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## "Just Don't Frighten the Horses": Discussing Porn and Kink in Fandom Spaces

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## Introduction

Fanfiction functions as two essential genres. The first is fanfiction as literature. Fanfiction, while generally not traditionally published, does have literary merit from a few different perspectives. Fanfiction can be looked at through both a feminist and a cultural lens. Fanfiction is a feminist concern because the majority of fanworks are written by women. According to Abigail Derecho, a fan studies scholar who has written about fanfiction and fan communities, women have been at the forefront of fandom communities since at least 1967 when the first *Star Trek* fanfictions were written (Derecho 66). Women fans also organized the first fan conventions, published the first fanzines, and started a letter-writing campaign to keep *Star Trek* on the air when the network threatened its cancellation (Derecho). Today's fandom spaces still consist of mostly women. While it is more common to ask for someone's pronouns in recent times, people in fandom still tend to assume that the person they are interacting with is female if their gender is unknown. Fandom, and therefore fanfiction, also serves as a subculture. As the average fandom participant is female, and therefore "marginalized," one of the purposes of fanfiction is to be able to see themselves in fiction. Even if authors do not use fanfiction to better represent women, they still put themselves into the narrative by controlling the narrative. Fandom also has developed a culture all its own. Fandom has its own rules, language, and history. People in fandom know how to navigate through its culture, while someone outside of fandom might be completely lost.

In chapter one of this thesis, I will be looking at the history of fanfiction and the emergence of slash fanfiction through media fandom. As a part of fanfiction functioning as literature, a lot of fanfiction is romantic fiction. The emergence of slash fanfiction in

relation to heterosexual relationships is particularly interesting. Slash fanfiction is the fandom term for putting two men into a relationship with one another. The terminology comes from how fanfiction is listed, either in print or online. When two characters are put into a romantic or sexual relationship they are listed by putting a slash between their names. For example, James T. Kirk/Spock would be the first identifying tag for Kirk and Spock in a relationship. If a reader wanted to find a fanfiction where Kirk and Spock were just friends, the slash mark would become an ampersand like so: James T. Kirk & Spock. Slash fanfiction served particularly well for romantic relationships, especially when it first came into being in the 1960s. According to Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana I. Veith, who wrote a famous fan essay about romance and *Star Trek*,

many feminists despair of ever achieving an equal, reciprocal relationship with a man. Certainly in a universe in which women as a rule have lower status than men, this is unlikely. Moreover, even if it were more likely, true equality in heterosexual relationships is most seriously threatened by the arrival of children. The mother is still viewed as the primary caretaker, and the child is seen as her first responsibility, taking precedence before all else. (101-102)

Romantic relationships in slash fanfiction can be equal, unlike what women might experience in their everyday lives. These relationships let fanfiction writers live out their fantasies for their own relationships where they are equal to their partner and do not take on most of the labor. This division of labor is also seen in traditional romance novels. It is the heroine's job, in a heterosexual romance, to figure out the hero's motivations. Frequently, the hero is standoffish and indifferent to the heroine. The heroine must see beyond his actions to the reasons for them in order to fall in love with

him. Constance Penley, a fan studies scholar and professor at the University of California, says the typical romance novel “serves to adjust the female reader to a patriarchal world where she must do all of the mental work of understanding and even forgiving her oppressor” (“Future Men” 179). Romance in fanfiction, especially in slash fanfiction, serves as a fantasy for equal relationships. Sexually explicit content is frequently depicted in romantic fanfiction. However, fanfiction as pornography is equally subversive and feminist in nature.

Fanfiction also functions as pornography. Not all fanfiction is sexually explicit. However, the main function of this thesis is to examine sexually explicit fanworks and why they matter. It is important to recognize that fanfiction can be seen as pornography for women. Pornography for women and by women is subversive. Teesha Morgan, an author and sex therapist, says “many women still feel so much shame around self-pleasuring, around masturbation, that they do not do it. Therefore, they’re relying on their partner as their only means to orgasm attainment” (Morgan 4:00-4:09). Sexually explicit fanworks reduce the shame tied to masturbation and women’s pleasure. Since fanfiction functions as pornography, it also functions as female pleasure. The argument against pornography is twofold. The first is that certain kinds of pornography may result in perpetuating violence. The kinds of pornography that are usually put under this umbrella include: rape fantasy, BDSM, underage representations of people having sex, and incest. While these sexual acts are not considered mainstream in fanfiction, they are frequently depicted. The argument that advocates for the censoring of fanfiction with these sexual tropes states that reading this material can cause desensitization and acceptance of the sexual acts that occur within the fanfiction. There is also an

equalization accusation that to read and write fanfictions with these particular sexual acts is to advocate for these acts to be performed in reality. The cry of pedophilia amongst antipornography supporters can be heard throughout fandom (fiction\_is\_not\_reality). The second argument against pornography is painted to be a feminist one. The argument is that any kind of pornography (including written) is harmful to women and that the act of the pornographic material existing is violence against women. Therefore, all sexually explicit material needs to be eradicated (Dworkin).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will focus mainly on fandom moving to online spaces and both the positives and negatives that resulted from this move from fanzines to websites. I will also discuss how this move resulted in censorship of fandom spaces mainly due to the corporatization of online fandom platforms, which also fall victim to the censoring of pornography. By corporatization, I am referring to ad revenues from corporations determining what is acceptable and unacceptable to post on fandom platforms. For example, corporations threaten to pull their ads due to content that the website is hosting. Fandom has been forced to move from *LiveJournal*, *FanFiction.Net*, and *Tumblr* due to changes that were enacted in these sites' terms of service. Due to these changes and the sites not informing users of the changes until after they were enacted, many fanfictions were deleted without notice to the authors. While there is still a fandom presence on all these platforms, there were mass movements to other platforms as a result of the changes. These changes all targeted pornographic material due to moral objections. Fans raised these objections to advertisers on the sites, the advertisers then threatened to pull their ads which would have resulted in the sites losing revenue, and then the sites changed their terms of service to pacify both the

advertisers and the original moral objectors. Fandom spaces run by corporations are vulnerable to the repression of freedom of expression. Although it is true that sites can enact whatever restrictions they deem necessary, these restrictions can also be harmful to the fandom community, especially as the fandom community is made up of mostly women. Therefore, the censorship of pornography on these sites is the censorship of women in spaces where they feel safe to explore their sexual fantasies.

Finally, in my third chapter, I will discuss why people should care about the censoring of fandom spaces, and particularly, the censoring of pornography in fandom spaces, especially as how it relates to outside of fandom spaces. The censoring of pornography is nothing new. According to Nadine Strossen, the former head of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), dictatorships have often suppressed speech they have deemed pornographic, and often this suppression has also affected political speech. For example, “[t]he white supremacist South African government banned Black writing as ‘pornographically immoral.’” The reasonings of the dictatorships were very much in line with the “feminist” argument, namely, that censorship was for their own good because sexual speech is harmful, especially to women (Strossen 219). In reality, as I will show in this thesis, the censorship and suppression of sexual speech tend to target the marginalized. Antipornography laws usually hurt the very people they purport to protect, namely women, but also people of color, and the LGBTQ community. Obscenity laws in the United States are not clear on what exactly constitutes obscenity. There is no real legal definition. Different states have different ideas on what types of material should be considered obscene. However, as with any other state law, federal



law is the standard. Federal standards use the Miller test as established by *Miller v. California*. According to the Cornell Law School,

[t]he Miller test for obscenity includes the following criteria: (1) whether ‘the average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find that the work ‘taken as a whole’ appeals to ‘prurient interest’ (2) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (3) whether the work ‘taken as a whole,’ lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. (Obscenity)

As can be seen from the Miller test, obscenity laws in the United States rely heavily on the community to create standards for defining what is obscene. However, these standards can be challenged and might not always hold up in court. The Miller test was introduced in 1973 but the United States had obscenity trials long before there was a standard for obscenity. The first obscenity trial involving a work of literature was in 1821 for the novel *The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure or Fanny Hill* by John Cleland (Semonche 13). The trial resulted in the conviction of the publisher Peter Holmes “for the corruption of youth and for offending the peace” (Semonche 13). In more recent times, there has been a push for censorship depicting queer relationships on the grounds of obscenity. The Wichita Falls Texas Public Library, in 1997, bought Leslea Newman’s *Heather Has Two Mommies* and Michael Willhoite’s *Daddy’s Roommate*. These books feature queer parents raising their children. In 1998, the reverend for The First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls checked these books out and then refused to return them. The library demanded he pay for them and he eventually acquiesced on the condition that the library would not replace them. The library did decide to replace the

books. The reverend responded by getting “the city council to pass a resolution giving three hundred adult library card owners the right to have material removed from the children’s area and placed in the adult section of the library, effectively censoring the books from their intended audience” (Semonche 51). This ruling was overturned eventually, and the books were declared protected speech. While the subject of this thesis is fanfiction, specifically censorship in fandom due to corporatization of fandom spaces, it also explores why fanfiction is censored, which is mainly on the grounds of “obscenity.” Looking at censorship in libraries based on the same grounds, it is possible to see how censorship of material considered obscene is harmful to the community it purports to protect.

Fanfiction functions as a microcosm in the argument of obscenity. The call for censorship of sexually explicit material in fandom is a troubling path to censorship itself, especially considering the majority of fans who write fanfiction tend to be women who are shamed for wanting and experiencing sexual pleasure. However, there are bigger implications involved. The fans calling for censorship tend to depict themselves as the progressive voices of reason. The same idea can be seen with antipornography and antisex feminists who have also put out the same call. The framing of censorship as progressive is dangerous and harmful to marginalized communities. Through the microcosm of fanfiction, I intend to highlight how sexually explicit works are not only not harmful but can be beneficial to both writers and readers and therefore should not be censored.

## Chapter One: The Beginnings of Slash in Media Fanfiction

Fanfiction can be defined, in its simplest definition, as fiction written by fans. Experts, like Abigail Derecho, agree that modern fanfiction can be divided into two parts. The first is literary fanfiction. The history of literary fanfiction is extensive. Depending on what can be argued as fanfiction, adaptations and any other kind of derivative fiction could fit into the definition. For example, there have been many adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. It is also possible to identify Dante's *Inferno* as fanfiction of the Bible. Literary fanfiction has also been used to comment on the original source material they were adapted from. As an example, women wrote fanworks in the 17th century to criticize male writing. More specifically, Lady Mary Wroth, niece of Sir Phillip Sidney, published a transformative work based on his book *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. She received criticism for her work, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) from Sir Edward Denny "who lambasted her for producing a romance, a type of work unseemly for a woman-the only appropriate genres for women writers being, according to Denny, translations of scripture and other devotional material" (Derecho 67). Lady Wroth responded to this criticism by "parodying a poem that Denny had written to censure her. She adopted his rhyme scheme, including his exact rhyming words" (Derecho 67). It is interesting that her original transformative work was criticized for being "inappropriate," considering that is the exact same criticism of sexually explicit fanfiction, especially slash fanfiction in the 1960s and 1970s. While the purpose of writing fanfiction can also be debated, "the larger philosophical import of this type of writing is that it undermines traditional notions of authority, boundaries, and property" (Derecho 68). Any kind of transformative fiction

takes the authority from the original creator and gives it to the transformer. The fanfiction writer, when they start transforming a work (whether that work is a novel, a film, a short story, etc.) has complete control of that work. They decide what will be changed and what stays the same. This is true regardless of whether the writer is a teenage girl sitting at her computer or if they are a respected published author. The purpose, however, is not the only defining characteristic of what qualifies as fanfiction. It is also important whether the work has been traditionally published. Can a transformative work be considered fanfiction if the author is seeking monetary gain?

