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## Place Me in Gettysburg: Relating Sexuality to Environment

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### Abstract

This project links sexuality and environmental issues in the context of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It considers how I, a queer student at Gettysburg College, can be in “right relations” with this environment. While queer ecological scholarship defines “right relations” as relationships where all beings—people of all identities, as well as animals, plants, and the land—can flourish through their interactions, I inquire whether such flourishing is possible for me, and others like me, here in this place. To answer this question, the project links queer ecological scholarship with environmental history scholarship specific to the Gettysburg battlefield and civil war. It also involves research into archival and contemporary articles about the battlefield and the college. I created a website using Scalar to present this research interwoven with my personal experiences as prose essays, accompanied by artwork. I found that queer students at Gettysburg don’t fit into the heteronormative fraternity-based social environment and can feel “unnatural” and alienated from the campus community. As a white student, I can escape to the pastoral landscape of the battlefield as a respite. However, because the battlefield is constructed to primarily valorize white men, it is a white masculine space. Its use is often uninviting (even threatening) for people of color, and also for queer people, especially when white supremacists gather. Yet, through the reclamation of alternate historical narratives, like those of Black residents and women during and after the civil war, the landscape can become a place for students of color, and those like me, to feel more connected to a shared past. In merging historical alternate narratives, enviro-sexuality scholarship, and my own experiences the project informs how Gettysburg students might reclaim and make narratives that can inspire an investment in “right relations”—with all people, as well as the land.

### Keywords

queer, place, nature, Gettysburg, civil war

### Disciplines

Environmental Studies | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies

### Comments

Please visit the project website at [Place Me in Gettysburg](#).

This project was created for ES 460: Individualized Study-Research

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Place Me in Gettysburg: Relating Sexuality to Environment

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the Environmental Studies Major

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To answer this question, the project links queer ecological scholarship with environmental history scholarship specific to the Gettysburg battlefield and civil war. It also involves research into archival and contemporary articles about the battlefield and the college. I created a website using Scalar to present this research interwoven with my personal experiences as prose essays, accompanied by artwork.

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## Introduction

“We are actively making a case for our species to exist on this beautiful planet. Can we be just? Can we practice freedom together? Can we rediscover *right relations* with each other, including between humans and the earth? Can we remember what it is to be alive with each other, beyond suffering and survival?”

(brown 2019, 207, emphasis added by me)

This project documents my evolving relationship to Gettysburg College, a small liberal arts institution located in south central Pennsylvania. To do so, I use the notion of “place-making” as a starting point. Defined as the “psychological identification between self and site” involving “an ongoing social process” (Emmett and Nye 2017, 24), place-making helps us understand how sociocultural contexts that influence our identity formations also shape our relationships to the environments<sup>1</sup> we inhabit. As a person who identifies as an environmentalist and as a queer<sup>2</sup> student at a predominantly heteronormative<sup>3</sup> institution like Gettysburg College, I have found myself drawn to the battlefield grounds near Gettysburg but unsure how to be in “right relation.” Following Environmental Justice scholarship, like the work of organizer and author adrienne maree brown quoted above, I define “right relations” as a relationship between humans, animals, and plants where all beings have the ability to flourish through their interactions. My research question then is *what does it mean to be in “right relationship” to Gettysburg?*

I offer personal observations and experiences of my ongoing journey to do this work of “right relations,” so I can live in, for, and with “our beautiful planet.” I draw on two scholarly archives to help make sense of this endeavor—Indigenous studies and queer studies. Specifically, I draw on their epistemological overlaps to articulate what I call a queer Indigenous ecological

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<sup>1</sup> See Glossary p. 54

<sup>2</sup> See Glossary p. 55

<sup>3</sup> See Glossary p. 54

lens to frame my understandings. A queer Indigenous ecological lens questions mainstream American prescriptions for desire, pleasure, and modes of relating between humans, land, and animals. For a queer environmentalist (such as myself), I argue that this lens opens up the possibility of “right relations.” To unpack this framework, below I first discuss how Indigenous studies informs the notion of “right relations,” and then turn to queer ecologies<sup>4</sup>, and its possibilities.

### **Indigenous Environmental Relationships in Gettysburg, PA and Beyond**

Many models for “right relations” come from Indigenous people. As the college’s new Land Acknowledgement statement notes, “Gettysburg College is located on unceded Indigenous land including the traditional homelands of the Susquehannock/Conestoga, Seneca and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Leni Lenape, and Shawnee Nations, and the connections of Indigenous Peoples to this land continue today...” (Students for Indigenous Awareness 2021). Archeological evidence shows that as early as 1000BC to 1000AD, (during the “Early and Middle Woodland Phases”) Indigenous peoples lived in this area (Richter, 1990, 237). Their hunter-gatherer economies involved practices described as “primary forest efficiency” (Richter 1990, 237), which “involves the selective harvesting of nuts, berries and other vegetables and possibly fish and shellfish as these become seasonally available and supplementing these with the continuous year-round hunting of land and water animals” (Caldwell 1958). This is efficient in terms of the energy expended and nutrition gained as well as, in providing security against starvation because of the diversity of sources used. A “primary forest efficiency” relationship fosters an intimate knowledge of the plants and animals in an area, and a knowledge of practices that advance the sustainability of humans and the land base (*A Glossary of Manitoba Prehistoric Archaeology*). This is an example of “right relations” between people and their environment, and

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<sup>4</sup> See Glossary p.55



one passed down through generations of Native communities. For example, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a participatory democracy made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations who likely had relationships with the lands that Gettysburg College resides on and were forcibly relocated by colonial settlers to reservations, note: “Our relationship with land would be described in English as ‘sacred’ however, this description does not properly address the depth and breadth of how important the land is to us. It is our mother. The use of her must be done in a way that does not impair her abilities to provide for the ‘coming faces’” (Haudenosaunee Confederacy 2021). Unlike this sacred relation, United States nation building, defined by settler colonialism, prescribed a relationship to the land based in capitalist exploitation, which has and continues to threaten the future of our planet. Despite, the violent assimilation forced on Indigenous people by colonizers and the US government through treaty violations, the Indian Appropriations Acts (1851, 1871, 1885, 1889), the Dawes Act (1887), Indian residential schools (like The Carlisle Indian Industrial School located near Gettysburg), and more, Indigenous peoples like those of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy continue to look for ways to practice “right relations”, though they are alienated from some of their ancestral lands.

I am a descendant of white colonial settlers and my student life and inhabitation of this land is enabled by the violent removal of Indigenous people (Fenton et 2019). As Indigenous Studies scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) and numerous other Indigenous scholars write, potential non-Indigenous allies often reproduce violence by romanticizing Indigenous knowledges without highlighting or transforming the conditions of their exploitation (Whyte 2018). Whyte also explains that real allies should offer space for empowerment and healing in exchange for the knowledge and labor that Indigenous peoples provide (2018). In learning Indigenous histories, appreciating their varied contributions to caring for land and animals (e.g.

without romanticizing or appropriating), and then fully supporting Indigenous movements today, I think, we as white settler-descendants can *begin* the journey towards “right relations” with Indigenous peoples and our environment. I emphasize “begin” because there is a lot more to do and to tailor in this process. I am just beginning my journey but I think the aforementioned elements are getting at a common root system for growing “right relations”.

Because of their attention to “right relations,” Indigenous environmentalisms are often inherently intersectional in their inclusion, not only of non-human life, but also of human difference, such as sexuality and gender justice, transformation, and healing (Whyte 2018). Scholar Kim TallBear of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, probes these intersections, informed by an analysis of what she and other scholars describe as “settler sexuality”<sup>5</sup>. As she writes, in mainstream settler colonial systems: “social, cultural, economic, and legal structures support or reward monogamy while erasing or actively demeaning nonmonogamous relating,” (TallBear 2020). For example, the division of Indigenous lands into individual allotments with only men qualifying as owners, and their acreage increasing if they had a wife and children, incentivized patriarchal systems of monogamy and a focus on the nuclear family, while undermining many traditional Indigenous social systems that allowed for alternative modes of relating to each other and the land e.g. of matriarchy, extended family cohabitation, and two-spirit understandings (Tallbear 2018). TallBear notes that in her own community “before settler-imposed monogamy, marriage helped to forge important Dakota kinship alliances [with human and other-than-human relatives], but divorce for both men and women was possible. Women also owned household property. They were not tied to men economically in the harsh way of settler marriage” (TallBear 2018). Settler monogamy forwards a very particular relationship to the land—one of individualized ownership. Such an individualized model of property limits a more expansive

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<sup>5</sup> See Glossary p. 55

means to relate to land and each other in healthy, mutually-beneficial ways. While settler monogamy upholds a narrow, individualized outlook on land first and foremost as property, polyamory provides an alternative Indigenous openness to community: “polyamory is not only intimacy constituted by love and sex, but fundamentally by openness to multiple connections” (TallBear 2014). This Dakota-rooted polyamory allows for the inclusion of land and animals into our networks of kinship that underscore respect and love, not extraction or obligation. In other words, it invites a form of place-making in ways that seek to sustain the diversity and freedom of life in “right relations.”

