

RHETORICS OF RESISTANCE:
READING TABOO IN FANFICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

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Fan communities are spaces in which creators of fan media take agency over discourses of control through the act of creating and consuming queered texts. This study aims to examine the ways in which women redirect and subvert existing discourses and ideologies connected to female sexuality and desire. Through their engagement with fanfiction, these women participate in a culture actively creating rhetorics of resistance. Often this subversion takes place in the form of engagement with taboo topics and kinks.

This study sought to ask women in fan communities who read fanfiction containing nonconsensual sex, sex with dubious consent or rape fantasy, why they read this taboo kink and what they get from it. I interviewed three women who have participated in fan communities and read this kink. I hope to demonstrate the ways in which these women are taking discourses of oppressive control and flipping them, making stories vehicles for enacted subversive control. Ultimately I argue that in doing so, these women and these topics carry the potential to help us reorient and rethink human relations, to create safer and more understanding discourses surrounding women and desire.

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TRIGGER WARNING

In reading this, it must be acknowledged that what are being unpacked and examined are threads in a larger, much more tangled system of discourses and ideologies. It follows that as we work through them, things might occasionally seem contradictory; they might make sense from one angle and not another. They might push against the reader's boundaries, concepts of what is acceptable, what is right – your moral or ethical ideas. While this project doesn't require discomfort – particularly as my approach to working with my respondents is rooted in an ethics of care and compassion – reader discomfort is not only alright, but welcome. Discomfort is the space where who we are and how we see the world is pressed right up against an invisible wall; what lies beyond that wall are powerful ideologies, mechanisms of power, apparatus of repression, makers and controllers of the discourses that shape our perception of the world.

Should you find yourself at that discomfort, you may go in several directions. You may choose to push against it; you may want to break through it. Maybe you will choose to sit in that discomfort. It may be too much – as the topic does revolve around rape fantasy and therefore rape – and want to walk away. I feel like it is most important here to say that if this topic is triggering, self-care is the most important move if discomfort will be detrimental to your well-being. The ethical stance of care, compassion, and empathy that grounds my inquiry extends to the respondents, to myself, and to the reader.

INTERLUDE #1: What Language do I Have? 1

My body is political. It is owned. It is either barren or fruitful; it is sexed or violated; it belongs, but rarely to me. My body exists in words. Words write themselves on my skin, into my vagina, they inhabit my “womb”. Blessed, sacred, defiled, owned. It is the site of wars; it is ripped open by words and laws and burdens of proof.

My body is a place.

My desires have potential. Female desire – culturally considered by turns powerful, dangerous, degrading, or sacred – has been molded and constructed so that it is conceptually tied to the body. Considering the history shaping the repression, oppression and violence women have been subjected to, it can be said that tying desire to the body is an excellent form of control. After all, our bodies are dangerous secret-keepers.

I grew up Catholic. I grew up knowing I must emulate and honor the Virgin Mother. School dances were consistently interrupted by reminders to leave room for the Holy Ghost. It never mattered how far I really went, because every time I let a boy touch me, I was shamed. I remember the fear that God was waiting to punish me. Unlike Mary, God would impregnate me in order to make an example of my deceit. Mary, the Blessed mother, was to be emulated and consecrated. I, shameful thing, could never be her. Mary had already taken the whole virgin conception thing – I doubted that excuse would work again, no matter how virginal I really was (for those wondering, it was for quite a long time. Fear and shame are a powerful and effective tool of repression, capable of overcoming knowledge of science, biology, and common sense).

I always thought that desire was intrinsically linked to my body. My desires were my body. My deserved punishments would be of the body, *to* my body, not to my psyche. I didn’t know how damaged my psyche already was by these rhetorics.

As women, our bodies are objectified. We are not just lusted after. We are not just fantasy – or the antithesis, deemed worthless or disgusting by difference in standards. More – our sex, our desires, our secret selves – they are embodied. Gayle Rubin once stated, “We never encounter the body unmediated by the meanings that culture give to it” (147). Where is a language for a separation of self from body? Or, fantasies of physical acts one has no desire to actually participate in or have done to them? Where is the discourse that explains sexual desire that might have nothing to do with our bodies?

When I was a child I used to fantasize about dirty things. Wildly shameful things. Things I didn’t understand. I knew pleasure before I knew about sex. I knew about shame before pleasure. I knew that these fantasies were all deeply painful, and yet, my traitorous mind went back and back to these shameful things.

As a young woman, in my first sexual relationship, I did not know how to say no. I did not understand the true ownership of my body. I did not know that I could say no after saying yes. No had never been mine.

When I was a young woman, I used to fantasize about dirty things. Wildly shameful things. I was a wildly shameful being. These desires meant, somehow, that I was asking for it. The things I did and didn’t want were inescapably tied together and I couldn’t see more than my helpless, used body.

When I did finally make myself say no, I did not know how to enforce it. I’d learned that my body was a receptacle. My body was a toy. My body existed for someone else’s pleasure. I never took pleasure in being violated. I never wanted it.

What language do I have for rape fantasy beyond my body? A fantasy that's sexual without having anything to do with sexual organs, without corporeal pleasure? Without physical arousal? What language is there for sexual desire beyond biology?

CHAPTER ONE: Beginnings

Introducing

In May of 2011, I was in the beginning stages of a dangerous post-partum depression which eventually triggered a mental breakdown. At home with two small children while my husband worked long hours to support us, I began to retreat into fictional worlds – a long-standing coping method used in times of intense distress throughout my life. Rather than retreat into books, however, I became invested and interested in a television show, *Glee*. A series of events led me to the discovery of online fan worlds.

I remember the first time I encountered a fanfiction story with graphic erotic content. My mother was in the ICU in an induced coma as she recovered from a life-saving and dangerous emergency surgery while detoxing. My sister and I spent multiple 24-hour shifts in the hospital, awake, watching over her. I was learning to navigate Tumblr and stumbled upon a story. I read it under a blanket, on watch for doctors that may come in, fascinated by the available amount of well written, thought-out, crafted erotic fanfiction. This was the first time in my entire life that I realized that things I secretly fantasized about weren't mine alone. That I wasn't the only woman to have particular taboo fantasies.

My own fan community journey is long and layered. It led me from a space as a covert reader, to a creator of fan works in multiple genres, to my involvement in the creation a community specific podcast. I wrote fanfiction and I wrote meta¹. I made friends all over the world. I created a separate persona for myself – a persona that is completely genuine and yet separate from the one people outside of my fan and author communities know. As a member of fan communities I have an in-depth knowledge of how valuable and transformative these

¹ A phrase used within fandom for commentary or articles exploring meanings, motivations, complexities or potential within self-referential source texts.

communities are. I learned more about sex, my sexuality, and my desires in a handful of years of fan community than in the first 30 years of my life. In this space, I have encountered uncomfortable truths. I unlearned many painful, shaming, repressive discourses written into my very sense of self as a woman.

My experiences in fan communities did many things to enrich my life, including resurrecting my identity as a writer, which I had let stagnate after my father's death in 2005. There I found a space where I could finally revive the creative and intellectual senses of self I'd half forgotten. I began writing poetry at the age of ten; I studied poetry through high school and was mentored through my collegiate years until my father's death. In 2007 I began writing long form fiction when I first attempted National Novel Writing Month. Although I participated in NaNoWriMo for several years, I did not consider myself a writer. I didn't look back at what I wrote, I never showed anyone what I had written, and I had no future plans for these stories. It wasn't until I began writing and interacting with a community of like-minded readers and writers that I began to see myself, understand and respect myself as an artist.

In fan communities I wrote close to five hundred thousand words of fiction. I created a found family that fostered my creativity. They encouraged me to attend a week long poetry retreat in the Cape Cod with Marge Piercy. They advocated for my decision to go back to school. Who believed in my creativity and intellect long before I could.

In 2014 I was approached by a new publisher, Interlude Press, who were just beginning to sign authors. They initially sought authors whose work they were familiar with through fandom, but whom they believed could write strong original fiction in the LGBTQAI+ community. With them, I have published three novels, with a fourth on the way.

As part of my treatment plan post-breakdown I decided that getting out of the isolation of my home would be best for me. I had always known that I wanted to go back to school, and so I began auditing courses at Michigan State University in 2013. Although I had degrees in History and English, and had completed school to become a middle school teacher, none of these fields of study felt right for me.

In 2014 I took Trixie Smith's Embodied Rhetorics course, in order to get a feel for what was studied in and what the WRAC department did. Coming in to my decision to go to school again, I had felt frustrated by the strictness of chosen schools and degrees. I knew that my interests were interdisciplinary – ideas and projects I wanted to pursue were mixes of history and English, of sociology and even religious studies. I had never dreamt – as this program didn't exist when I was an undergraduate – that there were programs where I could study Cultural Rhetorics, much less ones that would support projects in which I could research sexuality, fan studies, female interaction with erotica, the rhetorical world shaping found in online communities.

Transitioning

In the wake of the success of *50 Shades of Grey*, a trilogy of books by E.L. James (originally written as fanfiction within the Twilight community), I became interested in the reception of books that contained graphic erotic content mass marketed toward women. Audience response to these books interested me for various reasons, including the fact that consumption of these books was in no way covert: their publication and subsequent popularity created a public space for women to discuss, acknowledge, and consume media with explicit sexual content that would normally be considered taboo. That there was such public acknowledgement and claiming of female desire and fantasy fascinated me. But further, the ways

in which the relationship between the characters became romanticized intrigued me: I never heard discussions about the inaccurate depiction of BDSM lifestyle within the book which abused notions of consent as well as emotional abuse. What was it about this book that women found empowering and/or romantic? Were readers subverting or redirecting the emotionally abusive relationship between the characters in a way that seemed empowering, or were they simply unseen? In all aspects, the ways these books simultaneously bought into and resisted dominant discourses of acceptable female desire fascinated me.

Considering the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, I found discussions being shaped surrounding them in popular media and in fan communities often differed. At the height of the book's entrance into popular culture I would hear radio shows where women would call in and discuss how reading these books had recharged their sex lives. Women describing how empowered these books made them feel; how they now felt comfortable performing sex acts they had not previously.

On the flip side, it was within fan discussions and fan forums that I finally came to understand what it was about these books that disturbed me. It was in fan communities that I learned about DBSM communities, about the importance of negotiation and consent with communities, where terms such as SSC (safe, sane and consensual) and RACK (risk aware consensual kink) are often invoked as essential (Beres and MacDonald 419). Descriptions of negotiation between characters Christian and Anna in *Fifty Shades of Grey* attempt to portray a contract negotiation of kink limits. However, ultimately, Christian violates the contract and employs emotionally abusive means of enforcing and gaslighting Anna, who is completely new to the BDSM scene (James). Fan blogs and meta posts critiqued these books in detail: both in regards to the way it portrayed BDSM kink and also, through critical analysis, the ways in which Christian's behavior could be read as abusive. I encountered these critiques within fan

communities long before I began to see mainstream critique of the books – I only really became aware of mainstream media critique when the book was being filmed as a movie, and when the movie came out.

There is a long standing history of romance and fiction presenting romanticized or eroticized rape: a narrative found quite often in romance novels. The use of rape in romance, both psychologically and as a narrative device, are not new (Tuscano discusses this in "A Parody of Love: the Narrative Uses of Rape in Popular Romance", as well as Radaway in *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*). I believe that in addition to these discussions about violence perpetrated against women in fiction and television there should be a discussion about ways and avenues in which women can take those themes and take agency, changing or queering them, redirecting existing discourses about sex, rape culture, fantasy, agency, etc. Rape portrayal in pop culture is far from rare. Often it is used as a shortcut trope utilized for the purpose characterization or to create a tragic backstory that situates a character more quickly in the present plot. In story structure and execution, however, this portrayal is often presented in a way that compounds the loss of female agency and point of view. For example, in *Game of Thrones*, "Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken", Sansa's rape at the hands of her new husband, Ramsey, transitions from the moment the act begins to the point of view of another male character, Reek, who is forced to watch her rape as a part of his own redemption storyline. In this way, all aspects of her "voice" are taken from her.

Fan communities are spaces in which redirections through the queering of existing stories, often in radical ways, take place. Previously, I've studied how fan studies can be an arena for studying rhetorics of resistance, in particular the way that they are a site for exploration of "taboo" sexual desire and practice. In this previous research I read a body of text that shaped my

desire to do a study with readers who are or have been active in fan communities and who have read fanfiction containing rape fantasy and/or elements of dubious consent.

