

Xiaoping Jiang

Study of gender and power in slash fan fiction:
A case study of BBC *Sherlock* slash fan fiction

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XIAOPING JIANG
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Abstract

My research aims at exploring how gender identity and sexed body in the dominant/submissive pairing are constructed with *BBC Sherlock* slash fiction as a case study. Because the construction of the dominant/submissive pairing in slash fan fiction is not merely a passive imitation of the heterosexual gender norms but through the analysis of which, one gains understandings of how power relations work on constructing one's body and identity. Slash fan fiction, commonly accepted as women's writing for women, provides substantial materials for the study of power and gender. Furthermore, specific interest is put to study how the writing and reading of slash fan fiction challenges the norms and impacts women in real-lives because resistance has been a main part of the study of power and gender.

Cultural analysis of texts provides the main methodological framework for my study. The data were collected from online website and analyzed through the signification process of linguistic signs which construct the dominant/submissive slash pairing. The theoretical framework, which consists of Judith Butler's *Gender Performativity* (1999) and Michel Foucault's *Microphysics of Power* (1978), was employed to discuss the findings and answer the research questions.

The findings show that a strong oppositional linguistic choice is used in constructing John and Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body. This construction reproduces not only the content of masculinity and femininity but also how one is produced and constrained by power relations. My study suggests that the construction of gender identity and sexed body in *Sherlock* slash fan fiction is the ceaseless enactment and reenactment of gender norms, and through which, the heteronormativity is ultimately confused and denaturalized. My study also indicates that women's writing and reading of slash fan fiction is, from the perspective of Foucauldian power, the practice of freedom which empowers women to resist the gender normalization that they are always subject to.

Key words: slash fan fiction, gender identity, sexed body, power, freedom

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1. Research Introduction

1.1 Introducing Fan Fiction

As a worldwide phenomenon, fan fiction has received much attention in academia. Different from mainstream media, the unique features of fan culture and fan fiction, especially one of its sub-genres, slash fan fiction, have provided many new possibilities and directions for research. Studies have been conducted concerning a wide range of topics, such as gender, sexuality, power, meaning-making and copyright issue, from various perspectives ranging from sociology to psychology. However, there are only a few studies done in a way where the interaction between gender and power relations are explored with a text-base analysis. Therefore, through an analysis of the texts of BBC *Sherlock* slash fan fiction, my study aims at exploring how gender identity and sexed body are constructed in the dominant/submissive slash pairing with attempts to seek for subversion and women's empowerment. To continue my study, I will first explain some key concepts of fan fiction and give an introduction of the history of fan fiction study.

The definition of fan fiction has been changing since its invention and use. In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2014) traced the history of this term, explaining that fan fiction was originally used to "describe fiction about fans", which happened in "science fiction fanzines" (p.5). This interpretation had been discarded, however, and replaced by the definition of fan fiction as "the imaginative of interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds" (Hellekson & Busse, 2014, p.5-6). However, this understanding of fan fiction is still too narrow and the scope of "existing literary worlds" should be expanded to include a vast variety of other media forms, such as the texts of TV shows or movies. Therefore, Hellekson and Busse (2014) extended their definition of fan fiction, suggesting that fan fiction are stories "tending to respond to a specific form of media texts", which began with TV shows such as *Star Trek* and "spawned con and zine culture" (p.7). Similarly, Sonia K. Katyal (2006) in her article *Performance, Property, and the Slashing of Gender in Fan Fiction* summarized fan fiction as "stories that are written about particular characters from popular television shows, movies, and other

cultural texts” which are non-profitably created and circulated by fans (p.482). Rebecca Brill (2015) in her thesis *Exploring Collective Storytelling, Sexuality, and Diversification in Slash Fanfiction* even expanded the scope of fan fiction to include stories that are written about people in real lives, such as “members of rock bands, radio podcasts or even movie celebrities”, which take “many forms” and happen “both online and offline” (p.4). Based on the purpose of this thesis, however, I will propose that fan fiction are stories that are written about specific characters of specific media texts, non-profitably produced and circulated by fans of online fandom.

While many academic efforts are devoted to the study of fan fiction, slash fan fiction, as one of its most popular sub-genres, also attract mass of academic interest. Catherine Tosenberger (2008) in her article *Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts: Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction* defined slash fan fiction as “fan writing concerned with same-sex romance” (p.185). She traced the origin of the term “slash” back to the 1970s’ *Star Trek* fandom, explaining that the term refers to “the punctuation mark” which used to divide the characters’ names as “Kirk/Spock” who are written as a same-sex romantic pairing in fan fiction (Tosenberger, 2008, p.186). With such a history, people tend to use this term to describe only male, homosexual relationships, as being the opposite of the term “femslash” for female, homosexual relationships (Brill, 2015, p.6). Although there are people applying this term to a broader scope including both homosexual and heterosexual romantic pairings, “slash” still keeps its “original meaning of homoerotic romance” (Tosenberger, 2008, p.186). According to the earliest slash fan fiction researchers such as Henry Jenkins and Constance Penley, the writers of slash fan fiction are commonly assumed to be female writer (Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1992). However, Brill (2015) provided a more radical argument suggesting that the slash genre “now includes a wide variety of sexual orientations, both of writers and of the characters they write” (p.6). For the purpose of this thesis, however, the definition of slash fan fiction will be confined to its narrow sense referring to stories that are written by female writers about the male to male romantic relationship, consumed and circulated by female fans online.

Although my study focuses on the online fandom, research done before the rising of internet also provide insightful perspectives for exploring my research questions.

In the pre-internet era, fandom was a “face-to-face proposition” which was circulated through fan clubs, zines or conventions (Hellekson & Busse, 2006, p.13). The academic studies of fan fiction in this pre-internet era mostly focus on studying the fans themselves with making more and more efforts to explore and understand the underlying reasons why women write slash fan fiction. One of the earliest academic literature on slash fan fiction is Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*. In this book, Jenkins borrowed the notion of “poaching” from Michel de Certeau to describe the readers’ active participation in the meaning making process. For Jenkins (1992), readers are no longer the passive recipients of meaning but rather placed in a position that against writers, attempting to win their own interpretation of the texts (p.27). Jenkins (1992) compared De Certeau’s concept of “poaching” to Stuart Hall’s “Encoding and Decoding”, arguing that Hall’s model places readers into a fixed position while De Certeau’s “poaching” model implies “multiple sets of discursive competencies by virtue of more complex and contradictory place within the social formation” (p.34). In Jenkins’ argument, fans are capable of utilizing these “multiple sets of discursive competencies” in order to formulate their own creative interpretation of a given text. Jenkins (1992) sought for the subversive aspects of these fan created interpretation which mostly categorized into the slash genre, suggesting that slash is “a reaction against the construction of male sexuality on television and in pornography” which might lead to the “transgression of gender hierarchy” (p.189). Jenkins’ elaboration of the active readers and their creation provides possibilities for my own study on the autonomy of female fans and their empowerment.

While Jenkins provided a sociological perspective on studying fan fiction, Constance Penley, also one of the earliest scholars in fan fiction studies, gave a psychoanalytical examination on slash fan fiction and its writers and readers. In her earliest essay *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Study of Popular Culture*, Penley (1992) suggested that readers of slash fan fiction can “hold a number of identificatory positions” in their reading process (p.480). In Hellekson and Busse’s (2006) reading of Penley’s essay, they explained that the notion of identification means that the female readers are allowed “to have and be either and both of the characters (p.19). These fluid “identificatory positions” empower women because

they are able to transcend the limited and fixed position imposed on them in real life. In this essay, Penley (1992) also combined the psychoanalysis perspective with feminism theories to explore slash fan fiction, revealing that slash fan fiction is subversive as it provides a space for women to resist the dominant heterosexual culture (p.490). Penley's psychoanalytical perspective lays the foundation for my discussion on how women obtain pleasure through unfixed identificatory positions in slash fan fiction.

Another scholar who attempted to explore slash fan fiction from the perspective of feminism is Joanna Russ. Her essay *Pornography by Women for Women, with Love* centered around the relationship between pornography, romance and slash fan fiction. In this essay, Russ examined the slash pairing Kirk/Spock in the fan appropriated texts of TV show *Star Trek*. She argued that the "sexual fantasy" women create in Kirk/Spock slash fan fiction works as "feminist creation" that empowers women as it is "the only sexual fantasy by women for women that's produced without the control or interposition of censorship by commercial booksellers or the interposition of political intent by writers or editors" (Russ, [1985]2014, p.94). Although many other research hold a different or even completely opposite opinion of slash fan fiction, especially of this Kirk/Spock pairing, the importance of Russ' essay should still be recognized for "its overt discussion of pleasure, its focus on community, and its stance" upon which writing slash is "a way to rewrite or reconfigure cultural needs that goes against the grain of mainstream culture" (Hellekson & Busse, 2014, p.77-78). Russ' study opens the possibilities for my own exploration on women's empowerment from the perspective of "feminist creation".

With the appearing and rapid spreading of Internet, the traditional face-to-face fandom gradually shifts online, along with this transition is that more and more academic studies on fan fiction take internet into account. Lyndsay Faye in the prologue of *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom* explored the role of Internet taking in changing the conventional "author-reader" relationship. She argued that while this "author-reader" relationship starts its transition in the pre-Internet era with the rising of "zines and other media", the advance of the Internet has sped this process up, making the conventional "author-reader" relationship shift to "a much more

varied, collaborative, inter-textual one” as technology enables anyone who has “a vested interest in the characters can contribute their own fanworks” (Faye, 2012,p.2).

In the Internet era, academic studies of slash fan fiction are not only centering around fans and fandoms, but also putting more and more emphasis on the texts of the fanworks in their analysis, while they still make great efforts to explore why women are fascinated with writing male, same-sex stories. Faye (2012) tried to give an answer when she figured out her own motivations in writing Sherlock fan fiction, arguing that “in the worlds of pastiche and of fan fiction, the gaps in knowledge of Sherlock Holmes’s character lead directly to the desire to fill in the blanks on the map, to own a greater knowledge of the detective than the detective himself would willingly allow” (p.6). In another word, the desire to explore the unknown aspects of the characters we love is what inspires us to become writers, which provides new perspective on the studies of the autonomy of female fans.

Along with the advance of technology, there is the rising of adolescent fan culture. In Hellekson and Busse’s (2006) argument, younger fans, who without the help of their parents could not easily get access to the fannish culture, now “enter the fan space effortlessly” with no concern about “financial resources” as well as “national boundaries and time zones” to set restrictions on “fannish interaction” (p. 13). Therefore, the studies of adolescent fan culture often intertwine with cyberspace studies. Catherine Tosenberger (2008), an expert on Potter fandom also suggested that younger writers are able to come into contact with “a wider audience than ever before” due to the Internet (p.185). Her works on Potter fan fiction engage a lot in studying the adolescent fan culture. She argued that while there are still many traditional adolescent literature aiming at promoting “‘correct’ attitudes about sexuality to an audience deemed in need of education”, the Potter fandom offers younger fans a place “not only to read stories that might not meet with adult approval, but also to write and distribute them” (Tosenerger, 2008, p.188). In Tosenerger’s argument, the “identity-bending, pseudonymous nature” of online fandom is significant for younger fans to freely express their sexuality which is unsanctioned in the heteronormative discourse without any fears of exposing themselves. To fully explore the subversive element of slash fan fiction, she borrowed the space theory from a fan Julad to describe slash as a space within which

adult women as well as young people are free and safe to be “strange and unusual” (Tosenberger, 2008, p.190).

