

Embracing Eroticism in Black Boy Joy: An exploratory study of Black boys' homoerotic friendships

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Heriberto Palacio III (left), Stephen Muldrow (center), and Brandon Reid (right).

Abstract

This paper discusses the intimate and erotic tensions of my brotherly friendships. Audre Lorde's writing on the erotic made me (the author) consider my own personal relationships with two men that are friends but feel like more than that. Brandon and Stephen are two Black men that I met in college and have remained connected to today. I am always curious as to the intimacy and erotic behaviors we engage in that can be deemed "sexual", but I argue that there is a homoerotic nature to these relationships that, in the light of Lorde's text, is a source of knowledge of each other's feelings, thoughts, and existence (bodily and spiritual). I explore the terrain and teetering boundaries of our eroticism and the deeper knowledge, intuition, and understanding of its dynamics. I go on to explain how eroticism in these relationships help us forge more meaningful connections that grows all three of us as individuals. This project utilizes an autoethnographic methodology with a theoretical framework rooted in Black feminisms to do a close analysis of the platonic bond between each of us respectively and the three of us as a whole-polygamous unit. This paper hopes to divulge the much-needed scholarship and insight of platonic relationships between Black men and de-sexualize the homoerotic knowledge-power that is contained in those expressions between us.

Introduction

Black feminist theory and methodologies have always been such a difficult thing for me to grapple with. As a queer–Black man, I’m always aware and self-conscious of my existence within academia, which in extension, makes me even more insecure about my engagement with “rigor”. I use quotes not to simply mock the notion but to also critically de-center this word as a main descriptor of impactful academic scholarship. Ironically, my Blackness and queerness are the very things that deterred me from Black feminisms and Queer theories at first and led me to chase the “rigorous” ways of research and writing. I feared my identity was too close to the methods and theories of Black feminisms and Queer theory to provide any substantial “rigorous” contribution from myself to academia (whoever or whatever that is). This is clearly trauma inflicted from the “rigorous” approach of not personalizing the research to your own experience. Over my years in graduate school to now, I have been grappling with what sort of scholar I was and the methods and theories I would engage with to create scholarly work. Recently, I have revisited Black feminisms in my *Feminist Thought & Theories* course at Texas Tech University and have felt revitalized. I will now venture into scholarly work that is built with the stones and mortar of Black feminists before me. I will de-center traditional “rigorous” work (as Audre Lorde would not have me use the master’s tools) and will adopt Black feminist methods and theories to deepen my knowledge expression. I share my journey and exploratory findings to deepen our understanding through cultivated and intuitive ways of knowing. It is with this rejuvenated lens that I bring you the following scholarship. I would like to my brothers Stephen and Brandon for loving me, supporting me, and being a personal source of emotional information that has made me a better scholar and a better man. It has taken tremendous vulnerability to write like this, so I thank you (the reader) for being present with this text. Let us begin.

Words and phrases that devalue (and empower) the Erotic: *bestly, lustful, savage, demonized, filthy, disgusting, whorish, selfish, lack of morals, unstable, fetish, confusion, trivial, sensational, chaos, bodily-knowledge, irrational, of the flesh, pornographic, not realistic, false power*

Eroticism—the very word drags thoughts of the flesh, sex, lust, and desire to my forefront of thought (it may be just the same for you). That is until I came across the writing of Audre Lorde. In *Uses of Erotic: The Erotic as Power** (1996), Lorde describes the erotic as “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female [and male or non-binary] and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (Lorde, p. 53). This resource has been ostracized and demonized by western society and now lives in the social constructed shadows of the pornographic flesh. Lorde warns us that succumbing to the sensation of the erotic alone is only an abuse of this power and leads us to the pornographic displays of eroticism. To say it plainly—Erotic vs. Pornographic: pornography represents the suppression of true feeling and is the direct denial of the erotic. Pornography emphasizes sensation without

feeling and I believe what Lorde identifies here is that there is a complex relationship of intuition, physicality, emotions, and psychic resonance that entangles itself with sensation that can be sexualized by those who seek sensation alone in eroticism.

The erotic is so feared, and so often regulated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of” (Lorde, p. 57).

It is important to note how Lorde points to how the erotic is not just a communal relationship, but also a personal one. The more attuned we are to our lives, we will ask—no—we will *demand* that our (internal and external) needs be met, or there will be resurgence. The erotic is not feared based solely on its sexualized overtone, it is also feared for the potential personal power it gives Black women (and beyond). This internalized fear has ripped us from the all-important power of the erotic and what it can do for us.

