

HEDDENS, KAYLA, Ph.D., AUGUST 2022

SOCIOLOGY

BUILDING A CONSENT CULTURE AND “DOING” CONSENT: THE IMPACT OF
INTERACTIONAL SCRIPTING PROCESSES ON GENDER INEQUALITY (214 PP.)

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Gender scholars contend that accountability for “doing” gender within interactions between individuals is how the gender structure can be challenged or “redone” (Connell 2010; Hollander 2013, 2018; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). Some scholars point to consent culture practiced by the BDSM (Bondage/Discipline, Domination/Submission, Sadism/masochism) community, as a model to teach consent and accountability (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005; Cagwin 2018; Dixie 2017; Harding 2015; Pitagora 2013; Stryker, Queen, and Penny 2017). Other research indicates that the BDSM community might “undo” gender, but more likely simultaneously challenges and reproduces gender inequality (Banerjee, Merchant, and Sharma 2018; Deutsch 2007; Simula and Sumerau 2017). However, little literature focuses on how consent is socially constructed to include interactional accountability that might challenge gender inequality within BDSM.

In this research, I consider how interactional consent scripts socially construct consent culture, how “doing” consent in the kink community provides an empirical example of “redoing” gender across the gender spectrum, and how BDSM identifying individuals and communities experience the conflict between consent culture and the hegemonic gender structure. I found that

socially constructed interactional consent scripts guide interactions in BDSM through stringent rules that aim to maintain agency and bodily autonomy through enthusiastic consent, boundaries, and limits. The BDSM community reinforces consent scripts with strict social control and accountability through formal and informal methods including social sanctions and reputations. I found that interactional consent scripts form the basis of “doing” consent, where individuals enact consent scripts in their interactions to uphold consent culture much like “doing” gender upholds the gender structure. Individuals in BDSM across the gender spectrum shared how “doing” consent allowed them to “redo” gender and sexual scripts by giving them more agency and bodily autonomy and lowering accountability for gender. However, the conflict between the gender structure and consent culture leads to identity dilemmas among participants, confusion in interactions, and experiences of marginalization and fetishization perpetrated by those who attempt to “do” gender while “doing” consent. While I provide insight into how “doing” consent redoes gender, ultimately the gender structure is both perpetuated and deconstructed within the BDSM consent culture.

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A dissertation submitted to
Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2022

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Marilyn Ann Cagwin, known to me as Gram.

Gram, you may have come from humble beginnings on a farm in upstate New York with no indoor plumbing and never received a college degree, but you were tenacious. You love your family fiercely and are always willing to sweat and go without to provide for us. Though we were privileged in many ways, we did not have financial privilege. That never stopped you from giving what you did have to be sure I always had what I needed. Through your perseverance, integrity, strength, hard work, patience, and faith, you show me that people can overcome their circumstances. Without all the guidance, support, and unconditional love you have shown me, I would not be the person I am, and this dissertation and subsequent degree would not be possible. I could never thank you enough for all you have done and what you have given to me, but I hope you know how instrumental you are in all my successes. You are the best person I know. Thank you, Gram, for encouraging me to never give up on myself and for always believing that this “pistol” would turn out to be “one hell of a person.”

I love you, always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee consisting of my chair Dr. Tiffany Taylor and members Dr. Kathryn Feltey, Dr. Clare Stacey, Dr. Katrina Bloch, Dr. Suzanne Holt, and my graduate representative Dr. Julie Massei, for the guidance, grace, and generous feedback that they offered me throughout this research process. Their support and suggestions were instrumental in helping me to craft and conduct this research project. Each member of this committee has encouraged my academic pursuits during this research, whether personally or through sharing their expertise during courses or direct consultations. I sincerely appreciate the encouragement, comments, and suggestions you have given me that will surely influence the future directions of my research trajectory and where I will take this research in terms of publication and applied work. I would like to extend additional and endless gratitude to my chair, advisor, and mentor, Dr. Tiffany Taylor. Thank you for always believing in me and this research from its conception. Your guidance, expertise, and willingness to provide constant critical and constructive feedback have been invaluable throughout this very long dissertation process. Beyond this, your encouragement and praise helped me to never give up on myself during this research and made this dissertation, of which I am incredibly proud, possible. Thank you for always having my back and being the best advisor I could have hoped for.

Thanks to both Dr. Erin Andro-Masetta and Dr. Katie Bullock for sharing their documents and forms used during their dissertation processes including their final dissertations. These documents were very helpful for me to consider as an example while I was crafting my own

research project. I would like to extend additional thanks to Dr. Katie Bullock for meeting with me for weekly Write and Rants, which admittedly turned out to be more ranting than writing. Your advice and friendship throughout this process made it more bearable and I will remember those times fondly. I would also like to thank my colleagues and professors for the grace and support you have shown me during this process. Thank you for everything from bouncing ideas, to suggesting literature, to providing critique and peer reviews. All of this shaped my academic perspective and abilities which made this research possible. Additionally, I would like to thank the Department of Sociology at Kent State University for the opportunity to write and defend this dissertation in a professional atmosphere and learning environment.

I would like to thank my family and friends for your immense support during the process. Thank you for always listening and reassuring me when I sometimes tried to lose hope that I would get to this point. You always lifted my spirits and made me feel powerful. I am entirely grateful for that. A special thanks to my partner and husband, Altman Heddens, for being my biggest cheerleader and ally during this dissertation and life. You have shown me an extraordinary amount of support and patience through this entire process. Thanks for cooking me dinner when I was too tired to function, for listening to me verbally process my ideas, and for reassuring me that it was going to work out in the end. You always believed in me and helped me to believe in myself. Thank you, my love, for encouraging me to shoot for the moon. Honorable mentions to my cats Q Noodle, Kittums, and Layla. Thanks for the cuddles and purrs when I was sad or overwhelmed. Thanks to coffee and lofi hip hop radio- beats to relax/study to. I sincerely could not have written this dissertation without either of these things and I am entirely grateful for their existence.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wonderful participants. Thank you all so much for trusting me and allowing me into your groups and lives and for sharing your personal experiences and stories with me. It has been my honor to represent this in writing. This project would not be possible without you all. Sincerely, you have my endless respect and gratitude.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic of consent has recently transformed into a pressing social issue. With the emergence of the 2017 #MeToo (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018) and #TimesUp internet-turned social movements, society began a complex conversation about consent, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the ways they disproportionately impact the lives of women. #Metoo and #Timesup have sparked debates about how sexual harassment and gender discrimination remain pervasive in the workplace and beyond. These digital movements signal what gender scholars have known for decades; gender is an enduring structure and a systemic apparatus of oppression and inequality which permeates all aspects of social life (Deutsch 2007; Martin 2004; Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2009; Risman and Davis 2013). Researchers have studied gender and gender inequality as a fundamental aspect of sociological investigation through a wide range of contexts from how we “do” gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) to how we “undo” gender (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Lorber 1994; Risman 2009) to “redoing” gender (Connell 2010; Darwin 2022; Kelly and Hauck 2015).

There is considerable literature on rape culture and the gender power dynamics that feed it (Boswell and Spade 1996; Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005; Fedina, Holmes, and Backes 2018; Harding 2015; Herman 1989). Scholars have investigated how the gender structure perpetuates rape culture (Boswell and Spade 1996; Buchwald et al. 2005; Gavey 2005; Herman

1989). Researchers have explored how gender and sexual scripts impact how individuals behave during physical or sexual interactions (Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Kane and Schippers 1996; Plante 2014; Wiederman 2005). Other scholars have pointed to consent culture, as practiced by the BDSM (Bondage/Discipline, Domination/Submission, Sadism/masochism) or “kink/kinky” and polyamorous (a relationship style that practices ethical non-monogamy, where individuals can have multiple and simultaneous relationships) communities, as a model to teach consent practices and accountability (Buchwald et al. 2005; Dixie 2017; Harding 2015; Klesse 2006, 2006; Pitagora 2016; Stryker, Queen, and Penny 2017). However, there is far less literature that focuses on consent and how it can be used to form a consent culture that promotes healthy relationships and gender equity. I believe it is vital to integrate these bodies of knowledge to understand not only how sexual scripts perpetuate rape culture and gender inequality, but also how interactions with consent develop scripts that can be used to disrupt normative processes.

In my dissertation research, I use qualitative research through in-depth interviews of BDSM individuals to explore how “deviant” subcultures interact with consent in ways that socially construct interactional consent scripts. These consent scripts: valuing agency and bodily autonomy through enthusiastic consent, boundary and limit setting, social control, and accountability from the theoretical basis for how kink individuals “do consent” in interactions. Doing consent is a powerful interactional tool that the BDSM community uses to reproduce or deconstruct normative gender and sexual scripts. I will show how doing consent can challenge and/or reproduce gender and gender inequality. This dissertation (1) provides an increased sociological understanding of the social construction of interactional consent scripts and consent culture, (2) explores how “doing” consent provides powerful empirical examples of “redoing”

gender, femininity, and masculinity for women, men, and people along the gender spectrum in subcultural BDSM communities, and (3) investigates how kink individuals and communities are impacted by the conflict between consent culture in BDSM and the hegemonic gender structure. By examining subcultural communities that value consent and promote consent culture, I provide valuable empirical insight into how “deviant” individuals can use their agency and interactions to ultimately impact the reproduction and deconstruction of the gender structure. Also, I show how the gender structure and consent culture are socially constructed to contain opposite and conflicting ideologies and how this structural mismatch impacts the experiences of people in the BDSM community. My major contribution to the literature is the theoretical advancement of BDSM studies and gender literature by framing consent scripting as interactional scripting mechanisms, consent culture as a subcultural social institution, and arguing that “doing” consent is an interactional mechanism and empirical example of “redoing” gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current discourse about consent, sexual harassment, and assault leads back to the gender literature to explore where we have been and where we want to go. It is vital to investigate foundational gender literature to understand how gender is both socially constructed and deconstructed, particularly within interactions and scripting. This foundation allows for the exploration of how power and patriarchy converge with the sexual and relational power dynamics within hegemonic masculinity and femininity to produce a rape culture woven into the social fabric. Through the normalization of rape culture, the larger conversation about consent becomes one of gender inequality. Nuanced ideals of consent deviate from rape culture through the rejection of hegemonic norms and agentic interactions that are beneficial concepts to explore in increasing gender equality.

INTERACTION AND THE GENDER STRUCTURE

Giddens (1984) contends that social institutions are practices that are routinized or carried out by most agents across time and space. A social institution only exists because individuals constantly produce and reproduce it. Social structure is the outcome of practices that have previously happened, is not separate from actions, and makes practices possible (Giddens 1986). Social structures do not reproduce themselves. Instead, it is always agents and their practices that reproduce structures (Giddens 1986). Whether gender is conceptualized as an "order" (Connell 1987), an institution (Martin 2004), or a structure (Risman 2004), gender is consistently seen as an aspect of an individual, something performed in an interaction, and something influenced by social structural factors while simultaneously influencing that same social structure.

The gendered interactions of individuals and how they are held accountable for their behaviors shape the overarching gender structure. Through these interactions, agents or actors “do”, undo, or redo gender in ways that reproduce and strengthen the gender structure (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). These habitualized interactions and patterns create status expectations and scripts that actors use to perform gender and sustain the gender structure (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Risman 2004). To discuss concepts that potentially transgress the gender structure, interactions, “doing”, “undoing”, and “redoing gender”, and scripting processes must be considered.

Gender Beliefs and Interactions

Widely held cultural beliefs about the distinguishing characteristics of men and women and how they should behave construct “gender beliefs” that play a key role in the interactional organization of the gender structure (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Gender beliefs are constrained

and reproduced by “gender stereotypes” or socially ascribed traits associated with traditional masculinity and femininity (Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 2011). These stereotypes result in gender role beliefs which shape behaviors about how competent a social actor is based on their gender status (Eagly and Wood 2012). Gender beliefs and stereotypes become rules and schemas that are organizing principles in constructing a gender structure that focuses on difference and inequality (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

As a diffuse status characteristic, gender has implications for who will be considered competent in specific social interactions or group tasks (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972). Diffuse statuses, like gender, always operate in the background, where people make judgments on concepts like competency without realizing that they are responding to ascribed status beliefs (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972; Ridgeway 2009). The result is cognitive bias or the reinforcement of the gender structure through expected status performances (Risman 2004). For example, men are seen to have mechanical ability and women to have domestic ability due to traditional status beliefs that women are homemakers and men have to innovate to become economic providers (Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2004). These stereotypes become so culturally ingrained in ruling institutions that individual accomplishments cannot undo the disadvantages associated with a lower status position, like being a woman.

It is not only status beliefs, but also the social practices and social relations within interactions that construct males and females as different and unequal (Goffman 1977; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2004). Societies desire systems of organization for social life to make interactions run smoothly (Goffman 1959). Social interactions are the process through which social actors act and interact with each other (Goffman 1959). In human interactions, social actors participate in “presentational rituals” that outlines what should be done and how to

treat others in that interaction (Goffman 1956). These presentation rituals allow actors to do impression management, where they can consciously or subconsciously influence other actors' perceptions of them (Goffman 1959). Gender is a socially constructed presentation ritual, or the "display" of the self, based on biological sex traits with which an individual is born or assigned (Goffman 1956, 1959; West and Zimmerman 1987). Goffman (1977) argues that social interactions, spaces, and institutions are socially constructed in a way that highlights gender differences.

Women are more likely to perform acts of deference toward the perceived higher status of men (Goffman 1956). However, to acquire deference, social actors are expected to exhibit the appropriate demeanor towards others. Demeanor can be expressed through ceremonial behavior like appearance, body movements, and other outwardly visible presentations of self (Goffman 1956, 1959). Gendered acts of demeanor often reinforce gender stereotypes and inform gender roles through the way an actor presents themselves in social interactions (Ridgeway 2011). "Gender roles" are socially situated in the cultural expectations of social actors to behave and interact in ways that are congruent with their gender display and therefore their biological sex characteristics (Lorber 1994; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). These gender roles form the foundations through which individuals "do gender" or perform and reproduce the expectations associated with the gender norms (West and Zimmerman 1987). Through social practices, social relations and interactions, and gender roles, actors, knowingly or not, participate in the creation and reproduction of the gender structure.

Doing, Undoing, Redoing Gender

To better understand interactional mechanisms that reduce gender inequality, it is crucial to investigate gender as a social institution (Deutsch 2007; Lorber 1994; Martin 2004; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013). Structuration theory highlights the recursive relationship between structures and individuals shaped by human actions (Giddens 1986). Social actors take their actions for granted while reflexively monitoring the implicit and explicit consequences of their actions (Giddens 1986; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013). These actions and interactions sometimes support the existing structure or work to alter it (Giddens 1986). Within the structure are cultural concepts, or “nonreflexive habituated rules, patterns, and beliefs which organize much of human life” (Risman and Davis 2013: 744). Following the work of Giddens (1986), structural theorists and scholars contend that this definition works to conceptualize gender as a structure (Connell 1987; Martin 2004; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013).

Gender is considered a social structure because its displays and actions transcend being a personality characteristic (Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013). Additionally, it is an organizing structure activated through cultural rules and institutions that creates stratification within society (Martin 2004; Risman and Davis 2013). It is present at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels in society. At the individual level, the gendering of the self occurs through the internalization and socialization of dichotomous gender identity, the quality of being female or male, or “doing” gender (Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). Individuals “do” gender based on socialized gender beliefs that are reinforced through interactions, social processes and relations, and structurally reinforced gender norms (Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). At the interactional level, social policing, or social control, occurs which allows society to dictate what actors should expect from others and

themselves (Goffman 1956; Risman and Davis 2013). Here, actors utilize the socialized concepts of gender roles to reproduce individual and structural gender norms by holding each other accountable for their gender performances (Hollander 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). The institutional level uses those interactional and individual standards to reinforce gender inequality, creating a “gendered power structure” (Risman and Davis 2013).

West and Zimmerman (1987) draw from the work of Goffman (1956;1977) in their seminal work “doing gender”, where they suggest that gender is socially constructed and reinforced. This process occurs at the interactional level, where social actors police each other through “normative conceptions” of how gender is presented or “done”. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), deviations from gender norms do not usually have immediate consequences. Within interactions, actors hold each other accountable for their gender performances through assessment and enforcement of sex category membership (Hollander 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). However, continued failures to conform to gender norms and roles are blamed on the deviant actor instead of the gender structure itself. The contribution of this theory is the importance of social interaction in maintaining the gender structure (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Some scholars critique the theory insisting it does not consider agency and acts of resistance, “rendering resistance invisible” (Deutsch 2007). Deutsch (2007) contends that the language of “doing” lends to the concept of perpetuating difference rather than removing it. To “undo” gender, Deutsch (2007) suggests that studies focus on how gender is done and “undone” (Butler 2004) at the interactional level alongside how the interactional and institutional levels might work together to produce social change. Risman (2009) agrees with Deutsch (2007) suggesting scholars consider how women and men “undo” gender through deviating from

traditional scripts. West and Zimmerman (2009) respond to this by contending that gender cannot simply be “undone”, instead changes in orientations to norms and social relations shift gender accountability. They argue that while gender may not be “undone” it could possibly be “redone” through shifts in accountability (West and Zimmerman 2009).

Connell (2010) argues this interaction process plays out in the work experiences of transpeople. She suggests that transpeople “redo” gender through challenging the gender binary and this influences how others “experience and interpret their own gender” (Connell 2010: 53). Kelly and Hauck (2015) agree in their study of queer couples who “redo” gender through changing interactions within the domestic division of labor and who is accountable for genders. Hollander (2013) claims that accountability is foundational in “redoing” gender expectations and practices. Through resisting acts of gender accountability, actors can reframe gender expectations within interactions through modeling and reviving messages of gender rebellion (Hollander 2013). However, Hollander (2013) admits that changes in gender accountability and expectations must be legitimate while rendering past beliefs illegitimate and are subject to the power dynamics present in the interaction. Individuals with more structural power will have more success at challenging gender expectations, while those with less power may not (Hollander 2013). Challenging and changing gender scripts relies heavily on interactions and power dynamics between actors. It is necessary to further investigate scripting processes to understand the power dynamics present within them.

Sexual Scripting

Along with gender roles, or gender scripts, “sexual scripts” are the socially constructed expectations of how social actors should behave in sexual interactions that are often conflated

with gender (Gagnon 1990; Wiederman 2005). Sexual relations between men and women become a naturalizing social practice where the gender structure is collapsed into the interactional practices of sexual scripts (Beres 2014; Gagnon 1990). Traditional sexual scripts frame expectations of social actors anchored in gendered conceptions of what is normative behavior in a sexual interaction (Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973). Normative sexual scripts for men include a desire for sex, having strong “sex drives,” being primary initiators and instigators for sexual intimacy, and the need to be sexually skilled (Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013; Wiederman 2005). Also, men are scripted to prefer recreational sex, place more value on sex than relationships, and seek multiple partners (Masters et al. 2013; Wiederman 2005).

Through normative sexual scripts, men are exposed to messages of sexual agency, dominance over women, and placing biological desires overall. Contrarily, sexual scripts for women include conflicting messages. Women are scripted to be desired for sex but not to desire sex, have weak “sex drives,” resist sexual advances, and are seen as valuable when less sexually experienced (Beres 2014; Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013). Also, sexual scripts for women indicate they prefer sex only within relationships, desire commitment, and monogamy, and seek emotional intimacy within sexual relationships (Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013). These norms teach women that their value lies in abstaining from and resisting sex outside of monogamous relationships, constricting women to understand their sexuality in reference to men’s pleasure.

Sexual Script Theory (SST) outlines how social actors develop an understanding of sexual behaviors and situations through social interaction (Dixie 2017; Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973). The resulting sexual scripts are gendered, as they correspond with hegemonic

masculinity and femininity (Kane and Schippers 1996; Wiederman 2005). Sexual scripts are embedded into society through four scripting levels; cultural, subcultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (Dixie 2017; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Plante 2014). Cultural level sexual scripts are messages of appropriate sexual behavior that are learned through society, media, and precautionary stories. Cultural scripts often use gender stereotypes to construct which sexual behaviors are appropriate for women and men (Dixie 2017). These scripts also inform individuals' attitudes towards consent and impact their participation with consent.

Beyond cultural scripts are subcultural scripts, which identify discourses, ideologies, and expectations held by a smaller group within the population (Plante 2014). Some authors contend that subcultural scripts are a place where normative gender and sex expectations are subverted (Haenfler 2012; Plante 2014). Interpersonal level scripts take place in sexual interactions with others and are the reconciliation between cultural and intrapsychic level scripts (Gagnon 1990; Dixie 2017). These interactions often take place in dating and sexual relationships and are where sexual cues and interests are negotiated (Dixie 2017). Intrapsychic scripts are where an individual utilizes cultural and interpersonal interactions to develop their own sense of acceptable sexual behavior (Dixie 2017; Gagnon and Simon 1973). These sexual scripts operate similarly to and reinforce the gender power structure and subsequently gender inequality.

Recent work in sexual scripting investigates reactions to cultural level sexual scripts on the intrapsychic and interpersonal levels. Masters et al. (2013) found that social actors respond to cultural-level sexual scripts in three ways; conforming, exception-finding, and transforming. Social actors who conform practice sexual gender scripts that match hegemonic cultural level scripts and were typically men (Masters et al. 2013). Conformer attitudes contribute to the reinforcement of hegemonic gender beliefs which inform social relational contexts and

consequently frame gender as a structure (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Exception-finding consists of making exceptions to gender norms and scripts through alternative sexual scripts generally practiced by women. However, the resulting scripts are not connected to a critique of hegemonic sexual or gendered cultural scripts (Masters et al. 2013). Transformers intentionally challenge gender and sexual scripts through their applications of non-traditional sexual scripts (Masters et al. 2013).

This is particularly true at the subcultural level, where transformations serve to alter dissatisfaction with hegemonic scripts, improve autonomy for women, and enhance wellbeing across the gender spectrum (Masters et al. 2013). The transformer approach utilizes the power of challenging the gender structure through interactional processes (Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009). These findings present the need for further research on how subcultural level scripts transform gender and sexual scripts within interactions to undo and redo hegemonic scripting processes. The current research will fill this gap in the literature by focusing on the subcultural scripting practices within subcultural groups. A critique of SST is that research using this theory does not consider the power dynamics and inequality at play within sexual interactions (Beres 2014). However, it is vital to unpack the power dynamics that take place within interactions among men and women to understand the challenges they face while negotiating scripting practices.

POWER AND PATRIARCHY

To understand the implications of the gender structure within interactions and scripting processes, the power structures must be addressed. The presence of patriarchy in societies implies males have a master status that places them in a position of power within interactions and scripting processes. However, this hierarchy becomes more nuanced with multiple forms of

masculinity and femininity considered. Those with dominant, or hegemonic, social positions have more power to shape gender and sexual scripts within a society. If allowed to control gendered and sexual interactions, hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity co-construct rape culture. However, this section explores how other groups can resist this power to create social change.

Patriarchal Power Dynamics

The gendered power structure uses gender norms and sexual scripts along with interactional gender relations to create a hierarchy of power (Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The resulting “patriarchy” is a hierarchical power structure where men are dominant, meaning they have more social power and value than women who are considered submissive (Acker 1989; Kandiyoti 1988; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Male dominance comes with ‘patriarchal dividends’ that provide men with power, prestige, and ‘material dividends’ such as less domestic responsibility, higher wages, and economic opportunities (Connell 2005). Also, men are most likely to hold political offices, which grants them more power to maintain their social positions against subordinated groups (Connell 2005). The firm grip men have over the powerful institutions of economy and politics puts women at a disadvantage to create meaningful change.

Within patriarchy, men exert ‘protective status’ over women so long as they act within the confines of expected gender norms, including submission to patriarchal ownership (Acker 1989; Connell 2005; Hunnicutt 2009). Patriarchal owners range in relationship with the subordinated woman, from fathers and brothers to husbands and partners. Men view women as vulnerable and unable to care for themselves. Therefore, women require protecting and men see

it as their responsibility to provide that protection (Connell 1987; Hollander 2001; Hunnicutt 2009). Women are subject to ‘patriarchal bargains,’ which act as implicit scripts that “define, limit, and inflect their market and domestic options” (Kandiyoti 1988: 285). However, women who deviate from expected feminine norms risk losing the benefits associated with men’s privilege and ‘protection’ (Connell 2005; Hollander 2001; Hunnicutt 2009). Men have a vested interest to continue the patriarchal structure of gender inequality as it directly translates to male social power, including wealth and status (Connell 1987). Women’s interests remain in creating changes to the gender order. They have historically advocated for their right to equal power which ultimately creates conflict between women interested in change and men defending their privilege (Acker 1989; Connell 2005).

Members of privileged groups are more likely to use violence to sustain their dominant status (Connell 2005). Violence is perpetrated against women through a range of acts from harassment in public or work spaces to physical violence in the form of domestic and sexual assault (Connell 2005). Hollander (2001) argues that even though actual violence occurs infrequently, it is the perception of violence that influences women’s fear and subordination. Women report feeling particularly vulnerable to physical violence such as sexual assault (Hollander 2001; Lorber 1994). Men also use violence against subordinated men to ‘other’ men who are labeled inferior to the ideal type of masculinity (Acker 1989; Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe et al. 2000). However, men do not report feeling the fear and vulnerability associated with physical aggression (Hollander 2001). This could be a form of impression management to their performance of masculinity. Conversely, it supports that even though men practice subordination against other men, that subordinated men still benefit from male privilege. This pattern of hegemonic male domination

through aggression not only influences the gender structure but also constructs interactions between gender groups. To better understand gender power dynamics, it is imperative to consider how masculinity and femininity are constructed in society.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Femininity

If men wish to benefit from the patriarchal privileges associated with male group membership, they must display possession of a masculine self (Schwalbe 2015). The masculine self is a presentation ritual that signifies to others in interactions that an actor belongs to the dominant male group (Goffman 1959; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). This presentation ritual of the masculine self, also known as masculinity, is a socially constructed identity that is conducted to claim and maintain privilege, elicit deference, and avoid exploitation (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015). Males participate in manhood acts in a variety of ways, but particularly through aggressiveness, emotion management, hypersexuality, intimidation, and rule-breaking behavior (Hochschild 1979; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015). However, masculinity is not a static term with a single definition. There are many ways to do masculinity, or multiple masculinities, based on cultural expectations of men and intersecting identities such as race and class (Connell 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Masculinity is socially constructed to privilege men who benefit from it actively or passively (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). It is inherently relational to the biology of maleness or that which is not feminine. This places masculinity as the opposite of femininity, however, it is co-constructed with femininity (Connell 1987, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity does not constitute total social control (Connell 1987). Instead, it is the social dominance of men through “cultural practices, discursive centrality, and marginalization of

alternatives” (Connell 1987; Currier 2013:360). Hegemonic masculinity requires the domination of women to maintain the patriarchy (Acker 1989; Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). However, men also subordinate other men who do not exhibit and subscribe to behavior aligned with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Currier 2013). This allows men who practice hegemonic masculinity to mitigate potential threats to their structural advantages (Acker 1989; Connell 1987).

With the domination of women and subordinated men happening structurally and interactionally, many scholars question how hegemonic masculinity can be challenged. Duncanson (2015) suggests that this can occur when men engage in identity construction that shifts away from radical othering of other men and the domination of women. He, in line with Connell (2009), suggests this occurs in interactions that reject violence and instead embrace equality, mutual respect, and empathy. By participating in identities that are associated with femininity, hegemonic masculinity becomes a “softer” hybrid masculinity that serves as a transition to disengage men with violent domination (Connell 2009; Duncanson 2015). These findings align with the concept that hegemonic masculinity, or gender and sexual scripts in general, can be “redone” through social interactions (Connell 2010; Duncanson 2015; West and Zimmerman 2009).

Doing femininity is reactive to men and culturally constructed masculinity (Currier 2013). Due to this reactivity, some scholars utilize the presence of hegemonic masculinity as an implication for the existence of hegemonic femininity (Crane 1999; Krane et al. 2004). However, Connell (1987; 2009) contends that femininity cannot be labeled hegemonic in the same way as masculinity (Connell 1987). Femininity lacks the structural power provided by patriarchy and gender relational power within interactions. The subordinate status of femininity excludes it from

being considered hegemonic. Instead, there are different forms of femininity but the prevailing form of femininity that results from patriarchal domination is emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). The performance of emphasized femininity occurs through compliance with hegemonic male subordination, attachment to, and accommodating of the desires of men (Connell 1987; Schippers 2007; Williams 2002).

Compliance is present within emphasized femininity in patterns of fragility, enacting sociability over technical skills, and accepting the rule of the domestic realm over equal employment opportunity (Connell 1987). Empirical evidence of emphasized femininity has been explored through the contexts of young girls “trying on” gender (Williams 2002), hookup culture (Currier 2013), fashion magazines (Crane 1999), and even roller derby (Finley 2010). Young girls “try on” emphasized femininity through thinness and attractiveness, self-esteem through attachment to men, and compliance with patriarchal ownership (Williams 2002). Hookup culture provides an interactional perspective of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Women enact emphasized femininity through disregarding their sexual desires, ignoring their right to sexual pleasure, and being ambiguous or downplaying their sexuality (Currier 2013). These strategies allow them to appeal to the ideals of emphasized femininity and traditional sexual scripts, even when taking part in a hookup that rebels against traditional ideals of female purity (Currier 2013; Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013).

Media influence is considerable in the social construction of interactional emphasized femininity. When viewing alternative representations of femininity in fashion magazines, women reject exaggerated emphasized sexuality and strength characterized by feminine empowerment which deviates from traditional norms of femininity (Crane 1999). These findings support that women internalize the gender norms prescribed by the gender structure, particularly in

compliance with hegemonic masculinity. Emphasized femininity is not a performance that is done with the intention to subordinate other femininities, but to appease subordination by men (Connell 1987, 2005). However, the characteristics sustaining hegemonic masculinity are only effective when women exalt one form of compliant femininity over other femininities (Schipper 2007). The act of othering those women who fail to properly do femininity is synonymous with hegemony. In this context, hegemonic femininity establishes a legitimate hierarchy within multiple femininities (Schipper 2007). This reframes Connell's (1987) concept of dominant hegemonic masculinity and subordinated emphasized femininity to a model that considers "multiple and hierarchical configurations of masculinities and femininities" (Schipper 2007:94). This shift positions femininity away from inferiority to hegemonic masculinity and considers the "idealized relationship between masculinity and femininity" (Schipper 2007:94). Schipper (2007) refers to this othered practice of femininity as a "pariah" femininity, which is characterized by the refusal to be compliant within hegemonic masculinity.

When considering gender maneuvering with women in the roller derby subculture, Finley (2010), building on Schipper's (2002) theory, finds that derby girls enact alternate feminine scripts. In derby, women perform gender in a way that both supports and disrupts gender norms associated with hegemonic femininity. Derby girls create a "harder" hybrid femininity that serves to "redo" gendered expectations through aggressive sports behavior, alternate attractiveness, and consensual physical contact. Through these performative interactions, derby girls transform normative gender and sexual scripts (Finley 2010; Masters et al. 2013; West and Zimmerman 2009). This performance is seen as 'empowerment' to derby girls, but could also be a rejection of patriarchal owners and rebellion against the perceived danger and vulnerability associated with hegemonic femininity (Budgeon 2014; Finley 2010; Hollander 2001; 2002;

Schippers 2007). However, this ‘empowerment’ should be approached cautiously so that it does not reproduce hegemonic gender relations (Budgeon 2014). Feeling like an empowered “bad ass” woman that can “kick ass” and set firm boundaries for consent is a presentation of gender used to cope with the danger associated with being a woman (Finley 2010; Hollander 2001; 2002; Hunnicutt 2009; Schippers 2007). This type of identity construction is necessary for a patriarchal society that gives women the option of limited agency through patriarchal ownership or verbal and physical violence. With the threat of sexual assault being normalized within gender relations involving hegemonic masculinity, women must carefully consider identities and interactional spaces that are not vulnerable to violence.

Rape Culture

Rape culture draws on traditional gender and sexual scripts to create a culture that supports rape by reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics of hegemonic masculinity and control over women (Buchwald et al. 2005; Christianson 2015; Herman 1989). Rape culture is a society where sexual violence and assault, and the threat of both, are so integrated into the social fabric they are normative rather than deviant occurrences within emotional and physical relationships (Buchwald et al. 2005; Harding 2015; Pascoe 2007; Pascoe and Hollander 2016; Phillips 2016). Previous research focuses on rape culture supported by the hook-up culture within college student populations (Boswell and Spade 1996; Currier 2013; Grigoriadis 2017a; Reling et al. 2018). These studies find that rape culture sustains and reproduces gender power relations through hegemonic masculinity, rape myth acceptance, hookup culture, the media, language, and politics (Boswell and Spade 1996; Burnett 2016; Grigoriadis 2017a; King 2003; Reling et al. 2018; Suarez and Gadalla 2010).

Within hookup cultures on college campuses, males and females interact with gender and sexual scripts (Boswell and Spade 1996; Burnett 2016; Martin 2016; Reling et al. 2018). The presence of fraternities and sororities where heavy drinking, hooking up, little supervision, and low reporting of sexual assault on college campuses normalizes rape culture (Boswell and Spade 1996; Burnett 2016; Martin 2016; Reling et al. 2018). Low reporting works to protect the perpetrators and creates a sense of tolerance and leniency, reinforcing rape culture (Burnett 2016). Even activities like “girl watching” and “girl hunting” groom men to participate in collective strategies of impression management that frame men as masculine, dominant predators on the prowl and women as vulnerable prey (Grazian 2007; Quinn 2002). These strategies “mobilize” masculinity and objectify femininity in ways that socialize sexual harassment and rape culture (Grazian 2007; Quinn 2002). Without accountability, regular reporting, and fair punishment, rape culture remains embedded in collegiate life.

Other scholars claim that media cultivates rape culture (Harding 2015; Phillips 2016). Mass media and popular culture are so enmeshed in the social fabric that sexual assault representations are normalized through television shows, video games, news, and social media (Burnett 2016; Harding 2015; Phillips 2016). Pornography plays an instrumental role in socializing actors, particularly young men, through depictions of sexual violence on women’s bodies (Buchwald et al. 2005; Harding 2015). While acts are “consensual”, they contain powerful sexual messages that rape is sexy (Buchwald et al. 2005; Gavey 2005). Porn reinforces that women are consumable objects existing for men’s pleasure (Buchwald et al. 2005; Gavey 2005). The news uses legitimate sexual assaults to depict rapists as men who ‘made a mistake’ and the women they sexual assault as responsible for that mistake (Burnett 2016; Phillips 2016).

These media representations establish rape culture through obscure messages about rape myths, sexual predators, and their victims.

The victim label works to silence those who experience sexual assault through shame and stigma (Cahill 2001). The stigma of ‘rape victim’ classifies the actor experiencing sexual assault as deviant, or devalued by other actors in society (Goffman 1963; Mardorossian 2014). The ‘rape victim’ label creates an undesired “spoiled identity” (Gavey 2005; Goffman 1963; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Phillips 2016). Some women ‘consent’ to non-consensual sexual interactions to avoid rape stigma (Grigoriadis 2017; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Phillips 2016). Women would rather accept the experience of “unacknowledged rape” than to be labeled deviant and become a stigmatized ‘rape victim’ (Goffman 1963; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004). Some scholars find the framing of women as victims increases both gender inequality and rape stigma (Christianson 2015; Mardorossian 2014; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004).

Language referring to women as victims reinforces feminine passivity and the subjectivity of their agency as individuals (Cahill 2001; Mardorossian 2014). Such representations reinforce the binary of agent/victim which is often conflated with gender (Cahill 2001; Mardorossian 2014). One study found that educated white men significantly endorse rape myths and participate in sexism and victim-blaming behaviors and attitudes frequently (Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Rape myth acceptance allows men to participate in victim blaming to avoid accountability and reinforce gender power relations (Harding 2015; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Phillips 2016; Reling et al. 2018). Here, the structure reinforces normative scripts within interactions, by subordinating women with stigma through the internalization of rape myths.