While Tosenberger’s studies on slash fan fiction mostly conducted from a “pedagogical or media literacy” perspective (Brill, 2015, p.10), there is other research seeking for subversion in slash fan fiction from a variety of perspectives. Sonia K. Katyal in her article *Performance, Property, and the Slashing of Gender in Fan Fiction* utilized the theory of Gender Performance from Judith Butler to examine how slash fan fiction perform in cyberspace. She compared slash fan fiction to Butler’s drag theory, arguing that as drag performances destruct the seemingly authenticity in gender structure and reveal spaces for audience participation in seeking for subversion, slash also “actively subverts the notions of ‘authenticity’ within a given textual narrative” in a similar way as “drag” does “by reworking narratives to develop same-sex relationships” (Katyal, 2006, p.492). In Katyal’s (2006) argument, the very existence of slash fan fiction is a proof of “the performative aspects of gender” as it subverts the “structural, ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ expectations associated with gender” through “reworking performance” (p.492). Katyal also highlighted the positive role of cyberspace taking in the recoding process of slash. For her, cyberspace provides an ideal world within which slash fans are allowed to “experience a world of imaginative possibility that transcends the political limitations of the current world in real space on another level” (Katyal, 2006, p.489). Apart from examining slash fan fiction from the perspective of Gender Performance, she also extended her analysis to a study on the content creation marketplace. She argued that there are two opposite marketplaces of content industry: one is commercial, formal, in real space; another is non-profitable, informal, in virtual space. She criticized the long-standing inequalities in the male dominated commercial marketplace by pointing out that there are disproportionately fewer female or other minorities taking part in the commercial content industry. In the contrary, the participation of content creation in cyberspace seems to reach “an almost breathtaking array of equity” (Katyal, 2006, p.466). In such sense, the informal marketplace in cyberspace functions just as Tosenberger’s “safe space” does as it allows women to create texts which is unsanctioned in heteronormative discourse. In Katyal’s “space”, copyrighted cultural products are allowed to become performative, women are safe to express oddity, fixed and rigid

gender structure has a chance to be transgressive and subversive.

Both of Tosenberger and Katyal's space theory suggested a strong distinction between the real world and women's creation which reveals the oppression of women as well as the possibilities for resistance. However, a simple detachment from the real world is not what my study aims at when seeking for women's empowerment. It seems that Katyal's appropriation of gender performative provides a solution: while she situated her research in the context of content industry, my study will focus on analyzing the texts of slash fan fiction from the perspective of gender performative.

While most of the academic studies on slash fan fiction are seeking for its subversive aspects to challenge the heteronormativity, there are also some other voices warning that not every slash pairing transgresses gender norms as it claims to be. When some slash fan fiction do have a subversive power, others do not, indeed, they even aggravate the stereotypical features which have been forcefully imposed on the heterosexual two sexes. As discussed in the above analysis, Joanna Russ' essay *Pornography by Women for Women, with Love* affirmed the empowerment of women in creating the slash pairing of Kirk/Spock, however, Lu Zhao's essay *Gender and Sexuality Performance by Captain Kirk, Spock, and the Women* gave a completely different argument on this pairing. Zhao (2011) also explored the *Star Trek* slash fan fiction from the point of view of gender performative, suggesting that slash attempts to break the normative heterosexual gender structure in the show by filling the characters with "performance characteristics of the other gender", which indeed denotes a more fluid gender performance that is open for negotiation (p.67). However, this negotiation between the audience and the original scripts does not help them to escape from "the dominant scripts that their cultures have taught them" (Zhao, 2011, p.67). In another word, as long as the audiences are creating their works based on certain social convention, they cannot avoid but subject to its influence. What's more, in Zhao's (2011) argument, slash fan fiction which aims at challenging "dominant sexual scripts" by appropriating these scripts, may have an "unintended effect of reinforcing the dominant scripts", as most of the appropriated scripts still apply "a traditional dominant/submissive dichotomy" to the same-sex

characters (p.68). In such pairing, the dominant one generally assigned male characteristics while the submissive one assigned female characteristics, sometimes in extreme case, the submissive one “seems little more than a woman with a penis” (Zhao, 2011, p.68). Zhao (2011) admitted that this feminization of male characters do challenge the notion of “gender is innate and heterosexuality the norm”, however, she could not seek any justification for such homosexual scripts to stand as challenge to heterosexual norms only through “keeping the gender performance and simply using a different criterion” (p.68). Thus, Zhao argued that these same-sex scripts are problematic rather than subversive. Zhao’s application of gender performative ignores its theory base that one is always situate within power relations, thus resistance could not exist outside the power networks. The scripts of gender performance are not problematic, instead, they problematize the very norms on which their performances are based.

Anne Kustritz in her article *Slashing the Romance Narrative* also examined such slash pairings, but different from Zhao’s argument, she suggested that the slash fan fiction which reproducing heterosexual conventions in its narrative provides a safe space for fans to respond to the problematic heterosexuality which they find difficult to deal with in real life. In Kustritz’s (2003) argument, this kind of slash fan fiction gains its subversive power exactly through filling the male bodies with disprivileged feminine features rather than the privileged masculine features (p.371). In another word, this appropriation of men to replace women’s disprivileged social status is transgressive and subversive.

In academia, most of studies on fan fiction centre around the slash genre from a wide variety of perspectives, such as sociology, psychoanalysis or the theory of gender performative. The topic of their studies also varies, while some focus on the issues of pornography, eroticism and romance, some concern about the relation between slash fan fiction and the content industry. Nevertheless, no matter how these change, studies on slash fan fiction revolve around two directions: one is looking for the underlying reasons why women create same-sex stories; one is attempting to answer whether slash genre subverts the heterosexual norms or not. Although it is difficult to pin down one or two general conclusions on such

complicated issues, these two directions are significant in forming my own research and argument on the BBC Sherlock fan fiction. As the culture and rules vary from fandom to fandom, I will pin down the context of my study by focusing on the specific BBC Sherlock slash fan fiction. What's more, while many academic studies start to take the texts into account in their analysis, there is still a lack of studies that center around the text itself. Therefore, attempting to fill in this gap, my study will focus on analyzing the texts of BBC Sherlock slash fan fiction. Lastly, while many studies apply the theory of gender performative to explore women's oppression and resistance through analysis of slash fan fiction, they seldom link their study to a further exploration on the relations among oppression, resistance and power. Thus, the employment of gender performative will be combined with the use of Foucauldian power in my study to seek for the subversive aspects of women's writing and reading of slash fan fiction.

1.2 Research Review on BBC *Sherlock* fandom

Since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the beloved detective in 1887, there has been a vast variety of adaptations being produced by fans all over the world. The BBC television series *Sherlock* is also one of those many TV and film adaptations of Conan Doyle's original texts. The show was produced by Stephen Moffat and Mark Gatiss, who brought the great detective Sherlock Holmes and his loyal friend and assistant John Watson from the Victorian era to the modern day London. Once the first season was released in 2010, the show has obtained great success and soon become a worldwide phenomenon. It triggers heated debate online and attracts a large number of fans to create fan fiction base on the characters of the show. For example, on the fan-created website Archive of Our Own, Sherlock Holmes & Related Fandoms is one of the biggest fandoms only second to Harry Potter fandom, with 111090 fan works available at the time of this writing, among which those labeled with the tag "Sherlock (TV)" account for the largest proportion. Such a phenomenon gains much attention in academia with studies being done specifically on the show and its related fandom regarding a range of issues, such as the interaction between the

show and its fandom, the power of fandom or the subversive and normative aspects of its fan fiction. The following review of previous research is divided based on the major research perspectives taken by the BBC Sherlock fandom studies.

From the perspective of transmedia, Nieves Rosendo focused on analyzing how *Sherlock* fandom interacts with the TV show and influences the production of the new episodes. The theory of transmedia has a close relation with the concept of convergence and collective intelligence advanced by Henry Jenkins. In Jenkins' (2006) definition, convergence denotes "a cultural shift" where consumers are inspired to "seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content", which consequently contributes to the circulation of media content (p.3). Convergence happens through the audience's "social interactions with others" which attracts much attention from the media industry, with the power of influencing the process of media consumption (Jenkins, 2006, p.4). This is what defines collective intelligence: no single audience knows everything, as we all know something, we can bring together the pieces and gain ourselves "an alternative source of media power" (Jenkins, 2006, p.4). The notion of convergence emphasizes the autonomy of fans and implies that their power to influence the world exactly derives from their own lives.

In the same vein, transmedia or transmedial storytelling enables "a narrative world or universe" to be broadened through "different media", thus, audiences "have to access these worlds through these media", interact with each other by sharing "the information obtained and their own creations" (Rosendo, 2016, p.22). Rosendo examined how transmedial storytelling is being utilized in the production and consumption process of the BBC Sherlock series. She used an example to illustrate how audiences participate in the content production process: when Sherlock's death put an end to the second season, along with BBC, producer Gatiss and Moffat hold a movement among the show's fans to collect ideas on how to bring Sherlock back to life so that the third season can be continued. Fans made their contributions "in the form of memes and fan fictions" to establish "theories on how Sherlock was able to escape death", which ultimately led to a production of a mini episode "Many Happy Returns" written by Gatiss and Moffat, presenting these fan created theories on bringing Sherlock back to life (Rosendo, 2016, p.24). Rosendo' study recognized the

active and positive participation of fans in changing the production process of the show which provides a transmedia perspective on exploring the autonomy of fans.

From the same research perspective, Jennifer Wojton also studied how fandom's activities effect the production of the show. By examining #Setlock, a specific hashtag used online when fans share newest information about the show's "on-location filming, episodes' character development, and plot", Wojton (2016) argued for the subversive aspects of Sherlock fandom in empowering the fans (p.194). However, #Setlock, which concerns mostly issues of fans' on-location visits and shares these information online, is criticized by many mainstream medias and even some fans for interfering the production of the show and releasing possible spoilers (Wojton, 2016, p.196-198). Wojton (2016) admitted the fact that "overly enthusiastic fans" would leave a bad impression to people in perceiving Sherlock fandom in general, still, she insisted that "whether #Setlock enhances or interferes with the show depends on one's perspective" and for better or for worse, #Setlock does affect how the show is produced and change how audiences perceive the characters' identity (p.197; p.206). Different from Nieves, Wojton gave a more critical examination on fan's role in changing the traditional production process with acknowledging the possible bad influence it may cause in developing a transmedial narrative.

Wojton also studied fans' appropriation of the show, especially stories regarding slash pairing of John/Sherlock. As Catherine Tosenberger's space theory suggested, Wojton (2016) also described #Setlock as "safe space" where fans are able to freely express themselves regardless the canon and give "'alternative' interpretations of the characters' identities" (p.195). In the #Setlock case, fans would seek any evidences, such as a photo that seemed like depicting John and Sherlock walking arm in arm, to validate their interpretation of the John/Sherlock slash paring. Sometimes the authenticity of the photo does not matter as fans are "playing" with the materials now (Wojton, 2016, p.204). This "play" which eventually engenders the reading of John and Sherlock in a romantic relationship, as Wojton (2016) explained, "is not only viable but highly desirable", because "valorizing alternative readings that venerate non-traditional identity groups can be empowering for fans" (p.204). Wojton's analysis of fans' attempts to seek for validation to justify the slash pairing of John/Sherlock reveals a strong interrelation between fan's creation and the real

world. Fans' creation is based on and restrained by real-life materials but with specific aims of rewriting this materials.

While most of the academic studies on BBC Sherlock series focus on the whole fandom and its interaction with the show, there are relatively fewer studies taking fan fiction as the major study object. By analyzing specific fan fiction rather than examining the fandom as a whole, Alyxis Smith studied how fans seek validation for the reading of John/Sherlock slash pairing. In her argument, there are two types of narrative in such Sherlock slash fan fiction validating the queer interpretation: one is about women taking the role as a "catalyst" to get John and Sherlock into a romantic and sexual relationship, which effectively subverts the canon and breaks the conventional depiction of women as "threats" to John and Sherlock's romantic relationship; another is about explicit sex scenes between John and Sherlock, in which they both obtain physical and emotional gratification (Smith, 2016, p.158-163). According to Smith (2016), such a serious description of sex scenes and sexual gratification is able to "argue against the skeptical brushing off of the possibility of a realistic sexual relationship between Sherlock and John" (p.163). Sexual gratification depicted in Sherlock slash fan fiction as challenging the norms and empowering fans will also be explored in my study to seek for the subversive aspects of women's writing and reading of slash fan fiction.