Fandoms – fan communities that is – are intrinsically disruptive, subversive spaces. Fans, (and by this I mean those actively engaged in the participatory culture of fandom) disrupt boundaries of dominant culture and what counts as ‘culture’ in regards to the arts. What is constructed as true culture is a part of an inherently classed system. It is those in the privileged class that have the power to establish what culture and art are. The establishment of a thing, however, necessitates the establishment of another, of a set of exclusions and exclusionary practices, and/or of a boundary. Boundaries must be enforced, reinforced and policed. This is how “taste” is deployed, as a construct, to police the border between what is art and what is lowbrow; “proper taste must be separated from improper taste” (Jenkins 16).

Fans are consumers and producers. Those with the power to produce have access to the possibility of capital – in this case, cultural capital. Fans, whom Jenkins describes within a cultural economy as “peasants, not proprietors”, both consume and produce (27). This very action has the power to destabilize this classed system, the boundaries of what is acceptable taste, of what is art, and how art itself can be consumed (16). Fans engage with texts in a fluid, constantly shifting, negotiated way. They take meaning and make meaning. This very action has the potential to break cultural codes; not just to break them, but to recreate, rebuild and manipulate them. Fan communities, even within their own sub cultures, experience and recreate this constant struggle over meaning (Hills xi).

This is important to keep in mind, because it points to the inherently slippery nature of fan community, fan culture and fan production. This messiness means that fan cultures aren’t suited for uniform or universal theoretical frameworks or studies (Hills xiii). They cannot be

easily codified or defined, as within each exist unique rules and self-regulatory practices. In regards to production from these communities, there cannot exist a uniform understanding either. Different fandoms utilize different tropes in fanfiction and art. Lenses for critical interpretation and analysis by fans of source text are uniquely tailored to a culture that has grown from the source text. This messiness (or as Hills later refers to it, playfulness) is important to keep in mind. The work of fandom is messy. And so is the work of looking at fandom.

Queering texts and creating spaces for taboo, for writing about, exploring, unpacking and enjoying sex makes creates a nervousness – both for outsiders, and also for those in-community who feel they must defend themselves against their interests. It is, after all, easier to dismiss a fan as too invested, too overzealous, perhaps out of touch, slightly (or mightily) perverted. Named as such, they are disempowered in their engagement with art, with cultural capital, with understanding of taste.

In my research I've encountered a self-consciousness within academic texts (Jenkins in *Textual Poachers*, for example) and within fans that manifests in a need to justify, explain and mitigate their interests as legitimate, and intelligent or even as normal. And this before the topic of sex is even broached. With erotic fanfiction, fans are making playgrounds of source texts, subverting through alteration cultural codes and then violating them even further with frank address and engagement with sex. Fan spaces are often considered gendered; in fact, the fan spaces I've participated in are primarily occupied (although not exclusively) by women.

Women. Talking about sex. Fucking with culture making. Creating sweet things, kinky things, dangerous things and stunning works of art.

This is a playground. This will be messy work.

Shaping

I shaped previous research in this area around a couple of questions: What do fanfiction stories containing a variety of taboo kinks tell us about the way women consume and manipulate media? Do these stories represent resistance to dominant discourses about female desire in creative spaces by allowing them room to express desires that might be considered taboo? Fan cultures are the site of both production (not just fiction, but art, meta, videos, podcasts, etc) but also personal and community building.

The primary mechanism of this particular study is to ask women why they read fanfiction stories containing a specific taboo kink and what they get from them. With related and more in-depth questions, I hope to address what stories with non-consensual sex or sex with dubious consent in sexual scenarios (hereafter referred to as rape fantasy, noncon, dubcon or non/dubcon) tell us about the way women consume and manipulate media². Could these stories represent resistance to dominant discourses about female desire in creative spaces by allowing them room to express desires that might be considered taboo? How do these stories fit into a narrative of shifting borders?

More detailed discussions with women who read these stories, getting an on-the-ground and in-the-community insight into their intentions, their interpretations, their connection/disconnection with existing discourses and ideologies connected to female sexuality, agency, desire, subjectivity are important and deserving of study.

² Within fan communities, non-consensual sex (noncon) is defined any sex act that occurs without *explicit* consent. I have found that definitions of dubious consent can vary within fanfiction communities by fandom and even author to author. For example, Maria defines dubcon as "... (a) when either one or more parties' ability to consent is compromised (e.g., they're drunk, they're sex-pollened, one of them wants to have sex and the other one is in heat and we're sure their body is demanding it but we don't know what they'd decide if they had a clear mind, etc.) or (b) when the consent or lack thereof is ambiguous (e.g., a scene that clearly was not fully negotiated, and it may seem like all the characters are into it, but we're not really sure)" (Maria 20 February 2017)

With these questions in mind, I designed a study in which I worked with three women (Moriah Gemel, Maria and Nigel Pancake) through a series of phased interviews. All three women have participated in fandom before and all three have read stories with noncon, dubcon or rape fantasy. Through the course of these interviews and analyzing them, I hoped to find themes or patterns, explanations in their words that might help me find some answers to these questions.

INTERLUDE #2: Permission to Name

My body is a repository of trauma. My body is memory, it is the barrier of thin skin working too hard to hold it together.

When I was a teenager, I didn't understand my body. I didn't have the words for that pressing, pressing up against my insides. For why I wanted to bite at it until the skin broke. For why neat little lines of cuts, thin ladders climbing my arms, were the only way out.

In therapy, Rochel and I skirt the issue. Not the results of breakdown. Not the knowledge that repression perpetuates trauma that we inflicted upon ourselves. We understand that these things are why we are here. We talk about the hard shit. Dismantle it. Try to understand it.

But this one, we can't.

We're in Anetia's old office, the one with couches marching along the walls facing each other. Of all of her offices; the spaces we followed her to, city to city, this is my least favorite. And today, Rochel and I are alone, our group of five down to two.

I've always felt like I have these memories... I begin. I don't have words but Rochel does, intuitively. We taste the darkness in the room. The sun is setting and the blinds are closed. I hold a pillow on my lap. *I can't say it because it's not true*, I think. She confesses that she has intrusive thoughts about her father during sex. *But that doesn't have to mean....* she says.

The monster in the room is in my chest. It makes me sick. It reminds me how very thin my skin is. How ephemeral recovery is. How weak I am. It licks at me, it coats me in disgust.

But maybe, I try, maybe I made this up. Maybe I just want answers.

She agrees. Anetia treads carefully. I can't breathe for the beast on my chest. It is the first time I've let these words out, pulling back the flaps of a box marked NEVER TOUCH. *I've always felt like I have these memories.* Disassociation sits next to me. I don't know who these memories are of, I have no face or name for them. Disassociation whispers, *it's okay.* I know her too, so well. She is always with the monster, she's been with me since I was a child. She comes when I'm touched. She comes when I'm fucked. She came, so blessedly, every time he fucked me. She helped me give up on no because it didn't matter to him. She taught me how to fuck for two years of hell.

Often though, she comes with a price. When I get that sick feeling in my stomach, a freefall and a rush of shame I lie down and feel panic and fear so intense I can taste them. I don't know the names of my triggers. *I've always felt like I have these memories.* I don't understand them, they're fragmented. I remember playing Clue. I remember what it's like to be on my back looking up at the ceiling, up in the corner. I remember the call of a spring bird. And it's sick, I'm sick, I can't breathe. The monster darkens the sunlight. And then She comes. Sweet Disassociation.

Could this mean...? Rochel looks at me and we both test the tautness of that string, the one between memory, between trauma, and words. *Maybe I just want answers.* We've pulled it too tight. My recovery is too fragile. I must balance taking care of myself and unpacking boxes and boxes of trauma that pulled my skin apart.

I leave therapy and when I get home, I lie down and bless the Klonopin in the medicine cabinet. I bless the cool dark of my room and my husband who loves me, and I ask her to come. I tape up the flaps of the box. I scribble out NEVER TOUCH and write, shaky and well meaning, WHEN I'M READY.

*I've always felt like I have these memories... Could this mean...? Maybe I made this up.
Maybe I just want answers.*

I don't name it. I doubt it. I doubt my voice. I can't give myself permission to name my trauma. I wait for someone else to tell me it's true.

CHAPTER TWO: Theory and Frame

Women's bodies are subject to discrimination, violence, persecution, victimization, shame, degradation, all of which are aided by political agenda, religious dogma, law, mass and popular culture: rhetorical fabrics of our society. In 1982, at the Barnard Sex Conference, Gayle Rubin first presented a workshop, "Concepts for a Radical Politics of Sex", which eventually became the article, "Thinking Sex" (Rubin 201). Here Rubin first began calling for the creation of "radical theories of sex" (145). In "Thinking Sex" Rubin stresses the need to treat sexuality with respect in times of social upheaval and conflict; the need for radical theories which sustain, examine, invite participation to shape radical resistance (145). In the years following the publication of "Thinking Sex", Rubin has reflected on social changes that occurred in the twenty years post publication of the article and the continued need for radical theories and understanding of sex (183). These things are still frighteningly relevant and necessary to this day.

Beyond injustices and the dehumanization of our bodies as women, our very desires are in jeopardy. Discourses of shame and control surround us all the time, not just in law or politics, but embedded in culture and media. Examination, conversation, engagement, enrichment of theories of sex have the potential to shape resistance. To unwrite what has been written on our bodies.

Question One

What is "good" sex? How do we define culturally acceptable sex? Culturally, there exist hierarchies of sex, which range from good, acceptable, normal, to bad, abnormal, deviant, etc.. These hierarchies function to draw lines between what might be considered good sex (married sex for example) and bad sex (casual sex, conversely). The drawing of those lines, or the compression of boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior are enacted in a myriad of ways (Rubin

143). Rubin's example of the charmed circle, in which valorized sex exists within the inner circle and "bad" sex in the exterior circle, is one such way to conceptualize this boundary drawing (152). Sex within the circle, or at the top of the hierarchy, is culturally created as a site in which nuance can play out; these sex acts are seen as capable of complexity. Those outside the circle, however, are stripped of that complexity or nuance, "incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence" (152).

As culture and societal perception and acceptance (or rejection) of identities or sex acts changes, so too does the border. Sex outside of marriage, for example, is much more culturally acceptable than it used to be, therefore moving more toward the center. This constant change, however, creates a tension, a fear that one change has the potential to set off a domino chain – that anything erotic crossing the border might cause everything to fall apart (Rubin 151).

Sex and desire that lie in the outer circle – taboo sex – falls victim to this stripping of complexity. One's desires, should they be considered taboo, too easily become essentialized. Female desire in particular has historically been linked with mental illness – from the idea of female hysteria (which was medically treated with orgasms by doctors, and then later with the development of vibrators) initially conceived by Plato to the image of the rabid female fan (imagine Beatlemania), in which women are stripped of the complex interplay of emotional, psychological and physical informing, creating and influencing desires. (Foucault 36; Saul 52; Rubin 150) They simply become bad. Taboo. Policed through judgement, medicine, religion, shame.

It could be easy to do so when thinking about women who not only participate in communities that create and disseminate kink laden erotica – rape fantasy, nonetheless – in a moment when rape culture is so clearly at the forefront of political, social, and critical

discourses. Rather than strip these women and their actions of the inherent messiness of their desires and where they meet cultural mores, perhaps we might consider my participant's engagement with such a taboo kink as representative of resistance, not a continued symptom of colonized desires and sexualities. These women do not want to be raped. As was demonstrated in their interviews, none of them fantasized about being raped themselves. Their interest in these stories and with this fantasy are complex and layered; as will be discussed later, our conversations made clear that each of these women is thoughtfully engaged in understanding their desires and the role of their desires in a larger cultural context.

The work of this thesis is to discuss the ways in which new radical theories of sex can emerge from work such as this: listening to and giving space to female narratives which represent resistance to normative, culturally "acceptable" sex and desire. This work doesn't seek to write about the women interviewed, but to give them space to talk about what are considered taboo desires and their engagement with subversive cultures, e.g fan cultures. To give them spaces to exercise agency. To talk about the ways in which they exercise agency in their actions. To demonstrate the vital importance of creating spaces for listening, spaces free of punishment or persecution for the existence of voices, stories and bodies, desires and sex.

While I appreciate, and have been deeply influenced by Rubin's analysis of sex and resistance, I want to talk about desire *beyond* the body. "It is necessary to recognize repressive phenomena without resorting to the essentialist assumptions of the language of libido" (Rubin 148). While an exploration of repressive apparatus and policing of desire is important, I would like to move beyond the impulse to essentialize engagement in fan fiction, fan culture, enjoyment of pornography, erotica, kink, kink-fantasy; to boil all of these down to a single function of human biology. Not to erase the body, or pleasure by any means, as this is important and valid

for many people. But to consider it one part of many moving, convergent and divergent pieces of the human, female experience.

