

CLICK HERE FOR COMMUNITY

**ONE ETHNOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY THROUGH A MOSTLY VIRTUAL
WORLD OF FANTASY, LITERATURE, SEXUALITY AND HARRY POTTER**

A senior thesis presented

by

Deena Shalowitz Cowans

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Click Here for Community: One ethnographer’s journey through a mostly virtual world of fantasy, literature, sexuality and Harry Potter

Abstract

This thesis seeks to answer the question “Why are there communities on the Internet that read and write sexually explicit fan fiction?” Part 1 moves through an examination of the history of the publication of the Harry Potter novels, the appeal of fantasy literature to children and adults, and an exploration of the current norms in heterosexual practices of “hooking up” on college campuses. This line of argument seeks to understand the various components that make the ethnographic community, Smutty_Claus, so unique. Part 2 of the thesis addresses the appeal of this community through ways of mixing fantasy and reality. Writing is discussed as a mode of performance and a way of achieving agency that is otherwise inaccessible to many women. The conversion of fantasy to tangible commodity through writing is compared with the commodification of other fantasies associated with Harry Potter through the sport of Quidditch and the Universal Studios theme park “Wizards World of Harry Potter.” Using auto-ethnography as method, the thesis relies on the stories of the author as a child and college students to understand the way in which the content of the stories on Smutty_Claus and involvement in the community can increase confidence and self-awareness. Through the ethnographic process, the author has found a way to live on the border between fantasy and reality.

6 Keywords for database search

- fantasy
- imagination
- auto-ethnography
- virtual anthropology
- sexuality
- performance

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Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

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Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

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“‘Tell me one last thing,’ said Harry. ‘Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?’
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Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

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Thank you for teaching me how to laugh, love and bake.

Introduction

Ricarda Steps out from Behind the Veil

I first found out about the massive world of Harry Potter fans that exist both on the Internet and in “real” life during my sophomore year of college. I decided shortly thereafter that this universe, commonly called the “Potterverse,” could be a quirky and fun subject for anthropological study. I had no idea that it would lead to a thesis, nor even what a thesis would entail. Now, at the end of my Duke career, I realize that doing a thesis meant not just writing and researching a subject but making my entire life revolve around one academic project. Researching and producing this thesis has been like a microcosm of all of the changes I have gone through in college. Somehow, not just my academic record but my friendships, my family, my romantic life and even my own sense of self have been implicated in this project. This thesis was about undertaking a personal journey, pushing myself to my furthest limits and engaging my intellectual curiosity. Before I dive into the experiences that have made this journey so fulfilling, I would like to make a few comments on the frameworks that have guided my thinking and writing.

I did my “fieldwork” primarily in the intangible field of Smutty_Claus, which is one of thousands of online blog-based communities hosted on sites like LiveJournal.com. Smutty_Claus has a specific relationship both to the sites on which it is hosted and to the community of Harry Potter fan fiction sites to which it pertains. The website layout, the hierarchical structures, the ability to access sexually explicit content, the act of joining the community by linking one’s own personal profile with the group page—all these are dictated by the technological and legal limitations of a major commercial blog site. Likewise, the characters that populate the stories of Smutty_Claus, the body of literature

which forms the basis for these characters and stories, the rating system applied to the stories and even the language people use to talk about their stories fit in to the world of Harry Potter fandom and fan fiction, of which Smutty_Claus is undeniably a part.

In this sense, my research in Smutty_Claus follows the anthropological tradition of studying a specific phenomenon in a specific site. When Malinowski asked readers to imagine themselves set down on a beach somewhere, he was acknowledging both that the reader would likely never have a tactile experience of the place (and understanding it therefore hinged on imagination,) and that the specific beach on which the reader was set down was less important than the experiences which being on the beach would create. In this vein, I accept the general anthropological principle that one example can be used to illustrate human tendencies that operate beyond just the specific phenomenon which was the object of study. An exploration of Smutty_Claus necessarily will include some discussion of Harry Potter as a literary and social phenomenon, but it is not my intention to make sweeping claims about all Harry Potter fans who engage with the fandom.

While “Harry Potter fans” may seem to be a clearly defined body of people, the number of people to whom this term applies and the scope of activities in which these people engage makes clear that the “Potterverse” truly is a little universe. The sheer number of people reading the books is record-breaking. The seventh and final book of the series sold 15 million copies in the first 24 hours after its release alone, and total sales of all the books hovers around 400 million (Forbes 2008.) The books have been translated into just about every written language on the planet and are still sold all over the world. The 15 million copies sold in the first 24 hours do not include the books that were preordered. It also does not necessarily imply a one to one ratio of books to readers, since

it is highly possible that families bought one copy for the entire family and several people then shared the book. The mad rush to buy the books the moment they were released and the extraordinary number of people who made the effort to get the book as quickly as possible indicates that the number of “Harry Potter fans” is many million. No study could possibly hope to adequately speak for all Harry Potter fans all over the globe.

Of course, not all of the approximately 15 million dedicated fans who cared enough to get the seventh book as quickly as possible are engaged in “The Fandom.” Up until this project, though I was a dedicated reader of the books and went to see all the movies, I had never gone to a Harry Potter website. I had never dressed up for a movie release, and did not even talk about the books with any of my friends. I greatly enjoyed the content of the books, but I was not “A Harry Potter Fan” in the sense of engaging with any aspect of the fandom. Now, having spent more than two years considering various aspects of this fandom, I would be reluctant to call anyone “A Harry Potter Fan,” because the ways of engaging with the fandom are so diverse.¹ There is wizard rock, a genre of music popularized by two brothers who call themselves “Harry and the Potters.” The number of bands has expanded exponentially, and wizard rock music is now even available on iTunes. The movies have their own subset of dedicated fans who dress up for premiers and wait in line for hours to get the best seats when the movie opens right at midnight. There are online “fan sites” which range in size from mega-sites like The Leaky Cauldron and MuggleNet to small, basic sites maintained by pre-pubescent

¹ For a complete and “insider” review of many aspects of the fandom, see *Harry, A History* by Melissa Anelli (2008.) She is the “webmistress” of The Leaky Cauldron, one of the largest and most well-known fan sites on the Internet, and has published a long and well-researched account of the growth of various aspects of the fan community using her perspective of one of a “BNF”, or big name fan, with 17 separate chapters on different aspects of the Harry Potter fan community.

children. There is fan fiction, which is the general category of fandom on which my research centered. Fan fiction is a long-standing tradition whereby people choose to author new texts using the existing characters of TV shows, books and even celebrities. There are blog communities whose sole purpose is to create a space on the Internet where users can post comments and chat with one another about the books and about life. More recently, there has been a proliferation of “embodied” fan communities. These include the International Quidditch Association, which governs Quidditch teams around the country; and Universal Studios, which has even constructed a section of their Islands of Adventure theme park to be “The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.”

Through this thesis, I seek to understand what might cause someone to go from one of the many millions of people who avidly read the books to one of the few millions who engage with the books through various experiences in the fandom. At its core, this thesis is about fantasy and reality, and what the world looks like at their intersection. My experience has taught me that, generally speaking, people become involved with the fandom because they realize that it can contribute to their living a more complex, rich and enjoyable life—a life in which they feel they have the agency to live as they choose. Harry Potter fandoms allow people to live a little differently, and in this case, different can be very good. I seek, through this thesis, to engage with just a few of the ways of living with Harry Potter. I do this primarily through the auto-ethnographic character of Ricarda, but also by engaging with stories of other people I met over the course of this journey.

I have decided to write about myself in third person and under a different name because of the question of objectivity in anthropology, and also questions about

specificity. Comparable to John Jackson's (1998) use of AnthroMan© as a pseudonym for himself in "Ethnophysicality, or an Ethnography of Some Body", I adopted a second identity from the outset of my fieldwork which has been woven into a story. My understanding of how to use my own story as an analytical tool was greatly aided by Heewon Chang's book Auto-Ethnography as Method (2008) in which she discusses the methodological steps and theoretical foundations for using the ethnographer's own experience as a type of "evidence."

Behind the veil of Ricarda I am able to write my personal narrative with ease when in reality, navigating the complexities and many layers of my fieldwork and lived experience was hardly effortless. Initially, the character of "Ricarda" that I imagined for myself did not reflect the person I believed myself to be. When I began this project during my sophomore year, I was downtrodden, shy, lacked a clear sense of self, and had virtually no self-confidence in any area of my life. I imagined a character Ricarda who was, as I said at the time, "a kick-ass Slytherin who could talk to anyone and research pornography, and never cared if someone thought she was weird" (Cowans 2008.) A major part of this journey has been about becoming Ricarda and I think I have been successful. I am much more confident and self-assertive than I was sophomore year, and I care much less what others think of me, as long as I am content with myself. I credit this change in large part to the research and writing that went in to producing the thesis.

In part 1 of the thesis, I will discuss the ways in which I have participated in fantasy worlds. Our experience with fantasy worlds begins in childhood through games of make-believe and reading fantasy novels. This education in the benefits of fantasy can be immensely helpful later in life as we struggle to navigate personal struggles and define

ourselves as adults. Though children may feel powerless when it comes to control over their bodies and lives, this powerlessness is assuaged through the experience of fantasy they have with mimetic imagination. In part 2, I will discuss how physical acts can be an outlet for performing different types of identity. Writing is both a comforting and daunting way to present information, and simply using a different name was a way to make writing about some of the most emotional moments in my life a little easier. Likewise, dressing up in special costumes and going to specifically marked spaces allows people the opportunity to transcend normative social expectations and perform identities and ways of living that straddle the boundary between fantasy and reality.

By writing as Ricarda in this thesis and not as Deena, I hope to portray Ricarda and her experience as a possible representative scenario for a Harry Potter fan, and not a singular individual character. While the stories included in this thesis and portrayed through Ricarda are all really my own life experiences, I intend for them to serve not as a form of “navel-gazing” but as an example of the ways in which life can be complicated, and how engaging with fantasy can help make sense of this confusion. Furthermore, I am inherently implicit in my fieldsite because I am a Harry Potter fan, a sexual adult and a writer. As Kath Weston (2007) discusses in “Virtual Anthropologist,” the question of “I” makes the ethnographer suspect, because it is not clear whether they write as “I, Native” or “I, Ethnographer.” To avoid this confusion, I have decided to write as my online persona, and remove as much of my “Muggle” self as possible. It is only at the end of the thesis that I will reintroduce the idea that I am, sadly, still a Muggle, albeit one changed by the ethnographic experience.

For all the narrative potential that Ricarda offers me, writing in third person was also a tactical decision made to help me feel comfortable with my work. From the outset, I was afraid to sacrifice my own “erotic subjectivity,” as Kulick says (1995). Sex and sexuality are extremely personal subjects, and therefore talking about them with others and writing about my own views was terrifying. As we will see, my understanding of my own sexuality was never simple or comfortable. I felt safer trying to hide behind a veil of objectivity than reveal my preferences. My views on sex are much more conservative and limited than the experiences of sexuality that are represented in erotic fan fiction. Therefore, if I had done this entire project only with material that interested me, there would be almost no stories for me to research, or at least research with any semblance of empathic objectivity. As I continued researching, it became increasingly clear to me that there was no line between what is “the field” and what is not “the field” in this project, and try as I may my experience was inevitably going to be subjective.

Struggling with questions about the role of my own erotic subjectivity has illuminated some of the dialectical relationships that researching this community involves. Both because of the sensitive subject matter and because of the nature of online communities, I have been plagued (or helped, depending on your perspective) by ethical dilemmas. In working through my concerns about talking to other people about sexually explicit material, and talking over the Internet instead of face-to-face, I have found the work of a diverse group of anthropologists quite helpful.

Napoleon Chagnon (1983) in The Fierce People discusses the fact that, though he was with the Yanomamo to study them, they were also keenly interested in studying him—they thought much of what he did, ate and wore was strange, and likely talked

about him the way he talked about them. His presence in the community was fascinating to residents of the village just as much as his insights on the village would come to be fascinating to Western readers. Reading about Chagnon's struggles with his position in the fieldsite raised concerns for me about my position relative to members of the community. I was worried that the people I talked to online would think it was weird that I chose to study them. As I became more personally invested in the stories and the community, I also worried they would think I was only interested in studying them for my own gain, and would ignore the enjoyment I got from engaging with the community. Similarly, I worried that the people I talked to about sexually explicit material would think I was a sexually deviant freak for studying some really graphic material and would temper their reactions and conversations with me to reflect their concerns about my motivations and preferences. I was worried that even conversations about sex with my close friends would change as a result of my research, regardless of whether or not the conversations were held under the guise of "research." Eventually, I was forced to accept that being studied is as much a part of anthropology as studying others. I am grateful to the many people who "pushed back" when I talked to them about sexuality.

Tom Boellstorff (2008), in his groundbreaking anthropological study of Second Life, discusses the difficulty of conducting online fieldwork and the fear some have that what happens in Second Life is not related to what happens in the "real" world. He concludes that it does not matter what the "real" life equivalent for anything is since it is its meaning in context that is important to him. Though it took me a while to come to the same conclusion, I agree, and for many of the same reasons. A person's "real" identity is not important to me since I will never get to know them in that context. It is inevitable

that their “real” selves inform their “virtual” selves, so I surely got to know some aspects of the “real” people. Overall, I did not care how different someone was when they logged offline, since that person would not have anything to do with my research or my interactions with them. This unease, which played out as intense personal anxiety that I would be talking to minors about sexually explicit material, took me a long time to accept. Even now, I am unwilling to openly guess who the people behind the usernames might be. I have suspicions about certain “characters” who pop up all over Smutty_Claus, but I generally think that these suspicions are irrelevant. As I will discuss in chapter four, though a person’s individual, “real” background likely informs their participation in the online community, what is of value is the performance that is put on through writing, not the performer herself.

And finally, a note on form and structure. Rather than use traditional subheadings, I have chosen to use quotes from the Harry Potter novels themselves at the beginning of each chapter and subsection to demonstrate the gist of that section. For one thing, I want to emphasize the importance of the canon of Harry Potter material in the online fandom. All aspects of the fandom depend on a familiarity with the novels and a belief that the content of the novels is worth exploring outside the physical pages of the books. I hope that these quotes illustrate the ways in which the Harry Potter novels are not just about a genre-specific plot that only make sense in the context of the books, but that the collective body of the books can serve as a sort of moral and ethical guide full of wisdom, humor and kindness. By prefacing each section with a quote instead of an academic sub-header, I hope to never lose the sense of magic and wonder about the world that the books create for readers. The sub-headers also function in the context of a decision I have

made about flow and narrative structure. By infusing the text with images and stories, I am deliberately allowing some degree of flexibility and discontinuity in the body of the text. These jumps in structure and narrative flow are meant to mimic the experience of going online. It is not always entirely clear where you will be taken if you click on a specific hyperlink. Going online involves a sort of leap of faith, and an understanding that if you get lost, you can always just click the “back” button. This fractured structure and way of experiencing the online world is mimicked by the sometimes abrupt jumps between sections. In particular, the jump from chapter two, in which I discuss fantasy primarily as it relates to children, and chapter three, in which I discuss sexuality primarily as it relates to adults, is meant to mimic the sometimes violent separation between childhood and adulthood. Freud spearheaded the psychoanalytic movement in examining the effects of societal expectations on children and adults. Though his work does not appear explicitly in this thesis, his framework that “growing up” is a difficult and psychologically exhausting process serves as a primary assumption on which I base all of my research.

"And now Harry, let us step out into the night and pursue that flighty temptress,
adventure"

Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Chapter 1
Ricarda Enters the Fieldsite

“From this point forth, we shall be leaving the firm foundation of fact and journeying together through the murky marshes of memory into thickets of wildest guesswork”
Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Ricarda slunk across the quad just as the sun was rising, head down to hide the mascara smeared across the upper half of her face, hair covering the already-fading bite marks on her neck. The dew felt good against her blistered, sore feet; the high heels responsible for the foot damage were clutched in her right hand along with her sparkly black purse. Ricarda’s left hand was busy texting her friend Ashley to inform her of the rest of the previous night’s exploits. Ashley and Ricarda had parted relatively early in the evening to spend time gyrating against boys whose names they barely knew before each leaving with their respective boys for dorm rooms somewhere. Ricarda wasn’t sure how Ashley’s night had ended, but she imagined it was similar to her own—an hour or so spent in progressively less clothing, lying under posters of a barely-clad Katy Perry, perhaps mumbling something but generally feeling too awkward to really let Max (was that his name?) know how things were going. Ricarda had learned to find some pleasure from the whole situation. Max (or was it Mark?) certainly seemed to appreciate what Ricarda was doing, and while Ricarda was definitely not about to start getting vocal with Max/Mark (how could she moan his name if she didn’t even remember it?) Max/Mark was occasionally right in guessing what Ricarda would like.

In the light of day, Ricarda had no problem admitting that what she really wanted was the stability and comfort of a relationship like the one that had ended a month before. In a relationship Ricarda didn’t feel awkward telling her partner what felt good, she

would actually be able to relax enough to focus on her own pleasure, and she would enjoy waking up next to him in the morning. Obviously the situation was quite different with Max/Mark. But right then, in the darkened, alcohol-fueled moment, Ricarda wanted to pretend that Max/Mark was not just a stand in, that he was not a Band-Aid on a gaping wound that really needed something stronger, like stitches. Which brings us back to daybreak on Sunday, as Ricarda made her great escape from Max/Mark's room before he woke up and she had to face him in the light of day, sober. As she climbed the stairs to her room, Ricarda passed a girl wearing running shorts, sneakers and a loose sorority t-shirt who Ricarda knew lived on the second floor. As Ricarda gave the girl a weak smile, she could feel the girl's eyes scan Ricarda's bare feet, smudged makeup and tight black dress before the girl gave Ricarda "the nod." Ricarda knew that nod. It said "I know what you were up to last night and I'm silently judging you, but don't worry, I know girl code and I promise never to explicitly mention this." Ricarda made it to her room, quietly unlocked the door so as not to wake her roommate and took a quick shower before sitting down at her computer. Without even checking her Facebook account, Ricarda navigated straight to Smutty_Claus, an online community that hosted sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction that Ricarda had been "researching" since last year, scrolled down to the Harry/Ginny link, and began searching for a story.

This was, unfortunately, becoming a pattern for Ricarda. The nights spent in random dorm rooms with boys she didn't know, the resulting and dreaded "walk of shame" and a near-obsessive focus on her academic studies had filled Ricarda's life since she was dumped. Ricarda had basically never been single before, and was disappointed to find that, instead of the fun and liberating single college girl life her

friends had been telling her she was missing, Ricarda was stuck in a world of awkward, pleasure-less hook-ups with a parade of name-less guys who, should they ever happen to encounter one another on campus, would avoid eye contact like they had never even met, let alone spent a night together in various states of undress. Ricarda had an amazing group of girlfriends who she felt comfortable talking to about everything and who she knew would support her through anything, but Ricarda's friends were unable to stitch up the wound that had been left by Ricarda's now-ex-boyfriend. In her defeated and depressed state, somehow only the stories of Smutty_Claus and other communities like it managed to make Ricarda feel better.

As a student in cultural anthropology, Ricarda had learned all about fieldwork and ethnography. She had been taught that the proper way of conducting anthropological research was to go into the field to participate and observe and interview. After a period of time, Ricarda was supposed to leave the field (a clear distinction) and come back home, where she would attempt to explain how the people she had studied felt about some aspect of their culture. She was supposed to write and write and write, trying to draw out the webs of significance which encase the people she studied. The problem was, Ricarda didn't want to leave the field when it was providing her with such a powerful source of emotional (and occasionally, physical) comfort, and she certainly didn't know how she was supposed to write about such a raw, emotional experience like the one she was having in Smutty_Claus. Ricarda had entered the field because she was curious as to who chose to read and write sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction, and especially as to who decided to immerse themselves in a community like Smutty_Claus. What Ricarda's attachment to the stories told her was that she had found the answer in herself—

participation in the community fills some of the emotional voids that life occasionally hands us.

So what, you wonder, is this “Smutty_Claus” that was proving to be Ricarda’s savior in her time of trouble? To answer this question, we’re going to need to go a little further back in time.

Our story starts a year before Ricarda’s early morning escape from Max/Mark’s room, as Ricarda began her first fieldwork experience. At this time, Ricarda was a socially awkward, shy and unconfident young sophomore who was coming off a really horrible freshman year and was just starting to explore the intellectual potential cultural anthropology held for her. She enrolled in a course on fieldwork methods in cultural anthropology because she felt that the research experience could be a way of finding herself again (the “self” having been lost over the course of so many traumatic experiences the year before.) Ricarda had decided to do her fieldwork on Harry Potter fans because she loved Harry Potter and had found the novels to be a source of great comfort and escape during the previous miserable year, and she was fascinated by the fact that she could conduct a major academic project about something she loved as much as Harry Potter.

Ricarda figured the easiest place to find others who loved Harry as much as she did was the Internet, so this was where she started. She had heard rumors of a site on the Internet called The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Online, so she sought out this site and enrolled.² Huddled over her computer at night, scrolling through links to

² Hogwarts Online is a virtual remake of Hogwarts found in the Harry Potter book series. Hogwarts Online has 5,000+ students from 60 countries across 6 of the 7 continents and offers all the traditional classes found in the Harry Potter series to broaden the magical knowledge of its pupils.

blogs serving as common rooms, role-playing areas (where people make up characters for themselves and then talk to one another in character) and even a Quidditch forum, Ricarda felt her already fragile social life slip, and contemplated making the full leap into blog-dom. She took an online quiz that was surprisingly extensive, and was frankly shocked to have been placed in Slytherin. Ricarda tended to be a very rules-following, bookish, shy girl, so she had really expected to be placed in Ravenclaw, not Slytherin.³

As Ricarda began to explore the Potterverse, she naturally began to talk about her experience with her friends. Ricarda's Muggle friend Brenda told Ricarda she knew about some of these fan communities, and she loved something called "fan fiction." Fan fiction is generally defined as a work (written or artistic) that portrays the characters of an existing popular TV show or book interacting and experiencing novel situations. Fan fic, as it is known, has long existed for TV shows, books and comic books of all genres and topics, and was dispersed in fan magazines that were mailed to subscribers. Brenda suggested Ricarda start by looking at MuggleNet, one of the largest and most popular Harry Potter fan sites that also hosted a fan fiction forum, and sent a few cute "fluff" stories to whet Ricarda's appetite. Ricarda was hooked. After a sleepless night reading stories, Ricarda decided this would be the focus for her research.

³ Every Hogwarts student is sorted in to a "House" at the beginning of their Hogwarts education. Though the houses are all equal, each has characteristics that define the members and that were defined by the House founders. Gryffindor, the house of Harry Potter and his friends, is known for being brave and chivalrous; Ravenclaws are known for their intellect and cleverness; Hufflepuffs are known for loyalty and friendliness; Slytherin, the house of Voldemort and Malfoy, is known for cunning and cut-throat ambition. Needless to say, Slytherins are often portrayed in a negative light, and many of the Slytherins are the "bad guys" in Harry Potter.

After reading a few more cute stories, Ricarda decided it was time to buckle down and study. Though she had initially been drawn in by the cute little “fluff” stories,⁴ Ricarda realized that those were perhaps too familiar for her to make them strange, which she would need to do if she wanted to maintain the erotic subjectivity⁵ she had heard was necessary in anthropology. If she was going to understand who wrote and read fan fiction and why, she was going to need to find something a little more outside her box of “normal.” She was always going to feel a connection to the Harry Potter characters, and she felt that the appeal of fluffy, funny stories was obvious- they make the reader smile. Since she thought she understood the appeal of these stories implicitly, she did not feel she could ask any real questions about them. So, like any good anthropologist, who seeks to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, Ricarda decided to begin by focusing on the strangest part of fan fiction- the “dirty”, graphic, not-so-hidden “adult” fictions. In her first few visits to various sites, Ricarda was shocked and somewhat horrified to find that the majority of stories were homosexual, graphically sexual, or involved some form of non-consensual sexual activity, and a good portion involved all three! Since none of these themes appear in any way in any of the books published by JK Rowling, Ricarda felt that, clearly, most fan fiction was not intended as a way for children to read about the moral adventures of their three favorite wizards. Harry Potter fan fiction is based off a children’s book series, so Ricarda reasoned that the popularity of something clearly not intended for children might help her understand who reads and writes sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction and why.

⁴ “Fluff” is a subgenre of fan fiction in which the story is meant to make the reader feel good. It is completely devoid of angst or conflict and usually focuses on sweet, romantic scenarios (but not sexually explicit).

⁵ Term taken from Kulick 1995.

A quick search for “Harry Potter” in the online catalogue returned 212 titles. Ricarda decided not to be stingy, and checked out 20. Most turned out to be boring or egregiously uninformed; those were quickly returned. One book, however, caught Ricarda’s eye, and in a big way. The Magician’s Book: a skeptic’s adventures in Narnia, by Laura Miller (2008), quickly became Ricarda’s obsession. Miller’s descriptions of her love for the Narnia books as a child exactly mirrored Ricarda’s love of Harry Potter. The difference was that Miller seemed to have figured out the allure of Narnia; Ricarda became desperate to read more in hopes that this woman would help her understand why she came still cared about the characters of the Harry Potter novels. Until she began her research, Ricarda had assumed that her experience with Harry Potter was unique—something she kept to herself, but could always turn to for an afternoon of enjoyment and escape. Upon reading Miller’s book, Ricarda realized that there were possibly many books that had this same effect on children, and that maybe there was more to them than just a good story. Ricarda was convinced Harry Potter was not just a popular children’s novel, and these fan fiction sites were not just another Muggle creation full of wizard-wannabe’s.

