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Abstract

BDSM (Bondage/Domination/submission/Sadism/Masochism) is often assumed to be automatically subversive of gender and sexual norms through its non-normative sexual practices. By deliberately or unintentionally ignoring race, there is considerable risk of the perpetuation of tacitly racist, neoliberal and hegemonic ideologies about sexuality and intimacy. In this article, I take up race play as an entry point to the implications of the practices existing at the nexus of sexuality, gender, race, and class. Specifically, how race play is raced to only include non-white bodies, as one aspect that reflects the oppressive impact of white supremacy in BDSM. With its practices of playing with hyperbolic racism, race play confronts notions of disguised racial superiority, and is, therefore, often a source of discomfort among BDSM practitioners. To highlight these themes, I examine how some of the markers of BDSM that have drawn from historical chattel slavery have been de-racialized in the process of neoliberal private desires and politically correct colourblindness.

Keywords: BDSM, Race, Kink, Bodies, Sex Studies

Introduction

“I do ‘race play’ whether or not I want to.” – Mollena Williams¹

BDSM (Bondage/Domination/submission/Sadism/Masochism) practices are often perceived to be subversive to gender and sexual norms.² Although this subversion is not always the case, there is a perception among many BDSM practitioners, that gendered power dynamics are something that can be manipulated in play. Despite the fluid treatment of other categorical identity distinctions, race is often not considered as something that can be *played* with. By deliberately or unintentionally ignoring race, there is considerable risk of the perpetuation of tacitly racist, neoliberal and hegemonic ideologies about sexuality and intimacy. I take up race play as an entry point to the implications of the practices existing at the nexus of sexuality, gender, race, and class. However, as the epigraph by Mollena Williams—Black BDSM activist, educator, and writer—suggests, race play is something that is unavoidable for racialized bodies. There is privilege in not having to constantly negotiate racial identities or to even address race,

which is particularly unique to white bodies. The line between fantasy and reality is blurred when the referent of the historical suffering of people of colour—in particular, Black people—is used for an other’s pleasure. That is, there are significant symbols of historical chattel slavery that are drawn on in many BDSM scenarios. I do not intend to simplistically align BDSM and slavery, as Christina Sharpe warned against,³ but instead I examine the intersection of abjected Blackness and contemporary BDSM through its shared markers with chattel slavery.

As a specific set of play practices, ‘race play’ involves the intentional use of racial epithets or racist scenarios to help construct or maintain the exchange of power dynamics between participants. It is considered an edgier and even controversial practice by most BDSM practitioners because of the emotional labour and risk involved. Race play disallows the concealment of the presence of unequal racialized relations in BDSM practices precisely because it draws on real historical and contemporary relations of racism as a tool for constructing power dynamics. There is a possibility in the space of race play to cause the subtended and constantly deferred awareness of racial privilege to arise. When white BDSM practitioners participate as if whiteness is not proactively there, it is exemplary of how whiteness functions by masking, deferring, and to a certain extent, naturalizing a specific type of racial entitlement to sexuality and humanity.

This article will examine how race play is raced to only include non-white bodies, as one aspect that reflects the oppressive impact of white supremacy in BDSM. The characterization of these practices as limited to certain racial embodiments reinforces the notion of possessive whiteness as an inherent, but nonracial quality. The privilege of whiteness allows for a choice in playing with race, whereas the racialized body is unable to escape the ‘reality’ of race. The constitution of whiteness is predicated on the inescapability of race by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), but these processes function with a simultaneous invisibility and presumed universality. With its practices of playing with hyperbolic racism, race play confronts notions of disguised racial superiority, and is, therefore, often a source of discomfort among BDSM practitioners. To highlight these themes, I examine how some of the markers of BDSM that have drawn from historical chattel slavery have been de-racialized in the process of neoliberal private desires and politically correct colourblindness.

