

Not Safe for Women: Asserting Control Over Trauma Through Fan Fiction

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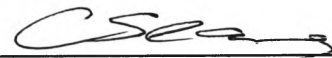
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Master of Arts
In
Human Sexuality Studies

by
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San Francisco, California
May 2017

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Not Safe for Women: Asserting Control Over Trauma Through Fan Fiction* by Joanna Lamstein, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.



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NOT SAFE FOR WOMEN: ASSERTING CONTROL OVER TRAUMA
THROUGH FAN FICTION

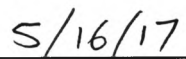
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Fandom scholars have yet to discuss the prevalent and popular themes of coercion and consent in the slash fan fictions. I analyze the depiction of consent and coercion in fan fictions that exemplify repeated themes of interest, including graphic, violent rape; victim blaming; eroticized rape; necessary homosexuality; and rape aftermath and recovery. Deploying psychoanalytical frameworks of fantasy and a close examination of white, male victimhood, I argue that ascribing violence onto white, male bodies simultaneously challenges notions of victimhood while also reaffirming it. I explore the attraction of these fictions, particularly as opportunities for authors and readers to work through issues of gender and violence as they produce and consume these stories.

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



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

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INTRODUCTION

A confession: I am a fan author and reader, and I enjoy reading rape stories.

I did not start reading rape stories with fan fiction. The first time I encountered rape noticeably in fiction I was thirteen with the novel *Speak* (1999), by Laurie Halse Anderson.¹ I consumed the book with horror, grief, empathy, and gripping interest. A year or so later, I found fan fiction, and I quickly found myself accompanying the characters I loved through experiences that haunted and troubled me. Stories like *Speak*, that dealt with coping, healing, and recovery, helped me navigate through a variety of emotional responses and situations. I also found stories where coercion and rape are intentionally eroticized. Sometimes deliberately tied into fear and trauma, sometimes sidestepped through textual justifications, but to my distress, I still found them erotic, too. I was both reassured and distressed that fan fictions that deal with issues of sexual violence were so common and popular; I was not the only one! But at the same time, I asked myself, why do so many people enjoy this? Why do *I* enjoy this?

When setting out to write my MA thesis, I decided to answer that question. How, when seeking out previous literature I found that fandom studies has not even discussed stories that deal with consent, coercion, and rape. Much of the scholarly work has focused on normalizing fan fiction as literature, as well as an outlet for erotic expression. In order to do this, much of the more controversial content in fan fiction has been noticeably ignored. I would like to add to the existing body of work by approaching fan fiction with sexual coercion and rape seriously, as fandoms scholars have done with other fan fiction. These stories are examples of people working through real issues made visible in our erotic

¹ Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999. Print.

imaginary. I want to build on other fandom scholars by legitimizing and taking seriously fan fictions that are normally seen as source of shame.

This thesis focuses on fan fictions (fan fics, or fics) that depict scenes of coercion and consent. Some of these fics include rape, and others are a little more complicated. By the end of this thesis, I hope to answer the question: how is coercion and consent being depicted in fan fiction, and what are authors working through about gender and violence in these representations?

My three overarching arguments are 1) fantasies are influenced by culture and influence culture. Violence and misogyny that permeates our society enters the erotic imagination, and the content generated reflects that violence. The difference between fan fiction and other media is that the authors of these stories are individuals, mostly women, writing them with no compensation. As I will demonstrate, 2) fan fictions are a space where issues of violence and consent are worked through, which is vital for marginalized groups that are subject to violence to explore issues of sexuality and gender. 3) I lastly argue throughout all the stories included in this thesis, which focuses on slash fan fiction between white men, that ascribing victimhood to white, male bodies, who are usually in positions of power, simultaneously challenges who are normally considered victims and conversely reaffirms that white men are not considered capable of being victimized.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

PART I: FANDOM

One of the earliest examples of fandom scholarly work is Lamb and Veith's, "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines."² An appropriate start for fandom studies, the article focuses on Kirk/Spock slash fan fiction. Much of the well-known academic fandom work, or also known as *acafandom*, explores slash as it is overwhelmingly popular and abundant in fandom spaces, to the point where it is impossible to examine fandom without it. Even in Henry Jenkins' crucial *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*,³ which reframes conversation about fan cultures as interpretive communities who "poach" and reinterpret media that is controlled by corporate interests instead of the consumer, focuses on slash fan fiction.

As a self-described aca-fan himself, Jenkins respectfully analyzes fan-generated content and culture, arguing that fan content should be considered legitimate creative works. Jenkins, along with Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* also published originally in 1992, are considered to be the start of fandom studies in scholarly circles. Jenkin's text was a call to legitimize fan fiction as literature, and other fan-generated content as recognized creative works. Prior to Jenkins, fan fiction was not considered seriously by academia at all.

The question that persists in the mind of acafandom is: Why are fans, a group that consists primarily of women,⁴ writing overwhelmingly about men having sex with men? The domination of slash fan fiction in fandom cultures is indeed a

² Lamb, Patricia Frazer, and Diana L. Veith. "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines." *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, 1986, pp. 235-55.

³ Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge, 2012.

⁴ Jenkins, Henry. "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 5.2, 1988, pp. 476.

worthy topic of discussion, though originally remained fairly heterosexist. Joanna Russ⁵ wrote on Star Trek back in 1985, when the primary form of sharing fics (which were called *specs*, as in speculative fiction, at the time) were through fan zines. Russ argued that Spock was coded female through his half-alien genealogy, which was the beginning of a continued theme in fan fiction to feminize a male character in a slash pairing. With the lack of fully-developed female characters, and much of the emotional investment in the show going towards the three primary male characters in the original Star Trek series, female fans were drawn to the connection that existed between Kirk and Spock. Other scholars, such as Henry Jenkins,^{6,7} have noted that female fans feel a definitive lack of affectively compelling female characters to inspire their creativity.

While some writers take pains to flesh out the female characters and their relationships in their favorite fiction, fandom is dominated by slash fiction. On the popular fan fiction website, Archive of Our Own (AO3),⁸ slash fan fiction makes up 61% (1,291,968) of tagged relationships as compared to 30% (188,032) for heterosexual works (often called just het fic), and just 9% (640,460)⁹ for femslash. Because the overwhelming majority of fics involved slash, much of the academic work on slash fan fiction has focused on normalizing the enjoyment of slash fan fiction. Lamb and Veith argue one of the reasons women write slash fan fiction is because it is free from the normal constrictions a woman finds in a heterosexual relationship. Women do not enjoy equal “sexual rank [with men] in

⁵ Russ, Joanna. "Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts." *New York: Crossing P*, 1985.

⁶ Jenkins, 2012, pp. 73.

⁷ Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. NYU Press, 2006.

⁸ Archive of Our Own. www.archiveofourown.org. Accessed Mar 27 2017.

⁹ As of October 19, 2016.

a sexist society,”¹⁰ and the slash allows for an escape from those confines as men in relationship with other men are considered sexual equals. In more ways than one, slash fan fiction allows women to imagine themselves with the power, agency, and privilege ordinarily afforded to (white) men, without the degradation, assumed gender roles, and heteronormative sexual scripts that dictate how a heterosexual romance is supposed to proceed.

Misogyny and racism make their way into fiction, both the fiction we consume and the fiction that we generate. They recur in fandom with the evidence of thousands upon thousands of individual fan fictions that ignore sympathetic characters who commit the sin of being female or a person of color in favor of the white male characters. For example, *Teen Wolf*'s (2011-present) protagonist is played by Tyler Posey, a man of Mexican descent. Despite being a well-developed character and the star of the show, the couple that primarily features in fan fiction consists of his friends, who are two white men.¹¹ In *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), though John Boyega plays a sympathetic character with a traumatic and tragic past, there are several thousands more fan fictions on AO3 that explore the relationship between two space nazis, one of whom is on-screen for only a few minutes.¹² In a time when neo-nazis and white supremacists have gained power in United States, this persistent attention and sympathy on white men in fan fiction is indicative of our current political and cultural state. The fact

¹⁰ Lamb and Veith, 1986, pp. 114.

¹¹ As of May 10, 2017, AO3 has a total of 82,233 individual works in the *Teen Wolf* category. Of those, the popular white male pairing between Stiles and Derek are tagged in 46,213 of those. Scott McCall, the protagonist of Mexican descent, and his canon girlfriend Allison Argent are tagged as a relationship in 6,853 fics, and Scott and Stiles as a pairing are tagged in 2,853 fics.

¹² As of May 10, 2017, AO3 has a total of 21,574 individual works in the *Star Wars: the Force Awakens* category. Of those, the white, male nazi pairing is tagged in 6,039 fics. Poe/Finn, a latino man and a black man respectively who are both protagonists in the film, are tagged in 3,609 fics. The next most tagged pairing is between space nazi Kylo Ren and white, female protagonist Rey at 2,646 fics, and then Finn/Rey at 906 fics.

that these two fandoms star young and attractive men, with co-stars who are likewise male, young, and attractive, would normally indicate that the fandoms would be inundated with slash pairings centering on them. The fact that both stars are men of color break away from that expectation.

Fandoms prefer white characters over men of color. *Supergirl* (2015),¹³ for example, goes against the grain for fandoms in preferring femslash over het, and even over slash. Specifically, the *Supergirl* fandom prefers *white* femslash and *white* het. Jimmy Olsen, played by black actor Mehcad Brooks, begins in the series as a potential romantic interest for protagonist Kara Danvers, but their pairing is so unpopular that it does not even appear in the top ten relationships list on AO3.

Misogyny in fan fiction operates in a similar way. Finding “a significant, three-dimensional, female character” is a repeated frustration among fans. Seeing oneself in a character, when many women characters in fiction are side characters, one-dimensional, or reduced to just a romantic interest, it is logical that women instead identify with the much more multi-faceted male characters. Agnes Tomorrow, quoted in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*¹⁴ said:

The writers of the series [*Blake's 7*] showed much more imagination when pitting the male characters against each other, in complex multi-layered interrelationships which continue to stimulate discussion, while the female characters were primarily pawns and patsies, taking little active part in the working out of their destinies (73, original alteration)

¹³ Berlanti, Greg, Ali Adler, and Andrew Kreisberg, developers. *Supergirl*. Berlanti Productions, DC Entertainment, Warner Bros. Television, 2015.

¹⁴ Jenkins, 2006, pp. 73.

However, even when complex female characters are present, writing about female characters seems to require a concerted effort as attention is still paid to the white male characters in fan fiction. As of now, acafans have not examined why, even when there are relatable female characters, fans persist in writing stories on white male characters and slash. Fandom studies still needs a comprehensive study of why fans spend their creative and emotional energy on these fictional male characters, even when villainous, misogynistic, or genocidal. For now, these trends are at the very least indicative that these racial and gender prejudices that exist in our current social and political climate.

Despite these trends of misogyny and racism, fandom remains an innovative and queer space. Lothian, Busse, and Reid¹⁵ argue that fandom is a queer and female space of infinite potentialities for identity and sexual exploration. As the work of unpaid individuals, fandom is separate from corporations and a site where fantasy and desire are expressed without the exchange of money or a consumer base that the author must cater to. It places creativity, and sexuality, into the hands of the consumer. As Russ writes, “I’ve spent so much time on this material partly because it’s the only sexual fantasy I know of written without the interposition of interests that are political or commercial.”¹⁶ Though I have argued against Russ’ claim that fan fiction is not *political*, I do agree that it is not necessarily *commercial*,¹⁷ anyone with an Internet connection can read, write, and post fan fiction. However, it would be negligent to ignore how we perpetuate prejudice in how and what we choose to

¹⁵ Lothian, Alexis, Busse K., and Reid, R.A. “Yearning Void and Infinite Potential: Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space.” *English Language Notes* 45.2. Special issue on “Queer Space.” Ed. Jane Garrity. 2007, pp. 103-112.

¹⁶ Russ, 1985, pp. 90.

¹⁷ Though this, too, is arguable. Most fan fictions are not done for profit, but *50 Shades of Grey*, which was originally a *Twilight* fan fiction turned into original work, may be considered an exception.

read and write. The fact remains that it is troubling to hold individuals, who are primarily women, solely accountable of what are clearly larger social issues. There is a marked difference between fan fiction and other major representations of sexuality, such as is found in the pornography industry, for this reason.

Queer writers do find a powerful medium for expression and representation in fan fiction. Constance Penley argues that “To make slash fiction do the ‘cultural work’ the fans want it to do, the slashers have ingeniously rewritten and recast the American mythos of interethnic male bonding by making that relationship homoerotic rather than homosocial.”¹⁸ Penley argues that Spock’s heritage of both Earth and the planet Vulcan is already miscegenation, and fans write about the tension of Spock’s heritage in relation to his sexuality.¹⁹ Additionally, fans have worked to increase gender representation on their own, such as Tobi Hill-Meyer creating a trans fiction anthology that includes the “digital stacks of free erotica.”²⁰ Busse and Lothian²¹ have also written about “genderfuck” and “genderbending”²² fictions, in which love is intertwined with trans, feminist, and queer politics. In its very existence, fan fiction serves to provide alternative readings of the canon, including and not limited to rewriting characters as queer.

Brenna Twohy made a compelling and incredible slam poetry

¹⁸ Penley, Constance. “Future Men.” *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. 2014, pp. 190.

¹⁹ Penley, 2014, pp. 186.

²⁰ Rae, Jetta. “Talking Trans Erotica with Tobi Hill-Meyer.” *Harlot.Media*. 5 May 2016. <http://harlot.media/articles/2850/talking-trans-erotica-with-tobi-hill-meyer>. Accessed 11 December 2016.

²¹ Busse, Kristina, and Alexis Lothian. “Bending Gender: Feminist and (Trans) Gender Discourses in the Changing Bodies of Slash Fan Fiction.” *Internet Fiction(s)*, 2009. pp. 105-127.

²² Though not central in this paper, “genderfuck” is not the common term in fan fiction, though “genderbending” is. Genderbending as a term has been criticized by fans who say that it is transphobic, as it assumes that someone’s gender changes with their bodily sex in the stories that it features in. I prefer Busse’s and Lothian’s use of the word genderfuck for that reason.

performance piece called “Fantastic Breasts and Where to Find Them,”²³ in which she argues that the sexiest thing about characters in fan fiction is that they exist “as part of a bigger story” and that “their kegels is not the strongest thing about them.” In the short three-minute performance, she critiques the violence, anonymity, and inability to relate to women in the popular pornography. Her performance insists that fan fiction is legitimate as an erotic source. Interestingly, as Jenkins argued for fan fiction’s legitimacy as literature, Twohy argues for fan fiction’s legitimacy as pornography, but as character-driven, literary pornography.

Sex is highly prevalent in fan fiction, often explicit and clearly intended for erotic purposes. More specifically, fan fiction often includes sex in addition to the plot. This large focus on sex, in conjunction with fandom’s preference for white men, is a large contributor to scholarly fandom’s focus on slash fan fiction. For reasons of consistency with previous fandom scholars, as well as how much more prevalent it is, this thesis will also focus on slash fan fiction. Most of the stories chosen are based around larger plots, and the the scenes I analyze for their depictions of consent and coercion are just one part of them.

This project will examine specific representations of violence and gender, specifically depictions of consent and coercion. My analyses here will certainly not cover all potential themes found in slash fan fiction, and especially not all fan fiction. And indeed, my methodology limits my research to speaking about the text available online and online fandom discourse. I aim to tackle a more difficult question to answer with a feminist and queer approach in my research: how is consent and coercion being depicted in slash fan fiction? What does it mean that the authors are typically using white, male bodies in these depictions? Fandom

²³ Twohy, Brenna. “Fantastic Breasts and Where to Find Them.” *Button Poetry*. 17 August 2014. https://youtu.be/bXey2_i7GOA. Accessed 11 December, 2016.

scholars have not yet delved into these subjects despite their prevalence, shying away from it sometimes at the request of fans themselves so as not to represent them poorly.²⁴ Sexual violence has been widely discussed by pornography scholars, however. Given the prevalence of explicit sex in both pornography and fan fiction, and how fan fiction functions as the primary erotic material for many fans,²⁵ I will next examine feminist scholarly work in pornography.