As she thought about what Miller had to say about reading Narnia and how it related to Ricarda’s experience reading Harry Potter and other fantasy books as a child, Ricarda realized that she had hit upon one of the things she found most intriguing about sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction. Ricarda had assumed that Harry Potter is a children’s series and that the only people who actively consider it (other than herself) are children, whom Ricarda assumed would be uninterested in sex. The fact that her interest

in the community arose out of her interest in Harry Potter, not her interest in sex or erotica, felt significant.

However, the erotic aspect of the community could not be ignored. In hopes of actively engaging with people on the subject, Ricarda created a LiveJournal account and began contacting people through personal messages to see if they would be willing to answer questions. There were still so many aspects of her project that she had not figured out, and Ricarda was scared that no one would want to talk to her. Since she had no credentials and no experience in the community, Ricarda decided to simply rely on her Muggle identity as a student at a prestigious university. However, this raised a concern—how much of her Muggle self should she reveal online? Ricarda felt it was unethical not to tell her new friends that she was researching the online world of Harry Potter fan fiction, and the Institutional Review Board that reviewed the ethics of Ricarda's research protocol agreed. However, she did not want the members of the online community to think she was only there for information, because Ricarda enjoyed her new friends. The Internet makes it easy to conceal one's Muggle identity, so Ricarda wondered whether it would even be feasible to reveal her "ulterior motives" to everyone she would interact with. And could she trust the identity of others? Anyone could easily conceal or recreate his or her Muggle identity, and no one would know. Therefore, Ricarda reasoned, who was to say that she wasn't being studied herself? After many conversations with trusted advisors and friends, Ricarda decided to just take things "at face value." Given that she had no way of determining someone's Muggle identity or if they were telling the truth about who they were, Ricarda decided that she would explain the details of her Muggle project to her friends only if it came up and rely on them to read the blurb she posted to

her personal profile. She knew this probably made her a bad anthropologist, since that world told her she should obsessively obtain informed consent for everything she did. But doing so would throw Ricarda back into a liminal state. Ricarda already felt more like a true member of the online community than a Muggle anthropologist, and she didn't think she was willing to sacrifice that identity just for a silly Muggle rule.

Ricarda was enlivened by the enthusiasm her online friends were showing towards her project, and began to talk about it with everyone. This led Ricarda's Muggle friends and family to conclude that Ricarda had finally gone off the deep end; clarifying that Ricarda was focusing specifically on what should essentially be called Harry Potter porn only served to reinforce the idea that Ricarda was thinking too far outside the box. As a budding anthropologist, Ricarda realized that she was breaking some very strong social taboos with her research. As we mature, we are expected to abandon the fantasy world, stop playing make-believe and participate appropriately in the "real" world around us. Adolescents and adults are expected to have developed enough wisdom to know that make-believe is inherently not real. Teenagers and adults who continue to try to exist in fantasy spaces that are age appropriate, such as Dungeons and Dragons or World of Warcraft, are deemed losers; the expectation seems to be that competent adults interact face to face with other competent adults and talk about "real" things like politics, sports and economics. Ignoring the fact that even politics and economics can be shown to be "imagined" concepts, the bias against anything that falls in to the "fantasy" genre (arguably a lifestyle) creates a taboo in society. Engaging in activities that break taboo becomes forbidden, secretive, hidden and dangerous.

By this time, Ricarda had mostly adjusted to reading and responding to graphic material online, but she felt that there would be no way to contain her giggles when it came time to actually discuss the material with a tangible, corporeal person. Conducting interviews face to face with people who knew Ricarda by her Muggle name and her Muggle identity meant that Ricarda would have to remove the virtual mask, the guise of objectivity, and be her Muggle self, and she was incredibly reluctant to do so. She had begun to understand that there are implicit expectations for interviewers and interviewees, and that the context of the interview was sometimes more important than what was actually said. So, while texting Ashley to tell her about a one night stand was normal and acceptable for Ricarda when she was talking to her friends as friends, if Ricarda had tried to conduct her morning-after conversation with Ashley as an interview on how Ashley felt about random hookups, Ricarda felt that the mere knowledge that the conversation was an “interview” meant that Ashley was likely to be much more squeamish and private than normal.

Her concerns about how to interview people about sex and pornography led Ricarda to consider shifting her research focus away from that aspect of fan fiction. By this point, Ricarda was feeling confident about her ability to understand online fan fiction communities and the people there; she knew which staircases to take to get to the websites she wanted, she could find blogs even if they required tickling the wall in the right spot to get in, and she always managed to skip the missing stair and avoid those pesky pop-ups. And then, Ricarda found Smutty_Claus. Lost in her thoughts one day, Ricarda clicked herself off an author’s page and onto this forum, which hosted stories authors wrote for one another in an online Christmas gift exchange. Just a quick look

through the “gift tags” on the stories and Ricarda realized that these authors were dealing with NEWT-level magic;⁶ suddenly, Ricarda felt like she was back in second year.⁷ She thought she had begun to understand the language of fan fiction communities, but when one note read “for puffifine, who wanted smut/wall!/pain!, het squick, implied slash, Squid cameo,” Ricarda felt her ego deflate like a balloon. Some of it she could decode, but Ricarda had never even heard of “het squick” before! Ricarda was itching to talk to beccafran, the moderator of this exchange, but first, she needed to understand the terms.

The Smutty_Claus page is tucked away in a small corner of cyberspace, and it is really a semi-hidden world where people with profile names like “ilovedraco” can read, write and discuss stories using the characters of the Harry Potter novels with sexually explicit content. They sign up in early September to be a part of a “Secret Santa” gift exchange of R- and NC-17 rated stories that will be posted and revealed in December. A typical Secret Santa exchange is fairly simple: every member of the group is randomly assigned a different person in the group, to whom they anonymously give presents in the days or weeks leading up to Christmas, and on the holiday, the identities of the Secret Santas are revealed. Smutty_Claus uses the idea of anonymous gift giving with an eventual “reveal” for their big event to run a yearly story and art exchange. Every member who signs up is given a “Secret Santa” to whom they send pairing requests and ideas of turn-ons. They then have four months to write a story that fits the requests of their pair. The stories are posted in early December and the identity of the Secret Santa is

⁶ NEWT, which stands for Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test, is a test taken by Hogwarts students in their final year of school. It is similar to an AP or IB exam.

⁷ Hogwarts students attend the school for seven years, so the magic they learn naturally becomes more complicated each year. Second year students, therefore, are young and naïve when compared with sixth and seventh years who are studying for their NEWTS.

revealed around Christmas. Members of the community spend the rest of the year reading the stories that have been posted, posting their own comments on the stories, and writing or drawing their own work to be posted on their personal blogs.

The operation of the community is quite simple, but the pretense is utterly bizarre. Most people would agree that, while it has immense appeal to readers of all ages, the Harry Potter books are expressly children's literature, and clearly do not contain sexually explicit content of any kind. Why then, does this community exist? Clearly many assumptions about what the Harry Potter novels represent, who reads them, and how and why people form communities are called in to question by the existence of the Smutty_Claus community.

Like many children, Ricarda's experience with fantasy and the development of her imaginative powers begins when she was a young girl. It is a common game of children to play "make-believe;" this silly game is in fact one of the most powerful experiences of our lives because we can do anything and be anyone, and we need no props other than ourselves to play. Though children suffer from a lack of personal autonomy, through their experience of fantasy they can gain power and pleasure. As children learn to read, those lucky enough to live in close proximity to a library are able to read countless books through which they can "make-believe" that they have all sorts of exciting adventures. While fads about "realistic" literature come and go, the novels that have proven to have the greatest lasting power with children are fantasy novels. This is no surprise, as it is these fantasy novels that fit best the make-believe games of childhood. Fantasy novels, then, can be seen to have a symbiotic relationship with child development because they foster the development of imagination and nurture children in

specific ways. For Ricarda, certainly, reading fantasy novels in elementary school was her introduction in to the awesome power of fantasy to create entirely different worlds in which Ricarda could play.

As a Harry Potter fan and an anthropologist, Ricarda had entered the world of Smutty_Claus and other online fan fiction communities to do research on why people were sharing their stories with one another in this online space when such an activity would definitely be against social taboos in modern Western society, Ricarda's "real" life. From what Ricarda had seen through her early perusing, the community had sort of super-organically decided to ignore the rules of the "real" society and create their own new rules. Sex is a major concern of adolescence and early adulthood because that is the time of life when people begin having it; unfortunately, the widespread experience of sex is not mirrored in a widespread, open discussion of the act (or acts, to take into account the plurality of sexual experience.) While in previous generations, people were required to openly rebel against society through acts such as burning bras (a mythical, not factual, event) or cross-dressing to deviate from the gender or sexual norm, the easy access to pornography through the Internet means that people can "experience" alternate experiences of sexuality by going online. Ricarda became hooked on the stories hosted on Smutty_Claus because they gave her a place to try out her fantasies with relatively little risk. But, as Ricarda would learn through the "Patented Daydreams" story,⁸ there are still lingering questions about the degree to which people are really able to leave behind restrictive forces like gender norms and the social preference for heterosexuality even in fantasy worlds.

⁸ See Chapter 3

The now-ubiquitous use of the Internet and the growing acceptance of pornography mean that people are able to explore fantasies in a variety of ways, such as writing sexually explicit stories using the characters of the Harry Potter novels. With one foot in the world of child fantasy, the Harry Potter aspect, and one foot in the world of forbidden fantasy, the sexually explicit aspect, the Smutty_Claus community is an interesting intersection of two fundamental experiences of fantasy. Writing, both in the fan fiction world and in anthropology, is a way of turning these blended fantasies in to a certain type of reality. The process of writing and creating a written work allows fan fiction authors to explore their fantasies and perform varying identities that may or may not reflect the identity they perform in the “real” world. Clifford Geertz (2000) is now famous for claiming that anthropologists inscribe culture by writing it down, but through her participation in Smutty_Claus, Ricarda came to believe that this can be extended further. Writing is an act of meaning making and a method of expressing a belief or fantasy, and it is a way for members of Smutty_Claus to claim that they “belong” to the group. Though Ricarda felt quite close, emotionally, to the stories on Smutty_Claus, interactions she had with beccafran in trying to get in to this year’s gift exchange made it clear that beccafran felt that Ricarda did not “belong.” Though she was disappointed to be rejected from the exchange, Ricarda ultimately saw the rejection as a way to explore how authors in Smutty_Claus come to consider themselves to belong to a community. Ricarda began to focus on theories of belonging and liminality as a way to understand how her place in the group affected the ways in which she perceived and interacted with the group. Following her rejection from the community by beccafran, Ricarda began to feel like she was only allowed to remain in the community if she did so silently and

without anyone knowing she was there. This naturally led her to consider ideas of voyeurism and the ways in which anthropological fieldwork is a largely voyeuristic activity. Though there are definitely negative connotations to the practice of voyeurism, we will also see, through examples from Smutty_Claus, that voyeurism can be a fun and thrilling way of exploring fantasies and “different” spaces. Through the medium of writing and the ability to both “watch” and “rewrite” culture in specific ways, fan fiction authors are able to explore their fantasies and perform varying identities that may or may not reflect the identity they perform in the “real” world.

From writing out and reading fantasies to actually living them seems to be a small jump, but a difficult one. For some people, engaging with the online community is enough to fulfill their desire for fantasy. But for many others, bringing the fantasy of Harry Potter to their “real” lives is a desirable, if unattainable, goal. People are unwilling to jump outside the boundary of what they perceive as normal alone. Luckily for Harry Potter fans, there is a massive community, both imagined and real, that is willing to jump with them. As Ricarda learned through her involvement with Smutty_Claus and her increasing reliance on the written word of the community to help her through difficult situations, there are ways in which “communities” can exist, especially in commercialized spaces that fulfill the adult desire to live “normally” in the capitalist world. Ricarda never got to interact face to face or even find out the “real” identity any of the people she met online, which made her wonder who the people who make up “The Harry Potter Fan Community” might be, and how that they have begun to “imagine” their fantasy world in to being.

Now, more than a year after she snuck out of Max/Mark's room to go read fan fiction in the peace and quiet of her own room, Ricarda has begun to understand ways in which she can create and "embody" her own fantasy community. She has clearly grown, matured and become more self-confident as a result of her association with this community. She is willing to acknowledge now that Harry Potter has become a way in which she finds comfort when upset and confidence when she is unsure of herself. Being an open Harry Potter fan has even helped her create new and better friendships with the people around her. While there is still something "abnormal" about being a dedicated Harry Potter fan, Ricarda has found that talking openly makes other people more willing to talk openly about their love of Harry Potter and their interest in living out certain fantasies.

Chapter 2

Ricarda Curls Up With a Book

“That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children’s tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.”
Albus Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

As a kid, Ricarda was painfully shy. She almost never spoke in school or to people she didn’t already know very well. As the school social worker explained to Ricarda and her parents, she was compulsively afraid of being wrong about anything, which kept her from speaking up in class. Ricarda was a small and awkward young girl. She would wear nothing but big t-shirts and stirrup leggings to school and her mother loved putting huge bows in her hair—outfit choices that were in stark contrast to the party dresses and children’s designer clothes of her peers. Between being small, awkward and more interested in reading about the mice of Redwall, the dæmons of Philip Pulman’s His Dark Materials and the witches and wizards of Hogwarts than interacting with her human peers, Ricarda was a frequent target for teasing. Getting stuffed octopi thrown at her head and other harmless but insulting taunts caused Ricarda to be reluctant to make friends and play with other kids during recess. In cyclical fashion, as Ricarda retreated from playing with her peers, books became some of her closest companions. Through reading and rereading, she fell in love with the fantasy books that are consistent favorites with kids, especially JK Rowling’s Harry Potter series, which was first published in the United States just as Ricarda began third grade.

"You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be"

Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

When the Harry Potter novels were first published in Great Britain in 1997 and the United States in 1998, they were marketed as fantasy books for children ages nine to eleven. Subsequent books developed more complicated, mature themes, which fit nicely with the fan community that grew up around the novels and literally grew up with the novels. Children such as Ricarda who were in the target age around the publishing of the first book aged at the same "rate" as Harry; Ron, Hermione and Harry and friends are 11 in the first book and are one year older in each subsequent book, and a new book was released approximately every year.

Around the time when the 4th book, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, was published, the fan community grew exponentially. The first three books were published earlier in Great Britain than the rest of the world, which led to people buying the book from the publishers in England instead of waiting for their copy to be released elsewhere. The fourth book was the first one to have a simultaneous publishing date in England and the United States (and a few other countries) which both acknowledged and contributed to the creation of a border-less fan community. The simple act of synchronizing the publishing dates was an acknowledgement of the existence of a global community. Publishers in various countries realized that Harry Potter had such popularity in so many countries that if individual publishers wanted to make money, they would need to make themselves competitive in the world market. However, this act also contributed to the growing global community because it showed fans in different countries that the novels were popular around the world. Fans who were interested in talking to people about the

books could look beyond their own borders. Once fans became aware of the existence of other Harry Potter fans across the globe, borders were erased and a community began to grow around the simple love of Harry Potter.

The community really came together after Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire was published to experience the agonizing wait for the next book together. This coincided with the invention of social networking sites and made it possible for Harry Potter fans across the globe to become a community. Partly as a response to the anticipation of the long wait for the fifth book to hit shelves and partly because they could with the aid of new technology, Harry Potter fans became prolific fan fiction writers (Anelli 2008). Harry Potter fans used their love of the story and characters and their access to the Internet to broadcast their fan fiction to a much broader community much more quickly, and were able in turn to gather feedback and start discussions about their work. This new community helped dedicated fans pass the time between books by imagining together what might happen to their favorite characters.

Amidst the growing fandom, each new book published by Rowling became an addition to the “canon” of fan fiction, and required fan fiction authors who cared about following canon (which was typically necessary to become a respected author) to go back and revise or write new stories. Sub-communities began to arise within the fan fiction community as the number of sites grew to the thousands, and debates emerged, such as whether Hermione would end up dating Ron or Harry.

The release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows in 2007 meant the end of the addition to canon. While this could have meant the end of fan fiction, fans were too

involved in their communities to stop writing. People did not seem to be able to let go of their favorite characters, and so they simply decided to write stories in which the characters grew up. Great authors sprang up, often lauded for their ability to mimic the style of JK Rowling herself—a common compliment is “Are you sure you are not JKR?” (Anelli 2008.) As part of the generation that grew up with Harry, Ron and Hermione, Ricarda remembered the devastation she and her friends felt when the last book was published and they realized they were done growing up with Harry. In discovering the continued existence of Harry Potter fan fiction communities and the creation of new works, Ricarda didn’t have to say goodbye to some of her closest friends, yet. The seven Harry Potter novels allowed adolescents to continue to engage with a compelling fantasy world as they matured. The fantasy world created by JK Rowling continues to evolve with the fans who read and write fan fiction and who simultaneously create and live out other forms of fantasy in their lives.

Growing up with these books, which all depicted child heroes who were self-sufficient, smart, resourceful and often lived in worlds wildly different from her own—worlds full of adventure, danger and happy endings—gave Ricarda an opportunity to face danger and stand up to evil alongside characters who were some of her best friends. As Ricarda moved through book series’ and her capacity for reading and understanding grew, she began to literally grow up with the Harry Potter novels. Ricarda was around Harry’s age as the books were published, and they grew in length and complexity as she became a better reader. Because of this parallel coming of age, Ricarda personally identified with the struggles Harry faced even though she wasn’t a student at Hogwarts because Harry exemplified characteristics Ricarda identified in herself, such as

frustration at being confined by rules set by the adults around her. Harry possessed a self-confidence and kind spirit that Ricarda knew, even in elementary and middle school, she wanted.

“Because that’s what Hermione does. When in doubt, go to the library”
Ron Weasley to Harry in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Reading and processing fantasy literature is a crucial aspect of child development, but what are the aspects of fantasy literature that make it so emotionally significant to children? Maria Tatar (2009) examines this question in Enchanted Hunters: the Power of Stories in Childhood, using the same books Ricarda loved so dearly as a child to examine what it is about the fantasy worlds they create that is so compelling to children.

Metaphors and cliché phrases abound to describe the way children consume literature—child readers are described as “bookworms”, “devouring books”, “obsessed with reading” and many other epithets that imply a wholehearted dedication to the act of reading as a form of consumption (Tatar 2009). Though current discussions focus on the fact that child readership is lower than in previous generations, it remains clear that many children love reading fantasy novels. The question, then, is why? What do the books we read as kids “do” to us both as we read them and as we grow older? Why were fantasy novels an acceptable and even desirable substitute for human interaction in Ricarda’s childhood? People are almost always nostalgic about the books they read as kids, and yet few people seem to be able to explain why their favorite childhood books got under their skin.

Studies show that children who are read to before they start school, and who remain active readers through their school years, are more successful in acquiring language skills and perform higher on academic tests (Wells 1985). But as the epithets

Tatar provides indicate, children read not for the benefits it will bring them in their later schooling but because they love exploring the world through literature. In contrast, few adults read for the pleasure of reading or for pure enjoyment of good literature, a problem CS Lewis (1961) addresses in An Experiment in Criticism. Lewis, best known as the author of The Chronicles of Narnia, was also an Oxford professor, Christian theologian and literary critic. An Experiment in Criticism is his attempt to analyze “good” literature by turning the usual methods of critique upside-down. Lewis argues that readers are usually judged based on the quality of the books they read, which implies that there are “good” books and “bad” books. Through An Experiment in Criticism, Lewis suggests that instead, there are “good” readers and “bad” readers. Readers Lewis terms them “the few”, who he considers to be “good readers”, and “the many”, a group which is comprised mostly of people who do in fact read books, but read them once and forget about them. From the distinction he creates between good readers and bad readers, and the qualities he attributes to each, it follows that the quality of a book can be judged based on how it is read. “The few”, as Lewis describes them, are adult versions of the same child readers who were obsessed with books. The “few” are the people who read books over and over, who remember passages and cannot stop thinking about them (Lewis 1961: 13).

This crucial element—rereading—reflects one of the most common ways people have described their experience with the Harry Potter novels. There are some people who have read the books, know the plot and the characters, but who don’t identify themselves as “Harry Potter fans.” Then there are people like Ricarda and Cara, who we will meet in chapter five, who have read the books dozens of times, use Harry Potter references in

colloquial speech, and consider reading the Harry Potter novels to be a major turning point in their lives. Despite the fact that rereading the novels seems to be a common experience for Harry Potter fans, people Lewis would classify as “the many” all seem to look upon rereading the novels with some derision. Especially when people hear that Ricarda and other dedicated Harry Potter fans continue to reread the Harry Potter novels and enjoy them, “the many” retort that the books are not complex enough to merit grown-up attention because they are children’s books.

The distinction between “children’s” literature and “grown-up” literature (I avoid the term “adult” because of its sexual or pornographic implications) seems clear in the minds of people who mock Ricarda’s enjoyment of Harry Potter, but the formal line between books for kids and books for everyone else is relatively recent. It wasn’t until Harry Potter had dominated the New York Times bestseller list for months, blocking other authors from getting their books in to the top spots that the New York Times split their list. Harry Potter proved to be so much more popular than any other book on the market that the bestseller list was forced to separate it and its supposed counterparts to “level the playing field” for every other author (Anelli 2008). Before the children’s list was created, authors of books geared for children typically languished in literary oblivion and made very little money as a result; the children’s list has given children’s authors a chance to shine. Yet the distinction also formalizes the bias adults typically have towards children’s books. This bias suggests that children’s books are not as complex or interesting as grown-up books, and therefore don’t merit the same kind of consideration. Though this judgment clearly has many layers and a long history, for now, let us simply ask: If children’s books are as simple as we would like to believe, should it not be easy

for adults to explain and understand their appeal? I believe the answer is that the fantasy novels we read as children “get under our skin,” because we read them at a crucial stage in our development, one where we are old and mature enough to process the messages books show us but too young to be cognizant of the values of the world around us and the ways our books might point to these values.

Because of this crucial timing, fantasy children’s books form who we become as adults. They teach us values, such as the confidence and kindness Ricarda admired in Harry, and ways of looking at and interacting with the world. Children’s literature, especially children’s fantasy literature, is able to teach children about important concepts such as moral values and self-confidence because children are able to enter into the story worlds of the books they read, a process called *mimetic imagination* (Tatar 2009:13). The capacity for mimetic imagination is especially strong during childhood because it is the period of life when our imagination develops, and mimicking the imaginative worlds around us is one of the ways we can develop this capability. By the age at which they can read imaginative books, children are old enough to have developed their sense of imagination and “make-believe”, but are not yet old enough to have been taught that their make-believe games are not real (though subsequent chapters will show that this distinction is not nearly as clear as adults would like to believe.) Through mimetic imagination children are able to “enter into a fictional world and make it feel real” (Tatar 2009:13.) As children mature, they are gradually taught by the adults around them that it is not socially acceptable to accept as truth the worlds they generate through make-believe; in the adult world we are expected to have a sense of “critical detachment” from the fantasies we experience because we are supposed to have enough world-wisdom to know

that our fantasies are impossible (Tatar 2009:22.) This expectation of “critical detachment” seems to be the source of the derision towards rereading the Harry Potter novels after childhood. It also explains why people who are not familiar with the fandom (Ricarda included, before she began her fieldwork) often think and talk about Harry Potter fans with condescension, a phenomenon we will see repeatedly in later chapters.

This is not to say that there are no novels for adults with fantastical elements or that portray worlds full of impossible adventures. Many of the most popular books for adults are engaging precisely because they also create a space that transcends the limitations of daily life for the readers. Leaps of logic and possibility are what make books by authors such as Tom Clancy, John Grisham, Steig Larsson, Robert Ludlum, Dan Brown, James Patterson, and Stephen King, who dominate the New York Times Adult Best Seller List, so popular. In fact, the ability to remove oneself from the “real” world is a fundamental appeal of popular culture. We willingly pay close to \$20 to go to the movies, eat special movie food and watch other people live out “other” lives for often less than two hours. Grown-ups who are supposed to be concerned with “adult” things like generating capital and being productive members of society are willing to give their time and money for a few hours of fantasy and escapism.

Clearly literature and the desire to immerse oneself in a “different” world is not a phenomenon unique to children. There are two crucial differences between literature for children and adults. In terms of content, though many grown-up novels portray worlds that would be impossible in the “real” world because of leaps in temporality or space, they usually do not rely on imaginary or mythical creatures, beings and powers to create the fantasy world. But the major difference between the way literature affects children

and adults is that while fantasy literature affords children a certain type of experiential knowledge because of their ability to apply mimetic imagination to what they read, adults are supposed to increase their knowledge about the world by physically living in it.