### **Queer Ecologies—Re-defining What’s “Natural”**

In contrast, settler colonial policies such as those of land ownership and monogamy act to isolate people (especially Indigenous peoples) from larger communities and our environments. For example, in mainstream settler societies queer people are often seen as unnatural compared to the heterosexual norm and are therefore socially ostracized. This characterization of “unnatural” comes from the Western “biological” assumption of heterosexuality as the biological norm in the natural world (Seymour 2013, 3-5), which can then inhibit queer people’s sense of connection to the environment. The work of the famous scientist Charles Darwin, for example, which outlined natural selection and sexual selection (which explain different species adaptations) nevertheless linked “an organism’s relationship to its environment and its sexual relations”, in a way that was interpreted as privileging reproductive sex, which was then extended to humans via the problematic development of social Darwinism (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 7-8). Early theoretical responses by queer studies scholars to this use of social Darwinism within environmental discourses was to urge queer people to embrace culture and align against nature<sup>6</sup>, but the scholarship of “queer ecologies” questions this binary. For

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<sup>6</sup> See Glossary p. 54

example, leading scholars such as Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Nicole Seymour suggest that we should instead interrogate the social constructions of “nature” and “natural” by settler societies and how those “enable exploitation and discrimination, or deny the complexities of humans and non-humans” (Seymour 2013, 5). Nature writer Ellen Meloy, in her scientific and poetic observations of desert plants, noticed how the many plant body parts like “filament, anther, pistil, ovary, [and] stigma” interact with the bodies of other plants, insects, and animals in ways that may or not be reproductive, and indicate something more like intimacy and pleasure (Chisholm 2010, 366-367). In seeing plants as desirous and intimate, we can relate to them, and lower the veil separating humans from the rest of the natural world.

There is another assumption about queer people that queer ecological studies notes, which has troubled my relation to Gettysburg: queer people belong in urban environments. Medical thinkers in the late nineteenth century, during rapid urbanization in the United States, thought they were observing more homosexuality in cities and so concluded that the city environment itself made men effeminate and gay (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 13). Then national and state parks were created for men to recreate and reaffirm their strength and manhood, so cities were deemed queer spaces while natural spaces were places where traditional masculinity could be exercised (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 13). As a queer person in Gettysburg, my “right relations” to this place seemed impossible because it is far from a queer urban space. But I also felt a deep connection to nature in Gettysburg that fueled me to stay and be part of this community. As Mortimer-Sandilands and Seymour note, we have to interrogate our Western understandings of what is natural, because my love for nature and my queerness are not forces at odds. As I am learning from the scholarship, I am not alone in feeling this connection, as many other queer people feel connected to nature too. Natural places often

become a haven free from the pressures of heteronormative society, and so cause queer people to be drawn to them and comforted by them (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 3). Queer people are also more active for environmental causes: “lesbians, bisexuals and gay people were more than twice as likely to join anti-war, environmental, and anti-corporate movements” (Swank 2018, 183). Relatedly, people of color are disproportionately affected by environmental injustices and so are more often active in environmental justice<sup>7</sup> movements (Skelton and Miller 2016). This is an intersectional issue in which marginalized voices have shown they deeply care for our environmental future because they are currently facing the consequences of environmental harm which stems from a power structure that privileges white masculinity. All people deserve access to the natural world and the chance to cultivate relationships that do more than conform to what are often destructive white settler norms of monogamy and property ownership.

At the root of my assertion to cultivate “right relations” is what queer activist and writer adrienne maree brown terms as “pleasure activism.” Pleasure activism is “the work we do to reclaim our whole happy and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” and brown asserts that “pleasure is a *natural*, safe, and liberated part of life” (brown 2019, 13, emphasis added by me). This elevation of pleasure as something essential and illuminating for how we get in “right relations” to ourselves, each other, and the earth, is one I will return to through attention to my own experiences as a person coming into my queerness while a student at Gettysburg College. I have found a great and motivating pleasure in being outside in nature: touching grass and bark and leaves, smelling pine, hearing birds, feeling sun, tasting air, and seeing myself as one part of these possible interspecies relations. Junauda Petrus-Nasah, creative activist, writer, and playwright, speaks to this connection to the natural

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<sup>7</sup> See Glossary p. 54

world: “nature was my first mentor on how to be erotic, wild, free, generative, intelligent, rhythmic, sexual, sensual, and shameless”, “it gives me permission like nothing else to accept myself in all of my own wildness and growth” (2019, 281-282). Though it might appear strange to passersby that I allow tree branches to caress my face, it is essential for me to be intimately connected to the earth to feel fulfilled, which in turn fuels my need to fight against the poisoning of the land and through that the poisoning of people and animals, which have been enacted through settler colonial norms of devaluing land as property, and prioritizing individual needs over that of the collective. My queer desires are essential for this process, not something to be hidden at the sideline of my environmental or social justice work, which is the message often sent by colleges or career settings in dominant Western society. As I will elaborate, Gettysburg College is a place made by social norms of heteronormativity, whiteness, partying, and academia while the surrounding battlefield offers a nationally iconic historical landscape oft-distorted by white supremacist narratives that ignore longer histories of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) relations with the land. I have had to reckon with these social norms, and Indigenous and queer ecologies are central to my efforts to make myself a place with which I can feel more in “right relations.”

### **A Few Additional Words to Situate the Reader**

I mapped the aforementioned Indigenous and queer ecological scholarship onto the Gettysburg landscape through my personal experience and with scholarship on the battlefield’s environmental history. And through this analysis, asked *what does it mean to be in “right relationship” to Gettysburg?* I saw providing alternate narratives as integral to answering this question. I engaged in the active recording of my alternate narrative, as well as learned about

marginalized historical narratives. This resulted in my writing of two long form essays: one entitled “Futurity” and the other “Community”.

The “Futurity” section identifies the ways that capitalism and homophobia in America stunt our imaginings of ethical environmental relationships and a fruitful planetary future. I also argue that the seeds of more expansive imaginings of “right relations with humans and the earth” are already within us, as queer youth. I draw on secondary and primary sources regarding the preservation of the Gettysburg National Military Park to unpack how the histories we tell about the past, influence the present and future. In “Community”, I explain my different experiences of community in family, backpacking with friends, at college parties, and the influence of those environments on my sexuality. I outline my draw towards polyamory<sup>8</sup>, articulated through a queer ecological lens influenced by queer scholarship and Indigenous scholarship, in response to those experiences. I argue for polyamory’s potential for creating alternative ethical ways of relating to each other and to animals and our environment, as rooted in pleasure. I conclude with the brief “Embodiment” section where I suggest that turning towards the wisdom of our bodies through a deliberate recognition of somatic practice is useful to illuminate “right relations” with ourselves and the environment. “Futurity” allows us to consider how the past affects our collective future, while “Community” sees how we relate to each other in light of that, and “Embodiment” notices how we relate to ourselves. Each section brings in personal anecdotes, historical context, and the intersections of Indigenous and queer scholarship (as a queer Indigenous ecological frame) to move from the macro to the micro level—discourses embedded in national, college, and my own body--to create a map of self-actualization towards my search for ethical relationships with the environment.

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<sup>8</sup> See Glossary p. 54

## Futurity

As a person who identifies as queer and an environmentalist interested in living in “right relations”<sup>9</sup> with others (human and non-human around me), I find that the concept of “thick desire”<sup>10</sup> from queer studies has helped me shift my earlier perception that the future is beyond concern because we aren’t living in it yet. Unlike before, I now find myself thinking of a future surrounded by people I love and who love me, eating fresh food from my garden, in touch with my changing queerness, continuously growing and shifting with change: in other words, getting right with transformation and feeling pleasure from it. I won’t just stumble onto these conditions, but will be building towards them. It is necessary for me to find joy and pleasure in this building process so that my growth can be sustained for the long haul (brown 2019, 1-18). We are all trying to balance being satisfied and happy in the present while longing for something better, and working from that place of yearning to mold the future. Sex education scholars Fine and McClelland define “thick desire” as the assertion that young people are entitled to financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, and protection from racialized and sexualized violence in which to cultivate their desires and “*imagine living in the future tense*” (2017, 297, emphasis added by me). Fine and McClelland argue that these rights are systematically denied to young women, people of color, and LGBTQ youth due to structural inequalities like “abstinence only until marriage” sex education, school inequalities generally, and incarceration of young people of color, among other factors (2017, 298-303). A rise in neoliberalism<sup>11</sup> coincides with the decentering of thick desire where the services that would ensure its qualities are increasingly relegated to private markets or to the family, where they often cannot be met for low-income people (Fine and McClelland 2017, 298). My focus is on how these neoliberal systems inhibit

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<sup>9</sup> See Glossary p. 55

<sup>10</sup> See Glossary p. 55

<sup>11</sup> See Glossary p. 54



thick desire for queer youth, specifically in disconnecting them from the natural environment. I focus on Gettysburg's history to explain barriers to QTBIPOC engagement with the Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP). In understanding history, I argue that we can work towards liberation as long as we center pleasure, thick desire principles, and healing of land and people.

### **Queer People in our National Capitalist Imagination**

Unfortunately, queer people have been stereotyped as being unconcerned with the well-being of the planet. Caring for the environment connotes an orientation towards the future e.g. calls by mainstream conservationists for natural spaces to be preserved for generations to come (Sierra Club 2021). As queer studies and environmental justice scholar Nicole Seymour notes, queer people are often excluded from identifying with these calls because they might not be able to envision themselves in the future, as they are excluded from the traditional path of marriage to child-rearing and so might dismiss the connection between their well-being and the environment's (2013, 18). And for many, being outwardly queer can be life-threatening in repressive heteronormative societies, making preparation for the future impossible because they are presently in constant survival-mode. Yet, it is essential to see how our oppression as queer people is bound up with environmental destruction, for if we don't realize this, we become disconnected from people and places and care only for the present in a way that harms both (Seymour 2013, 18). Unfortunately, the system that I as a queer person live in, which is American capitalism, reinforces our focus on the here-and-now, preventing our imagination of futures liberated from environmental abuse and homophobia.