Racing Race Play & White Invisibility

As Daisy Hernandez stated in one of the earlier mainstream discussions of race play for *Colorlines*, race play is “far from just black and white. It also includes ‘playing out’ Nazi interrogations of Jews or Latino-on-black racism, and the players can be of any racial background paired up in a number of ways.”⁴ Yet, most of the examinations of race play in the North American context—of which, there are notably few—focus on white and Black practitioners drawing on histories of slavery.⁵ Mollena Williams has drawn particular attention to

race play through her activism and writing under the former moniker, “The Perverted Negress.” In an interview with Andrea Plaid for *Racialicious*, Williams named several examples of race play that she explained as embracing real or assumed racial identities of participants to underscore and investigate differences. “You can have the white Master black slave thing. You can have a tables turned scenario, with a slave seducing the master, blackmailing them. The “Mandingo” black stud thing. And let us not forget we owned one another.”⁶ Williams went on to include examples involving Native Americans, Japanese internment, Iraqi prisoner torture, Sinn Féin interrogation, Indian caste discrimination, North and South Korean division, and Hutu and Tutsi violence. However, she maintained that at least in the United States, chattel slavery scenarios are the obvious source of history to draw on for race play scenarios. What is important to note with these seemingly dissimilar examples is that all the variations are predicated on a specific racial hierarchy.

When speaking to Black Fuhrer—a Black Dominatrix who has been publicly vocal about race play⁷—Ariane Cruz noted that, especially with the predominantly white clientele, the term “honky” wasn’t seen as racially charged, but as a convenient manner of humiliation that was only coincidentally rooted in the submissive’s race.⁸ This demonstrates the grounding of race play in foundations of racism that relies on particular understandings of racial hierarchy. It is also echoed by Danielle Lindemann’s study on professional dominatrices, who tended not to receive requests for race play from white clients, while such requests were “relatively common amongst clients of color.”⁹ Cruz concluded, if “calling a white man a honky lacks the same ‘charge’ as calling a Black woman a nigger, race play’s potentiality for racial subversion is limited, circumscribed by race and gender, and disciplined by white heteropatriarchy, seemingly a powerful and stable force both inside and outside the world of fetish.”¹⁰ Some BDSM practitioners insist on the fantastical element of kink and play that articulates a separation of desire from real-world consequence or political referents. Although Williams has discussed the potential benefits of race play because of consent and scenario control, she also stated about her own play, “My vagina isn’t really interested in uplifting the race. What pussy wants is fucked up stuff, really dark scenarios to test the boundaries and cut with an exnihilitating level of danger.”¹¹

In *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon Patricia Holland underscored the pervasive attempts to expunge erotic spaces from larger systems of racist violence, and “the erotic, therefore, touches upon that aspect of racist practice that cannot be accounted for *as* racist practice.”¹² One source of critical blindness in regard to matters of race is what Toni Morrison argued about the act of “noticing race,” where “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even liberal gesture,” and in the climate of critical discourse, “silence and evasion have historically ruled.”¹³ However, the ability to not address race and the proclamation of colourblindness are reliant on and emblematic of racial privilege. Post-racial rhetoric eliminates the acknowledgement of racial difference as something that contributes to the structure of rights and privileges. Assumptions of universal whiteness and non-racial possessive categorization write

the racialized bodies out in favour of the white body. Amber Jamilla Musser argued that in this process, particularly Black bodies are rendered superfluous, “made irrelevant on the present discomfort of the white body.”¹⁴ In their study of queer and trans BDSM communities, Robin Bauer commented that in the mixed-race spaces of BDSM dominated by members of the privileged race, the invisibility of whiteness seems to be a prerequisite for transgressions in other realms and categories of difference, including gender, sexuality, age, and class. In this regard, there is a “Tendency among BDSM queers to deemphasize and thus depoliticize race by deracing historically raced institutions such as slavery, colonialism, or even contemporary racialized stereotypes.”¹⁵

