Sadomasochism as *Make-Believe*

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In Rethinking Sadomasochism*, Patrick Hopkins challenges the "radical" feminist claim that sadomasochism is incompatible with feminism. He does so by appeal to the notion of 'simulation.' I argue that Hopkins's conclusions are generally right, but that they cannot be inferred from his 'simulation' argument. I replace Hopkins's 'simulation' with Kendall Walton's more sophisticated theory of 'make-believe.' I use this theory to better argue that privately conducted sadomasochism is compatible with feminism.*

INTRODUCTION

Some philosophical positions have ramifications beyond the classroom and the lecture hall. Those views that label themselves 'feminist' are a case in point. While some views may deal solely with the immutable truths of the universe, feminists, to some extent, must deal with the "real world." They must deal with a world in which women (as a gender, sex, social caste, or whatever) are contingently and arbitrarily<1> disadvantaged by the attitudes and actions of individuals and society at large. Feminists must therefore deal with practicalities as well as abstractions. Whereas solipsists may abandon their solipsism outside of office hours, true feminists must act like feminists. Being a feminist entails behaving in a manner compatible with feminism. What exactly behaving in such a manner involves is a matter of much dispute.

A notorious example of such a dispute is that concerning the compatibility of feminism and sadomasochism (SM). Sadomasochist feminists<2> argue that SM is perfectly compatible with, and perhaps even beneficial to, feminism. Feminists opposed to SM argue that SM represents another vehicle for patriarchy, replicating hierarchical relationships along gender lines. For some, this debate may seem unimportant. For those involved, this debate is of the utmost existential significance. If SM and feminism are incompatible, then the sadomasochist feminist is faced with a grave choice: suppress your sexual preferences or chuck feminism.

Alternatively, live hypocritically. Likewise, if SM and feminism are compatible, then anti-sadomasochists face a serious revision of their philosophical and practical commitments.

I argue that private acts of SM are indeed compatible with feminism.<3> I do so by assessing arguments to the same effect put forward by Patrick Hopkins in his paper "Rethinking Sadomasochism: Feminism, Interpretation, and Simulation" (Hopkins 1997). In that paper, Hopkins offers an analysis comparing private acts of SM to acts of simulation. Though insightful, his comparison ultimately fails. I identify why his analysis fails, and suggest an alternative analysis, which replaces Hopkins's underdeveloped notion of 'simulation' with Kendall Walton's robust theory of 'make-believe.'

Before we continue, it is worth pausing to remind ourselves that if SM did indeed aid the subjugation of women, then it would be morally abhorrent. There is no way around this. If SM genuinely replicated patriarchal injustices, then it would be the duty of all morally upstanding people, feminist or otherwise, to take a stand against it—especially insofar as it is a practice that is gaining social acceptability. Of course, we are still far from establishing this or the contrary. Furthermore, it is my belief that SM does not aid the subjugation of women. It is the purpose of this paper to show why it does not.

HOPKINS ON SADOMASOCHISM

In his paper, "Rethinking Sadomasochism," Hopkins addresses this long-standing debate between what he terms "radical" and "lesbian sadomasochist"<4> feminists. Whereas radical feminists argue that sadomasochism and feminism are not compatible, sadomasochists argue that they are. In accordance with the latter, Hopkins attempts to show that the two are indeed compatible and that the radical feminist criticism of SM is mistaken.

Hopkins identifies three main arguments that radical feminists put forward against SM. First, SM replicates patriarchal relationships. Put simply, in having a dominant and submissive sexual dynamic, SM is itself an act of patriarchy. Second, because SM eroticizes dominance, submission, pain, and powerlessness, (actual) consent to it is impossible. Thus, any arguments appealing to the consensual nature of SM are unsound. Third, by eroticizing sexual dominance and submission, SM validates and supports patriarchy, even if unintentionally. For brevity, I refer to this final argument as the "Third Argument."

Whereas sadomasochists previously employed libertarian arguments to counter radical feminist criticism, emphasizing the

consensual nature of SM, Hopkins instead uses the notion of 'simulation,' giving the debate a new locus. Rather than simply contradicting radical feminists by appealing to consent, Hopkins tries to undercut them by undermining their assumptions about the nature of SM. 'Simulation' portrays SM in terms of role-playing, as opposed to actual submission and violence. To illustrate the concept, Hopkins draws an analogy between participating in an SM scene and riding a roller-coaster. The former, he argues, is a simulation of violence and domination, the latter, one of death-defying, high-speed danger.

Simulation proves a very useful way of understanding SM. Hopkins uses it to counter the first two of the three radical feminist arguments outlined above, as follows. First, if SM is a *simulation* rather than a *replication* of patriarchy, then the first argument as its stands is no longer valid. Moreover, Hopkins gives us convincing reasons to think that this is in fact the case.<5> Second, if SM is a simulation, then the second argument no longer appears to apply. The second argument claims that consenting to patriarchal injustices, such as extreme submission, pain, and so on, is impossible. However, it makes no claim about the possibility of consenting to *simulations* of these injustices. Consenting to a simulation appears possible. If it is not, then the burden of proof lies with radical feminists to show why this is so.