There is a significant debate in fandom about the commodification of fan works. To keep fanfiction legal under copyright law, making money from fan works becomes a complicated issue. Even without the threat of illegality, there is the issue of taking a genre that is often thought of as subversive and critical and using it for capitalistic gains. However, some fans believe that the fate of the monetization of fanfiction is set in stone; that it is ultimately inevitable. This applies to not just literary fanfiction but also media fanfiction, which is the ultimate focus of this thesis. However, fandom communities have not yet made the transition from hobby to employment, at least not in the field of media fanfiction. According to Nele Noppe, a fan studies scholar, “regardless of whether or not some kind of hybrid economy for fan work is desirable, it isn’t very likely to come about soon. A variety of unfavorable legal, economic, and social circumstances are in the way” (3.1). While there are many questions about whether literary transformative fiction qualifies as fanfiction since they were traditionally published and became widespread, that is not the question this thesis will attempt to answer. Instead, since the focus of this thesis is media fanfiction, it will be focused on issues, particularly the corporatization of

fandom spaces online, in media fandom that relates to other forms of capitalism, rather than the commodification of fan works. In fact, the term fanfiction originated with media fanfiction in the 1960s and the *Star Trek* fandom (Derecho 63). The 1960s changed fanfiction because it was the era that truly defined what fanfiction was and what it could be.

So, what is fanfiction? It is important to come up with a working definition of the term for the purposes of this thesis. There is no definitive definition. Some fan scholars, like Abigail Derecho, insist that novels like Gregory Maguire's works (*Wicked* and others) are fanfictions because they are "texts that build on a previously existing text" (Derecho 65). Some fan scholars, like Henry Jenkins (1997) argue that fiction owned by corporations rather than "the folk," can no longer count as fanfiction (Helleskson and Busse 21). I argue that fanfiction has two components that must be satisfied. First, fanfiction must be a transformative work of original material written by fans. "Original material" does not mean that fanfiction cannot be defined as a transformative work of a transformative work. It means that the work being transformed must be the writer's own work. Second, fanfiction typically engages with a community. The word typically is used here because it is possible to write fanfiction and not share it with a community. However, it is not possible to study or analyze these fics because there is no way to access them. Literary fanfiction is published fanfiction. Therefore, the community it is shared with includes people who buy their books. Media fanfiction is shared online. Its community could be an archive on the internet, a fan convention, a platform on social media, etc. As hollow-echoes, a fan who writes fanfiction on *LiveJournal* puts it, "Most of the ways that [they] evaluate [their] success in the fandom boil down to evaluating

whether [they are] out there talking off the top of a cliff into a void, or hopefully, to an audience who is reading what [they] write, thinking about it critically, and expressing those thoughts” (hollow-echoes). Fanfiction changed in the 1960s because the community around the genre strengthened. Fans started to publish their material in fan-run zines. *Spocknalia* was one of these fanzines. It was first published in 1967 and featured Kirk and Spock stories. These stories were not slash fanfiction. They focused on the friendship between the two men rather than a romantic relationship. These zines would be sold at fan conventions to interested readers. If these fanzines had never been published, it is possible *Star Trek* would not exist as it does today, with multiple sequels, prequels, and novelizations. *Star Trek* was destined to be canceled early. However, because of fanzines, the female fans were able to organize a letter-writing campaign to the network demanding the show stay on the air. Their campaign worked and the original series managed to endure for three seasons. The first fan conventions were also organized and run by women for *Star Trek* (“History of *Star Trek* Fan Campaigns”). These conventions were originally organized by fans to commune with other fans, proving that fandom communities are essential in defining what can be considered as fanfiction.

In 1967, *Star Trek* slash fanfiction came into being. In slash, the relationships are either romantic, sexual, or both (Derecho 66). The first mainstream slash relationship (ship) was Kirk and Spock, or Spirk. Why is this important? It is important because most fanfiction is written by women. Henry Jenkins, an American media scholar, remarks, “[s]ince many segments of the population lack access to the means of cultural production and distribution, to the multiplexes, the broadcast airwaves, or the chain

bookstore shelves, this respect for the ‘integrity’ of the produced message often has the effect of silencing or marginalizing oppositional voices” (27). It is possible that women fans of *Star Trek* felt like they were not being represented by the material. The only main character that was a woman, Lieutenant Uhuru, dressed in a short skirt and repeated what the computer told her to the captain. Even though she was a Lieutenant, she could not be seen as being equal to the men on board the ship. Women fans started to write fanfiction that featured Kirk and Spock, publishing fanzines, and hosting fan conventions. This was “an effort to create a fan culture more open to women, within which female fans could make a contribution without encouraging the entrenched power of long-time male fans” (Jenkins 41-42). If media fandom, especially the emergence of the *Star Trek* fandom, was so focused on women, why were they writing about men?

Women wrote about male characters and slash ships for a few reasons. The first was that men had more character development and more complex story arcs than their female counterparts. Captain Kirk is off saving the day while Lieutenant Uhura is stuck behind the computer. Captain Kirk also has a close personal friendship with Mr. Spock. Their relationship is fully fleshed out and developed. Even though Kirk was in a higher position on board the Enterprise, through their friendship they are shown to be equal. An equal relationship between a man and a woman was hard to conceptualize for women in the 1960s and 1970s. Even in romance novels, which were written by mostly women, women were usually depicted as virgins and morally pure, while their male love interests were promiscuous and almost never portrayed any vulnerability in front of women (Penley, “Future Men” 177-178). It was easier to believe two men could have an equal relationship. Neither would be asked to sacrifice themselves for the other. Bodily

autonomy also plays a part in why women would choose to write about men. Men's bodies were their own to do with as they pleased; whereas, women's bodies "are a legal, moral, and religious battleground,...are the site for contraceptive failure,...are seen to pose the greatest potential danger to the fetuses they house,...are held to the painfully higher standards of physical beauty than those of the other sex" (Penley, "Future Men" 177-178). Also, like literary fanfiction, slash fanfiction can serve as a critique of the work they are transforming.

Another possible reason for women writing slash according to Paul Booth, a specialist in media and cultural studies, is "that it can represent for many fans a deliberate and an insightful critique of contemporary patriarchal culture, couched in often humorous and usually erotic gay fiction" (400). Booth compares slash to the literary style of the carnivalesque novel as it "represents [the] grotesqueness specifically both through its erotic spectacle of the male body and the extension and subversion of the typically heteronormative structure of the original text. By exceeding the boundaries of the text, both in terms of narrative and in terms of gender roles, slash fan fiction is grotesque" (402). Mikhail Bakhtin, who developed the literary theory of the carnivalesque genre, links the serio-comical to carnivalesque folklore. He states, "they are all to a greater or lesser degree saturated with a specific *carnival sense of the world* and several of them are direct literary variants of oral carnival-folkloric genres" (Bakhtin 107). Bakhtin's defining characteristics of the serio-comical is as follows: that they have "a new relationship with reality" (Bakhtin 108). This stipulation is further defined by having "their starting point for understanding, evaluating, and shaping reality...[be] the living *present*," serio-comical genres also "do not rely on *legend* and do not sanctify



themselves through it, they *consciously* rely on *experience*...and on *free invention*" (Bakhtin 108). He goes on to further clarify this point by stating that the serio-comical's "relationship to legend is in most cases deeply critical, and at times even resembles a cynical exposé" (Bakhtin 108). The third and final characteristic of the serio-comical genres "is the deliberate multi-styled and hetero-voiced nature" (Bakhtin 108). To clarify, "these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres-letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, paradoxically reinterpreted citations" (Bakhtin 108). It is not surprising that fanfiction is interpreted as carnivalesque. The genre meets all three of Bakhtin's characteristics. Fanfiction uses the present to transform media. By using the present, I refer to fanfiction writers using their present-day reality to inform their transformative fiction. This can be seen especially in slash fiction, where the politics of two men being together romantically and/or sexually feature either overtly or covertly. Fanfiction also does not rely on legend and is usually critical of the legend itself. The legend in this case is the media that fanfiction is transforming. While an argument could be made that fanfiction writers do rely on this media, as without the original media the fanfiction would not exist, it does not rely on media as the god of content. Fanfiction is transformative fiction. The last characteristic is the mixing of narration. Fanfiction is already the mixing of media and the novel.

Paul Booth is not the only scholar to see the carnivalesque in fanfiction. Amanda L. Hodges and Laurel P. Richmond, fan scholars from Newberry College and The University of Georgia, state "there are numerous ways fan fiction and fan communities channel some of the energy and possibilities inherent in carnivalesque play. The fluid,

interactive nature of fan fiction writing exhibits features of Bakhtin's description of carnival, the festive period when orthodoxy and hierarchy are questioned and inverted" (3.3) The very culture of fandom lends itself to the carnivalesque. While all fandoms are not critical of the source material they draw from, fandom still functions as subversion. Slash fandom especially fits into this category. Even if writers take an already established gay couple and put them into a fanfic, it is still a commentary on the original material. If fans want to make no changes to the source material, they would not be writing transformative fiction. It is transformative because it transforms the source material. Therefore, critique through fanfiction, even if it is not deliberate, is one of the main reasons transformative fiction exists. Slash fanfiction highlights this idea, specifically slash fiction that slashes men represented as straight in the original media.

However, the biggest reason why women put men in media into slash relationships in fanfiction is that it functions as pornography. When fanzines were still being regularly published "much of the work [was] so explicit...that when ordering any of these zines you [were] required to accompany your payment with a written statement declaring that you [were] over eighteen" (Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis" 304). The type of slash fanfiction that was being written in the Kirk/Spock fandom included BDSM and dubious consent tropes. It is important that *Star Trek* fans were writing porn. It shows that women were sexual beings. While some fanfictions were written as romance featuring romantic gentle sex, this was not the case for all fanfictions. Many of them were considered porn without plot. While there was no explicit sexual relationship between Kirk and Spock, the interpretation of their relationship as non-platonic does have some validity.

The episode “Amok Time” of *Star Trek* was written by Theodore Sturgeon, who was also the writer of a short story called “The World Well Lost.” “The World Well Lost” was one of the first gay science fiction stories written in a mainstream publication. It was published in June 1953 in *Universe* and “is often credited with having introduced the subject of homosexuality into the genre” (Garber and Paleo 202). However, it was not easy for Sturgeon to find a magazine that was willing to publish his story due to the content. The first editor it was submitted to “not only rejected the story, but called up every other magazine editor in the field to tell them not to accept the story either” (Delany xx). Ray Palmer, the editor of *Universe*, defied this edict and “helped establish [*Universe*’s] reputation as one of the era’s more sophisticated [sci-fi] periodicals” (Delany xx). The main characters in this short story are a couple of aliens that the humans call “the lovebirds” and two humans named Rootes and Grunty. Rootes is the captain of the spaceship they are using to transport the lovebirds back to their home planet because they have been classified as prisoners by their fellow aliens. Grunty functions as the ship’s first officer. The lovebirds are obviously a couple and present as genderless to the humans. They express their love for each other through physical contact as “the tall one’s hand seemed to stream toward the fingers of his beloved, and then back again, like the riven tatters of a torn fabric straining toward oneness again” (Sturgeon 7). The lovebirds are so in love with one another that the narrator, Grunty, perceives them to be “torn fabric” when they are unable to touch. For most of the story, the reader has no idea why the lovebirds are considered criminals until one of them holds up a picture that he has drawn for Grunty where “they were naked, and so was the small creature beside them. [Grunty] had never seen the lovebirds naked before.