While most of the academic studies seek for the subversive aspects of Sherlock slash fan fiction to challenge the norms, Rebecca Brill gave a different argument when she examined a specific type of slash pairing in Sherlock fan fiction. As previous discussion showed, there are many different types of slash pairings created, among which some do subvert the norms, while others are highly controversial, such as the dominant/submissive type of slash pairing. In the analysis of the subversive aspects of slash fan fiction, Brill (2015) agreed that while some slash pairings which adhere to the heterosexual norms "do occur and are subversive", there are other extreme cases presenting a rather negative effect (p.27). She used *Chameleon*, a Sherlock slash fan fiction, as an example to argue that assigning male sexuality with extremely aggressive and controlling characteristics is "actually aggravated, rather than subverted" (Brill, 2015, p.27). In *Chameleon*, Sherlock and John are constructed based on a sub-genre pairing "Sentinel and Guide bonding", which is an extreme

assumption of the dominant/submissive dichotomy. In this story, Sherlock, as the Sentinel, is the one to dominate, while John, as the Guide, is the one to completely submit, living in a life revolving around the Sentinel. Brill (2015) argued that such a narrative “sounds rather similar to the plight of women in traditionalist societies”, which only serves to aggravate “negative sexual roles” (p.27-28).

Whether the dominant/submissive slash pairing subverts the norms or not has been discussed in academic studies but remains unsettled. In my own experience of reading the BBC Sherlock slash fan fiction, I am also fascinated with the dominant/submissive slash pairing. As controversial as it seems to be, it also opens vast possibilities to explore issues regarding gender and power relations. While most of the previous academic studies tried to answer how the show interacts with its fandom and whether this interaction and the slash genre subvert the norms or not, they hardly contemplated the latter question through a text-based analysis. To fully explore Sherlock slash fan fiction in terms of gender identity, sexed body, power relations and subversion, and fill in the gap left by previous research, my study aims to analyze the texts of stories which depicting the dominant/submissive slash pairing of John and Sherlock.

1.3 Why the BBC Sherlock Slash Fan Fiction

There are many different pairings in slash fan fiction, among which the dominant/submissive pairing is chosen as my research object because of its unique feature. It exemplifies the type of slash generally described as romantic relationship between two men where one adheres to traditional male features while the other adheres to traditional female features. This characteristic makes the dominant/submissive slash pairing a suitable case for diverse and creative interpretations regarding issues of gender identity, sexed body, power relations and subversion. As my thesis will be developed around such issues, this specific slash genre is the best choice for a text-based study.

The BBC Sherlock slash fan fiction is chosen because of my own interest in the show and its slash fan fiction. What’s more, the unique identity of John and Sherlock

created in the show makes them more fluid to represent either masculinity or femininity, and based on which many slash stories are written. Indeed, the slash pairing between John and Sherlock is the most popular among all pairings in Sherlock fandom. And among this John and Sherlock slash pairing, many stories are created based on the assumption of the dominant/submissive dichotomy, which provides sufficient materials for my own research.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions derive from the unique features of the dominant/submissive pairing presented in Sherlock slash fan fiction. The slash stories which are written based on the dominant/submissive pairing share similar narratives. In these narratives, the dominant/submissive slash pairing between John and Sherlock is distinguished by their performances in specific scenes, such as sex scenes. In the dominant/submissive dichotomy, when John is assigned the masculine “dominant” role, Sherlock will be assigned the feminine “submissive” role accordingly. Exploring the construction process of John and Sherlock will reveal how gender norms are performed and sustained in the imitation of the dominant/submissive division. Therefore, the first research question will be addressing the construction process and proposed as followed:

How are gender identity and sexed body in the dominant/submissive slash pairing constructed?

And its sub-question will be deployed to address the controversy posed by this dominant/submissive slash pairing:

Does the dominant/submissive slash pairing subvert heteronormativity?

Because the definition of slash fan fiction is commonly accepted as women’s creation for women, exploration on women’s oppression and possible resistance will

be feasible with the discussion on how slash fan fiction impacts women in experiencing sexual pleasure. Therefore, the second research question proposed as:

Does the writing and reading of the dominant/submissive slash pairing empower women?

2.Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework according to which this study is elaborated.

2.1.Gender Performativity

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity is a theory concerning issues of gender, sex, gender performances and gender parody, which provides the basic theoretical framework for my exploration on the construction of gender identity and sexed body in Sherlock slash fan fiction.

2.1.1 Sex and Gender

It has long been accepted that sex is a biological product determining what male and female are while gender is its psychological and cultural expression possessing corresponding characteristics. However, gender theorist Judith Butler questions this perspective of biological determinism, arguing that sex is culturally constructed just as gender is.

Butler (1999) questions the prediscursive assumption of sex by pointing out that sex as prediscursive production is merely an outcome of "the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender" (p.11). Therefore, as the material form of sex, body has no privilege meaning but only functions as raw signs getting meanings through certain signification process.

Since sex as prediscursive production is denied, the cultural inscription imposed on gender according to the assumption of sex would no longer make any sense. The inner essence of gender governing the male gender identity and female gender identity would thus lose its power. As a result, masculinity may be able to signify a female body just as easily as it does to a male one, and femininity signify a male body as easily as a female one (Butler, 1999, p.10).

In my study of Sherlock slash fan fiction, gender identity and sexed body carry no privilege meanings but act as raw signs being constructed into the category of two

sexes. Studying the signification of these signs will reveal how gender identity and sexed body are constructed.

2.1.2 Performativity as Enacting and Reenacting Gender Norms

Butler rejects the idea that there is always a subject as the inner essence existing prior to the deed and determining one's gender identity. This inner essence is assumed to be the metaphysical existence governing the actions of body. Instead, in Butler's argument, subject is merely a fiction. Gender identity is not something immanent and fixed but is performative, that is, gender identity is the outcome of the enacting and reenacting of gender norms.

Developing from Simone de Beauvoir's ([1949]1983) idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"(p.295), Butler (1999) argues that gender is always "a doing" and further explains that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (p.68).

In other words, the construction of gender identity is the effect of expression, a process of enacting and reenacting performances. And these reiterative gender performances are not merely simple actions but should be taken as the "reiterative and citational practices" where the heteronormative structure of sex and gender are reproduced and sustained. (Butler, 1993, p.12).

Therefore, in my study, the construction of gender identity and sex body in Sherlock slash fan fiction can be approached as a set of reiterative performances which take the form of the heterosexual category of two sexes.

2.1.3 Gender Parody as Subversion

Based on the theory of gender performativity, Butler raises the notion of gender parody which refers to the imitation of the heterosexual category of two sexes in both gay and straight culture. The reiterative nature of gender norms provides not only the sustention of heteronormativity but also potential for subversion.

According to gender performativity, gender identity is constructed by the reiteration of gender performances, and through these reiterative gender

performances the heterosexual gender norms could be reproduced and sustained. However, the very fact that heterosexual gender norms have to be ceaselessly enacted and reenacted by individual for it to maintain its domination exactly reveals that the heterosexual gender norms are not as assumed to be original but rather a permanent imitation being imposed upon the body of individual.

Butler raises the idea of gender parody with drag queen as its specific example to suggest that the reenactment of heterosexual gender norms provides the possibility of subversion. She argues that the “‘presence’ of so-called heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts”, cannot be interpreted as “chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities”, but works as “the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories” (Butler, 1999, p.41).

Therefore, in my study, if the narratives of Sherlock slash fan fiction imitate the heterosexual conventions, such as the category of two sexes, then the reiterations of heterosexual conventions will ultimately reveal that heterosexual original is nothing but permanent imitation. The notion of gender parody provides a practical framework according to which the construction of gender identity and sexed body into the two sex categories in Sherlock slash stories is not merely a chimerical imitation but functions as the subversive site ultimately confuses and denaturalizes the two sex categories.

2.2 Microphysics of Power

Michel Foucault’s theory of microphysics of power challenges the assumption of power as repressive and coercive, and presents that power is productive and operated in the form of generating knowledge, with modern discipline as its specific technique.

2.2.1 Productive Power

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, as well as many other feminist theories are, in fact, heavily influenced by Foucault’s conception of power. Foucault terms the “repressive hypothesis of power” (1978) referring to the idea that power is

commonly believed to operate in the form of repression. For example, in dealing with the peripheral sexualities, sexualities that are apart from the conjugal couple, such as children's masturbation, incest, or homosexual, repressive power controls by imposing silence and secrecy upon them (Foucault, 1978, p.38). However, the fact that one merely needs to speak openly about these peripheral sexualities in order to obtain emancipation exactly exposes the fragility of the repressive power. Rather than being repressive, Foucault argues that power is productive. In this form of productive power, instead of silencing the peripheral sexualities, knowledge is produced and proliferated as new scientific discourses to describe and classify these deviant sexual behaviors, to mark them and assign particular features to them, so that individuals can easily identify them with new treatments and corrections can be invented and employed to regulate and prevent these newly formed deviant behaviors (Foucault, 1978, p.41-46).

By generating knowledge that defines the world, this kind of productive power operates not only in the public area but also in the private space, to the extent of the everyday lives of individuals, their bodies and "modes of conduct", namely, to the extent of microphysics (Foucault, 1978, p.48). Being a "socially recognized" subject, one cannot escape but only exists within the networks of power/knowledge (Oksala, 2016, p.475). As such, subject is not as assumed to be natural or authentic but is simultaneously produced and constrained by the microphysics of power.

2.2.2 Disciplining the Body

According to Foucault, to effectively control and regulate the subject for the benefits of modern societies, discipline is used and operated as a specific technology of power upon body. Discipline, in Foucault's (1995) definition, is a set of methods which enables "the meticulous control of the operations of the body", and makes "the constant subjection of its force" and forces them into "a relation of docility and utility" (p.137). These methods of disciplinary practices include the mechanism of construction as well as the means of correct training with the aims of making the body both docile and functional to its fullest extent. For example, in the army, the bodies of soldiers are imposed upon a series of movements and exercises attending to the slightest details. The patterns of their body gestures and movements are

broken down and reconstructed in a manner that from the length of the step to the direction of the head could be coded and trained for the maximal efficiency (Foucault, 1995. p.151). By internalizing the disciplinary practices, the human body is trained into a machine-like existence whose forces can be increased “in economic terms of utility” while these same forces can be decreased “in political terms of obedience” (Foucault, 1995, p.138).

This notion of disciplinary power offers feminist theorists useful insights to analyze the production of feminine body. For example, in Bartky’s argument, the ideal feminine body which imposed upon women are produced by a series of disciplinary practices such as dieting and fitness regimes. These disciplinary practices are used by the patriarchal power to subjugate women into submission and subordination. Women who strive to be sanctioned by the patriarchal power constantly subject to the disciplinary practices of femininity which aims at correcting and normalizing their body, its size, contours, gestures, appearance and movements with a consequence of them being turned into the docile body which is thought to be the “compliant companions” of man (Bartky, 1988, p.75). In the world of patriarchal domination, women are placed under the observation from man, as the prisoners in panopticon are under constant observation from the watch, this gaze ultimately internalized by them which results in a ceaseless self-surveillance that confines them to the docile, bodily being.

2.2.3 Resistance

The idea that subject is produced by the power/knowledge networks and inevitably subjugated to normalization seems presuming no possibility for resistance. However, Foucault (1978) supplements his theory of productive power arguing that because power is not as assumed to be fixed and stable but is undergoing confrontations and transformations, containing multiplicity of forces relations, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p.95). He also points out that “this resistant is never in a position of exteriority to power” because of the relational feature of power: the existence of power depends on multiple points of resistance (Foucault, 1978, p.95). These points of resistance emerge everywhere in the network

of power and being unable to form a “single locus of great Refusal” thus the existence of which can only thought to locate within the “strategic field of power” (Foucault, 1978, p.96).

In his late work, Foucault gives a fuller account on how the subject is able to perform resistance. He turns to the idea of “care of the self” — the ancient study of subjectivity — to elaborate the relation to oneself as a new constitutive element of subject (Foucault, 1997, p.88). Foucault argues that the practice of the self should be understood as the practice of freedom where one draws on one’s life and experiences for a self-transformation to resist the disciplinary power. To explain this, in one of his interviews, Foucault (1997) brought up gay movement as an example, suggesting that homosexual need not to find out what sexuality is but to “create a gay life”, “to become” because of the fact that “sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative life” (p.163). In other words, the practice of the self is not to discover the secret side or truth of oneself but to create a life, to transform oneself, to “attain to a certain mode of being” (Foucault, 1997, p.282).

