ways in which our minds and bodies are both moved (affected) and move (affect) other objects. It helps us understand how we experience attachment and the kinds of fantasies (social ideals) that mobilize our attachments to each other through institutional affiliation or relation to abstractions (race, class, gender, nation). While affect theory can be found in multiple disciplines, I am interested in the way that Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg articulate affect in the *Affect Theory Reader*. Affect is:

found in the regularly hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work— perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power— that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of “experience” (understood in ways far more collective and “external” rather than individual and interior), where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm. (7)

Utilizing an affective lens, I am interested in examining the way that emotions affect our sociopolitical relations. Furthermore, I want to analyze why social ideals are presented as being threatened by the existence of those who do not or cannot meet the demands of cultural reproduction (Ahmed 144). “Immigrants, queers, and other others” are posed as the biggest threat to heteropatriarchal hegemony because they do, by their very existence, work in

opposition to the systems and ideas that sustain heteropatriarchal power relations (144). In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed examines how our emotions influence our attachment and involvement in sociopolitical power relations. She analyzes how emotions become the characteristics of collectives (social structures), where social structures are created as 'being' through 'feeling'. She emphasizes the role emotions play in our embodiment of social ideals in the public and private spaces of our lives. Furthermore, Ahmed argues emotions are bound to the fortification of social hierarchy (Ahmed 2-4). This configuration of social structures (bodies of people) where some bodies are considered to be better than others, shapes social, political, and cultural ideals about how life should be. The social structure associated with the pinnacle of happiness and success is the heteronormative family because it best aids in the social reproduction of heteropatriarchal hegemony. The reproduction of life itself becomes attached to the reproduction of culture through the securitization of the family (Ahmed 144). Just like Berlant and Warner, Ahmed ties the heteronormative family to the culture and institutions it is embedded in. The nuclear family is in a dialectical relationship with cultural formation, where hegemonic ideals inform the nuclear family and the nuclear family reproduces hegemonic ideals. While analyzing the relationship between the normative family and the reproduction of heteropatriarchal ideals, Ahmed highlights the significance of the public and private spaces in these everyday sociopolitical relations. Tracing the lineage of U.S. heteropatriarchal hegemony, we begin to see how crucial the private sphere and normative family are in maintaining its power. Our emotional involvement in intimate relations is crucial to our understanding of the way that heteropatriarchal hegemony is sustained through the dialectical structure of the private and public spheres.

Ahmed later points out in her essay “Happy Objects”, that the normative family model produces generational feelings that sustain and naturalize a heteropatriarchal social order as the promise of happiness. In order to live a happy life, one must willingly embody heteropatriarchal ideals. Once we buy into this system of domination, we are promised happiness, despite our own lived realities that do not always emulate our larger social commitments. Since immigrants, queers, and other ‘others’ don’t emulate the normative family as a happy object, they become affect aliens: isolated from social attachment and belonging, yet never fully removed from social, political, and cultural structures of power (Ahmed 31). Affect aliens exist simultaneously outside of, and in, the heteropatriarchal social system, despite their lack of belonging. I believe Ahmed’s examination of happiness allows us to further analyze implications of race, class, gender, and sexuality as they interlock and overlap as means of isolation from happiness in a society dominated by heteropatriarchal ideals. Ahmed identifies the multiple relations that contribute to the successful reproduction of heteropatriarchal hegemony. To be happy in a normative sense is to individually and socially uphold Eurocentric cultural ideals with the false promise of gaining power and autonomy in our own lives. In a less optimistic sense, to be happy in a society hegemonized by heteropatriarchy is to partake in the subordination of anyone who doesn’t meet the demands of capitalist production. Though this analysis of happiness is quite bleak, it enables us to examine the ways in which our intersectional identities often produce non-normative feelings and alienation that lead to queer experiences of intimacy. Through this examination, we can better understand how to deconstruct heteropatriarchal hegemony and reconstruct a new social sense of belonging.