This paper will explore the intimate and erotic tensions of my brotherly friendships. Audre Lorde’s writing on the erotic pushed me to consider my own personal relationships with two men that are friends but feel like more than that. Brandon and Stephen are two Black men that I met in college and have remained connected to today. I am always curious as to the intimacy and erotic behaviors we engage in that can be deemed “sexual”, but I argue that there is a homoerotic nature to these relationships that, in the light of Lorde’s text, is a source of knowledge of each other’s feelings, thoughts, and existence (bodily and spiritual). I also seek to explain the terrain of the teetering boundaries of our eroticism and the deeper knowledge, intuition, and understanding that eroticism in these relationships forges a more meaningful connection that grows all three of us as individuals. This project will utilize an autoethnographic narrative methodology with a theoretical framework rooted in Black feminisms to do a close analysis of this platonic bond between each of us respectively and the three of us as a whole-polygamous unit. This paper hopes to divulge the much-needed scholarship and insight of platonic relationships between Black men and de-sexualize the homoerotic knowledge-power that is contained in those expressions between us. As a queer Black man, I am accessing my erotic power to create a way of knowing to heal systemic toxicity in Black masculinity performances in American society. That may sound like a far-off goal, but I believe starting from this place feels like the right step in that direction.

Stephen

To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a Kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us...[t]he need for sharing deep feeling is a human need (Lorde, p. 58).

To begin with Stephen, it would be best to start with how we first met. Now when I say “first met”, I am not just referring the first time we were acquainted with each other as people often do through simple introductions. I say first met as in the first intimate moment we shared together that solidified our bond as lifelong friends and later, brothers. Of course, this is subjective to my point of view and this moment could differ for Stephen himself. Stephen and I shared awkward introductions in a group setting at our college (*THEE* Tennessee State University—TSU) band camp, known as *Pre-Drill*. He played tenor saxophone and I played clarinet (these instrument sections of the band are a part of a larger sub-group—*woodwinds*). Through introducing ourselves via our high school lineage and city-state affiliation, we discovered we both attended high schools in Atlanta, GA (or at least what one would call the *Atlanta metro area*). He was a bit taller than me, caramel complexion, muscular build, wide-broad shoulders, lean runner's legs, thick-large hands, and a smile with twinkling eyes that compelled you to interact. He had a stuttering speech impediment that added charm to the way he would excitedly talk and horseplay around with me. These touch points did not necessarily draw us near one another in a deep sense but did give us the foundation for the bonding to come.

We occasionally hung out and then discovered our mutual interest in anime. This led us to have “anime nights” in my dorm room. We would just kick back and binge-watch different anime together until we had to retire for classes the next day. We kept up this routine with no drastic changes in our relationship until one evening, Stephen came banging on my door with feverous desperation. I was startled and opened the door and was taken aback by what I saw. The usually bright-eyed and smiling Stephen was now a disheveled pile of tears and blubbering sobs breaking down in the hallway of the dorm. He had a half-drunken bottle of clear liquor gripped in his hand and all he could muster up was murmurs and whimpering as he saw me take in his presence. My instincts activated and I grabbed him and pull him into my dorm room and shut the door. Liquor was illegal to have on campus and I didn't want him to draw attention to that with him practically crumbling in the very public dorm hallway. Stephen stumbled in smelling of sweat and the light scent of alcohol on his breath as he continued to sob and attempted to form words. He fumbled out gibberish and could barely form a sentence. My heart was racing, but I grabbed his shoulders and looked him in the eyes and said “Stephen, its okay. This is a safe space bro. What's wrong? Tell me”. He calms down a bit and then explained to me that a girl he was dating for a while in high school ended things with him and he was in a lot of pain. He was suffering what seemed like his first romantic heartbreak. I listened and comforted him as best I could, but at some point, he just erupted into a violent rage of tears and began to punch the wall. I grabbed him and hugged him while shouting “Stephen! Stop! Stop! Calm down man. I am here.