When women accept rape myths, they dismiss non-consensual sex experiences as sexual assault (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004). The most prevalent myths are that sexual teasing invites rape and that rape does not occur if women do not fight back (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004), which correlate with the traditional gender and sexual scripts of resisting advances and showing sexual restraint (Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013). Rape myths become the stereotypes that “stigmatizers” use to justify the occurrence of sexual assault while preserving the gendered power structure (Goffman 1963; Risman 2004). To be “good guys” who “don’t rape”, men use rape myths to stigmatize women to divert the stigma of being a sexual predator away from themselves (Goffman 1963; Pascoe and Hollander 2016; Suarez and Gadalla 2010).

Another argument is the existence of rape culture directly threatens female agency, liberty, and equality (Cahill 2001; Mardorossian 2014). Through limited structural power, rape myths, and rape stigma, women experience less agency in sexual power relations and interactions (Cahill 2001; Gavey 2005; Mardorossian 2014). Within a rape culture, the binary remains that men have agency over themselves and others and women are victims of men’s agency (Cahill 2001; Mardorossian 2014). This body of literature shows how rape culture reinforces gender inequality through exploiting gender norms and agency. It supports the need for further research into how it may be disrupted through transformative interactional scripting processes. The academic exploration of consent, particularly within ‘deviant’ subcultures, could prove to be a place where agency is preserved and transforming normative scripts is possible.

“DOING” CONSENT

Consent is defined as the act of granting permission for any contact to happen or the agreement to engage in any activities with another person (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). Martin (2016) proposes the need for future theoretical development in concepts related to rape culture, such as consent. She contends that sociologists have focused too closely on violence and have not provided a meaningful conceptualization of topics like consent (Martin 2016). Legal scholars agree that there is a need to focus on consent in its relationship to sexual assault and to provide context for law and policy (Decker and Baroni 2011). Academics assert that sexual agency can be preserved through ‘enthusiastic’ affirmative consent, where “yes means yes” (Barker 2016; LaFrance, Loe, and Brown 2012; Mardorossian 2014). Others argue that consent, no matter how enthusiastic, is not enough to prevent power abuse in coercive sexual interactions (Cowling and Reynolds 2004; Fischel 2019; West 2002). Between consent and coercion is a “grey zone” where sexual agency is often misinterpreted as implicit consent and is a result of coercive gender power differences (Christianson 2015; Pitagora 2013). However, consent can be enacted in a manner that preserves agency, avoids coercion, and shapes the culture around it.

Agency and Consent

When individuals act independently making their own free choices, they are exercising human agency (Christianson 2015). However, agency is not removed from how society is constrained by structure. Enacting agency results in patterns, or habits, within social interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Once habitualized, agency is integrated into language and institutions which provide legitimation and are ultimately internalized and accepted by society (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This is a continuous loop that feeds back into itself. Giddens

(1986) draws on a wide range of theories, including Goffman, to argue that individuals have some form of agency to transform an interaction. For Giddens (1986), agency does not exist in the intentionality of an individual's actions but in their ability to do them, which relates agency to power. When agents engage in practices, they draw on resources; authoritative resources (status) and allocative resources (money and wealth) (Giddens 1986). An agent's capacity to do individual practices is influenced by their access to resources (Giddens 1986). Bourdieu (1986) and Mills (1956) might argue that this access to resources grants individual actors more power to exert their agency.

Within the gender structure, men have greater access to resources and power, and therefore have more agency (Butler 2004). This transfers to sexual agency, where men have more power and agency within sexual interactions and women are limited in compulsory sexual agency, or sexual free will (Burkett and Hamilton 2012). In these power negotiations, women report feeling compliant to the desires of men through implicit consent rather than having freedom of sexual agency (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Christianson 2015). This echoes the gendered power structure of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, where male sexual dominance and female compliance are mandatory (Connell 1987; Masters et al. 2013; Schippers 2007). To understand how gender and sexual scripts can be transformed through interactional consent processes, consent must be considered an agentic process. This requires parsing definitions and concepts of consent, separating implicit consent as reactionary to the gendered and sexual power structure and agentic consent as the free will of actors within physical and sexual encounters.

Consent is the act of granting permission for any contact to happen or the agreement to engage in any activities and interactions with another person (Beres 2007; Langdridge, Richards,

and Barker 2007; Mardorossian 2014). An individual cannot give consent if they are inhibited by drugs or alcohol and granting previous consent does not imply future or reoccurring consent (Barker 2016; Carmody 2003; Mardorossian 2014). Implying consent under these conditions is coercive and predatory (Carmody 2003, 2005). Gendered power dynamics and agency are actively and passively involved within physical and sexual interactions, even when consent is communicated (Fischel 2019; Grigoriadis 2017a; Langdridge et al. 2007). However, there are various kinds of consent.

Implicit consent is the most prevalent in normative physical encounters and is ‘implied’ or assumed unless withdrawn (Christianson 2015). Implicit consent is not necessarily nefarious by design. Within sexual interactions, actors will use non-verbal communication of consent through touching, kissing, and pausing before proceeding (Cowling and Reynolds 2004). However, implicit consent can support rape culture through enacting traditional gender and sexual scripts of male agency and female subordination (Buchwald et al. 2005). Often, sexual education programs will teach implicit consent as ‘no means no’, where consent is assumed to be given unless it is withdrawn. (Barker 2016; Mardorossian 2014). While saying no or withdrawing consent should end any contact, the absence of ‘no’ does not necessarily translate to consent (Harding 2015; Stryker et al. 2017). Implicit consent does not take power dynamics and coercion into consideration, which influence an actor’s decision to consent. The line between consent and coercion is fine but immutable (Pitagora 2013). To gain a better understanding of agentic consent, that line must be defined.

Consent versus Coercion

The prevalence of implicit consent creates a “grey area” in consensual sex and physical contact, where both parties may not clearly express their intentions and desires (Christianson 2015; Pitagora 2013). Acquaintance and date rape are most likely to occur with implicit consent due to the presence of coercive forces and power dynamics (Mardorossian 2014). This happens when an individual does not or cannot say ‘no’ due to intoxication or lack of agency required to deny consent due to differences in social power (Grigoriadis 2017; Mardorossian 2014).

Feminists and sex-critical scholars point to ‘enthusiastic’ affirmative consent as a measure of bodily and sexual autonomy which is symbiotic and promotes healthy physical contact (Carmody 2003; Barker 2016). Rather than implicit ‘no means no’ consent, ‘enthusiastic’ affirmative consent, employs the mantra ‘yes means yes’ to signal consent that is communicated and understood between partners (Barker 2016; Cowling and Reynolds 2004; Dixie 2017; Lafrance et al. 2012; Mardorossian 2014; Muehlenhard et al. 2016).

Normalizing the verbalization of consent within interactions is necessary. Without it, individuals are likely to fall back on normative implicit consent scripts (Muehlenhard et al. 2016). However, some criticize the language of ‘enthusiastic’ consent because a sexual interaction can be enthusiastically consented to, but still be unenjoyable (Fischel 2019). Consenting enthusiastically does not mitigate structural power differences, or vertical statuses, that place one actor with authority above another (Cowling and Reynolds 2004; Fischel 2019; West 2002). These power differences often play out in gendered sexual interactions. As with implicit consent, actors respond to patriarchal structures like hegemonic masculinity in ways that void their ability to give affirmative consent.

Women sometimes choose to consent to a sexual interaction as a transaction that “trades power for patronage” for economic stability or physical safety (Schwalbe et al. 2000:426; West 2002). While the interaction itself is consensual, it is conditional to the underlying gender power structure and therefore coercive, intentionally, or not. As subordinates, women may find themselves dependent on patriarchal owners for access to resources, however, this problematizes the ability of women to exercise agentic consent (Connell 1987; West 2002). Some scholars are critical of the consent versus coercion paradox. They find the perceived structural inability of women to exercise agentic consent as disempowering and creates a false dichotomy between consent (agency) and coercion (rape) (Fischel 2019; West 2002). This frames all sexual interactions that do not contain affirmative consent as rape, which is categorically false (West 2002). There is a need in the literature to address how to practice affirmative consent in a way that considers structures of power and actively works to prevent coercion (Christianson 2015; Grigoriadis 2017a; West 2002). Prevention of coercion while considering power dynamics work together to create agentic consent that avoids coercive vertical statuses and promotes individual agency within physical and sexual interactions. With the gender structure being unavoidable in broader society, researchers have considered how agentic consent is scripted and enforced within subcultural interactions.

Subcultural Consent Scripts

While cultural scripting processes are embedded in the gender structure (Wiederman 2005), subcultural scripting processes transgress or transform cultural norms (Haenfler 2012; Masters et al. 2013; Plante 2014). Subcultural communities, like BDSM, are framed as sexually deviant, however, extensive research suggests that agentic consent is a cornerstone of both BDSM practices and members of the community (Baldwin 1995; Bezreh, Weinberg, and Edgar

2012; Cagwin 2018; Carmody 2003; Klement, Sagarin, and Lee 2017; Langdridge et al. 2007; Pitagora 2013; Simula 2019b; Simula and Sumerau 2017; Williams 2006; Wiseman 1996).

BDSM spaces allow social actors to play with, negotiate, and transgress gender roles and sexual scripts within a framework of negotiated consent (Bauer 2008). While gender and consent are negotiated in BDSM, this community rejects gender as an organizing structure (Lindemann 2012; Newmahr 2011). This is seen not only in the insistence on consensual practices but also in BDSM activities where women and men can choose to be dominant or submissive. There is a need for future research to investigate how gender inequality is being consciously subverted or reproduced through consent scripting processes (Lindemann 2012; Newmahr 2011).

BDSM is a point of contention among feminist scholars. Radical feminists view BDSM as reinforcing and reproducing structural inequalities that harm women and prevent equality (Seidman 2003; Wright 2006; Simula & Sumerau 2017). However, sex-positive feminists believe BDSM serves to create the possibility for subverting gender inequalities to shake the institutions that perpetuate them (Banerjee, Merchant, and Sharma 2018; Foucault 1990; Simula and Sumerau 2017). The BDSM community disrupt gender and sexual scripts within interactions by loosening gender accountability and allowing fluidity (Bauer 2008; Hollander 2018; Newmahr 2011; Simula and Sumerau 2017). BDSM practices “may reveal nuances and complexities related to doing and undoing gender,” (Simula and Sumerau 2017:4; West and Zimmerman 1987). Some research finds both are true, BDSM communities support the deconstruction and reproduction of gender through consent practices (Cagwin 2018; Simula 2019b; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Others contend that dominance and submission found within BDSM are not gendered experiences (Seidman 2003). Unlike cultural gender and sexual scripts, the roles in BDSM are more negotiable and fluid from one scene to another (Langdridge et al.

2007; Seidman 2003). Rather than disempowering women's agency, subcultural consent scripts offer a critique of the social construction of cultural gender and sexual scripts. This is achieved through subcultural scripts' resistance and transformation of gender norms and accountability (Hollander 2018; Masters et al. 2013; Seidman 2003).

Cagwin (2018), in line with Simula and Sumerau (2017) found that BDSM participants' sexual scripts deliberately include an overcommunication of consent, suggesting that normative sexual scripts could benefit from including agentic consent in their social construction of sexual scripts (Pitagora 2013). A recent study found that BDSM participants have lower rape-supportive beliefs due to their norms of agentic consent and consent culture (Klement et al. 2017). However, there could be other reasons that contribute to lower rape-supportive beliefs in this community like ties to non-monogamous and non-heterosexual orientations or sexual liberation (Barker and Langdrige 2010; Klement et al. 2017). Researchers that study BDSM have considered stigma (Bezreh et al. 2012), gender and power dynamics (Lindemann 2012; Newmahr 2011; Simula 2019b; Simula and Sumerau 2017), media (Barker 2013:50; Tripodi 2017), and consent (Barker 2013; Bauer 2008; Cagwin 2018; Pitagora 2013; Simula and Sumerau 2017) However, there is very little literature on consent culture within subcultural communities. The limited research focuses on consent culture within the BDSM community and how consent is enforced (Cagwin 2018). Other research focuses on building consent culture more broadly beyond communities that practice it (Stryker et al. 2017). Future research is needed to discover the complexities of the social construction within consent culture through interactional processes. There is a lack of literature in sociology about affirmative 'agentic' consent and sexual agency. Future research should consider how consent could be an interactional tool to "undo" and "redo" gender.

Research has considered how other deviant subcultures beyond BDSM such as; goths and gamers (Haenfler 2012), non-monogamous/ polyamorous communities (Barker and Langdrige 2010; Harviainen and Frank 2018; Klesse 2006; Pitagora 2016) and paganism (Kraemer and Aburrow 2016) connect to a willingness to deviate from normative gender and sexual scripts through rebellion, experimentation, and consent. Some research has documented the confluence of polyamorous and kinky identities (Barker and Langdrige 2010; Harviainen and Frank 2018; Klesse 2006; Pitagora 2016). However, research has only begun to explore interactional deviant subcultural consent scripting that occurs within subcultural communities. There is much to be learned about how normative scripts impact interactional consent practices. Future research is needed to expand sociological knowledge about how these subcultural consent scripts are developed and how they become salient to subcultural identities.

Consent Culture

Previous research suggests that stigma associated with the BDSM community is often a result of stereotypes and misinformation through media (Tripodi 2017). BDSM practices deviate from normative behaviors and are considered by society to be bad, morally wrong, or more extremely, abusive (Carmody 2003; Wright 2006; Langdrige & Barker 2007; Simula 2017). Depictions of BDSM in media conflate it with abuse, crime, and/or violence (Weiss 2006). The BDSM community is critical of these representations, rejecting the abuse depicted and the lack of agentic consent present (Weiss 2006; Tripodi 2017). However, these representations of BDSM as negative deviance could indicate that behavior within it has the potential to upset the social order and is thus subjected to stigma and sanctioning (Heckert 1998). While BDSM practitioners do solicit and inflict pain, it is the hyper presence of agentic consent that prevents the interactions from becoming abusive (Pitagora 2013; Simula 2019b; Williams 2006). Due to this

abuse stigma, BDSM practitioners find it necessary to conceal their identity and practice secrecy to protect themselves from the criticism of the larger society (Wright 2006; Winnick & Bodkin 2008; Stiles & Clark 2011). This secrecy is detrimental to the individuals and to a society that might benefit from the ideologies of agentic consent that BDSM champions (Winnick & Bodkin 2008; Stiles & Clark 2011).

As a deviant community, BDSM individuals participate in agentic consent as a form of stigma management, allowing them to avoid abuse stigma (Bezreh et al. 2012). Cagwin (2018) found that BDSM uses positive deviance in overconformity to agentic consent enforced by social sanctioning and social control (Heckert and Heckert 2002; Hughes and Coakley 1991). However, participating in a consent culture transcends the need to avoid stigma. Within a consent culture, individual actors are held accountable for the interactional subcultural consent scripting processes valued by the community (Cagwin 2018; Simula 2019b; Stryker et al. 2017). These values insist that agentic consent is common practice in all interactions (Cagwin 2018; Holt 2016; Pitagora 2013; Stryker et al. 2017). Consent culture scripts and values create a space where individuals can transgress and transform normative interactions within sex and gender (Cagwin 2018; Newmahr 2011; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Though consent violations do occur, the community response moves away from individual blame to a community responsibility model (Simula 2019b). In this model, individuals are held accountable for their consent interactions as members of the community (Hollander 2018; Simula 2019b). Holt (2015) noted that violations of consent culture norms are internally enforced by dungeon monitors and community leaders, who blacklist violators from BDSM spaces using a “zero-tolerance policy” (Cagwin 2018). By transgressing hegemonic gender and sexual scripts and practicing community

accountability to agentic consent, BDSM could be a place where gender is “undone” or “redone”.

BDSM is not the only subculture where consent culture has been documented. Some research notes the confluence of BDSM and the polyamory community in the practice of consent culture (Frank 2013; Harviainen and Frank 2018; Pitagora 2016). Research finds that pagans also practice the subcultural scripts that create consent culture (Kraemer and Aburrow 2016). Recently, Cagwin (2018) found that most of their consent culture study participants held all three identities. Participants self-identified with BDSM, polyamory, and paganism. This could point to an intersection of identities that specifically construct consent culture and warrants further investigation. Future research is needed to extrapolate the correlation between consent culture and subcultural communities, like BDSM, polyamory, and paganism, where consent culture is heavily practiced and enforced.

METHODS

This research aims to investigate how gendered and sexual interactional scripting processes within the BDSM community shape the rules and guidelines that create a consent culture and how consent culture is an example of positive deviance. To explore this, it is important to consider the lived experiences of individuals who hold one or more subcultural identities where consent culture is valued. The BDSM community is a population that is unique in its representations of multiple subcultural identities that value consent culture, including sexual orientation, relationship styles, and even religion (Cagwin 2018; Frank 2013; Harviainen and Frank 2018; Pitagora 2016). Using qualitative interviews is ideal to study subcultural groups and to best capture the realities of consent culture as practiced by these populations.

I conduct this research using the social constructionist approach to grounded theory and the feminist standpoint perspective to allow patterns to emerge within the diverse responses of the sample. Grounded theory is an inductive research technique that allows for theory to evolve from the data collected during both the collection and analysis process (Glaser & Strauss 1967). I will use the inductive approach to grounded theory, which incorporates the assumptions that reality is both multiple in perspective and socially constructed (Charmaz 2008). This approach includes methods of grounded theory where the research process emerges from interaction with participants, however, it considers the positionality of the researcher in the data analysis (Charmaz 2008). The social constructionist approach uses a “co-construction” process. Here, both the researcher and the participant are actively engaged in the research process and are not abstract objects within it (Charmaz 2008). This approach allows me to consider not only my positionality and interaction in the research process but also the influence of my own perspectives and privileges (Charmaz 2008). This is vital when considering interactional scripting processes involving gender and sexuality within deviant, often stigmatized subcultures because the identities of the researcher and the participant are interacting within the research process. Being critical of this interaction allows for a richer understanding of interactional gender scripting processes and how they also impact the research process itself.

Modified grounded theory fits well with feminist methodologies in the standpoint epistemology. Standpoint perspective reveals structural androcentric biases and power relations between the researcher and the researched (Sprague 2016). These factors are important when considering gender scripting processes alongside the influence the researcher has within the process when the researcher is female-presenting. The standpoint perspective also considers the positionality of the researcher while exploring complex power dynamics that impact interactional

scripting and consent culture (Sprague 2016). Through this approach, I seek to understand the lived experiences of BDSM-identifying individuals. I am particularly interested in how the gender structure and interactional scripting process impact their experiences with consent culture.

My goal is to preserve everyone's agency within the research process by considering the potential impact of power, social location, and privilege between the researcher and the participant. To achieve this, I encourage participants to ask me any questions I ask them, either from the interview guide or otherwise. (Charmaz 2008; Sprague 2016). I also ask participants if there are questions that I should add or should not ask them to include them in the "co-construction" process. I want to reinforce to participants that they are not resources I am extracting information from, but rather collaborators in the research. I am interested in creating a dialog with participants to explore interactional scripting process and consent culture together to investigate larger structural issues.

Data Collection

After gaining IRB approval from Kent State University, I recruited participants who self-identify as belonging to the BDSM community in-person and online from a BDSM club, henceforth The Club, Fetlife, and in-person and online community groups. I attended group meetings and events in person to build rapport and trust in my initial round of interviewing in 2018 for my thesis research. I did network through Fetlife, which is the largest public BDSM social media-networking website, using pre-established group events and forum postings from the local group I made connections with in 2018 before I was informed that Fetlife did not allow researchers to use the platform to recruit for qualitative projects. Instead, I utilized online flyers for recruitment and shared them on social media and with previous participants to encourage

individuals who are involved in The Club and BDSM social groups to participate. I used networking within community groups in the same geographic area my thesis was conducted to connect with individuals willing to take part in a formal interview about their lived experiences. I did have two participants from outside this geographic area, both in the Northeastern part of the United States. Snowball sampling was used to allow participants to identify other individuals that would be interested in participating in interviews. I used audio recordings to document interviews and asked for verbal consent with unsigned consent forms to ensure participants' confidentiality in this study. After the interviews were transcribed and deidentified, I deleted the original audio recording.

I began collecting data for this dissertation in 2020. In the Spring of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, restrictions, and government mandates. Because this historic event changed all our lives forever, it subsequently also impacted this research. I struggled to recruit in the early stages of this research because I could not attend the same in-person events I went to in 2018 that allowed me to build rapport and trust with this community. Also, the community became fragmented because no one could attend in-person community events. The BDSM community thrives on interpersonal interactions, making it perfect for this research, but also incredibly vulnerable to the restrictions the Covid-19 pandemic produced. Many I spoke with during this time expressed sorrow, depression, and anxiety about losing their community. I believe that the consequences of the pandemic definitely impacted my recruitment and interviewing process, particularly because of the loss my sample was experiencing and because of screen burnout that many began to experience during this time with the heavy influx of virtual meetings.

Sample

My sample was collected over two rounds of interviewing. I conducted qualitative face-to-face interviews in-person and online and the self-administered demographic surveys over a 3-month time frame for Round 1 interviews and a one-year time frame for Round 2 interviews. I participated in 36 total interviews, 18 in each round, with individuals who are over the age of 18. The Round 1 interviews were completed entirely in-person and Round 2 were completed entirely online due to the Covid-19 pandemic via Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom depending on availability for the participant. I did interview seven people from Round 1 again in Round 2. All demographics were self-reported in an open-ended format so that individuals could freely identify themselves. As Table 1 shows, participants were between the ages of 19 and 55 across the total sample. In Round 1, the age range of participants was between 19 and 51, and in Round 2 the range was slightly older at 23 and 55. The average age for the total sample was 31. In Round 1 the average age was 32 years old and for Round 2 was 34 years old. The total sample was slightly older with 12 participants in the 19-29 range and 24 participants the in 30-55 range. Though my participants seemed to understand the difference between biological sex and gender, when I asked them their genders, most (30) identified themselves as 'Female' or 'Male'. Of the six participants who indicated a gender, four indicated that they were 'Non-binary' or 'Femme' and three indicated they were 'Transgender' (two men and one woman). Additionally, one transgender woman identified as male on the survey, but identified herself to me as a woman during the interview process.

Most (34) identified as white, with one describing themselves as Native American, one as Mixed race (Blank and White), one as Latino, and one as Black. The total sample was fairly educated with all but one individual having had some college or trade school training. Almost

half (17) held college degrees with one associate degree, ten bachelor's degrees, and six master's degrees. Most (29) identified as being 'Polyamorous' or 'Poly'. Eight participants identified that they were 'Married' and 'Polyamorous'. Far more (15) claimed to be 'Partnered' and 'Polyamorous', and three of those also shared they were 'Divorced'. Alternatively, three participants claimed to be 'Engaged' and 'Polyamorous', one was 'Dating' and 'Polyamorous', and two were 'Single' and 'Polyamorous'. Of those (6) who did not identify as 'Polyamorous', four claimed they were 'Divorced', 'Separated', or 'Single' and one said they were 'Dating' and 'Monogamous'. Interviewees were diverse in their religious affiliations, however, most (13) identified as being Pagan/Wiccan. Aside from this, seven participants identified as 'Non-religious', six as 'Christian/Catholic', two as 'Atheist', and two as 'Unsure.' The remaining six participants identified as other affiliations ('Spiritual', 'Agnostic', 'Pantheistic', 'LaVeyan Satanism', and a mix of 'Agnostic/Pagan/Secular Buddhism'). As shown in Figure 1, most of the sample across both rounds of interviewing identify as LGBTQ+. Only six people in the sample identified as 'straight' or 'heterosexual.' Almost half of the sample identified as 'Queer' (7), 'Pansexual' (7), or some combination of these identities (2). All participants identified as being lower-middle to middle class.

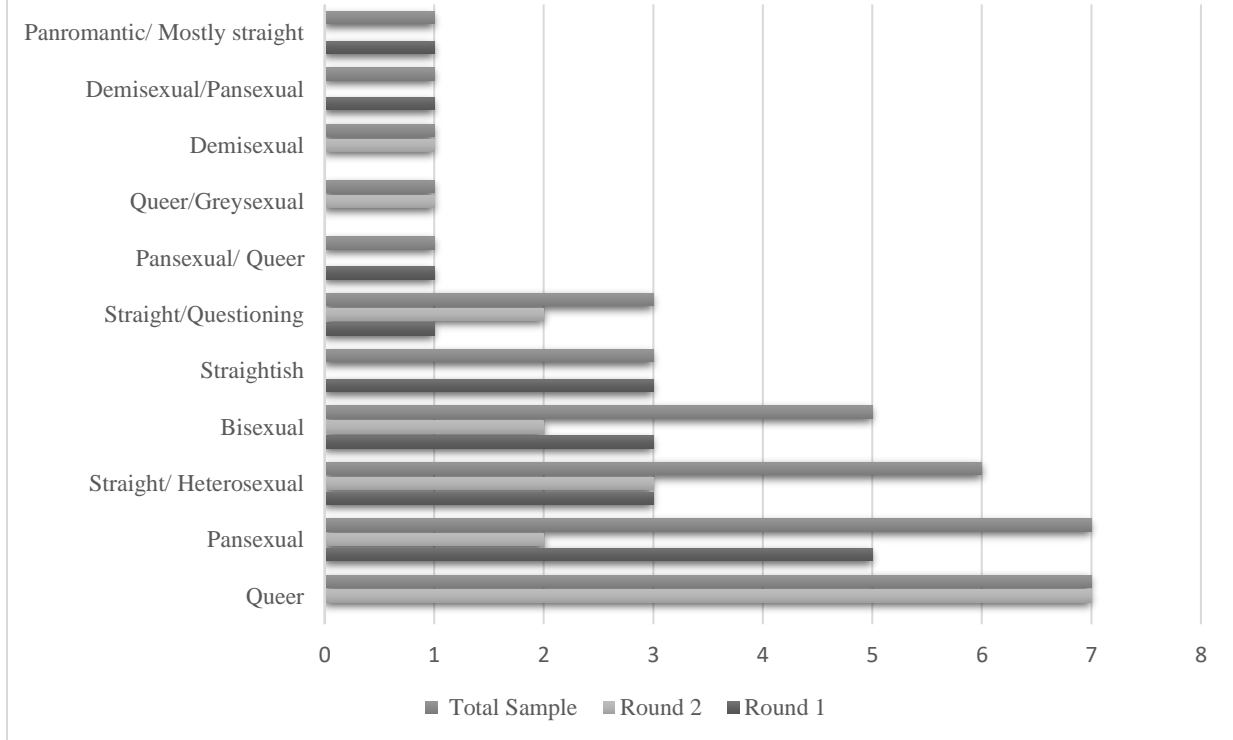
TABLE 1: Participant Demographics

	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>** Age</i>	<i>BDSM Identity</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Relationship Status</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Employment</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>
Round 1	Abel	42	Dominant/ Daddy	Male	Married/ Poly	Graduate School	Small Business Owner	Non-Religious	Straight/ Questioning
	Alanon	40	Dominant/ Top	Male	Married/ Poly	Some college	Uber Driver	Pagan	Pansexual
	Bear/ Will	31	Dominant/ Top	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Technical Writer	Non-Religious	Straight
	Carole	51	Submissive/ Bottom	Female	Separated	Bachelor's	Banking	Christian	Straight
	Delores	19	Dominant/ Switch	Female	Engaged/ Poly	Some college	Unemployed	Pagan	Bisexual
	Esmerelda	28	Switch	Female	Married/ Poly	Some college	University Administrative Asst.	Pagan	Pansexual/ Queer
	Gus	21	Slave	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Some college	Student	Pagan	Demi/Pansexual
	James	42	Switch	Male	Divorced	Associate's	Paramedic	Catholic	Straightish
	Jay	38	Dominant	Male	Partnered/ Poly	Bachelor's	Demographic	Spiritual	Straightish
	Jessica Valkyrie	28	Dominant/ Top	Female	Engaged/ Poly	Trade School	Sales Manager	Wiccan	Bisexual
	Kyle	46	Dominant/ Top	Male	Married/ Poly	Bachelor's	Traveling Health Screener	Catholic	Straight
	Luna	30	Submissive	Female	Married	Some college	Convenience Store Clerk	Pagan	Pansexual
	Mack	27	Switch	Male	Partnered/ Poly	Bachelor's	Chemical Technician I	Non-Religious	Straightish
	Michelle	28	Submissive	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Trade School	Self-Employed	Agnostic	Bisexual
	Moirra	30	Submissive	Non-Binary	Single/ Poly	Master's	Teacher	Spiritual Hindu	Pansexual
	Ostris	21	Switch	Male	Partnered/ Poly	High School	Flooring Technician	Christian	Panromantic/ Mostly Straight
	Sage	30	Dominant	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Bachelor's	Admin Work, Clinic Worker	Atheist	Pansexual
	Trinie/ Nico	21	Submissive	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Some college	Retail- Comic Shop	Unsure	Pansexual
Round 2	Abel *	46	Dominant/ Daddy	Male	Married/ Poly	Master's	Pro Sales Manager	Non-Religious/ Spiritual	Straight/ Questioning
	Carey	32	Switch/ Bottom-leaning FTM/ Man	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Trade School	Welder	Pagan/ Other	Queer
	Carole *	55	Submissive/ Bottom	Female	Separated/ Poly	Bachelor's	Banking	Christian	Straight
	Claire	35	Switch	Woman	Partnered/ Poly	Bachelor's	Graduate Student	Pantheistic	Queer
	Edward	33	Submissive/ Bottom	Male	Single	Master's	Engineer	Pagan	Bisexual
	Emma	23	Switch	Female	Dating/ Poly	Bachelor's	Teacher	Non-Religious	Queer
	Esmerelda *	28	Switch	Femme/ Non-binary	Partnered/ Poly	Some college	Dominatrix/ Sex Worker	Pagan	Queer
	Hades	33	Dominant	Male/ man/ Cis	Partnered/ Poly	Some college	Sous Chef	Agnostic/ Pagan/ secular Buddhism	Heterosexual
	Helen	42	Dominant/ Top	Female	Partnered/ Poly	Bachelor's	Homemaker/ House manager	Pagan	Queer
	Kat	32	Switch	Female	Single	Master's	Graduate Instructor	Non-Religious/ Other	Bisexual
	Lily	30	Switch/ Submissive	Female	Partnered/ Poly/ Divorced	Trade School	Beauty industry	Pagan/ Wiccan	Pansexual
	Luna*	33	Submissive	Female	Partnered/ Poly/ Divorced	Some college	Stay-at-home Mom	Pagan	Pansexual
	Nick	46	Dominant/ Top	Male	Partnered/ Poly/ Divorced	Bachelor's	Computer Operator	Catholic/ Spiritual	Straight/ Questioning
	Nico/ Trixie*	25	Submissive	Man	Married/ Poly	Some college	Retail- Comic Shop	Unsure	Queer
	Rose	25	Switch/ Bottom	Femme	Entangled/ Poly	Master's	Research Asst/ Higher Education	Atheist	Queer/ greysexual
	Squeek	31	Switch/ Soft Dom	Male	Single/ Poly	Some college	Carpenter	Lavayan Satanism	Demisexual
	Valkyrie/ Jessica *	32	Dominant/ Top	Female	Married/ Poly	Trade School	Sales Manager	Celtic Pagan	Queer
	Will/ Bear*	35	Dominant/ Top	Male	Dating/ Monogamous	Bachelor's	Technical Writer	Non-Religious	Straight

* Participants took part in Round 1 and Round 2 interviews. Pseudonyms changed based on participants comfort. Bolded name/ Round 2 name will be used.

** Pseudonyms were self-selected by participants or randomly selected. All names have been changed.

Figure 1: Participants Sexual Orientation



Interviews

The interviews for both Round 1 and Round 2 contained two parts, a face-to-face in-depth interview, and a self-administered demographic survey. The face-to-face interview and self-administered survey components were administered in one interaction with the participant. The interview for Round 1 covered three topic areas: sexual history, BDSM and consent, and wrap-up questions. Round 2 interviews covered the same three topic areas in a different order: BDSM and consent, sexual history, and wrap up questions. Round 2 did contain questions not included in Round 1 about gender experiences to capture that data better than I was able to in Round 1. Interviews in both rounds were semi-structured. I utilized an interview guide to maintain both my own and participants' focus on research questions. I did use probing questions beyond the interview guide to gain a richer understanding of participant experiences. The demographic survey for both rounds focused on two topic areas: background history and family history. I gave the demographic portion at the end of the interview questions. This survey served to situate individuals in their unique social locations and provide context to their interview responses. The surveys consisted of 20 qualitative, open-ended questions and took no longer than 30 minutes to complete. All Round 1 interviews took place in a private study room at a local library to protect anonymity. Round 2 interviews took place online, in a virtual face-to-face format from my office. I encouraged individuals to also participate from a private location, many shared they were in their homes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Each interview did not exceed 90 minutes for both the interview and demographic survey.

Coding and Analysis

As I recruited in The Club and at kink events in Round 1, I took field notes and jottings to capture the overall setting and feel of the social environment where BDSM-identifying folks

regularly interact (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). I did casually observe interactions during my recruitment by the nature of being present in the space, but those observations only served to inform descriptions of the environment (Emerson et al. 2011; Lofland et al. 2006). I used environmental observations gained during recruitment to craft the “thick description,” or a detailed account of my experiences in the field, found at the beginning of Chapter 2 (Emerson et al. 2011; Geertz 1988). This thick description was vital to set the stage on which all the data would play out. Considering the symbolic interactionism in this research, it proved to be an important analytical tool. I also took notes after interviews to capture any observations during interviews in both rounds. I found this helpful to capture and describe body language, facial expressions, and emotional expressions connected to the data (Emerson et al. 2011).

I transcribed data using Otter.ai software to assist in the process. I wrote analytic memos throughout the transcription process in both rounds and noticed patterns and themes throughout the data. I coded using Atlas.ti software, using modified grounded theory to consider these initial patterns in the data (Charmaz 2008). Once patterns surfaced, I used open coding to consider each theme and recoded to confirm patterns throughout each round of interviews (Emerson et al. 2011; Lofland et al. 2006). I then utilized focused coding to make larger connections between the major themes and the literature through extensive and reflective memos (Emerson et al. 2011; Lofland et al. 2006). Finally, I analyzed each theme and connection to concepts in the literature across each interview and each round of interviews to consider similarities and differences among respondents (Emerson et al. 2011; Lofland et al. 2006). This allowed me to ensure the pattern was reliable, repeated, and rooted in the data, and that subsequent conclusions are accurate and valid. Major themes in Round 1 included: perceptions of consent, consent as stigma prevention, and the gender-power paradox. Exploring these themes in my thesis research led me

to be even more curious about consent culture, particularly the interactional and gendered aspects. In Round 2, the prevailing themes included the social construction of consent culture, consent scripts, “doing consent”, “redoing” gender, “the empowered submissive”, the fetishization of minority groups, and the gender structure-consent culture paradox.

Personal Standpoint

Because I follow the feminist standpoint perspective and use it for this research, I must disclose my own personal standpoints and/or biases that may have unintentionally impacted the research. This research grew out of an observation assignment that I did for my undergraduate research methods, though it has morphed and challenged me in ways I could not imagine since then. I had access to this group and space because I am a member of the BDSM community and have been (and am currently) a member of The Club since I was 18 years old. The Club was one of the first public social environments I experienced as an adult. I am a nonbinary person who was assigned female at birth. I have experienced substantial gender-based harassment during interactions in social spaces since I hit puberty. The Club was a special place for me because within its walls I could dance and laugh and be and not have to worry about sexual harassment based on my body and perceived gender. I attended other clubs and I noticed that people, particularly men, would touch me and dance against me without asking. I found this incredibly strange and uncomfortable coming from a place like The Club where that was never okay or allowed. I stopped attending these types of bars, clubs, and social spaces because of that unwanted behavior. I was acquaintances with or socially aware of a few of my participants (Luna, Helen, Valkyrie, Lily, and Kyle) before my research. This could have influenced their decision to participate or their decision to disclose some information. While I have never been physically or romantically involved with any of my participants, I recognize that my personal

experiences in connection to individuals and this community has likely skewed my desire to do this research and maybe even my perception of the community itself. However, I would like to add that I have been removed from active participation in the community since I began this research out of an abundance of caution. I have strived throughout this research to remain critical and approach analysis as unbiasedly as possible. Because of this, I discovered many new things and experiences during this research that were contrary to my assumptions and my own experience.