²⁴ Jenkins, 2012, pp. xxix.

²⁵ Twohy, 2014.

PART II: PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography, like fan fiction, varies in length, draws upon other bodies of work to set up a scenario, and are absolutely numerous and easily consumable online. They also both have a lot of sex, which is not found so explicitly or in as many varied ways in any other media. As stated, the main difference between mainstream pornography and fan fiction is that the former involves a multi-billion dollar industry and real bodies, and the latter involves a few individuals generating content for free. Regardless of this difference, the erotic imaginary is made visible through graphic depictions of sex in both of these mediums, and sexual violence is common in both of them. Violence in fan fiction remains a contentious issue.^{26, 27} For example, at the Gender Politics in Fandom panel at the Sherlock 221B Convention 2015, panelists including fan authors and readers who defended writing rape/non-con in fan fiction as a method of therapeutic coping were harassed, called “dangerous survivors,” and video recorded when telling their personal stories which were subsequently posted online.²⁸ More common examples are the frequent calls for censorship in fan fiction, or fans who conflate writing about sexual violence means that person is morally flawed or supports it.^{29, 30}

These are not new conversations in fandom, and the scholarly work about

²⁶ greenjudy. 25 Feb. 2017. <http://greenjudy.tumblr.com/post/157701143312/so-many-miles-to-go-dksaga-reysistantis-i>. *Tumblr*. Accessed 20 Mar. 2017.

²⁷ feynites. 15 Oct. 2017. <https://feynites.tumblr.com/post/151859527274/zefram-cockring-lizdexia-magnusbene>. *Tumblr*. Accessed 20 Mar. 2017.

²⁸ thegreenirene. “What Happened at 221b Con 2015: The Gender Politics of Fandom Panel and the Aftermath.” *Tumblr*. 18 April 2015. <http://thegreenirene.tumblr.com/post/116696525144/what-happened-at-221b-con-2015-the-gender>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2016.

²⁹ harriet-spy. 3 April 2017. <https://harriet-spy.tumblr.com/post/159171552933/vulgarweed-fuckyeahfightlock>. *Tumblr*. Accessed 17 May 2017.

³⁰ bold-sartorial-statement. 26 April 2017. <http://bold-sartorial-statement.tumblr.com/post/159859897733/re-hatemail-post-1-that-post-is-very-helpful>. *Tumblr*. Accessed 17 May 2017.

representations of violence in pornography helps to navigate the depictions of coercion and consent in fan fiction. In this section, I deploy theories of fantasy, counterpublics, and necessary homosexuality onto fan fiction, arguing that 1) fantasies are shared and the violence that permeates our society manifests in fan work, 2) fandom is a counterpublic which is response to mainstream cultures, and 3) writing fan fiction that deals with traumatic issues is an alternative means for queer and female individuals to reassert control over their sexuality and healing.

Fantasy

Fan fiction is written by an individual, with perhaps some input from an editor, known as a beta reader. Fantasy is significant for fan fiction, as the author is writing and publishing their written fantasy for free public consumption online. Though psychoanalysis has many faults, it is useful when thinking about fantasy, especially in review of violence and violent imaginaries. Natalie Purcell³¹ approaches fantasy with a psychoanalytic framework in her book, *Violence and the Pornographic Imaginary*. In this text, Purcell grapples with the idea that pornography is “just fantasy,” and argues for fantasy’s significance for individuals and as a culture. Implying that pornography is “just fantasy” shuts down how those pornographies might be indicative of our cultural and political climates. The appeal in erotic situations often comes with the charge and tension that is already instilled in oppressive structures.

Purcell’s argument about fantasy being a social phenomenon resonates with fan fiction.³² Specifically, Purcell argues that fantasies are all part of a shared collective, meaning that culture influences our fantasies, and is influenced by our own fantasies through the content we generate. These shared fantasies create

³¹ Purcell, Natalie J. *Violence and the Pornographic Imaginary: The Politics of Sex, Gender, and Aggression in Hardcore Pornography*. Routledge, 2012.

³² Purcell, 2012, pp. 33.

narratives and tropes, some of which appeal to many people. That is, there are elements in pornography that resonate within a lot of people. In fandom, people write their fantasies, publish them in free, public, online spaces, and other people enjoy them. Fans come together over narratives they enjoy, genres within fiction, create writing prompts for each other, and directly share and support each other in building community through their fantasies. They connect with other fans to enjoy these fantasies, to create their queer, alternative readings of the text away from the canon and mainstream cultures.

The fact that there are tropes, common themes that repeat over and over, in pornography indicate a wider cultural resonance for arousal with particular elements in pornography.³³ Our fantasies are indisputably informed by our culture,³⁴ and Purcell applies the Lacanian concept of “The Law” to the power disparities in pornography between men and women. The Law is “patriarchal system of structure meaning that regulates how we think, who we are, and what we do.”³⁵ Despite our wishes otherwise, personal fantasies contain the potential to be the “vehicles of our domination.” While I believe the application of The Law works well for understanding mainstream heterosexual pornography, I also believe there to be other explanations as to what is happening in fandom as it is a generally female-dominated and queer-centric space that allows women to express their desires. In a world where violence against women is a daily occurrence and a constant battle in politics, fantasies are necessary to cope and work through issues of violence and misogyny.

In the Freudian ego, fantasies often are not completely intentional or driven by the individual; so, they are not so much controlled by the ego, so much

³³ Purcell, 2012, pp. 35.

³⁴ Purcell, 2012, pp. 27.

³⁵ Purcell, 2012, pp. 31.

as haunt it. For psychoanalyst Ethel Person, fantasy's purpose was emotional and psychological, to help the individual get through daily life.³⁶ Fantasy is based on what we want, but cannot or do not have. Fan fiction, we can extrapolate, is a medium that very expressly allows an individual to share their desires without censorship or the interests and demands of a multibillion dollar industry. Further, the proliferation and volume of fan fiction works indicates that many people find reprieve in escaping to other people's fantasies.

Purcell discusses a fantasy schema; for something to arouse us, it must already be present in our highly-constructed fantasy scenarios.³⁷ She suggested fantasies inform us that we have a desire, and do not function to fulfill that desire. She uses food as an example—we know we want strawberry cake when we fantasize about eating it, but the fantasy does not substitute the act of eating a cake.³⁸ Fantasy allows us to imagine a scenario in which wish fulfillment is possible, despite any logistical obstructions in reality. But violent fantasies do not necessitate action, nor precede violence. In other words, having violent fantasies is not a meaningful distinguishing characteristic for people who commit violence. So, while fiction matters, and fantasies are never “just fantasies,” what influences fantasies and what is influenced by fantasies is subtler than any direct causal model.

Additionally, while Purcell's model of fantasies describes a flowing of information inward to the private and outward to the public, Nancy Fraser³⁹ suggests a model of public, private, *and* counterpublic.⁴⁰ Fraser suggests that

³⁶ Purcell, 2012, pp. 19.

³⁷ Purcell, 2012, pp. 20.

³⁸ Purcell, 2012, pp. 21.

³⁹ Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26. 1990, pp. 56-80.

⁴⁰ Fraser, 1990, pp. 61.

instead of the public and private dichotomy, there are, in fact, many competing publics to counter the mainstream public. Fandom and fan fiction do not operate along strictly public or private lines. Part of fandom's charm is that most fan works are easily accessible to anyone who searches for them. Fandom exists in a public sphere, but not *the* public sphere of the majority, as confused non-fans mock fandom relentlessly when fandom leaves its space. An example of how fan culture is misunderstood and subject to mockery is the entire premise of the hit and ongoing TV show, *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present). Its four main protagonists are all pathetic, socially awkward, nerdy men, none of the women understand their fannish tendencies and merely tolerate it, which holds up incorrect gender stereotypes about fandom and nerd culture.

Competing publics, or counterpublics, document the voices of groups outside of the mainstream. The rise of the digital era and the convergence of media have given rise to the proliferation of different countercultures and increased accessibility, which enables individuals to find a counterpublic that suits them, but also enables those outside the counterpublic to find and take from that space. These counterpublics are not necessarily virtuous,⁴¹ and fandom is just one example of a rather large counterpublic (which is comprised of many different and separate counterpublics). The existence of these multiple publics allows spaces for these other voices that would not be found in a single, majority public. In this way, the pornography industry, film industry, and publishing industry would be the majority publics, with fan fiction occupying a sometimes resistant and queer counterpublic space, that nevertheless replicates similar narratives and themes as the majority publics.⁴²

⁴¹ Fraser, 1990, pp. 67.

⁴² An example of this is *Star Wars: the Force Awakens*, which as mentioned earlier, has thousands of individual fan fictions focusing on two, white, space nazis rather than the fully developed black

Fantasy, then, is no longer dominated by major corporations. Individuals and small groups seeking to generate content based on their fantasies can easily do so.⁴³ Asking if these counterpublics are by necessity progressive is a dead-end question. I instead turn to asking what common threads do we see repeating in the fantasies depicted by fan authors, and investigate how consent and coercion is being depicted and to question what cultural issues are being worked through these fantasies.

Queer Readings and Limits of Imagination

When I refer to fan fiction as a queer counterpublic, I am suggesting, like other scholars,⁴⁴ that fandom is usually a space for the expression queer gender and sexual identities. Fandom creates narratives of its own and that are often repeated until they become unique tropes. As tropes are created, limitations in the cultural imagination become visible. One relevant narrative trope that is a staple presence in fandom is *necessary homosexuality*, a term explored by Jane Ward.⁴⁵ This theory describes circumstances in which a man who identifies as heterosexual must have sex with another man. The examples Ward primarily uses are hazing practices in American fraternities and the military, and in these real-life instances, she describes these situations designed to reinforce white heteromascularity through homosocial bonding. It is important to this theory that these men continue on to live heterosexual lives afterwards.⁴⁶

To support her argument for necessary homosexuality and its grip on our erotic imaginary in gay porn, Ward spends a brief two pages discussing how

male lead. Given the rise of nazism in the United States and the 2016 elections, it is not a stretch to say that this is representative of our current political climate.

⁴³ Making a profit off those fantasies is an entirely different matter.

⁴⁴ Busse and Lothian, 2007, pp. 103-112.

⁴⁵ Ward, 2015, pp. 17.

⁴⁶ Ward, 2015, pp. 25.

necessary homosexuality as a trope demonstrates the limited imaginative landscape of pornographic fantasies in fan fiction.⁴⁷ Her brief synopsis and application of Kirk/Spock *Star Trek* fan fiction to her theory has a misleading implication. Slash fan fiction usually ends with the men involved ending up in a relationship, and they do not continue to live heterosexual lives. While not all fan fictions have happy endings, much of slash fan fiction (or any fan fiction where the main plot of the story is the relationship) ends happily or with the two of them together despite hardships or identity crises.

The theme of happy endings in slash fan fiction may be a response to the Bury Your Gays⁴⁸ in mainstream fiction. Gay or bisexual characters, most particularly lesbians, are some of the most likely to die in a series, and some notable examples are Tara Maclay in *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, and more recently Lexa from *The 100*, which sparked a fury in the fanbase over this particular trope. The happy endings in fan fiction are understandable in the context of fans *not* receiving from mainstream fiction, and that fans often use fan fiction to write what they want to see.

Necessary homosexuality does not then apply to how these narrative ends, but to a common plot of these narratives. As Ward explains in her book, the repeated use of this trope, while enduring for a variety of reasons, suggests a severe limitation in the erotic imagination in how to bring two men together. This is particularly true if those men who are depicted or presumed straight, as most characters are unless specifically stated otherwise, and sometimes not even then.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ward, 2015, pp. 102.

⁴⁸ A lengthy list of fictions that use this trope can be found here: "Bury Your Gays." *TV Tropes*. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays>. Accessed 21 Feb 2017.

⁴⁹ This happened in the *Legend of Korra* fandom in a rather hilarious manner. After the series finale where the female protagonist Korra was implied to be in a relationship with Asami, a fan attempted to argue that this lesbian ending to the series was heterosexual because Korra was

The trope allows authors to ignore the nuances in sexual orientation. The characters in fan fiction often do directly acknowledge that they are gay, it is often framed to make the other man the exception to their normal heterosexuality. When they do admit gayness, the authors frequently erase any potentiality for bisexuality, even if the male character has canonically had relationships with women. However, the trope is clearly compelling given its multiple variants and persistence in the erotic imaginary.

The narratives of fan fiction face similar constraints in the sexual imaginary, but the endings differ widely between fan fiction and pornography. A happy ending in pornography is typically an orgasm. In fan fiction, a happy ending is also often an orgasm, but in addition to the two (or more) male characters in an overt romantic and sexual relationship. Unlike the pornography Ward discusses, necessary homosexuality in fandom awakens the characters' homosexual desires. In other words, we often cannot imagine how to bring people together without falling onto cultural narratives that preserve that status quo. However, the fact remains that this narrative appears persistently in fan fiction in many forms and must be highly compelling for many authors and readers. It provides a situation for the exploration of consent and coercion where the threat of violence comes from an external source. The narrative of necessary homosexuality is one ripe for complex emotional anguish, both during sex and afterwards. Many of the stories delight not only explicit sex, but also the aftermath. While potentially limiting, necessary homosexuality and similar tropes in fandom always compelling in some way.

masculine like a feudal lord, and Asami was feminine like a handmaiden. The canonically heterosexual relationship was actually the queer one because the man was the effeminate one. Lesbian sexuality has also been of great focus in the *Steven Universe* fandom, to much more annoyance for the abject denial.

Traumatic Narratology

Another key concept to consider when examining fantasy and narratives in pornography is the issue of trauma. As Purcell argues with her notion of shared fantasies, what we experience and intake in life influences the content authors generate. Fiction is often used as a coping mechanism, for both large traumatic events and the daily traumas of existing in the world as a minority.

As stated, some fan fiction authors and readers use fan fiction as a method of coping with their own sexual traumas. In her book *Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Ann Cvetkovich argues that insidious, daily traumas in everyday life manifest themselves in fiction.⁵⁰ In conjunction with Purcell's work in the flow of sexual violence in our pornographic imaginary between public depictions and private expressions, Cvetkovich's concept of daily traumas⁵¹ can be applied to sexual violence in fan fiction. With the never-ending input of sexual violence cisgender women receive, through fictional and nonfictional media portrayals and subtle mechanisms in daily life, the output of eroticized rape in fan fiction is sensible. Threats of sexual violence towards women are a normal, daily experience for women in 2017. Heterosexual sexual scripts include the man convincing a woman to date him, regardless of how many times she refuses. And of course, the current President of the U. S. A has faced several sexual assault and rape allegations. Sexual violence in fan fiction is a theme emblematic of a larger societal problem, rather than an isolated issue.

This falls into a larger concept of traumatic narratology for women, particularly queer women. The events at the Sherlock BBC Convention provides

⁵⁰ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2003.

