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CONSENT IS SEXY: BDSM ETHICS AND FICTIONAL BOUNDARIES IN WATTPAD EROTIC FANFICTION

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Abstract

This article examines consent, erotic fantasy, and queer representation in Wattpad fan fiction. Drawing on queer theory and BDSM frameworks, it explores how consent is depicted, negotiated, or absent in these narratives, reflecting or distorting real-world ethics. The study highlights the role of paratexts—particularly tags and warnings—as ethical tools for writer–reader engagement. The analysis focuses on four works of fan fiction featuring BDSM. Findings show fan fiction's potential as a queer and feminist space, while also revealing gaps in content warnings and ethical communication. Finally, this article argues that consent must be understood both within the story and in its digital-cultural context.

Keywords: Consent, BDSM, Fanfiction, Queer Theory, Wattpad.

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1. Researching at the Margins

Erotic fantasies involving celebrities or fictional characters are common in informal settings, but remain underexplored in academia. This study focuses on erotic fan fiction that incorporate BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism) dynamics and are published on the Wattpad platform. Although fan fiction is historically a female-dominated and potentially subversive genre, it can also reinforce hegemonic narratives depending on its representations. Combining fan studies with queer theory, we approach BDSM both as a practice and as a thematic element that amplifies the stakes of consent, power, and narrative ethics.

Fanfiction and BDSM each depart from conventional forms, the first through literary production that circulates outside publishing markets, the second through erotic practices that deviate from normative sexuality. It is this shared transgressive potential that grounds the present study, since practices that unsettle established norms also unsettle the terms on which agreement to those practices is given. Following Kristina Busse's (2017) insights on reader-text dynamics, we therefore investigate how fictional spaces articulate, or fail to articulate, ethical concerns about consent.

This study draws upon a multidisciplinary theoretical framework grounded in queer theory and fan studies. These perspectives allow for a layered understanding of how power, pleasure, and ethical negotiation operate both within the content of erotic fan fiction and its broader circulation in digital fan communities. The corpus consists of four erotic works of fan fiction featuring BDSM scenarios, selected from the Wattpad platform. These fan fictions were chosen based on three criteria: (1) they are tagged or described as BDSM-related; (2) they are complete narratives; and (3) they reflect a diversity of character dynamics, including heterosexual and queer relationships.

The fanfictions include two stories featuring real celebrities (Harry Styles and Halsey/Melanie Martinez as the main couple) and two involving fictional characters (Loki from the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the pairing Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter, known as Drarry). This selection ensures both variation in fandom type and relational configuration. The stories are examined not only for their narrative content but also for reader interaction through Wattpad's comment sections, which serve as a form of public paratext and ethical negotiation.

To assess how consent is represented, the study focuses on two analytical dimensions (i) such as narrative depictions of consent: how consent is described, negotiated, or assumed within the BDSM scenes; and (ii) use of content warnings and tags: how paratextual signals prepare the reader for the narrative's ethical and erotic boundaries.

Wattpad was chosen as the central platform because of its widespread popularity and its informal, user-driven culture, which contrasts with more structured platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3) and makes it a productive site for observing whether ethical norms around consent are made

explicit in less regulated fan communities. Combining textual analysis with paratextual observation, the methodology interrogates both the formal narrative mechanisms and the broader cultural practices that shape the experience of consent in digital erotic storytelling.

2. BDSM

Known first as sadism and masochism, then as S/M, the practice examined in this research has a long history of pathologization. Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published in 1886, catalogued it as a disorder, and that classification proved durable. Only in the 1980s did the practice come to encompass elements beyond pain and to be named BDSM, gaining currency among gay groups, and only in 2018 was it removed from the World Health Organization's list of illnesses. Even so, the association of practitioners with sexual perversion or psychological disturbance has not entirely dissipated (Bauer 2014, 8).

Practitioners take up various roles, among them dominant, submissive, and switch. The first two lend themselves to being read as a reinforcement of characteristics conventionally attributed to men (dominance) and women (submissiveness), an interpretation Raab identifies and resists (4), and one that flattens BDSM, gender, and the possibilities of transgressing either. If sex does not equal gender, as Judith Butler (1990) argues, neither does a preference in sexual play mirror the gender of the person who holds it.

Raab (2013) locates the transgressive potential of BDSM in a distinction from subversion. To transgress is to "embody or perform a gender role in a way it is not typically embodied or performed" (5), whereas to subvert would be to "disrupt them [gender norms] or undermine them to the point of creating change" (5). The difference is one of degree and consequence, though even minor departures in gender performance produce disturbance and thereby confirm that such performance answers to no fixed ideal (Butler). What opens the possibility of transgression is that the roles are intentionally acted out, a deliberateness that renders the normative dynamics of gender explicit rather than leaving them implicit. BDSM remains a broad practice, encompassing people with different beliefs, politics, and ideologies. The potential to transgress gender is therefore never guaranteed by the practice itself; it emerges only where practitioners interrogate gender norms and make a conscious effort to reconsider them.

Rethinking BDSM begins with dissociating dominance and submission, and pleasure and pain, from binary dynamics. Dominant and submissive are roles selected within a play, while pleasure and pain are both sensations (McPhee 2014, 7), whether physical or emotional. In her introduction to *Female Masochism in Film: Sexuality, Ethics and Aesthetics*, Ruth McPhee proposes that masochism may amount to more than a "simply passive or reactive form of desire" (8), which reaffirms her contention that pleasure and pain are not opposites but sensations

in their own right, each carrying its own connotations and implications for the self and for others (8).