The push to accept dominant American capitalist and heteronormative ideologies started for me and many others, in childhood. To borrow from queer writer and activist adrienne maree brown, in the US, gender normativity, racism, classism, ableism, and other forms of identity

based discrimination, are the “waters that we are all swimming in” from a very young age, and these factors shape our desires and fantasies for our futures (2019, 222-223). Growing up, there was very little space for me to imagine or ask, “What if I don’t want to marry a man? What if I don’t want to get married at all? I don’t really want to work in a formal setting (especially if it is anything like school), so would I be a housewife?” The nuclear family, gender roles, and the promise of fulfillment in consumption (made possible through a 9 to 5 job) are all recurring norms under American capitalism (Beckert and Desan 2019). I, like many others, am told that college would ensure a future by leading me towards a career that would sustain me under capitalism (Horn and Moesta 2020). I tried to project straightness and cis-ness to make the education process easier (as it was clear that this was the norm and I was assumed to fall under it). My draw towards Women and Gender Studies as a major was discouraged by some of my family and peers, under the auspice of not being one of those gateways-to-career, but probably an equal influence was homophobia and sexism. Such thinking undermined my passion and creativity, which limited my imagination for the future, and my ability to contribute to collective imaginative solutions for the world.

But the rekindling of my imagination emerged in its necessity for my survival. As a queer person, inhabiting and making a safe place within a college that routinely presented a spectrum of heteronormative spaces from uninviting to dangerous, could only happen by imagining a present and future that was different. Seymour draws on queer scholar José Esteban Muñoz’s work on queer utopianism to forge the link between queer futures and anti-capitalism: “that we might use the past and the future to combat the kind of here-and-now logic that allows capitalism, among other things, to flourish” (2013, 10). In other words, she presents a sense of queer environmental futures that can fight against the hetero-capitalist logic that threatens and

stunts all of us—not just queer people, but all entities that are marginalized by the norms of this system. I see capitalism managing my future in shaping my sexuality for marriage and child-rearing and my mind for a career. At the same time, it functions materially and environmentally in ways that sacrifice our planetary future for its profligate use of resources today.

Capitalism's engine is fueled by extractive industries that treat land and labor as disposable. As environmental justice scholar, Rachel Stein writes, there is a disproportionate effect of environmental ills on “poor communities and communities of color” ranging from “dumping of industrial toxic wastes, struggles over water rights and water quality... substandard housing, toxic schools, economic disinvestment” which “may be exacerbated due to our gender and sexuality” (2004, 2). Even those of us not living in extremely polluted environments (like me in my suburban New Jersey childhood home) are affected by capitalism's insidious disregard for “right relations” to land and community<sup>12</sup>. We might feel disconnected from the natural environment due to urban sprawl<sup>13</sup>. We may also feel disconnected from our neighbors in our single-family homes, separated by manicured lawns and fences. And disconnected from our supermarket food that is easily replenished from who-knows-where. Why would we stop by the neighbors to ask for an egg or cup of sugar anyway? These systems we live under suggest we can individually buy our way to happiness through consumer goods which we need our menial jobs to afford. And, in American capitalism access to these jobs is controlled by white heteronormative society (Chen 2020).

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<sup>12</sup> See Glossary p. 54

<sup>13</sup> See Glossary p. 55

## **Heteronormativity at Gettysburg College (And Escape From It)**

I find myself facing a microcosm of this white, straight, male control in the fraternity-dominated culture at Gettysburg College and the consistency with which they are assured a monopoly on campus space in their huge houses. This type of privilege is tied to the past as the fraternity alumni have now become big donors (with capitalism firmly on their side). While their philanthropy can benefit students like myself who come to the college on much needed scholarships, it also often tends to maintain hierarchical traditions that require deeper critical attention. Bob Garthwait who the (Garthwait Leadership Center is named after) was a fraternity member of Alpha Chi Rho in the 80s and became a large donor and Board of Trustees member, until he resigned when a picture of him dressed as a Nazi at a frat party surfaced (Pontz and Mangala 2019). Whether he should resign or not was a much contested issue, and the contemporary debate speaks to the racism that accompanies white heteronormativity, bubbling behind fraternity walls. It also reminds us that some fraternity members garner power and influence over the present campus climate through their control of campus spaces for student socializing.

In attempting to conform to the norms of Gettysburg College, I attended fraternity parties. They provided the primary scene for socializing while channeling my lust and need for excitement through heteronormative lenses. I was often subconsciously changing my behaviors to suit the male gaze and finding validation in the attention of the men who controlled everything from alcohol distribution to what music was being played. I was mostly just trying to dance and lose myself in that bodily pleasure but I had to defer to filling an expected role as an underclassmen at a party to get my songs played. I dreamed about having space controlled by

people like me, having parties that were high-energy in a similar way to these parties but more safe.

Just past the frat houses, surrounding the college is the Gettysburg National Military Park (aka the battlefield) which is the only natural space within walking distance that students can find solace. As a lonely first-year, I would come here and find myself walking, feeling the breeze, and hearing the birds, and thinking of home. At that time, the history of the land that this battlefield occupies, whose depth of context and contradiction creates varied possibilities for relating to land, was overwhelmingly missed by me as I was seeking secluded spots to be myself. I wanted to write poems and breathe air and touch the rocks and ground and think about nothing or just about me. Robert E. Lee never crossed my mind but I would sometimes people-watch and wonder why anyone would choose to be here and look at the statues (like *really* look and read the plaques). I also wondered why I didn't see more students here. Was this a place ever intended for college student stress relief? The college was here before the Battle of Gettysburg even happened but why does that fact feel so unimaginable, especially for me as a queer student. Queer students wouldn't have been welcome to the college or battlefield then, are we now? How firm is the grip of tradition? To whose detriment is it held onto?

### **The Historical Gettysburg Landscape**

I wasn't drawn to American Civil War history in the way most people are, with an interest in the role war plays in nation building, or in how people use strategies and tactics to out-manuever enemies, but in trying to answer my own questions of who has access to this place, it became clear to me that imagining a past is essential for imagining a present and future. Freedom dreaming is a tradition rooted in the Civil Rights era but can be centered on asking these questions: "What does the dominant culture have that we want? What does the dominant

culture have that we don't want? What do we have that we want to keep?" (Tourmaline 2020). I was happy to see the battlefield land preserved even if it was by dominant cultural institutions like the National Park Service, but I noticed its use not being truly accessible to all kinds of people. Seeing how history affects our present struggles for liberation helped me notice these trends and think up answers to these questions, especially in a place like Gettysburg where we encounter figures from the past (albeit made of stone) everyday: their presence emboldening some people's ideologies and erasing the presence of others.

I have learned that who controls the battlefields has changed drastically over time: from the Department of War, to private citizens, and now to the National Park Service (NPS) (Black 2012, 349). With these changes in power, have come changes in the treatment of the land and intention in how it should be consumed by tourists. The Civil War was a war about slavery: the North wanted to expand westward and take the land for small, white farmers, while the South wanted to expand its plantation economy which was built on slave labor (Fiege 2012, 201-202). The intentions for war weren't moral, but were economic, and ultimately capitalist. The North didn't fight for the sake of freeing the enslaved who suffered so immensely for generations, but because their economic and land needs conflicted with the continuation of slavery in the South. The South used racist justifications to continue slavery, and horrible atrocities were acted on slaves by their masters: the primary motivation for fighting was that the entire Southern economy was reliant on the enslavement of Black people. The competitive pressures of the global cotton market spurred plantation owners to engulf "the far more productive soils of the Alabama and Mississippi black belts, a massive migration that entailed the brutal dispossession of Native Americans from the Southwest and the systematic breakup of slave families and communities" (Oakes 2016, 199). When cotton prices were low, the slaveholders simply increased their

productivity and output by working slaves harder (Oakes 2016, 199). This capitalist greed and unsustainable consumption of people and land to feed it, significantly shapes a white American relationship to land and to non-white people.

The North and South differed in their relationship to the land for profit and for battle, but the war would be decided by which side could best leverage the landscape and its goods to their strategic advantage (Fiege 2012, 200-218). Many of the problems the Confederacy had leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg, were defined by the landscape: lack of railroads, use of rivers by the Union to invade, lack of food since most of the plantations grew inedible staple crops. The culmination in Gettysburg was sort of an accident, but its distinct topography proved important to how the battle unfolded. In a decisive move, Robert E. Lee decided to attack the Union Army which turned out to be detrimental, as the Union occupied the literal high ground. Little Round Top and Culp's Hill provided natural and manipulated barriers to the Rebel onslaught, when Union commanders ordered their soldiers to move the logs, rocks, and soil to create a barrier against gunshots. The final effort would be known as Pickett's Charge wherein around fourteen thousand Rebel soldiers assembled in front of Seminary Ridge and moved as a wave across the landscape and collided in a huge, violent clash with the Yankees on Cemetery Ridge, where around half of the Rebel soldiers perished (Fiege 2012, 214-218). Because of these topographical features being so important to understanding the battle, and the battle's importance in deciding the Civil War, this landscape has been preserved.

The land that was littered with bodies of at least seven thousand humans and around three thousand horses, decaying and festering (Fiege 2012, 220) is the place that I walked or ran or pranced, singing to myself with comfort and delight as a college student. The places of the most bloodshed were sites I was taken to almost as soon as I got to Gettysburg College during Lincoln

Scholars pre-orientation. It felt as good as it does now to leave campus and go walk around somewhere (even in the August heat), though at that time, I didn't really learn too much about the land aside from specific details of the battle with some parts of it semi-reenacted by our awkward group of kids who had just met each other. The actors in the Civil War we learned about were only white men, and at that time, I didn't really feel good about seeing busses go by with Confederate flags on them. But what I did like were the sprawling fields. It made me feel a little less closed in to this new life (even though there were fences everywhere). I felt more peaceful than I had at other times in those first few days of orientation.

Some historians would critique the progression of the battlefield from being clearly damaged and torn from battle, to a pastoral and beautiful scene that can make it hard to envision the bloodshed (Fiege 2012, 226). As Brian Black notes, though the Gettysburg Battlefield was not created to preserve the scenery for its own sake but because the natural features were essential for understanding the battle (2012, 352), they highlight its "sacredness" as a site of historical significance in the national imagination. Fiege even goes as far to describe Americans' visitation of Gettysburg as "pilgrimages to a national shrine" (2012, 225). I'm not sure if the peacefulness I felt when walking alone on the battlefield was the sacredness the GNMP is meant to preserve. I felt more awed by nature, my heart and mind opened up by the open air, whereas historically, the battlefields' use is much more complicated than that.