Possibly no one had" (Sturgeon 12). Grunty understands that their crime had been that they loved someone of the same sex.

Grunty also has his own secret. It is imperative that he keeps it and that "no one must know what he was, what he thought. If anyone did, it would be a disaster beyond bearing. It would mean no more flights with Rootes" (Sturgeon 6). The reader, of course, will suspect what Grunty is keeping hidden. When the lovebirds reveal their gender to Grunty, he laughs and he lets them go. There is a feeling of affinity fostered within Grunty. There is also joy that they have found each other, and joy from Grunty that he can help the lovebirds when he cannot help himself. He wishes he could free himself the way he frees the lovebirds. He sees the world as full of "people with few but massive taboos, a shockable, narrow prissy people obeying the rules-even the rules of their calculated depravities-and protecting their treasured, specialized pruderies" (Sturgeon 9). He could never be free in the world that he describes. The lovebirds serve as wish fulfillment. They are persecuted by their people, but they are found and saved by Grunty, and they go off to live the rest of their lives on their own terms. In the end, Grunty:

watched the Captain's unconscious face, reading it with great tenderness and utmost attention, like a mother with an infant. His words said, Why must we love where the lightning strikes, and not where we choose? And they said, But I'm glad it's you, little prince. I'm glad it's you. He put out his huge hand and, with a feather touch, stroked the sleeping lips. (Sturgeon 17)

From this passage, the reader becomes aware that Grunty, the first mate, is in love with his captain. It is an unrequited love, a tragic love, a love that he can never have.

However, he still finds peace in it. The parallels between Grunty and Rootes and Spock and Kirk are obvious. While “Amok Time” does not explicitly answer the question if Spock is in love with Kirk, it does have a subtext of queerness.

In “Amok Time,” Spock must mate because he is in Pon Farr, which is part of the reproductive cycles of Vulcans. He is required to mate, or he will die (“Amok Time”). Fanfiction plays a lot with this “fuck or die” trope. Fuck or die is when “the author puts two or more characters into a situation that forces intimacy between them” (“Fuck or Die”). This trope has moved outside of *Star Trek* fandom. On *Archive of Our Own*, there are currently over four thousand fanfictions tagged for fuck or die (“Works in Fuck or Die”). In the episode, Kirk decides to redirect the ship to Vulcan at Spock’s request after Spock tells him the truth about why he needs to go there. However, once they get there, things do not go as planned. The Vulcan that Spock was supposed to mate with challenges him. She picks Kirk as a champion, resulting in Kirk having to physically fight Spock. If Kirk wins, the female Vulcan can mate with someone else. If Spock wins, the female Vulcan must mate with Spock. During the battle between Kirk and Spock, the first move Spock makes is to literally tear Kirk’s shirt, which exposes Kirk’s chest. At one point in the battle, they switch weapons to cloth whip-like implements that they use on each other. At the end of the battle, they roll around with each other on the sand; their bodies are tightly pressed to each other the whole time, and Spock ends up choking Kirk with his “whip.” This is not even the queerest thing that happens in the episode. When their battle ends, Spock no longer feels the need to mate. The act of the battle frees Spock from the “fuck or die” regulations. He even acknowledges to Kirk that the battle had fulfilled his need for mating (“Amok Time”). While the first Kirk and Spock

slash fanfiction was not published until 1974, after “Amok Time” women fans started to write explicit sexual fanfiction of Kirk and Spock and pass it around their fan communities. Sometimes these fanfictions were handwritten and directly given to other fans and sometimes they were mailed out to fans that lived farther away from the author (Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis” 308).

Diane Merchant wrote “A Fragment Out of Time” in 1974 in *Grup* #3. It is the first published Kirk and Spock slash fanfiction. It also holds the distinction of being porn without plot, even though it is relatively tame. *Grup* was the only adult fanzine printed at the time (“A Fragment Out of Time”). Ironically, the first line of “A Fragment Out of Time” was “Shut up...we’re by no means setting a precedent” (Merchant 47). Merchant’s fic, on an interesting note, does not center around “Amok Time.” Instead, the fic opens with Kirk giving Spock a sensual massage. He is slowly stroking his oil-coated hands over Spock’s body. While the fic is short at two pages, it feels like a slow build to a heated sexual encounter. The building tension in the fic parallels Kirk and Spock’s relationship in canon. Spock “could not prevent this, any more than he could stop a solar eclipse...even if he’d really desired to. It had been building all these years...no one set of circumstances was the cause...now, it seemed it had been inevitable from the outset” (Merchant 47). This line gives a fatalistic impression of Kirk and Spock’s sexual coming together. It happens because it was supposed to happen. They do not come together in an explosion of need, like in an “Amok Time” fuck or die scenario, but with clear intent and acceptance. Spock does not fight the emotion he feels with Kirk because he sees it as an inevitability; but, more importantly, he wants Kirk. He desires Kirk even though he is not in Pon Farr.

While “A Fragment Out of Time” was not the first slash fanfiction of Kirk and Spock, it was the first publicly visible one. Unlike previous fanfictions that had been written, this fanfiction was not exchanged between fans who already knew that their offerings would be accepted. The first “rule” of fandom is that no one talks about fandom. There are very good reasons for this rule. Slash fiction was seen by others to be “immoral” and “obscene.” This attitude might be linked with this type of fanfiction portraying explicit sexual acts; however, “we live in a time when ‘obscenity’ and ‘homoeroticism’ have been conflated in the minds of many people...and jobs and lives are on the line” (Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis” 310). In the 1960s and 1970s feminists generally believed in the evils of pornography. They did not distinguish sexually explicit material made for and created by women and sexually explicit material made for and created by men. As a result, “as the women fans see themselves as readers and writers of pornography, they do not feel accepted by a feminism that is popularly perceived as moralistically antipornography” (Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis” 319). Most slash fanfiction writers in the 1960s and 1970s did not consider themselves feminists. Anti-pornography feminists were not the only objectors to slash fanfiction. As stated previously, some fans believed the works to be “obscene” based on the grounds of homosexuality. However, this stance was almost never overtly referred to. The fans were “reluctant to criticize the slashers in overtly sexist or homophobic language, usually falling back on ‘we wouldn’t want children at conventions to accidentally be exposed to this stuff’ or ‘it’s an insult to Gene Rodenberry’s vision’” (Penley, “Future Men” 187). In today’s standards, the objections stem from the exploitation and fetishization of gay male bodies. This objection is

especially seen in fanfiction where the writers are mostly women. Although, like the fans of *Star Trek*, these objections also feature the cry of “Save the children!” However, the objection to slash fanfiction in the 1960s and 1970s was that any kind of sexually explicit material that featured gay men was obscene on the grounds of it being gay. All queer fiction had to do to be considered obscene was to exist.

The controversy around slash fanfiction and fanfiction as pornography only increased when the internet started to become available to the masses. The internet made it possible for fans to establish more widespread communities. Fans were able to take the concept of fanzines and use it on the internet to establish online fandoms. It also allowed fans to publish their work completely anonymously. While fanfiction had been published under pen names in fanzines, the small size and the intimate relationships of the fandom community made it hard to remain anonymous. There were both benefits and drawbacks to this anonymity. The benefits were obvious. Fanfiction authors were allowed to express themselves without the threat of real-life repercussions, like losing a job or custody of their children. They were also able to form strong connections with other fans across the world. However, there were also negatives to being anonymous within the fandom community. Some of the negatives included fans becoming overly aggressive when it came to content they did not agree with, like slash fanfiction, corporatization of fandom platforms infringing on fandom communities, and fans attacking other fans by posting their real-life identities. In the next chapter, how fandom developed through the establishment of online spaces will be explored.



## Chapter Two: The Corporatization of Fandom Spaces

In the 1990s, fans started to move online to platforms like *GeoCities*, which was a web-hosting service that was free to use. *GeoCities* hosted a lot of fansites that published fanfiction (“GeoCities”). Some of these included fandoms were *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and, of course, *Star Trek* (“List of GeoCities Fansites”). While *Geocities* did allow slash fanfiction, they did establish rules in 1998 (*GeoCities* was established in 1994) to prohibit nudity and pornography including “images and text” because “they [did] not reflect the concept of community which [they] cherish[ed] and offer[ed] to [their] homesteaders, visitors and sponsors” (“GeoCities”). This chapter of the thesis will deal heavily with the “sponsors” part of these rules. Websites often are sponsored by corporations. As fandom communities moved online, they were affected by these corporations. When fanfiction was primarily published in fanzines, there were no limitations put on fans by outside forces. All the rules that fans had to abide by while publishing in fanzines were established by the fans themselves. Online fandoms drastically changed who was able to control the content of fan creators. Of course, censorship enforced by websites that were sponsored by corporations was often focused on sexually explicit material, especially relating to queer material. Sara Gwenllian Jones, a social sciences professor at Cardiff University, points out that moving to online spaces increased fandom’s “visibility and accessibility” (Jones 117). Fandom becoming more visible and accessible was detrimental to pornography in fanfiction. People started to worry about children finding explicit material in fandom spaces, websites where fanfiction was hosted became beholden to their sponsors who wanted to maintain a “moral” image, and the feminist stance of pornography as harmful

to women of the 1960s and 1970s persisted. All these factors lead to fanfiction hosting sites removing pornographic content over and over again. *GeoCities* was just the tip of the iceberg. Fans would be required to move their content to multiple different platforms throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In fact, this process is still continuing. While moving from site to site is an inconvenience for fans, the real harm for fanfiction came from websites that changed their Terms of Service (TOS) without warning and then mass deleted fics that no longer fit within their TOS.

One of these websites was *FanFiction.Net*. The first purge of *Fanfiction.Net* happened in September of 2002. The TOS changed on the site to state that fanfics rated NC-17 by the authors would no longer be permitted. Unlike some other sites, with this change in TOS, they did give the users a month's notice to save their works before they were deleted. The announcement from the site was as follows:

Though they are a very small portion of the site, the adult stories have generated almost all the complaints filed on record in the past year. Moreover, the highest concentration of them are growing in areas with subjects targeted to younger readers and with increasingly controversial subject matters. (*"FanFiction.Net's NC-17 Purges: 2002 and 2012"*)

The reasoning behind the ban of this material is the "save the children" argument. Children might see sexually explicit fanfiction and become traumatized. However, these works were clearly labeled as NC-17, so therefore, not appropriate for anyone under the age of seventeen to read. Fan reactions to *Fanfiction.Net's* ban were mixed. Some fans were upset, while others pointed out "[t]hey have every right to ban NC-17 fic if they want. It's a private site" (*"FanFiction.Net's NC-17 Purges:2002 and 2012"*). It should be

pointed out that *Fanfiction.Net* was and still is supported by corporate sponsors, just like *GeoCities* was. If corporations threatened to pull their money from the site due to the nature of the content being hosted, then *FanFiction.Net's* compliance was understandable. However, the impact of corporate sponsors of fansites on the fandom community cannot be overstated. Corporatization of fandom spaces kills freedom of expression in fandom creations. Fandoms on other sites also began to feel the tightening of leashes and collars around their throats from corporations.