This perspective of self-transformation is appropriated by feminist theorists to form the idea of consciousness raising. Margaret McLaren (2004) argues that consciousness raising is the feminist practice of freedom which aims at resisting the patriarchal gender normalization by utilizing the rules and conventions of one’s culture for a self-transformation (p.230). Amy Allen (2008) also suggests that without a full account of power relations and subjection, one is not able to access to the truth, such as gender normalization and subordination and set oneself free (p.3). Therefore, Foucault’s microphysics of power provides an insightful understanding of how one is constructed through disciplinary practices and subjugated to norms, with this acknowledgement, one is able to appropriate the norms and achieve a self-transformation.

In my study of Sherlock slash fan fiction, female writers and readers engage in the activity of appropriating the norms of patriarchal power by creating the binary sex category between John and Sherlock. By doing so, they are creating their own sexual pleasure and transforming the gender normalization imposed upon them. Therefore, through the writing and reading of slash fan fiction, female fans are actually doing

the practice of the self which is the significant practice of freedom because they empower themselves to resist gender normalization by drawing on their lives as materials for a creative self-transformation.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, I introduce the collection of data and the methodological framework based on which the data are analyzed.

3.1 Collecting Materials

The data analyzed in this study were selected from a fan-run website thebestofsherlockfanfiction.tumblr.com, which aims to recommend the classic and popular BBC Sherlock fan fiction. The data includes 4 stories which were collected from two source websites: Archive of Our Own and Doodle-writes.LiveJournal.com. The selection criteria was based on, first, the narrative of the story. Only the slash fan fiction that are written about the dominant/submissive pairing between John and Sherlock were collected for analysis. Second, the data were presented in the form of extract of the slash stories. The extracts were chosen based on their detailed descriptions about the performances of John and Sherlock in specific scenes, through which, John as the dominant and Sherlock as the submissive can be clearly distinguished.

3.2 The Cultural Analysis of Texts

For methodology, I chose professor of media culture, Mikko Lehtonen's theory, cultural analysis of texts. In order to examine the actual meaning-formation of texts, he suggests an approach consists of three levels of analysis: the poetics of text, the hermeneutics of context, and the study of reading and readers. Text, as assumed to be a completed and final "work", whose analysis has been confined to the text in itself (Lehtonen, 2000, p.83). However, cultural analysis of texts rejects such "essentialism" by pointing out that texts are not mere objects with completed and final meanings in itself but work as "raw materials of meanings" which obtain "actual meanings as they encounter contexts and readers" (Lehtonen, 2000, p.140).

Therefore, to study the actual meaning-formation of texts, one must take into account the three levels of analysis mentioned above. In an actual reading situation, texts, contexts and readers as subjects are not separated elements but deeply

intertwine.

Some concepts should be examined first before applying the cultural analysis of texts as methodological framework.

3.2.1 Defining the Key Concepts

MEANINGS, according to the theory of cultural analysis of texts, are produced through the signification of a variety of signs. We obtain knowledge about reality and our own identity based on how different signs are signified. Hence, signs take an important role in forming our culture and the interpretation of which is significant for our being in the world. What suggested in this claim is that meanings are in all human activities. As human beings, we are the producers of meanings as well as the products of meanings. Approaching human reality from this point of view, Lehtonen (2000) argues that “our world is a world of meanings” (p.17).

What’s more, based on the above argument, Lehtonen (2000) suggests that meanings are not some objective entity already exist to reflect the world, instead, as constructed and created by people, meanings are “unstable”, “temporary”, and always “susceptible to change” (p.17).

POWER are deeply connected to the concept of meaning. As cultural analysis of texts suggests, there is a complicated relation between meanings and social relationships and the study of which ultimately leads to the discussion on another concept, power. In Lehtonen’s argument, the function of power is not only through force but also based on the fact that certain meanings regarding the world prevail other meanings and thus occupying the hegemonic position. By silencing the voice of the “deviants” and “dissidents”, depriving their “words” and “meanings”, dominant meanings appear to be the only legitimate knowledge to make sense of the world (Lehtonen, 2000, p.19). However, he soon points out that dominant meanings are not as assumed to be the only “accessible means” in comprehending and interpreting the world, even though it occupies the hegemonic power position (Lehtonen, 2000, p.19). There are “residual” meanings and “emergent meanings” through which the silenced can be heard and become “visible” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.20).

In my study of Sherlock slash fan fiction, this perspective can be applied through two respects: first is the unequal power relations between the two male characters where one is the dominant while the other is the submissive manifest in slash fan fiction; second is the writing and reading of slash fan fiction, which considered as “deviant” knowledge compared to the legitimate heterosexual norms, is excluded from the dominant culture. But as power operates in the form of meanings and meanings is unstable and ever-changing, I presume that the writing and reading of slash fan fiction are able to gain a voice for those being silenced.

LANGUAGE, based on the theory of cultural analysis of texts, is not taken as a mere tool that conveys messages from a sender to a recipient any more (Lehtonen, 2000, p.23). Instead, language actively participates in the process of meaning-formation by setting up restrictions for meanings with which we know what and how to comprehend human reality (Lehtonen, 2000, p.26). Moreover, linguistic signs do not possess stable and immutable meanings in themselves but obtain meanings based on the context.

As the process of signification, language produces meaning by distinguishing one linguistic sign from another (Lehtonen, 2000, p.23). Language can also be seen as one form of representation, which suggests that language does not merely present the object it signifies but represents it and produces meanings about it.

Analyzing the language — words and diction — used in Sherlock slash fan fiction will show how meanings are produced in the texts and contexts, thus reveal how gender identity and sexed body are constructed in slash fan fiction.

DISCOURSE, according to cultural analysis of texts, consists of a group of statements which are regulated by a certain discursive practice. This discursive practice utilizes unspoken historic rules to restrict people’s behaviors in a variety of fields ranging from society to language (Lehtonen, 2000, p.43). Within a specific discourse which is governed by a set of discursive practices, people know who is entitled to speak, what is allowed to be talked about and how it can be talked about, in which place and under which prerequisite. Those who are excluded by a certain discourse simply do not have a voice to express themselves in that discursive regime.

Different discourses have different discursive practices. And the relations among different discourses are either “inclusive” or “exclusive” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.42). Moreover, these relations are always hierarchical because certain discourses are considered to be the dominant while others have to make great efforts to gain themselves a voice in order to be heard. However, in Lehtonen’s argument, the hierarchy of discourse is not permanent because discourses are not something stable and unchanged but open gaps for people to use language in variable ways to signify the world and produce meanings about the world (Lehtonen, 2000, p.44).

From this perspective, women’s reading and writing of slash fan fiction can be approached as women’s language and women’s discursive creation with which they are able to gain themselves a voice among the dominant discourses.

3.2.2 The Poetics of Text

As one of the three levels of analysis in cultural analysis of texts, the poetics of text focuses on comprehending meanings by analyzing the “text”. In Lehtonen’s argument, the concept of text includes two dimensions: texts as physical beings and texts as semiotic beings. As physical beings, texts are quite contradictory because they appear to be “ready”, completed in their material form (Lehtonen, 2000, p.96). However, text is only identical with itself in a physical way. The material form of texts does not contain any meanings but only functions as raw material for the formation of meanings (Lehtonen, 2000, p.96). As semiotic beings, texts are open for meanings. The polyphonic nature of texts is determined by the very fact that linguistic signs do not contain any meanings in themselves but only function as raw materials obtaining meanings in relation to other signs within a certain context. The production of meanings from texts are moments where texts and readers meet in a certain context (Lehtonen, 2000, p.83). Meanings produced from the same texts are quite diverse since different readers carry different cultural practices when they encounter a text, even the same reader would produce different meanings out of the same text if s/he is placed in a different reading context. Once a text is read, it can never maintain its “identity”.

However, this does not mean that texts are totally open as if they carry infinite

meaning potentials. The number of potential meanings is determined by “readers’ textual competence”, as well as “the text being read” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.97) . Therefore, texts themselves are important in the process of meaning formation. Narration of a text brings a temporary closure to its meanings through a set of arrangement and the selection of materials. On the one hand, readers cannot just read anything out of a text regardless of its narration, on the other hand, it is exactly because of these limited choices of a narration that open gaps for readers to complete and actualize its potential meanings.

Emphasizing the polyphonic quality of texts and its relation to contexts and readers, Lehtonen brings up “the poetics of text”, according to which the central problems concerning texts analysis are not “which and what” anymore, but “why and how” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.73). The poetics of text ask two questions: “what things texts are capable of signifying and by what means” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.73).

From the traditional point of view, a text is commonly accepted as a work, a completed object already in its final meanings. In order to study a piece of literary work, one requires a certain literary competence which includes three dimensions. First, studying the “significance of the work” is to study what has been expressed in the work that is important to human reality (Lehtonen, 2000, p.85). Second, studying the “consistency of the work” is to understand how the work is articulated to be uniform on the level of signification (Lehtonen, 2000, p.85). Third, studying the thematic unity of the work is to study the “linguistic features” of the work which are presented by reading the work on the assumption of the “consistency” of the work, which in turn reveals that there is a “consistent structure of form in the work” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.85).

On the contrary, studying the text as “text”, the significance, consistency and thematic unity of a text mentioned above does not assure the text to be a uniform entity any more, but opens ruptures and gaps for variable production of meanings. From this perspective, a text can be approached from many respects. For example, to study the meaning formation of texts through the disposition of language is to study the linguistic signs as raw materials obtaining meanings through the surrounding signs. Texts can also be approached in relation to other texts, to their readers or to certain contexts. All these contribute to the meaning potentials of texts which make

texts to be always on the move, on the way to actualize meanings.

3.2.3 The Hermeneutics of Context

In order to study the role that contexts play in the formation of meanings, Lehtonen puts forward “the hermeneutics of context”. Next to the poetics of texts which asks “what different meaning potentials texts contain”, the hermeneutics of contexts study “which of these potential meanings actualize to any given reader in a respective context” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.112).

According to Lehtonen, the notion of context is defined as “cultural resources” with which the meaning potentials of texts are actualized by readers (Lehtonen, 2000, p.105). Namely, the cultural resources readers have at their use determine what kind of meanings they are able to produce from the texts and how they produce meanings from these texts (Lehtonen, 2000,p.105). From this perspective, discourses can be considered as one form of “cultural resource battalion” where readers produce meanings from texts based on the discursive practices imposed on them (Lehtonen, 2000, p.105). As certain discourses are more compelling than others, a certain means of reading would be taken more worthy than others. However, a certain reading is only a temporary fixation of meanings and always being competed by others as discursive formation.

3.2.4 The Reading and Readers

As the theory of cultural analysis of texts puts so many emphases on the interaction between texts, contexts and readers, the last question brought up is about readers which asks “what kinds of meanings and why do people produce them from this text (or in this text) in this historical time and place?” and “what possible effects does this text have on the practices of people’s lives?” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.128).

In Lehtonen’s argument, a reader functions as “a sampler of meanings” who makes sense of reality by connecting meanings with each other (Lehtonen, 2000, p.131). Different readers read different meanings out of the same texts depending on “what they have at hand” (Lehtonen, 2000, p.131). The relation between readers and texts

is mutual: readers produce meanings from texts which in turn impact the identity formation of themselves by sorting out what is significant to them among other things. Moreover, as readers we have multiple identities. The different identities as readers in us would be “activated” through the reading of different texts (Lehtonen, 2000, p.136). From this perspective, women’s reading of Sherlock slash fan fiction would have great impacts on their identity formation which opens possibilities for them to perceive themselves differently and experience the world differently.

