

‘Somewhere Over The Rainbow’: Women, m/m romance, and the politics of writing queer desire

This paper examines the contested politics surrounding women’s production and consumption of male/male [m/m] romance and erotica in a contemporary cultural moment marked by renewed debate. In the wake of the success of the TV adaptation of *Heated Rivalry*, popular and media commentary has drawn on pre-existing debates to frame such texts as fetishistic, appropriative, or depoliticising gay male sexuality to render it ‘palatable’ for a presumed heterosexual female audience. These critiques raise questions about authorship and legitimacy, as well as the ethics of writing queer desire from outside lived experience.

Drawing on mixed-methods research with women who produce and consume m/m sexually explicit media ($n=488$), alongside qualitative data exploring the perspectives of gay and bisexual men ($n=170$), this paper complicates such critiques by foregrounding the multiplicity of meanings attached to these texts. For many women, engagement with m/m functions as a space for exploring gender and sexuality in ways that challenge heteronormativity and conventional scripts of desire. At the same time, participants’ accounts suggest reflexive engagement with these tensions, including an awareness of the potential for voyeurism and appropriation, and ongoing negotiation of their position in relation to them.

Importantly, perspectives from men who have sex with men do not uniformly align with accusations of appropriation. While concerns around fetishisation are present, they are often situated as relatively minor in comparison to a broader endorsement of sexual autonomy, alongside recognition of the potential for women’s engagement with m/m to contribute to the normalisation of queer desire and forms of allyship.

Rather than resolving these tensions, this paper argues that women’s engagement with m/m romance is best understood as a complex, ambivalent cultural practice - one that simultaneously risks reproducing problematic dynamics of representation, while also opening up spaces for queer imagination and the destabilisation of heteronormative/monosexist frameworks of desire.

Bio

Dr Lucy Neville is a criminologist, writer, and activist whose work explores violence, sex, and sexuality. She is the author of *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys* (Palgrave Macmillan), which draws on her research into women’s engagement with male/male sexually explicit media. She is committed to interdisciplinary collaboration (#IAF) and to moving research into the public arena. Lucy’s academic life is deeply intertwined with her creative one. She is a long-time fanfiction writer and published erotica author, drawing on both in her exploration of women’s writing, desire, and the messy, contested politics of who gets to tell which stories.

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