Question Two

What does the act of reading fanfiction non/dubcon stories tell us about these women's consumption and manipulation of media? At its heart, fanfiction is a manipulation of existing discourses. Authors of fanfiction consume stories and narratives and alter them. Whether they are writing “fix-it” fiction, which functions to fill in gaps or make changes to storylines they do not like, or Alternate Universe (AU) stories that place the characters in completely different settings or establish particular tropes (Alpha/Beta/Omega dynamics, wing!fic, in which people have wings, soulmate stories, etc.), or canon compliant fiction (stories that follow the narrative, plot points, resolutions), fans are altering texts in some way.

Canon compliant fiction is an interesting example: although it does follow the canonical story, the act of filling in, adding to, exploring character growth, etc. inarguably changes the source text. Often canon compliant fiction operates as wish fulfillment – even if that takes the form of exploring a painful or dangerous plot or story element that was presented but not explored in depth. In many of the *Captain America* stories provided to me as examples by my participants, a common theme is that of recovery from trauma. Many characters, particularly that of Bucky Barnes/The Winter Soldier endure immense trauma that fans want to see explored and addressed. These changes represent a multiplicity of desires expressed.

Not all fanfiction is pornographic; *one* aspect of fanculture is that it is a space where a myriad of sexual desires and fantasies can be played out – whether in fiction, videos, art, etc. Fan culture operates from both spaces of love or a desire to honor the object of desire (the specific

TV show, for example) or to express frustration, or even hatred (as can be seen in the evolution of the Twilight fan culture which eventually became a “hate fandom”). In both cases, fans are making what de Certeau calls small moves within a larger power structure.

This study focuses on readers of fanfiction; it must be stated that it is in both the act of creating and in consuming fanfiction that subversion takes place. The act of “consuming” is always that – active. Jean Genet states that “the tension you bring to the work of art is an action” (qtd. in Doty 1). De Certeau’s consumers, those who are dominated by society and “systems of operational combination,” are not passive; rather, employ various actions to resist these systems (11). In order to understand these modes of resistance, de Certeau emphasizes the need to understand how a system is being manipulated by consumers and not producers (13). Tracing from the actions of authors to those of readers, it helps to understand the ways in which “Words become the outlet or product of silent histories...the thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader’s) slips into the authors place” (19). Both authors and readers are consumers of source texts. Readers are “‘renters’ who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text” (20).

With the emergence of Queer Theory in the 1990’s, it can be argued that Rubin’s desired radical theories of sex, sexuality and desire were constructed and were beginning to emerge. By tracing the work of theorists such as Althusser, Sussere, Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick, Warner (to name a few), one can see rejection of the Enlightenment ideals and a new focus on questioning as an intellectual model (Jagose 77-78). Emerging from post structuralism’s understanding of identity as inherently unstable, Queer as a concept and theory is one of a constant state of formation, “it’s definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics” (Jagose 1).

De Certeau's renting, the active manipulation of oppressive system, appears in fanfiction through the manipulation of existing stories, small movements of resistance, of reclaiming, of pushing past and through and against apparatus compressing acceptable behavior. Queering media is a small move. My positioning fanfiction as a site of queering does not refer to the act of taking canonically straight characters and making them gay (although this does happen quite often, it is not relevant to this terminology). Queering here means the changing of texts, something that is not only enacted by those who identify as queer or create queer characters. What if the queering of texts, much like Queer Theory, were understood as forms of personal survival, with "the power to wrench frames" (Berlant and Warner 348). From a queer positionality, queer commentary enacted through the subversive nature of changing texts can perhaps create "publics that can afford sex and intimacy in a sustained, unchastening ways, publics that can comprehend their own differences in privilege and struggle; publics whose abstract spaces can also be lived in, remembered, hoped for" (Berlant and Warner 344).

The act of queering media can be understood as one way of navigating the difficulty of studying reception of mass media. Queer, as a term applied in this context (queering media) is a space of recognition of the "erotically marginal", where one enacts both resistance and a willing openness to possibility – spaces where one can play, explore, enact, and exists in a multiplicity of ways (Doty 3).

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick's work aims to dismantle binary oppositions, which are by nature unstable and exist in tension, despite their seemingly concrete and inalienable definitions (active vs. passive, for example). These definitions exist in a power structure where one is considered the valorized half. This structure, which Sedgwick names the double bind, requires that the subordinate half must be central and marginal at once (9).

Examining the ways in which engagement in fan culture, the queering of canonical texts, the agency inherent in manipulating sexual narratives, is linked to this. “Deconstruction of these double binds...allows us to see them as sites rich with potential to manipulate them” (10).

In Rhodes and Alexander’s “Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self”, the authors ask readers how, at a time when women are so often the victims of danger, we can create what Royster and Kirch call “an ethics of hope and care” (qtd. in “Techne” Rhizome2). They offer theory that decenters and acknowledges middleness of self – existing not in horizontal or vertical planes. This functions as does Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, a theory which offers a different way of examining ways in which we can reorient ourselves. A queer phenomenology is this understanding, a theory which “might be one that faces the back, which looks behind ‘phenomenology’” (Ahmed 5). Applying this theory, queering media is an act of turning our bodies away from understanding, defining, and orienting ourselves in context of power structures and apparatus. Fanfiction functions as a mode of turning our bodies away from these lines.

The impulse to reduce female desire, and in particular the desire to read or engage in subversive texts, in interest in taboo kinks, into something dangerous or perverted cuts off the potential to embrace “simultaneity and multiple, sometimes contradictory layers of identity” (Rhodes and Alexander *Rhizomes* 4). Desires cast as good/bad, right/wrong, normal/perverted function as binaries that are inherently unstable. In order for good, right and normal to exist as prized or (right), bad, wrong and perverted desire must exist, propping up the other half of the binary. In relation to mass media subversion and mass media’s role as a site of cultural creation, queering texts functions as a way to pull these apart and take advantage of the instability of double binds, of the fetishization of norms (Berlant and Warner 345), opening a world of

possibility, a way of orienting queerly and accessing the “multiple, sometimes contradictory layers,” Rhodes and Alexander speak of.

Question Three

Do these actions represent resistance to dominant discourses of female desire by allowing them to express taboo desires? Western conceptions of sex and sexuality are ingrained with particular meanings and value systems; so ingrained it is often impossible to identify them, much less question them (Rubin 146). These values reappear in various political contexts, in media and culture, change shapes and take different rhetorical expressions in response to examination of values and resistance as they are identified (150). We live in a culture that constantly reinforces the boundaries between good sex and bad, between acceptable or depraved desires and actions. Social mores, law, and culture renegotiates boundaries on the terms of those with the power to do so in order to define acceptable sexual behavior and desire (143).

But what of resistance? Both resistance and oppression function in as a hydra. Oppressive rhetorical and discursive hydras – as an example mass media and religious dogma – constantly re-replicate apparatus of oppression which suppress sex, changes to sexuality, desire and modes of resistance (DeRogatis 234-237; Cavendish 212-213). If discourses of power and repression are constantly reifying themselves, it follows that resistance must also exist and be doing so as well. Discourse exists within mechanisms of power, so discourse can be a mode of resistance, to organized strategic operations (Jagose 82).

New sexualities, new conversations, new theories also reproduce themselves or find ways to push back against oppressive borders. Particular rhetorical actions are forms of resistance, and fanfiction is one of those. I believe that fan studies are an excellent arena in which to examine rhetorics of resistance, in particular that of taboo sexual desire and practice and specifically in

this case, of women who read non/dubcon fanfiction. Erotica – pornography – is to this day contested ground within feminist theory/circles, continual ripples emanating from the vitriolic feminist Sex Wars of the 1980's (Rubin 201). Approaching pornography or erotica as a site rich with the potential for feminist thought, care, and theory is critical for forward movement in understanding how taboo kink in fanfiction, being read by women, can not only be feminist, but radical, with the power to wrench frames.

Question Four

How does this fit into the narrative of shifting borders? “Pleasure and power to not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce on another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement” (Focault 48). I speak of shifting, and of borders, calling back Rubin’s Charmed Circle to underscore the potential of Queer Theory as applied to this study. Through small moves, fanfiction creates spaces for play within Sedgwick’s double binds. It has the power to move the borders of the circles. Here we can create space, as fanfiction and as fans who read it, for dialogue between mechanisms of power and agents of pleasure.

As women, we need to press back against repressive and violent discourses, to resist. Rubin pushes for a radical theory of sex in response to renegotiations at the border of good and bad sex (Rubin 147). This rhetoric changes constantly. Even as we think we’re “liberated”, repression exists. It reinvents itself. It rewrites itself. It lays down on our bodies. If we are going to be radical, or make radical turns, we must always continue to resist. We must do this work in order to “denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression” (Rubin 145).

Resistance is messy. Talking about it, thinking about it, the constant need to reify it – is messy work. Pulling at the many threads surrounding conversations of dangerous sex asks us to try to make sense of mess. To surrender to it in. Perhaps even, to play.

INTERLUDE #3: The Fallacy of Critical Distance

Imagine identity at the nexus of creation and remembrance. Identity as an artifact.

I want to write about these women I tell Trixie. To tell their stories for them.

About them? For them? I sit with the words. Can I write *about* these women? Do I want to? Isn't that the shape of true academic work? Haven't I come to these spaces with years of critical distance imprinted in my understanding of academic work? This project is about stories; it is about sex; it is about desire. *I want to understand how we're made to feel shame for our sex, our desire, our stories*, I say. In these nascent stages, I can't see that I've shaped a project misunderstand my own language. I erase myself without even knowing. This *our* doesn't include me. Or, more accurately, I don't perceive the importance. My own presence.

Alright, I tell Trixie. *I don't want to write about them. I want to help them tell their stories.*

How can I write about the ways our desires, our bodies, our sex, have been colonized if I assume I can write *about* these women and not *with* them? Shouldn't I give them space to tell whatever stories they have?

In interviews, these women are my familiars. We have shared language. Moriah and I go off topic regularly. "Gosh, I hope my committee doesn't mind that I'm basically just having a fun convo with you," I note. I remember the sound of her laughter from times we've been together, from video chats. "LOL sorry guys I'm just awesome she can't resist" Moriah jokes. We know each other well enough that commas are unnecessary unless we are editing each other's work. "I'm a kinky fandom fucker," I joke in a tone I would only ever share with her. "I find the kinksters and kind of make my place among them," Moriah says. *Yes*. Moriah readily

and easily talks about her traumas and sexual assault, and I don't offer a word on how close she hits to home. She knows; perhaps it would change the tone of our conversation, and I worry that inserting myself in such a personal way will take away from her story.

When I speak to Maria face to face, I'm taken by how beautiful she is. I've known her for years, but never face to face. This interview is lost, but we share turns out to be an intense moment for me. She sits in her closet while she talks to me so that her roommates can't hear her. She talks about the impact of Catholicism on her ideas of sex and sexuality. Later that night, she sends me links to a tumblr post conversation between her and another fandom author about the role of religion in sexuality. It's one in the morning but I read it. The trauma of this upbringing is a language we both speak. I say this in a *thank you* text, but don't articulate details. When we redo the interview, our words don't capture the connection I felt in the recognition of a shared trauma. I don't tell her this because I worry about directing the tone for her.

I remind Nigel of a fandom story we both found incredibly sexy and we compare the number of times we've read it. We touch on how terribly problematic it is – its premise is rooted in rape that the author has named “sort-of date rape”. Still, we read it. We remember it. We agree that it gets boring when the story devolves into a sappy love-mess. I love a great love story. Still, this story stays with us both. The conversation is light, but turns when Nigel tells me she masturbates when she reads erotica. Perhaps for Nigel, it was still light. I don't tell her that these words pressed down into my chest. I've worked hard to remove myself from this study, to find that I've forgotten so much of what I already knew. It's not a surprise that she does this – in Glee fandom there's a phrase used when a favorite author writes something sexy: “I'll be in my bunk”, which is code for reading and masturbating.

But I have been so caught up in trying to justify my understanding of my role, of erasing myself, I haven't seen that some of my central questions really belong to me. To my emergent understanding of my self, my desire, my sexuality as I navigate this study.

I began this project asking myself: *What language do I have for rape fantasy beyond my body? A fantasy that's sexual without having anything to do with sexual organs, without corporeal pleasure? Without physical arousal? What language is there for sexual desire beyond biology?*

I began this project imagining that *my* stories must be extracted. I imagined these women as a triangle, as if their stories, as if these artifacts, were a closed circuit I was trying to understand. That I had to understand from the outside.

But I'm in that circle. It can't be helped. These questions are valid. They are important and they guided a lot of what you read here. Still they are *mine*. Identity, the body, memories and traumas – if treated as artifacts when I'm offering to tell their stories – why would my body, my memory, my unnamed traumas be artifacts I should sift out?

I imagine Trixie now, telling me I finally understand. There is no such thing as critical distance here. It would dishonor all of us.