When adults try to blend the fantasy world of books with the “real” world through mimetic imagination the way children often do, they get called crazy. There is no clearer example of this expectation than the character of Don Quixote, an emblematic literary figure for hundreds of years. While adults encourage reading for children, believing that it will improve their academic performance in school, readers are told that the adult Don Quixote’s brain dried out from so much reading, which is what caused him to go crazy (Cervantes 2001). The narrator of Don Quixote claims that it is insanity caused by reading too many books of knight errantry that caused Don Quixote to abandon his “real” life and believe that he could be a knight errant. Don Quixote is so obsessed with the world portrayed in his books that he decides to play the children’s game of make-believe and wander around the plains of La Mancha in a suit of armor, fighting giants and rescuing princesses; his friends the curate and the barber are so alarmed by Don Quixote breaking the taboo against adults employing mimetic imagination that they burn his books and even use his logic of blaming problems on the necromancer to try to convince him to abandon his life of knight-errantry. For a child to imagine that windmills are giants and try to fight them is a “proper” application of mimetic imagination and development of confidence, but for a grown man to want to fight these same windmills/giants is considered insanity. It is not that fantastical books or books centered on adventures do not exist for adults; it is just taboo for adults to enjoy them in the same way children enjoy fantasy literature.

Fantasy novels form a sort of “safe zone” in which children can test out adventure, autonomy and danger without any real risk. Children journey into the worlds portrayed in their books and experience the adventures right alongside their favorite characters. They are therefore able to experience vicariously a variety of exhilarating, confidence-boosting adventures that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. Children are not in control of their bodies and lives—the adults responsible for them dictate their daily schedule and habits. In this way, they are made in to children by a similar process to the creation of delinquents that Michel Foucault (1995 [1975]) describes in Discipline and Punish. As we have seen, through mimetic imagination children are able to make the fantasy worlds of their books feel real; the pleasure children get from reading these books seems to be a pleasure of feeling autonomous and powerful within the space of the novel. The Harry Potter novels are full of these thrilling, self-confidence boosting risk-free perilous adventures. Harry, Ron and Hermione are constantly breaking rules, defying bad guys and standing up for what they believe despite the potential consequences. Sometimes they get detention, but in the end the heroes always end up defeating the forces of evil that work against them. This application of mimetic imagination allows child readers to live out the fantasies and taboos of horrific experience while simultaneously reassuring them of their own safety (Tatar 2009:82). By living out adventures with the characters through their experience of the fantasy novel, children learn ways of coping with and reacting to the world around them that allow them to be successful, autonomous actors in society.

While every fantasy novel “teaches” something about the world to the children who read it, some books have a more explicit moral message than others. The Narnia

series, by CS Lewis, has been one of the most popular children's series since its publication in Britain in the early 1950's. Lewis was an Oxford don and Christian theologian who was firm in his insistence about the importance of religion and faith in Christianity in living a fulfilled life. While he is best known outside academia for his Narnia books, the majority of his books were theological texts about living a spiritually fulfilling life as a Christian. He brought his religious conviction to the children's books he wrote by using important stories from the Bible— in Lewis's stories the creation of the world, the resurrection of Jesus and the end of the world were re-presented (in the sense of presented again, but differently) for children.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950), the first Narnia book to be published and the most famous, is ostensibly about the four Pevensie children who journey to the magical land of Narnia through a wardrobe in the country house in which they are sheltered during the bombing of London. While in Narnia, the children encounter magical creatures such as centaurs, fauns, witches and a talking lion. They are drawn into an adventure to overthrow the evil witch who rules this magical land, and are crowned the kings and queens of their new country once the witch is defeated, which fulfills an age-old prophesy about the country. In this aspect, the novels fit the genre of children's fantasy literature—they are imaginative, depict danger and adventure, feature children as heroes, and have an ultimate happy ending.

However, The Chronicles of Narnia also have a Christian agenda that is apparent to any minimally educated adult who reads them. Aslan, the talking lion who helps the children on their journey, is a clear parallel for the figure of Jesus Christ; The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is easily read as an allegorical tale of the crucifixion and

resurrection of Christ. This not-so-hidden religious content raises questions about the implications of giving the Narnia books to children, especially non-Christian children. Since it is widely accepted that children internalize and respond to the messages they receive through literature, giving kids books with religious content is likely to have a lifelong impact on their experience of religion.

Laura Miller, founder of the popular website Salon.com, writes about her experience with the Narnia books as a child, the ways and reasons she rejected them for a long period in her adolescence and early adulthood, and how she came to appreciate the books anew. Miller, like many authors who write about the experience of childhood reading, compares her relationship with The Chronicles of Narnia to her first real love (2008:11). The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was the first real book Miller read, and it had a profound impact on her future as a reader. She immediately fell in love with the genre because it allowed her to live out adventures, journey to far-off places, and experiment with common childhood fantasies like having no parents—all themes Tatar identifies as important for children reading fantasy literature. Miller makes the same claim as Tatar, that fantasy children's literature is often seen as a form of escapism in childhood. She counters this claim, like Tatar, by insisting that fantasy literature is so important to children because, through mimetic imagination, it gives children a chance to finally be taken seriously in the world they inhabit, in this case the fictional world of Narnia (2008:61).

“The dementors affect you worse than the others because there are horrors in your past that others don't have”

Remus Lupin to Harry in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban⁹

Ricarda never read Narnia as a young girl, which was probably because her teachers, librarians and parents were all wary of giving a religious Jewish girl such obviously Christian stories. But aside from the Christian content, Narnia was exactly what Ricarda needed as an elementary school student, and Miller's narrative of her love of Narnia as a young girl closely parallels how Ricarda feels about the books she did read when she was younger. In fact, when Ricarda finally read the full Chronicles of Narnia in college, she felt the same shadow of visceral love for the stories that she remembers feeling about The Golden Compass, The BFG, and that she still feels when she reads the Harry Potter novels. The visceral love Ricarda felt for the Narnia books when she read them at the beginning of her college experience was not just a shadow of the feeling of escaping from “real life” that mimetic imagination offers to children who read fantasy novels and play make-believe. In childhood, mimetic imagination provides child readers the ability to leave a world that is frustrating and difficult and enter a different world where there is always a happy ending. As we have seen, mimetic imagination is not a socially acceptable option for lucid adults. But sometimes the demands of the “real” world are enough to make “adults” like Ricarda, who should know better, accept that they must break social taboos. In order to cope with the real world, Ricarda needed to leave it for a while. The gut feeling Ricarda experienced reading Narnia and rereading Harry

⁹ "Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them... Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself...soulless and evil. You will be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life." Remus Lupin to Harry in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Potter as a freshman in college, the wrenching desire that the world in the books could be real, was Ricarda's way of reacting to and coping with a world that was too much to deal with alone. Ricarda's world was crashing down around her, and she found herself increasingly turning to the one place where she knew everything would turn out ok—the fantasy world created by JK Rowling.

Duke had been Ricarda's dream. She grew up a Blue Devils basketball fan, and she made sure to ace every homework assignment, test and quiz in high school so she could get in to Duke. Ricarda grew up in a comfortable home as the adored oldest daughter and granddaughter of doting parents and grandparents. She was close with her family and enjoyed having family dinner every night. The shyness Ricarda felt with her peers was never a part of her life at home, and she enjoyed talking to her family, especially her mother and grandmother, about everything under the sun. Getting in to Duke early decision seemed to be the natural beginning to the next chapter in a charmed life.

But shit happens. Less than a month before Ricarda was supposed to leave for school halfway across the country, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and needed surgery and chemotherapy; Ricarda's aunt and grandfather, who had both been fighting leukemia for years, were both declared terminal and given at best a few months to live. Instead of leaving a home that had been a constant source of support to start the next great adventure of her life, Ricarda left without knowing what would be there when she got back. Less than two weeks after school started, Ricarda's aunt passed away and she left school for the first of what would become regular trips home for a funeral. Ricarda flew home almost every week, each time to find that the situation had become

even worse than the last time she was there—her mom had withered, her grandpa was fading quickly and the rest of Ricarda’s family were clearly suffering emotionally even if they were physically sound.

Ricarda felt separated from everything in the world. She struggled to make friends at school because she was gone almost every weekend and felt uncomfortable opening up to people who were practically strangers about the worst time in her life. She began to lose touch with her boyfriend and best friend because she didn’t know how to communicate over the phone the desperation and sense of doom she felt. Every time she called home, which she did several times a day, her family only seemed to be able to tell Ricarda that she should be glad that she was at school and not at home because she had no idea how bad things were there and how miserable everyone felt all the time—this did not actually serve to make Ricarda feel any better but in fact made her feel like she was no longer even connected to her family. Ricarda’s grades and social life were suffering and her Duke dream was turning out to be a cruel nightmare. She felt as if every fiber of her being was screaming for help, but either no one noticed or no one knew what to say. Ricarda was unable to face doing schoolwork when it was possible that she would be dropping out of school any day, incapable of making friends with the other kids in her dorm because she was afraid of being “the messed up cancer girl.” She was too afraid to ever put her phone on silent, lest she miss a call in the middle of the night from her family, so she barely slept.

To fill the time, Ricarda fell back in to her childhood source of comfort—the Harry Potter novels. She read them again and again and again, delighting in discovering little details and clues, feeling reassured that the happy ending was always waiting for her

at the end of the novels. She felt comforted knowing that if Harry Potter could make friends with Ron and Hermione, fall in love with Ginny and defeat Voldemort despite growing up an orphan in a home where he was openly despised, Ricarda too could overcome the struggles in her life. She found that relating her feelings to what happened in the books made it easier for her to talk to people about what she was going through.

“I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind.... At these times... I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure”

Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Though it was “improper” for her to rely on mimetic imagination, Ricarda found herself trying to learn to cast a Patronus charm with Harry.¹⁰ She didn’t have the wand, and she knew that it was socially unacceptable to walk around carrying a stick and bellowing “*Expecto Patronum*,” but Ricarda came to realize that she too could defeat dementors by focusing on happy memories and positive thoughts. Because of the stigma of wishing to enter fantasy worlds through literature as adults, and because adulthood is sometimes difficult, it is crucial that children read fantasy books while they are children and can practice mimetic imagination while it is still socially sanctioned for them to do so. Reading fantasy literature as children equips us with the imaginative powers we need to deal with things as they come. We need to learn how to take control of our world as children in the “safe” place of fantasy novels so that when we are adults and we feel out of control or powerless we can draw on the lessons of childhood. Adults are expected to

¹⁰ "A Patronus is a kind of positive force, and for the wizard who can conjure one, it works something like a shield, with the Dementor feeding on it, rather than him. In order for it to work, you need to think of a memory. Not just any memory, a very happy memory, a very powerful memory... Allow it to fill you up... lose yourself in it... then speak the incantation ‘*Expecto Patronum*’."—Remus Lupin to Harry in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

be powerful by the exact same dynamic which renders children powerless; writ large, by adulthood we are supposed to have finished the process of becoming autonomous, so those who need to keep working to be full agents in society are considered pathological (like Don Quijote). The “real” world is not an easy place in which to create and live in an imaginative space, as Don Quixote shows, but as we will see in chapters four and five, there are options for creating alternate spaces in which the creation of fantasy universes is possible.

Yet for all the evidence that novels open the possibility for readers of all ages to engage with fantasy and desire in crucial ways in the space of the book, mimetic imagination is a crucial aspect of why fantasy literature is a developmental tool for children beyond just the physical pages of the book itself. Literature is certainly a socially valid form of temporary escapism for adults, but fantasy literature specifically has the potential to affect how children develop and live in the world. Therefore, if most adults follow the social taboo against fully immersing themselves in fantasy worlds, there must be some other way in which adults can engage with fantasy in fulfilling ways. There is more to a fantasy novel than the basic and, admittedly, often simple plot line and structure, but there is a reason we give fantasy novels to children—they satisfy many of the basic needs of children, as outlined earlier in the chapter. There is some fantasy literature for adults, but it does not enjoy nearly the same popularity as children’s fantasy literature, and the genre as a whole lacks critical and popular acceptance when the works are specifically written for adults. It seems that the same stigma that prevents many adults from rereading their favorite books from childhood prevents them from reading more grown-up versions as adults. We believe that fantasy and imagination are for children,

and it is the purview and perhaps duty of adults to read more “sophisticated” works.

Fantasy literature for adults gets stigmatized as “loser literature” for readers who have not grown up or are not competent enough to read grown-up books.

It should be expected that works targeted towards older readers have themes and messages that appeal to the struggles of a different stage of life. Perhaps this is why the term “adult literature” is often used to refer to pornographic or graphically sexual material. If autonomy is the great struggle of childhood, then relationships and sex are some of the greatest struggles of the rest of our lives. Though sensuality figures prominently in children’s literature, there seems to be a taboo on mixing overt sexuality and childhood in contemporary Western cultures— consumers must be 17 or 18 years of age to legally consume sexually explicit materials. This imaginary dividing age is a crucial marker for other coming-of-age transitions in the United States, such as the ability to vote, join the military and go to jail, among others. It is also the age at which many children leave their parents’ home for good, a stereotypical rite of passage that signals the transition from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, if we accept that Harry Potter was published for children, and the legal consumption of sexual materials is an adult activity, then it would seem that NC-17 Harry Potter fan fiction is a literary genre out of place. The Harry Potter novels were there for Ricarda when she needed to deal with the overwhelming reality that the world was not a fundamentally good place. But once Ricarda’s world stabilized and she was able to begin exploring other aspects of being an adult, Ricarda realized that perhaps the world of Harry Potter and the fandom associated with it could help her make sense of the world in a different way.

Ethnographic Interlude
Ricarda Takes a Moment to Talk About Socks Instead of Sex



Figure 2- Under the Mistletoe, or How the Nargles Smutted Christmas

This work of art depicts Professor Severus Snape and Luna Lovegood enjoying an intimate moment in front of a fire around Christmastime. The white dots around their heads and torsos are supposed to be Nargles, creatures Luna believes infest mistletoe and steal things. To an unseasoned consumer of sexually explicit fan fiction, this image is likely shocking both for the clumsily rendered portrayal of vaginal intercourse and the fact that this sex act occurs between characters who are a professor and a student in the books.

One evening while trying to show Ashley around Smutty_Claus and explain the appeal of the stories to her unimaginative friend, Ricarda discovered this image. Ashley

was simultaneously horrified and transfixed by the image on the screen and felt the need to comment to Ricarda that it seemed anatomically impossible. Brenda walked in to the room and immediately covered her eyes. But Ricarda, a seasoned consumer of graphic fan art, knew to look past the artwork and scroll down to the comments. She figured people would comment on the mixed media used to create the image (Snape and Luna are clearly hand-drawn, but the rug appears computer-generated, or at least computer-augmented.). Ricarda thought perhaps some members of the community would find the kiss mark on Snape's shoulder endearing and would comment on how they always felt Luna and Snape could bring out the best in each other. However, within Smutty_Claus, this work of art garners an entirely different set of comments. Here are just a few examples:

Kitty_fic: LOL! Love the socks! Great position!

katmarajade: Mmm... lovely. It's nice to see Snape with his inhibitions lowered and really enjoying himself. *cuddles him* I love the gorgeous, intricate rug, their socks! (hey, it's cold!), Luna's Christmas tree earrings, the gorgeous background with the tree and fire and sparkly flakes and the insanely perfect mistletoe! And the lipstick bit on Severus' shoulder is the perfect touch. :) Merry Christmas, indeed!

ships_harry: Great position! So cute that they left their socks on :D. I particularly like the little lipstick kiss on Snape's shoulder :).

curia_regis: OMG I ADORE THIS SO MUCH! I love everything from Luna's pink socks (SO LUNA) to the fact Snape left his socks on as well, the beautiful rug and the mistletoe. AND THE SPARKLY NARGLES! (I'm assuming they're sparkly Nargles.

g) YAY YAY YAY! THIS IS THE PERFECT GIFT TO WAKE UP TO ON CHRISTMAS! I can't wait to find out who you are! Thank you so much mystery artist! ♥

antisocial_nerd: Wowza!!! Love the socks and the position!!! Awesome XD

glitter_pink: “This is definitely the year of the sock! I love Snape's chest hair and Luna's earrings are Very Luna. Good job Mystery Artist!”

Perhaps ozma_katiebell said it best: SOCK!gasm! How wonderful!

Even Ricarda was surprised by the emphasis on the socks in people’s comments. While comments that simply acknowledge the erotic power of the stories and artwork are rare, most people comment on the form and structure of the work and the relationship portrayed between the two (or more) characters in the work. The emphasis on a banal detail like socks seemed strange even to Ricarda. We will see in the next chapter that comments about the relationships portrayed in the stories may actually get at what is so appealing about these stories and works of art to members of the community, but Ricarda was fairly certain that the discussion of socks did not fit this schema. While it is possible that Smutty_Claus somehow attracts people with sock fetishes, Ricarda felt that claiming to have a “sockgasm” may have a different purpose. As Ricarda had experienced when she first began to research sexually explicit fan fiction, it is difficult even on the Internet to confess to liking something non-normative. Members of Smutty_Claus recognize that sex with underage participants is illegal and frowned upon by mainstream society. But this image obviously does not portray Luna to be uncomfortable or violated in any way. In fact, both Luna and Snape appear to be enjoying themselves. It feels strange and perverse to even type a sentence that says “Snape and Luna appear to be enjoying

themselves”, so perhaps members of the community avoided this discomfort by focusing on socks instead of sex. By acknowledging their “sockgasm” instead of orgasm, they were able to express how much they liked the work of art and found it appealing through the language of a (more) socially accepted fetish like socks instead of child pornography. As we will see in the next chapter, the fantasy world is an outlet for people to explore what they find appealing and learn to express their desires in a safer space than the “real” world. In these comments about socks instead of sex, it seems the members of Smutty_Claus remained focused on the safe zone of socks while they engaged with others about a picture they found stimulating.

Chapter 3
Ricarda Gets a Little Kinky

“When you have seen as much of life as I have, you will not underestimate the power of obsessive love”

Albus Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Remember Ricarda’s great escape? When we first met her, she was fleeing across the quad early on a Saturday morning, looking like one hot mess after spending the night with a boy named Max (or possibly Mark) who she met at a club the night before. As we learned, by the time she came back from a semester abroad junior year, this “walk of shame” was not a novel experience for Ricarda. She came to college with a boyfriend who she had basically been with since middle school. When they broke up, Ricarda was almost instantaneously overwhelmed by the sexuality that surrounded her in college.

It seemed like everywhere she looked, people were taking out their late-adolescent horniness on whoever they could find. Having been mostly sheltered from this in high school because of her commitment to a long-distance relationship, Ricarda was dazed, but she was also excited. It felt like such a stereotypical college experience to meet some guy in a club while drunk and go home with him. After feeling so disconnected from “college” freshman year, Ricarda was excited about the possibility of being a “typical” college student, and it seemed hooking up was one of the best ways to participate in “typical” college student behavior. The problem was, Ricarda had no idea what exactly this “typical” hook-up involved. Having made it through one year of college uninitiated in the normative practices of the college hook-up, Ricarda had some catching up to do. Gradually, though, she came to have an idea of what was normative, accepted and acceptable in college hook-ups through “hands on” experience and talking to her female friends.

Ricarda preferred “learning” through discussions with friends simply because it was less embarrassing. As she learned, trying something in bed with a guy and getting a cold reception was a huge bruise to the ego, and Ricarda was not a very confident person even with all her clothes on. Likewise, it seemed that many of the guys Ricarda hooked up with had very different expectations than Ricarda for how the night would end. Several times Ricarda was kicked out soon after telling the guy she wouldn’t sleep with him, which made her think the only thing guys ever wanted from her was sex, defined exclusively as vaginal intercourse. She began to play a game while scoping out guys by guessing how many minutes they would be alone together before he would ask if she had a condom (and why on earth should SHE have to have the condom? She didn’t have the penis!) In Ricarda’s mind, sex was not something to be taken lightly, but it seemed that no other college boy felt that way. They all seemed to only want their idea of sex, and they wanted it to happen as quickly as possible. Ricarda as a person—everything from her name to her interests—was unimportant as long as the boy had access to her vagina in a short period of time.

Wondering when the awkward moment where she had to tell a guy she wouldn’t have sex with him would happen (as it almost inevitably did) made hooking up more stressful than enjoyable for Ricarda. For one thing, though her confidence was at an all-time low, she wanted to believe there was more of value about her than her sex organs. The fact that all these guys seemed to think it was their God-given right as a college male to have sex with Ricarda made her wonder just how many girls were actually sleeping with these guys. Thinking about the other girls the guys had hooked up with only served to make Ricarda start trying to compare herself to every other girl she saw. Because the

men Ricarda was attracted to seemed exclusively focused on her body as an object for consumption, Ricarda began to think of herself in terms of what her body looked like as well. Instead of attempting to connect with guys on the basis of mutual interests or compatible personalities, she became concerned about what each guy thought of her body, her techniques, her clothes, her hair, her makeup and so on, continuing the cycle that commodified Ricarda and made her feel like nothing more than a body for use by heterosexual males. Technically she was able to choose the scenarios, which would make it seem like Ricarda had agency in her hook-ups. Mostly, though, she felt trapped in a system that compelled her to engage in pleasureless activities in order to be “normal”. In short, the more she hooked up, the less Ricarda was able to focus on the fact that these acts were supposed to be pleasurable, because she was so concerned about how she measured up.

And then, magically, several weeks after her great escape from Max/Mark’s room, Ricarda hooked up with someone very different. Instead of feeling awkward or paranoid about how she measured up, all she thought about was how good everything felt, and how comfortable she was with him. Instead of going back to her room in the dead of night with some guy she found while intoxicated at a bar, Ricarda hooked up with someone she had been interested in for a while. Ricarda and Lawrence met early in the year because of mutual interests and later realized they also had several mutual friends. As they continued to run into each other at events around campus, Ricarda was surprised by how easy it was to talk to Lawrence. They shared many of the same interests and passions, and though they were not close friends, when they did see each other there was never a quiet moment. Instead of worrying about her makeup and not sounding like a

dork, Ricarda and Lawrence laughed, poked fun at each other and discussed things that interested both of them. She was still reeling from a bad breakup and had said she needed time to herself before getting involved with someone again. But Lawrence made Ricarda smile, and she liked the feeling.

Ricarda was used to being taken advantage of for her body, and she had heard that Lawrence had a reputation for treating women like disposable objects. Therefore, Ricarda decided to try to preserve the relationship she and Lawrence did have, and didn't even try to pursue a hook up with him. She was beginning to understand that power and pleasure exist in a symbiotic nature where the absence of one typically leads to the absence of the other, so she tried to keep the pleasurable balance she had with Lawrence by not engaging with him in a way that she had learned made her feel powerless. But he pursued her, and in a moment of *carpe diem*, Ricarda let him. After months of checking her watch while hooking up to see how much longer she needed to tolerate being with the guy, Ricarda was shocked to find that she and Lawrence spent over two hours together. Usually, Ricarda spent around 30 minutes with a man—the men were so focused on reaching orgasm as quickly as possible that they lost interest once they had achieved their climax, making the time spent together quite short. More shocking, Ricarda enjoyed every minute she spent with Lawrence. Naturally, she felt the need to text Ashley to discuss it with her.

Ricarda: OH. MY. FUCKING. GOD.

Ashley: What happened???? I lost you in the mosh pit where did you go????

Ricarda: Back to the room with Lawrence.

Ashley: OMG Ric! You didn't! How? When? How was it????

Ricarda: We ran in to each other on the quad, next thing I knew, we were in his room MOANING.

Ashley: MOANING? Like, good moaning? Did you have sex??????

Ricarda: Definitely good moaning. No sex. He asked but didn't seem to care when I said no. All he seemed to want was to make me moan. WTF who is this boy?

Ashley: JEALOUS. I need to hear this story ASAP.

Ricarda: Coffee at 3?

Ricarda and Ashley met up later that afternoon. Sparing no details, Ricarda discussed how she felt totally at ease, and how she was amazed to have found a boy who agreed that there are many ways to access pleasure that were not vaginal intercourse. As she tried to describe the experience to Ashley, Ricarda found herself drawing parallels between her hookup and some of the stories she read on Smutty_Claus. Frustrated that Ashley couldn't understand what she was trying to say, she decided to send Ashley the following story...

Patented Daydreams by biggrstaffbunch

Ginny Weasley has always been a very good girl. Well, all right -- *most* of the time.

The thing with good girls is that their safe, by-the-book, under-their-family's-thumb lives have the tendency to become dreadfully boring. Rules, regulations, and order only hold so much allure in the face of six older brothers who thrive on danger and chaos, after all. Sometimes a girl wants nothing more than to roll down her knee socks, hitch up her skirt, and live a little.

Because the other thing with reasonable, practical girls is that when they find themselves walking the thin line between common sense and rebellion, they usually retreat to a place deep within themselves. Fearing what they would do when presented with temptation, the good girls find an outlet through which they live vicariously. In Ginny's case, it is the latest publication of *A Wand in Time* and a nice session with her trusty fingers. After breathless dates that leave Ginny flushed and charged, with itchy skin and jittery nerves, the worn, beloved book is

there under her pillow and her hand is at the ready, ready to soothe her anxious mind and send her off to lands where she can look and touch without worrying about being called a slag. In the world of imagination, at least, Ginny can be something *other* than innocent and virginal, and not have to worry about embarrassing herself silly all the while.

And yet.

