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# On “Baring One’s Breasts”: Representations of and Interactions with Non-Monogamy in Pop Culture

*Liz Borden*

## **Abstract**

While representations of non-monogamy have grown in the last decade, non-monogamous lives and experiences remain extremely underrepresented in popular culture, political discourse, and academic research. Additionally, present representation is characterized by systems of privilege that are constructed by heteronormativity (and to a related extent, homonormativity and polynormativity), settler colonialism, and racism. Through an autoethnographic narrative and a critical reading of *Wanderlust*, *Newness*, and *Black Mirror* “Striking Vipers,” I address some of these gaps by considering various overlapping structures of hetero-/mono-/polynormativity, race and racialization, LGBTQI2S+ in/visibility, and the machinations of neoliberal capitalism and colonial sexuality embedded in the stories we tell (and are told) about non-monogamies in Western popular culture.

**Keywords:** Non-monogamy, Popular Culture, Heteronormativity, Autoethnography, Queer Theory

Popular culture is arguably one of the most powerful vehicles of public knowledge, humour, fashion trends, celebrity, and consumer demand; it is a powerful generator of our collective memories, a seductive and shocking mirror of society, and virulent incubator of social trends. As one of the main sites of public discussion of sexualities, and a central source of how people imagine themselves and others as sexual beings, popular culture is a valuable tool for how people build their sexual identities and practices. In the last decade, mainstream popular culture appears to have developed an appetite for topics relating to non-monogamy, and more specifically, polyamory in very particular ways. Non-monogamy is an umbrella term used for the social practice or philosophy of consensual and ethical non-dyadic intimate relationships which do not strictly adhere to the standards of monogamy, particularly that of having only one person with whom to exchange sex, love, and affection. More specifically, non-monogamy indicates intentionally undertaken forms of relating, in which demands for exclusivity (of sexual interaction or emotional connection, for example) are attenuated or eliminated and individuals may form multiple and simultaneous sexual, romantic, intimate, and/or domestic bonds.<sup>1</sup> In Western culture, ideas about what constitutes a normal relationship have been expanding for decades: queer families have become more visible; people are more likely to live together before

marriage; and the age when people first get married has risen considerably. Younger people are approaching marriage and relationship structures as self-determined, flexible, and negotiable. As part of this shift, non-monogamy appears to have entered public discourse as something most people can casually discuss over breakfast and polyamory trend pieces seem to be everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

In response to representations and my own interactions with non-monogamy in Western popular culture, I offer anecdotal and personal experience beginning with an autoethnographic account, entitled “Baring One’s Breasts,” which connects to broader cultural, political, and social understandings in the public discourse of non-monogamy and popular culture. “Baring One’s Breasts” is an unapologetic spoken-word poem—a universalizing rather than a minoritizing move, as Eve Sedgwick would call it<sup>3</sup>—with the aim of not just thinking unsayable things but speaking them and refusing the demands of normativity on those who relate, and create kinship, in a myriad of other ways, by writing myself into the narrative.<sup>4</sup> By telling my story and reflecting on my own lived experience in relation to the representation of non-monogamies in popular culture, I make my invisible, visible—by talking to myself and others—which “open[s] up possibilities for questioning identities, make[s] the unfamiliar familiar, and bring[s] the peripheral, the taboo, the visceral, the private to the center of academic conversations”<sup>5</sup> to ask: What are the ideological labours that representations about non-monogamies and polyamory in popular culture doing? Whose identities are represented? Whose are not? How do these representations maintain, legitimize, and/or challenge hetero-/ mono-/polynormativity? How do these representations maintain and legitimize social privileges and inequalities along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality? What constitutes living a happy life? Pursuing answers to these questions contributes to the interrogation of normative ideologies and hegemonic paradigms; furthers social justice aims within queer and feminist discourses, practices, and publics; as well as makes space to reflect on the potential impact of these institutions and organizations (and those they serve).

### **Baring One’s Breasts**

I am wild woman.

I am grand/mother. I am teacher and mentor.

I am devout student and captivating lover.

I am epiphany, aesthetic moment, and intuition.<sup>6</sup>

I am recklessly beautiful, intentionally provocative, and confrontational.

I re/claim and take up space. I am loud.

I show up in the world refusing to lie down.

I speak inconvenient truths; “Love’s Not Colour Blind.”<sup>7</sup>

I am relationship anarchist<sup>8</sup> in the age of Professor Marston and the Wonder Women,  
Savages, The Magicians, and Unicornland.

I am polyamorous in a culture of #MeToo, enthusiastic consent and body positivity,  
shame and trauma awareness, and 2SLGBTQIA+ parenting.

I am sex positive in a world of infinite love.

I am feminist killjoy<sup>9</sup> and un/happy queer.<sup>10</sup>

I am threat to polite politics, settler-colonial sexuality, and pedestrian fantasies.<sup>11</sup>

I spit out status quo bullshit when it becomes too sour.

I am love’s tender rampage: “The Hella Problematic Slut.”<sup>12</sup>

I loathe to ride relationship escalators built by the fruits of colonial imperialism  
and reeking of Indigenous dispossession.<sup>13</sup>

I sew dangerous coats, made of pockets and sedition.<sup>14</sup>

I refuse to cultivate fragile masculinity.

I am not more radical than thou. There are no free passes here.

None of this will be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity,  
transcendence, or self-indulgent re/telling.<sup>15</sup>

None of this will be un/comfortable. None of this will be un/familiar.

I am hurting and healing, articulate and uncertain.<sup>16</sup>

I am unresolved conversations and interrupted arguments; strange dialogue.<sup>17</sup>

Here, I disrupt taboos, break silences, and reclaim lost and disregarded voices.<sup>18</sup>

Here, I ask the unanswerable, seek indeterminacy, and consider my own unforeseen.<sup>19</sup>

Here, omissions and failures, disappointments, tensions, and exclusions  
are transformed into stories—of resistance, reproduction, and oblivion<sup>20</sup>—  
to help clear the way for a  
full-throated feminist futurity.

r**EVOL**ution!