The cultural analysis of texts provides a very useful guideline for my study of Sherlock slash fan fiction. Although it concentrates more on the theoretical discussion on the relations among texts, contexts and readers, the central research questions of these three analysis levels still provide an applicable methodological framework. My study mainly focus on the level of texts, as well as readers, and for analytical purpose, I will first analyze the texts with the discussion on readers followed. According to the poetics of texts, I will divide my analysis into different thematic units and study how linguistic signs used in the texts as raw materials obtaining meanings through surrounding signs under each themes. As text is a discursive formation, in this analytical process, to fully expose its hierarchical structure, I will also seek for the absent and the silenced which contribute to its establishment and maintenance. For readers, I will study how the reading of Sherlock slash fan fiction impacts women’s perception of themselves and their experiences with the world.

4. Analysis of Data

The following analysis focuses on examining how John and Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body in the dominant/submissive dichotomy are constructed based on the theory of cultural analysis of texts.

According to the poetics of text, I divide my study into different themes within which certain linguistic signs are used and signified to construct gender identity and sexed body in Sherlock slash fan fiction. The following chapters are arranged according to the themes I identify in exploring the texts of Sherlock slash fan fiction.

4.1. Theme "Gaze and Pleasure"

This chapter discusses the first theme "Gaze and Pleasure". My study first examines "Gaze", and then turns to "Pleasure", with the exploration on how "Gaze" works with "Pleasure" in the construction of John and Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body.

Following are two extracts from Sherlock slash fan fiction *Those in Peril on the Sea*, which shows how "Gaze" works between John and Sherlock.

Extract 1

A small smile was stretched across his flushed face. The redness gave him a bit of color, a bit of ruddiness to his cheeks. John nodded vaguely and watched Sherlock navigate back towards the cluster of tables on the far end of the room. He bent his long arms behind his head to undo the ribbon keeping his hair tied back, gather it all together again (Some had fallen out) and tie it back up.

There was something incredibly wrong about watching a seventeen-year-old tie his hair back and thinking it seductive.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

Extract 2

The cold air felt good against his hot face, and Sherlock seemed to find it refreshing as well. He reached back and held his hair off his neck—John watched as the shimmer of sweat evaporated away with the wind—and untied the ribbon, letting his hair fall back and around his face.

It wasn't as long around the face as John had first judged it to be; it reached to about his chin, and had a bit of a wild curl to it. It curved underneath his chin, tips kissing the underside of his jaw.

Sherlock slid the red ribbon into his pocket and ran his fingers through his hair, muttering, "Lord, that's cumbersome."

Not knowing how to respond to that, John stayed quiet and leaned against the railings, staring at Sherlock staring at the ocean.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

These two extracts both depict how Sherlock “do” his hair, but are entirely through the gaze of John. Here, John and Sherlock presented in the dominant/submissive dichotomy are constructed through the establishment of another binary: Gaze/Gazed. The linguistic signs used in constructing John and Sherlock are totally different. For John, as the one who gazes, there are no specific description of his appearance and body but merely signs such as “nodded”, “watched”, “stayed quiet” and “staring” depict his action, showing his “gaze” is upon Sherlock. As the object being gazed, Sherlock is constructed through completely different linguistic signs such as “small smell”, “flushed face”, “redness”, “ruddiness to his cheeks”, “seductive”, “red ribbon”, “wild curl”. These different linguistic signs used to construct John and Sherlock only obtain meanings through their interaction under “Gaze”.

According to cultural analysis of text, linguistic signs have no prior meanings in themselves but gain meanings through surrounding signs in a certain context. For example, linguistic sign “seductive” is not fixed and possesses no privileged meanings but signifies different meanings in different contexts. If “seductive” is placed in the discourse of recipe, it may signify a dish that is delicious and simulates one’s appetite. Once “seductive” is situated within a certain discourse, its meaning will be temporarily fixed through surrounding signs. Here, in Sherlock slash fan fiction, the

linguistic signs construct Sherlock's body temporarily achieve closure on their meanings through the gaze of John, the narration of the dominant/submissive slash pairing as well as the reading of the audiences. The linguistic sign "seductive" signifies sexual attractiveness of Sherlock's body in relation to John's "gaze". Surrounding "seductive", linguistic signs such as "flushed face", "redness", "red ribbon", "wild curl" that construct Sherlock's body signify the meaning of sexual temptation. It is only under the gaze of John that a male body as Sherlock can be able to convey the meaning of sexual attractiveness, presented as a body that should be gazed.

It is clearly showed in the scenes that the "gaze" has never been equal between John and Sherlock. In both scenes, the focus of construction has been put on Sherlock's body whereas his gaze towards John is silenced. The construction mechanism of John and Sherlock under theme "gaze" functions as this: when John is gazing Sherlock, to complete his gaze, Sherlock's gaze must be avoided and silenced. In the world of patriarchal domination, woman is the one under a generalized male gaze which aims to subjugate woman into the docile sexual being. In the narration of the dominant/submissive slash pairing, instead, Sherlock is the one under the ceaseless gaze of John and becomes the feminine sexual being. Even though John and Sherlock both have male bodies, the signification of them are completely different where John, as the gaze, signifies masculinity while Sherlock, as the gazed, signifies femininity. Therefore, along with the establishment of binary gaze/gazed, the binary masculinity/femininity is constructed.

According to cultural analysis of text, the meanings of linguistic signs "masculinity" and "femininity" are not fixed but permanently constructed. For example, in the above extracts, "femininity" is signified as "flushed face", "redness", "ruddiness to his cheeks", "seductive", "red ribbon", "wild curl" to explain the sexual attractiveness of Sherlock. In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, "femininity" is permanently constructed through Sherlock's body in relation to John's gaze. To further explore this, the following is another extract from *Those in Peril on the Sea*.

"No, this is fine." Sherlock stepped towards the mantelpiece, and John found himself staring at the other man's bare feet. They were pale, delicate.

.....

Then Sherlock dropped the dressing gown from his shoulders, and all thoughts of feet flew from John's mind, as an expanse of pale back was revealed. As expected, he was slim, but not without muscle. There was not a scar on him, and the only blemishes were the pinpoints of light brown freckles.

.....

He was gorgeous, every fine-boned, creamy-skinned inch of him, and all John could think about was tracing his tongue from freckle to freckle, from shoulder all the way to ankle, where a lone circle sat on the very center of his tendon.

Sherlock turned around. John slowly came to the realization that there was arousal heavy in his trousers.

.....

John, across from him, became focused and intense and Sherlock found himself staring over his head, rather than in his eyes, because for once he understood how it was to be pierced by a gaze.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This slash fan fiction was adapted from movie *Titanic*. The whole story starts with Sherlock being forced to marry James Moriarty in order to rescue the Homes Corporation. According to the times in the story, it was only acceptable for Sherlock to marry a man after he was through the process of feminization. However, on the giant Titanic, Sherlock met John, a doctor retired from the army, and fell in love with him. What happened between Jack and Rose in *Titanic* was borrowed and rearranged between John and Sherlock in this story. The scene extracted above depicts John sketching Sherlock's naked body whereas in the movie the naked body that being gazed is a female body.

In this extract, Sherlock's body is constructed with linguistic signs such as "bare feet", "delicate", "pale back", "slim", "creamy-skin", "gorgeous" while John is constructed through signs "focused", "intense", "arousal". In this construction, the linguistic sign "arousal" signifies John's desire towards Sherlock, who is sexually attractive enough to be gazed and desired. Therefore, when being placed around "arousal", linguistic signs "bare feet", "delicate", "pale back", "slim", "creamy-skin",

“gorgeous” that are constructing Sherlock’s body are filled with the meaning of sexual attractiveness.

As mentioned above, within heterosexual discourse, women’s body is being ceaselessly gazed by men and turned into the docile sexual being. In Sherlock slash fan fiction, however, Sherlock’s male body is used to replace the female body as sexual being. To complete this replacement, in this story, Sherlock is constructed compare to woman with linguistic signs such as “gorgeous”, “slim”, “delicate”, “pale back”. When being compared to woman, all these linguistic signs construct Sherlock as sexually attractive as woman signify the meaning of femininity, despite the fact that a male body they are addressing. In such construction, the gender identity and sexed body of John and Sherlock imitates the heteronormative assumption of masculinity and femininity.

“ Woman”, “man”, “femininity” and “masculinity” as linguistic signs do not possess privileged meanings in themselves but are constantly constructed and reproduced in discourse. As such, in Sherlock slash fan fiction, the sexed body of John and Sherlock, whether it is biologically male or female, is deprived of any innate essence but functions as raw material obtaining meaning through the imitation of the heteronormative two sex categories.

In addition, as it is discussed before, the gaze between John and Sherlock is never equal. In the end of this extract, when John’s gaze towards Sherlock is described as “pierced”, rather than gazing back, Sherlock is “staring over his head”. As the docile sexual being, Sherlock is not allowed to gaze back at John. Hence, in the narration of the dominant/submissive slash pairing, the construction of binary gaze/gazed and masculinity/femininity is completed under the function of John’s gaze and the absence of Sherlock’s gaze.

The unequal gaze between John and Sherlock brings another inequality: desire. In this extract, John is described as “focused”, “intense”, and getting “arousal” when he is attracted to Sherlock’s “delicate”, “slim”, “creamy-skin”, “gorgeous”. Linguistic sign “arousal” signifies John’s desire towards Sherlock as masculine because John is desiring Sherlock’s feminine sexual body. However, in this scene, Sherlock is only presented as the bodily sexual being whose desire towards John is missing. To explain

the “gorgeous” of Sherlock, John’s gaze reaches every part of Sherlock’s body from “feet”, “shoulder”, “back”, “freckles on skin” to “ankle” and “tendon” but never the penis. To complete the construction of “masculinity” and “femininity” of John and Sherlock respectively, Sherlock’s desire as a man must be silenced.

What’s more, in this extract, John’s desire towards Sherlock is also described as imagining of “tracing his tongue” on Sherlock’s body. In the operation of “gaze”, the establishment and completion of binary gaze/gazed and masculinity/femininity is always accompanied by John’s “touch” on Sherlock’s body. In comparison to Sherlock’s lack of autonomy, John’s gaze upon Sherlock is confirmed by his “touch” on Sherlock’s body.

The following is an extract to explain this.

He tilted his head to the side, to look at John, and found him much closer than expected. He wasn't uncomfortable with it, strangely enough. Nor was he uncomfortable when John haltingly came closer, kissed his mouth. He wasn't uncomfortable, or nervous. It felt good.

They pressed their foreheads together and breathed, and John murmured, "Are you okay?"

"Yes." For the first time in a while, he wasn't lying. His hand rose and found John's and their fingers intertwined, and for a moment Sherlock processed the magnitude of what was about to happen, of what they were doing. Sherlock whispered, "I think... I'd like it if you'd touch me."

.....

Sherlock smiled against John's cheek, took John's hand and lowered it to his thigh. Warmth radiated from him, from his hand and his leg pressed against Sherlock's and his side and his forehead and his breath on Sherlock's face.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

Last extract borrowed a classic scene from movie *Titanic* depicting the naked body of Sherlock and the desire of John towards this body. After John sketches Sherlock, the story continues as these two men are trying to have sex. As analyzed previously, Sherlock’s body is filled with the meaning of sexual attractiveness under John’s

“gaze”. As a “touch” on the sexual body is always following a “gaze” in Sherlock slash fan fiction, linguistic sign “touch” is also important in clarifying the femininity of Sherlock from the masculinity of John.

This scene is constructed through the perspective of Sherlock where Sherlock “felt good” and asked John to “touch him” when John “came closer” and “kissed his mouth”. Here, the sign “touch” plays a significant role in clarifying the division of masculinity/femininity. It seems that Sherlock is the one taking the leading role in the dominant/submissive pairing between himself and John when he asked John to “touch him”. However, when Sherlock asked John to “touch him”, his desire towards John is presented as the passive “to be touched” in comparison to John’s active “to touch”. While John desires Sherlock in a way that he wants to “trace his tongue” on Sherlock’s body as previous extract presented, Sherlock desires John in a submissive way that he wants “to be touched”. In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, in order to construct Sherlock into the docile sexual being, his desire towards John must be subjugated into submissive and subordinated. Therefore, linguistic sign “touch” clarifies the binary of masculinity/femininity in the construction of John and Sherlock where “to touch” clarifies John’s desire as masculine while “to be touched” clarifies Sherlock’s desire as feminine.