In spite of its merits, Hopkins's simulation argument ultimately fails. Although he adequately uses the notion of simulation to answer the radical feminists' first two arguments, Hopkins fails to answer the Third Argument. Instead, he reverts to general polemics and to counter-arguments more appropriate to the old libertarian/consensual debate. Furthermore, Hopkins does not himself seem to think that an appeal to simulation can defeat the Third Argument. In Hopkins's own words, "It is not obvious that [the Third Argument] has been challenged by characterizing SM as consensual performances in contexts of simulation" (Hopkins 1997, 203). A second problem is that Hopkins does not fully support his simulative theory beyond appeals to intuition. He is not explicit about exactly what makes something a case of simulation. As a result, Hopkins leaves important questions unanswered—when exactly does an act become a simulation? What is to say that SM *does* constitute simulation? Are some simulations more morally pernicious than others? Third, there is reason to believe that the details of simulation that Hopkins does offer are not quite right. We return to this third problem later.

In this paper, I agree with Hopkins that SM is compatible with feminism. I restrict my argument to private SM role-play and make no claims about SM as used in pornography or in other widely disseminated media. I attempt to show their compatibility by

exchanging Hopkins's inadequate theory of simulation for a more comprehensive theory borrowed from the philosophy of art. Specifically, I use Kendall Walton's theory of *make-believe*. I argue that on this theory, engaging in SM scenes is relevantly similar to engaging with fictions. That is, it is relevantly similar to reading a book or watching a film, for example. As a result, I argue that if we accept Kendall Walton's theory, then the Third Argument commits radical feminists to a philosophically untenable position. In light of this position, I argue that radical feminists cannot legitimately claim that SM supports and validates patriarchy. Finally, I suggest that the Third Argument reduces to a claim about 'appropriateness'—more on this later.

In the first section, I outline Walton's theory of make-believe. In the second section, I explore SM as a form of make-believe. In the third section, I re-evaluate the Third Argument using Walton's theory. In the fourth section I offer the 'appropriate' understanding of the Third Argument—namely, that the Third Argument's claim is one of taste and appropriateness. Finally, I examine three possible problems for our solution and suggest responses to them.

KENDALL WALTON'S THEORY OF MAKE-BELIEVE

The theory Walton develops in *Mimesis as Make-Believe* is highly influential in the philosophy of art. One commentator has even suggested that following its publication, we might start referring to aesthetics as mimetics (Carroll 1991, 383). Walton's theory offers valuable contributions to several areas, including the relationship between imagination and fiction, the nature of abstract art, and the paradox of tragedy. If I am right, it also provides an invaluable contribution to at least one debate in contemporary feminism. We now examine this theory.

"In order to understand paintings, plays, films, and novels," writes Walton, "we must look first at dolls, hobbyhorses, toy trucks, and teddy bears" (Walton 1990, 11). This is the crux of Walton's theory; to engage with a work of fiction is to engage in a game of make-believe. Specifically, Walton understands fictions on the model of children's games of make-believe. However, he does not understand them as merely analogous activities. Rather, psychological engagements with works of fiction are "continuous with children's games of make-believe," in which the "representational works function as props . . . as dolls and teddy bears serve as props in children's games" (Walton 1990, 11).

A make-believe game, in the general Waltonian sense, begins with a principle of generation. A principle of generation, once operative in a social setting, prescribes rules, which determine

what one is to imagine given certain circumstances. These can be explicit or implicit (Walton 1990, 38). Two children walking along a sidewalk might verbally agree that dark paving slabs "count as" fire. This is a principle of generation. They have explicitly entered into a game of make-believe, in which it is appropriate, upon seeing a dark paving slab, to see fire.<6> Someone watching a film also enters into a game of make-believe, one in which the principle of generation is implicit. The film, like the dark paving slabs, is a prop around which one plays a game. The principle operating in this case might be: one must imagine *x* when one sees *x* depicted on the screen.<7> Thus, when we see the image of a man pulling a boat over a hill, we must imagine a man pulling a boat over a hill.

Walton's understanding of "fictional worlds" is such that props, combined with principles of generation in this way, create an 'objective' fictional realm. In this realm, there exist fictional truths and falsehoods, independently of what participants do or do not imagine. In the paving-slab game, dark paving slabs are fictionally fire. This is the case regardless of whether the participants confront any particular paving slab or not. A dark paving slab, hidden from view, is still fictionally fire in the game, even if no-one imagines it to be so. Likewise, a puddle misconstrued as a dark paving slab is not fictionally fire, even if one of the children confuses it with a dark paving slab and thus imagines fire. In this respect, imaginings and fictionality are analogous to beliefs and truth; fiction is independent of imaginings just as truth is independent of belief. Thus, just as (at least on a realist picture of truth) the statement "Germany won the 1990 World Cup" is true independently of our beliefs, so statements about fictional worlds are fictional (that is, fictionally true) independently of our imaginings. It is fictional that Humpty Dumpty sits on a wall and that Oedipus kills his father, in their respective "worlds." This remains the case, even if no-one imagines it, or someone imagines it differently.<8> In Walton's words, "props generate fictional truths independently of what anyone does or does not imagine" (Walton 2004a, 137).