An online journaling site, *LiveJournal*, had their own mass deletion of user blogs in 2007. This mass deletion became known as strikethrough and boldthrough, referred to as such due to the appearance of journals on people's friends list. If a journal had been removed, a line appeared through the journal name. Unlike *Fanfiction.Net*, users were given no warnings about the change to the TOS. Instead, on May 29, 2007, over 500 users had their journals permanently removed ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough"). A lot of the journals that were removed had some connection to sex; these journals included child pornography, incest, pedophilia, rape, domestic violence, BDSM, and prostitution. Among these deleted blogs were also rape survivor groups, book discussion groups, role playing games (RPGs), and fan content. The fannish content that was deleted included journals dedicated to fanfiction. There was a group called Warriors for Innocence behind the TOS changes and the resulting mass deletion of blogs. The people in this group were right-wing conservative Christians whose main purpose was to "save the children" ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough"). A *LiveJournal* user that went by stewardess left this comment after the mass deletion:

I understand why I'm driven to expose how quickly Six Apart rolled over for WFI. I lost no trust in Six Apart because of the purge; I had none to begin with. I have always known what Six Apart would do when offered a choice between advertising dollars and fandom. What worried me was the discovery that a ready-made Hammer of God was handy for anyone who cared to wield it.

("Strikethrough and Boldthrough")

Six Apart was the owner of *LiveJournal* at the time of strikethrough and boldthrough. Of course, these mass deletions had severe consequences for fan communities on *LiveJournal*. The change in TOS particularly affected fans who engaged with queer content, as that was the main content that was deemed objectionable and non-compliant with the new rules. From the comments and discussions in the fandom community, heterosexual pornography was not targeted by *LiveJournal*. None of the comments mentioned underaged depictions of fictional characters involving heterosexual pairings, like the pairing of Snape and Hermoine, were found to be in violation of the TOS. However, Snape/Harry artwork was found to be depicting child pornography and subsequently removed ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough"). Warriors for Innocence hit *LiveJournal* in their pocketbooks. Sailormac, a *LiveJournal* user during the purge, reported that they had gotten this email while at work for a travel agent:

"From:warrriorsforinnocnce@gmail.com Subject: Your Company's Ad Appears on a Child Sex/Rape Site Date: June 16, 2007" ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough"). This email was sent a month after the mass deletion to try to put even more pressure on advertisers about the material that *LiveJournal* hosted. As long as fan sites are being funded by

advertisers, fans will never have true freedom of expression. Yet another example of this corporatization of the fandom community is the *Tumblr* purge.

The *Tumblr* purge is the most recent addition to the mass deletion of fandom content due to TOS changes on the site. The *Tumblr* purge occurred in late 2018. Some blogs were deleted without informing the blog owners beforehand. In fact, *Tumblr* informed no one of their new guidelines until a month after the purges began. On November 16, 2018, *Tumblr's* iOS app was removed from Apple's app store. This removal was related to child pornography that has been found on *Tumblr*. However, in order to have the app put back into the app store, *Tumblr* decided to purge all not safe for work (NSFW) content ("*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge"). It was the *Tumblr* users that first alerted other users of the purges, not *Tumblr* itself. A tweet from a user named Pup\_Amp on November 19th read "Just a heads up that @tumblr is deleting adult and NSFW blogs left and right. Please follow creators you enjoy from tumblr on their other platforms before it's too late. How easily Tumblr is deleting a culture of sex-positive content and all it's taken is a single click" ("*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge"). The purges also made some tags on *Tumblr* unsearchable. Some of these tags were related to NSFW content such as: porn, NSFW, sex, etc.; although included in these banned tags were terms like gay, chronic pain, and LGBT ("*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge"). The chronic pain was probably banned due to the word chronic as it is associated with marijuana. The banning of the tags gay and LGBT are more troubling because it comes with the assumption that content given a queer tag is automatically sexually explicit and "obscene." The users of *Tumblr* did try to save and archive blogs that were considered in danger of being deleted, but *Tumblr* began blocking the IP addresses of the archivers

(“*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge”). It was not until December 17, 2018, that *Tumblr* made an official announcement on its site about the NSFW ban, frequently referred to as the porn ban. Their statement was that *Tumblr* should be,

a safe space for creative expression, self-discovery, and a deep sense of community. As *Tumblr* continues to grow and evolve, and our understanding of our impact on our world becomes clearer, we have a responsibility to consider that impact across different age groups, demographics, cultures, and mindsets. We spent considerable time weighing the pros and cons of expression in the community that includes adult content. In doing so, it became clear that without this content we have the opportunity to create a place where more people feel comfortable expressing themselves. (“*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge”)

*Tumblr*'s use of the phrase “different age groups, demographics, cultures, and mindsets” gives the same reasoning that every other site used for fan creations gives, “save the children.” Fan reactions to *Tumblr*'s delayed announcement were not positive.

Fans questioned *Tumblr* banning sexually explicit content throughout the whole site rather than trying to moderate the site for illegal content. A user named Deanna Echanique commented on *Tumblr*'s post:

You say there is a ton of places on the internet for adult content, but that's a lie. Left and right we are being removed, or shunted to unsearchable voids like you do here (and patreon does). The people who grew your platform are just a stepping stone to be discarded once you think it's too hard to police your platform against illegal content. Instead of hiring moderators to remove child porn, you'll throw us all in the garbage. Forget that sexuality is a form of expression, an

exploration of fantasy in a safe way (via art)...But fuck us, huh? Fuck sexual expression. Fuck erotic creativity. Fuck the people who made your platform big and the community you've built. Erotica has always been disposable, the first to go in these Puritan purges in the name of "save the children." ("*Tumblr* NSFW Content Purge")

Of course, even though all these sites used the same rhetoric, the children were not the priority, the advertisers were. Apple is not a pornography-friendly company, and they used *Tumblr's* lack of moderation of illegal content to force the platform to remove all pornography, or what could be classified as such, from their site altogether. Steve Jobs said, "folks who want porn can buy an Android phone" (Koebler and Cole). The ban on tags is still ongoing on *Tumblr*. While users can search queer terms now and get results from those searches, in 2021 more tags became unsearchable to iPhone users. Android users were not affected by this ban. A user that goes by *twentysideddinglehopper* made artwork that featured the banned tags formed into the shape of Apple's logo. Some of the tags included in the art piece are vagina, spank, lace, fucking, sexism, mature, and body (see fig. 1).



Fig.1. twentysideddinglehopper. "Selection of iOS Banned Tags." *Skrunklecore sneeg snek*, 27 Dec 2021, <https://at.tumblr.com/twentysideddinglehopper/selection-of-ios-banned-tags-bannedtags/tw4jvwciq5e8>.

Corporatization, however, is not the only barrier that came out of fandoms migrating to online spaces. Copyright issues also became more relevant as fandom became more widespread. Copyright issues carry different connotations than corporate issues. In copyright, it is mostly the author of the original source material who is objecting to the fanfiction in question rather than a faceless advertiser or corporate platform. Therefore, even though money is a big factor in authors' claims of copyright infringement, it is not the only factor. Original source authors might also object based on a personal dislike of how fanfiction authors are transforming their works or characters.

Copyright issues have affected freedom of expression in fanfiction since fanfiction moved to mostly online communities. Once fanfiction started to be published on websites rather than in small fanzines, fans have been threatened with lawsuits. Anne Rice is an infamous name in fandom spaces. As fanfiction of *The Vampire Chronicles* began to be published on sites like *GeoCities* and *Fanfiction.Net*, Anne Rice sent cease-and-desist letters to the fans who were writing it. On her website, she stated "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even



think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes” (“Anne Rice”). Fans responded to this with fear. They had no idea if Anne Rice could sue them or not and “some of [the] C&Ds implicated the private businesses of the people involved” so “because all of [the fans] were poor, [they] didn’t challenge the C&Ds. Instead [they] took [their] stuff off the websites they knew about and hid the fic away” (“Anne Rice”).

Anne Rice was not the only challenger to fanfiction. Larry Niven, an American science fiction writer, also threatened to sue the fanfic writer Elf Sternberg over a specific fic. Sternberg wrote a slash fanfic that featured a character design that Niven came up with. This fanfic is titled “The Only Fair Game.” From then on, Niven was anti-fanfic. When someone asked him permission to use his creation he responded, ‘I hereby refuse you permission to use the kzinti in any literary property. The last guy who did that involved the kzinti in a sadomasochistic homosexual gangbang, badly, and published it on a computer network. A friend alerted me, and we spoke the magic word (lawsuit) and frightened him away” (Schwabach 83). This is the only time Niven sent a cease and desist letter about a fanfic. Up until then, he had been pretty supportive of fanfic in general (Schwabach 83). It is interesting that a sexually explicit slash fanfiction is the only time that Niven has objected to a specific fanfiction that used his character design. Niven did refer to the fanfic as “a sadomasochistic homosexual gangbang,” which could give the impression it was mostly the gay sex he objected to in relation to his characters. Of course, there might have been other grounds for him to pursue a lawsuit, especially if he believed that Sternberg’s fanfiction, in particular, violated copyright law, possibly due to the content of the fanfiction.

“The Only Fair Game” is a rape fantasy fanfiction that compares sex with battle. The main character, Shaper of Swords, has just mated for the first time. He is not satisfied because “the act is...unworthy of a Kzin” and says this is because his actions “had to be...controlled” so he would “not damage the female” (Sternberg). He is invited to “hunt the deadliest of all game, not to kill, but to mate...in combat, with claws and teeth” so that there will be blood and a “memory to cherish” (Sternberg). He is then told that he will be hunting another male Kzin in order to mate with him. He accepts because he is intrigued by the concept. Shaper, as he is called in the story, is presented as an alpha male. He does not necessarily crave violence but rather he desires victory through combat. He wants to dominate his mating partner so thoroughly that they have no choice but to submit. While the fanfiction does have sexually explicit themes, the most prominent theme in the work is power. Shaper wants to overpower his sexual partner. In fact, the battle is what drives him into “a wild frenzy of lust” (Sternberg). As he overpowers the other male Kzin, the other male still fights against him. Shaper “liked it that way...liked this hunt” and laments that “females [weren’t] like this” (Sternberg). While Sternberg is writing about an alien species, he is really writing about how he views men as a whole. Men are supposed to dominate through their superiority with strength. However, women are considered inferior not because they are inherently weaker, but because they are too submissive. One of the other Kzin, K’narl, tells Shaper “that human females have some fight in them...but with proper training [he is] sure they are as pliable as [their] own [females]” (Sternberg). Women are inferior and submissive because they are trained to be, not because it is their nature. This also sounds like commentary about women. Sternberg sees violence as being trained out of women and

therefore they have lost their ability to fight back which makes them less desirable. While the theme of the story is by no means feminist, it does speak to sexual fantasy, specifically queer sexual fantasy. It is interesting that this is the first fanfiction Larry Niven objected to, particularly when he had been known for being accepting of fandom works in general. It is not a stretch to say that Niven protested more on moral grounds than economic ones.