In the end of this extract, Sherlock is constructed as “smiled”, “lower John’s hand to his thigh” while John is constructed with linguistic signs “warmth radiated from him”, “his leg pressed against Sherlock’s”. When Sherlock’s desire towards John is signified as “to be touched”, signs “smiled”, “lower John’s hand to his thigh” signify the meaning of seduction and Sherlock’s consent to John’s touch on him. Whereas, when John’s desire toward Sherlock is signified as “to touch”, signs “warmth radiated from him”, “his leg pressed against Sherlock’s” signify John’s aggressively dominant role in his relation to Sherlock.

The following is another extract explaining how “touch” works with “gaze”.

Sherlock’s eyes slide shut, he looks blissfully and tragically sad.

.....

“it’s a quote. Faulkner. I hate it, I’ve tried to delete it, but I can’t.” Sherlock tries, and then his face cracks from the weight of too much emotion, and he shatters into

shards of technicolour. And then he looks as if he's about to fucking cry and so the doctor does the only thing that he can think of doing, which is finally, finally reaching out to touch just his fingertips over the angular bow of Sherlock's lips.

At the doctor's touch, Sherlock's face stops it's shattering immediately, turning into something else. He smiles beautifully, the skin tugging against skin.....

Extracted from Our Enthusiasms Which Cannot Always Be Explained, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This plot takes place when John and Sherlock are taking a cab back to their home after an investigation of a crime scene. In relation to John's "touch", Sherlock is constructed through linguistic signs such as "sad", "too much emotion", "about to cry". These linguistic signs obtain the meaning of femininity around linguistic sign "touch". As it is discussed before, "touch" clarifies the binary of masculinity/femininity in John and Sherlock's construction. When John's desire towards Sherlock presented as "to touch", his desire signified as masculine. Therefore, being placed around linguistic sign "to touch", "sad", "too much emotion", "about to cry" are filled with the meaning of femininity in comparison to masculinity.

In the end of this extract, linguistic sign "smiles" is used again to depict Sherlock's reaction to John's "touch" on him. When "smile" is being placed around the sign "to touch", it signifies Sherlock's consent to John's touch on his body. In this construction, "touch", as it fills John's desire with masculinity, it also gives the meaning of "being desired" as femininity to the sign "smile". In comparison to John's desire is "to touch" Sherlock's body, "smile" signifies Sherlock's desire towards John is "to be touched". What's more, the "smile" of Sherlock is seen as "beautifully" in John's eyes, therefore, in relation to "beautifully", "smile" signifies the sexual attractiveness of Sherlock's body.

As it is pointed out previously, gaze has never been equal between John and Sherlock. When John gazes Sherlock, to complete his gaze, Sherlock's gaze must be avoided and silenced. Following "Gaze", "Touch" always works as clarifying the division of masculinity/femininity between John and Sherlock in the narration of the dominant/submissive slash pairing. What's more, "Touch" also distinguishes the different way that John and Sherlock desires each other. Similarly, the pleasure they

experience is also different. In theme “Pleasure”, “Gaze” and “Touch” are also significant in constructing John and Sherlock into the heteronormative two sex categories.

His paperback lay abandoned on the floor as he gently rubbed fingers over Sherlock’s brow and temples, careful to apply only a light touch of pressure as he stroked along the orbital ridge and up over the zygomatic arch. The clean curls had started to fluff themselves up into untamed chaos, and they twisted around his knuckles lovingly as he tunnelled his fingers through Sherlock’s hair.

A breathy hum of appreciation made John swallow tightly, and he glanced down at Sherlock’s face, seeing the dark fan of lashes and pink lips parted around every breath. Quickly, John began to list the bones beneath his touch, feeling out the different plates of Sherlock’s skull in a desperate effort not to think of the pleasure in Sherlock’s expression, intense enough to border on erotic.

‘Is this helping?’ John asked, wincing at the low, gravelly tone to his words. It said far more than the sentence he had uttered, but thankfully Sherlock either ignored it or failed to register it all together.

This time the noise Sherlock made was a purr: a rough, rumbling sound deep in his chest that had John’s stomach clenching and heat pooling between his legs. An erection now would be impossible to hide, and he bit his lip hard, trying to fight it as Sherlock steadily relaxed against him further, his breathing becoming deeper and more even with every passing minute as John battled with his body in an effort not to embarrass himself.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

The pleasure discussed in this theme is about sexual pleasure that John and Sherlock experience in erotic display. My analysis mainly focuses on examining how John and Sherlock’s pleasure are presented in different ways to construct them into the heteronormative two sex categories.

This scene takes place before John and Sherlock have sex. Although without the final “inserting”, John and Sherlock still experience pleasure through John’s “touch” on Sherlock’s body. “Pleasure” is always structured around linguistic sign “touch”. As

“touch” clarifies the binary of masculinity/femininity where John desires Sherlock in the male gendered way while Sherlock desires John in the female gendered way, the “pleasure” they experience in erotic display also operates with “touch” in this construction mechanism.

In this extract, Sherlock’s pleasure is presented as “a breathy hum of appreciation”, “erotic expression”, “a purr” while John’s pleasure is presented with linguistic signs such as “stomach clenching”, “heat pooling between his legs” which ultimately lead to “erection”. By touching Sherlock’s body, John experiences “erection” which implies his desire to Sherlock. Here “erection” signifies John’s desire as masculine in relation to his “touch” on Sherlock. Surrounding “erection”, linguistic signs “stomach clenching”, “heat pooling between his legs” signify John’s sexual pleasure as masculine. When John’s sexual pleasure is filled with the meaning of masculinity, “a breathy hum of appreciation”, “erotic expression”, “a purr” signify Sherlock’s sexual pleasure as feminine in mutual relation.

It is clearly showed from this extract that “touch” clarifies the different ways where John and Sherlock experience sexual pleasure. While John experiences sexual pleasure as the one who “touch”, in mutual relation, Sherlock experiences sexual pleasure as the one who is “being touched”. As such, “touch” clarifies the binary of masculinity/femininity in the construction of John and Sherlock by distinguishing not only the desire they have towards each other, but also the sexual pleasure they experience in erotic display.

In addition, as it is pointed out before, slash fan fiction often use more linguistic signs to construct Sherlock as the docile bodily being that is sexually attractive enough to be gazed and touched. In this extract, along with John’s “touch”, Sherlock’s body is constructed with linguistic signs such as “clean curls”, “dark fan of lashes”, “pink lips”. Whereas John is described merely through linguistic signs such as “rub”, “stroke”, “tunnel” which all signify the meanings of “touch”. Therefore, linguistic signs “clean curls”, “dark fan of lashes”, “pink lips” signify Sherlock’s body as sexually attractive in relation to John’s “touch”.

What’s more, being placed around “pleasure”, “clean curls”, “dark fan of lashes”, “pink lips” are the significant signs constructing the pleasure that John is seeking for in exploring Sherlock’s body. While “rub”, “stroke”, “tunnel” bring pleasure to

Sherlock as his body is being explored.

In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, “curls” and “hair” are two of the most repeatedly used signs in the construction of Sherlock’s body. As “curls” and “hair” are the typical characteristics of woman which, when being placed around “touch”, signify sexual attractiveness of Sherlock’s body, simultaneously reproduce the content of femininity through Sherlock’s body.

The story continues as John and Sherlock confess their love to each other and try to have sex.

His dressing gown had slipped off his right shoulder to slump around the curve of his bare bicep, and his hair was insane. There was also, John noticed, an imprint of the weave of his jumper on one cheekbone. It all added up to the kind of debauched look that made something in John’s hind-brain give a pleased, possessive growl, yet Sherlock made no move to adjust his appearance.

.....

He felt Sherlock shiver, a delicate tremor of delight, and even though it was Sherlock on top of him, pinning his legs and taller with it, there was no doubt about who was in control. He followed where John led, returning the glide of his tongue and the faintest edge of teeth, parting with wet, filthy sounds of pleasure only to return again, drinking from John’s mouth as if it were the only sustenance he would ever require.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

In an erotic display, Sherlock’s body is presented as the docile sexual being that is under John’s gaze and touch. In this extract, the construction of Sherlock is totally through John’s gaze with linguistic signs such as “bare bicep”, “insane hair”, “weave on cheekbone”, “debauched”. Therefore, in relation to John’s gaze, linguistic signs “bare bicep”, “insane hair”, “weave on cheekbone” “debauched” signify sexual attractiveness of Sherlock’s body. And this image of Sherlock gives John the feeling of “pleased” and “possessive”. Here, in relation to “pleased”, linguistic sign “possessive” signifies that John obtains his “pleasure” through the possession of Sherlock’s body. Therefore, around “pleasure”, there is the establishment of a pair of binary:

possess/possessed. When “bare bicep”, “insane hair”, “weave on cheekbone”, “debauched” are filled with the meaning of femininity, “possessive” signifies John’s sexual pleasure as masculine in mutual relation. Therefore, “possessive” clarifies the construction of John and Sherlock in the dominant/submissive slash pairing simultaneously fills the binary of masculinity/femininity with the meanings of “possess” and “possessed” respectively.

In comparison to John, Sherlock’s “pleasure” is presented with linguistic signs such as “followed”, “drinking from John’s mouth”. The linguistic sign “drinking from John’s mouth” implies the act that Sherlock is “given” something by John. Here, “given” signifies “possessed” when being placed around linguistic sign “possessive”. In comparison to this, John is assumed to be the “give” and “possess”. As the one who is being possessed, Sherlock is not allowed to possess anything himself, which leads to his inability to “give”. Therefore, he can only be “given” pleasure by the one who possesses him. On the contrary, as the one who possesses Sherlock, John obtains his pleasure through “in control”, “led”. When possess/possessed is categorized into masculinity and femininity respectively, linguistic signs “in control”, “led” signify John’s pleasure as masculine while “followed”, “drinking from John’s mouth” signify Sherlock’s pleasure as feminine.

The story continues as followed.

Sherlock’s robe had slipped off both shoulders, now, blue fabric rippling around his elbows and falling in a cascade off the slippery sofa. John’s palms trailed down his arms and across his bare chest, calling forth a gasp of pleasure as he swept his thumbs over the tight buds of Sherlock’s nipples and down across his meagre belly. At last, he followed the trail of hair to where it vanished beneath the low-slung waist of Sherlock’s pyjamas.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, John’s possession of Sherlock is always constructed with “touch”. In this extract, John’s “touch” on Sherlock is described as “palms trailed down his arms”, therefore, linguistic sign “palms” is significant to claim John’s possession of Sherlock. In an erotic display, when John’s

“palms” are put on Sherlock’s body, John is possessing Sherlock, to complete his possession, Sherlock’s “palms” are always missing or not allowed to do anything on John’s body.

In this scene, Sherlock’s body is constructed through linguistic signs “bare chest”, “tight buds of nipples”, “meagre belly” in relation to John’s “palms”. When John’s “palms” clarifies his possession of Sherlock’s body, it also clarifies the binary of masculinity/femininity in the construction of John and Sherlock. Therefore, linguistic signs “bare chest”, “tight buds of nipples”, “meagre belly” signify sexual attractiveness of Sherlock’s body in relation to John’s “palms”. In addition, being placed around “pleasure”, “bare chest”, “tight buds of nipples”, “meagre belly” are the essential signs constructing the “pleasure” that John is seeking for when he explores Sherlock’s body in an erotic display.

The following is another extract to explain how “Pleasure” works differently in the construction of John and Sherlock’s body.

“Come here,” John breathed in a command Sherlock was never going to disobey, as he climbed on the bed with Sherlock, straddling his thighs.

Sherlock sat up to meet him, shifting carefully so their hips aligned just so and John’s whole body shuddered as their erections pressed together. A roll of John’s hips and Sherlock’s breath was catching in his chest, the hot rush of want surging through his veins.

“To think,” he gasped as John pressed soft, opened mouthed kisses down his neck, “I used to think sexual arousal an infrequent, but inconvenient distraction.”

“Changed your mind, have I?” John teased. John traced patterns over Sherlock’s left nipple with his tongue, coaxing it to hardness before moving across to the right.

“You could say as much,” Sherlock answered, arching into John’s touch as hands skated down to Sherlock’s waist and his skin hummed in response.

