

Y'all Come Back Now:

Negotiating Geography, Identity, and Subjectivity in the Queer American South

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In

Women and Gender Studies

by

Lindsie Teter

San Francisco, California

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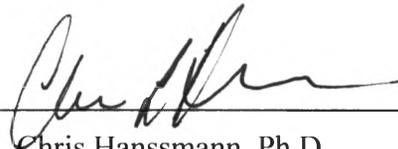
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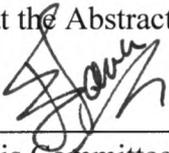
Y'all Come Back Now:

Negotiating Geography, Identity, and Subjectivity in the Queer American South

Lindsie Rae Teter
San Francisco, California
2018

This project is concerned with the relationship between the American South and queer identity and subjectivities. This project is particularly interested in the situatedness of the South within the nation, how narratives about the South pervade and operate in the American imaginary, as well as the ways in which the region often functions as an internal other. Due to these constructions, this project is interested in the ways in which the Southern United States is frequently painted as uninhabitable for queer folks and queer and trans folks of color. As such, this project engages with representations of queerness in the American South through the analysis of Viceland's show *Gaycation*, as well as provides intervention into these narratives by centering interviews with queer Southerners and Southern-based queer organizations. Finally, this project considers the role of affect in relation to the South, orientation, and (dis)identifications.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

05.19.2018

Date

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Introduction

In the Fall of 2015 I found myself fresh out of college, undergraduate degree in tow, and approximately 3,000 miles away from home. That's a thirty-six hour drive, a two-day and sixteen hour Greyhound bus ride, and a two-hundred and seventeen hour bike ride, if you are ambitious. Home is located about forty miles north of Atlanta, Georgia, in a town where people ride their tractors and horses on the road at any given time, neighbors know each other's first and last names, and everyone tailgates the Friday night high school football game, of which my father is the head coach. It was at times, and still is, an interesting place to navigate as a queer non-binary person. When I first moved to California, queer folks and non-queer folks alike frequently asked me the following question with a bright toothy smile on their faces: "Is being in California a culture shock? It must be so different from the South." To be quite frank, the only shock I encountered was the frequency of this question, as well as other comments like it. While working as a barista in a cafe in North Berkeley my first few months of living here, I had struck up a conversation with a customer who asked what state was on my shirt with the word "home" overlaid on top of it. "It's Georgia!" I said. She replied with a sentence that hasn't left my mind since she uttered it almost four years ago, "Oh wow! You must feel so much better now that you're no longer stuck in the South!"

Growing up in Georgia, coming out, and being queer in the South has immensely shaped me as an individual. The communities through which I move and feel rooted in are inextricable from a Southern upbringing. This is an integral part of my identity, so

much so that the opening chords of Ray Charles' cover of "Georgia On My Mind" are enough to bring me to tears. I thank the clay that stained my feet summer after summer for being equally kind, stern, nurturing, and forgiving. I thank the dirt roads and empty fields that held and continue to hold space for me, despite preconceived notions that state otherwise. I thank the Southern air in my lungs that kept me breathing through moments of happiness and uneasiness, and Georgia's summer showers for showing me the importance of loss and beginning anew. I thank the South for the existence of the sweet gender neutral "y'all."

It was not always this way, I was not always as thankful. In fact, it took most of my life to restore to the South amorous feelings and gratitude after years of being told, and believing, that my rural Southern town was not meant to hold space for someone like me. Like many others, I found myself branding backwardness onto the rivers and mountains of the Southeastern United States that seemed to hold me hostage. I now find myself situated as a subject moved West, longing for peaches and sweetened ice tea on wooden porch swings, returning to the South all that I had striped from it over the years, and returning to myself all of the markers of my Southern upbringing that once felt stifling and humiliating.

This research begins first and foremost with an acute interest in the Southern United States. The American South is widely known as the land of "southern fried" anything, tea sweeter than your favorite candies, and a closet chock-full of literal and figurative skeletons and ghosts. The Southern United States has found itself sutured to a

cultural reputation that has saturated national and cultural imaginary. The region's cultural marker has perpetually come to be identified through the inescapable relationship to its long history of violence and brutality, particularly around race and increasingly about sexuality.¹ Consequently, the South's historical markings provide a backdrop of the region that has pervaded for centuries.² Here, it is not difficult to conjure characters and symbols of the American South, though there are certainly an "eclectic range of narratives and images of the American South."³ Often the utterance of the words 'Southern' or 'the South' may call upon an image of a white, backwoods, God-fearing "redneck." A good ol' boy, clad in denim overalls overtop ripped long johns with steel-toed work boots gripping a Natural Light beer can. It's easy to imagine him sitting on the back of his Ford F-150, legs dangling and a Confederate flag waving off the backend of the truck bed. This character is, of course, a fierce proponent of the second amendment and has a family lineage rife with Rebels that even predates the American Civil War.

This character has arguably become the most cited image of the U.S. South. There are, of course a myriad of iterations of this character. In fact, Tracy Moore of Jezebel has graciously provided us with a field guide of racists in her piece, "A Complete Guide to

¹ E. Patrick Johnson, "Introduction," in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1.

² E. Patrick Johnson. "Introduction," 1.

³ Martyn Bone, "Introduction. Old/New/Post/Real/Global/No South: Paradigms and Scales," in *Creating and Consuming the American South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 1.

All the Kinds of Racist Southerners.”⁴ It would be a shame not to note that the article is accompanied by an image of the United States as Confederate flag with Paula Deen riding it like a mechanical bull at the local county fair. Here, our personal map of Southern racists provides us with a few of the following: the dumb white supremacists, the dumb openly racist southerner, the political racist, and the good-old fashioned racist, all of who double as homophobic bigots.⁵ Regardless of the fact Moore notes that racist Southerners come in all forms, not only the uneducated racist, the belly of this article is the understanding that the regional South is the site of these characters, the site of racism and homophobia. As such, the region has long come to be understood as particularly dangerous for those folks who fall outside of this caricature; the non-white, non-normative, and, perhaps, non-religious subject.

The permanency of the region’s cultural reputation of danger is due in large, if not most, part to its troubled and gruesome past. The region’s hauntingly long history of racial violence and injustice has manifested into widespread cultural and national ideologies that have come to be etched into the American collective consciousness.⁶ While the South is also imagined as a site of homophobia, it is frequently the legacies of slavery, the Civil War, and Jim Crow laws most heavily plastered across the South’s

⁴ Tracy Moore, “A Complete Guide to All the Kinds of Racist Southerners,” Jezebel, June 22, 2013, accessed February 17, 2018, <https://jezebel.com/a-complete-guide-to-all-the-kinds-of-racist-southerners-534732976>.

⁵ Moore, “A Complete Guide.”

⁶ E. Patrick Johnson, “Introduction,” 1.

landscape. The region's deep and bloodied histories have become crucial landmarks for the construction of the South within the imaginary. In turn, this iconography often depicts the region as a one-dimensional, frozen site, an easy repository "for all that is backward and hurtful in the United States, past and present."⁷ Donna Jo Smith notes that the South is frequently characterized by qualities of negative excess; exhibiting more racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence.⁸ This perpetual negative excess both posits the region as spatially distinct from the rest of the nation, as well as backwards and stuck in time. As such, the Southern United States has come to be understood as a localized site of threat and violence within the nation.

Literature Review

In situating queerness in the American South as central to this project, this literature review explores the fields of southern studies and gay and lesbian/queer studies. As Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are often rendered invisible in these fields, I argue that southern studies disappears the queer subject and gay and lesbian/queer studies disappears both the South and the rural, this literature review is also keenly interested in the ways in which affect, queer theory, and queer southern studies

⁷ Carolyn Leste Law, "Introduction." in *Out in the South*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 3.

⁸ Donna Jo Smith. "Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity," in *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 378.

may be used as an intervention to think through the relationality between the space and place of the Southern United States and queer identity and subjectivity.

Imagining the South

While I believe it is critically important, and in fact mandatory, to call attention to the region's deep and bloodied landscapes in order to avoid participating in perpetuating an erasure of these violent histories, it would be inappropriate to ignore the ways in which the cultural ideology that has come to be recognized as the American South has quite tangible effects. The Southern United States has come to be understood as a spatiality deeply entrenched in an unshakable legacy of violence.⁹ This idea of a predisposed and violent Southern subculture continues to operate in a myriad of ways within cultural and national imaginaries. As Southern studies scholar Martyn Bone suggests, it is imperative to direct attention to the ways in which these ideas and narratives about the region, as well as subsequent ideas of 'Southernness,' have, "...social and material effects that register on various local, regional, national, and transnational scales."¹⁰ Therefore, this chapter is similarly interested in the material effects of narratives that surround the Southern United States, both at large and specifically in relation to queer people and queer and trans folks of color.

⁹ Erin Fuchs, "Why The South Is More Violent Than The Rest Of America," Business Insider, September 18, 2013, , accessed February 17, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/south-has-more-violent-crime-fbi-statistics-show-2013-9>.

¹⁰ Martyn Bone. "Introduction," 1.

Within the imaginary, narratives around the American South are perhaps inseparable bedfellows with conversations of regional distinctiveness. In fact, it is this idea of a regionally distinct South that provides ample breeding ground for the continued circulation of ideas of dangerous backwardness. Southern distinctiveness is, of course, no new phenomenon and while some would suggest that conversations around regional distinctiveness have been exhausted, they are nonetheless integral to this project. As such, it perhaps comes as no surprise the ways in which the South's history operates in this discourse. More explicitly, it becomes increasingly apparent that the South's distinctiveness is intricately and intimately sutured to the region's racial histories, with the South first emerging as a spatially distinct region through the implementation of slavery, the Civil War, and its aftermath. As Southern historian John Shelton Reed suggests, the origin of regional distinctiveness is inherently tethered to slavery and the events leading up to, and including, the Civil War.¹¹ Therefore, if regional distinctiveness was linearly mapped, slavery and the Civil War would serve as the key historical identifiers leading to a manifestation of a regional difference. Similarly, the creation and maintenance of ideas of southern distinctiveness lends itself to the idea of the South as an American problem.¹²

¹¹ John Shelton Reed, "'Who am I?': Regional Affiliation," *Southerners, the Social Psychology of Sectionalism*, Institute for Research in Social Science Monograph Series, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1983, 11.

¹² Larry J. Griffin, and Don Harrison Doyle, "Introduction," in *The South as an American Problem*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 2.

While I will return to ideas of southern distinction and the idea of the problem region, I want to take just a few steps back momentarily to think critically about the geographic particularities of the South. More specifically, while it seems quite easy to conjure up an image and locate the South within the imaginary, manifesting the imagined location of the South into a physical geographic boundary proves to be more difficult. I find it particularly interesting that the understanding of the South is wildly pervasive, yet the geography of the region, being able to identify it specifically on a map, is contested, which is true for other imagined “threatening” spaces. While conceptually imagined, where exactly does the South, the disavowed regional space, begin and end? Further, which states actually comprise the geographical makeup of the American South? Countless folks, particularly various writers and scholars in Southern Studies, cite the Mason-Dixon line, made famous as the symbolic divider between Southern and Northern states during the Civil War, as the liminal space where the South and the non-South meet.¹³ Though a historically significant boundary marker, I’m curious, does contemporary national imaginary consider states such as Maryland and Delaware southern, given that this is how the United States census marks the top of the regional Southern United States?¹⁴ I ask these questions not with the intention of providing an answer, but in order to suggest that within the nation’s imaginary there lacks a unanimous geographical conception of the American South. It then proves interesting that the South

¹³ Bone. “Introduction.” 4.

¹⁴ United States Census Bureau, “Geographic Terms and Concepts - Census Divisions and Census Regions,” *Geography*, February 9, 2015, accessed May 6, 2017.

is a space with a name and attributed cultural significance whose spatial place is debatable. Donna Jo Smith notes, “Clearly, the South doesn’t function simply as a region that we can demarcate on a map but operates as a ‘state of mind.’”¹⁵ Thus, while the spatial conceptualization of the South is unanimously unmappable, the region is simultaneously hailed and disavowed when needed, representative of both political backwardness and American authenticity; equal parts romanticized and feared.

In thinking about geographies and the mappability, or unmappability, of the Southern United States I certainly want to make clear that I am under no assumption that national and regional boundaries are real, fixed, or given margins. However, the fact that these boundary markers are not “real,” does not eradicate the materialities to them that make them tangible, almost as if they were real. Whether or not there is a physical or geographic boundary, we have come to understand them as genuine so much so that the skin can seemingly feel the boundary through its reified imagining. Homi Bhabha suggests the, “narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the 'nation' as a narrative strategy.”¹⁶ Therefore, it is perhaps most helpful to think alongside Benedict Anderson’s suggestions of imagined community. Anderson notes,

¹⁵ Smith, “Queering the South,” 377.

¹⁶Homi K Bhabha, “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *The Location of Culture*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 140.

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.¹⁷

Thus, there is an imagined affinity that works to secure the idea of the nation through an idea of comradeship. Further, though it is imagined it is understood to be verifiable. I'm curious, then, if there is both an imagined national community and imagined southern community.

The South as Other

The Southern United States operates in a myriad of ways within cultural and national imaginaries. Consequently, the South's historical markings provide a backdrop of the region that has continually pervaded for centuries. Through the inscription of these Southern histories into contemporary consciousness, the South is constructed as the geographic space within the nation that poses as a danger, an imminently violent threat to the non-white and non-normative subject. The process of localizing threat and danger, sealing and designating violences as a product of regional placement, is a project of maintaining national innocence.¹⁸ Further, as a result, this becomes a symbiotic relationship wherein the South is “subordinated to the North in the cultural imaginary” and thus, “the North depends for its meanings on the normative definitions attached to the

¹⁷Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson. “Introduction,” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London; Verso, 2006), 6. <http://hdl.handle.net/jpllnet.sfsu.edu/2027/heh.01609.0001.001>.

¹⁸ Smith. “Queering the South,” 381.

South.”¹⁹ The South, and by extension its residents, become subordinated due to the construction of a national binarism that ideologically demarcates the nation into geographies of South and non-South. In this narrative, the South becomes sutured to its complex histories, rendered a fixed, violent, and thus, dangerous region. Therefore, as a point of opposition, the non-South becomes situated as a fluid, non-violent, and thus, alternative space.

As Donna Jo Smith notes in “Queering the South,” the South is frequently characterized by qualities of negative excess; exhibiting more racism, sexism, and violence, intimately tied to the homogenous construction of the region as one of explicit whiteness within the nation’s imaginary.²⁰ Smith questions who these various forms of negative excess aim to serve, arguing that these “defining” characteristics of the South are ultimately utilized in order to maintain a myth of American innocence.²¹ The construction of these binaries serve to provide the nation with an internal other with which to scapegoat injustices enacted across the nation as a whole. If the Southern United States serves as the hotbed of racism and homophobia, the remainder of the imagined non-South, which includes all states not marked as “southern” within national consciousness, are then pardoned from similar violences— as these acts are seen as isolated incidents, as opposed to being indicative of regional backwardness. There is,

¹⁹ Smith. “Queering the South,” 378.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

however, an exception to this rule looming both overhead and between these words I write. Within the cultural imaginary the rural Midwest is similarly typecast and imagined to be the location of homophobia, transphobia, and racism, with the deaths of Brandon Teena, Phillip DeVine, and Matthew Shepard often cited as evidence. Though this seemingly contradicts the dualism of the South and non-South I argue that due to both region's conflation with temporally lagging rurality, the South may perhaps extend, imaginatively, to fold in the Midwest's dangerous rurality. I will expand more about the functionality of rendering rurality as dangerous in a subsequent section.

Thus, if we come to understand that the South and the Midwest are mapped dangerously similar, or similarly dangerous, it is easier to understand how their imagined spaces have become salient in public discourse. Further, by understanding the construction of a close relationship between these spaces, one devoid of critical engagements with their regional uniqueness and specificities, we may understand how, through imagined homogenous rurality, the South/non-South binary continues to operate. Therefore, the non-southern space is hailed as a liberal safehaven and the South is inevitably positioned as the location within the United States with an overwhelming amount of undesirable traits that must be distanced from at all cost by any good, true liberal American citizen-subject. The creation and maintenance of a national binarism wherein the South is subordinated to the non-South within the nation's imaginary is, I argue, a project of the nation identifying an internal other.

In understanding the role of the South as an internal other for the United States it is perhaps useful to turn toward Edward Said's *Orientalism*. In turn, it may be helpful to consider that the South is not merely operating as an internal other, but that, as geographer David R. Jansson suggests, the South's role for the nation is a mode of internal orientalism.²² I want to make clear, however, that my intention is not to suggest that Edward Said's *Orientalism* is perfectly mappable to the production of the South as "other" within the United States. Therefore, while the use of *Orientalism* in this project is not directly in line with Said's use, in relation to the construction of the Middle East, it is a helpful framework for observing the production of American national identity and the role of the regional South. Specifically, *Orientalism* is a helpful framework for examining the particular deployment of stereotypes and myths of the Southern United States.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* critiques the "European invention" of the Orient, which is particularly attuned to the geographic spaces of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, with a specific focus on the Islamic Orient.²³ More specifically, for the European West, the Orient comes to stand as "...not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of

²² David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity," *Political Geography* 22, no. 3 (2003): , doi:10.1016/s0962-6298(02)00098-7.

²³ Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," in *The Edward Said Reader* (London: Granta, 2012). 141.

the Other.”²⁴ Said notes that the process of producing an identifiable Other works as a process of self-definition for Europe that is steeped in the material realities of civilization and culture. He argues, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”²⁵ Thus, a hegemonic ideology of an imagined “us” vs. “them” emerges wherein European culture is superior to “Oriental backwardness” that, in turn, reifies deeply imbalanced imperialist and colonial power structures.²⁶ Thus, these essentialist narratives and representations serve to maintain binary geographical and political oppositions. For the purpose of this project, it is helpful to use Orientalism as a framework for understanding the binary creation, consumption, and reproduction of national identities. Further, Orientalism is helpful for understanding the ways in which these “geographical and cultural entities” are simultaneously man-made and material realities.²⁷

In “Internal Orientalism in America: W. J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity,” David R. Jansson uses Orientalism as the foundation for what he proposes as internal orientalism within the United States. Here, he uses Lousie Schein’s construct of internal orientalism in order to explain the “othering of a region internal to the state toward the construction of a privileged national

²⁴ Said, “Orientalism,” 142.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 151.

²⁷ Ibid., 147.

identity.”²⁸ Therefore, while Said’s Orientalism critiques the Other that is external to the state, internal orientalism involves the othering and subordination of a weaker region within the nation.²⁹ This, much like Orientalism, in turn produces a desirable national identity. Similarly, for Said, Orientalism served to provide Europe with a rationalization for colonialism in that the “East” was deemed different, inferior, and therefore needed to be rescued. Jansson posits a similar ideology, though naming the colonialist or imperialist relationship as one between the American North and American South.³⁰ Here, in line with Jansson, I suggest this desirable national identity also results in the maintenance of national innocence wherein by locating a particular geographical other within the nation it moves to assign the region as the sole site of danger.

For Jansson, the operation of internal orientalism within the United States hinges on the construction, and the reified construction, of the South as internal other. As an internal other, the region must come to be understood as inherently distinct from many other U.S. regions, as well as distinguishable from national standards.³¹ Therefore, the South must be presented as at sharp odds with the imagined nation, projected as a clear-cut counterpoint. As Larry J. Griffin and Don H. Doyle note in *The South as an American Problem*, the southern United States, more than any other region, “has often been defined

²⁸ Jansson, “Internal Orientalism,” 295.

²⁹ Jansson, 297.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

³¹ *Ibid.*

as being at odds with the mainstream of American values or behavior and therefore has been constructed as a special problem . . . something that must somehow be addressed and solved.”³² Here, the South becomes distinguishing for being at odds with the “mythical American national identity” that is characterized by elements such as “mobility, progress, change, rationality, science, and individualism.”³³ Thus, the nation becomes an emblem of modernity, positing the South as its antithesis. For the framework of internal orientalism, Jansson suggests that this becomes a spatial process where the South, in these representations, turns its back on and proudly marches away from the spatiality of progress and modernity.³⁴ Further, the South is often imagined as speaking against individualism as it is continuously constructed as a homogenous region with a hive mind. Therefore, the spatial and temporal homogenization works to suture the South as an effective internal other.³⁵

In these constructions, the South must come to be imagined as a space of systematic difference. Rooted deeply in the region’s history and “agricultural mentality,” the American South is understood as an outdated “obstacle toward progress and development.”³⁶ Thus, as noted above, this produces a regional identity that in turn

³² Griffin, “Introduction,” 1.

³³ Jansson, “Internal Orientalism,” 299.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 300.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* 303.

informs a national identity wherein the South is “backward, intolerant, poor, racist, and premodern” then the non-South is “progressive, tolerant, prosperous, enlightened, and modern.”³⁷ More explicitly, Jansson suggests,

In constructing the image of the South as the American region uniquely beset with its associated array of flaws, the national identity is wiped clean of these unfortunate traits, so that the presence of poverty, racism, etc., throughout the rest of the country is not considered evidence of the “Americanness” of these characteristics, but rather is seen as anomalous, aberrational, and ironic. The vices of racism, poverty, xenophobia, violence, backwardness, and intolerance have been spatialized (one might say “regionalized”) through the national discourse, so that this set of undesirable traits is held to inhere in the imaged space called ‘the South.’³⁸

Therefore, it matters not whether similar violences and injustices exist elsewhere in the nation, as they certainly and obviously do, but that the image of the American South has been reproduced enough that its regional identity is salient and tangible. Further, it matters that in this imagining the nation is specifically imagined as removed from the antiquity of the Southern United States. Through the process of spatializing undesirable excess, the non-South is able to both project the image and imagine itself as unflawed, unendowed with negativity and violence. It becomes clear here that these narrative identities deeply inform one another. That it is through the production of an internal other, through the deployment of internal orientalism, that the nation comes to understand itself through its production of the identity of the regional South. Simply, the nation depends on its construction of the South for understanding its own identity.

³⁷ Ibid. 311.

³⁸ Ibid.

As the United States' designated other, the South serves the nation as the solitary hotbed of racist and homophobic acts. As a result, the United States is able to maintain an image that associates "the nation with democracy and change and the region with racism and tradition."³⁹ Ultimately, these discourses manifest in the creation of a national binary that divides the country, designating regions as either southern or non-southern. Here, through the drawing of an imaginative boundary line, the South becomes known as the site for all danger enacted upon the non-white and non-normative. Residual ideologies circulating the region's histories perpetuate the sociocultural mythology of the South as backward and dangerous.⁴⁰ These narratives and images of the "authentic regional South" have been created, circulated, and consumed throughout the nation and beyond.⁴¹

Sexual Geographies: Gays in the City, Queerness as Non-Rural/Non-Southern

A seemingly distinct region, the South performs as a site of negative excess, as well as a spatiality that is the imagined home to the most vile and deprived of the nation's citizens.⁴² As such, the siloing of threats of violence within the ethereal South have material effects, such as the creation and maintenance of a binary within the nation.

³⁹ Leigh Anne Duck, "Introduction," in *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006). 3.

⁴⁰ Latoya E. Eaves, "Outside Forces: Black Southern Sexuality," in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: New York UP, 2016), 146-57.

⁴¹ Bone, "Introduction," 4.

⁴² Smith, "Queering the South," 381.

Here, the United States, as an imagined collective community, becomes partitioned into two distinct national spatialities; the South and the non-South. As I have demonstrated above, the American South has come to serve the nation in particular ways, specifically through this imaginative national binary. This binary, as noted, functions to subordinate the South to the non-South within the imaginary.

The creation, maintenance, and treatment of this national binary, one that demarcates large portions of the United States as either southern or not, eerily mirrors a similar binary understanding of space and place. I want to suggest that the South and non-South binary is parallel to, or perhaps somewhat of a warped reflection of, the spatial division commonly thought of as the urban and rural. Though perhaps it is already easy to imagine, the South would be analogous to the rural, with the non-South corresponding to the urban. This is not to suggest that the binaries are exact copies of one another, though I do find the slipperiness between these spaces, the South and the rural particularly, to be quite interesting. Therefore, it is important to make transparent that I am not suggesting an inherent similarity between these spaces. However, perhaps it is necessary to contend with the ways in which the South, within national and gay imaginaries, is often codified as dripping with monolithic rusticity and backwardness. Here, the gay imaginary is an imaginary “in which the city represents a beacon of tolerance and gay community, the country a locus of persecution and gay absence.”⁴³ The very same rural stylistics, in fact,

⁴³ Scott Herring, “Introduction,” in *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 13.

that seem to make rurality, in any locationality, legible within the urban and rural binary. Therefore, I want to acknowledge this slippage while also holding it in tension as a helpful framework for understanding the relationship between queer subjectivity and geographic spatiality.

The similarities between the understandings of both binaries I have suggested provide a helpful framework in imagining the ways in which the South and the rural are imagined as spaces devoid of queerness. Further, the South and the rural are often positioned within national consciousness as violent and dangerous space for queer folks and queer folks of color. Similarly, the non-South, alongside the urban space, are continually constructed as geographies promising queer life and longevity. With this in mind, perhaps it might then be helpful to examine the ways in which queerness has been imagined in relation to urban and rural spaces? To begin understanding the similarities between these binaries, I want to first examine and draw attention to the complex roles that both the urban and rural space have respectively played. In this chapter, as well as this project at large, I am specifically interested in the role that these spatialities play within sexual geographies. Explicitly, I am interested in the ideologies and histories that have seemingly become inherently tied to this space.