Allusion to the sacred was both used to prevent certain tourist activity (like limiting reenactments) (Black 2012, 359) and also as a justification for stringently policing the landscape and attempting to return it to how it looked in 1863, with the ultimate goal being tourist draw (2012, 360). The "continual monitoring and intensive management" is what Black sees as an egregious controlling of nature (2012, 361). For me, this management style cannot be separated



from colonial and masculine ideologies of controlling nature which are recurring in US history. According to the NPS “there are 1,328 monuments, memorials, markers, and plaques on the battlefield that commemorate and memorialize *the men* who fought and died during the Battle of Gettysburg” (National Park Service 2020, emphasis by me), standing in positions of dominance, on a pedestal looking down on visitors (unless in you’re in one of the tall buses). More specifically, these monuments depict *white men*. Though Gettysburg had a large Black population preceding the Civil War, they faced constant prejudice from other townspeople (Fuoss 2018, 76-96) and were forbidden by Lincoln to serve for the Union (except for in the Navy or as cooks/servants in Federal military camps). Once Black residents discovered that their homes lay in the Rebels’ path, they had to decide whether they would resist or flee, as it became obvious that they could be violently captured and transported to the South for enslavement. Many Black people throughout Pennsylvania pushed Governor Andrew Curtin to allow for their enlistment, as Rebels poured into the state, which he allowed, resulting in droves of Black militiamen. Some like Basil Biggs, Black resident of Gettysburg, sent his family north, but remained at his property which he had worked hard for as a “veterinarian, wagon driver, and farmhand,” only fleeing at the last moment when Confederate forces rode into town. The damage to his home and property that he returned to were immense, similar to what many other Black residents experienced. Biggs remained, but many of the other Black residents left Gettysburg after the battle, with an unknown number captured by Confederates and sent South to be enslaved (Fuoss 2018, 76-96). These stories are only now beginning to be told (Michael 2021).

And still, what of the many women who tended to the wounded? Tillie Pierce, only 15 at the time of the Battle of Gettysburg, took care of soldiers behind Little Round Top and also wrote a detailed account of the battle (Elspas 2020). This obviously shows her bravery,

compassion, and intelligence, but also speaks to her privilege in not fearing enslavement when the Confederates came and her ability to attend school to give her these writing skills. Fuoss notes that “Between problems of illiteracy and the prioritization of reconstruction, white observers controlled written narratives of black citizens in the campaign” (Fuoss 2018, 99). We may never know about the participation of Black women who might not have fled, or those who resisted their capture by Confederate soldiers. Instead, the stories told right after the battle encouraged the celebration of the “equal valor and heroism exhibited by *white* Union and Confederate soldiers” (2018 100-101, emphasis by me). Why should only the white men fighting to sustain (or end, through economic rather than moral motivations) a system with this inherent, racial and sexual violence be put on pedestals for tourists to admire? Elevated in stature literally and morally?

Other national parks in the US differ somewhat from the battlefield’s origins but are also rooted in preserving racism, toxic masculinity, and heteronormativity. The fear that “white European masculinity” was declining due to urbanization was sparked by “...medical thinkers of the late nineteenth century c[oming] to believe that the environmental conditions of large urban centers actually cultivated the homosexuality that people were (they thought, increasingly) seeing”, which was also linked to rising numbers of immigrants (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 13). National and state parks were meant to be the cure for these urban ailments as white men could go into the wilderness and become strong and “masculine” through recreation (2010, 13-14). The battlefield is not meant to be used in this way, even though it is a national park, but it furthers this able-bodied male narrative of power and control and resilience in the face of a harsh landscape.

To return to Fiege, the battlefield continues to be used by various groups to affirm white supremacy or embolden white patriotic ideology (2012, 226). The Peace Light was unveiled on the 75th anniversary of the battle by a Union and a Confederate veteran, while President Roosevelt said “All of them we honor, not asking under which Flag they fought then – thankful that they stand together under one Flag now”(Hawks 2020). This effectively reduced the Civil War to a skirmish between brothers when it was actually a fight over land and enslaved labor to fuel American capitalism. The reduction to everyone standing under one flag ignored the enduring plight of Black people during 1938, and upheld white supremacy. Importantly, the battlefield has become as Fiege and others note, also a place for more peaceful and inclusive narratives. This same monument would be a place of convening and memorial after the murder of African American students at Kent State, entwined with anti-Vietnam War protests (2012, 226). And most recently Scott Hancock, Professor of History and Africana Studies at Gettysburg, and about thirty others gathered at the Peace Light to fill in this missing history with signs bearing quotations from primary sources about the treatment of slaves by monumentalized figures like Robert E. Lee (Schuessler 2020). The “neutrality” of Roosevelt is now being combatted in the work of people like Hancock, through revealing buried historical facts thereby helping us recognize a fuller picture of our past in such places.

### **My Relationship to this Place**

Even as place-making happens at a personal and psychological level of self (as I noted in the Introduction), it also refers to “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value” (Project for Public Spaces 2007). The Gettysburg National Military Park cannot be neatly summarized as purely historical or purely cultural or even as purely a park. In speaking of battlefields in general, they are “not devoted to the

preservation of priceless and unique natural scenery for future generations, nor [are they] intended to provide relief from urban stress. It is a space devoted to the memory of war, an attempt to create a memorial in the classic sense, a place that evokes reflection on the meaning of the tumultuous events that transpired within its precincts” (Black 2012, 349-350). Black prompts me here to question what an “authentic” landscape really looks like: is it a place that preserves a historical time in a certain place? Or would it be something allowed to grow and change uncontrolled by humans? What does it mean that I use the battlefield to relieve my stress which is not the intended use? What does it mean that for some, the being on the battlefield sparks real fear for their safety in the idolization of slaveholders and erasure of Black narratives?

The intentions within the preservation of the GNMP point more towards historical and capitalist uses than anything else, but it is similar to other parks and green spaces in that it is surrounded by development but remains open and public. There is a freedom there that isn't present on campus or walking through town. I have been looking for, without even being conscious of it, more spaces outside that I could be my full queer self. In often being associated with urbanity, queer people are seemingly disconnected from natural spaces, when it is actually the opposite: they are often more connected and politically active for environmental causes (Seymour 2013 18-19, 25). Recent research has noted that “lesbians, bisexuals and gay people were more than twice as likely to join anti-war, environmental, and anti-corporate movements” (Swank 2018, 183). I thought I'd need to leave Gettysburg to really find my queer self in a city, but nature can be the perfect place for self-discovery.

At college, I found myself reading about Vancouver's West End which is a place that has a green matrix of parks (namely Stanley Park) wherein the newly “out” gay men in the 70s and 80s could meet up and be together, sheltered from the police by dense vegetation (Ingram 2010,

257-258). In much of North America, the green matrices near more densely populated places were lost during the twentieth century and so queer communities evolved differently than the West End, which drew queer people there who wanted to be together outdoors (Ingram 2010, 263). Gettysburg is another unique exception as a well-preserved green matrix (e.g. different parts of the battlefield are not connected), and because of the college and draw of young people, has an opportunity to be a queer space. Since I had little space on campus to be myself and I wanted to be outside, away from a policing presence or heteronormative gaze, I found myself with queer lovers on the battlefield (especially at night) somewhat like the queers in Stanley Park. I only really understood my motivations later but it was partly a response to accidentally letting my queerness out on campus and seeing the response from people. It was of course motivated by a love of being outside and the pure pleasure of kissing someone while having my hands pressed in the grass, but I more often did these things in queer relationships. The safety of secrecy was also a factor *and* at the same time my desire to be outside and my desire for queer relationships aligned and magnified each other. I had a hard time parsing this out at the time in realizing my queerness in college. There is the push and pull of campus: it is the place you want to escape from for its stress and heteronormativity but you are drawn back in by the love of learning and knowledge that your only queer community for miles is here, even if it is relegated to certain spaces and not fully accepted. My place-making<sup>14</sup> on the battlefield was always tied to these negative and positive aspects of campus, with a wandering and imaginative mind leading me somewhere.

My ability to cultivate my queer desire was both enabled and restricted by the conditions of Gettysburg College. “Wanting” can be defined as “position[ing] a young person as feeling entitled to that which comes in the future” (Fine and McClelland 2017, 317), which makes it a

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<sup>14</sup> See Glossary p. 54

radical political act for those whose desires are not addressed by traditional structures like majority heteronormative colleges. Reina Gossett, trans activist and filmmaker, better known as Tourmaline, explains that “freedom dreaming” aligns with this definition of wanting in that our longings and dreams birth actions that transform our conditions (Tourmaline 2020). We manifest the future by acting in the present. During my first-year freedom dreaming looked like small escapes in my imagination to queerer spaces, if I couldn’t do it physically: huddling in a corner of a dorm hallway with my friend illegally streaming *Call Me By Your Name*, playing a male character in a play and bringing my boyishness to it, sitting on the Hansen Hall porch with my friends and divulging desires at night with barely anyone around. My draw to the battlefield was strong but didn’t really become routine and therapeutic until my sophomore year when I’d need to leave the claustrophobia of the Paxton motel residence. My friend and I would walk or bike through the neighborhood that had castle-like frat houses as well as beautiful houses of community members, to get to the field where you can see the watchtower and Peace Light out in the distance. We’d sit on a blanket under the stars and talk and forget about the campus a bit. The outline of the trees against the sky would take different shapes on different nights, the moon providing different light when it was shaped like a clove of garlic or a toenail. Something was happening to us, something enriching us, and sustaining our continued study at the college.