“Lie down,” John whispered against Sherlock’s lips in command, sparks of need so sharp they were like electricity running through his veins as he obeyed.

.....

“Please,” Sherlock breathed, hips pressing down into John’s touch and he was

ready. Unable to think of anything beyond the need for John inside of him, for release.

John eased in. One smooth thrust and it was as though he'd set every one of Sherlock's nerve endings on fire. Again.

Extracted from A Silver Sixpence, Doodle-writes.LiveJournal.com, 10th. Mar. 2018

In this extract, the linguistic signs constructing John and Sherlock appear as binaries that all match the construction mechanism of the heteronormative two sex categories. For example, when John “pressed kisses” on Sherlock’s “neck”, Sherlock did not “kiss” back, but only presented with linguistic signs “gasp”, “neck”. In this construction, the absence of Sherlock’s touch on John’s body places him into the subordinated category of femininity. Whereas John is placed into the dominant category of masculinity as he is able to do something on Sherlock’s body. In the same way, while John is presented as “in command”, Sherlock is constructed with linguistic signs such as “never going to disobey”, “obeyed”. These linguistic signs obtain meanings in their mutual relation where “in command” signifies masculinity while “obeyed” signifies femininity.

It is worth noticing that, in this scene, Sherlock’s “erection” is also presented. The “erection” of Sherlock is important to remind the readers that the body they are gazing at is a male body. However, this male body is deprivileged in a way that he is not getting “pleasure” through his “erection”. In the construction of their “pleasure”, John’s “erection” brings him the “whole body shuddered” and “hot rush of want surging through his vein” whereas Sherlock’s pleasure is silenced. Even though a male body he has, Sherlock is still constructed into the category of femininity because he is unable to react to his “erection”. The disempowerment of Sherlock’s male body is confirmed as he experiences “pleasure” when “obeyed” to John’s “command”. When John is “in command”, Sherlock is described as “obeyed” which brings him the pleasure of “sparks of need”, “sharp” and “electricity running through his veins”. In relation to “in command”, Sherlock’s pleasure is signified as feminine despite the fact that he occupies a male body.

In addition, as it is discussed before, linguistic sign “touch” is important in clarifying the binary of masculinity/femininity as well as claiming John’s possession of

Sherlock's body. Here in this scene, when John puts his "hands" on Sherlock's body, the reactions of Sherlock are described as "arching into John's touch", "hips pressing down into John's touch". These linguistic signs signify Sherlock's "consent" to John's "touch" on his body with the result of confirming John's possession of Sherlock's body.

Also in the end of this scene, Sherlock obtains his pleasure "nerve endings on fire" through "John inside of him". The sign "inside of him" clarifies the meaning of "give" and "given" between John and Sherlock, which also places John and Sherlock into the "possess" and "possessed" respectively. As the "possessed", Sherlock can only obtain "pleasure" through John "inside of him", which ultimately clarifies John's possession of his body. This final "inserting" is the completion of John's possession of Sherlock with John finally getting into Sherlock's body.

4.2 Theme "Violence and Protection"

This chapter studies another theme "Violence & Protection". My analysis also divided into "Violence" and "Protection", and focuses on how these two co-operate in constructing John and Sherlock in the dominant/submissive pairing.

Following are some scenes also extracted from slash fan fiction *Those in Peril on the Sea*. These extracts mainly depict the conflicts between Sherlock and his fiancée, James Moriarty. Being adapted from the original character in *Titanic*, fiancée James Moriarty is presented as a successful, but sinister and violent businessman.

James was three inches shorter than Sherlock, but his commanding presence made him seem taller. He was also slightly fuller-bodied, more masculine. Next to him—next to many people—Sherlock appeared too thin and almost fragile, despite the height difference. Everyone who so much as glanced at them would know what they were.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This extract is structured before James abused Sherlock in the storyline. The

construction of “violence” between James and Sherlock is important in distinguishing the binary of masculinity/femininity. Here, James is presented as physically superior with linguistic signs such as “commanding presence”, “seem taller”, “fuller-bodied”, “more masculine”. The sign “masculine” fills its surrounding signs “commanding presence”, “seem taller”, “fuller-bodied” with the meanings of masculinity. In relation to James’ masculinity, Sherlock is constructed into the category of femininity with linguistic signs “too thin” and “almost fragile”. In this construction, Sherlock appears to be physically inferior to James, which makes violence possible upon him.

The story continues as followed.

Almost pleasantly, he said, "Sherlock?" to which Sherlock grunted. Suddenly, James' fingers were at his waist, pressing far too hard. In his ear, James said, "I'm getting tired of this game you're playing, Sherlock. I've had enough now."

"That's unfortunate, darling. I do so enjoy a good game." He smirked to himself. It was short-lived, though, because James' hand immediately tightened again. The smirk was lost in a wince of pain and a barely-suppressed gasp.

.....

"You like games?" This he said lightly, airily as if he were actually inquiring after Sherlock's interests.....When Sherlock did not answer his inquiry, James squeezed Sherlock's skin almost too painfully. Sherlock could not suppress his gasp. "Answer me, Sherlock."

"Yes," Sherlock snarled, trying and failing to wrench himself away from James. Ground out, "I like games."

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This extract shows how “violence” works in constructing James and Sherlock into the heteronormative two sex categories. Here, linguistic sign “hand” is important in constructing James’ physical superior. When Sherlock disobeys James’ will, James punishes Sherlock with violence such as “fingers at his waist”, “pressing far too hard”, “hand tightened”, “squeezed almost too painfully”. In relation to James’ capable “hand”, Sherlock is deprived of capability to fight back but whose reaction only described as “grunted”, “smirked”, “gasp”, “pain”. As James’ “hand” is capable of

bringing Sherlock “pain”, in such construction mechanism, James body is empowered with linguistic sign “hand”. To complete this construction, Sherlock’s reaction to fight back must be avoided and silenced. As the end of this extract shows, Sherlock “trying and failing to wrench himself away from James”, here, Sherlock’s male body is disempowered with linguistic sign “failing”.

Therefore, a hierarchy of power relation is built up with the construction of “violence” between James and Sherlock, which is based on the gender structure of the heteronormative two sex category. As previous analysis showed, linguistic sign “hand” is important in clarifying the division of masculinity/femininity in the construction of John and Sherlock. Here, “hand” clarifies and reproduces the content of masculinity as it empowers James. In comparison to this, “failing” clarifies and reproduces the content of femininity as it disempowers Sherlock. Therefore, the binary of powerful/powerless is established as unequal gender structure between John and Sherlock.

The story continues as the violence escalates.

"Then you'll like my game. The rules are very simple. You make me happy, and... I'll make you happy in return." His hand moved, hidden by the fabric of Sherlock's long suit jacket, and squeezed his arse. Sherlock flinched involuntarily and ferociously.

"If you think that will make me happy, you deserve less credit than I gave you."

.....

His head turned fractionally. Damn James Moriarty. Trust him to be the only person to recognize Sherlock's fears and use them against him. "How do you figure?"

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

In this extract, the power relation between James and Sherlock is established as order and obey. James orders Sherlock to “make me happy” and uses violence such as “squeezed his arse” to make Sherlock obey. As these signs being placed around each other, linguistic sign “make me happy” signifies the meaning of sexual pleasure while “squeezed his arse” suggests that the violence James uses is more than purely physical violence but involves sexual implication. As James’ violence escalates, Sherlock’s reaction is getting more intense from merely “smirked”, “gasp”, “pain” to

“flinched involuntarily and ferociously” and “fear”. When James’ “violence” brings Sherlock “fear”, an unequal power relation is established between James and Sherlock. In this construction, linguistic sign “fear” deprives Sherlock of power, simultaneously empowers James with aggression and violence. The fear of Sherlock ultimately confirms the empowerment of James.

In addition, as this extract shows, one of the main purposes of James’ violence is to fully control Sherlock’s body. To maintain his absolute power, James’ dominated role is not allowed to be challenged. Once Sherlock shows any potentials of resistance, which might lead to the establishment of unequal power relation being challenged, the violence upon him gets more and more intense. Consequently, to end the violence, there must be a third party involved as Sherlock is deprived of power to fight back.

The following is another extract to explain how “violence” works in the construction of an unequal power relationship with a third party concerned.

"I told you, in no unclear terms, that you were to come to me last night," James hissed, lips drawn back on his teeth like a snarling wolf. "You blatantly disobeyed me, and I won't stand for it. Do you understand me, Sherlock?"

When Sherlock neglected to reply, and tried to avert his eyes, James grabbed his face—thumb dinging harshly into one cheek, index and middle fingers into the other—and growled, "Do you understand?"

.....

Sherlock gasped and, half-crazed, struggled wildly away. James, however, had better leverage and was able to subdue him simply by grabbing his upper arms and pushing him back against the chair. Now he did yell, and in the small room the noise pierced Sherlock's eardrums. "I won't be made a fool, understand?! You'll obey me if I have to beat submission into you!"

.....

"James, I think you'd be wise to unhand my brother."

James' head snapped up, staring at something over Sherlock's head. Sherlock did not have to look around to know who was standing there—it was quite obvious not only from the words spoken but from the voice that spoke them—and could only

bring himself to be unspeakably relieved when James' hands left him.

For a moment, it looked as though James would retaliate. Then, apparently thinking better of it, he snapped, "Excuse me," and fled the room.

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This extract firstly depicts how James reacts when his power is challenged by Sherlock's disobedience. It is obviously showed that "violence" is what he uses to win his power back. James is compared to "a snarling wolf" with surrounding signs "hiss", "lips drawn back on his teeth". When Sherlock "blatantly disobeyed" James, to claim his power back, James threatens Sherlock as "I won't stand for it". Here, the metaphor of "a snarling wolf" functions as a symbolic representation of power around linguistic sign "I won't stand for it".

Rather than obeying James' order, Sherlock tries to resist as he "neglected to reply" and "advert his eyes". These reactions do not help to confirm the power of James. Therefore, in order to claim his absolute power over Sherlock, James "grabbed" Sherlock's face, "thumb dinging harshly" and "growled". Linguistic signs "grabbed", "thumb dinging harshly" both structured around the central sign "hand" under theme "violence". As previous analysis pointed out, linguistic sign "hand" clarifies James' superior to Sherlock if it empowers James by bringing Sherlock pain. Sherlock's pain is the confirmation of James' power. However, in this scene, James' power has been challenged all the time as Sherlock does not make any reactions to confirm his "violence".

The non-cooperation of Sherlock only brings the escalation of James' violence. When James' power is weakened, Sherlock finally seizes this opportunity and "struggled wildly away" in order to escape from James' control. However, Sherlock's attempt fails as James "subdue" him simply through "grabbing his upper arms" and "pushing him back". Here, linguistic sign "subdue" signifies the meaning of violence when being placed around "grabbing" and "pushing". And then, James threatens Sherlock again with "I have to beat submission into you" if Sherlock disobeys him. "Beat submission" indicates a causality between linguistic signs "beat" and "submission" in constructing the unequal power relation between James and Sherlock. When "beat" signifies violence, to confirm the absolute power of James,

the complete submission of Sherlock is the ultimate goal of James' violence.

However, in the end of this extract, the hierarchy of power relations is reconstructed with the intervention of Sherlock's brother. When Sherlock's brother requires James to "unhand" Sherlock, he is actually making a new order to redefine the power relation among them. As James obeys the order with his "hands left" Sherlock and "fled the room", he is confirming the power of Sherlock's brother over him. In the meanwhile, when James' "hands left" Sherlock, to which Sherlock feels "relieved", "hands left" also implies that James is losing his power over Sherlock, which ultimately leads to the release of Sherlock's body. However, this release of control does not empower Sherlock as the ending of violence is due to the intervention of a third party. To end the violence by making a higher order overwhelms the former one, a new hierarchy of power relation is therefore established.

The unequal power relation between James and Sherlock is established as order and obey around "violence". In this construction, as the one being deprived of power, Sherlock is incapable of ending the violence by himself. As a result, he can only seek for help or protection. In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, "protection" is always following "violence" in constructing a new hierarchy of power relation as protect and protected.