While Sara Ahmed's work tackles both decolonial and queer discussions of intimacy in the abstract, we should further evaluate whether or not these theoretical abstractions correlate with the social reality that are we bound to. Pop culture is one of the best places to identify the correlations between theoretical abstractions and social reality because it encompasses the activities and feelings produced as a result of our collective social interactions with hegemonic ideas or objects. Pop and visual culture allows us to grasp how society generally feels about something. It allows us to evaluate whether or not these general social feelings replicate or oppose our theoretical assumptions.

Queer World-Making: Subverting Heteronormativity Through Intimate Fantasy

In recent years, the word "queer" has become quite popular. The popularization of "queer" in US pop culture has led to an expansion of its definition, function, and representation in cinema, music, art, and literature. Particularly in cinema, queerness has been granted the visual space to articulate subversions of heteronormative culture through the creation of alternative endings to the heteronormative production model. Rather than deriving purpose from the reproduction of life and culture, queer art and media invites us to think about a multiplicity of narratives that counter and complicate normative configurations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The queer-world making project is an important one (in film especially) because it gives us the opportunity to visualize an alternative reality while navigating the in betweenness of our own roles and intimate relationships in the public and private sphere. If done correctly, queer film can be monumental in encouraging us to rethink the way in which we occupy time and space in a heteronormative social order.

One show that has been consistent in exploring queer themes is *Black Mirror*. In addition

to being known for its futuristic depictions of technology, *Black Mirror* produces many episodes that analyze identities such as race, class, and gender. “Striking Vipers,” the first episode of the fifth season of *Black Mirror*, examines the relationship between race, sexuality, intimacy, and fantasy. The episode’s opening scene takes place in a bar where we are introduced to Danny and Theo, a young couple in love. The young couple roleplays that they meet for the first time in the bar. Karl, Danny’s best friend and the couple’s roommate, then comes up to them and the fantasy world shifts into the reality. The three dance and enjoy themselves at the nightclub and eventually all go home. Later that night, we see Karl and Danny sitting on the couch playing *Striking Vipers* – a fantasy-themed fighting game based on the real-life game, *Mortal Combat*. The show then jumps forward 11 years. Danny and Theo are married, settled, and living a suburban life. Karl on the other hand, is living the single life in the city. Their storylines converge when Karl comes to Danny’s very suburban 38th birthday party. At the party, he gives Danny the newest version of the *Striking Vipers* game. That night, they enter the simulated virtual reality game with the intention of brawling it out like they used to. Instead, they found themselves in a make out session. They exited the game and chalked up the sexual outburst to a drunken mistake (they conveniently said they were drunk from the party that happened roughly eight hours earlier). Shortly after, they enter the game again, unquestionably sober, and begin to have passionate sex. It is from here their digital affair begins and queer potential arises.

Danny and Karl, two presumably straight, U.S. black men, are left to sort out questions of sexuality, gender, intimacy, and world-making as their virtual fantasy leaks into the real world of heteropatriarchal hegemony. In this section, I will analyze the significance of a fantasy space that

exists outside of heteronormative space and time. Specifically, I will argue that the world-making that Danny and Karl participate in hinges on intimacy, where gameplay exists in a fantasy space. This fantasy space becomes the mode through which they can express themselves because it is removed from the normative construction of heteropatriarchal social order and does not require that they partake in its reproduction. The game *Striking Vipers* does not require these black men to carry their imposed oppression through their bodies in the game and therefore acts as a space where both Karl and Danny are free to explore queer fantasy. I will examine Karl and Danny's world-making in *Striking Vipers* as a means to better understand the construction of black masculinity, black queer identities, and intimacy in the United States today.