⁵¹ Cvetkovich, 2003, pp. 4.

an example of people using fan fiction as a creative medium to cope with the trauma of sexual violence, this is not a fact that is often made public by authors. *Traumatic narratology* are narratives in which aspects of real life trauma are explored, often pressing the boundaries of the more widely accepted coping mechanisms, such as therapy and medication. Fiction also provides space to work through the erotics of trauma, when gaining any pleasure from trauma is seen to invalidate a person's claim to victimhood. If the victim has an orgasm, they are assumed to have wanted it. Female victims will have their accounts delegitimized for any number of arbitrary reasons, such as for their clothing and alcohol consumption. Fictionalized versions of trauma provide space for queer women to work through those daily issues of misogyny that permeate our culture, where they are not ostracized for finding pleasure in them. How we cope with trauma or daily life does not fit a linear narrative,⁵² nor can we presume what each author and reader take from the stories they produce and consume, which is a fairly well-accepted, even if not well-acknowledged fact in fandom.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the prevalence of sexual violence in fan fiction, it is easy to avoid it in fan fiction. Due to the major fan fiction archive's tagging system, avoiding particular kinds of content is easy. Tags also make a subject more visible, so while effective at warning potential readers, they also make fan fiction seem unique in the amount of sexual violence present in its content. Sex already makes power inequities visible, and marking them further ensures these fantasies are seen as unusual, rather than what they are: common.⁵³ Many people are not only having fantasies that include sexual violence and rape, for their own and for others' pleasure. Fan authors find support and community

⁵² Cvetkovich, 2003, pp. 17.

⁵³ Purcell, 2012, pp. 37.

for the content they create, and tagging makes it easier for fans to find each other with similar interests.

As established, fans largely comprise of women, and fandom operates largely as a queer female space. Fans explore through their work shared fantasies to address issues of gender and violence. Though not inherently progressive or revolutionary, fandoms operate as counterpublics to mainstream cultures, offering queer readings of canon. And currently, writers have a safe space through AO3 free from censorship where they can publish their work regardless of content.

3. BACKGROUND

To understand why I argue against censorship throughout this thesis, I must dedicate this section to explaining the purpose of AO3 and why it was founded. Censorship has long been an ongoing problem for fandom even before AO3. For example, in the days of fan zines, the publishers would not accept stories that contained the writing trope known as a Mary Sue. Mary Sues are female characters that save everyone, get the guy(s), and is loved by the canon characters. She's often a genius, Olympic-level athlete, and is never wrong.⁵⁴ She has been almost universally hated by fandom as she is considered to be a hallmark of poor writing. The dismissal and score for the Mary Sue was justified by stating that a character without flaws is uninteresting, and that characters cannot be perfect. In recent years, more fans have been embracing the Mary Sue, arguing that the scorn for her is poorly-disguised misogyny. Additionally, fans have begun to stand up for her as part of the natural writing process for teen girls. Teenaged girls are consistently told that they are not pretty enough, smart enough, popular enough, so why would they not rewrite themselves as a character who is enough?

I started writing fanfiction the way most girls did, by re-inventing themselves. Mary Sues exist because children who are told they're nothing want to be everything. As a girl, being "selfish" was the worst thing you could be. Now you live in Narnia and Prince Caspian just proposed marriage to you. Why? Your SELF is what saved everyone from that sea serpent. Plus your hair looks totally great braided like that.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ladyloveandjustice. "Mary Sue, What Are You? Or Why the Concept of Sue is Sexist." *Tumblr*. 8 Dec. 2011. <http://ladyloveandjustice.tumblr.com/post/13913540194/mary-sue-what-are-you-or-why-the-concept-of-sue>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁵⁵ unwinona. "The Importance of Mary Sue." *Tumblr*. 9 Feb. 2014.

The Mary Sue is a fairly benign example of censorship for fandom, and it also came from within fandom. Women who wrote Mary Sues—or just accused that their characters were such—were not published in the zines, and received reviews and comments that nonetheless told them that they should not publish such terrible writing. I recall receiving such comments myself when I first began writing fan fiction when I was thirteen, and I remember reading them on other’s works as well. I continued writing despite the negative feedback, as while the comments were disheartening, they could do nothing to stop me. Now that publishing fan fiction was no longer in the power of fan zines editors, the Mary Sue was inoffensive enough to escape the censorship that did occur on fanfiction.net and LiveJournal.

Some of the censorship on fan fiction websites took place because the authors of the source material disapproved of fan fiction. Anne Rice is notorious for banning all fan fiction of her novels,⁵⁶ and for threatening to sue fan writers. She went even further than that by replying to a negative review of her book on Amazon.com, saying that she rejects all negative reviews and that the reviewer was “interrogating the text from the wrong perspective.”⁵⁷ George Lucas made a massive effort to put a stop to Han Solo/Luke Skywalker slash fan fiction, and was fairly successful.^{58,59} For the most part, fan works are so prevalent and at least tolerated by authors now that lawsuits are not a concern for fan creators, though

<http://unwinona.tumblr.com/post/76199740643/the-importance-of-mary-sue>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁵⁶ Pauli, Michelle. “Fan fiction.” *The Guardian*. 4 Dec. 2002.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2002/dec/05/internet.onlinesupplement1>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁵⁷ “Anne Rice.” *Fanlore*. 28 April 2017. https://fanlore.org/wiki/Anne_Rice. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, 1988, pp. 475.

⁵⁹ “Lucasfilm.” *Fanlore*. 1 Oct. 2016. <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Lucasfilm>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

there remains some concern about copyright laws,⁶⁰ but there have been enough precedent to secure fan-generated, derivative works to be within the terms of fair use. Additionally, the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), which runs AO3, has a page stating that they will provide legal assistance to any fan writer whose work is challenged.⁶¹

AO3 also champions the right of writers to write and publish the content they desire, and never deletes any work for its content. On their Terms of Service page, they state, “Unless it violates some other policy, we will not remove Content for offensiveness, no matter how awful, repugnant, or badly spelled we may personally find that content to be.”⁶² Though they claim no responsibility for the content a reader might see on AO3, the archive uses a comprehensive tagging system that makes individual works easily searchable, and also functions as warnings to potential readers. While there exist many online archives of fan fiction throughout the web, I will focus on works published on AO3 because of these reasons.

The tagging system on AO3 and online blogs come from a relatively recent call for there to be warnings on works for potential triggers. And until 2016, there were no scholarly articles that specifically examined trigger warnings from a fandom perspective, focusing on trigger warnings in academic spaces. Alexis Lothian provided that much-needed addition on trigger warnings to fandom studies in her article, “Choose Not to Warn: Trigger Warnings and

⁶⁰ Davis, Lauren. “Are fan fiction and fan art legal?” *io9: we come from the future*. 12 Aug. 2012. <http://io9.gizmodo.com/5933976/are-fan-fiction-and-fan-art-legal>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁶¹ “Legal Advocacy.” *Organization for Transformative Works*. <http://www.transformativeworks.org/legal/>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

⁶² “Terms of Service.” *Archive of Our Own*. <http://archiveofourown.org/tos>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

Content Notes from Fan Culture to Feminist Pedagogy,"⁶³ traces triggers warnings to old fan fiction archives. She refers to trigger warnings as "cautionary enticements," which describes how in fan fiction, these warnings are meant to keep away those who would despise the content, and entice those who would love it. A prominent example I personally remember from fanfiction.net, which was widely used and popular among fans in the 2000s, were the warnings "slash don't like don't read" and "lemon." "slash don't like don't read" was meant to invite those seeking slash fics to the story, while warning those who would only hate it (and more importantly, verbalize their hate in the reviews) to not even bother with the story. "lemon" was meant to entice and caution readers for explicit sex within the fic, with the added benefit of avoiding fanfiction.net fic purges of explicit content.

Significantly, Lothian notes that AO3's description of each of the potential, major warnings never employ the word "trigger." "The language highlights writers' own judgment, calling attention to amusingly complex situations that fan fiction's embeddedness in science fiction and fantasy are likely to generate."⁶⁴ AO3, if it is a safe space for anyone, is a safe space for writers, granting them the power to label their work as they choose. The description and function of AO3's warning system assumes that both the author and reader are capable of defining the content and deciding for themselves. This "for fun"⁶⁵ model of trigger warnings and tagging is entirely different from how trigger warnings function in academia, though trigger warnings in academic spaces are hotly debated.

⁶³ Lothian, Alexis. "Choose Not to Warn: Trigger Warnings and Content Notes from Fan Culture to Feminist Pedagogy." *Feminist Studies* 42.3. 2016, pp. 743-756.

⁶⁴ Lothian, 2016, pp. 747-8.

⁶⁵ Lothian, 2016, pp. 748.

AO3 has a Warnings section that all authors must select at least one of the six⁶⁶ of when posting a story. One of those six is “Creator Chose Not to Use Archive Warnings,” which is a warning in and of itself without necessitating specificity and often used for stories that list sexual violence and consent subtags. The particular warning of interest for this paper is the “Rape/Non-Con[sensual]” tag, though as stated, it overlaps with “Creator Chose Not to Use Archive Warnings.” When no warnings are chosen but the story contains sexual violence or issues of consent, common subtags include Dubious Consent, Rape Aftermath, Rape Recovery, Gang Rape, and so on.

Fan fiction is hosted on many various websites, blogs, and forums. AO3 specifically provides an archive designed by fans for fans to prevent fics disappearing due to censorship or websites that cease to work. AO3 is the largest source to find fan fiction, and given its unique tagging system, all of the stories in this project were found on this site.

⁶⁶ No Archive Warnings Apply, Creator Chose Not to Use Archive Warnings, Graphic Depictions of Violence, Major Character Death, Rape/Non-Con, and Underage

4. METHODS

Through my analyses, I employ both a literary and media studies approach. In Rita Felski's text, *The Limits of Critique*, she argues the need for a *postcritical* theoretical framework,⁶⁷ to approach text connectively rather than suspiciously. That is, instead of approaching a text looking for what can be criticized for the sake of smug pseudo-intellectualism, I approach each text looking for what is descriptive, imaginative, inspirational, fantastical, and provocative. I believe that this theoretical approach is best when researching a topic like rape in literature, as the stories I examine not only depict violence, they also inspire healing, coping, and connection. Postcriticism regards fiction that inspires affective responses, be they disgust, horror, fear, and eroticism, as still an accomplishment, which is an attitude I intend to deploy. Media is meant to emotionally draw in the reader, and certain affective responses are not lesser than others.

I use insights from new criticism in my readings of fan fictions in terms of the technical skills for close readings. The reason why I employ postcriticism's theoretical approach but new criticism's technical approach, is because postcriticism instructs on how to approach a text and interpret it, but provides few tools for close reading. New criticism, while providing the technical skills for close reading, refuses to acknowledge how a text is interconnected with the author and historical context, insisting instead of focusing on "the text itself."⁶⁸ New criticism as a theoretical approach is not widely used by literary theorists nowadays,⁶⁹ and it is not particularly useful here, given how fan fiction poaches and transforms texts for fans' own purposes. Additionally, the nature of the AO3

⁶⁷ Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. University of Chicago Press, 2015, pp. 181.

⁶⁸ Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 136.

⁶⁹ Tyson, 2006, pp. 135.

as a fan fiction archive means that authors are given space to frame their story through tags and notes, which will be considered as part of the story in the following close readings. For the purposes of this project, a merge of postcriticism and new criticism will be deployed.

A tenet of new criticism I will be using include the assumption that every word is intentional, and should be treated as such.⁷⁰ I will conduct a close reading of five selected fan fictions, guided by Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Tyson approaches the text through an understanding of literary language, searching for textual evidence of tension, organic unity, paradox, irony, ambiguity, and concrete universals, as well as well-known use of figurative language in literature such as symbols, images, and metaphors. In my analyses, I will apply a new critical technical approach to close reading in conjunction with a postcritical framework.

Specifically, I do not intend to examine each text as a standalone, or as the "the text itself."⁷¹ Instead, as part of my deployment of Felski's postcritical approach, I will apply the *actor-network theory* (ANT).⁷² ANT assumes that each text to be an independent actor which influences culture and is influenced by culture. That is, the author might intend for their text to have a specific meaning, the text is separate from authorial intent.⁷³ This theoretical approach best underscores how fiction and its content matters within the world, as narratives, like fantasies, are shared.⁷⁴ Applying new criticism's "the text itself" approach would be highly inadvisable for the literary category of fan fiction, as fan fiction

⁷⁰ Tyson, 2006, pp. 167.

⁷¹ Tyson, 2006, pp. 136.

⁷² Felski, pp. 183-184.

⁷³ *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov exemplifies this.

⁷⁴ Frank, Arthur W. *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*. University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 199.

is perhaps the most obvious mode of fiction that is influenced by outside source, seeing as fan fiction is a character-driven genre of literature, based on other works. Participation in fan cultures requires the reception of a usually fictional object, and interpreting that work into the production of new creative works.

My focus on narratology is to examine the narrative significance within a cultural context, especially for narrative themes that repeat themselves often in fan fiction. And these narrative themes in fan fiction can repeat themselves in fandoms for decades, or be so pervasive in the erotic imaginary as to be found in most fandoms. For example, as I showed earlier, the common theme of necessary homosexuality implies a limited cultural imaginary of scenarios in which two men have sex or get together romantically. Narrative, as defined by Arthur Frank in *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, “generates stories and it marks a similarity between certain stories.”⁷⁵ The narrative is a storyboard, in other words, that authors rewrites with their own particular take. Let us examine the “Fuck or Die” trope. Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek* develop a romantic relationship, but in one fic it may be through a desperate bid to save Spock’s life. In another, their relationship begins as part of a cultural misunderstanding with aliens. A narrative is a shared collective, and are by nature shared fantasies.⁷⁶ By examining narratives, I will be able to examine the function of shared fantasies in fan fiction.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be employing intersectional feminist narrative theory. Feminist narrative theory focuses on representations of sexual orientation, race, gender, history, era, and class. Intersectional narratology illuminates “how certain positions and concepts enjoy privileges while others suffer from inattention or disparagement.”⁷⁷ As I hope to demonstrate,

⁷⁵ Frank, 2010, pp. 199.

⁷⁶ Purcell, 2012, pp. 33.

⁷⁷ Keen, Suzanne. *Narrative Form: Revised and Expanded Second Edition*. 2nd ed., London:

intersectional narratology complicates texts rather than neatly bundling them up categorically, which is a much-needed approach to the subject of sexual violence, rape, and consent. It is not enough to approach the text suspiciously, to decry certain subjects as problematic for existing and congratulate ourselves on our superiority. Fan fiction authors are individuals who express their desires, and forge a community with others who share their desires. Refusing to examine the nuances of that expression would be a step-back and a disservice to previous work in fandom and sexuality studies.

This thesis is separated into sections by themes, focusing on one fan fiction per section. The next section, Section 5, focuses on a scene that depicts graphic and violent rape, in a scene that is intended to provoke feelings of horror and helplessness. In Section 6, I discuss how victim blaming is worked through in fan fiction, and what it means for primarily female authors to be writing male characters struggling with victim blaming in slash fan fiction. Section 7 analyzes a story that eroticizes rape, and the underlying justification that these characters want what is happening to them. Tying into the theme of justification, Section 8 explores complex issues of consent with the theoretical concept of necessary homosexuality. The last analytical section, Section 9, focuses on the aftermath and recovery of rape, and further examines depictions of sexual violence on white and male bodies that are ordinarily perceived as powerful.

I begin my analyses in Section 5 with *Cerberus* by Crunchysunrises,⁷⁸ which is an example graphic, violent rape, that is not eroticized but was written with a great amount of attention and detail. The author writes this story as a response to a prompt to cross over the stories of *Harry Potter* and the American

Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 13.

⁷⁸ Crunchysunrises. "Cerberus." *Archive of Our Own*. 12 Dec 2012. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/591278>. Accessed 2 Feb 2017.

crime show *Criminal Minds*. In this fan fiction's world, Supervisory Special Agent Aaron Hotchner is Hermione Granger's uncle, and the narrator and protagonist of the entire story. The story is a fairly popular one for the *Criminal Minds* fandom, appearing on the second page after searching by the number of *kudos* each fic has in the fandom. This particular story graphically invokes horror and helplessness, as well as challenges our notion of who can be a victim.