In what she noted as a disproportionately white community for her fieldwork, Staci Newmahr described edge play and the processes of consent negotiation with ‘riskier’ practices. In mentioning race play, Newmahr ultimately names it with incest play, rape scenes, extreme pain scenes, and “symbolically unethical transgressions, such as hitting in the face (particularly when man-to-woman).”¹⁶ When discussing consent, riskiness, policing, and edge development, Newmahr failed to differentiate these types of play, tie them to larger structural inequalities, or note the ways in which certain racialized bodies at the intersection of gender and sexuality may need to negotiate these scenes differently. While not entirely unsurprising given the racial demographics of Newmahr’s fieldwork community, her claims to larger applicability in theorizing kink make the lack of critical insight on racial differentiation notable. In her study of BDSM community in the San Francisco Bay Area, Margot Weiss also noted that her interviewees slipped seamlessly between speaking about “black/white race play, Nazi play, rape play, and incest play” as if they are all related as “forms of play [which] re-encode particularly loaded, culturally meaningful power inequalities” and address structurally-related traumas.¹⁷ The conflation of the various types of edgy practices works to obfuscate the particular histories and hierarchies that are being eroticized.

As Vivian Killjoy, BDSM practitioner and blogger argued, the assumptions of similarities between all types of edge play is inaccessible to Black women (particularly submissives). The inability to remove her Blackness or the history that accompanies it, characterizes “every facet of [her] personal play” and there are safety precautions that Black women must take that white women will likely not have even considered.¹⁸ Killjoy went on to question whether white Dominants automatically empathize with Black submissives in a way that allows for respect of safe words and hard limits because of the assumptions about Black bodies being able to endure more pain. She poignantly asked what any of the precautions “mean when your pain is categorized in a partner’s mind as not the same as theirs?”¹⁹ The unfeeling Black body is a pervasive myth that continues to be perpetuated by white supremacy and its cultural representations. In historicizing this harmful assertion, Saidiya Hartman argued that Blackness became entrenched within the biological index that is saturated with pain. Within the context of chattel slavery, the picture of suffering presented by abolitionists called for empathy

based on lengthy and vivid descriptions of the suffering of the Black slave body. As such, pain provided the “common language of humanity” but also “required that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make that suffering visible and intelligible.”²⁰ Similarly, in her analysis of abolitionist paintings, Christina Sharpe argued that the advancement of abolitionism was to occur by viewers placing themselves into the scene through identification with the depicted Black slave, in order to play the Master and “play the slave a little bit.”²¹ This replacement of the white body for the Black obliterated the suffering of the black body and risked “naturalizing the condition of pained embodiment.”²²

In his study of Black abjection, Darieck Scott asserted that when members of oppressed groups take up race play as an enactment of their erotic fantasies, their play includes identification with the victim and the perpetrator.²³ If white practitioners, as the (often unacknowledged) privileged group, can only identify with/as the perpetrator, this may partially explain the discomfort of doing or encountering race play.²⁴ This is echoed by Bauer’s account of the public performance by Black Mistress Mz Dre, entitled “The Black Confederacy,” where Mz Dre dominated her white submissive, using historical techniques that had been done non-consensually to Black people in the United States. Bauer noted that the predominantly white audience of Mz Dre’s performance was uncomfortable with the confrontation of racist history precisely because they were unable to “experience the reversal Mz Dre offered as a form of critique, reconciliation or catharsis ... This experience shows that there are still limits to the parodying potential of BDSM when it comes to race.”²⁵

White guilt that reinforces systemic racism also pervades erotic encounters. Writing in 1991 in one of the first collections of BDSM practitioner accounts, Tina Portillo, a self-identified SM dyke of colour, indicated, “it surprised [her] that some white leatherdykes didn’t want to play with [her] unless they were bottoming.”²⁶ As a Black woman, Portillo found herself desired by the predominantly white leather dyke scene in only a particular way that helped alleviate the racial discomfort. This alleviation may come from the perception of a power dynamic that reinforces existing social anti-Black racism. However, these inclinations were more about the feelings of white practitioners than Portillo’s own desires or agency. She went on to say that race play can be done “as long as it is mutual and in loving spirit.”²⁷ In this regard, Cruz asserted that race play goes beyond typical notions of ‘play’ because of the “unique physical and psychic labor on behalf of its participants” that exposes the extent to which sexual desire and pleasure are constructed through social exchanges as products of the mind and body.²⁸ As Williams emphasized, “Doing race play is HARD [sic]. It isn’t some walk in the fucking park. And finding people I trust enough to do it with is almost impossible because it is hard, and they are at risk ... The one thing – the only thing – that separates BDSM from abuse is consent.”²⁹ A refusal of white practitioners to engage in play, while simultaneously denying the racial referents of BDSM that will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section of this article, creates a scenario where

liberal white subjects are able to exercise the privilege to side-step discussions of race through operationalizing their racial invisibility.