CHAPTER THREE: Methods

Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to ask women why they read fanfiction stories that include non-consensual and dubious fantasy. Related and more in-depth questions hope to address what stories with non/dubcon tell us about the way women consume and manipulate media. While crafting this project, I hypothesized that reader engagement with rape fantasy in fanfiction fits into a narrative of shifting borders where women occupy multiple, sometimes conflicting spaces. Engagement with these stories and with rape fantasy as a trope and kink could represent resistance to dominant discourses about female desire in creative spaces by allowing them room to express desires that might be considered taboo.

The project aims to understand the ways in which women engage with their sexuality, desires and culture in resistant ways. Their participation in fan communities, which are a subculture whose nature is resistant by the very fact of their function to queer, alter, expand and resist existing stories, demonstrates an existing engagement with cultural discourses. For the purpose of this project I narrowed my research to include only readers who enjoy non/dubcon fanfiction, in order to understand what they get from it, why they like it, how they feel about their desire, sex, sex practice, selves.

For this project, I interviewed three women – Moriah Gemel, Nigel Pancake and Maria (all their own chosen pseudonyms) – with whom I had existing relationships. Its initial aim was to create a site at which I could, with them, create a space for their narratives – for their voices – describing what kink, what fandom, what fanfiction, and what erotica mean to them. These participants are female-identified readers. Participants were asked to provide examples of stories

they have read that they have enjoyed or assessed as “good,” as well as those categorized as “bad”, which I read and then discussed with them.

This is a qualitative study whose methods for data collection and analysis utilized survey, phased interviews, archival work, and critical discourse analysis using mixed methodological approaches. This work is located within Cultural Rhetorics, considered here as a subset within the field of Rhet/Comp. Defined by the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab as “an orientation to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks,” I shaped the work of this thesis as such (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab 2). This work examines multiple, complex threads, orienting toward Queer, Indigenous and Feminist methodologies, which I believe naturally overlap.

I initially envisioned myself conducting an ethnographic study, as I felt that this would be the most effective and ethical way to do this study. However, reading texts such as *Coming of Age in Second Life* by Tom Boellstorff made clear that the scope of my imagined study would require much more time and resources than I had. Johnstone and Eisenhart’s *Rhetoric in Detail: Discourse Analysis of Rhetorical Talk and Text* and Radaway’s *Reading the Romance: Women, patriarchy and popular literature* text helped me understand the value of using discourse analysis of the texts these women were reading as a method for this study. In constructing my method and timeline I referenced Seidman’s *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers*. This text guided my decision to do phased interviews. I also utilized Creswell’s “Designing a Qualitative Study and Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry” for guiding understanding of research design and scope.

In the course of this project, I have and am working to unravel queer composing; how queer composing, particularly when what’s composed examines sex, sexuality, desire and

trauma, can untangle powerful discursive ideologies of oppression and repression. Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* was deeply influential to the genesis of this study. I approached interviewing and analyzing these interviews by treating these women's words as individual theory, each of which helped guide me as I began examining the complex narratives involved in all aspects of this work. I went into this work keeping in mind Wilson's assertion that research is life changing ceremony (60). I had difficult moments in discussing these topics, and in analyzing these interviews. Wilson helped me keep in mind that this research was intended to build relationships; my axiology demanded that I approach this study rooted in an ethics of care. I did not want to write *about* these women, but *with* them. Riley-Mukavetz's "Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology: Making research matter with multi-generational women from the Little Traverse Bay Band" provided a model for this, and demonstrated the importance of approaching this work as a collaborative, self-inclusive space and influenced my decision to work with my respondents the way that I did. "A cultural rhetorics orientation is to enact a set of respectful and responsible practices to form and sustain relationships with cultural communities and their shared beliefs and practices including texts, materials, and ideas" (Riley-Mukavetz 109). Moving into shaping this project, it was critical to me that I work to maintain relationships, respect the works involved, and approach beliefs with that same respect. As a part of this practice, all participants were invited to read this thesis, to rescind permission to participate or to have particular information or portions of interviews withheld, and the option to have final say in any portion of this work they disagree with or felt was misrepresented.

My involvement in this project was always intended to do good, and to do so I had to honor every narrative involved – including my own; never shying away from the truth. This was difficult work. This was personally life changing work.

This work is inherently feminist. Undeniably, the Sex Wars of the 1980's had a profound and seismic effect on feminism and sex studies. I believe that we, as women, are still feeling the effects of this break; I believe that there is still work to do in healing the divides between women's communities. This work is grounded by a pro-woman, sex positive, compassionate stance, dedicated to resistance through care, aimed at helping to create spaces for women's voices. Taormino et.al's collection of critical essays, *The Feminist Porn Book: The politics of producing pleasure* was instrumental in my approach to this work, these women, and the stories they shared with me.

Using queer methodological frames entails not only examining texts that have been queered, but how. The borders of power and resistance are constantly shifting. They lie in spaces that lack absolutes. As discussed in Chapter Two, Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, Rhodes and Alexander's "Techne" and "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive" as well as Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* shaped my approach to the use of Queer methods in this study. As defined by Rhodes and Alexander in "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive", "Queer rhetoric is self-conscious and critical engagement with normative discourses of sexuality in the public sphere that exposes their naturalization and torques them to create different or counter-discourses, giving voice and agency to multiple and complex sexual experiences" (Rhodes and Alexander Introduction).

One of the limiting factors of this study is that I'll be talking to a small pool of women; this means that this study won't be able to draw wide conclusions about fanfiction communities or fan engagement on a macro level. As well, as a researcher in this project, it is important for me to acknowledge that I have deep ties in fan culture. I personally have engaged in and worked to create relationship with women in subversive spaces for years within fanfiction communities

as a reader and author. I do not come to this study as an outsider to this particular world. I read – either through curiosity or my own desire – stories containing various taboo kink. I have authored stories with various taboo kinks. I firmly believe in the fandom phrase “your kink is not my kink,” which adopts a nonjudgmental stance toward what others choose to read or fantasize about. As well, I have definite opinions about the importance of treating these topics in written work with respect, rather than as a thinly veiled trope that could be seen as exploitative. Keeping this in mind, I chose to honor my involvement and opinions as an important part of the study while also remaining vigilant in understanding that my understandings might not align with that of my participants.

These interviews required me to ask in-depth questions about sensitive topics which carried the potential to cause the participant emotional discomfort. I took as much care as possible when navigating topics and conversations. This required vigilance, responsiveness, and communication with participants.

Participants: Who they are

Nigel Pancake

I first met my first respondent, Nigel Pancake, 3 years ago in a *Glee* RPF fandom forum³. We became friends; at the time she was living relatively near me geographically, and we would meet up and spend time together. While we had bonded over fan community, we became closer as we realized how much we had in common, including that we both had gone through post-partum depression. Nigel was working toward completion of a PhD. I was trying to decide what I was going to go back to school to do. In our conversations, Nigel helped me suss out the

³ RPF is an acronym that means either Real Person Fandom or Real Person Fiction. This is fan work or community surrounding “real people”. This can mean that the work/fandom follows actors. It can also include creators, spouses/partners/family members etc.

sorts of interdisciplinary work I was interested, in motivated me to begin taking courses after a ten year break post receiving my undergraduate degrees.

Nigel identifies as cis-gendered, heterosexual and white. She is thirty seven years old and is married. She described her family income as the very low end of upper middle class, “but ONLY because my upbringing was privileged” (Pancake 21 March 2017). Nigel, like another respondent, Maria, considers the safety net of having parents who will help her family if something happens a factor in determining soci-economic status.

Nigel has participated in fandoms off and on for the last 15 years, and is not currently active in any fandoms. She is not a producer – of fiction, art, or gifts – but a reader and a self-proclaimed lurker⁴. As well, she’s worked as a beta reader editing fanwork for other authors. She’s participated in fandoms for various seasons of *American Idol* as well as *Glee* (Pancake 19 January 2017).

Moriah Gemel

My first face to face participant interview was with Moriah Gemel. Moriah is twenty seven years old and identified her household income as the upper end of lower class. When asked about identifiers (race and sexuality), she answered, “I’m white, ish. Female. ish...queer” (Gemel 27 February 2017). I asked her to elaborate on “white-ish” and she stated that her mother is multi-racial and her father is white. She is currently still active in fanfiction communities. Her involvement in fan communities began when she was twelve. From 2001-2009 Moriah wrote and read fanfiction for various anime fandoms, but did not consider herself “active”, meaning she did not interact with other fans on a personal level. In that time she also participated in a forum

⁴ A lurker is someone who follows fan work and fan communities without participating.

called Anime League. She considered this to be peripheral fandom activity, “We all loved anime, but rarely discussed our fandoms” (Gemel 20 January 2017).

In 2009 at the age of 20, she joined the *Supernatural* fandom. She considered herself a part of this fandom in that she interacted with other fans and saw herself as a part of their community. Moriah took a break after nearly a year in the *Supernatural* fandom and in 2011 she joined the *Glee* fandom and created her first Tumblr account. Moriah is still occasionally involved in *Glee* fandom. Currently she is involved in a fandom for the popular webcomic “Check, Please!”⁵ (Gemel 20 January 2017).

Moriah both writes and reads fanfiction. Her connections in *Glee* fandom led her to being approached by an independent LGBT press (the same press I work with, Interlude Press), who have published two of her books thus far, one of which is a BDSM serial.

Currently, Moriah is heavily engaged in fandom on Tumblr, “I participate daily, multiple times a day” (Gemel 20 January 2017). Aside from fanfiction (reading or writing), she also engages in meta analysis and conversations of source materials. Moriah writes, reads and practices kink independent of fan communities (Gemel 27 February 2017). When I asked her if the experience of participating inside and outside of fandom are different, she stated that she does see and experience it as different. Her level of connection to these narratives and investment in them is different. She doesn’t experience the need to expand those universes beyond the given narratives. “That’s what usually precedes fandom for me. When I love the characters and I want to make art about them” (Gemel 27 February 2017).

⁵ Also referred to as omgcp!

Maria

My third respondent chose to go by the name Maria. Of my three respondents, I know her the least well. I first met Maria in *Glee* fandom when she was in the process of writing a story I loved⁶. I remember messaging her from time to time to let her know how much I was enjoying it, as the third part had not been posted. This was in 2011. For the next few years we became what I would call Tumblr friends (as opposed to the friendships I developed with both Nigel and Moriah, which extended into our real lives and included meeting face to face several times). Outside of fandom we never spoke, but I followed her fiction, and she followed mine. We knew enough about each other's lives to know when the other might need encouragement, or a simple offer of a listening ear, as we both went through difficult times while we were in the same fandom.

Maria is my youngest respondent at the age of 24. When asked, she stated that she hasn't figured out what ethnic label she feels applies to her, as she's $\frac{3}{4}$ white and $\frac{1}{4}$ Latina. "It's all a little messy. Especially because Hispanic/latinx are really ethnic categories that intersect in many different ways with American racial categories" (Maria 20 February 2017). Maria was raised in a middle to upper-middle class family. Despite her entry level job in publishing and the high price of her rent, she stated that she might consider herself middle class, due to the safety net of her family's financial support, should she need it. Maria identifies as queer, bi or pan, depending on situations (Maria 20 February 2017).

Maria is currently active in fan communities and has been since 2003. Initially, she began in the *Harry Potter* fandom at the age of 10 or 11 at Mugglenet. She read a great quantity of

⁶ Maria asked that I not name the stories she wrote.

Harry Potter fanfiction there and at fanfiction.net. Maria also spent some time in the *Twilight* fandom. “When I went to college, the HP fandom seemed to be stagnating—or maybe I had just gotten past the point where Mugglenet and fanfiction.net’s quality could remotely satisfy” (Maria 6 February 2017). She identifies her time with *Twilight* as a “stopgap” between fandoms, rather than a deep investment. Maria did identify that on the plus side, the fanfiction coming from *Twilight* included a lot of kink and power dynamic fiction, which she liked.

Her involvement in the *Glee* community, which is where we met, began when she saw a TV clip where Blaine Anderson, a canonically gay character, was introduced. Before committing to watching the show, she checked to see if there was an existing fandom for it. Unlike my other participants, Maria seemed to enjoy source material more with the knowledge that there was a community to share that enjoyment with. “Glee...is the first time I really formed relationships with people in fandom” (Maria 06 February 2017). Maria attributes this to logistics – fandom migration from LiveJournal to tumblr summer 2011 in combination with the way the tumblr structures and creates a particular culture. *Glee* fandom was also Maria’s first real involvement with fanfiction writing; prior to this the majority of what she wrote was original.