While depictions of non-monogamous relationships in popular culture have increased over the last decade, the stigma about being non-monogamous is far from gone. Many non-monogamous lives and experiences remain extremely underrepresented in all aspects of social life.<sup>21</sup> Myriad movies, TV shows, and news stories hinge on the idea that the ideal relationship is one where two people are loving, mutually exclusive partners. In *Polyamory, Monogamy, and American Dreams: The Stories We Tell about Poly Lives and the Cultural Production of Inequality*, Mimi Schippers states, “The stories told about intimacy, kinship, and family in ... popular culture and other media are, with few and isolated exceptions, decidedly mononormative in that they consistently portray monogamous coupling as the very definition of happily-ever-after and non-monogamy including polyamory, as titillating but also difficult and dangerous.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, contemporary representations of non-monogamy, and in particular polyamory, can further reinforce and (re)constitute various sites of privilege leaving unaddressed the intersections between gender, sexuality, race, ability, and class. This trend allows monogamy to remain the unchallenged model for healthy and normal adult relationships—even in stories about non-monogamy. And so, I—as a queer, feminist, polyamorous scholar—remain highly cautious of efforts to normalize non-monogamies into mainstream popular culture, particularly when the forms of non-monogamy that are getting the most airtime is one that is the least threatening to dominant social norms.

Broader discussions about non-monogamy and polyamory have emerged across a range of scholarly disciplines and within various advocacy circles addressing a variety of topics ranging from anarchist politics and polyamorous identity,<sup>23</sup> communication in polyamorous communities,<sup>24</sup> BDSM in polyamorous communities,<sup>25</sup> diversity within polyamorous communities,<sup>26</sup> safe-sex practices,<sup>27</sup> infidelity as polyamorous practice,<sup>28</sup> sexual hierarchy,<sup>29</sup> theology and sexuality,<sup>30</sup> and theoretical contestations of monogamy.<sup>31</sup> While these contributions frequently offer conceptual tools to explore the intersections between non-monogamy and race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age, they often do not “provide a framework for understanding the ways intersecting identities are conflictual or harmonious between and within groups, in addition to emphasizing the need for the analysis of power dynamics.”<sup>32</sup> In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to provide language for how Black women are oppressed by race and gender.<sup>33</sup> As Crenshaw indicates, “Intersectionality has roots in feminism, with its most complex interactions with institutions and social practices first articulated by minority racial and ethnic or multicultural feminists.”<sup>34</sup> In contemporary feminist theory, intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct multiple identities and social locations in hierarchies of power, privilege, and social inequalities. The concept of intersectionality is not an abstract notion, but a description of the way multiple oppressions and privilege are experienced. Intersectionality is the systematic analysis of the ways multiple social identities interact in different contexts over time. The term references the “critical insight that

race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena.”<sup>35</sup>

Normalization, particularly within popular culture, resides in the way that we speak, the ideas that get refined, reworked, and is encoded in ordinary words until they seem harmless enough. It is the ability to fit things into an accepted narrative, and like any normative model, works in concert with a range of other normative models to create a full—if rarely explicit—picture about who counts and who does not, and about what is real and what is not worth considering. Normalization is the process through which configurations of sexuality, race, gender, nation, class, and ethnicity are reframed to fit into heteronormative ideologies. This reframing is used primarily to justify and rationalize broader race, gender, and sexual regimes of domination and oppressive perspectives which slam against the intersection of a multitude of marginalized identities and queer possibilities.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of representation has underpinned a large bulk of academic work about diversity as represented in popular culture and across the fields of media studies, media sociology, and gender and sexuality studies.<sup>37</sup> Observing contemporary representations of non-monogamy in media, Niko Antalfy states, “The media sustains a deep interest in polyamory and there is a definite segmentation in the representation of this phenomenon, ranging from acceptance, to ambiguity, to outright hostility. The last two betray underlying tensions about multi-partner alternatives to the cultural conformity of monogamy.”<sup>38</sup> Commenting on the lack of diversity in the representation of non-monogamy in popular culture, Andrea Zanin writes:

Add the mainstream media’s desire to show images of poly people who are cute, young and white and we are getting a very narrow picture indeed ... It’s a crying shame, because the stories of poly people who are in their sixties and seventies would be amazing to hear. And no, not all poly people are white, but when white is the only image people see of poly, it sure does create a barrier discouraging people of colour from understanding themselves as potentially poly ... in addition to questions of race and age and orientation ... and of gender ... it holds hands with other problematic ideas. Ideas of what family is or should be, and of how kids can or should work into the equation; questions of illness/health and ability/disability, including STI status; questions of class and economic position; and a range of others.<sup>39</sup>

For instance, in the television series *Wanderlust* (2018),<sup>40</sup> I am confronted with white privilege and Western notions of coupledness—where everything can look as close to monogamy as possible and where a third (or fourth) relationship is not about being its own autonomous relationship but exists only to serve the primary couple—where couple privilege is, at its core, considered normal. This normalization of couple privilege is presented as socially sanctioned

pair-bond relationships involving only two people and thus inherently more important, real, and valid, than other types of domestic, intimate, romantic, or sexual relationships.

The series gets off to a very risqué start, with the pilot episode featuring a masturbation scene, sex scene, and the first ever female orgasm shown on the BBC. Episode 2 saw a sex scene in a bathroom, Episode 3 was a steamy romp in Joy and Alan's car which is followed by, in Episode 4, Joy masturbating while Alan, her husband, watches. In the fifth episode of *Wanderlust*, Joy, who is embarking into an ever increasing chaotic "open marriage," is counselled by her therapist, Angela. She takes Joy through every emotional trauma and sexual experience, seemingly, that she has ever had—relationship fumbblings, fucking strangers in her office, failed orgasms, dead pets, her (emotionally absent) father, funerals, and the suicide of a client—to get at the underlying reason why Joy is orientated towards (former and new) intimate partners. Her therapist believes her toxic relationships with men may have contributed to her decision to open her marriage.

In a dizzying array of sub-plots that follow Joy's therapy session, Alan falls in love and moves in with Claire (following the inevitable consequence of the open relationship agreement trope). There is a classic confrontation between wronged older wife and challenged younger girlfriend (Alan is positioned as normal and even objective and is therefore unquestionable and desirable to both women). After experiencing the cold fury of Joy, Claire seems guilty about taking another woman's husband and reconsiders her choices and as the exotic Black 'other,' she gets eliminated to re-establish the rule of white mononormativity. Alan moves out of Claire's love nest and decides he would rather live in his nice comfortable Victorian detached home, thereby re-establishing his social capital, Joy makes a move on her ex-lover, Lawrence, but is rebuffed and he gets to keep his current wife. Claire then starts dating one of Joy's rejected lovers, presumably making Claire no longer sexually available to Alan. Alan moves back in with Joy and the reunited couple ends the series where they began: standing at the foot of their bed, about to have sex, and (at the risk of sounding facetious) everything is neatly tidied up—as if by magic and free of all consequence—all by the power of heteronormative monogamous marital bliss.