Today, her latest "adventure" has caused her heart to double its rhythm until she can scarcely breathe, and for the first time ever, Ginny isn't sure that the exploits of Lady Victoria and Lord Nicholas are going to be any good at calming her down. As she enters the darkened Burrow, she is thankful for the closed doors of the rooms beside her own. Ginny notices her hand is shaking as she opens her door and walks in. Her high heels are kicked in the corner instead of put away properly, and she carelessly drops her cloak in a pile next to them. She rolls off her stockings before crawling into bed in her wrinkled dress, tugging the covers up around her and sinking into the darkness. With a weary flick of her wand, the curtains of the window swish close and her desk light flickers on. Then Ginny's hands instinctually reach under the pillow for the book she desperately hopes will give her some reprieve.

She finds a Patented Daydream Package instead.

Sitting straight up in her bed, Ginny falters. Oh, this is just *asking* for trouble. When Fred first slipped it to her last summer in the twins' crowded joke shop, she had rolled her eyes and accepted, reasoning that it wouldn't do to make a scene and refuse. After all, it wasn't as if she was going to use the dratted, stupid thing. She'd tossed the box under her headboard and promptly forgotten about it. But here it is now, beckoning in the soft light from the desk. Normally, Ginny would blanche and throw the package away.

But instead, Ginny sweeps her fingers over the smooth surface of the intriguing box, and wonders-- what *would* it be like to escape for a little while? Never before had an opportunity to try it out presented itself, but now--

The image flashes through her mind, of grasping hands, panting gasps, and the familiar longing to just go a *little* bit farther until reason sets in. Her date tonight has left her itchy with need, like her dates have done every night since she and Harry had their huge fight five months ago following Voldemort's demise.

In short, this good girl needs a shag, and bad.

Clutching the small box and easing it out, Ginny lets that long-ago, devil-may-care attitude take ahold of her. Now is as good a time as any to test for herself the effectiveness of the Daydream the twins have created, isn't it? Now, when she could use a release from the oppressing desire and the sick feeling of longing in her gut. Now, when she doesn't have to look in the eyes of *another* Harry clone and know she wants Harry still, and wants him with a fervor that scares her

greatly. Now, when everyone is asleep and she has the privacy and freedom to just *leave* herself.

Ginny Weasley has always been a very good girl and because of this, she carefully eases the package open, whispers the incantation, and succumbs to the only means of comfort she has on this horrid, terrible, frustrating night--

* * *

A second later, Ginny opens her eyes. She wonders fleetingly where exactly she is before remembering. Oh, right, she thinks. Daydream. Her hands clench in anticipation of swashbuckling pirates and oiled chests. Instead, she gets opulence and mood-lighting.

She is in a room with large stone walls and lanterns with orange flames flickering shadows across her face. There are tapestries of beautiful maidens and handsome knights lining the walls, lush displays of color and excess. Fruit baskets and chocolate pieces line the vanity and dressers, and in the dim glow from the lanterns, Ginny can see rose petals strewn among the goodies. It is the ultimate setup of seduction, complete with the large, plush bed she is lying on currently. Satiny sheets the color of deep, bleeding crimson swath the bed, beneath soft pillows threaded with scarlet and gold. Silvery curtains hang around the bed, creating a soft diffuse to the room that makes Ginny feel as if she's in another world completely.

The filmy curtains flutter in an inexplicable breeze stirring through the windowless room. The air smells like jasmine and grass, and Ginny feels a stirring in her lower abdomen at the sheer sensuality of the scent. She grabs a soft, gold pillow and hugs it to her chest, then looks down at her form in surprise.

Gone is her demure little black dress from her date earlier this evening. Instead, Ginny is wearing a floaty green nightie, straps thin and delicate against her shoulders and hemline riding dangerously close to upper thigh. She blushes and despite herself, her nipples harden visibly through the thin, lacy bodice. She swallows and blinks the confusion out of her eyes, eager to start the daydream.

"Love slave?" she calls tentatively, because really, what good is this fantasy if there isn't a love slave? She clears her throat and giggles. It's a daydream, she reminds herself. There's no use being nervous about something that isn't even **real**.

Doesn't mean she isn't anxious to know whose company she'll be keeping during these lovely hours just floating about in the inner reaches of her dirty mind.

"Hello?" Ginny tries again. "Anybody?"

The large, ornate door thunders as a knock rumbles the doorframe and Ginny yelps. Swallowing again, hard, she gingerly swings her legs off the bed. So, it's one of those ask and ye shall receive daydreams. Ginny smiles. Fred and George might not have thought of the implications of their baby sister using their charm for sex, but it surely has served Ginny's purposes so far. Her skin tingles, actually tingles, in anticipation as her hand grasps the doorknob and twists.

And then her heart, rolling along at a healthy, eager pace, skids, stumbles, and screeches to a halt. Because standing in front of her, hair messy, spectacles crooked, green silk robe open over toned chest and low-slung boxer shorts....is Draco Malfoy.

* * *

"Oh," Ginny breathes after a moment, backing away involuntarily, her hand over her chest.

Malfoy arches a brow, focusing on her bosom for just a fraction of an instant before raising his sharp gaze to hers.

"*Quite*," he drawls, then pushes off the doorframe and saunters into the room as if he owns it. And, Ginny thinks dazedly, it actually looks like he could. Her eyes involuntarily follow the lines of Malfoy's arse as he walks, and Ginny is momentarily appalled to feel that familiar drop in her lower stomach as Malfoy turns and catches her eye.

"Weaslette," he begins, cocking his head and picking up a strawberry from the fruit bowl, nibbling at it experimentally. "You look a little like you're going out of your freckled head."

The delicate insult jolts Ginny out of the dreamy surprise of seeing Malfoy here in what was supposed to be her cave of carnal sin.

"You were supposed to be Harry," she snaps, her hands on her hips.

Malfoy's eyes again follow the way Ginny's breasts heave as she huffs in indignant righteousness. "That's obvious," he retorts, reaching up to finger the spectacles still sitting askew on his nose. "Every time I try and take away these blasted things, I end up almost burning my fingers. Also, my hair..." he stops, as if the tragedy is too much to continue. "My hair is *awful*. I don't know how Potter lives his infernal life with a dead Kneazle on his head." He looks in the mirror on the vanity for a few moments, his hands running through his hair slowly. Ginny squirms for a second as she imagines grabbing that hair between her fingers as she rides Malfoy's lithe frame for all she's worth--

Malfoy screams in surprise and waves his hand around, smoke rising from his impeccably kept nails. He scowls as he turns from the mirror and glares at her

from behind specs that are crookedly, stubbornly staying on. "Weaslette," he declares, "I officially hate you."

Ginny groans and mashes her palms against her eyes, her body still a little flushed from that flash of a mental image. "And I hate you," she responds despairingly. "So why are you here?"

Malfoy shrugs. "Maybe you have some freakish, deep-seated attraction to my wicked good looks. How the bloody hell should I know? I'm here, I'm in a pair of really unsupportive undergarments, and I'm some twisted parody of fucking *Potter*. This is *your* fault, so get on with the indignity already!"

The jasmine-scented breeze floats under Ginny's nose once again and she inhales, ready to lob a scathing retort and a Bat-Bogey Hex at Malfoy's dumb head. Then she shudders, feeling heady, liquid-smooth sensations flow through her veins to her toes and fingertips. Her skin warms as the jasmine curls around her limbs, and she rubs her thighs together as that familiar tightening between her legs takes effect. The sound of Malfoy's voice and the way his hair tumbles across his forehead and his stupid, blasted specs are doing something odd to her.

This daydream, she decides almost desperately, is rapidly turning into more trouble than it's worth. The descriptions of Lord Nicholas's thorough ravishing of Lady Victoria would have helped Ginny get to the same place, arching and crying out at the darkened ceiling of her bedroom. She certainly doesn't need an imaginary *Malfoy* to get off-- Or does she?

* * *

Her eyes fly open as Malfoy's fingers brush her arm. He is looking down at her uncertainly, his shoulders bunched in an awkward who-knows? shrug. Ginny clenches her fingers to stop from punching--or, oh Merlin, caressing-- him. His lips are so close, his breath stirring against her nose. She doesn't want him here, not looking at her with that wide, grey-eyed look that's almost like anticipation underneath all the contempt. He's never looked at her like that in real life, never even given an indication that she's a person to him, much less a *desirable* person. It feels grossly false that Ginny should stand next to him now, her nipples aching, wishing he would just touch her already.

But it's a *daydream*, and her skin is so hypersensitive right now, if a troll touched her, let alone someone who's as inarguably attractive as Malfoy, she'd likely combust. As it is, the spectacles really do turn her on past any points of comprehension, so she gives up and tugs Malfoy's head to meet hers. After all, just because she hates Malfoy, doesn't mean she can't at least get some practical use out of him tonight. Good girls wouldn't, and right now, Ginny's is everything *but*.

"Malfoy," Ginny sighs seriously. "Shut up from now on, alright?" Malfoy just nods mutely as his fingers trace the dip of her back, caressing her bum in a way that sends shivers down her spine.

His kiss is hot and possessive when he leans down, his lips dry but smooth, his tongue already moving against hers in a maddeningly firm rhythm. His fingers grasp her jaw and slip through her hair, his hands guiding her chin as he changes angles, slanting his mouth over hers this way and that. Each new kiss brings a new sensation, a new taste of mint and fruit and something warm like dusk. The heat of his body against hers, his hard chest and thighs pressed against her front brings Ginny even closer to his form, her fingers skating over his nape and the hollows of his neck.

He may not be Harry, but Dream-Malfoy is almost as good. As long as he keeps on using his mouth for things other than talking.

Ginny gasps into his kiss as Malfoy's hips bump hers, the hard ridge of his erection already evident. Her eyes open once again and look Malfoy in the face. His eyes are bright and almost feverish, and his lips pink, swollen. Ginny gulps as another wave of unadulterated lust sweeps through her, causing her stomach to contract and her legs to shake. This is the part where she usually runs from her dates, not ready to sleep with random men when she is positive of what she really wants. And what she really wants is Harry, no matter how pig-headed he's being at the moment. It's Harry she dreams about usually, and it's only Harry's hands she will let touch her like this in real life.

But no matter how much she loves Harry, wants Harry, misses Harry-- Dream-Malfoy's hands are doing pretty well right about now.

Malfoy's fingers creep up the side of her hem before he's cupping her bum in his hands and pushing her up and closer, the hot, strong feel of his palm against her skin taking Ginny's breath away for a moment. His fingers are dangerously close to the wet heat already emanating from between Ginny's legs, and as Malfoy kisses her fiercely again, she moans into his mouth and widens her stance. Malfoy groans in response and squeezes her bum, inching his fingers closer until they are almost stroking her moist slit.

Ginny holds her breath for a moment, clutching Malfoy's shoulders, and then his hands are *there*, touching her, and she is positive it is all over. There is no way she can resist him now, and fantasy or not--she needs this moment more than she ever thought possible.

* * *

Malfoy brings his fingers back and forth along her cunt before leaning down and sucking her nipples through her nightdress. "Malfoy," Ginny gasps. "*Fuck.*"

Malfoy just gives a breathless acknowledgement in response, one hand inching up beneath her night-dress and the other continuing its lazy perusal of her most secret part. When one hand finds her breast, the one he didn't lave, cupping its heavy weight and swiping across her nipples, Ginny grits her teeth against how good it feels in tandem with his other hand stroking from arse to front in a slow, heated rhythm.

When Malfoy finds her clit, Ginny actually growls as she pushes his hand away so she can rip her nightdress off, cooling her overheated skin and making her nipples pucker even more. Then she is stepping closer, reaching down and working her hands through the slit of Malfoy's boxers to take ahold of his cock. Ginny is so intent on her task, she doesn't even notice Malfoy's wide-eyed gaze. When he makes a stuttery groan at the feel of her hands wrapped around his erection, Ginny chances a look up at him. His silver eyes are fastened on her naked form, and Ginny feels two high spots of color rush to her cheeks as she realizes Malfoy is the only other person besides Harry she's ever been nude for.

Ginny's hands reach down to work her own clit and continue what Malfoy started. He makes a noise of protest but she shakes her head and kneels. This is what she wants right now, inexplicably. To be in power, and contrary to what anyone has ever told her, she's never felt more powerful than when on her knees, driving her man insane.

Her man. Ginny gasps and pants as her fingers work the tight bundle of nerves that is sending off white-hot sparks through her body, gathering slow, coiled ropes of warm tension in the pit of her belly and the small of her back. The feel of cock is heavy on her tongue, warm and pulsing, and she sucks leisurely as Malfoy groans and writhes. Ginny wishes for a moment, looking up at the way Malfoy's hair is so much whiter than ebony, how his eyes are light instead of dark emerald, how his specs are square instead of round, that her "man" was really here.

And then, just as Malfoy grabs Ginny's head and she feels that contraction in the rolling weight of his balls, there is a bright flash of light and standing in the room is none other than...Harry.

"Ask and ye shall receive," comes a sing-song voice a lot like Fred's, and then Ginny is looking up in desire mingled with horror as Malfoy comes, warm and sticky across her chest. With Harry, his familiar green eyes wide with shock and repulsion, watching.

* * *

The orgasm that was building in Ginny is slightly tamped down at the look on Harry's face, and the utter surprise of seeing him here, of all places. Malfoy is slumped over slightly, his hand damp on Ginny's shoulder as he recovers from his orgasm. But his eyes are shiny and calculating as they fasten on Harry's

form.

Ginny decides she likes this Malfoy so much better than real-life Malfoy, whom she has a sneaking suspicion would be hexing Harry right now, cock spent and all. Then she thinks she probably ought to like this Malfoy better, as he's a complete product of her imagination, and has managed to get her riled up in a way that is panging painfully through Ginny's body now, as her unfinished orgasm lies panting in her veins.

Against her better judgment, (but then this entire fantasy is against her better judgment and it just doesn't matter anymore) Ginny's fingers again begin working at her clit, pressing and rolling and making Ginny arch up on her knees, her head lolling back as the itchy warmth builds deep in her muscles. Her breath comes in gasps and pants and she gives a desperate, apologetic frown to Harry before closing her eyes and grabbing Malfoy's hand, placing it on her breasts. His fingers work at her nipples, caressing and pinching and then Ginny hears a thud as he drops to his knees and places his mouth against her left breast.

The flutter of his tongue and teeth against her nipple, the heated moisture of his mouth sucking at her sensitive skin, pulls everything into a tiny, volatile little ball in the pit of Ginny's stomach, and as her fingers work faster, as the itchy sensation grows more and more hot and bright, she falls back, grinding her center against the heel of her hand and making low keening noises between whispering frantically.

It's only when she's blasted high off into the atmosphere and then come down again, shaking and gasping at the aftereffects of her incredible orgasm, that she notices that she's been saying Harry's name the entire time.

"Like what you see, Potter?"

Malfoy's voice cuts through the drugged, jasmine-and-sex scented air and Ginny starts, her heart thudding to life once again. Harry's eyes have darkened to almost black, and Ginny gulps, afraid she has gone too far.

"Yes," Harry admits, his voice rough. "I really, really do."

Ginny feels a flash of promise and then Harry steps closer, his fingers undoing his buttons slowly. The flash of promise turns to full-fledged desire, and Ginny makes a mental note to thank Fred and George for their brilliancy. Later. Harry's eyes have gone very dark. Much, much later.

* * *

Harry continues speaking, almost casually, as his shirt lies discarded on the floor and he begins working on his trousers. "Of course, I'd like what I see even better if *Malfoy* weren't around, but..." Harry trails off, his eyes zeroing in on Ginny's

form. "This is *her* fantasy. So I'm here because she wants *me*, too."

"No need to be petulant, Potter," Malfoy drawls. "These stupid spectacles and my tragic bed-head are evidence enough that Weasley *really* wanted you all along. But variety is the spice of life, and I think it's...interesting that there's three of us here, and not one of us is leaving." Malfoy turns to Ginny, his hand lazily stroking his erection. "Weaslette? Have you been thinking naughty menage a trois thoughts?"

Ginny squeezes her eyes shut. "Not of late," she grits. "And lovely how you're making this incredibly awkward, Malfoy..."

"Oh, shut it, you old cow," Malfoy says, almost affectionately. "This was all already horrendously awkward." He looks sated and sly now that he's come, and he saunters closer behind Ginny, stroking her spine slowly. "There's no other explanation for it, really. Why else would the daydream, designed with your greatest desire in mind, pop both of us here into your den of sin?"

Ginny shivers at the feel of his fingers on her back and the heat of Harry's gaze on her open, sweat-sheened body. "Because in the beginning I was so desperate for a shag, I asked for someone--*anyone*--to come deliver me. And alright. You do have a strange sort of attractiveness. But I was desperate!" Harry looks at her strangely and Ginny shrugs. "It's been a long time," she says softly, averting her eyes. Harry's gaze deepens with guilt.

"Yes, my real-life counterpart isn't so good at knowing what's best for him, is he? But *I* know. I could have done so much for you." Harry's voice slides over Ginny's senses, hot and velveteen. "So why am *I* here if someone--anyone--was enough for you?" he asks, pouting deliciously. His trousers are bulging in a tell-tale fashion, and Ginny smirks, thinking that probably, Harry doesn't care either way right now. She tells the truth anyway.

"I wanted you to be. I want *you*. I miss you and think of you, and Malfoy may have been an accident--"

"Yeah, you can say that again," Harry grumbles. Malfoy makes an indelicate sound of protest.

"--a *happy* accident, but he was an accident nonetheless. *You* are here because I wished you would be. So are you going to take advantage of this fantasy or flounder about and give me a severe case of sexual frustration again, which is what got us into this mess in the first place?" Ginny lets her hands cup her breasts, arching into Malfoy's touch as he massages her shoulders and licks her neck.

Harry looks at Ginny for a moment more and Ginny tilts her neck back, liberated

by the fact that now that Harry is finally here, she actually doesn't really *need* him. Malfoy's doing a terrific job all on his own. Doesn't mean that she doesn't *want* Harry, however, and Ginny spreads her legs wider and lets her fingers drift down to tug her curls, just to entice Harry a little bit more.

It does the trick. With a growl and falling to his knees, Harry is tugging Ginny's cunt to his mouth in one smooth motion, and then: oblivion.

* * *

Harry Potter at her center and Draco Malfoy at her back, and Ginny has never, ever felt more satisfied than right this second. Draco's cock is nudging her arse, and she wiggles, rubbing against his erection and smiling as his moans brush hotly against her neck. His hands are rolling and tugging at her nipples, and his lips find hers as she leans back, turns her face to meet his. His kiss is hot and wet, and Ginny squirms at the feel of his tongue on hers and Harry's tongue *in* her.

Harry's hands grip her thighs as he licks firmly at her clit, and Ginny is so preoccupied she doesn't notice Malfoy's fingers creeping up her skin. His hand pauses to stroke her curls for a moment, palm cupping her centre, before his fingers spear into her. Ginny cries out, arching against Malfoy's fingers twisting in and out, in and out, and the rub and swipe of Harry's tongue against the little bundle of nerves currently humming happily.

When the world explodes, the only thing that anchors Ginny to the floor is Harry's fingers biting into her thighs and Malfoy's lips latched onto her neck.

They don't give her much time to recover. Once Ginny can breathe even slightly again, Harry swoops in and claims her mouth with his, kissing her fiercely. Malfoy's hands gather Ginny's hair at her nape and move her curls aside to kiss her shoulder, and back, her hip. Then Harry is hitching her hips up and Malfoy is helping, letting Ginny lean back against him as Harry wraps her legs around his waist and moves closer, his cock pressing against her tingling center as he reclaims her mouth.

"Harry," she gasps, between kisses and the slow, burning grind Harry has started up. Malfoy in the back keeps Ginny's steady, holds some of her weight as she undulates desperately against Harry.

"Potter," Malfoy hisses, and Ginny can feel his erection spring back to life, rubbing against the small of her back. "Give her what she wants."

Harry smiles. "Oh? And what would that be?" He pushes against Ginny, lets his erection grind slowly against her. Ginny mewls and rolls her hips, causing Malfoy to curse.

"Fuck her, you bloody imbecile! We don't have much time left."

Ginny sobs her agreement, her hands scrabbling to find purchase against Harry's shoulders. "Please," she gasps. "Oh, Merlin, please."

Harry smiles again, this time grimly. "Because we have no time left...and because you both asked so nicely..." Then he is nudging his boxers down and positioning himself at Ginny's opening, holding her legs and inching in ever so slowly. Ginny strains and cries out in desire, and Malfoy rubs her breasts, swiping his thumbs across her nipples. Harry grabs Ginny's waist, claims her mouth, and plunges home, his erection filling her with that long-lost, thick, hot feeling of *home*.

In and out, in and out, slow and delicious, as Ginny cries out Harry's name. Malfoy's hand finds her clit as Harry thrusts, and Ginny tilts her head back to prop against Malfoy's shoulder. Harry's breathing is ragged as he begins to pick up pace in time with the speed of Ginny's gasping moans, and soon, his thrusts are erratic, driving, hard and rough and oh-so-good. Ginny feels that tenacious grip on this unreality begin to unravel, and she gasps louder, encouraging Harry.

"Harder," she begs. "Faster." So Harry thrusts and Malfoy rubs her clit, and then he captures her mouth in a kiss as Harry falls forward, kissing her neck and collarbone as that tingling, tight feeling expands within her.

When they all come, one after another, she swears she blinks out of existence for a moment before she realizes her fantasy is coming to an end. She wonders for a second if she'll even be able to walk tomorrow, let alone ever look either of these men in the eye, but she is too busy kissing both of them, sloppily, to care.

The daydream shimmers out of existence as Ginny's eyes droop closed, and the feeling of longing settles deep in her bones.

* * *

The fantasy is still in the vague corners of her mind as Ginny slips into wakefulness, the smell of sex and Harry and Malfoy's colognes still lingering deep in Ginny's nose. Her eyes open drowsily and she takes in the pink frilly curtains and the worn bedspread of her childhood room. Her fingers are clutched tightly around the Daydream Package, and she smiles as she remembers the abandon with which her most secret fantasy had been fulfilled.

Fred and George have an industry here, Ginny thinks. A very lucrative one at that. *She'd* certainly pay a Galleon or two for another experience like the one she's just had.

Ginny cocks her head, thinks of how familiar that look of longing on Malfoy and Harry's faces had been when the fantasy had started dissipating. And then she

smiles slow, thinking that maybe she won't need a Daydream package next time. It's time to take the bull by the horns and tell Harry exactly what she wants from him. And stopping by Malfoy's office in Diagon Alley, especially after-hours, isn't so outlandish, either. Last time she ran a file past his department, she'd seen him eye her legs with interest.

Ginny nods to herself, satisfied, snuggling deep in her covers, and thinks maybe Lord Nicholas and Lady Victoria aren't all they're cracked up to be after all.

“Well,” said Ashley. “I’m definitely not going to ever be able to read Harry Potter the same way.”

“Sorry. Well, not really that sorry. But do you see what I mean? Hooking up with Lawrence, it wasn’t just good, it was like something out of a magically altered universe. A universe where it was ok for me to let him focus on my pleasure for hours, and I didn’t owe him anything for it. Where he was there because he wanted to be with me, not because he wanted to spend time with a generic vagina and pair of boobs. Which made me *want* him to want my body, and made me want to pleasure him. Does that make sense?” Ricarda sighed.

“Yea, totally. He wanted you to enjoy yourself, you wanted him to enjoy himself, and everybody ends up moaning. So. When’s the next time you’re seeing him?”

“Not soon enough.”

“It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live”
Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone

Ginny learned the value of immersing herself in fantasy through her “Patented Daydream” experience, in which she was able to reverse the traditional power relationships between men and women engaged in heterosexual sex acts. Ricarda too was

learning to turn to fantasy to make experiencing her sexuality fulfilling and appealing; her first reaction after hooking up with Max/Mark was to turn to Smutty_Claus, not her friends or even her own hands. As Ricarda had experienced it, the sexual landscape for heterosexual college women hadn't changed much since the "sexual liberation" movement in the 1960's. Her body was still objectified and even commodified by the heterosexual men she supposedly desired, which left her feeling both emotionally and physically unfulfilled. Though the discourse of "progress" and the widespread discussion that women are achieving unprecedented equality with men in all areas of life would make it seem that Ricarda should feel equal agency to men in sexual relationships, this was definitely not the case. As a heterosexual woman living in a heteronormative world, Ricarda felt she should not have any reason to complain about feeling wronged by the system. Yet instead of being able to fully participate in heteronormativity and claim agency over her body by hooking up with whomever she wanted, Ricarda found herself feeling excluded from normative society.

Ricarda's experiences as a heterosexual woman on an elite college campus made it clear that the ideals of "free love" generated nearly 50 years ago had still failed to make sexual pleasure accessible to women. Instead of being able to access her sexuality on equal footing with men, it seemed that sexual liberation had only liberated the already free men. Though the stigma against having many sexual partners is certainly lower for women now than it was a generation ago, lack of social stigma does not necessarily make having multiple partners any more pleasurable for women. The men Ricarda hooked up with were so focused on the main event—vaginal intercourse—that they often skipped all semblance of foreplay and buildup. Not only was this physiologically unlikely to make

hooking up satisfying for Ricarda, but it made hooking up feel dry (often literally) and emotionless. Part of what was so satisfying about hooking up with Lawrence was the build-up that came before the physical event. Ricarda felt connected to Lawrence beyond just the few square feet of the bed they were in, and he clearly felt the same way. Because of this, both were interested in giving and receiving pleasure. They had a relationship that involved an equal exchange of opinions, jokes and laughter (social pleasures), so when things got sexual, it made sense that they would engage in an equal exchange of physical pleasures.