Hug me bruh. I am here.” At first, he was reluctant and fought out of my grip. I held onto him, feeling his muscles ripple under my hands and his breath was shallow and fast while trying to escape my embrace. He felt hot with rage to the point where it singed me in violent waves of pressure. I felt his grunting rumble deep in his chest and vibrated me as a result. I continued to hold him until he slowly began to calm himself. His breath started to slow. I felt it rhythmically begin to match my own. The heat from his body settled into a warm energy that wrapped around me—his arms were now wrapped around me as his head slid into the pocket of my shoulder and he gripped me tight. Not in the violent way as he was before, but in a cherishing pressure that just told me “Don’t let me go, please”. His sobbing became fainter in my ear as my shoulder was wet with his tears and breath. I felt how his body would lift and release breath as I held his back. We took a last breath together and parted from embrace. We made eye contact and I saw how reddened and wet his face was, but a glimmer of warmth returned to his eyes. We looked at one another what seemed like hours until he whispered, “Thank you, bruh”.

This moment (to me) was the moment where I engaged in a bodily knowledge of homoeroticism. Of course, in that moment, I had no idea what was happening. But the vividness of that memory lives within my skin. I still feel the warmth of his touch and the vibrations of his breath as we embraced. The key to the erotic knowledge here is not just the bodily tension and sensation that could be read as borderline sexual. The focus here is how our bodies began to adjust to one another. My body sensed the tension and rage of his body and proceeded to calm it. Utilizing steady breathing and a comforting but tight embrace, my body was able to tap into Stephen’s body and lull it of stress. It is not a one-sided transaction. This is not a delivery *from*, but an exchange *between*. The pressure of his feelings reached me too, and I understood his pain without words and my embrace matched that energy output. In that brief moment, I learned so much about Stephen that went beyond common hobbies and hometown bearings. I learned the temperature of his body. I learned the shape of his torso as my hands gripped him tightly. The way he draws breath. The scent of his natural musk and sweat that permeated off his stressed and pained body. I *felt* this knowledge.

This bond-forging moment established a baseline of erotic knowledge between us. Hugs became more frequent, vulnerable conversations became more casual, emotional expressions more fluid. We shared more moments of erotic intimacy that provided more knowledge between one another such as wrestling, cuddling, long embraces, bodies wrapped, tangled, and touching in one form or another. These intimate moments were homoerotic and instilled a knowledge of our relationship within our bodies and spirit. Our relationship was not just an abstracted verbal contract, it was a bodily knowing of one another.

My nicknames for Stephen were Stebbie (Stee-Bee) or Stephen Universe (after the charming animated series Steven Universe created by Rebecca Sugar). Other nicknames were: Fake-husband, Brudder (bruh-dur), Beautiful, Gorgeous, Big-Sexy.

Brandon

For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing (Lorde, p. 54).

To begin with Brandon, is to begin by untying a tangled knot of puzzles pieces with no reference provided. Brandon was always very guarded about himself. His default was usually to disengage and observe. Even within engagements where he was the center of attention, he would not be keen on too much intimacy, this included verbal or otherwise. Brandon was in no way a cold-hearted brother; he was just very protective of his energy and selective of his connections. So much so that our bond did not grow beyond the casual until many years later into our friendship. Much like Stephen, I met Brandon at TSU's *Pre-Drill*. He was tall, chocolate skin, lean body, and an elongated neck that really emphasized his chiseled face. My first impression of him was that he was a very smart and introverted guy with a knack for video games and sly jokes. He was also close friends with others I associated with at the time and those connections alone sustained us through most of the first few years of friendship.

Soon after graduation, we reconnected as professionals running the same circle of Museum administration. He was a budding Museum Educator at a museum down the street and I was working as administrator for the Exhibitions and Design department at a neighboring museum. As young Black men in predominately older white spaces, we found comfort in each other and began to talk more and hang out every now and again. I got another job in his home state, Michigan, and he saw me off with a night of beers and food at his local Nashville favorite *M.L. Rose Craft Beers & Burgers*. It was a beer-burger joint that I never frequented, but this was the time that I say I met Brandon (all over again I could say). We had such intimate conversations that night. We ended up having about six beers and were drunk with laughter by the end of it. A moment that really stuck out to me was when Brandon and I realized that we had a lot in common and we needed to be better friends to each other. I felt a deeper connection forged that evening. It was few days before I hit the road to my new job in Michigan, and that moment with Brandon, made it feel the upmost bitter-sweet. Brandon and I vowed to stay in touch, and we did just that.