Robin Bauer, in *Queer BDSM Intimacies: Critical Consent and Pushing Boundaries*, examines the notion of harmonic sex, the ideal situation in which sexual acts are supposed to occur according to hegemonic discourses. Such sex, in Bauer's account of its construction, takes place "between egalitarian partners whose intimate bodily interactions are devoid of power dynamics and anything that may be thought of as unpleasant emotions or sensations, such as pain, humiliation, shame or discomfort" (3), an ideal that installs sex as private and non-political. BDSM transgresses these conventions on both counts, since it foregrounds the very power dynamics the ideal excludes and makes unpleasant emotions central to the practice.

Even though practices related to BDSM and non-normative sexualities have been put side by side in the past, they cannot be seen as the same. BDSM communities, created by practitioners, can be inclusive and with a plurality of gender, sexuality and identity expressions; or they can be white, straight, and cis oriented. The BDSM related practices will carry the values and privileges of the context of the participants (Weiss 2011, 20); therefore, there is not only one way to look into it. It cannot be claimed that BDSM is inherently transgressive and empowering, nor that it purely reproduces patriarchal notions of dominance and submission, as stated by feminist scholars during the Sex Wars, in the 1980s (Ferguson 1984, 107).

BDSM is not confined to couples occupying binary roles, controlling or being controlled. Scenes take place between two people or among three, four, or many more. What makes them possible is consent among the participants, whatever their number.

Approaching BDSM through queer theory yields a perspective in which power dynamics are interchangeable and dominance and submission operate not as a hierarchy but as roles chosen by practitioners. Juana María Rodríguez (2011) finds a precedent for this in the Spanish servicial, "of service", which "is not to dismiss him or her as being weak, or devoid of desires or agency; instead, it most often is a compliment that recognizes that person's willingness to acknowledge and respond to the needs and desires of another" (338). From there she asks what it might mean to read sex and sociality through a Latina femme understanding of servitude and submission (338). Hegemonic discourses may fix the meanings of dominance, submission, pain, and humiliation, but a queer perspective on BDSM can unsettle them, generating new meanings and setting kink-shame aside

3. Fan fiction

Fan fiction is written by fans of movies, TV series, books, and celebrities, who place characters and public figures in scenarios of their own invention or draw on fictional worlds created by other authors. The impulse often comes from a *ship*[1] that the source text left underdeveloped, as with Clarke and Lexa from

the TV show *The 100* (2014-2020), or from one that never materialized there at all, as with Hannibal and Will from the TV show *Hannibal* (2013-2015). Ships are not confined to fictional characters, and one of the most popular in Brazilian fanfiction culture pairs the singer and actress Selena Gomez with the TV host Fausto Silva. Whether the object is a character or a celebrity, the narrative may unfold in an alternate universe (AU), where the figure is inserted into a story unrelated to their actual life and profession, or it may hew as closely to that life as possible. Across these configurations, a common device names the protagonist "y/n", short for "your name", so that readers supply their own and write themselves into the narrative.

Released from the publishing market and its expectations about sales figures, erotic fan fiction is positioned to offer more diverse plots and characters. This is not to assume that analyzing fan fiction will invariably yield transgressive, non-normative stories. What can be expected is that their conditions of production and circulation, free and online, written by mostly anonymous writers for mostly anonymous readers, broaden the possibility of departing from a common place grounded in heteronormative culture. Exact demographic figures for writers and readers of fan fiction are unavailable, yet Döring notes a broad consensus that erotic fan fiction writers are "predominantly female and often relatively young" (4), and that they also tend to identify as LGBTQI+. She characterizes them as combining "(1) their love for the source material (e.g., Star Trek, Twilight, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Harry Potter) with (2) their sexual desires, and (3) their interest in writing" (4).

In their opening essay for *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, Hellekson & Busse make a claim for fanfiction as literature and prompt that by working with topics such as science fiction, comics, video games, pornography, and fan-created texts, scholars challenge the high-low culture notion (Hellekson & Busse 19). If popular literature (including fiction and then, more specifically, romance) has been – and perhaps it's not completely overcome the accusations – considered "low culture", then it is not a stretch to assume that fan fiction would be right alongside them. The high-low culture dichotomy has been challenged in Academia, in works such as Denise Dias de Carvalho Sousa's, in her PhD dissertation entitled "O sabor da literatura cor-de-rosa: a leitura dos romances das séries *Sabrina, Julia* e *Bianca*" (2014). Sousa discusses romance novels aimed for women, and mentions that "even not being legitimized by literary criticism, by school and by the Academia, this kind of literature stimulates the youth fondness for reading and develops reading behaviors[2]" (Sousa 18).

3.1 Corpus

The four fanfics we analyze are the following:

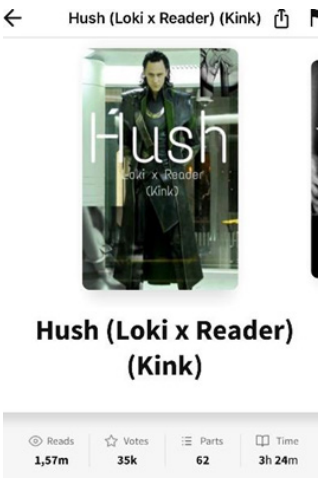


Figure 1: cover of *Hush (Loki x Reader) (Kink)*. Screenshot from Wattpad.
Source: https://www.wattpad.com/story/144820430-hush-loki-x-reader-kink

Hush (Loki x Reader) (Kink). The fanfiction is about a fictional character, Loki, from Avengers, and the love interest is the Reader (y/n). They are a straight couple, as the Reader is read as female.