Ricarda clearly benefited from engaging with the stories on Smutty_Claus. As her conversation with Ashley made clear, Ricarda had become more used to thinking about sexuality through reading the stories of Smutty_Claus. The contrast between Ricarda and Ashley's reactions to the work of art "Under the Mistletoe, or How the Nargles Smutted Christmas" was a testament to the greatly increased comfort Ricarda had talking and thinking openly about sexual pleasure. Though she didn't recognize this at the time, Ricarda came to understand that her sexual experiences were becoming a space of mimetic imagination in which she was able to claim agency over her own pleasure via reading stories like "Patented Daydreams." While this is a permutation of the childhood experience of mimetic imagination, since Ricarda never tried to do a "role-play" of any of the stories she read, she was clearly relying on the lessons of the Smutty_Claus stories to help her become more autonomous and comfortable in her sexual life.

Consuming sexually explicit material is one way of engaging with and living out fantasies, and it turns out that the "fantasy" world itself is extremely conducive to

exploring ideas of sexuality. In recent years scholars of many disciplines have begun analyzing the historical basis and current ways in which we define sexual categories and assign certain acts and identities to these seemingly self-evident categories. The wide-ranging works of these scholars show that, contrary to the biologically deterministic and socially accepted view that penile vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman is the “proper” experience of sex and anything else is an aberration (Foucault 1986), there is no inherent duality of sexual identity and experience, nor is “normative” sexual experience for any category or identity necessarily limited to intercourse. Despite the seemingly rigid categories we are socialized to recognize, people are often curious and explorative in their experience of the sexual universe. The past decade has experienced an exponential increase in what is publicly accepted as normative sexual practice, which is reflected in the way the media treats and portrays sexuality. However, the perceived “preference” for vaginal intercourse still exists.

In order to understand why Ricarda felt pressured into vaginal intercourse in almost every sexual encounter, we need to break down her experience into some categories. I will first examine what might be “normative” sexuality and what society would consider “non-normative”, and how we came to those definitions; Ricarda clearly felt caught by the desire to be “normal” within what she recognized as a heteronormative society. From an examination of normativity in practice, I will show how we have reached a perceived duality where we categorize people according to their experience of eroticism as either heterosexual or homosexual, and how people may even be pigeon-holed into sub-categories in this duality. In the last few decades, homosexuality has become much more widely accepted, but we will see how even this politically correct

“acceptance” ignores the reality of sexual experience as much as the “free love” movement failed to give Ricarda greater access to sexual pleasure. And yet, Ricarda was able to access pleasure with Lawrence after learning to feel like his equal through a long build-up and a lot of time reading stories on Smutty_Claus. Therefore, I will examine how fantasy spaces allow for an exploration of non-normative sexuality and sexual experience within the fantasy world we began exploring in chapter two. Using the work of Joanna Russ on sexually explicit Star Trek fan fiction written “by women for women”, I will try to understand why women are interested in fan fiction as a form of erotic material. This discussion will lead us back to the “Patented Daydreams” story, as well as a work of art entitled “The Education of Teddy Lupin.” It is here that we will begin to look at how the specific appeal of Smutty_Claus and how the community functions in the context of “culture” and “society” and as a culture and society unto itself.

“Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Dursley of Number 4 Privet Drive were proud to say they were perfectly normal, thank you very much”

Opening line of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone

It turns out that even the term “heterosexual” and the idea that heterosexuality and homosexuality exist in a dichotomy only came into use around 100 years ago—hardly the biologically steadfast category of being we would like to imagine it represents. As Jonathan Ned Katz (2007) lays out in his book The Invention of Heterosexuality, clearly defined sexual categories such as “heterosexual” and “homosexual” are a socio-historical construction that only arose in the Western world in the past century or so (2007:11). The term “heterosexual” first appeared in medical texts, defining, at different moments, men who experienced sexual desires for other men, people who were “too” obsessed with sex, people who desired sexual experiences with both genders, and people whose attraction to

the other gender was somehow perverse and pathological (such as prostitutes.) Finally, less than 100 years ago, “heterosexual” began to be used in non-medical texts to refer to people who were attracted to members of the other gender (Katz 2007). Even after the term ceased to be used in discussions of human pathology, it was several more decades before the idea became mainstreamed. Now, “heterosexual” refers to a category of people who identify themselves or who society identifies as normative (Foucault 1980).

This socially constructed category seeks to define people according to which erotic acts they prefer to experience, and, arguably, categorizes people according to their non-erotic acts as well. “Normal” heterosexuals should naturally prefer vaginal intercourse; while we have become much more flexible in accepting the necessity of foreplay, the expectation exists that vaginal intercourse should occur as quickly as possible (At least, the boys Ricarda met thought so.) “Normal” heterosexuals also should never allow their sexuality to be called into question. Even something as simple as two men touching can have the wrong connotations and incite suspicions about how to categorize those men. Our experience of eroticism has become a way of identifying and defining ourselves, and the definitions we choose, or that are chosen for us, can dictate proper ways of thinking and feeling within our category. Katz suggests that we have reached a point in the rigidity of the sexual definitions, and that they have achieved a social power so potent that there may be emotions that we believe fulfill each gender role (2007). Women are supposed to be passive, vulnerable, emotional(ly unstable) and sensitive; men are supposed to be stoic, powerful, assertive and sometimes even callous.

As many sexuality studies scholars have noted, sexuality is most often studied through hard science such as biology. As a result, many of our popular understandings of

sex as a subject for academic study are a result of this “scientific” background of research, and our ways of thinking about sex are often dominated by the physical acts themselves and not the relationships they create between people. According to what I deem biological determinists, who try to use the physiology of penile-vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman to defend the “rightness” of the heterosexual experience, the emotions considered appropriate for each gender have evolved by some obscure but undeniable scientific process of evolution to bring us to the ultimate “goal” of procreation. The focus on the reproductive potential of penile-vaginal intercourse is fundamental to a definition, and defense, of heterosexuality (Katz 2007:21; Foucault 1986). Sex, according to the biological determinists whose logic dominates popular discourse, is a method of procreation. Any pleasure it creates is simply an evolutionary tool to get us to keep doing it. But as Ricarda’s experience with Lawrence shows, there are ways to experience sexual pleasure that don’t involve a penis penetrating a vagina. Therefore, decompressing the societal preference for penile-vaginal intercourse will be crucial to our understanding of why certain acts constitute “non-normative” sexuality, and why these “non-normative” acts have such wide appeal.

As Carole Vance (2007) acknowledges, discussing heterosexuality places a lot of what we consider important in society at stake. Vance asserts that anthropologists are often unwilling to touch sexuality because it is not a “valid” subject of academic concern and that it lays the anthropologist’s career on the line (2007 [1991]: 41). And yet, as Kulick (1995) says, “Sex is far from new or taboo in anthropology. Quite the opposite: anthropology has always trafficked in the sexuality of the people we study” (1995:2.) But this exploration of sexuality is almost always in the traditional anthropological fieldsite of

a “different”, exotic culture where the norms are clearly different—for example, places where women walk around with breasts uncovered, where homosexual rituals are normal parts of rites of passage, and people slaughter animals or even people to honor pagan gods. For the anthropologists who study sexuality in these “different” places, “... the sexual behavior of other people has been widely understood to be a point of irreconcilable difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Kulick 1995:4.) According to both Vance and Kulick, there seems to be some sort of inherent danger in exploring our own culture’s sexuality. Where exactly the danger comes from and what the negative consequences of studying sexuality are precisely is not clear to Vance, nor to me. Vance suggests that sexuality studies can only be undertaken by scholars who have already established their credentials as academics through other types of work, and even for these well-respected scholars, embarking on a study of sexuality is a risky move for their academic career. Katz takes this idea of the danger of discussing sexuality even further, and claims that an open discussion on sexuality is dangerous because it opens heterosexuality to critique (2007:67). I take this to mean that exploring heterosexuality would naturally lead to delegitimizing the power of heterosexuality and “the heterosexual” over other sexual experiences;¹¹ understandably, a heterosexual writer who is, under this framework, in a position of power is not likely to be excited about the prospect of losing their position. As Katz suggests at various points in his book, often the major critique posed to writers who seek to criticize the heteronormative power spectrum

¹¹ Analysis of gender as a form of power dichotomy is common in academia. Though I do not explicitly use the language of power to analyze gender here, I acknowledge that this is a compelling framework for the claims of this chapter. For two very different and fascinating examinations of how male-female relations can play out as power struggles, I recommend the work of Laura Mulvey (1975) on the heterosexual male gaze and the way femininity is constructed in relation to masculinity, and the work of Octavio Paz on “La Malinche” and the power of the slang word *chingar* (“to fuck”) to illustrate gender and power relations.

are met with resistance that “it takes one to know one,” and that these non-normative writers are only putting forth their argument because they wish to destabilize the power relations created by the imbalanced sexual duality. This kind of critique clearly shows that even within academia, openly identifying oneself as anything but heterosexual and heteronormative can be ground for critique. Kulick suggests that the apprehension many anthropologists feel about exploring sexuality in their fieldsites is that such an exploration puts the ethnographer’s own “erotic subjectivity” on the line, making an even more liminal figure of the already-liminal researcher (1995:5), as we will see in the next chapter.

Perhaps it is the perceived danger of critique that leads otherwise intelligent, insightful social scientists to make seemingly value-laden assertions about sex and gender roles that affirm heteronormative power relations. The work of Seal and Erhardt (2007) on sexual scripts is a clear example of this type of work. While Seal and Erhardt claim to try to debunk many of the perceived scripts for sexual interaction between men and women (never acknowledging that the relationships we have come to define as heterosexual are only a small portion of the existing sexual practices in the world), their study seems to affirm the most base, common stereotypes of a “typical straight guy”. The researchers claim that they have investigated sex as love and romance and sex as conquest (in reality heterosexual vaginal intercourse, but to them this goes without saying) (2007:375). However, as Kinsey demonstrated nearly 50 years before the Seal and Erhardt study was published, sexuality is not a universally understood term. Kinsey argued that most people exist in some sort of continuum of sexual identity and

experience, and that at many points in our lives, we are at least curious about experiencing other sexual “identities.”

As Foucault suggests in volume 3 of A History of Sexuality, there has historically been a unilateral focus on penetration as the only sexual act of any value (1986:30). And as Ricarda’s experience with college boys shows, in many ways the focus on penetration, specifically a penis penetrating a vagina, continues. Ricarda herself had fallen in to the trap of the repressive hypothesis; she forced herself to hook up with random guys because she thought it was the proper thing to do and ignored the fact that she rarely derived any physical pleasure, because she was so focused on the meaning and social import of what she was doing.

The concept of a fluid spectrum of sexual experiences and erotic preferences instead of a singular focus on penetration can be examined both through theory and through examples. As Jeffrey Weeks makes clear, even the term “homosexual” does not necessarily refer to one category of people (2007 [1981]:125). Weeks joins the conversation with Katz and Vance to argue that the practices we have come to associate with the term homosexuality have in fact changed quite a bit over the course of history. His argument takes the angle that even what seems to be one category is constructed in different ways throughout history and across cultures and even people. Though historians have often tried to write about “the” homosexual experience, sometimes even with the honorable intention of trying to validate the homosexual experience as more normative than current society would have us believe, the mere practice of “defining” homosexuality assumes that homosexuality has a singular root and meaning (Weeks 2007 [1981]:126-127). For example, in ancient Greece it was expected that older men would

have sexual relationships with boys, but would also marry and have vaginal intercourse with women. For the Greeks, though they recognized that some men seemed to prefer their erotic experiences with one gender or the other, there was no need to define a man according to his erotic enjoyment.¹²

Back to the biological determinists and their assertion that sexual relationships that do not focus on or lead to penile-vaginal intercourse are counter-evolutionary. We have already seen that labeling all sex acts other than vaginal intercourse as improper assumes that the sole goal of erotic experience is reproduction, which ignores the immense pleasure associated with sexual experiences. Or, as Vance describes it, the “physiology of orgasm and penile erection” does not alone explain sexual schema (2007 [1991]:48). Men who have penises do not need to insert their erect penises inside women with lubricated vaginas to achieve erection or orgasm, and women with vaginas do not need men with erect penises inside their vaginas to achieve orgasm. In fact, the insertion of an erect “real” penis into a lubricated “real” vagina does not guarantee orgasm for either party. Those who say that vaginal intercourse is the biologically dictated “proper” expression and fulfillment of sexual desires have obviously never had sex or experienced the wide range of sexually pleasing experiences that do not require insertion of an erect male penis in to a lubricated female vagina. Sexual experiences involving any number of people who identify with a number of current gender distinctions use many different tools, both body parts and “toys” in an almost incomprehensible variety of ways

¹² Foucault, in volume 3 of *A History of Sexuality*, seems to try to question this assumption in his analysis of the work of Artemidorus. However, he claims that Artemidorus focuses mainly on the social import of the sex acts that occur. Therefore, I conclude that because Artemidorus sanctions even some relations between men, Weeks may be right in asserting that the ancient Greeks were more flexible in their definition of sexual categories than we are now in modern Western society.

experience “sexual” pleasure that may, or may not, lead to orgasm. What appeals to one person may not appeal to another both across and within sexual categories. Furthermore, there is no indication that the orgasm potentially generated by one method is in any way “better” than any an orgasm achieved by other means.

“It is our choices...that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities”
 Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

For people like Ricarda who wish to live erotic lives not entirely dependent on the practice prescribed by the biological determinists, fantasy spaces provide an ideal forum for exploring what is erotic, sensual, sexual and simply pleasurable to each of us. The opportunities for this kind of exploration are endless. There is the obvious multi-billion dollar pornography industry that produces videos and visual materials with an incomprehensibly wide range of people, settings, experiences and budgets, each of which allows the viewer to watch whatever type of fantasy they please for free, or at least much cheaper than hiring a prostitute (and much safer). There is also the burgeoning sex toy industry, where toys of all shapes, sizes, levels of mechanical complexity and purpose are available to basically anyone with money. These two commercialized areas are popular spaces for adults¹³ to play out fantasies in the same kind of safe spaces that fantasy literature provides for children. However, as Joanna Russ (1985) explains, the commercialized fantasy world has become a sort of half-fantasy; it is so commodified and “plastic” that it doesn’t necessarily reflect the deep-seated but passionate desires of many adults, but rather becomes another way of imposing societal expectations about sex (1985:91). Therefore, in order to understand truly explorative, curious (in the double

¹³ Defined legally as anyone over 17, 18 or 21 depending on the state, country and material in question, which raises the question discussed in chapter two over who is an adult.

sense of slightly odd and inquisitive) sexuality, I turn to a forum that is definitely not “normative”—sexually explicit fan fiction depicting relations between Captain Kirk and Officer Spock from Star Trek.

Joanna Russ investigates Kirk/Spock (K/S, two of the main characters of the Star Trek series) pornographic fan fiction, in her words “Pornography By Women For Women, With Love”, as a way in which women can play with their understandings of sexuality and physical love (1985). Russ explores how K/S fictions, which are predominantly written by women with an intended readership of women, allow the women who read and write these stories to explore their understandings of sexuality, relationships and what turns them on. As she explains, despite the fact that Kirk and Spock are both (sort-of) male characters, the stories should not, and are not, read as homosexual pornography. Russ describes the sexuality in the stories as “nominally male” (83), “multiplex, worthy, androgynous” (84), and “totally unlike reality” (86). Spock, as half-human and half-Vulcan, is not therefore not really male. And, at times each character displays characteristics that Katz would posit are “female” emotions.

However, Russ argues that these semi-biological facts are unimportant to the appeal of the K/S stories to the women who read and write them. Instead, it is the recurring themes of “hurt/comfort”, drawn-out sexual tension, impetus to act on desires and sex as fulfillment of emotion that make these types of fics so popular with women. According to Russ, “The writers and readers of these fantasies do what most of us can’t do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own

pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen” (1985:90).¹⁴ Kirk and Spock are familiar, well-developed characters to lovers of science fiction and Star Trek, and this makes them useful figures for playing with alternate sexual realities. Reading about them experiencing a fulfilling romantic and sexual experience together is a liberating and encouraging outlet for women.¹⁵

Because of their familiarity, Kirk and Spock can serve as condensation points for a wide variety of human traits and emotions. Russ and Radway seem to agree that putting familiar characters in to challenging sexual situations, whether it’s Kirk and Spock or the beloved heroines of romance novels, is an adult way of using mimetic imagination to “try out” our desires. As Radway points out, women often struggle to gain autonomy and agency, and are often subject to the whims of a male-dominated society. Catharine Driscoll, in her examination of the relationship between romance and pornography in fan fiction, agrees that writing romantic works is a way for women to move toward an ideal (2006: 83). We will see much more of the importance of writing in gaining autonomy in the next chapter. For now, I want to emphasize Russ’ understanding of women’s (and, I believe, all humanity’s) needs: “What they [the women] do want is sexual intensity, sexual enjoyment, the freedom to choose, a love that is entirely free of the culture’s whole discourse of gender and sex roles, and a situation in which it is safe to let go and allow oneself to become emotionally and sexually vulnerable” (1985:89). This is exactly what Ricarda hoped for in all of her sexual experiences. The fulfillment of these desires

¹⁴ Janice Radway, in *Reading the Romance*, also discusses how romance novels can be a space that allows women readers to experiment with autonomy. Through engaging with a space that resembles the patriarchal and repressive society in which they live and reading about how the heroines navigate their society to achieve the happy ending, Radway suggests that readers of romance novels learn ways to cope with their own situations (1991).

¹⁵ See also Catharine Driscoll’s chapter “One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006).

with Lawrence both led to and superseded the fulfillment of physical desire that she felt with him, which made their sexual experience together so remarkably good. Kirk and Spock, as semi-marginal, “imaginary” beings, provide a kind of safe space for science-fiction aficionados to come to an understanding of how to live in their ideal world. Within K/S fan fiction, it is exploring sexuality through the “different” lens of male homosexuality that allows the mostly female readers of the fics to imagine different ways of accessing sexual pleasure outside the confines of heteronormativity.

“Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love”
Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Harry Potter fan fiction, I believe, fulfills a similar function for a different generation. The relative anonymity and ubiquity of the Internet and the written word allows people to be more sexually curious and explorative than they would ordinarily be in the same way that the K/S fanzines gave the women writers and readers spaces to explore sexuality. Smutty_Claus in some ways affirms the heterosexual power structure and categorical divide in sexual experience, while also acknowledging that the lived experience and enjoyment of erotica is much broader than any category can encompass. The main page of the Smutty_Claus community explicitly says that the community is for people who want to read and write heterosexual fan fiction, and that while they accept and support homosexuals, it is not the theme or goal of this community.

Many of the stories posted on the site portray strongly homosocial bonds¹⁶, homoeroticism (not acted upon) and explicitly portrayed/describes homosexual practices and experiences, as we saw in the Patented Daydreams story. Smutty_Claus is a place explicitly and solely for gaining pleasure; the inclusion of so much homoerotic material indicates that this is a common part of the experience of pleasure, at least for the



Figure 3- The Education of Teddy Lupin

members of the community.

As we can see in Figure 3, “The Education of Teddy Lupin,” mixing homosexual and heterosexual experience, along with portraying many different types of erotic experience, is fairly common in Smutty_Claus. This work of fan art is another example of a way to simultaneously affirm heterosexual norms and represent a variety of sexual practices. Even though the piece is primarily about the heterosexual education of Teddy Lupin, it also acknowledges the erotic potential and coexistence of same gender sexual experiences. Teddy, the son of Remus Lupin

¹⁶ Eve Sedgwick (1992) coins the neologism “homosocial” in the introduction to her book Between Men. The term is meant to refer to all bonds between members of the same gender, but she uses it primarily to refer to bonds between men that often depend on homophobia and affirm heterosexuality. In the context of Smutty_Claus, homosociality usually appears in close proximity to homoeroticism, as we saw in “Patented Daydreams”.

and Nymphadora Tonks, is “educated” in heterosexual practices including kissing, fondling and (implied) penile-vaginal intercourse by a variety of woman in a variety of settings. Grafted in to this vignette is a depiction of two women, identified by the artist as Fleur Delacour and Nymphadora Tonks (Teddy’s mother), enjoying a homosexual act together. Because it is a work of art and not a story, the connection is not explicit. Yet no one commented on this work, which is pretty uncommon for the community. I take this to be a sign that viewers were untroubled by inclusion of the female pairing in the work, because the members of Smutty_Claus are usually fairly vocal about what doesn’t “work” for them. I think the undisputed, normal portrayal of these women in the same work as the young, presumably heterosexual Teddy shows that the members of Smutty_Claus accept a wide range of sexual practices as “normal”, and also accept that these relationships can occur in the same context as practices that would be categorized differently.

“Patented Daydreams” also clearly shows an alternate experience of heterosexual fantasy. The story is undeniably focused on a heterosexual relationship, as per the requirements of the community. Ginny is being driven nearly mad by her heterosexual desire for vaginal intercourse with Harry, and by the close encounters she has with the other men she dates (and, as far as the story makes clear, Ginny is only dating men). But, rather than give in to the pressure to have sex with other men, Ginny turns to masturbation to relieve her sexual frustration. Right from the beginning of the story, we are introduced to a marginalized sexual practice—though the topic of male masturbation is fairly common, the media and popular culture almost never acknowledge female masturbation nor validate it as a necessary or common practice among women. Once

Ginny enters the Daydream, she is the one in power. She makes the active decision to call for a “sex slave” to fulfill her every sexual need, revels in her own sensual enjoyment of the daydream, and seems to be in control of the physical action throughout the scene.

Take, for instance, this short paragraph:

Ginny's hands reach down to work her own clit and continue what Malfoy started. He makes a noise of protest but she shakes her head and kneels. This is what she wants right now, inexplicably. To be in power, and contrary to what anyone has ever told her, she's never felt more powerful than when on her knees, driving her man insane.

Ginny alone decides that she wants to perform oral sex on Malfoy, and she does so, according to this author, because it gives her a feeling of power. This is not always the case—the giver of oral sex, whether in a heterosexual or homosexual relationships, is usually the one portrayed as less powerful; the giver is necessarily not the receiver, and they are often portrayed, especially in fan fiction, as the weaker, more passive member of the relationship. Nearly all of the Harry/Malfoy stories, for example, portray the hero of the story receiving oral sex as from the weaker character (who this is varies by story). The boy receiving the action is the dominator. Ginny flips this power dichotomy by asserting her right to choose how and when to pleasure Malfoy. Delightfully, Ginny is repaid in double for her insistence on controlling the giving and receiving of pleasure. Once Harry materializes, both Malfoy and Harry insist solely on furthering Ginny's pleasure, and Ginny, because she has already established herself as the governing figure in the scene, is able to completely let go and enjoy the action provided for her by Harry and Malfoy.

However, the fact remains that Ginny needed a magically induced daydream to enact her desires. She was still stuck in the heterosexual power web where “good girls”

are not allowed to pursue sexual relationships with men and are expected to always be the ones to say “stop”. Ginny, in her daydream, is able to accomplish what the women in Russ’ chapter accomplished through their reading and writing of K/S stories—they can create fantasy worlds where sexual interactions obey rules they create, and that serve their needs and desires best. But while we can, and should, celebrate the fact that the author of this story has created a universe in which women are allowed to enjoy sexuality and take ownership over it, the fact remains that the Patented Daydreams story is actually a “meta-fantasy”, or a fantasy within a fantasy. There is the fantasy induced by the Patented Daydream charm of the story, but then there is the fact that all fan fiction scenarios are “fantasies.” Therefore, Ginny was only able to achieve the type of sexual liberation necessary to fulfill her desires after two levels of “editing” the rules of society.

Ricarda’s hook up with Lawrence also happened under two levels of “editing” reality—the alcohol involved clearly lowered her inhibitions, and the fact that Lawrence was not a totally random boy and Ricarda already knew him (and his reputation) made it easier for her to anticipate what the hook up would be like. In her later discussions with Ashley about the hook up, both wondered what it would have been like if Ricarda and Lawrence were sober, or if Ricarda hadn’t already known Lawrence. Ricarda’s previous experience with guys indicates that she would not have been as relaxed and focused on pleasure. It took two different ways of altering the reality (that Ricarda was engaged in sexual activity with a boy she wasn’t dating) for her to be able to relax and enjoy the experience. Similarly, while Ginny certainly achieved an unprecedented level of power in her fantasy within the story, the author of the story also has the power to create the world

in which such a fantasy is possible. Like the writers of Kirk/Spock fan fiction, someone had to create the fantasy world in which such a fantasy could be realized.