On the surface, I read *Wanderlust* as having an appeal to fantasy. There are a lot of steamy sex scenes involving a pair of attractive people rediscovering the excitement of intimacy with someone new. There is double-dating action with Joy, Alan, and their respective partners, which is, for me, sheer bliss (it just sets my kitchen-table poly-heart aflutter). It also makes an admirable effort to subvert gender stereotypes, although not between the main characters, but rather in a subplot involving Naomi, Joy and Alan's older daughter, who can be read as non-heteronormative. However, the last two episodes of *Wanderlust* resonate the strongest with me, and I feel they accomplish two things. Firstly, they exemplify what many non-monogamous individuals may experience when accessing and navigating the mental health care system and conventional counselling therapies that are both colonial and imperialist systems embedded in

dominant values and cultural norms “where heterosexual monogamy has been historically promoted as the most widely accepted and advocated ethical/moral relationship option available.”<sup>41</sup> Secondly, I feel the episodes are representative of all too familiar narrative tropes that implicitly and explicitly suggest that once you ‘fix’ what is wrong with you, you will abandon your disruptive, deviant, and immoral behaviours, and return to living a good life and your “happy” ending.

In “The Monogamous Couple, Gender Hegemony, and Polyamory,” Mimi Schippers highlights dichotomous understandings between “normal” and “unconventional” relationships in popular culture. These narratives reinforce the notion that non-monogamies are only temporary before one abandons these kinds of interactions for more permanent and serious relationships. She states:

the discursive construction of the monogamous couple supports, legitimizes, and naturalizes white, middle class, and Western constructions of gender and intimacy as superior to those of non-Western, non-white populations...in order to secure race, ethnic, or national superiority and to legitimize colonial, imperialist, and racist policy...if we look closely at Western or white supremacist discursive constructions of the ethno-sexual abject other, they often rely upon the monogamous couple [or the closest thing to it] as normal, moral, and natural in order to cast imagined or real sexual practices as deviant or immoral.<sup>42</sup>

For example, *Newness* is a 2017 American romantic drama film directed by Drake Doremus.<sup>43</sup> The film taps into a topic historically thought of as a taboo in mainstream popular culture: exploring other relationships or openly having other partners. *Newness* is fun in the beginning, as are most relationships. The story follows Gabi and Martin—two millennials navigating a social media-driven world, and the strains couples face in relationships—who meet on WINX (a Tinder-like dating site) and begin a relationship quickly after. The couple becomes engrossed in each other until the first time, after a double date, that Martin says “I’m so tired” when Gabi wants to make out—and both roll over to opposite sides of the bed, each illuminated by a glowing phone. Suddenly, the allure of infinitely available casual sex reasserts itself into their lives and honesty begins to disintegrate into lies (of omission). After Gabi and Martin disclose to each other that each of them has had an affair, they attend a couples therapy session in which they are told the solution to their problem is radical honesty and transparency. From that tiny gem of guidance, Gabi and Martin embark on finding other partners, together and separately, by way of an open relationship. They seek out threesomes and orgies. They create their own secret sex game where they act as voyeurs, watching each other flirt and go on dates with other people. They openly talk about their experiences having sex with others. They ritualistically delete their personal WINX apps. After their break-up, and a series of abysmal experiences dating other people, the couple reconcile their differences, and decide to abandon their pleasure-seeking adventures for a sexually and emotionally exclusive relationship (read as a promise) with each



other. The closing scene depicts Gaby and Martin, sleeping in bed, holding hands, peaceful and serene, the embodiment of monogamous happiness.

I read *Newness* as a cautionary tale about the indecisiveness, insatiability, sexual/gender inequalities, and dangers of hookup culture whereby non-monogamy is equated to promiscuity inevitably constructed as a reserve of many unwholesome things such as irresponsibility, hedonism, failure to care or love, gender inequality and even sexual exploitation. The failure to care or love/sexual exploitation trope can be evidenced in the interaction between Gabi and Larry when he describes their relationship as a “transaction.”<sup>44</sup> Further, the contemporary binary opposition between monogamy/non-monogamy tells a story of what is meant (and not meant) to constitute as genuine and meaningful relationships. The permutation of (unrestrained) jealousy, possessiveness, anger, microaggressions, and (sexual) violence—presented in this film as normal—is expected in much of normative Western culture whereby the idea of sexual exclusivity is held up as the epitome of love and commitment, and hence any real or imagined digression from this path is constructed as if it should be met with distrust and jealousy. Further, the strict dichotomy between monogamy/non-monogamy is part of the dominant narrative that tells us that “when love and intimacy are considered...the dyad or couple remains a definitional or assumed feature of intimate and sexual relationships.”<sup>45</sup> This narrative is evidenced in Esther Perel’s private conversation with Gaby and Martin during the book signing in which Esther states: “Just so we are clear I am not recommending [open relationships] but that doesn’t mean it’s not valid. So, if you think of it as the thing that doesn’t kill us but makes us stronger, then yes. But I really want you to imagine it less as a destination and more as a layover.”<sup>46</sup>

In North America, the culture of privilege found in polyamorous communities is aligned with multiple intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression. In “Popular Culture and Queer Representation: A Critical Perspective,” Diane Raymond notes:

The increasing appearance of GLBT major and supporting characters acknowledges the very real changes that have occurred in the constitution of the character’s populating television’s worlds. [*These characters*] offer the potential for subverting heterosexist norms and assumptions. I argue, however, that how these shows resolve tensions often results in a reinscription of heterosexuality and a containment of queer sexuality, that is, that the resolution these programs offer enables viewers to distance themselves from the queer and thereby return to their comfortable positions as part of the dominant culture. Such a dynamic enables power to mask itself, making it all the harder to pin down and question.<sup>47</sup>

While individuals involved in non-normative relationships and activities risk social censure, people unprotected by social advantages are more vulnerable to the discriminatory impacts than those shielded by race and class privileges. For Christian Klesse, the constitution of polyamory (and other non-monogamous identities) is a site of privilege that intersects with other forms of

social power.<sup>48</sup> This insulation provides greater social latitude to engage in and redefine their lives and experiences than what is available to those burdened by racism, poverty, inadequate education, limited job prospects and other forms of discrimination. The problem, then, is not just that what is broadcasted in the media portrays the practice of non-monogamous relationships in particular ways, but rather, it is the limited sample that focuses on people with privileges in marital status, race, class, gender and sexual identity. For these reasons, it is crucial to acknowledge the ways in which systems of privilege and oppression shape the everyday realities—and representations—of those who practice non-monogamy.