The pinnacle moment that I wish to focus on in our friendship was a night out on the town in Nashville, TN. Brandon and I had a tradition, where we would go to three specific bars/clubs when we go out together. We determined through a knowledge of intuition and causality that this was the perfect formula for a successful night out together. It was our little ritual that we do together, and we would end our night is at a club called *Play*. This was a "gay" bar that had areas to dance, watch drag shows, or recuperate outside on the patio. Brandon, being a straight guy, enjoyed coming here because the dancefloor was always a lot of fun. Everyone dances their own way and is celebrated for enjoying themselves no matter if they were a "good" dancer or not. Every time we go, little by little, I think Brandon instinctively fell into the spirit of the dancefloor and danced his heart out more and more each time. It was one night here that he and I had an erotically intimate moment. Once again (as I repeat this often not only for the reader

but for myself as the author too), when I say erotic here, I do not mean in a sexually driven or romantic manner. The moment we shared was platonic, but deeply intertwined with erotic and physical connection. We were dancing on the dancefloor like we usually would. We were pretty inebriated at this point with drinks in our hand enjoying the dance floor. We had a colorful group around us dancing as well. I want to take note to describe them, because it really was what one would call “diverse” There were tall, big, wide, thin, chunky, white, Black, Asian, Latino, long hair, short haired, queer, straight, and everything in between! It felt good to just be in good energy. There was a felt energy in the air around us.

While enthralled in dancing, Brandon and I suddenly formed a synergetic connection. Throwback hits from when we grew up came on back-to-back and captivated us into an intertwined dance. Our bodies seemed to know what to do to the tunes blasting from the DJ. We locked into eye contact while we moved and expressed our bodies on the dance floor. Suddenly, we were transported to a world where it was just him and I. The dance floor expanded below us, and we entered a dimension that was just for us. Suddenly, the crowd around us naturally gave us the space we needed to expand *into* one another. I danced with flamboyant flare and mixture of calm-rhymical movements. It was a hefty-booty shake into a swaying vogue-ish parade of movements. Brandon started a bit more rigid but began to loosen up and dance more openly as the night progressed. His movements were articulate, yet smooth, and bursting with energy. A dip here and there and hyping each other up as we shared this physical expression together. Every now and again I witnessed the crowd around us watch in awe. We were dancing and expressing ourselves in completely different (sometimes even physically contradictory) ways, but we were in sync with one another. Our bodies were attuned to one another. My heart swelled with passion as we danced on and on for what seemed like hours, somehow never breaking eye contact all the while.

This is the moment I feel that Brandon and I understood each other. Not on a conscious way in one would say “I get you”. It was more about how our bodies became enveloped in one another as we danced. We physically spoke through our dance movements and communicated our passion to one another. The pure joy we both felt resonated the space around us and encapsulated us in a physical space alone in public. The way we locked eyes and saw one another. Not just in a physical sense, but also in a spiritual sense. I could see and feel Brandon’s physical energy around me. I could feel our exchange as we cascaded around one another in a flowing pattern of dance. Suddenly, the club lights flashed on, and we were forced back into reality. We collapsed into each other’s arms damp with sweat and hot with excitement. Breathing heavy from all that endless dancing, we just looked at each other and laughed. Brandon was never one for words like I was, but he didn’t need to say anything at that moment. I already knew what I needed to know.

Looking back at this moment with Brandon provides further insight into the homoeroticism of my close relationship with him. The physical synergy between us was an exchange of bodily knowledge. Our bodies communicated themselves to one another and learned from one another. The energy felt between us informed our souls of this divine connection and

moment. I could feel Brandon even though we didn't touch. The moment could be called romantic (it was in some regard), but it is not romantic in a sense that now my body and mind desired Brandon beyond platonic intimacy and vice versa for him as well. The erotic energy exchange did however forge a deeper connection between us that cultivated more intimate moments to follow. Brandon and I began to talk more about our feelings with one another and share our insecurities, moments of pain, and moments of hope. Hugs were more frequent, saying "I love you" was more routine now, and identifying points of connection became simpler. There are of course many other variables within our relationship that brought us to those points, but I recognize this moment at club *Play* as a definitive moment for us and our bodily knowledgebase. The eroticism of those moments did not sexualize them, it enhanced them beyond our own understanding as a way of knowing that allowed us to engage in higher forms of ourselves in our relationship as friends, and now, brothers.

My nickname for Brandon was Bran-Bran. The petiteness and repetition of it was an endearing factor for me. Other nicknames were: Zaddy-B, Brand-o (Bran-Dough), Beautiful, Baby Daddy, Pretty Boy.