I. Heteronormativity in the US

We can begin to analyze Danny and Karl's heteropatriarchal social positions with bell hooks' definition of patriarchy. For hooks, patriarchy is:

a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks 18)

hooks asserts that patriarchy effects every member of society negatively. While women are typically considered the only victims of a system that favors men, hooks reminds us that most men don't benefit from this system either. Black men in the US have especially suffered the effects of toxic masculinity and its racist ties to heteropatriarchal domination. Beyond her general definition of patriarchy, hooks also unpacks psychological patriarchy which situates "masculine" and "feminine" in opposition to each other, where only men can be masculine and only women can be feminine. This polarization leaves people to express only certain parts of

themselves while suppressing large amounts as well. Furthermore, the power relations associated with masculine and feminine behavior creates a perverse version of intimacy, embedded in layers of dominance and submission, complicity and manipulation (33). Of specific importance to my analysis is the way patriarchy teaches boys and men to be unemotional. To be masculine means to be rid of emotions because emotions equate to weakness. Men are taught to suppress their emotions rather than discuss them and expose their vulnerabilities. The pressure to be strong overpowers the importance for men to be human. Patriarchy as a system instills loneliness in men.

However, as hooks further points out, most men don't think about patriarchy – “what it means, how it is created and sustained” (hooks 28). And yet, this system of power is the very thing that shapes our experience of the world. Patriarchy, as hooks describes here, is rooted in hegemonic power relations that are inextricably linked to violence. Among the most common forms of these violent power relations are heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification. With each relation comes a set of expectations for the way that we are meant to fit into the heteronormative paradigm. More precisely, each relation comes with the expectation that we will contribute to reproduction and progress. Inheriting a history of modern thought, heteronormative cultural intelligibility relies on our constant contribution to the reproduction of heteronormative culture and ideas. In her essay “Queer Feelings,” Sara Ahmed describes these phenomena as the “reproduction of life” and the “reproduction of culture” (Ahmed 423). The reproduction of life is the process by which we reproduce the social ideas that guide our public and private lives. The reproduction of life is threatened by any person or idea that challenges heteronormative social ideals. In order to secure its continuity, the reproduction of life becomes bound up with the

reproduction of culture through the nuclear family unit. That is, the nuclear family becomes both the material and immaterial site by which heterosexuality is continuously reproduced. Along with the birthing of new life in the private sphere, the familial unit is bound to the public sphere by re-birthing ideas about the ways of living that are already embedded in the structure of heteronormative culture. The simultaneous reproduction of life and culture that Ahmed discusses highlights the interconnected relationship between the private sphere (as it relates to the nuclear family) and public sphere (as it relates to society) (423). Within both spheres, gender roles determine our mode of production to continue to birth heteronormativity.

Danny and Karl both show the lack of emotionality that they are expected to perform in a heteronormative framework. Towards the beginning of the episode, Danny's 38th birthday party scene serves as an example of the private sphere that heteronormative society mandates that we recreate. The scene is set at Danny and Theo's suburban home and serves as the material site of reproduction. While the party seemed fairly pleasant, it was apparent that Danny was emotionally removed from the scene. He stared blankly at a grill, isolated, while the moms and children played in the backyard. One woman attempted to introduce her husband to Danny in hopes that the men would become friends. It resulted in an awkward exchange, where the husband eventually left Danny at the grill (alone again).

II. Erotohistoriography and Black Masculinity

However, Danny's recreation of the private sphere is challenged for the first time when his college friend Karl arrives to his party. While the two are clearly happy to see each other, they do not immediately express that happiness outwardly. The closed off, heteropatriarchal

society that they live in contrasts from the fantasy world they create in the game *Striking Vipers*. Here, Danny and Karl can exist beyond the constrictions of a binary and rigid world - i.e. they are not confined by the expectations of heteronormative masculinity. Because the men are de-burdened from the reproduction of life and culture in the game, the men are more open to explore intimacy and sexual desire in non-normative ways. Another important link to make to hook's argument is that patriarchy is bound to violence. In this way, a fantasy-fighting game seems like the perfect place to reimagine intimacy between two men who are conditioned to embody rage in place of all other emotions. *Striking Vipers* invites viewers to imagine the line between violence and erotic desire as well. The first time Danny and Karl make out is after fighting, after exerting their bodies onto each other. They are simultaneously experiencing this non-normative construction of intimacy outside the confines of heteronormative space and time while also experiencing pleasure that is un-linked from production. Elizabeth Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography will touch on this further.