Copyright law does not care about the morality of the transformed work. It “recognizes only economic, not moral, rights in copyrighted works and characters, and provides no relief to the content owner in the absence of an actual infringement of copyright” (Schwabach 81). Even if Niven had sued, most likely the courts would have sided with Sternberg as “the higher degree of creativity in a fan work, the more likely the work is to be transformative and the less likely it is to be derivative” (Schwabach 59). As a result of cease-and-desist letters that threatened lawsuits being sent out to fan creators and the corporatization of fandom spaces, *The Organization of Transformative Works (OTW)* was created in 2007. It is a nonprofit organization that was founded by fans and run by volunteers (“About the OTW”). Part of the OTW’s mission is “arguing that fanfic and other fan works are fair use” (Schwabach 60-61). According to Stanford University, fair use “is any copyrighted material done for a limited and ‘transformative’ purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work” (Stim). Part of the OTW is *Archive of Our Own (AO3)*, which was created to host and archive fanfiction. AO3 is unlike any other platform that hosts fanfiction. It does not restrict content. If the content is legal to post, AO3 will host it. This content includes things like extreme underage, rape fantasy, and incest. As a result of the organization’s status as a

nonprofit and because they do not let advertisers promote on their site, they cannot be threatened with loss of funds. Therefore, they are free to host what they choose. As such, works that are found in violation of another hosting platform's TOS can be transferred to AO3 with no worries about them being taken down due to content.

There are a few fanfictions on AO3 that explicitly state the reasoning behind posting was that they had been removed from another platform. For example, an anonymous poster posted a fanfic with the note that "Wattpad has been removing [their] old stories on the basis of being 'inappropriate'" (Anonymous). The fanfic they posted is rated appropriate for teens by the author and contains the pairing of Sam Winchester/Dean Winchester, better known as Wincest. This pairing could be seen as "inappropriate" because it is the pairing of the two main characters from the television show *Supernatural*, who are brothers. The author states that they are posting them to AO3 to "preserve [their] oldest writing" although they do go on to say that they "wrote this at a young age and no longer support the same ships, fandoms, or values as originally written" (Anonymous). The disclaimer is interesting because the author wants to preserve their work and yet they are distancing themselves from the subject matter of that work, since the work features an incestual relationship. AO3, as previously stated, has no restrictions on the content of posted work. Wincest is not considered a rarepair, which is the term for ships that have almost no content. There are over 30,000 fanfictions currently posted on AO3 that depict the brothers in a romantic and sexual relationship ("Works in Dean Winchester/Sam Winchester"). "One Too Many Drinks" by Anonymous is just one example of these fanfictions.

“One Too Many Drinks” starts out with a typical premise for Wincest fanfiction. Sam drunk texts Dean his romantic feelings for him and that “ever since [he] was 13, [he’s] been thinking of [Dean’s] lips against [Sam’s]” (Anonymous). Because Sam and Dean are brothers, there often is some kind of catalyst where they are forced to confront their feelings for one another. For example, there are currently 172 works listed in Dean Winchester/Sam Winchester that feature the fuck or die tag (“Works in Dean Winchester/Sam Winchester”). Being drunk or being forced to have sex does not manufacture feelings that were not there before but brings them to the surface. In “One Too Many Drinks” when Dean receives Sam’s text, he recognizes that Sam is intoxicated and he reacts with jealousy because “his brother [is] out getting drunk with someone that wasn’t Dean” and he thinks of Sam as “belong[ing] to him” (Anonymous). Dean is possessive of Sam to an unhealthy degree. Sam is not allowed to have his inhibitions lowered with anyone but Dean. Dean does not respond to Sam’s confession of love, not because he feels awkward, or that the love is unrequited but because if Sam loved him “why did Sam leave?” (Anonymous). Sam leaves for college in *Supernatural* before the show begins. The show starts with Dean picking up Sam from college on a search to find their father (“Pilot”). Dean’s reaction to his brother leaving for college is not a normal one. He is not proud of his little brother for getting into college. He sees Sam’s choice in going to college as “leaving” him. Dean decides to confront Sam about the text message in person and goes to Sam’s school. The only physical contact they share in the fanfic is a hug where Sam throws “his arms around his brother’s waist, feeling Dean’s wrap around his shoulders and neck in response” (Anonymous). Even when they share their love confessions at the end, they do not kiss. Yet, this short fanfic

about Sam sending a drunk text to Dean, which results in the brothers confessing their feelings for one another, was found to be “inappropriate” by *Wattpad*, the original hosting site.

There are several Wincest fanfics posted on *AO3* with the note that they were considered inappropriate for *Wattpad*. In the quest to find fanfics that were deleted by *LiveJournal* or *Fanfiction.Net* due to sudden changes in the TOS, I was not successful. When I put a call out on *Tumblr*, I got multiple anonymous messages suggesting that I should kill myself.<sup>1</sup> The only other responses I received were negative ones that confirmed that the author had been unable to save their work. The “kill yourself” responses are a good indicator about how people perceive pornography in fandom. There is a “jump from ‘it offends me’ to ‘therefore it is bad’ to ‘therefore we must fight it’” (Russ 93). While the corporatization of fandom has harmed freedom of expression, on sites like *LiveJournal* and *Fanfiction.Net*, the role advertisers played in getting platforms to change their TOS was fueled by users of those platforms. It did not matter that those users deliberately sought out the fanfiction they were protesting. They were convinced fanfiction needed to be censored and removed so it could not harm others. Through their actions, they made advertisers more active in controlling what is allowed on a platform. They spread corporatization over a community that was founded on subversion. In doing so, they did harm to the fandom community. Censoring pornography in fandom is harmful because “it is the only sexual fantasy by women for women that’s produced without the control or interposition of censorship by commercial

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<sup>1</sup> I posted a blog post that requested fanfics that had been deleted due to TOS changes. I had some people reblog this post that tried to help me find fanfic that might have been saved from various website purges. I also received messages that featured the above sentiment. I deleted them and never received any further messages.

booksellers for the interposition of political intent by writers or editors” (Russ 94). The mass eradication of fanfics actively harmed women, both authors and readers.

### Chapter Three: Why Censoring of Pornography is Harmful to Fans

As previously mentioned, the rise of online platforms where fans posted their fan creations led to a more widespread fandom community. One of the negatives that has been seen from easier access to fandom creations is the corporatization of fandom platforms, and how those corporatizations led to censorship and a stifling of freedom of expression that mainly affected women since they are the main consumers and producers of fandom content. One of the factors that led to the corporatization of fandom spaces was the corporations themselves. The other major factor was the fans whose objections to the content were based on moral grounds. These fans have become more and more visible as fandom's online presence grows. They have been given the term anti (Aubrime). In order to understand anti, a definition must be reached. For the purpose of this thesis, an anti is someone who is anti-pornography,<sup>2</sup> anti-kink, and typically anti-sex in general. Although, it is not their stance against these things that classify them as anti. Anti are also defined by their desire to eradicate everything they disagree with as they see the material as "harmful." It should not be concluded that anti are intruders or not a part of the fandom community. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, who are both sociologists with publications in cultural studies, point out "the study of subcultures tends to treat them as if they were both homogenous-more or less as if all members of the group were the same and all shared exactly the same beliefs and practices-and unchanging. In fact, what should be kept in

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<sup>2</sup> Anti-pornography as it relates to others consumption of pornography. Anti having or viewing of pornography tends to be rationalized. For example, Anthony Comstock, the man behind the Comstock Act, "left a remarkable collection of prints, pictures, and literature, seized by him during his public career-which is said to contain a sufficient amount of really pornographic material, to enrich his heirs could it be sold" ("Anthony Comstock").



view is the fluidity of subcultures” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 160). Antis do not share the same views as the creators and consumers of pornographic fanfiction, but they are still part of the community. Indeed, this is a key part of the definition of an anti. As members of the fandom community, they engage with fandom in fandom spaces. This engagement leads them to have more influence over other fans which is how new antis are made. Anti ideas did not originate in fandom spaces, however. The belief that pornography is harmful and therefore should be banned and made illegal is not a new one. It is also not new that women were the driving forces of these beliefs but that ultimately, pornography bans frequently hurt the people they are trying to protect.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a group of women who defined themselves as radical feminists worked together with the religious right and were able to get anti-porn laws passed. Anti-porn laws stopped the importation of obscene material into Canada. The law was originally supposed to ban porn that was “degrading” and “dehumanizing to women” (Strossen 19). However, marginalized people were actively harmed by this ban. Most of the pornography that was affected by the ban was gay pornography. It began being seized by customs at the U.S./Canadian border. Gay bookstores struggled with keeping their doors open since their stock was being seized. Meanwhile, straight pornography had no trouble crossing the border and getting into Canada. Soon, it was no longer just pornography being seized at the border but any material that was deemed LGBTQ. This law led to more legislation restricting sexual content (Strossen). There was a law passed “making it a crime to make, print, publish, import, distribute, or sell-and in some cases even possess-any depiction of a sexual act by anyone under eighteen years old, even in fiction and art” (Strossen 240). This law is not only harmful

to fanfiction, but harmful to literature. There are many works of literature that depict people under eighteen engaged in a sexual act, or what could be perceived as a sexual act. Also, as seen with the *LiveJournal* purges, a total ban on sex results in harm to the very people that the rule is purporting to protect. In the *LiveJournal* purges, banning sex in totality also resulted in rape survivor groups being purged. It is easy to see how this law would result in banning literature that discusses sexual assault among people under the age of eighteen. Besides harming the LGBTQ community, the law also harmed artists and creators as it was enforced by Canadian authorities and resulted in the prosecution of Eli Langer, an artist from Toronto. Langer's paintings were seized from an art gallery called the Mercer Union. The paintings were found to be in violation of the law because they depicted children and adults in sexual acts. They were not child pornography, however, as the children in the paintings were not real. Langer did not use models to paint his works, only his imagination. The case ended up being dropped due to the outrage of the artist community. If Langer had been prosecuted, he would have faced up to ten years in prison. The prosecution still wanted to destroy Langer's artwork despite the case being dropped (Strossen). There is a provision in the law that exempts "works with artistic merit (as well as educational, scientific, or medical value)" (Strossen 241). This provision did not stop Langer's artwork from being seized. It did not stop prosecutors from wanting to destroy his work. The language used in the pornography ban, which stated that the pornography to be banned was pornography that was harmful to women, did not stop LGBTQ material from being seized. In addition to harming the gay community, the radical feminists' belief that most pornography is harmful to women

is propaganda. The supposedly inherently harmful nature of pornography is also at the root of antis' desire to ban it from fandom platforms.