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

In the following chapters, I discuss the results of my analysis. In Chapter 2, I provide thick descriptions of the physical space to set the stage for how interactions place within it. I explore how the BDSM community socially constructs consent culture by creating, maintaining, and reinforcing consent scripts within interactions through rules, education, reputation, accountability, and social control. In Chapter 3, I discuss how interactional consent scripts provide the basis for “doing” consent similarly to how individuals “do” gender. Additionally, I discuss how doing consent can contribute to redoing gender and femininity for women and people who identify beyond the gender binary. In Chapter 4, I consider how doing consent impacts men and how it can redo masculinity. However, I also explore the concept of the “fake toxic hyper” dom, and how they leverage gender power to avoid accountability for doing consent. In Chapter 5, I discuss the struggle to maintain a consent culture subculture in the gender structure. The mismatch in ideologies and the prevailing power of the gender structure create confusion and disconnect for individuals in BDSM. I include empirical examples of this in “the empowered submissive”, “topping from the bottom”, “femmes submitting to masculinity and dominating femininity”, and “the fetishization of women, transpeople, and people of color.”

Finally, in Chapter 6, I give an overview of the findings in each analytical chapter and how they contribute to or expand the existing sociological literature. I also discuss the limitations of this research and make suggestions for future research efforts in this area of study

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CONSENT CULTURE THROUGH INTERACTIONAL CONSENT SCRIPTS

INTRODUCTION

The Club is an unassuming, old brick building that is painted industrial grey. It sits at the end of the block nestled between a small gym and a bike shop in a historic district of a once significant city of the Confederacy. There is a single blacked-out window, obscuring the curious glances of people passing by on the brick-paved sidewalks, making its presence in the popular clubbing and bar district a mystery to the raucous groups of people making their way from the parking area to their various destinations. Over the years it has developed a reputation for hosting weird sex parties, word of mouth and rumors have been exacerbated by the sightings of the patrons coming and going in all manner of costume, leather, lace, and lingerie. The solid metal door is appropriately painted caution tape yellow.

Upon entry, music thumps loudly, pulsing through the entire space. A small vestibule/reception area is walled off from the rest of the club space, except for the black velvet curtain at the end of the wall, where a bouncer stands, sometimes arms crossed, sometimes briefly chatting with those entering. There is a chalkboard wall to the left with the weekly events and the check-in area is to the right. The walls in this area are painted black, it is dark aside from a small desk lamp on the check-in desk. Next to the check-in desk is a coat check area, where

you can buy a hanger or cubby to store your belongings for the night. The check-in process includes the “door person”, usually a younger conventionally attractive woman, but not always, asking for your membership number/card. To enter this club, you must be a member or the guest of a member, at least on Friday and Saturday nights. Membership is attained by filling out an application, providing identification, and having an established member serve as a sponsor, someone already in the community, who can vouch that you are a safe person. If you are a guest, you must show your photo identification. If you are under 21, they use a permanent marker to draw large circles on each of your hands to indicate you may not be served alcohol. Members may bring two guests who act and dress appropriately, extra guests must be approved in advance by management. You are always fully responsible for your guests and may not leave them alone in The Club. Members and guests are expected to be in “dress code” including; appropriate attire for the themed event of the evening, fetish wear including (but not limited to): liquids, corsets, leather, vinyl, PVC, platforms, collars, cuffs, fishnets, satin/lace, chains, knotwork, roleplay gear, boots, blacklight reactive clothing, or goth/industrial night standards consisting of a dress or button up in standard black and dress jeans or slacks. No one is admitted outside of the dress code on weekend nights. However, weekdays are not considered members only and are more casual and flexible in terms of clothing and do not require membership for all events.

The door person will ask if your guests understand “the rules” and even if you answer yes, they recite the rules to the guest anyway. No touching without consent. Do not touch the cage dancers for any reason. Consent is mandatory. Absolutely no photography inside of The Club, even in the bathroom. Do not interrupt a scene for any reason. Be courteous, respectful, and inclusive always. If you do not follow these rules, you may be removed from the event, temporarily or permanently banned, or have your membership temporarily or permanently

revoked at the discretion of The Club's management. Once the rules are verbally agreed to, the curtain is pulled back, and you can enter.

The music is louder now. It is dark. The walls, ceiling, and surfaces are painted black. The floors are red brick, and the ceiling is open with exposed rafters and vent work painted black. The smell of cigarette smoke, sweat, and faint bar food is in the air. Immediately to the left when you walk in is the DJ booth, where a person sits over the mixer and other electronics by a small desk lamp. There is a pool table in front of the DJ booth and an open area with exposed beams and rafters that are generally used for rope play and suspension scenes, affectionately called "the rope pit". Past this area is the dance floor, which is allotted a large portion of the total space in the room. On the dancefloor, lights flash and at least a few people are generally always dancing. Depending on the popularity of the song, the dancefloor could also be completely packed with bodies. On opposite corners of the dance floor are two cages. The one in the front is enclosed and dancers who are hired by The Club rotate in and out for sets. They sway, dip, spin, and grind to goth/industrial electronic music in a rhythmic dance. The cage dancers might be the first thing you notice when you come in. Their lit cages and limited, albeit themed, clothing give the immediate vibe of sensuality, seduction, and unobtainable exoticism. The other cage is open for patrons to use for dancing or scenes. Another prominent feature in the opposite corners of the dance floor is two Saint Andrew's crosses, which are two large thick beams of black painted wood crossed over each other like a person-sized X with restraints for arms and legs at each point. On one side of the dance floor, there is a small bar seating area, encouraging attendees to watch the festivities on the dancefloor and the surrounding area.

Past the dancefloor, there is a long, well-stocked bar on the left side of the room with two small televisions on either end. They normally play movies that correspond to the night's theme

whether it be horror, cult classics, or superhero movies. The bar is typically very busy. Here, you can order all manner of alcohol and food, with vegan/vegetarian options and nonalcoholic and themed beverages available as well. The bartenders are young, attractive, and always in costume to the theme of the evening. Behind the bar, they also have a display case with cigarettes and clove cigars for sale. Although smoking is not allowed in establishments in most places, the private nature of the club allows the rule to be overlooked by state health inspectors. Past the bar is the kitchen where you can watch as food is being prepared for hungry club-goers.

Across from the bar is a large open seating area, with booth seating facing outward along the walls, ample tables and chairs, and black-painted picnic tables. People gather in groups around the tables to talk, sip drinks, or nibble at the food served on metal cafeteria-style trays. However, on BDSM theme nights, these tables and chairs are removed to make room for demo stations. One way to visualize a demo station is to think of sampling stations set up throughout grocery or big box stores; there you can have a little taste of something new before purchasing the whole product. Each demo station exhibits a different type of kink or BDSM play. These can range dramatically or be very specific to the theme of the event. A broader event might include rope play, electricity play, piercing or knife play, fire cupping, wax play, or impact play such as flogging, whipping, caning, etc. Each demo station has a member of The Club who has expertise in a specific kink-related skill, performing the skill as a service top or bottom. Clubgoers are invited to approach each station and sign up for a spot to play. Once it is their turn to play, they negotiate what will transpire in the scene and what they want to get out of it. They discuss consent, safewords, and aftercare and then proceed with the scene.

Behind the seating/demo area are the restrooms, which are separately labeled with symbols for Venus (female) and Mars (male) corresponding with the binary words “Women” and “Men”.

Each has a few stalls with toilets, a urinal in the “Men’s”, one sink, and a caddy on the sink with an assortment of publicly accessible items like hair spray, combs, mints/mini mouthwash, condoms, dental dams, lube, hand sanitizer, and more. The last space in The Club is at the very back behind a heavy black curtain, dubbed “the backroom”. This space is a more private area, but anyone within the club can typically access the room.

Once past the curtain, there is a swing in the middle of the room with a blue seat and shiny, thick metal chains, like those you would see at a playground but more substantial to hold the weight of adults. Around the perimeter of the room are couches with black wood frames, red leather upholstery, and silver metal riveting on the border between leather and wood. In one corner is another St. Andrew’s cross and, in the other, a kneeling bench used for spanking, impact, or other play. There is a projector casting the same movie from the bar area onto the wall and one single door on the right that leads to a large single-stall bathroom with symbols indicating all genders and handicap accessible with the word “Restroom” in all caps. Inside this bathroom is a sink and toilet, but also a table with a caddy full of similar implements as the other two restrooms. Next to the caddy is a package of sanitizing wipes. Beside the table, there is also a larger black leather bench in the bathroom with a reputation for being a private spot to hook up.

The Club is a quasi-public and pivotal physical space in the local BDSM scene. Sundays through Thursdays, The Club operates events such as local music acts, drag and burlesque performances, live Rocky Horror Picture Show reenactments, comedy shows, games, movies, and arts and crafts nights. It serves as a community hub for many different groups of marginalized people or those with alternative or fringe interests from LGBTQ+ specific events to community artisan markets for pagans and witches. During the week The Club also hosts different BDSM groups, generally in the back room, where groups will hold meetings called

“munches” which facilitate socialization through hanging out, eating, and talking. During this time, groups also teach classes for continued education on BDSM-related topics such as negotiation, consent 101, and others. Other support groups sometimes meet at The Club as well, often focusing on specific sections of the kink population such as submissives, tops, littles, or owners/pets. There is often a heavy amount of cross-over between membership in various groups, with many intersections of folks identifying as kinky, queer, and pagan/Wiccan/alternative religions in this space. The physical space becomes paramount for this overlap to take place. Here, members can explore and play with identity, interests, and community. Here, multiple identities converge, overlap, and interact creating the perfect environment for consent culture to thrive.

In this chapter, I explore how the BDSM community creates, maintains, and reinforces consent culture through interactional scripting mechanisms. I analyze how this community uses social control and accountability to establish the rules of consent culture and the expectations for interactions and behaviors that make up consent scripts. I also explore the formal and informal educational components used to teach consent and what role education and community participation play in creating and maintaining consent scripts. Lastly, I investigate how self-policing, accountability, reputation, and informal and formal sanctions reinforce consent culture.

The Rules of Consent Culture and How to Play the Game

While The Club is essentially a bar that hosts publicly available themed events, it is also available primarily to BDSM groups for private functions. To attend a private function hosted by TNG or one of the other local groups, you are required to preregister on Fetlife, a social media website that is like a kinky version of Facebook. TNG, or The Next Generation, are common

BDSM groups found in many cities around the country. These groups are age-restricted to 18–35-year-old kinky folks to create a safe space for newer people to learn among peers who are more likely to have shared experiences. The goal of TNG groups is to have a space for newer individuals in the BDSM/kinky scene to learn and grow alongside peers and slightly more established people in the community. This allows for mentorship and for those who are newer to learn how to practice BDSM/kink within physical spaces in a way that is deemed best practices by the community. Other local and national groups do not have age restrictions requiring everyone to be 18 or over. On Fetlife, you can join a variety of local groups and have access to attending events either in quasi-public places, like The Club, or private parties that are typically held at various group members' homes and properties. Once you sign up for a private event at The Club, you arrive and check in the same place as a regular themed night, however with your username from the Fetlife registration instead of your member number. After the designated check-in time, the door is locked and no one else may enter the space, even if they registered. Also, if you leave for any reason, you are not allowed reentry to the party.

During these parties, the lights are brighter, and the music is softer, making the sound of people talking, implements striking flesh, and other such scene sounds more audible. Also, clothing is completely optional once the event starts. The state's liquor agency does not typically allow for this, but because this is a private club and a private event, it is allowed. They do serve alcohol at the events, but not from behind the bar. Typically, there is another bar set up away from the usual one and all the accounted for regular business liquor bottles and taps don a paper cup to indicate that they are not being used for the party. It is unclear who supplies alcohol for the events, but it is likely provided by the groups and not The Club itself.

Before the official start of the party, a leader will generally have everyone assemble around the dance floor, will climb atop an “A” frame step ladder, and will recite the house rules through a bullhorn: consent is mandatory full stop, engage in Safe, Sane, and Consensual (SSC) and Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK) (Langdridge et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2014). Red is the universal safe word, do not interrupt a scene, wipe down/sanitize anything touched during a scene that could have encountered body fluids, barriers are mandatory for any kind of penetrative play, and what the Dungeon Monitors (DM’s) say goes. They will be observing all scenes during the event, and they will interrupt a scene if there is a safety concern. If you do not follow these rules, you will be asked to leave.

They begin with the most important rule, consent is mandatory. Agency, or consent, is highly valued in the kink community. SSC and RACK are the guiding principles of BDSM play and the foundation of consent culture scripts in many ways. Delores was only 19 at the time of our interview in 2018. Already, she has a strong understanding of consent and concepts like SSC and RACK. Delores is a dominant leaning switch identifying bisexual woman and she shares:

There is safe, sane, and consensual, but then there is Risk Aware Consensual Kink, and like both of those things involve consent which just goes to prove how important consent is to the BDSM world. Because both of them are like yeah, you kind of need to have permission to do something before you do it.

Consent is vital to any interaction and should include the risks associated with the interaction.

Any interaction should be agreed to with judgment uninhibited by coercion, alcohol, drugs, or anything else that prevents anything short of enthusiastic consent. Most people I interviewed

(See Chapter 1 for methods) discuss how they do not find it safe or moral to participate in BDSM scenes with intoxicated people or while intoxicated themselves whether it be recreational drugs

or alcohol. Squeek, a soft dom-identifying demisexual cis man, tells me firmly, “You cannot consent if you’re drunk.” He goes on to explain:

It doesn't matter if you've had half a shot or 12 fucking beers, whatever. If you are under the influence of any substance, whether it be drugs, alcohol, anything fucking anything. If your mental state is altered, you cannot give consent.

The influence of alcohol or recreational drugs could potentially allow a person to be coerced into doing something they may not do if they were sober, and coercion of any kind is unacceptable. A few people indicate that having a drink or two or that some marijuana specifically was fine, particularly if consent and scene negotiations were covered ahead of time while sober. The play space is usually a bar after all. For some, a small amount of alcohol helps with nerves in a social environment. Edward, a submissive identifying bisexual cis man tells me, “I would say that a very small, a very small amount helps a person get relaxed, but I would never, I mean, I pretty much never have more than like two drinks.” There is some tolerance for alcohol as social lubrication in the kink community. But how do people know how much alcohol is too much?

Helen explains that the consent negotiation process is a vital place to gather all kinds of information, including cues on intoxication. She shares, “I’m having a conversation. But during this, I’m also checking them. I’m seeing how responsive they are like, how attuned they are...” She explains that if someone seems intoxicated through verbal or visual cues, she will not play with them and has “let them know, like, you are too inebriated and fucked up for this.” Emma agrees and points to DM’s as another way to determine alcohol consumption. Emma tells, “The DM’s are pretty good about watching people and seeing if you look too wobbly. You know, if it’s clear that you’re drunk, you’re definitely too drunk to be doing kink.” Agents of social control like community members and DM’s serve pivotal roles in policing interactions to enforce consent scripts. She goes on to say, “Alcohol can really change your consent. I know after the

first shot, I'm way more likely to have a second shot. And on it goes... I don't really play with people who drink a lot.” Others agree with Emma and do not play with anyone under the influence of any substance, as it could lead to safety issues due to heightened or diminished pain sensitivity. Valkyrie, a dominant identifying queer cis woman, has served as a leader of various kink groups and has been in the community for many years. She explains:

You can accidentally cause harm to someone because you are... Impact, for instance, you're hitting someone. They might not be able to feel exactly what you're doing, because they're under the influence until that influence wears off, and you've accidentally done harm. I just don't feel comfortable with anyone that could have any of that not self-awareness.

Beyond safety concerns, most people believe that consent given under the influence of alcohol, recreational drugs, or even interpersonal power dynamics prohibits coercion-free negotiation before a scene. This is a strong departure from rape culture, where alcohol is blamed as the cause or used as an excuse for sexual assaults and contributes to rape myths and victim blame (Abbey et al. 2003; Boswell and Spade 1996; Buchwald et al. 2005; Christianson 2015; Herman 1989; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Reling et al. 2018; Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Consent culture actively repels the ideologies about alcohol and other drugs perpetuated by rape culture through hyper-conformity to consent scripts. True agentic consent means considering the risks, discussing safety and boundaries, and still wanting to participate in an activity because it is desirable without any outside influence, including alcohol or recreational drugs.

The BDSM community has many different interactional tools to communicate consent. This group uses the stoplight consent method because it is easy to use and well known in this community (Cagwin 2018; Dunkley and Brotto 2020; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Whenever a scene is being conducted the stoplight consent method provides continuous communication of ongoing consent within the interaction. Gus explains, “So, most normal safe words situations are

[the] traffic light system. So, there is green for go, yellow for slow down, or check in with me, or what's going on, and red for stop. That is what I usually use." Stoplight, or traffic light, consent is a simplistic form of verbal consent communication. Green means everything is going well. Yellow means check-in, an adjustment may be necessary, and red means all interactions stop, and the scene is over. This system is so ubiquitous within interactions in this community that "red" is known as the universal safe word. Everyone knows that red means stop immediately, consent has been revoked.

A huge part of agency is bodily autonomy (Christianson 2015; Stryker et al. 2017). Many people I interviewed tell me that they are regularly tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is common in the kink community. Some share that they feel discussing STI test results is a part of informed consent. They believe that people deserve to consider each other's STI status before they consent to play with that person, whether the play is sexual or not.

Esmerelda, a switch-identifying queer nonbinary femme, shares:

I think it's part of informed consent, specifically, because you can't consent to what you don't know or don't talk about. If I go home and have sex with a stranger, from a bar without protection, and neither of us talk about testing or anything. Like that's not informed consent for either of us. So yeah, I do feel like safer sex is part of our culture.

Often individuals get tests and share the results with their play partners before they engage in any activities that could involve bodily fluids. Regular STI testing is not normative in society because of the stigma and shame associated with casual sex outside of monogamous relationships (Barth et al. 2002; Hood et al. 2011). Due to this stigma and shame, STI testing is not usually proactive and tends to be a more reactionary process. These attitudes are pervasive enough that some people I interviewed even describe how providers seemed confused or concerned when they came in for regular testing. Edward shares his experiences with testing:

I feel like the doctor's attitude was that you don't get tested unless you're actually experiencing symptoms. They were a little bit confused why I wanted to be tested without having any symptoms or any specific reason to believe that I've been infected by something. I just say, well, it's been six months. So, I just want to get a new test. I'm just trying to be safe here.

Regular STI testing is just one of the precautions taken to ensure all parties maintain their agency and bodily autonomy in interactions. Extra care is also taken to sanitize play spaces and surfaces that may encounter fluids, even if none are visible out of an abundance of caution. Barriers, including condoms, dental dams, and even gloves, are expected to be used even when partners are tested and share results. The rules surrounding bodily fluids and barriers are in place to protect individual bodily autonomy and consent, but also the community.

Once a scene begins, the participants should not be interrupted. It is an intrusion on the consent and terms negotiated between play partners. It can even be dangerous to those participating in the scene or the would-be intruder. DM's are the only exception to this rule. DM's are trusted and knowledgeable people within the community who have taken a specific class to teach them how to make sure people are safe within a scene in any play space and how to intervene if necessary. They have the authority to end a scene at their discretion. They will physically interrupt a scene with no arguments from those involved if there is a concern of a consent violation or safety. They also reserve the right to ask anyone to leave at any time for not following the rules. They are, for all intents and purposes, the police of the play space or event. Their job is to limit harm to everyone present, to keep the peace of the environment, and to answer any questions about safety, rules, and procedures. Esmerelda explains that DM's:

They are kind of like roving security slash check-in people. They watch a kink event, they watch a kink party, and they make sure that safe words are being respected, usually red... They are often equipped with first aid kits in case a health risk happens or an emergency along those lines. So, they're watching out.

Emma agrees and elaborates, “DM’s have a light-up armband on them. So, if you see someone with a light-up band, feel free to go up to them with any questions.” They specifically wear the armband, like a badge, so that they are highly visible even in low lighting situations. Most people discuss them mundanely as if they are staple figures expected to be present within play spaces. Some express gratitude or a feeling of safety from having DM’s present. While DM’s are an important part of the self-policing that occurs regularly at parties and events, Valkyrie shares that the DM’s are not the only layer of safety present:

You have the people that are well respected that might may have been dungeon monitors before, taught classes, etc. and then you also just have everyone else kind of self-policing. So, you have three main layers to a party that really help with that. I know I’ve been to parties where you can tell someone is new and they are playing. Then there’s just a group of people watching, and kind of seeing if they should step in and how it’s going. Yes, it’s sloppy, but is it harmful? No. But you are seeing what they’re doing, you’re watching it, and making sure that it doesn’t go south.

Experienced community members also participate in active observation of the interactions occurring in play spaces to make sure they are safe and in line with the rules and consent scripts. The “three layers” of safety Valkyrie refers to are made up of the rules of (1) the space and the players following the rules in any given scene, (2) the dungeon monitors who are specifically trained to police play spaces, and (3) the members of the community present who watch out for any behaviors, not in line with the consent culture values. These rules and entities create three layers of safety. There are rules in place to encourage consent scripts in all interactions and those participating in the interaction while following the rules alongside formal agents and informal peer networks and community in place to ensure the rules are followed.

Constructing Consent Scripts with Boundaries and Limits

Consent culture cultivates well-developed rules and consent scripts for interactions that differ from the interactional scripts of the larger society. Consent is the gold standard in the BDSM community. All the rules and values center around the agency and bodily autonomy of individuals. People are entitled to make decisions for themselves and their bodies in kink. The community practices enthusiastic consent, so having agency and autonomy means being excited and empowered to make those decisions. Squeek shares, “The definition of consent is... being open, willing, and desiring, or at least enthusiastic about being with or exploring something with the other party.” Here, Squeek distinguishes the enthusiastic consent definition from implicit consent (Beres 2007; Carmody 2003; Lafrance et al. 2012; Stryker et al. 2017). Interactions in society are often guided by gender and sexual scripts that center around the agency of men and inform them to assume they have consent unless it is revoked and if consent is revoked, they should try harder to get their way (Beres 2014; Masters et al. 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005). This is wholly rejected in the kink community because consent is only consenting when it is given free of coercion.

Squeek elaborates how coercion differs from consent, “Five ‘no’s’ and a ‘yes’ is still no. I’m sorry. It doesn’t matter who the hell you are.” For kinky people, if someone says no, it means no. If someone says yes, it means yes. Badgering someone who is telling you no until they say yes does not mean you have their consent. It only means you have used your power to wear them down and manipulate them to get your way. Consent culture denounces and forbids these behaviors because it is not consensual by their definitions. Consent in kink is individuals having the agency and bodily autonomy to enthusiastically participate in any activity free of coercion.

To express what they want to enthusiastically do with their bodies in kink, people must define boundaries, set limits, and have safewords to keep interactions consensual (LaFrance et al. 2012). Consent means clear communication of boundaries, hard and soft limits, and safewords. Valkyrie explains that to her consent means, “you set boundaries for yourself physically, emotionally, and mentally and for someone to respect those boundaries.” Boundaries are an important part of the conversation surrounding how to have healthy consent. People must know what to do, but also what not to do. When people discuss boundaries and limits in kink, it creates a clear picture of safe interaction.

What happens in a BDSM scene can vary dramatically depending on the people involved, what they negotiate, their interests, their boundaries and hard limits are, and what they want to get out of it or how they want to feel. A scene can range in the types of play that occur. It may contain something that seems to be borderline vanilla, like being handcuffed and tickled with a large feather. However, a scene can be more intense, like hook suspension where someone’s flesh is pierced with hooks, and they are lifted from the ground by them. What remains constant are the consent scripts active in the interaction.

In a community that follows consent scripts, boundary setting is essential to the scene-building process. Negotiating the scene, and consent within it generally starts with two people discussing what they like and do not like, including hard limits. Will explains:

A hard limit to me is the limit that cannot be broken. It's a violation if it is broken, as compared to like a soft limit, which is one that you might want to explore pressing, or changing or resetting the goalposts the boundary of a limit. A hard limit does not change. it's the line in the sand. You don't cross the line in the sand. It's the brick wall.

Will feels that hard limits are a way to communicate where the line is between consent and violation. Hard limits always mean no. Hard limits are boundaries set by individuals to identify

types of play they will never be interested in participating in. However, soft limits are more flexible or ambiguous. It is typically an act people may be interested to explore with the right person, in the right headspace, under the right conditions, at some point in time. Soft limits are not something they are actively interested in, but also not absolutely opposed to forever.

Respondents all had very similar definitions of what a hard limit/soft limit is. Edward explains that limits and the distinction between them is important. He shares:

The hard limit is important because that's where you're drawing your boundary of consent and consent is what everything is based on. The importance of a hard limit versus a soft limit can become kind of a gray area, but it helps to conceptualize that this is something that I might be okay with. [It is] the difference between gently pushing a boundary versus a hard limit is really important because you are saying upfront, 'I don't care how you want to do this, that's off-limits.' A lot of people want to kind of have their boundaries pushed in some way during a scene. So limits allow you to say, these are the ways I'm okay with my boundaries being pushed and these are the ways I'm not okay with my boundaries being pushed. That helps create an intense, enjoyable scene that doesn't kind of go over the line. It can be very impactful to cross the line in a bad way and that's why hard limits exist.

Some people like to explore limits to see exactly where the line is. These are sometimes called “edge players”, they play at the edges of their limits and like to push their boundaries. This is certainly possible to do safely because hard and soft limits are communicated and consent scripts are followed. However, figuring out the boundaries and limits is not unique to edge players.

Exploring boundaries and limits allows people to maintain agency and bodily autonomy while negotiating their desires with their partners. Esmerelda explains:

Everyone has limits. I truly believe that. Even if your limit is death or dismemberment or, being outted to the whole world, or blackmail or whatever, everyone has a limit. Everyone has many usually. That's perfectly normal. Figuring out your hard limits is just as important as figuring out your interests because that's the spectrum within which you can work.

The exploration and communication of boundaries and limits are essential to consent scripts. It is equally important to do what you want with your body, but that means not doing something to

someone else's body that they do not want. Esmerelda feels that limits are not generally a topic of discussion in society. To them, this is something that distinguishes consent culture from rape culture. Respecting consent by respecting boundaries. Boundaries and limits can vary greatly from person to person. What one person desires as their favorite kink might be another person's hard limit. Therefore, open communication is vitally important to consent script. Valkyrie points out:

There are so many hard limits. I know for me, I'm a top, but I guess if I were to be submissive, rape play would definitely be a hard limit for me. And that would be a very triggering thing for me. Then for others, I know some people like to take it to another level with the societal boundaries. There are a lot of different things, even as far as race, I have seen a lot of people like to play with that. That can be a hard limit for some people or for other people, it could be a therapeutic thing. Another thing that I found is sometimes, even though it's really hard for people, it can be a form of therapy. For instance, like the rape play, I actually know someone who actually likes rape play, because they had a very bad experience. But they like rape play because they know that they can have it stop at any point in time, no matter what. So they can take that situation and have control over it. So hard limits, it can be a hard limit for one person. And it could be something that's therapeutic for others. It's just a matter of how mentally and emotionally you want to navigate that. I've always been very known for cock and ball torture in the lifestyle. I've actually had trans women that I've played with that actually wanted me to degrade them for their gender, things like that. So it's something where it's therapeutic for them, but it can be very triggering for other people.

Valkyrie feels that sharing and respecting hard limits is important because it can be the difference between consent and trauma. Discussing boundaries and limits also allows people to explore, play with, and potentially heal previous trauma they experienced in society from sexual assault to experiences of structural gendered and racial trauma (Cascalheira et al. 2021; Hammers 2019; Thomas 2020). Boundaries and limits can be very specific to the individual and the scene. Just like consent, boundaries are never implicit. They are always openly communicated as part of establishing consent and negotiating a scene. Boundary setting with limits is fundamental in determining what is consensual within a scene. Most of the people I

talked with said that if someone disregards their hard limits, it is a consent violation equivalent to physical or sexual assault. Luna explains:

You know, sometimes there's a line, that you're not sure where it is, you know, but if it's a black and white, 'Hey, don't put your finger in my butt.' And then two seconds later, 'Oh, well, I figured maybe I try because you'd like it.' That is a distinct breach of what my hard limit is. I said I don't like that. I said, Don't do it. Not, under any circumstances. If you decided that you were just going to try it because you want it to be done. You use overstepped my boundaries. You've crossed a hard limit line for me and I no longer want to participate.

It is simple. If someone tells you not to do something to their body and you do it anyway, you are violating their consent and autonomy. However, people still violate others' consent. This is likely because agency, bodily autonomy, and boundaries are not valued by people in society.

Particularly, if someone does not inhabit identities congruent with privilege. Agency (consent), bodily autonomy, boundary maintenance, and the coercion-free negotiation of each are the key components in developing the scripts of a consent culture. It is a reciprocal process where people within interactions explore themselves and each other while also having a very clear conceptualization of what is consensual and what is not. Hard and soft limits are the boundary between a fun time and a consent violation.

Like consent, limits, boundary setting, and boundary maintenance are all ongoing, fluid processes within interactions. An individual's hard and soft limits can change from moment to moment or day to day just like consent. What a person wants or does not want can change and thus communication before and during play become key to maintaining healthy interactions. "I really feel that consent and limits, in general, are the kite string that allows us to fly," Esmerelda shares emotionally, then continues:

Consent to the BDSM community is the lines in which we're allowed to color and play. I really feel that explicit communication about boundaries and being able to say no, just as

easily saying yes. Wow. Feelings. It's so important and it's something that mainstream culture, heteronormativity, gender binary, white supremacy, patriarchal culture really lacks. If we had more of it, we would have less sexual violence, less domestic violence. I really believe in consent culture. I really feel like to the kink community at large. Consent is the leash per se, in a way, it's what allows us to play and run and explore things, but it keeps us grounded in our bodily autonomy.

Esmerelda wipes away tears as they share this with me. When I ask if they are okay and want to continue, they smile and wave me off. They tell me that being in the BDSM community has been so monumental to who they are now. They feel grateful for being in a community that centers on consent. For Esmerelda, the consent, bodily autonomy, and negotiations of boundaries and limits in kink allow them to interact in ways that feel comfortable, healthy, and safe. These consent scripts in consent culture actively subvert normative scripts in society. They feel that consent scripts have the power and potential to change sexual and domestic violence because they challenge normative scripts. For Esmerelda and others I interviewed, consent culture and consent scripts are a refuge from a broader society that devalues consent, perpetuates rape culture, and upholds oppressive structures like gender and patriarchy. Here, they have agency and autonomy, but they have more power to set boundaries and limitations within their interactions.

Individuals in a consent culture expect themselves and others to follow consent scripts, but violations of these scripts can and do still occur. Boundaries and limits get crossed either intentionally or unintentionally. What happens if someone breaks the rules? Just like the leader tells people who come to play parties, if you break the rules, they ask you to leave. That is reasonable for a party, but does this also apply to the whole community, how does this happen? To explore this further, I will consider how the kink community values reputation and protects itself through exercising accountability and heavy social control.

Reputation Matters: Accountability and Social Control

Consent scripts form through the actions and interactions of BDSM community members. This means that having communal spaces like The Club is particularly important to consent culture. Here people can observe acceptable behavior and techniques associated with consent scripts through their interactions with and among others. They learn the rules, how to be safe, and above all, how they must practice consent within all interactions. The BDSM communities teach the rules of consent culture in both formal and informal ways. There are regular educational classes, taught on weeknights at The Club, where individuals can attend and learn concepts like SSC, RACK, the stoplight, number scale, and nonverbal consent methods, such as dropping keys or a bandana. Informal methods can include community engagement activities like observation, mentorship, friendships, and first-hand experiences. Both formal and informal consent education require interactional components and form the foundations of the expectations for interactional consent scripts.

Most people I interviewed regularly attend parties either at The Club or in places remarkably like it in other areas. They express that The Club and the local BDSM community play a fundamental role in learning what consent is and how it operates, something neither their sex-education classes nor others in society taught them. Few people identify their parents as their primary source of consent education. The overwhelming majority of those I interviewed point to the BDSM community as their first exposure to consent education. The kink community and physical spaces like The Club provide access to information and interactions where people experience primary consent script socialization. Esmerelda shares:

Having a community in the BDSM world or a mentor/mentee... there's an educational component to the kink community in general. So, I feel like some of the enforcement is just

humanity enforces it itself, because by engaging in consent culture and watching out for each other, asking before we hug our friends, you know, discussing STI testing, all of that is about consent culture.

Maintaining a consent culture requires enforcing adherence to consent scripts in interactions. The community reinforces consent scripts through a strict no-tolerance/zero-tolerance policy in place for consent violations. While this is not an “official” policy, violation of consent goes against the foundational principles of consent culture. A consent violation can range from hugging someone without explicit consent to behavior in a scene that violates negotiated consent to rape. If a consent violation happens in a BDSM space, particularly if it occurs within a particular group like TNG, there are formal and informal sanctions that the community uses to hold violators accountable. Claire explains:

I would say the direct social sanctioning is removing an individual from the space and talking to the individual. I have seen people get excluded from spaces forevermore for even pushing up against the line of consent. They are like, ‘it wasn't exactly necessarily that I was crossing it.’ But I have seen people get pushed, and push up to that line, and somebody was uncomfortable, and the individual that pushed that line was excluded from the space. Moreover, people talk, which is the indirect social sanction. Because of how social networks work, if any individual like individuals, particularly individuals within social influence their positions, start talking, that shit spreads and everyone knows. So that's more of the indirect type of social sanction that I have seen.

Some sanctioning is direct or formal, where leadership discovers a consent violation and bans the offending party. However, there is a range of actions that leaders can take. Previous leaders like Will and Gus shared with me, that when leadership within a specific BDSM group, a DM, or The Club’s management receive a complaint of consent violation from any person in the community, they immediately reach out to those involved to figure out what happened, why/how it happened, and what consequences will be the result. They will either temporarily or permanently ban the person depending on what their investigations find. A temporary ban is only given to people when consent violations occur because of inexperience or ignorance. In these situations, the

consent violator cannot attend events for a prescribed time and must complete education courses before they can petition leadership to attend spaces/parties again. If someone is permanently banned, they are no longer welcome at that group's spaces or events. The leaders of various BDSM groups and The Clubs management, in conjunction with a few other local play spaces, communicate with each other to ensure everyone is aware when a person is labeled a consent violator. They also communicate when they remove someone from a specific space or group because of their actions or consent violations. These heavy sanctions are the more formal ways that the community holds its members accountable and ensures that everyone follows consent culture scripts. The only option is to adhere to the prescribed scripts or be cast out. Or is it?

While the community expects mandatory adherence to consent scripts as outlined in the rules of The Club, BDSM groups, private parties, and educational classes, what do individuals do interactionally to support consent scripts? They also reinforce consent scripts informally or indirectly as Claire describes in the above quote. This is a small community and word travels fast. Reputation is incredibly important within this community and becomes like currency. It is a social mechanism used to determine if and how a person is properly engaging in consent scripts. Having a good reputation for being safe (doing RACK and SSC), knowledgeable about consent and kink, and skilled in various play mediums (impact, rope, etc.) is critical to an individual's ability to interact in BDSM spaces. Nico shares, "Everything is based on reputation and if you don't go out and get your face out there then you are not going to have a reputation. Which is kind of just like not existing." Gus agrees and explains, "It's very reputation oriented, so if you don't go out and meet people and earn a reputation, then you are not going to be able to find partners as easily." Nico and Gus discuss reputation as a vital part of your identity in the community. Reputation is earned through being actively involved in the community because here others can

see you interacting and/or can vouch for your ability to use consent scripts to play in acceptable ways.