A number of scholars have argued that attempts to address the intersecting and interlocking nature of gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability have taken an additive approach that has continued to normalize some experiences while marginalizing others.<sup>49</sup> While effective in disrupting some hegemonic narratives, these ideological moves have had multiple and contradictory effects. For example, in *Studying Sexualities: Theories, Representations, Cultures*, Niall Richardson, Angela Werndly and Clarissa Smith contend that mainstream representations—especially in relation to race, gender and sexuality—play a significant role in the naturalizing forms of relationships while demonizing others and have a continuing role in creating perceptions of non-monogamy as a racialized and classed phenomenon.<sup>50</sup> Here, heteronormative non-monogamy is, for the most part, a homogeneous enclave of privileges, including gender, race, and class privileges, offers important insights towards ways of bringing together feminist, queer and critical race theories into dialogue with non-monogamies, and polyamory specifically, both in terms of symbolic meaning and embodied practice. For example, in “Disability and Polyamory: Exploring the Edges of Inter-Dependence, Gender and Queer Issues in Non-Monogamous Relationships,” Alex Iantaffi observes that in the dominant landscape of non-monogamies and gender non-conformity, there is little representation of disabled, queer, non-white bodies. Within a complex counterculture imbued with privileges, life as a queer, disabled, non-monogamous person, identity and sexuality becomes a messy (sometimes incoherent) challenge to dominant understandings of disability, gender, and sexuality:

Disability, polyamory, gender non-conformity, and queerness have the potential to defy the binary systems to which we have become so accustomed in the white, Anglo-American overculture that surrounds us ... Despite being seen by some as the ultimate proof of an imperative, biological, and innate binary construct, queer people, including those of us who do not conform to the overculture’s gender expectation, have reclaimed the body as a site of resistance.<sup>51</sup>

From this perspective, the multiplicity of desires and identifications unsettle many taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability.

A number of scholars have engaged with the ways race and class are bound up with gender, sexuality, and non-monogamous relationship structures.<sup>52</sup> They argue, in different ways, that the current, popular understanding of race and ethnicity does not accurately account for the multiple ways people self-identify and any critical inquiry of non-monogamy requires thinking about how it is co-constructed within colonial, white supremacist, hyper-capitalist spaces, histories, and structures (institutions) that confer privilege within and at the margins where poly struggles are seen. For example, In *Love's Not Color Blind: Race and Representation in Polyamorous and Other Alternative Communities*, Kevin Patterson examines white privilege, racism and prejudice and their impact of people of colour and other marginalized individuals practicing non-monogamies in everyday life.<sup>53</sup> For Patterson, polyamory, however compassionate an alternative to monogamy, still operates and is rooted in a racist society. According to Patterson, the prevailing problem is that the representation of polyamorous relationships in the media and popular culture resides in a standard of whiteness. While this standard of whiteness may make polyamory more accessible and acceptable to the mainstream, it also erases the experiences of POC in poly-life. In *Fraught Intimacies: Non/monogamy in the Public Sphere*, Nathan Rambukkana examines how non-monogamies are represented in the public sphere, and points to the differential treatment of white polyamorists and culturally polygamous immigrants in Canada.<sup>54</sup> Rambukkana's analysis reveals how some forms of non-monogamy are tacitly accepted, even glamourized, while others are vilified, reviled, and criminalized.<sup>55</sup>

Further integrating anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, critical race, and feminist theories into the study of non-monogamies and polyamory, a number of scholars have considered the social protections afforded by race and class privileges that can provide buffers to particular individuals—and dissuade POC, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups from—participating in polyamory and non-monogamous relationships to navigate the myriad of potential negative outcomes related to sexual and relational non-conformity. Commenting on the politics of Black respectability and white homonormativity in popular culture, Iyana Robertson writes:

For many bisexual Black men, a falsified reputation precedes them, and most mainstream images of Black male sexuality do very little to help ... In essence, because of the stigmas surrounding Black male bisexuality, many Black bisexual men are living covertly—or on the “down-low”—without the support of one other, to lessen the likelihood of being abandoned by their immediate communities ... Heteronormative relationship concepts also threaten to diminish the experiences of bisexual Black men ... The stress of constantly toeing the lines of heterosexism and hypermasculinity, naturally, poses a threat to the mental health of bisexual Black men.<sup>56</sup>

For example, *Black Mirror* (2011–2019) is a British dystopian science fiction anthology television series created by Charlie Brooker.<sup>57</sup> It examines modern society, particularly regarding

the unanticipated consequences of new technologies. Episodes are standalone, usually set in an alternative present or the near future, often with a dark and satirical tone, although some are more experimental and lighter. In season five, the show tackles how disconnected people are because of modern technology. The episode “Striking Vipers” remains one of the series’ rare explorations into queer desire. One of the best things about *Black Mirror* is its capacity to surprise viewers. Many of the program’s finest episodes trick the viewer into making certain assumptions or sympathizing with certain characters before revealing things are not what they seem. While “Striking Vipers” represents the very real struggles many Black bi+ (bisexual, bi-curious, pansexual, fluid, queer, MSM, no labels, etc.) men face, there are many complex and nuanced questions raised in this episode, such as Black masculinity, transgender identities, normative ideas around maleness, internalized biphobia and homophobia, and Black bodies, violence, and the police state that are not explored despite its contemporary relevance.

But in order to get to the nuance and specificity about the characters and the world in which this story takes place, the reader is required to have an understanding of how a person’s overlapping identities—including race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and disability status, for example—impact the way the characters experience oppression and discrimination. The reader is also required to know how fragile masculinity plays out in oft complicated and complex ways, the trivializing of trans-experiences in popular culture, normative tropes of Black men as liars, cheaters and sexually insatiable, and societal advantages and privileges afforded to heterosexual, monogamous coupling. For instance, when the main characters, Danny and Karl, agree to meet in real life—not to fight but to kiss—to learn if their feelings for each other in the game universe translate into real life, their reaction can be read as evidence of fragile masculinity. The subsequent physical fight between Danny and Karl signifies the precariousness of socially constructed notions of manhood which can create anxiety among males who feel that they are failing to meet cultural standards of masculinity—with predictable consequences.