Figure 2: cover of Daddy's Girl. Screenshot from Wattpad.
Source: https://www.wattpad.com/ (deleted)[3]

Daddy's Girl is a Harry Styles fan fiction, and the love interest is a woman. The story presents a heterosexual relationship. Considering Harry Style's fandom, and how it is mostly composed by young women, it is very common to have this sort of relationship. Here, we have the first fan fiction based on a real person, and the second with a straight relationship.

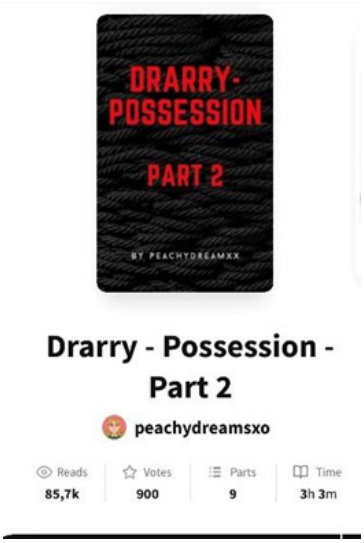


Figure 3: cover of *Drarry - Possession – Part 2*. Screenshot from Wattpad.
Source: https://www.wattpad.com/story/308105983-drarry-possession-part-2

Drarry - Possession Part 2 is a fan fiction about Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, from the Harry Potter saga. Canonically straight and cast as enemies in the books, the characters appear here as gay and in a relationship. Our initial intention was to work with the first installment, but Wattpad removed it from the site for reasons that remain unknown. The story is also posted on AO3, though it would no longer serve our purpose there, given that we set out to work exclusively with fan fiction from Wattpad. We then considered substituting another fanfiction with comparable elements, a fictional character and a gay couple, and found none on Wattpad that matched the pattern and had a considerable number of reads. *Drarry - Possession Part 2* was our best option, combining a high number of reads (85.7k), a gay couple, and characters from a fantasy saga. Its status as a sequel did not compromise the research, since we were able to analyze the story and the comments as we did with the other selected objects.



Figure 4: cover of *Not Afraid Anymore*. Screenshot from Wattpad.
Source: https://www.wattpad.com/story/105313443-not-afraid-anymore-halsanie

Not Afraid Anymore is a fan fiction about the singer Halsey with the singer Melanie Martinez. Both singers are bisexual. There are no indications that they ever pursued a romantic relationship – but we are talking about (fan)tasies, so whether the story has any connections to real life or not is not necessarily relevant to our analysis, as we are not comparing the fanfics to the celebrities' lives, since we see them as characters in this context.

4. Consent is sexy

In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", Adrienne Rich addresses the absence of choice for women in a male-dominated society. She asks whether we should condemn all heterosexual relationships, even the "least oppressive" (659), and answers that the question is not one of good or bad relationships but one of choices. Some women lack the economic freedom to leave a heterosexual marriage (635), and although her essay dates from 1980, the condition persists, since the Gender Pay Gap Report of 2020 found women's salaries in the United States to be roughly 19% lower than men's even in comparable jobs. Beyond being held in relationships by constraints larger than personal willingness, women confront a set of expectations attached to marriage itself and may endure marital rape, abuse, and servitude to their husbands (644). The "I do" of the wedding vows may be read by some as consent, yet it cannot be consent when it is the only option on offer.

4.1 Consent in BDSM

Consent operates across social interactions in a general sense, yet it remains predominantly associated with sexual relations, as in campaigns against sexual violence built on slogans such as "no means no". D. J. Williams and his

collaborators devote an article to negotiation and consent in BDSM practices, arguing that consent, for all its familiarity, has been treated simplistically, reduced to "yes" and "no", particularly in the *vanilla* world (4). Because consent within BDSM dynamics resists that reduction, they conceptualize three levels of it. *Surface consent* is the clear yes or no. *Scene consent* names the negotiation and communication that precede an interaction, through which the parties establish what they are willing to do. *Deep consent* is the most complex of the three, since it holds that when one party has not asked to stop, whether because of physical or psychological constraints, the others should be able to read the situation and recognize that enough has been done and that the person is no longer comfortable with what they had consented to earlier (4). What the three forms share, the researchers conclude, is a demand for open communication before, during, and after the interactions, also referred to as *scenes*.

Consent is now regarded as a defining element of BDSM relations, to the point that the infliction of pain, degradation, humiliation, and physical restraint, when performed outside its boundaries and without the consent and negotiation that make the practice safe and enjoyable for everyone involved, amounts to plain abuse. Such centrality is recent. The motto SSC, for Safe, Sane and Consensual, was coined in 1983 by a member of New York's Gay Male S/M Activists in response to predatory dominants who sought to force young submissives into uncomfortable and abusive situations within the practice. Rules and negotiation are nonetheless not always honored by practitioners, however central the literature on BDSM holds them to be, and some invoke the practice as a pretext for abusive behavior.

To say that BDSM is ethical because it strongly relies on consent is not an irrefutable argument. We opened this section with Rich's essay on compulsory heterosexuality and the conception that consent is not a given within an unequal society, and because of that, to argue that because someone consented to something makes it okay, goes towards a neoliberal perspective that leaves social and identity aspects aside.

Consent (or the lack of it) is part of BDSM and of our daily lives. Robin Bauer, author of *Queer BDSM intimacies: Critical consent and pushing boundaries*, states that:

> The fact that everyone has grown up with and is constantly surrounded by non-consensual power structures complicates what it means to give consent and makes it hard to establish *valid* consent, not only in BDSM interactions but also in general. This resonates with feminist critiques of liberal notions of consent based on free will (Bauer 78).