BDSM & Shared Markers with Chattel Slavery

As Anne McClintock noted, the transformation of the industrial economy from slavery to the wage market coincided with the emergence of European BDSM subculture at the end of the eighteenth century.³⁰ As such, the transformation of objects that were specifically emblematic of slavery, like slave-bands and collars, were taken as kinky paraphernalia for erotic relations with inscribed meanings through understandings of race and gender. By borrowing these, “S/M plays social power backward, visibly and outrageously staging hierarchy, difference and power, the irrational, ecstasy, or alienation of the body, placing these ideas at the center of Western reason.”³¹ Ada Demaj offered an interesting interpretation of this analysis, indicating that, at face value, the markers of BDSM are a displacement of imperialist slavery onto the erotic realm. But, she indicated that they may also be interpreted as “a refusal to allow the history of slave labour to fade into the past – a refusal to forget!”³² In this way, the symbols highlight the unnaturalness of unequal social power relations because of the necessity of “props and labels to acquire their force.”³³ While this may be true of intentional race play, there is risk of holding history at a distance with willful ignorance and the silencing of race, despite drawing from that history for erotic sustenance. However, overt race play is often not supported by BDSM communities.

There have been past issues with the play practices of dungeon owners that sparked debate in BDSM communities about the ethics of hosting events in those spaces. For example, in 2019, the Women of Drummer event in Montreal was moved after a community member publicly reported that the intended dungeon, The Triskelion, was managed by a Dominant who had been identified by some community members as a nazi fetishist.³⁴ Although the space was being offered for free, the organizer of the event, who was queer, trans, and a person of colour, opted to move to another space. There have been similar reactions by queer BDSM communities to dungeons that have hosted ‘slave auction’ events.

In addition to the language of ‘property,’ ‘ownership,’ ‘Master/slave,’ and physical markers of slavery in terms of bondage, BDSM events sometimes also draw on the space of the slave auction block. Likely because of the salience of the image, Weiss began her ethnography on the San Francisco BDSM community with an account of her attendance at a charity slave auction.³⁵ Weiss recalled an “uncomfortable” scene in which a young, Black woman was auctioned by her “severe-looking white” Master.³⁶ She noted similarities of the scene to a historical slave auction, where the woman’s genitals were displayed, her collar and leash still attached, and as her Master proudly espoused her submissive qualities. When discussing the BDSM slave auction, Katherine McKittrick’s analysis is useful with regards to the meanings and marketable qualities associated with the slave auction block, as a site of public racial-sexual

domination and measurable documentation. There is a specific spatial positioning of the objects of Black bodies for the gaze and assessment of the buyer that allowed for visual demarcation and attachment of discourses of dispossession and captivity to the flesh.³⁷ This objectification contributes to the processes of subjection. As Hartman stated, the “black performative is inextricably linked with the specter of subjection, the torturous display of the captive body, and the ravishing of the body that is the condition of the other’s pleasure.”³⁸ The moment of sale reifies the Master’s whiteness as embodied universality and subjectivity, and acts a profitable and pleasurable economic exchange.

Slave auctions do not entail the *actual* sale of submissives, but typically give the successful bidder the opportunity to negotiate mutually consensual play with their ‘purchase.’ However, denying that a slave auction has nothing to do with historical slavery reinforces the invisibility of whiteness that is seemingly pervasive with many BDSM practices.³⁹ The Black slave/white Master combination described by Weiss likely made the audience uncomfortable for this reason, as the racialized reminder of chattel slavery enacted by the performance prohibited the possibility of historical disavowal that was enabled by white participants.⁴⁰ Even though these participants were not necessarily consciously race playing, their racialized bodies depicted the salient and crucial connection between the racialization of sex and the sexualization of race that is often ignored.

