The Embodied Intimacy of Survival: Peer, Partner, and Client Intimacies of Transfeminine Sex Workers of Color in Tangerine and Afuera

Emi Wyland
Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018

Recommended Citation
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018/141

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2018 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.
THE EMBODIED INTIMACY OF SURVIVAL: PEER, PARTNER, AND CLIENT INTIMACIES OF TRANSFEMININE SEX WORKERS OF COLOR IN TANGERINE AND AFUERA

Emi Wyland

Mentor: Amber Musser

Using close readings of scenes from the films Tangerine (dir. Sean Baker) and Afuera (dir. Steven Liang), I analyze how transfeminine sex workers of color (TSWOC) negotiate and navigate intimate relationships with peers, romantic partnerships, and clients through a lens informed by queer of color critique, Black feminism, and Chicana feminism. Attending to the significance of touch between TSWOC, I argue that TSWOC peer intimacies in these films embody a form of deep alliance predicated on cooperative care labor and interpersonal accountability. Alternatively, verbal conflict with romantic partners illustrates how partnered intimacy relegates TSWOC to liminal space between co-dependent, yet oppositional determinations of colonial capitalist womanhood, and emerges as platform to negotiate TSWOC’s relationship with capitalism and subject determination. Grounding these intimacies within the landscape of sex work, I engage my analyses of touch, labor, and subject determination thus far with the inherent uncertainty and power hierarchies in sexual labor. I argue that client intimacies serve as a conduit for physical and sexual violence against TSWOC, which queers Delany’s theory of “contact.” Ultimately, the imbrication of violent “contact” and analgesic “networking” within the sex trade produces ruptures in the bodily discourse of sex, which radically open ways differently raced, sexed, gendered, classed, and naturalized bodies can interact with one another and produce new meanings, mobilized to disparate ends of national discourse reification and queer world making.