Understanding the roles and histories of the urban and the rural as they relate to queer and queer and trans folks of color importantly involves both a definition of these spaces, as well as attention given to the ways in which these spaces are in large part products of the imagination. The dictionary defines urban as, “of, relating to, or

designating a city or town.”⁴⁴ Rural is thus defined as, “of, relating to, or characteristic of the country, country life, or country people; rustic.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, here rural also extends to encompass “country people.” In *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, Scott Herring notes that urban when defined by Webster’s dictionary may also be defined as an adjective, that “in the U.S. census use, designating or of an incorporated or unincorporated place with at least 50,000 inhabitants.”⁴⁶ However, Herring is quick to point out that population density cannot serve to classify a difference in rurality and urbanity, noting that many spaces considered rural fall under the Bureau’s “urbanized area” ideology.⁴⁷

The instability in defining and identifying the urban and rural, as well as the imagined divide, is, as Herring suggests, “context-specific, phantasmatic, performative, subjective, and . . . standardizing as it is geographically verifiable.”⁴⁸ Therefore, he suggests, ideas and claims related to urbanism and rurality are simply as, “phantasmatic as [they are] factual.”⁴⁹ While these locations are geographic, perhaps in some cases

⁴⁴ “Urban,” Dictionary.com, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/urban>.

⁴⁵ “Rural,” Dictionary.com, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rural>.

⁴⁶ Herring, “Introduction,” 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 13.

easily mappable, they simultaneously operate as spaces imbued with sociocultural narratives and effects. This project thus situates itself alongside Herring's ideology that these spaces operate as structures imbued with specific feelings, regardless of the particularities of definition. I will expand on the role of feelings in relation to the Southern United States in chapter three.

Acknowledging the fictive nature of the urban and rural binary, as well as the feelings associated with these spaces, is helpful for understanding and interrogating the ways in which this binary came to be so pervasive within gay imaginaries in the first place. While I want to focus in on the circulation of narratives around urbanness and ruralness as it specifically relates to queer identity, subjectivity, and thus queer imaginaries, I also encourage us to keep in mind that ideologies surrounding ruralness and urbanness are equally present in a larger national imaginary. For example, the 2017 election cycle and subsequent results thrust the rural space back into political conversations, with many touting a belief that rural voters, the hicks and hillbillies, were to blame for the 45th presidential election.⁵⁰ A quick Google search turns up articles such as *The New York Times*, "Why Rural America Voted for Trump," as well as *Dissident's*, "Why Trump Won Rural America."⁵¹ As *Slate* writer Isaac Chotiner sees it in his

⁵⁰ Ryan McMaken, "It's Not Urban vs. Rural - It's Suburban vs. Urban." Mises Institute. August 09, 2017. Accessed February 17, 2018. <https://mises.org/blog/its-not-urban-vs-rural-%E2%80%94-its-suburban-vs-urban>.

⁵¹ Keith Orejel, "Why Trump Won Rural America," *Dissent Magazine*, October 16, 2017, accessed February 17, 2018, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/rural-vote-trump-economy-manufacturing.

interview piece with political scientist Katherine J. Cramer titled, “Rural Resentment,” rural consciousness and resentment are to largely to blame. I draw attention to a small slice of this media cycle simply to highlight the fact that these ideologies are pervasive outside of the specificities of this project. As such, within both gay and national imaginaries, which of course are not mutually exclusive, the rural is consistently subordinated to the urban.

Within queer studies, as well as the imaginary, there has been an oppositional configuration of the urban and rural dichotomy.⁵² These imagined spaces have come to be, and continuously are, understood as inherently distinct. Further, the urban space is perpetually privileged in this dichotomy within the national and gay imaginaries. As noted in *Queering the Countryside*, there is a “tendency to generate imaginary spaces on the two distinct poles of freedom and intolerance” wherein the metropolitan space is the site of queer sexual freedom.⁵³ The ideology that posits the urban site as a space for sexual exploration for the otherwise closeted queer is no new phenomenon. In fact, cities have had a long history of being understood as the quintessential spaces of queer identity and community formation. In “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” D’Emilio artfully situates the rise of gay identity formation alongside industrialization and capitalism, citing the shift in family dynamics as the key factor. Here, he notes that the “transition away from

⁵² Colin R. Johnson, Brian J. Gilley, and Mary L. Gray, “Introduction,” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: New York UP, 2016), 12.

⁵³ Johnson, Gilley, Gray, “Introduction,” 12.

the household family-based economy to a fully developed capitalist free labor economy” created a transition wherein the family ceased to exist as a unit of production and the individual wage laborer rose.⁵⁴ Therefore, he credits this to the decline of the importance of the family as a means of survival and that as a result of folks flocking to urban centers for work, there was an appearance of a “collective gay life.”⁵⁵

These new, capitalist-influenced experiences of homosexual desire took place in the comfort of city anonymity that provided space for sexual awakening. Thus, a subculture of gay and lesbian subjects was evolving within the American city, ultimately creating a collective consciousness that would “strengthen their sense of identification with a group”⁵⁶ D’Emilio states, “It has made possible the formation of urban communities of lesbians and gay men, and more recently, a politics based on sexual identity.”⁵⁷ Thus, we see, as D’Emilio argues, that the creation of a gay identity emerged particularly enmeshed within politics of capitalism and urbanization. While D’Emilio suggests that gay identity emerged within urban spaces due to industrialization, he continues to cement gay identity to the urban. In “Forging a Group Identity: World War II and the Emergence of an Urban Gay Subculture,” he cites WWII as a driving factor for

⁵⁴ John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 102.

⁵⁵ D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay,” 106.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 170.

gays in the city noting, “the relocation of civilians of both sexes to the burgeoning centers of defense industry typically involved a shift from rural and small-town residences to impersonal metropolitan areas.”⁵⁸ Therefore, similar to the move for individualized wage labor, the war effort brought many subjects outside of the familial confines, often to anonymized urban spaces wherein sexualities could be explored.⁵⁹ For the academy, D’Emilio’s work has come to serve as the blueprint for understanding the tethering of gay identity within the urban space. While D’Emilio doesn’t necessarily suggest that same-sex desires and behaviors, along with gender nonconformity, were not present outside of the metropolitan, his theory does suggest,

...that the emergence of a distinctive lesbian and gay identity depended first and foremost on a mutual recognition of sameness among people harboring same-sex erotic desires. It also says that the likelihood of such mutual recognition occurring gradually increased as more and more people found themselves in closer and closer to proximity to one another as a result of urbanization wrought by capitalist development.⁶⁰

Thus, while D’Emilio is not discounting non-urbanized queer experiences, his work has nonetheless influenced a long tradition, particularly in gay and lesbian studies, that continues to reinscribe the ideology that urban locations and gay identity are mutually constitutive.

⁵⁸ John D’Emilio, “Forging a Group Identity: World War II and the Emergence of an Urban Gay Subculture,” in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23.

⁵⁹ D’Emilio, “Forging a Group Identity,” 38

⁶⁰ Colin R. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 5.

In fact in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, Karen Tongson suggests that the works of D’Emilio have been influential in the perpetuation of the urban as queer space. Tongson states, “...there is a reproducibility to D’Emilio’s community-building, national paradigm, which I would argue help establish ‘the city’ as the exemplary site for queer politics as well as culture...”⁶¹ Therefore, she notes, cities have long been upheld as the emblematic spaces of arrival for queer folks, ultimately becoming a “natural habitat” of sorts.⁶² Further, through D’Emilio’s work, as well as scholars deeply influenced by his theory, particular urban cities, such as San Francisco and New York City, are situated as privileged sites of sexual diversity.⁶³ This, Scott Herring echoes, extends past New York and San Francisco to include the likes of Los Angeles and Chicago as national victorious queer sexual cultures, as well as cities such as London, Berlin, Mexico City, and Paris rounding it out transnationally.⁶⁴ Thus, we see that not only are urban spaces generally more privileged, but that even within that geographic site it is particular urban geographies that warrant more praise.⁶⁵ These cities come to be framed, naturalized even, as “the epicenter of contemporary queer life.”⁶⁶ Further, queer

⁶¹ Karen Tongson, “Relocating Queer Critique: Lynne Chan’s JJ Chinois,” in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, (New York: New York University Press), 49.

⁶² Tongson, “Relocating Queer Critique,” 47.

⁶³ Ibid. 51.

⁶⁴ Herring, “Introduction,” 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

urbanisms have positioned the city as a distant reference point of queer lifestyle for those queer folks who lie far beyond the margins of city living.⁶⁷

In seemingly stark contrast to the utopian, sexually liberating, and modern metropolitan space is the heavily surveilled, sexually repressed, and anachronistic rural stylistic. If queerness has come to be understood as firmly situated within the urban space, complete with a backdrop of a city skyline, we now arrive at an impasse, in the middle of a vast, yet dense corn field, where the rural stands as the space devoid of queer identity and community. Further, the rural space becomes imagined as one of inherent danger for queer and queer and trans folks of color.

While perhaps the rural space, as well as rural life, was previously associated simply with farming, now conjuring up images and narratives of the rural, much like images of the South, often means imagining intense religiosity that inevitably manifests itself into unchanging or backward ideologies related to race, gender, and sexuality. As noted above, E. Patrick Johnson attributes not just any religiosity to the South, but one that is “frequently associated with a virulent and unrelenting fundamentalism.”⁶⁸ This strict fundamentalism stylizes the rural and the Southern as repressive spaces and, due to

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ E. Patrick Johnson, “Church Sissies: Gayness and the Black Church,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 182.

the often intimate nature of religion and anti-homosexuality stances, they both also become sites of ignorance.

As a space that is continuously described as slow or stubborn to change, the rural is often characterized, within the imaginary, as a spatiality that is secluded or isolated from “broader national and international trends.”⁶⁹ As Colin R. Johnson, Brian J. Gilley, and Mary L. Gray note in their anthology, *Queering the Countryside*, the idea that rural life is inherently isolated proves problematic considering rural America’s radical transformation through the 1920s,

particularly through the rise of new communication, information, and transportation technologies, and often in ways that accord remarkably well with the predictions of Karl Marx and others who made prescient note early on of capitalism’s tendency to ‘annihilate space’ by tethering local economies together into national and international markets.⁷⁰

In relation to the construction of the rural for queer and queer and trans folks of color, the rural often stands as the space devoid of queer identity and community. This, much like the functioning of the South in the national imaginary, is due in large part to the conception of the rural as a space of political stagnancy and white backward ideology, as mentioned above. For example, J. Jack Halberstam’s “The Brandon Archive,” in *In a Queer Time and Place*, extensively notes the role the rural plays in both the documentary film, *The Brandon Teena Story*, and the national imaginary in relation to the murder of Brandon Teena. Here, Halberstam notes that the rural backdrop of Brandon’s murder

⁶⁹ Colin Johnson, “Introduction,” 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

serves to position the space as, “a site of horror and degradation in the urban imagination” that symbolizes an “urban fantasy of homophobic violence.”⁷¹ Thus, the documentary perpetuates an ideology that sutures anti-queer violence to one spatial location. This fantasy is perpetuated and maintained, Halberstam notes, through classist rhetorics that enable the urban queer to create and maintain a fantasy of urban safety, wherein violence upon the queer body is an act of white-trash masculine rurality.⁷² Here, the rural comes to be read in and through rural white hetero-masculine violences, of racism, homophobia, and transphobia. Thus, urban queers can rest assured that the narrative of violent homophobic and transphobic violence is firmly pinned “to the landscape of white trash America.”⁷³

I suggest that the demarcation of urban sanctuary and rural violence mirrors the ways in which the South and non-South are conceptualized. The urban serves to represent a space of queer hospitality and vitality, much like the non-South, with the rural space becoming the space to be left behind, the danger to be abandoned, much like the South, in hope for a queerer future. The pervasive ideologies surrounding these spaces are so similar, in fact, that there is often a slippage where the South is imagined as rural for the queer subject. Thus, the South and the rural each become nationally recognized as

⁷¹ J. Jack Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies,” in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 25.

⁷² Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies,” 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

unwelcome spaces for queer folks and queer folks of color. However, the widespread bias that the urban and the non-southern are the only spaces for queer community and survival ignores the very tangible reality that queer folks and queer folks of color do live in and continue to choose both the regional and spatial locations of southern and rural.

John Howard notes that these metropolitan cities continue to be circulated in queer cultural consciousness because they are the cities historians credit with developing gay identities and cultures.⁷⁴ Of course, it is not only through academia or queer historians that these ideologies circulate. In fact, the maintenance of these narratives heavily relies on urban bias that gives way to the spatialization of the gay imaginary.

In “Get Thee To A Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” Kath Weston examines the role of geography as an intricate piece of the fabric of gay identity in the 1970s. Weston documents the influx of lesbians and gay men into metropolitan areas with a specific investment in the ideology surrounding San Francisco as the gay utopia or “mecca,” taking particular interest in the ideological and cultural merging of gay identity with the San Franciscan urban space. She asks, “what led us to conjecture that ‘like’ others were to be found in urban centers?”⁷⁵ Weston finds that the shoring up of San Francisco, and other like metropolitan areas, as central gay community

⁷⁴ John Howard, “Introduction,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, (New York University Press, 1997), 4.

⁷⁵ Kath Weston, “Get Thee To A Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” in *GLQ* 1 June 1995; 2 (3): 258.

spaces was largely due to the circulation of cultural narratives of the gay imaginary.

Weston credits books, television shows, movies, and personal contacts for disseminating cultural ideologies that “anchored the imagined community space” as existing within the city.⁷⁶ Further, she notes,

Every friend who sends a letter back from San Francisco filled with tales of city streets covered with queers builds the city’s reputation as a safe harbor for “gay people.” Every reporter who files a story on gays from Greenwich Village or Castro Street locates the gay subject in space, and that space is almost invariably an urban one. Her report simultaneously conveys a vision and a directive to people in pursuit of the gay imaginary: “Come to the big city. This is the place where surely you can find others who occupy the categories ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay.’”⁷⁷

As such, the gay imaginary is spatialized, resulting in “a sexual geography in which the city represents a beacon of tolerance and gay community.”⁷⁸

Bridging the Gap: Queer Southern Studies, Queer Theory, and Affectual Ties

As the scholarship above shows, conversations about the American South, particularly in southern studies, often center conversations about the role of the South in the nation as internal other. Though these are important considerations, and they prove a helpful framework for critically engaging with the South, these conversations often fail to consider discussions of sexuality within the region even as the South is often cast as a space for both racism and homophobia. Further, gay and lesbian studies, in continuing to

⁷⁶ Weston, “Get Thee To A Big City,” 268.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 262.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

center the urban as queer site, often fails to acknowledge queer subjectivities in both rural and Southern spaces. In these discrepancies, as well as in a move to bring these fields into conversation, I first look to the field of queer Southern studies. John Howard's 1997 anthology *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, is notably the first book that centers lesbian and gay Southern histories explicitly.⁷⁹ American lesbian and gay history, he notes, has not accommodated considerations of southern queer lives and culture, as it "evinces a bicoastal bias—a focus on persons and events from the East and West Coasts."⁸⁰ He states, "the very theoretical model our field is founded on effectively discounts and marginalizes Southerners," which he suggests is due to the role of the city in studies on queer sexuality.⁸¹ Overall, the anthology, organized chronologically and spanning about 150 years, serves as an intervention into both southern studies and gay and lesbian studies in a move to center the often invisibilized experiences of queers in the American South throughout history.

Few notable works have been produced since *Carryin' On*, though Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (1999), E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (2008), and Carlos L. Dews and Carolyn Leste Law's the edited

⁷⁹ Howard. "Introduction." 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

collection *Out in the South* (2001) stand as some exceptions.⁸² Though these are strides, many of the works remain centered on the gay male subject, with only Johnson's *Sweet Tea* focuses particularly on race and queer identity in the South.⁸³ Nevertheless, these canonical works think through the particular materialities of queerness in the American South, as "a region full of the most remarkable paradoxes."⁸⁴ Further, as a field, queer Southern studies both centers and disrupts the often imagined contradictory nature of the South and queerness. In fact, E. Patrick Johnson encourages a "reconsideration of the South as 'backward' and 'repressive,' when clearly gay community building and desire emerge simultaneously within and against southern culture."⁸⁵ Therefore, reading the South queerly can serve as a means of holding the region accountable for, as Carolyn Leste Law notes, "its spectacular homophobia and other forms of bigotry and hypocrisy" while also dispelling the myth that "gay people cannot live in the repressive atmosphere of the South, that all gay and lesbian southerners are driven out, indeed suspect if they choose to stay."⁸⁶

⁸² Joe Edward Hatfield, "Southerners and the City: Queer Archives, Backward Temporalities, and the Emergence of AIDS," Order No. 10126804, Syracuse University, 2016. <https://search-proquest-com.jpllnet.sfsu.edu/docview/1808509718?accountid=13802>. 15.

⁸³ Hatfield, "Southerners and the City," 15.

⁸⁴ Law, "Introduction," 2.

⁸⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, "Some Bitter and Some Sweet: Growing Up Black and Gay in the South," in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press), 2008, 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

As a field that will continue to grapple with the meanings, makings, and operations of the American South within cultural and gay imaginaries, I find that expanding considerations about the queer Southern United States beyond the often central historical case studies, which currently serve as anchors to challenge and enrich conversations about queer identity and subjectivity in the South, to be a helpful intervention. Therefore, in line with E. Patrick Johnson's call to reconsider the South I turn to both affect and queer theory as a helpful framework for engaging with reconsiderations of the region and queerness. Here, we can better imagine how Southern queer subjects negotiate and agitate particular narratives of the Southern United States. As expanded upon above, the Southern United States has come to be understood through particular circulating narratives. However, for the purpose of this project, I believe it imperative to not only think about the narratives and the role they play for situating the South within the nation and the imaginary, but also encourage a move to understanding that inherent to the creation, circulation, and role of narratives of the American South means considering the embeddedness of particular affect and emotion.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Sara Ahmed explores the ways in which emotions work to situate social and political life. She notes, "Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others."⁸⁷ Therefore, she notes, instead of

⁸⁷ Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Feel Your Way," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York:

asking and tracing what emotions are, she is rather particularly interested in what emotions do, the ways in which they function socially, and how emotion shapes both individual and collective bodies that can result in the creation of affective communities.⁸⁸ These affective communities and landscapes are equally a result of contact with objects, the feeling generated through that contact, as well as the act of repeated contact and subsequently generated feeling. She notes, “The process of attributing an object as being beneficial or harmful, which may become translated into good or bad, clearly involves reading the contact we have with objects in a certain way.”⁸⁹ In reading this contact impressions are made, due to how objects impress upon us. Ahmed states, “How the object impresses upon us may depend on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions.”⁹⁰ Objects become sticky, she argues, as a result of contact, and repeated contact, that has repeatedly been associated with bad feelings. For the purpose of this project, I read Ahmed’s conversations about emotions while holding the American South in mind as the object in which emotions are circulating. Therefore, in thinking about the work of emotion in situating the South within the imaginary, I suggest that the South’s histories serve as particular “bad” impressions. Further, Ahmed suggests that emotions are not simply about movement, but also involve attachments and

Routledge, 2004), 4.

⁸⁸ Maria Serena Sapegno, “Book Review: The Cultural Politics of Emotion,” *Feminist Theory* 7, no. 3 (2006): 370-72. 371

⁸⁹ Ahmed, “Introduction: Feel Your Way,” 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

orientations. The stickiness of bad feelings thus influence and encourage orientations away from the objects in question. We are further encouraged to turn away from objects that threaten to make us the other, as well as threaten our ability to flourish. As such, this project is also interested in what it means, then, for Southern queer people and queer and trans people of color to orient themselves toward an object steeped in bad, sticky feelings. This also calls for a conversation about what it is assumed that Southern queer subjects are turning away from. In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed discusses the way in which happiness as an affect has come to be associated with particular life choices over others.⁹¹ Here, she traces the role of happiness, particularly for the queer subject who is turning away from heterosexuality. Happiness, Ahmed notes, comes to be associated with orienting in the “right way.” Though the “right way” for Ahmed, in the context of this book, is orienting toward the path of heterosexuality, examining the role of happiness affects allows us to think critically about the ways in which both for the South and queer subject within the region are postured as at odds with happiness, due to their orientation.

As far as Southern queer and queer and trans folks are concerned, if the South has become a bad object, then we can come to understand Southern queer subjects as improperly orienting. Here, instead of fleeing from the “bad object” of the South, they

⁹¹ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction,” in *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham and London: Duke

University Press, 2010), 50-87.

turn toward it. Therefore, in these misaligned, or failed, orientations, queer Southern subjects operate on a non-normative temporality. In *A Queer Time and Place* J. Jack Halberstam offers the uses of queer temporalities, queer time and space, in order to engage in conversations about queer counterculture's existence in places otherwise imagined to be as devoid of queerness.⁹² Here, Halberstam argues, a queer adjustment to time also "requires and produces new conceptions of space."⁹³ As such, this necessitates new ways of engaging the non-normative behaviors "that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects."⁹⁴ Queer space then refers to the ways in which queer people negotiate place-making practices through the production of queer counterpublics.⁹⁵ Michael Warner describes queer counterpublics as an "alternative to heteronormativity and an altered discourse of acceptable sexual standards."⁹⁶ Through the use of queer time and space, and queer counterpublics, Halberstam also proposes a destabilizing of the centering of the urban space for queer subjectivities. He notes, "The division between urban and rural or urban and small town has had a major impact on the

⁹² Halberstam, "Queer Temporality," 1.

⁹³ Halberstam, "Queer Temporality," 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Sarah Steele, "Performing Utopia: Queer Counterpublics and Southerners on New Ground," in *A Critical Inquiry Into Queer Utopias*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 131-147.

ways in which queer community has been formed and perceived in the United States.”⁹⁷ This is particularly helpful as I begin to imagine the relationship to space and place for queer subjects in the American South. Halberstam spends a great deal of *In a Queer Time and Place* imagining queer temporalities alongside the life and death of Brandon Teena, a trans person who was brutally murdered alongside two friends in Falls City, Nebraska in 1993. Here, Halberstam is interested in Brandon Teena’s non-metropolitan location, and the ways in which, through what he calls the “Brandon Archive,” his death often served to reinscribe stereotypes of rural white trash homophobic and transphobic violence and reinstate the metropolitan as a site of queer safety and longevity. He notes, “ultimately we can use Brandon’s story as it emerges here to being the articulation of the stories of white, working-class, rural queers, and to map the immensely complex relations that make rural America a site of horror and degradation in the urban imagination.”⁹⁸ Implicit in these narratives that represent the rural space as a site of queer horror is the idea that “rural and small-town queer life is generally mythologized by urban queers as sad and lonely, or else rural queer might be thought of as ‘stuck’ in a place they would leave if only they could.” As such, Halberstam offers the term “metronormativity” as a mode of exposing the ways in which “urban” and “visible” are conflated in gay and lesbian narratives and the ways in which this narrative supposes a story of migration “to a place

⁹⁷ Halberstam, “Queer Temporality,” 15.

⁹⁸ Halberstam, “The Brandon Archive,” 27.

of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy.”⁹⁹ Due to the ways in which the American South is often rendered as a monolithically rural space, Halberstam is helpful for understanding the ways in which the South is mapped similarly dangerously for queer and queer and trans folks of color. Similarly, Southern queer counterpublics and their subjects, produced through queer uses of time and space, agitate the rhetoric of the South as inherently unsafe to queer people and queer and trans people of color and disrupt the erasure of queer southern communities, granting us the ability to come to recognize the South as a region of complexities.

Though the standard understanding of regional affiliation within the American South, as it exists in the cultural imaginary, renders particular images of the region and its affiliates, engaging with Southern queer temporalities, counterpublics, and improper orientations holds the potentiality of reimagining the regional space of the American South and subsequent identifications. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Esteban Muñoz defines disidentification as “a mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it...that works on and against dominant ideology.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, performing disidentifications means working within the dominant ideology in order to renegotiate on and against it. In his chapter “Performing Disidentifications,” Muñoz

⁹⁹ Halberstam, “The Brandon Archive,” 36.

¹⁰⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, “Introduction: Performing Disidentifications,” in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

offers the concept of disidentifications as a mode of remaking a world full of queer possibility.¹⁰¹ Disidentification, he notes, may serve as a survival technique for queer people of color and other minority subjects that works simultaneously inside and outside of the impossible conditions of the dominant sphere. For Muñoz, to disidentify means to embody a “disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.”¹⁰² In this project, I argue that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may embody disidentifications in order to disidentify with dominant narratives of the American South that position the region as particularly harmful for queer subjects. Similarly, I posit that a Southern queer disidentification can be a means of reimagining the South. Further, through disidentifications, queer uses of time and space, and queer counterpublics, we are able to position Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as pivotal sites of cultural knowledge production and commentary on the queer American South.

Conclusion

Taking the existing scholarship listed above into account, this project is situated at the intersections of Southern studies, gay and lesbian studies, and queer Southern studies. As such, this project makes use of both affect and queer theory to continue to interrogate the ways in which the South operates within the nation, cultural imaginary, and the gay

¹⁰¹ Muñoz, “Performing Disidentifications,” 3.

¹⁰² Ibid.

imaginary. Therefore, this project engages in conversations about representation, orientation, and identification for queer and queer and trans people of color in the American South. This project is deeply invested in continuing conversations that nuance popular narratives about the regional South, particularly as it relates to queerness.

Building from this introduction's analysis of the American South's role within the United States, particularly attuned to the creation and function of the South/non-South binary, as well as the understanding of the privileging of the urban space within the gay imaginary, Chapter 1 explores the Viceland television series *Gaycation* as an archive. As such, I conduct an analysis of two *Gaycation* episodes, "USA" and "The Deep South," to effectively demonstrate the ways in which the South is often rendered as a distinct region within the United States. These episodes in conjunction serve helpful in that they visually demonstrate the ways in which urban spaces, particularly Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, are often heralded and privileged as key queer spaces. Further, these episodes effectively demonstrate the ways in which the South is often positioned as an acutely difficult space to inhabit as a queer person or queer person of color.