The antipornography argument, framed as a progressive one, states that “problematic” fanfiction normalizes deviant sexual behavior. The supporters of this argument believe that the more people read about these acts the more they will think that it is okay to perform them on others or have them performed on them. This idea is provably false. Scientists and researchers have investigated these accusations which concern the viewing and reading of more mainstream porn and erotica. They have concluded that sexually explicit material does not cause violence against women. In fact, most sex offenders “had less exposure to sexually explicit materials than most men, that they first saw such materials at a later age than nonoffenders, that they were overwhelmingly more likely to have been punished for looking at them as teenagers, and that they often find sexual images more distressing than arousing” (Strossen 260). Edward Donnerstein, a researcher at the University of California at Santa Barbara, states “a good amount of research strongly supports the position that exposure to erotica can reduce aggressive responses in people who are predisposed to aggress.” To corroborate the research supported idea that repression, not pornography, leads to sexual violence, John Money, an expert on sexual violence at John Hopkins Medical School, states “current repressive attitudes towards sex will breed an ever-widening epidemic of aberrant sexual behavior” (Strossen 261). All of this is not to say that fiction has no effect on reality whatsoever. Repeated images in the media can influence people’s beliefs. These beliefs can include ideas that are tied to gender roles and how

women should be viewed and treated in society. However, the role of fiction in people's views of gender has been grossly overstated.

Thelma McCormack, who is the former director of York University's Feminist Studies Centre, explains "the more traditional a person's views are about women, the more likely he or she is to accept inequality as inevitable, functional, natural, desirable, and immutable. In short, if any image of woman can be said to influence our thinking about gender equality, it is the domestic woman not the Dionysian one" (Strossen 262). There are two things in this statement that are important. The first, is that mainstream media has more influence over people's views about women than pornography. This statement is logical since people are exposed more often to mainstream media, especially at young ages. The second significant point that is made in this statement, is that people already have to hold the beliefs that are being influenced. Fiction reinforces the views that people already have rather than making them change their views entirely. Andrea Dworkin, a renowned radical feminist and one of the women behind enacting antipornography laws, contradicts this view. Dworkin argues that censorship in privileged countries, especially the United States, does not exist. When writing is banned in America, there are no real consequences. The author is not affected, the material is still readily available, and no one is getting killed or arrested; therefore, censorship in the United States is not harmful. She states, "[i]n our world, the writer gets harassed...the writer may be poor or not-the injury is considerably worse if he is; but the writer is not terrorized or tortured, and writers do not live under a reign of terror as writers, because of what they do" (Dworkin 22). Dworkin uses this claim of censorship not causing harm as justification for censoring specific works. Her call to arms is the

censoring of pornography. She supports this call to arms through feminism. She believes "[t]he insult pornography offers, invariably, to sex is accomplished in the active subordination of women: the creation of a sexual dynamic in which the putting-down of women, the suppression of women, and ultimately the brutalization of women, is what sex is taken to be" (Dworkin 25). Her argument is that pornography will influence the way women are treated during sex. Pornography actively harms women because it justifies suppressing women. However, as previously stated, research does not support this argument. The suppression of pornography does not lead to less violence against women and can actively harm women and other marginalized groups through blanket censorship. Dworkin does not account for pornography written for and by women. She maintains "one reason that stopping pornographers and pornography is not censorship is that pornographers are more like the police in police states than they are like the writers in police states. They are the instruments of terror, not its victims" (Dworkin 28). In direct contradiction to this statement, fanfiction features pornography that is written by mostly women to indulge in sexual pleasure.

It has already been discussed in this thesis why women exploring pleasure relating to sex is subversive and empowering. The belief that all pornography is harmful as are the people who create pornography is an antifeminist belief. As previously mentioned, the women who wrote *Star Trek* slash fanfiction did not consider themselves feminists because they were told that any kind of pornography was harmful to women. Fanfic writers still produced explicit sexual content, but they were made to feel ashamed for their sexual fantasies. Shame around pornography, especially pornography mainly

produced by and for women, can have harmful consequences, such as the repression of sexual pleasure and agency. In the words of eye-of-orion, a tumblr user:

I need us to stop and think about why we've decided that fictional sex is the most damaging thing anyone could ever find on the internet. I need us to think about the culture we live in, which encourages us to be sexually available (to straight men) but punishes us if we (sluts) enjoy it. Because here's the thing: fanfic is not coming from a position of power and prestige in our society. It is a niche genre primarily written by women, for women, for *free*. And it is a place where many of us do find power in exploring our own sexuality (or asexuality). Even when that exploration takes us to gritty, horrifying (or cathartic) places. I'm going to need us to think long and hard about why we're prioritizing fictional characters over the needs of real women. (eye-of-orion)

Dworkin helped to get antipornography laws passed because to her, "Pornography is inequality. The civil rights law would allow women to advance equality by removing this concrete discrimination and hurting economically those who make, sell, distribute, or exhibit it" (Dworkin 37). The term "concrete discrimination" allows no room for exceptions. According to Dworkin and other radical feminists, all pornography is harmful to women and all pornographers should face consequences for producing it. However, she fails to see the harm that would occur to the very women she is trying to protect. Antis typically take this same "progressive" stance when they argue against pornographic fanworks.

Antis, through their belief that kink and pornography are harmful, also believe that,

fiction affects reality, in that any problematic behaviors or topics in media, fictitious or not, will cause people to normalize those behaviors resulting in people (specifically minors) thinking that such actions are acceptable in real life. This is a common argument used by conservative groups to enact queer censorship, who argue that children who see LGBTQIA+ characters in television or books will “turn gay,” so the sanitization of all adult fan spaces is therefore required to protect minors who could potentially encounter problematic sexual content. (Aubrime 1.2)

As can be seen, this is the exact same argument of the radical feminists for restricting pornographic content, except the language has been changed from protecting women to protecting minors. Also, like radical feminists who paint all pornographers with the same brush, antis do not take the content creators into account. Antis frequently target content creators with death threats, suicide baiting, and accusations of child abuse. They “perpetuate a climate of fear, shame, and trauma in fan spaces. The most common targets of such abuse are women, people of color, teens, abuse survivors, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Fans who are already marginalized are further deprived of safety, anonymity, outlets for growth, self-expression, and relationships” (Aubrime 1.3). Even though antis claim they are acting in support of minors, minors are not exempt from their attacks. Antis frequently use buzzwords, words that are designed to cause a negative knee-jerk reaction, to get people on their side. The words they use most often are pedophilia, rape, and incest. They tell fans they are supporting these things if they create, or even engage in, fanfics that they consider to be immoral. For example, ships featuring two adults that have a large age difference between the adults

are often called out as pedophilia. If the couple in a ship were raised together but are not genetically related, the ship is often deemed incestual. Antis not only use these tactics to convince other fans of the immorality of sexually explicit material in fandom, but they also use them to convince themselves of their own morality and righteousness.

When they,

[convince] themselves that all nonantis are pedophiles, antis can excuse any ill behavior directed toward nonantis, which most often manifests as aggressive racism, misogyny, and homophobia. Antis may also describe ways they hope individuals (including minors) will suffer or die for their fictional interests or tell sexual assault victims their assault was deserved as a result of the “corrupt” nature of such interests. (Aubrime 3.2)

Antis, according to their beliefs, are free to harass and bully others in fandom as they serve as a guiding force of morality. Like radical feminists, antis are inherently antisex. The view that sex is immoral is harmful to the very people that antis and radical feminists are trying to “protect,” mainly women and minors. In May of 2022, an “unknown attacker” began sending the *Organization of Transformative Works*’ (the organization responsible for creating AO3) “volunteers threatening emails with illegal child sexual abuse material” (H). While the OTW never released the contents of the emails’ threats, it is believed that these emails were sent because of the content that AO3 hosts. Someone was possibly protesting fictional pornographic content by sending actual child pornography. Volunteers for the OTW are, of course, fans that want to devote time to a fan-run organization. The continued harassment of fans by antis is particularly troubling “since the primary creators of transformative fandom are women,



people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people" therefore "it becomes readily apparent how the anti movement seeks to limit the voices of those who are already vulnerable, thus promoting further isolation and violence against them" (Aubrime 3.3). Antis have a big influence over younger people and usually recruit minors to their cause. They bombard them with antisex views, especially the belief that any sexual activity is immoral for minors to engage in, and "in this way, sexual thoughts and feelings become criminal for [them] to express" (Aubrime 4.3). The minors then internalize the idea that sex is inherently problematic. As previously mentioned, fan communities are made up of primarily women and women have been continuously shamed for their sexual pleasure. When teenage girls are told that all sex is immoral, their sexual pleasure as adults is also compromised. Nadine Strossen, a pro-pornography feminist, argues "[w]omen should not have to choose between speech and equality, between dignity and sexuality. Women can be sexual beings without forsaking other aspects of our identities" (Strossen 14). Teenage girls are told the opposite of this by antis; they should not be exploring their sexuality because it is dangerous for them to do so. Antis indoctrinate them to believe that all sex is problematic, even sexual fantasy. Not only do antis indoctrinate young fans, they also frequently "target them with accusations of pedophilia" as:

age boundaries are firmly drawn between seventeen-and eighteen-year-olds as well (eighteen years indicating adulthood), with some stating that in romantic relationships between the two, it does not matter if the seventeen-year-old is "even a day younger." The seventeen-year-old is still a minor, which makes the eighteen-year-old partner a (supposed) pedophile. (Aubrime 4.3)

Because antis equate fiction with reality, even shipping a minor and an adult in a fictional relationship is considered pedophilia. However, no matter the content of fanfiction, it is not illegal to produce because it is fiction. Under the law, there are no perpetrators to arrest and no victims to protect.