Consent cannot be given based solemnly on the argument of free will because the roots of it are much deeper.

Bauer arrives at critical consent through interviews with practitioners from these BDSM communities and an extensive review of the literature on the subject. Like Rich and Weiss, they hold that consent is never a given for individuals who belong to an unequal society, and from that premise they propose that "what

may be necessary for valid consent is a position of empowerment that enables one to deal with the material, social and emotional consequences of saying no to sex or BDSM, even if that just means being able to endure a moment of awkwardness" (80).

If such a position is to be available, people need a space in which boundaries and consent can be discussed without coercion or misconstruction, and respect is for Bauer the only means of reaching a successful negotiation. Respect, "as opposed to the concept of tolerance, is not a paternalizing gesture granting partial acceptance from a position of cultural superiority or hegemony" (91). It does not erase oppressive social structures, in their understanding, but signals an awareness of them, producing a "temporary, situational balance through acting as if all parties hold sufficient amounts of negotiating power" (91).

From their reflection on dyke and queer BDSM practices, Bauer proposes the concept of *negotiated consent*, or *working consent*, "to stress that consent is not to be taken for granted, but has to be actively and critically established, and even then, will always remain relative in a culture of social hierarchies and given its affective character" (99). Consent is complex, and negotiating it requires holding many aspects in view at once, so what Bauer offers is a way of working with that complexity rather than resolving it. That the concept emerges from interviews with a dyke and queer BDSM community should not be dismissed, given what heteronormative culture prescribes elsewhere, namely that men initiate the sexual encounter and women resist it (78), a script grounded in the belief that men hold power over women. Queer BDSM communities, as Weiss and Bauer both show, tend to be more critical of the practice and of the power dynamics it involves.

The discussion of consent leads to a political view of BDSM because BDSM, like sex in general, is political in the end. Talking about consent demands that we understand the intricacies of the practice and the dubious ground on which it stands. Consent matters without being everything, since a healthy practice, one that does not manipulate consent and genuinely respects its participants, will reflect the beliefs its practitioners hold.

4.2 Fictional consent

The fictional consent addressed in this section is not a derivative of "fake," but of fiction as a genre. While consent is usually discussed in relation to the interactions represented within a narrative, erotic fiction also establishes a form of negotiation between writer and reader that occurs before the reading experience itself. In this sense, consent in fictional contexts involves not only the actions and relationships portrayed in the story, but also the paratextual elements that frame how readers encounter potentially sensitive or transgressive content.

Since 2014, discussions of whether trigger warnings are necessary have been prominent in academia, especially in the United States, prompted by students who request them in syllabi and course materials (James 296). Such discussions generally concern materials that may evoke traumatic memories or

emotional distress, yet the broader practice of signaling potentially challenging content has a much longer literary genealogy, one in which paratextual warnings and framing devices have historically mediated the relationship between texts, readers, and socially contested forms of desire.

Eighteenth-century libertine literature offers an early instance, where warnings and moralizing gestures frequently operated through ambivalence. In apparently distancing a text from its own erotic or transgressive content, these strategies could at the same time intensify curiosity and feed the fascination surrounding forbidden desires (Hunt 1993, 15-18). The suggestion that a text was dangerous, improper, or scandalous thus became part of the very mechanism through which it circulated, drawing readers precisely because of the boundaries it appeared to violate (18). Nineteenth-century Naturalist writers framed controversial representations of sexuality through claims of social observation and scientific discourse, a strategy that let them negotiate the circulation of taboo subjects while sustaining a tension between moral critique, exposure, and fascination (Brooks 28-30).

Genette (1997) understands paratexts as thresholds that mediate the relationship between text and reader, and on that understanding contemporary tags and content warnings on digital platforms belong to this longer history of negotiating access, expectation, and interpretation. Where earlier literary warnings often relied on concealment, provocation, or moral distancing, digital tags tend to operate as tools of community organization and ethical communication. In fan fiction communities, particularly those engaging with erotic and BDSM themes, they signal content while also serving as mechanisms through which writers and readers negotiate boundaries, expectations, and forms of consent.

Tags can work as warnings, in the manner described above, and equally as a teaser of what the story holds, which is why Busse calls them "both warning and advertising" (203). Requiring as they do a prior knowledge of fandom and of the fan fiction universe in general, they help writers find the right audience for their stories, and in the case of stories involving BDSM, that audience is ideally a *knowing* one.

The expectation with a knowing audience is that they will be familiarized with BDSM and what the practice entails. Our hypothesis is that, if a writer offers enough tags and warnings about the content of the fanfiction they post, then the readers will be aware of what kind of sexual relations they are about to read and there won't be the need to introduce all the rules and negotiations BDSM relations usually entail. However, our time looking for fan fiction to analyze in this research has shown us that many writers do not make use of tags. One of the possible reasons is that fan fiction stories are sometimes written without anything more than an initial idea in mind. Therefore, the writer does not know how the story will go and can't predict the tags to use (there is always the possibility of editing and adding tags later, though).

In her chapter on fictional consent, Busse observes that "female fan fiction fandoms in particular have a long history of acknowledging and addressing

morally ambiguous themes" (198), which accounts for the popularity of tags among fanfic writers. Women once stood accused of being too sentimental to write erotic literature (Alexandrian 328) and now constitute the majority of those writing it for the publishing market, which already casts doubt on the charge. Sarane Alexandrian's worry that women would lean into the romantic and fail to deliver erotic content is disproved by a closer look at the themes of the erotic novels published today. From "daddy kinks" to dark romance novels – a subgenre that includes morally gray characters, dangerous situations, and occasionally horror elements – in which it is common to find trigger warning such as the following, from the dark romance novel *Her Soul to Take* (2021):

> The Kinks/Fetishes Within This Book: Consensual non-consent (CNC), breathe play/choking, bloodplay, spit, swallowing bodily fluids, needle play (body modification fetish), pain play, fear play, public play, bondage, restraint, spanking/impact play, erotic humiliation/degradation, raw sex/sex without a condom (Laroux 6).