Chapter 2 builds upon the deployment of popular constructions of the American South, particularly as it relates to queer subjects, and interrogates these narratives by centering Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as key interlocutors. Therefore, this chapter is concerned with interrupting, disrupting, and nuancing the imaginary's relationship to Southern queerness. Drawing heavily on interviews I conducted, as well as participant observation, with Southern queer folks and Southern

queer organizations in the South, this chapter interrogates two key concepts the circulated throughout my interviews: the misconception that Southernness and queerness are mutually exclusive and the narrative of queer life in the South as one of inherent struggle. As such, this chapter highlights the importance of embodied space and experience when talking about queer subjectivities in the American South. In a move to disrupt and nuance both of these narratives, and in turn the narratives that I laid out in the introduction, alongside the interviews I conducted, I draw attention to several Atlanta-based queer organizations that operate throughout the Southeastern United States. It is my hope that through the interviews, as well as the media and organizations I highlighted, that the chapter served as a space to interrupt, disrupt, and nuance the national imaginary's relationship to Southern queerness. Further, it is my hope that through these conversations representation of Southern queerness also worked simultaneously as a mode of disruption.

Chapter 3 returns to the circulation of narratives surrounding the American South that have been discussed both the introduction and chapter 1. However, here I think explicitly about the role of emotion or negative affectual circulations in relation to the South. As such, I offer a consideration of the power and operation of emotions in relation to residual feelings about Southern histories and the ways in which this shapes the perception of the region within the sociocultural imaginary. Through the sociality of emotions, I trace the ways in which the Southern United States is positioned as backward and dangerous produces the region as a threat for queer people and queer and trans

people of color, as well as the nation. I then begin to think through the ways in which the South, in its accrual of negative residual feeling, is situated as antithetical to happiness, which subsequently positions Southern queer folks as at outside of or at odds with happiness. In turn, I detail the ways in which, according to heteronormative and homonormative cultural scripts of happiness, the Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color's object choice of the American South positioned them as failing to correctly orient to the proper life pathways. As such, I think about the ways in which, through bad feeling and orientation, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may be exercising queer counterpublics, temporalities, and disidentifications as a mode of reimagining the American South.

Chapter 1: Examining *Gaycation* and the Southern United States within the Imaginary

After a series of titillating teasers, complete with Antebellum drag and exaggerated Southern drawl, the credits roll and fade to the inside of a pickup truck cruising along an expansive interstate with a funky, country-inspired guitar riff hanging underneath. Though teeming with lush forest on either side of the sparkling asphalt, the long shot of the road infers that it is desolate, in the kind of rural way where Super 8 Motels on interspersed exits are the only signposts to break up rolling acres of farmland. We see Ian Daniel, co-host of *Gaycation*, in a backwards ballcap, one hand casually draped atop the wheel of the pickup truck as he tells us, “I am on my own personal Gaycation... and I’m roadtripping throughout the Deep South. I’m going to Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Georgia.” The camera shifts back to the road ahead, so incredibly long that there is no end in visible sight, it is looming. The guitar riff, once lively and fun, cuts off abruptly only to be replaced with building ominous sound. As Ian begins to speak, a transparent map of the Southern United States fades in atop the shot of the ceaseless interstate. “I’m driving,” he says, “through the Deep South. The states that originally formed the Confederacy. Each of these states has its own unique identity, which contributes powerfully and positively to American culture, going beyond Southern charm and hospitality.”

The foreboding music raises, ever-so-slightly, in volume as we cut to the outside of a malt shop, in what can only be imagined as in the “middle-of-nowhere” American

South. We momentarily see a church whose placard reads, "It's all about Jesus!" as Ian, with a stern and steady voice, reminds us, "At the same time, the region is highly conservative and tightly bound to its traditions of God, guns, and Southern glory." The malt shop is replaced by a small town mainstreet, a horse-drawn carriage slowly passes through the frame and we see four stoplights, which are, perhaps, the only ones in town. "These Republican strongholds," Ian notes, "have created some of the most anti-LGBTQ legislation the country has seen." We see slow shots of two men exiting a barbershop whose chipped wall paint indicates that its last touch up was decades ago, a close-up of an American flag billowing slowly enough in the wind we can count the times the fabric folds in on itself, and finally a wide shot of a road littered with more American flags and a billboard that reads "GUNS" in large white lettering. The shots are slow, deliberately slow, perhaps a metaphor for the region known to be slow to change. Ian notes, "But yet, the South has a higher population of LGBTQ people than anywhere in the nation...so on this road trip, I want to talk to as many people as I can to understand the LGBTQ experience here and find out what it means to be Southern and queer."¹⁰³

As noted, through the inscription of these Southern histories into contemporary consciousness, the South is identified as the space of political and ideological backwardness, perpetuated by an imaginary that seemingly seals the nation as temporally fixed. E. Patrick Johnson attributes this fixedness to religiosity, "But not just any

¹⁰³ "Gaycation," VICELAND, accessed February 24, 2018, https://www.viceland.com/en_us/show/gaycation.

religiosity: the South is frequently associated with a virulent and unrelenting fundamentalism.”¹⁰⁴ Though this project does not essentially interrogate the role of fundamental religion in depth, it is nevertheless a considerable layer in understanding constructions of the South. Therefore, Southern histories within the national imaginary ensure that the region may never become unstuck in time, forever locked into this temporal location. Further, undoubtedly leaking from the crevices of regional temporal fixedness are ideologies of an inherent Southern rusticity and distinctiveness. Thus, with these constructions and ideologies in mind, this project is specifically intrigued by the ways in which these constructions of the South as an unlivable space are presented as not only generally dangerous, the South as site for national danger, but as particularly potent for queer people and queer and trans people of color. In turn, by locating racism and homophobia as intrinsic to the American South, the rest of the United States exonerates itself, thus imagined to be free from the likes of racism and homophobia.

Building upon the introduction, this chapter is interested in the ways in which the American South is mapped as particularly dangerous, due to citations of its seemingly rampant racism and homophobia, for Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color. As such, this chapter is specifically interested in representations of the American South within the larger cultural imaginary and, more specifically, the gay imaginary. As I posited in the introductory chapter, the American South has long come to be understood

¹⁰⁴ E. Patrick Johnson. “Church Sissies: Gayness and the Black Church,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 182.

as a distinct region within the United States as a result of the region's histories being etched into the collective imaginary. Therefore, this chapter keeps in mind how the South has come to be imagined an "other" which, as I suggested, in turn creates a South and non-South binary. Similarly, this chapter continues to hold in mind the ways in which the South is often ruralized and, thus, the South/non-South binary mirrors the division of the geographies of the urban and the rural. As it relates specifically to queer subjects, this chapter continues to hold in mind urban bias, particularly around cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York as they are often heralded key sites for queer subjects. Therefore, in specific relation to sexual geographies, I will be thinking through these Southern, and Southern queer, representations of the region through Viceland's television series *Gaycation*.

On March 2nd, 2016, as part of its new programming launch, Viceland released the new television series *Gaycation*. Like much of the work produced by Viceland, whose stylized aesthetic is closely aligned to the likes of lifestyle-oriented documentary, *Gaycation* is an American documentary-style television show featuring actress Ellen Page and friend Ian Daniel, both white, cis, affluent queer folks currently situated within the United States. As noted on the website's series description, *Gaycation* centers around Page and Daniel's "personal journey to explore LGBTQ cultures around the world" wherein they meet and interview various folks about their experiences being queer in their particular geographies.¹⁰⁵ It is worthy to note that while *Gaycation* markets itself as

¹⁰⁵ "Gaycation," VICELAND.

LGBTQ travels across the world, of the ten episodes currently released just under half are filmed in the United States.

Though I will only be analyzing two specific *Gaycation* episodes, one more explicitly than the other, context and a brief analysis of the show as a text is helpful. Throughout the first season of the series, Page and Daniel are followed by their camera crew through the countries of Japan, Brazil, and Jamaica, with the season finale featuring an episode titled, “USA” to round it out. Each episode is premised on Page and Daniel traveling the countries with the intention of interviewing locals, who may or may not identify as queer, about the local LGBTQ scene, their nation’s relationship to queerness more broadly, and as one news outlet describes it to “unearth what it is really like to be gay in the world.”¹⁰⁶ When it was renewed for a second season, we saw Page and Daniel explore the Ukraine, India, France, and Orlando, Florida, post the Pulse nightclub shooting, as well as a particularly interesting and final stop in the “Deep South.” Hidden beneath *Gaycation*’s seemingly “harmless” research for the greater queer community—the episodes are generously peppered with a myriad of shots of smiles, gay bars, laughter, and hugs—are undertones of queer white savior sentimentalism and tourism, imperialism and Empire, Western identity politics, and constructions of the other in the name of

¹⁰⁶ Adrian Lee, “Ellen Page on ‘Gaycation’ and the Privilege of Travel,” *Macleans.ca*, March 15, 2016, accessed April 28, 2018, <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/television/ellen-page-on-gaycation-and-the-privilege-of-travel/>.

“human rights.”¹⁰⁷ In turn, and perhaps unsurprisingly, *Gaycation* frames the United States, and arguably the West at large, as the epicenter of queer safety and community. Perhaps this is apparent in the fact that there are no repeated episodes for the other countries Page and Daniel visit, seemingly insinuating that forty-five minutes is enough time to encapsulate their complexities, but that queer U.S.-based subjects should take center stage as just under half of the episodes are shot in the United States.

As a sort of Frankenstein of a travel show, one that is not exactly formulaic in the traditional “resort-front travelogue” but also isn’t not a show about travel, as a whole *Gaycation* operates in deeply problematic ways. While seemingly packaged and presented as activism, with Page and Daniel are looking to shed light on LGBTQ lives across the nation, *Gaycation* deploys an incredibly dangerous rhetoric of the white Western subject gallivanting across the globe masquerading with the feel-good intent of learning about, read “exploring,” other cultures. As Jasmine Rault notes in “White Noise, White Affects: Filtering the Sameness of Queer Suffering,” *Gaycation*’s inaugural season may have been “more aptly titled *Homophobiocations*, as it follows Page and Daniel’s discovery of the real-life stories of struggling and less fortunate sexual minorities in Japan, Brazil, Jamaica, and the USA (except also Saskatchewan, Canada).”¹⁰⁸ What

¹⁰⁷ Tovah Leibowitz, “Ellen Page’s Gay Imperialism is Not Activism,” Harlot Media, March 17, 2016, accessed February 24, 2017. <http://harlot.media/articles/1513/ellen-page-gay-imperialism-is-not-activism>.

¹⁰⁸ Jasmine Rault, “White Noise, White Affects: Filtering the Sameness of Queer Suffering,” in *Feminist Media Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017): , doi:10.1080/14680777.2017.1326557. 586.

becomes increasingly apparent throughout Page and Daniel's travels is that their uninhibited access and movement around the globe is wholeheartedly aided by their white, cis, affluent, and able-bodied privileges. Tovah Leibowitz notes, "Ellen and Ian's unbridled movement across the globe is staggering to watch in the wake of vast criminalization of immigrants and refugees, unprecedented expansion of border militarization, violent capture and caging of vulnerable bodies in detention camps, and the many other brutal containment and deportation policies of national regimes."¹⁰⁹ The privileges of their movement are often rendered invisible in *Gaycation's* globe-trotting. *Gaycation* also thrives upon the assumption of a universal queer subject. Here, Western sexual exceptionalism fuels the idea that there is a generalized queer identity and subjectivity across the globe. As Rault notes, *Gaycation* asks us to "focus on the universal emotional truth that brings us together: homophobia hurts."¹¹⁰ In turn, conversations of racism, classism, patriarchy, and colonialism disappear from view.¹¹¹ Further, she notes that this prioritization of homophobia over everything is "central to the performance of what Jasbir K. Puar calls a 'queer transgressive subjecthood... underpinned by a powerful conviction that religious and racial communities are more homophobic than white mainstream queer communities are racist.'"¹¹² Therefore, both homophobia and transphobia become threatening signs of "barbarism and

¹⁰⁹ Leibowitz, "Ellen Page's Gay Imperialism."

¹¹⁰ Rault, "White Noise," 597.

¹¹¹ Rault, "White Noise," 589.

¹¹² Ibid. 590.

backwardness,” their focus obscuring “any irritating information about racial, ethnic, class, historical, or cultural difference.”¹¹³

A further problematic implicit within these agendas, *Gaycation* positions Page and Daniel as the key authorities capable of determining the gay-friendliness of the space, the ga(y)te-keepers, if you will. Further, as Leibowitz notes, the countries that Page and Daniel visit in season one are also the “very same populations that, unsurprisingly, have been most severely displaced by a carefully curated gay and lesbian tourism industry that has divided the world into two precarious yet politically-convenient distinctions: ‘gay-friendly’ and ‘homophobic.’”¹¹⁴ Therefore, each place Page and Daniel visit is “assessed according to its capacity to protect the cosmopolitan LGBT subject.”¹¹⁵ Though *Gaycation* touts itself as a positive endeavor with a somewhat implied intent on building solidarity between queer people across the world, in reality, as Sara Ahmed notes, “even solidarity becomes a mechanism of asserting the superiority of one form of politics over others.”¹¹⁶ As such, Page and Daniel’s movement and search for “LGBT cultures” ultimately, and inevitably, map sexuality according to Western identity politics as they cite both legislative measures and coming out narratives as markers of progress and gay-

¹¹³ Ibid. 591.

¹¹⁴ Leibowitz, “Ellen Page’s Gay Imperialism.”

¹¹⁵ Rault, “White Affects,” 591.

¹¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, “Problematic Proximities: Or Why Critiques of Gay Imperialism Matter,” in *Feminist Legal Studies* 19 (2), 2011. 130.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10691-011-9180-7>.
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/883225503?accountid=13802>.

friendliness.¹¹⁷ Page and Daniel's queer imperialist globetrotting is deeply and inherently problematic. The positioning of the United States, or North America at large, as the central location for queer identity is implicit throughout the duration of the programming, though perhaps most visibly realized in the season finale, "USA." It becomes clear that particular American enclaves are reified as more hospitable to queer identities and subjectivities.

As the opening season's finale, *Gaycation's* "USA" turns the lens inward with the episode summary reading, "Ellen and Ian go on a road trip from Iowa to New York City (with a brief detour to Saskatchewan, Canada) during which they explore both the progress and setbacks of the LGBTQ movement in the United States."¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that Page and Daniel are "bringing *Gaycation* back to America," what this episode does not note, however, is that their road trip across the United States takes place nearly exclusively in the heart of the major metropolitan cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, with their brief detour through Iowa serving as the only exception.¹¹⁹ In particular, the episode opens with cheers as "history is made" by legalizing gay marriage, and Page and Daniel celebrate at the New York Pride festival two days later. After Page and Daniel's glitter and rainbow-filled New York pride party, complete with a montage of folks celebrating Page's recent coming out statement, Daniel

¹¹⁷ Ahmed, "Problematic Proximities."

¹¹⁸ "Gaycation," *Viceland*.

¹¹⁹ "Gaycation," *Viceland*.

notes, “New York is one of the most open-minded places for LGBT people in the country... and while it seems like America is at the center of a progressive situation, you have an aggressive backlash from people in the opposition... we’re off to hear what the mood is like in the Heartland.” Here, Page and Daniel travel to Des Moines, Iowa. Though the capital city, here it is stylistically rendered as rural as they visit a county fair to conduct interviews with folks who opposed gay marriage due to religious liberty laws, one of which is a family who quickly equates gay marriage to bestiality and pedophilia. We then see Page and Daniel weaving in and out of a sea of white Iowans at the fair in order to interview Ted Cruz about the role of religion, and religious liberty laws, in the fight against gay marriage. As one can imagine, the conversation is heated and goes nowhere. Though they interview three older white queer folks in the state, the visit to Iowa serves as a direct counter to the celebratory scenes moments before, perhaps a play on the longstanding rendering of the rural, particularly the rural Midwest, as dangerous. As a space that is continuously described as slow or stubborn to change, the rural is often characterized, within the imaginary, as a spatiality that is secluded or isolated from “broader national and international trends.”¹²⁰ In relation to the construction of the rural for queer and queer and trans folks of color, the rural often stands as the space devoid of queer identity and community. This, much like the functioning of the South in the national imaginary, is due in large part to the conception of the rural as a space of

¹²⁰ Colin R. Johnson, Brian J. Gilley, and Mary L. Gray, “Introduction,” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: New York UP, 2016), 3.

political stagnancy and white backward ideology, as mentioned in the introduction and briefly demonstrated here through *Gaycation*. Here, it is helpful to think back to J. Jack Halberstam's discussion of the rural backdrop of Brandon Teena's murder as it served to position the space as, "a site of horror and degradation in the urban imagination" that symbolizes an "urban fantasy of homophobic violence."¹²¹ For *Gaycation* in particular, this dangerous rurality is not only a product of white backwardness, but is particularly fueled by rural religiosity.

In a striking opposition to the image of an Iowa county fair and Ted Cruz debate, Page and Daniel gallivant off to San Francisco with Page noting, "You can't talk about gay rights in America without going to San Francisco." Here, images of steep San Franciscan streets, the Castro's rainbow sidewalk, and Dolores Park's "gay beach" dominate the screen as Page goes on to say, "This sexually and socially liberated city is a stark contrast to the conservative atmosphere we've just experienced. We're visiting a woman who was raised in the religious right and sought out the inclusivity of San Francisco." Though there are scenes that seemingly contrast San Francisco's positioning as "queer mecca," we join Page and Daniel to interview Miss Major Griffin-Gracy about the disproportionate violence trans women of color face, which is shortly followed by a home visit to the family of Taja DeJesus, a trans woman who was a victim of a fatal homicide, Iowa, and rurality, remains the site of homophobic and transphobic violence.

¹²¹ J. Jack Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 25.

After their interview with DeJesus' mother Page notes through tears, "I feel like I've felt angry all day because we were just in Iowa and we were surrounded by so much homophobia ... I don't have time for some conservative dude who is running for President spewing his shit which is responsible for this ... I really just find myself going, 'What is wrong with people?'" The episode continues with Page and Daniel traveling to Chicago, back to New York to go to a vogue night, and ends in Los Angeles with a brief discussion about queer homeless youth. Though Page and Daniel direct attention to non-Midwestern and non-rural danger, the episode nonetheless closes in Los Angeles, with a utopian look toward the future as Page, laughing and surfing, notes, "It can be daunting, what we've seen, but it does feel like love prevails."¹²²

The "USA" episode, in fact any episode for that matter, is deserving of attentive and critical engagement. Though I have tried to highlight key points, this does not serve fully as an in-depth analysis. However, it serves helpful for the purpose of this chapter because of the fact that in the hour and six-minute "USA" episode there is at least one glaring omission. Though Page and Daniel take a brief detour through the ruralized Heartland, exposing likely the "worst" America has to offer, as I watched the hour countdown, I realized that throughout the duration of the homecoming episode Page and Daniel do not once engage with the Southern United States. In fact, the region's existence is merely a footnote, discussed only by an interviewee who mentions that she is from Austin, Texas originally. Further, not only does the "USA" episode reify the ideology

¹²² "Gaycation," *Viceland*.

that queerness is best situated within U.S. boundaries, but by effectively rendering the South invisible in the episode dedicated to the United States, *Gaycation* visually perpetuates the ideology that the South is a distinct spatiality from the rest of the nation. In a move that further bolsters this assumption, it is not until the end of the second season that the South is acknowledged through its own episode titled, “The Deep South.” By not acknowledging the South in the “USA” episode, and centering another episode solely in the South, we can come to understand these spaces as inherently different, and see the manifestation of ideologies that partition the United States along South and non-South binaries. Further, not only does the “USA” episode reify the ideology that queerness is best situated within Western boundaries, but by effectively rendering the South invisible in the episode dedicated to the United States, *Gaycation* visually perpetuates the ideology that queerness is best situated in places like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. At once the American South circulates between being American, not American, or, perhaps, too American. By not acknowledging the South in the “USA” episode, and centering another episode solely in the South, it is implied that not only is the South is different from the U.S., but that it is also inherently different from the rural space presented to us through the Midwest. Further, though Daniel is clearly on a mission to “talk to as many people as [he] can,” implying that there are queer people and queer people of color in the South, it is also simultaneously presented as a region devoid of queer identity or, at the very least, comprised of queer outliers. Here, by queer outliers I mean folks who do not flock to the often “utopian” queer spaces that the “USA” episode

offered through the likes of Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. John Howard notes that these metropolitan cities continue to be circulated in queer cultural consciousness because they are the cities historians credit with developing gay identities and cultures.¹²³ Of course, it is not only through academia or queer historians that these ideologies circulate. The maintenance of these narratives heavily relies on urban bias that gives way to the spatialization of the gay imaginary, as discussed in the introduction. Thus, it becomes apparent that inherent to the maintenance of the utopian metropolis as the site for queer embodiment is an encouraged migration away from the spaces imaged to be in opposition, the rural and the South. For how else would a queer subject have a “life worth living” outside of the likes of San Francisco?¹²⁴

Though it is clear that *Gaycation* values and prioritizes a particular standard of mainstream American queerness, they draw intriguing boundaries around queer identity and subjectivity within the United States. As such, if we think back to the opening scene with Ian that I detailed at the beginning of this chapter, it becomes clear here, in line with his exploration, that being both Southern and queer are particularly different experiences than the queer experiences featured in the “USA” episode. While the episode is filmed in America, the cinematic construction of the South operates much like the non-United States based episodes. For instance, *Gaycation* continues to deploy a discourse of

¹²³ John Howard, “Introduction,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, (New York University Press, 1997), 4.

¹²⁴ Luke A Boso, “Urban Bias, Rural Sexual Minorities, and the Courts,” in *UCLA Law Review* 60, no. 3 (2013): 565.

exoticism that, apparently, is worthy of queer exploration. The American South is treated as just as much of a spectacle as the episodes Page and Daniel filmed abroad. Creating this spectacle of the American South, however, rests on the “commercialization of southern past” and the commodity-fetishism of American South tourism wherein *Gaycation* capitalizes on the imagery of the dangerous and rural Southern space.¹²⁵

In “Introduction. Old/New/Post/Real/Global/No South: Paradigms and Scales,” Martyn Bone details the rise in the commodification of the Southern United States and how it particularly resulted in increased tourism. Southern tourism as deployed in the deep South episode similarly capitalizes on the idea of southern distinctiveness. For the purpose of *Gaycation*, southern distinctiveness is packaged in relation to queerness through discourses of both real and imagined danger. Packaging southern distinctiveness in relation to tourism, however, is not an isolated ideology. In fact, *Gaycation*’s momentary slip below the Mason-Dixon builds upon a decades-long enactment of the creation and consumption of a nationally romanticized Old South.¹²⁶ As Bone notes, the southern tourist industry traces its lineage as a product of post-Civil War history and the creation of a national fantasy of regional distinctions.¹²⁷ Here, the South capitalized on northerner’s fascination with war battlegrounds, marketed as historical sites, as well as

¹²⁵ Martyn Bone, “Introduction. Old/New/Post/Real/Global/No South: Paradigms and Scales,” in *Creating and Consuming the American South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 4.

¹²⁶ Bone. “Introduction,” 5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

images that portrayed the South as nostalgic, exotic, and authentically American.¹²⁸ Thus, the commodification of the American South brought tourists “southward in search of the ‘real’ Old South.”¹²⁹ Daniel echoes this sentiment, searching for the real, read essentialist, experience of southern queerness. As the Southern United States becomes commodified, culture becomes consumptive. As a result, both in relation to *Gaycation* the national imaginary more broadly, the South serves as a means of cultural content over cultural context.¹³⁰ Thus, I suggest, as the South becomes a means of content, the region simultaneously becomes a spectacle consumable by the voyeuristic non-southern queer subject. The South, and by extension the Southern queer, become fetishized objects wherein the non-Southern queer subject may derive pleasure from seeing the “private and forbidden,” and perhaps dangerous, world of the American South.¹³¹ Further, through watching *Gaycation*, the non-southern queer subject is able to derive pleasure from peering into lives of others from the safety of the non-southern regional space.¹³²

There are a myriad of ways in which one could approach a critical engagement with *Gaycation*'s “The Deep South” episode. However, due to the construction of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “From Appalachian Folk to Southern Foodways: Why Americans Look to the South for Authentic Culture,” in *Creating and Consuming the American South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 51.

¹³¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975),” in *Film Theory & Criticism*, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University, 2004). 835.

¹³² Ibid.

South as a place predicated on the “traditions of God, guns, and Southern glory,” I will highlight these themes. Ian Daniel, sans Page who doesn’t appear at all throughout the episode, takes a deep nose dive heading straight into the heart of Austin, Texas to “meet someone who considers himself quintessentially Southern.” The gloomy music from the episode’s opening follow Daniel as he walks up to Michael Cargil, a Black gay man who is the founder of Central Texas Gun Works, in at an outdoor gun range. Daniel notes, “Michael Cargil is pro-god, pro-gun, and a proud gay man.” Here, and throughout the interview, race disappears. After a proper Southern surprise thunderstorm, Daniel and Cargil move inside Cargil’s gun shop where we witness the following exchange:

Daniel: You’ve had a full experience of being gay in the South, what’s that been like?

Cargil: We’re in Austin. We can do whatever we want to do here. Most of the people here are liberal, I’m conservative. It’s hard to me, cause I am that gay Black Republican...

Daniel: And so, where did your conservative values come from? Did it come from your upbringing?

Cargil: That comes from just being in the situations that I’ve been in and living the life that I lived. I served in the military, owning my own company... I like the conservative values, there are a lot of things about the conservatives that I do not like, but there are a lot more things that I like than I dislike.

Daniel: How do you feel, then, about laws against LGBT people, discrimination laws, religious liberty laws that are happening in our country that are being pushed upon by states and cities by Republicans, really?