When sexual fantasy is punished under the law it is usually to protect particular groups of people. Despite that, according to Andrew Gilden, a professor of law at Willamette University, “many of the vulnerable individuals ostensibly protected by the practices of punishing sexual fantasy-teenagers, women, and sexual minorities-are frequently the very individuals whose sexual desires offend the common sense of judges, juries, and law enforcement” (486). As has been seen through this thesis repeatedly, the reasoning behind suppression of pornography as a way to protect marginalized communities is misinformed at best, and harmful at worst. Pornography used as an expression of sexual fantasy is not inherently harmful, even pornography that seems disturbing or extreme, like fanfiction featuring incest, a minor/adult sexual relationship, or rape. While this type of pornography is not mainstream in fanfiction, it does serve a purpose and does not typically mean that the writer or the reader wants to experience their sexual fantasy in reality. The supposition that the type of legal pornography someone consumes is reflective of their morality is not only a false one, as reading or viewing pornography does not determine who someone is, but can also be a harmful one. This can be seen in court cases that deny custody rights to parents. Because the judges are uncomfortable with the content being consumed “they are repeatedly unable to divorce their disapproval of the sexual desire at hand from an evenhanded assessment of the actual risks posed” (Gilden 434). There have been

multiple cases of judges reacting to their own disapproval of pornography to the detriment of the parties involved. In one such instance, *Micnhimer v. Micnhimer*, “the mother had been given primary custody” and:

[t]he father was allowed unsupervised visitation on the conditions that (1) he not have any access to the Internet in his home, and (2) his wife could inspect his computer in his home to ensure he had no internet access. These conditions were put into place because the father had at some point viewed pornography while the children were *in the same house* with him...The father objected to the “homophobic bias” of the initial order. (Gilden 437)

The father, in this case, can be assumed to have looked at gay pornography while his children were in the house with him. There is no mention that the children were ever exposed to said pornography. The objection of the mother was raised purely because she did not agree with the father’s pornography consumption, as there was never any harm caused to the children. It was not until five years later that the father in the case managed to gain back his access to the internet (Gilden 437). While custody battles are not directly related to fanfiction, it is still possible to see how it ties together with anti-beliefs. Specifically, antis also believe that the type of legal pornography someone consumes can result in actual harm either towards the consumer or people involved with the consumer. In reality, the opposite has been proven true. Fictional pornography can be especially helpful as it has been reported that “[i]ndividuals with a sexual interest in teenagers or even younger children report using the internet as a way to cope with those desires” (Gilden 476). AO3 does host fanfiction that contains extreme underage sex, sometimes between adults and children and sometimes between the

children themselves. Antis become especially persuasive when they argue about these works. However, according to United States law, “no children were...arguably harmed in the production of this content, and it [is] insufficient to argue that it might ‘whet the [sexual] appetites of pedophiles” (Gilden 469). Just like the argument that violent pornography leads to violence against women has been proven false, fictional underage pornography does not lead to the sexual abuse of children. While this kind of pornography certainly causes distress through disgust and outrage, feelings do not equal facts. Antis lack proof to back their claims, so they end up gaining followers by preying on people’s emotional responses. It is important to recognize “[a] substantial number of men and women not only report that they have explored bondage, submission, and rape fantasies online, but also that they have little desire to pursue those fantasies in their physical sex lives” (Gilden 476). Fantasies are important for exploring desire, but they do not define who people are or even, in most cases, what they want out of their sex lives. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a good example of an erotic novel that was marketed toward women and found inappropriate based not only on its content but the fact that it was presented as being pornography for women. This example is especially relevant as *Fifty Shades of Grey* started out as *Twilight* fanfiction. The people that object to this novel use the same rhetoric that is widely used by antis in fandom spaces, which is reading “harmful” pornography causes harmful sexual behavior. However, it is important to discuss what the actual content of the novel is and why it might appeal to women.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* is an erotic novel written by E.L. James that features a BDSM relationship between the two main characters. This novel is highly debated as

critics of it believe that the sexual practices depicted within it might be harmful to women. This reasoning is especially important as *Fifty Shades of Grey* is marketed as pornography for women and was written by a woman. It is the first novel in a series where two characters, Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele, explore a BDSM relationship together. As mentioned previously, it also began as *Twilight* fanfiction. It is easy to see the *Twilight* roots within the novel. In fact, not knowing that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is *Twilight* fanfiction could easily affect someone's perception of the novel.

Christian Grey portrays stalker-like behavior throughout the course of the novel, just as Edward, the main male protagonist in *Twilight*, does. Edward is drawn to Bella because of his darkness as a vampire but at the same time, he pushes her away in order to protect her. The same storyline is used in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, only instead of Christian protecting Anastasia from his vampirism, he is protecting her from his darker sexual urges. Anastasia tells her friend and roommate Kate, after she has met Christian for the first time, that "he keeps warning [her] off" (James 55). Instead of trying to protect her life, Christian is protecting her innocence. He does not want to corrupt Anastasia with his sexual lifestyle. Of course, just like in *Twilight*, Anastasia and Christian cannot resist one another and do develop a relationship. In fact, in some ways *Fifty Shades of Grey* can be classified as a typical romance novel. According to Rita Dirks, an English professor at Ambrose University, the novel has a "sensational yet predictable plot: Ana is 21 and Christian is six years older when they meet; Ana is a virgin and Christian is an expert...Ana's mother is distant and her biological father deceased" (Dirks 83).

However, unlike in *Twilight* and other traditional romance novels, Anastasia and Christian develop a sexual relationship more than a romantic one. In *Twilight*, there is

no sex before marriage between Edward and Bella. In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, marriage is never mentioned, and the characters engage in copious amounts of sex. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is presented as, at least in the first novel, more about the fulfillment of sexual desire than finding romance.

Christian tells Anastasia early in the novel, soon after they first meet, that he does not “do romance. [His] tastes are very singular” (James 72). Christian’s warning to Anastasia is the narrative declaring itself as more sex-focused rather than romance-focused. While this changes toward the end of the novel and most likely the subsequent novels in the series, there is still an emphasis on sex. By Christian declaring his tastes to be “very singular,” this emphasis on sex becomes focused on kink, which is the plot of the novel. Christian desires a BDSM relationship and Anastasia is open to exploring it. There are problematic depictions of Christian and Anastasia’s relationship throughout the novel. However, the function of this novel is to be sexually titillating to women; therefore, it is subversive in that it encourages women’s sexual pleasure. It also does this in the text itself. Anastasia calls the sexual part of herself her “inner goddess” (James 137). This phrasing equates sex to power by using the term “goddess”; it also equates sex with femininity. One of the first times Anastasia uses this phrase in reference to herself is when she first experiences giving sexual pleasure to Christian, and she is “watching him writhe subtly with carnal longing” (James 137). While this passage is not about her receiving her own sexual pleasure, it is still about power through giving sexual pleasure. She is not passive in this experience. She actively chooses to engage in sex and she finds power in the choice. Power in submission is also shown in the novel in relation to sex. Sometimes this power is

depicted as her exploring her sexual fantasies and sometimes this power is depicted as her making decisions in her relationship with Christian.

Anastasia has a fantasy where she is teased with a riding crop. She relates this fantasy to Christian. In the novel, he fulfills this fantasy, even down to the type of riding crop he uses which is “brown plaited leather” (James 321). Anastasia specifies the riding crop to Christian when she tells him her fantasy. She is surprised that he brings this fantasy to life so exacting of her wishes, and he responds “[w]e aim to please, Ms. Steele” (James 322). While Christian is the dominant partner in their relationship, he still acknowledges Anastasia’s power through sex. The novel is not about Christian dismissing Anastasia’s wishes but rather it is about fulfilling her desires. As Anastasia is the main character in the novel, and as such the narrative is from her point-of-view, the reader is put into the same position as Anastasia. Therefore, it is the reader’s fantasy being fulfilled alongside Anastasia’s fantasy. Anastasia also shows power in her relationship by deciding what is allowed or not allowed when it comes to the BDSM aspects. She exchanges emails with Christian detailing what she wants, what she does not want, and what she is unsure about in connection to their sex life. She tells him that there will be “no fisting of any kind” as well as setting deal breakers such as “not eating food from a prescribed list. The food list goes or [she] does” (James 204-205). Christian does not condescend to her about these deal breakers. He reassures her that “it is the sub who has all the power. That’s [Anastasia]” and that he “can’t touch [her] if [she] says no” (James 400). It is important to note that Christian is not “giving” her power; he is acknowledging it. She holds power in the relationship because she is the other person, besides Christian, in the relationship, not because her partner is giving her permission

to hold power. A woman practicing sexual agency in a relationship in order to gain sexual pleasure is a subversive concept for an erotic novel. However, there are problematic elements and themes in *Fifty Shades of Grey* which also need to be explored for the purposes of this thesis.

In a novel about a woman's sexual pleasure, the protagonist does not masturbate. She is not stated to be asexual and she is sexually attracted to Christian from their first meeting. However, when Christian demands she "[s]hows [him] how [she] pleasure[s] [herself]" she is confused and responds she "doesn't know what [he] mean[s]" (James 114). She is so unfamiliar with her body that she does not immediately understand that he is referring to how she likes to touch herself when she masturbates. This is not unusual for women. As previously mentioned, women are generally ashamed of masturbation, especially when they have sexual partners. So, while it is a somewhat realistic portrayal of some women's thoughts on masturbation, it is not a healthy one, especially when the novel is erotica meant to give women pleasure assumedly through masturbation. Christian goes on to further clarify to Anastasia by asking her "[h]ow...[she] make[s] [herself] come" and to further reiterate the point of Anastasia's ignorance she answers that "[she] doesn't" (James 118). This remains the case throughout the novel. She never masturbates and only relies on Christian for her sexual satisfaction. She indulges in fantasies at times, like the previously mentioned one of being teased with a riding crop, but she never touches herself. Because of her adverseness to masturbation, it is not only orgasms she relies on from Christian, but also her likes and desires in the bedroom. When she tries to object to certain sex acts, Christian tells her "[w]e can work up to that." She objects by saying "[o]r not do it at all"



and he contradicts her when he tells her “[t]his is part of the deal, baby, but we’ll work up to all of this” and promises that he “won’t push [her] too far” (James 260).

Anastasia’s control being overridden at times could be a way of eliminating shame from sex. The whole theme of BDSM in fiction as well as rape fantasy is tied, at least to an extent, to letting go of control. If someone has no control over what happens to them, then they cannot be responsible for what occurs. With BDSM, letting go of control functions as roleplay. In reality, all Anastasia has to do is say no as Christian has already informed her. Anastasia does experience shame during sex. When she is with Christian and he is “sitting beside [her], he gently pulls [her] sweatpants down” and she thinks to herself “up and down like whores’ drawers” (James 277). She relates women who enjoy sex and have sex often to “whores.” By giving up some of her control to Christian, through roleplay, she can also give up her shame. While Christian does try to persuade Anastasia to go further than she is comfortable going sexually, Anastasia also violates Christian’s boundaries multiple times in the novel.

Christian, in the past, has been sexually abused by an older woman that was a friend of his mother’s. He tells Anastasia she “seduced [him] when [he] was fifteen” and that “[s]he had very particular tastes” and he “was her submissive for six years” (James 154). Anastasia immediately sees this as an older woman preying on a vulnerable child. However, Christian insists that “[s]he was all [he] wanted, needed” (James 154). While it is not directly tied to his relationship with this woman (at least in the first book), whose name is revealed to be Elena later in the novel, Christian does not like to be touched. He tells Anastasia about his dislike early on in their relationship. Despite his setting a clear boundary, Anastasia tries to touch him constantly throughout the novel, especially

when he is sleeping. She “stretch[es] [her] hand out on his chest” and “his hand swoops up to grab [hers]” then he tells her “[d]on’t.” After he reinforces this boundary, she asks why he does not like to be touched (James 269). She does not accept his no and demands a justification for his boundary. Christian is not the only one in the relationship to push against boundaries. Contrary to popular belief, “*Fifty Shades* is not an eroticisation of male domination. Christian craves his own submission to Ana” (Dirks 92). Christian, even though this is not the only time Anastasia has violated his boundaries, chooses to stay in a relationship with her. By the end of the novel, Christian desires to be in a romantic relationship with Anastasia. Anastasia admits she “was frightened [he’d] leave [her] if [she] didn’t agree to all of [the contract].” He then tells her that he’s “not going anywhere...[They’re] following [her] advice, [her] definition:compromise” (James 459). By this point in their relationship, Christian has developed romantic feelings toward Anastasia. While most of the novel has been about fulfilling Anastasia’s sexual desires, it is also about the fulfillment of Christian’s hidden romantic desires, which Anastasia makes Christian aware of. When the couple ends their relationship at the end of the novel, it is not Christian’s but Anastasia’s decision as Anastasia does not think she “can be everything [he] wants her to be” (James 509). This is mostly in relation to Christian wanting to spank Anastasia and Anastasia being opposed to it. Again, she is making the decision over what is and is not acceptable in their relationship; she is also willing to end the relationship in order to enforce her boundaries. Anastasia and Christian’s BDSM scenes “take place in an atmosphere of fundamental consent, deep trust, care, and love, with the aim to mutual pleasure” (Dirks 92). In the end, Anastasia pushes against Christian’s boundaries with the result being

Christian lightly reinforcing them. When Christian pushes Anastasia's boundaries, the result is the end of their relationship.