After they kiss and reveal they felt no desire for each other (read as a refusal to have characters who explore bisexuality to ever acknowledge it), they argue and in the midst of a highly emotional and physical fight, police arrive, and they are arrested. The scene ends with Theo, Danny’s wife, bailing her husband out of jail and, on the car ride home, demanding to know what is happening between him and Karl.<sup>58</sup> As the credits roll, we are treated with Della Reese’s “Not One Minute More,” Theo is aware of her husband’s cheating and the virtual relationship with his best friend. The couple has come to an agreement: once a year (on his birthday), Danny can spend the night in the game with Karl and Theo is free to enjoy a one-night stand on the down-low—their happy ending.

The term “on the down-low” is a “colloquial term that emerged in the African American lexicon to refer to any covert sexual behavior and was picked up by the mainstream media to refer specifically to African American men who identify as heterosexual, maintain relationships

with women, and secretly have sex with men.”<sup>59</sup> Keith Boykin writes, “For white America, the down low is a way to pathologize black lives. And for the media, the down low is a story that can be easily hyped.”<sup>60</sup> As a media-constructed narrative that casts Black bi+ men as liars, cheaters and sexually insatiable, specifically racialized and sexualized cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities can be read in “Striking Vipers.” In this text, the narrative of the down-low connects at the intersections of queer and Black. Danny’s (and by extension, Theo’s) choices are constrained by compulsory monogamy. Framed differently, in the mononormative world in which this story takes place, “the unintelligibility of polyamory, as well as a heterosexist conflation of homoerotic desire with inferiority”<sup>61</sup> force Danny and Karl to keep their love and desires a secret.

Racism, imperialism, and colonialism are deeply interconnected systems that construct regimes of normalcy, including the normative power of whiteness and the binary of the self and other. Colonialism is the historical and on-going process of conquest and exploitation of people, land and resources.<sup>62</sup> Racialized constructions of normalcy are a violent process, and rest on the invisibility of the colonizer.<sup>63</sup> Sherene Razack as referred to whiteness as the colour of domination describing how it shows up in discursive moves of innocence and the repetitive denial of white dominance and complicity in systems of domination.<sup>64</sup> Whiteness has also been described as profoundly spatial.<sup>65</sup> In *The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of “White Privilege,”* Zeus Leonardo explains:

In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color. As such, a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the state of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it.<sup>66</sup>

For Leonardo, pointing out white racial hegemony involves more than just noting racial privileges and advantages or viewing racism as an unfortunate by-product of everyday thought and practice unconnected to subjects but, instead, requires a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy that is deeply connected to socioeconomic, legal, and spatial acts and processes that secure domination.

Hookup culture, as depicted in *Newness*, is a visible, public, and performative system: it is a system that works through, is enacted by, and embodied by individuals and individual bodies. It is a system that is rooted in larger systems and structures of white supremacy, *gender inequality*, classism, misogyny, homophobia, etc.<sup>67</sup> For example, it is depicted during the scene in which the character Martin and several male acquaintances discuss their experiences using the Tinder-like app, WINX. Presented as male bonding, Martin’s friends jokingly laugh and share stories about all the non-white women they have hooked up and had sex with and how the app

meets their tastes, preferences, and sexual appetites with women. In this scene, white male sexuality is left unmarked and unproblematized. Non-white women are fetishized and presented as exotic sex objects to temporarily satisfy the desires of white men and whiteness shows up in declarations of innocence, the repetitive denial of white dominance and racism, and complicity in systems of dominance.<sup>68</sup>

Racialized bodies, and the ways in which they express power through sexuality, formal authority, and through kinship relationships are limited in the white Western imagination. While Black women are more visible than ever in popular culture, “there is still a need to pay attention to the subtle messages in which racism and sexism are so often embedded in this era of supposed diversity and multiculturalism.”<sup>69</sup> When Black women’s experiences are visible, they often lack the full range of real-world experiences. For Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, “While most people of color, and African Americans in particular are perceived through a distorted lens, Black women are routinely defined by a specific set of grotesque caricatures that are reductive, inaccurate, and unfair.”<sup>70</sup> Imagery of the de/sexualized, colonized Black woman not only has its roots in modern media but is also rooted in the history of (sexual) slavery. Jane Ward writes:

Ideas about the difference between black and white sexuality, and female and male sexuality, were also used by whites to justify white supremacy...with one consequence of this strategy being that white men were posited as the paragons of proper heterosexual agency. Whites defended racial segregation as a means of protecting passive and vulnerable white women from sexually violent black men, and, less commonly, from the corrupting influence of hypersexual black women. In this formulation, white male sexuality...is visible only as that which was properly positioned vis-à-vis women.<sup>71</sup>

For example, in the television series *Wanderlust*, the character Claire can be read as the younger, single, educated, pot-smoking, vulgar and angry feminist who is positioned as simultaneously privileged and marginalized. She accepts Alan’s proposal of an “it’s just sex” dynamic which reinforces cultural stereotypes of the hypersexual Black female, who yearns for sexual encounters with white men. When Alan becomes excessively emotionally invested and attempts to inject domesticity into the relationship and, by extension Claire’s living space, she is repulsed and subsequently removed from the dynamic. Her abrupt exit repositions the monogamous marriage and domestic arrangement between Joy and Alan as central. The character Angela, on the other hand, can be read as Claire’s counterpoint. She exists in the series perpetually sitting in her therapist office chair, intelligent and professional yet sexually and socially conservative, assertive yet unassuming, and strong and detached. In some ways, I read Angela as the substitute for the socially constructed white woman conditioned by hegemonic values and norms—monogamous, virtuous, morally superior, feminine, and desexualized—a guardian and purveyor of moral and ethical respectability.

For scholars such as Bridget Byrne, “intersectionality loses its critical power when race becomes something only relevant to women of colour rather than also being used to examine the construction and maintenance of structures of power, including whiteness.”<sup>72</sup> According to Byrne:

Scrutiny of the production of whiteness relies on attention to the ways in which raced, gendered, classed and other norms are used to construct an Other considered unintelligible and unworthy of subjecthood. It involves questioning what technologies of looking, labelling, categorizing and failing to see or silencing are utilized to recognize the subjecthood of some people and to cast others into what Judith Butler (1997) calls the ‘abject zones of sociality.’<sup>73</sup>

One way in which the centrality and dominance of whiteness is maintained is through the figure of the person of colour. The person of colour is presented as an added extra thus “re-securing the centrality of the subject positioning of white [people].”<sup>74</sup> In order to explore the possibilities of decentering whiteness in non-monogamies, scholars must consider how whiteness and sexual citizenship are intersectional to the extent that they are raced, gendered, classed and heteronormative.<sup>75</sup> The intention here is not to re-center or reify whiteness, but rather to destabilize it by making it an object of analysis.