Though Daniel's question is baited, Cargil, clearly anticipating the pushback, is quick to respond that he wholeheartedly disagrees. He notes, "I'm not going to allow you to come into my bedroom, stay out of my bedroom, that's the bottom line." Daniel presses again, "Well, what if you did want to get married and you vote Republican and that right is stripped away from you? What do you say to that? Because a gun isn't going to help you." The reference to the gun is abrupt and strange, I'm left wondering if a part of their conversation has been edited out. In response, Cargil acknowledges the complexities, further complicating the character *Gaycation* presents him as by noting that his partner is a Democrat, and closes by encouraging folks to become involved in politics to make sure "our elected officials don't stray too far to the right or to the left." Daniel remains unconvinced noting, "But in the deep South, are things straying too far right?" as we quickly cut away from Cargil, left with no conversation about race and haunting music on the rise.

The cinematic construction of *Gaycation*'s "The Deep South" episode operates and reads quite similarly to their non-United States based episodes, a drastic departure from the "USA" episode that predated it. Each episode features an introductory voice-over that quickly introduces each country through their gay marriage and anti-discrimination laws which serves to measure gay friendliness. However, their initial

homebound “USA” episode opens over a montage of past travels with Page noting, “Ian and I have been traveling around the world exploring queer culture. We’ve witnessed some incredible things, but have also seen that many countries still have a long way to go in the fight for LGBTQ rights.” Thus, the countries Page and Daniel visit are often described and depicted as continuing to be inherently homophobic in comparison to the United States, with a long trajectory ahead of them. “The Deep South” stands as the internal exception. Here, Daniel’s latches on to the role of the Republican party in the South and the anti-LGBT laws, particularly the transgender bathroom bill, pushed forth by them, as we’ve seen a bit in his conversation with Cargil. Daniel uses conservatism, that he implicitly pins to the South, as a discourse of exoticism that, apparently, is worthy of queer exploration. The American South is treated as just as much of a spectacle as the episodes Page and Daniel filmed abroad, clearly playing into the trope of positioning certain locations within the U.S. as safe havens. Creating this spectacle of the American South, however, rests on the “commercialization of southern past.”¹³³

Religion is featured within the United States-based episodes as a uniquely Southern, and rural, problem. In fact, it is the unbending religiosity, imagined to be inherent, of the American South has, alongside its violent history, provided much of the backdrop of what makes the region so unsafe particularly for queer folks and queer folks of color. Though the episode clings to religious homophobia, at times used interchangeably with the Republican policy, it is not explicitly acknowledged until the

¹³³ Bone, “Introduction,” 8.

episode is just fifteen minutes from being over. The mood changes drastically as shots of downtown Atlanta's interstate fill the screen, just moments after Daniel had been flogged at Atlanta-based leather bar The Eagle, and he narrates "I'm in Atlanta, Georgia, the heart of the Bible Belt. Where sixty-five percent of the population identifies as as Christian." We follow Daniel up the stone steps of a church and through the large red front door adorned with a cross, Church hymns swelling behind his footsteps, as he details the complex role of the Church during the Civil Rights Movement. Once inside, Daniel is a stark contrast to the Black congregation. The shots have, once again, been slowed as we watch members dance at the pulpit, join together in prayer and song, arms outstretched, reaching toward the heavens. "Still today," he interjects, "many look to the Church for political and social guidance on today's most pressing issues, like LGBTQ rights. While there are some churches that are making progressive strides, many still condemn homosexuality as a sin." The camera holds steady on a wooden cross, which over time becomes blurred as we cut to an interview that features Daniel's interviewee's faces blurred and voices changed by request as he begins interviewing gay members of the congregation. "Church is one thing," one interviewee notes, "but like the Black Church..." The interview hovers over the question of coming out, the relationship with homosexuality and the Black Church, and closes with Daniel's stating, "it sucks that we have to live in this blur..." The positioning of these interviews within the only moment of explicit engagement with religion proves to be a bit strange. Interestingly enough, the backward and religious homophobia that undergirds the implied Southern danger is

divorced from its characteristically imagined white, racist Southerner and is questionably mapped, through the cinematography, onto the Black Church specifically. Here, *Gaycation* is guilty of playing into the trope of seeking out the Black Church “in anticipation of polarized discussions of LGBTQ issues.”¹³⁴ As Latoya E. Eaves notes, “Popular culture and the media have covered the most prevalent discursive formation of the Black Church –homophobia – more frequently than other aspect of queer life in the American South... Media debates rarely discuss queer Black subjects beyond the opposition of Black Church leaders to the movement towards marriage equality in the United States.”¹³⁵ As we see in Daniel’s interview with two Black queer church members, the conversation exists solely on this narrative.

Leaving the interview he notes, “LGBTQ Southerners are still up against unchecked stigma, and unchecked stigma breeds hate, which in some cases leads to violence.” The interview is immediately followed by an interview with Marquez Tolbert, a young Black gay man whose boyfriend’s mother’s partner attacked him and his boyfriend with boiling water as they slept. Daniel interviews Tolbert about his traumatic experience, it is an almost inappropriately intimate and emotional moment wherein Tolbert reveals his injuries to Daniel, who quickly looks away. Jasmine Rault refers to these moments of *Gaycation* interviews as “White affects” wherein Page or Daniel

¹³⁴ Latoya E. Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities: On a Queer Black South,” in *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): , doi:10.1353/sgo.2017.0007. 90.

¹³⁵ Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities,” 91.

capitalizes on, “the ‘intimate emotional moments’ of others...”¹³⁶ By positioning this interview directly following a critique of the relationship between homosexuality and the Church, here visually represented as the Black Church, *Gaycation* racializes and solidifies religious homophobia within the Black Church.

Strangely enough, this dangerous and homophobic religiosity is not depicted, as one may assume, during Daniel’s oddly non-contextualized visit with two mourners at a Confederate gravesite. In fact, for an episode that identifies “Southern glory” as a hallmark of Southern identity, it is glaringly absent. Located after a scene detailing the rise of HIV rates in the South, we accompany Daniel to the Confederate gravesite along with two members of the Alabama Flaggers. Though Daniel himself does not provide context, the Alabama Flaggers are “dedicated to preserve our Heritage in all aspects of History of America.”¹³⁷ This heritage reads preserving markers of the Confederacy. Daniels listens intently while Frida Mincey, Alabama Flagger director, recites the Confederate prayer atop an image of the Rebel flag strewn across a headstone, the younger member shedding a tear. This scene lacks an interview, instead turning to detail the “Confederate Spring...where ultra-conservative tea partiers gain influence in the region.” As the camera cuts away to images of the Confederate flag, “a sign of heritage to some and systemic oppression to others,” we are lead into Mississippi, the which retains

¹³⁶ Rault, “White Noise,” 594.

¹³⁷ Freda Mincey, “Alabama Flaggers Blog,” Alabama Flaggers Blog, January 01, 1970, accessed May 07, 2018, <http://alabamaflaggers.blogspot.com/>.

Confederate imagery in its state flag. “Just before I arrive,” Daniel says, “the last segregated schools of the state are being ordered to integrate by the federal government. And this is the same state responsible for passing the nation’s harshest legislation targeting the LGBTQ community.” Here, segregation and anti-LGBTQ laws are seemingly equated and identified as uniquely Southern, or explicitly a unique product of Mississippi. Further, what would have otherwise been the perfect opportunity to engage critically with whiteness and Southern glory vanished just as quickly as it appeared, never to resurface throughout the episode again. I am left wondering if this is due to Daniel’s own whiteness and, thus, his proximity to this particular kind of whiteness that, in the context of the show, is implicitly read as “bad racist white people.”¹³⁸ Therefore, perhaps his non-engagement is a mode of protecting the liberal white gay subject.

The specificities of “The Deep South” episode, ripe with the insinuation that the socio-geographic dimensions of the South, those of White supremacist biker bars, Confederate flag rallies, and sprawling plantations, are what make it inherently unsafe, further compounded by the region’s imagined rampant religiosity, are certainly worthy of an in-depth analysis of their own.¹³⁹ While I have a myriad of concerns with the episode’s inattention to conversations about race, particularly the visual cues that racialize religious homophobia within the black church, as well as Daniel’s inability to engage critically

¹³⁸ Rault, “White Noise,” 588.

¹³⁹ Newman, Joshua, and Michael Giardina, “NASCAR and the ‘Southernization’ of America: Spectatorship, Subjectivity, and the Confederation of Identity,” in *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*. 8, no. 4: 2008. 481.

with whiteness, for the purpose of this paper I am most interested in the ways in which *Gaycation's* "The Deep South" serves to further exemplify the national construction of a south and non-south binary; the separation of the United States into two different episodes is evidence enough of the pervasiveness of this ideology. In fact, the episode perpetuates an ideology of inherent "southern values," that make being a queer person or queer person of color undeniably more difficult in the region. Therefore, while the episode is filmed within the U.S., the cinematic construction of the South operates much like the non-United States based episodes. Here, *Gaycation* continues to deploy a discourse of exoticism that, apparently, is worthy of queer exploration. In short, the American South is treated as just as much of a spectacle as the episodes Page and Daniel filmed abroad clearly playing into the trop of positioning certain locations within the U.S. as safe havens. Creating this spectacle of the American South, however, rests on the "commercialization of southern past."¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

This chapter was specifically interested in interrogating the representation of the Southern United States within the sociocultural imaginary, as well as the circulation of these narratives. I was particularly interested in the ways in which the South is mapped as an inherently dangerous as it is constructed as a site of racism and homophobia. In keeping in mind the role of the South's histories, regional distinctiveness, and the ways in

¹⁴⁰ Bone. "Introduction." 8.

which the American South has come to be understood as a backward other, I examined the Viceland show *Gaycation*. Here, through both the “USA” episode and “The Deep South” episode, I demonstrated the ways in which in the cultural and gay imaginary the United States often becomes a binary division of South and non-South. This binary, I suggested, is quite similar to the binary division of the rural space and the urban space. I specifically thought about the ways in which these two spaces are produced for queer folks and queer and trans folks of color. To demonstrate these findings I turned toward Viceland’s new television show *Gaycation*. Through this series, with two episodes in particular, I demonstrated the ways in which *Gaycation* served as a visual representation of not only the partitioning of the nation into the South/non-South binary, but for particularly demonstrating the ways in which Western sexual geographies are imagined within cultural consciousness. Here, I detailed the ways in which *Gaycation* serves to uphold notions of urban queerness, centers Western queer subjectivities, and posits the South specifically as uniquely difficult for queer and queer and trans folks of color through its histories. Here, I thought critically about the ways in which queer subjectivity and identity are intimately tethered to the urban space, particularly Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. Therefore, because the South is often imagined as a monolithically rural space, I used the frameworks of rurality to think through positions of queerness in the American South.

Chapter 2: Queer Interventions into Narratives of the South

“A lot of people don’t align being queer with also being Southern. In the national conversation of queer rights, the South is typified as a conservative and regressive Hell, and it completely negates the lives and work of Southern queers creating art, culture and fighting for our existence.” — Taylor Edward, Atlanta, July 12, 2017¹⁴¹

In this chapter I am interested in continuing to think through the deployment of the narratives of the South as they relate specifically to queer and queer and trans people of color. Here, I find it to be helpful to keep in mind the operation of binaries that I raised in the first chapter, like the urban and rural and “South” and “non-South,” because of the ways in which they are deeply embedded in conceptions of the American South. Further, I would like to continue to engage with representations of the American South as it relates to queerness, with a keen focus on media, art, and culture. In this vein, I find it imperative to highlight voices from the region itself. Therefore, with this in mind, I would like to draw attention to the interviews I conducted with queer Southerners, both individual interviews as well as organization-specific interviews I conducted. Finally, this chapter is concerned with interrupting, disrupting, and nuancing the national imaginary’s relationship to Southern queerness. With this desire in mind, I look to Southern queers themselves, and Southern queer organizations and groups, as key interlocutors. As such, this chapter is concerned with the following questions: What possibilities arise when we lay bare the tensions in assumptions about the South? Where can we identify work that nuances these preconceived assumptions about the queer South? Further, what work is

¹⁴¹ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

possible when we interrupt these narratives? Finally, and more importantly, how are Southern queer folks themselves engaging with and, perhaps, intervening in these narratives themselves?

The Oxymoron of the Southern Queer

During the summer of 2017, I loaded up two suitcases worth of clothes, enough to hold me over for the two and a half months I found myself back in the Southeastern United States. I used this time first, to nurse my Southern homesick blues via plates of covered (melted cheese) Waffle House hashbrowns and second, to put out a call for participants to be interviewed about queer identity and subjectivity in the American South. I reached out first to two of the most active Southern queer folks I knew from back home and, through word of mouth, I found myself added to various internet groups, invited to intimate social gatherings and organizing meetings that extended beyond my own queer kinships in North Georgia. Through this network of patchwork sewn Southern queers, I was able to conduct interviews with folks, seven in total, from around the Southeastern United States. Many folks I interviewed still reside in the South, scattered throughout Louisiana, North Carolina, and Georgia, in both urban and rural geographies. I presented the interviewees with the option of conducting our interview either by phone or in person, with several choosing the latter. The interviews that took place in person were either conducted in homes or at East Atlanta-based neighborhood queer bars at the suggestion of interviewees, perhaps a subconscious nod to the idea of queer bars as staple safe spaces, and took place in both group and individual settings. These interviews lead

me to founders, leaders, and members of passionate Southern-based political and arts organizations that have thus become central figures for this chapter's focus on interrogating stereotypes about queerness in the American South.

The volunteer interviewee's ages ranged from 21-37 and included indigenous, Black, mixed race, or white folks who identified as cis, trans, or gender non-conforming. The interview was focused generally on narratives of the South in relation to queerness, representations of Southern queerness, and any general life history folks felt inclined to share. The interviewees were encouraged to tell me a bit about themselves, including pronouns and how they self-identify, though no questions probed any kinds of identifications in particular. These interviews, often conducted in sticky humidity overtop a steady soundtrack of chirping Southern cicadas, focused heavily on the interviewees life in relation to where they grew up, how they personally experienced the South, and their situatedness within it along various identity intersections. As the interviews progressed, often becoming less formulaic and turning more conversational in nature, I asked folks to speak to their relationship to Southernness and queerness, with attention to meanings, distinctions, and representations of the South and the queers in it. Together, we perspired through sweltering Georgia heat, densely filled the air with thick Southern drawls, huddled together under back porches during the region's famous daily summer thunderstorms and torrential downpours, and shared our Southern queer stories as if they were peach cobbles, overtop tables cluttered by glasses of Sweet tea, among other lively spirits.

Over the course of my time interviewing, I began to notice the emergence, and I suppose reemergence, of particular topics. These topics were unsurprising in nature, as they were certainly things I had gnawed on both on my own and amongst my personal Southern queer groups from time to time. However, what became clear to me over time was that conversations about the relationship between queerness and the American South, at least in this current moment, also meant addressing particular narratives and stereotypes. Therefore, as the summer came to a close, and my initial interviews along with it, and I boarded a redeye bound for San Francisco International Airport, I began mulling over two specific narratives I found to be at the forefront of the interviews I conducted: the oxymoron of the Southern queer and the narrative of struggle for the queer Southerner.

I want to take a brief pause to think back to the discussion of *Gaycation*, for just a moment, as it serves as a perfect visual representation of the first recurring narrative. As a media representation, *Gaycation* was most helpful in that it, while it perhaps attempted to provide unbiased opinion, it still insinuated an underlying ideology that the understandings of “Southern” and “queer” are mutually exclusive, regardless of the interspersed exoticized Southern gems whose lives Ian peers into from the safety of his own privileges. Though the episode clearly depicts tangible materialities of queer folks existing in the South, as Ian is of course interviewing queer people who reside in the region, there is still an implied understanding of contradiction. More explicitly, similar to my suggestion in chapter one, *Gaycation*’s “The Deep South,” reifies the widespread

understanding that queerness has very little to no place in the Southern United States. Thus, as Southern lesbian and gay studies scholar Donna Jo Smith suggests, there comes to be both a real and perceived understanding of a gap between “southern” and “queer” as identifiers.¹⁴² The gap is perhaps both real and perceived in its continuous circulation and, as a result, may become internalized for some Southern queer folks. What we see through the likes of *Gaycation* and larger narratives at work is, as Smith notes in “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” the notion that “Southern queer” is an oxymoron.¹⁴³

I first met Taylor Edward, a queer and trans person of color who is a DIY multi-media performance artist, community organizer, and drag queen, through our university’s gay/straight Alliance group while we were both undergraduates in Atlanta, Georgia. As the group’s president, Edward had kicked-off the Spring semester of the Alliance that year with an LGBTQ roundtable, that I had stumbled upon by pure accident. I would later go on to participate in several of their queer variety shows, aptly named “Sweet Tea,” which is coming up on five years running now. Taylor Edward is tall and lively, with perhaps the most hearty and infectious laugh I’ve ever heard and an unwavering dedication to organizing within the Atlanta queer community and greater Southeast. In

¹⁴² Donna Jo Smith, “Same Difference: My Southern Queer Stories,” in *Out in the South*, (Temple University Press, 2001), 127.

¹⁴³ Donna Jo Smith, “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 370.

fact, I had the pleasure of interviewing them for their co-founded organization “Southern Fried Queer Pride,” which I will return to later in the chapter. Due to Edward’s position as a central figure within the Atlanta queer scene and organizing groups, I found it appropriate that they were my first interview. Subsequently, they were the first person to name the first narrative deeply embedded within the cultural imaginary, the idea that the queer is not a Southerner and the Southerner is not a queer.

In what follows, I highlight the commentary of three respondents, Edward included, who speak to the circulating idea that queer subjectivities and the South are mutually exclusive. I met both Freddie Mercury Retrograde and Angelica through a closed Facebook group titled, “Atlanta Queer Women and Non-Binary Social Club,” which seeks to disrupt cis-gay male dominated social spaces, that a friend added me to. Freddie, a barber, musician, drag performer, and rural Georgian “queer from around here,” and I met at the local queer watering hole, Mary’s in East Atlanta Village. Angelica, a Black non-binary femme textiles and fine arts student, and I conducted our interview over a lively phone call, as a meeting point between our houses was difficult to navigate. Due to their relatedness in speaking about an implied understanding of mutual exclusivity, I find it helpful to group their comments together. Taylor Edward notes,

A lot of people don’t align being queer with also being Southern. In the national conversation of queer rights, the South is typified as a conservative and regressive Hell, and it completely negates the lives and work of Southern queers creating art, culture, and fighting for our existence.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

Freddie Mercury Retrograde, in relaying a conversation between a friend from New York, notes, “She said, ‘I love the South and I love queers in the South. I love the Southern mentality and I love queer mentality.’ There’s a large intersection there, it’s not just separate identities of Southern and queer.”¹⁴⁵ Angelica notes, “I wanna have my Blackness and Southern values and queer values intertwine.”¹⁴⁶ In a follow up interview I asked Angelica to talk a bit about what it would mean for them for these to become enmeshed, in which they note,

For me, it may sound trite, but I really feel like it means the freedom to be myself in all my glorious “contradictions.” I want the freedom to be Black and Queer and Southern and not feel like I have to pick and choose when it’s deemed acceptable. I’m a big believer in kindness and politeness and goodness and “southern hospitality.” And when I think of my queerness I think of it as being my authentic and true self since I could form those thoughts to decide about gender and relationship structures etc. Being a Black person, means there are struggles I face within my community when it comes to being a non-binary agender trans person, a feminine person. I feel that in a lot of ways, Blackness has to be packaged in an acceptable pill for the status quo to swallow, and being Black in the South especially. And being queer and Black in the South. Like can’t I be the Southern belle/gentleman and be upfront that colonial America was built on the backs of slave labor, which I can trace my ancestors to? Can’t Black Americans have a place in the South? I’m rambling, but to me when those three things intertwine I feel that I will have an overwhelming satisfaction that I am here and I am me, and I will be safe in those identities together in their complexities.

Each respondent highlights the fact that there are circulating narratives functioning that work to separate queerness and Southernness and, subsequently, to erase queerness from the Southern United States. Angelica specifically raises the concern that, in their

¹⁴⁵ Freddie Mercury. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 25, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Angelica. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 29, 2017.

experience, there seems to be a further, more complicated, narrative insinuation that divorces Blackness from both queer identity and the American South. Here, they highlight their negotiations of their Black Southern queer identity, which are seemingly presented as disparate. In discussing Southernness, they highlight the likes of “Southern hospitality,” demonstrating the parts of “Southernness” that rings true for them, perhaps as a counternarrative. Similarly, they highlight navigating their relationship to queerness as a Black non-binary person. In a later aside, Angelica mentions that this is perhaps due to negative beliefs about queerness in the African American community due to largely conservative values, which, they note, can be factual but is also often a wrongfully rendered popular culture stereotype assigned solely to the Black Church and religiosity through. A quick complication to this stereotype is the Westboro Baptist Church, a white church whose website URL reads “godhatesfags.”¹⁴⁷ When Angelica poses the question, “Can’t Black Americans have a place in the South?” they move on quickly, couching what they’ve said as ramblings. Though they didn’t elaborate here, I’m curious about how this perhaps relates to images of the South as inhospitable to Black Southerners, which can often materialize in an encouraged migration away from the region or, perhaps, work to erase these lived realities. However, Angelica uses embodied experience and knowledge to directly disrupt each operating narrative through their “Southern Belle/Gentleman,” who is both upfront about the colonial histories of the United States and simultaneously unapologetically Black, queer, and Southern. I will return specifically

¹⁴⁷ Westboro Baptist Church Home Page, , accessed May 12, 2018, <http://www.godhatesfags.com/>.

to the role of embodied and situated experience for Black queer Southerners in the following chapter, wherein I propose Latoya E. Eaves' "Black Queer Geographies" as a mode of disidentifications.¹⁴⁸

With the above commentary in mind from my interviewees, I move to suggest that embodied experience serves as a powerful negotiation and intervention into potentially harmful characterizations of the South as the region relates to queer and queer and trans folks of color. Similarly, I suggest that embodied space works in tandem in that it underscores "the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, lived experience, and a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world."¹⁴⁹ Further, both embodied space and experience allows for folks to "not only structure spaces but experience them differently and inhabit distinct sensory worlds," due to unique individual experiences.¹⁵⁰ Further, these excerpts, paired especially with the likes of *Gaycation* in mind, reflect the idea that within the American imaginary and, subsequent circulating narratives, Southern queerness may be ambivalent on many fronts. It became clear to me that the folks I interviewed were interested in talking about this insinuated ambivalence, as it seemingly means constantly negotiating identity in order to

¹⁴⁸ Latoya E. Eaves, "Black Geographic Possibilities: On a Queer Black South," in *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): , doi:10.1353/sgo.2017.0007. 82.

¹⁴⁹ Setha M. Low, "Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture," in *Space and Culture* Vol 6, Issue 1, pp. 9 - 18 First Published February 1, 2003 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331202238959> pg 10

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 13.

communicate that, though seemingly disparate, these identities can be inhabited simultaneously in their complexities. Perhaps it is the widespread nature of these narratives, and in turn feeling the need to defend their identities, that encourages such conversations when discussing the South.

In tandem with my interviews, I began to notice how widespread this idea, that the South is inherently separate from queer subjectivity and identity, was also rampant in literature on queerness in the American South. In “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” Donna Jo Smith suggests the terms queer and Southern, “both come laden with a host of stereotypes, which we have all internalized to one degree or another.”¹⁵¹ Further, she notes, these stereotypes can conflict, suggesting that, for some, the notion of a “Southern queer” is in fact an oxymoron.¹⁵² Smith’s chapter, which serves as both a personal narrative and reflection on the treatment of the queer South within academia and the cultural imaginary, is a move to theorize the relationship between the “Southern and the lesbian/gay.”¹⁵³ Here, she muses about the ways in which these “identity categories,” that she suggests are equally mythical, are popularly defined as ideological opposites.¹⁵⁴ Smith attributes this to media representations that often present queer subjectivities as “urban, sophisticated, and upwardly mobile,” which she suggests

¹⁵¹ Smith. “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” 370.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 379.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

is a recipe for exclusion of queers in the South, given that the region, and the folks in it, are usually not classified this way, as they are often cast as outside of urbanness.¹⁵⁵ Thus, it becomes apparent in these conversations that Southern queers are oxymorons for the simple fact that Southern identity and queer identity are assumed both stable and incompatible.

I draw attention to Donna Jo Smith's work for several reasons. First, Smith's work helps us understand the geographical and cultural positionality of queers in the South, as well as how they have been discussed within academia, particularly in gay and lesbian studies. Similarly, her work is helpful in that it thinks through the functionality of the myth of these stereotyped identities, provides personal narrative from a lesbian from the South, and encourages a reorientation to the region. Donna Jo Smith's projects, here I'm specifically calling attention to her work in "Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity," as well as, "Same Difference: My Southern Queer Stories," are moves to bring together her "disparate" identities of Southern and queer.¹⁵⁶ In, "Same Difference: My Southern Queer Stories," she notes these are her attempts to, "answer this question and to negotiate this gap, both perceived and real, between my southern and queer selves."¹⁵⁷ Similarly, through her move to San Francisco during her young adult life, she describes recognizing a gap between, "where I am from and who I was

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 372.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "Same Difference: My Southern Queer Stories," 127.

becoming.”¹⁵⁸ While she continually writes queer folks in and through the American South with the use of the shorthand “Southern queers,” there still seems to be an underlying assumption that these are conflicting. As evidence, I would like to point to the very physical partitioning of Southern and queer in her chapter title alone. The implied dissimilarity is represented visually, and thus within our imaginary, as “Southern/Queer.” Here, the forward slash may act as both visual and textual border between these two categories. Therefore, while I believe her work is productive in the ways in which they nuance conversation about queer folks in the South, her hesitation to bring these markers into proximity, even when that is seemingly her goal, is palpable. In fact, in “Queering the South” she notes,

My interest in the historical experiences of queers in the South reflects a desire to create a narrative that would allow me to bring the seemingly disparate parts of my identity together, if only for a textual moment. I am leery of this desire for synthesis, for given the normative definitions that coalesce around “the South” and “southern,” (i.e., the South as more racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. than the rest of the country), this desire seems suspect. I have had to ask myself what this “togetherness” would symbolize.¹⁵⁹

Here, it becomes clear that even in moves that would seemingly align themselves with the potentiality of togetherness between regional and sexual identity, the heterogeneity between Southern and queer is still quite heavy, tangible, and internalized.