Women have taken space within the erotic genre in the traditional publishing market and in fan fiction. The potential ambiguous and sensitive themes are one of the reasons for the encouragement of the use of tags, apart from the warning/advertising. Wattpad, for example, ranks stories within the tags they are inserted. The platform even shows the best rank of one or more tags, as exemplified in the image below:

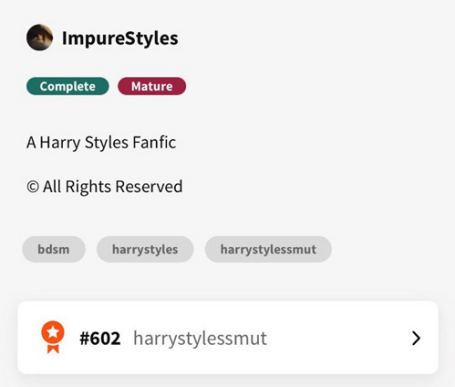


Figure 5: Screenshot from Wattpad. Source: https://www.wattpad.com/ (deleted)[4]

The fanfiction shown above is economical in their tags, using only three; however, they do make it clear what to expect: smut, BDSM, and Harry Styles. However, BDSM is an acronym, and distinct practices are part of it. Busse reminds that the use of tags by the writers "affects reader expectations, and if those are disappointed, readers can become angry" (Busse 204). And if the readers are angry, they will express it in the comments section.

The comments section in Wattpad tends to be a place for the readers to interact among themselves, and not as much for the writer. Writers will leave

notes and warnings in the body of the text, in bold, in the beginning and/or end of the chapter. We see a distinction between stories on Wattpad and those posted on AO3. While writers answer many of the comments left by the readers on AO3, Wattpad writers have a certain distancing from the readers. Even if they acknowledge the comments when posting a new chapter, they rarely respond directly. While this may partly reflect the platform's interface and the practical difficulty of engaging with a large volume of comments, it nevertheless creates an impression of distance between writer and reader. We see this as a reiteration of the hierarchy of writer and reader. The writer appears to occupy the position of control, while readers primarily discuss the story among themselves, much as they would with traditionally published books.

This relation between writer and reader on Wattpad offers a different perspective from the usual studies on fan fiction. Commonly, fan fiction works are posted chapter by chapter, allowing readers to interact with the author in the course of the story and even make suggestions. Because of those interactions, scholars such as Byrne and Fleming consider fan fiction to be collaborative writing (3). It is impossible to trace whether writers on Wattpad check the comment section or whether readers' comments affect the development of the plot. Likewise, it is not possible to account for interactions that may occur outside the platform. Nevertheless, within the comment section itself, the writer–reader dynamic appears less community-oriented than on AO3, where direct exchanges between authors and readers are more readily visible. So, if the relation between writer and reader is not so horizontal, and the use of tags is, at many times, negligent, can Wattpad readers trust the writers to respect the tags they have chosen for the story, or to respect the safe space for the readers to interact in the comment section?

5. "We love some consensual smut"

The title of this section borrows a comment we once encountered in a Wattpad comment section, written in response to a scene in which the romantic interest took care to ask whether the protagonist wanted the sexual encounter to begin. As our understanding of consent expanded, we came to disagree with what that reader meant by the phrase. For them, consensual smut was a matter of two characters discussing consent explicitly within the story. In this article, consensual smut extends past the page to the agreement between writer and reader.

5.1 Daddy's Girl

The first fanfic, *Daddy's Girl*, was brought earlier for an example of the use of tag rankings. The description goes as the following: A Harry Styles Fanfic. And the story contains only three tags: bdsm, harrystyles, and harrytylessmut. It also contains a warning, posted before the story starts:

Title of the chapter: WARNING

> If you do not like such things do not continue on.
> This one contains strong sexual content.
> Please be advised.
> Thank you.[5]

The warning has 139k views against the first chapter's 131k, from which we can assume it worked for some readers, who decided against going on. The first two lines of the text carry 29 comments, most of them variations on "and why do you think I'm here?", which suggests those readers are comfortable with the strong sexual content.

Daddy's Girl offers few tags and a vague warning. BDSM covers a variety of practices and kinks, so even a knowing audience, familiar with what the acronym stands for, cannot anticipate the particularities of this story or the sexual fantasies and encounters it will represent. Such vagueness can make the reading less pleasurable and, as Busse points out, make readers angry. An angry reader is not the end of the story, yet comment sections tend to be very active in fan fiction posted on Wattpad, and a number of readers complaining that they do not understand or do not accept what the story presents can disrupt the fantasy the writer offers to everyone else.

The title *Daddy's Girl* suggests a Daddy dom/little girl relationship, since it holds both terms, "daddy" and "girl". Sometimes referred to as DDLG, this sort of relationship casts the dominant as a father figure and the submissive as a young girl. The story presents nothing of the kind, which makes the title misleading and shapes readers' expectations about what they are going to find. An informed audience, one that understands BDSM and knows what a DDLG relationship entails, may well feel betrayed by the author.