Maria identifies *MCU/Captain America*⁷ as her current “main fandom”. She is working on a story for this fandom, but is mostly a reader. As well, she is in what she considers a relationship building phase with the community. *Twilight*, *James Bond*, *omgcp!* webcomics, *Star Trek* (RPF) are other examples of fandoms she’s dipped a toe into (6 February 2017).

⁷ MCU being the Marvel Comic Universe, of which Captain America is a part.

Process

Implementation

Once I received my IRB exemption designation, I moved forward with this project by reaching out to six women I knew within fan communities I had participated in. I borrowed language from my drafted consent form and modified it to tailor it to individual requests, asking if they were interested in participating. I aimed for a pool of 3-5 respondents. Within the day I had found three respondents. Of the other three, one declined and the other two did not initially answer. Once I received confirmation from respondents who were ready to move forward, I sent them links to the consent form for participation via Google Forms.

Interview Process

The interview portion of this study was designed as phased interviews. Each woman participated in a three phase interview. The Phase I interview was done in Google forms (Appendix A). It consisted of a consent form (Appendix D), and then basic information. Participants chose their aliases, should they chose to use one for the sake of anonymity. They were asked their ages, status as participant in fan communities, if they read noncon/dubcon. In addition they were asked to provide examples of one or two favorite fan stories containing one or both of these themes.

The Phase II was a six question email interview (Appendix B). Each participant described fan community history and which fan communities they have participated in. They were asked to quantify their levels of fan engagement and what forms their engagement took (examples being as authors, readers, beta readers, etc.). In order to me to get a baseline for their perceptions, they were asked how they define kink. In addition, I asked them why selected particular stories as their favorite examples of this kink. Finally, I asked them for example stories that utilized rape

fantasy and noncon in troubling ways. Responses to the second questionnaire varied. Nigel's responses were short; when asked why she chose her example story, "Howl at Your Beauty Like a Dog in Heat" by a_living_museum, her response was shorter and ended with, "I'll think of a better answer for the in-person" (19 January 2017). She later directed me to a compiled list posted by a fan author of bp!Klaine fics⁸, noting that not all were noncon, but directing me to themes she enjoyed (those with medical kink). In later interviews Nigel indicated that she really only enjoyed noncon stories if one of the characters, particularly Kurt (a character from *Glee*) has a boy pussy (Pancake 6 February 2017).

By contrast, Moriah chose to give three examples, all from *Glee* fandom, one of which was a story she wrote, "Tasting Flight". Both Moriah and Maria chose two of the same stories: "Going Under" and its sequel "Defeated by You" by MissBeizy. Maria provided me with six story examples from both *Glee* and the *MCU/Captain America* fandoms (Maria 6 February 2017).⁹

Prior to their Phase III interviews, which were initially designated as face-to-face interviews, I read examples of these works in order to have an idea of what they liked. Only one respondent, Moriah, gave an example of a story that utilized rape fantasy or noncon in a troubling way ("The Pavaroti Protocol", by canniblaïne). Nigel and Maria described why they might not like a story without providing examples.

⁸ Bp! Is a fandom trope in which one of the characters has what is called a boy pussy. This can denote a character with both male and female genitals, or a character who is considered male but with female sex organs. Within this trope, characters are *not* considered trans. Bp! functions in alternate universe (AU) settings in which someone with bp! can be revered as unique or rare. Sometimes they are considered "property" to be sold or owned as a slave. Often there is a plot element in which a character with a bp! goes into heat.

⁹ See Appendix E for a full list of stories provided by respondents, including summaries, tags and warnings.

I conducted face-to-face interviews that were tailored to each respondents' prior answers in Phases I and II. They were all conducted via Google Hangouts and I used the Kaltura CaptureSpace Desktop Recorder to record them. Because I have auditory processing issues, I gave all three the option to do them face-to-face, with the choice to have only their voices or both voices and faces recorded. Maria opted to only have her voice recorded but we did speak face to face. Both Nigel and Moriah consented to recordings of their faces and voices.

The third phase of the study was designed to function as a conversation. I prepared guiding questions to shape the conversation, however, I wanted to leave room for respondents to take the conversations where they wanted (Appendix C). I wanted their insights and interpretations of the topics.

Post face-to-face interviews, I obtained consent from all three respondents to ask follow up questions. The night of M's interview she emailed me a links to a tumblr conversation she'd had with a friend about the role of Catholic upbringing and her relationship with sex.

Coding

I organized a coding system with the hopes of discerning patterns and themes within the nine total interviews done with all three women. I began by creating a spreadsheet that listed all the questions and responses obtained in Phase I and Phase II. I then went through and read the answers, looking for key words that were used consistently (either throughout an individual's interview or across interviews between other participants). As I discovered commonalities I began color coding them each time they were mentioned. Through this process I was able to find eleven consistent and common key words in these interviews: desire, shame, control, violence, norms, fantasy rape, enjoyment, consent, submission, fetish and recovery. I then grouped

sentences that fell under these terms – even if one sentence overlapped with multiples, as a way to narrow them into a more manageable number of themes.

From these eleven key terms, I narrowed to six: desire, control, violence, consent, recovery, and norms. Using these six themes I created individual spreadsheets. Any use of a key word or mention that was thematically relevant was pasted from master documents (transcripts and interviews). I began sifting through the Phase III interviews this way as well. Each spreadsheet was organized with a reference to the question it was in response to, the comment, what other themes it would cross reference with.

From these six themes I was able to narrow my focus on the relationship between control, desire and recovery, which ended up being the most relevant and to the point when keeping initial research questions in mind. I was then able to cross-reference data and group it further into these three areas and also note ways in which they interact and work with each other.

Setbacks

In the course of implementing this project, I encountered several roadblocks or setbacks. There were moments when I had to change direction based on responses I was receiving either from my committee, respondents, or feedback groups. Initially, this project struggled to get off the ground as I found myself losing participants within the first month of their agreement to participate. Finding women I knew who read this kink and would be willing to participate in a study on it proved to be a challenge. I did not anticipate that one of the potential candidates I asked to join would realize that they no longer felt comfortable identifying solidly on the gender binary and therefore didn't feel they would be appropriate for the study. Finding new participants took well over a month.

Once I finished my Phase III interviews and shared the beginnings of my study with feedback groups, it became apparent that without stated race, sexuality or socio-economic status, many readers were under the assumption that my respondents were most likely white and middle class. I chose to follow up and ask respondents, should they wish to answer, what their race and socioeconomic status are. Building from this realization, I also asked participants to identify sexual orientation, to avoid having them read through a cis-lens. Having taken ideas for structure and methods from Radaway's model, I had notes that her study was focused on white, middle class women. Radaway herself notes this in her forward (9). Without a diverse sample, one could hardly apply an intersectional feminist study. Despite this, I initially opted not to ask for this information for a few reasons. Primarily, because this study is meant to be anonymous. The very nature of online communications being what they are, one could not verify answers regarding age, race, socioeconomic class, or even gender when remaining anonymous. I chose to ask their ages, as they had to consent under the understanding that they had to be 18 in order to participate, and I had to trust those answers. As well, I trusted their answers defining their gender. In part, this choice came from my knowledge of these women and their gender identifications.

The largest set back this project faced was the loss of participant data. As stated, I used Kaltura CaptureSpace Desktop Recorder to record face-to-face interviews. Shortly after completing my interviews, two of the three files corrupted and were lost. After it became clear they were not recoverable, I went back to the two participants whose interviews I had lost and asked them if they would be willing to do another interview, this time in the form of a Google chat. While this format had limitations – the interviews took much longer and conversational flow was impeded by the back and forth format – they proved to be much easier for me to work

with once I decided to move to a data coding system of analysis. It must be acknowledged that going in to the repeat interviews I already had ideas regarding their answers, as I remembered them from before. This might have changed the questions I asked and therefore the answers I got vs. what I might have otherwise had to work with.

INTERLUDE #4: I Read a Story

I read a story that stayed with me for days. I read a story and kept it with me for days.

Sometimes, fiction haunts me. It crawls under my skin. Stories have infinite potential for readers who become so viscerally attached to words. Words have been my safety. As a teenager, I hid in books. I would hide in closets and read. I protected myself from my own home in books. Mostly this was good. Sometimes, harmful. I will never forget Stephen King's *Gerald's Game* when I was 15. I still feel sick when I think about it.

I remember when MissBeizy was writing "Going Under" and "Defeated by You". When she told me she was writing "Defeated by You" I was thrilled to find out there would be a sequel to a story I had loved. She was worried – if I remember correctly, she said it was one of the darkest things she'd ever written. She is unafraid for herself, but aware of her readers. She is a woman who moves forward with her writing though. She honors herself.

It didn't feel dark to me, years ago. It felt thrilling. I don't remember why. When I go to her AO3 page again now, I am taken back. Both of us stopped writing *Glee* fanfiction at the same time. Over 100 stories and I've read them all. Once, years ago, we jokingly held a "Porn Off" in which we wrote increasingly funny, erotic short stories with reader prompts. I don't remember her stories as dark. I remember them as unapologetic. MissBeizy taught me an awful lot about being unashamed of desire, of writing whatever you wanted.

Now though, "Defeated by You" is dark. Perhaps I am still raw.

I had read "How at Your Beauty Like a Dog in Heat" on family vacation; the first of the stories I've read or reread for this project. That's the thing about too much fanfiction. You'll read anything anywhere, so long as you know how to be covert. I have a fucker of a migraine. I'm

waiting for a seat in a restaurant and I'm reading on my phone. The story is posted on the *Glee* Kink Meme which is giving my phone fits.

I stop part way through. My eyes throb and I feel like I may throw up. The headache is in my neck. I feel disconnected from the story. I don't understand the characters, I don't understand why the author worked so hard to make the prompt work and failed. Now, I feel this story all over me. I close out the page. Kurt is helpless in his bed. Blaine is an unrecognizable character, dark and twisted and increasingly unable to tell right from wrong. This is somehow too close. This has taken a character I love and made him a predator; I wonder who could have been hiding in a closet in my room.

Another friend tells me about A/B/O stories all the time. Honestly, I've been clueless. But Maria's stories finally make it make sense for me. There's a need that's undeniable in "Positive Reinforcement". It's sexual, but also deeply psychological. When the story ends, I want so much more; but more about the characters' trauma. I want the trauma looked at, turned around and puzzled through. I love, and I love, and I re-read this one days later and want to write. I tuck this story close.

I want to look at trauma with intimacy. I want to lose myself in it. Desperation with care.

I read more. I keep reading. I read stories with this trope for days: I learn what works and what doesn't, taking apart plot devices and character turns. Language and sophistication in writing. I trust Maria. I love "The Deep End". I keep this story. It's sexy and funny at once. It doesn't take itself seriously. I re-read the summary for days and laugh. "*Exquisitely tragic and beautiful Russian romance, James Bond shenanigans, designer drugs with highly specific effects,*

Steve Rogers' overactive imagination, a swimming metaphor. Also: a villain has a secret sex room, some assassins join the mile high club, and Captain America punches a shark."

I trust Maria. She's told me Dsudis is unafraid and so I am. MissBeizy always was too.

I crave sushi for days. I feel sick for days. I am fascinated, and that compounds the sickness. Dsudis is unapologetic. The story is complex. The story does everything "Howl at Your Beauty" didn't do for me – makes me think, makes a difficult to pull off plot believable. But I'm too close. I too know what it means to respond to patterns; I too learned to read cues and think they meant sex was expected.

I don't feel healed in my own life. I haven't turned my own story on its head.

I crave sushi for days. I read a story and it keeps me for days.

Years have passed since I learned of the "Pavarotti Protocol". I've been warned off by everyone who knows me because it crosses all of my hard limits. Moriah names it as a story she doesn't like and reminds me in chat not to read it

I punish myself, but lightly. I tell myself I read the comments rather than the story because I'll learn: I'm honoring my own questions, right? Why women read this?

It's been too easy, in these months, to forget to take as much care of myself as I would the women who have trusted me to take care with their stories. It's a lesson I must relearn over and over. It's too easy to let a story take me, and to read a pattern, and to punish myself. I am haunted. I am haunted and I file the comments on this story alone with *Gerald's Game*.

CHAPTER FOUR: Data

Themes

While each woman had what could be considered a central narrative to their individual stories, reading across their collective interviews I identified several themes. I located eleven intersecting topics (desire, shame, control, violence, norms, fantasy rape, enjoyment, consent, submission, fetish and recovery), which I then organized thematically and re-examined. Several topics within themes overlapped or interconnect when the narratives are examined holistically and on a macro level. Keeping in mind my initial research questions, I will be examining three themes that emerged most often in the women's interviews: *desire*, *control* and *recovery*.