Elizabeth Freeman's book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* explains the relationship between bodies and time. Freeman asserts that there is a normative timeline that has been deemed the official timeline of humanity. This "official" timeline is the heteronormative one that I have mentioned throughout my paper. The official timeline that we are meant to reproduce leaves out the conflicting and violent histories that exist outside of normative space and time. She calls for an erotohistoriography - a counter history of history itself - as a means to see these alternative timelines manifest. Erotohistoriography doesn't seek to simply add the "other" into the normative historical timeline, but rather to understand the present as bound to social realities and experiences of the past, present, and future (Freeman 95). This

includes erotic and intimate bodily responses to pain, pleasure, past, and future. The body then, is a method by which we access a historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations. In other words, Freeman's method seeks to understand non-normative bodies through their erotic and intimate experiences, especially as they counter the narrative of heteronormative reproduction.

Towards the end of her book, Freeman addresses how racism further affects queer people of color's participation in a collective queer experience of public and private erotic pleasure. Freeman's erotohistoriography in conjunction with Frantz Fanon's piece *Black Skin, White Masks* helps to depict the social and political structures that are imposed on black bodies and how those structures bind black bodies to oppression in the past, present, and future. In his text, Fanon asserts that social and political values are ingrained into consciousness, establishing an inherent disconnect between the black man's consciousness and his body. In this way, the black man is essentially alienated from himself. Furthermore, "black" is a relational term and understood only in relation to "white" - only ever the negation of white. Because of this, black bodies within the normative historical timeline exist as a negation of heteropatriarchal structure; black bodies are used to situate whiteness as "naturally" superior. Since black bodies are situated in opposition to whiteness, they are also seen as the ultimate threat to white superiority. Furthermore, Fanon states that black bodies are "responsible not only for [their bodies] but also for [their] race and [their] ancestors" (92). Using Fanon and Freeman's analysis, we can assert that black bodies are bound to the subjugation of a white subject and that histories of oppression are linked to their ancestors as well as the colonial construction of race. The past events as well

as prevailing structures of power, keep black people slaves not to the “idea” others have of them, but to their epidermic body (Fanon 95).

III. Black Queer Fantasy

This idea of appearance is of importance when thinking about non-normative identities and representation because some non-normative identities are more highly visible than others. For example, queerness may be visibly ambiguous or invisible, while blackness is quite quickly recognizable. While multiple layers of oppression may be at work to burden certain bodies more than others, what can be done to liberate these bodies? Specifically, what does black queerness look like and how can it escape a seemingly inevitable fate of trauma and melancholia? Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman cites queerness as a starting point to unpack the oppressional package of race and sexuality. Abdur-Rahman asserts that “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Abdur-Rahman 344). Her conceptualization of queerness lends itself nicely to Danny and Karl’s relationship in “Striking Vipers” where a queer world-making project allows Danny and Karl to express intimacy and emotion in ways that the heteronormative world would never permit. Danny, bored and otherwise unfilled by the reproduction of heteronormativity, turns to a fantasy world of gaming in order to construct an alternate reality where he is unbound from his appearance, and therefore the subjugation of black bodies. Similarly, Karl, longing for intimate and emotional connection that he is not receiving in the real world, turns to a world of fantasy as a means to unbind blackness from whiteness. Both men reject, at least temporarily, the present of the heteropatriarchal world and indulge in a fantasy of queer intimacy and a rejection of

heteronormative production. Danny and Karl are embodying what Abdur-Rahman calls the black ecstatic. As she points out in her essay,