Another aspect of *Fifty Shades of Grey* that people find problematic is that the couple engages in a BDSM relationship, and according to some, it is not a healthy one. The argument is that women will think that this kind of relationship is acceptable. Clare Phillipson, who is the director of a charity for victims of domestic violence, insists that the novel is "really about a domestic violence perpetrator, taking someone who is less powerful, inexperienced, not entirely confident about the area of life she has been led into, and then spinning her a yarn." She goes on to caution "[t]hat message is so dangerous" for women (Flood). However, this is a misreading of the novel. Anastasia, while she is inexperienced in both sex and kink, is not taken advantage of by Christian as he does not attempt to manipulate her into dangerous sexual practices by "spinning her a yarn." He, instead, "suggest[s] [she] do some research" as she would "be amazed [at] what [she] can find on the Internet" (James 148). Anastasia does, in fact, do research and therefore she is able to come up with her own terms for their relationship. The novel features "Ana negotiat[ing] her own sexuality" (Dirks 83). Not only does Christian suggest that Anastasia research BDSM before committing herself to the contract, but this also encourages the curious reader to do their own research before establishing rules and boundaries. Even if the novel had no passage about research, it does not matter. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a fictional novel and not a how-to manual. It is not James's responsibility to make sure the reader engages in safe, sane, and consensual BDSM practices. The idea that women who are interested in exploring sex and kink would use a novel as their instruction manual is absurd. This idea infantilizes

women and puts too much responsibility on authors. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a popular novel as “in 2013 [James] was the Forbes top-earning author-she made \$95 million that year” (Dirks 82). As a popular book, it can be argued that it is also influential. However, the real influence of the novel is for women to find their own path to sexual pleasure, whether that path is through masturbation, kink, roleplay, fantasy, etc. It is still the reader’s responsibility to do their own research in order to engage in these practices (if they choose to do so) in an informed way.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* is not a dangerous novel if any novel can be said to be dangerous. It is a novel that explores sex and kink through the lens of female pleasure. While BDSM might not be for everyone, those people do not get to decide whether other people can engage with a fictional representation of the lifestyle. It is up to the individual to decide if the content of the novel is worth reading or not. Certainly, it can be critiqued, but it should not be censored. This is true for other fictional pornographic content as well. Reading pornography, as has been proven through study and research, results in no real harm done to the reader or the people that they interact with in real life. It has never been proven that women who read *Fifty Shades of Grey* go on to become victims of domestic or sexual violence due to the content of the novel convincing them that violence is acceptable in a relationship. It is possible that women who read the novel develop more of an interest in kink. However, this interest does not appear to be harmful and can be seen as helpful. Women have been denied exploring their sexual fantasies due to shame and embarrassment. Sexually explicit fanfiction that has most likely been written by a woman and is usually read by women is a way for women to own their sexual pleasure. *Fifty Shades of Grey* started out as *Twilight*

fanfiction and became a very popular novel, which shows that women are interested in sex and kink. The call for the novel to be censored and banned on the behalf of women is the call that women should not be reading pornography (especially kink-based pornography) and therefore, functions as a denial of women's sexual pleasure.

## Conclusion

Fiction that encourages women to explore their sexual fantasies and desires, and LGBTQ fiction that features explicit sexual relationships have always been maligned. However, with the internet becoming widely available, it has become easier to see. Censorship did not start with the internet, but it did become more prevalent. It also became easier to threaten and ridicule people who engage with said fiction, especially when people can hide behind anonymity. More visibility of censorship leads to more censorship, in general, and does not only pertain to fanfiction. Book banning also is not new, but it is becoming more common as,

[t]he ALA's (American Library Association) Office for Intellectual Freedom counted 729 challenges to library, school, and university materials in 2021. It's a significant jump: Last year (2020) the group noted 156 challenges-and in 2019, there were 377. Although the 2020 number was impacted by the pandemic, which forced schools and libraries to shut down, the ALA said they don't usually get more than 500 book challenges in any given year. (Mazariegos and Sullivan)

Just like with fanfiction, banning books also typically targets marginalized people. For example, in 2021:

*Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe top[ped] the ALA's 10 most challenged books list...The ALA said the memoir, done in comic form and recounting Kobabe's path to gender-identity as nonbinary and queer, has been "banned, challenged, and restricted for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to have sexually explicit images." (Mazariegos and Sullivan)

Ultimately, the focus on banning fiction, whether it is fanfiction or novels, tends to be fiction that supports exploring sexuality, especially when the sexuality being explored is a woman's, a member of the LGBTQ community, or a POC's. A good number "of the books banned and challenged in 2021 are related to LGTBQ+ topics and most were written by Black or LGBTQ+ authors" (Mazariegos and Sullivan). Through these examples of book banning, it can be seen how fandom and fanfiction function as a microcosm. The reason people should care about the call for censorship of sexually explicit works in fandom is because it does not only happen in fandom. While fanfiction is also important as its own topic of study and should be considered a type of literature, it is also a niche interest. Novels are more mainstream. However, the fandom community, especially the part of the fandom community that supports censoring sexually explicit works, can be used to show the dangers of more widespread censorship and the harm that can result, mostly to marginalized people.

While there are many examples of censorship recently, an especially relevant one is from a public library in Enid, Oklahoma, as they have a library policy that "library programs and exhibits should be 'non-partisan' and 'will not make as the object the study of sex, sexual activity, sexual perversion, sex-based classifications, sexual preferences, sexual identity, gender identity, or subjects that are of a sexual nature.'" As a result of this policy the library "canceled a romance book club and a sexual assault awareness book display" (Willingham). This not only affected a book club where the group was most likely primarily women but the librarians were told to take down a book display because its function was to promote sexual assault awareness. This policy of censorship not only harms women who are possibly seeking sexual pleasure, it also

harms people who have been victims of sexual assault. The book display not only makes people aware of sexual assault, but it also makes people aware the library has books on sexual assault. While the books can still be checked out, they might not be if people do not know they exist. The policy also bans book displays and meetings for gender identity and sexual preferences. This ban has a direct correspondence with the efforts of fans trying to censor certain types of fanfiction. It is obvious how a blanket ban involving sex can be harmful to sexual assault victims, people questioning their sexuality, and the transgender community. Just like the library, fandom is supposed to be a safe place to explore not only sexual fantasies but also identity. It has been mentioned previously in this thesis that during the *Tumblr* ban, the tags queer and gay were unsearchable. These words are automatically equated with sex and obscenity. In the current day, it is clear to see how the word transgender is also being filed under sex and obscenity. It is important to discuss actual cases where censorship has been enacted, not just for the purposes of fandom but also to explore real harm done to marginalized communities. Censorship, especially the censorship of sex and “obscenity,” despite the claims that it only exists to protect the vulnerable, has never helped people who have been “othered” by laws and society; it has only harmed them.

If writing “obscene” fanfiction or novels could be punished by the law, as some antis have called for it to be, what would that look like? Unfortunately, it does not have to be imagined. While any kind of fanfiction, as long as it does not violate copyright laws, as well as novels, can be written in the United States without fear of prosecution, the same cannot be said for other countries. Recently, in 2018, a Chinese writer referred to by the name of Liu in the Chinese media was sentenced to ten years in



prison because her novel, which was published in 2017, contained gay sex scenes. The “novel, titled *Occupy*, portrays ‘obscene sexual behavior between males,’ according to a description from police” (Daugherty). While it is true that China has a different culture and a different form of government, and it could be argued that a country with free speech as a protected right built into its constitution would never put anyone into prison for expressing their constitutionally protected right; as seen previously in this thesis, judges, reacting to their own bias, will remove custody of someone’s children for viewing gay pornography. It should be said that fanfiction, while it still functions as literature, unless it is changed from fanfiction to a more traditionally published work, like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, will never be sold in bookstores or be on the shelves of local libraries. As a result, fanfiction will never fall under book-banning efforts. This does not mean there is not a danger of sexually explicit fanfiction being censored. As already explored throughout this thesis, anywhere corporations control a fandom platform, there are dangers of censorship. Fanfiction that fandoms produce is generally known only by that fandom. Therefore, the question remains: Why does it matter if fanfiction is removed and restricted, especially to people that are not in fandom at all? There are a few reasons I believe it should.

The first, is for the academic study of fanfiction. Kristina Busse, a fan studies scholar and a professor at the University of South Alabama, remarks “[i]t is ultimately irrelevant whether fans like a given story and its tropes for sexual or other affective reasons. The fact that fans share these kinks and that fanfiction is an easy way to write and read specific desired story lines, characterizations, and tropes is a feature rather than a bug. Fandom should celebrate its ability to appeal to narrow audiences.” She

goes on to say that “[b]y understanding fanfiction in its fannish context and as a performative act that may have been written for a specific purpose or person, we can value fanfiction as both text and artifact, as a literary work and a cultural engagement” (Busse 56-57). Fanfiction cannot be analyzed as literary works or studied for its cultural significance, however, if it does not exist. Often, once a website deletes the content it is hosting, that content can no longer be accessed. This is especially true if the website in question gives no warning to the creator of the content that their works will be deleted. Again, one of the primary functions of fanfiction and one of the characteristics that it is defined by, is community. One of the reasons fanfiction is significant to academia is its cultural significance. In order to see the culture of fanfiction, there needs to be fanfiction to study. While there is still fanfiction out there to be analyzed and studied, there is a lot that has been lost. In order not to lose any more, it is important to recognize and discuss the consequences of censorship, which not only affect the fanfiction itself but also the people who write fanfiction. The second major characteristic of fanfiction is that it is transformative. This is important as it relates to the community and culture of fanfiction.

The defining characteristics of fanfiction, according to this thesis, are that it is centered around community and that it is transformative. The community aspect is one of the reasons academia should care about censoring fanfiction, but why should everyone else? The transformative nature of fanfiction is the primary purpose of the genre. Even if the transformation is subtle and canon compliant with the original source material, every fanfiction is a transformation of something else. The transformative nature of fanfiction combined with the primary writers of fanfiction who, as has been

pointed out many times previously in this thesis, are women and people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, is why everyone else should care. Censoring already marginalized people is telling them their voices do not matter, which only reinforces what most of the population has told them. There are laws that are being discussed and laws that have already been passed that take away the right to live as who you are. They take the right to be informed about your history. They take away your access to healthcare. They take away your children. People justify censorship of fanfiction because they think it violates morality and promotes harm and therefore must be contained. However, as I hope I have proven in this thesis, fanfiction, even pornographic fanfiction, does not cause harm but promotes self-discovery. Through the writing and publishing of fanfiction, the authors find a community that accepts them and through this community, their voices are heard and celebrated.

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