Black Boy Joy

Before I continue with my narrative, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge what may be a touchy subject. The year 2020 brought a wild plethora of things, but the infamous star of the new decade was the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe and affected millions to indefinite amounts of people. Writing this today in 2022 still feels like it just happened yesterday. I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge that this was a trying moment for our species, and I do not diminish its impact when I mention it here. My heart goes out to those affected directly and indirectly from this impact.

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference (Lorde, p. 56).

Stephen, Brandon, and I have our own respective relationships with one another, but what is even more interesting is the polygamous bond shared between us. We were all connected indirectly, but this triad of brotherhood did not surface and solidify until a couple of years ago during a trying time in global history. The COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe and instilled fear into us. I took the time in quarantine to really consider the relationships I was forging and how to better pour into those I cared about. It began with me Facetiming (Apple iPhone's video calling system) Stephen and Brandon separately to check in and catch up on the strange new time we were in. Soon I talked to each of them daily until I suggested that we do a group Facetime. I had no idea at that moment, but that connection virtually created a triangular tether that was now a pillar in each of our lives. Before I knew it, we were scheduling a call for every Friday where the three of us would get on Facetime to talk, game, watch shows together, catch up on world news, and check in on one another as we voyaged into the unknown pandemic future. One night, I suggested we make a name for our group chat, and we came upon *Black Boy Joy*. It was a catchy mid-pandemic pet name at first, but 2 years later, it has now become a solidified and longstanding relationship for us. It is a haven of respite for us. Our bond was solid, but still found a way to be deepened through a moment that forged a bond more unbreakable than before (even virtually).

In late 2021, we were all used to living with the panic of the pandemic and life had a new normal. Stephen's birthday was coming up and Brandon and I, a few months before, planned secretly with Stephen's girlfriend at the time to fly out and surprise him for his birthday weekend. We were so excited to hang out together as a group. This was going to be the first time we did since college (as we never had isolated group hangouts like this together before without other parties being in the mix). The planning leading up to it was exciting for us. The three of us engaged in such a deep connection through Facetime, I personally was excited to just spend physical time with them. We could be able to just share physical space. I did not realize at the time, but I longed for this sharing of physical space (perhaps they did too). We don't necessarily need to touch, but my body wanted to feel the presence of their bodies (and I intuitively believe

their bodies did as well). My skin tingled with the thought of it. Looking back, I see that my erotic power was trying to tell me how much I needed this respite with my brothers. How anticipated my skin, my muscles, my heart, and my soul were for this reunion. Then, the day finally arrived.

Brandon and I landed in Raleigh, NC (the metro area Stephen lived nearest) and took a rideshare (the millennial version of a taxi) to Stephen's place. His girlfriend snuck us in, and we surprised him with bags in our hands and medical face masks on our face from being in the rideshare. He was in complete shock. Brandon and I on the other hand, spent most of the day traveling and were worn out and starving. Stephen was smiling ear-to-ear and could not stop pacing and looking us in joyous disbelief. "It's going to be such a great birthday weekend now" he said with that warm smile and shining eyes of his. We had such a great weekend and had many moments of intimacy and platonic love that were notable. But I would like to point to a moment during the weekend where we (unknowingly at the time) participated in more homoerotic practices that bonded us on a deeper level than our previous video calls ever could (that may seem a bit hyperbolic, but it is how I felt). To celebrate our first *Black Boy Joy* in-person, we poured up beverages of merry and played video games together. As the night progressed of course, the testosterone in the room became thick and seething. We were very touchy-feely (again, not in a sexual and lustful way) in a very passionate and aggressive way. This led to use wrestling and aggressively dogpiling one another. We were shouting and grunting. We were wet with sweat and haughty with triumphed laughter or barking with vigor. Our thumps and growls echoed the walls of Stephen's apartment as we tussled and attempted to best one another through pins of submission (which of course was not discussed prior to engaging in these behaviors). Why were we doing this? We didn't have a reason really. Our bodies just felt the need to play with one another. Not the sensationally lustful erotic way, but in the passionately joyful erotic way that provided our bodies with a space to share knowledge with one another through rough house play.