A number of critical social theorists take up the social construction of gender and sexuality and argue, in different ways, that the supposed naturalness of the sex/gender binary is the basis of heteronormativity and the systematic privileging of heterosexual identities over others.<sup>76</sup> In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler explains “abjection” and how it plays a role in creating the subject. For Butler, this process is crucial in “constituting a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject.”<sup>77</sup> Butler also explains that this process is present in homophobia, racism, and sexism, which involves expulsion, exclusion, and repulsion from society when certain identities become and symbolize the Other. Since abjection helps in understanding part of the creation of the subject it can also serve as a way to understand Butler’s idea of gender performance. In her analysis of the discursive limits of sex, sexuality and gender are not natural but rather, discursively produced, and have “a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies [it] controls.”<sup>78</sup> From abjection, we can see that the boundaries of the subject’s inner and outer worlds are truly unfixed and are not innate but created by the subject.

Understanding that representations of gender and sexuality become more diversified once we leave traditional modes of production, representation of non-monogamies in popular culture is not only about a lack of visibility, but what has been presented thus far has been deeply embedded in a transnational process referred to as homonationalism. Originally proposed by Jaspir Puar, homonationalism is an enactment of LGBTQ performances, identities, and relationships that incorporates them as not only compatible with but even exemplary of

neoliberal imperialist ethics and citizenships.<sup>79</sup> Homonationalism refers to socio-spatial and political processes that strategically incorporate certain privileged queer bodies into nation-building projects. Homonationalism can be understood as a fourth dimension of homonormativity—an imperialist dimension—alongside its class, gender, disability, and racial dimensions. In the participation of homonationalism, we become blinded by our privileges and actively work against the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our community “rather than show solidarity with those who are also oppressed by monogamous and heterosexual familial forms.”<sup>80</sup> For Puar, homonationalism can be evidenced in the essentializing of gendered dynamics in intimate relationships, the erasure of queer ethical non-monogamous configurations, “othering,” and how mononormativity plays out in nation-states, found in cultural, discursive, performative and aesthetic configurations, and political performativity of texts in popular culture. Homonationalism “is more than the processes of patriarchy, heterosexism, and compulsory heterosexuality. It is also colonial nation-building projects—instruments of imperialist and colonial ideologies—reinforcing specific (white) kinship structures (nuclear family, monogamy, and so on) as a way of erasing other cultural ways of engaging.”<sup>81</sup>

In *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz states:

Disidentification is [a] mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counter-identification, utopianism), this working on and against is a [survival] strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance.<sup>82</sup>

Disidentificatory practices allow individuals to neither completely identify with the normativity of monogamy nor completely reject them. Disidentification is the process by which one reworks identities and cultural practices, so they simultaneously retain that which is edifying and pleasurable while also rejecting and confounding socially prescriptive norms.

In search of the radical potential of a queer politics within non-monogamies, it is a paradox to practice a philosophy centralized on the critique of normativity, when the politics normalizes what it means to be queer. Similar to Cathy Cohen’s radical critique in “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” I choose to focus on the idea that “if there is any truly radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of such politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin.”<sup>83</sup> The



manifestation of non-monogamies in contemporary Western culture alludes to the multitude of ways non-monogamies and queerness can be expressed and articulated. As Anna Storti states, “These various embodiments contribute to an array of difference, one that if viewed non-hierarchically, serves as an opportunity for queer politics to productively refrain from attaching to any normalized expression of performance, whether [*non-monogamist*] or queer.”<sup>84</sup>

For me, the emergence of non/monogamies into mainstream consciousness and popular culture has meant filtering out various levels of vitriol aimed at individuals who choose not to navigate normative relationships and “every relationship which does not represent this pattern, is being ascribed the status of the other, of deviation, of pathology, in need of explanation or is being ignored, hidden, avoided and marginalized.”<sup>85</sup> Even when there is a “good” portrayal, storylines largely suggest that polyamory is just means fear of commitment or that it is easier than monogamy, because it’s only about sex. This lends to a general resolve with a move towards a monogamy-redemption arc. Agreeing with Sara Ahmed, as a queer subject, “[sic] feel the tiredness of making corrections and departures; the pressure of this insistence, this presumption, this demand that asks either for a ‘passing over’ (a moment of passing, which is not always available) or for direct or indirect forms of self-revelation”.<sup>86</sup> Ahmed tells us that “in the intentional shaping of our stories, amidst the surfaces of individual and collective bodies—norms—we might even have other stories to tell.”<sup>87</sup> And so, I say, yes! To make things queer, view things from a queer angle, emphasize disturbance, disorientation, fluidity, impermanence, and other ambiguous emotions and perspectives and embrace the accompanying feelings that are unpleasant or downright painful.

Wishing neither to aspire to current iterations of non-monogamies in popular culture (via assimilation) nor abandon mainstream popular culture (via resistance) altogether—as in doing so I miss the potential to search for, see, analyze, and archive the ideological labours current representations of non/monogamies are doing—I will answer the call of imagining the futurity of non-monogamies and in which ways stories about nonmonogamies could be different. I do not want to limit what ‘counts’ as non-monogamous representation but to further contribute to the social and political potential of non-monogamies to reveal alternative ways of loving a good and happy life—via transformation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Western notions of family and non-monogamy in pop culture, see Liz Borden, “Non/Monogamies in Canada Children’s Picture Books,” in *The Spaces and Places of Canadian Popular Culture.*, ed. Victoria Kannen and Neil Shyminsky (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2019), 92–101.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Mellissa Fabello, “How ‘Relationship Anarchy’ Can Help You Deepen Your Friendships. Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.self.com/story/relationship-anarchy-friendships> ; For example, see Eve Rickert, “Canada

Defines Love—Exclusively (with Carrie Jenkins).” Oct 31, 2020. <https://everickert.medium.com/canada-defines-love-exclusively-63bd57e4ac3d>.

<sup>3</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, California: Univ of California Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Behar, “Introduction: Out of Exile,” in *Women Writing Culture*. Behar, Ruth, and Deborah A. Gordon, eds. (Berkeley, California: Univ of California Press, 1995), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Cosenza, “Once Upon A Time: Looking to the Ecstatic Past for Queer Futurity,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 9 (2012): 37.