In chapter twelve, the main character, Anna, is punished for avoiding the romantic interest, Harry Styles. Punishment is a common role-playing dynamic in BDSM scenarios, but here it appears on dubious ground, since consent is never made clear within the characters' relationship. Harry begins whipping her ass cheeks and the comment section is adamant, answering with a flat NO. Readers do not enjoy the action, above all because Anna had given no sign of wanting this sort of relationship or of taking pleasure in pain.

Daddy's Girl draws the singer Harry Styles into a fantasy where he figures as a dominant stranger, possessive and controlling, qualities that operate as construction of the character rather than as negative traits in themselves. Placing a celebrity in such a fantasy is a bold move, since the character's contradictory and at times abusive behavior left some readers uncomfortable, unwilling to picture their idol in that light. Our analysis finds no indication that the writer was concerned with presenting an ethical BDSM practice in the characters' relationship. BDSM as a practice, with its rules and beliefs, goes almost entirely unmentioned, which suggests the topic held little interest for the writer. What

readers received, then, was a kink relationship as the writer imagined it, and it did not resonate with all of them.

By announcing a story with BDSM through the hashtags, the writer attracts readers who are interested in the practice and perhaps familiar with it, so it comes as no surprise that some of them complain about how the relationship is portrayed and criticize Harry's abusive behavior dressed up as kink.

5.2 Hush (Loki x Reader)

Hush (Loki x Reader) (Kink) offers its warning and advertising in the title itself, with *kink* in parentheses, and the reader also knows from the outset that this will be a "y/n" story, since Loki's romantic interest is the reader. The description is as vague as the previous story's, if not more so, announcing only that the first chapter tells all. That first chapter is entitled "Subjugation", and where the description remains unclear, the chapter title proves suggestive enough. All the chapters are titled, in fact, which gives the reader at least some idea of what to expect, unlike *Daddy's Girl*, where they are only numbered.

Hush offers no warnings but proves somewhat more generous with tags, which are loki, lokifanfic, lokiaufeyson, lokilovestory, lokiodison, lokiofasgard, lokisarmy, lokismut, lokixreader, and wattys2018. The generosity lies in quantity alone. The tags serve neither as warnings nor as much of an advertisement, since they do not indicate the story's content, being instead variations on possible fandom names for the character. Only "lokismut" points to sexual content, which readers could anticipate anyway from the writer's classification of the story as *mature*, a label that covers all four fanfics studied here. The pattern repeats that of *Daddy's Girl*, where the sexual element is signaled through terms as broad as BDSM and kink.

In the story, Loki is able to read the main character's mind, which is a helpful feature when establishing consent. The couple has a bitter dynamic. One of the first physical contacts they have, with a clearer sexual innuendo than the hair pulling and the grabbing in a fight, happens while the main character is in her cell and Loki comes to bring her food.

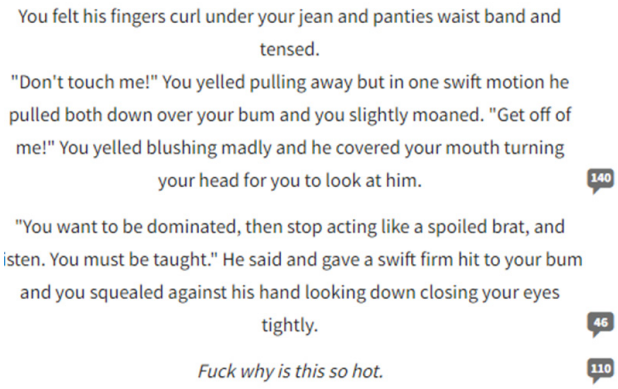


Figure 6: Screenshot from Wattpad. Source: https://www.wattpad.com/560123591-hush-loki-x-reader-kink-punishment

The scene above is set in motion by y/n's refusal to be an agreeable hostage. Her reaction is the thought "*Fuck why is this so hot*", yet the comment section divides over it. The relationship advances on unfriendly terms, with the main character hesitating and resisting Loki's advances while he persists. One reader comments "bitch you're a goddess remember??", and she is indeed a goddess, strong, intelligent, capable of handling herself in a fight, all of which readers have already been told. A real scenario would call for weighing many factors around limits, consent, the position the protagonist occupies in society, and the bearing that position has on her choices. The world of this fan fiction, however, is not modeled on the real one but on a fantastic setting in which children of gods are about to begin a sexual relationship. Given what readers have been offered so far, the relationship between Loki and y/n appears framed as a mutually constructed dynamic between two characters of comparable agency within the fictional universe rather than as a product of structural power imbalance. Such a reading cannot fully dismiss the broader social structures that shape consent, discussed earlier in this article, and yet the narrative presents their interactions as an ongoing negotiation and not as coercion. The fan fiction thus asks that consent be understood as freely given within the internal logic of the story.

5.3 Not Afraid Anymore

In *Not Afraid Anymore* the writer uses a passage from the story as a description:

> 'You're not allowed to touch yourself, or I'm gonna punish you. And your not gonna like it when I punish you kitten'
>
> A lot of smut, a lot. Just saying.

The description offers little about the plot, but the passage it reproduces gives the reader a teaser of the relationship the protagonists will have, one that suggests a dominance and submission dynamic along with kinks related to punishment.