I will delve further into how fics with scenes of abuse and violation that are represented through victim blaming which appears in multiple stories in Section 6. *Heart in a Headlock* by SweetandSharp⁷⁹ explores victim blaming through the gender norms in the alternate reality known as Omegaverse. Omegaverse is an alternate universe narrative in which human reproductive physiology is altered, creating a gender distinction of Alphas, Betas, and Omegas. Precise definitions differ by author and story, but Omega are usually men capable of becoming pregnant and carrying a fetus to term, and also undergo an animalistic heat. Alphas usually have knots (a swelling of the base of the penis to keep them locked with their sexual partner during sex, based from canines), and betas are usually humans as we typically think of them in terms of reproductive capacities. Within this alternate universe, the author works through gender norms and coercion of this universe.

The seventh section will examine a fic in which sexual assault is eroticized, and justified throughout. *Turnabout is Fair Play* by peevee⁸⁰ is a *Sherlock* BBC fan fiction with Sherlock Holmes/John Watson as the pairing. In it, Sherlock attends to a drugged Watson after an investigation, and then engages in

⁷⁹ SweetandSharp. "Heart in a Headlock." *Archive of Our Own*. 1 Oct 2012. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/987049>. Accessed 9 Feb 2017.

⁸⁰ peevee. "Turnabout is Fair Play." *Archive of Our Own*. 20 July 2015. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/4385624>. Accessed 2 March 2017.

undiscussed somnophilia while Watson is still unconscious. It is yet another story in which the author Chooses Not to Use Archive Warnings, but acknowledges the specific issues within the other tags, utilizing Dubious Consent, Drugged Sex, and Consent Issues. Like *Cerberus* and *Heart in a Headlock*, the author employs key words to invoke certain affective responses and attitudes towards the actions taken by the characters.

In the eighth chapter, I will move towards a focus on narratives, specifically examining the prevalence of Ward's theory of *necessary homosexuality* in the "Fuck or Die" trope of fan fiction. As I stated earlier, this particular narrative is of interest because often no particular person is at fault, which is certainly true in the many iterations of the trope in *Star Trek* fan fic. The most popular example of slash fan fiction has been *Star Trek*, and my own fan fiction analysis would feel incomplete without at least one story from its extensive fandom. With the release of the *Star Trek* (2009), and subsequently *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) and *Star Trek Beyond* (2016), the adoration of the Kirk/Spock pairing reemerged in a new generation, imaginations happily running with the Alternate Original Series universe the movies crafted into canon.⁸¹ Very specifically, fans have enjoyed reimagining how Spock's *pon farr* would play out in this universe, with no Vulcans and an increased bond with his humanity and crew. *Pon farr* is the Vulcan heat which the men undergo every seven years. It originally appeared in Season 2, Episode 1, "Amok Time" (1968). In the episode, the *Enterprise* must return to the planet Vulcan so Spock can mate with his fiancée, or else he will die. His fiancée, T'Pring, refuses him, so he and Kirk must instead fight to the death to save Spock's life. Kirk and Doctor McCoy (nicknamed Bones) trick Spock into thinking he has killed Kirk by injecting Kirk

⁸¹ The movies are essentially Alternate Universe (AU) fan fiction, but with a much larger budget.

with a hypo before the fight that guarantees that Kirk will display deathlike symptoms long enough for Spock's furious mating drive to be satisfied. In fan fiction, Kirk and/or Bones employ sexier problem-solving methodology.

Of Sentinels and Anchors by CorpusInvictus⁸² is one such pon farr fic, though the author's unique twist is based on the prompt from the Star Trek XI Kink Meme: "AU: Spock was raised on Earth with no Vulcan influence on his life." The author states in their notes that they wanted to explore a "more humanized Spock with far less control over his telepathic abilities." The story totals at a respectable 12, 728 words, and comprises of snap shots of Spock's life prior, during, and post the events in the 2009 film. I will be examining how consent is deployed through this fic and in this narrative, specifically how the coercion comes from the circumstances, rather than any one person, as well as the assumption that once again, the victim wants it anyway.

In the final analytical chapter, I explore an example of how fan fic writers deploy frameworks of consent to show the aftermath and recovery trajectories of rape victims, in addition to continuing the thread of white male victimhood. *Until you pull too hard* by tinygreyghost⁸³ is a *Dragon Age: Inquisition* fic in which the customizable protagonist, the Inquisitor, is a male elf who was imprisoned and raped by original character, human Lord Vallenberg. The story focuses on frameworks of consent, and their application to rape aftermath and recovery. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is a video game and series that has garnered attention for its inclusion of both straight and gay romanceable characters. The *Dragon Age* franchise introduces a world with political intrigue and racial and class

⁸² CorpusInvictus. "Of Sentinels and Anchors." *Archive of Our Own*. 10 March 2015. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/714827>. Accessed 1 March 2017.

⁸³ tinygreyghost. "Until you pull too hard." *Archive of Our Own*. 3 July 2015. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4261044>. Accessed 1 March 2017.

differences in a medieval fantasy setting.

The themes for each chapter are based on prevalent themes that exist within fan fiction about sexual coercion and consent. There are many stories that have similar themes to these for each category, the story chosen for each theme is one that I found well represents that theme. Because there are hundreds of thousands individual fan fictions on AO3 alone, I acknowledge that I cannot examine every potential theme, or every twist on that theme. Further, the stories I have chosen are from fandoms I am familiar with as a fan myself. It is with these fandoms that I have seen reoccurring themes that I have chosen to address. Fandom scholars, even with their extensive focus on slash fan fiction, have not yet included violence within fan fiction as an academic topic, having previously focused their attention on first legitimizing fan fiction as literature. If we are to take fan fiction seriously, we must take all parts of it seriously, and not dismiss entire segments as unworthy for consideration.

Ultimately, I present two main arguments in this thesis. Throughout each of these analytical sections, I examine the fan fictions for how they ascribe victimhood to white, powerful, male bodies. I argue that this simultaneously challenges our notions of who can be victimized while reaffirming that men cannot be victims of sexual assault. White, male bodies also provide an equalizer not found in the dynamic of male perpetrator and female victim, as when the victim and perpetrator are both male, they are seen as sexual equals. Writing and reading men as victims is already removed from the archetype of a victim. Additionally, male victims add an additional charge to the situation, as the characters themselves struggle with seeing themselves as a victim.

I aim to demonstrate how fantasy manifests itself as a shared collective in fan fiction through connections between the stories. My analyses focus on the

depiction of coercion and consent in slash fan fiction, of what major themes occur among various stories and narratives. By my conclusion, I argue that misogyny and violence permeates our fantasies and reasonably appears in the content authors create. I also argue that white male victimhood is deployed in fan fiction to address issues of coercion and consent that authors may have difficulty working through with a female character. I call for ways to expand on this research, and provide examples of the continuing importance of fan fiction.

5. GRAPHIC AND VIOLENT RAPE

The deployment of graphic and violent rape in slash fan fiction often play with representations of gender not found in mainstream media. By virtue that these stories are slash fan fictions, the first difference between fan fiction and mainstream fiction is that the victim is male and white. As we will later see in sections seven and eight, while some stories do indeed reinforce the idea that men are incapable of being victims of sexual assault, *Cerberus* by Crunchysunrises challenges that notion. I argue here that by writing a white man in a position of authority as a victim of rape, this story expands preconceived ideas of who can be victimized. Additionally, the powerful, white, male victim adds an additional dimension to the themes of hopelessness and vulnerability for characters most often thought of being invulnerable. I also argue that the author deftly crafts a compelling scene through the perspective of the victim, drawing the reader into his affective responses.

Cerberus is a crossover fic between *Criminal Minds* and *Harry Potter*. Most of the fic deals with how Aaron Hotchner, from *Criminal Minds*, is Hermione Granger's uncle, and how she comes to live with him and his wife after her parents are murdered by Death Eaters. The scene of interest in this fic occurs after a canon event where a serial killer, George Foyet, attacks Aaron in his home. In the TV show,⁸⁴ the viewers see Foyet shoot and taunt Aaron, and then take him to a hospital so he doesn't die. This scene in *Cerberus* fills in what happens between the time Aaron is shot and before he appears at the hospital. As many authors have also speculated and written, this scene is a graphic and violent rape scene between Foyet and Aaron. Other stories explore what might have taken

⁸⁴ "... And Back." *Criminal Minds*, season 4, episode 26, CBS, 20 May 2009. *Netflix*, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/70189673?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C25%2C79b1e2eb-ada4-4dbe-8487-145655cf3518-37613699>.

place between the scenes, or even deal with the aftermath and the struggles Aaron would go through as a middle-aged man being a victim of rape. In this selected scene of *Cerberus*, after Aaron is shot by Foyet in his home. Foyet then proceeds to taunt him verbally, undresses Aaron by cutting off his clothes with a knife while also intentionally cutting him, and then raping him with a steel dildo.

This scene in *Cerberus* is particularly striking in the context of the overall lack of emotional follow through in the story. For most of the story, Aaron's emotions are superficial, without much elaboration or intensity. The story is r a *crossover*⁸⁵ fic, focusing primarily on Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* being Aaron's niece. The rape scene is a sudden change in tone as well as emotional intensity when compared to the rest of the fic. The author lingers on Aaron's thoughts and emotions in this scene, providing a level of detail not elsewhere in the story.

One reason why I have chosen this particular rape scene over others is because it is clearly the part of the story that the author wanted to write. The care it has taken to craft such an effective scene is obvious. Aaron Hotchner is narrator throughout the entire story of 22,837 words, giving us a rather detailed look inside his head and the author's characterization of him. The author, in their notes, makes clear who is called the *implied author* and who is the *real author*.⁸⁶ The real author—the writer, as opposed to the character whose perspective and interpretation of events we consume the story—makes their priorities clear in their notes, that this fic fulfills several fan fiction prompts they had undertaken,

⁸⁵ *Crossovers* are stories in which a character from one canon is somehow found in another canon. In this story, Hermione is the niece of Aaron Hotchner, and so has a reason to be in the *Criminal Minds* universe. Technically, this fic would be called a *fusion* where two or more canons exist in one world somehow, but crossover is still most often used. Another term that encompasses more numerous crossovers are *Fandompalooza*, which another story I examine in this paper, *Heart in a Headlock* by SweetandSharp, is aptly tagged as.

⁸⁶ Keen, 2015, pp. 36.

such as “sexual extortion” on their Hurt/Comfort Bingo Card, “object penetration” on their Kink Bingo card, “vulnerable” on their Dark Fantasy Bingo card, and “Cleaning (not bathing)” on their Cotton Candy Bingo card. A Kink Bingo card is a bingo card with specific writing prompts for sexual situations. This specific rape scene, then, was meant to fill several of these prompts.⁸⁷

In the selected scene, the theme of hopelessness is juxtaposed with relief several times. In the second paragraph in the text, our protagonist longs to be “unconscious,” and his inability to be so is emphasized with the repetition and continuation, “Unfortunately, Aaron is not only conscious and alert but also trapped in the moment rather than floating away in a haze of endorphins and pain to that safe mental space at the back of his head, a remnant of an *unhappy* childhood.” In this line, we see Aaron’s longing for a psychic peace, to escape from his bodily helplessness to an apathetic frame of mind. Ironically, it is implied in this line that this existing psychic attitude originated from whatever constitutes an “unhappy” childhood. He is able to withdraw mentally from the current events, his internal monologue becoming more scientific—specifically, he considers what updates he will make for Foyet’s criminal file, which had previously diagnosed Foyet as impotent.

Not entirely impotent, Aaron thinks, mentally amending the Foyet file. *Extreme sexual sadist requiring a toxic combination of obsession, control, and an unwilling partner to experience sexual arousal. Inflicting*

⁸⁷ Bingo Cards are literally bingo cards with challenges and prompts for fan creators in each square. Fans organize Bingo Cards as a challenge for each other with a specific deadline, with various ways to complete the challenge. They may need to complete a line of prompts for a more traditional bingo, or complete all of the prompts in a “blackout.” The names of the Bingos, with examples here being Kink, Cotton Candy, Dark Fantasy, refer to the overall theme of the bingo cards. Kink refers to sexual acts, Dark Fantasy refers to more violent and non-consensual prompts, and Cotton Candy refers to less sexual, sweeter, and more innocent acts.

mental and/or emotional distress onto the target of his obsession over a period of time prior to their encounter, letting that person know of his interest so to speak, serves as foreplay to him. This can, in the right circumstances, outweigh gender preferences.

Aaron's fallback onto a clinical approach to his rape occurs in reaction to the sheer amount of helplessness he feels during the scene, but it fails him Foyet penetrates him. Instead of directly addressing the penetration, the author repeatedly uses the word "nothing" or variations thereof throughout the text. Though a rather innocuous word on its own, the four occasions it is used are a striking contrast to Aaron's clinical language elsewhere in the story. The use of "nothing" and later the word "thing" centers the penetration as a traumatic event that is too much for Aaron to bear. The rape, even if Aaron feels relief at times during the penetration, is too traumatic to confront directly. Additionally, the word "nothing," best captures the moments when helplessness combines the physical and the psychic for Aaron.⁸⁸

"Nothing" is first used when Foyet penetrates Aaron. It contrasts the pain between the sexual penetration to the penetration of the knife on his flesh. Compared to the knife, the dildo penetrating him is relatively painless. The author juxtaposes here between trauma and relief; between moments of intense violence and violation, Aaron notes moments of relief at the lack of physical pain, when most of Foyet's actions have been excruciatingly painful.

The intrusion, although painful on many other levels, is surprisingly physically painless, save for a low level burn that is *nothing* in the grand

⁸⁸ Tyson, 2014, pp. 140-141.

scheme of Aaron's suffering. For a single, solitary moment, Aaron feels something dangerously close to gratitude toward Foyet, despite the violation of something slowly, inexorably being pressed into him. He goes limp with relief (original emphasis).

By using the word “nothing,” the author suggests the idea that in the moment, Aaron’s primary concern is pain reduction, and the rape “although painful on many other levels,” is not immediately and physically painful. Though it does not mitigate the horror of the scene, it challenges the categorical assumption that horror and terror must be the only felt emotions through such a trial. In other words, this scene not only explores the victimization of a man, but also the myriad of emotions that occur with that trauma, without diminishing his victimhood. Like Cvetkovich argues in *An Archive of Feelings*, a perfect victim is meant to feel only that trauma, when in reality, trauma is sutured to many other emotions and experiences.⁸⁹

The word “nothing” is also used to denote Aaron’s helplessness. In contrast to the first use of the word “nothing,” these occasions signify that he cannot confront directly with what is happening to him. The second time helps connects the reader with Aaron and his experience, as he is the undeniable subject of this scene, and the character with whom we are intended to sympathize and empathize. “Aaron’s face mashed into the carpet, blotting his tears and muffling his gasps and groans into nothingness, as Foyet ruts into him.” This repeats the physical futility of Aaron’s resistance and his pain. The fourth time is situated similarly in physical helplessness and inability to act, later in the second page, when Hermione and Harry Potter arrive at his apartment where the rape is taking

⁸⁹ Cvetkovich, 2003, pp. 103.

place, and knock on the door. With great distress, Aaron acknowledges that “there is nothing he can do to save himself, much less the teenagers.”

The third instance of the word “nothing” links the psychic nothingness to a physical nothingness. “[Aaron] is an empty vessel filled with nothing (except Foyet’s steel cock.)” The psychic escape that Aaron was longing for in the beginning is granted, but this already tenuous victory is further negated by the parentheticals, the physical presence of Foyet’s steel dildo. During this occasion, a physical nothing would have been ideal. It is also in this short paragraph where the concept of relief is directly brought up again, as “Aaron is distantly grateful to discover that, somewhere along the way, his emotions have shut down.” I return briefly to the beginning of this scene from *Criminal Minds*, where Aaron has mentions his childhood, which is implied to be unpleasant. It is heavily implied that Aaron Hotchner’s father was abusive in the show, and the implications has been commonly accepted as canon within the fandom. The author here is suggesting that Aaron has revisited the headspace created during his childhood abuse in order to cope with his rape. The author might even be implying that Aaron was raped by his father, but there is no further textual evidence of that in this scene or in the story. Bringing up Aaron’s childhood abuse reinforces that Aaron is a survivor as well as how trauma lingers despite the individual’s strength and survival.