By turning us outward, ecstasy compels our gestures and pleasures beyond the containments of self and surface...Ecstasy thus emerges as an alternate structure for the black queer beyond, one rooted not in the temporal logics of futurity but in the affective, embodied, and relational pleasures of the disastrous now. (350)

In other words, the black ecstatic emphasizes gestures and pleasures that are bound to our physical bodies but go beyond them. Furthermore, the black ecstatic requires one to exist freely in the catastrophic now rather than in the hope or optimism of future liberation. The black ecstatic embraces the “interrelation of political terror, social abjection, and aesthetic abstraction in contemporary black queer cultural production” (343). Employing the black ecstatic avoids both the valor of black histories as well as the promise of liberated black futures in order to present new relational and representational modes in the continuous calamity that black life in modernity is comprised of (345). Moreover, Abdur-Rahman asserts that the black ecstatic is linked to privacy and “being a mystery” (352). Danny and Karl embody the black ecstatic through the world-making process they create in “Striking Vipers.” While they cannot entirely escape the heteropatriarchal reign of modernity, Danny and Karl are capable of suspending the power it holds over them by delving into a private exploration of queer fluidity. While both men appeared to be straight in the real world, they were able to experience intense homosocial and homosexual desire when social and political pressure was removed from their world. At the same time, they did live in the disastrous present that Abdur-Rahman refers to because of the way their fantasy world leaked into their social and political realities. After experiencing homosocial and homosexual bonding with Karl in the world of Striking Vipers, Danny began losing intimate interest in Theo, his wife of over ten years; his conformity to the heteropatriarchal order began to

shift. Additionally, Karl was no longer able to perform sexually with women in the real world. Both Danny and Karl's lives were affected by the queer desire they indulged in within their fantasy world. Perhaps, their lives were also affected by the suspension of the subjugation that heteronormative culture has ingrained into the black body.

Abdur-Rahman's idea of "being a mystery" is also relevant to Danny and Karl's relationship because of the way in which Danny and Karl choose to not identify throughout the show. Throughout their time playing *Striking Vipers*, Danny always uses the character Lance, a buff average fighter. Karl on the other hand, always uses Roxette, a highly feminine fighter. The real-life identities of Karl and Danny, plus the identities they choose to embody while maintaining a sexual and intimate relationship online, complicate race, gender, and sexual relations throughout the episode. Lance (Danny) while in the fantasy world, tells Roxette (Karl) that they aren't gay because when they have sex, they are a man and a woman. However, this seems to be a sign of Danny's internalized homophobia because he later makes Karl meet him in real-life. At their meet up, Karl and Danny decide they must kiss to see if they are gay. Danny insists that he just needs to know. In other words, Karl and Danny attempt to bind queer experience to the heteronormative model of reproduction. The two kiss and say that they feel nothing. Seconds later they are on the ground wrestling in the rain.

As viewers, should we take this scene at face value? How should we attempt to rectify queer desire and heteronormative cultural reproduction? If we take this as Danny and Karl unwilling to admit their feelings for each other because of the patriarchal script imposed on them, how might the aggressive fight afterwards speak to a stitching of their fantasy and real worlds? The scene ends with cops showing up and arresting both Karl and Danny, reminding

viewers that part of the normative production model is to police any existence that threatens its reproduction of the cultural ideals that have built and sustained white supremacy in the US.

Danny and Karl's mere existence as black men was enough for cops to use violence to police black, queer experience. If the police wouldn't have shown up, I argue that Danny and Karl would have transferred their virtual reality into a real-life fantasy of homoerotic desire; they would have affectively stitched their worlds. However, the police sirens that end the scene remind viewers that black men are not given the space to explore desire, especially homoerotic desire. They do not have the privilege of private intimacy in heteropatriarchal spaces.