The story carries thirteen tags, which are 50shadesdarker, 50shadesofgrey, badlands, bdsm, crybaby, gay, gxg, halsey, kink, lesbian, melaniemartinez, notafraidanymore, and smutty. The first two, referring to the Fifty Shades trilogy, indicate that the story will follow a comparable premise, and taken together with the description and the quoted passage they point to a relation of domination and submission like the one in those books. The song "Not Afraid Anymore" also appears on the soundtrack of the film *Fifty Shades Darker*, which could raise doubts about whether the tags concern the story or the song, though the writer states at the end of the first chapter that she was watching the movie when she began writing and took it as inspiration. "Badlands" and "notafraidanymore" reference Halsey's album and song respectively, while "crybaby" names a song by Melanie Martinez, the other protagonist, and tags of this kind can indicate which *era* of the artists the fanfic draws on, usually with respect to the appearance they will have. The remaining tags concern sexuality and sex, with "bdsm" and "kink" once again offering only a vague idea of the sexual encounters to come, and "gay", "gxg" for girl x girl, and "lesbian" specifying the sexuality of the romantic interests. The chapters are titled, and every title is a line from Halsey's "Not Afraid Anymore", which means they serve little informative function, since they exist to reconstitute the lyrics and do not always bear on the content of the chapter they head.

Unlike *Daddy's Girl*, *Not Afraid Anymore* incorporates explicit discussions of BDSM practices into the narrative. Early in the story, Halsey tells Melanie that they will not engage in any sexual activity until a BDSM contract has been signed, which prompts readers to discuss contracts and consent among themselves. The protagonists later negotiate the terms of their dynamic openly, with Melanie establishing limits by refusing practices such as anal sex and fisting. The story introduces readers to dominance and submission, pet names, punishments, rewards, and the negotiation of roles, presenting BDSM as a practice structured around communication, boundaries, and consent rather than as a sexual aesthetic. Those readers appear to bring some familiarity with the topic themselves, discussing pet names and their own kinks in the comments, which allows them to enjoy the romantic and erotic dimensions of the story.

5.4 Drarry - Possession Part 2

The last fanfic, *Drarry – Possession Part 2*, is a sequel. Furthermore, we think it's relevant to present the metadata of both stories, part one and two, because they complement each other.

Drarry – Possession, offers a brief description of the plot, and some warning:

> As Harry grows tired of Draco's smug attitude, he finds a more effective way of both shutting him up, and bringing him to his knees.
>
> EXPLICIT STORY. Please read the tags. 18+
>
> Pure Smut, Kink & a little Fluff

From the description the writer offers, we can infer an enemies to lovers dynamic, since Harry dislikes Draco, at least at first, and a form of dominance is already in play in the line about bringing him to his knees. That line need not be sexual, but the words that follow settle the matter, announcing an EXPLICIT STORY. The further specification that this is "pure smut, kink & a little fluff" fills in the relation to expect between the couple, one that will be largely sexual while carrying some emotional care.

In *Drarry*, part 1, the writer asks readers to "please read the tags", which suggests those tags are more thorough than in the three fanfics discussed so far. They are bdsm, bdsmrelationship, bondage, bottomdraco, bxb, degradation, degrading, dirtytalk, domharry, dracomalfoy, drarry, drarryfanfic, drarrysmut, fetish, harrypotter, humiliation, kink, kinky, petnames, pining, shame, subdraco, submission, texttospeech, topharry, and toys.

Of these twenty-six tags, at least nine name specific fetishes and kinks that will appear under the broader headings of "bdsm", "bdsmrelationship", "fetish", and "kink", namely "bondage", "degradation", "degrading", "dirtytalk", "humiliation", "shame", "submission", "petnames", and "toys". Others indicate the roles the characters take up in the relationship, "domharry" and "subdraco", alongside those naming the ship "drarry", for Draco and Harry. The tags on their own suffice to inform readers of what the story holds and what sort of erotic endeavors to expect.

The author opens the first chapter with the disclaimer "this fic can also be found on ao3" followed by the author's username on the other platform. We have mentioned that fanfics on AO3 tend to make more use of tags and warnings, and this gets explicit here in the distinctions between the fanfics posted exclusively for Wattpad, and *Drarry*, that is also on AO3. One of the comments on this first line of the chapter says "the tags are just, yes", which shows an appreciation towards the author for being informative with the tags. The next part of the disclaimer reiterates that the story is for those above eighteen (the comment section has a few comments making fun of this, saying "yeah we all 18 here"), and reminds the reader to please check the tags. Furthermore, they display that "unkind comments will be removed". None of the comments are contrary to the removal of unkind comments, even if it demonstrates a controlling behavior from the writer and, somehow, invades the reader's space. The reader space is something we have reflected on from my time on the platform, since writers don't usually

appear in the comment section – again, differently from AO3, where writers and readers mingle in the comments frequently.

Drarry - Possession Part 2 offers a brief description of the plot:

> Draco just wants to be treated like he's nothing. He wants to endure punishment for being a filthy whore whilst on his knees, begging for it.
>
> Harry is the perfect dom, and degrading Draco Malfoy is enough to get his own juices flowing.
>
> They're a match made in heaven.
>
> Kink - Fetish - Dirty Talk - Bondage - Spanking
>
> Part 2 in the Possession series. Please read Possession (part 1) if you haven't already. (Drarry – Possession Part 2)

Part two continues the relationship that part one initiated, and readers arrive knowing the roles each character occupies, Draco as submissive and Harry as dominant. In describing part one, the writer had noted that the story would be fluff and smut, tender and hot. That warning does not reappear in part two, even though the story answers to the same description, and some of the kinks are listed there instead, among them "Dirty Talk - Bondage - Spanking".