The idea of “editing” reality to convert it in to fantasy is clearly crucial to the appeal of the stories hosted on Smutty_Claus. But Ricarda’s experience and the comments community members posted make clear that the goal of these fantasy stories is not just to help the reader achieve orgasm as quickly as possible. If this were the goal, the stories would jump immediately to sexual activity. Instead, almost every story has a significant portion of character and scene development before there is any sort of physical interaction. The importance of setting the scene seems to work in two ways. It creates the sort of build-up, like foreplay, that is necessary for an ultimately explosive finale. By the time the story does describe sexual activity, the reader has been waiting and anticipating the action and feels not just pleasure but relief at the gratification. Further, the reader is emotionally invested in the story in a way that simply does not happen with mainstream pornography. Readers of sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction are intimately familiar with the characters and understand the intricacies of their personalities as if they were close friends. Part of the pleasure Ricarda felt when reading “Patented Daydreams” came from an affirmation that there would be an ultimate happy ending and not just a climax. The Harry/Ginny relationship was one with which Ricarda strongly identified, so reading about the characters working through their personal problems and ultimately having a fulfilling sexual experience together gave Ricarda hope that she too could achieve this kind of emotionally and physically fulfilling relationship. Through reading this story and feeling the same kind of close association with the plot that she used to feel about the Harry Potter novels themselves, Ricarda learned how to

take a feminist and feminine point of view with regards to her sexual life. She could be both a heterosexual woman and feel a sense of agency over her body while hooking up with Lawrence because she could relate their relationship to the one presented in “Patented Daydreams.” Because she participated in this exchange of pleasure in Smutty_Claus, Ricarda was able to be both a peer and a lover with Lawrence, and found that both identities were much more fulfilling when they occurred together.

Chapter 4

Ricarda Writes What She Sees

“The mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure. Thoughts are not etched on the inside of skulls, to be perused by an invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing”

Severus Snape in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

By this time, Ricarda had been exploring the world of Smutty_Claus and other online Harry Potter fanfic communities that host R-rated and NC-17 fictions and artwork for almost two years. She had decided to put her field-knowledge to good use and write a senior distinction thesis about her experience—it seemed like the right thing to do. After all, her academic studies had come to be an important part of how Ricarda defined herself in college, so dedicating a good portion of her year to completing a major academic project seemed like a fitting final intellectual experience for Ricarda in her undergraduate years. She decided she wanted to complete the project as a thesis and not just an independent study because she wanted to focus on the writing aspect of presenting her research.

Through her mother’s illness, Ricarda learned to open up by talking to people about what was going on inside her head, but she had really always felt that writing was one of the ways in which she best expressed herself. Harkening back to her days as a shy child, writing had always been a way for Ricarda to open up about her thoughts, feelings, experiences and reflections on the world around her. Writing was a space where she knew no one would laugh at her, make fun of her or judge anything she said. She kept journals in which she wrote in Spanish and Hebrew, drew pictures, and reflected on her relationships with the people in her life. The journal became a secret space in which Ricarda practiced turning her day-dreams and day to day experiences into mini-fantasy

adventures; because she knew no one would ever read them, Ricarda felt at ease using her journal to explore her fantasies. Similar to a Patented Daydream, the journal allowed Ricarda to separate herself from reality a little and imagine life a little differently. While she was abroad, Ricarda regularly wrote lengthy, descriptive e-mails to her friends and family, and enjoyed keeping a blog where she recorded her travels and enjoyed telling through written words the funny little experiences she had walking around every day. The physical act of writing (or typing), of turning her thoughts in to something tangible, came to be a meaningful experience in and of itself. Ricarda set out time every day to write emails and blog posts, and this time between dinner and going out was a semi-sacred part of Ricarda's day. In this time, she could reflect on and process her day by scrolling through the words she had put on a page. As she increasingly relied on the emails and blog posts she created to serve as her way of communicating with her family and friends at home while she was abroad, Ricarda came to value writing as one of the most powerful modes of self-expression.

“‘Professor Severus Snape, master of this school, commands you to yield the information you conceal!’ Snape said, hitting the map with his wand. As though an invisible hand were writing upon it, words appeared on the smooth surface of the map. ‘Mr. Moony presents his compliments to Professor Snape, and begs him to keep his abnormally large nose out of other people's business’”

From Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban¹⁷

Given the importance of writing to the existence of Smutty_Claus, and the powerful role the written word had in the community to function as the performance of identity for every member, Ricarda wanted to be an author. She was excited to finally

¹⁷ The Marauder's Map is a magical document created by Harry's father, James, and his friends Peter Pettigrew, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. For those who know the magical password, the parchment shows a live map of the castle and everyone in it as they move around. But for those who do not know how to operate the magical document, such as Snape in this quote, the map resorts to the sort of harmless taunting for which Harry's father was known.

move from a “lurker”—a member of the community who doesn’t actively participate in writing and editing—to a contributing member by writing a story for the 2011 gift exchange.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Ricarda had sadly underestimated how easy it was to become one of these authors. The day sign-ups opened, Ricarda logged in to LiveJournal and found that, though Smutty_Claus sign-ups had been open for less than a day, there were already more than the maximum number of people signed up! She sent the following e-mail to beccafran, the moderator of the community:¹⁹

“hi

i think i am too late to sign up for the exchange, since theres way more than 75 comments.... also, i do not have an active journal. i am a senior in college, and im doing a senior honors thesis in anthropology on HP fanfic communities (specifically communities of R or NC-17 fics), so its really important to me that i get to participate actively in this exchange. research protocols on research with human subjects requires that i make my research goals public, so my LJ profile has the following posted to it...

"I am a university student conducting fieldwork for a senior thesis in anthropology. I've always been an avid Harry fan, and my experiences with HP fanfic have led me to look more closely at these groups. I'm really interested in how people form online communities and why, and also what the rise of new virtual ways of interacting means for the "real" world. Anthropology is all about talking to people, so PM or e-mail me at XXXXXXXXXX@gmail.com if you want to chat! (All your information will be kept private and I will not include anything if you ask me not to). See my blog for updates on my thoughts and experiences! . If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about what your experiences reading, writing or responding to fics, and about your experiences in this community in general. These conversations can last as long as you want, and you are free to refuse to answer a question or stop talking to me or responding to my emails any time you wish, and I will not pursue contact any further. I will not associate anything you say with your ID or e-mail address unless you specifically ask me to. You are also free to ask me anything you like, and I will respond as best I can."

ideally i would be able to participate in the gift exchange so i could experience the community for myself, but if this isnt possible, would you possibly be able to post a comment in the forum letting people know about me and my research and telling them that i would love to hear from them and chat? as my above profile information indicates, confidentiality is my top priority. im

¹⁸ I borrow my understanding of the term “lurker” from a wonderful introduction to a book on online fan fiction communities (Hellekson and Busse 2006.)

¹⁹ As with most blog-based communities, the moderator is the person who controls all comments, stories and works of art posted in the community. In the case of Smutty_Claus, the moderator is also the one who decides who will participate in each year’s exchange, and the person in charge of assigning partners.

just really interested in exploring why people get involved in these communities, and i want to show the validity and importance of the internet in personal expression now.

thanks so much for your help and understanding, and if theres anything else i can do, please let me know!

RB”

Almost a full day later (an unheard of delay in the realm of online communities), Ricarda received the following response from beccafran:

“Ricarda,

Thank you for your email, and for your interest in the Smutty Claus community. I've given this a lot of thought since receiving your email. I'm sorry, but at this time I think it would be best if you did not participate. I'm just not comfortable with making my participants a part of your research, without their prior knowledge and consent. After all, they've signed up for a fic exchange, not an anthropological study. I hope you can respect that.

If you want to talk with members of fandom about their experiences and opinions, you might try a community like this one:

<http://community.livejournal.com/fanthropology/>

which is more focused on discussion and meta-analysis, rather than simply an exchange community. If your interest is simply in writing and participating in fan communities, there are several communities that have a more casual week-to-week setup, rather than a formal exchange component -- I'd recommend one of these:

<http://community.livejournal.com/sortinghatdrabs/> or

http://community.livejournal.com/hp_smutday

I'd also be happy to answer any questions you may have personally, or if you have a formal poll or questionnaire for use in your research, I'd be willing to pass out the link or direct any interested participants to it.

I hope you understand. Please let me know if you'd like to discuss further, or feel free to contact me at my personal email address, XXXXXXXXX@yahoo.com.

R---

aka beccafran

Smutty Claus moderator”

Feeling rejected and dejected, Ricarda contemplated giving up research. There was still time to drop the thesis class (and save her social life), and Ricarda wondered

how well she would be able to understand Smutty_Claus without the experiential knowledge of being an author in the exchange. Beccafran's email made it clear that, as the moderator, she felt responsible for being the gate-keeper of the community; Ricarda was deemed unfit to pass in to the group. For most anthropologists, being rejected from the fieldsite means the end of the project. But, as Ricarda realized, this did not need to be the case in her research. There certainly was, at least in beccafran's mind, an "in" and "out" of the community, but there was also massive potential for what Ricarda had already been doing for two years, lurking; in other words, Ricarda could continue to watch the activities of the community unseen by anybody as long as she kept her comments anonymous, or simply didn't comment. Since Ricarda had not encountered any other anthropological writings that spoke of an ethnographer rejected from a community who was still able to safely participate and observe members of the community, Ricarda felt she could set her own precedent, and decided to keep visiting.

She was a little apprehensive about basing her entire understanding of the community on the insights she gained as a voyeur; the term had never really had positive connotations, and as we will see in the story "Rita Skeeter's Last Scoop", writing about one's voyeuristic activities could have really big, bad consequences for the unwanted watcher/writer. But really, leaving the community and abandoning her senior thesis was not an option. Ricarda was already so committed to her project that she felt compelled to write about what she had seen, read and experienced, and the ways it had changed her. She also wondered how many other "lurkers" there were in communities like Smutty_Claus. She felt that the omnipresence of these people was important in understanding the ways in which Smutty_Claus works on people, and works for people.

“If you’re holding out for universal popularity, I’m afraid you will be in this cabin for a very long time”

Albus Dumbledore to Rubeus Hagrid in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Beccafran had made it clear that Ricarda did not belong to the group. As beccafran put it, she was not comfortable making *her* participants the subjects of an anthropological study. The possessive pronoun beccafran used to describe the members of the community seemed to imply that the “official” members of the community are the 75 people who write stories that are posted, and who receive a story-gift from another one of the 75 people. But, as we have already seen, “belonging” to Smutty_Claus seemed to be about more than just creating fan fiction and fan art, since Ricarda had established a strong bond with the community without ever engaging in this creative and generative work.

So what exactly is “belonging” in an online community? How could Ricarda not have the experiential knowledge of being a fully acknowledged member and yet still feel associated with the super-organic existence of the community? Perhaps the answer lies in Ricarda’s liminal association to the community. The liminality of the “lurker”, someone who feels they are a part of the group but is also not entirely accepted as part of the community, functions on multiple levels. As Victor Turner writes, “The attributes of liminality or liminal personae (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (1969: 95). Lurkers in online communities exist on the thresholds of the community. They are not dissociated from the community—simply knowing about the existence of the community and frequenting the site means that they are in some way engaged with the group. But not complying with the

fundamental work of the community by not creating stories to be posted means that the lurker evades classification. They cannot be identified by their specific name nor the specific works they have created and contributed to the community, since their presence is often unseen.

Lurkers in online communities exist exactly on the border between “in” and “out” in online communities. “As liminal beings they [the neophytes] have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands” (Turner 1969:95). “In”, being one of beccafran’s participants, would mean being an author or artist. Those who are “in” have a position within the “kinship” system of the community via writing for someone and receiving a story or work of art from someone else. Ricarda and the other untold number of lurkers in Smutty_Claus are definitively not “in” due to their lack of relational interaction with other members of the community. But they’re also not “out.” Ricarda continued to return to the LiveJournal page throughout the fall, waiting for new stories to be posted and reading and rereading old ones.

“‘Why were you lurking under our window?’ ‘Yes -- yes, good point, Petunia! What were you doing under our windows, boy?’ ‘Listening to the news,’ said Harry in a resigned voice. His aunt and uncle exchanged looks of outrage. ‘Listening to the news! Again?’ ‘Well, it changes every day, you see,’ said Harry”

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

The fact that this reading occurred under the context of generating her own written work *about* Smutty_Claus but not really *for* Smutty_Claus meant that Ricarda was actually engaged in the voyeuristic work of anthropology. As Kulick put it, anthropology is “essentially peeping through keyholes and broadcasting what we see

there” (1995:3). Ricarda, by visiting the site and observing the actions of the people who interact in this LiveJournal community, joyfully consuming the materials they created but never herself creating materials for consumption by other members of the community had found a way to peep through a technological keyhole. As beccafran’s admonition that the members of the community had not signed up for a study made clear, she felt that peeping through the keyhole could be tolerated so long as Ricarda did not broadcast what she saw. In short, beccafran was willing to allow Ricarda to be a voyeur, but not a writer. However, given her training in anthropology and her personal identity as a writer, Ricarda doubted whether this would be possible for her. Ricarda felt that writing was crucial to how she defined herself. As we will see, it is also crucial to the work of anthropology. As she pondered the possible dangers of broadcasting everything she saw through her privileged position at the peephole, Ricarda came across the following story:

Rita Skeeter’s Last Scoop by Irthunder

How did I end up here? Well, that is quite the question, isn't it? What was my crime? Did I murder someone? No. Did I support He -Who -Must -Not -Be -Named? No. You might think that my crime was too insignificant to land me in Azkaban, but Harry Potter didn't think so. After all, he was the one to turn me in. After all my articles and books about him, this is the thanks I get? I suppose it could have been worse. Little Miss Perfect, otherwise known as Hermione Granger, could've been the one to bust me.

Now, where should I begin? Perhaps with my name. For those who don't know me, and I can't imagine anybody who doesn't know me, my name is Rita Skeeter. For years, I made my reputation as a writer who shed light on secrets witches and wizards wished to remain hidden. I exposed Hagrid's giant secret. I reported on Harry Potter's fainting spells at school. I was also the one to interview him about You Know Who's return.

I'm sure you're asking yourself about what I could have done to earn a trip to Azkaban. I'm afraid this might cause some of you to laugh, but I am an unregistered Animagus. Yes, according to the antiquated laws of the Ministry, that is enough to have me hauled off to prison. I don't know of any others to have been sent to prison, but to be fair, I don't know of any other unregistered Animagi either. There were rumors that Peter

Pettigrew, Sirius Black, and James Potter were Animagi as well, but who could believe those tall tales?

But the second question you're asking is how did I get arrested? Well, that is quite an interesting story. First, let me tell you that Harry Potter, Miss Granger, and her soon to be husband, Ronald Weasley, all knew of my status. But if they knew, why didn't they turn me in? Well, Miss Granger held that threat over my head for a year, but she didn't do it. Instead, it was Harry Potter. But what could have caused him to turn on his only ally in the media? Well, that is why I'm telling you this story. It's the story about my last scoop.

It was the biggest Quidditch match in League history. The Holyhead Harpies were trying to win their first Quidditch championship in history. Their opponent was Chudley. Now, the Cannons were not that good historically, but this was also their first championship match appearance. While Holyhead had many fans already, the fact that made the match more interesting was their star Chaser, Ginny Weasley. She was also known as The Witch Who Stole Harry Potter's Heart. Of course, she didn't like that title anymore than Harry Potter liked being called The Boy Who Lived. At least I didn't make up that title; I would've come up with something far more interesting.

The match itself, unfortunately, was lopsided. Even though Chudley had improved, they couldn't contend with Holyhead's Chasers, Beaters, or Keepers. Holyhead was too good for Chudley. It reminded me of the Quidditch World Cup, where Viktor Krum had caught the Snitch and Bulgaria had only lost by ten points. Unfortunately for Chudley, they didn't have a Seeker who had Krum's abilities. The match was over fifteen minutes after it began.

Still, I was determined to put an exciting spin on the match as possible. Readers always like drama in other people's lives. Why else would they have bought into my story about Harry's tangled love life at Hogwarts years ago? I had taken out my Quick Quotes Quill and some parchment, when something caught my eye. Harry Potter was walking away from the stands. Where was he going? I was determined to find out.

I followed him from a discreet distance. It had taken me a minute to realize that he was heading toward the Holyhead changing room. Why? Was it for a celebratory hug and kiss for his girlfriend? Little did I know that the truth would be far more interesting and exciting to watch.

As I continued to follow, he continued to look over his shoulder. He seemed to suspect that someone was following him. Fortunately, he didn't come close to spotting me because I had already transformed into my Animagus form: a beetle. Thus, I was able to continue to follow him discreetly.

He had pushed the door open when I flew in behind him. I could hear water running in the background. Maybe members of the team were already in the showers. Harry took one last look around him and then he pulled out a cloak. I couldn't believe my eyes; it was an Invisibility Cloak. Not many witches or wizards had them. If only I had one, I wouldn't need to transform into my Animagus form to get the juicy stories.

Apparently he thought the rest of the team was there. But only Ginny was in the shower room. She was not yet naked, but clad only in her bra and knickers. I didn't know where her boyfriend had gone, but I knew he was in the room. She was about to remove her bra, when Harry suddenly took off his cloak. She yelped in surprise, but it was quickly cut off by a passionate kiss from him.

I could not hear anything from where I was, and I didn't want to risk them finding me. I watched as Harry unclipped Ginny's bra and tossed it over his shoulder. I watched as she pulled his shirt over his head. I watched with fascination as the pile of clothes increased.

I continued to watch as Harry pinned Ginny to the wall, kissing her as though his life depended on it. I saw her reach her hand over to turn on the shower. She then tried to move to the water, but Harry continued to pin her to the wall. I thought I heard something. Then it sounded again. She was begging. "Harry, please!"

"Please, what?"

"Please, fuck me," she replied. I wasn't able to see the expression on his face, but I could imagine it was a grin. He lifted her up a little bit off the floor and then guided himself in. I continued to watch as I heard moans and cries, and the sound of skin slapping against each other. Ginny had closed her eyes with pleasure as Harry continued to thrust in and out.

Suddenly, he pulled out. Before she could protest, he guided her to under the shower. He picked her up, this time not using the wall to help support her. She bounced up and down on his cock as the warm water hit them. Their mouths continued to do battle, trying to obtain dominance. From my point of view, it looked as though Ginny was winning.

But as much as I would have loved to stay longer, I had to leave. After all, articles don't write themselves. As I left, the lovers were now on the floor, with Ginny on top and Harry's hands on her breasts. This would be quite an interesting article. I just didn't know how interesting it would be.

The day the article was printed in *Witch Weekly*, was the day that my freedom was ended. I had received a courtesy copy from the editor and saw the headline: "Weasley Is His King." I had barely begun to read it, when the door to my office flew open. I dropped

the magazine in shock. Standing in the doorway was Harry Potter, and a surge of fury was emanating from him.

Before I was able to say anything, he walked to my desk and looked me square in the eye. "How dare you!" he snarled. "How dare you spy on us!"

I didn't flinch. "Harry, dear, the readers have the right to know all about you and your girlfriend. That's the cost of being a hero," I said coldly.

"I thought you were supposed to stop writing these types of stories about people. But I guess that didn't stop you from writing that tripe about Dumbledore," Harry replied furiously.

I smiled coldly again. "If you're referring to Miss Granger's deal, that was only for one year. I made the deal with her, not you. At least I didn't put in the article about how you sucked on her nipples or trailed kisses down her neck. Be grateful I left out some details."

Now it was Harry's turn to smile and it was a smile I didn't like. "You're right, Skeeter. You didn't make the deal with me. But unfortunately for you, you still haven't registered as an Animagus."

"And what are you going to do about that?" I asked, daring him to try something.

Harry's smile turned colder, sending a chill up my spine. "Simple. I am an Auror, which means I can place you under arrest," he said.

I was stunned. And true to his word, I was arrested that day and charged with being an unregistered Animagus. As I sit here in my cell in Azkaban, I have wondered if I should have changed how I did things. I've decided that I was right to do things how I've done them. After all, I wouldn't be Rita Skeeter otherwise. It is saddening that my last scoop caused me to land in prison, but I've dealt with worse before and have survived.

Then everyone will see what new scoops I can get.

Ricarda definitely did not want to end up like Rita Skeeter—penalized for writing and publicizing what she saw as a voyeur. The unwanted publication of personal activities and opinions was obviously morally wrong. And yet, it seemed to be exactly what many anthropologists do. Kulick's comment about the peepholes implies that the subjects of study often do not know about the intentions of the anthropologist. Or, if they

do know, they often do not comprehend the degree to which their private lives will be made public. Writing about what she saw in Smutty_Claus from the vantage point of a voyeur seems incredibly self-centered to Ricarda. After all, voyeurs necessarily only benefit themselves and do not owe pleasure to anyone else. But, as Ricarda reasoned, she had not deliberately chosen to be a voyeur. She had asked beccafran to allow her to be a participant, to be a part of the exchange of pleasures that she understood was crucial to emotionally fulfilling relationships.

However, by rejecting Ricarda from becoming anything other than a liminal member of the community, beccafran had turned Ricarda in to a permanent voyeur. Though this was initially frustrating, her voyeur status gave Ricarda a shaman-like status as a permanent outsider (Turner 1969:116). Rejection from being an author *for* Smutty_Claus would turn out to be a blessing in disguise for Ricarda, and the key to becoming an author *about* Smutty_Claus. Ricarda was already struggling enough to put into words the changes Smutty_Claus had made in her, and perhaps involving herself even further would have made it impossible for Ricarda write about her research. Though she would not originally have chosen rejection from the opportunity to participate in the generative work of Smutty_Claus, through rejection, Ricarda “assumes a statusless status, external to the secular social structure, which gives [her] the right to criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all, and also to mediate between all segments or components of the structured system” (Turner 1969:116-117). Though Ricarda initially felt that all she wanted to do was blithely criticize (in the sense of disparage) beccafran’s decision, remaining a liminal person turned out to be necessary to her to be a critical (in the sense of analytically sharp) “reader” of the activities of

Smutty_Claus. Remaining a step apart gave Ricarda an understanding of the ways in which Smutty_Claus worked on her, and allowed her to postulate about ways in which it works on people who are officially sanctioned (by beccafran, the highest structural power in the group) “members” of the community.

“The truth is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with caution”
Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone

And so Ricarda sat down to write. Some of the writing was easy—analyzing texts and telling little stories about her life felt natural to Ricarda as a practiced scholar and journaler. But when it came time for Ricarda to put in to written words the ways in which participating in Smutty_Claus, even just as a lurker, had changed Ricarda’s very existence and concept of herself, Ricarda found herself unable to write for the first time in her life. The prospect of writing down, of literally inscribing her experience, was daunting. As Geertz says, “The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse—[s]he writes it down. In doing so, [s]he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be recounted” (1973:19). Whereas Ricarda had previously enjoyed writing because it was her personal space to work through her experiences, this kind of writing was a completely different type of action. The stakes were different because of the judgment that automatically came with producing an academic text. The sort of writing Ricarda needed to do about Smutty_Claus, mixing her personal experience with her academic intellect, involved a degree of analysis completely different than what she was used to doing in her journal. Instead of just writing for herself, Ricarda felt the need to show the world, through her writing, that a community that may at first glance seem strange was really a

powerful tool that helped people understand their lives and make sense of the world around them. This sort of “Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import” (Geertz 1973:9). Ricarda was reluctant to make sweeping claims about the social ground and import of all of Smutty_Claus. In short, though beccafran had conferred on Ricarda a positionality that was, through sheer luck, exactly what Ricarda needed to do the sort of analysis of Smutty_Claus that she felt was necessary, Ricarda was unwilling to assume her different moral status, and would have preferred to remain a passive lurker.

Ricarda sat in front of her computer, groaning and moaning and writing nothing. When this activity became too frustrating to continue Ricarda would go online, navigate to Smutty_Claus and read a few stories. She hoped that maybe by returning to the primary source material, she would feel some sort of inspiration or gust of fervor and affection for the community. She hoped to be suddenly compelled to let the feelings flow through her fingers and magically appear on the page as her thesis. This, needless to say, did not happen. What did happen was that Ricarda would get distracted and instead of reading one story, would end up reading eight and waste all of the time she had set aside for writing. Eventually, though, the obsessive return to the works of Smutty_Claus held a gift for Ricarda. As the effects of the stories themselves wore off, Ricarda began to notice other little details that suddenly seemed meaningful. One day, in perusing the author’s notes that appear on the main page and describe the content of the story, Ricarda noticed that almost all of the authors ended their notes saying “Millions of thanks to my amazing beta for helping me pull this story together!” or “Dear (name of recipient), this story took more out of me than anything else I’ve ever written. I hope you like it!”

Ricarda wasn't alone! Her fellow fans also had trouble turning their thoughts in to words! For a community that depends on writing to function, Ricarda was initially shocked that the writers of the community also had trouble generating written works. But perhaps they too were having the same problem as Ricarda—the prospect of using writing to perform their identity with the specific goal of the performance being judged by someone else was daunting. For Ricarda writing her thesis and the authors of Smutty_Claus writing their story-gifts, the writing itself was what was being judged. The call to perform using written words was undeniably scary. When Ricarda wrote emails, blog posts or journal entries, the focus was not on the words she generated but their ability to help her sort through parts of her life or communicate information to her friends and family. But when writing was the act of creating the analytical inscription of social discourse that Geertz references, it becomes a mode of performance unto itself.