As a result, some imaginings are appropriate where others are not. The principle of generation that dark paving slabs are fire implies various other fictional truths (Walton 1990, 138-44; Walton 2004c, 242). Perhaps standing on a dark slab entails fictionally dying, or holding a stick over one entails fictionally lighting a torch. For a child in the "paving slab = fire" game to stand on the paving slab and not "die" is for them to imagine inappropriately and flout the rules. Likewise, representational works of art generate implied fictional truths. Walton considers Francisco de Goya's *No Se Puede Mirar*, which depicts the victims of an execution; at the picture's edge are the tips of the firing

squad's gun muzzles. The actual firing squad cannot be seen. Walton writes:

> Yet there can be no doubt that there are soldiers (or anyway people) holding the guns. . . . It would be a willful misinterpretation, to maintain that the guns are hanging in midair. The position of the guns is responsible for the presence of the soldiers in the picture world. (Walton 1990, 140-41)

The picture implies that fictionally there are soldiers holding the guns in the world of the picture. To imagine otherwise is not to play along—to flout the rules of the game.

Walton identifies two general types of imaginative activity, deliberate and spontaneous. Whereas deliberate imaginings are calculated and somewhat artificial, spontaneous imaginings, such as we experience in roving daydreams, enjoy a greater degree of will-independence. As a result, spontaneous imaginings are often more vivid and exciting. They engage us more as spectators watching events unfold than as perpetrators, artificially contriving each successive event (Walton 1990, 13-16). Props, insofar as they generate a kind of objective, fictional realm within a make-believe game, are conducive to spontaneous imaginings. Much as the real world is vivid and engaging because it is mind-independent, so are fictional worlds that involve props.

With the theory's framework in the background, we can now divert our attention to a paradox in the philosophy of art, which Walton's theory appears to solve. This, I hope, will convince the reader of the merits of Walton's theory, as well as further demonstrate how the theory works. The paradox, which Colin Radford outlines, concerns emotional responses to fictions. If we can respond only emotionally<9> to what we believe to be true, and we know that fictional works are not true, how is it that we *do* respond emotionally to such works? (Radford 2004, 170-71).

We can present Radford's paradox as an inconsistent triad:

1) We can respond emotionally to a thing iff we believe the thing to be real.
2) We do not believe in the reality of events or characters in fictions.
3) We respond emotionally to the events and characters in fictions.

Solutions to Radford's paradox all deny one of the three statements. Before offering his own solution, Walton systematically examines each of the main solutions to Radford's

paradox, and finds them to be inadequate (see Walton 2004b, 178-81).

To explain his solution, Walton introduces Charles, who is watching a horror film about a green slime. Charles, we are told, "cringes in his seat as the green slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth." He emits a shriek as the slime turns, spots the camera, and begins moving toward the audience. Afterwards, Charles confesses that "he was 'terrified' of the slime" (Walton 2004b, 177).

Walton's solution denies the third statement of the triad. In order to do so, Walton divides the experience of emotions (in Charles's case, fear) into three necessary parts: belief, involuntary response, and behavioral motivation (Moravcsik 1993, 441). To fear something, I must first believe myself to be endangered by that thing.<10> Second, I must *feel* endangered by that thing. This involves having the appropriate physiological responses: an adrenaline rush, sweaty palms, and so on. Third, I must be motivated to act deliberately. If I fear an oncoming train, I must try to flee from its path or try to call for help, for example.

Charles, who sits "terrified" before the oncoming slime in the film, lacks the first and third dimensions of genuine fear. Though he jolts, his heart races, and his hair stands on end, Charles does not experience genuine fear. Charles lacks both the *belief* that the slime is real and the *motivation* to act. Charles does not warn his family, call the police, or flee from the cinema, nor does he feel an inclination to do so. Walton notes:

> Fear is *motivating* in distinctive ways. . . . It puts pressure on one's behavior (even if one resists) . . . to insist on considering Charles' non-motivating state to be one of fear of the slime, would be radically to reconceive the notion of fear. Fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all. (Walton 2004b, 180)

What Charles does experience—the physiological response bereft of belief or motivation—is what Walton calls *quasi-fear* (Walton 2004b, 177).

But why does Charles comment that he was "terrified" of the slime? Walton suggests that Charles's fear of the slime, including his comment, is part of a make-believe game. It is *fictional* that Charles is terrified, just as it is fictional that a green slime is bearing down on him. To understand how this works, Walton compares Charles's experience to that of a child, Timmy. Timmy is playing a game in which his father is a ferocious monster chasing after him.