The ability to perceive the white body as properties capable of owning itself emerged through these racially contingent forms of property and property rights.⁴¹ As racialized bodies were and continue to be signified through race, whiteness was privileged as unadulterated, exclusive, and rare. As Umami Khan argued, whiteness simultaneously functions as an “unmarked signifier of sexual purity.”⁴² By extension, BIPOC bodies automatically possess non-normative sexuality that writes them into states of abjection through the colonial, white supremacist gaze, a process that Cruz refers to particularly for Black women as “racial-sexual alterity.”⁴³ Formally BIPOC-only spaces in the forms of caucuses and play parties mark an increasing awareness and grappling with the racism in white-dominated spaces. Historically, BDSM communities have often claimed to be insulated from racism because of the emphasis on fantasy and erotic pleasure, but some dynamics, like the rejection of a space because of rumors of nazi fetishism described above, seem to signal a shift away from unproductive colourblindness.

Conclusions

Race play can be a space of forceful encounter with unnoticed racial privilege that brings these racialized histories and the contemporary impact of white supremacy and colonialism to the foreground of BDSM. There are dense circuits of meaning that are generated in spaces of collision between sexual pleasure and racist histories. The invisibility of whiteness and silencing

of race is confronted with race play, which by extension makes both the performative pleasures and injuries of race, visible. The choreographies of violence and desire that characterize the complexities of interracial encounters and their accompanying history are revealed through the simultaneous processes of racialization and the presumed invisibility of race in erotic spaces. Moreover, BDSM race play exposes situatedness and implications in racial hierarchies that are most often silenced through rhetoric of private and individualized pleasure and fantastical detachment of BDSM from everyday life. Through this analysis, I am not advocating that every person take up race play as a radical racial political stance, but have treated it as a phenomenon that is apt to begin an examination of the implications of practices, which exist at the junction of sexuality, gender, race, and class.

The privileges afforded by whiteness allow choice in entering an arena of playing with race. Colourblindness allows the fantasy of escape from racism without giving up the material benefits of whiteness, but race play disallows historical disavowal and calls race/racial difference to the forefront of the erotic realm.

Notes

¹ Mollena Williams, "BDSM and Playing with Race," in *Best Sex Writing 2010*, ed. Rachel Kramer Bussel (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2010), 70.

² BDSM is the compound acronym that encompasses a wide range of mutually consensual practices that involve playing with power and/or pain.

³ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 123.

⁴ Daisy Hernandez, "Playing with Race; On the Edge of Edgy Sex, Racial BDSM Excites Some and Reviles Others," *Colorlines* 7, no. 14 (2005): 14.

⁵ In a recent article, Ariane Cruz, one of the early scholars to engage in analysis of BDSM and race indicates that there is a shift in BDSM studies that are now becoming more attentive to race and the racialized erotics of sexuality. While I agree that there is certainly more consideration than when I first started working on this topic in 2015, there is still a large gap in existing literature and the need to continue to push against the erasure of racialized BDSM practitioners in academic accounts. See, Ariane Cruz, "Not a Moment Too Soon: A Juncture of BDSM and Race," *Sexualities* 24, no. 2 (2021): 819–24.

⁶ Mollena Williams and Andrea Plaid, "Race Play Interview – Part I," *Mollena*, April 6, 2009, <http://www.mollena.com/2009/04/race-play-interview-part-1/>.

⁷ Black Fuhrer, "White on Black Race Play – My Views," YouTube, October 26, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4W8f-xmCEE>.

⁸ Ariane Cruz, "Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography and Black Female Sexuality," *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015): 433.

⁹ Danielle Lindemann, *Dominatrix: Gender Eroticism, and Control in the Dungeon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 160. Lindemann's study goes on to discuss the therapeutic potential of professional Dominance, but positions race play as *either* the reproduction *or* the subversion of racial hierarchies.

¹⁰ Cruz, "Beyond Black," 433.

¹¹ Williams and Plaid, "Race Play Interview – Part I."

¹² Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 27. Emphasis in original.

