

Sara K. Howe; Susan E. Cook (ed.), *Representing Kink. Fringe Sexuality and Textuality in Literature, Digital Narrative, and Popular Culture*. Roman & Littlefield, 2019.

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1 By its title alone *Representing Kink* questions the notion that kink is in and of itself the representation of BDSM, leather, and latex by which it prominently is sold. Kink is always already a deviation from what is considered the norm, which lead to the normative representation we have of it today. Hence this collection of articles unravels the lens through which kink is viewed in two major ways, firstly, by engaging with a wider range of kinks not represented in BDSM and leather communities and, secondly, by analyzing fan-fictions of popular movies and TV-series, which subvert popular characters and images from the bottom-up. Instead of engaging with a top-down representation of kink, the majority of the nine articles collected in this book engage with the bottom-up expression of desire. These expressions are found in digital narratives unfiltered and uncensored by publishing houses and institutions that provide alternate readings of popular fictions. Kink, in this sense, can therein also be viewed as something already latent within popular culture.

2 Another reason that *Representing Kink* is such a thought provoking investigation on fringe sexuality, is because it puts the ethics of analysis before morals. Where morality puts principles before matter, ethics implies that one must investigate the matter to understand the principle of what one is dealing with. As the first two articles of this collection deal with the upsetting subject matter of rape role play and fantasies, the difficult analysis of these subjects give a productive evaluation of their principles topics. Analyzing rape role plays in independently published taboo erotic romances written by female authors, Sara K. Howe's "Playing Rough," shows how a difficult ambiguity of desire is in play in these fictions. Jane M. Kubiesa's "Violating the Vampire," on the other hand, looks at the rape fantasies in Twihard fan fiction (fan fiction surrounding the Twilight-franchise), providing a deeper insight into how these fantasies are structured, the narrative that carries them, and the social constructs underlying these desires, e.g. the notion of a 'animalistic' male desire and a 'passive' female desire. Both articles are highly informative for research on rape culture and researchers investigating sexuality in popular present day fiction.

3 Though the first two articles are, by topic, the most difficult to engage with, they are not the sole productive efforts of this collection. Fe Lorraine Reyes article "A Kink of One's

Own,” contrasting the prior articles, investigates how a feminist position and voice in the work of Kathy Acker uses kink to subvert patriarchal norms of desire. The last six articles go further, showing how the realm of popular culture and kink overlap and converge, rendering kink innate to the realm of popular culture. Sean Shannon’s “It’s a (Bound and Gagged) Living: *Sweet Gwendoline* and the ‘Danger Girl’ Archetype” for instance gives a perfect example of this by showing how John Coutts used the archetype of the ‘danger girl’ to illustrate images of fetish and bondage legally, evading censorship. The ‘danger girl’, a damsel in distress ending bound and gagged by enemy agents of popular spy narratives, is shown to be both a trope and an expression of a kink. Images of popular culture, therein, are shown to be more ambiguous in what they display.

4 Digital fan-fictions also create ambiguities of popular images by rewriting, kinking, and queering characters from popular movies and TV-series. Whitney S. May’s “To Test the Limits and Break Through” illustrates this by analyzing fan-fiction surrounding Disney’s movie *Frozen*, while Jonathan A. Rose’s “Breaking the Scales” does the same with fan-fiction surrounding the TV-Series *Supernatural* and the *Harry Potter*-franchise. Both articles provide excellent examples on how fans re-imagine the protagonists of these narratives in the image of their desire, by, for instance, interpreting them as gay characters. Rose’s article also evaluates fan-fiction that imagines favorite characters with ‘excess body fat,’ and attributing that characteristic with positive attributes. Kinks, by this example, are also shown to embrace attributes and desires otherwise shunned in U.S. society, enforcing a constructive self-confidence rather than a destructive feeling of shame.

5 Before evaluating this collection’s contribution to academic research, it should be said that it is not the first book to make kink its main subject matter. Ummni Khan’s *Vicarious Kinks, S/M in the Socio-Legal Imaginary* (2014) illustrates how S/M was prominently viewed as misogynistic by anti-porn feminists and how underlying that representation was a desire to victimize the S/M practitioners. Catherine Scott’s *Thinking Kink, The Collision of BDSM, Feminism and Popular Culture* (2015) likewise sheds light on this conflict on a superficial level, while showing the representation of BDSM in popular culture. Ariane Cruz’s *The Color of Kink, Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography* (2016) investigates the features of race play in BDSM and pornography. The focus of these three monographs is limited to the field of BDSM, the cultural discourse surrounding porn, and feminist discourses putting both these expressions of desire into question.

6 *Representing Kink* stands out from these monographs on three accounts. Firstly, it takes digital narratives of fan-fiction into account and, therefore, self-articulated desires rather than

marketed representations, secondly, by not limiting its investigation of kink to the realm of BDSM, and, thirdly, by showing how kink is not the polar opposite of popular culture but a potential laying latent within it. This, overall makes *Representing Kink* an outstanding collection of articles that, by taking digital narratives into account, opens up a whole new avenue of research. It contributes to the research fields of queer theory, sexuality studies, feminist studies, literary studies, and porn studies by showing how kink encompasses the creative, subversive force of desire capable of transforming normative images of the self. Understanding kink as swerve, i.e. a motion, rather than through the legal definition of deviancy, *Representing Kink* provides a deeper understanding of desire that is refreshingly new and highly educational.