Writing, Ricarda came to realize, was her only way to make the fantasy world Smutty_Claus allows authors to create “real” to everyone who was not a part of the community. In Geertz' words, “...anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens...” (1973:18), and Ricarda wanted the anthropological community to literally be able to read about what happens in a world where all she had done was read. The effects that Smutty_Claus has on people are turned in to something “real” when they are written and posted. The fantasies go from existing, intangible in the deepest recesses of our brains to an existence as a tangible object that can be distributed and analyzed, immortalized or destroyed. This idea of writing for an audience, therefore, is inherently performative—it is about an author using her fingers to create words and meaning that will then get up on the stage and perform, for anyone who cares to read it, who the author

is and what she believes. Every writer is the creator of his or her own written world; we have the power to decide how to encode our own—or other people’s—fantasies or all to see. In trying to write as a way of explaining Smutty_Claus so that others could pick up the tangible document and read it, Ricarda was not just a writer, she was a performer, or creator of a world. No wonder the task of writing up her experience was daunting—Ricarda hadn’t anticipated that, at age 21, she was to become a creator of worlds!

This makes the writer-creator, like the anthropologist, something of a voyeur. She must “watch” the fantasy to understand it, but with enough objectivity to transform its raw emotional and visceral content into the tangible word. In this sense, Geertz was correct in identifying the act of writing as the most important task of the anthropologists (1973:19). There is the anthropologist-as-voyeur, the liminal figure who semi-participates in culture through intimate yet critically detached observation. Then, there is Geertz’s anthropologist-as-meaning-maker, the privileged, initiated expert who has achieved the necessary qualifications and capabilities to “read” culture in its raw, lived form and turn it in to something that can be literally read by others. This creator of worlds is charged with turning the culture of the community in to written words that can be consumed by others without the consumer ever visiting the community itself.

“‘It’s just hard’ Harry said finally, in a low voice, ‘to realize he won’t write me again’”
Harry to Albus Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Writing as a performance of personal identity is not unique to Smutty_Claus, nor to academia. In the context of virtual communities, writing is really the only way people come to understand each other. The communities do not interact face-to-face, but through blog posts, stories, instant messages and e-mails. Therefore, all interaction in the

community is deliberately and (at least theoretically) pre-meditated. As Henderson and Gilding discuss in their study of online communication, people have the ability to make sure they come out sounding like the type of person they want to perform (2004: 496). Participants in online communities have time to consider what they say and can choose to “edit” themselves by presenting only those facets of their personality which they consider flattering or which they think the other people they communicate with will like. This means that sometimes people can choose to deliberately portray a version of themselves which would otherwise be taboo in “normal” society. Henderson and Gilding discuss an example of a man who used the Internet and online communities as an outlet for his anger problems, preferring to let out his frustration on people he met online instead of people he had to see face-to-face every day (2004:496).

However, as Henderson and Gilding explain, and as Ricarda experienced, more often the Internet leads to hyper-personal communication, or sharing that surpasses the boundaries for how much information people share about themselves with others. The relative anonymity offered by not having to look someone in the eye meant that people were frequently more willing to share personal details than they would be with people in their “real” lives. This parallels Ricarda’s experience writing in her journal. Because she did not have to immediately answer to the judgment and critique of other people when she wrote in the journal, it became a space where she was willing to express herself more fully and be “uncensored” in her performance of her beliefs. Perhaps the people who write for Smutty_Claus are more willing to explore their sexual fantasies there than in their “real” lives. If someone in the community thinks they are a total freak or have really weird turn-ons and desires, the author won’t necessarily know, and won’t have to face the

judgment of the other members of the community. Occasionally members of the community do post comments that suggest that they found a particular story strange in its pairing or setting, or people may express that something “didn’t work for them, but all the power to you for trying”. In real life, trying something new in bed and being told it doesn’t work is a painful rejection. This rejection is exactly what scared Ricarda in her hook ups with boys before Lawrence. The feeling of comfort she felt with him seemed to be the deciding factor in making her willing to be open about what they did. But in Smutty_Claus, this same kind of rejection of a preference can simply be read as a different preference in writing style and is easily ignored.

The nature of the Internet allows the people who convene there to, in a super-organic manner, abandon the social facts of “normal” society and create a community that operates under different social conditions. Social facts are defined by Durkheim to be external influences that operate on members of society and cause them to act, think and even feel certain ways that fit with the norms of the group (1962). Social facts operate as the unspoken rules that govern a societal body, in which the social facts exist in each of the parts because they exist in the whole (1962). Perhaps it is actually the nature of a smaller, like-minded group like Smutty_Claus that has allowed for the removal of many social taboos, because, according to Durkheim, typically inoffensive groups can commit unthinkable atrocities when individual members fall under the influence of the group (1962). While Ricarda certainly doesn’t consider enjoying sexually explicit material an atrocity, Durkheim’s point seems to be that under the influence of a group, social expectations can far overreach the dominant social facts. Furthermore, the space of the group has also allowed members to transcend the taboo on adults participating and

immersing themselves in fantasy worlds. The social facts of the community in Smutty_Claus form a set of super-organic norms of behavior transmitted from member to member by education and even fixed in writing (Durkheim 1962). Every member who chooses to associate with the community must accept that the space of the community operates under different conditions than “real” life. Members who choose to stay in the community are educated in what the rules of the community are by experiencing the community and reading the “Rules and Guidelines” posting.

And again, we’re back to the question of why. Why would people deliberately abandon their “real” lives for periods of time to immerse themselves in worlds driven by fantasy, even though this activity is taboo in “normal” society? Well, because the world of fantasy offers participants possibilities that do not otherwise exist. As Joanna Russ suggests in her discussion of women who write sexually explicit fan fiction, “The writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can’t do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen” (1985: 90). Experiencing the community of Smutty_Claus is akin to being magically handed a space where the participant can make the mini-world operate under whatever rules he or she likes; as the author have the ultimate authority.

Creating a world through writing is not just about creation and exploring fantasies, it’s about autonomy. As we saw in chapter three, especially for women, and more generally for just about anyone who does not identify as a heterosexual white male engaged solely in penile-vaginal intercourse, the world of sexuality is often a place where autonomy and the right to control access to pleasure is socially taboo. For these people, who are disenfranchised in their access to pleasure by the constraints of “normative”

society, the fantasy world offers perhaps a more fulfilling view of life. In the words of Joanna Russ, "...fantasy isn't just a vicarious substitute for real experience; its meaning as experience becomes changed when it's made in to fantasy" (1985:88). Similar to the ways in which mimetic imagination crucially makes children's exploration of fantasy literature a formative part of their development, writing fan fiction and turning fantasy into specific forms of reality makes the very meaning of experiencing the world different for authors. As we saw in chapter three, there is a disconnect between the vast cadre of pleasurable sexual activities that are possible and the subset of activities which are considered normative. Fantasy spaces allow for the subset of pleasurable activities to be expanded to fit the needs of the fantasizer. Writing sexually explicit fan fiction can stand alone as a way for the authors to create a more fulfilling world in which to live. Therefore, it stands to reason that writing as a part of a community of authors and readers who also wish to change the parameters of "normal" society has to potential to have an even greater effect on the enrichment of participants' lives.

As Henderson and Gilding showed, the hyper-personal dimension of communication in virtual worlds facilitated creation of trust between participants and led them to feel more fulfilled in their "real" lives via their virtual experiences (2004). The idea of a "virtual" way of communicating arose with the rise of virtual mass media, which allowed people to share ideas even when they were not face to face (Boellstorff 2008:36). Before there was virtual technology, people interacted literally facing one another. Early participation in virtual communities involved video games that allowed players to interact or play "against" one other person. The communication was "virtual" because it was achieved through simultaneous contact with a third party non-human agent

(the gaming console.) Metaphorically, these two-player video games generated an image of “community” as of the two players standing in front of a mirror, where their joint image is projected back to them via the mirror. As technology developed, simultaneous play from different locations allowed for contact not just at a virtual technology, which is the situation faced by gamers playing 2-person or multiplayer games, but through a virtual technology, which is possible with the Internet (Boellstorff 2008). This difference, the change in the physical and ideological positioning of people in the context of others, is huge. Multi-player games allowed multiple people to interact from widely varied locations as if they were standing side-by-side, with the game serving as a sort of



Figure 4- Harry in front of the Mirror of Erised

metaphorical mirror that reflected both their individual identities and joint image back to each of the players. The Internet and the online communities that exist within it have the power to enchant this metaphorical mirror. Interacting through online blog communities is like standing in front of the Mirror of Erised.²⁰ Participants

engage with their community by sitting

alone in front of their computers, often in silence. This is akin to standing alone in front of the mirror, because there is no definitive “other” interacting simultaneously. Yet from this solo perspective, the member of the online community receives projected back

²⁰ Harry Potter discovers the magical Mirror of Erised, which allows the viewer to see their heart’s deepest desire (“Erised” is “desire” backwards, or reflected upon itself) during his first year at Hogwarts. When Harry first looks into the mirror, he sees himself surrounded by his deceased parents and family members, the community he lacks but most desires.

around them an image or idea of the community he or she most desires, an image so realistic we have come to take it as truth (see Figure 4).

The assumption of truth in the projected image of a community around a virtual participant indicates that virtual communities are beginning to pass out of the liminal stage of their inception, where they are “unstructured” or “rudimentarily structured” groups of people to the kind of “structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system” we have come to recognize as modern and highly evolved civilization (Turner 1969:96). Early critiques had focused on the fact that online communities took away from the time that participants could have spent creating “real” relationships in the “real” world, and this was viewed as having a detrimental effect on society (Henderson and Gilding 2004). But now, when a participant in a virtual community logs into her site and sees projected back to her a community of like-minded people who share a specific culture, set of values and way of looking at the world, we must accept that though she may be alone in front of her computer screen, she is not alone any more than we are alone as we walk around in our tangible daily lives. Turner cites Martin Buber as explaining community in similar terms—“Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou. Community is where community happens” (Buber 1961:51 cited in Turner 1969:127). For the members of Smutty_Claus and other online communities based on blogging, the community happens in the technological platform provided by the blog and on each individual’s computer screen, which is linked through the remote capabilities of the Internet, to all the other user’s computer screens.

Though the community that exists in this virtual Mirror of Erised is imagined, its effects are very real. Members of these virtual communities can exist in the world with the secret knowledge that they belong to a group of people who affirm their beliefs and values. Through these groups, members of online communities are able to create virtual lives that are infused with influences from the fantasy worlds they love. Mostly free from the regulating influences of the market, these communities allow fantasies to flourish under nothing but the influence of the people directly consuming the fantasies. Communities of people who live on the border of fantasy and reality also exist in the embodied world and are fulfilling and meaningful influences on the lives of those who participate in the embodied fan space. But, as we will see in the next chapter, these embodied fan communities are subject to commodification and the regulating influences of the capitalist market, which fundamentally alters the way members consume fantasies and fantasy materials.

Chapter 5

Ricarda Makes New Friends

"Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open"

Albus Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

After spending months in Smutty_Claus, Ricarda could definitely sense a change in herself. She now spent almost all of her time alone, reading or writing. But on the rare occasions when she did go out, she and her friends could tell that her confidence level was much higher than it had been even a year before. Instead of being the quiet girl trying to melt in to the background of every conversation, Ricarda loved talking to different people. She laughed easily and spent very little time worrying whether people liked her. Ashley even joked that soon Ricarda wouldn't need a wingman—she would be able to walk up to a guy and introduce herself alone. Ricarda realized that her hook up with Lawrence and her newfound love of socializing made her much more comfortable in her own skin. When she first began looking at Smutty_Claus, Ricarda had been reluctant to reveal the topic of her research to anyone, lest they think she was weird. Now, Ricarda's thesis was becoming a primary topic of conversation with people in her physically embodied life.

Ricarda was shocked to discover that the more she talked to people about her research interests, the more she was able to engage with others. One day while waiting for her Arabic class to start, Ricarda began chatting with a girl named Cara. On the surface, Ricarda and Cara had nothing in common. Cara was a sophomore from the Deep South who wore a large crucifix necklace and regularly talked about her involvement in her Christian fellowship. Ricarda had initially avoided conversation with Cara because she figured Cara would look down on Ricarda's interest in sexually explicit Harry Potter

material and perhaps even try to convert Ricarda to Christianity. But that day, Ricarda mentioned that she hadn't done the Arabic homework because she was swamped working on her thesis. Naturally, Cara asked about the topic of Ricarda's research, and Ricarda decided she had nothing to lose by being open with Cara. She told her about Smutty_Claus and braced herself for a judgmental stare or condescending religious tirade. Instead, Cara squealed loudly and jumped up to hug Ricarda.

“Ohmigosh I LOVE Harry Potter! That is so cool that that's your thesis! Tell me more! What else have you looked at? You should totally come to our Quidditch practice tomorrow, I'm sure everybody on the team would be so excited to hear about this! Oh my gosh, I can't believe this is a real thesis at this university! No one ever takes Harry Potter seriously. I feel so validated!” And then Cara hugged Ricarda again.

Ricarda was a little taken aback, as were the other students also waiting for the class to begin. Not only was she shocked that the normally conservative Cara was physically open enough to hug someone she had never even talked to, but Ricarda definitely would not have guessed that Cara was on the school's Quidditch team. Ricarda had seen a few people walking around campus in “Duke Quidditch” shirts, but she didn't know that there was an actual team. As she asked Cara about the Quidditch team, Ricarda noticed that Cara began to sit straight up on the front of her chair, gesture with her hands and smile more. Cara not only played on the Quidditch team, but was the founder and president. Cara showed Ricarda bruises she received in their last match a few days ago and laughed as she recalled the story from each bruise. Ricarda was shocked about this, too. Cara definitely did not strike Ricarda as the contact-sport type, and Ricarda had no

idea that Quidditch was such a physical activity. By the time the professor arrived to start class, Ricarda could barely wait to hear more about Quidditch.

"He stood up, looking around. Was he in some great Room of Requirement? The longer he looked, the more there was to see"²¹
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

The Quidditch team and other embodied fan spaces seemed to Ricarda to be completely different from Smutty_Claus and other online blog communities. The grown-ups who mostly populated these embodied fan communities clearly transcend the taboo against adults publicly engaging with fantasy. Sure, participating in a college Quidditch team or even visiting a Harry Potter theme park is more a form of escapism or temporary pleasure than the experiential knowledge children (and Don Quixote) gain from fantasy. Still, Ricarda felt that running around a field with brooms between their legs and chasing a runner dressed in gold spandex was not a normative athletic experience. In Ricarda's experience (and she had considered herself an athlete for most of her life), athletics is about self-discipline and pushing the body to its furthest limits. She had come to understand that her participation in athletics was not simply about training the body but about performing certain types of bodily feats and even perhaps performing gender, race and class²². But a lifetime of exposure to professional athletics and hyper-competitive school teams had taught Ricarda to believe in the importance of winning, extrinsic rewards and bureaucratization in popular sports (Crone 1999.) Within the context of

²¹ After willingly sacrificing himself to Voldemort, Harry wakes to find himself in a dream-like space. The place is mostly devoid of sensory material. However, with each moment he spends there, it materializes around him.

²² David Rowe (1998) discusses the importance of analyzing class, gender and race in sports sociology in the article "Play Up: rethinking power and resistance in sport". His commentary on the appropriateness and adequacy of these three lines of study in relation to sport mirror Ricarda's own academic experience studying sport sociology in classes.

Quidditch teams across the country, the emphases on winning and bureaucratization through the efforts of the governing body, International Quidditch Association (IQA), are growing, creating a tension between the stated goals of the IQA and the lived reality of athletes on Quidditch teams.

The IQA is a registered non-profit organization that oversees Quidditch teams, organizes tournaments such as the World Cup, and helps new teams get started. It defines its mission as follows:

1. To Govern and Facilitate Competition

The IQA will govern the league by maintaining and distributing a standardized rules set, and facilitate competition by organizing matches and tournaments to increase opportunities for competitive play.

2. To Promote the Sport of Quidditch

The IQA will work with various media and arrange for demonstration matches to showcase the sport to a wider audience and attract new participants and supporters.

3. To Support and Connect the Quidditch Community

The IQA will serve as a communication resource for Quidditch teams worldwide, helping to connect teams, share news, and keep fans informed.

4. To Create Magical Communities through Outreach Efforts

The IQA will utilize its worldwide network of teams to organize civic events to build and improve communities (IQA “Our Mission”, 2011.)

According to Cara, the IQA is currently seeking to make Quidditch an NCAA sport. As Cara understands the process, there needs to be at least 200 registered teams on college campuses nationwide; currently the IQA has around 60 teams on record. However, given that the first World Cup occurred in 2006 with only 12 teams in attendance (IQA “History of the Sport” 2011) the league is growing remarkably fast, and NCAA recognition is a legitimate possibility within just a few years. The mission statement and rulebook released by the IQA and their rapid recruitment of official teams

are evidence of the increasing bureaucratization of Quidditch. Should Quidditch become an NCAA sport, the game would be subjected to the national guidelines of that already well-established organization, which would likely radically change the atmosphere of the game.

The athletes on the Quidditch team are, as we will see, focused on these aspects of their sport, as well as their physical performance. But Quidditch matches have a level of quirkiness and fun that Ricarda does not remember feeling during her games or competitions. From what Cara described to Ricarda, Quidditch matches are not just a performance of athletic prowess but a theatrical performance of fandom and community. Though this lighthearted feeling of camaraderie and childlike play is in danger if the sport continues to move towards increased bureaucratization and emphasis on winning, for now it seems that this embodied fan community had found a way to straddle the line between fantasy and reality in a way that was fulfilling to both participants and onlookers. Ricarda set up a lunch date with Cara to try and understand how Cara and the other members of the Quidditch team had come to rest so easily on the border between fantasy and reality, when Ricarda felt like living her life in this liminal space was nearly impossible.

The girls met up on a Friday afternoon in a popular campus eatery, and Cara immediately began chatting to Ricarda. She was insatiably curious about what Ricarda had found in Smutty_Claus, and probed her about the pairings Ricarda liked best and the other sites she read. They spent quite a while debating the merits of next-gen and

Marauder-era fics,²³ both concluding that they liked feeling like the magical world continues. This led them to discuss how they first discovered the novels, and what their experiences have been with the books and fandom since then. Like Ricarda, Cara was an avid reader as a child. Her mom owns a bookstore so, like Ricarda, Cara was one of the first in her town to read the novels. She also instantly fell in love with the magical world and the characters that inhabit it. For Cara, like Ricarda, the transition to college life was not easy, and she too turned to the fantasy world of Harry Potter to help her make sense of her new world. However, whereas Ricarda turned inward and simply read the books, Cara turned her fantasy world outward.

Shortly after arriving at Duke, Cara saw a sign for Duke Quidditch. Thinking this would be a great “crazy, typical college experience”, she searched for the group on Facebook. She was dismayed to find that the group was struggling and about to disband simply because one of the original founders failed to complete the paperwork on time. As a self-described natural leader, Cara immediately seized upon the opportunity to make the Quidditch team a thriving reality. She filled out the paperwork and began a hefty advertising campaign that involved posters and tabling in popular locations on campus. Within a year of arriving at Duke, Cara had grown the Quidditch team from a scraggly group of friends to a booming success. The email listserv now reaches about 250 people. Even Cara was overwhelmed when 100 people showed up to the first public practice. She credits this high involvement to the fact that Harry Potter has an extraordinarily large fan

²³ “Next-gen” refers to stories that focus on the children of Harry and friends; Marauders-era refers to fics about Harry’s parents and friends. These characters are briefly introduced in the books, but are never developed through stories. The stories make the magical world feel continuous and therefore more “real”. However, serious fan fiction communities are usually very focused on “canon”. Since there is almost no “canon” material about these characters, “next-gen” stories are sometimes regarded as being “too imaginative”.

base. Cara was frankly shocked that there were so few Duke students engaged with the Quidditch team when she arrived on campus, since she knew many Duke students who loved the Harry Potter novels and were “dorky enough to get excited” about something like Muggle Quidditch. So, she did what the original founder of the Duke Quidditch team had not done, and began to reach out and advertise the team.

Cara divides the team in to two main groups—those who participate for the athletic and competitive aspects, and those who participate because it gives them a social outlet to talk about Harry Potter and meet other fans. However, she was careful not to draw the distinction between the groups too clearly. As she said, most serious Harry Potter fans are not the most athletic people, so their interest in being involved in an athletic embodied fan community seemed out of character (a clear stereotype of bookish people, but from the pictures Cara showed Ricarda of the team, Ricarda had to agree with Cara’s generalization). Conversely, people who were only interested in an athletic team sport could easily just join a club or intramural soccer or basketball team; therefore even those who were among the most athletic and competitive members of the team were also obviously interested in being a part of an embodied fan community.

The “more sporty” group is comprised of 20-40 people who must attend at least two practices per week. Team members also must attend a mandatory meeting to familiarize themselves with the rules outlined in the rulebook of the IQA. These are the people who compete against other university Quidditch teams and who participate in the sport seriously and as a way to stay in shape. Aside from the fact that no one can fly, the sport looks very much like a “real” Quidditch match at Hogwarts would, according to

Cara. The IQA rules of the sport, sometimes called Muggle Quidditch, are based on the rules outlined in the Harry Potter books. The IQA also relies on rules and practices from soccer and dodgeball as necessary. Thanks to the help of the IQA and members of the competition team, the Duke Quidditch team is now seeking Club Sport status, which would entitle it to University funding. They are coached by a Duke student who used to play on the varsity football team. He is not actually a Harry Potter fan, but he went to one of their matches to support a friend on the team. After watching the Duke team get slaughtered, he volunteered to coach them and help them increase their athletic legitimacy. At each practice, the coach has the team practice running, throwing, tackling, aiming at a target and scrimmaging. These coach-led practices reflect the emphasis on winning that Crone identified having a substantial impact on contemporary sports. Continuing Crone's line of thinking, Craig Forsyth (2004) points out that this strong emphasis on winning the competition often means that fewer team members get to play. Though the Duke Quidditch team is much less competitive than the professional and professional-level leagues Forsyth discusses, the importance of winning certainly means that participation on the Quidditch team is limited by athletic ability, as well as ability to meet the practice requirements set by Cara and the coach. Given that the IQA claims that the organization "serves to... increase athletic participation among children and young adults and bring magic to communities" (IQA "Overview", 2011) the growing emphasis on winning may be detrimental to this goal. Though the IQA is explicitly interested in promoting community and encouraging people to be active and athletically engaged, in their quest for national recognition and institutional rigor, they may be excluding fledgling teams who cannot afford to be members of the organization.

As for the other social members of the Duke team, some come just to the public practices that the team holds on the main quad every few weeks. Others mainly come to the social events the team holds. This year, Cara organized a Yule Ball²⁴ to benefit Book Aid International. She also arranged for the team to go see the premier of the 7th movie together, and convinced the movie theater to let her group be the first to enter the theaters. Cara noted that many people came to the first practices with a friend, but now “they are all like a family unit”. At the time that Cara and Ricarda had lunch, the team had a ban on discussing the books because one team member had not finished reading them. However, Cara noted that they regularly use Harry Potter references in their conversations with one another. She emphasized the benefits the Quidditch team has brought her and many of the members—benefits which parallel the four goals outlined by the IQA. They have to work together because it is a team sport, which Cara (and the IQA) sees as an inherently beneficial activity. Through their t-shirt sales, the Quidditch team has raised money for new equipment; the 500 shirts sold have done wonders to increase awareness about the Quidditch team on campus. Through competition, the members of the Duke Quidditch team have met Quidditch players at other schools, and they plan to travel to New York City in Fall 2012 for the IQA World Cup. Finally, as events like the Yule Ball show, the Quidditch team is invested in social action and community building.

²⁴ In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the Yule Ball is held around Christmastime to give students from the three schools participating in the Triwizard Tournament an opportunity to dress and up and socialize with each other outside the realm of the competition. The Yule Ball Cara organized was open to students across the Triangle area and also sought to provide a space for members of the different Quidditch teams to mix and mingle outside of the competitions.

These examples of commodification of the Harry Potter phenomenon reflect David Rowe's (2004) analysis of the importance of commodification of sport. From what Ricarda had seen on Smutty_Claus, the types of fantasy exchanged by participants in the community are less subject to commodification since their only exchange value is the trading of social pleasures. Through writing, the fantasies of the authors and artists are turned in to a sort of commodity in that their ideas and thoughts become a tangible object which gets "traded" in the Secret Santa exchange. However, in contrast with the pornography industry, the stories on Smutty_Claus are freely given, not bought and sold, and therefore should not be considered commodities as defined by Marx but exchanges of social pleasures. In its inception as a sort of grassroots organization for the intercollegiate exchange of social pleasures such as athletic competition, Quidditch also initially resisted commodification. The fledgling teams seemed to fulfill the ideal of a proletariat retaking of sport from industry and function as a sort of "nonmonetized spontaneous play" (Rowe 2004:243.) Even as the league began to bureaucratize, Quidditch teams were able to maintain a position of opposition to normative culture. The sheer fact that the sport has its origins in a fantasy novel gives it a permanent position on the border between fantasy and reality. Quidditch teams therefore serve as an effective tool to mediate between the core and periphery (Rowe 2004:243) by shunning the normative taboo against adults engaging with fantasy; athletes on Quidditch teams, who are often avid Harry Potter fans, are able to partake in competitive athletics and ignore the taboo against adults in fantasy worlds without falling victim to the regulating influences of normative society.