Though Donna Jo Smith frequently refers to queer folks in the South as “southern queers,” the above quote calls attention to fact that she is perhaps using this in order

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Smith. “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” 372.

describe the locationality of these particular queer subjects, not as a potential identity category in its own right. However, over the course of my time conducting interviews, I noticed that when I prompted people to share how they identify, folks often referred to themselves as a “Southern queer.” Here, it was implied that “Southern queer” was being delivered as an identity category that didn’t apportion region from sexuality. In response to this identification I asked interviewees, ““What do the terms ‘southern’ and ‘queer’ mean to you? What does it mean to identify as both ‘southern’ and ‘queer?’” Here Taylor Edward replied,

Southern, to me, means being from and identifying with the culture of the South. We have a communal ethic. Queer, to me, means disrupting norms and systems that I’m forced into, and rebuilding them so that they’re more realistic and inclusive. To be a Southern queer is to do this work within a boundary that also has unrealistic expectations and stereotypes thrown at it. So it’s like working to unlock a box within a box.¹⁶⁰

Freddie Mercury Retrograde notes, “Southern queerness, to me, it’s like Southern hospitality coupled with hillbilly don’t give a fuck ... and that to me is queer as hell. You know, like, there’s a lot of hidden queerness.”¹⁶¹ Here, at least in the case of Taylor Edward and Freddie, we see the identity of “Southern queer” as looping together of Southernness and queerness, much like crocheted fabrics interlocked by a steady hooked needle.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

¹⁶¹ Freddie Mercury. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 25, 2017.

In January 2013, Fonseca, a brilliant writer, fellow Southern queer, and good friend of mine similarly mused upon the question of “southern queerness” for her Autostraddle article, “Going Down (South): Profiles In Southern Queerness.” She asked a handful of Southern queer identified folks, “What does it mean to be both queer and Southern? What happens when two vague identities fuse together?”¹⁶² Perhaps our similar curiosities are emblematic of the oft overlooked narratives of Southern queerness, a search for meaning in our tender Southern queer hearts. Below are a few narratives from her respondents:

Being a southern queer person of color means I am fulfilling legacies of survival; it means I am honored and blessed every day with the resilience of my peoples’ and my region’s history. It means that I am constantly learning how to be a better person in the face of opposition – my life is dedicated to love and compassion, for myself and for others. And it means I’m damn fierce. (Loan, North Carolina).¹⁶³

“What it means to me to be queer and “southern” (on the Mexico border) is to be weary. Some of our culture is very cold and traditional. On the other hand, it also means to have pride because our culture is dripping with diversity, strength, and revolution.” (Alyssa, Texas).¹⁶⁴

“For me, being queer in the South means totally and completely loving a deep-fried, gravy-smothered, God-fearing, foul-mouthed, sweat-stained, beautiful place that doesn’t always love me back.” (Jackie, Arkansas).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Sarah Fonseca, “Going Down (South): Profiles In Southern Queerness,” Autostraddle, April 18, 2013, , accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.autostraddle.com/going-down-south-profiles-in-southern-queerness-153950/>.

¹⁶³ Fonseca, “Going Down (South): Profiles In Southern Queerness.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

What we see here, through both the interviews I personally conducted and the short Autostraddle vignettes, is that, first and foremost, there are undeniably nitty-gritty queers in the South identifying as “Southern queers,” serving to disrupt the idea that Southernness is antithetical to queerness. Further, Loan finding a Southern queer identity as a queer person of color to be a legacy of survival and resilience provides an interesting disruption into the notion that the South is perhaps doubly inhospitable for Southern queer people of color. Though, the region’s history is acknowledged, Loan offers perhaps a counternarrative in lieu of the circulating narrative that posits the South as purely escapable territory. Here, the South may come to exist as a space of survival against intersection oppositions. Perhaps it is, as Jemar Tisby notes in “I’m a Black Man Who Moved to the Deep South. Here’s What it’s Teaching Me About Race,” the immediacy of the American South’s past that “makes it real down here.”¹⁶⁶ He notes, “Nothing stands between you and the stories you hear about slavery, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement. This history is in the ground you walk on and the people you live among.”¹⁶⁷ Tisby doesn’t shy away from the very visible markers of Southern histories still present in the Mississippi Delta where he lives, noting the segregated cemeteries and the Mississippi flag’s retention of the “Southern cross” which he notes at a local truck station

¹⁶⁶ Jemar Tisby, “I’m a Black Man Who Moved to the Deep South. Here’s What It’s Teaching Me about Race.” Vox, October 31, 2017, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/10/31/16571238/black-man-deep-south-race>.

¹⁶⁷ Tisby, “I’m a Black Man Who Moved to the Deep South. Here’s What It’s Teaching Me about Race.”

“hangs just below the American flag, the two symbols inseparable from each other.”¹⁶⁸

The South’s racist past is etched into the very fabric of the region. However, Tisby suggests that though “the racial wounds are apparent here, and they help me see this nation for what it truly is.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, the South may work as a means of exposing the nation, as I discuss elsewhere in this project. Further, he notes, “But as long as there has been oppression, people have resisted it. Living in the South has turned my attention to the countless women and men whose acts of defiance, both everyday and exceptional, broke down barriers and built new bridges.”¹⁷⁰ Therefore, perhaps the immediacy of these histories, the seemingly overt forms of racial and sexual bias, and the particular narratives they foster, can be interrogated in order to engender conversations about acts and modes of resistance that are also uniquely Southern.

There are home-grown, Southern-fried, queers self-identifying in a move that explicitly fastens together Southernness and queerness in a way that solidifies the potentiality of inhabiting these identity categories simultaneously, without a desire or need to silo them in totality. I draw attention to the work of these first-hand narratives as embodied and situated knowledges in order to nuance the idea that “the South” and “the queer” are always mutually exclusive. Of course, the existence of queer-identified folks in the South dispels the ontological myth that works in ways that make these folks

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

invisible, but perhaps a Southern queer identification can also work as a mode of resistance against ideologies of oxymoronic identity. I want to be clear here that I am not suggesting or implying that there is an essentialized experience of queer subjectivity in the American South, or that identifying as a Southern queer is a universal identity category. It is, of course, necessary to understand that one's experience of queerness in the South is unique and affected by intersections of race, gender, class, ability, citizenship etc. Therefore, it is not my desire to suggest that the term "Southern queer" is collapsable or able to be boiled down to essential ingredients.¹⁷¹ Similarly, it is not my desire to be able to provide a stable definition of "Southern queer" for the very same reasons. Therefore, while definitions are perhaps helpful, or even desired by some, I am not interested in stable identity categories of either Southern or queer, as they are inherently contestable categorizations. However, I have found that it still means something to be "queer" and to be "southern," even if, and perhaps only if, there is ambiguity. As Smith notes, "it still means *something* to be queer and it still means *something* to be from the South or to identify as 'southern.' That we find it difficult to answer *what* in any conclusive sense does not undermine the effects these identities have in the world. It is our assumptions about this 'what' that could prove difficult for us to negotiate, however."¹⁷² It is here that my project finds itself interpolated, in the messy mechanics of nuancing fixedness. Therefore, I suggest that because it means something to identify as a

¹⁷¹ Smith, "Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity," 371.

¹⁷² Ibid.

“Southern queer,” perhaps the explicitness of this identity can serve to disrupt narratives that displace queer identity from the Southern United States.

Representational Lack: Interrupting the Narrative of the Struggling Southern Queer

The oxymoron of Southern queerness, or the assumed mutual exclusivity of the queer subject and the regional South, is also deeply laden with a myriad of other circulating narratives and ideologies. As noted, through my interviews with Southern queer folks, it became evident that the queer Southerner was operating in two distinct ways in the American imaginary. In the first instance, as I have noted above, queer folks in the South were seemingly erased from the region entirely. This may become evident in the ruralization of the American South, wherein the region is rendered as inherently non-urban. In making the imagined South non-urban, the South becomes imagined to be a distinctive place with traditions, institutions, and worldviews that are simply too threatening to queer subjecthood.¹⁷³ Thus, the queer vacates the South, in turn leaving it empty of queerness. However, in another instance, either perhaps as a precursor to the above narrative or a shift that changes shape when confronted with the knowledge of a queer residing in the South, queer life and subjectivity in the South is understood only through the bleak lens of struggle. As Donna Jo Smith notes in “Queering the American South” upon reflecting on myths surrounding the region, “One myth that is particularly

¹⁷³ Johnson, Gilley, and Gray, “Introduction” 1.

southern *and* queer reflects the notion that it's harder to be queer in the South than in the rest of the nation."¹⁷⁴ Further, there is a seemingly apparent understanding that "queers in the South not only would want to leave home but literally would be *required* to leave home as a matter of survival."¹⁷⁵ I am intrigued by and will expand upon this specific idea, encouraged migration, in more detail in a later chapter. However, what we see here is that Southern queers are not only imagined as non-existent in the region, but when they are granted seemingly tangible visibility they are explicitly written out or else they're doomed to struggle to survive. Here, when the Southern queer is finally granted access and visibility to and in the very region with which they reside, or conceivably identify with, the life trajectory is and will always be narrow, continuing to be cast within the dark shadows of violence and danger.

As Carolyn Leste Law notes in *Out in the South*, it has also become popular myth that the atmosphere of the Southern United States is far too repressive for queer people to live in. As a result, "all gay and lesbian southerners are driven out, indeed are suspect if they choose to stay or cannot leave."¹⁷⁶ In this narrative, the Southern queer is, should they wrongfully stay by choice or not, doomed to a life of immense difficulty devoid of, in keeping with the mythmaking, queer culture or other queers themselves. Therefore, not

¹⁷⁴ Smith, "Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity," 381.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Carolyn Leste Law. "Introduction," in *Out in the South*, (Temple University Press, 2001), 3.

only is the South positioned in particular ways within the imaginary, but representations of queer subjectivities were also particularly pigeonholed. In chapter one I expanded more explicitly on representations of the narrative of “Southern queer struggle” through *Gaycation*. However, due to the fact that interviewees raised these concerns themselves, that mythical scripts continuously reify the positionality of the Southern queer as always and forever at odds with the region, I felt it important to highlight. Therefore, I suggest that engaging with these narratives through nuanced or counternarrative representations could intervene into the popular narratives circulating the American South and queer sexualities. Over the course of my research, as well as in my own experience as a Southern queer born and raised in the “red wasteland,” this tapered narration of a struggling Southern queer made glaringly obvious the institutionalized nature of representational lack.¹⁷⁷ Reflecting on the topic of representation during our conversation, interviewee Taylor Edward notes,

Our narratives are always shoved into these roles of being out of struggle and survival, and while that is a part of being queer in the South, it’s not our entire existence. I’d like to see more accurate and reflective representation of Southern queerness. The Southern queers I know aren’t moping around saying ‘Why is it so hard being queer in the South?’ They’re working hard every day to make it easier and fulfilling to be queer in America.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Anastasia K. Zimitravich, “Southern Fried Queer: Being Queer In The South,” BUST, 2015, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://bust.com/feminism/15705-southern-fried-queer-being-queer-in-the-south.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

This is not to say that Edward believes that things are progressively fine and therefore critiques are unwarranted. However, their thoughts do speak to the idea that Southern queer existence is typified in particular ways.

Narratives that position life below the Mason-Dixon as a particular struggle for queer and queer and trans folks of color seem to also be inundated with narratives of queer flight from the South. In an interview conducted through *Wussy Mag* with queers who left the South one interviewee remarked that leaving the South was,

a combination of a number of things. Progress is slow in Atlanta, and certainly not invested in by the existing social and political climate. I wanted to live in a city that at the very least pretends to care about the disenfranchised; be it with dollar bills or intentional policies that try to protect/respect the dignity of individuals, decision makers in the South keep moving backwards... I don't think I can separate my decision to leave the South from the deep grief and crazy-making that comes from the struggle. POC, queers, immigrants, and all of us at the intersections are constantly being told 'there is no room for your full-self at this table,' whilst simultaneously being sold a false dream of meritocracy—that 'if I can make it, anyone can' nonsense.¹⁷⁹

Now, I don't highlight this interview to discredit the very material reality and lived experience of this individual. However, I do want to draw attention to the pervasiveness of these ideologies so much so that they have come to be internalized. In fact, Alxndr, who conducted this *Wussy* interview, notes,

As you can see, there's a lot that goes into the decision process of moving out of the South. The mentality of there being no community or radical vibrancy in the South is silencing and destructive. Job opportunities and resources that are

¹⁷⁹ Alxndr, "Queer Flight: Why Queers Leave the South," *Wussy Mag*, April 19, 2016, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.Wussymag.com/all/2016/4/19/queer-flight-why-queers-leave-the-south?rq=southern+queer>.

progressive and have radical potential are major draws for hungry queers who want to feel like their work will be welcomed. Maybe queers will fly and be fulfilled in the South if we didn't clip their wings first.¹⁸⁰

I respect the decision of these queer folks from the South to relocate. As a queer Southerner who has since relocated to California from Georgia, for both personal and professional reasons, I would, in fact, be a hypocrite if I didn't. However, like Alxndr and the folks I have interviewed, I do find troubling the mentality, and the narratives that are subsequently produced, that forcefully assign to queers in the South a life of perpetual hardship. As evidenced above, these narratives are not only circulating within the national imaginary, but have become pervasive within queer narratives as well. Though personal experiences and narratives are of course important, and people are entitled to them, the risk lies in the wide circulation of these narratives as the sole stories of queerness in the South. For example, Donna Jo Smith notes, "Southern and non-Southern queers alike have internalized this myth to the degree that it has had significant effect on Southern queer experiences."¹⁸¹ However, like Alxndr, I too find these ideologies destructive and silencing. The type of work being done in these narratives is obvious, reified narratives of the Southern queer struggle work to further position queerness as antithesis to the region. Therefore, I am left to wonder about the radical possibilities of a South that isn't time and again imagined as devastating to its queer inhabitants. More explicitly, I look specifically to Southern queer media representations, and arts and

¹⁸⁰Alxndr, "Queer Flight: Why Queers Leave the South."

¹⁸¹ Smith, "Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity," 381.

political organizations engaged in nuancing, or perhaps dismantling, these very narratives themselves.

Southern (Fried) Queerness

Individuals identifying as Southern queers, or perhaps not identifying as such but continuing to live queerly in the South, are certainly not the only interventions into narratives that present the South as unsafe for queers and queer and trans folks of color and, thus, assumed to be devoid of queerness. In fact, my research for this project first began with an interest in queer art, culture, and organizing as a means of destabilizing narratives surrounding the South and queerness. Through my own personal Southern queer connections, some of these folks are friends and some are friends of friends, I came to know of several Southern-based queer arts and advocacy organizations. Similarly, through these community founded and led organizations, I was introduced to other Southern organizations who were all building community alliances throughout the greater Southeast. I highlight them here to think about the ways in which their work resists the dominant narratives of the South that I have outlined above. Here, I suggest that in this resistance disruption exists.

The early stages of this project were centered around these organizations and, specifically, conducting interviews with founders and members. In fact, it was through the growth of this project, through both interviews and participant observation within these organizations, that I ended up connecting with folks to conduct personal, individual

interviews. Though these organizations are Atlanta-based, with much of their early involvement in arts, culture, and activism centering queer Atlantans, or perhaps in a nod to Andre 3000 of OutKast, “ATLiens” who acknowledge that “The South has something to say,” their reach and focus has expanded throughout the deepest pockets of the Southeastern United States.¹⁸² Therefore, I would like to suggest here that these organizations, and their work, similarly engage in a project to dismantle the idea of incompatibility between the South and the queer, as well as speak directly to the subsequent erasure of these subjectivities from the regional space. Here, I would like to highlight the work of three specific Southeastern queer organizations, some of which I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing.

According to the Georgia Voice, an LGBTQ media outlet with a bi-weekly print edition founded in Atlanta in 2010, Georgia has come to be home to a variety of LGBT/LGBT-friendly organizations, nonprofits and support groups both within Atlanta and across the state.¹⁸³ For the specific purpose of this project, I focused on three Atlanta-based organizations: Southern Fried Queer Pride, Rotten Peaches, and *Wussy Mag*. Though these organizations were founded in, and currently have their headquarters located in, the Atlanta area, each organization respectively participates in outreach across

¹⁸²Andres Tardio, “11 Things You Might Not Know About Outkast's 'ATLiens',” Billboard, July 27, 2016, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7487857/things-you-might-not-know-outkast-atliens-big-boi-andre-300>.

¹⁸³ “Organizations,” Georgia Voice - Gay & LGBT Atlanta News, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://thegavoice.com/organizations-2/>.

the state of Georgia, the greater Southeastern United States, and are looking to expand nationally. Choosing to center these organizations specifically was both logical and happenstance. I knew the work of those involved in Southern Fried Queer Pride through events and community organizing at the college we all attended. However, it was through Southern Fried Queer Pride specifically that I was introduced to both *Wussy Mag* and, later, Rotten Peaches as each organization had fostered community support and coalition with one another, continuing to work closely with and support one another. Therefore, it is perhaps no surprise to point out that the organizations share a great overlap in folks who are either members, direct employees, or both.

These organizations, of course, do not represent a comprehensive list of Southern queer organizing, nor would I want or argue for them to. However, I find that these organizations are speaking to the kinds of political, art, and cultural organizing by young queer activists happening in the American South contemporarily. Therefore, I find it is most helpful to think of these organizations, Southern Fried Queer Pride, *Wussy Mag*, and Rotten Peaches, as just three slices of a fresh-from-the-oven Georgia pecan pie. In addition to these three organizations, I highlight the work of a web-series, “The New Deep South,” as a media representation that, unlike the underlying narratives in the likes of *Gaycation*, showcases the myriad of ways to nuance the South and queer identity and subjectivity.

Founded in 2014 by queer and trans folks of color, Southern Fried Queer Pride, “was born from the margins of what has been misunderstood as both the South and the

LGBTQ community in America.”¹⁸⁴ Since its founding, the organization has grown in numbers, events, and locations. Throughout my time in Atlanta, I was able to reconnect with co-founder Alxndr and talk about the organization’s growth since its inception. Southern Fried Queer Pride started first and foremost as an alternative to mainstream Atlanta Pride, which has been critiqued for catering specifically to white, cis, gays and lesbians. Similarly, the organization became a response to the dwindling of queer safe spaces and the over-reliance on bars and clubs centered around alcohol for queer community. Here, Taylor, alongside co-founder Micky Bradford and several others through a group called Queer Up Atlanta, dreamed of providing an intersectional and radically inclusive Pride festival that centers the most marginalized voices of the queer South; queer and trans folks of color. Alxndr notes that Queer Up Atlanta, full of radical young queers, ultimately fizzled out but the core idea of Southern Fried Queer Pride remained, eventually becoming both a festival and an organization. The initial goal, as mentioned above, was to provide an event that was for and by the community. It was imperative that art and activism mixed and mingled, that the space would be a voice for queer and trans people of color, and, as Alxndr notes, that this took place “all in the name of being Southern.”¹⁸⁵ The initial goal was met in 2015, with the first Southern Fried Queer Pride Festival. This week-long festival, held during Annual Pride season in

¹⁸⁴ Fernanda Cunha, “Southern Fried Queer Pride Strives to Be ‘Radically Inclusive,’” Atlanta Creative Loafing, May 22, 2017, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.creativeloafing.com/content-270732-Southern-Fried-Queer-Pride-strives-to-be-'radically-inclusive'>.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

downtown Atlanta, the city's own Pride festival is held during October, featured "arts and crafts workshops, artist talks, youth outreach events, films, a block party, performances from dancers, bounce rappers, drag queens and much more."¹⁸⁶ Over time, the mission has grown exponentially. While Alxndr and Bradford, alongside members, continue to host an annual alternative Pride festival, now heading into their third, the organization has expanded to include monthly events that prioritize and give platforms to artists and activists in the South. Their most frequent, an event that predated Southern Fried Queer Pride itself, is Sweet Tea, a monthly queer variety show. Southern Fried Queer Pride's other outreach community programming includes a mixture of social justice art events, such as galleries, music nights, or skill sharing, and sit-down community meetings that deal with racism within the queer community and intimate partner violence.

As a grassroots, homegrown organization that doesn't accept corporate funds or "money from questionable sources," a direct departure from Atlanta Pride, the organization has faced funding challenges, as well as challenges in getting the word out to the community about events. However, through the power of community and social media, Southern Fried Queer Pride has been able to multiply attendance, programming, and overall success each year. Their success is due in large part to social media, as well as collaboration with other organizations and collectives that Alxndr says they "see as comrades or who align with our goals and mission and we are always in communication

¹⁸⁶ Matt J. Jones, "Upcoming: Southern Fried Queer Pride," *Wussy Mag*, April 20, 2015, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.Wussymag.com/all/2015/6/1/upcoming-southern-fried-queer-pride>.

and collaboration with them.”¹⁸⁷ This has allowed them to expand their reach and be in collaboration with both Atlanta-based organizations, *Wussy Mag* and Rotten Peaches, as well as groups in North Carolina and a continuous network throughout the South, including the folks at Southerners on New Ground, which is a “regional Queer Liberation organization.”¹⁸⁸

As Alxndr sees it, Southern Fried Queer Pride continues to fill the niche that is missing in the community. They note, “I can’t name any other Southern queer and trans person of color led organizations that facilitate social justice-informed arts-based programming that is grassroots.” In their most recent 2017 festival, Southern Fried Queer Pride focused intently on providing a safe space that serves the “populations of our community that are bearing the weight of this current political climate.”¹⁸⁹ For Southern Fried Queer Pride, this meant expanding the festival from a three-day event, as it stood in the beginning, to a five-day event. This expansion included events such as Queer Qumbia: A Latinx Social, which coincided with the release of the organization’s first zine *LA CHANCLA*, The Jewel Box: A Trans Resilience Social, and Look Who’s Fucking Now! A Black Porn Critique. Southern Fried Queer Pride’s events promote a space that strives to be safe, open, and accessible. In an interview with Wussy Mag about the

¹⁸⁷ Taylor Edward. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ “Home,” Southerners On New Ground, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://southernersonnewground.org/>.

¹⁸⁹ Cunha, “Southern Fried Queer Pride Strives to Be ‘radically Inclusive’.”

opening festival Alxndr notes, “We’re a community, not just the first two letters, but an entire alphabet. We need spaces that celebrate all of our different facets. This event aims to celebrate ourselves but also educate anyone with an ear for more than just the “LG” in LGBTQ.”¹⁹⁰ Further, they note that these events have encouraged the organization’s recent move to expand Southern Fried Queer Pride to other Southern states rises out of the “necessity to invest in Southern resilience, especially as queer and trans people face political and social upheaval.”¹⁹¹ In fact, just this last October Southern Fried Queer Pride completed their first satellite festival in Durham, North Carolina. Though Southern Fried Queer Pride doesn’t have an official headquarters, they often meet in a small workspace in the back of a local boba cafe, they are looking to put down physical roots through fundraising for an official, communal DIY headquarters and continue to expand their festival and network throughout communities in the queer American South.

As one might have noticed, Southern Fried Queer Pride is frequently in direct contact and conversation with the second organization I have chosen to highlight, *Wussy Mag*. As noted above, *Wussy Mag* interviewed Southern Fried Queer Pride for their first ever festival, though that is not the only time the organizations have shown some supportive overlap. In fact, as part of Southern Fried Queer Pride’s initial festival launch, *Wussy Mag* invited Southern Fried Queer Pride to take over the *Wussy Mag* social medias for a week. *Wussy Mag* started as a “Southern + Queer” online magazine that covers

¹⁹⁰ Jones, “Upcoming: Southern Fried Queer Pride.”

¹⁹¹ Cunha, “Southern Fried Queer Pride Strives to Be ‘radically Inclusive.’”

queer nightlife, art, and culture in Atlanta and the greater Southeast.¹⁹² As a platform, Atlanta-based *Wussy Mag* has a keen interest in discussions of, “politics, art, and expression from the perspective of Southern queers.”¹⁹³ As they note, “There is a bounty of new life and queer energy in the Southeast and we’d like to share a little of ours with you.” Since its May 2015 founding, *Wussy Mag* has expanded to include two print editions, *Wussy Rag*, a bi-weekly print distributed across Atlanta, as well as the quarterly *Wussy* print editions with the current three, The Body Issue, The Fight Issue, and The Sex Issue, available now. Through the print edition of *Wussy* the mag has traveled throughout the Southeast as well as globally in the likes of London, Berlin, Barcelona, and Vancouver.