Aaron uses the word “thing” when he cannot directly confront calling the steel dildo by its name. “But Foyet keeps pressing the object into Aaron and, although it is rounded and blunt, the thing continues to get wider and wider, as if it has no edges.” The implement that Foyet uses to rape Aaron is never specifically named except for as his “steel cock”—it is never called a dildo nor an implement. In the same paragraph, it is referred to as “something.” Though

described through Aaron's physical sensations, what kind of implement Foyet uses is left vague. This vagueness allows Aaron to refuse to acknowledge the exact nature of what is happening to him in the moment, to refuse the rape's realness by calling it a "dildo" or "dilator." Additionally, Aaron Hotchner is an FBI Unit Chief, and a man in his 40s, both positions of authority and power. Given that receiving anal sex, even (or especially) forcibly is a sign of emasculation, using the word "thing" preserves some of Aaron's masculinity.

In the same paragraph at the end is, "When [Aaron] feels himself close around the wide, rounded girth of something, a long shudder of relief wracks through Aaron. It hurts." What hurts, specifically? The shudder? The object? Closing around the object? The relief? This ambiguity contains the potential for many things to be painful, but also specifics, depending on what the reader finds catching their attention. In my initial reading of this story, I connected with the cumulative bodily and mental sensation of shuddering with horror and pain, and continued with that reading, but the "it" is nonspecific. Perhaps it is the object that is now causing him tremendous amounts of pain, or the "closing around" it? These multiple readings allow the reader to focus on what can provoke in them the most anxiety.⁹⁰

Aaron Hotchner as a victim of this horrific, violent rape raises interesting questions about male victimhood. Aaron is not the typical victim of rape we imagine, being middle-aged, white, male, and in a powerful position of authority. I believe the issue of victimhood in fandom is a complex one, and not easily navigated. As demonstrated by Aaron's clinical notes to himself, neither Aaron nor the reader can forget his own positionality. Foyet's reason for raping him is partly because Aaron is powerful; he is specifically getting off to reducing Aaron

⁹⁰ Tyson, 2006, pp. 253.

to a victim. There is a distinct discomfort to the scene apart from the violence of it that is caused by how poorly Aaron fits our typical construction of a rape victim, which adds to the horror of it.

As discussed, the majority of fan fiction focuses on slash fan fiction, of men having sex and relationships with other men. By default, much of the fan fiction with sexual violence content also involved male pairings. Stories with female victims of sexual assault are by no means rare, but they tend to focus on sexual violence and rape as trauma. They are complex, affective reading experiences that explore that usually avoid eroticizing the rape by lingering on it in the text that we see more often in slash fan fiction. While not the rule, often the perpetrator is an unsympathetic side character, the antagonist, or even an original character. One such story that is also part of the *Criminal Minds* fandom called *Seventeen Minutes Until Extraction* by AudreyV.⁹¹ Aaron Hotchner and Emily Prentiss must have exhibitionist sex in front of an hostile audience for the entertainment of an original antagonist, who will otherwise kill them. The scene is graphic and eroticized, but the story ends with the antagonist arrested and gone, and Emily Prentiss acknowledging that she does what she must for her job, and is none worse for the wear. Prentiss is the victim, but so is Hotchner, though Prentiss is given significance as a victim due to her role in the exhibition and gender.

Do we not believe men can be victimized the same way women can? The number of eroticized rape fics that are slash support this idea, though many of these fics also clearly label the act that is happening for what it is through the Rape/Non-Con tag, or through more specific subtags. Similarly, many of these

⁹¹ AudreyV. "Seventeen Minutes Until Extraction." *Archive of Our Own*. 6 Feb. 2012. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/333845>. Accessed 15 Feb 2017.

stories do not seem meant to be “feel good” erotica. When discussing misogyny in pornography, Purcell writes, “There is something in misogyny and violence that appeals to us,”⁹² and the shared appeal and fantasy of violence applies here. The violence and the affective responses it provokes is sutured to the erotic. The rape scene in *Cerberus* is meant to provoke visceral horror, playing with the horror of rape, violence, and helplessness overlaid with masculinity made vulnerable. These themes, dark as they are, are interesting because the layers that contribute to the horror of it, and how they challenge our notions of white masculinity and victimhood. It is the horror in part that is pleasurable. Mainstream pornography has many examples of eroticized rape scenes with female victims, but our conception of a female rape victim is more loaded with preconceived notions than with a male victim. Additionally, a male victim allows the author to play with masculinity and victimhood.

As stated, male victims add a charge to the scenes that are not present in scenes with female victims, and sexual scenes with charge are infinitely more appealing than those without as found in research exploring rape scenes and race play in BDSM and pornography.^{93, 94} Charge here means the layers of interest the scene holds for readers, specifically how Aaron’s whiteness and maleness adds an additional layer of vulnerability to the rape scene. Female victims often must subscribe to being a perfect victim, and this pressure is evident in these stories, a popular example being Lisbeth in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Further, the rape of women in fiction is prevalent enough in mainstream fiction. Men as victims of sexual violence rarely appears seriously, often being played for

⁹² Purcell, 2012, pp. 37.

⁹³ Weiss, Margot. *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*. Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 218.

⁹⁴ Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 96.

laughs.⁹⁵ Aaron in *Cerberus* makes for an interesting victim because a sexual assault on him seems almost inconceivable against such a powerful man. Content such as this scene challenges previous notions of whom can be victims of sexual assault, exploring even Aaron's own disbelief at his victimization.

Though horrific, violent, and intense, *Cerberus*' rape scene provides gripping emotional tension through the contrast of horror and moments of relief. The graphic descriptions maintained a level of fear through the narrator's inability to see what was coming. The chosen subject of this story allows for the reader to empathize with Aaron's trials, and even emotionally explore such a horrifying scenario safely through fiction. Given that the fic contains careful warnings that are reiterated in the author's notes, readers are assumed to have agency when choosing for themselves what content they read. Though trigger warnings travel poorly outside of fandom, here they assume readers are capable to decide for themselves what they want to read, and operate as the opposite of censorship.

The rape scene is a complex journey through representations of violence and gender, that would be enjoyable to those who enjoy experiencing visceral and sexual horror. The scene accomplishes what the author set out to do, and maintains horrified tension and fear throughout. For readers searching for horror and explorations of victimhood and masculinity, *Cerberus* does a terrific job.

⁹⁵ This is such a common occurrence in fiction, that TV Tropes has given it its own page, under "Double Standard: Rape, Female on Male," and can be found here: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DoubleStandardRapeFemaleOnMale>

6. VICTIM BLAMING

Omegaverse is a fandom-specific concept that, while not particularly common (totaling 20,728 individual stories on AO3 as of February 9th, 2017), is prevalent enough that it has spread to every fandom discussed in this thesis, and to many more. *Heart in a Headlock* by SweetandSharp is based off of the BBC show, *Merlin*, as an alternate reality where Merlin is a professor of Sociology, and in this long, yet unfinished story of 287,019 words, we see snippets of his classroom and research, finding further gender variations of the eight accepted genders accepted in this universe and that are stated in the author's appendix.⁹⁶ This fic becomes an interesting exercise to explore gender relations through a concept where its signature is pregnant cisgender men. I argue that this fic applies notions of gender inequity and rape culture to the Omegaverse concept, working through issues such as victim blaming and assault through a male character, as well as a crisis of sexual identity. Our male protagonist fights against his society's feminization of him, and the fear that when he meets his mate, he will be forced to be a submissive, house omega.

The scene of interest of *Heart in a Headlock* is a scene of dramatic climax, in which Arthur confronts our protagonist Merlin about the secrets he has been keeping. These secrets include that Merlin is a male omega (a *momega*, in the story), and then as revealed in the scene, Arthur's *truemate* (like soulmates). Arthur is a malpha, a male alpha. An omega, and specifically a momega in this fic, is a man who has the capacity to become pregnant and give birth. Alpha are characters⁹⁷ with penises that have knotting capabilities during sex, in which they and their penetrated partner are locked together. Biting their partner as a form of

⁹⁶ SweetandSharp. "Appendix to Heart in a Headlock." *Archive of Our Own*. 1 Oct 2013. <http://archiveofourown.org/works/987046>. Accessed 9 Feb 2017.

⁹⁷ Almost always male characters, but this fic does feature female bodied characters with penises.

claiming them is a common feature in Omegaverse stories as well. Betas are characters whose reproductive capacities are as normal humans, though occasionally this designates them in a hierarchy among other characters. At this point in the fic, Merlin and Arthur are friends, with the scene immediately preceding this one with Arthur and Merlin amiably parting ways after hanging out as Arthur goes to a dinner with one of Merlin's work associates. Merlin is in his apartment alone when Arthur returns, having learned from that work associate that Merlin might be using suppressants to hide his omega scent and identity.

This scene explores victim blaming rhetoric through the climactic scene in their fic. In this *Merlin* fic, we are firmly within Merlin's head via third person narration save for a couple of chapters. We are not often privy to others' thinking except Merlin's own, and his perspective shines light onto the gender relations of this world. He is our authority about this world,⁹⁸ and we as readers assume him to be knowledgeable throughout the story, but many times the author demonstrates how limited the perspective of one person is. When the perspective changes in the story, it highlights what Merlin has missed. At the end of this scene, Merlin retracts his own previous interpretations of the current events. And it is through Merlin's perspective that we experience the complex nature of accountability of disclosure and assault, as well as when that accountability is so disproportionate that it becomes victim blaming.

The scene of interest begins at the end of Chapter 7: Faces and Condensation. This scene is the much anticipated confrontation between Merlin and Arthur, in which Merlin's sexgender as an omega is revealed to Arthur, as Merlin had been taking measures to pass as a male beta throughout the entire story. It is also revealed to Arthur that Merlin and Arthur are *truemates*—their

⁹⁸ Keen, 2015, pp. 52.

particular biologies align particularly well together, which are essentially biological soulmates who are identifiable by scent. Merlin has known, and by extension the reader, has known that they are true mates since the beginning, and made the active choice to not inform Arthur because he believes Arthur is a typical, meat-headed alpha, and he does not want to be reduced to merely an omega.

This scene is the culmination of two hundred thousand words of build up. A less intense and dramatic interaction would have been a disappointment. The story is described succinctly and humorously by its summary, “Professor Merlin Emrys is happy with his life, his career and his research, and not resembling the dewy eyed, spread legged omegas on the cover of *Playstud*, thank you. Until the Irony Gods start to mess with him.” It is about the relationship or lack thereof between Merlin and Arthur. It is a collection of mostly chronologically stories in this universe focusing around these characters, with a broad range of genres.

Additionally, authors do take care in how they frame their stories, especially with content about consent and coercion. A *Sherlock* BBC story I will discuss in depth later, *Cross Wired* by Pretty Arbitrary,⁹⁹ includes in the author’s note at the beginning with, “No Johns were (non-consensually) harmed in the making of this fic.” Framing these stories with humor is a common approach. Considering that we have seen that even when a story includes depictions of horrific rape, there must be moments of relief for both the character and the readers. It appears that authors use humor to counter the seriousness of the content, to reassure the reader that the content is not as dark as implied.

By the demands of the narrative, the plot must deliver affective build and

⁹⁹ PrettyArbitrary, “Cross Wired.” *Archive of Our Own*. 5 March 2012. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/351941>. Accessed 2 March 2017.

release effectively to keep the reader engaged.¹⁰⁰ The result is that, as a reader, the anticipation creates an eagerness and satisfaction with the scene, even though the scene itself is horrifying and frustrating with Merlin's self-blame. If we proceed with the well-accepted definition of *plot* meaning "The fully reconstituted set of narrated events, complete with causal relations and consequences (and a clear sense of what does *not* happen)"¹⁰¹ and *story* meaning "the events of the narrative as 'they happened' in the imaginative chronological ordering of fictive time,"¹⁰² this scene is *necessary*.

Rereading the scene without the long, anticipatory build-up demonstrates the horror and frustration present much more clearly. The tension in this particularly scene teeters delightfully and unnervingly between violence to tenderness continuously. It begins with Arthur knocking forcefully on Merlin's door, having just come from a dinner where Merlin was outed to Arthur by his supervisor from work. The beginning of this scene is a tonal contrast to the end of the scene before, in which Arthur and Merlin part ways amicably when Arthur leaves for the dinner. Words loaded with violent implications such as "shook," "force," "hammering," "unrelenting," "drumming," "shoved," "slammed," and "fervor," are used to describe Arthur's actions. Arthur's gaze is described as "deadly" and "thunderous." When the mood changes to tenderness, words such as "gently" and "soothe," along with a brief section of intimate bathing. Arthur also provides Merlin with fresh and dry clothes after shoving him repeatedly into the shower to forcibly reveal his natural scent, as well as a towel, in a paragraph that reads as tender.

¹⁰⁰ Though for fan fiction, which is available and created for free, are more likely to resist typically storytelling narratives as the form allows for experimentation.

¹⁰¹ Keen, 2015, pp. 77. Original emphasis.

¹⁰² Keen, 2015, pp. 76.

Additionally, the violence is oftentimes romanticized and minimized through Merlin's perspective throughout, with phrases such as "Arthur's face was a picture of focus, and it made him look *beautifully* intense through [Arthur's] anger," and "They kicked up the rug and jostled furniture in some entanglement that was more akin to a *sloppy grapple than a violent altercation*" (emphasis mine). "Beautifully" makes Arthur appealing and distracts from his anger in the same breath. "A sloppy grapple than a violent altercation" defines the interaction for the reader, rather than let us define it for ourselves. Importantly, framing the interaction that way downplays the violence of it. In addition, although the language of the scene toys with minimizing Arthur's actions, and Merlin himself becomes caught up in pleasure at several points, he consistently states his objections, even though the feelings he experiences are complicated with fear, outrage, and pleasure.

Merlin blames himself throughout the scene expressing guilt that he lied to Arthur about his omega identity, as well as their compatibility as true mates. In this scenario, Arthur is framed as the wronged party, and Merlin is at fault for not being honest. This assumes that Arthur had the right to know about Merlin's sexgender. Specifically, Arthur believes that his actions during this scene are "different" and less serious than Merlin lying to him and making him question his sexuality. Arthur's humiliation over being fooled by Merlin's lies as well as the humiliation of having to question his sexual identity are important enough for Arthur to repeat several times, quoted below (all emphasis mine):

Tell me you didn't let me kiss you and then let me have *some kind of sexuality crisis*. Tell me you didn't lie to me!

Was it fun? Making the *big bad alpha think he's gay*? I bet you'll even get a great article out of it in some academic journal so my humiliation can be national!

What? *Hurdle over my sexuality*? Were you honestly going to hold my adherence to my *orientation* over me? And then what? Once I'd proved I was willing to *subvert* parts of myself for you, give up my mate, my dreams, you'd gift me with the truth? Allow me in on the fact you're something I might want to fuck while celebrating the conversion of another heterofascist into gender fluidity?

Gay in this world is defined by pairings that do not possess reproductive capabilities, as defined by the author in their appendix. As beta males, like cisgender men in real life, cannot become pregnant and give birth to children, Arthur questioned if he was heterosexual, as in exclusively attracted to those with the capacity to become pregnant and carry children. Sexual orientation, in this universe, is notably defined by reproductive capacities. Whether a person if masculine or feminine bodied does not seem to be factored into that.