People can gain a reputation for being highly skilled, having an impressive pedigree from mentorship by another person with a prestigious reputation, or being involved in the scene or a specific skill for a lengthy time. Valkyrie explains:

Reputation is huge in the community, especially since in BDSM, you're doing a lot of stuff that can cause harm. To have that reputation, to be trusted, to be knowledgeable is a very sacred thing in the community you can create...that's a very, very important thing to guard.

She mentions how reputation is sacred to the community because of the risk of harm in the interactions they have with each other. However, it is likely deeper than that. In consent culture, consent scripts are ideals and sacred. Reputation is a measure of how individuals enact the sacred and separates consent scripts from the profane or unholy consent violations (Durkheim 1965; Zondervan 2016). Reputation is the direct result of a kinky person's ability to successfully use sacred consent scripts to interact acceptably in a consent culture. If people learn that someone values consent and has a reputation for consistency in clear and fair negotiation, knows what they are doing, and is highly skilled, they become a "good kinky person" and an incredibly desirable and at times popular play partner. Certain prestige comes with that positive reputation, even popularity. Popularity and status come along with having a good reputation and being a "good kinky person." In this culture, having a good reputation, prestige in skill, and the popularity that results from these things give a person social capital and power among their peers.

Having a bad reputation can have an equal but opposite effect. If someone is found to be a person who violates consent either through inexperience or generally, they are seen as an unsafe

person, their reputation suffers, and their pool of potential play partners shrinks dramatically. When people in the community look for new play partners, they often ask someone for their references or people they have previously played with so that they might make sure that the person they are considering as a play partner is verified as being a safe person to play with. Interpersonal vetting is common practice within the community. Since reputation places such an influential role within this community, people will also communicate to their friends, partners, groups, and networks if they know someone who violated consent or if they had their consent violated and who was responsible. These informal networks serve to protect those within the community from individuals deemed dangerous or unfit to be in community spaces.

However, what happens when a “good kinky person”, who has a good reputation, prestige, and popularity becomes a consent violator. When I asked what would happen if someone in that position were to violate consent, I received mixed reactions. Some insist that those people are treated no differently from anyone else who violates consent. Valkyrie shares she has witnessed this firsthand:

If someone is regarded very highly in the community and they show that they have [consent] violations, very quickly that disintegrates. I've actually had... a couple of people that I knew personally, that actually had pretty high regard. That quickly just disintegrated to where they got banned from everything. Their clubs, their everything, they just got completely erased. They were one of.... I guess you would call royalty in the BDSM community, and very, very quickly fell off. So, it can happen, it can happen very quickly. It's something like I said, you have to safeguard your reputation. That level of policing, accountability is something that we take very seriously. So, I don't care how awesome you look in the community, you do one small thing, you can get taken down real fast.

For Valkyrie, reputation is no match for the social control and accountability expected in consent culture. To her, if you aren't following the rules and consent scripts, you are out. However, others respond with exasperation that popularity does matter in terms of accountability.

Esmeralda shares:

Unfortunately, sometimes someone's reputation is so powerful, that they're free from consequences. We see that all the time in the world, in politics, in money, etc. So, the reasons for that are usually that they've built a facade of clout, they may have a long string of play partners that didn't go well, but because they have a long string of play partners, they're seen as more experienced or more approachable. So vetting is very important.

Some people use their reputation or popularity as a shield to avoid accountability when they engage in problematic behavior in the community. The community tries to prevent this by encouraging players to “vet” their partners by candidly talking to people they have played with previously. However, this vetting might not always have the desired effect. Some express that the person whose consent was violated might be looked at suspiciously, because how could someone with that good of a reputation go from being placed on a pedestal to a consent violator? Some discuss that infighting happens where some people refuse to believe the person who was violated, people take sides, and it can and has fractured whole groups and communities. Nick explains:

It gets really ugly. It's gotten really ugly. I have one example, where the person [violating consent] actually formed an opposing group. They made it hell, for the person [whose consent was violated] ... and they decided to press the issue and they split the community, that's what happened. It definitely made people take sides.

Popular people can leverage their popularity to potentially manipulate the community to avoid accountability. In this situation, the popular consent violators blamed the victim, made all their social networks believe it, and started a new group to maintain their power through popularity and not be held accountable for their actions. Will has been a leader in local groups for many years and he shares, “People who are popular... seem to get lenient judgments, they're not held to the same standards, unfortunately, when it comes to consent.” It is interesting that even within a community that actively uses consent culture and consent scripts regularly in interactions and structure, when a person with power (aka popularity) behaves badly and needs to be held

accountable, the community reacts similarly to how society reacts to rape culture. There can be suspicion, victim blame, and many folks who take the side of the abuser. Interactional scripts from the dominant culture likely inform these reactions.

While the consensus is that consent is the law of the land and that violation of this value will not be tolerated, there can be exceptions to every rule, even within kink. Some people I spoke with discuss the idea of restorative justice. Simply banning and canceling people is not enough because it just drives them out of communities where they will play on their own and continue the behavior in a less monitored space, causing potential harm to unknowing, likely newer, people. They describe how there needs to be an avenue in kink toward restorative justice, where those harmed are protected and prioritized, but the offending person is offered a path toward rehabilitation, reform, and reentry into a community that can hold them accountable. The zero-tolerance for consent violations might be effective in some situations, but in others it makes accountability through banning something a person cannot learn from, possibly making them dodge it even more. While this might not work in every instance, it is interesting that the younger, yet still experienced, kinksters I spoke with are the ones calling for the overhaul in how the consent violation process is handled. Swinging a ban hammer is not enough to protect the community for this vocal minority.

CONCLUSION

Consent culture and consent scripts are the law of the land in the BDSM community. Every interaction socially constructs consent scripts that play out within the regular interactions community members have with each other. These interactional consent scripts are then reinforced in formal and informal through (1) the rules in interactional spaces like The Club,

BDSM group parties, and munches, (2) education through classes, interactions, and demonstrations, and (3) methods of social control through regular boundaries and limits in interactions and vetting for individuals, and sanctioning, peer-policing, and accountability for actions through zero-tolerance bans for the larger community. Spaces like the Club are vital to creating consent scripts because they are the stage where the interactions take place. They also provide structure by making rules and enforcing them. Different methods of education are also important because whether someone is interacting with peers in a class, in a scene, or a demonstration, they are learning what consent scripts are, how to do them, and the consequences if they are broken. Lastly, and most importantly, consent scripts are socially constructed and reinforced through accountability and social control. There are multiple interactional tools that individuals use and engage in to maintain consent scripts in kink spaces. They are informally maintained through ongoing processes that happen within interactions like consent negotiations, boundary maintenance through limits and safewords, vetting, and reputation. Consent scripts are reinforced formally through peer-policing and DM's, group leaders, and management at The Club. The heavily policing and informal and formal sanctioning keep individuals accountable for following consent scripts in interactions. However, some report that popularity can potentially impact who is held accountable and how they are sanctioned.

Popularity seems to become a valued status in the kink community that allows certain people to experience privilege and skirt accountability, much like gender allows in the rest of society. This finding made me question, what role does gender play in consent scripts? In the next chapter, I will investigate how socially constructed, interactional consent scripts in kink culture allow individuals to “do consent”. I will consider if doing consent is different from

“doing gender.” If so, I will explore how this difference impacts the interaction between individuals of different genders in consent culture.

CHAPTER 3
**DOING CONSENT: REDOING GENDER AND SUBVERTING
HETERONORMATIVITY**

INTRODUCTION

The ideology of consent culture permeates the BDSM community and produces powerful consent scripts that inform the interactions between individuals in intentional and unintentional ways much like gender scripts. Within a consent culture, individuals “do” consent much in the way that they “do gender” in the broader society, by performing and reproducing the expectations associated with consent scripts (Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). The gender structure socially constructs scripts, norms, beliefs, roles, and stereotypes about biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality to inform binaries that maintain the gender power hierarchy that promotes patriarchy, heteronormativity, and rape culture (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Hollander 2001; Hunnicutt 2009; Kane and Schippers 1996; Lorber 1994; Martin 2004, 2016; Masters et al. 2013; McNeill 2013; Ridgeway 2009, 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013; Seidman 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005). The gender structure perpetuates itself through socializing the habits, language, and interactions of individuals (Berger and Luckmann 1966). It embeds itself in institutions like family and education and legitimizes itself through social control maintained by the gender power hierarchy (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis

2013). The gender power hierarchy relies on the interactions of individuals to support the concept that men's increased access to resources determines that they have greater power to enact agency (Bourdieu 1977; Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Butler 2004; Giddens 1986; Mills 1956).

However, consent culture in the BDSM community empowers agency through highly valuing consent (Cagwin 2018; Simula and Sumerau 2017). The resulting consent scripts maintain the vital interactional concepts of agency and bodily autonomy through enthusiastic consent, coercion-free negotiation of interactions between social actors, boundaries through hard limits and safe words, and the enforcement of accountability for all these much like the gender structure. As I briefly discuss in Chapter 2, consent scripts are often directly oppositional to gender norms and sexual scripts and conflict with how interactions are socially constructed by the gender power structure. Scholars suggest that subcultural and intrapsychic scripts can empower individuals to intentionally transform cultural gender and sexual scripts (Dixie 2017; Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Haenfler 2012; Plante 2014). People within kink often challenge the gender binary by subverting gender power through consensual power exchange, power dynamics, and play (Bauer 2008; Cagwin 2018; Simula 2019b; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Participants hold each other accountable to consent scripts intentionally and unintentionally in ways that resist acts of "gender accountability," or making sure others "do" gender "appropriately" within interactions. (Cagwin 2018; Hollander 2013; Simula and Sumerau 2017; West and Zimmerman 1987). These acts of gender rebellion and adherence to consent scripts allow people in BDSM to redo gender individually, interactionally, and within their own subculture in ways that potentially challenge the gender structure (Connell 2010; Goffman 1956; Hollander 2013, 2018; Risman and Davis 2013). If "doing consent" is so heavily subscribed to

and gender norms are consistently redone in kink spaces, how does this impact individuals' perception and experience of gender within their interactions?

In this chapter, I will explain how interactional consent scripts form the theoretical framework of doing consent. I will use doing consent to explore how it is an avenue for redoing gender and femininity. Also, I will consider how redoing gender through doing consent impacts women and trans and nonbinary people in the BDSM community.

From Consent Scripts to Doing Consent and Redoing Gender

The BDSM community is a consent culture that expects individuals to “do” consent scripts in their interactions, similarly to how the gender structure expects individuals to “do” gender (Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Much like the “doing” gender theory, doing consent is socially constructed by hyper-conformity to and accountability for consent scripts. But, as previously noted, consent culture and the gender structure have conflicting values. How can a consent culture resist the norms of gender structure from within that very structure? It goes through the same reciprocal process of social construction. Indeed, doing consent is a socially constructed, interactional process that informs commitment to and accountability for consent scripts in consent culture and vice versa. It also provides empirical support for how individuals can assert their agency within interactions to resist the social constructions of gender and sexual scripts in society (Hollander 2018; Masters et al. 2013; Seidman 2003).

To explore how consent scripts impact the interactions between individuals in the BDSM community, I ask each participant how they think and feel about doing consent. Though there was some variation in responses, many people found doing consent empowering because it is

critically different than the gender norms they are usually exposed to in society. Emma, a switch-identifying woman told me consent norms are empowering, she exclaimed:

Ab-so-lutely! I feel like in day-to-day life... I'm not [empowered]. It's not very normalized to be so clear with your consent and your boundaries in life. I feel like in regular society, it's more nuanced and there's more gray area, which leads to more mistakes or boundaries being stepped over. But in kink, it's very easy to be clear, cut, and dry. You can make a checklist and answer for each interaction; Yes, no, maybe. I think that's incredibly empowering because it helps. You can be more specific, like, 'Yes, I want this, I want this, but I don't want this,' and you can tailor-make this experience for you and your partner or partners, whatever.

Doing consent provides a very clear outline for maintaining agency, comfort, and safety within interactions. Emma discusses how that isn't the case in "regular society". She discusses how interactions in general society often feel as if they fall in a grey area, where boundaries, expectations, and consent are not clearly communicated, much less negotiated. The experience of this "grey zone" is documented as the space between consent and coercion, where gender blurs agency in interactions (Christianson 2015). However, she feels empowered within the interactions she has in kink spaces because doing consent means preserving her agentic consent. BDSM empowers people to exercise agency and to do consent in their interactions while expecting them to be accountable for the agency of other people in every interaction.

Carey, a bottom-leaning switch identifying trans man enthusiastically agrees that he found consent norms empowering. It makes things a lot easier for him and he feels more comfortable in interactions with others. He describes being a poly person and how when he is looking for a new partner, dating in the "vanilla" world was "obnoxious" because of vanilla people's lack of knowledge about doing consent. He says in the kink world he could go to places like The Club and not have to worry about people violating his consent or not knowing how to act within interactions with himself or others. People in general society are often operating on the

assumptions they have from doing gender, including norms, stereotypes, and sexual scripts. Generally, consent and bodily autonomy are not considered within normative interactions. Consent culture in the BDSM community and doing consent provide comfort in bodily autonomy for Carey. This allows him and others to decide if, when, and how they want someone to have access to their bodies.

Squeek, a soft Dom/switch identifying man told me that doing consent is attractive. He exclaims, “Oh, fuck, yes! To me, the sexiest thing about another human being is consent. That is where the law of attraction starts with me. I'm not one of those people that has like a standard or a type or expectations, any kind of shit like that. That's not how I work.” For Squeek, when people do consent it increases his attraction to them because he knows that person will respect his boundaries and will share their own. He feels that this makes interactions much less inhibited and more natural. He shares with me that he was raised by two women and had an abusive father. Squeek reflects, “I watched in the first few years of my life... my father was abusive piece of shit. Very physical, very aggressive, just very shitty in general.” From a young age this physically and verbally aggressive man became his example of what not to be. Instead, he embraces the feminine energy he was raised by which gives him more understanding of women and what it is like to not have power. For him, this early influence made consent norms in kink seem like the rule and not the exception. He always wants to respect another person and their bodily autonomy because he has seen how doing gender can lead to abuse when mixed with toxic masculinity. Instead, doing consent means rejecting messages about bodies and entitlement informed by gender.

Helen, a dominant/top-identifying woman agrees that consent norms in BDSM are, “definitely better than consent norms in the general culture, that's for goddamn sure. Because the

general culture has a whole kink for non-consent. So just the language of consent culture is powerful. When it gets us this language; that's empowering." She asserts that power comes through the ability to consent, a shared communal language where people learn to explore and establish boundaries regarding their physical and mental space, and the words to communicate boundaries so others can respect them. Helen is critical of the general culture because of its pervasive lack of consent in interpersonal and sexual interactions between people of different genders. Interestingly, she says that the general culture 'has a kink for not consent' as if the society fetishizes that lack of consent within its interactions. This tracks considering how rape culture is perpetuated through media representations of sex, romance, relationships, and gender (Buchwald et al. 2005; Phillips 2016). Perhaps, there is something to be said that the dominant culture does not want all people to feel empowered and to "do consent" through agency, boundaries, and bodily autonomy. This could be potentially detrimental to ruling structures like gender, which thrive on multiple power hierarchies. Doing consent, like the BDSM community practices, is possible. However, it requires accountability both individually and in the structure of the community itself which is likely antithetical to a society that privileges some while oppressing most.

Nick, a dominant identifying man, told me, "consent norms are empowering. It can be empowering... to a group or a situation where there are a number of people that are following what everybody has mutually, or physically, or spoken, or written, or whatever, agreed upon because it allows freedom." Nick agrees with Helen and others, doing consent is empowering because it demands that communication is clear and open about boundaries, expectations, and autonomy. This grants everyone involved the freedom to openly communicate about desired interactions but also the freedom to do them, so long as everyone is doing consent. Interestingly,

this is seen as freedom even when the interaction is heavily confined by the rules and boundaries of consent scripts. Perhaps, it feels like freedom because BDSM is considered deviant and some of the activities might otherwise be seen as assault or abuse to society and that places a stigma on those that do them (Bezreh et al. 2012; Colosi and Lister 2019; Goffman 1963). Doing consent gives individuals the freedom or agency to explore certain activities with others without fear of causing harm or being stigmatized. It may also feel like freedom because of the clearness of expectations within the interaction which is not usual for interactions in society. Within normative interactions, people must navigate a grey area of gender and sexual scripts, where they almost play a guessing game of how to appropriately interact in the ways they desire (Christianson 2015; Goffman 1956; Pitagora 2013). In comparison, doing consent is the freedom to be clear and discuss how to make an interaction enjoyable for the participants involved.

Kat, a switch-identifying woman said that she could see how people would find doing consent freeing or empowering. She shares:

I don't know if I would use the word empowering, but I think it's helpful to know that there is this language. If you were to use it and somebody was to not respect it, that would be a very clear indicator that something was not okay. I think, particularly as a woman who has been socialized into people-pleasing, knowing that something is not okay can be really hard. It can take a long time and a lot of work. If you say 'yellow' and somebody doesn't check-in, or you say red and they don't stop, then you're like, okay, well, I don't need any more data. I have that information. I think it can also contribute to comfort and security in general. So, I guess if all of that means empowerment, then yes, it is.

Kat discusses how she is not sure if doing consent is empowering because it depends on what an individual finds empowering. However, she continues to echo what others share about being grateful for having a language to communicate consent and how difficult it can be for women that are socialized by gender norms to be "people-pleasing" or to care more about accommodating others than themselves. For this reason, the language of doing consent can

empower a rejection of gender norms when used in interactions. Also, she describes how if/when people do not follow consent norms by reacting to safe words or cues, like the traffic light system, it is a huge red flag that tells someone that they are either dealing with a consent violator or someone new to and/or uneducated in consent scripts. Doing consent is so pervasive and expected within kink interactions that when someone does not have the language to express and communicate in ways a consent culture demands, it is a reason for a pause or possibly concern. A consequence of not doing consent as expected is being outcast from spaces that practice consent culture like the BDSM community.

While doing consent is freeing for some, for others the power of doing consent comes from the accountability and social control within a consent culture. Valkyrie, a dominant-top identifying woman, shares:

I think it's very empowering. I think a lot of times in regular society, we don't talk about consent as much and we don't empower consent as much. Whereas in BDSM, that's the first thing that you learn is about consent and body autonomy. [You learn] how to be in a community, be surrounded by people that understand that your body is your own and that if you violate that, you are blacklisted. Having that level of self-policing and accountability, it's very empowering.

Valkyrie agrees that doing consent is empowering because of the bodily autonomy and agency that accompany it. However, she goes a step further to say how it is also the community itself, the accountability the community expects if consent is violated, and the absolute social control or blacklisting/ banning that happens in response to consent violations that adds to the feeling of empowerment. These are the main tenets in a consent culture that contribute to doing consent: agency, bodily autonomy, boundaries, accountability, social control, and enforcement.

Others disagree with the concept that doing consent gives power. Nico, a submissive identifying trans man did not find doing consent empowering. He very boldly said, “No, I think

it is mandatory.” For Nico, because he became involved in consent culture at 18, consent norms do not particularly make him feel empowered. He finds doing consent to be the bare minimum for any interaction. Rose, a bottom-leaning switch identifying femme agrees and shares:

I don't think I feel specifically empowered, actually. Not because I don't think that they couldn't be empowering but because I don't come from a space outside of the community where the very basic consent norms are present. I think it doesn't feel different to me to be in a space where I can tell someone like, 'No, not at all. No, don't touch me. I'm not feeling like that tonight.' I try not to operate in spaces where that's not the case already. So, I don't think I feel specifically empowered.

Rose agrees with Nico and does not find consent norms specifically empowering because she has come to expect doing consent as normative in her interactions, not something empowering but something natural. She also admits that she self-selects into social circles that are kinky and kinky adjacent so that she can avoid people that do not automatically do consent. Rose shares, “my friends are all kinky.” She describes how all her close friends and social network consist of people who are kinky and “kink-adjacent” though she does not elaborate on this, from context I presume these are LGBTQ+ and polyamorous folks. Though Rose does admit she maintains some friendships through school or work, she tells me that she is not out to these friends as a kinky person and considers her friends and even acquaintances with the BDSM community her real friends.

Most of the participants agreed that they found it powerful to engage in consent scripts within interactions, to do consent, instead of adhering to the expectations of society often rooted in gender and sexual norms/stereotypes/scripts. However, some people shared that doing consent is just normative to them within their interactions in kinky and beyond to their social relationships. It has become so ubiquitous that people do it automatically in social situations outside of kinky. For example, even at non-kinky events or in casual settings, friends ask each other “are you

huggable” before they greet each other with hugs and ask if someone has mental and emotional bandwidth before talking to someone about heavy personal topics. If doing consent contains the primary scripts to inform interactions, what role does gender play in these interactions? If women, men, and people of other genders feel empowered to do consent in their interactions, how might this redo gender?

Much like gender, doing consent is socially constructed. The BDSM community is a consent culture because it expects everyone to do consent. Individuals do consent in interactions where they enact their own agency and respect the agency of others. Enacting agency contributes to establishing patterns, or habits within these interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This habitualization of doing consent, including the preservation of agency, allows individuals to create language around consent and structures, like DM’s, leaders, The Club and its management, to provide legitimation. Once legitimation occurs, individuals internalize and accept doing consent as part of what it means to be a member of the BDSM community and subculture (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Indeed, doing consent is a socially constructed, interactional process that informs commitment to and accountability for consent scripts in consent culture and vice versa. It also provides empirical evidence for how individuals can assert their agency within interactions to resist the social constructions of gender and sexual scripts in society (Hollander 2018; Masters et al. 2013; Seidman 2003). In doing consent, people in kink can reject doing gender and sexual scripts, and/or redo gender because the structuration of consent culture provides alternative, albeit temporary, scripts to inform how kinky people socially construct interactions. But how does this process play out in interactions? Is a subcultural structure like consent culture really able to usurp the pervasive power of the gender structure?

Doing Consent Means Redoing Femininity

In the normative gender structure, people are not consenting to “doing” any specific role. They are socialized to believe that they are supposed to occupy a certain gender depending on their sex assigned at birth and should express that gender in socially expected ways, and accept the norms, expectations, and stereotypes that accompany it. We are seeing more women (Darwin 2018; Morash and Haarr 2012), men (Lui 2013; Scheibling 2020), trans people (Connell 2010) non-binary people (Darwin 2022), and queer people (Kelly and Hauck 2015) in society openly challenge the gender structure in individual and interactional ways. However, doing gender is still the norm and not necessarily because we are consenting to it. In consent culture, everything comes back to autonomy and agency through consent. Every individual has a choice in every interaction to decide how they want to do or redo the gender assigned to them by society. This can be particularly powerful for women who have historically been oppressed within the gender hierarchy. Perhaps, it could be argued that the kink roles (dominant, submissive, switch) they choose may be informed by the traditional gender hierarchy, but in a kink context, gender is being played with regularly and everyone is enthusiastically agreeing to the game, the rules, and all are in on the fun.

Able discusses how the “framework of consent”, or doing consent, guides all interactions in a way that makes everyone involved feel safe and in control of their experiences. He tells me that women are specifically empowered by dominant and submissive roles and power dynamics. Women can clearly define and inhabit these roles within kink interactions. Because they are doing consent, women choose to be dominant or submissive and shape what that means for them and how they will engage with it through clear communication with their partner(s). This is a stark difference from how gender norms and sexual scripts heavily influence women’s physical

interactions with others, particularly in sexual situations. Women are scripted to not like sex, to not take control in sexual interactions (Beres 2007; Kane and Schippers 1996; Wiederman 2005). However, women in kink are likely examples of “transformers” who use subcultural sexual scripting to challenge and redo sexual scripts in non-traditional ways (Dixie 2017; Masters et al. 2013). Able does comment that sometimes two switches can play, and the roles become more “blurry”. In the situation with two switches, the roles of who is doing what action to which party involved could be negotiated to be more fluid. There may not be one party who is “giving or receiving”. Instead, the dynamic between the two can change or evolve during the scene or from interaction to interaction. Doing consent allows for both clear-cut roles and fluidity in interactions for women. Through this flexibility, women redo gender expectations in doing consent.

To explore this I asked Esmerelda, a switch identifying femme who uses they/them pronouns, how they felt about doing consent. They share:

I do feel it's very empowering. I feel like consent culture and kink has really taught me how to stand up for myself and negotiate what I want and think about what I want and say no when I want to. I'm allowed to say no, at any time, to hug people, to fuck people, to play with people, to talk to people, do emotional labor... All of those are mine. And I can say no.

Esmerelda echoes what most others say that the agency available from doing consent is particularly empowering, specifically as it pertains to interactions. It even goes beyond kink-specific interactions for Esmerelda and includes social and emotional interactions. This allows all people the choice to decide which actions and activities they do and do not want to take a part in. However, this can be particularly powerful for women who have long been denied agency and autonomy. Doing consent becomes a way for women, as well as femmes and people beyond

the binary, to reclaim their power in interactions. This may even be the first experience women have with doing consent in their lives. Esmerelda elaborates:

I do think women are empowered in the kink community to explore being in charge, which we don't usually get in the mainstream patriarchal world. Also, we can explore the taboo of the idea of being feminine, submissive, and leaning into some of those stereotypes about gender and power. That kind of shadow work and taboo exploration is possible in the BDSM community in a healthy context, because of consent. We talk about the difference between domestic violence and BDSM, super overly simply, often being consent. It can look very similar to the outside untrained eye. But if there's consent, then both parties are enjoying it, and enthusiastically, hopefully, consenting to it.

It is interesting that to Esmerelda, exploring concepts equated with hyper-femininity, like submission, is taboo when the expectation and expression of femininity is very normative. But perhaps they have a point in that the decision to act in ways that have been normatively equated with femininity is a choice in BDSM that people of any gender can explore, including women. This is in line with “choice feminism,” or the concept that women can choose femininity unproblematically and with agency (Budgeon 2015). In doing gender, femininity is expected. However, doing consent, femininity is a choice that is not constrained by a singular, cultural definition. The biggest difference between how femininity is informed by gender, how it is expressed, and who and how folks are doing and redoing it comes back to consent scripts reinforced by consent culture.

Esmerelda shares with me that they are a switch. To them, the scale between the concepts of dominant, switch, and submissive are on a spectrum, much like gender or sexuality. Where you fall on that spectrum could be permanent, it could evolve over time, or be dependent on the partner, skill, scene, or even mood. While the flexibility to inhabit any role has the potential to redo gender, it can also become confusing. For some, navigating between BDSM roles and doing

consent in kink and gender roles and doing gender in society leads to feelings of conflict.

Esmerelda admits to me:

When I first discovered BDSM, I was extremely resistant to identifying as a switch, even though I already knew deep, deep in my heart that there was a submissive part of me. But I was like, 'No, I'm a Domme. Lalalalalala.' I was very much in denial for a while and really had an identity crisis over it. I truly did. I was like 20 and I was like, 'Ah! I'm attracted to masculinity, and I want to be submissive to it.' That makes me so mad. I'm still mad. Honestly, that's part of the kink, I think because it's humiliating in a way to be leaning into that type of normative patriarchal power dynamic. So that's part of the turn-on for me honestly. Like, 'Bad Feminist' roleplay is definitely a thing. I'm so glad I'm anonymous right now.

Esmerelda shares how they have at times felt uncomfortable with the idea of being a switch because of discovering that they were attracted to submitting to masculinity. This feels wrong to them as a feminist. They clarify that it specifically felt wrong submitting to masculine men because they are aware of the “normative patriarchal power dynamic” that they are potentially perpetuating as a femme who submits to masculine dominance. This led to internal conflict. What would they potentially lose if they allow themselves to participate in acts that reproduce the gender hierarchy in a space of gender rebellion? Would they lose the power they had found? Questions like these almost caused them to reject their desired identity because BDSM has been a space where they could do consent and redo expectations of their perceived and assumed gender.

They also mention feeling more comfortable identifying as a domme in kink spaces because, as a petite femme, also being submissive might give people the idea they could boss them around or take advantage of them. They are afraid that men might use their perceived gender and kink role against them. This is interesting as it seems to depart from the theme that doing consent is the rule (structure) and gender is a toy (agency) in interactions. Perhaps, their previous experiences with doing gender as a femme in society has led to an abundance of caution

with men and masculinity. To avoid any potential harm, they use their domme role almost like a shield until they found a masculine partner that does consent in a way that makes them comfortable sharing their submissive side. It is interesting that they take their feelings of shame and express them through humiliation and roleplaying as a “bad feminist”. Even though they experience a conflict between doing consent and doing gender, they still redo gender by taking control of that conflict and using it for what benefits them and brings them pleasure.

Emma shares that she is a switch, “I’m very switchy very switch at this. Like it is very dependent on who I’m playing with and how I’m feeling, you know, what’s the vibe? Who are you? What are you into? I think it is very much dependent on me and the other party, what are our combined intentions? I just love being fluid.” Emma identifies as a woman. She loves the ability to decide what roles she wants to play in interactions and how that can change depending on the mutually agreed outcome of the interaction. She also tells me:

When I got into kink, I was only a bottom. I was a very submissive bottom getting in. I tried it, I was happy like this, but this isn’t quite right. Flipped, completely flipped the game, and was super dominant in another relationship where we were monogamous. I was his mistress very dominant, very powerful in the relationship. I was like, I like this, but this isn’t quite me either. Now I’ve kind of evened out to a middle ground where with my living partner, I tend to have a more submissive or subservient role. But sometimes, I top for our friends. Sometimes they want to bottom, sometimes they want to top. Sometimes I want to bottom, sometimes I want to top. It really depends. I enjoy whatever I’m feeling at the moment. I just enjoy what that space brings.

It is interesting that when Emma first became involved with consent culture, she defaulted to a submissive role, which was congruent with her gender identity as a woman and allowed her to do gender as expected. However, after she was exposed to having a choice and doing consent, she completely subverted gendered expectations, redid gender, and took on a dominant role. After she became more experienced, she realized that for her it was the choice that feels comfortable and powerful. Emma enjoys having options. She can be in control, not be in control, or both

because everyone enters the scene with clear boundaries, limits, enthusiasm, mutual respect, and does consent. Her fluidity in interactions is made possible by doing consent because the expectation is that everyone negotiates their own terms and autonomy which directly challenges gender norms and redoes gender performances. The power in choice lends to support for the autonomy and self-definition championed by choice feminism (Budgeon 2015; Thwaites 2017).

Carey finds doing consent can empower women because they have options that are contrary to normative sexual scripts. Women can say “I like this, and I don’t have to be ashamed of it” or “no, I do not like this”. It allows women agency and autonomy over their sexual experiences, bodies, and pleasure in interactions. Doing consent means that women have the authority to clearly communicate their wants and needs without that being a surprise or something for men to “dance around”. According to Cary, “no means no, and that’s okay,” in consent culture. Gender norms and sexual scripts dictate that men have implicit consent, where consent exists unless it is revoked and coercion can be used to convince others, particularly women, to participate in sexual acts whether they want to or not. In society, “no” can mean “try harder” or that a man is not trying hard enough to get what he wants. Doing consent requires enthusiastic, informed consent where an individual is expected to say “Yes” to affirm their desire to participate in activities free from coercion. Carey also discusses how people accept rejection in consent culture. If two people have interests that do not match up, they just accept it and move on to find another partner. Those same people are more likely to be friends without hurt feelings because doing consent normalizes open communication. Carey finds in “vanilla” or “heteronormative” spaces the same interaction might be considered rejection, which in the case of a woman rejecting a man is often met with hurt feelings, animosity, and potential danger. Doing consent enables interactions to be based on mutually agreed to terms, including saying no

or revoking consent without penalty. This encourages women to speak up for their pleasure and sexual desires. Doing consent not only authorizes women to redo gender but also the sexual scripts and expectations that accompany it (Wiederman 2005).

Carole, a submissive identifying woman tells me that doing consent and consent in general, are empowering. She shares that she is older (55) and when she was growing up women were still struggling to feel empowered. She shares that being in the BDSM community is her first experience with other people valuing her consent. She finds that incredibly empowering because suddenly she has a voice and can use it to communicate what she wants in interactions. Carole shares that she finds having the authority to say “No” particularly empowering. She also finds the ability to say “Yes” equally empowering. She remembers feeling like she did not have a choice as a wife to say “No” to her husband, sexually or otherwise. She shares that she just did gender by keeping the house, cleaning, cooking, and laundry, followed sexual scripts by being submissive sexually, and was agreeable to his wishes in interactions. He also never asked for her consent in any interaction because that was not necessary. In doing consent, women not only have choices, but they are also respected for those choices, which had not been Carole’s experience in interactions primarily informed by gender norms in society. Kat agrees when she says, “I think that in those spaces and by that identity [woman] it is empowering. The idea that you get to say, ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or decide who touches you, or what they touch you with, how they touch you, or who you touch is empowering.” Here again, we see that doing consent empowers women through bodily autonomy and control over their bodies in general. This is something that doing gender and sexual scripts in society do not permit and is, in fact, constantly under attack through social forces like not holding rapists accountable for their crimes and limiting reproductive rights for women by social institutions attempting to maintain the gender order

(Buchwald et al. 2005; Grossi 2022; Herman 1989; McGovern 2022). However, doing consent not only normalizes bodily autonomy and agency for women and everyone else; it requires it under threat of excommunication from the community.

Emma shares that being able to decide on how to interact with others is a game-changer.

She explains:

I think it's nice, because I feel like in regular roles, like heteronormative society, I feel like it's very kind of cut and dried. You [women] should be attractive and feminine and all this stuff. Women, I mean, me personally, I find it very empowering. I don't have to be some like super subservient, feminine, whatever, I can be whatever I want. If that is like a super dominant kick-ass woman, I can be and that's amazing. If I want to be that super feminine, like a 1950s housewife, I can be. I can play whatever role I want. I feel like in kink, probably for all genders, you don't have to fit into that stereotype of super masculine or feminine. If you want to be a super masculine man every other day but when you play, you want to be like a cross-dressing bottom? Absolutely. You could do that. If during the day you're a regular housewife and when you play, you're this kick-ass, dominant, beat-yo-ass woman. Absolutely. It's very empowering to be your true self without society really weighing you down or changing you.

It is interesting that here Emma describes the roles that someone plays in kink as a “true self” as if the roles you choose for yourself, gendered or not, are more authentic than the gendered self that is socially assigned. For Emma, choosing fluid BDSM roles and redoing gender as necessary to suit her desires in interactions allows her to feel authentic in her identity. Kink roles regularly subvert and redo normative gender and sexual scripts, particularly within transient interactions. Doing consent empowers women to assert what gender and femininity mean to them and what power it has over them. Lily shares with me that doing consent empowers women to express themselves differently because:

It teaches you vulnerability in a safe way. Sometimes being vulnerable... Real-life is way too fucking hard and scary. So, you can kind of practice that [vulnerability] in a controlled environment with someone that you trust. Kind of letting your guard down and realizing that something bad isn't going to happen every time you do that. It's easier to

translate that to your day-to-day life when you start taking those steps of trusting the people around you in a controlled environment.

Doing consent within kink provides women with a safe space to be vulnerable and practice boundaries that will be respected. Women do not have the option of “letting their guard down” in general society, particularly with their bodies, as it could mean anything from experiencing unwanted attention to sexual violence. Women are taught to constantly be aware of themselves, their bodies, and their surroundings to guard against these threats. Interestingly, kink spaces become a place for women to learn skills and techniques for doing consent kink interactions, but also for all interactions. This is particularly important for women who learn different messages from gender norms and sexual scripts. Lily also shares:

I also think that for women, they know it's a community that they can go into where they're not going to be slut shamed. Everyone's fine with it. Most of the time for some people in kink, it's not even really a sexual thing. But for me, it is. For a lot of women I know, it is. They don't have to be shamed about sex. It's very body positive for women. When you are on Fetlife or looking at fetish models. It's not fucking Vanity Fair. Like you see women of all sizes, all races. If you go to The Club, you'll see a big girl on the cross, you'll see a skinny girl on a cross and nobody bats an eye. Nobody's going up to the big girl like, ‘Wow, you're so brave’, you know those backhanded fucking ‘compliments’ because everyone is in that community. Just let people fucking live! Women can't do that in everyday life. Everything we do is a problem. We are too skinny or too big or too this or too that. For me, the BDSM community is so accepting, you can just be a woman and exist as a woman. Nobody's going to give you shit for it.