According to the publication's founders, *Wussy* began as an outlet for the marginalized voices “within the already marginalized LGBT community.”¹⁹⁴ In order to speak directly to this, *Wussy* operates as a submissions-based platform in a strive to reflect the diversity of the queer community in Atlanta and throughout the American South. Therefore, though *Wussy* is headquartered in Atlanta, the submissions-based operation allows for a multitude of Southern queer voices and experiences. In its

¹⁹² “ABOUT,” *Wussy Mag*, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.Wussymag.com/contact-us-five/>.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Muriel Vega, "Wussy Magazine's New Moves," *Atlanta Creative Loafing*, June 16, 2016, , accessed March 27, 2018, <https://creativeloafing.com/content-168425-Wussy-magazine's-new-moves>.

inception, *Wussy Mag* was heavily involved and focused on queer nightlife, as Zaida Jones-Sanchez, *Wussy's* features editor notes, “Nightlife is essentially what birthed us.” Further, Sunni Johnson, Arts Editor and Writer notes, “We created *Wussy Mag* to document and promote events that were more underground or ‘queer,’ like Southern Fried Queer Pride and the Radical Faeries, that homonormative Midtown nightlife publications didn't cover.”¹⁹⁵ Though nightlife continues to play a huge role in *Wussy Mag*, with the organization collaborating with the city’s new Latinx party, La Choloteca, for New Year’s Eve, hosting a springtime *Wussy* Prom, as well as the staple annual yearbook photoshoot, their programming doesn’t end there.¹⁹⁶ As PAPER Magazine notes,

Programming runs the gamut: public poetry readings paired with jazz; Queer Drunk History, a comedy night organized with variety show group Queeriety; regular crowd-engagement-encouraged cult film screenings (But I'm a Cheerleader! is next); zine release parties at independent galleries; a coffeeshop drag brunch and social; an unveiling celebration for a mural from Living Walls, a public art nonprofit. (It's worth pointing out that those outside-the-bar events often open doors for younger generations searching for community) ... *Wussy* works in politics, too — last year they held a meet-and-greet with LGBTQIA+ mayoral and Atlanta City Council candidates, and they've built entire shindigs around fundraising for community nonprofits. The online content is sometimes political and social justice oriented as well; of late, they've reported on the backlash of newly surfaced racist remarks made by a popular drag bar owner,

¹⁹⁵ Vega, “Wussy Magazine's New Moves,”

¹⁹⁶ Jhoni Jackson, “‘Wussy’ Mag Is Making Inclusivity the Norm in Queer Atlanta,” PAPER, January 26, 2018, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.papermag.com/Wussy-mag-atlanta-lgbtq-2528917021.html>.

explored activist fatigue in the conservative south, and educated readers on the history of openly queer political candidates.¹⁹⁷

As a Southern queer, finding representation of queer Southerners can often be hard to come by. As Editor-in-Chief John Dean says, “If one queer person can read *Wussy* and feel witnessed and validated, then our job is done.”¹⁹⁸

Wussy's work is inherently tied to debunking the first theme that arose in my interviews, the mutual exclusivity of Southernness and queerness. However, their work is also deeply situated in disrupting the ideology that Southern queer life is one of unimaginable struggle, as compared to the queer life nationwide. In August of 2016, *Wussy* released a video titled, “Queers of ATL: Being Queer in the South,” wherein Southern queer folks, many based in Georgia, spoke about their experiences being queer in the American South.¹⁹⁹ Here, interviewees discuss their own interpretation of what it means to be queer in the South. Though at first, the video seems to align itself alongside narratives of unique Southern struggle, some folks share that there aren't always a lot of places to call home or that being queer is one of many struggles, they are also careful not to characterize this as the only possible Southern queer experience. In fact, many cite the region as a place of healing, one where wounds are being tended to and wherein the

¹⁹⁷ Jhoni Jackson, “‘Wussy’ Mag Is Making Inclusivity the Norm in Queer Atlanta,” PAPER, January 26, 2018, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.papermag.com/Wussy-mag-atlanta-lgbtq-2528917021.html>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Wussy TV, “Queers of ATL: Being Queer in the South,” WussyTV, 2016, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctHszNBuRVA>.

hardships produce a tougher, comedic skin. One interviewee and Atlanta performer notes, “Being queer in the South is a blessing, honestly. We have so much to give and to show ... I think that people really write off being queer in the South.”²⁰⁰ Another interviewee describes the South as “one of the most imaginative places to really explore yourself, everyone here is artistic as fuck.”²⁰¹ A final interviewee notes the feelings of safety, visibility, and care that come along with being a Southern queer.²⁰² In the most banal ways, *Wussy*’s circulation and existence, through their various print, online, and physical presence in the South, purely problematizes and dispels the myths surrounding the region as it relates to queerness. *Wussy*’s archive, though just nearing three years old, is filled to the brim with personal narratives of Southern queerness, with a keen focus on nightlife, art, and culture. Here, *Wussy* is neither situating the South as a premier site for queer subjectivity, nor does it condemn it entirely. Instead, *Wussy* exists as a space of visibility and, through its submission-based format, gives Southern queers themselves the platform and authority to discuss nitty-gritty queerness in the South for what it truly is.

Through my interviews and participant observation with SFQP and *Wussy*, as well as interpersonal relationships, I was directed to newcomer Rotten Peaches. Launched on December 3, 2016, Rotten Peaches has sought out to fill a void in LGBTQIA+ Atlanta and beyond, the limited access to queer women-identified spaces. This happened in part,

²⁰⁰ Wussy TV, “Queers of ATL.”

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

as founder Chelsea Hoag notes, as a response to the overwhelming disparity between gay bars and lesbian bars. When interviewing Hoag about the founding of Rotten Peaches and the story behind such a name she notes,

Now, the name might sound a little odd but hear me out. After moving from Tennessee to Georgia, it became very apparent Georgia is known for its peaches. And if you present even slightly femme, you'll find yourself meeting a Southern draw saying something along the lines of, "Well, ain't you a Georgia Peach." So, as a play on words, I called this dream queer girl group of mine 'Rotten Peaches.'²⁰³

Though Hoag founded and fully runs Rotten Peaches, with some volunteer help from queer friends from time to time, Hoag also defines Rotten Peaches with the help of friend and member Leila Nicole who notes that a Rotten Peach is,

A reflection on neoliberal activism as a deviant Southerner // A peach rotting on your desk full of complaints ... If I'm going to be read as rotten and angry, I hope you can never quite wash away the stickiness from your hands nor the stained truth of it all ... I hope the rotting of me meant something to the metal of you ... So I, the non-religious, the chain smoking, the deviant re-raised by a herd of black sheep, pray for the most bountiful harvest of peaches to be delivered to your gates. I pray for so much of this deviant Southern that the rotting rusts your gears. I hope the machinery quits working and the mechanic is on strike waiting for their living wage and that the fruit in you rots, too. That you finally become willing to carve the fight into the soft of you, willing to decompose the pristine and performative and embrace the messy and the human. 'Cause, to me, the juices of rotten peaches tastes like freedom, like hope for a revolution.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Chelsea Hoag. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Phone, November 27, 2017.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Here, the imagery of the peach, Georgia's rebranding namesake, works to queer both the Southern colloquialism and the people themselves. Thus, in the instance of Hoag's organization, the queer remains intimately tethered to the Southern.²⁰⁵

I spoke to Hoag a bit about what it means to her to have a queer women-centered space and how that reflects the folks involved in Rotten Peaches gatherings. She notes that many of the folks involved identify as queer, trans, non-gender binary, genderqueer, or fluid among many identities. Further, Rotten Peaches seeks to disrupt restrictive binaries. In her interview with *Wussy Mag* Hoag notes, "If you identify as female or not, Rotten Peaches aims to connect a community of women and allies who want to find strength in numbers."²⁰⁶ During our interview she noted that during Rotten Peaches' first year alone they "hosted close to 20 events, partnered with national brands, raised money for Planned Parenthood, and hosted local political fundraisers such as "Queer the Vote." In fact, their premiere dance party was a collaboration with The Peach Coven, a non-profit that donates hygiene toiletries, wherein they took pad and tampon donations for homeless folks in Atlanta.

²⁰⁵ Tove Danovich, "The Un-Pretty History Of Georgia's Iconic Peach," NPR, July 21, 2017, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/07/21/537926947/the-un-pretty-history-of-georgias-iconic-peach>.

²⁰⁶ "Rotten Peaches: A Mission Statement We Can Sink Our Teeth Into," *Wussy Mag*, November 28, 2016, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.Wussymag.com/all/2016/11/26/rotten-peaches-a-mission-statement-we-all-need-to-hear>.

In looking toward the future, Hoag wants to move the group beyond events just centered around alcohol. This past year Rotten Peaches has either hosted or co-hosted some of the following: Queer Picnic in the Park, a Rotten Peaches Family Potluck, FEMME: A Celebration, Peaches Sk8 Day, S'more Plz: A Queer Bonfire, Then & Now: Lesbian and Queer Women's Space in Atlanta, and a Kiki for Atlanta Trans Organizations. Of these events, nearly half were co-organized with either Southern Fried Queer Pride or *Wussy Mag*. When asked specifically what Rotten Peaches is Hoag responds, "I like to say it's nebulous group on purpose. Think of it as a facilitator and accelerator for queer women. My goal is to eventually turn Rotten Peaches into my full time job. I want nothing more than to create space for queer women across the country." This May, Rotten Peaches is teaming up with Atlanta Cycling Fest to do a "cute queer bike ride" and Hoag looks to incorporate more events that are not at bars or centered around drinking.²⁰⁷

Throughout my research and time spent with the above organizations, and with shows like *Gaycation* in mind, I became increasingly interested in finding more media representations of Southern queerness that provided nuanced narratives instead of conforming to popular ideas of Southern queer life. Over the course of the last year, I came across a web-series titled, "The New Deep South," that sets out to address the myths that I noted above. "The New Deep South," a webseries by the production

²⁰⁷ Chelsea Hoag. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Phone, November 27, 2017.

company The Front, “explores the vibrant and multifaceted queer culture that is emerging in the American South.”²⁰⁸ This series follows the lives of queer folks and queer folks of color to explore the tangled and complex nature of sexual identity in the American South, providing an intervention into the region’s cultural narrative by complicating ideas that rethink Southern queer existence.²⁰⁹ Creators Rosie Haber and Lauren Cioffi note, “The rest of the country sees queer life in the Deep South as being really tragic and utterly challenging . . .” and thus were inspired to create the series to elevate and celebrate flourishing Southern queerness.²¹⁰ Further, in a Huffington Post interview, Thalia Mavros, The Front founder and executive producer of the series,

We love to pinpoint areas of tension in the world and tell unique stories in a way that humanizes the issues while exposing the forces that are shaping them. In this case, the American South was a strong backdrop for examining the tangled and complex natures of sexual identity, family and legacy for queer youth in a time of transition and national change.²¹¹

To date, creators Haber and Cioffi have released three roughly ten-minute episodes, centering conversations about trans identity, starting a family, and the creation and

²⁰⁸ “About Series: The New Deep South,” The Front, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.thefront.com/watch/new-deep-south-episode-2-kayla/>.

²⁰⁹ Mikelle Street, “‘New Deep South’ Series Explores LGBTQ Life in Mississippi,” NBCNews.com, May 04, 2017, accessed March 27, 2018. <http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/new-deep-south-series-explores-lgbtq-life-mississippi-n754736>.

²¹⁰ Mikelle Street, “‘New Deep South.’”

²¹¹ James Michael Nichols, “Here's What It's Like To Be Queer Today In The American Deep South,” The Huffington Post, November 03, 2015, accessed March 27, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-front-releases-instababy_us_5638d61ce4b00a4d2e0be0da.

impact of chosen queer families, specifically in the Mississippi Delta.²¹² The interviewees vary among age, class, and race, though all identify on a queer spectrum. The first episode, “Instababy,” features a young couple, Keeta and Toni, from Jackson, Mississippi with a desire to start a family. Here, the couple chooses to pursue the adoption of an unborn child through social media app Instagram.²¹³ According to Mavros, the episode’s November 2015 release, was purposefully timed to coincide with the federal court hearing challenging Mississippi’s same-sex adoption ban, who at the time was the last state in the U.S. to ban same-sex adoption. The second installment, “Kayla,” features a young queer subject who, while at the time was using their birth name and he/him pronouns, identifies as a woman and wants to begin transitioning as Kayla post-high school graduation. Here, “The New Deep South,” takes a sharp dive into rural Mississippi, the heart of the Delta, to tenderly uplift the evolution of a young person exploring their gender in “a place where it is hard enough to imagine such an identity let alone embody it.” The third installment, “House of JXN,” has screened at the Tribeca Film Festival and continues to make the festival circuit, which unfortunately makes it currently unavailable to view on The Front’s social media pages.

As a series, “The New Deep South” began with a keen interest in providing more nuance to conversations and deep-seated ideologies that inform the ways in which the South is characterized in relation to queer subjectivity. Creator Lauren Cioffi notes that,

²¹² “About Series: The New Deep South.”

²¹³ Nichols, “Here's What It's Like To Be Queer Today In The American Deep South.”

through this series, she wanted other people to “experience the Mississippi that isn’t really shown in the media — really fascinating and dynamic and a lot more vibrant than what people think Mississippi is.”²¹⁴ Here, “The New Deep South” debunks the myth that queer folks are all well-off, urban, white, and, particularly, non-Southern. Further, it provides key intervention into narratives that, much like those raised by the folks I interviewed, that write off the South as a region that is dangerous and full of adversity. For example, after the release of its second installment, “Kayla,” executive producer Thalia Mavros participated in an interview with New York and Los Angeles-based media company MILK. Here, writer Jake Boyer reinscribes the very narratives “The New Deep South” sets out to interrogate. In fact the article opens with Boyer stating,

Despite the leaps and bounds of progress that have been made for the LGBT community in America over the past year, we often forget that it’s still incredibly dangerous for so many of us. It’s particularly rough in a place like the South, a sizable portion of the US that has bred a culture of open hostility towards the queer community. Treatment toward these citizens is extreme, volatile, and dangerous on a daily basis.²¹⁵

Later in the article, Boyer follows this sentiment by asking Mavros whether or not she thinks the South is in fact inherently more dangerous and if she would encourage queer folks to “stick out” their adversity.²¹⁶ To which she notes,

²¹⁴Nichols, “Here's What It's Like To Be Queer Today In The American Deep South.”

²¹⁵ Jake Boyer, "Unveiling the Lives of Queer Youth in the Deep South," Milk, November 11, 2015, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://milk.xyz/feature/unveiling-the-lives-of-queer-youth-in-new-deep-south/>.

²¹⁶ Boyer, “Unveiling the Lives of Queer Youth in the Deep South.”

Everyone should make that decision for themselves. Some people find it dangerous and are compelled to move away, but we also hope this show will help create a balanced viewpoint. Places like Mississippi seem difficult for the LGBTQ community, but queer people can live and do well there, and, often love where they live and the people they live with.²¹⁷

It becomes obvious through the episodes, as well as press interviews, the “The New Deep South” is committed to providing a space to reimagine the South’s relationship to queerness. Further, the webseries firmly situates Southern queer folks at the helm of their own stories. As the creators note, “The lives of queer people in the South are typically portrayed in only one depressing mode of representation, according to filmmakers Rosie Haber and Lauren Cioffi, so they decided to do something about it.” Thus, we learn here about the queer South from Southern queers themselves. Ultimately, what these videos aim to demonstrate is that queer Southerners continue to live in, make community, and reimagine the American South, regardless of it being painted as uninhabitable for them.

In the most literal sense, through their very existence, Southern Fried Queer Pride, *Wussy Mag*, Rotten Peaches, and “The New Deep South” disrupt ideologies that seek to expunge the queer subject from the American South. Similarly, not only are these organizations and groups queer, but explicitly Southern *and* queer. Therefore, through the identification of “Southern queer” these organizations, and the folks involved in them, make a clear point that the South is not being stripped or partitioned off from their queer identities as well. While there are certainly many Southern queer organizations, for example perhaps a more obvious highlight would have been a focus on Southerners on

²¹⁷ Ibid.

New Ground, I chose these organizations because of the ways in which they operate independently, but also as collaborative efforts together and across the Southeastern United States. Thus, although these organizations each have their beginnings rooted within the urban Atlanta cityscape, Southern queerness extends beyond the parameters of the Atlanta and, further, beyond the parameters of Georgia. Individually, and collectively, these organizations seek to provide adequate space and support to Southern queers across the region. Through the move of naming themselves and identifying specifically as Southern queers, they demonstrate not only the vibrancy, and very existence, of queer life down South, but they each work to illuminate the multitude of ways in which one may experience identifying as a Southern queer. Thus, these organizations and groups dispel the idea that queers cannot be Southerners, or that Southerners cannot be queer, as well as refuse to engage in a politics that privileges an “oversimplified visibility and stability in both queer and Southern identity.”²¹⁸ For these queer Southerners, there is not a clear separation between queerness and Southernness, there is no moment where their Southernness ends and queerness begins.

Perhaps being a Southern queer is a lot like, you might have guessed, a fresh pitcher of sweet tea. A classic Southern sweet tea is, bless our hearts, a true craft passed down through generations. Recipes vary from family to family, some swear by Lipton, some by Luzianne, and some will never tell. However, without a doubt the most important rule to follow in any Southern sweet tea recipe is mixing the sugar into the tea

²¹⁸ Smith, “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” 380.

while it is piping hot. This is the only way to ensure that the sugar effectively dissolves into the tea, that the sugar and the tea are inseparable. In closing this chapter, it is this idea of inseparability that I want to draw our attention to. Perhaps, much like the dissolved sugar in a pot of boiling tea, identifying as a Southern queer is a deliberate move to make inseparable the often divided constructions of queer identity and the American South. Much like one would never refer to sweet tea as “sugar and tea,” using “Southern queer” as an identity is a move toward unification as opposed to reifying the assumed disparateness of Southern and queer. Here, the Southern queer identity forces a reading of the South as queer, nuances narratives around the South, and works to reevaluate what the region has come to be associated with. In turn, reading the South queerly also works to create and maintain a dialogue wherein the South is still held accountable for the homophobia, racism, and bigotry it has long been associated with, while also not suggesting that these violences are inherently region specific. The work of these organizations, groups, and media representations also works to dispel the myth that queerness in the South is always deeply embedded in struggle. As such, this chapter served as an intervention into narratives around the American South, particularly as they relate to queer folks and queer and trans folks of color. I began with a keen interest in continuing to think through the deployment of narratives of the South as they relate specifically to queer and queer and trans people of color. Therefore, in tandem with these circulating narratives, I was curious about how Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color engage these stories of the violent and dangerous South as a region proposed as

the only site of national danger. The most effective way to understand how queer Southerners interact with these narratives was through conducting interviews. As such, this allowed me to speak directly with folks who identified as queer Southerners in order to engage in conversations about the South and the narratives intimately linked with the region.

Chapter 3: Affect, Orientation, and (Dis)Identification

“Southern, to me, means being from and identifying with the culture of the South. We have an communal ethic. Queer, to me, means disrupting norms and systems that I’m forced into, and rebuilding them so that they’re more realistic and inclusive. To be a Southern queer is to do this work within a boundary that also has unrealistic expectations and stereotypes thrown at it. So it’s like working to unlock a box within a box.” —Taylor Edward, Atlanta, July 12, 2017.

“I feel this stubborn tension about staying. Like, there’s a part of me that’s like, ‘Oh, wouldn’t it be easier to be around people who look like you, who feel like you, and think like you?’ But then, if we all did that there would be none of us here. So I feel this duty to stay to continue ... remaining to be seen.” —Jay Giles, Atlanta, August 3, 2017.²¹⁹

For the purpose of this chapter, I am specifically interested in thinking through orientation and identification in the queer American South. Here, I am interested in how, despite the myriad of narratives disseminated that produce a brutal and threatening Southern United States, erase queer and QTPOC subjectivities from the region, or narrate the particularity of their lives through lenses of struggle, queer subjects in the region continue to identify with and orient themselves toward the American South. As I have demonstrated, conversations around the Southern United States are usually laden with thinly veiled and overt forms of regional bias and longstanding assumptions about the symbolic importance of the South in conversations around national identity. Further, these constructions of the South as an unlivable space are presented as especially potent

²¹⁹ Jay Giles. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, August 3, 2017.

for queer people and queer and trans people of color. This potency, as I have suggested, is intimately entangled with ideologies of white rural masculinities wherein violence is enacted through racism and homophobia. Here, I encouraged us to think about the ways in which the South is often mapped and imagined as monolithically encompassed in these rural spatialities.

Thinking through constructions of the American South throughout this project's research, as well as the narratives embedded within these constructions, has inevitably led me to consider the ways in which the region is saturated and dripping with affect and, further, how the work of emotion aids in the reification of particular narrative trajectories. More explicitly, constructions and narratives about the Southern United States remain powerful because of the ways in which affect has become embedded. Therefore, these particular embedded affects work to aid in their continued circulation. As such, it is my interest in this final chapter to think more explicitly about affect's role in shaping understandings of the American South. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the American South is positioned as structurally opposed to, and therefore remains outside of, happiness as an affect, as well as scripts of happiness. In turn, I am curious about the ways in which this positioning relates to identity, subjectivity, and orientation for Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color.

In thinking with affect I suggest that the American South has come to be situated, particularly for Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color who reside in the

region, as a bad object choice because of its saturation in bad feeling.²²⁰ Therefore, if the South is situated as a bad regional object for Southern queer subjects, how is it that folks continue to both identify with and orient themselves toward the region? In short, what does it mean when queer and queer and trans bodies of color do turn toward the South? When they are nurturing to and in a space that is consistently painted as uninhabitable and “not” nurturing towards them?

Negative Affectual Circulations: Emotion’s Role in Situating the South

Residual feelings and emotions circulating the region’s histories perpetuate the sociocultural mythology of the South as backward and dangerous, both politically and bodily.²²¹ As Latoya E. Eaves notes in, “Black Geographic Possibilities,” the South’s “cultural identity has remained fixated on a set of historical moments and iconography, such as the pre-abolition South and its secession movement, the role of the South in the Civil War, deep-fried and sugared foodscapes, widespread persistent poverty, and widespread Christian religiosity, to name a few.”²²²

²²⁰ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Feel Your Way,” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-16.

²²¹ Latoya E. Eaves, “Outside Forces: Black Southern Sexuality,” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*. (New York: New York UP, 2016), 147.

²²² Latoya E. Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities: On a Queer Black South,” in *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): , doi:10.1353/sgo.2017.0007. 82

As I have noted throughout this project, this iconography often depicts the region as a one-dimensional, frozen site, easy repositories “for all that is backward and hurtful in the United States, past and present.”²²³ The perception of isolated danger and backwardness beneath the Mason-Dixon fuels the fire that orients “bad feelings” toward the South, subsequently discouraging subjects from turning toward such a space.²²⁴ This section begins to think through the role of emotion in perceptions of the American South. I hope to nuance, and perhaps disrupt, the situatedness of the South as merely a bad object in totality by interrogating the relationship between feelings, subjects, objects, and the mobilization of these affects.²²⁵ It is evident that the continued circulation of narratives has typified the South in particular ways. It is similarly apparent that folks feel passionately about the South, regardless of which side of the often binary opposition of feelings their passions fall. For this reason, I am curious about two questions in particular: what types of affect do or do not accompany the South within the cultural imaginary? Further, how do these emotional ties operate and what exactly do, or can, they do?

²²³ Carolyn Leste Law, “Introduction.” in *Out in the South*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 3.

²²⁴ Ahmed, “Introduction: Feel Your Way,” 1-16.

²²⁵ Ibid.

The cultural narratives staining the South are linked to that of, Latoya E. Eaves states, “plantation culture, Jim Crow laws, and Bibles.”²²⁶ As E. Patrick Johnson notes, “The past haunts the air...the region’s long history of grotesque racial violence—slavery, lynching, cross burnings, etc.— is etched in the American imagination.”²²⁷ The etching of these hauntingly dense pasts that “formed the very core of the Southern political, economic, and social system” produces the South, within larger cultural imaginaries, as a site of abjection, a culturally backward space saturated with bad feeling. As a result, I argue that this produces the South as an inherently bad object.²²⁸²²⁹ It certainly would be a violent injustice not to highlight the very material existence of these histories, as well as the very material effects both historically and contemporarily. Racially motivated violences continue to be enacted by white supremacist groups housed within the region, whose member numbers have been progressively rising in the Trump era.²³⁰ Rebel imagery, its symbolism and intellectual underpinnings, remains steadily rampant

²²⁶ Eaves, “Outside Forces,” 146.

²²⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, “Introduction,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1.

²²⁸ Zack Beauchamp, “Yes, The South Really Is Different-And It's Because Of Race,” ThinkProgress, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://thinkprogress.org/yes-the-south-really-is-different-and-its-because-of-race-40f7de085908/>

²²⁹ Eaves, “Outside Forces,” 146.

²³⁰ Sarah Begley, “Trump's First Year as President Saw Surge in White Groups,” in *Time*, February 21, 2018, accessed April 20, 2018, <http://time.com/5168677/donald-trump-hate-groups-splc/>.

throughout the American South. Confederate flags continue to adorn the back of Ford pickup trucks, front lawns and wrap around porches, and Southern Statehouse grounds. A significant contemporary act of resistance to this stronghold imagery occurred in 2015, when young black activist Bree Newsome, in part motivated by the massacre at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina weeks before, scaled a 30-foot flag-pole on the grounds of the South Carolina Statehouse to remove the high-flying Confederate flag.²³¹ Relying solely on these static, though materially factual, images of the Southern United States is seductive perhaps in the desire to distance oneself far from them. However, as Latoya E. Eaves notes in “Outside Forces: Black Southern Sexuality,” this presentation of the South, as a purely bad object, is problematic in that it “insinuates a strict regionalism that does not acknowledge the opportunities, realities, and experiences of the entire U.S. South.”²³² She elaborates further to note that “relying on these conceptualizations fails to realign figurations of the South as a place of multiplicities. The relationships and identities of the South should not be generalized, as the diversity of issues and points of pride extend beyond these strongholds.”²³³ Therefore, the problematics lie here, in the sociocultural imaginings of the American South as purely

²³¹ Lottie Joiner, “Bree Newsome Reflects on Taking down South Carolina's Confederate Flag 2 Years Ago,” Vox, June 27, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/6/27/15880052/bree-newsome-south-carolinas-confederate-flag>.

²³² Eaves, “Outside Forces,” 147.

²³³ Latoya E. Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities,” 82.

and totally one-dimensional, buttressed by the nation's endless supply of negative affect that produces it as stuck in time.