To begin, I believe it is important to address the question of sex. When examining this topic and my interactions with women, particularly keeping in mind the question of what is considered "good sex" (culturally and personally), it seems as though a definition might be helpful. One must think beyond basic or common definitions of sex (which are murky on their own) and ask, what is sex? For many people, sex is tied to the idea of penetration. For example, the most common meaning of "I lost my virginity" is (word for tied to) the sex act in which a male penis penetrates a female vagina. This is an inherently heteronormative paradigm, but also clearly demonstrates the ways in which some sex acts fall far within the inner circle, cornerstones of "good sex". I believe that how sex is defined and perceived is ultimately a personal one, and I think it is important here to be clear about my own definitions of sex or what a sex act is. I believe that acts enacted or participated in by ones' self alone are sex acts. Masturbation, I believe, is a sex act. Seeking something one desires, interaction with the object of desire in whatever way feels best for the agent – while perhaps more conceptually nebulous – could be a sex act.

If we think, perhaps, about someone who falls within the asexual spectrum. They may not desire a physical encounter with another human, or if they do, under specific circumstances, some of which include a desire for closeness and for making their partner happy, but not arousal as we are taught to imagine it. Enjoying reading erotica – enjoying a particular kink and interacting with it on personal terms – can be considered, in my opinion, a form of sex as well. In their introduction to the *Feminist Porn Book*, Penley, Shimizu, Miller-Young and Taormino frame feminist porn as a site in which one can begin to deconstruct the ways sex is defined, to “expand the language of sex as an erotic activity; an expression of identity, a power exchange” (Tormino et.al. 10). Going forward, I will be considering the actions taken by these women – seeking, reading, enjoying in a variety of forms – to be sex acts.

What does reading fanfiction tell us about the ways these women consume media? How is this consumption a manipulation of media and discourses of sex and sexuality? Here I am reminded of Maria’s second interview, in which she described watching *Glee* for the first time and then seeking out a fan community before committing to the show. Maria wanted the community; she enjoyed the show more when she knew there was an active space of like-minded participants who would be actively reading, discussing, and queering the source texts. Nigel described her media habits – she doesn’t read fiction other than fanfiction, and rarely watches television shows. Her participation in active media viewing is informed by a deep connection to a show or topic. She understands that connecting with a pairing on a show, for example, and then becoming a part of that community, is a lot of emotional work (Pancake 6 February 2017). Shows she deeply connects with are the ones that draw her into fandom, and attract her to stories about pairings she enjoys or would like to see. In both cases, these women are the agents of a

very specific and thoughtful, deliberate choice and arbiter of engagement. They are in no way helpless to the media – they actively seek spaces that are subverting it.

Demonstrated in the discussion of the three emergent themes, keeping in mind that all three women have an understanding that their desires land in a culturally taboo zone, it is clear that their actions are resistance. All three women were cognizant that these desires are considered taboo; all three women chose to participate in this counter-culture and seek expressions of kink and taboo sex for their own enjoyment regardless. By understanding their desires, their choices to violate culturally embedded discourses and rhetorics that function as control mechanisms, these women subvert. Their agency pushes and shifts borders.

Control

In speaking with my respondents, I found that there were different narratives of control appearing in their interviews: oppressive and subversive control. The first – oppressive control – functions as a social force, policing or inhibiting desire and sex. This control is linked to power on a larger scale, to hegemonic discourses, to rhetorical depictions of appropriate sex or sexuality in spaces such as mainstream media or religious rhetoric. The second – subversive control – is embedded and enacted by these women in the act of reading and enjoying taboo kinks in fanfiction.

Oppressive control operates through a variety of mechanisms; as my respondents participate in fan communities, it is unsurprising that mainstream media appears as one. As well, particularly for myself and for Maria, religion has played a very important role in the oppressions and sex shame we have felt. Pop culture, media, religion: all operate within the complex structure of shifting borders – ideologies of reifying control and shifting sites of resistance. These women are a tiny microcosm of a larger movement. I have learned through personal

experience and observation that religious rhetorics in Western history have long enacted oppressive, damaging narratives meant to control women in a myriad of ways, sex, desire and sexuality among them. Media is saturated with images, stories, and character work that reinforces a narratives of acceptable female desire, female sexual behavior, what it means to be female or feminine. Although there have been shifts in recent years, these patriarchal, sexist and controlling systems continue to operate. Many watchers of television shows or movies, for example, may not be aware of the male gaze which filters their watching and therefore understanding or analysis or takeaway from what they were watching, and yet it is there. The role of religion and people's relationship with it has changed dramatically over time; and yet, religious rhetorics surrounding women and sex still operate. They may look different; for example, contraception is still a hot button topic, particularly when tied to religious dogma and discourse, but it is much more available now than in the past. However, these rhetorics still have tremendous power. Despite increases in access to birth control, women are still fighting for the right to make procreative choices for themselves, and a large portion of this fight is linked to religious rhetoric and dogma (Cavendish; DeRogatis).

These narratives are a part of culture creation – they are a product of culture and also create culture. While it is not unheard of for creators to push the boundaries or break away from cultural norms within media narratives or storylines, or even within religious confines (new Christian churches with increasingly liberal, positive missions), overwhelmingly, they are still participating in this circular relationship. What is created in this dynamic, and what is enforced are cultural norms as well as perceptions of what falls inside the circle and what falls outside of that circle – the non-normative. The boundaries of this circle may shift, but there will always be acts, ideas, people, who fall outside the boundaries.

Respondents demonstrated an understanding of this power dynamic, of cultural conditioning, and the concept that desires and actions could be considered normative or non-normative. This understanding appears most clearly in their varied definitions of kink. Moriah described kink as “Anything outside the ‘norm’” (Gemel 24 November 2016). Maria articulated quite clearly the ways in which culture shapes our understanding of acceptable sex. Kink, for her, is “any sexual interest.... that's considered unusual in whatever culture you're living in. So whether something is considered a kink depends on your time and place and the people you're surrounded with. It's a moving target” (Maria 6 February 2017). Maria acknowledged that rape fantasy is not “culturally acceptable/expected” (Maria 20 February 2017). Nigel too, stated this, that what is “kinky” is not “socially normal or acceptable”, to the point that she would never tell people outside of fandom or a safe space that she reads noncon fic (Pancake 6 February 2017).

When interviewing Maria, Moriah and Nigel I was able to identify both psychic and physical violence as factors influencing their feelings about sex and desire. Both Nigel and Maria spoke about shame, which is an excellent form of control – and what I consider to be a form of psychic violence – which is enacted through many institutions and takes many forms, including media and pop culture. Through the interview process, Nigel explicitly links shame with control in regards to sex and desire (Pancake 19 January 2017 and 6 February 2017), also stating that these feelings of shame are “issues I’d like to work on more in therapy and with [her husband]....but I do think that I have a lot of body shame” (Pancake 6 February 2017). Nigel’s body and sex shame – which are strong enough she identifies them as something she needs to work on in therapy and with her husband – are the result of psychic violence.

Maria has identified one source of shame (her Catholic upbringing) and is able to clearly articulate the effects of it. More than once, Maria describes herself as a trauma victim (Maria 6

February 2017). Although there is no history of sexual abuse in her life, she states that she experienced emotional abuse. Regarding sex and desire, she stated; “I have a shit ton of baggage about sexual desire because I was (a) raised super Catholic (classic), (b) raised a woman with a sex drive in a culture that would maybe prefer we don't have a sex drive (unless and until it is activated by a man)” (Maria 20 February 2017). Maria links growing up as queer in this environment to her experiences and perceptions of herself as traumatized as well.

Maria experienced, as I did, incredible confusion and guilt related to our Catholic upbringing about pleasure might have the capability to violate virginity in some way. She describes what she went through when she began reading erotica and getting off on it:

I had the expected MASSIVE GUILT DELUGE. I spent a lot of time hiding that I was (a) reading erotica (b) getting turned on (c) masturbating. I had a whole years-long guilt and confusion spiral about whether I was a virgin??? (Uh, tmi, but I used to masturbate in the shower and so for years was like...did water??? Take my virginity??? Like, I literally looked things up in the Catechism trying to figure that shit out (Maria 20 February 2017).

Earlier I stated that sexual contact that wasn't even a penetrative, procreative activity left me with an irrational fear that God would punish me by impregnating me. Both of us were brought up in an intensely sex-shaming culture which effectively used myth of virginity (referring here to the myth of the Virgin Mary and Immaculate Conception) to control any sexual pleasure we might have experienced. Being a virgin was the ultimate aspiration, the cornerstone of being “good”. Being sexual, doing sexual things – such as masturbation – took away from that purity. These are spaces that are inherently messy, which make them hard to untangle. Virginity is understood in the Catholic Church as penetrative, procreative, heterosexual sex. Despite this incredibly narrow definition, *any* sexual actions, fantasies or contact were controlled through

discourses of shame. As an adult, it is easier for me to understand that this violent shaming was meant to function to keep us away from sex, operating as Rubin's "sex panic", the domino that set off a chain effect. Both Maria and I experienced shame to a degree that it had the ability to confuse us about basic biology (no, you cannot get pregnant because a boy touches your breasts) and boundaries (is penetrating one's self with water somehow capable of nullifying virginity?).

It is commonly assumed that women who experience rape fantasy are victims of sexual assault themselves. Of the four of us, only Moriah and I identify as rape survivors. Throughout our interviews, I found myself moved by Moriah's insight and ability to articulate how her history influenced why and how she reads (and writes) rape fantasy in ways I have previously not been able to. Rape is clearly a violent trauma that affected her deeply, and yet, Moriah's interview is ultimately powerful and positive. Moriah does not read rape fantasy to punish herself, or to shame herself in any way. "As a survivor of rape...I too have had to make the best of a bad situation" (Gemel 27 February 2017). It is clear from our interviews that reading rape fantasy is Moriah's way of taking *back* control.

Desire

In the course of these interviews, I found that my respondents' engagement with this kink is ultimately their way of flipping the script on oppressive control and taking it back; enacting subversive control. All respondents' choices to read and enjoy this and other kink tropes in fanfiction are forms of exercising control over discourses that have thus far controlled or shaped them in some way. Ultimately, they understand the ways in which social forces have influenced their ideas of sex and desire, and chose to subvert those in finding ways to express and experience pleasure through them.

My respondents often linked their actions (reading rape fantasy in fanfiction) with release and submission and ultimately pleasure of some form. These women owned the desire to be out of control; they spoke of the power of submission. I find that submission is commonly considered weak – that the submissive partner or person is weak or giving up control of a situation. In BDSM relationships (a word I use that is not meant to imply romantic partnership, because BDSM relationships can be entered to in a myriad of forms between multiple people. They do not have to be romantic, or even sexual), it is ultimately the submissive who has the power to give the gift of control to their partner; they are never forced into an action or scenario they haven't consented through (either explicitly or through the negotiation of contract or set parameters). In a healthy BDSM relationship, the submissive has the power to begin, end, pause and shape a scene or dynamic. They are not helpless or abused.

Although not all respondents link their desire for submission or release of control to BDSM, they function in the same way. They are the agents in this engagement. They chose to read these stories – and although they might not choose to share this fact with people outside of fan communities or trusted inside circles – they do not feel shame over their choices. Rather, both Nigel and Maria had a keen sense of understanding that their silence was a form of navigating culturally acceptable discourses rather than because they are personally ashamed or feel dirty.

In the second and third interview phases, I spoke with Moriah, Maria and Nigel about why they chose the stories they shared with me as examples of favorite stories featuring noncon/dubcon or rape fantasy. Their answers here were particularly enlightening, demonstrating this idea of subverting shame by turning it into pleasure, or taking having their desires controlled and turning this script into a way to take pleasure for themselves. Taormino et.al. touch on this in

their discussion of what feminist porn can and does do, “Feminist porn explores sexual ideas and acts that may be fraught, confounding, and deeply disturbing to some, and liberating and empowering to others” (15).

When Maria described why she enjoyed the story “Positive Reinforcement”, she mentioned that “underneath my interest in noncon/dubcon is (a) relief about not being in control and (b) finding desperation deeply arousing.” (Maria 6 February 2017). I asked Nigel if what she enjoyed “Howl at Your Beauty Like a Dog in Heat” was when the character being raped (Kurt) succumbs to the pleasure and submits to it, or if it was the shame he experiences after the encounter. “Yeah, I think it’s both probably...the idea that you’re not responsible for, like it’s just you’re giving up control,” (Pancake 6 February 2017). These statements might beg the question: How do we frame women who are aware of rape-culture, articulate about how it functions and firmly against this culture the perpetrated and abets this violence as sex positive, feminist, and subversive?