Lily describes how the kink community fosters sex-positive and body-positive sentiments. This is huge for women who are regularly confined by the stereotypes and expectations of gender and femininity in society. Consent norms empower women and others, to be respectful of diverse gender expressions, racial identities, body types, and sexual proclivity. Doing consent rejects the prescribed feminine ideals and accountability to perform it that the gender structure expects of women. Instead, it promotes acceptance by holding women accountable for how they choose to

live in their gender identities and expecting everyone to respect it because everyone deserves that right.

Helen identifies as dominant or a top. Helen has found doing consent as a dominant woman and a professional dominatrix empowering, she echoes what Lily said about body positivity:

It has empowered me. It has helped me conquer a lot of my body issues, conquer a lot of my shame. That is the thing, it has helped me work through and process. I have processed a great deal of shame through the work I do for others. When I dominate, I aim toward mutual healing.

Helen shares how doing consent and being dominant helps her take control over herself, and her bodily autonomy, and release a lot of the shame she had about her body. Interestingly, Helen talks about doing consent in her domination as an act of healing for herself and others. Being a powerful woman and commanding respect for her body and her desires is healing in interactions, particularly for a woman who is taught to be critical of herself by gender norms and sexual scripts. Helen does consent which lets her engage in femininity in ways that subvert or “redo” gender norms. Esmerelda shares that femininity can even be a weapon:

I like using femininity as a weapon as a pro domme. As a femme in this world, I have no very little choice about my body and how I'm perceived and the fact that I have long hair, and [being] petite makes people assume that I'm a woman and have breasts. I try to use that against them. If I can. Honestly, like, as a pro domme and an on-and-off sex worker of many years, I really feel like, if I'm going to have this be my perception in the world, I'm going to use it to my advantage.

One of the most important aspects of doing consent is the value a consent culture places on accountability. This is a community that engages in heavy social control and accountability for violating consent can be as drastic as being permanently ousted from BDSM groups and spaces. Gender norms and sexual scripts in society oppress women and support rape culture by

consistently allowing men to avoid accountability in their interactions with women, even in cases of personal and sexual violence. The increased level of accountability among individuals of all genders is perhaps the most compelling and empowering factor in doing consent for women.

Valkyrie tells me:

I think, especially for women, we walk through society, and we feel like, even though we might be around a bunch of nice guys, if there's one bad one, how nice are those guys going to be? Are they going to stand up for you? You don't know. Whereas in the lifestyle, you know that if someone's around you, if they don't do something, then they are at the same level as the guy that is doing something wrong. They are gonna have that level of accountability that we just don't have in regular society. So absolutely. I feel like it's empowering.

Women are more empowered by doing consent because it is drastically different from doing gender and sexual scripts, which inform most social interactions outside of BDSM. In society, men can present as “nice guys” and be allies against “bad guys” or as “nice guys” that could cause you harm. It is difficult to know how the “nice guys” will react if a man does cause you harm. In a rape culture, the victim is often blamed. Men will overwhelmingly use gender norms and scripts to “pull rank” and the victim is often left without support and the perpetrator without accountability. Valkyrie says this is the main difference between general society and the BDSM subculture where everyone does consent.

In the kink consent culture, bystanders are also encouraged to do consent, which informs them to interject on behalf of the person whose consent is being violated and to hold the consent violator accountable for their actions. This accountability is expected for every single consent violation that occurs, from hugging someone without consent to sexual assault. Valkyrie, as a woman, feels empowered to know that doing consent reinforces consent culture where her interactions are safe and on terms she defines. Here, women can express their sexuality, desires, and bodies with the expectation that any breach of their consent will result in accountability. This

alone redoes gender by giving women an avenue toward justice through accountability. Anything beyond that is completely unacceptable. This creates power for women in a way that they are rarely afforded through doing gender in society.

Doing consent means that women have more choices. They can decide if they want to participate in interactions as a dominant/top, submissive/bottom, or switch. Each of these roles gives them the ability to subvert and redo gender. Women have access to fluidity in how they interact with these roles and redo gender by defining femininity to suit them and redefining it as often as needed. Doing consent means having the agency to say no, but more importantly yes in all interactions, physical or otherwise. Women are encouraged to reject slut shaming, embrace body positivity, and seize control of their sexuality through doing consent. This redoes gender and sexual scripts like thinness, attractiveness, fragility, ignoring sexual pleasure and sexuality, and purity associated with emphasized femininity (Currier 2013; Kane and Schippers 1996; Masters et al. 2013; Williams 2002). Perhaps, most importantly, doing consent means that accountability is normative and the consequences for not doing consent are swift and dire. This accountability is a key factor in women being able to do consent and redo gender (Connell 2010; Darwin 2022; Hollander 2013, 2018; West and Zimmerman 2009). The shifts in who is accountable to do gender and sexual scripts, resistance to gender accountability and gender expectations, and gender rebellion to doing gender and sexual scripts are how women who do consent within the BDSM subculture redo gender and challenge what it means to be feminine. If women can redo gender and femininity through doing consent as the minority group in the gender hierarchy, how does it impact people outside of the gender binary who regularly “redo” gender as individuals?

Doing Consent Beyond the Gender “Binary” and Heteronormativity

The BDSM community has ample crossover with the LGBTQ+ community. Consequently, kink spaces tend to also be queer spaces. This means that most people in consent culture are either part of the queer community or are actively engaging with folks who are part of the queer community. In fact, without trying to recruit any specific population of people, most of the people I interviewed identify within the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Only two out of eighteen people in my sample identify as straight or heterosexual. I also have a gender-diverse sample with three people identifying as trans and two nonbinary identifying people. This presents the opportunity to consider how doing consent impacts the experiences and interactions of individuals beyond the gender binary. The confluence of the BDSM and Queer cultures is no accident. Queer people have long been involved in BDSM communities from early gay leather communities to the present day. The LGBTQ+ community is also confined by doing gender and doing sexuality in very prescriptive, heteronormative ways and also participates in gender rejection and resistance. They are both “deviant” and stigmatized subcultures, which likely leads to some sense of camaraderie.

Valkyrie shares that camaraderie in having stigmatized identities contributes to the increased and continued comingling between kink and queer people. “Everyone who is kinky knows what it's like to be judged... We have that empathy towards people who are not part of the gender norms that we've had for hundreds of years. I think that's the bare basic of understanding that we're able to support those that don't identify as a certain thing.” Valkyrie describes that the kink community has more empathy and understanding for genders outside of the normative binary because kinky people are deviants to society as well. Kinky people know what it means to be stigmatized, judged, and outcast for their identities, though there is a significant difference in

the impact of a BDSM identity and a master status like gender (Berger et al. 1972; Ridgeway 2009). However, it still creates a bond between kinky and queer people, especially among those who reject the gender binary. BDSM is a place where people are consistently experimenting within interactions. For people beyond the binary, it opens doors to possibilities that they might not experience otherwise. Valkyrie elaborates:

Then you have people who are into puppy play and horseplay and things like that. So, you already had that basis before, you know that gender fluidity really became as huge and as comfortable as it is now. So, when it came to being gender fluid and being outside of that box, it was just another added layer to that whole big range of identities that we already had. It was just an understanding of, 'Okay, this is who this person is. Cool, moving on.' Because that is consent, an understanding of letting people be who they are, as long as it didn't cause harm to others. So, if you just add on to the gender nonconformity... it's just 'Okay, cool. Next!'

Valkyrie, a queer woman, talks about how some trans and nonbinary people she plays with prefer play that allows them to not be gendered but still participate, like puppy/kitty and PONY play. Here, the person can be an animal that is gender ambiguous and focus on the power dynamic they want to experience. She explains that there are so many identities in the kink community and that doing consent means everyone is constantly talking about their identities, what that means to them, and how they want that identity to be involved or not involved in interactions. This is empowering for trans/nonbinary people outside of the gender binary because they are entering an accepting space that gives them options and normalizes sharing and changing, respecting, and playing with identity. This community is resisting gender expectations by not holding each other accountable for doing gender. Through doing consent, both cis people and trans, nonbinary, and people of other gender identities regularly redo gender through their individual and interpersonal interactions.

Lily, a pansexual woman, talks enthusiastically about how welcoming the community is to trans and nonbinary people. Doing consent means accepting trans and nonbinary people, calling them by their names and pronouns, and respecting their gender identity and presentation. She shares:

I think there is a great relationship with LGBTQA community and BDSM. I think there's an understanding." She gave an example "Let's say you're new to a city and you have to choose between a brewery and a BDSM club, you are probably going to pick the BDSM bar because nobody is gonna call you a slur and you'll just be accepted. A lot of the people that go to The Club are gay, not necessarily even into kink. They just can live. They can just go and have a drink and not be with the straights. Because kink straights are different from vanilla straights, I guess. It's way more accepting than the rest of the world for the gays which is awesome.

She discusses how accepting the BDSM community is and that the overlap between BDSM and the LGBTQ+ communities might form around consent culture and doing consent. For Lily, kink spaces are queer-friendly havens of refuge, where both kinky and queer folks can come together to avoid the "vanilla straights." Vanilla straights, as she describes, are likely cishet nonkinky people who do gender normatively and could range from ignorant to hostile in interactions with people of queer and kinky communities. "Kink straights" while possibly still cishet, operate in interactions by doing consent. BDSM is welcoming to anyone who follows the rules and does consent. Individuals are encouraged to be themselves, accept each other, and respect each other's bodies and boundaries. Will, a straight man, agrees and shares:

I have seen that a lot of non-binary people, trans people, non-cis people have felt discrimination, persecution, whatever. They have issues that gender normative people do not have. Them being able to express themselves even if it's pseudo- publicly has been empowering for them. They seem more confident. The first time someone comes out as trans or identifies that way, and maybe starts dressing differently or acting how they would consider normal in a public space... that is definitely empowering for a lot of maligned groups, groups that have been persecuted against.

Will tells me that he has served in leadership positions in various groups. Also, even though Will is straight, he plays nonsexual with people of all genders. For Will, the gender of the person is less important than them feeling included and having their needs met in the community. Again, with cis people and people beyond the gender binary, doing consent means redoing gender through agency and bodily autonomy.

I interviewed Nico, a queer man, for my thesis in 2018 as Trixie. At the time, Nico identified as a pansexual woman (Cagwin 2018). Since then, he has transitioned to a man, but he still identifies as a submissive. Nico told me that he feels people of other genders are empowered by doing consent because, “I think that they are more prevalent in those [BDSM] spaces. So, there are more of them there and there is safety in numbers.” Nico points out that the large degree of cross-over between the BDSM and LGBTQ+ communities is likely due to the feeling of safety that doing consent provides. For Nico, power comes from representation and safety. By existing within the kink community and consent culture, trans and non-binary folks have space where they can feel safe both in interactions with cis people and each other.

Carey, a queer man, shares that he is a trans guy, he told me, “I came into kink as a woman. I transitioned to kink. It's been the most welcoming place of everywhere I've had to navigate.” To him, doing consent means he can be trans and queer in a community that respects and embraces him. It is normative to do consent for people in the kink consent culture, this often means tolerance, acceptance, and even encouragement of breaking/ playing with norms of doing gender. This creates a feeling of safety for Carey that does not exist for him in “vanilla” spaces or heteronormative society where doing gender in non-normative ways can produce stigma, hostility, or violence. He feels by doing consent, he can choose how he interacts with others and how they interact with him. He has the agency to be himself, to not only choose what role he

wants to play, usually a bottom-leaning switch, but also autonomy over his body and identity. Ultimately, he is redoing gender through doing consent like the women in the sample, through having the choice to reject gender and sexual scripts and not be held accountable to perform gender prescribed by society.

Rose, a queer femme, shares that she is femme (non-binary) and many of her close friends are also trans and non-binary. For her, the kink community has allowed her to explore her gender identity and sexuality in a community where others share ideas and experiences that make it easy to do. She said she has had many friends enter kink and discover themselves as being gender-nonconforming, trans, or queer, in general. She elaborates that there is an:

Almost magical, temporary way that it can be really empowering, especially when you are trying to conquer these big questions about selfhood and identity. I think that the community offers this useful space to, and I'm not gonna say this term in a derogatory or detracting sense, play dress up almost. So, if you maybe aren't safe to present as your gender identity in your day-to-day life, when you come to a party, maybe you can, and in the process of being able to do that like what identity feels good to you.

Rose describes how because the BDSM community participates in “doing consent”, this allows individuals to explore themselves both individually and within interactions. Because each interaction can be tailored and negotiated to the boundaries and desires of everyone involved, people outside of the gender binary can redo gender. In one interaction they can present or act in ways that might be synonymous with a particular gender or multiple genders. Esmerelda, a queer femme, agrees and shares:

I am also nonbinary. I think that I've seen a lot of people explore their gender more comfortably in the kink community. That's true for me, too. I think that these humans helped me explore my own gender and ideas about power and masculinity and femininity and what that means at all... if anything. I feel like there is space for people to explore gender, and transition, or change, or update, or re-explore parts of their genders that maybe the mainstream world wouldn't be as accepting about. In the kink world, we are all exploring things that are taboo to the mainstream culture, and one of those things is

gender. And I have done a lot of thinking during my 13 years in the kink community about power in gender and it's been frustrating because of the patriarchy. Fucking patriarchy. But, within the kink community, I feel very much empowered as a nonbinary femme to explore, quote-unquote, "masculinity and femininity", and use those things in the context of power and submission. There's wiggle room to look around and try new things.

For Rose and Esmerelda, doing consent means that gender is fluid, and they can change gender presentation, gender identity, and gender expectations from one interaction to another. Doing consent rewrites the gender expectations of every interaction from permanent to negotiable. This alone could be very empowering for trans and nonbinary people.

Most of the cis participants enthusiastically agree that doing consent means accepting everyone for however they choose to identify, however, Helen shared that this has not always been the case in the BDSM community. Helen told me that she feels that people outside of the gender binary being empowered by doing consent is a relatively new concept in kink. She shares that she believes the newer generation of kinky folks empowers diverse genders, but that:

The older school BDSM community was definitely a gender binary universe. I think that it [the BDSM community] was among the first to start being more trans-friendly. But I remember there were times where I was dating trans people and we would cross over into like, swinger groups. It wasn't understood that swingers might be hostile. The older group crew might be hostile to transphobic. That is one of the reasons I kind of stopped with that scene. Because I was rolling with so many trans humans and that definitely changed. I think, yeah, there was a change of gender [acceptance/expectations?]. There was a generational shift.

Helen discusses how she has been involved in the community for many years and there was a time when roles like submissive and dominant were more correlated to biological sex and gender or in queer arrangements who was masculine and who was feminine. However, as the community evolved and continued to play with gender and subvert cultural norms through doing consent, a shift occurred where the community values surrounding gender changed. Interestingly, swinging communities were less accepting of trans people than BDSM communities. It is

possible that swinging communities are more concerned with both doing gender and sexual scripts because sexual interaction and genitals are involved. If the swingers are cis het, this could lead to gender panic. BDSM does not necessarily include sexual interaction. However, Helen does describe that the generational shift has contributed to the kink communities being more accepting of gender diversity. This acceptance and shift in who is accountable for gender and how they perform it likely contribute to the community's ability to redo gender when doing consent.

Valkyrie shares that she feels gender expectations are changing with the acceptance of people of different genders and the new generation of kinky people coming into the community. She describes how there seems to be a boom in interest in the kink community, particularly as the younger generation, Gen Z, reaches adulthood. She is hopeful that, "with all these different genders and things, all the hard gender roles of 'men do this' and 'women do this' are fizzling away. Then with this boom in the new kinky kids, there are no super strict gender boundaries." Here, Valkyrie is describing how she notices change occurring in attitudes surrounding gender in the kink community. Emma, a queer woman, shares that she is 23 and has only been active in the BDSM community for a few years since she turned 18. Her perspective on whether gender is important in the community was radically different from Helen's perspective. When I asked Emma if gender is important to the BDSM community, Emma shakes her head and says:

Because of who I am as a person, absolutely not. But I think it definitely depends on who you ask. I find that for a lot of the younger people, it doesn't really matter who you are, it just matters what you want, and how that can be achieved. It doesn't matter if whoever tops me as a man, woman, or other gender, it just matters what you can do and if you vibe.

For Emma and people in her generation coming into kink, their focus is less on gender. It is more important to do consent and focus on what skills are brought to the table in interactions. I think it

is interesting that Emma describes the younger generation in kink as caring less about gender and Helen describes an older generation that was highly confined by doing gender in BDSM. Could this just be a generational shift in how doing gender is acceptable in general? Emma does share that:

Age simply plays a factor in it. I find that a lot older, not all, but a lot of older people in this scene tend to be like, very cis het. They tend to have very strict roles for each gender for what you 'should be' and if that's something you find comfort in, go for it. Absolutely. I don't care.

From these accounts, it seems that gender did inform kink interactions a lot more in the past and maybe for some, particularly older kinksters, gender is still done in BDSM. However, as the older generation ages out of the community and the new generation come in there is a shift where doing consent means gender is redone by both women and people beyond the gender binary through their interactions in kinky spaces despite the prevailing gender hierarchy in society. It is possible that this generational shift in attitudes about gender and sexuality fuels the communal hyper-focus on doing consent and creating consent culture more broadly. It is probable that the desire of individuals in BDSM to continuously differentiate themselves from society.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explore how consent culture socially constructs consent scripts in BDSM to inform how individuals should “do consent” and what that means for doing and redoing gender for women and people beyond the gender binary. If society is a continuously reproduced human product of social order, the same is true for its subcultures (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Brekhus 2015; Haenfler 2013). Individuals in kink impact consent culture as an institution and how it is constructed, then that construction constrains how they adhere to it. The

BDSM community provides secondary socialization for individuals by introducing them to new socialized concepts in the objective social world of the subculture (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Agents of socialization in kink include friends, mentors, DM's, groups and group leaders, The Club and its management, munches, educational classes, parties, etc. They teach individuals how to assimilate and understand the actions and reactions of others so that they can learn to properly interact. People internalize the socialized messages of consent culture and do self-identification as kinky people. Being a kinky person means doing consent and doing consent is required of kinky people.

In consent culture, individuals do consent in interactions when they simultaneously enact their own agency and respect the agency of others. Consistently enacting agency in interactions contributes to establishing patterns, or habits, of doing consent. Consistent with prior theorizing on the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966), I find the habitualization of doing consent in interactions, including the intentional preservation of agency, allows people in BDSM to engage in typification. Here, people create social bonds with each other through shared meaning, symbols, and language of consent culture. Socially defined terms like dominate/ submissive/ switch, enthusiastic consent, safewords, and hard and soft limits are all typifications vital to construct meaning and shared understanding that forms social norms, or consent scripts, for doing consent. Doing consent is an action and an ideology because it is interwoven and institutionalized within consent culture to make behavior predictable. DM's, leaders, The Club and its management, and kinky people and their reputations provide legitimation through social control. They warn under threat of expulsion that doing consent is moral and expected. However, it is the people in the BDSM community who maintain consent culture as an institution through their interactions. They inform the socialization of future kinky people to also internalize and

habituate doing consent. DM's, group leaders, and The Club and its management are also agents of social control that are reified as "things," usually "good things" (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Here, the social control they exert on the BDSM community through accountability to doing consent is positively received. Once legitimation occurs, individuals internalize and accept doing consent as part of what it means to be a member of the BDSM community and subculture (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This process is a continuous feedback loop and never stops.

Doing consent is enacting a habitualized and pervasive set of social scripts within the consent culture in the BDSM subculture. It "does" agency and bodily autonomy through enthusiastic consent, coercion-free negotiation of interactions between social actors, boundaries through hard limits and safe words, and the enforcement of accountability through informal and formal social control in interactions. The strict adherence to these values contributes to informing people's attitudes, beliefs, and actions within physical and social interactions in kink. Doing consent becomes a powerful method to inform not only how people are expected to interact with each other in the BDSM community, but also how they should interact with gender and sexual scripts in these spaces. Doing consent means that women and people beyond the gender binary, who are normatively oppressed by the gender power hierarchy, have more choices. They can choose what roles they want to play and what concepts like femininity and masculinity mean to them, they can redefine and redo gender itself. Doing consent empowers women and people beyond the gender binary to have agency and bodily autonomy through being able to say "no" and more importantly "yes" to interactions involving their bodies. It promotes bodily autonomy, which lets individuals reject the embodiments of normative gender expressions and expectations. It creates fluidity to explore gender as a spectrum. Women and people beyond the gender binary can reject and embrace gender expectations and accountability by choosing BDSM roles that suit

their own desires and centering their own pleasure in experiences. But most importantly, doing consent redoes gender by not holding people accountable for “doing” gender while simultaneously holding individual actors accountable for doing consent in their interactions.

While this is a powerful empirical example of redoing gender individually and within interactions for marginalized gender identities, it does not consider the elephant in the room, men and masculinity. In the next chapter, I explore what doing consent means for men. Does doing consent redo masculinity as it does femininity or does the prevailing gender structure inform and impact ‘doing consent’ more than my participants are aware of? I explore these questions and discuss the implications for men doing consent in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DOING CONSENT, REDOING MASCULINITY, AND CONFLICT WITH DOING GENDER

INTRODUCTION

The gender power hierarchy is pervasive. It demands that individuals “do” gender appropriately and hold each other accountable for their gender performances (Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013, 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). This is especially oppressive for subordinated genders like women and people beyond the gender binary. Even though men are privileged in the gender hierarchy, it also confines them to participate in strict gender interactions and performances through hegemonic masculinity to maintain the power structure (Connell 2005, 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). The BDSM community regularly plays with gender power dynamics by encouraging consensual power exchange and power dynamics that subvert the norms of doing gender and sexual scripts.

As I discussed in the two previous chapters, my findings demonstrate that doing consent means engaging in a ubiquitous set of social scripts within the BDSM consent culture. These consent scripts include valuing agency and bodily autonomy through enthusiastic consent, coercion-free negotiation of interactions between social actors, boundaries through hard limits and safe words, and the enforcement of accountability for all these concepts within interactions. Often, these consent scripts directly conflict with the norms and values of the gender power structure. Consent culture expects individuals to strictly do consent in physical and social

interactions. As I show in this chapter, this ultimately influences individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Doing consent informs kink interactions so strongly, that it can redo gender by replacing gender scripts in interactions. It has the potential to redefine femininity and masculinity by redetermining who is held accountable for gender expressions and stereotypes.

Doing consent gives people an alternative to doing gender by encouraging the subversion of gender norms and sexual scripts. Like women and people of other genders in the previous chapter, men may also be able to redefine and renegotiate what masculinity is to them. Through doing consent, men may be able to reject aspirations of hegemonic masculinity. More importantly, consent culture does not hold individuals accountable for doing gender. Instead, individuals only hold each other accountable to do consent, which intentionally and unintentionally resists gender accountability in interactions (Hollander 2013). Doing consent is a gender rebellion that allows women and people beyond the binary to redo gender individually and interactionally within the BDSM subculture (Connell 2010; Goffman 1956; Hollander 2013, 2018; Risman and Davis 2013). However, does the same apply to men? In this chapter, I will consider what doing consent means for men. Does doing consent redo masculinity as it does femininity or does the prevailing gender structure inform and impact 'doing consent'?

Doing Consent, Redoing Masculinity

Consent culture clearly values agency and autonomy. In doing consent, everyone has the choice to decide how they want to participate in interactions. This choice was particularly powerful for women and people of other genders in Chapter 3. Doing consent means that they can decide how they *want* to do and redo the gender assigned to them at birth within each interaction. In BDSM, doing consent means choosing a kink role (ex: dominant/ submissive, top/ bottom, switch) that may or may not be traditionally associated with gender norms and sexual

scripts assigned to femininity or masculinity. The power is the choice to interact on self-defined terms. Like women and people beyond the gender binary, men have limited choices in the gender structure. For them, it is aspiring to hegemonic masculinity or bust (Connell 2005; Duncanson 2015). While hegemonic masculinity is not accessible to all men, not at least trying to achieve it can result in compensatory actions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015).

To explore how doing consent impacts the interactions of men in the BDSM community, I ask each participant how they felt about doing consent. Is it empowering for men? Abel, a dominant identifying straight but questioning man, tells me that doing consent is empowering and he relates that feeling of empowerment to his dominant role. He considers himself a service dom, which allows him to provide pleasure as a service while fulfilling his own “sadistic side” as he describes it. He finds doing consent in BDSM particularly empowering because it makes interactions happen more smoothly and maximizes positive outcomes for all parties involved. Because boundaries and agency are well established, doing consent for Able means “I’m now given free rein to work within those confines. What is more empowering than that? Clear directions in any phase of life are empowering. That’s what consent really comes back to.” Conceptually, doing consent acts as the lines in the coloring book that should be colored within, but the lines are all negotiated so if those involved in any interaction want to move the lines, or color outside of them, flexibility is available. That is a comfort for men in kink interactions. Men know in advance how far is appropriate and know how to interact with others in healthy ways.

When discussing how men are empowered by BDSM, Able mentions that men who do gender and normative sexual scripts are usually seen as sexual predators/perpetrators in society, particularly in kink. He finds the absence of consent education in normative interactions

unfortunate. Able feels that instances of rape, particularly date rape, could be avoided by doing consent because of the clear boundaries maintained by both parties. Able finds doing consent empowering for men because it means:

Very clear boundaries, and maintaining those boundaries, and having the framework that consent provides... it takes off the table that you're going to be a sexual predator in that instance.

Doing consent allows men to have a framework for interactions that helps them be “a good kinky person”, one that follows the rules, but also gives them an avenue to explore their desires and maintain their status as a “good guy who doesn’t rape” (Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Sometimes doing gender and normative sexual scripts can cause confusion and conflict for men. Because of masculinity and implicit consent scripts, it is sometimes difficult for them to distinguish desired behavior from coercion, or an act of violence (Barker 2013; Beres and MacDonald 2015; Grigoriadis 2017a; Hollander 2001; Pitagora 2013). Able says that doing consent is the most direct way to interact in mutually enjoyable ways without worrying about assaulting anyone. For him, even violent BDSM play is not assault, but any lack of consent is an assault. It is interesting that for Able there is no middle ground, either you do consent, or you are a sexual predator. Through these “very clear boundaries” doing consent provides avenues to say yes or no freely and enthusiastically to any activity. Kink play can range dramatically from tickling with a feather to rape play, better known in the community as consensual non-consent or CNC. BDSM empowers men to engage in behavior they desire that may be defined as socially deviant and not be seen as rapists, so long as they do consent.

Edward, a submissive identifying bisexual man, agrees and explains that doing consent can, “form these lanes that people are expected to be in, and they can get used to places that help establish clear boundaries. I feel like compared to non-BDSM spaces, it just turns a lot of

interactions from a gray area into black and white areas.” As I discussed in the previous chapter, normative interactions informed by doing gender often leave a lot to interpretation through anticipated gendered actions and reactions. This leaves a lot of room for errors to occur. Doing consent requires everything to be clearly communicated and consented to in all interactions. Edward agrees with Able that for men doing consent, “can be empowering in the sense that you know where you can go and when you can go [to] places that you would never have expected, you wouldn't be able to without those clear lines.” Kink allows for interactions and behaviors that are seen as deviant in the larger society, however doing consent makes these interactions “safe” or less deviant, because of agency and clear communication (Cagwin 2018; Holt 2016; Klement et al. 2017; Simula 2019a; Stiles and Clark 2011; Stockwell, Hopkins, and Walker 2017).

The process of explicitly communicating boundaries and desires is not normative because doing gender and sexual scripts for men means being socially and sexually assertive, particularly with women. In society, this has led to cyclical rape culture, where men use messages from doing gender and implicit consent scripts to inform their physical and sexual interactions, and those interactions influence and reinforce the gender structure (Buchwald et al. 2005; Connell 1987; Martin 2004; Risman 2004). Men are not held accountable for consent violations because of their power in the gender hierarchy and because aggression and sexual proclivity are normative for a man doing gender. Doing consent redoes gender because it holds men accountable for consent scripts that directly challenge gender norms and expectations through respecting agency, bodily autonomy, and boundaries.

Masculinity confines men to very specific gender norms, stereotypes, and roles (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Valkyrie shares that she thinks men are empowered by doing consent because:

I think it's empowering for them because they're able to ask those questions without being judged. They're able to ask, can I touch you here? Can I do this? Can I use this toy? How hard can I hit you? Whereas in regular society, they wouldn't be able to ask us questions. I think it's just that level of communication throughout the community, that lets them know where they stand. Whereas outside of the community, they're not sure how they're being perceived.

Valkyrie explains that doing consent gives men new scripts and language to use in interactions. In kink, men are not expected to innately know what to do and take the lead in interactions as gender norms suggest. They do not have to feel judged or less masculine for respecting agency by asking questions or asking about and respecting boundaries, because in doing consent, asking questions and respecting boundaries are expected and encouraged. Masculinity can be redefined or reimagined within a consent culture that does consent. Men have options to act and communicate in ways that directly conflict with the norms associated with doing gender and sexual scripts. Men redo gender by actively engaging in doing consent and negotiating what masculinity means for them.

For Nick, a top/ dominant identifying straight but questioning man, the assertiveness or confidence often associated with masculinity is not something that comes easily to him. He rejects traditional hegemonic masculinity. In kink, he desires a balance of power within himself, but he still feels conflicted about it. He shares with me:

So, my ultimate wish scenario is that I would be a pure 50/50 switch. But I know that I have trust issues in that I need to have trust with people. I also know that being pure 50/50 is not able to exist. It doesn't exist. I'm very skeptical that it can exist out in the community.

Even though Nick identifies as dominant, he wants to switch. He sees being a 50/50 switch as the golden standard of power neutrality, a place where he can avoid aligning masculinity with dominance. But he feels that this is rarely the case for switches. In his opinion, everyone leans in one direction toward dominance/submission or top/bottom. He shares with me that he originally identified as a submissive but that he does not feel he can trust other people enough to submit to them. Interestingly, he trusts himself to do consent in a dominant position but is not sure he can trust others. He finds it difficult to let his guard down no matter the gender of his play partner. Nick admits, “it took a lot of courage and self-admission. But what I found is that the only way for me to be able to do anything out in the community is I have to embrace my top side. So yeah, I do mainly top.” Nick describes how at first it was difficult for him to embrace his top or dominant side because he was uncomfortable with having power over others, especially women, who he primarily plays with.

Nick shares that he now feels empowered because he can use his top side to facilitate the desires of his play partners and that makes him happy. This type of attitude and perspective in dominance/topping is more in line with a service top, or someone like Able who sees topping as a service or courtesy to a play partner. For Nick, assertiveness or aggressiveness often associated with masculinity is not something that comes easily to him. Doing consent as a top or a dominant is empowering because it allows Nick to have new experiences and to gain confidence in himself and his abilities without engaging in problematic masculinity. Men who do not do gender correctly in society are often outcasts and subordinated by men participating in hegemonic masculinity. Nick is hesitant to participate in the dominance that he associates with masculinity. Instead, he participates in doing consent which allows him to form his identity as a dominant/top around equality, mutual respect, and empathy which directly challenges or subverts hegemonic

masculinity. This shift away from the violent domination of other men and women's agency, bodily autonomy, and boundaries can redo gender and masculinity (Connell 2009; Duncanson 2015).

When I ask Will how men are empowered by doing consent he shares "I can say that there's some gender conflict stuff." Will describes that a gender conflict may occur for men depending on their BDSM role. Submissive men might conflict with gender norms and sexual scripts they are taught in society because submission is not a normative quality for men in masculinity (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015). However, dominant men also experience conflict, as the brand of hegemonic masculine dominance they are taught by society is not supported within consent culture. Dominant men must relearn how to do masculinity while doing consent. By doing consent, men redo gender even in dominant roles by rejecting hegemonic masculinity. This allows men to redo masculinity by decentering men's gender power in interactions and instead centering respect for the agency and bodily autonomy of others.

Will goes on to say, "I've never felt more masculine establishing consent towards anyone... But also, on the flip side, I never felt emasculated either." Will explains doing consent within interactions does not make him feel more or less masculine. It is just normal and expected in kink, so for Will doing consent is not tied to his gender identity or the power that identity may hold. It is important that Will shares that doing consent does not make him feel less masculine. In society, men informed by hegemonic masculinity, normative sexual scripts, and implicit consent, could feel that asking for consent is detrimental to their performance of masculinity. Men are supposed to be in control and take charge of interactions. Asking for permission could come across as weakness. Doing consent redoes masculinity by removing the expectation that men should do gender by taking the lead and directing interactions without input from others.

Instead, doing consent informs that everyone should ask for and give consent enthusiastically, including men. This is important for doing consent to be possible. If men can do consent and redo masculinity, this changes the gender order so that femininity can also be redone. However, it is interesting, for Will at least, that doing consent is not particularly empowering as a man. Perhaps, it is because men redo power when redoing gender. Or it could be that because Will does not connect gender identity to doing consent, it does not necessarily feel empowering for him as a man. It is just normal, standard procedures in interactions in the BDSM community.

I ask Squeek, a soft dom identifying demisexual man, about submissive men and empowerment. He explains he cannot speak to that because he is a soft dom with ‘submissive tendencies.’ He is a service bottom, where he considers the acts of submission he does as a service to play partners because he wants to nurture them and make them feel good. That creates pleasure for him. Squeek shares that he can see how it is empowering for submissive men to do consent, to ask for what they want, be direct about it, and then get it even when they are submitting to their desires. Claire agrees and shares that she could see how men who are subs would be empowered because they are allowed to get, “away from the confines of hegemonic masculinity for a minute.” Submissive men are empowered because through doing consent they can submit and reject masculinity, at least within that interaction. This can be temporary and does not have to change how they might express their masculinity outside of BDSM. However, by participating in submission that is typically associated with femininity, men are redoing gender and sexual scripts associated with masculinity (Connell 2005; Hollander 2013, 2018). When men do consent, they are redoing masculinity by blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity within interactions. Here, they can engage with gender as a continuum versus a rigid binary (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993).

When doing consent, men have to opportunity to be dominant/submissive, a top/bottom, or a switch. In kink, there is a choice that transcends doing gender and sexual scripts. That choice alone is powerful in providing a space where men can redo gender. Men like Able, Will, Nick, and Squeek can do consent to be dominant in a way that is comfortable for them and that diverges from masculinity. Men can also embrace the violent domination of hegemonic masculinity but transform it through the power of consent culture. Even though they are enacting prescriptive masculinity and gendered power as men, they are redoing gender because they participate in doing consent. Esmerelda agrees that men are empowered by doing consent in different ways, they share:

I think men are empowered to take either a submissive or dominant role in the BDSM community, and that is different than the mainstream world. The mainstream world expects men, because of toxic masculinity, to be dominant and aggressive, and not ask for consent. So, I feel like the BDSM world was like, okay, you can be dominant, and aggressive, but definitely you need to talk about consent. I think that is empowering.