Edward Linenthal, American Studies scholar specializing in memorials, thought of the Gettysburg National Military Park as a place where in touching the rocks, trees, and earth we could transcend the barrier between past and present, connecting to those who died (Linenthal 1991; Fiege 2012, 227). Basil Biggs and many other African Americans disinterred the bodies buried in shallow graves on the battlefield to move them to the Soldiers National Cemetery enacting “the first physical efforts to develop a commemorative landscape at Gettysburg” (Fuoss

2018, 97). We must remember and honor them. A telling of their stories is essential for making the GNMP safer for Black students who might feel they have no legacy there. “Thick desire” which asserts that young people are entitled to peaceful conditions in which to cultivate their desires and “imagine living in a future tense” (Fine and McClelland 2017, 297), is at stake for BIPOC and all other students of marginalized identities (including LGBTQ+) in a distortion of this history. Remembrance is the sacredness I have never really spoken of, but I talk about it now with my queer friends who feel and confirm it too. I am calling for a healing of this land in intimate student reconnection to it. By understanding its history and our place in it, we can move towards the future, acknowledging the blood fertilizing the land, and healing both land and people in tandem. This piece of writing is one offering towards this possibility.

## Community

When I say community, I am thinking of a group of humans and non-humans who love and support you. All people need community to support their growth, but queer people seem to often be seeking it out, as they aren't always accepted by the families and communities into which they are born. So I draw on queer studies scholarship to help me think about how we can expand our love to a diversity of humans in ways that transcend the boundaries of heteronormative conceptions. Queer ecologies as well as Indigenous knowledges, further expand these inclusive ideas of love and support to the non-human world. The way that many Americans conceive of community is steeped in capitalism, settler colonialism, and the ways those forces structure family, and in so doing, behave violently to people, land, and animals.. A queer Indigenous ecological lens centers community structures that defy these parameters in boldly loving land, people, and animals in consensual, enriching ways. Following adrienne maree brown's attention and work on pleasure activism<sup>15</sup>, I am imagining the move away from community violence through support enabled by deep communication and an orientation towards the pleasures and desires of community members (2019, 13).

For me, blood relatives, especially the nuclear family, provided my first community, because it was with them that my home's "appearance, sounds, and smells become part of a daily round" (Emmett & Nye 2017, 24). These connections to home-place were mediated by the nuclear family and so discouraged certain eccentric/queer behavior while disconnecting me from any real conception of a culture outside of white America, as well as from a broader sense of community. My blood family connections used to be especially strong when my life revolved around Italian Sunday dinners with my grandma and aunts and cousins, which I never thought of as distinct from American culture. I think the feeling of disconnection from a lineage is common

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<sup>15</sup> See Glossary p. 54



among white Americans, especially those who have immigrants far back in our family histories, and so lack a real connection with the place we come from. Alexandria Barnes, an American with Greek heritage puts it well: “I wanted to know why there weren’t rituals that held us together and why holidays felt devoid of meaning and connection” (2019, 54). Only “superficial ornaments but not the traditions, magic, or lore” (Barnes 2019, 53) were passed down to me which has caused me to feel ungrounded. After my Grandma died, these “superficial ornaments” became even more superficial, a link lost to my Italian lineage. Recently, I have wanted to learn more about my ancestors to deepen my relationship to my past (which I realized was so important in the “Futurity” section in a collective sense) and feel a sense of relationality to something bigger than myself and my immediate family.

From these complicated blood relations, friends were added through activities and school. The haphazardness of these connections has made me think a lot about the difference between chosen and accidental relations. In a way, you choose who in your “extended” family you want to be close to, but there is no way to escape (as a young person) that you live with who you live with, at least for me there wasn’t. Growing into my queerness has made my blood relationships more tenuous, for it seemed like the more I learn about myself, the further I deviate from my family’s values. This is evidenced by my alignment with this statement by Sami Schalk, professor of Gender and Women’s Studies and pleasure activist: “For me, my sexuality has space for all gender identities and presentations, but my attraction to BDSM, my polyamory, and my political stance against marriage are just as central to my sexuality and relationships” (Schalk 2019, 172). This broad conception of sexuality is inherently opposed to the nuclear family structure I come from where straightness, monogamy, and child-bearing are expected. My blood family knows that I am bisexual and accepts that in some ways, but they are able to be in denial

about my gender identity because they think my primary partner is a man and they think I am a woman (the auspice of straightness). I haven't told them that I am non-binary (and use they/them pronouns) because my mother especially, has expressed sentiments that non-binary people are just confused or mentally-ill. I don't fear that she will throw me out of the house but I fear the face-to-face invalidation that would come from talking about it. My sister and friends and partners give me support in this regard which sustains me, but the lurking pain does get ignited when my mom and others use she/her.

And with friends, are they really chosen or do circumstances bring you together? How are we supposed to think about our past relationships and/or decide who we want to stay in relation with? I still have dreams of childhood friends that I have long-stopped interacting with for one reason or another. In one dream recently, I was speaking to a friend who took me on my first camping trip. I thanked her for giving me that experience and said that I think of her often when I am on a road trip or backpacking. This is true but I never really acknowledged it in my waking states. To speak to her in the present and express gratitude felt good, even though it was a dream. She was someone I loved even though we grew apart for various circumstantial reasons. I want to be intentional in who I stay loving, and let go who is not fulfilling which I am learning through studying/practicing polyamory, a concept I elaborate on later. Now I will explain the role that fraternities play in college community-building.

### **Fraternities and College Community**

College is framed as providing you with an instant community. Since my choice to attend Gettysburg College was haphazard and financially-rooted, I didn't feel like I belonged for any real reason, and so I dismissed the idea that this was a genuine community. I would cringe at platitudes like "this is your new home!". I can recall visiting Gettysburg on a rainy day, as a

prospective student, running late with my mom, all these bad omens coloring my experience with foreboding, and then once I was there, thinking the whole time about how I was going to have sex later. The future decisions of what college to attend didn't seem as important to me as my present pleasurable thoughts. This orientation towards pleasure has followed me through my college career, and always seemed at odds with the demands of academia.

I was warned about the frat presence on the Gettysburg campus before attending, but I didn't know how queer I was yet, or how strong the grip of heteronormative Greek life was on campus social life. Their houses literally surround the campus, (which I might have noticed when visiting if I wasn't lost in sexual fantasy), and for me, create a sense of being trapped. This monopoly on space only becomes more evident on Friday and Saturday nights as groups of students flood the streets, crossing paths and interacting about which frat they're going to next. In fraternity culture, toxic masculinity and heteronormativity are upheld by the demeaning ratio system, which is affirmed by an anonymous Gettysburg student's account: "How many girls we would need to bring along like cattle so that we could have the proper ratio to gain access. Trying to find the most attractive ones to sell to the brothers like fresh meat" (Anonymous 2019). I have been demeaned by the ratio dilemma, being gendered as a woman based on how I looked, which made it easier in some ways to get into frat parties, but I was at a loss for what to think once I was allowed inside.

All Gettysburg students (especially women) hear stories of assault and pass along tips like "don't got to SAE because it basically stands for Sexual Assault Expected". Such understandings are not unique to Gettysburg, as studies show that many fraternities have a "propensity to develop a culture that is conducive to sexual abuse" created by a gender hierarchy where men hold the dominant position (Kummerow and Stompler 2016). The Instagram account

“@gburgsurvivors” posts anonymous stories from survivors of interpersonal violence at Gettysburg College, with so many of them mentioning fraternity involvement (Survivors of Gettysburg 2020-2021). I would often descend many stairs into a fraternity basement where the dance area would be surrounded on all sides by pledges leaning against the wall, and a raised DJ and bar area, with men controlling the music and alcohol distribution. You might see men and women dancing together or making out, and if it is two women kissing, it is likely a coerced performance for the male gaze. And if it is two women willingly kissing of their own desire, the uninvited male gaze will certainly be upon them. These norms and performances subconsciously shifted my behavior as I was growing into my sexuality in college.

### **Sexual Misconceptions: Rethinking the Role of Polyamory in Community**

Like a fraternity environment, my first conceptions of polyamory were over-sexualized and heteronormative: either of naked hippies in the 60s, or a semi-modern conception of a sex dungeon wherein everyone is in latex or leather and handcuffs. One conception is seemingly more “natural” and bright (sunlight on bodies) while the other is dark and hidden, but both are stereotypes of the breadth of ways to be polyamorous. I was forced to reckon with these stereotypes when I broke up with a long-term, long-distance monogamous partner my second year of college (ironically, the one I was thinking about on the college tour) and became sexual with multiple partners. I followed my lust where it led me within the prescribed gender and sexuality roles I was falsely ascribing too, which felt better than when I had been in monogamy, but was I actually being polyamorous?

Something about these relations wasn’t completely fulfilling but I couldn’t imagine another way. I was conditioned in the Gettysburg environment to believe that casual sex with cisgender heterosexual men was my only options for sexual fulfillment without being “tied

down” to one person. In this process, a trusted friend referred me to *The Ethical Slut* written with the wisdom of authors Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy. Even before knowing what polyamory could be and whether I want it as some have defined it, I was reassured that “our programming about love, intimacy, and sex can be rewritten... By breaking the rules, we both free and empower ourselves” (Easton and Hardy 2017, 13). To aid in my reprogramming/unlearning were the seeds of my queerness and deep erotic knowledge that required my focused attention, when I had previously dismissed those feelings as frivolous. My socialization had distanced me from this self-knowledge but Easton and Hardy reminded me that it was there: I just needed to nurture it.

Polyamory doesn’t really have a neat definition. Some reasons why can be seen in this “definition”: “Some feel it includes all forms of sexual relationships other than monogamy, while others restrict its meaning to committed long-term love relationships (thereby excluding swinging, casual sexual contact, fuck-buddy circles, and other forms of intimacy). We like it because, unlike “nonmonogamy,” it does not assume monogamy as a norm (Easton and Hardy 2017, 278). The fluidity in this semi-definition gave me a space of transition from monogamy to a more expansive understanding of my sexuality and desire, which would grow with me.