As we see in the quotes, Arthur's crisis of sexuality has much to do with what we would normally call a gay crisis, or trans panic. He feels very entitled-- though he and Merlin were not in a relationship by this point in time, and only beginning to acknowledge that they may, in fact, have feelings for each other, Arthur feels he should have been informed about Merlin's sexugender immediately. Merlin believes Arthur's arguments. He believes that expecting another person to "hurdle over [their] sexuality" is too much to ask, despite the fact that Arthur does not have any right or ownership over Merlin's body,

regardless of their true mate status. If Arthur has a sexuality crisis over his attraction to Merlin, thinking he is a beta male, that implies his own issues with homophobia, rather than any fault on Merlin's.

Arthur does not believe that his actions are the same as or worse than Merlin's lies. Despite forcing his way into Merlin's apartment, forcing Merlin to shower to bring forth his natural omega scent, and drugging him twice through alpha fangs and their natural venom of *doulostonin*, a characteristic of Alphas unique to this story, Arthur's centers the problem firmly on his perceived humiliation. He does not perceive his actions as violent, but a justified response to this slight. As such, he is offended when Merlin moves to protect his face at one point, insisting that, "I'm not going to hit you!" and not realizing why Merlin might have reacted in such a way.

Merlin's self-blame is tied with this homophobia and trans panic rhetoric, which further stirs up frustration at his misplaced guilt. The idea that this violence being enacted upon him is his fault for not hiding his identity well enough is evident in lines like, "It served [Merlin] right. He should have hidden the bottle back with his dirty laundry, or in his nightstand with his suppressants," and "Arthur was going to be so mad at him. He didn't want to make his alpha mad." As this is Merlin's perspective, the reader can be guided by this thinking which is thankfully countered by the end of the scene, but is horrific for a reader who does not find Merlin to be a reliable narrator.

Fortunately, the scene and story does not absolve Arthur of wrongdoing, and flips the blame away from Merlin. This scene succeeds as an appropriate climax because Merlin's worst fears and anxieties come to pass. Merlin's concerns throughout the story are justified in this scene, as Arthur's actions are worse than he feared. Like a man who calls a woman beautiful in one breath, and

a bitch in the second after rejection, Arthur behaves so abhorrently after his discovery of the truth that he inadvertently proves to the readers, and to Merlin, that Merlin was right all along.

The frustration of this story finds stark relief at the end of the scene, after the violation takes place, though there are moments throughout where Merlin becomes more coherent. He attempts to run twice, and in his thoughts, he is defiant, “He was bent in sycophantic deference! Exposing his neck as if Arthur were his master! As if Merlin owed him something after Arthur had subjugated him, bullied him. No! This was not who he would be. He refused, utterly refused to be that meek subordinate.” He resists, but Merlin fears what Arthur is capable of, of whether it would come to blows or rape. “But they always think their mate wouldn’t.” At this point, Merlin and by extension the reader have reason to be afraid of Arthur. The tender descriptions of Arthur earlier in the scene no longer matter, and the few moments of pleasure later in the scene are directly followed by Merlin’s indignity and rejection. It is clear, at this point, that Merlin has acknowledged that he has been assaulted and drugged by Arthur, who is not shy about employing violence to get what he wants.

The scene comes to a head after Arthur discovers that he and Merlin are true mates, and the victim-blaming rhetoric is crushed and abandoned. In the worlding of this Omegaverse, alphas engage in scentmarking, producing a liquid called *aquarichor* that keeps those marked with it smelling like the alpha for about six months. After Arthur learns Merlin’s true identity, Arthur forces Merlin to kneel so he can scentmark him. This is not completely clear initially, as Merlin’s panic shows:

The sound of loosening metal teeth jolted terror through Merlin. Not

Arthur. Never. Arthur wouldn't! He couldn't!

Would he? All the fears that had flashed through his mind for the last hour swamped Merlin's mind. While it wasn't a fist aimed at him, rape was a crime no less violent. And it would be rape. The few feet they'd moved from the position where Merlin had clutched Arthur in passion might as well have been miles.

At this moment in the scene, the pleasure Merlin finds in the proceedings is deftly eliminated as a valid reason for the continuation of events. When being marked, he moans in “wretchedness” and “carnality,” and afterwards demands, “H-h-how could you?” he said between stabbing breaths from a throat clogged with betrayal.” Though there is pleasure marked by the use of the word “carnality,” it is not a justification for proceeding, and the violation takes precedent in the narration. Even though there is pleasure, that does not minimize the violation. Merlin realizes he was wrong about his truemate, and that it was he, not Arthur, who had been lied to. If his truemate was like this, and behaved in such a way, what is the reason for even having a truemate? The scene ends with Merlin forcibly throwing Arthur out of his apartment, and his friends coming to help him.

I almost chose instead to focus on the following chapter for analysis, rather than this particular scene, as in the next chapter, we join Arthur’s sister Morgana in a confrontation with Arthur, in which she roundly condemns him for his actions in his interactions with Merlin. She also notably asks Merlin “Did my brother rape you?” before the confrontation, so she could take appropriate actions if he had. Merlin answers no, which is why I refer to what happens in this scene

as a violation, but not rape, nor especially a sexual assault, as in the world itself, a scentmarking is not necessarily sexual. My chosen scene focuses on consent and coercion, specifically of the character navigating through several acts of coercion and ending up fighting against both the attacker and his own self-blaming thoughts.

I argue that that the emotional satisfaction from this scene comes from Merlin working through and then against his own victim-blaming rhetoric. Merlin finally kicking Arthur out is gratifying, and practically worthy of cheering. Working through that thinking and reaching the conclusion that they are not to blame is important in a society where victim-blaming rhetoric is so prevalent. By encouraging and mapping how to counter one's own thoughts, the author essentially provides a deeply empathetic model for the readers.

As with all the fics that appear in this thesis, it is important to discuss the maleness and the whiteness of the victimhood, particularly here, where the *maleness* of the character in question is complicated by the Omegaverse. As I stated earlier, Merlin fights being reduced to a sexual object by passing as a beta male for most of the fic. His fears of objectification and being reduced to a gender role are similar to the trials of cisgender women, but unlike most cisgender women, he is undeniably masculine in his presentation and his identity. His masculinity does not protect him from this reduction, which I argue is the significant point in many of these stories. Masculinity, for all of its power, does not protect men from being victimized.

It is also noteworthy that the endgame relationship is, in fact, supposed to be Arthur/Merlin. We are supposed to like Arthur, and eventually, support their relationship, and which begins during Morgana's confrontation with him. This narrative then, even though we see a character enacting assault on another, hinges

on the belief that people can change and work through their issues. Whether or not we believe people can change, the narrative throughout the story maps how someone can overcome their own internalized prejudices, or apologize for committing such an action against someone. It may also provide a map for how two people can move past such events in their relationships, and at the very least, the curiosity of how the author will recover the relationship and the character of Arthur is highly compelling for the readers. As, ultimately, authors write what they find interesting, rather than what is healthy.

7. EROTICIZED RAPE

In *Turnabout is Fair Play* by peevee,¹⁰³ we see how rape can be easily eroticized in literature through the careful use of certain adjectives and adverbs. Like with the previous fic, *Heart in a Headlock*, the male victim is feminized. I argue here that in order to victimize the male character, he must be feminized. I also argue that, like in the next section with *Of Sentinels and Anchors*, the eroticism hinges on the underlying assumption that the victim wants it.

In the story, Sherlock Holmes from *Sherlock* BBC molests John Watson while he is in a drugged state. The two are in an established relationship, and the scene (which constitutes the entire story, as its only 1,611 words) begins with the end of one of their detective investigations. John is drugged by their suspect, and Sherlock helps him home and into bed, monitoring his vitals for hours before he begins touching him.

Throughout the text, there is a repeated emphasis on John's vulnerability while drugged. John is "so pliant, soft and warm," "defenseless," and, "vulnerable." When Sherlock moves on to physically touching John, the "half soft[ness]" of John's penis is eroticized. This delight that Sherlock takes in John's vulnerability, which he continuously compares to how John normally behaves while having sex, that he is normally "so responsive," and usually "he's *hard* and wanting and pinning Sherlock to the bed" (emphasis mine). Why this particular focus on softness?

The idea that a body usually so powerful--not only being white and male, but also ex-military and capable of fighting and murder--becomes vulnerable is one that often seems enchanting to fan fiction authors. A similar idea is deployed in *Cerberus* with Aaron Hotchner. When Aaron, character from *Criminal Minds*

¹⁰³ peevee, 2015.

who is white, male, and the leader of an FBI unit, is raped in *Cerberus*, part of what makes the scene interesting is the everpresent knowledge to both the character and the readers that he is not the typical rape victim. Additionally, male characters are often feminized in slash fan fiction when they are the receiving partner, or implied to be. Fandom scholarly work has also argued that one of the men in a gay relationship must be the “woman” of the relationship. Joanna Russ suggests in her early article about Kirk/Spock that Spock’s feminine qualities render him relatable to female fans.¹⁰⁴ That penetration is inherently masculine, and being penetrated is inherently feminine and feminizing, retains the Lacanian cultural descriptor of the phallus having mystical, dominating, identity-changing powers.¹⁰⁵ It is important to remember that authors make the choice of how their story is framed.

How a character interprets events in a story is not necessarily how the reader will interpret those events, and readers should be able to parse the character’s narration from their critical interpretation. That said, fictional characters lack proper agency by the virtue of being fictional. They cannot, and do not, act upon their own desires but merely the desires of the author. When a character justifies their somnophilia to themselves by repeating that they cannot resist, and they to face no consequences for those actions, we must as readers understand the framework of consent that is being imposed on us. In *Heart in a Headlock*, we saw how the author guided the reader through a scenario where the victim first blames himself before blaming his attacker. Unlike *Heart in a Headlock*, *Turnabout is Fair Play* employs justifications for sexual assault without any critique, and the act is even rewarded in the story, and is also

¹⁰⁴ Russ, 1985, pp. 82-83.

¹⁰⁵ Lacan, Jacques. "The Signification of the Phallus." *Écrits 2*, 1966, pp. 103-115.

eroticized.

The focus on vulnerability in this story plays into our cultural phenomenon of rape apologia, as part of a larger mentality that rape is inevitable.¹⁰⁶ Sherlock repeatedly “can’t resist” furthering his touch and ministrations on John’s vulnerable, unable to consent body. The idea that someone can not resist the temptation of sexual assault follows a “boys will be boys” rape apology rhetoric. The summary of the story adds on to this excuse, being “Sherlock crosses boundaries, as usual.” The “as usual” suggests that Sherlock’s behavior is dull, expected, and typical. That Sherlock would do something like sexually molest John in his sleep is not upsetting because such a thing is expected of Sherlock. And this is true, canonically, as Sherlock conducts experiments on John without his knowledge or consent, including drugging him.

The framing of this story differs from others that fall within similar categories. For example, *Cross Wired* by PrettyArbitrary¹⁰⁷ uses the tags and notes to exhaustively warn readers of what is to come, but also simultaneously lessen the impact of those warnings in their notes. Partnered with tags such as “All the warnings, Triggers, Dubious Consent, Rape, Violent sexual fantasies, Sensory Deprivation, Knifeplay, Asphyxiation, Bloodplay, Snuff fantasies, Bondage, Discussion of Major Character Death, Possessive Behavior, Captivity, Rough Sex, Unsafe Sex, Bad Decisions,” are tags and notes that are, “it’s not as dark as the tags make it seem, Dark!fluff”¹⁰⁸ and “On the other hand, it all turns

¹⁰⁶ Jewkes, Rachel, Emma Fulu, Tim Roselli, and Claudia Garcia-Moreno. "Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Non-Partner Rape Perpetration: Findings From the UN Multi-Country Cross-Sectional Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific." *The Lancet Global Health* 1.4, 2013, pp. 208-218.

¹⁰⁷ PrettyArbitrary, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ *Fluff* refers to a specific genre of fan fiction that encompasses sweet, heartwarming moments, such as small slices in between canon in which the characters have a cute moment. Domesticity is a common focus for these. *Dark!fluff* (or sometimes *Dark Fluff*; the exclamation mark denotes the

out fine! Really!” The author provides every warning they can think of, even though the story ultimately depicts a consensual relationship. They do not minimize the content of the story, even while reassuring readers that the story still has a happy ending. In contrast, the summary *Turnabout is Fair Play* creates an excuse for Sherlock before the story even begins.

We see in *Turnabout*, from the perpetrator's perspective, how his actions are justified. Sherlock does believe there should be consequences to his actions. He thinks, when John wakes up after Sherlock is inside him, that “he knows that at this point there should probably be shouting. This is really, really not good.” These sentences seem perfunctory at best along with his justifications. Even more so, when the only consequences that Sherlock faces afterwards is that John later molests Sherlock in *his* sleep, which is left to these last three lines:

He wakes, later, to three of John’s fingers slick and wet buried *sweetly* in his arse.

John looks up at him, wicked grin on his *lovely little* mouth,

“Turnabout is fair play.” (Emphasis mine)

Even Sherlock’s violation is romanticized, with romanticized words such as “sweetly,” and “lovely.” “Sweetly” emphasizes that Sherlock enjoys the fingers in his ass. If “sweetly” was removed from that sentence, or replaced with a less

first word an adjective) are also cute moments, but are generally acknowledge to be fucked up cute moments, such as the sweet, bonding moments you might find between sociopathic murderers, or people who fantasize about violating or murdering the other, and the other happily indulges in modifications of those fantasies, like in John does for Sherlock in *Cross Wired*.

pleasant word, the sentence could read more neutrally or as a violation. “Lovely,” emphasizes the attractiveness of John from Sherlock’s perspective, how attractive he is to him and how overall pleasant the proceedings are. “Little,” as well, denotes affection and harmlessness when describing John’s characteristics. Without “lovely” and “little,” the sentence still reads playfully, “John looks up at him, wicked grin on his mouth.” If “cruel” or “ugly” were inserted before mouth, our interpretation of this event would be drastically different. Instead, the words used have positive connotations, which creates an erotic atmosphere.

Let us compare this fic to another *Sherlock* fic, *Cross Wired* by PrettyArbitrary, which was mentioned previously. In it, John finds Sherlock’s diary and discovers the dark, sexual fantasies Sherlock harbors about tying, beating, and murdering John. And John, though horrified, is further conflicted by how exciting he finds these prospects, which is tied to how much he trusts Sherlock to actually harm him. John confronts Sherlock, who never intended for John to discover these fantasies, and they discuss the possibility and limitations of enacting those fantasies. Both characters acknowledge their desires, even when strange and violent, and have a conversation about making them happen safely. The interest, and the charge, is rooted in how John and Sherlock’s mutual desires match, which is fitting for its tag of Dark!Fluff. Even when discussing intensely violent and dominating sexual desires and fantasies, that these two found each other is written as sweet. The intensity and violence of these fantasies is not minimized or ignored because the author highlights how it is those very things that John finds erotic.

Meanwhile, the justifications in *Turnabout* remain that Sherlock has too little control over his impulses, but that it is alright in the context of their relationship. The actions themselves are minimized through the language that the

author uses, and maybe through the context in the established relationship, but it is clearly an issue that goes undiscussed. The assumption is that John has permission to do the same. Further, Sherlock perceives John's body to be consenting when he is incapacitated. "John's body seems to be approving, his body legs spread ever so slightly wider and he makes a snuffing noise." This immediately contradicts the previous paragraph wherein Sherlock's observation that "John's cock has started to swell and flush slightly with the attention. It's a purely physical reaction, fascinating to watch and touch." The logic of consent within *Turnabout* appears to be inconsistent, relying on clichéd and misinformed ideas surrounding consent and sexual behavior.

Despite the justifications and eroticized rape, this type of fic is common on AO3, receiving kudos and positive comments by readers. This particular story succeeds in being erotic for the author and the readers. This story, and others, allows the writers and readers to safely explore that fantasy. To be clear, AO3 is not a safe space and is never meant to be a safe space, except for writers, who can produce whatever content they like without fear of being deleted or banned. This fic provides a safe way to explore the fantasy of non-consensual somnophilia, as well as other situations of sexual coercion and assault. And as discussed in the literature review and backstory sections, it is vital to sexual minorities to be able to freely express their desires.