Through my different relationships in life, I have come to realize the different forms the erotic can take. And this form, the three of us in a physical body-ball of testosterone and passion, was a platonic, but highly physical (homo)eroticism that boned us more deeply. We gripped one another firmly, by in no means tenderly, but not to hurt each other either. There was a restraint, not physically, but spiritually. Our physical bodies seemed primed for the pressure and physical demand of this moment. But our spirits were warm, and the pressure felt welcomed. The joy of testing your strength all out with your brothers was a moment that we shared on a homoerotic level of intimacy. The way our bodies pushed against each other, pushing the limits of our strength. This may seem like a terrifying experience if one did not trust the others and vice versa. My body was able to let down the well-placed guard of "always be in a position to execute your own power at will" and just enjoy the moment of protected freedom. This homosocial male bonding moment allowed our bodies learn how to trust another body on a level that is not inherently sexual and/or romantic. Erotic knowledge of each other divulged in ways that were not known to us prior. The resistance and fatigue of bodies clashing, the limits and potential of

our strength, and the bodily contact that wasn't violent or lustful. These are ways of knowing and knowledge that exchanged between us and awoke some of our dormant energies and feelings. I felt like a young boy again, not in a physical way, but in a soulful way. It felt joyful. This was the Black boy Joy we have been feeling through our screens this whole time. The difference was my body now knew how this felt and was now much wiser because of it. My soul felt nurtured and replenished through these exchanges.

Following this visit, our conversations continued to grow and expand into deeper (one could say "forbidden") corners of our friendship. Sometimes it feels a little uneasy because its unknown terrain for us. Growing up, we were taught in one way or another that this level of intimacy was reserved only for our lovers and maybe our mothers (to a limited extend). Our relationship was something we haven't really experienced before and it was scary, but exciting. We learn so much from each other every day not only through intended exchange, but also through our erotic power of just being present in each other's lives. Time and time again these men have been with me to keep me standing when all I could do was collapse. To keep me smiling when all I could do was weep. To keep me fed when all I could do was starve. Stephen, Brandon, and I share a bond that is sustainable *because* we do not fear the erotic and intimate corners of our brotherhood. Pushing against each other's limits of love and care to discover new ways of knowing one another, and thus knowing the world beyond us.

Conclusion

Before I move to conclude my exploration of these intimate relationships with my brothers, I would like to take space to postulate a larger conversation that could be had here about assemblage. It is a rather new conceptual framework to feminism, but women of color have discussed this for years (i.e., intersectionality, queer theory, disability studies etc.). Assemblage is complicated and messy, but I best understand it as an interwoven web of markers that make up “identity” and isolating any one or few of them only tells a partial story. The partial story in this paper addressed the homoeroticism of Stephen, Brandon, and I’s relationships. There is a larger whole of assembled identities and nuanced existences that make up these relationships and I have only postulated a small corner of it. This does not diminish the important work discussed here, but does illuminate the complexities of our relationships with one another. We exist in multiple identities simultaneously and they collide in our relationships to form new identities. The convergence of these existences forms new bonds and connections that only deepen the mess of assembled identity. It is clearly seen (through all the mess) the complex assemblage of Stephen, Brandon, and I’s formation around the identity of *Black Boy Joy* (BBJ). Assemblage allows us to consider the possibility that BBJ is a unified identity that is assemblage of the three of us as assemblaged-bodied individuals. There is a distinct dynamic that is always in flux but has a baseline structure that we are not consciously (for the most part) privy to. We become “someone else” *together*. We still outwardly recognize our individual selves, but our link to the identity of BBJ forms a polygamous assemblage that has its own web of connections, thoughts, feelings, and dynamics. I theorize that this interwoven identify is formed when all three assemblages of us come together and make new connections and pathways, much like the human brain does. A unified, but a tangled mess that isn’t quite clear. There is much left to discuss on the matter, but for the sake of this paper’s length I will leave this here to be picked up (whether by me or someone else) another time.

Exploring the inner circles and dark cornered boundaries of my intimate relationships using the power of eroticism has revealed to me a way of knowing that can be used to deepen our spiritual and intellectual knowledge. Exploring my relationships with Stephen, Brandon, and the combined *Black Boy Joy* (an assemblage of individual identities that make up this grouped identity) as an example of such power, I have come to see more to these erotic interactions than what meets the eye. I believe eroticism can look different for each person and their respective relationships but is a power that can be utilized as a knowledge of one’s body in relation to other bodies it cares for and vice versa. This is a knowledge we cannot continue to ignore. Distrusting “irrational” knowledge is of the master’s tools. In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness or those other supplied master’s tools of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, and self-denial (Lorde, 1996). Most importantly, I can deepen connections with my brothers, who I love immensely. And deeper connection to myself, who I love beyond rational understanding.

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