Doing consent empowers men to escape gendered norms that stem from how masculinity is constructed in the gender power structure. It provides men with a new framework and insight into how to interact with others in healthy ways while embracing their desires. Men can reject doing gender and how they are expected to interact with others. Esmerelda offers, “I think that the kink community really allows space and context and framework for men and everyone, to explore things that toxic masculinity and patriarchy and rape culture don't easily allow.” As this chapter shows, through doing consent, men are offered the same fluidity that women, femmes, nonbinary and trans people express having in the previous chapter. Not only does this fluidity help them redo gender by giving them choices, but it also gives them a lens through which they can explore themselves in ways not readily available outside of the BDSM community. One way men can reject “toxic” masculinity, patriarchy, and rape culture and redo masculinity is through

doing consent. Esmerelda also describes how through kink; men are sometimes experiencing nontraditional gender roles for the first time in their lives. They explain:

I think that the kink community empowers men to explore non-conventional gender roles and non-conventional gender expression. I've seen a lot of people come into the kink community, and then realize more about their own gender over time, because they feel more comfortable in the kink community being quote weird unquote or being in between.

Society expects men to do gender and engage with and express masculinity in very specific ways. Because of this, BDSM and consent culture might be their first exposure to non-normative gender expression and a community that embraces deviation from social norms. By being in the kink community and doing consent, men are free to explore gender in ways they are not typically allowed. This can be a revelation to men. They might find that they identify differently than they did before doing consent gave them the freedom to redo gender and reject gender expectations. Nico and Carey, two trans men, both told me about how their experiences in kink helped them to find themselves and transition in a way that made them feel powerful and safe. Though this is not true for every person, their first step into manhood was doing consent and discovering who they were beyond prescriptive gender.

Doing consent means exploring alternatives to traditional gender and sexual scripts. This can also mean redoing sex and sexuality and provides a flexibility men do not normally experience (Wiederman 2005). Hades, a dominant identifying man, said that he plays with people of different genders, but the type of play may differ depending on the gender of the person. He shares that he is only comfortable doing nonsexual play with men because he identifies as a heterosexual man. But he does describe how if a man were to become aroused during a scene with him that would not bother him. He would be happy they are enjoying it even

if he does desire to have sex with them. He also describes playing with trans women sexually and non-sexually. He explains:

I've played with trans women, and I have no problem playing with trans women. I play with trans women pre-op and post-op. I have had sex with trans women post, but I actually have had sex before with trans women pre-op. It's not what I will normally do because it's not actually what I'm normally attracted to. This stems into a whole other conversation about trans people that I always have. I have a bunch of trans friends, and we have conversations about this all the time. But it's like I explain to people when we play, I'm like, look, I'm not attracted to a penis. And thus, no matter how much you look like Angelina Jolie, if you have a penis, I'm not going to feel that attraction to you.

Even though Hades is a cishet man, he is attracted to all women including trans women. He describes having sex with “pre-op” trans women but that it is rare because he is not attracted to penises. It is interesting that he is validating all trans women as women and is interested in them sexually... unless a penis is present. However, a penis being present has not stopped him from having sexual experiences with trans women. He may be experiencing conflict between doing gender and doing consent. It is also possible Hades has internalized heteronormativity or is experiencing stigma or conflict surrounding non-normative sexuality. However, he is not the only cishet man that discusses playing with other men and people of all genders. Will, a dominant/top-identifying cishet man tells me that he regularly plays with people of all different gender identities. For him, his needs are met through participating in the physical acts, but his desire to participate goes beyond serving his own interests. Will shares:

I do it because it's needed in our community. There's a lot of the typical male dominant/female submissive stereotypes, but it's very hard for people to find play partners if you're the black male submissive or trans submissive. I feel like they shouldn't not have play just because I'm a straight man.

Will is aware that some people's identities may complicate their participation in the BDSM community. For him, doing consent means he can play with anyone of any gender identity, or sexuality. While both Hades and Will are comfortable doing scenes with men and people of all

gender identities if the play is typically not sexual in nature. But they both indicate that if men or people with other gender identities become aroused during nonsexual play, it would not bother them. They are happy to facilitate the person having a positive experience. Interestingly, consent allows them to navigate sexuality and gender in ways that are not consistent with the norms involved with doing gender and sexual scripts. It is possible that men's experience with doing consent in the kink community makes them more open-minded and accepting of different kinds of bodies and their relation to gender and power (Simula and Sumerau 2017). This openness redoes masculinity, gender, and potentially heteronormativity by disassociating biological sex from gender expression and allowing sexuality to be independent of both.

In the gender hierarchy, masculinity is placed opposite and above femininity and creates a binary associated with biological sex. Doing gender reinforces this hierarchy of dominance in a patriarchal society. However, consent culture does not value masculinity or femininity over the other. In kink, men do not have to subordinate women/femininity, people beyond the binary, or other men to maintain their agency and power. By doing consent, men can reject hegemonic masculinity and co-construct gender with others in the community as a fluid and equal continuum. The door is open for men to value women and their empowerment. Perhaps, women and all gender identities doing consent promotes men's desire for respect, empathy, and even equality. Choosing to engage in interactions with these values while rejecting violence is key to redoing gender (Connell 2009; Duncanson 2015; West and Zimmerman 2009). This shift in values and scripts possibly also leaves them more open to engaging with social movements like feminism. A few men in the project claim to be feminists. When I ask Hades how men are specifically empowered by doing consent, he interestingly starts talking about empowering women and feminism:

I'm very feminist. I'm all about women doing their thing and empowering them, and them doing as they please because it's their body, they can do whatever they want with their body. But at the same time, it has put us men in a position where we have to be very hesitant with the things we do with certain females, or women, it's not just females since sometimes it's derogatory to others. But a lot of women now feel that a man doing certain things or calling them certain things [is wrong]. To some women, it is wrong because that's not how they feel. But at the same time, when we have that power to play with a specific person where we can actually do the things we want with that person, being a woman, in this case, we do feel empowered. We do feel like kings, almost gods because I have your life in my hands. But yeah, I will say like, it's a little difficult sometimes.

Hades describes that he is a feminist and that being a feminist is congruent with doing consent in kink. However, he also discusses how it is difficult to navigate various feminist ideologies among women in social spaces and interactions. For him, being a feminist conflicts with his dominant identity which aligns with masculinity scripts through taking power and control over that which is feminine, regardless of gender. His brand of sadistic play can include violent dominance over women that is consistent with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Taking that control makes Hades feel empowered as a man and a dom. Interestingly, he views it as women giving him the power to play with them. That makes him feel empowered to be in control within the interaction to the degree that he describes feeling like a king or a god. This could be seen as wildly anti-feminist because a man is controlling and doing violence to women/femininity. A woman is submitting to a man and is experiencing violence. What is feminist about that?

The difference is that Hades, and his partners, are doing consent. He is playing with hegemonic masculine concepts with a person who desires and consents to be involved. Some could argue that the desire of Hades and his partners to engage in these acts at all is because of the influence of the gender structure. That could be true. However, others describe engaging in specific kinds of play therapeutically to process and regain a sense of control over trauma and

oppression. The act of doing consent redoes gender, even within interactions that could be construed as doing gender. Here, Hades and his partner are enthusiastically consenting, setting boundaries and limits, and respecting agency and bodily autonomy. This firmly deviates from doing gender and masculinity which expects gender interactions of dominant masculinity and submissive femininity to be automatic and normative. Yet, Hades feels doing consent means the bottom/submissive, which for him is typically a woman, has the actual power in a scene or interaction because they can negotiate boundaries of the interaction and ultimately revoke consent. Hades shares that people in the top or dominant role can also withdraw consent and it does happen if or when they reach a limit or have concern for their play partners' safety.

Men feel powerful doing consent because they can safely play with some parts of masculinity. They can provide a service or act as facilitators for the pleasure of others. They can play with whoever they want. They can be feminists. But is this how they are perceived by others? To gain perspective, I ask Helen, a dominant identifying queer woman, about how men are empowered by doing consent. Interestingly, she agrees with Hades and explains:

Well, let's start with what's 'men', and then let's talk about what's wicked different with a dominant man and a submissive man. Like I feel like a lot of submissive men are experiencing a great deal of happiness and joy and freedom in surrendering to women. I'm probably processing and working through a lot of patriarchal garbagey bullshit with that. I think a lot of pain in dominant men I have struggled with. But also, I see many of them building for themselves a language and space where they really are super into consent. They really are super into women. They really are trying to be dominant males and feminists.

Helen talks about how submissive men are allowed to be submissive to women and enjoy it, presumably without having their masculinity questioned or being abused for their preferences unless that is their desire. Helen feels that subverting gender norms and expectations associated with doing gender and masculinity is powerful for men. She is aware that her perspective could

be informed by patriarchal constructs of both gender and power. However, it is an excellent point, doing consent does redo gender by refusing to police how men interact with gender. She explains that she has struggled with dominant men, likely because of the ‘patriarchal garbagey bullshit’ she experiences regularly in society. However, she sees many men using the language of doing consent in positive ways. Some dominant men are feminists, as Hades claims to be, who love and respect women and reject hegemonic masculinity. Instead, these dominant men do consent as a feminist act. Even when their dominant actions align with masculinity, men are redoing gender by empowering women through honoring their agency, bodily autonomy, boundaries, and limits in interactions. This is a stark contrast to how doing gender socializes men to subordinate women and disregard their autonomy to maintain their own structural power (Connell 1987, 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Men have the freedom to reject or redo the masculinity doing gender prescribes to them within consent culture. They can reshape what both dominance and masculinity mean in ways that support feminist ideals. One example from my research involves Squeek, a “soft dom”, which he describes as dominance as an act of service for his partners. This kind of service dom is sometimes described as “bottoming from the top” because they are engaging in dominance almost in a way that submits to the desires of their partner. However, Squeek defends this and explains, “I’m not a full submissive because it’s just not me. I still like to be able to take control when it’s needed and when it’s warranted.” For him, much of his domination exists around his desire to please his partner and as a vessel for fulfilling their desire. To some people that could be seen as submissive, but Squeek insists that he does like to be in control in interactions. He doesn’t like the ‘hardcore’ idea of domination, which is why he prefers the term soft dom. This means that he avoids violent domination and sadism. When he is dominating, he does not desire

to control. He enjoys it because he is facilitating pleasure and the catalyst of happiness for the other person. Squeek tells me:

Honestly, this is part of my training and tantric background and all the other shit. The other person's pleasure is what gets me off. Being able to know that I am causing another human being to feel that way and see that I'm doing it. That is the most fucking rewarding thing on this planet. To me, personally.

For him, the feeling of being empowered comes from the ability to make pleasure happen and fulfill the wishes of his partner. This does seem to line up more with what one would expect from normative feminine submission, bending to the desires of another. However, when Squeek does consent it allows him to redo what masculinity and domination mean personally to him. He can negotiate his desires to cause pleasure in specific ways that conflict with hegemonic masculinity. Doing consent allows Squeek to do dominance and masculinity softly, rejecting masculine violence and centering a man's pleasure. For Squeek, dominance and masculinity include traits traditionally associated with femininity. Doing consent means he can do what feels natural to him and focus on what he finds most important in interactions, the enjoyment of the other person. Squeek does not explicitly call himself a feminist. However, he unknowingly engages in pro-feminist behavior by doing consent to redo gender and sexual scripts that decenters masculinity and blur the masculine/feminine binary. When men do consent, they are choosing to subvert the structural power afforded to them by society. This could be one of the main reasons doing consent is possible.

Doing consent opens the door to exploration for men. It can give them the language and perspective to process and reprocess their experiences in a society ruled by gender. Men can become aware of their privilege through doing consent in kink interactions. Helen shares with me that she has been a professional dominatrix for over a decade. She specializes in financial

domination (fin domme), which is a form of dominance where people, usually cis het white men, desire to have a fin domme take power and control over their finances, wealth, resources, etc. These interactions can range from 24/7 power exchanges to sugar daddies that contribute funds to their domme without giving up full control of their wallets to isolated scenes where an agreed-upon amount of capital is in the fin dommes control. She discusses how she benefits beyond making money from these arrangements:

I'm definitely working out my fucking issues by taking men's money and hitting them for it. It's been extremely satisfying and healing work and healing for them too. I'm healing them too. They get so much out of it. They walk away better people for it. It's good for them. It's like deep down, they know that their privileged asses are overprivileged. There's something wonderfully freeing about surrendering that for them. But it's still scary. So, they still need to do it in a controlled environment with a trained professional. So, I will now professionally take your fucking money. It's really great.

Helen describes that some men are aware of their structural power in society and wish to submit that power through their finances to a fin domme. By engaging in this play, men can shed economic power tied to their gender if only temporarily and within the safety of an interaction guided by doing consent. They maintain their autonomy yet are not in control at the same time. They are in control of not being in control and can revoke consent at any time. Interestingly, she uses her work as a fin domme as a form of self-therapy for the oppression she normally experiences in society at the hands of privileged men like those she dominates. There is likely a gender aspect at play for the men as well since Helen is a woman. The men she dominates may use the experience similarly, to process the feelings and/or guilt they may have from occupying a place in the gender power structure that oppresses others, particularly women.

In a patriarchal and heteronormative society, men are the breadwinners. Masculinity is tied to power through money and earning potential. Society values men's labor more as the continued disparity between the wages of men and women along intersectional lines illustrates

(Connell 2005). In doing consent in kink culture, men have the space in interactions to redo gender and masculinity associated with power derived from money. It also lets them explore beyond their structural power in intersectional ways. Helen describes this as ‘healing’ and perhaps that is true for her and some men. However, once the interaction is over, even if men or women involved feel relief and healing, even if they have redone what gender and power mean within the interaction by doing consent within a “deviant” subculture, the gender structure remains pervasive.

The institutional power that is prescribed to people based on gender and other intersecting identities never leaves an individual, even when they do consent and redo gender in interactions in the kink community. While doing consent gives all people, including men the ability to redo gender by rejecting normative gender and sexual scripts, this cannot “undo” gender (Butler 2004; Connell 2010; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009; West and Zimmerman 2009). The interpersonal and interactional acts of individuals in consent culture subverts and redoes gender norms (Connell 2010; Hollander 2013, 2018; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999, 1999). However, the redoing of gender through doing consent is likely confined to the people and interactions in subcultures like the BDSM community. Kinky folks cannot escape the gender structure of the larger society they inhabit. The gender structure is so pervasive and fundamental to informing every aspect of ourselves and the world around us that it is ever-present (West and Zimmerman 1987). If doing gender is omnipresent within individuals, what does this mean for doing consent and redoing gender? Can doing consent and gender simultaneously occur? What would two concurrent and conflicting concepts look like in practice? To investigate these questions, I explore how the ideologies of doing gender and doing consent clash and potentially overlap in individuals and interactions within kink.

“Fake” “Toxic” “Hyper” Doms: Cishet Men (re-re) Doing Masculinity

Most of these participants enthusiastically share with me that the BDSM community is one of the most open and welcoming spaces they have inhabited in society. Consent culture and doing consent open avenues for men, women, and people of all genders to explore and redo gender expectations and power dynamics. However, even in consent culture because the community is so open, some “bad apples” can gain access and wreak havoc, sometimes undetected. Squeek says with exasperation, “with any niche group of people, no matter what it is, in this country, in this fucking world, there's always going to be bad apples.” But does that bad apple spoil the bunch? How can you tell a “bad apple” from a good apple? Good apples do consent... right?

Sometimes it is not so straightforward. Helen feels that for most men, doing consent in BDSM empowers them to shift expectations of doing masculinity and gender. However, there are some men, particularly cishet dominant men, who miss the mark. Perhaps, even intentionally because they know they can get away with it. Helen previously tells me she has had issues, particularly with dominant men in the past. She explains that issues stem from the ambiguous nature of good and bad apples. Helen seems frustrated when she says:

A lot of them [men] are doing it [consent] well and a lot of them are shitty little fucking ass weasels who are hiding behind the pretense of being the whole dom BDSM daddy, motherfucker. Like I see you, assholes! I have a hard time with dominant males for this reason because it is difficult to differentiate between these two sometimes.

Helen has been in the kink community for a long time and recognizes that while most men do consent and challenge gender norms, some do not. She illustrates that the “bad apples” are often the “fake doms”, or dominant identifying cis men who use the power they wield through their gender and BDSM role to subvert consent scripts. They try to push their own desires and

agendas within negotiations or scenes rather than respecting their partner's agency, autonomy, and boundaries as doing consent would dictate. The key difference between “fake doms” and “real doms” is if they do consent or not. For Helen, she finds it frustrating because it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between a “real dom” and a “fake dom” before damage is done. This is insulting to her as a domme, as a woman, and as a member of consent culture because it casts doubt on those who follow the rules and strictly do consent.

Hades explains that he has participated in various dominant roles like being a daddy dom, a handler for pet play, a rigger in rope play, and a primal hunter for predator/prey play. Mostly he identifies as a cishet man, a dom, and a sadist. To Hades, being a “real dom” or top means doing consent to maximize positive outcomes for everyone involved in a scene. He finds doing consent in the dominant role powerful because of the immense trust and responsibility that go into it. He primarily does sadism, so he often tops in intense scenes. For example, he describes a branding scene he did. This type of scene is not spontaneous. He negotiates with a partner for many months and sometimes years to perfectly plan and cultivate something this intense and permanent. He makes sure he has the proper tools, that they are sterile, and there is a medical professional (a friend who is a nurse that is nearby but not in the room witnessing the act) on standby in case the person needs medical attention. The goal is mutual satisfaction and safety. The person he is branding trusts him fully to do the scene and even potentially puts their life in his hands. For him, doing consent as the dom or top in this type of interaction is the ultimate form of mutual respect and trust. It makes Hades feel powerful as a dom to execute a scene requiring this much skill and planning regardless of his or his partner's gender.

Interestingly, despite discussing his desire for control and feeling powerful, Hades consistently insists it is the submissive who has most of the power and control in any interaction

through their ability to withdraw consent. He reiterates that a dom can withdraw consent at any time as well, but still feels the submissive or bottom has the power. A “real dom” knows that they are not the one with all the power in an interaction, it is the other way around. He mentions that there are also “fake doms” in kink that tend to be older cishet white men. Hades’ definition of “fake doms” is very similar to Helen’s. A “fake dom” informs their dominant role with scripts from hegemonic masculinity, where they have power and control through doing gender and do not have to do consent. Here, again, “fake doms” do not do consent and do not seem interested in redoing gender. Instead, they use gender power to their advantage and possibly use doing consent as a disguise to enter kink spaces and communities.

“Fake doms” give “real doms” a bad name. This trend seems to occur regularly enough that people in the kink community are on guard to the point that they avoid cishet white dominant men. This is difficult for men who fit some or all these descriptions but are adamant about doing consent. Able, a dominant identifying straight but questioning cis man, explains that he has had a tumultuous journey with his BDSM role. He feels conflicted with his dominant role at times because of what people associate with being a dominant man. However, Able feels that his kink role is part of his identity, it is not something he can or wants to change. He tells me:

For me, it's really who I am in general. A lot of my female partners call me daddy, right? That's another categorization. I'm probably more of a daddy dom versus a 'just in the bedroom dom' or whatever. Also, I have an aversion to the term 'dom' even because it comes across as, almost toxic in the nature of it. I really tried to run away from it. It's funny because more and more you'll see on more and more people's Fetlife profiles that 'if you're a cis white male who identifies as a dom, I'm probably not into it.' I understand. I understand why they think that... because every fucking cishet white guy thinks they are a dom without any clear understanding of what that even means, or what that entails. I think they don't even understand that being the dominant means you're the one who is subject to the most boundaries. You really are the submissive in a way because you're the one doing what it takes to make the other person happy to please the other person. There are so many things that go into being a dom. Again, I told you aftercare is a big part of

who I am. A lot of guys are like, ‘Oh, being dom just allows me to fuck whoever I want and then leave their ass on the bed.’ No. That’s not really dom, that’s just shitty male behavior.

Able discusses that just the term “dom” is conflated with toxic ideas about domination. These are likely formed from gendered power dynamics in a society where men are dominant and everyone else is submissive (Connell 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015). He avoided using dom as a descriptor for his identity because of the perceptions that accompany it. He tells me that many people prefer the term “top”, but he prefers being a daddy dom. Daddy doms, or Mommy doms, often approach the dominant kink role from a place of nurturing. This can range from full role play and age play, to simply taking on the role of a parent with a balance of loved and discipline for their submissives (Martinez 2018). This lets him do consent while inhabiting a dominant role almost as a service to his partners and is synonymous with being a “real dom.” Interestingly, doing consent allows Able to negotiate the gendered meaning of his role. For him, a man who is a “real dom” does consent and redoes masculinity by approaching domination as a service where he is nurturing and compassionate. He feels that when a “fake dom” man uses doing gender and sexual scripts to inform his dominant behavior, he is weaponizing privilege to take advantage of others. This rejection of doing consent is unacceptable to Able and many others in the kink community.

Able explains that there seems to be a shift happening in the kink community where people are rejecting the ideologies and intersections of power that go along with the “fake dom.” He agrees that this particular brand of dominant man, the “fake dom” or “toxic dom” relies on doing gender and “toxic” masculinity to mobilize gendered power to get what he wants without doing consent. Able vehemently rejects this conceptualization of dominant men. He asserts that inhabiting a dominant role means doing consent and being submissive to the boundaries and

autonomy of your partner. Able insists that real dominance is informed by doing consent and disconnecting the role from masculinity. Able implies that toxic doms are often either older men who are set in their ways or men who are not actively involved in community life and events. It seems that “toxic doms” associate dominance with doing gender and masculinity. If they are not active in the community, their gendered perspectives of the dominant role are likely informed by society’s, often incorrect, presentation of BDSM in media, pornography, and pop culture. Able explains that the association between cishet white men and toxic doms is likely because of “toxic” masculinity. For toxic dom men, kink spaces are a place where they can have free reign to do toxic masculinity. Able shares:

The fact of the matter is, is that white people in general, but white men more so... Because look, white women are hierarchically less oppressed than, let's say, Native women, who literally go missing or get murdered without anybody even reporting it. Women are still, unfortunately, a very marginalized category by, generally, white men. But white people and white men, more importantly, have always felt or viewed the entire world... as somehow submissive to them.

Able shares he is mixed race, white and native, though he grew up in a white household that kept him away from his native family and culture. It was not until he was older that he could explore this part of his identity. He tells me that this experience caused him to do deep internal processing about the structural power of whiteness and men. He describes that it makes sense how people with hierarchical power from their gender, but also other intersecting identities, are more likely to see this “toxic dom” behavior in men as normative. This is likely because it jives with how they perceive and do gender. They might also do it to be resistant to doing consent because it limits or redoes that structural power. They want to be involved with kink for their own desires, but doing consent is too costly to the gender power they enjoy. Lily agrees:

Most cis men do get off on having a sense of control. I mean, we all do. But there's this a specific brand of that for a lot of cis straight men. When they don't get that from their jobs or their financial situation it helps them feel powerful.

Lily feels that “cis straight men,” particularly doms, use BDSM as a space where they can seek out the power and control that they feel entitled to and are denied through their job or socio-economic status. Interestingly, this is the antithesis of men seeking submission through financial domination. Here, Lily is referring to the same brand of “cis straight white dom men” that Helen and Able discuss. For her, these men come in looking for and expecting power and control because they feel entitled to it. They are either unaware of doing consent or actively ignore it so they can reclaim the masculine privilege society has denied them. However, Lily also claims that, “we all like having a sense of control”. There is a big difference between desiring control over yourself (agency) and others (power dynamics) when all parties are doing consent and those expecting control because of gendered entitlement. It is unclear if Lily is using the concept of “everyone liking control” to excuse the behaviors of “cis straight men” because doing femininity means deferring to men (Currier 2013; Schippers 2007). Even though she is critical of “toxic doms”, it is possible that this comment is an unconscious response to gender, but I, unfortunately, did not probe further to verify this suspicion.

Edward agrees with Able and Lily. He also discusses how some dom men and men in society act in ways that could be seen as “toxic masculinity”, though he does not like how that term has become “vague” in meaning. Edward shares that for men who are seeking healthy interactions, consent culture and doing consent are very empowering. However, there are men present in these spaces who are there to intentionally take advantage of other people. They see power dynamics in BDSM as an opportunity they can exploit to get what they want out of someone, particularly young women who are new to the community. Edward explains:

The other side of that coin is, when we create these spaces, we inevitably kind of end up accidentally inviting in these people that see it as a good opportunity to act in ways that are very toxic and harmful towards other people. Men that just have a desire to be abusive to a receptive target, can and do find BDSM space is sort of a ripe, fertile ground for going hunting, I guess. That is one of the things we're constantly trying to combat.

The kink community is incredibly welcoming to a diversity of people. Unfortunately, this sometimes means that people enter who are predatory. Edward explains that this is a known issue that often happens in the community and that the community takes steps to consistently shut it down. Some steps might be to educate new people and encourage them to vet their partners through other community members, attend “munches,” or more casual meetings usually held in public spaces like The Club or restaurants, to be more involved in the community, and meet and play with new people publicly before meeting up privately. The danger is greater for young submissive women who are new in the community. Edward shakes his head and says with a sigh, “It's all too common for the new, inexperienced, early 20-something women to immediately be devoured by the wolves. That happens in and out of BDSM spaces.” He explains that teaching new people the rules of consent culture and doing consent as soon as possible is imperative to safety. He said he has heard stories from women who have bad experiences with “dom” men they meet outside of the local community, either on Fetlife or other dating sites/apps. Once these women find the local community, the damage has already been done. Edward feels the community creates a safe space for new people to learn about healthy interaction and doing consent. However, despite the efforts of the community, others I spoke with reported similar challenges.

Nick, a dominant identifying straight but questioning cis man, tells me that he has experienced internal conflict in identifying as a dominant man. He thinks that it is important that

men feel empowered to be dominant so long as they do consent. But he feels it really depends on the man and how he approaches masculinity. Nick explains:

I am smiling and nervously laughing at this because there's a positive and negative. Some people, who in society are uncomfortable because they're not the alpha type at all, are able to be empowered in taking on that dominant role and be positively reinforced by community members who are like, 'it's okay to exhibit that it's okay to act that way and show your dominance.' Now, the negative to this is when males, that are in dominant/submissive, or dominant/slave, or whatever power relationship, go to a social or party and say, 'I'm a D type, all caps DOM, I get ultimate respect.' It is not something that anybody has a right to put on anybody else. That's where I find the negative, that arrogance that goes with it.

Nick does seem nervous as he talks about this topic. It seems difficult for him to parse through the roles men inhabit and how doing consent empowers them. He discusses how submissive men are empowered by doing consent because they can redo gender in ways that are taboo for them according to masculinity. Switch men are empowered by doing consent because they can be 'a facilitator or the facilitated.' They get to choose and be in flux with how they do and redo masculinity and not be confined by specific gender expectations. While this echoes how others have described doing consent, Nick struggles when he talks about dominant men and how they are empowered.

He begins discussing this dichotomy between the "good dom" and the "hyper-, all caps DOM." A man who is a "good dom" does consent and seems to be synonymous with a "real dom" or a "good apple". "Good doms" are empowered to be dominant in ways that may align with or deviate from masculinity and sexual scripts. They avoid causing harm to others and their identities are embraced by the community because they do consent in all interactions. He juxtaposes this against what he refers to as the problematic "hyper DOM" man, who informs the dominant role through doing gender. Nick explains the hyper DOM's attitudes and behavior:

Comes from the old school way that men were in society and they're just carrying it into the [BDSM] communities and that is very, very, very dangerous. Some of them are just predatory without even really knowing that they're being predatory. They just think that (is) the way they're supposed to act.

Nick describes a “hyper DOM” as an alpha man, who is doing gender and hegemonic masculinity to demand power in kink spaces. This hyper dom is equivalent to the “bad apple,” “fake dom,” “toxic dom,” or the cishet white dom men that others describe. They are all ultimately the same problematic dominant men relying on doing gender and sexual scripts learned in society to approach dominance in a way that jives with gender norms and rejects doing consent. When a hyper dom comes into the community that does consent, it is likely jarring because they cannot separate being dominant from performing hegemonic masculinity. It is likely, though not directly documented in this data, that these men feel less dominant and powerful when stripped of hegemonic masculinity. But how does a consent culture react to this apparent rejection of its dogma and scripts? Nick shares:

The attrition has been actually quite interesting with how it is played out. In my own community, when those types come in, they actually didn't make it to a party. There are a couple of situations where they were at socials. They found very quickly that the thoughts and feelings and ideas that they thought they had, were very quickly not reinforced by the discussions we had and the way we talk to them about how the community actually works. There have also been situations where they have almost immediately broken rules, or rules are not followed at any event, and they take themselves out of the organization.

In Nick’s experience, the community makes it very clear what their values and belief system are and enforces doing consent causing these hyper doms not to stick around for long. However, their presence is not isolated to an occasional appearance, nor is this a conceptual bad apple, “fake, toxic, hyper DOM,” cishet, white boogeyman in the closet or under the bed. They are real men in the community, and some lurk out in the open, maybe even in disguise as a popular

“good dom.” Nico tells me that he thinks it is a bigger problem than people may acknowledge.

He explains:

Honestly, I think that a lot of men take advantage of that sort of [BDSM] space because non-men are more willing to be more vulnerable in those sorts of spaces. I think that men have a tendency to prey on those sorts of people, particularly older cis men.

Nico is quick to point out that this is not a scary story or hyperbole, there are men present in the kink scene who are actively using normative power through gender and sexual scripting in a predatory way. It is unlikely that these are older dominant men or men who are new and simply uneducated, or that their predatory behavior is unintentional. They are a real and present threat to others in the community. To Nico, there are men in the community who are not doing consent properly and are not being held accountable. They hide behind their tenure, reputation, and prestige in their predatory pursuits of new, young, submissive non-male people to exploit and abuse. Like Edward, Nico thinks it is a problem the community must regularly address and correct, and that it often falls short of holding these men accountable due to reputation or technicalities.

It is enough of a problem in the kink community that individuals refuse to play with dominant cishet white men. Able previously described seeing people on Fetlife issuing blanket rejections of play partners who have even the potential to be fake/toxic/hyper doms. Others I interviewed echo the same sentiments. Nick shared that he generally only plays with women, except for one scene with his woman-identifying fiancé as the “co-top,” or two people topping at once a male submissive. Overall, he feels it is too uncomfortable to even consider the idea of playing with cis men because he does not find them trustworthy or safe. Instead, he chooses to play and have relationships with women. When people I spoke with do play with men, they are on guard due to the sheer potential of running across a fake/toxic/hyper dom man. Esmerelda is a

switch-identifying nonbinary and queer femme. For them, having a female-presenting body can be a hazard. They share:

When I negotiate with men, I feel like I tend to put my boundaries upfront first really, really fast and hard like, 'Hey you, pay attention! This is a boundary! Put your dick down! We get it!' But with women, I feel like yeah, the negotiations are just more flirtatious and I don't do that to be manipulative but I do it because I'm enjoying it and I feel safe already. I just feel safer around femmes and queer people. You know, that's another reason I don't really date [or play with] straight men and feel safer with bisexual men.

Esmerelda explained how they feel they must be extra firm with boundaries because straight men are more likely to slip into doing gender and sexual scripts. This is uncomfortable for them, particularly as a queer nonbinary femme. To prevent this discomfort, they generally avoid this entire demographic of people as a rule in favor of women and queer folks who feel safer in interactions. Having interactions with fake/toxic/hyper doms is not desirable for people who do consent and value consent culture. It feels dangerous and is usually avoided. Yet, these men are still present in a community that regularly bans people for not doing consent. How are fake/toxic/hyper dom cishet white men able to feel empowered to exist in kink spaces that do consent?

Rose laughs at this question and explains:

Well, cis men are empowered how they're empowered everywhere else in their lives. They're already empowered. Like they don't need help. I feel like cis men are just empowered no matter what.

Rose believes that the power men have from the gender and intersecting structures in society is ever-present. No matter what community or space they interact with, they retain that power. It may be that the fake/toxic/hyper dom men are aware of this and use it to their advantage in kink by weaving together doing gender and enough doing consent to fly under the radar while exploiting submissive women. However, for Rose, men's power is something they cannot simply shed and pretend does not exist because they do consent. The gender power hierarchy exists even

if a man is redoing gender and masculinity, even if they are submitting or switching, even if they are empowering femininity and disengaging with heteronormativity. Their hegemonic power remains intact beyond all kink interactions and is present whether it is utilized for doing gender or rejected and subverted in redoing gender and doing consent.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I consider how doing consent is an interactional mechanism in BDSM that informs how individuals, particularly men, do consent. In doing consent, men have choices. They can choose how they define concepts like femininity and masculinity and determine how to interact in ways that do not “radically other” men or “dominate women” which are imperative for redoing gender (Connell 2009; Duncanson 2015; West and Zimmerman 2009). They also choose what kink roles they want to play. Here, men are not confined to hegemonic, violent dominance over women and other subordinated men (Connell 2005; Currier 2013; Hollander 2001). Men can redo masculinity and embrace fluidity. Men can redefine the dominant roles to be “soft” or a “service” to the pleasure of others. They can participate in submission, which is traditionally associated with femininity, switch between different identities, or create their own hybrid identity. Men can do consent to reject or embrace gender expectations and sexual scripts in ways that bring them pleasure. They have the agency and bodily autonomy to say yes but also no in interactions with others. This is important because it releases men from “manhood acts” like hypersexuality (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Men can set boundaries for themselves through limits and are empowered by respecting the same of others. Doing consent means clear communication about boundaries that limit accidentally crossing the line between consent and assault. This is important for men I spoke to because they are “good apples,” and do not want to be rapists or be seen as dangerous to interact with just because they are men (Pascoe and

Hollander 2016). In doing consent, men have the fluidity to explore sexual identity and masculinity, which can also mean redoing heteronormativity as well. Men are a vital piece to the puzzle of why consent culture and doing consent can redo gender norms in interactions. It is because men are actively subverting hegemonic masculinity and gender norms while not holding each other or anyone else accountable for “doing” gender, that doing consent is powerful in kink interactions and the BDSM community.

This is not always the case. Men can also leverage their structural power in society within consent culture. Some men attempt to do gender while they feign doing consent, which I will explore further in Chapter 5. Some men may seek out BDSM or kink spaces because they perceive it to be a space where they can enact the type of violent domination supported by hegemonic masculinity and pornography. The men in this research refer to these men as “bad apples,” “fake doms”, “toxic doms,” or “hyper DOMS,” and discuss at length the difference between these “bad doms” and “good doms.” It comes down to good doms do consent while bad doms abuse or avoid doing consent to instead do gender to be predatory in kink interactions. Many people speak about this “fake, toxic, hyper dom” like a fictional monster, a Frankenstein of intersecting privilege that means to oppress them. Some discuss their presence as a real but occasional experience that the community quickly rejects and casts out via the mighty ban hammer. However, others tell me that this is a problem that still exists and dodges the ban hammer. Sometimes these “fake, toxic, hyper dom” even disguise themselves long enough to gain power through popularity or prestige which they use to avoid accountability and continue to do damage, particularly to women and people beyond the binary who are new to the community. This avoidance of accountability is not surprising considering that they are doing the same gender and sexual scripts that inform and support rape culture in society. What is surprising is

that the kink community has not yet found a way to prevent them from sullying their highly valued consent culture.

Doing consent is an important and valid theoretical and empirical contribution. However, the gender structure is still pervasive even in consent culture. A subculture still exists within society and as such, members of the BDSM community are primarily socialized by social institutions, including gender. Hegemonic gender power is absolute in society and not even consent culture or actively doing consent can stop it. The experiences of these participants suggest there is a natural conflict of interests that occurs between doing gender/the gender structure and doing consent/consent culture. In the next chapter, I will explore this conflict to see how doing consent and doing gender can occur simultaneously even when in direct conflict. I will consider how gender structure and consent culture simultaneously influence interactions and cause confusion for individuals in the BDSM community. Finally, I will compare examples of these mismatches in individuals and interactions to investigate the repercussions of the gender structure versus consent culture conflict.