Understanding a disturbing kink or trope can become the site of empowerment requires that we take a turn not only toward compassion toward these women, but also that we frame the texts offered as sites of learning. In these texts, rape can be seen as a plot device, a vehicle toward pleasure. We’re taught to say no to desire. We’re told wanting sex, being sexual, that engaging in the erotic is shameful, degrading – in fact, often owning sex positivity or being sexual can become a weapon; women who want sex are often framed as “wanting it”, the perpetrators and victims of violences they are inflicted to. Maria and I discuss the use of additional tropes – such a sex pollen or A/B/O and why she likes them so much: “probably because of this sense that there are really strict rules for when and where and between whom sex

is appropriate. And this does away with all of that without it being anyone's fault” (Maria 6 February 2017).

That they read these stories doesn't speak for a desire to have choices taken away – but the choice is really whether to allow themselves to experience pleasure without baggage. They don't want to be helpless or powerless in real life. Rather, they've experienced control through violence to such a degree, are conditioned to saying no to desire, that they want a space where the fantasy of submitting to pleasure is the end goal. The way the above given stories function, that roadblock, their shame or guilt or sense that they can't be sexual, is removed by a *plot device*. They seek out a taboo kink because they enjoy the idea that there is something that has the power to take them from that controlled space and into that pleasure (which consequently, Nigel and Maria explicitly state heightens the pleasure as a fantasy).

Like many other aspects of this study, this is a messy thing to untangle. It is not that these women want to lose their autonomy or ability to say no in real life. Instead they take this feeling (being helpless to pleasure), this thing they're told not to want (sex, pleasure, fantasy), and find a way to make it work for them. Maria describes this when discussing “Positive Reinforcement”: “In this story we have Bucky Barnes unable to communicate, not making decisions – and somebody is not forcing pain on him, but instead coaxing and coercing him into pleasure” (6 February 2017).¹⁰ Nigel states clearly that without the element of pleasure, she has no interest in noncon fic. “I would not be interested in a story where the person who was non-consenting was not at some point depicted as enjoying it” (Pancake 6 February 2017).

¹⁰ See Appendix E for summary of this story.

“Going Under”, by MissBeizy, is what made this kind really click for Maria, when she first began to see it as really sexy¹¹. “I’m very subby but hadn’t explicitly mentally connected rape (and similar) fantasies with that relief of giving up control and not having to make decisions” (Maria 6 February 2017). In reference to MissBeizy’s story (which Maria, Moriah and I had all read previously), Moriah speaks to the complex structure of the story, in which one character, Kurt, experiences rape fantasy, and through a series of events, eventually enacts it in a (very intense) roleplay scene with his partner, Blaine. These stories make a series of moves (which do not shy away from complex, dark or difficult moments) that upend conventional understanding of who has control. Moriah explicitly links this story with BDSM concepts, particularly RACK. “Control is really with the main character [Kurt], who sets up the entire scenario for acting out the rape fantasy and controls everything that happens. But he gets to release control...while his partner, playing the rapist, creates the illusion of a lack of control.” (Gemel 20 January 2017)

Recovery

For Moriah in particular, as a survivor of rape, turning this narrative into one of pleasure is incredibly powerful; “to take control by allowing myself pleasure through my character’s pleasure....to positively sexualize something that is negatively sexual is to take its power away. It can no longer hurt me” (Gemel 20 January 2017).

For my respondents, agency is deeply linked to narratives of recovery. As we’ve seen with Moriah above, subverting these narratives – rape as a violence into rape as a vehicle for pleasure – takes the power from the shame, trauma and violence. Maria referred me to a set of

¹¹ See Appendix E for summary of this story.

stories (*The Sushi Series* by Dsudis), which takes the reader through a very complicated examination of sexual trauma – one in which the victim (Bucky Barnes from the *Captain America* movies) is initially tortured and trained to pleasure himself through the withholding and giving of food (which is deprived for long periods otherwise). The first story shows us the ways in which his abuser breaks him. The second story shows us what happens after. What happens when the Bucky is in a safe space but is triggered – the appearance of the food used for the torture (sushi) and how his lover (Steve Rogers) has to navigate taking him out of the triggered state by enacting a scene of withholding and giving rewards for pleasure, but changing the script. It is an interesting, insightful, complicated (and for me, occasionally difficult) read. Maria described why she liked it; she references her baggage and trauma and then what this story gave her.

It says: okay, you have this script. Okay, you have this trauma. Okay, it's unavoidable. Okay. Now...what are you gonna do with it? How can you twist it for your own pleasure? How can you interact with this? How can you act this out in a way that reduces harm, or that's even good for you? (Maria 6 February 2017)

While both Maria and Moriah explicitly verbally link these stories and their engagement with narratives of recovery, it can also be seen in Nigel's story as well. Nigel shares that she's experienced body shame, and that she feels that narratives of shame and control have influenced her own sex life, but that these stories help provide her with pleasure (Pancake 6 February 2017). Seeking them and using them for her own pleasure is a positive experience. That she reads erotica doesn't shame her or make her feel degraded. As she says, "It works for me" (Pancake 6 February 2017). And for many women, I believe it can be as simple and complicated as that. As owning something that works for us. That makes us feel good in connection to something that

has been used as a weapon to make us feel bad, shamed, and victimized. As Moriah so beautifully put it, “The point is...to express, safely, the absolute release of surviving and even enjoying and claiming as one's own one of the worst possible experiences one can face” (Gemel 6 February 2017).

INTERLUDE #5: I Begin to Rebuild

Archives are lovely things. Archives and ephemera; existing together at once in internet spaces. I don't think of this project when I write myself into Queer Conversations. When Elise and Lauren help me articulate how my own body and sexuality exist in conflicting, haunting, lovely spaces. My body is the archive. My body holds the stories. My body makes the stories. And yet, I am twisting in winds; I am wound tight and I am fracturing and I am pulling pieces of self as they change together.

Imagine identity at the nexus of creation and remembrance.¹²

It is April 5th. I look at my computer screen and my heart beats too hard.

Will people open me like a memory box, lining ticket stubs and found poems, my 13 year young face like a pale moon, too round, cheeks soft with lingering trauma?

April has come. Spring is unpredictable. March winds blew my storm door off its hinges. It broke a small tree, one that was nestled inside a protective circle with six other trees. I don't understand this, how something protected could be the thing that succumbs.

I've been thinking about writing, digital spaces and my bisexuality. About a life of queer ephemeral moments which create constant states of reorientation within the shifting liminal spaces of queer. I have a lived sexuality and a written sexuality. I have written my body and desire into being. My queerness exists differently in digital spaces, in digital compositions. My queerness is resistant and resilient. It rewrites and reprograms.

¹² Excerpts from "The Tension of Narrative Stitching", a work in progress presented at the 2017 Queer Conversations Symposium

It is April 6th and I still haven't figured out how I will write myself into a thesis taking shape. Instead, I read a story to a room of people and come out as asexual for the first time. I honor myself in a room half filled with people who care deeply and a handful of strangers.

This constant reorientation is disorienting and destabilizing.

I write this the night before I read this; I am dizzy but strangely, feel deeply moved by my own commitment. I feel brave. I feel utterly exposed. I once came out as pansexual. A year later, bisexual. This moment, grey ace. I'm still learning what this means for me. I wonder how I will take this self and grow back into my life and body.

Being bisexual is to constantly fight for my ability to claim it, to be it, while simultaneously working against becoming an artifact of bisexuality, essentialized rather than seen as moments and movements, trails of ephemera that constellate right as the universe is in a state of constant expansion.

This program, this thesis, every time I tried to explain this work and these women to others, I felt this bone deep protectiveness. Don't essentialize me. Don't essentialize them. I have been swimming upstream so hard for two years. I'm just the author of erotica. I am just a body that produces pornography. I'm speaking into an empty room. I spend two years trying to understand why I love writing something my body is almost always disconnected from. I am not like Nigel and Maria. I do not get off on these stories. I'm not sure these stories heal me like they do Moriah. They haunt me and hurt me and teach me. They comfort me and intrigue me. We, the four of us, understand sex and stories in unique ways and I want to tell the whole world to shut up and listen. I want to take sex beyond the body; I want to explain how it can be both. It can be all. Our bodies, our sex, our desires: we can exist in endless, conflicting spaces. And we should be able to do so safely. But this world doesn't always care.

Rhodes writes; tells me that it is an ethical, feminist move to come out. I thought Rhodes meant I needed to come out the people in my life who don't know about my sexuality.

It is April 12th. Autumn previews a conference presentation. She strips down. She shows us her trauma. She fills the room with bravery. After, she looks at me and says she knows I know. We speak a similar language; mental illness and mental breakdown and what it takes to rebuild. The constant rebuilding this work takes.

It is April 12th and I open this document. I close my eyes and write things I've never told anyone but my therapist and Rochel. My keyboard is so loud; I know I will workshop these words with twelve people and I can't even see what I type because I am crying. I have made a circle of women who have been hurt. Who are strong, who work to heal themselves. I think, *I can be that brave*. I can honor them, I can honor myself. This is one of many ethical, feminist moves I can make in my life. This is a coming out of it's own.

I can name my trauma.

I don't have to ask permission. I don't have to wait for anyone else to tell me what happened.

I name my trauma. I name it and share it and pick up a little brick. I write about these women with love and wonder if they'll ever know how much they've meant to me. How they teach me about agency. This is life changing. This is ceremony and community.

I begin to rebuild.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions

This project entailed hours of conversation and over twenty thousand words in alphabetic interviews. To say there are things unexplored would be a gross understatement. What we have here is me following a single thread – the way that control, desire and recovery work within these narratives and in our engagement with this fanfiction trope. There is so much left unsaid. I speak of my own approach as sex-positive: all three women interviewed are inherently sex-positive, despite various levels of trauma spoken of. That's one of many beautiful things that came to me from the work.

There's a lot of camaraderie, fun, and in-jokes that couldn't have made it into this project but that feel important to highlight. There's a shared history, a thread that ran between us all, despite the fact that our conversations were individual. Although the four of us have gone in separate fandom directions, we all met and have a shared history with the *Glee* fandom. We rarely addressed specifics of the show or fandom highs and lows; perhaps because they didn't need said. Despite fandom difficulties (*Glee* could be a divisive fandom), I know that it was a positive experience for us all. This shared moment and history went miles toward a built-in trust. And this, I believe, is important to remember in this sort of work. I chose women I knew because without trust, I think the honesty of the work, on both ends, would have been compromised.

Should I revisit this topic or project again in the future, I would love to facilitate a group conversation, particularly about topics unaddressed here. Although we spoke about it, there is a lot of unmined territory about willingness to reveal themselves as women who read or engage in erotic activities over fandom activities. Several times, we addressed admiration for authors who displayed fearlessness and commitment to writing kink. Conversation and study with women who write these stories could be a really important converse bookend to this study. While I read

the stories provided in detail, a great deal more critical analysis could have been articulated and explored. In interviews with Maria and Nigel we addressed the messy, fascinating nature of gender and genitals within non/dubcon stories operating within certain tropes (bp! and A/B/O in particular, where characters display a variety of genital expressions, occasionally with mixed genitals). Considering our experiences as women, our bodies and desires, it would be important and interesting work to look back and think about the causal threads in that creation and enjoyment.

And here, it is important as well to address the word control. Linking the word and concept of control to these stories carries the potential for negative association. Undeniably, the four of us have been subject to controlling forces, ideologies and mechanism of power. Closing this project however, I want to return to something I stated above. Maria, Nigel, Moriah and even I have histories and engagements that very thoughtfully turn that narrative – being subjects of control – to one of agency. The stories we read, the sex we like (which is incredibly varied), our fantasies, carry a very rich potential to teach others; they offer spaces where we can take an important – vital – turn. What these women do restructures one aspect of human relations. Maria links her trauma to the story of two characters working through it, and muses “If only we could all toss out unhelpful conventions and take care of one another so creatively and compassionately” (Maria 6 February 2017). What if? What if we could do work, positive, compassionate work with women that aimed to shift the borders of control and regulation, of shame and violence just a little?

What if it was expected that most folks would grow up to have rape fantasies, I’m sure...we would have more conversation about consent and negotiation in sexual

education classes. There would be jokes and colloquialisms about it, in the way that there are jokes and colloquialisms about missionary, and blowjobs (Maria 20 February 2017).

This is the *what if* that stays with me. Because here, Maria clearly understands the ways in which sex acts have the power to move within the Charmed Circle. And in the case of rape fantasy, what if we allowed ourselves to imagine a world in which engaging in this fantasy had the power to make this world *safer* for women? The beauty of this space, for me, was understanding this aspect of Maria, Nigel and Moriah's stories. These women have taken this turn, have taken texts and found ways to learn from them. These women engage with one of the best kinds of sex – not the culturally acceptable perhaps – but sex with agency. With desire that makes them feel good. With self-respect.