> Timmy flees screaming to the next room. The scream is more or less involuntary, and so is the flight. But Timmy has a delighted grin on his face even as he runs . . . it is fictional that he is afraid. Fictionally the monster attacks; fictionally Timmy is in mortal danger . . . and when he screams and runs, it is fictional that he is terrified. (Walton 2004b, 181-82)

Walton does not mean to claim that Charles is *pretending* to be afraid, like an actor dissembling on stage to create an impression.<11> The quasi-fear sensations are very real. Rather, Walton claims that Charles is make-believedly responding (by being quasi-terrified) to a prop (the depicted green slime) in accordance with an implicit principle of generation operating in watching a film (or all films). Of course, actors too, insofar as they must imagine various states of affairs obtaining, given certain circumstances, are also engaged in a kind of make-believe game. The salient difference, however, is that whereas actors generate truths only in virtue of their behavior, Charles generates truths in virtue of his mental states. Charles, like Timmy, is a reflexive prop in a game, of whom it is fictionally true that he is terrified, just as it is fictionally true that he is being approached by a green slime. The games' props and the participants' mental states generate these fictional truths. Furthermore, Walton claims, other psychological attitudes to fictions work on the same model. When we "grieve" for Anna Karenina or "admire" Superman, we do so fictionally (Walton 1990, 249-50).

"Like any interesting theory," writes one commentator, "Walton's too leads to further explorations" (Moravcsik 1993, 443). This is what I intend to do in the next section—explore Walton's theory further, as an aid to understanding SM.

ROLE-PLAY SM AS MAKE-BELIEVE

Hopkins successfully describes SM as a form of simulation rather than replication. We can use his observations to show that role-play SM constitutes a type of make-believe game. Hopkins offers a single, intuitive argument for preferring a simulative rather than replicative understanding of SM: that it describes the practice more accurately. On the replicative understanding, SM practitioners are merely reproducing patriarchal injustices. This means that in enacting a rape scene (albeit one to which both parties have consented, in which a time limit is imposed due to other obligations, and a safe-word exists just in case it gets too intense,

and so on) the "rapist" is actually committing rape. On a simulative understanding, however, sadomasochists do not reproduce such injustices as rape literally. Instead, they merely replay "surface patriarchal behaviors onto a different contextual field." This, as Hopkins notes, makes a "profound difference" (Hopkins 1997, 196). Hopkins highlights the telling fact that sadomasochists even call their sexual practices "scenes." This, he points out, is indicative of the sadomasochists' conscious recognition that SM is simulative.

The crucial difference between SM scenes and the injustices they simulate is that the former "gut the behaviors they simulate of their violent, patriarchal, defining features," those features that cause "harm, limit freedom, terrify, scar, destroy and coerce" (Hopkins 1997, 197). The difference is reminiscent of that between quasi-fear and fear proper. Without their essential features, all that remains to link SM scenes and the injustices they simulate is a superficial similarity. But, as Hopkins notes, "similarity is not sufficient for replication" (Hopkins 1997, 196). Furthermore, he suggests, the claim that SM practitioners enjoy violence no longer holds, or, at least, requires defending. If SM is simulative rather than replicative, then its appeal may lie in the scene as a simulation, not as a watered-down form of the injustice it simulates (Hopkins 1997, 198-99). In Hopkins's words,

> The SM practitioner may find actual violence and humiliation repugnant and horrible, but finds a simulation of that event thrilling and exciting—not as stand-in, but as a goal in itself. It is simply not justified to assume that an SM participant finds real violence . . . desirable. (Hopkins 1997, 199)

Once we accept Hopkins's simulative analysis, seeing how role-play SM constitutes make-believe is easy. SM scenes involve prop-oriented fantasies, on whose details participants agree beforehand—an explicit principle of generation, we might say. Pat Califia, a self-proclaimed feminist and practicing sadomasochist, observes:

> The key word to understanding S/M is *fantasy*. The roles, dialogue, fetish costumes, and sexual activity are part of a drama or ritual . . . a sadomasochist is well aware that a role adopted during a scene is not appropriate during other interactions. . . . The S/M subculture is a theater in which sexual dramas can be acted out and appreciated. (Califia 1994, 168)

Replace "SM" with "make-believe" and subtract the sexual dimension, and we have an accurate description of Timmy and his father, cited above.

I noted earlier that Hopkins's notion of simulation might not be entirely right. One example of simulation Hopkins uses is that of actors acting out a scene on stage. Walton draws a fine line between actors dissembling on a stage and participants in games of make-believe; Hopkins does not. Hopkins's idea of simulation is largely mechanical. For him, merely imitating the actions of an actual event is sufficient to simulate it. Whether we engage psychologically with the simulation, as Charles does in the cinema, is unimportant.<12> Califia's theater metaphor would suggest that this physical conception of simulation is attractive.<13> It relegates the psychological dimension to the sidelines when this is, in fact, central in uniting different types of make-believe game into one kind. If we accept the Waltonian understanding of make-believe games, then Hopkins's likening of sadomasochists to stage actors is wrong. The two are relevantly different. Sadomasochists are participants and spectators; they are reflexive props whose psychological states generate fictional truths. Actors on stage (unless particularly caught up in their roles) are solely performers for an audience, generating truths by virtue of their behavior alone. Role-playing sadomasochists genuinely experience quasi-emotions and often show as much. Actors try to disguise their true emotions by dissembling to their audience (Walton 2004b, 182). An accurate comparison utilizing the same metaphor would be to compare SM scenes not to theater, but to the *engagement with* or *enjoyment of* theater, from the point of view of the audience.<14> An audience member's game of make-believe is dependent on her or his psychological states, just as a role-playing sadomasochist's game is.