Drarry, in both parts, stands in contrast to the other three fanfics. Where tags, warnings, and the overall prospect of consent from the reader are concerned, it opens the widest range of possibilities. The tags are clear and informative, and the writer, by exercising control over the comments, keeps the reader's experience untouched by other readers' negative interpretations. We have described angry readers as breaking the fantasy, so in deleting unkind comments, and in warning beforehand that they will be deleted, the writer acts less as an authoritarian than as a custodian of the reading experience. The author has after all stated and presented the elements of the story plainly, and on our argument that tags and warnings function as consent, a reader who proceeds can be assumed to have consented to what was proposed. Unkind comments about the story, when they concern sexual content or other aspects already signaled, break the contract between writer and reader, who remains free to stop reading at any point.

The tension between these two readings is worth naming rather than smoothing over, since a writer's withdrawal from the comment section was described earlier as a reiteration of hierarchy while the same writer's intervention in it is described here as care. What resolves the apparent contradiction is that consent is not a single operation performed once and then held, and the comment

section does not occupy the same position in both cases. Where tags and warnings are vague, as in *Daddy's Girl* and *Hush*, the contract between writer and reader was never properly drawn, and the comment section becomes the belated site where its terms are contested, which is precisely where the writer's absence tells, since readers are left to negotiate among themselves the conditions they were never offered in advance. Where the tags are thorough, as in *Drarry*, consent has already been established at the threshold, and the comment section is no longer the place where the agreement is settled but the place where it is inhabited, so that moderating it protects the readers who did consent from those who proceeded past terms they chose to ignore. Withdrawal and intervention thus carry opposite valences depending on whether the paratext has done its work, which suggests that what governs the ethics of the comment section is not the writer's proximity to it but whether readers entered the story on terms they were given the chance to accept.

This analysis of the possibility of consent across the four works of fan fiction indicates that only *Drarry*, in both parts, informs readers sufficiently for them to consent and proceed with the reading. That is not to say it is the only one its readers appreciated, since all four have a great number of reads and enjoy some measure of popularity. Fan fiction hold the potential to be collaborative, a reading experience grounded in community and exchange that blurs the line between writer and reader, and yet when the writer withholds from readers the chance to consent to the topics and themes the story will present, the trust between them can break.

The tagging practices are themselves telling, as only the fanfics with queer relationships use tags to indicate the sexuality of their stories, with "bxb" and "gxg", while those with straight relationships carry no tag suggesting the nature of the relationship at all. Those straight ones involve Harry Styles and Loki, and neither figure carries an obvious sexuality that would license the presumption. Harry Styles is famously shipped with his former bandmate Louis Tomlinson, and a great number of stories pairing them circulate on fan fiction platforms, while Loki is a bisexual character. *Daddy's Girl* does offer some suggestion of the sexuality represented, since a woman appears on the cover and the other character is a man, but *Hush*, the Loki fanfic, gives no indication whatsoever.

What we can conclude is that the three of the four works of fan fiction we selected from Wattpad offer little consent from writers to readers. Apart from that, we could notice a repetition of heteronormative culture, assuming "straight" to be the default mode for sexualities by using tags only when the relationships differ from that.

6. Final Remarks

This study set out to explore how BDSM-related erotic fanfictions on Wattpad engage with the ethics of consent, both within their narratives and across the broader writer-reader dynamic. Read through queer theory and critical BDSM

scholarship, consent in fan fiction emerges as more than a narrative device, as a layered interaction that takes in paratextual elements such as tags, warnings, and comment moderation.

These findings invite a reconsideration of the hypothesis advanced at the outset, that sufficiently detailed tags and warnings could prepare readers for BDSM content to such a degree that narratives would have little need to address the rules, negotiations, and ethical principles characterizing BDSM relationships. The analysis supports it only in part. *Daddy's Girl* does rely largely on paratextual elements to establish readers' expectations, while *Not Afraid Anymore* demonstrates that tagging and narrative explanation answer to distinct purposes. Paratextual warnings there coexist with narrative strategies that introduce readers to BDSM ethics instead of displacing them, which suggests that authors may incorporate such discussions even when the content has already been signaled clearly through tags.

All four stories were widely read and engaged complex sexual dynamics, yet only *Drarry*, in both parts, consistently furnished its readers with the clear and detailed tags and disclaimers that make informed engagement possible. The remaining stories offered warnings or suggestive descriptions and nonetheless relied on vague or insufficient paratextual signals, leaving the burden of interpretation and boundary-setting with the reader.

This disparity calls for a more intentional ethical approach to the publishing and consumption of erotic fan fiction, above all on Wattpad, where fanfiction can serve as a space for learning about sexuality and BDSM, particularly for younger readers exploring these topics (Döring 4). Tags and warnings are no mere formality. They constitute a central part of the consent contract between authors and readers, and when well executed they allow fantasies to be explored safely while emotional and psychological boundaries are respected.

The research also found heteronormativity still permeating tagging practices, since heterosexual stories frequently go without indicators of relational dynamics while queer ones call for explicit labeling. Such asymmetry installs heterosexuality as the default and opens another axis of power negotiation that intersects with erotic and narrative practices.

What this work argues for, in the end, is a broader understanding of consent in digital erotic storytelling, one that takes in textual and contextual elements alike and affirms fanfiction's potential as a space for feminist, queer, and ethical engagement with desire.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Does not apply.

End notes

1. A *ship* (short for *relationship*) refers to a desired or imagined romantic and/or sexual pairing between two characters or public figures
2. "mesmo não sendo legitimado pela crítica literária, pela escola e pelo meio acadêmico, esse tipo de literatura estimula o gosto juvenil pela leitura e desenvolve comportamentos leitores". My translation.
3. The story was deleted from the platform; therefore, it is not possible to share the exact source.
4. The story was deleted from the platform; therefore, it is not possible to share the exact source.
5. Wattpad does not have a number of pages, so we are going to identify only the chapter/part of the quotes.

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