At base, I came to define polyamory for myself as “maintaining multiple loving relationships at once”. Realizing that this was what it meant and what I desired, was very different than practicing it. My conditioning in a compulsory monogamous, heteronormative society still left deep marks on my thinking and feeling that I would need to reckon with. And one of these really influential reflections of societal norms for me was pornography. Pornography is complicated because it both programmed me in normative ways to desire men and (ironically) connected me to my queer sexuality. In speaking on desires and fantasies, brown reminds us that

the many complications of rape culture infuse “fantasies of incest, rape, coercion, boundary transgression, force, transaction and scenarios where the masculine wields power over the feminine” into our sexual desires (2019, 223). Based on mainstream media like TV and movies and from porn, I learned that sex was supposed to happen spontaneously, wordlessly, and perfectly, with both people knowing intuitively what the other person wants. And combined with the idea that the woman should be passive, I often found my boundaries transgressed by men. They assumed I wanted certain things without asking. Some of them I did want, because of my socialization, but I was turned off by their assumptions, and still found myself with little language for how to negotiate those situations. I would ignore the wisdom of my body and its boundaries, thinking that I needed/wanted the sex I was engaging in when sometimes I just wanted to flirt. My repeated failure to assert my boundaries (especially with men) is also rooted in family dynamics. I was often told by older people in my family to alter my appearance to be more desirable to men, with the subtext that how I want to look doesn’t matter. Similarly, I was taught by my family that love is unconditional, so in those situations where I wasn’t being supported by my lover, I wasn’t necessarily supposed to set boundaries or be upfront about my disagreement with their ideas.

The sex negativity (especially for queer sexualities) I experienced at home and at Gettysburg, further cemented my association of sex positivity and a lack of boundaries. Sex positivity is the belief that consensual sex is a healthy force in our lives, while sex negativity is believing that sex is dangerous and that certain desires are wrong (Easton and Hardy 2017, 280). Even in classes like “Feminism and Pornography” we focused so much on the ways that pornography is dangerous rather than the ways it can be liberating and pleasurable (for viewers and actors). I thought sex-positivity meant that you shouldn’t think too much about what/who it

is that you desired, and instead just listen to your bodily urges. I now see how failing to tune into the mental and spiritual aspects of desire can have negative repercussions (which I expand more on in the concluding section on “Embodiment”). I was also learning more about kink spaces at this time of hooking up with men: listening to episodes of the Queer Sex Podcast in headphones while I ate alone in Servo. I heard about the vast possibilities within kink and heard some things I wanted to try, but I realized a lot of my current desires were results of patriarchal conditioning. I am still in the process of unlearning and picking what it is I want to hold on to.

Though brown states that “desire-setting happens early, and if we aren’t both careful and creative we can get stuck in fantasies that don’t mature and politicize with us” (2019, 222) they also give hope that it doesn’t have to be that way. There are some desires I don’t need to let go of completely but that I can intentionally shift by imagining new fantasies (2019, 224). I also have the power to engage in certain sex acts that could have been demeaning in one setting, but are consensual and liberating in another. There is a difference between holding yourself with kindness in your complicated desires that are molded by our patriarchal environments, and being sex negative, which I was conflating. We all must make a choice to love ourselves enough to access our desires and see which are deeply fulfilling, without shaming ourselves for some things that still turn us on. I am excited and energized by the possible shifts I can make by tapping into my deeper desires inspired by ethical pornography and queer sex educators (brown 2019; Easton and Hardy 2017; AORTA Films 2021). We are all contradictory and complex, which brings me to an expansion of polyamory to relationships with the more-than-human.

### **Loving Nature: Queer Indigenous Ecologies**

I have a practice of going on walks when I am trying to solve problems and understand my place in conflicts, especially regarding relationships. It can help to be alone and clear my

mind of everything except for the issue at hand so I can move through the emotional turmoil that the situation is causing me. Then I can think of the best way to address the harm. Touching trees with my hands and walking close so that branches brush my face are grounding exercises that allow me to feel my feelings without being overwhelmed (Petrus-Nasah 2019, 281) What kind of relationship was I cultivating here? A parasitic one where I extract comfort from these plants and give nothing back? How can I make this relationship deeper and more mutual? In her work, Dr. Kim TallBear of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate expands the previous definition of polyamory to the more-than-human. She refers to her work in this field as “autoethnographic polyamory practice” (TallBear 2020). Tallbear “translates” these knowledges in important and expansive ways: “In my Indigenous and Dakota translation, polyamorous multiplicity is not only about human relations. It is an ethic that also focuses on multiple relations with place, and values the hard work of relating to and translating among different knowledges” (TallBear 2020). I aspire to this sense of polyamory.

While, Easton and Hardy’s definition provides a helpful start to my understanding of polyamory, they only account for human relations. TallBear offers another voice and experience that is essential for a widespread shift away from how coloniality wires us to treat the land and each other. The widespread adoption of colonial ways of relating is integrally related to an undermining of Indigenous sovereignty. Monogamous ownership of our partners is integrally related to ownership of land as is evidenced by The Dawes Act which divided Indigenous land into private parcels owned by a male head of a nuclear family, and furthered settler constructions of family, gender, and sexuality, to assimilate Indigenous people (Finkelman and Garrison 2009). These constructions were forced on Indigenous people, and in different ways, are also forced on non-Indigenous people. We need to be vigilant when we lapse into colonial relations to land and



each other, which is inevitable as these values are built into the institutions and structures governing American life. One way to stay vigilant can be to learn about the land we occupy and the Indigenous people who traditionally stewarded the land and continue to operate in “right relationship” to it. I realized, I was using trees and earth to answer questions about my human relations but I found I was also projecting love out towards these beings who I felt were supporting me. I still need to more intentionally cultivate this love and intimacy for the non-human world because it guides and sustains my polyamorous relationships to family, friends, lovers, and the world.

When I first thought about intentionally deepening my relationship with nature I turned to backpacking. In my life, this has also acted as an escape from living conditions that are not ideal with my blood family. I have a lot of privilege in being able to step away from home life to go to the woods with friends who I have sort of chosen to be in relation with: together we have the right gear to be able to make shelter, food, filter water, and not freeze. We are also all white and so see ourselves represented by mainstream media in outdoor activities generally, and backpacking specifically. These representations are not passive for “they also have the power to determine who actually participates in environment related activities and who does not; which voices are heard in environmental debates and which voices are not” (Finney 2014, 3). The reverberations of colonial history’s privileging of who has access became apparent to me as a white person. As environmental sociologists like Carolyn Finney highlight, “The ideas, thoughts, and solutions that arise from an African American experience of the environment are mediated by differential access, needs, privilege, and history” (Finney 2014, 4). In contrast to my experiences of pleasurable escape, nature activity environments reproduce inequalities and so make this relationship for people of color more complicated.

I realized the poignancy of this inequitable access at Gettysburg, as someone white like me, without a car on campus, can walk to the nearby battlefields for time in a natural environment with little about my appearance communicating my identities that could be targeted or policed (e.g. queer and trans), whereas QTBIPOC are targeted, preventing their use of the battlefield. This racism is due in part to the misrepresentation of Gettysburg's history, as the section on "Futurity" evidenced, to undermine African American experiences during and after the Civil War. There have been numerous meetings of the KKK on the battlefield (Hamilton 2013; Dougherty 2014; Mathias and Campbell 2017) often sanctioned by the NPS under "freedom of speech". This white supremacist presence is emboldened by the monuments which affirm their memorialization of people like Robert E. Lee and use of the confederate flag (Globalstory2 2020). The battlefield is not always rife with huge groups of white supremacists, though I often see individual visitors with confederate flags on their cars. So, this natural space, despite being public lands, is not accessible to everyone (Schuessler 2020).

Before I learned about the deepseatedness of American environmentalism's<sup>16</sup> preferential history, I bought into its myth of land use for recreation. Though, as someone who has had access to green spaces and public parks my whole life, I never experienced anything like backpacking until I went with a friend during a summer break from college. There is a masochistic element where you know you're going to be in physical pain and you want to feel that to prove that the comforts of suburban life don't define/limit you. Especially at first, my friends and I were all about ascending peaks and adding them to our list of completed ones so one day we could be Adirondack 46ers, which is a title you achieve when you summit all 46 High Peaks in the Adirondack Mountains. This sense of "conquering the challenge" is built into the white American colonial history of men dominating wilderness. As environmental historian Kimberly

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<sup>16</sup> See Glossary p. 54

A. Jarvis notes, wilderness politics were first being advocated between 1870 and 1930 and the idea “was attractive to both men and women, [but] wilderness was often referred to in masculine terms. Rugged and dangerous, wilderness experiences required physical strength and endurance, which would counterbalance the effects of the more effeminate modern urban life that many Americans believed threatened American masculinity” (2007, 150). Such ideologies persist as I have often felt belittled as femme-presenting by some men in rock climbing or hiking contexts. Even as I experienced this attitude of masculine-coded dominance towards the natural environment that colonial society has embedded me within, I had to figure whether it was the act of backpacking itself that was colonial and patriarchal or whether the intentions and identities behind it were just as important.

Depictions of people like John Muir as “rugged” and “manly” because he would venture out alone, dominate mainstream environmental histories in the US, but backpacking has never been about solitude for me. Connecting to my loved ones and nature in tandem is what excites me. My companions have on their backs the material for our survival, as well as the love and energy to keep me motivated. While you walk, you might be aligned in pace with different people at different times and get to talk to them about something you share (like an idea or an ache/pain). The different kinds of connections sustain you in the journey. I feel like these friendships are a microcosm of a community relying on each other for survival. TallBear and Willey highlight the value of friendship as “a site of intimacy, meaning-making, resource sharing, and transformation [which] has the potential to unravel stories about the specialness of sex and to fuel our imaginations to rethink forms and structures that exceed the ideal of the settler family, which may sustain and remake us” (2019, 8). As they have connected here, seeing the importance of friendships in our life for bringing a different kind of love and intimacy and

growth can help us upset the trajectory of monogamous couple to family. In being with friends and seeing how different people and places draw different feelings/personalities/intimacies out of me, I am reminded that I have always practiced polyamory: friendship is one of the many loving relationships we sustain at once.