If role-play SM is a means by which individuals enter into make-believe games, then we can assert that SM, as make-believe, is relevantly similar to other make-believe games. This includes children's games, but more importantly, it includes the enjoyment of theater, novels, and other works of representational art.

THE THIRD ARGUMENT

With the relevant similarity of role-play SM and other make-believe games established, we can now tackle the Third Argument. In this section, I argue that the Third Argument commits radical feminists to a philosophically untenable position. Recall that the Third Argument claims that by eroticizing sexual dominance and submission, SM validates and supports patriarchy, even if

unintentionally. In this respect, the Third Argument asserts that SM is anti-feminist.

As we have seen, on Walton's theory, performing an SM scene is relevantly similar to engaging with fictional works. If radical feminists accept Walton's theory *and* the Third Argument, this has serious ramifications. It appears to commit them to labeling the enjoyment of any representational work that depicts patriarchal injustice as endorsing patriarchy.<15> Obviously, this is quite a commitment. On this view, enjoying films such as Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* and Lars Von Trier's *Dogville*—films designed to make the brutality and perversity of rape tangible to their audiences—is an anti-feminist activity. But the ramifications do not stop there. Just as performing an SM rape scene constitutes an enjoyable make-believe game about rape, *Schindler's List* and *The Grapes of Wrath* constitute enjoyable make-believe games about the Holocaust and the Great Depression, respectively. By extension, those committed to this view would, it seems, have to maintain that enjoying *Schindler's List* is anti-Jewish<16> and enjoying *The Grapes of Wrath* is pro-exploitation. This is untenable.

There is, however, another way of understanding the Third Argument. Melinda Vadas, in her paper "Reply to Patrick Hopkins," does not merely claim that SM supports patriarchy, but that SM "conceptually and empirically requires the existence or occurrence of actual injustice" and that "To take pleasure in SM is to make one's pleasure contingent on the actual occurrence and meanings of rape, racist enslavement, and so on" (Vadas 1997, 216).

Again, we must stress that if Vadas (or indeed any like-minded feminist) is right about SM replicating patriarchy, then this is a very grave matter. However, it is my belief that we can counter her argument using our earlier conclusions. If SM scenes are anti-feminist because the pleasure sadomasochists derive from them is contingent on actual injustices, then the abovementioned works of fiction must be anti-feminist, anti-Semitic, or pro-exploitation also. The game into which *Schindler's List* invites us would be very different had the Holocaust not actually occurred. In such a Holocaust-less world, the same literal film would prompt different fictional truths and thus a different make-believe game. We would be asked to imagine a man named Schindler and a place called Nazi Germany much in the same way that we imagine Batman and Gotham City. In other words, we would imagine them without the backdrop of the *real* Oscar Schindler and the *real* Nazi Germany. Likewise, *Irreversible* would be a different work in a world without rape. Presumably, it would fail to excite the same indignation as it does in our world. In this way, these films are

conceptually dependent on the actual injustices they depict, too. Vadas faces the same unpalatable commitments as other radical feminists.

It is worth pointing out, furthermore, that articles written about patriarchal injustices, like the one you are reading now and Vadas's own, are also conceptually and empirically dependent on these injustices. Were conceptual and empirical dependence on patriarchal injustice (coupled with enjoyment) sufficient for condemnation, then reading and writing this paper would itself be worthy of condemnation, at least, as long as the reader takes enjoyment from reading it, as I have from writing it. Furthermore, this would be the case regardless of whether we accepted Walton's theory.

THE APPROPRIATENESS UNDERSTANDING OF THE THIRD ARGUMENT

It seems odd that a person would commit herself to such an untenable position as Vadas's. In this section, I suggest that the motivating force behind the Third Argument lies in a judgment of appropriateness. Namely, its motivation is really a matter of taste, rather than of moral right or wrong. To put it simply, radical feminists are mistaking a disagreement about appropriateness for a moral disagreement. In order to see why, we must return to make-believe games in the representational arts.

The film *Irreversible*, cited earlier, includes a rape scene that lasts nine minutes. For some, including a friend of mine who walked out of a viewing, this is gratuitous. She did not walk out because the film was overwhelming, in a way a horror film that plays on existing anxieties might be, or because it was dull. Furthermore, she did not think ill of those who saw the film through. She left solely because she believed the film was made in bad taste. Her qualm was with the appropriateness of how the film dealt with rape.