1982. 35 years ago Gayle Rubin spoke of radical theories of sex, of their potential. What if? What if we began making turns such as these? If we told women “desire whatever you want”? If we embraced “your kink is not my kink,” even if you find that kink personally disturbing? If we were able to discern the difference between fantasy and action the way that these women have? In every moment of this work I saw these women as radical, as brave, as important.

I like to imagine this border between acceptable and unacceptable, or between controlling or repressive forces and people. I drew a diagram once, for a friend as she helped me with this thesis. The line was waved, with a hump pushing in on the “control” area. In messy letters, I wrote “men”. And below, in this bulging area, pushing forward, “women”. And then, above it, “Radical Theories” and an arrow to redrawn borders. Where women, and that little bulge, moved into a bigger space, next to the men.

This is incredibly oversimplified. Silly perhaps. But a stripped, powerful visual capturing one of many potentials this kind of work can do; not the work of examining rape fantasy, per se (although including it). But the work of creating spaces where people can speak to each other while orienting toward conflicting, difficult spaces. Listening with compassion and a willingness to learn and honor.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
PHASE ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Email Address
2. What name/alias would you like me to use in this project?
3. What is your age?
4. Are you currently active in a fanfiction community?
5. Do you read rape fantasy or non-con fiction?
6. If so, please list one or two of your favorite stories. If possible, please provide links in addition to author and title.

APPENDIX B:
PHASE TWO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your history with fanfiction communities?
2. What fandoms do you or have you participated in?
3. What was your level of engagement, and in what ways were you an active participant in that fandom?
4. How would you define kink?
5. Why did you select (insert title of story) as a favorite story?
6. What are examples of fanfiction stories that utilize rape fantasy and noncon in ways that troubled you or that you didn't like?

APPENDIX C:
PHASE THREE GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. You spoke about your history with fanfiction communities. At what point in this history did you begin to read rape fantasy or noncon stories?
2. What attracted you or drew your attention regarding stories with these particular themes?
3. Earlier you defined kink as (insert definition here). Can you tell me more about this?
4. Can you elaborate on what elements in stories will turn you off or on to a story?
5. You've said that (insert number, even if it's none) know about your engagement in fan communities. Can you tell me more about why you (have or have not) shared this part of your life with others?
6. In what ways do you think perceptions of acceptable or unacceptable desires are played out in our culture? Where and how do you think you've seen this played out?
7. How do you feel about this? How do your desires fit into this narrative, or what you're told is acceptable desire?

APPENDIX D:
CONSENT FORM

You have been invited to participate in a research project for a study titled Narratives of Resistance: Reading Taboo in Fanfiction, in which you will be interviewed about reading of fanfiction with noncon or dubcon tags. This research will be used for the interviewer's thesis. It seeks to explore the ways in which women use fanfiction to subvert, resist, redirect and explore dominant discourses about women's desire, sexuality, and agency. The goal of this project is to examine these themes in fanfiction through the voices of those who participate, with the desire to unpack the power of fanfiction in creating spaces for women's agency.

Participants will be interviewed in three phases. The first interview will consist of a survey with both general data and provide the base for subsequent interviews. Following this phase, respondents will receive an email interview tailored in response to survey answers given by each individual that will further explore thoughts and opinions, as well as fiction each responder has read in the past. The third interview will be conducted via video or text chat. This will function for interviewer to gather more information based on email responses.

The interviewer and interviewer's thesis committee will have access to the interviews.

These interviews will be asking in depth questions about sensitive topics which may cause the participant emotional discomfort. Interviewer will take as much care as possible when navigating sensitive or upsetting topics. Interviewer will take as much care as possible in protecting the identities of all research participants. Interviewee has the option of keeping their identity completely anonymous and steps will be taken on the part of the interviewer to maintain that anonymity upon request. Participation in this study is voluntary and the interviewee will incur no risk or penalty for refusal to continue to participate in the study. Interview material will be available to the interviewee upon request. Should a participant request it, portions of the interview or materials may be withheld from final product of research project.

This study is intended to represent women's voices through their participation in fan communities, particularly through the reading and writing of fanfiction. The goal of this study is to talk with women rather than about women, and to honor their thoughts, opinions, and desires without judgement. Interviewer seeks explicit consent to use excerpts from interviews in the final submission of thesis. Transcripts may be used in future published works.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact the researcher:
Tania de Sostoa-McCue
judearaya@gmail.com
(248) 931-8631

You may also wish to contact Michigan State University's Human Research Protection program at:
Phone: 517-355-2180

Fax: 517-432-4503
E-mail: irb@msu.edu
Mail: 202 Olds Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48224

You will receive a PDF copy of these statements to keep. By clicking yes, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

APPENDIX E:

FANFICTION SUMMARIES

I've listed all fanfiction stories provided to me by the respondents in Phase One. I am listing them by author, title, fandom, character pairings (called slash, e.g. Kurt/Blaine slash), and where it was posted. I have posted summaries, warnings and tags based on what was provided by the authors. Summaries appear exactly as they do in the story, so there are typos. Depending on location of the original post, there may or may not be tags or warnings. For example, on LiveJournal, authors were not obligated to leave warnings or tags; some authors choose to do so and others do not. On AO3, authors are prompted to fill out tags as a part of the form when they post a story. In the section of the story where summaries are located, some authors choose to include additional warnings.

- 1) a living_museum. "Howl at your beauty like a dog in heat." Glee fanfiction. Kurt/Blaine slash. LiveJournal.

This story is a prompt fill from the Glee Kink Meme, where posters can request any story they like, and authors can choose to fill them or not.

Prompt: When Kurt is fourteen years old, his father gets remarried to Blaine's (or whoever, I don't really care) mom. Blaine is a Senior in high school, Kurt is a freshman, do they don't have much in common. Because of this, they don't talk that much. They are still able to get along though.

A couple years later, when kurt is sixteen and Blaine is twenty, he somehow manages to find out that Kurt has a boypussy. I don't care how, just so long as Kurt doesn't realize. Instead of being disgusted, Blaine becomes obsessed, even spying on Kurt when he gets dressed. One night, he can't take it any more and sneaks into Kurt's room at night to finger fuck him and eat him out. Kurt has really bad eye site and must wear contacts, which he takes out at night. Because of this, he can't see a thing when Blaine comes into his room, and is really panicked and confused. Kurt's also never touched his Bp, not because he's disgusted by it, but simply because he's uninterested In sex. Would love for him to come that first time, but also be humiliated and crying.

It soon becomes a nightly thing, and goes on for about a year before Blaine finally fucks Kurt. Intensely and roughly. But by this point, Kurt has become a total cockslut and been begging for it for months, despite the fact that he still doesn't know who the person is.

- 2) Appalachian_fireflies. "Suppress that Shit." Captain America fanfiction. Bucky/Steve slash. Archive of Our Own.

Summary: Steve's been on street suppressants for years to cope with something he doesn't want to talk about, thanks. He gets why the hospital is making noises about liver failure, but he

couldn't care less. They don't get it. This alpha they're sending him to isn't going to either. I think this fic was inspired by a fic that had a "compassionate care center" or something similar for omegas. Of course, I remember basically nothing else, as it's been years. If someone could let me know what that fic is so I can cite my sources, I'd be super appreciative.

In real life, no one really gives a shit if you get hurt and need help. You pretty much have to pull yourself up. Or not. Fantasy is much better imho, but feel free to be annoyed by the expectations it sets!

Tags: Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Alpha/Omega, Hurt/Comfort, Desperation, Suppressant Withdrawal, Sexual Abuse, Anal Sex, Vaginal Sex, Past sexual abuse of a minor, Self-harm, Drug addiction, Drug Withdrawal, Hospitals, Magical Healing Cock, Depression, Suicidality, Parent Death.

- 3) Canniblaïne. "The Pavarotti Protocol." Glee fanfiction. Kurt/Blaine slash. LiveJournal.

Because this story was posted on LiveJournal under a private account, the author was not obligated to provide tags, as would be the case with something posted on AO3.

Summary: Pavarotti's death has been blamed on Kurt, and he must now face the consequences and punishment.

Warnings: Object insertion, birds, non-con, etc. **May ruffle feathers.**

- 4) Dira Sudis (dsudis). "Dinner for Two." Part Two of the Sushi Series. Captain America fanfiction. Bucky/Steve slash. Archive of Our Own.

Summary: Bucky had followed him to the kitchen and was kneeling naked in the doorway. He was staring up at Steve with the slightly glassy expression Steve knew all too well, although he'd never seen it like this.

Bucky called it going into a pattern, not programming, because his actions weren't predetermined; he just had a limited range of responses to whatever was happening around him.

Tags: Hurt/Comfort, Past Rape/Non-con, Brainwashing, Dubious Consent, Eating Disorders, Hand Feeding, Rape Recovery

- 5) Dira Sudis (dsudis) "See the Master's Hand." Part One of the Sushi Series. Captain America fanfiction. Bucky/Pierce slash. Archive of Our Own.

Summary: "Remember," Pierce said gently. "The experience of pleasure is necessary for the health of the body and brain. Your sexual needs have to be satisfied, just like you have to be fed."

Tags: Hand Feeding, Dehumanization, HYDRA Trash Party, hydratrashmeme, strategic petting, Masturbation, Oral Sex

- 6) Emilyenrose. "The Deep End." Captain America fanfiction. Bucky/Steve/Natasha slash. Archive of Our Own.

Summary: exquisitely tragic and beautiful Russian romance, James Bond shenanigans, designer drugs with highly specific effects, Steve Rogers' overactive imagination, a swimming metaphor. Also: a villain has a secret sex room, some assassins join the mile high club, and Captain America punches a shark.

Tags: Sex Pollen, Dubious Consent, Humor, Angst

- 7) Hyperthetical. "Positive Reinforcement." Captain America fanfiction. Bucky/Steve slash. Archive of Our Own. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/3283625/chapters/7164305>.

Summary: "That's what you do when life hands you a chance to be with someone special. You just grab that brownish area by its points and you don't let go no matter what your mom says."
- Buster Bluth

HYDRA gives the asset a reward. It goes about as well as you can imagine.

Tags: HYDRA Trash Party, Implied/Referenced Torture, Sex Pollen, Cock & Ball Torture, Fisting, Orgasm Delay/Denial, Forced Orgasm, Prostate Milking, Voyeurism, Bondage

- 8) Lurkdusoleil. "Tasting Flight." Glee fanfiction. Kurt/Blaine/Sebastian/Jeremiah slash. Archive of Our Own. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/881210/chapters/169644>.

Summary: Blaine has been a slave in Sebastian's household for ten years. But never in that time has he met someone like Kurt, who is now his duty to train for Sebastian. Warnings include: Slavery (including the sale and treatment of humans as objects or property), non-con, dub-con, multiple sexual partners (in some instances while in a monogamous romantic relationship), controlled lifestyle, physical abuse, eventual instances of psychological/sexual torture, ageism, sexualization of and sexual contact with minors (youngest mentioned is 13; biggest age gap is 16 and 26; innocence!kink is involved), brief mention of STDs, mentions of kidnapping, clinical sexual contact, multiple graphic instances of voyeurism and/or multiple-participant sexual contact

Tags: Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Multiple Pairings, klaine endgame, Threesome - M/M/M, Sexual Slavery

- 9) MissBeizy. "Defeated by You." Glee fanfiction. Kurt/Blaine slash. Archive of Our Own. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1083992>.

Summary: This sequel contains: sub!Kurt/dom!Blaine, BDSM, binding, anxiety attacks, night terrors, plugging, flogging, breathplay, rough sex, pushed boundaries, rape/assault play, slapping, and choking.

The crux of this story is a rape role play, explicitly as stated. The role play is consensual but be aware that it is played out in full detail, including physical and verbal assault, the presence/threat of a weapon, slut shaming, homophobic language, and forced penetration. Happy ending, of course, because my boys always work it out and satisfy each other's needs (soulmates even when it's super kinky!), but the content is harsh and the journey rough so please do not expect anything less.

Tags: BDSM, Rape Fantasy, AU, Dom/sub, Impact Play, Anxiety, Rape Roleplay, Anal Plug, Subspace, Rough Sex, Breathplay

10) MissBeizy. "Going Under." Glee fanfiction. Kurt/Blaine slash. Archive of Our Own.
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/923154>.

Summary: An AU where Kurt Hummel goes to see Dr. Anderson about troubling dreams and ends up getting more help than he imagined he might. Sub!Kurt/dom!Blaine.

Warnings for: detailed discussions of rape fantasies, with very brief mention of slut shaming and homophobic slurs (not between Kurt and Blaine). There is no actual rape in the story and the interaction between Kurt and Blaine is separate and purely of a D/S nature, though the fantasy is discussed throughout.

Not angsty. But heed the warnings.

Tags: AU, Rape Fantasy, Dom/sub, BDSM, Rough Sex, Humiliation, Slurs, Anxiety, Anal Sex, Subspace

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