<sup>6</sup> Tony E. Adams, Stacy Linn Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography. Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Kevin A. Patterson, and Ruby Bouie Johnson, *Love's Not Color Blind: Race and Representation in Polyamorous and Other Alternative Communities* (Portland, OR: Thorntree Press LLC, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Ian MacKenzie, “The Rise of Relationship Anarchy,” *InMac*, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, [ianmack.com/rise-relationship-anarchy/](http://ianmack.com/rise-relationship-anarchy/).

<sup>9</sup> Erin Wunker, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life* (Toronto: Book\*hug Press, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Kim TallBear, “Yes, Your Pleasure! Yes, Self-love! And Don’t Forget, Settler Sex is a Structure,” *The Critical Polyamorist*, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, [criticalpolyamorist.com/homeblog/yes-your-pleasure-yes-self-love-and-dont-forget-settler-sex-is-a-structure](http://criticalpolyamorist.com/homeblog/yes-your-pleasure-yes-self-love-and-dont-forget-settler-sex-is-a-structure).

<sup>12</sup> Janani Balasubramanian, “9 Strategies for Non-Oppressive Polyamory,” *Black Girl Dangerous*. October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, [bgdblog.org/2013/10/9-strategies-for-oppressive-polyamory/](http://bgdblog.org/2013/10/9-strategies-for-oppressive-polyamory/).

<sup>13</sup> Scott Lauria Morgensen, “Theorizing Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism: An Introduction.” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 2–22.

<sup>14</sup> Sharon Owens, “Dangerous Coats” Twitter Post. June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. <https://twitter.com/SOWensTeaHouse>.

<sup>15</sup> Wanda Pillow, “Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research,” *International journal of qualitative studies in education* 16, no. 2 (2003): 175–196.

<sup>16</sup> Tami Spry, *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Tami Spry, “Autoethnography and the Other: Performative Embodiment and a bid For Utopia,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 627–649.

<sup>18</sup> T. E. Adams, & S. Holman Jones, “Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory, and Autoethnography,” *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 108–116.

<sup>19</sup> Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, “Autoethnography’s Family Values: Easy Access to Compulsory Experiences,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2005): 297–314.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel E. Dubrofsky, *The Surveillance of Women On Reality Television: Watching The Bachelor and The Bachelorette* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Joshua Gamson, “Popular Culture Constructs Sexuality,” in *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies*, eds. S. Seidman, N. Fischer and C. Meeks, (New York: Routledge, 2011): 27–31.

<sup>22</sup> Mimi Schippers, *Polyamory, Monogamy, and American Dreams: The Stories We Tell about Poly Lives and the Cultural Production of Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 4.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Deric Shannon and Abbey Willis, “Theoretical Polyamory: Some Thoughts on Loving, Thinking, and Queering Anarchism,” *Sexualities* 13, no. 4 (2010): 433–443.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Ani Ritchie, and Meg Barker, “‘There aren’t words for what we do or how we feel so we have to make them up’: Constructing Polyamorous Languages in a Culture of Compulsory Monogamy,” *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 584–601.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Meg Barker, “On Tops, Bottoms and Ethical Sluts: The Place of BDSM and Polyamory in Lesbian and Gay Psychology,” *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (2005): 124–129.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Melita J. Noël, “Progressive Polyamory: Considering Issues of Diversity,” *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 602–620.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Marcia Munson, “Safer Sex and The Polyamorous Lesbian,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 3, no. 1-2 (1999): 209–216; Marcia Munson, and Judith P. Stelbourn, “Introduction: The Lesbian Polyamory Reader: Open Relationships, Non-Monogamy, and Casual Sex,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 3, no. 1-2 (1999): 1–7.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Pepper Mint, “The Power Dynamics of Cheating: Effects on Polyamory and Bisexuality,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 4, no. 3-4 (2004): 55–76.

- <sup>29</sup> See, for example, Petula Sik Ying Ho, "The (Charmed) Circle Game: Reflections on Sexual Hierarchy Through Multiple Sexual Relationships," *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 547–564.
- <sup>30</sup> For further discussion, see Robert E. Goss, "Proleptic Sexual Love: God's Promiscuity Reflected in Christian Polyamory," *Theology & Sexuality* 11, no. 1 (2004): 52–63; and Angela Willey, "'Christian Nations', 'Polygamic Races' and Women's Rights: Toward a Genealogy of Non/Monogamy and Whiteness," *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 530–546.
- <sup>31</sup> For further discussion, see Tony Coelho, "Hearts, Groins and The Intricacies of Gay Male Open Relationships: Sexual Desire and Liberation Revisited," *Sexualities* 14, no. 6 (2011): 653–668; Brian Heaphy, Catherine Donovan, and Jeffrey Weeks, "A Different Affair? Openness and Nonmonogamy in Same Sex Relationships," in *The State of Affairs: Explorations in Infidelity and Commitment*, eds. Jean Duncombe, Kaeren Harrison, Graham Allan and Dennis Marsden (New York: Routledge, 2004), 167–186; Stevi Jackson, and Sue Scott, "The Personal is Still Political: Heterosexuality, Feminism and Monogamy," *Feminism & Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2004): 151–157; Lynn Jamieson, "Intimacy, Negotiated Non-Monogamy and The Limits of The Couple," in *The State of Affairs* (2004), 35–57; and Christian Klesse, "Polyamory and its 'Others': Contesting the Terms of Non-Monogamy," *Sexualities* 9, no. 5 (2006): 565–583.
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- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 1.
- <sup>36</sup> Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and The Future of Polyqueer Sexualities* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 25.
- <sup>37</sup> See, for examples, Giovanni Porfido, "Queering the Small Screen: Homosexuality and Televisual Citizenship in Spectacular Societies," *Sexualities* 12, no. 2 (2009): 161–179; Christian Klesse, "Marriage, Law and Polyamory. Rebutting Mononormativity with Sexual Orientation Discourse?" *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, 6(6) (2016): 1348–1376; Joshua Gamson, "Popular Culture Constructs Sexuality," *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies* (2011): 27–31; and Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Vol. 2. (New York: Sage, 1997).
- <sup>38</sup> Nikó Antalffy, "Polyamory and The Media," *Journal of Media Arts Culture* 8, no. 1 (2011).
- <sup>39</sup> Andrea Zanin, "The Problem with Polynormativity," *Sex Geek: Thoughts on Sex and Life* (blog), January 25, 2013, <https://polyinthemedia.blogspot.com/2013/01/andrea-zanin-problem-with.html>.
- <sup>40</sup> *Wanderlust*. Directed by L. Snellin (United Kingdom: Drama Republic, 2018).
- <sup>41</sup> Adrienne L. Johnson, "Counseling the Polyamorous Client: Implications for Competent Practice," *VISTAS Online* 50 (2013): 1.
- <sup>42</sup> Schippers, *Polyamory, Monogamy, and American Dreams*, 315, 319, italics mine.
- <sup>43</sup> *Newness*, Directed by Drake Doremus (United States: Scott Free Productions, 2017), 117 minutes.
- <sup>44</sup> *Newness*, 1:45:07-1:47:00.
- <sup>45</sup> Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo, Kristen Barber, and Erica Hunter, "The Dyadic Imaginary: Troubling the Perception of Love as Dyadic," *Journal of Bisexuality* 7, no. 3-4 (2008): 173.
- <sup>46</sup> *Newness*, 1:02:55-1:04:38.
- <sup>47</sup> Diane Raymond, "Popular Culture and Queer Representation: A Critical Perspective" in *Gender, Race and Class in Media A Text-Reader*, eds. G. Dines & J.M. Humez (LA: Sage Publications, 2003), 99–100; italics mine.
- <sup>48</sup> Klesse, "Polyamory and its 'Others.'"
- <sup>49</sup> For example, see Niall Richardson, Clarissa Smith, and Angela Werndly, *Studying Sexualities: Theories, Representations, Cultures* (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2013); Alex Iantaffi, "Disability and Polyamory: Exploring the Edges of Inter-Dependence, Gender and Queer Issues in Non-Monogamous Relationships," in *Understanding Non-monogamies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 172-178; and Julie L. Nagoshi, Stephanie Brzuzy, and Heather K. Terrell, "Deconstructing the Complex Perceptions of Gender Roles, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Among Transgender Individuals," *Feminism & Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2012): 405-422.