- ¹³ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9. Morrison is concerned with canonical works of American fiction by white writers in the 1980s and 1990s, but her observations continue to be widely applicable, particularly within erotic spaces.
- ¹⁴ Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 101.
- ¹⁵ Robin Bauer, "Transgressive and Transformative Gendered Sexual Practices and White Privileges: The Case of Dyke/Trans BDSM Communities," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4: 246.
- ¹⁶ Staci Newmahr, *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 148.
- ¹⁷ Margot Weiss, *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 23.
- ¹⁸ Vivian Killjoy, "Vivian Killjoy: On Race & BDSM," *DoomCookie* [blog], August 13 2015, <http://doomcookiephoto.tumblr.com/post/126591810417/vivian-killjoy-on-race-bdsm>.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18.
- ²¹ Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 126.
- ²² Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19.
- ²³ Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 222.
- ²⁴ In discussing transgressive potentials, this is suggested in Ada Demaj, "Touching Race Through Play: Sadomasochism, Phenomenology, and the Intertwining of Race and Sexuality," *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* 11 (2014): 105; Bauer, "Transgressive", 247; and, Bauer, *Queer BDSM Intimacies: Critical Consent and Pushing Boundaries*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 190.
- ²⁵ Bauer, *Queer BDSM*, 190.
- ²⁶ Tina Portillo, "I Get Real: Celebrating my Sadomasochistic Soul," in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson, (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1991), 50.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ²⁸ Cruz, "Beyond Black," 426.
- ²⁹ Mollena Williams and Andrea Plaid, "Race Play Interview – Part II," *Mollena*, April 7, 2009, <http://www.mollena.com/2009/04/race-play-interview-part-ii/>.
- ³⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 142. A similar argument is made by Karen Halttunen in her article, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 304.
- ³¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 143.
- ³² Demaj, "Touching Race," 103.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 104.
- ³⁴ For further discussion of the eroticization of Nazi themes, see for examples: Daniel H. Magilow, Elizabeth Bridges and Kristin T. Vander Lugt, eds., *Naziploitation! The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012); Susan Leigh Star, "Swastikas: The Street and the University," in *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*, eds. Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E.H. Russell and Susan Leigh Star, (San Francisco: Frog in the Well, 1982), 131–36; Arnie Kantrowitz, "Swastika Toys," in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Los Angeles: Daedalus, 1991), 193–209; and, Irene Reti, "Remember the Fire: Lesbian Sadomasochism in a Post Nazi Holocaust World," in *Unleashing Feminism: Critiquing Lesbian Sadomasochism in the Gay Nineties*, ed. Irene Reti (Santa Cruz: HerBooks, 1993), 79–99.
- ³⁵ Weiss indicated that these auctions were common occurrences during her fieldwork and were popularly coupled with play parties afterwards.
- ³⁶ Margot Weiss, *Techniques*, 3–4. She later stated that it was the "single most disturbing picture I have from that day," which upon further reflection, was indicative of her "well-meaning whiteness disturbed by the scene." This ethnographic encounter allowed her to frame her examination of the universality of whiteness providing the background for the scene, which produced privilege and transgressive performances at the same time.
- ³⁷ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), Kindle Edition, 1156, 1192.
- ³⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

³⁹ There are scenarios that specifically racialize the slave auction or ‘Plantation Retreats’ that intentionally draw on historical notions of chattel slavery, but these are far less common than the de-racialized ‘slave auction’ described in Weiss’s work. See, for example, Chauncey DeVega, “Playing with Sex, Power, and Race: Did You Know That There are ‘Plantation Retreats’ Where Black People Go to Serve Their White ‘Masters’?” *Indomitable Blog*, August 12, 2012, <http://www.chaunceydevega.com/2012/08/playing-with-sex-power-and-race-did-you.html>.

⁴⁰ Although Weiss also described other nonwhite submissives in the auction, she notes the specific reaction by the audience in with the Black submissive as one of unenthusiastic discomfort.

⁴¹ See Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1719–20; and, George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the ‘White’ Problem in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1995): 369–87.

⁴² Ummi Khan, “A Woman’s Right to Be Spanked: Testing the Limits of Tolerance of SM in the Socio-Legal Imaginary,” *Law & Sexuality: A Review of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Legal Issues* 18: 95.

⁴³ Ariane Cruz, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 33.