CHAPTER 5

CONSENT CULTURE VERSUS THE GENDER STRUCTURE: CONFLICT, OVERLAP, AND CONFUSION

INTRODUCTION

While doing consent is highly valued by the BDSM community and is pivotal to the reciprocal process of creating a consent culture, which in turn creates doing consent, people do not always get it right. The gender structure is so powerful that even within a consent culture producing subcultural community that strictly does consent and redoes gender within interactions, it seeps in. Once the lights come on and the party is over, people within the BDSM community must become members of society once more. Everyone in society experiences gender as a primary agent of socialization (Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). From infancy, individuals are taught messages about gender and what it means for norms, values, expression, and interactions (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Even when individuals are not aware of it, even when they actively resist it, they are informed by gender (Connell 2010; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). The experiences of individuals and scenarios in this chapter and the previous chapters are empirically sound examples of how doing consent can and does redo gender among individuals and within interactions in the kink community. However, I would be amiss not to discuss the instances where doing consent is no match for the gender structure, even within a consent culture like BDSM. I will explore how the conflict and overlap between consent culture and the gender structure impact individuals and their interactions in the kink community.

The Consent Culture and Gender Structure Conflict

Consensual power exchange is a foundational principle in BDSM. The community uses power exchange to play with gender in consensual interactions. However, gender has likely informed what kink roles, like dominant/submissive, top/bottom, and switch, mean and what activities they entail (Bauer 2008; Simula and Sumerau 2017; Weiss 2021). Simultaneously, as shown in the previous chapters, doing consent in these roles also rejects and redoes those gendered meanings. Masculinity and domination are traditionally associated with men; however, kink also gives women the power to be dominant (Connell 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Femininity is equated with women and submissiveness in society; however, kink allows men to relinquish power and submit (Budgeon 2014; Schippers 2007). The gender structure constructs interconnected binaries, female or male, woman or man, feminine or masculine; however, kink allows multiple spectrums of identity to be crafted and recrafted and to exist concurrently (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Simula and Sumerau 2017; Sloan 2015; Weiss 2021; West and Zimmerman 1987). The gender structure produces rape culture, while the BDSM community produces consent culture (Buchwald et al. 2005; Burnett 2016; Cagwin 2018; Frith 2009; Herman 1989; Klement et al. 2017; Martin 2016; Stryker et al. 2017). The gender structure and consent culture are socially constructed as opposite to each other. It is no wonder that people within the kink community experience conflicts between the gender structure and consent culture. The gender structure is present in consent culture, but the importance of gender among individuals and their interactions within the community varies.

In our conversation about gender, I ask Claire, a switch-identifying queer trans woman, if gender itself is important to the BDSM community. She explains:

It is used as a toy. In some situations, it is used. There is sometimes some version of gender, expected gender, or gender roles in BDSM communities. Speaking broadly about the BDSM community and how gender interacts with it would be much more difficult. There's no way to say in some parts 'yes, absolutely, it's very important' in some parts of it, 'no, it's not.' In some parts, it's empowering and then in some parts of it, it may potentially reinforce the traditional boundaries or gender roles. So, trying to talk about a single community as a monolith is very, very difficult, particularly when you get into subcultures such as this.

Claire communicates that while doing consent and consent culture are fundamental to kink communities, the same cannot be said for doing gender in all BDSM. The kink community is not uniform in its views and opinions about gender. For some, gender is important to kink roles and interactions, for others it may not be. For example, in Chapter 3 Helen and Emma describe differences in the older generation versus the newer generation in accepting trans people from different perspectives. Helen alluded that the older generation seemed to use doing gender to inform interactions, while Emma describes that doing gender is currently not as important in the kink community. For some, like Valkyrie, gender is empowering in kink perhaps because of how they can choose to do or redo it. For others, like Will, gender has nothing to do with power in BDSM. But it is not a zero-sum game where either doing consent wins and the gender structure loses or vice versa. Instead, there is the potential for, and probability of, gender-informing interactions and roles within kink in the background or alongside doing consent.

The conflict with the gender structure and consent culture begs the question; how does this play out for people in kink? To explore this, I ask Valkyrie, a dominant-identifying queer cis woman about her experiences with gender in the kink community. She shares that when she entered the community, she immediately identified as a submissive because it seemed like what she was supposed to do as a woman. Her conceptualization of women as submissive was informed by gender roles and expectations in society. However, she quickly realized she is a

dominant/top. She remembers feeling conflicted because she felt she “melded” more in the community as a submissive than a dominant. Some people had more difficulty accepting it and she even got some pushback at first where people questioned if she was *really* a domme. She feels that because some of the folks she first played with were older, they had expectations of what her role should be as a woman. Valkyrie describes how she had experiences with some dominant men, potentially “fake, toxic, hyper doms,” who still tried dominating her socially, even when she identifies as dominant. She recalls shutting that behavior down and standing up for herself. Later, the people who questioned her or tried to dominate her without doing consent were removed for consent violations or faded out of the community. Valkyrie does not think her experience is unique for women alone. She recognizes that all people are heavily socialized by gender long before they experience consent culture. She explains:

I think that with gender, it's been ingrained before kink, the gender roles of men being dominant, women being submissive. I know especially some of the older submissive men that I know started out as very, very dominant. It was very difficult because he felt like it was difficult to let go because he didn't want to be perceived as weak.

Here, the submissive who identified as a man struggled with gender and kink identity because of the mismatch between how he identified in kink and what society had taught him about masculinity and being a man. However, she goes on to tell me that she feels that gender-based conflicts are becoming less prevalent. She feels a generational shift in the community has Millennials and Gen Z relying more on doing consent than doing gender to inform interactions. Others describe that gender was at one time more important in the BDSM community than it is now. That shift in doing consent has opened the door to reimagine power dynamics and redo gender. However, it also creates an environment within the kink community to be the interactional stage for conflict as the transition happens. Further, the kink community may not ever be able to make a full transition to consent culture so long as the gender structure remains a

ruling institution in society. Instead, the community could be left with conflicting social scripts that force individuals to consistently navigate both doing consent and doing gender.

While Valkyrie (quoted above) seems to be aware of how the gender structure has and does impact how she does consent in kink, this might not be the same for everyone. It is probable that many people in kink are not aware of gender operating in the background of social life as it does regularly in society. Individuals are socialized to both consciously and unconsciously do gender in interactions. However, the findings in Chapter 4 of the “fake toxic hyper dom men” indicates that doing gender is not strictly unconscious. While I could argue that these dom men are likely the exception and not the rule, many people explicitly avoid playing with these men because they do gender and not consent. People in the kink community are not completely unaware or ignorant of how gender can influence interactions in kink even when all parties are doing consent. Edward shares:

I think there might be some lingering carryovers from non-BDSM spaces that are carried into BDSM spaces. Maybe with assumptions that are made about your partner, things that you might think need to be negotiated versus things that don't need to be negotiated. There might be some assumptions there that are gender-based. But I think, for me anyway, it doesn't make any difference.

It is important here that Edward recognizes that the gender structure is pervasive and infiltrates BDSM even when it actively works to counteract, play with, and subvert the power dynamics associated with gender. However, Edward also shares that he is a submissive identifying bisexual cis man and does not consider gender. He enjoys kink play and sex with people of different genders. For him, it depends more on the type of play he wants to do and the “vibe” with the person than the gender of the person. Interestingly, he then tells me that an individual's, “energy is entirely different depending on gender.” This seems to directly conflict with, “not considering gender.” It is likely that Edward is aware of gender but is unaware of how it is influencing his

own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and decisions to interact with others. The “vibe” he describes is possibly based on gendered ideas that women and men are fundamentally different and thus bring different, masculine or feminine, “energy” to a scene (Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This is also interesting because he is a submissive and seeks domination no matter the gender of his partner. His statement suggests that he believes that men and women do domination differently and could be informed by dominance being a quality of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Schippers 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Edward is aware of the influence of the gender structure and even applies it to interactions in kink where he is doing consent. Still, he somehow does not think that gender has any influence over him or his interactions. The consent culture and gender structure conflict here is about what ideology will influence the interaction, doing consent, which rejects/redoes gender, or the gender structure, which demands fealty to doing gender. This conflict leads Edward to acknowledge gender influences ‘some people’ in interactions but not himself. He values doing consent and maybe cannot process doing gender at the same time because it conflicts so heavily with his belief system. The underlying idea is that one cannot simply do gender if they believe in consent culture and are a “good kinky person.”

Another example of this plays out in how Will discusses doing consent and doing gender. Will identifies as a top/dominant cis man. He shares with me that he does not feel empowered by doing consent as a man. Perhaps, he does not feel powerful because he recognizes he is giving up power by doing consent as a man in a dominant role. He shares that he does not think gender is important in kink. However, he does feel empowered by doing consent as a top/dominant. Will explains that:

The need for control is just part of my life that I like to experience. Doing it to another person is exciting. For me, it is empowering, to know that someone has put their trust in me with something, whatever it is, whether it be, calculated violence, or sexual experience, or anything in the BDSM world. It feels good. It is empowering. Sort of its own little rush, high, whatever you want to call it.

Will finds that it is the kink role and not someone's gender that empowers individuals. In his opinion, kink roles are more important to the BDSM interaction than gender. However, he discusses a "need," and a desire to be in control that aligns with the scripts he is taught as a man through masculinity (Connell 2005; Kollock, Blumstein, and Schwartz 1985; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). At the same time, he discusses feeling powerful doing consent because of the trust others place in him within interactions. Although Will rejects the influence of gender, it is possible that kink becomes a place where he can do consent and the parts of gender and masculinity he enjoys as a "good guy" or a "good kinky person" and avoid abuse and rape stigma (Bezreh et al. 2012; Cagwin 2018; Pascoe and Hollander 2016; Simula 2019b). This may be why he feels a "rush" or "high." However, admitting that gender is a factor in interactions where he is doing consent could throw the ideology of consent culture into question. Are negotiations truly coercion free if gender is operating in the background? As a man, does this mean he is unintentionally influencing people with his gender power and is therefore violating agency and not doing consent? That would mean he is not a "good kinky person" and not be able to reduce stigma. While this is all inferred, it seems that the potential for questions like this is enough to make kink people, particularly men, disassociate from the idea that doing gender can impact interactions even when doing consent.

Squeek told me he plays with people of various gender identities including trans and nonbinary folks, but less with cis men. He said that his playstyle is "not really" affected by his play partner's gender. Interestingly, he states, "But obviously guys tend to be a little more

intensive than females because, boys, it's just the way we are, shit... But I mean, even that is such a mild difference that I don't really consider it to be there.” Here, masculinity and sexual scripts are ascribed to male play partners. ‘Boys play harder because they are boys’ or ‘boys will be boys’ type mentality (Pascoe 2007; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Perhaps, Squeek is just more comfortable playing roughly with men, or it could be that he does not like violent play with women because of what he shared previously about having a physically abusive father. But it is interesting that he says this and then downplays it as if there is not *really* a difference between play with men and women, and any difference is so slight it does not count. It almost seems like he realizes as he is talking how gendered his statement is and backpedals to avoid how it came out. This is telling of how doing gender is operating in the background even when individuals are members of a consent culture and do consent in ways that redo gender. They may redo gender intentionally in interactions, but that gender socialization is still present.

Squeek shares with me how men are empowered by doing consent, but he disagrees with how some men use that power. He describes how the ‘typical male ego’ infuriates him because it empowers men but objectifies others. To Squeek, being a man and dominant to a person, particularly a woman, is not an entitlement but a privilege the person is granting him. He finds it offensive when some dominant men do gender through normative masculinity in kink roles without doing consent because there is a big difference between dominance prescribed by hegemonic masculinity and dominance negotiated in doing consent. Some men do not know the difference when they enter the community or are willfully ignorant of it. However, people in the kink community do use gender roles and stereotypes to inform their perspectives. Lily shares:

I think that a lot of men feel empowered by giving pleasure also. They feel more like a man like we've conditioned them to associate manhood with being able to give women pleasure. Of course, I'm speaking from like a straight standpoint. But even so, with gay

men, depending on their identity, [they have] what we think of as a ‘typical male attitude’. It's empowering to have that sense of control and to also know that you're giving someone pleasure.”

Interestingly, she believes that manhood or masculinity is associated with women's pleasure when it is normative for men's pleasure to be centered in heteronormative sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Masters et al. 2013; Wiederman 2005). She goes on to say that this equation of man + control + giving sexual pleasure = power happens regardless of sexuality. It is possible that because she likes to be in control that she assumes this applies to men as well, particularly because it matches with expected gender and sexual scripts.

While Squeek finds the “typical male ego” bad because he associates that with entitlement, Lily finds the “typical male attitude” good because they can do consent in ways that make them feel powerful and align with doing gender. These types of conflicting statements and ideologies occur often through the interviews between two or more individuals and, sometimes, even within some individuals. It was sometimes difficult to navigate if participants were always aware of how gender was operating in their perceptions of interactions. The confusion, conflicts, and mismatch of ideologies are all likely occurring because of the conflict of ideologies between the gender structure and consent culture. I could see it playing out within individuals and their interactions. In the next section, I will explore some of these empirical examples of gender versus consent conflict to prepare for a larger discussion of how the literature explains what I show in this data.

The “Empowered” (or powerful) Submissive

In the previous chapter, I outline and discuss in detail the concept and presence of “fake, toxic, hyper doms” as those who do gender to maintain power and do consent enough to maintain access to and avoid accountability in the BDSM community. Though these “fake, toxic,

hyper doms” are seemingly those with the most structural power, typically being cishet white men, most participants in my sample insist that it is actually the submissive and not the dominant who has all of the power. Is this an example of gender subversion? Or is it yet another example of doing consent and doing gender in conflict, or at least being muddled?

Hades, a dominant (sadist) identifying cishet man, discusses how doing consent is empowering to be able to explore the kinks he is interested in with others and that the interactions are safe, fun, and enjoyable because everyone involved has negotiated their boundaries and can give or revoke consent at any time. However, he is critical of “fake, toxic; hyper doms” who assume because they are dominant men, they take charge of the scene and call the shots. Hades says the assumption is incorrect and explains.

It's very empowering not only for us as tops that receive that power, but for the bottoms also because people always ask doms and bottoms like, 'Who has the power at the end of the day, the bottom, or the top?' When you find fake doms, they are like, 'Oh me I'm the Dom.' That's when you correct them and say, 'No, you're incorrect.' The bottom has the power always because she's the person or he's the person or they are the person that is gonna tell you no. As soon as they say 'No', it's always done.

Here, Hades discusses that the gender of the individuals in the top or bottom position does not matter, in a consent culture all individuals have agency in interactions. However, ultimate ‘power’ is afforded to those in the bottom or submissive roles because they can always withdraw consent at any time and the top has to abide by it. In Chapter 4, Hades did explain that dominants and tops can withdraw consent as well, but it is far less common. Interestingly, the person who is seen to have the most power is the person who is receiving the play, regardless of gender, even though consent culture demands consent scripts and doing consent for all. So how does the concept of the “powerful” submissive become canon in the community?

To explore this, I ask participants about if and/or how people are empowered in the kink community, both by gender and kink roles. I ask Luna, a submissive identifying cis woman if she found doing consent empowering, and she exclaims:

Yeah, absolutely! Especially for the submissive, especially for the person who's supposed to be viewed as weaker. Because we really do have all the power. All of the power, in a good healthy relationship. All of what you do to me is up to me. It doesn't matter what you want to do, how you want to do it, or when you want to do it. If I don't want to do it, we don't do it. That's really, really empowering. To be able to say no, to be able to mean it, stick to it, and not be judged for or berated for it. It's amazing to be able to just know your power to do that. I love it!

Here, again, is the theme of the empowered or “powerful submissive” where the submissive has “all of the power” because they have the right to revoke consent. It may seem a bit like Luna is diminishing the wishes of her partner, but that is not the case. What she is saying is that once she negotiates what she and her partner do and do not want in the scene, or even during a negotiation, the partner is expected to respect and maintain the boundaries and intentions set. Interestingly, she equates a healthy relationship with the submissive person having power. Dominance is stripped of some of its meaning as it pertains to society or masculinity. Your will is not being exerted over another person regardless of their desires. Instead, dominance is an act of agreed-upon will that is being exerted in the ways that were agreed to.

I ask Carey, a bottom-leaning switch and a trans man if he feels empowered by his submissive role and he explains:

I do a lot of times. Because there's the idea that the top has all the power, but I think it's either like pretty equal, or the bottom a lot of times has more power to stop things. So, I feel like, while a lot of times the point is to be able to let go of control, to relax in a way, I know that I'm still actually completely in control of a situation. That is, is empowering. Because then it leaves me free to explore and have, you know, way more fun experiences... I'm a queer, masc person... this is something that I'm really proud that I can feel comfortable with and that I can feel that I have the opportunity to do. Because a

lot of times there are [people who think] guys shouldn't be bottoms or submissive at all. Dumb stuff like that. So, I'm really glad that I can do that.

Carey is one of the few people in this research who describes that both people have equal power in the interaction, however, he admits that it feels like the submissive has more power to end the scene by revoking consent. As a bottom-leaning switch, Carey prefers being the bottom or submissive, receiving actions in a scene. He did share that he will occasionally switch, but more as a service to his partner and for their enjoyment. Carey feels that people stigmatize men in the bottom or submissive roles. Interestingly, he reports this stigma as doing consent seems to otherwise imply acceptance. But it is likely a product of the mismatch between the expectation of the gender structure and consent culture. Men can be submissive and do consent and have their agency and bodily autonomy respected, but they may also experience stigma from some people in the community who are trying to hold men accountable for doing gender, which means not doing dominance. People in kink do consent, but they are also responding to doing gender even as some of the members of the community play with and redo gender.

As previously discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, in the gender structure, submissiveness is prescribed to women and femininity where dominance is associated with men and masculinity (Connell 1987, 2005; Lorber 1994; Masters et al. 2013; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004; Simula and Sumerau 2017; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005). Men are seen to have power in the gender power hierarchy because they use prescriptive gender roles, norms, beliefs, and stereotypes to enact or do gender in interactions (Connell 1987, 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). This reinforces the cultural ideal of men as dominant and women as submissive (Berger et al. 1972; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987). However, in the BDSM community kink roles of dominance, submissive, and switch are all self-assigned by individuals. While I have discussed how the conceptualization of what it means to be dominant

or submissive is likely informed by gendered connotations of the terms, any person of any gender can do consent in any role, and it can change as often as the individual desires.

This concept of the empowered or “powerful” submissive is an example of how individuals respond to conflicting messages they receive from consent culture in BDSM and the gender structure. Here, the submissive is seen as powerful because they are typically the ones receiving an action during play. When doing consent, if anyone withdraws consent, all activities must stop. But it is the submissive or bottom who is perceived to be powerful because they ultimately decide how and who has access to their bodies. Hades likely sees the submissive as more powerful, because he is doing consent, and being a “good kinky person” means never violating doing consent, thus he must always respect the withdrawal of consent of his typically feminine submissives.

Hades still reports that doing consent makes him feel empowered as a dominant even though the submissive has all the power because he can avoid the abuse stigma that might come along with the kink activities he does with women. Carey and Luna are likely empowered because they can subvert normative gender expectations with their kink roles. Luna gets to have agency and bodily autonomy as a submissive woman and Carey gets to be submissive as a man and feels empowered by that. However, men are typically afforded agency and bodily autonomy by doing gender and not all submissives are women. Individuals in kink are likely experiencing an identity dilemma because their identities hold conflicting meanings and values (Wolkomir 2006).

This dilemma creates confusion for them because participants claim it is always the submissive who has the power in the interaction, however that submissive can be any gender. If the submissive is a woman and is empowered in the bottom role, even though submissiveness

aligns with femininity, she is powerful because doing consent means agency and bodily autonomy. But if the submissive is a man, he is still empowered and subverting gender by acting in a way that is associated with femininity, yet still maintains power in the dynamic. Previously, participants have discussed how everyone is empowered no matter their gender or kink role. However, there are these mismatches that occur. If a man is a submissive and a woman is a dominant, are both empowered because they are subverting gender? But if the submissive, in this case, a man, has all the power and the dominant is actually submissive to them, does that reproduce hegemonic gender power dynamics? Theories of gender as a structure, institution, or order describe the interactive effect between individual agency and the structure by which someone can rebel against and reinforce the social structure (Connell 1987, 2010; Hollander 2002; Martin 2004; Risman 2004). Individuals are both subverting and reproducing the gender structure as they do consent. The conflict with trying to both do consent to subvert and redo gender while doing gender, even internally or unintentionally, simultaneously plays out in both the “fake, toxic, hyper dom” and “the empowered submissive.” However, there are other examples of individual and interactional confusion caused by the conflict between the gender structure and consent culture playing out.

Femmes Switches Subverting Gender? Submitting to Masculinity while Dominating Femininity

There is a trend in this data of women and femme switches communicating that they are more comfortable with submitting to masculinity (men) and to dominating femininity (women). As I discuss gender and kink roles with everyone, I notice that women and femme nonbinary people who identify as LGBTQ+ and a switch describing how and why they prefer submitting to men and masculinity and dominating women and femininity. Although many of these folks are aware of gender and doing consent, and in many ways actively subvert it, their preferred play

partners linked gender characteristics like dominance and submission to biological sex or gender identity. For example, Esmerelda tells me:

I tend to feel slightly more submissive to masculine-presenting people and more dominant towards feminine presenting people. Which I also feel extremely guilty about because it's by the book. I know so many bisexual switches who are women, bisexual, and femme switches that are submissive to men and dominant to women. I'm like, so let's think about this. I really like that BDSM makes you think, where's the patriarchy in my soul? How can I dig it out, get rid of it, use it, lean into it, or turn it into a fetish? If you can't win, join them, or whatever.

Here, Esmerelda wrestles with how the gender structure informs BDSM roles. They realize that as femme queer switch who is submissive to masculinity and dominant to femininity, they are participating in patriarchal power dynamics and are potentially unconsciously responding to gender roles and sexual scripts. What is interesting, is that they contribute their ability to question these positions and power dynamics to kink and doing consent. They can be what they want, and they do switch roles and play with people of different gender identities and sexual orientations in different positions, however, their preference is still more normative in a sense. It is also interesting that they see this as something that needs to be purged or turned into a kink. BDSM allows for 'patriarchal' or normative values to be subverted or fetishized in a way that is reassuring or comforting to Esmerelda.

Here, they are sarcastic when they say, "if you can't win, join them." What they mean by this is if you cannot beat the patriarchy, bend it to your own pleasure, by your own terms in kink. Maybe they are informed by or reproducing the gender power structure, but in kink, they feel it is within their control and a choice they decide to make for themselves (Banerjee et al. 2018; Thwaites 2017). However, Esmeralda was not alone in this experience. Lily identifies as a submissive-leaning switch cis pansexual woman, and she explains to me that:

I'm mostly subby with the men and then for women, I like to switch. I've done switch stuff for some men too, it just depends. If they're not as traditionally masculine or if they're pansexual... it just depends on the situation. But for me, I guess it means that I allow myself to be vulnerable. I need that vulnerability in a controlled environment. It just feels good when you can take your hands off the wheel a little bit. I am not a control freak with other people but for myself, in my everyday life, I'm analyzing everything. So, to just kick back, relax, and just be crazy. It works.

Lily shares that even though she is pansexual and a switch, she prefers to be submissive to men and dominant with women. Even though doing consent makes it possible for negotiations to be based on role, preference, and other factors, people are still subconsciously influenced by doing gender and sexual scripts. Lily discusses how submitting fulfills her desire to not have to overanalyze or to be in control in an interaction. However, part of that "relief" is likely through performing femininity in submitting to masculinity. This interaction likely feels familiar and comfortable for a cis woman. In our interview, Lily also shares that she uses these types of scenarios to work through trust issues she has with men because she has experienced sexual assault (Casalheira et al. 2021; Thomas 2020). For her, being submissive helps her to feel in control of an interaction. It is possible that though she may be responding to gender norms and sexual scripts, she also feels that this is a space where she can set the rules and the limits, thus she feels relaxed because she is confident consent scripts are going to be followed and she is going to remain safe.

Lily shares with me that as a pansexual she plays with people of different genders. However, she tends to be submissive to men and switches with women/femmes. She describes that in her interactions, women tend to, "incorporate as much sensuality as they can. Power and beating, it's a little warmer. A little more comforting." Lily feels women are more likely to show sensuality and tenderness through their displays of power. They align with expected gender norms even in a position of dominance. Lily describes how she feels empowered to "let go" with

men because she has control even over a dominant masculine man through her own boundaries and doing consent. It is similar with women, but also women are more “comforting” and “warm.” Men need boundaries and women feel safe. Even though she does not seem confused by what she is saying, the conflict between the gender structure and consent culture is apparent. She simultaneously finds submitting to masculinity and men comforting because she can be vulnerable and give up control. But in being the submissive to a man, she perceives she is actually the one who has the power and control as the “empowered submissive.” Likely, she is subconsciously responding to gender. When she submits to men, she is “letting go” by giving him access to her body even though she maintains control through boundaries and limits.

Marginalization and Fetishization

Consent culture ideology suggests everyone gets agency and autonomy through doing consent and that doing consent means everyone from diverse backgrounds and identities is accepted and respected. However, some of the participants reported experiencing marginalization and even fetishization because of their identities. With the presence of the “fake, toxic, hyper dom,” who bring existing power structures from society into the BDSM community, intersections of the hegemonic power structure infiltrate and impact those who are most vulnerable.

I ask Rose, a bottom-leaning switch queer femme to explain the process of how she finds play partners. As she was explaining, she brings up that when she is considering new play partners, she is interested if they are, “playing with someone who looks like me” which she describes as, “a rarity” in the BDSM community. Rose tells shares with me that as a Black, femme person in kink, she must be careful selecting partners because she experiences being

fetishized by her race and identity. I ask her if she feels fetishized as a Black femme and she exasperatedly explains:

Absolutely. 50,000%. Yeah. All the time. All the time. I think, especially as a person of color, who likes more intense play that, for some reason, it seems to really make people really fascinated about slavery. Like, all the time. I intentionally have changed my Fetlife label because I used to have 'slave.' Which I feel okay with having. I've done the like emotional and introspective work on my part. The objectification fetish is disgusting, and that idea that unknowingly I'm participating in that person's own fucked up ideas of fun and fetish... I don't want to be the image when they close their eyes and have their racist masturbation periods, or whatever that they're seeing. That's just, I can't deal... I got at least twice a week messages from white cis men being like, 'Wouldn't you love to be whipped by a white man?' I'm like, 'I mean, NO.' I was like, 'I enjoy whips. But no, NO for that.' Now I have a complex about it. Now, I literally will not do it. One of my favorite tops is great with whips. He's a white man and I will not play with him in public. Because I didn't realize how pervasive even people's association was. But also, their willingness to try to discuss that association with me, which like, keep it in your head if you're gonna think like *that*.

Rose discusses how being a Black femme/female-bodied person is challenging in the BDSM community. Often, she experiences overt and covert discrimination, microaggressions, and racism within kink. She describes how the language of BDSM, particularly 'master' and 'slave' bring up racialized ideas of power dynamics. That fuels uncomfortable to painful interactions for her where she cannot simply do a scene because she wants to, she must consider the intentions and perceptions of her doing anything as a Black femme person. The idea that people could use her body for fetishistic and racist fantasies makes her reject doing specific kinds of interracial play, particularly with whips, both publicly and sometimes even privately. Rose shares that her experiences are also the experiences of her partners in kink and kink-adjacent communities:

One of my partners... he's a Black man. He's the same way... there are things he just like will not do in public. Like he won't go to orgies because as soon as he walks into a space like he's a BBC (Big Black Cock) and he becomes this dispenser of this non-consensual kind of roleplay. Like he hasn't consented to that dynamic or that like fetishization.

This is not an isolated occurrence for Rose. Her friends and partners also discuss how race and gender impact their participation in the BDSM community. For Rose's partner, being a Black man brings up racialized stereotypes and fetishization of hyper-masculinity, increased libido, and penis size, and dominance, even when it is not consented to. This is likely a byproduct of pornography, gender, race, and sexual scripts (Cruz 2016; Erickson et al. 2022). It also deviates from the ideal of consent culture and doing consent. Individuals are likely operating on these social assumptions and biases in the background and are not actively questioning and considering structural socialization while they are supposedly doing consent or participating in a consent culture.

Race and gender are not the only intersecting marginalized and/or fetishized identities conflicting with the ideals of consent culture. Some participants also discuss how they experience marginalization/fetishization because of their gender identity and sexuality. Emma shares that she feels her perceived gender identity impacts people's acceptance of her as a nonbinary kinky person. She shares as a female-bodied person:

I think more just because it is fetishized or it is seen as, 'Oh, that's cute or I could be into that.' Specifically, or especially when in a subservient role. Even when in a dominant role, for some men they're like, 'yeah!' That's the kink, but I think there is a certain like negative view, especially with submissive kinky men. There are definitely negative societal stereotypes that are slowly being worked through. I've never seen a meme about pegging boys... then in quarantine... So, they're really with it, but I think it is more seen as something to commodify... than it is someone seeing that and being like, 'I see that, and I respect you.'

Here, Emma discusses how as a nonbinary femme, when she is in the submissive roles, she finds that men outside and inside of kink tend to fetishize her perceived womanhood and submissiveness. She feels that the submissive role is more acceptable to men because she can be sexualized in this position. But she discusses how that is not the same for submissive men. In

general society, submissive men are not doing masculinity correctly and face stereotypes and stigma (Connell 1987, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). However, she explains that during the pandemic she noticed a shift where memes about pegging, the act of a person, usually a female, using a phallus to penetrate a man anally or orally for sexual gratification, men became more mainstream. Now since the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, Emma feels that men are more open to the idea of being dominated by a woman. But she does comment that this is likely a product of the commodification of pleasure during the pandemic and more from people's desire for any sort of new stimulation or pleasure and not because they necessarily now respect submissive men or dominant women and femmes.

Edward shares with me that he has experimented with many different roles in BDSM. As a bisexual man, he appreciates the fluidity that the BDSM community allows for identity/sexuality. However, he describes that he occasionally experiences biphobia within kink and kink adjacent spaces. He shares his experience with:

A swinger couple that is terrified that a bisexual guy will like, try to, I don't know, molest the male half of the couple when he's not looking? Just really bad assumptions about the desires or the self-control of people with more than one set of desires.

In this situation with the swinger couple, even if they might be interested in bringing Edward into their dynamic as a third, his bisexuality makes him a threat to the male partners' sexuality/masculinity. So, while these kink and kink adjacent spaces are much more accepting of people with different identities or sexualities, there are still some who experience stigma and stereotypes due to a mismatch in gender and sexual scripts, and consent culture and gender structure. Nico also shares that for some trans and nonbinary people, it can be:

Super objectifying and super negative to be in some kinky spaces where these dominant identities still are dominant. So, even though maybe you find it safer, maybe you find more like-minded people around you, you're still usually a marginal identity.

So even though gender-diverse people might find the BDSM community to be safe because of doing consent and diversity acceptance, they are still marginalized because they still experience discrimination. Nico describes how people with “dominant” or structurally powerful identities (read: cishet white men) even within kink, are informed about nonbinary and trans people as people by the same society that oppresses them. So, while doing consent and consent culture may be empowering because of being accepted for who you are, interacting as you want, and having autonomy, the societal marginalization based on gender identity and sexuality cannot be shed simply because of the presence of doing consent. The heteronormative patriarchy embedded in the gender structure is still internalized within individuals and operates in ways that oppress nonbinary and trans people within the BDSM community.

Even cisgender participants were aware of this happening in the BDSM community. I ask Luna, a cisgender pansexual woman how people of other genders are empowered by doing consent, she explains that:

Trans and nonbinary folks have other struggles that I would never be able to relate to in a million years. I'm guessing the empowerment is similar, if not more of an impact for them. That's when they aren't put into certain situations simply because they're being fetishized.

She admits that as a cis person she has no idea how to answer that question or how to speak for others. But she does share that has trans and nonbinary friends. She can see how people are empowered in the kink roles they decide to play, and how doing consent facilitates bodily autonomy and agency as discussed in Chapter 3. However, she mentions being aware of the fetishization of trans and nonbinary folks' experiences in the community. She did not go into

more detail and I, unfortunately, did not probe further. But it seems Luna believes trans and nonbinary people are afforded the same empowerment in BDSM spaces regardless of their gender identity... so long as people are not using them for their own internal and nonconsensual fetishization of trans and/or nonbinary bodies. While she believes that the BDSM community is welcoming to trans and nonbinary folks, she also feels that LGBTQ+ and kink communities can be “gatekeeping” and that sometimes both communities can be discriminatory to trans and nonbinary people. However, Luna claims that this is the exception and not the norm from her own experience.

The highly valued consent scripts guided by agency and bodily autonomy, which form how individuals do consent, lead to participants in the previous chapters to report a higher level of acceptance of diverse individuals within the BDSM consent culture. However, the example in this chapter shows that the gender structure and other intersecting institutions that produce primary socialization about gender, race, and sexuality are also influencing individuals and their interactions. It is likely that because consent culture exists as a form of secondary socialization that social constructs of primary socializing institutions, like gender, inform individuals and their behaviors without them always being aware of the influence (Berger et al. 1972; Connell 2010; Martin 2004; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005). This creates a conflict for individuals in what should guide an interaction, doing consent or doing gender. It also likely creates internal conflict, or identity dilemmas, within kinky individuals as they seem to struggle between how they were socialized to think about and do gender and how they are expected to think about and do consent as a “good kinky person” (Wolkomir 2006).

CONCLUSION

Prior chapters more so focused on how members of the kink community successfully constructed consent culture and how they redo gender in ways that help them create a (sub) culture around consent (Cagwin 2018). This chapter, however, highlights points in which consent culture comes into conflict with the overarching gender structure/institution/order. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate how a community dedicated to building a consent culture can still struggle with outside gender norms. I analyze this further and discuss how the data provides empirical examples that complement and expand the existing literature in the overall discussion and conclusion of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

During my time in graduate school, I have watched the rise of the #Metoo and #Timesup social movements cause shock waves of change through society. Powerful sexual predators were held accountable, and justice was served for many victims. However, since the height of these movements, there has been a substantial cultural backlash against women and female-bodied people seemingly for daring to demand agency and bodily autonomy for themselves and justice for the crimes and sexual violence perpetrated against them. The year 2016 was my first year of graduate school. I gathered with my new friends and colleagues expecting to be together to witness the first female and woman-identifying person to make history and become the President of the United States. Instead, I watched in horror as a man accused of multiple sexual assaults and harassment allegations became the President and nominated another man accused of sexual assault as a member of the Supreme Court.

I am currently witnessing people who subscribe to biological and traditional ideas of gender trying to dismantle and overturn settled law in the case of *Roe v. Wade* to deny millions of citizens with uteruses the right to their own reproductive agency and bodily autonomy. It is a bizarre thing to spend six years learning about gender and conducting my own research to write a dissertation about consent, consent culture, and the possibilities it could have to challenge and

change existing structures as I wait with bated breath, knowing that a ruling denying me my own agency and bodily autonomy is coming any day now (I wrote this section two days before the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was published). I worry that the backlash against social gains surrounding gender, sexuality, agency, and bodily autonomy will only get much, much worse before it gets any better. I hope that this research will matter to future investigations of agency and bodily autonomy and that it will encourage continued scholarship around consent and consent culture that could make a difference in a society that desperately needs this knowledge.

In this dissertation, I have examined how the BDSM community interacts with consent in ways that challenge and reproduce the gender structure/institution/order. Through interviewing 36 BDSM-identifying individuals about their experiences in consent culture, I identified three main themes. The first theme, presented in Chapter 2, describes the ways that people in a consent culture socially construct interactional consent scripts that inform and reinforce consent culture. Here, they heavily promote agency and bodily autonomy, reinforced through boundaries, limits, accountability, and social control. The second theme plays out across Chapters 3 and 4. I discuss how the consent scripts in Chapter 2 form the interactional basis of “doing consent” and compare how this concept is similar to and different from “doing gender.” In fact, doing consent becomes an example of how individuals can use interactions to “redo” gender. These chapters explore how doing consent redoes gender across the gender spectrum for women and men, masculinity and femininity, and trans and nonbinary people. The final theme begins in Chapter 4 and concludes in Chapter 5, where I explore the conflict that occurs between consent culture and the gender structure and how this causes identity dilemmas and confusion in the interactions of BDSM-identifying individuals. This dissertation has implications for how individuals can use agency and communities can use interactions to challenge existing structures like gender.