In thinking through the functionality of emotions and how objects, places, bodies etc., become stuck in particular emotional landscapes I look toward Sara Ahmed's work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Here, Ahmed explores "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies," noting that bodies "take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others."²³⁴ She is keenly focused not on what emotion is, per say, but what emotion does, the ways in which they function socially, and how emotion shapes both individual and collective bodies that can result in the creation of affective communities.²³⁵ In "Introduction: Feel Your Way," Ahmed works through the sociality and function of emotions, specifically thinking through the ways in which emotions circulate and create others who serve as sources of feeling.²³⁶ Here, Ahmed is thinking specifically about the role of emotions in the nation, what bodies come to be interpolated—read white, cis, heterosexual, etc.,— as well as which bodies come to be outside Others considered to be injurious—which can be read here as non-white, immigrant, queer—.²³⁷ Throughout this chapter, she traces the movements of emotions, noting how they operate to make and shape bodies and objects in particular ways that,

²³⁴ Ahmed, "Introduction: Feel Your Way," 1.

²³⁵ Maria Serena Sapegno, "Book Review: The Cultural Politics of Emotion." *Feminist Theory* 7, no. 3 (2006): 370-72. 371

²³⁶ Ahmed, "Introduction: Feel Your Way," 1.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

through the social hierarchy of emotions, involve orientations. Ahmed is particularly useful for the ways in which she tracks the circulation of emotions, noting how, through repetition, emotions can shape the very surfaces they come into contact with often producing stickiness.²³⁸ Ahmed's work on feeling, and its movements around, toward, and away from particular objects, is a helpful framework for understanding the ways in which emotions both circulate and operate if we position the American South as the object. Therefore, I want to think through the role emotions play in the positioning of the South within the nation and its projected image, as well as how this relates directly to Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color.

The basis of emotional circulation, and subsequent orientation, Ahmed argues, first involves contact with the object in question. She notes feelings, "take the 'shape' of the contact we have with objects" as the feelings generated in the initial contact influence future perceptions of said object.²³⁹ Through contact and emotions, impressions can be made and objects can be assessed for whether or not they are beneficial or harmful to the subject. This, she notes, can easily be translated into good or bad, which "*already* involves a process of reading...contact involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject."²⁴⁰ Ahmed notes, "How the object impresses upon us may depend on

²³⁸ Ibid., 5.

²³⁹ Ibid.,

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions.”²⁴¹ As detailed above, the American South has left its impression within the cultural imaginary. Therefore, it is possible to understand how the South has come to be solidified affectually as an inherently bad object within national and cultural imaginaries because of the region’s histories, particularly around race. The South, imagined, experienced, or merely uttered, generates a feeling.²⁴²

Impressions and repetition, Ahmed notes, may allow objects begin to become sticky with particular feeling.²⁴³ For, example, if one is constantly left feeling badly after repeated interactions with an object, it is possible that the object has thus become attributed with said feelings. The stickiness permeates so much so that even the memory of the impression of the object can incite the bad feeling.²⁴⁴ And, as Ahmed notes throughout, some objects become stickier than others, which occurs when they are repeatedly associated with bad feelings. Stickiness is thus born from contact and solidified through repetition. These repetitive feelings, through the sociality of emotions, begin to create tentative boundaries.²⁴⁵ Ahmed notes,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

²⁴² Ibid., 6.

²⁴³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

In my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and outside in the first place ... it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others.²⁴⁶

As a region coated in feelings, perhaps more so than others, the South becomes a site of tension, within the national imaginary, through its attachment to particular negative affects. Specifically, as I have suggested above, narratives and feelings surmise a prolonged pain and suffering within the Southern United States. Further, the region has so long come to be associated with rhetorics of hate that it has in turn come to be both hated and feared by the nation, as it is positioned as a space that houses both hate and fear. The histories of Southern pain and suffering have come to be evoked in public discourse so frequently that, I suggest, referencing the region is itself “enough to evoke images of pain and suffering.”²⁴⁷ These images have impressed upon national consciousness enough that the South has, over time, come to be situated as the sole site of pain, extending enough to encapsulate a myriad of prejudices. Therefore, similar to my discussion about the South as internal other, emotion, in specific relation to the South's histories, plays a powerful role in creating and maintaining ideological boundaries set by the nation about its, though perhaps more easily contested in the current political climate, liberal image. In turn, due to the South's seeming inability to measure up to the image of the United States as liberal land of the free, the region is marked as antithetical or outside

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁷ Sara Ahmed, “The Contingency of Pain,” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

of national ideologies. As Larry J. Griffin notes in “Why Was the South a Problem to America?,” the South serves as a problem for the nation because it seemingly contests and troubles American identities, ideals, and practices.²⁴⁸ These categories can of course be interrogated, as in their materiality they have historically excluded marginalized groups at various intersections of race, class, gender, citizenship, sexuality, and ableness etc. However, through the nation’s deployment of this measurement system, the South comes to be understood as injurious for the nation’s image. Thus, it must distance itself from the region in order to maintain the air of liberal innocence dripping from propaganda-packaged images of safety and freedom. Here, the nation, sans the regional South, is imagined to be a pure, liberal, democratic body. Through constructing the South as hateful and injurious, the region comes to be understood as a site of injury and, in turn, the nation disavows the South, defining the conditionality of genuine subjects, non-Southerners, and national hospitality.²⁴⁹ This injury is phantasmic and conceals any traces of these projections outside of these spaces.²⁵⁰ Explicitly, this creates and maintains an ideology that racist and homophobic acts cease to exist outside the boundary of the hateful, erasing the multitudes of violent injustices occurring across the nation. Further, this implies that, for queer people and QTPOC specifically, there must be something

²⁴⁸ Larry J. Griffin, “Why Was the South a Problem to America?,” 12.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵⁰ Ahmed, “The Organisation of Hate,” 49.

wrong with them for not migrating away from the South.²⁵¹ This ultimately situates Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as victims of the South.

I want to make clear, however, that in highlighting the work of negative affect in situating the American South within the nation and the imaginary that I am not suggesting a move to forgetting pain. As Ahmed notes, “... forgetting would be a repetition of the violence or injury.”²⁵² Instead, I hope to draw attention to the work of emotions in the circulation of narratives in order to think through the affective landscapes that continue to position the South as the nation’s proprietor of harm. These negative signs accrue affective values that frame the South in particular ways. This happens through the circulation and mobilization of sticky, magnetic feelings. The threat occurs both politically and bodily through acts of violence that link to displays of racism and homophobia. These spatial objects, “Threaten to violate the pure bodies; such bodies can only be imagined as pure by the perpetual restaging of this fantasy of violation.”²⁵³ Ahmed notes, “Hate is involved in the very negotiation of boundaries between selves and others, and between communities, where “others; are brought into the sphere of my or our

²⁵¹ Mark Hain, “We Are Here for You: The “‘It Gets Better Project’, Queering Rural Space, and

Cultivating Queer Media Literacy” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: New York UP, 2016). 165.

²⁵² Ahmed, “The Contingency of Pain,” 33.

²⁵³ Ahmed, “The Contingency of Pain,” 44.

existence as a threat.”²⁵⁴ I would like to think through the positioning of these negative affects in the South against narratives of happiness. Alongside the narratives of danger and vulnerability attached to queerness in the American South, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are positioned as inherently and perpetually unhappy and unloved by the place they call home.²⁵⁵

Improper Orientation: A Southern Queer’s Failure

As noted above, the operation of feelings and emotions are deeply entrenched in impressionality. In continuing to think about “how objects impress upon us,” I want to think about how the emotions and impressions formed through contact then affect how a subject may orient themselves in relation to an object.²⁵⁶ If, after contact with an object, one is left feeling badly or left with a bad impression, it will then influence their decision to turn away from said object in the future. Likewise, if one has left contact with good, happy feelings they are encouraged to turn toward the object again. Contact does not always have to be tangible in order to work effectively on a subject’s inclination to turn toward or away from an object. In fact, what I have often found while participating in conversations surrounding the South, is that folks without material connections or

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵⁵ Frank Bruni, “The Worst (and Best) Places to Be Gay in America,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2017, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/25/opinion/sunday/worst-and-best-places-to-be-gay.html>.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

experiences within its parameters shape their emotions through the circulation of popular narratives about the region or through engaging with the memories or impressions of others. These ideas are disseminated orally, through history books, friends, and social media. In fact, a simple Google search for the most unsafe states for LGBT people turned up a “top five” Rolling Stones’ article wherein four of the five states were located in the South.²⁵⁷ Through stickiness and magnetic affective operations, objects become endowed with meaning and value. Bad feelings and stickiness thus influence and encourage orientations away from the objects in question. We are further encouraged to turn away from objects that threaten to make us the other, as well as threaten our ability to flourish. The South, for instance, is a site of other creation through the ideology of its inherently harmful nature. What this muddies, however, are the very material realities and complexities for queer and QTPOC folks within this spatial location and the importance of, as Carly Thomsen notes, “the politics of space to the construction of their sexual identities.”²⁵⁸ Therefore, I want to hold stickiness and negative affect in tension in order to think through the work sticky, negative affect deploys in relation to orientation. I am similarly curious about the ways in which the South and queer life in the region, through its accrual of negative affect, is positioned particularly against neoliberal constructs of happiness and its pursuit. As Edgar Cabanas notes in “Rekindling Individualism,

²⁵⁷ Nico Lang, “The 5 Worst States for LGBT People,” *Rolling Stone*, November 24, 2014, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-5-worst-states-for-lgbt-people-20141124>.

²⁵⁸ Carly Thomsen, “In Plain(s) Sight” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: New York UP, 2016), 249.

Consuming Emotions: Constructing ‘Psytizens’ in the Age of Happiness,” the neoliberal discourse of happiness, “combines the modern Romantic ideal of the emotional as the set of inner dynamics that drives human action with the rational and utilitarian demand for self-control as the ability to manage and channel these emotions with the goal of maximizing individual self-interest.”²⁵⁹ Here, pursuing happiness becomes a necessary individual pursuit. As such, if the South has become a region so steeped in bad feelings, so antithetical to the proper pursuit of happiness, how does that position Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color? Interrogating the politics of affectual regional space creation will disrupt and allow space for new modes of conversation about the realities and experiences of Southern QTPOC and queer folks.

Through its positioning as a sticky object (no this is not a reference to the region’s intense humidity though that certainly may conjure negative affect for some) the American South has come to be understood as in stark opposition to good feelings and objects, specifically happiness. As Sara Ahmed notes in the introduction of her book *The Promise of Happiness*, the understanding of happiness comes to be “associated with some life choices and not others” and, further, that “Happiness is ‘feeling good,’ which means we can measure happiness because we can measure how good people feel.”²⁶⁰ In tracing happiness as an affect, Ahmed notes that it has become measurable. As a result, databases

²⁵⁹ Edgar Cabanas, “Rekindling Individualism, Consuming Emotions: Constructing ‘psytizens’ in the Age of Happiness,” in *Culture & Psychology* 22, no. 3 (2016): 471.

²⁶⁰ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction,” in *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 50-87.

are produced wherein happiness can be located not only individually, but geographically and placed into a comparative model.²⁶¹ Therefore, in the national imaginary this comparative model would effectively locate the American South as outside the perimeter of happiness, situating it firmly on the unhappy side of an affectual binary. The South is often presented as either an obstacle itself or as a site of obstacles in the way of happiness, particularly for queer and queer and trans people of color in the region. Often this rhetoric is internalized, A GLAAD article about queer life in the South notes, LGBT people in the South continue to face obstacles at higher rates than the rest of the country."²⁶² The article fails to mention, however, how these obstacles are stratified across intersections of race, gender, class, and ability, among others, such as housing access, job security, and surveillance. I suggest that situating the South as obstacle-ridden effectively implies that happiness is neither indicated nor predicted in relation to the South.²⁶³ Therefore, due to their situatedness, the Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color's proximity to happiness while residing in the South is seemingly forever widening.

Though Ahmed traces the role of happiness in relation to heterosexuality, specifically the ways in which queer subjects and lives are perhaps placed outside of

²⁶¹ Ahmed, "Introduction," 6.

²⁶² "LGBT Life in the South," GLAAD, March 10, 2016, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.glaad.org/southernstories/life>.

²⁶³ Ahmed, "Introduction," 6.

happiness and the family, I am curious about how happiness as both an affect and mode of orientation is circulating within the national queer imaginary. Within happiness and good feeling are deeply embedded ideologies of both responsibility and “correct” orientation. Happiness works as an individual responsibility that inevitably, through promoting our own happiness, has the potential to increase other people’s happiness.²⁶⁴ Further, Ahmed notes, “Happiness is often described as a path, as being what you get if you follow the right path ... Happiness becomes a form of being directed or oriented, of following ‘the right way.’”²⁶⁵ The “right way” is, of course, implicated in a subject’s proximity to the norms and ideals that have already been assigned as happiness makers. Therefore, in promoting happy subjects and worldmaking it is understood that there are particular ways of living that produce and promote happiness and, in turn, promoting happiness would mean promoting those ways of living.²⁶⁶

Ahmed characterizes this through Alan Carr’s idea of “flow” to describe the relationship between happy persons and happy worlds.²⁶⁷ There are particular queer lives that queer subjects in the United States are encouraged to pursue in order to orient themselves toward happiness in the “right way.” Which begs a two-fold question of whose happiness is model happiness and what bodies can achieve it? As I have

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ahmed, “Introduction,” 11.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

suggested, these paths lead queer subjects down the end of the rainbow to the major urban cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. In pursuing the proper queer path, urban centers are situated as acceptable object spaces. As an example, we can think about how this is reified again and again particularly through incarnations of the “It Gets Better Project.”²⁶⁸ This project offers young queers, often imagined as rural or Southern, YouTube videos where older, wiser queer folks share stories of being bullied but promising queer youth that “it gets better,” “...urging them not to give in to despair.”²⁶⁹ The It Gets Better Project often communicates messages that reinscribe ideas of the urban city as a place of safety for queer youth. Often these videos communicate that “...part of getting *better* is getting *out* of the narrow-minded rural area, the oppressive small town . . . because happiness, acceptance, self-fulfillment, and others like you are to be found only in . . . urban centers.”²⁷⁰ As the South and rural centers are continuously stuck in homophobic and racist feelings, these sentiments of flight are widely accepted as the only way queer youth can create and maintain better lives. However, this can be detrimental and does a great disservice to queer people “...living in environments consistently represented as hell on earth for queer people.”²⁷¹ Further, as Jasbir Puar notes, this campaign started by two affluent, cis, white gay men, inevitably promotes a

²⁶⁸ “It Gets Better,” It Gets Better, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://itgetsbetter.org/>.

²⁶⁹ Haim, “We Are Here for You,” 161.

²⁷⁰ Haim, “We Are Here for You,” 164.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

“narrow version of gay identity that risks further marginalization.”²⁷² She argues that, “queer people of color, trans, genderqueer and gender nonconforming youth, and lesbians have not been inspirationally hailed by IGB in the same way as white gay male liberals” whose videos are “a mandate to fold into urban, neoliberal gay enclaves, a form of liberal handholding and upward-mobility that echoes the now discredited ‘pull yourself up from the bootstraps’ immigrant motto.”²⁷³ However, these narratives continue to prevail and hold merit in the cultural queer imaginary.

As we have seen, location becomes imbued with feeling due to the fact that we judge something to be good or bad “according to how it affects us, whether it gives us pleasure or pain.”²⁷⁴ If, as subjects, we orient ourselves toward the pleasure offered by non-Southern urban centers, then we are correctly directing ourselves toward objects that are presumed to grant us happiness.²⁷⁵ Therefore, we are correctly aligning ourselves with, as Karen Tongson notes, the emblematic spaces of arrival for queer folks, the

²⁷² Jasbir Puar, “In the Wake of It Gets Better,” in *The Guardian*, November 16, 2010, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign>.

²⁷³ Puar, “In the Wake of It Gets Better.”

²⁷⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 22.

²⁷⁵ Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” 26.

“natural habitat” of sorts.²⁷⁶ Through affectual circulations, these narratives inherently deploy ideologies that, as J. Jack Halberstam suggests, rural or Southern queers “might be thought of as ‘stuck’ in a place that they would leave if only they could.”²⁷⁷ In turn, as Halberstam’s metronormativity suggests, this inevitably “maps a story of migration . . . a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy.”²⁷⁸ One must, of course, contend with the role of privilege, such as race, class, gender, etc., in narratives of queer happiness and metronormativity.²⁷⁹

I move to suggest that within the national imaginary, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are perceived as not following the path in the “right way,” specifically due to the imagined rampant homophobia, racism, and their intersection. Further, if becoming properly oriented means being “directed toward specific objects that are already attributed as being tasteful, *as enjoyable to those with good taste*,” it can be understood that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as subjects are imagined to be misaligning or improperly orienting subjects with poor taste.²⁸⁰ In turn,

²⁷⁶ Karen Tongson, “Relocating Queer Critique: Lynne Chan’s JJ Chinois,” in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, (New York: New York University Press), 47.

²⁷⁷ J. Jack Halberstam, “The Brandon Archive,” in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 36.

²⁷⁸ Halberstam, “The Brandon Archive,” 37.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 34.

the American South becomes the wrong object to orient oneself toward. Through this improper orientation, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are inevitably moved outside of the proper path of happiness and therefore do not remain “in flow.”²⁸¹ Explicitly, queers who pursue happiness are not queers who pursue the American South. Ahmed notes, “you have to be the right kind of queer by depositing your hope for happiness in the right places ... or it is simply not given.”²⁸² In this move, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color become unhappy subjects.

While mapping Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as unhappy subjects works in particular ways within national affectual imaginaries, I am curious about the potentialities of unhappiness, or at least deviations from strict modes of happiness. While I am not necessarily suggesting that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are inherently unhappy, I am curious about working with their assigned unhappiness. In her chapter “Unhappy Queers” Sara Ahmed directs us to Heather Love who argues, “We need a genealogy of queer affect that does not overlook the negative, shameful and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century.”²⁸³ This call is perhaps most beautifully encapsulated through E. Patrick Johnson’s oral history project, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* for the ways in

²⁸¹ Ibid., 37.

²⁸² Sara Ahmed, “Unhappy Queers,” in *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 106.

²⁸³ Ahmed, “Unhappy Queers,” 89.

which he intricately weaves “bitter experiences with sweeter stories” of black gay men in the American South.²⁸⁴ His stories, both personal narrations and gathered from the men he interviewed, are laced with complexities that nevertheless show that “despite the South’s history of racial segregation and religious fundamentalism, black gay men have carved out a space in which to live productive and fulfilling lives.”²⁸⁵ The negative, the shameful, the difficult is never overlooked, in fact often reading these seemingly “repressive sacred” spaces, for example the church, as vehicles for sexual desire and expression.²⁸⁶ Though I will return to his work in the subsequent section on identification.

Perhaps investing in the presumed unhappy scripts of Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color can work specifically to disrupt the reinvestment in particular narratives of queer happiness. If, as Ahmed notes, “Queer and feminist histories are the histories of those who are willing to risk the consequences of deviation,” this divestment from the one-dimensional scripts offered to queer subjects in the United States can reorient and disrupt our reliance on the pursuit of happiness and, further, both rethink the materialities of unhappiness and fracture the over-reliance on queer affective

²⁸⁴ E. Patrick Johnson, “Some Bitter and Some Sweet: Growing Up Black and Gay in the South,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press), 2008, 24.

²⁸⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, “Introduction,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3

geographies.²⁸⁷ Or, perhaps, queers who invest in bad object choices can find modes of “happiness” in their effective disruption of traditional gay and lesbian happiness scripts, as well as narrations of marginalized life in the South. Therefore, through the subversion of these scripts of happiness, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color in turn can move beyond conceptions of being a happy queer and instead, as Ahmed suggests, can be imagined as happily queer. Opposed to being positioned as a happy queer subject, this means not promoting conventional images of happiness and, further, that might mean “being happy to be the cause of unhappiness ... as well as to be happy with where we get to if we go beyond the straight lines of happiness scripts.”²⁸⁸

When we circumvent and deviate from conventional images of queer happiness we allow ourselves the possibility of settling in on the wooden back porch of our favorite neighborhood queer bar in the dead heat of a Southern summer. We convince ourselves we can beat the humidity intensified heat with a cool 32-ounce glass of our favorite local beer, Sweetwater 420, and take comfort in the audio concoction of chirping crickets, laughter, and a drag queen performing to Jo Dee Messina’s “Heads Carolina, Tails California.” This was, at least, the setting for my final interview with Jay Giles, a Georgia-born and raised textiles artist and professional bookbinder. For her, disrupting scripts of happiness in relation to the queer American South is a stubborn pursuit. She notes,

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 97.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

I feel this stubborn tension about staying. Like, there's a part of me that's like, subscribing to the narrative of, 'Oh, wouldn't it be easier to be around people who look like you, who feel like you, and think like you?' But then, if we all did that there would be none of us here. It also assumes that there aren't folks like that here. So, I feel this duty to stay, to continue, to remain to be seen. It feels important to not just move away.²⁸⁹

In "Feminist Killjoys" Ahmed tracks the feminist killjoy troublemaker and the disruption of scripts of happiness.²⁹⁰ This outlines the feminist as one who does not place their "hopes for happiness in the right things."²⁹¹ I move to suggest, in what may be an obvious correlation, that in their improper orientation the Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color become situated as killjoys. In "Happy Objects" Ahmed poses the following question about the feminist killjoy: "Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Or does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy?"²⁹² Here I note that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color expose the bad feelings by continuing to find ways to reimagine orientations toward the "bad" object. Ahmed notes, "Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places."²⁹³ Therefore, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as killjoys work to disrupt traditional scripts of LGBT happiness that are often imagined as white,

²⁸⁹ Jay Giles. Interview by Teter. Personal interview. Atlanta, August 3, 2017.

²⁹⁰ Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys," in *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2010), 59.

²⁹¹ Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys," 60.

²⁹² Ahmed, "Happy Objects," 39.

²⁹³ Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoy," 66.

wealthy, urban, and cis, as well as exposing the fallacy that the nation paints of itself as a liberal, welcoming, safe space. Take, for example, an article for pop culture magazine Complex's website wherein Michael Arceneaux talks about his experiences as a Black gay man in the South.²⁹⁴ In "The South Is A Terrifying Place For Gay People (Just Like the Rest of America)," Arceneaux describes conversations with folks who are not from the South and the ways they anticipate for his response to meet their stereotypical expectations. He notes, "You can tell the person asking is likely anticipating me to offer a dramatic pause—perhaps one long enough to let a single tear fall down my face—before ultimately saying something that fits into their stereotypical presumptions."²⁹⁵ Here, he reflects on misconceptions of the South as the hotbed for racial and homophobic violence by shining light on violences that were enacted outside of the region, noting that the South has no monopoly on either. He further conceptualizes a Southern identity that differs from preconceived stereotypes noting, "The thing about us southern folk is while bigotry might be directly in our faces and heard at higher volumes, we have always found a way to bounce pass it . . . the thing about hearing prejudice at its bluntest delivery is that it does not mean you are any safer in places where it is conveyed in softer tones." Further, he states, "I've been called a "faggot" in every part of America. There is no

²⁹⁴ Michael Arceneaux, "The South Is A Terrifying Place For Gay People (Just Like the Rest of America)-But It's Also the Most Fun," Complex, June 14, 2016, accessed December 17, 2016, <http://www.complex.com/life/2016/06/southern-joy-and-homophobia>.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

singular place where I feel safer than the other.”²⁹⁶ Instead, he urges a critical interrogation of America as a whole, noting that these ideologies are not necessarily indicative of the South but of the very fabric of American society. Though this is just one example, it helpfully demonstrates the ways in which a Southern queer identity, as inhabited by both queers of color and white queers, calls attention to the disparity of the nation’s guise by pointing out the violences and injustices that occur in backyards across the United States, Southern or otherwise. This can violate the fragile condition of peace and safety the nation puts forward by scapegoating the South. As troublemaker, killjoy, and affect alien, they disrupt the promise of happiness from the nation that longs to distance itself from its “backward” Southern half.²⁹⁷ In turn, the Southern queer killjoy contains the potentiality to expose the systemic violences that rupture liberal bubbles across the nation who would otherwise imagine these as purely regional violence.

Deep Fried (Dis)Identifications: Queer Temporality, Counterpublics, and Potentiality

As I suggested above, the Southern queer stands as a subject who, through their fondness for bad objects, has improperly orientated themselves toward the American South. Here, in turning toward the region the Southern queer fails to adhere to contemporary and often homonationalist scripts of happiness and paths toward the “good

²⁹⁶ Arceneaux, “The South Is A Terrifying Place For Gay People (Just Like the Rest of America): But It's Also the Most Fun,”

²⁹⁷ Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” 39.

life.” Thus, I suggested that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may exist as killjoys in that they are troubling narratives and affects commonly associated with the Southern United States and, in turn, expose the fallacy of the scripts they are rejecting. This positioning, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as disrupting and killing the joy of happiness scripts, in turn produces queerness in the American South as a happily queer alternative counterpublic.

In his book *Publics and Counterpublics* Michael Warner analyzes notions of the public and the private.²⁹⁸ Publics, he notes, are essential facts of our social landscapes, often functioning as an invisible background of American life, that shape self-understanding and social space.²⁹⁹ Though imagined, publics have real consequences and its power comes from “its intelligibility across cultural, political, and economic landscapes of everyday living.”³⁰⁰ Through his discussion of publics, and the variety of their manifestations, Warner argues, there is a particularly dominant public sphere, national heterosexual culture, that “operates as the horizon of official public sphere.”³⁰¹ This dominant public, by definition, “can take their discourse pragmatics and their

²⁹⁸ Sarah Steele, “Performing Utopia: Queer Counterpublics and Southerners on New Ground,” in *A Critical Inquiry Into Queer Utopias*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 131-147.