The time has come now to hone the skills of multi-relationality and be more intentional about loving not just my immediate friends but the land, animals, and the larger community of people who have been denied the ability to engage in “right relations”. Here, I turn again to the wisdom of Indigenous thinkers, who are upsetting the colonial hold on nature, outdoor discourses, and spaces. Jolie Varela founded Indigenous Women Hike to reconnect to the Paiute lands that her ancestors are from and hike the Nüümü Poyo, which was named the John Muir Trail by the US government after his death in 1915 (Chavez 2018). The “ancestral relationship between the Paiute women and the Nüümü Poyo” predates the US and John Muir, as it was used by Ahwahnechee, Paiute, Miwuk, Mono, and other tribes to care for the land, before they were forcibly removed to create the national parks (Chavez 2018). Tazbah Chavez who wrote this piece for Project 562 gives a summation of the connection: “When you’re hiking that far on your own land it’s as if your body takes over because your cells, skin and muscles are made of thousands of years of inherent endurance. Your body adapts to altitude because it’s your ancestors’ breath in your lungs, you drink the water straight from the flowing creeks because it’s the original life source, and you trust your internal navigation because your spirit knows where it’s going” (Chavez 2018). They would speak to the land in Paiute which is their language that enriches the land in calling back to their ancestors who walked this path before them, and enriches the speaker in connecting them to that history. Varela has an Instagram page called “Indigenous Women Hike” where she provides education and resources while also fundraising

for loved ones and providing updates on her work in her Paiute community. Varela and others in Indigenous Women Hike also created the Payahuunadü Gear Library so that they would have everything they needed on the Nüümü Poyo, and for others in the future to have that access barrier removed to recreation on their land (Indigenous Women Hike 2021).

I have the immense privilege of being able to afford gear and the ability to travel to many places on Turtle Island, but I lack ancestral knowledge for how to be in “right relationship” to these lands. Professor Robin Wall Kimmerer, enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and plant ecologist, describes her encounter with students who, like me, do not have this ancestral knowledge and their resulting lack of ability to imagine “right relations” between humans and the earth (2013, 6). Kimmerer explains that the “Skywoman story shared by the original peoples throughout the Great Lakes, is a constant star in the constellation of teachings we call the Original Instructions” which guide people towards right environmental relations (2013, 7). Indigenous people are the bearers of these stories and wisdom and so it is essential to defer to their long-established place-based knowledge. On the Nüümü Poyo, the Paiute women hikers took every opportunity to teach other hikers Paiute words and offer up education on the lands (Chavez 2018). There are so many opportunities to educate yourself on Indigenous cosmologies and worldviews, especially with the sources already online, without further burdening Indigenous people. Education before a hiking trip, and then adherence to what you learned is essential to being respectful e.g. not visiting a sacred area or monument that should not be visited (Indigenous Women Hike 2021). Since the creation of United States parks would not be possible without the removal of Indigenous people, their education centers and websites inevitably fall short in centering Indigenous voices. Varela makes it clear in the post on IWH, that “just because the land is “owned” or stolen by LADWP/Bureau of Land Management/NPS

and other non-Indigenous institutions, it is still important to practice consent” (Indigenous Women Hike 2021). Education for recreation will also set the groundwork for expanding our knowledge on Indigenous issues so that we are not just respectful visitors, but become active agents for Indigenous sovereignty. Just because, like me, you have not been raised with Indigenous ancestral knowledge, does not mean you can’t relate well, but you have to put in the work. It is work that can open you up to pleasure and joy and love, because it is rooted in care for our human and animal and plant communities. It must also be noted that many Indigenous people themselves have been alienated from their ancestral knowledge through the numerous aforementioned assimilationist policies. The least we can do is aid in preservation of this knowledge and respect it deeply without further burdening Indigenous people.

### **Economies of Scarcity and Starvation**

Unlike Indigenous ethics of reciprocal relations with land, coloniality is rooted in capitalism which commodifies land and human labor and convinces us that we should treat the land and each other in similar extractive ways. We are taught to believe in scarcity which wires us to primarily find pleasure in buying and hoarding, rather than in engaging with the land reciprocally. As brown notes “a small minority of our species hoards the excess of resources, creating a false scarcity and then try to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves” (2019, 15). The latent idea that “there isn’t enough, so we need to hoard, enclose, divide, fence up, and prioritize resources and people” ultimately alienates us from each other and prevents community strength (brown 2017, 18). And if we do want to make changes to our ways of living, political scientist Michael F. Maniates writes, we are encouraged to partake in the “individualization of responsibility” (2001, 33) which encourages us to make individual consumer changes like take shorter showers. This leaves us with “little room to ponder institutions, the nature and exercise of

political power, or ways of collectively changing the distribution of power and influence in society” (2001, 33), and so leaves larger capitalist structures untouched, preventing deep change. I see this in the relationships (or lack there-of) of the mostly-white communities I have been raised in where single family homes make choices for their own benefit. There are no calls for collective work for community change. To combat this we must “tap into the natural abundance that exists within and between us, and between our species and the planet. Pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism” (brown 2019, 16).

Similar to economies of scarcity, “starvation economies” refer to the belief that there is only a finite amount of love which must be fought for and hoarded (Easton and Hardy 2017, 33-34). We are wired to think that if our partner is also seeing someone else, then that means they have less love to give to us. The myth of starvation economies has led me to break up with partners because I found myself interested in someone else: I thought I wouldn’t have enough to give to more than one person. Easton and Hardy do acknowledge time as a limiter, like how it is unrealistic to have dinner every night separately with each of your partners, but there is no limit to how much love you give and receive, and polyamorous practices can serve to open you up to more possibilities (2017, 34). If you do have partners with conflicting needs in this way, these boundaries need to be communicated. What kinds of relations can we imagine when we are not envisioning cohabitation with someone for the rest of our lives? Who can we let in, knowing it can’t be forever? What happens when we don’t value life long bonds over transient ones? Strengthening community connections is what will ultimately sustain us, and polyamorous networks should be considered as a first step towards larger webs of relating.

## **Honoring My Boundaries**

I often find myself looking to the future for the community that I want. I think that once I live on my own in a big queer city, then I will be happy and whole and supported. Imagining this future helps me get through some hard times, but it also prevents me from truly connecting to the present and to the people around me as I cling too tightly to fantasies of escape. Buddhism's "first noble truth that there is no place where one can entirely escape suffering or harm" (Escobar 2020), helped me realize that there is no community where you will like/agree with every person, but there are things we can do to make community relationships stronger, mainly communication. Communicating clearly can be difficult, especially when we have already had past experiences of our boundaries being transgressed or we were never taught in our families that we could say "no" but the reality is that "your no makes the way for your yes" and "boundaries create the container within which your yes is authentic" (brown 2019, 15). Understanding what we need and what we can provide is essential to being in any relationship. Further, love with conditions frees us up for more loving relationships with other people, or with ourselves.

My relationship with Gettysburg and its people has been a difficult one. I think I initially tried to fit into the stereotype of a hard working straight student who also goes to frat parties on the weekend and is happy doing so, but maintaining that facade was detrimental to my mental health. Gettysburg did eventually provide a container for me to realize my queerness with some of my best friends, but we often felt isolated from the other straight and queer students. It was only when one of my friends inspired me to embrace the community that is there that I started to understand community isn't something you step into but something that you help grow. You cannot do this if you are always trying to escape. I have since made more concerted efforts to



maintain relationships with the Gettysburg student community, especially in studying remotely. One of these groups had morphed from being a study group to share resources around the demonstrations for Black lives occurring in the summer 2020, to a mutual aid study group, to just being a place where we would gather on Zoom to provide support for each other. It felt good to hold each other (even virtually) and express gratitude for the work each of us was doing even as our productive capacities were strained by living through a pandemic. I was able to see that there is a Gettysburg community for me to tap into but it required my notice, love, care, and boundaries.

## **Embodiment**

Simply being in a place doesn't imply you are present (as was evidenced by the "Community" section). Similarly, just inhabiting your body, doesn't mean that you are embodied. Somatics is a tradition and practice that has many manifestations but its Greek root *soma* means "the living organism in its wholeness", which sees the body as a manifestation of the mental, physical and spiritual (brown 2019, 274). Psychologist Erica Knight's literature review of "embodiment" in a somatic context reveals two principle meanings: 1) the physical manifestation of our experiences, values, and societal norms and 2) "inhabiting or filling one's body with oneself" (2014, 89). The critical link between these is that by performing practices that allow us to more authentically inhabit our bodies (definition 2), we can take stock of the ways that we have been conditioned to react over time (1), which gives us the power to understand shifts that we need to make to be living healthier, happier, and more authentically (Knight 2014, 90). I am offering somatics here as a possibility for "right relations" to our bodies, which can promote "right relationship" to our world. Understanding how disembodiment is forced on different people through colonialism, racism, transphobia, and ableism, is also essential for entering and creating a somatic practice, which the organization "Generative Somatics" is particularly attuned to. "Generative Somatics" identifies embodied transformation in a politicized way as it "supports our values and actions becoming aligned" (brown 2019, 274; Knight 2014, 89).