However, it also provides theoretical advancement and empirical evidence for the social construction of subcultural social institutions, structuration theory, “doing” and “redoing” gender, and the sociological advancement of BDSM/kink studies.

DISCUSSION

Chapter 2: The Social Construction of Consent Culture through Interactional Consent Scripts

In Chapter 2, I begin by providing a thick description of The Club which sets the scene, or stage, where individuals will participate in presentation rituals and interactions (Geertz 1988; Goffman 1959). The Club, and many play spaces like it, serve as a pivotal physical location for the BDSM community (Haenfler 2012; Herman 2007; Webster 2020). In these safe havens, kinky people can meet, play, and most importantly, learn about the rules of consent culture, gain education in consent scripts, and be socialized as “good kinky people.” Though I am a member of The Club, as discussed in my Methods Standpoint Statement, through the recruiting process I was able to gain access to private TNG group events. I knew The Club had rules like consent is mandatory, do not touch the cage dancers or anyone without consent, no photography inside, do not interrupt scenes, be respectful or you will be removed. However, at the private event and through interviews, I learned “The Rules” of TNG and their parties which differed slightly from public events; Consent is mandatory, engage in SSC and RACK, barriers (condoms, dental dams, gloves, etc.) must be used for penetrative play, DM’s are in charge and what they say goes, and if you do not follow these rules, you will be asked to leave (Langdrige et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2014). The focus is on agency and bodily autonomy through consent.

My findings in this research agree with previous literature, that the BDSM community uses definitions of agentic enthusiastic consent, or consent that is deliberate and a celebrated act

of autonomy free from coercion (Barker 2016; Cagwin 2018; Carmody 2003; Pitagora 2013; Wiseman 1996). These definitions directly oppose implicit consent that is practiced in society which supports rape culture and fuels rape myths (Beres 2007; Buchwald et al. 2005; Burnett 2016; Carmody 2003; Harding 2015; Herman 1989; Lafrance et al. 2012; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Reling et al. 2018; Stryker et al. 2017; Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Outside of BDSM, interactions in society often rely on gender and sexual scripts where the agency of men is centered and consent is assumed unless withdrawn (Beres 2007; Masters et al. 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005) In this community, “Yes” means Yes and “No” means NO (Lafrance et al. 2012). Attending these events and learning the rules firsthand along with interview data, helped me to triangulate definitions of consent among participants (Cagwin 2018).

BDSM-identifying or kinky people desire to preserve agency and bodily autonomy. They shared with me that they try to achieve agency and autonomy preservation through limiting alcohol and recreational drug use, learning and using methods of consent like the stoplight method, getting regular STI testing, and sharing the results with play partners. Many people reported that they prefer to play when everyone is sober and not under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs. Some reported that they did not mind if they or a partner had a drink or two, as long as negotiations were done beforehand and they were not at the point of intoxication because that could be seen as unsafe (Ortmann and Sprott 2012). Using consent methods, like stoplight consent where green means “all good,” yellow means “slow down/ check-in,” and red means “stop right now,” allows individuals to have a standard for communicating consent in a scene and within a play space (Cagwin 2018; Dunkley and Brotto 2020; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Like Gus shared with me previously, if someone yells “red” in a play space, everyone

pays attention because they know there is a problem. Participants also share that regular STI testing and sharing results is an act of both agency and bodily autonomy. For this population, knowing your status and sharing it with others so they can make informed decisions for their own bodies is part of agentic, enthusiastic consent.

I learned that consent scripts of agency and bodily autonomy through agentic, enthusiastic consent are socially constructed through utilizing boundaries and limits. Boundaries and limits are set through open dialectic communication of what you and your partner both wish to do with your bodies. This includes establishing safewords, like stoplight consent, and limits (LaFrance et al. 2012). These boundaries and limits can be very specific to the person or the play that is being negotiated. Participants expressed that boundaries, safe words, and limits made them feel safe to explore during play because everyone knows where the lines are and knows not to cross them. Some participants even expressed that they could reprocess traumatic experiences of gender or racialized violence during kink scenes because of the safety provided by boundaries and limits. The literature agrees that kink activities can be therapeutic for individuals with trauma (Cascalheira et al. 2021; Hammers 2019; Thomas 2020).

One critical component to socially constructing consent culture is how the consent scripts mentioned above are reproduced and enforced. I learned that DM's, TNG group leadership, and The Club's management all play an important role. DM's are specifically trained to monitor play parties to make sure everyone is safe, and the rules are being followed during interactions. They are the socially appointed police in The Club or play space. The group leaders, along with and in collaboration with other group leaders beyond TNG, are there to sort through any allegations of consent violations and hold individuals accountable to consent scripts and community expectations by demanding either reeducation or banning and blacklisting violators. The Club's

management also controls who is allowed to be physically present in that space. They also collaborate with DM's and group leaders as well as other clubs in the region, to be sure everyone is aware of dangerous people or known consent violators. While these are more formal methods of ensuring individuals remain accountable for adherence to consent scripts in interactions, the reputation of kinky individuals operates informally to achieve the same thing.

Reputation matters. At least that was the resounding opinion of my sample. They describe how reputation is sacred in the BDSM community because it separates consent scripts from the profane or unholy consent violations (Durkheim 1965; Zondervan 2016). Individuals can gain a good reputation or be a "good kinky person" by being known for following consent scripts, being highly skilled at a specific form of play, or being mentored by another prestigious person in the community. This can increase someone's desirability as a play partner and/or popularity in the larger community. Having a bad reputation for violating consent, or not being seen as a safe partner, or being poorly skilled can have an equal but opposite effect. People do not desire to interact with someone with a bad reputation. Reputation for being a "good kinky person" is currency and is a type of socially constructed presentation ritual (Goffman 1959). Popularity becomes a valuable status within this community. However, some participants told me how popularity is sometimes abused and used to avoid accountability by people who act as if they are above adhering to consent scripts. Popularity is power and power allows individuals to avoid accountability, especially when they are primarily socialized in a society that supports rape culture where men use their power to avoid accountability for sexual assault and reproduce rape myths (Frith 2009; Harding 2015; Herman 1989; Mardorossian 2014; Martin 2016; Pascoe and Hollander 2016; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004; Suarez and Gadalla 2010).

Chapter 3: Doing Consent: Redoing Gender and Subverting Heteronormativity

In Chapter 3, I explore the interactional consent scripts in BDSM as the foundation for “doing” consent using the “doing” gender theoretical framework. Here, “doing” consent operates remarkably like “doing” gender where individuals perform and interact with consent in ways that inform the overarching structure (West and Zimmerman 1987). Participants describe that they found it powerful to “do” consent because it allowed them to act and interact in ways that preserved their agency and bodily autonomy that doing gender and sexual scripts did not. I discovered that doing consent is part of the process that socially constructs consent culture as a social institution (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Giddens 1986). Here, individuals habituate “doing” consent in their interactions and typify the language of consent. Doing consent is so expected and ubiquitous that it is institutionalized in TNG and other kink groups, The Club, and the larger kink community. Social control surrounding “doing” consent and holding kinky people accountable for “doing” consent formally and informally through DM’s, leadership, The Club and its management, and individuals and their reputations provide legitimation. Finally, individuals accept doing consent as normal which reinforces the process and causes them to habituate it and the cycle continues as described.

I found that the interactional nature of doing consent and the focus on agency, bodily autonomy, and accountability allowed individuals to “redo” gender (Connell 2010; Darwin 2022; Hollander 2013, 2018). Participants can use doing consent to resist the social constructs of doing gender and sexual scripts within interactions. Instead, doing consent allows them to redo what gender means to them as individuals and as a community. This was particularly powerful for women, those doing femininity, and trans and nonbinary people because doing consent empowers their agency and bodily autonomy. It gives them a wider range of choices in what

roles they could take in interactions. This fluidity is not generally supported by doing gender. Doing consent also encourages body positivity, control of their sexuality, and the rejection of slut shaming. All the above challenge normative gender and sexual scripts. By doing consent and doing things like body positivity in interactions, women, femmes, trans, and nonbinary people redo gender by doing it differently from gender norms and not holding each other accountable for doing emphasized femininity and gender (Budgeon 2014; Currier 2013; Schippers 2007).

Chapter 4: Doing Consent, Redoing Masculinity, and Conflict with Doing Gender

In Chapter 4, I investigate if the findings of doing consent and redoing gender for women, femmes, trans, and nonbinary people were the same for men and masculinity. Participants felt that doing consent had similar effects for men and masculinity, where men found it was powerful to be able to redo expectations of normative gender surrounding masculinity. This was especially true for submissive men, who benefitted the most from doing consent to rebel against normative gender ideals. When doing consent, men could be submissive even if it is traditionally associated with femininity. They could also do dominance in “soft” ways or as a service to those they interacted with. This allows them to redo conceptions of masculinity and perhaps form a type of “hybrid” masculinity (Budgeon 2014; Connell 1987, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Currier 2013; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2015). Men also describe how doing consent helped them to feel that they were interacting with others in safe ways. My participants discuss that the discourse, language, and actions of doing consent allowed men to truly *be* feminists. Men play a vital part in redoing gender because in doing consent they value and respect the agency and bodily autonomy of others and reject violence as a form of gender power which challenges doing hegemonic masculinity and the gender power hierarchy (Connell 1987, 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Duncanson

2015; West and Zimmerman 1987). Their willingness to not hold others accountable for doing gender and to instead redistribute power by means other than gender truly makes redoing gender possible within interactions in the kink community (Budgeon 2014; Connell 1987; Currier 2013; Hollander 2018; West and Fenstermaker 1995).

However, participants also report that there are some people, particularly cis het white men, in the BDSM community that still rely on gender power to avoid accountability for doing consent. These so-called “fake, toxic, hyper doms” use institutional power to invoke gender conceptions of masculinity and dominance to assert themselves over others in interactions and with the larger community. Structural power remains intact, and people respond to it unconsciously, even within a consent culture. When a person enters a kink space, they can do consent and redo gender as much as they want. However, they are still a member of society while they participate in a subculture. When they exit, they once again have the same level of structural power they had when they entered. While no one in the sample describes being a “fake, toxic, hyper dom,” they told me that they avoid them as play partners and more generally in social interactions. However, “fake, toxic, hyper doms” are depicted as sometimes disguising themselves as doing consent so that they could be predatory, especially to women, femmes, trans, and nonbinary people. While doing consent redid gender for most people in my sample, “fake, toxic, hyper doms” were still able to avoid accountability for doing consent and instead did gender. Both could be simultaneously possible due to the known conflict between doing consent and doing gender. I explore this further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Consent Culture Versus the Gender Structure: Conflict, Overlap, and Confusion

In Chapter 5, I investigate the conflict that occurs between doing consent and doing gender to discover if both could be simultaneously possible and how the experience of conflict impacts kinky people's experiences in BDSM. It is worth noting that the gender structure/ institution/ order is socially constructed similarly to consent culture, but with different ideologies. Both rely on individuals to habitualize "doing" ideologies in interactions, integrating the ideology into their language and culture, creating and supporting social structures that institutionalize and legitimize ideologies through social control in formal and informal ways, causing individuals to be socialized by and internalize these ideologies before repeating the cycle (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Connell 1987; Giddens 1986; Martin 2004; Risman 2004). Individuals experience each of these cycles in relation to gender and consent culture, however, they experience it with gender first because gender is a primary agent of socialization, whereas consent culture is a secondary agency of socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Risman and Davis 2013). My population seemed to understand what gender was and how it impacted people and interactions as well as how consent culture did the same. However, some of what they told me about their experience showed the conflict between gender and consent culture at play individually and interactionally.

Participants report conflicting experiences between their gender identity and kink role. These identity dilemmas are likely products of the conflict between the gender structure and consent culture (Wolkomir 2006). Participants describe the concept of the "fake, toxic, hypedom" discussed in Chapter 4. They also thoroughly discuss the concept of the "empowered" or powerful submissive. In a BDSM power exchange or scene, individuals believe that it is the submissive that truly has the power. It may seem like the dominant is the one in control, but my

participants claim that it is actually the submissive or bottom who is in power because they are giving the dominant access to their bodies through consent and can revoke consent at any time. While this could be seen as an example of redoing gender if the submissive is a woman, femme, trans, or nonbinary person, it creates confusion when the submissive is a man. Is a submissive man powerful because he is the submissive or because he is a man? The answer is likely both.

While doing consent subverts and redoes gender, gender is pervasive enough to operate subconsciously and even unconsciously (Connell 1987; Martin 2004; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). My data shows this in the example of women and femme switches who prefer submitting to men and dominating women. Here, it is likely that the early and omnipresent influence of doing gender and the gender structure itself may cause women and femme switches to want these interactions. Doing consent likely adds a layer of comfort to the situation because they know they are retaining their agency. However, it could be that women and femme switch feel more comfortable as submissive to men because they perceive that to be the role where they have more power. Perhaps they are more comfortable in the dominant position with women because this is almost where they would submit, and they feel more comfortable doing that with a woman. Though these preferences may be just that, it is more likely that they are also responding to gender in subconscious or unconscious ways through these arrangements.

Finally, my research shows that even though consent culture redoes gender and values agency and bodily autonomy, marginalization and even fetishization of those with less structural power does occur in the BDSM/kink community (Cruz 2016; Erickson et al. 2022). This was particularly reported by participants along the intersections of race, gender identity, and sexuality. This shows that identities that hold intersecting power, like the “fake, toxic, hyper, doms” described as cishet white men, are using this power to further oppress and marginalize

vulnerable populations. It is proof that although consent culture tries to mitigate the negative consequences of the gender structure by doing consent and redoing gender, and is successful in varying degrees, it is not a consistent experience for all.

The gender structure is so ubiquitous to the human experience in society that it is difficult to parse through and expunge, even within a consent culture that has the educational capacity, tools, and community across the individual, interactional, and structural levels to replace gender. Consent culture may be able to redo gender subculturally and within interactions, but the prevailing gender structure will always conflict with the values of consent culture unless there is a massive shift in how gender is done in society. However, it is encouraging that a social space exists that challenges and redoes gender at all, even if it is temporary and limited in scope. It has interesting implications for practical application, the literature, and future research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITERATURE

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature on the social construction and use of interactional scripting, doing and redoing gender, and the conflict between the opposing social structures/institutions/orders of consent culture and the gender structure. Research has recently boomed in BDSM/kink studies, which considers BDSM/kink communities as a source of academic significance (Weiss 2021). Scholars have used sociological approaches to consider BDSM and stigma management (Barth et al. 2002; Bezreh et al. 2012; McGrady 2016), identity development (Cruz 2016; Erickson et al. 2022; Newmahr 2011; Pitagora 2016; Rehor 2015; Webster 2020), media representation (Tripodi 2017; Weiss 2006), mental health (Casalheira et al. 2021; Hammers 2019; Thomas 2020), and gender and sexuality beliefs and scripting (Bauer 2018; Dixie 2017; Foucault 1990; Ortmann and Sprott 2012; Simula 2012; Simula and Sumerau 2017) to name a few. BDSM, as a field of study, incorporates a social constructionist lens, where

it is understood to be created by individuals within the community (Beckmann 2009; Giddens 1986; Guidroz 2008; Seidman 2003; Simula 2019c). Rather than being a novelty, BDSM studies in sociology are distinguished by this social constructionist perspective as different from medical and psychiatric studies and are instead a complex social phenomenon worthy of serious academic analysis (Simula 2019c).

BDSM is a ‘deviant’ subculture, but it is also a space where nonconformity can lead to social change (Adler and Adler 2006; Haenfler 2012, 2013; Wolf and Zuckerman 2012). Research has consistently shown that the BDSM community highly values agency and bodily autonomy associated with consent (Baldwin 1995; Barker 2016; Beres 2007; Beres and MacDonald 2015; Bezreh et al. 2012; Cagwin 2018; Carmody 2003; Dixie 2017; Dunkley and Brotto 2020; Foucault 1990; Galilee-Belfer 2020; Grigoriadis 2017b; Klement et al. 2017; Pitagora 2013; Simula 2019b; Stryker et al. 2017; Tripodi 2017; Williams 2006; Wiseman 1996). Kinky individuals desire to make free choices and exercise human agency through consensual interactions (Beres and MacDonald 2015; Christianson 2015; Galilee-Belfer 2020). Consent is so highly valued that the BDSM/kink community forms the foundation of their (sub)culture around this concept (Beckmann 2009; Cagwin 2018; Simula and Sumerau 2017). Many social theorists point to BDSM individuals and their ability to exercise agency as an example to change interactions and ultimately impact social structures (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Connell 2010; Giddens 1986; Goffman 1959; Hollander 2013, 2018).

In my research, I show how individuals create and maintain consent scripts in ways that socially construct consent culture. To my knowledge, there is no other research in the sociological study of BDSM that considers interactional scripting as a mechanism for creating and supporting consent culture. There is little research about consent culture in and beyond the

kink community in general (Cagwin 2018; Klement et al. 2017; Kraemer and Aburrow 2016; Stryker et al. 2017). My findings provide support that socially constructed interactional scripting can ultimately impact how social institutions operate and who and how they hold individuals accountable for social norms (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Dixie 2017; Giddens 1986; Hollander 2018; Masters et al. 2013). This has powerful implications for how individuals can enact consent scripts to inform interactions beyond BDSM. I believe that college campuses could benefit from teaching and enforcing consent scripts to repel rape culture (Barth et al. 2002; Boswell and Spade 1996; Grazian 2007; Grigoriadis 2017b; Reling et al. 2018). Some literature exists about consent on college campuses (Grigoriadis 2017b; Muehlenhard et al. 2016), however if a consent culture could be formed within a larger social institution, it could lead to lower rape-supportive beliefs, disproving rape myths, and potentially even redoing gender in society (Buchwald et al. 2005; Klement et al. 2017; Stryker et al. 2017).

This research fills a gap in the literature by examining how gender inequality is being subverted and/or reproduced through consent scripting processes (Lindemann 2012; Newmahr 2011). I build off the findings in Chapter 2 of this research to discuss how interactional consent scripts, like gender and sexual scripts, are socially constructed (Connell 1987; Dixie 2017; Gagnon 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Giddens 1986; Lorber 1994; Masters et al. 2013; Plante 2014; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987; Wiederman 2005). Individuals in the broader society experience socialization of gender beliefs, norms, values, and associated sexual scripts (Berger et al. 1972; Deutsch 2007; Goffman 1956, 1977; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 2009, 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004). In consent culture, individuals are socialized by and held accountable for “doing” consent scripts just as they are for “doing” gender in society (Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987). They “do” consent by

performing and reproducing consent culture within interactions. As a primary agent of socialization and a prevailing structure in society, gender informs individual, interactional, and structural conceptualizations in individuals from, and sometimes before, birth (Berger et al. 1972; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Connell 1987; Giddens 1986; Martin 2004; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Consent culture is a secondary agent of socialization, meaning individuals have already experienced significant gender socialization before they ever enter a consent culture.

As I note in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, gender structure and consent culture have conflicting values where the gender structure supports the gender power hierarchy and rape culture and consent culture is maintained through hyper conformity to consent (Cagwin 2018; Connell 1987; Dunkley and Brotto 2020; Herman 1989). I use Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality alongside Giddens's Structuration theory to discuss how consent culture is a subcultural social institution that holds individuals accountable for doing consent individually and interactionally (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Giddens 1986). Doing consent influences and is influenced by consent culture through the agentic actions of individuals but most importantly within interactions between individuals.

Scholars contend that interactions and accountability within interactions are where the gender structure can be challenged (Connell 2010; Darwin 2022; Hollander 2013, 2018; West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). The gender literature suggests that these interactions are where individuals can "redo" gender by using their agency to influence interactions with and expressions of femininity and masculinity and who is held accountable for doing gender (Connell 1987, 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hollander 2001, 2013, 2018; Risman and Davis 2013; West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). My research provides an important

empirical example of how individuals use interactional consent scripting to “do” consent and redo gender. Consent culture shifts expectations and accountability away from “doing” gender to form “doing” consent.

Doing consent allows fluidity in gender and sexual scripts, expressions, norms, expectations, and values for women and femmes, men and mascs, and trans and nonbinary people. Here, they can redo gender and challenge what it means to be feminine or masculine within the BDSM subculture. However, both gender and consent culture as structures are repellant to change (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Connell 1987; Giddens 1986; Martin 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004, 2018). Consent culture is formed and conducted in ways that redo the gender structure/institution/order, but the gender structure/institution/order holds firm in how it socializes and influences individuals and interactions to maintain itself as a power structure (Acker 1989; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Cagwin 2018; Connell 1987; Kandiyoti 1988; Martin 2004; Risman 2004; Risman and Davis 2013). Consent culture also continues to perpetuate itself through socialization and individual and interactional reproductions. My data shows that these simultaneous processes result in identity dilemmas and confusion within interactions for kinky people who are simultaneously trying to do and redo gender while doing consent (Connell 2010; Darwin 2022; Wolkomir 2006).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings in this dissertation are subject to several limitations. First and foremost, I conducted much of this research and Round 2 interviews during a global pandemic. It was difficult to get interviews and the time between interviews is likely a limitation when conducting inductive research. Also, the interview guides from Rounds 1 and 2 were slightly different which produced some data in Round 2 that was not able to be analyzed in Round 1. Also, in Round 2 when I ask participants questions about gender, I asked them if BDSM was “empowering” and then if people of specific genders were “empowered” in BDSM. Considering the complicated nature of power in both consent culture and the gender structure, I would suggest that future researchers avoid this language and ask questions about gender that allow participants to bring in ideas of power on their own. In Round 1 of data collection, I selected participants from one specific regional area out of convenience and because I was constrained by limited time, budget, and resources to include a wider physical area. I used snowball sampling and online recruiting to contact participants for both rounds of this research. In Round 2, I relied on connections made from Round 1 to recruit participants due to the pandemic. While snowball sampling is sometimes necessary for hidden populations, my ability to reach potential participants was often constrained by social groups that might contain individuals with similar patterns of thought and behavior (Lofland et al. 2006).

The sample size of total participants from Rounds 1 and 2, while adequate for this analysis, is relatively small and difficult to generalize to the broader BDSM community. The BDSM community spans multiple identities, nations, languages, etc. Future research should conduct a large-scale study that considers the experience of consent culture across various regions of the United States and beyond to international communities. It would be interesting to

see if findings of consent scripts, consent culture, “doing” consent and “redoing” gender were consistent across various national and international samples. This would be particularly interesting in international communities that experience higher levels of gender equality. The time span of this research is another limitation. Though I was able to utilize two rounds of sampling in a four-year period, this does not necessarily rise to the level of longitudinal data. A qualitative longitudinal study could provide a more expansive understanding of how consent culture is created and changes over time in relation and reaction to the gender structure.

Within the present study, most participants identified their race as white which limits analysis based on race. This may be a representative sample within the geographic location. However, considering the powerful experiences of racial marginalization and fetishization shared by Rose, this is an area that BDSM studies should research to expand and diversify the body of knowledge. This research also contained a diverse sample of sexualities and BDSM roles but seemed to have more people along the bi/pan/queer spectrum and lacked representation of gay and lesbian people. This might be representative to the local area where the research took place and/or the age range of those interviewed, but future research should investigate if and how gay and lesbian populations participate in consent culture. The overrepresentation of highly educated folks is another limitation. Future research should consider if consent culture and BDSM spaces are stratified by class and other identities as well.

In fact, future research should consider as many intersecting identities as possible to see if and how consent culture is constructed and deconstructed across intersectional lines or if it produces equality for some rather than others. As a marginalized researcher studying a stigmatized population, it is difficult for me to know how my own intersecting identities have impacted this research process. It is possible that my positionality as a white, educated person, a

kinky person in the community, and an authority figure as a researcher potentially impacted the responses I got from participants. Future research should consider the positionality of the researcher when studying the BDSM community. Future research should include observational studies of consent culture to triangulate data and discover if interview data matches interactional data.

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide and Demographics Questions (Round 1)

Face to Face interview

1. Can you think of a nickname you'd like to have me call you? This name will be used in the research, please choose a name that is not associated with your identity.

Sexual History

2. Have you become sexually active?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. How many sexual partners have you had?
3. When you are sexually active, do you take steps to have "safe" sex?
 - c. What kinds of precautions do you take?
4. Have you ever been tested for HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases?
 - d. Was there anything particularly memorable about that experience?
5. Were you educated about sex?
 - e. How old were you?
 - f. Describe your reaction to this information.
 - g. Describe how you learned about sex.
 - h. Could you tell me a bit about how this information impacted your sexual relationships?

Consent and BDSM

6. How were you educated about consent?
 - a. Who or what educated you about consent?
 - b. How did you feel about this information?
7. Describe your idea of consent.
 - c. What does consent mean to the BDSM community?
 - d. How does the BDSM community teach consent?
 - e. How does the BDSM community enforce consent?
 - f. Describe the importance of safe words.
 - g. Describe the importance of hard limits.
8. When did you realize you were interested in BDSM?
 - h. How old were you?
 - i. How were you introduced to this lifestyle?
9. How would you describe your D/s role?
 - j. What does this mean to you?
 - k. How do you negotiate consent in this role?
10. Which fetishes are you most interested in?
 - l. Why do you enjoy this/these?
 - m. How do you navigate matters of consent with these fetishes?
 - n. How does this sort of play give you sexual satisfaction?

- o. How do you participate in this play in your personal relationships?
- p. What are your favorite “toys” to play with?
 - i. Can you give me an example of how you negotiated consent with ____?
- 11. Describe what you look for in a play partner.
 - q. Do you need to be attracted to a play partner?
 - r. About how many play partners have you participated with?
- 12. How do you find play partners?
 - s. How do you negotiate consent with a play partner?
- 13. What is the most intense scene you’ve witnessed/been involved with?
 - a. How was consent attained or discussed?
 - b. How did you feel about it?
- 14. How often do you participate in BDSM activities under the influence of alcohol?
 - t. How has alcohol use impacted your decision to participate in BDSM activities?
- 15. How often do you participate in BDSM activities under the influence of recreational drugs?
 - u. How has recreational drug use impacted your decision to participate in BDSM activities?
- 16. Do you use any social media associated with the kink community such as Fetlife?
 - v. How did you get involved with this social media/Fetlife?
 - w. Do you feel Fetlife promotes consent within the BDSM community?
 - x. If so, how so?
 - y. If not, what are the issues you have?
- 17. Do you consider yourself a member of a BDSM group (For example TNG)?
 - z. How did you get involved with this group?
 - aa. Do you feel this group promotes consent within the BDSM community?
 - bb. How does it do so?
- 18. Do you consider yourself a member of the BDSM community?
 - cc. Describe how you feel about BDSM as a community.
 - dd. Are you “out” about your status in the BDSM community?
 - ee. Do you feel your BDSM status is accepted in society?
 - ff. How often do you participate in events?
 - gg. Is it important to you to be active in the community aspect of BDSM?
 - i. Why?

Wrap up Questions

- 19. What else would you like to share with me?
- 20. I’m very glad you agreed to speak with me today. May I ask why you decided to participate?
- 21. I may give this interview to others in the future can you think of any additional questions that might be beneficial?

Self-administered

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. In what city and state were you born?
3. Where do you live now?
4. How would you describe your gender?
5. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
6. How would you describe your ethnicity?
7. How would you describe your religion?
8. How important is religion to you?
9. What is your marital/relationship status?
 - a. Have you ever been divorced?
 - b. What type of partner(s) do/did you have?
 - c. What type of relationship styles are/have you been involved in?
10. How would you describe your current employment?
 - a. What do you do for a living?
 - b. How do you feel about your job?
 - c. What do you find most gratifying or challenging about your job?
 - d. How would you describe your income?
 - e. How would describe your class status?
11. How would you describe your highest level of education?

Family History

12. What was your parent's marital status?
 - a. What was the socioeconomic status in your household growing up?
 - b. What did they do for a living?
 - c. What kind of parenting style did you experience?
 - d. Were you close with anyone in particular in your family?
13. How many children do you have?
 - a. How would you describe your parenting style?
 - b. How do you feel about having children at some point?

Wrap Up Questions

14. Any other thoughts or suggestions about this process you'd like to share?

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide and Demographics Questions (Round 2)

(To be completed in the interview)

1. Have you read the consent forms?
 - a. Do you have any general questions regarding the consent forms or the research?
 - b. Do you voluntarily consent to the terms outlined in the consent form?
2. Can you think of a nickname you would like me to call you? This name will be used in the research, please choose a name that is not associated with your identity.

Consent and BDSM

1. How were you educated about consent?
 - a. Who educated you about consent?
 - b. How did you feel about this information?
2. Describe your idea of consent.
 - a. What does consent mean to the BDSM community?
 - b. How does the BDSM community teach consent?
 - c. How does the BDSM community enforce consent?
 - d. Describe the importance of safe words.
 - e. Describe the importance of hard limits
3. Describe a typical experience of establishing consent.
 - a. Describe a time when establishing consent was difficult.
 - b. Did your experience within the BDSM community help you to negotiate consent in this scenario?
 - i. Why or why not?
4. Some people find consent norms in BDSM empowering. What do you think?
 - a. Are men empowered by BDSM?
 - i. If so, how?
 - ii. If not, why?
 - b. Are women empowered by BDSM?
 - i. If so, how?
 - ii. If not, why?
 - c. Are people of other genders empowered by BDSM?
 - i. If so, how?
 - ii. If not, why?
 - d. Can you recall a time when gender was important to the BDSM community?
 - i. What did that look like?
 - ii. What did you experience?
5. Describe what would happen if consent were violated in a BDSM space?
 - a. How are consent violators held accountable for their actions?
 - b. Does reputation play into this? If so, how?
6. When did you realize you were interested in BDSM?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. How were you introduced to this lifestyle?

7. Do you consider yourself to be Dominant, Submissive, or a Switch?
 - a. IF NONE OF THESE: How would you describe yourself?
 - b. What does this mean to you?
 - c. Does your role make you feel empowered? If so, how?
 - d. How do you negotiate consent in this role?
8. Describe what you look for in a play partner.
 - a. Do you need to be attracted to a play partner?
 - b. About how many play partners have you participated with?
 - c. Do you play with play partners of different genders?
 - i. If so, how does play differ with people of different genders?
9. How do you find play partners?
 - a. How do you negotiate consent with a play partner?
 - b. How does consent negotiation vary with partners of different roles or genders?
10. What is the most intense scene you have witnessed/been involved with?
 - c. How was consent attained or discussed?
 - d. How did you feel about it?
11. How often do you participate in BDSM activities under the influence of alcohol?
 - a. How often do you participate in BDSM activities with partners who are under the influence of alcohol?
 - b. How has alcohol use impacted your decision to participate in BDSM activities?
12. How often do you participate in BDSM activities under the influence of recreational drugs?
 - a. How often do you participate in BDSM activities with partners who are under the influence of recreational drugs?
 - b. How has recreational drug use impacted your decision to participate in BDSM activities?
13. Do you use any social media associated with the kink community such as Fetlife?
 - a. How did you get involved with this social media/Fetlife?
 - b. Do you feel social media/Fetlife promotes consent within the BDSM community?
 - i. How does it do so/ Why does it not?
14. Do you consider yourself a member of a BDSM group (For example TNG)?
 - a. How did you get involved with this group?
 - b. Do you feel this group promotes consent within the BDSM community?
 - c. How does it do so?
15. Do you consider yourself a member of the BDSM community?
 - a. Describe how you feel about the BDSM as a community.
 - b. Are you “out” about your status in the BDSM community?
 - c. Do you feel your BDSM status is accepted in society?
 - d. How often do you participate in events?
 - e. Is it important to you to be active in the community aspect of BDSM?
 - i. Why?
 - ii. How has Covid impacted your ability to participate in the BDSM community?

- iii. How do you feel about that?
- iv. How do you think Covid impacts how consent is taught and enforced in the community?

Sexual History

- 16. Have you become sexually active?
 - a. How old were you?
- 17. When you are sexually active, do you take steps to have “safe” sex?
 - a. What kinds of precautions do you take?
- 18. Have you ever been tested for HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted infections?
 - a. Was there anything particularly memorable about that experience?
- 19. Were you educated about sex?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. Describe your reaction to this information.
 - c. Describe how you learned about sex.

Wrap up Questions

- 20. What else would you like to share with me?
- 21. I am very glad you agreed to speak with me today. May I ask why you decided to participate?
- 22. How did the interview process make you feel?
- 23. I will give this interview to others in the future can you think of any additional questions that might be beneficial?
 - a. Were there any questions that made you uncomfortable or that you feel I should not ask?

(To be completed by the participant after the interview)

Demographics Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What city and state were you born in?
3. Where do you live now?
4. How would you describe your gender?
5. What are your pronouns?
6. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
7. How would you describe your ethnicity?
8. How would you describe your religion?
 - a. How important is your religion to you?
9. What is your marital/relationship status?
 - a. Have you ever been divorced?
 - b. What type of partner(s) do/did you have? (ex. Male, female, trans)
 - c. What type of relationship styles are/have you been involved in? (ex. Open, poly, monogamous)
10. How would you describe your current employment?
 - a. What do you do for a living?
 - b. How do you feel about your job?
 - c. What do you find most gratifying or challenging?
 - d. How would you describe your income?
 - e. How would describe your class status?
11. How would you describe your highest level of education?

Family History

12. What was your parent's marital status?
 - e. What was the socioeconomic status in your household growing up?
 - f. What did they do for a living?
 - g. What kind of parenting style did you experience?
 - h. Were you close with anyone in your family?
13. How many children do you have?
 - a. How would you describe your parenting style?
 - b. If you do not have children, how do you feel about having children at some point?

Wrap Up Questions

14. Any other thoughts or suggestions about this process you would like to share?

APPENDIX 3: Recruitment Script

Research Opportunity

Hello! We are looking for individuals to participate in a research project conducted through the Department of Sociology at Kent State University. We are interested in learning about the BDSM community to observe how sexual consent is discussed, taught, and enforced. We are interested in the personal accounts of BDSM identifying individuals to discover how they approach topics of consent and create a consent culture. Ideal participants will complete an in-depth interview for this project.

You will participate in an interview by answering a series of questions. We anticipate that the interview process should take no more than one hour. You will participate in a brief survey after the interview. This survey will ask questions about your background demographic information including family history. This survey should take no more than thirty minutes to complete. The total time for participation will not exceed ninety minutes.

Your identity will be kept confidential by changing your name to a pseudonym throughout the project. Any details shared about your history and life can be masked to protect your identity while preserving your experiences and the information your grounds your experiences.

There is no financial compensation for your participation in this study, however, there are potential benefits. This research may not benefit you directly, however, your participation in this study could serve to better inform perspectives of the BDSM community through lived experiences in research.

Please be aware that you must be a least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

We want to emphasize that participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may decline to participate or discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you would like to participate, or if you have any questions pertaining to this study, please contact you may contact Kayla Heddens at kheddens@kent.edu or 330.672.0069. You may also contact Dr. Tiffany Taylor at ttaylo36@kent.edu or 330.672.9474.



Participate in a new study: Building a Consent Culture

Overview

- Participate in a research study exploring consent and consent culture within the BDSM community as a tool to reduce stigma and improve healthy relationships and bodily autonomy.
- Engage in a 90-minute in-depth individual interview about lived experiences
- This study is available to any eligible person in the U.S.

Eligibility

To participate you must be:

- BDSM/Kink identifying adult (18 years or older)
- Consenting to be involved in study
- Actively involved in the community currently or previously (munches, play parties, etc.)
- Available and willing to complete interview virtually.
- English -speaking

Contact us

If interested please email Kayla at kcagwin@kent.edu for more information

Principal Investigator (PI):

Dr. Tiffany Taylor

Co-Investigator:

Kayla Cagwin M.A.

IRB approved research

Kent State University
Sociology Department

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