This is a common phenomenon. Jokes often seem insensitive or tasteless. This is especially true when their subject matter coincides with controversial, personal, or otherwise sensitive issues. However, such jokes are not *necessarily* morally pernicious. For example, a comedy show that ironically depicts an overt racist or a sexist (to take two controversial areas) is not therefore racist or sexist. More relevantly, bearing Walton's theory in mind, *enjoying* such a comedy does not make one guilty of racism or sexism either. In an ironic portrayal of such characters, the comedic value stems from ridiculing these characters—their offensiveness, irrationality, or lack of self-awareness—not in endorsing their views.<17> Of course, some people do take offense at genuinely

ironic comedies of this kind. At least some<18> of those people have either misunderstood the content, or possess different standards of appropriateness and taste from our own. The salient point is, however, that these standards *are* ones of personal taste. That someone finds something tasteless or inappropriate does not establish that it is immoral. To return to the first case, that my friend disapprovingly left a cinema in which people were enjoying a film depicting patriarchal injustice does not establish that watching the film supports patriarchy.

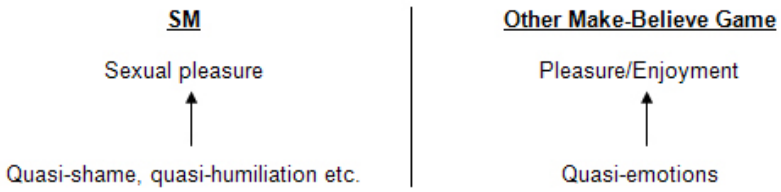
SM employs many controversial settings. Fantasies are played out through roles such as "Nazi and Jew, white and black, straight man and queer, parent and child, priest and penitent, teacher and student, whore and client" (Califia 1994, 169). Given the nature of these roles and the sexual manner in which they are played out, it is unsurprising that SM has invited attack from some feminist scholars. However, given the preceding analysis, it appears that this criticism, however intended, can be understood only along the same lines as criticism leveled at the controversial films or jokes described above. Specifically, they are criticisms of taste and appropriateness. As such, radical feminists cannot legitimately establish that SM validates and supports patriarchy. At least, they cannot do so within their current radical feminist critical paradigm. At best, they can establish that SM is inappropriate.<19>

SOME ISSUES

In this section I address three potential problems for our analysis of SM. The first concerns a possible discrepancy between SM participants' experience and the experience of others engaging in non-SM, make-believe games. The second issue concerns the fact that the pleasure sadomasochists derive from SM is specifically sexual. The third and final problem concerns one final way SM participants may inadvertently endorse patriarchy.

To begin, if role-play SM is a type of make-believe game, as we have established, then why is it that sadomasochists derive very real sexual pleasure from SM? After all, in the case of Charles and the slime, did Charles not *quasi*-fear the slime? Does this real sexual pleasure preclude SM from being a make-believe activity? We have anticipated the answer to these questions in our discussion of enjoying fictions. Remember that, though we *fictionally* fear the monster or *fictionally* grieve for Anna Karenina, ultimately, we *really* enjoy these works of fiction. To compare the sexual pleasure sadomasochists obtain from SM with the quasi-emotions one experiences when one engages with fictional works

is to draw a mistaken parallel. As such, role-play SM still constitutes a make-believe game. As the diagram below shows, the sexual pleasure sadomasochists obtain through SM does not correspond to quasi-emotions. Rather, it corresponds to the *real* pleasure one obtains in engaging with works of fiction. The quasi-emotions experienced during SM correspond to quasi-emotions experienced when engaging with works of fiction. In SM, these take the form of quasi-shame, quasi-humiliation, quasi-power, and so forth, depending on the exact nature of the role-play.



A separate possible problem is the fact that sadomasochism gives specifically *sexual* pleasure. Sexual pleasure seems more morally dubious than simple enjoyment. It is one thing to enjoy *Schindler's List*, someone might say, but it is another to derive sexual pleasure from it. This is an intuitively powerful difference. To see why, we need only compare someone who claims to like *Schindler's List* with someone who remarks that they find the film sexually arousing. However, I believe we can easily show this intuition to be mistaken.<20>

I believe we can resolve the apparent problem—that SM engenders specifically sexual pleasure—by recalling the notion of 'appropriateness.' In passing, I will suggest that gaining sexual pleasure from SM does not parallel gaining sexual pleasure from *Schindler's List*. More importantly, however, even if we accepted that the two acts were equivalent, and someone were to derive sexual pleasure from *Schindler's List*, it seems that radical feminists could still only criticize this as inappropriate, not as supporting patriarchy or some other injustice.

The make-believe games sadomasochists enter into are not any old simulations. They are simulations of a consciously sexual nature. *Schindler's List* differs from SM role-play insofar as according to the most obvious interpretation at least, it is not meant as a means to sexual gratification. As such, my intuition is that gaining sexual gratification from SM is simply different from gaining it from *Schindler's List* or *Irreversible*. Though we cannot say for certain what the creators' precise intentions were in making the films, we can safely make the general claim that they were not intended solely as pornography. Interpreting *Schindler's List* as pornography would be a substantial departure from common sense. Interpreting *Irreversible* in the same way would be to treat a clever and nuanced work in a very flippant manner. It would be akin to

interpreting an effective horror film as a comedy. Ultimately, it matters little whether the two activities—sexually enjoying SM and sexually enjoying *Schindler's List* or *Irreversible*—are equivalent. To see why, we must examine our second, more important, point.