IV. Does Fantasy Matter?

However, not all hope is lost. The final scene of the episode shows Theo giving Danny the *Striking Vipers* game and virtual reality plug-in that started all of this. Danny logs on at midnight to see Karl (as Lance and Roxette) and Theo goes out on the town. From the calendar displayed in the background of Karl's apartment, it appears that once a month, Danny and Karl are allowed to access their fantasy world and so is Theo – the final scene is Theo at a bar, talking with a new man. The way the show ends reminds me of Sara Ahmed's essay "Queer Feelings" because of the discomfort each of these queer characters face. Karl is uncomfortable, possibly for a few reasons. Viewers are left wondering why he chose to be a woman in his fantasy world. Is this an exploration of gender, or perhaps just an embodiment of both masculine and feminine energy? Additionally, he pursues Danny in both their fantasy world and in the real world. Karl sits uncomfortably in the normative gender expression he is supposed to identify with as well as with normative sexual desire. Danny finds discomfort in the mold of heteronormative domesticity. As a man, he is supposed to be the breadwinner, strong, and unemotional. He sits

very uncomfortably between the normative standard he is supposed to embody and the desire for intimacy and closeness that he feels internally. Theo finds discomfort in being the dutiful, selfless wife. Like Danny, she also doesn't feel fulfilled by her role in the reproduction of heteronormative culture. Throughout the episode, Theo wants to be seen sexually and explore a fantasy world of her own; she seeks erotic desire. While she never overtly steps out of the normative wife role until after she came to an agreement with Danny, we were able to see her dissatisfaction with the heteronormative private sphere that she was engulfed in. However, unlike Danny and Karl, Theo felt a sense of obligation to the normative private sphere which kept her from accessing black queer fantasy in the same way as Danny and Karl.

This triangle of Danny, Karl, and Theo's relations results in a perfect depiction of queer feelings. As Ahmed states in her essay, "queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us" (Ahmed 430). By the end of the episode, the characters did not come to overtly object to heteronormative culture. No large social systems had been rocked and there was no real call to dismantle or overthrow heteronormative coupling or the nuclear home. The public and private spheres remained intact and so did the characters' outward expression towards normative coupling. However, what did change was the way in which each of the characters inhabited their heteronormative roles. Danny and Theo remained married and maintained the reproduction of life and culture in the nuclear home. Karl still lived as a bachelor in the city, contributing to capitalist production model in the public sphere. The characters were each able to inhabit their normative script differently because of their fantasy world-making projects. Danny was able to meet with Karl and the two were able to experience

queer homosocial and homoerotic desire that would normally not be granted to them in a normative heteropatriarchal social structure. Theo was able to live out her roleplay fantasy mentioned in the very first scene of the movie; she was able to go to a bar and be desired. She was able to be *seen*. While not much changed structurally, the individual lives and relationships between each of these characters got a whole lot queerer. As Ahmed would say: they are able to sink differently into the normative roles they are placed in and navigate the in betweenness of queer existence. Overall, “Striking Vipers” vibrantly produces black queer potentiality while tackling toxic masculinity and heteronormativity. The ending leaves us with hope of future queer world-making. This section of my paper has explored the ways in which queerness, identity, and fantasy open us up to non-normative experiences of intimacy. Furthermore, “Striking Vipers” has countered and complicated heteronormative constructions of race, class, gender, and sexuality by reimagining the way we occupy the heteronormative roles placed on us by society.

Concluding Thoughts

Intimacy is composed of the attachments that we make to objects throughout our lives. It is a framework through which we can come to understand the affects that govern the attachments and relations we make and how we assign meaning to them. Additionally, it allows us to bind together unfixed spatial and social relations that stretch across time and space. We are able to do this by:

- (1). Recognizing that intimacy is a set of spatial relations.
- (2). Examining how intimacy explores the interconnectedness of personal and global relations.
- (3). Acknowledging that intimacy sustains a set of practices that apply to, and connect the body with, things outside of it (Pain and Staeheli 345).

By understanding intimacy as a fluid relation that allows us to explore the unfixed-ness of emotions and institutions, we are able to access its liberatory potential.