Turnabout frames consent using positive modifiers, a direct contrast to *Cerberus* which created the horror of the rape through negative modifiers with violent and painful meanings. The author also determines how consent is framed, and the most interesting stories address the consequences of the character's actions, like in *Heart in a Headlock*. peevee here creates a story that is meant to be quick and erotic, sidestepping the fallout that could have come with Sherlock's

actions. The story could have been framed in a better way, but I hesitate to hold solely one author responsible for a rhetoric of rape apologia that has permeated our society so thoroughly especially when at least the author for this story has acknowledged through the tags that there are consent issues.

8. NECESSARY HOMOSEXUALITY

The ship pairing of Kirk/Spock is so popular that it is recognizable for people who have not seen or are not fans of *Star Trek: The Original Series*. Not only is it recognizable, but the ship has been long-lasting, with the recent *Star Trek* films reviving fan fiction for both the pairing and its tropes. *Pon farr* is the biological mating imperative that male Vulcans undergo every seven years, canonically requiring either a mating session or a fight to the death. Since the episode featuring pon farr, “Amok Time,” aired in 1967, fan authors have rewritten the episode to have Kirk volunteer to save Spock’s life with sex rather than a fight. Since the new *Star Trek* movies, the Star Trek fandom has been much more active with Kirk/Spock, and many have been happily exploring how Spock’s pon farr would play out sexily in this universe.

Pon farr is a version of the “Fuck or Die” trope, and is clearly a compelling one given how long it has persisted in the fandom’s erotic imagination and by the number of fics centering on it. I argue in this section that pon farr, like other “Fuck or Die” subtropes, demonstrates a constraint in the imagination, specifically in how fans imagine these two characters can come together romantically and sexually, suggesting that these characters will not begin a relationship--or have sex--unless forced to by circumstances outside their control. However, I complicate that argument by maintaining my stance that fan fiction is essentially what fans find to be interesting, and not what is healthy. The “Fuck or Die” trope presents circumstances where two characters are forced to have sex for external reasons, such as here, where Spock will die if he does not have sex. Neither character involved is at fault, as Spock’s biological imperative is literally a matter of life and death and beyond his control, and writers enjoy fleshing out this narrative in multiple forms.

In addition to my analysis of the narrative, I also argue that male victimhood once again is predicated on the assumption that men cannot be victimized. Like in *Turnabout*, where Sherlock gets away with molesting John while he's sleeping without his consent because John turns out to be into it, the events of this fic are ultimately smoothed over because Kirk wants to have sex with Spock, anyway. Even in situations where the situation is coercive, it appears that men are depicted as still wanting sex regardless.

The scene for analysis in *Of Sentinels and Anchors* by CorpusInvictus¹⁰⁹ is when Spock and Kirk are trapped together in a cave due to problems with technology and poor weather. The twist on this particular narrative of pon farr is that Spock's father died when he was young, and he was raised on Earth by his mother with no training on how to control his telepathic Vulcan abilities by accident. He badly hurts a young girl who kisses him unexpectedly in school, and he takes a series of medication to manage his powers. After the events of *Star Trek* (2009), Spock is still Captain Kirk's First Officer on the USS Enterprise, finding that Kirk's presence calms him. Snowed in on an alien planet and unable to be rescued for several days, Spock enters pon farr while trapped in a cave with Kirk.

Of Sentinels and Anchors deploys pon farr as so many have done before to orchestrate Kirk and Spock into sex and a relationship, illustrating the *necessary homosexuality* theory. First, Kirk is framed as exceptional, as first as an exception to Spock's telepathic abilities and also sexually. "Something about Jim negates the ill effects of his poorly-controlled telepathy," and "Jim has always been a source of telepathic silence." For unexplained reasons, Kirk quiets Spock's powers. He is special in a way impossible for anyone else, and their relationship

¹⁰⁹ CorpusInvictus, 2015.

can progress much faster and with better results than otherwise. Spock also refers to Kirk as an anchor, or “touchstone.” When attempting to convince Kirk that he is a danger, Spock says, “You are an aberration. It appears that when I am near you, my telepathy is easier to control. Among others... [...] Among others, it is dangerous.” Exceptionalism is a common theme in slash fan fiction, which uncomfortably continues the erasure of bisexuality. Characters are allowed to claim heterosexuality except for this one person. In cases where characters reconsider their sexual orientation, they bypass bisexuality in favor of gay. In this particular case, Kirk is exceptional for unknown reasons that are unattainable by anyone else. We are never given an explanation for why Kirk is the exception to Spock’s telepathetic turmoil, but the title provides some hints we can flesh out.

The title obviously references Spock’s usage of the word “anchor” in the fic when referring to Kirk, but “sentinel,” might instead have a more fannish inspiration. In the show, *The Sentinel* (1996-1999), there exist people who are Sentinels, who have greater senses and physical strength than most people but can easily become overwhelmed by their abilities, and Guides, who provide a sensory and emotional focal point for their Sentinels so they can continue to function. Though the show itself does not have a large fandom, the idea has bled into many various fandoms in a sort of alternative version of soulmates. Certainly, this fic seems to deploy that concept to the relationship between Spock and Kirk, even though it is not pulling directly from *The Sentinel*. While the romanticized idea of “The One” is not unique to this alternate universe, when presented with this exceptionalism, it strikes biphobic and homophobic chords. Instead of directly acknowledging a character as bisexual, exceptionalism in fiction justifies uncritically that their only exception is a particular character, but they are otherwise heterosexual. For this one character only, they will make an exception.

Unlike in *Turnabout is Fair Play*, a BBC's *Sherlock* fic in which Sherlock molests and assaults a drugged John Watson, there is no clear perpetrator in *Of Sentinels and Anchors*. As in many "Fuck or Die" fics, the characters are forced to have sex for circumstances beyond their control, in this case because Spock will die otherwise. Both stories involve men who cannot "resist" the temptation before them, but the framing of consent is different. It is also interesting to consider frameworks of consent in interspecies relationships in universes such as *Star Trek*. Imagining the consent discourse and frameworks in a universe such as *Star Trek* with presumably regular cultural and sexual exchanges between different sentient species is an entertaining exercise. It is at the very least necessary to maintain an awareness that this universe would have different frameworks of consent than we do.¹¹⁰ Some fan fic authors admirably attempt to introduce modern feminist frameworks of consent in their stories, but it is jarring when characters from fantasy medieval settings or from other planets and cultures throw around terms like *enthusiastic consent* and *victim-blaming*. Certainly, they are fantastic terms to understand and include in fiction, where narrative empathy draws the reader to form an investment to characters,¹¹¹ they are startlingly out of place. Another story I will analyze when discussing the Rape Aftermath/Rape Recovery tags, *Until you pull too hard* by tinygreyghost,¹¹² is a great example of how to address modern frameworks of consent as they might appear in the fantasy medieval world of the video game series, *Dragon Age*.

That said, it seems odd to dismiss *Turnabout's* use of "can't resist" as a justification, but not Spock's. The narrative intentionally explores consent in

¹¹⁰ The *Mass Effect* video game series includes a romanceable alien character, Garrus. As part of his romance arc, the player must acquire permission from both the captain and the doctor. The latter includes instructions on how your two species can engage in intercourse.

¹¹¹ Keen, 2015, pp. 115.

¹¹² tinygreyghost, 2015.

circumstances that are coercive. Pon Farr should be considered an “external circumstances,” as again, Spock will canonically die if he does not either have sex or engage in a fight to the death. Kirk has the option in this fic to let Spock die, or to kill him with his phaser, but decides that he is not willing to lose his First Officer, and that sex is the better option. Kirk initiates the kiss with Spock, who describes his control and mind “[snapping] beyond his control.” The similarity in rhetoric does not do justice for how *Of Sentinels* handles the character’s decisions based on the options they have. And much of fan fiction, especially for science fiction and fantasy stories, often explore the limitations of consent in situations beyond what we can imagine in reality.

The scene itself is tense and laden with fear on both Spock’s and Kirk’s parts, true to the uncertainty and risk that goes along with “Fuck or Die” scenarios. Spock’s fears are based on his previous interaction with a girl in school, who kissed him, and he drove her to near insanity. Spock tells Kirk that, “I need you [...] to find out phasers. I need you to set them to ‘kill.’” Kirk outright refuses to kill Spock, even after Spock tells him about what he did to the last person who kissed him. Spock is not scared of killing Kirk, but of destroying his mind, as we see immediately after their orgasmic mind meld; “[...] [Spock’s] eyes squeezed shut and tears streaming down his face. He can’t open his eyes, can’t look, can’t see the dead look in his Captain’s eyes, can’t bear to know what he has done-.” Spock is afraid of what he might be capable of, which we are privy to because we see the events through his perspective. Due to Spock’s abilities as a telepath, we are also able to know some of what Kirk is feeling and thinking. “Spock senses the moment the anxiety makes a sharp turn to true fear,” when they realize that Spock does not have his medication. When Spock reveals what he did to his schoolmate, Kirk is noticeably afraid. “And [Spock] can’t verbalize it, but

he must be projecting the images again because Jim's face goes tense and frightened for a moment." The threat of harm is real and is not downplayed in *Of Sentinels*. And, despite this threat and the clear discussion of it, Kirk makes the decision to save Spock regardless.

However, I do not call Spock the "perpetrator," even though it is he who becomes a threat to the other's well-being. Perpetrator, here, is not defined by penetration, as penetration does not occur in this fic, but instead a mutual orgasm via thought in a mind meld. Often in stories, the perpetrator and penetrator are synonymous, which makes invisible sexual assault and violence that do not include penetration. In this story, and other "Fuck or Die" stories in which a character is inflicted with a biological mating imperative, "sex pollen," or some other such mechanism, the inability to give consent is sometimes addressed. This particular story presents Spock's *pon farr* as acting upon feelings he already had. Kirk says afterwards that Spock had just made their arrangement a "permanent" one, implying that both of them wanted to have sex with each other anyway. Spock's ability to consent is addressed in this fic, with Kirk noting that the girl from Spock's childhood had kissed him suddenly and without his consent. When Spock tells Kirk that he "ripped into her mind like it was paper" when "All she did was try to kiss me," Kirk responds, "She didn't try. She managed. And you weren't prepared for her. [...] You'd never felt her mind before. You've felt mine. You've been able to touch me without going crazy. And you called me an anchor." The conclusion is that, if Spock's *pon farr*-driven desire for Kirk is based on his already present feelings for Kirk, and Kirk is willing, then the situation is still consensual, despite the circumstances. As previously stated, the question of culpability constitutes some of this trope's continuous appeal; no one is clearly at fault. This trope allows the navigation of unusual circumstances for consent, the

capacity and decision making for consent, and provides for sexual scenes charged with fear, violence, and emotional consequences.

The fact that Kirk is willing to have sex with Spock sidesteps the more negative repercussions they could have faced in this story. If Kirk had even been a little less willing—if he was not attracted to Spock, but only wanted to save his life—his capacity to consent would be much more clearly coerced and hesitant. But like in *Turnabout*, the potential negative consequences do not come to pass because the other party turns out to be willing. It is a staple of the trope of necessary homosexuality in fandom that the characters already want each other, but refuse to act on it, so they need an external force to start their relationship.

These narratives also continue the idea that men cannot be victims of sexual assault, if they always already want it. This idea is an extension of the cultural stereotype of men being always ready to have sex at any time given the opportunity, so that they could not possibly be raped if they are always willing. Though consent is discussed in this fic, and Kirk and Spock come to an agreement after considering other options, this narrative still displays this troubling trend.

Necessary homosexuality has infinite possibilities in the erotic imaginary. Authors do not shy away from the ugliness of the situations for the characters, creating complex and lengthy stories that effectively explore the circumstances and aftermath. It is worthwhile to note that, though an interesting narrative that contains complex affective potential, the common implication is that the characters involved would never have had sex or start a relationship together if they had not had circumstances that forced them to. There appears to be a of fics that explore men acknowledging and admitting to their feelings without being forced to, which indicates that authors do not believe that to be as interesting, or that it is difficult to imagine men owning up to their own feelings without first

being forced to. This says as much about erotic imaginary as it does about our cultural understanding of how men handle their own emotions, explicitly that they do not.

9. RAPE AFTERMATH AND RECOVERY

The *Dragon Age* video game series takes place in the fantasy continent of Thedas, with magic and fantasy races such as elves, dwarves, and qunari, as well as humans. The games are well-known for both the option for gay romances, as well as the complex moral choices available to the player throughout the games. In this section, I examine a story that explores the aftermath and recovery of a past rape. The protagonist is a male elf, who is white but is also slightly racialized through allegory by virtue of being an elf. I continue my analysis of male victimhood, specifically discussing the effect this racialization has in terms of perceived power, as well as the continued appeal of applying violence to white male bodies. I also argue that fics provide spaces for writers to work through complex issues like rape aftermath and recovery, presenting an idealized way to navigate frameworks of consent and healthy relationship conversations.

This fic is based on the third game in the main series, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. The Inquisitor is the player character, who can be either male or female, and one of the four aforementioned races. If an elf, the player experiences prejudice from the other characters, receives disadvantages in certain political situations, but occasionally has options for elf-only knowledge. Elves in the game were formerly slaves in most of the continent (and still are in the country of Tevinter), and still face socioeconomic disadvantages and are often the victims of violence. The racialization of their history of slavery and current social situations is easily comparable to that of Black people in America, and the cultural and mythological is often comparable to Jewish and Rromani people.

While the story and politics of the game's world are complex and interesting, most elves are still white.¹¹³ Their racialization is primarily allegory,

¹¹³ *Harry Potter* and *Zootopia* are great better-known examples of this. *Harry Potter* discusses

and as an RPG, the player has the option to do some truly heinous acts against elves. The player can, for example, destroy an elven clan in each of the three primary games with no consequences, which exemplifies of how poorly this game series handles their racial allegory. Another example is that the player can choose sell your dark-skinned, elven companion, Fenris, in *Dragon Age 2* back to his former master. The player also discovers in *DA:I* that the Elven gods did not protect the elves, but rather enslaved them, which is uncomfortably similar to the common antisemitic idea that Jews are the cause for antisemitism, which to be clear, is absolutely not true.

While the game mishandles its racial comparisons, playing as an elf to explore the racial tensions is still interesting.¹¹⁴ Many authors explore the racialization and Jewishness of elves to a more detailed degree than the game allows, though they are often still white, or left unsaid, which generally means white by default. And, despite the racialization, I argue that characters like the elf Lavellan in this fic allows authors to discuss racism while refusing to acknowledge or consider actual Black people or Jewish people. It is still, in essence, a white male character.

*Until you pull too hard*¹¹⁵ is a story based on the following Kink Meme prompt: “Pre-game M!Lavellan is at some point kidnapped by a gross, kinky, elf-fetishist noble and is raped and thoroughly humiliated” which the author

eugenicist ideology such as some people are lesser due to their birth and heritage, but none of the main cast are confirmed as people of color. It is also an allegory to the Holocaust with no Jewish people. *Zootopia* uses cute, fluffy animals to address anti-black racism, which obviously disallows people of color to be visible. And in this age of alternative facts, subtlety and allegory does not work. Neither do verifiable facts, but leaving less room for misinterpretation would likely be appreciated by non-white fans.

¹¹⁴ You can make a protagonist who is dark-skinned, and there are characters who are dark-skinned. Skin color is not equated to race within this world, but players have created *mods* (short for *modifications*) for the games to make the dark-skinned (female, primarily) characters white.