To address the second point, let us assume for now that taking sexual pleasure from SM and *Schindler's List* are equivalent acts. Furthermore, let us imagine that someone derives sexual pleasure from *Schindler's List*. The only thing that suggests that this scenario is problematic is a vague, uneasy sense that something is not quite right—the intuition alluded to earlier. However, now consider someone responding to *Schindler's List* with mirth or laughter. This prompts a comparable uneasy feeling. Now imagine a spectator sobbing in response to a Monty Python sketch in which several characters die. A similar feeling remains.<21> It is clear that what is at play here is merely a sense that the responses in our imaginary scenarios are inappropriate. It is inappropriate to "get off" sexually to *Irreversible*, just as it is inappropriate to sob during an untouching comedy. What at first seemed morally dubious now seems only inappropriate. In stressing the specifically *sexual* pleasure sadomasochists derive from SM, radical feminists are reverting to a disagreement regarding appropriateness.

Some may even think it right to say that there is something *wrong* with the person who acts inappropriately in this way, if not in a moral sense, perhaps in a psychological one. But it is the specifically *moral* sense of wrongdoing with which radical feminists are concerned. Psychological maladjustment does not in itself entail moral maladjustment. It certainly does not entail the endorsement of patriarchal or any other injustice. To accuse someone therefore of being psychologically maladjusted, should we be so inclined, is not to implicate them as a supporter of patriarchal injustice.

We must also pause and remember that the sadomasochist and the person aroused by *Schindler's List* seem different in an important way. To see this, we must simply recall the first point made above that an SM game is specifically a sexually arousing game, whereas *Schindler's List* is not. To summarize the two points then, we can say this. Performing and obtaining sexual pleasure from SM and gaining sexual gratification from a film like *Schindler's List* or *Irreversible* do not appear to be equivalent sexual acts. SM make-believe is designed to engender sexual pleasure. To understand the films as being so designed is to entertain a strange or flippant interpretation of them. More importantly, however, even if gaining sexual pleasure from SM and *Schindler's List* were sexually equivalent acts, then radical feminists could *at worst* accuse sadomasochists of

inappropriateness, psychological maladjustment, or some other malaise. They could not use the equivalence of the acts to implicate sadomasochists in supporting patriarchy.

The third problem we identified at the start of this section is one further way by which SM participants may inadvertently endorse patriarchy. It is a way particularly pertinent to this essay, being an accusation critics often level at works of fiction. The accusation is that of "glorification." For example, films depicting the Mafia, acts of brutality, or recreational drug use in a positive light are sometimes said to glorify these things. This is a perfectly sound observation. One need only look at some forms of advertising or propaganda to appreciate this fact. With respect to the subject at hand, radical feminists might level this criticism at SM in a final effort to confirm the claims of the Third Argument. However, this tactic is as fruitless as the rest, as I now attempt to show. In order to do so, we must first examine what it means to "glorify" something. I take the enjoyment of films as representative of all make-believe games.<22>

When we speak of gangster films glorifying gun-ownership, or advertisements glorifying smoking—in the morally questionable sense of glorification—we are making at least one of two claims. Either we are claiming that the film intentionally endorses some dubious principle, or we are claiming that the audience will receive the film in such a way as to endorse such a principle.<23>

We might make the first claim with regard to old cigarette advertisements. Some are presented in the form of a tenuous story, to the effect that smoking is somehow conducive to good health. Perhaps the protagonist outshines his fellows at sporting events or successfully uses tobacco to fight off a cold more quickly. Given the fact that we know smoking to be grossly unhealthy, we might accuse these advertisements of glorifying smoking.

In the second instance, we may not believe that the filmmakers are consciously trying to endorse anything at all, and yet claim that their work glorifies a dubious principle, regardless. In fact, we may even *know* that the authors are averse to what their film purportedly glorifies. In this case, glorification involves the manner in which audiences receive the film. Naïve or foolish viewers may misconstrue a game of make-believe, into which a gangster film invites them, as somehow approving the *actual* use of weapons. This may be so despite the filmmaker's intention that the film be simply "a bit of fun." In Waltonian terms, the intention may only have been to create a world in which *fictionally* guns and violence are cool.

To show that private SM does not glorify patriarchal injustice, it will suffice to observe that it fulfills neither of these two criteria for glorification. In the first instance, sadomasochists are not trying

to push a patriarchal agenda through their SM. As Hopkins notes, sadomasochists are not attracted to *genuine* rape, battery, and torture.<24> Moreover, *feminist* sadomasochists, whose hypocrisy the Third Argument is designed to establish, naturally find such acts "evil, deplorable and repugnant" (Hopkins 1997, 198).