Intimacy has not been normatively welcomed in academia as a legitimate epistemology or knowledge-seeking practice. This is largely due to the naturalization of Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal hegemony, which subscribes strictly to rationalist epistemological projects and distinguishes itself as superior to all other ways of knowing. Our current hegemonic intellectual and social practices are rooted in heteropatriarchal hegemony and dismiss nearly all sensuous, emotional, and imaginative experiences from our sociocultural lexicon. Intimacy is a subversion of normative, world-making projects because it invites us to imagine a world beyond the cultural mold of reproduction.

Some forms of knowledge that come from sensuous, emotional, and imaginative experiences include decolonial and queer deconstructions of heteropatriarchal hegemony. Decolonial thought forces us to acknowledge how the world has been affected by colonialism and imperialism. Rooted in the history of colonization in Latin America, decolonial narratives have emphasized that the social construction of race and gender have continuously impacted the way that society naturalizes social inequality and specifically, white supremacy in the U.S. Queer thought investigates the discomfort and social isolation that many feel because they don't fit into the heteropatriarchal order of the here and now. Additionally, both decolonial and queer sites of knowledge critique heteropatriarchy's capitalistic approach to forming and ordering social relations. In other words, both argue for a society that unstitches capitalism and happiness. Combining these two schools of thought allows us to fruitfully analyze the lingering effects that imperial rule has had on building and sustaining the Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal social system

that hegemonizes the way that we live our lives in the present. By thoughtfully investigating the ties of imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and liberation, we can uncover the myriad local narratives that arise out of the distinct, intersectional identities that inform each of our lives. Furthermore, by identifying sensuous, emotional, and imaginative experiences as sites of knowledge, we can see the significance of utilizing intimacy as a source of liberation from heteropatriarchal hegemony.

Intimacy can truly become a liberatory experience once we identify our bodies as sites of negotiation and exchange, where our perceptible and imperceptible identities affect our attachments to, and existence in, heteropatriarchal hegemony. Combining decolonial thought and queer theory's erotohistoriography, I propose decolonial erotohistoriography as a liberatory practice by which we see the interconnectedness of individual stories of resistance and altering global affairs through deeply embodied pleasures that counter the logic of development. Our ability to deeply embody these pleasures for the sake of pleasure instead of production is the defining feature that will make intimacy a source of liberation from heteropatriarchal hegemony. Additionally, the liberation that comes from decolonial erotohistoriography starts in our denunciation of cultural reproduction in the private sphere. The private sphere is the space where we are given the opportunity to engage in individual world-making projects without the immediate policing inherent in the public sphere. The decolonial analysis of "body" stresses location while the queer analysis stresses corporeality. By focusing on the sociopolitical location of the corporeal body, we can create a pathway by which non-normative people can decolonize hegemonic relations of power through the recognition of their own narratives, citing the body as an epistemology of its own, with the liberatory potential to defy both public and private spheres

of hegemony. Carolette Norwood states that “the process of liberation entails falling in love with a self I did not know, a self that was prohibited, a self that was shunned for no apparent reason, a self that was (and is) beautiful!” (Runyan 7). It’s an acknowledgement and acceptance of queer feelings. Once we acknowledge that the social ideals that we attempt to reproduce are ones that can never truly be embodied, we can begin to unstitch pleasure from production. In doing so, we can begin to focus on desire and pleasure for our own sake and for the sake of sharing in closeness and intimacy with other people. This acceptance of alternative forms of intimacy will allow us to reshape, over time, the values of the public authority and hopefully erase that authority altogether. By unlinking pleasure and production, we can challenge the heteropatriarchal model of progress and define pleasure and intimacy as happy objects rather than shameful ones. Finally, decolonial erotohistoriography will allow us access to a third sphere of society, fantasy. Introducing fantasy into our way of understanding social relations further expands our intellectual practice in the academy as well. By involving sensuous, emotional, and imaginative experiences into epistemological practices, we can begin to utilize intimacy as a fruitful intellectual framework.

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VITA

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