This legitimized embodiment of some of the fantasy world of Harry Potter makes Ricarda wish she had discovered Quidditch earlier. As an athletic Harry Potter fan, she

felt this would have been a great way for her to connect with other likeminded people. Just from this one lunch together, Ricarda and Cara became instant friends. They began to talk about things other than Harry Potter before class, and Ricarda delighted in being able to offer some big sister advice to Cara. They ran in to each other while waiting in line for the opening of the 7th Harry Potter movie, and Cara invited Ricarda and Ashley to sit with the team. Instead of worrying about looking dorky, Ricarda delighted in admiring the details of Cara's Luna Lovegood costume²⁵ and talking to the other members of the Quidditch team about what parts of the book they thought would get cut from the movie. The feeling of instant community was undeniable, and wonderful. For the first time since she began her research, Ricarda felt like she didn't have to hide her love of the novels. In fact, being a Harry Potter fan seemed to be a way to open doors for new friendships.

"McGonagall had replaced the House tables, but nobody was sitting according to House anymore: All were jumbled together, teachers and pupils, ghosts and parents, centaurs and house-elves"

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

The IQA is clearly increasingly trying to legitimize the sport through efforts to set and enforce nation-wide regulations. This tendency towards increased organization in new sports usually leads either to institutionalization (in this case, being chartered as an NCAA sport on college campuses) or decline (Forsyth 2004:130.) Cara seems to be in favor of such bureaucratization because it would give her team and others like it financial resources and greater access to opportunities to play than are currently available to them. The bureaucratization and recognition of Muggle Quidditch as a regulated and even NCAA-recognized sport also would be a major step in acknowledging the cultural

²⁵ Luna is often described as an ethereal blonde with a penchant for very strange clothing items such as radish earrings, crazy glasses and anything yellow.

salience and importance of the Harry Potter phenomenon in the beginning of the 21st century. As we saw in chapter two, mainstream society often looks down upon those adults who continue to engage in a significant way with fantasy worlds after childhood. Should Quidditch be recognized by a substantial commercialized enterprise such as the NCAA, this would represent a major shift in the open recognition of the importance of this fantasy world to adults. As Cara's initial reaction to Ricarda's thesis makes clear, this kind of official sanctioning of the importance of fantasy is rare; "serious" institutions like Duke and the NCAA have the opportunity to validate an important experience for thousands of people.

Increasingly, venues are popping up acknowledge and sanction the importance of the fantasy world of Harry Potter. As is clear from the increasing commercialization of Harry Potter fantasies that has followed the legitimization of the IQA and Quidditch as a sport, the potential commercial gain that can be extracted through mixing this fantasy with reality is immense. Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, has long been known for its ability to commodify and commercialize virtually any fantasy or cultural phenomenon.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, when Universal decided to add a Harry Potter-themed section to the Islands of Adventure park, the idea was an instant hit. The millions of people who had read and enjoyed the books would now have an opportunity to physically walk around an embodied space designed to recreate the magical world created by JK Rowling, and could do so without fear of transgressing social taboos. As a bastion of United States commercialism, there is probably no more powerful institution for the legitimization of a cultural phenomenon than Universal Studios. Excited by the idea of

²⁶ Just within the Islands of Adventure theme park that is home to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter there are sections dedicated to Dr. Seuss, Jurassic Park, Pop-Eye and SpiderMan.

being able to literally see the magical world of the books and curious about the hype that was generated about Universal's new park, Ricarda recruited Ashley to take a trip with her to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Walking around the Wizarding World of Harry Potter was a physically confusing mix of fantasy and reality. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a relatively small section at the back of the Islands of Adventure Park in the Universal complex. Though it was the beginning of October, the weather was warm and sunny. Ricarda was sweaty and suntanned in her cotton t-shirt and shorts. While rubbing more sunscreen on her arms, Ricarda had her first glimpse of Hogsmeade. Walking through a large set of fake stone gates with a cast-iron sign reading Hogsmeade – "Please respect the Spell Limits," Ricarda and Ashley were immediately treated to a view of the fake-snow-covered roofs of Hogsmeade and a replica of the Hogwarts

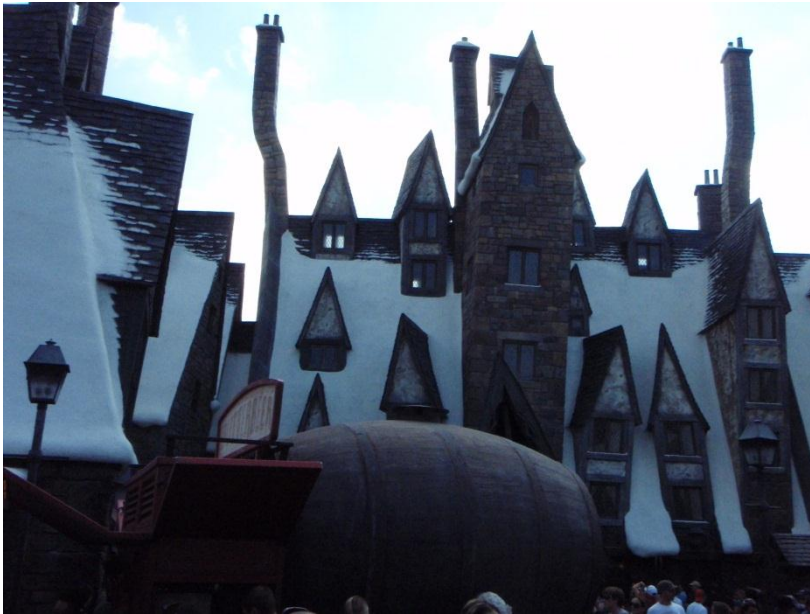


Figure 5- The snowy rooftops of Hogsmeade

Express (see Figure 5). After squealing and jumping up and down for a few minutes, Ricarda asked Ashley to take a picture of her in front of the Hogwarts Express train. She pushed past the dozens of other tourists

attempting to get the same shot and grinned at the camera. With her first Potter World picture under her belt, Ricarda pushed back to Ashley. She wanted to take a few minutes to just stand there, look around, adjust to being in the space and generally get a feel for

the park. Unfortunately, the rush of people and the excitement and impatience of the crowds required that they plunge right in.

The girls headed to the Triwizard Tournament ride, a rollercoaster that was supposed to simulate a dragon ride. The costumed attendant informed them in a thick, fake British accent that they were required to deposit their bags in one of the nearby lockers. After pushing through more crowds to reach the lockers, Ricarda read the operating instructions and pressed her finger onto a special pad which identified her fingerprint and automatically linked a locker to the fingerprint. They shoved their stuff into the small space, which was emblazoned with a medallion identifying the locker as number 579 in the Harry Potter typeface used in the books. The line for the Triwizard ride snaked through the dungeons of the castle before depositing them in a stone-lined atrium with a maze of lines and barriers, typical of Universal Studios. After a brief but adrenaline-inducing ride, Ricarda scanned her finger on the screen again to open her locker.

It was getting close to noon and the already-large crowds were mounting. Ricarda and Ashley walked quickly to the back of Harry Potter World to get in line for the main attraction, a simulated ride/tour of Hogwarts Castle and the Forbidden Forest. They deposited their bags in another fingerprint-protected locker and walked through another gift shop to get in line. This time Ricarda decided to rebel against the rules and keep her camera with her. This proved to be a great decision, as she was able to pass the hour or so waiting in line taking pictures of the surroundings in another underground labyrinth of castle passages. During the long, slow walk, the girls encountered doors marked “Potions Classroom” and “Kitchens”, and signs marked “No Muggles Allowed” to keep park

visitors from entering certain passageways. There were also replicas of artifacts from the castle such as the Sorting Hat and the hourglasses that recorded house points. These clever decorations added to the confusion between the crowded, commercialized park and the fantasy world of Hogwarts that it was supposed to mimic (See Figure 6).

After about 250 yards of tunnels snaking through a seemingly endless underground dungeon area, the girls emerged into the hot, sunlit, outdoor part of the line, in the “greenhouses”. They were immediately greeted by a woman, also costumed and speaking in a thick, fake British accent, who asked if they



Figure 6- The "Sorting Hat"

would like to purchase a bottle of Heineken, Sam Adams or Miller Light. This struck Ricarda as quite odd. She had once again assumed that because Harry Potter is a children’s novel, a Harry Potter theme park would be child-centered. By this time, Ricarda should have known better than to assume anything about the Harry Potter fan community. Yet a beer truck selling American beers in the middle of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter struck Ricarda as incredibly weird. The beer cart was doing remarkably well. Their market seemed populated not by parents who were trying to use alcohol to escape the doldrums of spending a day in Harry Potter world with their children but the other college-age and young adults in line. As she began to ponder this, Ricarda noticed that there were very few children in line and in the park itself. Ricarda

and Ashley had gone to the park on a Sunday over Columbus Day weekend, when children should be free, but they seemed almost conspicuously absent. The groups of 20- and 30-somethings buying beers to cool down and pass the time waiting in line seemed to be the target consumers for the park.

The beer cart and the height requirement on all the rides made it clear that the Wizarding World of Harry Potter was not really meant for children – at least not children in the target age for the Harry Potter novels. The park seemed to be more about the physical pleasures associated with a visit to a special theme park. Drinking beer in the middle of the day and openly proclaiming ones' knowledge of Harry Potter minutia are not usually accepted for adults in “normative” society. However, the space of the park made it possible for temporary visitors to abandon normative social facts and operate under the expectations of this new group. Likewise, the adrenaline rush afforded by rollercoasters was technically the same as that offered by driving too fast or engaging in other reckless behaviors. However, while reckless, adrenaline-seeking behavior is usually illegal, it is both legal and encouraged in a theme park.

Specific to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Ricarda felt that the broad appeal of an amusement park made it possible for “adults” to publicly enjoy a fantasy space. Many of the young adults in the park likely read Harry Potter as children and felt the societal pressure to abandon the novels as they grew up, just like Ricarda. However, sanctioned by the immense capitalist engine of Universal Studios and positive reviews in major media outlets, visiting the park and immersing oneself in the fantasy world could be viewed as completing “adult” norms. The near-obsessive attention to detail in creating the park (JK Rowling even consulted on the plans and gave everything her OK) was

impressive and important to creators and visitors. The park designers recognized the importance of this fantasy world to potential visitors, and strove to make the physical embodiment of the fantasy as “realistic” as possible. However, by filling the park with commercial reminders like stores and beer carts, park designers were able to reaffirm the parks’ function as a temporary space for escape and bodily pleasure.

“There was no point in worrying yet.... what would come, would come... and he would
have to meet it when it did”
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

But to focus on the ways in which the park allows grown-up visitors to continue to complete societal norms ignores the pleasure guests clearly got from visiting. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter gave Ricarda an opportunity to live with the fantasy of Harry Potter in a socially sanctioned forum. This was similar to the way the Quidditch team affected members. Running around with a broomstick between the legs while alone would quickly attract ridicule. But in the context of a Quidditch match that is also a display of athletic ability and an affirmation of the tenants that are important to other mainstream, commercialized sports, the same broomstick becomes a necessary athletic commodity. By mixing elements of the fantasy world of Harry Potter with “normative” governing bodies like Universal Studios or the non-profit IQA, these embodied fan communities could appeal to a broad variety of people. The physical space provided for the mixing of fantasy and reality allowed people to connect over shared experiences and play with their Harry Potter fantasies. Both of these activities involve “coming out” from behind the veil of anonymity afforded by the Internet by associating the vulnerable physical body with fantasy. However, within the almost-ritually sacred space of these

embodied fan communities, people are able to connect with one another and inject their lives with a little more fun and imagination.

Conclusion

Ricarda Steps Out from Behind the Veil, Again

“‘Tell me one last thing,’ said Harry. ‘Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?’
 ‘Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?’”

Albus Dumbledore to Harry in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Between my first time entering an online Harry Potter website nearly two years ago and today, a lot has happened. I’ve lost old friends and made new ones; I’ve had my heart broken and fallen in love; I’ve been frustrated by my lack of agency in the world and I have occupied major leadership positions; above all I have constantly benefitted from the broadened horizons that both my personal and academic experiences have brought me. So now it’s time for me to own up. I’ve hidden behind veils of objectivity and technological anonymity; I’ve tried to pretend that this is all just “research”; I’ve tried to maintain some semblance of critical separation from the community in Smutty_Claus and the embodied fan communities I’ve encountered. But the time has come for me to come out of the closet and admit, publicly, that I love Harry Potter. I love the books and the wonderful stories they contain. I love that the books are a consistent place I can turn to when things get tough. I love that I owe my sanity to a fantasy world created by some British woman. I love the fact that people who love the books as much as I do helped make the characters I love live on. I love that the stories these other Harry Potter lovers create allow me to see my favorite characters doing the things that I want and struggle to do in my own “real” life. I love that simply reading these stories has made me so much more comfortable in my own body. I love that the physical act of writing has made me feel autonomous and smart and competent. I love that I have a new way to connect with perfect strangers. But most of all, I love the new way that living with this fantasy world has helped me look at the “real” world around me. Because I read and

wrote, I am a different person. I can now be a critical observer of the world around me while still feeling that childlike sense of wonder and amazement at the funny details of everyday life.

Obviously I can't escape the "real" world, and I wouldn't try. I can't change that I was shy, that my mom got sick, that I succumbed to the pressures to look and act the "right" way. I can change the way I respond to these things, and in the process, I have become the confident, almost badass Ricarda I imagined. I went in to this project so full of assumptions, it's almost a miracle I was ever able to look past them. When I began researching Smutty_Claus more than two years ago, I felt the need to pretend that I found the stories just as weird as everyone else seemed to find them. I thought that since "normal" grown-ups aren't supposed to rely on fantasy to learn about the world, I needed to hide the fact that these books helped me through some really tough times. I thought it was "normal" to have a series of random hook-ups in college, and I thought I was supposed to pretend to like these one night stands. I thought I was supposed to like subjecting my body to the whims of boys I didn't know, and I thought I was weird for not wanting to have sex with each and every one of these men. I thought it was my rightful place as a woman to accept the injustices of a still male-dominated society. I thought my lack of agency and my inability to claim ownership over my own pleasure was normal and unchangeable. And somehow, in the process of writing out my stories and connecting them to the work of other scholars, I have come to realize that I was wrong about all of these assumptions. This is the great irony—though I spent the better part of two years trying to deny the importance of fantasy in my life, I have been able to live out a fantasy that has made me the person I wanted to be. It was only through continuing to look at a

community where people insist on doing things differently that I was able to learn that things could be different. I don't have to accept things as they are just because they seem normal, or normative.

And so here I am, proudly proclaiming that loving Harry Potter has changed my life for the better. Through reading fantasy books as a kid, I used my capacity for mimetic imagination to simulate making parts of the fantasy world fit with my "real" world. By acting out the adventures of my fantasy books and playing make-believe, I learned how to make myself believe that fantasy worlds could be real. Though I no longer fill my days with games of make-believe, I was lucky enough not to lose the capacity to spend time in my imagination. As I continued reading stories in Smutty_Claus like Patented Daydreams, I learned how to ignore the rules I learned from normative society and make my sexual life fit my fantasies. Reading about women like Ginny claiming autonomy over her own sexuality and insisting on hooking up in a way that was fulfilling to her taught me to do the same.

Crucially, and thankfully, I did not let my experience with Harry Potter and fantasy stop there. Though it was harder than I imagined possible, forcing myself to write about this world and the ways it changed me seemed to solidify these changes in myself. Forcing myself to remember, record and analyze moments of my life that felt significant helped me make sense of a chaotic world. Writing out my stories helped me see the bigger picture in my life. As Geertz might say, by trying to draw out the webs of significance that undergird each experience in my life, I am able to see the hammock of culture in which I lay. For example, I can see now that the pleasure I felt with Lawrence

occurred not by random chance but in relation to all my experiences with sexuality that came before.

Lawrence was not some Max or Mark, that much was always clear. But though the physical difference between the two hookups was immediately apparent, the fact that the physical aspect was affected by my emotional and mental state has only become clear to me through writing about both stories. At the time, I knew that I could rely on events that happened in a fantasy world to help me make sense of the “real” world. I also recognized that I could be a heterosexual woman and be in control of my own access to pleasure, because I had read about one of my favorite fantasy characters (Ginny) taking control of her pleasure. Untangling the web of experiences that led me to enjoy myself with Lawrence could not have happened without trying to write a thesis about Smutty_Claus. In thinking and writing about the appeal of sexually explicit Harry Potter fan fiction, I found that sex is not the only, nor even the most important part of these stories. Their appeal lies more in the build-up the author creates and the familiarity readers have with the characters. Mainstream pornography seems to jump straight to the “main event”, just as Ricarda had experienced with boys like Max/Mark. But the stories on Smutty_Claus take the time to develop a scenario and relationship between the characters before they land in bed together, which makes the sex scene at the end so much more satisfying. As soon as I identified the importance of build-up and emotional connection to the pleasurable sex acts depicted in the stories on Smutty_Claus, I was able to recognize these elements of build-up and familiarity that made Ricarda’s experience with Lawrence so remarkably good. Unfortunately, I didn’t recognize the difference at the time. I was so used to fleeing the room immediately after a hook up was over that I

did the same to Lawrence. It was only later, as I realized that I actually liked Lawrence that I regretted my knee-jerk reaction. Fortunately, I now recognize my mistake and can avoid doing the same thing twice. I can acknowledge that I was able to enjoy myself physically because I felt comfortable emotionally, which makes me confident that I can continue to experience pleasure. Accessing pleasure isn't magic, it's being aware of yourself and your needs.

Writing is a wonderful way of performing ourselves because we can become the creator of a world. It's almost magic—until I sit down to write, the page is empty and literally meaning-less. But as soon as I put my words on to the page, I have created something that I can hand to anyone I want, and they will be able to see on the page the meaning that I see in the world. Writing about my experiences with fantasy novels as a child (and college freshman) and sexuality later in college has given me a way to enact and demonstrate the autonomy these experiences helped me find in myself. Initially, I needed the anonymity and separation that the Internet and writing in general offer. I was so scared to own up to the fact that I had let fantasy in that I needed to hide behind the veil of Ricarda. Writing behind the veil of Ricarda about what I learned from this community was like a dress rehearsal for my coming out as a Harry Potter lover.

Perhaps the last and hardest part of learning to live on the border of fantasy and reality has been accepting that I might be the last one to get here. My birthday fell just around the time when I was beginning to be comfortable admitting that I still loved Harry Potter. It had become a frequent topic of conversation with basically all of my friends, so I decided to have a Harry Potter themed birthday party. I hoped people would think it was kind of funny, since they knew I like making Harry Potter jokes. I invited everyone I

knew, with no regard to whether they would think it's weird that I wanted to have a Harry Potter party in my early twenties. In total, I invited 27 people to the party, nine of whom I counted as a close friend at the time of the party. Openly acknowledging to the other 18 guests that I like Harry Potter at least enough to have a Potter-themed party felt like a big step in my coming out.

As is common now, I made a Facebook event for the party to let people know about it. Here, I began to try to cover up the fact that I really wanted this party to be a Wizarding wonder. The first paragraph of the event description was all excuses and reasons people should be able to make it to the party: "I realize this is the weekend before finals but I'm specifically having the party on a Saturday night so that we all have Sunday to recover. Plus you have plenty of advance notice to prepare. And what is another 2 hours or so on a Saturday night REALLY going to do in the long run?" I had created a "cast list" to post to the event, and explicitly told people "Dressing up and acting in character highly encouraged", "...characters were assigned because of the amusement I would get out of watching 2 people interact..." etc. I meant all of it as a joke, and thought my sarcastic tone came across in the paragraph I posted. For example, I "called out" one person, saying "in one instance the character assignment was based on an affinity for seeking out creatures others find disgusting, aka possums". I kept this person anonymous in my "call out" and referenced what had been a personal joke between me and the guest. Yet the invitee with the affinity for possums decided to identify themselves through frequent postings on the event wall relating to the possum saga, and an entire conversation sprung up on the event wall about the possum joke that involved people who were otherwise unrelated to the situation. The possum-loving guest

and the other guests who engaged with the possum saga were already willing to jump into relaxed fantasy space I created before the party even began. People clearly were reading what I was posting and taking it seriously.

A closer read-through of the event wall also shows that people were, before the party and with nothing to “gain”, taking the time to show their interest in the subject. Of the 23 postings and comments made on the event wall, spanning 12 days between when I created the event and the day of the party, 14 are directly related to Harry Potter trivia. These posts show that the guest was thinking about the party and took time to find a link, copy it and paste it to the event wall, where it would be publicly available to all invited guests. There was a definite conversational, fun feeling in the Facebook event that showed the guests’ interest and excitement about the party.

In the days leading up to the party, I was extremely concerned that no one would come. The party was two days before finals, so I thought maybe my close friends would make time for me, but no one else. I was, therefore, shocked to show up and find that 18 of the people invited, a full 2/3, made it out. In fact, all showed up fairly early, indicating that they had specifically gone out that night to come to my party, and hadn’t just rolled by after going to some other event. And, of the 18 guests, all but three wore costumes that showed thought and effort and couldn’t really be worn anywhere but the party (such as the guest who was invited to come dressed as Dobby and actually wore a pillowcase with a rope belt). In one case, a guest had actually gone out of her way to purchase new earrings to fit her character. People didn’t seem to mind when their character was not their gender (or species, in the case of the guest assigned to be Hedwig), and simply found ways to comply with the character I had assigned them as best as possible. I

actually was not dressed up as my character (Harry Potter, of course), and was pressured by the rest of the guests to draw a lightning bolt on my head with eyeliner because I was “lame” for not being in costume. I was afraid of openly admitting that I had a Harry Potter party because I love the books and not just as a joke, so I tried to dress as “normal” as possible. But the joke was on me, and I ended up being one of the only people who didn’t fit into the rules of the fantasy world I had created.

My fantasy space actually seemed to be enlivening the party beyond my wildest dreams. Few people knew each other beforehand, and I had always assumed that because Duke can be cliquy, no one would mingle or be willing to be even a little “different”. Again, my assumption was just so wrong. All these costumed strangers walked around all night speaking in British accents and talking to people whose characters would have been friends (or enemies) with theirs. Everyone even seemed delighted with the presence of Butterbeer and Firewhisky instead of the usual 21st birthday party fare of cheap, generic alcohol.

Given that I fully expected that no one would show up, I had hoped, at best, that people would make funny jokes about how I was obsessed with Harry Potter and the event would otherwise proceed like any other normal 21st birthday party. I certainly did not expect that anyone would come in costume, talk in an accent all night, or make an effort to get to know someone they weren’t friends with because one person was supposed to be Ron Weasley and the other was supposed to be Hermione Granger. I think this party and the fantasy space I created with my Harry Potter theme gave my friends the opportunity to be “dorky” for a night without risking their social status or worrying about what everyone would think of them. Like the almost ritually significant spaces of the

Duke Quidditch pitch and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, my party gave people who were otherwise not invested in the Harry Potter fan community an opportunity to try mixing fantasy and reality by dressing up and displaying their trivia knowledge. I also think it gave people a chance to try on a new identity. Obviously I like all my friends for who they are, and mostly tried to assign characters that would fit people's personalities. But it seemed like the people who were assigned to be characters like Hedwig, Snape and Malfoy had the most fun jumping outside themselves and acting like someone totally different, if just for a few hours. The girl I assigned to be Hedwig, for example, was someone I wasn't very close friends with but was interested in getting to know better. And the party definitely served that purpose. She fulfilled her role as Hedwig²⁷ that night by sending messages to someone I liked who was a close friend of hers. Her deciding to actually act like Hedwig and send messages for me gave me an outlet to tell her about my personal life, which was an entryway into an intimate, meaningful friendship that goes way beyond her role as a mediator; to this day she is one of my closest friends. However, without the Harry/Hedwig dynamic written in to our relationship, I don't know that I would have opened up to her or asked for her help and advice, and we might never have become good friends. In moments like this, accepting the fantasy and living it, if just for one silly night, allows people to transcend what they would consider uncrossable social boundaries. And the beautiful thing is that once those boundaries have been crossed together, it's easy to come back to "real" life and maintain the relationship that was created in the liminal space of fantasy.

²⁷ Hedwig is Harry's pet owl. In the Wizarding world, witches and wizards send mail through owls.

I will always be able to go back to Smutty_Claus and other Harry Potter fan fiction stories when I need an outlet to help me understand my life. The stories hosted on the community and the simple experience of being a part of the community (even if just as a voyeur) have made a significant impact on the way I think about myself and my relationships to everyone around me. But more importantly, I now no longer need an enchanted mirror to see my life filled with what I most desire. Through my participation in Smutty_Claus, I was able to look in to the virtual Mirror of Erised and imagine myself to be exactly the woman I wanted to be, and I was able to imagine my ideal self in a community of likeminded people. In writing out my stories and opening myself to a life filled with fantasy, pleasure and imagination, I have created for myself a new “real” life that is better than anything I, or JK Rowling, could have imagined. And that, dear readers, is magic.

Mischief Managed.

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