In the second instance, radical feminists cannot accuse sadomasochists of inadvertently engendering a belief in the naïve or foolish—at least not sadomasochists engaging in purely private role-play.<25> This kind of SM lacks the right (or wrong) kind of audience. Furthermore, specifically *feminist* sadomasochists belong to a social group that surely enjoys the greatest immunity to the forces of patriarchy—namely, feminists. The problem with such films as the gangster one described above is the thought that the film is irresponsible given its wide dissemination. With such a large audience, many young and impressionable minds may misconstrue the film to be depicting the world as it really is, or should be. This is not the case when only a few feminist individuals participate in the game privately.

Conclusion

By employing Walton's notion of make-believe, we have established a parity of type between role-play SM and engaging with the representational arts. Consequently, any claim made against SM (qua make-believe game) must be a claim against engaging with relevantly similar works of fiction. Thus, the radical feminists' Third Argument against SM is also an argument against engaging with works of fiction depicting patriarchal injustice.

Labeling SM as anti-feminist by way of the Third Argument, therefore, commits radical feminists to the untenable claim that engaging in all like works of fiction is anti-feminist. As the position is untenable, SM and feminism appear to be perfectly compatible.

Notes

I would like to thank Jennifer Saul for her unwavering help on this article. Thank you also to Robert Hopkins, my family, and my friends.

1. Arbitrary because lacking in justification, not because of chance.

2. I use "sadomasochist feminist" here merely as convenient shorthand. I do not wish to presuppose the legitimacy of being at once a sadomasochist and a feminist.

3. I restrict my argument to private acts of SM for reasons made clear at the end of the section "Some Issues."

4. I refer to all sadomasochists, as my analysis is not specific to a single group, lesbian or otherwise.

5. I examine these reasons later, in the section "Role-Play SM as Make-Believe."

6. More precisely, the two children have explicitly entered into a game in which a paving slab *is* fire. That they make-believedly *see* fire when confronted by a paving slab is an implicit principle naturally adopted once the explicit principle is.

7. In fact, Walton thinks that make-believe is involved at a logically prior stage too: in generating the fact that *x* is depicted on the screen—that the collection of two-dimensional colors and shapes represents *x*.

8. At least in the same "fictional world"—that person may have entered into a new game of make-believe in which Humpty Dumpty does not sit on the wall, but this is a different game.

9. Or "have psychological attitudes toward," if preferred.

10. Or, if not *believe*, then possess some equivalent cognitive state.

11. Walton sometimes uses "make-believe" and "pretense" synonymously. As such, my use of "pretense" differs from Walton's. I use "pretense" in its more mundane sense—a psychologically detached "acting out." In this sense, someone who is make-believedly scared by an effective horror film differs with respect to his or her psychological attitude from someone *pretending* to be (quasi-) scared by a poorly made horror film.

12. I cannot say whether Hopkins would accept watching a film as a case of simulation. I suspect, however, that it is of no great importance. As long as we establish that SM constitutes make-believe, and accept Walton's point that to engage with fiction is to perform make-believe, then we have enough to make our argument.

13. Though, of course, she does include appreciation in her metaphor.

14. Walton notes that enjoying a work of fiction and playing a child's game of make-believe differ with respect to physical participation. "Appreciators are passive, reflective, and 'distanced,' it may seem, while children are active, physical and involved" (Walton 1990, 224). Furthermore, he notes, a child's game—and, evidently, an SM one—is less restricted in terms of participants' control over prescribed imaginings. However, he successfully shows these differences to be ones of *degree* rather than *kind* (see Walton 1990, 224-29).

15. Of course, the Third Argument concerns eroticizing, not just enjoying. I address this issue in the section entitled "Some Issues."

16. Those tempted to explain the enjoyment of *Schindler's List* or similar films as the enjoyment of the fact that several of the victims are ultimately rescued would need to explain why it is that we enjoy tragedies with no triumphs or happy ending. For his treatment of this issue, see Walton 1990, 255-259.

17. Of course, some jokes are morally pernicious in a way described by the Third Argument. This is a separate but related issue, which I touch upon in the final section.

18. I am inclined to say *all* of these people. But we need not make this stronger claim to establish the appropriateness argument.

19. Clearly, radical feminists are taking issue with *something* that private sadomasochists are doing. My point is that it cannot be a moral something, unless we are to accept what is completely counter-intuitive and ignore my discussion of glorification and sexual enjoyment (later on). If radical feminists truly are making a moral objection, not one concerning appropriateness, then the burden of proof lies with them to show why.

20. We should note that there is no obvious reason why taking sexual pleasure from a make-believe game involving patriarchal injustice is any more pro-patriarchal than taking mere enjoyment. If this is the case, then the burden of proof lies with radical feminists to show why this is so.

21. The sexually inappropriate response does seem a little more "grating" than the inappropriate sobbing. I suggest this is simply because sexual pleasure remains a taboo subject and has a long history of being deemed somehow wicked.

22. I use simply "film," rather than "enjoyment of films," for brevity.

23. Representing the deontological and consequentialist ends of the moral spectrum, respectively.

24. At least, we have no reason to believe they are more attracted to violence than non-sadomasochists, until we have empirical evidence that suggests as much.

25. Again, I make no such claim about SM in published pornography.

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