### **Coloniality's Rupture in Relating to the Body**

In order to understand how we can become embodied, we have to analyze the forces that create our disembodiment. María Lugones, "theorist of resistance", explains in her work on decolonial feminism that when European colonizers arrived in the Americas, they found people

with “complex relations to the cosmos, to other selves, to generation, to the earth, to living beings, to the inorganic” whose “erotic, aesthetic, and linguistic expressivity, whose knowledges, senses of space, longings, practices, institutions, and forms of government” did not align with their mission to extract wealth (2010, 746-747). In order for the colonized to pursue their capitalist, imperial venture, they had to “invent” the colonized as “less than human primitives, satanically possessed, infantile, aggressively sexual, and in need of transformation” (Lugones 2010, 747). A hierarchical, dichotomous relationship between human and non-human was imposed on the colonized, alongside a hierarchical, dichotomous gender system: men/women (Lugones 2010, 743). Indigenous people were invented as less than human and so were not yet men/women, but would be made into them by the civilizing mission (2010, 743). These attempts to restructure Indigenous lifeways were detrimental but not total: many Indigenous people today possess “cosmologies incompatible with the modern logic of dichotomies” (Lugones 2010, 748) and so live in ways that work against these hierarchies and divisions like in a deep somatic relationship to the natural world.

Within Indigenous communities, stories that maintain such somatic relationships serve as acts of resistance to colonial histories by transcending the need for recognition by the colonial powers that be (2010, 746). Though the annexation project of colonial conquest may look different today than in the 1700s, its cultural and material legacies continue, like in constructions of gender (2010, 746). To uphold the gender binary is often still celebrated as being civilized (2010, 748), and is portrayed as if it has always been and will always be (similar to how capitalism in the United States is framed as the only viable economic system). As many stories as there are of celebration of the binary, there are countless “resistant socialities” that meet “in the flesh over and over” and “impel us to know each other as selves that are thick, in relation, in

alternative socialities, and grounded in tense, creative inhabitations of the colonial difference” (2010, 748).

### **The Erotic as Antidote**

One example of resistance to colonial constructs is in an expansion of the notion of the erotic from its confinement to sexual intercourse. The seminal work on this topic is Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic”, which adrienne maree brown includes in its entirety at the beginning of their treatise *Pleasure Activism*. The root of *erotic* is the Greek word *eros*, “the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos and personifying creative power and harmony”, and so Lorde defines the erotic as “an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered” (2019, 30). Lorde sees the erotic as the bridge to “the physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us”, and thus, it allows us to be in tune with our intuition and desires (2019, 31). In sum, paying attention to the erotic knowledge within us, brings us closer to somatic embodiment, which can help us live purposeful lives defined by love, joy, and truth.

### **Conclusion**

As I have mentioned in the “Futurity” and “Community” sections, I sometimes used sex as an escape from my pressing reality or had my boundaries transgressed in sexual situations that caused me to dissociate and so be literally disembodied. These examples are not given to diminish potential erotic power in a partnered sexual situation, but as experiences I had that distanced me from my body and present reality rather than grounding me in my body and reality. Seeing erotic power as more than something expressed in partnered sexual situations can open up more possibilities for its use to fuel other pursuits. Entering spaces like the Gettysburg National Military Park allowed me to connect more deeply to my erotic power because I could be alone,

and be able to truly inhabit my body, without judgement from others. Plants aided me in providing pleasurable sensations to my body: branches and leaves brushing my cheeks, or grass on my back, or bark on my hands, but they also grounded me in my body and in Gettysburg as a place which before these experiences, I had felt very disconnected from. Fraternity parties played a large role in my connection to my body through dance, but the heteronormativity and looming threat of assault impeded a deep, queer connection to body in its wholeness. Gettysburg College classrooms have sometimes been spaces that, similar to fraternities, reproduce male dominance and encourage a disconnection from erotic knowledge. But professors like Dr. Hakim Mohandas Amani Williams, Dr. Nathifa Greene, and Dr. Salma Monani have purposefully subverted these dynamics through exercises like restorative justice circles or curricular orientations towards work by queer, Indigenous, and other non-canonical scholars. Bringing significant attention to emotion, pleasure, and feelings in the mind and body while learning have been most impactful to me, and I am forever indebted to these professors for making a space for that.

Dr. Williams' unabashed enthusiasm and bold presence reminds me that it is possible for the personal and sensual body to be present in the classroom. Black feminist theorist and professor, bell hooks notes that erotic energy cannot be banished from the classroom, and so should be sparked by "passionate pedagogy" that enables positive, transformational learning (2010, 154-155). I can envision a future where there is more safety and therefore freedom in academic spaces to be vulnerable. Like polyamory that engages the more-than-human world, relations that are sensual, not sexual, should have space to be valued in the classroom. Our sensual bodies can be more engaged by non-sexual touch that "bring our bodies into communion" and mediate the hierarchy between teacher and student (hooks 2010, 155). For me, sparks of erotic energy in academia have been what inspires me to continue. Overall, this project

was meant to chart my connection to Gettysburg as a student, but also as a queer and trans body, seeking safety but also pleasure. I wanted to be vulnerable in a research project format where those types of communicating and learning are not instantly seen as compatible. I wanted to make space for pleasure and chart ways for other Gettysburg students, past, present, and future to see their emotions reflected in the landscape.

As many institutions do, Gettysburg College has values that they espouse like “The worth and dignity of all people and the limitless value of their intellectual potential” and “The free and open exchange of ideas and the exploration of their ethical and spiritual dimensions” (Gettysburg College 2021). As was mentioned in the “Futurity” section, I approached values like these with cynicism when first attending Gettysburg, knowing that they weren’t really being honored, but, as in the “Community” section, I learned the value of embracing what community is already there and the work people are doing, is the best way to bring about change. I wanted to aid in the process of aligning our values and actions (Brown 2019, 274; Knight 2014, 89) through this work of affirming the worth of marginalized people in Gettysburg’s history with the somewhat spiritual dimensions of my personal journey. Following queer and Indigenous thinkers attunement to the value of transformation and “becoming” has allowed me to be present in my body as well as in places like Gettysburg. We are all unfolding, unfurling, and changing as we learn and practice being with each other and ourselves, and we need some grace in that process. Clubs like Students For Indigenous Awareness are carving out spaces for students to be seen and supported within meetings, and campus-wide in their creation of a land acknowledgement statement that is supported by fighting for institutional change. I have already seen institutional change in my years at Gettysburg and so I am hopeful. I offer this work to inspire queer connection to the landscape: lay out on the battlefield, breathe and be alive. The historical death

does not need to be forgotten but we can live on after it: feeling the breeze against your skin, leaning against monumental slabs, running up to the Peace Light and dancing with full, orgasmic joy.

## Glossary

Though there are many ways to define these terms, I am drawing from queer studies and Indigenous studies to define them as these are the main disciplines I am in conversation with.

**Community:** a group of humans and non-humans who love and support you.

**Ecology:** “Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy’s definition of “ecology” proves relevant here: “ecology is a study of interrelationship, with its bedrock being the recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us” (6)” (Seymour 2013, 52).

**Environment:** “any outdoor green space, whether natural or constructed, insofar as it relates to environmental issues such as air quality, climate change, and species protection” (Finney 2014, 4).

**Environmental Justice:** “Environmental justice, as defined by leaders in the field such as Bunyan Bryant, Robert Bullard, and Ben Chavis, is the view that inequalities of race and class put people of color and poor people at greater ecological risk” (Seymour 2013, 26).

**Environmentalism:** “connotes an activity or practice related to the outdoors, especially having to do with addressing a problem or a set of issues” (Finney 2014, 4).

**Heteronormativity:** “the Western social norm, or assumption, that the overwhelming majority of sexual relationships in society are heterosexual. Further, heteronormativity is the dominant sexual model of social, cultural, political, and economic organization, including the way it organizes identities, experiences, regimes of truth and knowledge, and ideologies of gender and sex.” (Jeppesen 2016, 493-496).

**Nature:** the non-human world: plants, other animals, earth.

**Neoliberalism:** a type of liberalism that favours a global free market, without government regulation, with businesses and industry controlled and run for profit by private owners (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries 2021).

**Place-making:**

1. “psychological identification between self and site” involving “an ongoing social process” (Emmett and Nye 2017, 24)
2. “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value” (Project for Public Spaces 2007)

**Pleasure Activism:** “...learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet” (brown 2019, 15).

**Polyamory:** maintaining multiple loving relationships at once.



**Queer:**

1. “to describe that which questions the naturalness, and undermines the stability, of established categories of sex, gender, and sexuality.” (Seymour 2013, 28).
2. “of, relating to, or being a person whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity is not cisgender” (Merriam Webster 2021, 2c)

**Queer Ecology:** “... ideas and practices of nature, including both bodies and landscapes, are located in particular productions of sexuality, and sex is, both historically and in the present, located in particular formations of nature. The critical analysis of these locations and co-productions is what we mean by “queer ecology”: there is an ongoing relationship between sex and nature that exists institutionally, discursively, scientifically, spatially, politically, poetically, and ethically, and it is our task to interrogate that relationship in order to arrive at a more nuanced and effective sexual and environmental understanding” (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 5).

**Queer theory vs queer ecology:** “Queer theory was part of an agenda to build solidarity between and among genders, sexualities, and cultures. Queer ecology, by contrast, could function as a mode of investigation that better recognizes more nuanced differences as part of broader initiatives for environmental justice” (Ingram 2010, 260).

**Right Relations:** a relationship between humans, animals, and plants where all beings have the ability to flourish through their interactions.

**Settler Sexuality:** “A white national heteronormativity [and increasingly also homonormativity] that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects” (Morgensen 2010, 106).

**Thick Desire:** “...young people are entitled to a broad range of desires for meaningful intellectual, political, and social engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, protection from racialized and sexualized violence, and a way to imagine living in the future tense” (Fine and McClelland 2017, 297).

**Urban Sprawl:** “The Vermont Forum on Sprawl ([www.vtsprawl.org](http://www.vtsprawl.org)) offers a succinct definition of sprawl as “dispersed, auto-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in rural countryside” (Frumkin et al. 2004, 1).

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