¹¹⁵ tinygreyghost, 2015.

immediately follows with, “This is not that fill. This is twelve years after that, when the nobleman comes to Skyhold to ally with the Inquisitor. Please be warned that this references explicit past child sexual abuse and contains on-screen dubious/non consensual acts, and lots of stress.” Instead of fulfilling the prompt, which has the makings of an eroticized rape story, the author instead chooses to focus on the aftermath and recovery of that event. The story is appropriately rated Explicit for the explicit sex scene that occurs in Chapter 3 of the story, where the antagonist Lord Vallenberg threatens to reveal that he had raped our protagonist, Lavellan, in the past as a means to shame him for being weak.

The rape of Lavellan in the past is mentioned, and Lavellan is raped during the fic. Lavellan’s descriptions and memories of the past trauma are clear enough, but the author shies away from graphic descriptions of penetration, utilizing euphemisms instead. The penetration is clear but vague, with one line before Lavellan’s thoughts take the reader elsewhere:

Lavellan braces himself as best he can, but the coverlets are satin and slippery, and his knees slip out from beneath him. He tries to catch himself, and his fingers brush something hidden under his pillow: his shard of dragon tooth on a thin silver chain.

He closes his hand around it and the dragon tooth bites into his skin. It’s only a pinprick but the pain is more immediate than the blunt shove of Lord Vallenberg’s flesh into his. The pain radiates throughout his body, and the more Lavellan focuses on that pain, the less afraid he is.

Until he’s not afraid at all.

Lavellan forces Vallenberg away from him, chases him through the castle to prevent him from leaving and escaping the consequences of his actions. Lavellan learns that he “was only one of many [who had been raped by Vallenberg],” and confronts Vallenberg publically. The rape scene itself, and the following confrontation, with Vallenberg invoking racialized rhetoric by calling Lavellan “the loveliest creature I’ve ever seen” in one scene and an “animal” and “barbaric” during the confrontation. This rhetoric is used to diminish the power Lavellan possesses, as he is now rather powerful as the Inquisitor of the Inquisition, commanding armies and having many diplomatic ties. This fic demonstrates how Vallenberg’s racial power (in this case, of being human) is leveraged against minorities in acts of violence, even though the imaginary still focuses on the white male body.

In addition to the deployment of rape recovery and aftermath, this fic is remarkable for how it navigates modern frameworks of consent without jarring the reader out of the story with modern terminology. While using modern terms for consent arms readers with vocabulary, that means nothing if those concepts are not well demonstrated. A leading example of this, *50 Shades of Grey*,¹¹⁶ uses BDSM terms and is described the relationship between the main characters as kinky, when the traits of the relationship resemble abuse far more closely than a healthy kink relationship.

Terminology that is out of place within the setting is jarring to the worlding of the story. The terminology is important, but it is possible to demonstrate these terms without naming them, in such a way that it is true to the fictional setting and compelling. In Chapter 4 of the story, Lavellan overcomes his shame for having been victimized by Vallenberg to protect others who have been

¹¹⁶ James, E. L. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. New York :Vintage Books, 2012. Print.

and will be hurt by Vallenberg. The power Lavellan has as the Inquisitor is actually used against him in this fic. For the first three chapters of this five part story, Vallenberg uses Lavellen's current power as a threat against him, as if anyone found out about Lavellen's victimization, he would lose his power, respect, and position. The fact that Lavellan's power can be used against him in such a way is sutured to Lavellan's racialization, implying that he would lose his power if it is revealed he is an elven "slut." It is fortunate that Lavellen is surrounded by supportive people, as the scenario Vallenberg threatens easily could have come to fruition had Lavellen's company had been lesser.

Instead, Lavellen's power is such that it is not used against him, and he publicly confronts Vallenberg in front of his people, even though it is a humiliating and vulnerable experience for him. In doing so, the author creates an appropriate dramatic climax that plays on Lavellen's fears of ruination, rejection, and vulnerability. Because it goes well, we as readers see how the public revelation of rape plays out in a rather idealistic manner. Vallenberg's escape is prevented by another character, Cassandra, who also silences him when he is publically accused and insults Lavellan in retaliation. Vallenberg is dragged away to the dungeons, and Lavellan retreats with the Iron Bull in tow. It is a gripping scene, but reinforces the idea that victims must in some way be retraumatized publically in order to achieve justice, which is unfortunately consistent with many people's experience with sexual assault. Lavellan notes that his clan never spoke of his capture and rape ever again, and that they never sought justice on his behalf. While his friends' support seems wishful at times, I argue that this is an example that victims of sexual assault can and should surround themselves with people who will provide this level of support.

Lavellan's friends and social support in this fic are vital to his recovery.

Particularly his relationship with another character, the Iron Bull, which functions as a contrast to Vallenberg's abuse. In the previous block quote, Lavellan grabs hold of a dragon tooth necklace which was given to him in game by the Iron Bull, who is a romanceable, bisexual, and kinky character. Their relationship, which begins with casual sex, includes discussion of consent and safe words in the the game's cut scenes. How that kink plays into the aftermath of Lavellan's abuse, and how the characters delineate between consensual kink and sexual violence makes clear the importance of consent and discussion thereof.

These conversations occur in the final chapter, when Lavellan's continued self-blame is confronted head on by the Iron Bull, and it is in this chapter where discussion of consent and victim blaming are addressed. During the conversation, Bull asks Lavellan to answer him "honestly" when he asks, "Did the way we are together ever upset you?" The author clearly separates rape and abuse from consensual BDSM play.

"No," Lavellan cuts across him swiftly. "No. I've wanted everything you do to me, and I know I only have to say our word and it stops. It was nothing like-"

He remembers that he screamed until he was sick with Lord Vallenberg and still he didn't stop.

Without using the word "consent," tinygreyghost gives a great example of it in just a few lines. Lavellan then tells Bull what had happened, repeatedly blaming himself through his narration. "Perhaps he's telling Bull more than he should. It can't be pleasant to hear about your partner's sordid moments," is one

such line, in which Lavellan's own description of the events paint the rape as something "sordid," which implies a moral failing on part of Lavellan for something that was done to him. Lavellan fears Bull's reaction throughout this second to last scene in the story, in addition to his underlying fear that he has ruined a political opportunity and his organization's reputation. Bull addresses consent wonderfully in this scene, which is lengthy to include Lavellan's response:

"Stop," Bull says again. "This is important. You have done nothing wrong. Not back then, not now. You are not at fault for anything. You have been brave and tough and so good, and I give you my word: anyone ever tries to hurt you in that way again, kadan, it will be over my dead body."

Bull makes the promise simply, with no posturing but absolute certainty, and Lavellan believes him.

He opens his mouth to awkwardly thank Bull, but what comes out instead is an odd, choked cry. Hiccupping sobs burst out of him and he can't seem to hold them back. There are no tears, just the release of so much anguish and stress. They wrack his whole body, and he thinks he might fall apart completely, but Bull hauls him in close again, presses a fierce kiss to the top of his head. Lavellan squeezes his eyes shut and hides against Bull. The dry sobs keep coming until the tightness of Bull's arms around him means he can't draw breath enough for them. Exhaustion begins to overwhelm him and drag him towards the edge of sleep.

“It’s all right, kadan,” Bull murmurs to him. “It’s over.”

And Lavellan lets go.

Lavellan’s recovery continues in the final scene immediately after this, but this moment is important. Lavellan has the space and opportunity to mourn and recover from what has happened to him, which he had not had space to do so prior. Bull directly insists that Lavellan has “done nothing wrong” is a departure from the previous four chapters of Lavellan’s self-blame and Vallenberg’s threats and insults. Without ever using the term “victim-blaming,” the characters counter its rhetoric and insists that Lavellan stop blaming himself for a crime that was done to him.

With a male victim, rape remains a bit of an inverse novelty, with male rape victims so infrequently recognized and legitimized. Rape backstories for women have become unfortunately a staple in fiction, known better as a trope called “Rape is Backstory” or as it appears with a touch of morbid humor, “Rape as the New Dead Parents.”¹¹⁷ For example, dead parents as an backstory is best represented in the form of Batman’s origin which drives him to donning a mask to fight crime as a superhero, though it still occurs in the mainstream, such as in *Harry Potter*. The popular Marvel series *Jessica Jones* centers entirely on rape as a backstory for its titular character. Rape as a background for female characters is tiresome, rarely handled well, and after so many iterations of it (a lengthy list again is available online on the TV Tropes link), it becomes boring. As previously

¹¹⁷ “Rape as Backstory.” *TV Tropes*.
<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RapeAsBackstory?from=Main.RapeIsTheNewDeadParents>. Accessed 3 March 2017.

discussed, the fact that *Until you pull too hard* centers around a male victim who is allegorically racialized and in a position of power challenges preconceived notions of who can be victimized while working through a model path of recovery.

The central theme of social support throughout this fic is heartwarming, and Bull's threat against anyone who harms Lavellan in the future, that it will be "over [Bull's] dead body," continues the theme of social support in the fic. However, it also raises a question about protection and justice. A supportive social network is necessary but not always found in rape recovery, and it is fortunate that Lavellan has that in this story. Protecting one's partner and friends from harm is admirable as well, as we should look out for other people (and not necessarily just the ones we happen to love). But as appears here, there is often a theme in rape narratives, though more frequently when cisgender women are the victims, that it is their male relative or partner who exacts vengeance.

The conclusion of the fic suggests that a reasonable response to rape is murder, which frequently appears in rape narratives. Though Lavellan is never feminized, the responsibility for killing his rapist is never expected of him. In rape narratives where women are the victims it is usually the male protagonist who seeks vengeance for them, but Lavellan's male identity changes the interpretation of the rape narrative. Men are often expected to react violently, and as stated, are the ones who seek revenge for their (female) loved ones. That violence is not expected of Lavellan and that his masculinity is never put into question expands how we think of male victims. It is possible to survive through abuse and trauma, and not only remain intact, but receive aide in order to recover.

Women who are victimized and must be avenged by the male protagonist is long-standing narrative trope that is called "fridging," a term that originates

from DC Comics Green Lantern series in which the male protagonist Kyle Rainer comes home one day to find his girlfriend dead in the fridge. This is a persistent theme in fiction and video games, where violence against women is used to progress the male protagonist's story. Anita Sarkeesian, in her well-known Tropes vs. Women series, discusses this unoriginal, misogynistic, and repetitive trope in video games.¹¹⁸

Unlike the unfortunate women Sarkeesian analyzes, Lavellan's allegorical racialization makes it possible to use his increased social power against him. Lavellan remains though a figure of agency and respect with his whiteness. *Until you pull too hard* presents a story where the protagonist has surrounded himself with people who will provide the support he needs during his recovery. Like *Heart in a Headlock*, the reader is invited to share in the narrator's victim-blaming, which is challenged in this case by the other characters. That is, fan readers can read this story and find the characters they love fighting for justice in a case of rape, which is comforting and satisfying in a world where rapists are often excused and rewarded for their crimes.

¹¹⁸ Sarkeesian, Anita. "Damsel in Distress (Part 2) Tropes vs. Women." *Feminist Frequency*. 28 May 2013. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-2-tropes-vs-women/>. Accessed 3 March 2017.

10. CONCLUSION

In this project, I have analyzed the work these fics do, how consent and coercion is handled with eroticism and horror in turn, and how fan fiction operates as a space largely occupied by queer women dealing with issues of violence. I have discussed fantasy as a shared collective, and how violence inevitably merges into our erotic imaginary. I have suggested why these stories are compelling, and navigated the draw of ascribing victimhood to white, male bodies. Without interviewing other fan authors and readers, I cannot speak as to why others might find these stories compelling, but I would like to direct our attention to a quote from a Tumblr blog, which is a popular online blogging platform for fans.

For context, Tumblr user *misshoneywheeler* replied *idontgiveaneffie*'s post¹¹⁹ in which they stated that fandom is a safe space with no room for “kink meme shit.” *misshoneywheeler* countered with the argument that AO3 specifically outlines in its Terms of Service that it never deletes anything for content, and intends to archive any and all fan fiction.¹²⁰ Instead, they argue it is a safe space for writers to protect against being deleted, censored, or threat of legal action, in addition to this significant passage:

So holding individual women (because that's what fandom primarily is, women exploring their sexuality in a safe forum filled with other women doing the same) accountable for their fictional exploration of things that a) exist in real life in genuinely damaging forms, b) have significant impact on women themselves, thus leading in some part to the urge to explore

¹¹⁹*misshoneywheeler*. *Tumblr*. 3 April 2017. <http://misshoneywheeler.tumblr.com/post/159139199987/idontgiveaneffie-god-keep-ur-fucking-kink-meme>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

¹²⁰ “TOS FAQ Home | Archive of Our Own.” *Archive of Our Own*. Accessed 4 May 2017.

those things safely, and c) have existing in movies, television, popular culture, the Bible, and in all of literature since literature began? Well, that's just an extension of the same culture that polices women's sexuality in the first place and drives them to find safe ways to explore it.

A future study should build on this textual analysis with interviews with writers and readers in fandom, as well as a discursive study into online fandom spaces, to explore what they find compelling and important about the fic they consume. As stated in the quote above, other fans are indeed using AO3, and fan fiction, as a safe space to explore complex facets of their sexuality. Fandom has experienced a renewal in the debate about censorship, with older fans fighting against calls for censorship by younger fans who are not familiar with fan fiction's censorship-filled history, or aware that trigger warnings are designed with the consumer's agency in mind, rather than evidence that that content should just not exist.

In my conclusion, I would like to suggest possibilities to be explored in a larger study with interviews and discursive analysis. Sexual coercion and rape are ever-present fears for women in America, and in other parts of the world. By writing slash fan fiction, authors and readers eliminate the sexual vulnerability that is often associated with women. Men being on equal sexual footing is perhaps a more freeing and powerful way to explore coercion in fiction. Cisgender white men do not fall into any specific archetypes or assumptions as victims, because they are presumed incapable of being victims. While many of these stories hinge on that assumption, the fact that women are not using depictions of female bodies to work through these issues is significant. Women are writing rape and coercion, and instead of writing rape revenge stories, they write men who are powerful agents of their own sexuality. Perhaps writers find the conventions and

assumptions that go into a rape story of a woman distasteful, or they are unwilling to contribute to the overwhelming amount of stories that graphically depict women being raped. Perhaps they want to write a character who has presumed agency, which women find more difficult to attain. Perhaps writing about men being victimized is easier for women to work through than writing a woman dealing with the same issues. The possibilities are as endless as they are significant.

Fan fiction allows fans to explore what is interesting and what we do not see in the mainstream. As a counterpublic, it explores more facets of rape in stories that are often not just about rape, than mainstream fiction does. It explores the detailed issues of consent, victim blaming, violence, recovery and aftermath. Fans are grappling with issues that exist in real life in a space that is safe for writers. But on that note, it would be remiss to leave readers with the impression that fandom is dominated by depictions of coerced sex, issues of consent, and other dark themes. If we base what people want to see in the counterpublic of fandom that they find lacking in the mainstream, by far fans want to see happy, domestic, and cute moments.

For comparison, the “Rape/Non-Con” tag on AO3 totals at 67, 508 individual works as of May 4th, 2017. The total number of individual works for the tag of “Fluff,” which comprises of stories of moments and themes that can be described as sweet and happy, is 443,869. There are many more fics centering around cuddling, sleeping with a loved one, drinking coffee with a loved one, and having a loved one cook you breakfast than there are fics like described in this thesis. Themes of violence are present in our imaginary and shared fantasies, but so is a desire for soft domestic moments, love, happiness, and sleep.

Sexuality in fan fiction deserves more serious analysis, both on violence,

consent, and beyond slash fan fiction entirely. Consent and coercion in het fics, femslash fics, and even in other fandoms are bound to be differently represented than in the ones in this thesis. In the future, I aim to expand on these analyses and observations for a more comprehensive literary analysis of consent and coercion in fan fiction.

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