²⁹⁹ Jessica Blaustein, “How Publics Matter: A Handbook for Alternative World-Making,” in *American Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2004): 171-81.
<http://www.jstor.org/jpllnet.sfsu.edu/stable/40068220>. 172.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 176.

lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy.”³⁰² As Nancy Fraser has observed, Warner notes, “when public discourse is understood only as a ‘single, comprehensive, overarching public,’ members of subordinated groups ‘have no arena for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies.’”³⁰³ In response, Fraser suggests that members of “subordinated groups —women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.”³⁰⁴ Fraser calls these “subaltern counterpublics” that are “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”³⁰⁵ Borrowing from Fraser’s counterpublics, Warner conceptualizes queer counterpublics. A counterpublic, he notes, “maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.”³⁰⁶ Queer counterpublics, in their subordinate status, experience friction as they are “demarcated from the distinctly dominant public and characterized by their shared

³⁰² Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” in *Public Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2002,

www.davidtinapple.com/comaff/14.1warner.pdf. 88.

³⁰³ Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” 85.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 87.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 85.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 86.

membership and discourse.”³⁰⁷ However, as a counterpublic of sexuality, queer counterpublics offer an “alternative to heteronormativity and an altered discourse of acceptable sexual standards.”³⁰⁸ Therefore, perhaps it is easy to imagine Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as inhabiting and constituting an alternative counterpublic sphere considering they are renegotiating dominant, often white, heteronormative publics. However, similar to the ways in which I noted above that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color disrupt both hetero- and homonormative scripts of happiness, I move to suggest that a Southern queer counterpublic is an alternative counterpublic that is also, simultaneous to its position outside of dominant heterosexual norms, positioned as counter to national LGBT publics and politics. Southern queer counterpublics hold the potentiality of engaging in transformations of lifeworlds, not “merely replications of the status quo.”³⁰⁹ As Matthew Chin notes in “Making Queer and Trans of Color Counterpublics: Disability, Accessibility, and the Politics of Inclusion,” the process of constructing modes of stranger sociability, as Warner notes that counterpublics are ‘counter’ in their reimaginings of stranger sociability,

is particularly significant for QTPOC because they are often passed over, expelled from or granted only provisional membership within dominant publics (Giwa &

³⁰⁷ Steele, “Performing Utopia,” 133.

³⁰⁸ Steele, “Performing Utopia,” 134.

³⁰⁹ Matthew Chin, “Making Queer and Trans of Color Counterpublics,” in *Affilia* 33, no. 1 (2018): 18.

Greensmith, 2012; Ware, 2010; White, 2013). By creating their own counterpublics through practices of accessibility, QTPOC... are thus building their own modes of belonging in a broader context that devalues their lived existence and realities.³¹⁰

Southern queer counterpublics thus offer an alternative to heterosexuality, mainstream understandings of queer subjectivities, and reimaginings in relation to queer geographies.

A Southern queer counterpublic is deployed through queer uses of time and space. J. Jack Halberstam's "Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geography" offers the uses of queer time and space, queer temporalities, to engage in a conversation about queer counterculture's existence in places otherwise imagined to be as devoid of queerness.³¹¹ Here, Halberstam states, queer space, "describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics."³¹² Thus, through Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color's creation of queer counterpublics within the South, they not only disrupt the rhetorics of heterosexuality inherently present in the nation at large, as well as homonormative affinities to geography, but may also disrupt the ways in which the South exists in the nation. As such, Southern queer counterpublics and their subjects agitate the rhetoric of the South as inherently unsafe to queer people and queer and trans people of color and disrupt the erasure of queer Southern communities.³¹³ Thus, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may envision themselves in relation to the region

³¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

³¹¹ Halberstam, "Queer Temporality," 1.

³¹² Halberstam, "Queer Temporality," 6.

³¹³ WUSSY TV, "Queers of ATL."

differently than the national and cultural imaginary suggests, allowing an alternative, queerer relation to regional space.³¹⁴ In turn, these Southern queer and queer and trans of color temporalities and counterpublics that reimagine queer relationships to space present the potential to disrupt preconceived ideologies of queer flight and, perhaps, metronormativity.³¹⁵ This is not to say, of course, that queer people in the South don't also participate in metronormative migrations. For example, some of the folks I interviewed were located in Atlanta, a major metropolitan space in the Southeast, as an alternative to their perhaps more rural or suburban upbringings. However, Southern queer counterpublics, produced through queer uses of time and space, grant us the ability to come to recognize the South as a region of complexities, complete with a multitude of voices, lived experience, and identification.

I have demonstrated throughout this project that the Southern United States has long been understood and characterized through its assumed regional distinctiveness. In turn, it is often assumed that the folks who either reside in, or are from, the South have some degree of regional identity and affiliation. While this is certainly not true of every Southern resident, I have become increasingly interested in regional identity and affiliation due to the fact, as I noted in chapter three, that many of my respondents, both queer people of color and white queers, in my research identified explicitly as Southern queer.

³¹⁴ Halberstam. "Queer Temporality," 1.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

The search for a distinct regional identity in the American South is, of course, no new phenomenon. In fact, the very question of quantifiable and certifiable regional identity has been central to much of Southern Studies. John Reed's *Southerners: The Social Psychology of Sectionalism*, perhaps the pinnacle work for Southern regional identity, provides a space wherein one can think through Southern subjectivities and identity negotiation in the region. For Reed, Southern identity does not have to hinge particularly on residence or geography, but serves "as a reference group, a cognitive entity that people use to orient themselves."³¹⁶ Thus, he finds that identity for his respondents is two-fold, equally working both as a self-designation and as an identity designated by others. Southern identity formation, for self-identified Southerners, is equal part thinking of oneself as a Southerner, feeling close to other Southerners, leading to a sense of identification with the regional group as well as the importance of non-Southerners for identity.³¹⁷ For many, the regional Southern identity hinged on having the counter identity of non-Southern, both as a mode of distinguishing as well as the careful attention to ways in which the way non-Southerners viewed them. As Reed and his respondents see it, regional affiliation is related to both regional identification and regional consciousness. Therefore, regional affiliation is influenced by non-Southern

³¹⁶ John Shelton Reed, "Who am I?": Regional Affiliation," in *Southerners, the Social Psychology of Sectionalism*, Institute for Research in Social Science Monograph Series, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). 11.

³¹⁷ Reed, "Who am I?": Regional Affiliation," 15.

ideologies.³¹⁸ Similarly, conversations around regional identity and affiliation must take into account the making of the image of the Southerner. The creation and maintenance of regional consciousness and the Southern stereotype is heavily influenced by first-hand experience with regional groups, through family and community, as well as a heavy influence from mass media.³¹⁹

Despite Reed's best efforts, it is clear that a distinct regional identity is not actually quantifiable and both regional distinction and subsequent identity category are purely manufactured. Further, Reed's work fails to take into account the race or sexuality of his Southern correspondents, effectively rendering regional identity both white and heterosexual. However, being unable to neatly package and define a Southern regional identity does not mean that the category is without materiality. Additionally, his disengagement with race and sexuality in relation to a Southern regional identity does not mean that queer and queer and trans folks of color do not identify as Southern. As such, it still means something to identify as a Southerner and it still means something to be identified as a Southerner. Regardless of the creation of the region and identity within the imaginary, these categories are still being deployed by Southerners and non-Southerners alike. This, of course, echoes Donna Jo Smith's assertion, "...yes, it still means *something* to be queer and it still means *something* to be from the South or to identify as

³¹⁸ Ibid., 26.

³¹⁹ John Shelton Reed, "What is a Southerner?": Regional Consciousness," in *Southerners, the Social Psychology of Sectionalism*, Institute for Research in Social Science Monograph Series, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 28.

‘southern.’ That we find it difficult to answer *what* in any conclusive sense does not undermine the effects these identities have in the world.”³²⁰ Understanding the deployment of these categories, with the material realities of these manufactured understandings of identity in mind, leads me to ponder the potentialities of identifying as a Southern queer subject.

It is true that a regional identity and affiliation is perhaps unquantifiable. Southernness and Southern queerness mean explicitly different identifications and affiliations for folks across various intersections of identity and lived experience. Though the standard understanding of regional affiliation within the American South, as it exists in the cultural imaginary, renders particular images of the region and its affiliates, engaging with Southern queer temporalities, counterpublics, and improper orientations holds the potentiality of reimagining the regional space of the American South and subsequent identifications. Similarly, in problematizing an essentialist understanding of queer identity in the South, it allows us to excavate the malleability of a Southern queer identification.

Perhaps it is most helpful to think about a identification as Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as a disidentifactory relationship.³²¹ In “Performing

³²⁰ Smith, “Queering the South,” 371.

³²¹ José Esteban Muñoz, “Performing Disidentifications,” in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1.

Disidentifications,” José Muñoz offers the concept of disidentifications as a mode of remaking a world full of queer possibility.³²² Disidentification, he notes, may serve as a survival technique for queer people of color and other minority subjects that works simultaneously inside and outside of the impossible conditions of the dominant sphere.³²³ In the Southern queer subject’s queering of time and space, thus queering regional affiliation and identification, enacting a disidentifactory relationship allows not only a disruption of what the nation’s imaginary of the South is, but also the tangible effects of this imaginary. Through disidentification and the creation of a counterpublic sphere, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are enabled to inhabit the seemingly counter identities of Southern and queer, as expanded upon in chapter three. By disidentifying and enacting queer time and space, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color do not assimilate to the dominant culture’s concept of the American South. Instead, by working within the South, they are able to value the local and enact structural change. These disidentifying subjects are able to hold onto the South and breathe new life into it and thus, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may desire the South, but desire it with a difference.³²⁴ Finally, while there is no totally unified, generalized

³²² Muñoz, “Performing Disidentifications,” 3.

³²³ Muñoz, “Performing Disidentifications,” 7.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12, 15.

Southern queer subject, their disidentification allows for a utopianism that “looks into the past to critique the present and helps imagine the future.”³²⁵

Through José Muñoz’s framework of disidentification, I argue the queer Southern subject to be disidentifying in order to remake a world full of queer possibility.³²⁶ As noted, Muñoz offers disidentification as a survival technique that works both in and outside of the impossible conditions of the dominant sphere.³²⁷ It is important to note, then, just who or what Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are disidentifying with. In this scenario, I suggest that the dominant sphere is dominant ideologies that circulate the South, both from heteronormative and homonormative publics. As these publics construct Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as victims of the South, they must interface with the South, and these publics, in different ways. As Muñoz notes, “Minoritarian subjects need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own senses of self . . . must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates.”³²⁸ I suggest that Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color then disidentify with these preconceived notions generated through dominant culture and ideology. Further, I also suggest that disidentification, through a Southern queer counterpublic, creates the Southern queer identity as an

³²⁵ Ibid., 25.

³²⁶ Ibid., 3.

³²⁷ Ibid., 7.

³²⁸ Ibid., 5, 6.

“identity-in-difference” that is formatted by the subject’s failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere which, as Muñoz notes, is predicated “on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere.”³²⁹

Perhaps a Southern queer disidentification with the American South is a means of reimagining Southernness and a regional identity or affiliation. As Muñoz notes,

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.³³⁰

Take for example, E. Patrick Johnson’s work on black gay men in the South wherein he notes that the men he interviewed often draw upon “performance of ‘southernness’—for example, politeness, coded speech, religiosity—to instantiate themselves as ‘legitimate’ members of southern and black culture while, at the same time, deploying these very codes to establish and build friendship networks and find life/sexual partners.”³³¹ Here, performing particular modes of Southernness, in perhaps what may otherwise be largely associated with Southern backwardness and therefore disassociated with black queerness, scrambles and reconceptualizes the potentialities of black queer Southern living. In turn,

³²⁹ Ibid., 6

³³⁰ Muñoz, “Performing Disidentifications,” 31.

³³¹ E. Patrick Johnson, “Introduction,” 3.

this moves to destabilize the universalizing of “Southernness.” Recycling and recoding meaning, in the case of the American South, certainly does not mean an absolution of the materialities of Southern living. Southernness, like any identity, is and will remain impure, as it “can be and often is problematic.”³³² However, recoding and recycling the South queerly through a disidentification framework necessitates, as E. Patrick Johnson notes, “a reconsideration of the South as ‘backward’ and ‘repressive,’ when clearly gay community building and desire emerge simultaneously within and against southern culture.”³³³

E. Patrick Johnson’s oral history work with Black gay men in the South problematizes the idea that the South is inherently always hostile to, or devoid of, Black gay men. He playfully, with his truly Southern prose and colloquialisms, disrupts and disidentifies with the fabrics of both Southern culture and ideologies surrounding it. Johnson’s informants and personal narratives present no sleight of hand. Instead *Sweet Tea* lays bare the complexities of the American South’s relationship to race and sexuality. Though the book ends sadly, with Johnson describing the murder of two close friends who are both black gay men in the South, what would seem to reify narratives of Southern hostility, the book serves to complicate narratives and demonstrates that “there

³³² Joe Edward Hatfield, “Southerners and the City: Queer Archives, Backward Temporalities, and the Emergence of AIDS,” Order No. 10126804, (Syracuse University, 2016). <https://search-proquest-com.jp11net.sfsu.edu/docview/1808509718?accountid=13802>.

³³³ E. Patrick Johnson, “Introduction,” 3.

is no master narrative of southern Black gay experience.”³³⁴ Therefore, oral histories serve as a powerful tool for animating disidentifications, particularly for Black queer southerners in this case, and positions Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as sites of knowledge production.

In “Black Geographic possibilities: On a Queer Black South,” Latoya E. Eaves proposes a Black Geographies framework in order to, as Katherine McKittrick notes, “engage with a narrative that locates and draws on black histories and black subjects in order to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic.”³³⁵ Here, Eaves is particularly interested in “Queer Black South geographies” that pays attention to “both the embodied experiences and material realities” that seek to dislodge homogenous understandings of Black queer engagement with space.³³⁶ Her work employs narratives from Black queer women, often unrepresented against the backdrop of overwhelming studies on white gay men, in the South as she notes, “Given that queer Black space-making occurs within different relegations of place and power, it is important to centralize narratives that produce knowledge of disrupted spatial normativities and simplified understandings of Black subjects.”³³⁷ Though Eaves chooses

³³⁴ E. Patrick Johnson, “Epilogue: Why This Story Now?,” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 547.

³³⁵ Latoya E. Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities: On a Queer Black South,” in *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017):, doi:10.1353/sgo.2017.0007. 85.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 88

to highlight on respondent's story, Rebeca, it provides a crucial information on "transformative spatial relations and practices."³³⁸ Rebeca's "insular, rural and white racialized geography" proves challenging, due to its lack of racial diversity. However, she "wholeheartedly regards the region as her home."³³⁹ Notions of home and community, Eaves notes, are further influenced by religion. She notes that structural components of Black Geographies should draw on Black religious practices, as "the Black Church has been a cornerstone of Black mobilization and a hub of radical social change."³⁴⁰ Much like Johnson notes in his work, queerness has long been entangled in Black religiosity, regardless of reified media perceptions of the Black Church as a site of pure homophobia.³⁴¹ What these narratives conceal, however, though Eaves notes that Rebeca's specific relationship with religion is tenuous, is religion nevertheless remains a prominent fixture in the lives of many LGBTQ Southerners.

I highlight both the oral history work of E. Patrick Johnson and Latoya E. Eaves' "Queer Black Geographies" as they provide particular disidentifactory interventions, specifically for Black queer Southerners. The work of both authors provides disruptions, interventions, and re-narrations of the role of the spatial South in specific relation to race and sexuality. Therefore, in their disidentifactory frameworks, I find both works to be

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Eaves, "Black Geographic Possibilities," 90.

³⁴¹ Eaves, "Black Geographic Possibilities," 91.

employing queer uses of time, space, and counterpublics in order to provide necessary interventions into narratives of the South that seek to dispel or erase Black queer Southern sexualities. Similarly, what these projects each have in common is their intentional positioning of Black LGBTQ folks as crucial sites of knowledge production.

Through disidentifications, queer uses of time and space, and queer counterpublics, we are able to position Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as pivotal sites of cultural knowledge production and commentary on the queer American South. Here, through their lived experiences, materialities, and situated knowledges, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are able to renegotiate the boundaries of affiliation, identification, and spatial location. As Patricia Hill Collins notes in “Black Feminist Epistemology,” in relation to the importance of lived experience to Black feminist thought, “knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate.”³⁴² In a similar vein, I suggest that it is through highlighting the importance of the lived experience of queer and queer and trans Southerners of color, alongside queer temporalities and counterpublics, that we may begin to nuance affectual ties to both national consciousness and the physical South in conversations around queer and QTPOC bodies who themselves can create “independent

³⁴² Ibid., 257.

self-definitions and self-valuations” alternatively, producing distinctive standpoints due to power relations.³⁴³

Conclusion

This project is certainly not a comprehensive representation of Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color’s relationship to orientation and identification. However, it is through this work that I hope to engage in more complex conversation about the spatial relationship to queer identity and subjectivity of queer and queer and trans people of color in the American South. This chapter has expanded upon the circulation of negative narrations of the Southern United States by focusing keenly on the role of emotion or negative affectual circulations in relation to the region. Here, I was particularly interested in the power and operation of emotion, particularly residual feelings related to Southern histories, shaping the perception, and perhaps geography, of the Southern United States, rendering the region in particular ways within the sociocultural imaginary. Specifically, I was interested in residual and sticky feelings that continue to produce images of the American South as inherently backwards and dangerous, specifically for queer people and queer and trans people of color. Similarly, through the sociality of emotion, I was interested in the ways in which these affectual signs positioned the South as threatening or injurious for the nation.

³⁴³ Ibid., 252.

In thinking through affect's role in relation to the American South I became keenly interested in the operation of happiness. I was particularly interested in the ways in which the South, and the Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color, are, as subjects, often presented as outside of, or at odds with, happiness as an affect and subsequent life path. Here, I detailed the ways in which, according to heteronormative and homonormative cultural scripts of happiness, the Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color's object choice of the American South positioned them as failing to correctly orient to the proper pathways. Therefore, I suggested that they are not only deviating from heterosexuality, and their object choices, but also deviate from national lesbian and gay narratives. In turn, continuing to think alongside the work of Sara Ahmed, I became curious about the potentialities and what it would mean to orient toward, and perhaps invest in, the unhappiness scripts assigned to queer and queer and trans folks of color in the South. As such, I became interested in what it can mean to be a subject who is happily queer without good taste investing in unenjoyable objects.³⁴⁴ This, I argued, allowed us to think critically about the conventional scripts of happiness. In this vein, I offered Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as killjoys who, through their "bad" object choice and "unhappiness" expose the use of bad feeling, particularly as it relates to heteronormative and homonormative orientations to the "right" path, as well as disrupt the image of the non-Southern United States as liberal, welcoming, and safe.

³⁴⁴ Halberstam, "The Brandon Archive," 34.

With the above in mind I began to think through the ways in which, through bad feeling and orientation, Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may be exercising queer counterpublics and temporalities. Here, through Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, I discussed the ways in which Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color are not only positioned as deviating from national heteronormative culture as a dominant sphere, but simultaneously positioned as distant from urban homonormative cultural imaginaries. Through the use of queer counterpublics, these subjects renegotiate both hetero- and homonormative publics.

Through the deployment of queer time and space Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color move to agitate rhetorics of the South in relation to queer subjectivities. In turn, this agitation allows a reimagining and reorientation of the South as a geographic and cultural space. In closing, I thought more explicitly about the role of identity and identification in particular. Here, I began by detailing the ways in which regional identity and affiliation are mapped through Southern studies, specifically the ways in which regional consciousness work through narratives produced through both Southern and non-Southern subjects. Though tracing regional identity and affiliation is not necessarily quantifiable, as John Shelton Reed's findings note, they retain materiality. By making an intervention into Southern studies', through centering queer identity and subjectivity with Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color, I began to think about the ways in which Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color may be enacting a disidentifactory relationship. I suggest that thinking alongside Muñoz's theory of

disidentifications allows us to remake a world of queer possibility. Here, I suggest that there is the possibility of disidentifying with preconceived notions of both the American South and cultural imaginaries of queerness. Through the work of E. Patrick Johnson and Latoya E. Eaves, I posed situating Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color as key producers of knowledge as a mode of enacting a disidentificatory framework. Their work through oral histories and *Queer Black Geographies* highlights the particular narratives of Black queer Southerners' relationship to race, sexuality, and Southern space. Here, lived experiences, materialities, and situated knowledges, can allow Southern queer and queer and trans folks of color the potentialities of renegotiating the boundaries of affiliation, identification, and spatial location. These histories, past, present, and future, are often hidden and risk loss without such interventions.³⁴⁵ Reading the South queerly acknowledges the region's deep histories while pushing for understandings of the South as a complex region that houses vibrant energies giving life to its present. Perhaps then we may renegotiate oft imagined nomadic identities and to be able to perhaps reimagine the region covered by kudzu.

³⁴⁵ Hain, "We Are Here For You," 165.

Conclusion

As a queer person born and raised in the Southeastern United States, this project is very near to my heart. In part, this was motivated by my own attempts at trying to understand and negotiate my relationship to space and place in the American South. Growing up and living in a town nestled at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains felt, for most of my life, isolating and suffocating. Most of my years were spent driving around aimlessly at night, listening to music and longing for a future where the cow pastures of my hometown had long disappeared from my rearview mirror. As such, I had spent most of my life performing mental and emotional gymnastics in order to distance myself from Georgia, ashamed by the often stereotypical images, sounds, and smells of small town Southern living. I spent years ridding myself of anything that could expose my Southern roots, which might explain why people often ask me, "If you're from the South, why don't you have a Southern accent?" I cursed the soundtrack of summer grasshoppers and cicadas and daydreamed about trading in their sounds for the steady hum of traffic and nightlife in a far off, distant city. I had created a mental map of spaces I longed to live in, ones that I felt would nurture my queer identity instead of making me feel alienated. New York, perhaps. Los Angeles, maybe. San Francisco had even crossed my mind a time or two. In 2015, I jumped at the opportunity to put as many miles as geographically possible between myself and the Southeastern United States, what I had known as home for twenty-two years. I remember watching the South's landscape grow smaller from my airplane window, eventually disappearing beneath me.

Though a sentimental person, never in my life had I considered that moving across the country to California would awaken in me a desperate longing and heartache for small and winding back roads, sitting on the shore of the Chattahoochee River during the humid summer, and the smell of Fall lingering on the trees and in the air on the first of October. This deep-seated ache only grew larger throughout this project, as I continued to research, write about, and yearn for the space that at once felt so close and so distant, so troubled and so welcoming, so good and so bad. Writing about the American South far removed from the region often left me feeling hypocritical, disingenuous, and distant. What did it mean that I was thinking about and producing these conversations about Southern queer living as a queer living so far from the South? How could I think through and alongside these feelings?

Just down the street from where I grew up sits a pay what you can farmer's stand, take a right on Hickory Road and a sharp left onto Stringer Road and you'll arrive. The stand is small and quaint, filled with seasoned fruits and vegetables grown on the farm directly behind it. In the back right corner sits a lockbox that serves as the cashier, relying on the honor system for payment. Amongst the fruits and vegetables sits several bunches of sunflowers from the expansive field just to the left of the stand. Back home in the summer of 2017, both to visit and conduct interviews, I found myself driving by the stand and sunflower fields on my way back from interviewing a close friend who had volunteered to participate in my research. In this interview my friend had made a comment that she felt a stubborn duty to stay in the South as a queer person. For the

majority of this project, I had felt a strange contradictory tension being a person who had left the South yet was producing work about the queer South. However, driving home after this interview, with the yellow, green, and brown of the sunflowers filling my passenger side window, I came to realize my work was also in part a product of stubborn determination. In my “coming home by going away,” I had felt a stubborn responsibility to both the South and the Southern queer folks in the region, keeping both in more nuanced conversations about queer space and place regardless of my geographic positioning.³⁴⁶ Though I seemingly inhabited a contradictory position, I nevertheless brought Georgia with me, and it is in that regard that this project is deeply indebted to the Southern queer folks who opened their hearts and homes to me. Without them this project would not have been possible.

My personal experiences growing up in the Southern United States as a queer non-binary person are, of course, unique. Further, a Southern queer identity and subjectivity is not universal, nor do I have a desire to be able to package one as such, as each subject’s experience is negotiated by complex intersecting identities.³⁴⁷ However, this project began with an interest in the relationship between the American South and queer identity, as well as what it could mean to be queer in the American South. As this

³⁴⁶ Carolyn Leste Law. “Introduction,” in *Out in the South*, (Temple University Press, 2001), 3.

³⁴⁷ Donna Jo Smith, “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 370.

project has shown, the South has come to be understood in particular ways within the cultural and gay imaginaries that often effectively render the region unsafe and inhospitable for queer people and queer and trans people of color. Subsequently, Southern queer bodies and experiences are often made invisible. As such, this project sought to provide an intervention into the often narrowly cast narratives of not only the South as a region, but common scripts of queer Southern living as well. This project thought through and alongside popular constructions of the South and looked to queer and queer and trans folks of color living in the South to negotiate interventions. As Southern queer subjects continue to be looked over in both southern studies and gay and lesbian studies, this project turned toward queer theory to think about Southern queer temporalities, counterpublics, and modes of (dis)identifications. In “Queering the South,” Donna Jo Smith notes, “Our projects will be stronger if we consider our subjects’ *relationships* to popular definitions of the South and inquire about *their* definitions of *southern...*”³⁴⁸ As such, in hopes at expanding and problematizing understandings of the American South, this project employed affect theory in order to think critically about the role of emotions for both thinking about the South and queer people and queer people of color who turn toward the region. It is my hope that this project served as a means of continuing to think critically about the particularities of sexual geographies, the spaces we commonly align queer bodies with, as well as interrogate the narratives commonly

³⁴⁸ Donna Jo Smith, “Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity,” in *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 382.

associated with the American South. In its barest of bones, through this project I hoped to engage in more nuanced conversations about the relationship between the South and queer subjectivity and identity.

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