<sup>50</sup> Richardson, *Studying Sexualities*.

<sup>51</sup> Iantaffi, "Disability and Polyamory," 164.

<sup>52</sup> For examples, see Damien W. Riggs, "Priscilla, (White) Queen of the Desert: Queer Politics and Representation in a 'Postcolonising' Nation," *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies* 14 (2006): 38–55; Nathan Rambukkana, *Fraught Intimacies: Non/Monogamy in The Public Sphere* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015); Christopher N. Smith, "Open to Love: Polyamory and The Black American," *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* 3, no. 2 (2016): 99–129; and Patterson and Johnson, *Love's Not Color Blind*.

<sup>53</sup> For further discussion, see Patterson and Johnson, *Love's Not Color Blind*.

<sup>54</sup> See Rambukkana, *Fraught Intimacies*.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Government of Canada, "Processing Spouses and Common-law Partners: Assessing the Legality of a Marriage," Subsection, Polygamy. [n.d] <https://canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/permanent-residence/non-economic-classes/family-class-determining-spouse/legality.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Iyana Robertson, "Why Don't Black Men Get to Be Bisexual?" *BET*, October 22, 2019. [bet.com/style/living/2019/10/22/black-men-can-t-be-bisexual.html](http://bet.com/style/living/2019/10/22/black-men-can-t-be-bisexual.html).

<sup>57</sup> *Black Mirror*. "Striking Vipers." Directed by O. Harris. United Kingdom: House of Tomorrow. June 5, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> *Black Mirror*, "Striking Vipers," 53:40-57:33.

<sup>59</sup> Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Keith Boykin, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005), 21.

<sup>61</sup> Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy*, 105.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2015); and Huanani Kay Trask, "The Color of Violence," *Social Justice* 31, no. 4 (2004): 8–16.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Richard Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 539–548; Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993); bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Fiona Nicoll, "'Are You Calling Me a Racist?': Teaching Critical Whiteness Theory in Indigenous Sovereignty," *Borderlands eJournal* 3, no. 2 (2004); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1994); and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> For further discussion on the colour of domination, see Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, Audrey, and Linda Peake, "Racism Out of Place: Thoughts on Whiteness and an Antiracist Geography in the New Millennium," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 2 (2000): 137.

<sup>66</sup> Zeus Leonardo, "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege'," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004): 137–152.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Vetter, "It's not you, it's—Hookup Culture and Sexual Subjectivity," *Honours Thesis*, Paper 852 (2017). <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/852>, 15, italics mine.

<sup>68</sup> *Newness* 3:10-3:53

<sup>69</sup> Paula Matabane, and Bishetta Merritt. "African Americans on Television: Twenty-Five Years After Kerner," *Howard Journal of Communications* 7, no. 4 (1996): 336.

<sup>70</sup> Charisse Jones, and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Jane Ward, *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 57.

<sup>72</sup> Bridget Byrne, "Rethinking Intersectionality and Whiteness at the Borders of Citizenship," *Sociological Research Online* 20, no. 3 (2015): 178.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

<sup>74</sup> Jaspir K. Puar, "'I Would Rather be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *PhiloSOPHIA* 2, no. 1 (2012): 52.

<sup>75</sup> Sexual citizenship has become a key concept in the social sciences. It describes the rights and responsibilities of citizens in sexual and intimate life, including debates over equal marriage and women's human rights, as well as shaping thinking about citizenship more generally. For a more detailed discussion see, for example, Diane Richardson, "Rethinking Sexual Citizenship," *Sociology* 51, no. 2 (2017): 208–224.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1993), Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (East Essex, UK: Psychology Press, 2004), Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 134.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Puar, "I Would Rather be a Cyborg."

<sup>80</sup> Kleese, "Polyamory and its 'Others'", 525.

<sup>81</sup> Juan Battle, and Colin Ashley, "Intersectionality, Heteronormativity, and Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families," *Black Women, Gender & Families* 2, no. 1 (2008): 5.

<sup>82</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11–12.

<sup>83</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 438.

<sup>84</sup> Anna Storti, Anna. "(Re) Conceptualizing the Normative: A Glimpse into the Radical Potential and Ultimate Failure of Queer Politics," Undergraduate Research Project, (Pomona: California State Polytechnic University, 2013), 10; italics mine.

<sup>85</sup> Robin Bauer, "Non-monogamy in Queer BDSM communities: Putting the Sex Back into Alternative Relationship Practices and Discourse," in *Understanding Non-monogamies*, eds. Meg Barker and Darren Langdrige (New York: Routledge, 2010), 145.

<sup>86</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 147.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.