Following last scene, the story continues as Sherlock asks John for help.

Looking up at John, Sherlock muttered, "If I let you help me, will you?"

"Of course," John said, sitting down next to him. He placed his hand on his shoulder, patting it comfortingly. "You're awfully pale, Sherlock. Are you okay?"

"I need your help," Sherlock muttered, irritable in his pain and confusion and panic. "I can't think, John. Or I'm thinking too much. Only I don't know what to think. I thought I was alright, I never thought it would—I can't do it, John. I just can't. I'm not that strong. I'm not. I'd rather die, John. I'd rather die than marry him, John. My head, fuck my head is pounding."

.....

And now he did slump with his head against John's shoulder, and murmur, "I'd say I

don't know what came over me, but it would be a lie."

John didn't say anything, but he wrapped his arms around Sherlock and patted his back. "It's okay."

"Is this okay?"

"Yes," John murmured into his hair. "Yes, it's more than okay."

Extracted from Those in Peril on the Sea, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This extract depicts how the power relation established in “violence” shifts in “protection”. Here, Sherlock is constructed with linguistic signs such as “pale”, “irritable”, “pain”, “confusion”, “panic”, “not that strong”. All these signs signify Sherlock as vulnerable to “violence” in relation to sign “I need your help”. The reaction of seeking for protection simultaneously disempowers Sherlock with his incapability of protecting himself.

In comparison to Sherlock’s incapability, John is presented to be the one who is capable of helping Sherlock. In the construction of John, linguistic sign “hand” again functions as the central sign in clarifying the hierarchy of power relation. Around “violence”, linguistic sign “hand” claims James’ power over Sherlock if it brings Sherlock “pain” and “fear”, however, around “protection”, what caused by “hand” are not “pain” and “fear” any more, but protection and safety. In this scene, in his reaction to Sherlock’s pain, John is described as “placed his hand on Sherlock’s shoulder”, “wrapped his arms around Sherlock”, “patting it comfortingly” and promises Sherlock “it’s okay”. To which Sherlock “slump with his head against John’s shoulder”, a sign which, surrounding sign “it’s okay”, signifies Sherlock’s trust and safety when John is around. When John’s “hand” is capable of bringing Sherlock trust and safety, in such construction mechanism, linguistic sign “hand” ultimately fills John’s body with power to protect Sherlock.

It seems that, in “protection”, the power relation between John and Sherlock becomes more equal because Sherlock’s body is released from control in the order/obey power relation with James. However, as equal as it appears to be, John and Sherlock are still constructed into a dichotomy. In such dichotomy, John is empowered with his capable “hand” which brings Sherlock protection, whereas Sherlock is under “control” of that “hand” as long as he needs John’s protection.

The following two extracts further explain how “protection” works in constructing the unequal power relationship between John and Sherlock.

Extract 1

John stepped forward, inserting himself between Greg and Sherlock in one efficient movement. The army taught him many things, but one of the best skills other than shooting people from far away was how to make himself seem tall and commanding while still being the shortest man in the room.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

Extract 2

John stepped forward, past Sherlock’s hunched form, to stand between him and the threat that lay ahead. He bore no spear, no weapon with which to fight off the creatures, yet his readiness for battle seemed to radiate from every angle of his body. He was braced, grim-faced and determined as the quiet wind brought with it the phantom cheers of an audience who had long since turned sedimentary in their graves.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

These two extracts both construct John as the “protector” in his relation with Sherlock through linguistic sign “stepped forward”. In the first extract, around “stepped forward”, John is presented with linguistic signs such as “efficient movement”, “army”, “seem tall”, “commanding”. These signs enable John physically to take the role of “protector” so that he can “step forward” and protect Sherlock. What’s more, in the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, the construction of John is always through linguistic sign “army” to emphasize his masculine characteristics. In this scene, surrounding “army”, linguistic signs “efficient movement”, “seem tall”, “commanding” are filled with the meaning of masculinity. As such, the content of masculinity is reproduced by the construction of “protector”.

In the second extract, the sign “stepped forward” is also important in clarifying John’s identity as the “protector”. When facing a “threat”, John chooses to “step forward” and “stand between” Sherlock and the “threat”. Here, the sign “step

forward” signifies John’s identity as “protector” in relation to “threat”. Whereas, Sherlock is constructed as the “protected” when John “pasts” him and “stands between” him and the “threat”.

In addition, Sherlock is also presented as “hunched form” around linguistic sign “threat”, whereas John is constructed with linguistic signs “braced”, “grim-faced” and “determined”. In this construction, linguistic sign “hunched form” disempowers Sherlock as it makes Sherlock incapable of protecting himself from the “threat”. On the contrary, John is empowered with linguistic signs “braced”, “grim-faced” and “determined” as they make John capable of fighting against the “threat”.

“Protection” is always triggered by “violence” in constructing an unequal power relation as protect/protected between John and Sherlock. The content of masculinity and femininity is also reproduced and maintained through the construction of protect/protected in Sherlock slash fan fiction.

In the narration of Sherlock slash fan fiction, however, violence is not limited to physical violence as James does to Sherlock, it is extended, for example, in this story, the “threat” which John is protecting Sherlock from is a fatal disease Sherlock is suffering. When there is no one, no medicine able to cure Sherlock, John presented to be the only person to “protect” Sherlock from pain.

Strong arms tightened around him, hands splaying across his bare chest and sliding down over his heart, along his ribs, fingertips framing his navel before thumbs rubbed at the jut of his hip-bones. He was utterly nude again, exposed in John’s lap. He could feel the cool rasp of denim and the prickle of John’s wool jumper, but the disparity did not seem to have much relevance. He was warm, comfortable and safe, held up and held in by the wall of John’s chest and the weight of his embrace.

With a sigh, he leaned back, resting his head on John’s shoulder and feeling the scar there curl and flex before falling still once more: John’s own hidden hurt. Idly, he moved his fingers along John’s jaw: stubble and skin, the unyielding ridge of bone and the soft press of a pulse in the hollow beneath - wonderful in ways Sherlock could not even begin to describe.

Extracted from Electric Pink Hand Grenade, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

This scene takes place after Sherlock attacked by the first seizure and sent to hospital. With nothing to reduce Sherlock's pain, John "held up" Sherlock in his arms in order to comfort Sherlock, to which Sherlock feels "warm", "comfortable" and "safe". In this construction, John is presented with linguistic signs such as "strong arms", "hands splaying", "the wall of chest", "the weight of embrace" while Sherlock is constructed through signs "utterly nude" and "exposed in John's lap".

It seems that the function of these linguistic signs is similar to those in theme "Gaze and Pleasure". For example, "utterly nude" and "exposed" are common signs in constructing Sherlock's body as sexual being if they are placed under John's "gaze". However, these linguistic signs obtain completely different meanings when they are articulated around "protection". Linguistic signs "strong arms", "hands splaying", "the wall of chest", "the weight of embrace" fill John's body with power as they are able to bring Sherlock "warm", "comfortable" and "safe". In comparison to these signs, "utterly nude" and "exposed" signifies Sherlock's body as delicate and vulnerable that needs to be protected.

It is clearly showed in this extract that Sherlock is not the only person gets hurt, but so does John. Different from Sherlock, however, John's "hurt" is "hidden". When Sherlock is allowed to "expose" his pain and seek for protection, John's "hurt" must be avoided and "hidden". What's more, in order to maintain his power as the "protector", John is not allowed to be protected by Sherlock. As it is discussed in previous analysis, "hands" is important in clarifying the hierarchy of power structure between John and Sherlock. In this scene, when Sherlock is "feeling" John's "hidden hurt", he puts his "fingers" on John's "jaw". Along with Sherlock's "fingers", John is presented with linguistic signs "stubble and skin", "the unyielding ridge of bone" and "the soft press of pulse", but there is no description of John's reaction to Sherlock's "fingers". When John's "hands" is capable of making Sherlock "warm", "comfortable" and "safe", Sherlock's "hands" is disabled as they make nothing to ease John's pain. In this construction, John's superior in his power relation with Sherlock is secured with Sherlock's incapable "hands" doing nothing on his body and failing to protect him.

The following is another extract to explain the importance of the sign "hands" in constructing protect/protected.

John smooths back a blood matted curl to Sherlock's scalp with his thumb and cranes his own head down to be closer to the man in his arms.....Sherlock smiles deliriously hard it looks as if his face might crack and shatter into a million pieces — even though he's hurting and bloody and bruised, he's never looked more beautiful.

.....

“Your hands,” Sherlock slurs as he laces their fingers together and brings the back of John's against his cool cheek, “Warm. Steady. The hands of a killer, my proverbial savior. Irony, I love it. They're marvelous, you know?”

Extracted from Our Enthusiasms Which Cannot Always Be Explained, Archive of Our Own, 10th, Mar. 2018

In this extract, Sherlock is attacked by a suspect when he is investigating a murder case alone. It is John who finds Sherlock and save him when his life is in danger. This scene takes place when John finally locates Sherlock and holds him “in his arms”. As described in last extract, Sherlock is also held up in John's arms when he is hurt. Linguistic sign “in his arms ” signifies John's protection for Sherlock when Sherlock is “hurting”, “bloody” and “bruised”. In mutual relation, “hurting”, “bloody” and “bruised” denotes that Sherlock's body needs to be protected. These signs also disempower Sherlock as he is unable to protect himself.

What's more, Sherlock is described as “beautiful” under John's gaze. Here, linguistic sign “beautiful” places Sherlock into the category of femininity in relation to John's gaze. Surrounding “beautiful”, “hurting”, “bloody” and “bruised” signify the protected as feminine. In relation to this, John is constructed as the “protector” who is placed into the category of masculinity. In this extract, John's “hands” is the symbolic representation of power in relation to linguistic sign “proverbial savior”. As John's “hands” is capable of “saving” Sherlock, John is empowered with linguistic sign “hands”. Therefore, in the construction of the unequal power relation between John and Sherlock, John is the “protector”, empowered, and masculine while Sherlock is the “protected”, disempowered, and feminine.

4.3 Disciplining the Male Body

According to cultural analysis of texts, reality can be approached as discourse which is regulated by certain discursive practices and ready for change due to its instability. From this perspective, Sherlock slash fan fiction can be taken as the discursive formation where female fans use language to redefine the world.

In the discourse of Sherlock slash fan fiction, female fans reconstruct the patriarchal discursive practices and rearrange them upon John and Sherlock. The two male bodies they are controlling have been subject to a series of disciplinary practices which is used by patriarchal power to effectively control and regulate the body of individuals. For example, in the world of patriarchal domination, gaze is the technique constantly being used to subjugate women into the docile sexual being. In theme "Gaze and Pleasure", gaze is appropriated by female fans to discipline Sherlock's body. The functions, motions and capabilities of Sherlock's body are broken down and reconstruct in a way where his body is effectively turned into the docile sexual being. In order to become the normalized sexual being, Sherlock has to "smile beautifully", be "slim" and "pale", keep "clean curls" and "fan of lashes", whose desire and pleasure has to be controlled and rendered submissive. As such, the disciplinary practices of femininity are reproduced and maintained through the construction of Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body. In contrast to Sherlock, John's body is subject to the disciplinary practices of masculinity. For example, in theme "Violence and Protection", the functions and capabilities of John's body have to be broken down and rearranged so that he can protect Sherlock from danger. Therefore, John's "hands" have to be capable, his "movements" to be effective, himself to be "commanding" and "determined": his body functions as a protector which is capable of saving Sherlock. Through John's construction, the disciplinary practices of masculinity are reproduced and sustained.

5. Result: Answers to the Research Questions

Based on the analysis elaborated above, the following chapters will give answers to the research question *“how are gender identity and sexed body in the dominant/submissive slash pairing constructed?”* and its sub-question *“does the dominant/submissive slash pairing subvert heteronormativity?”* within the theoretical framework of Gender Performativity. Then this part will be continued by answering to the second research question *“does the writing and reading of the dominant/submissive slash pairing empower women?”* based on the theory of Microphysics of power.

It is clearly shows from the data above that John and Sherlock have been subject to a set of disciplinary practices of masculinity and femininity respectively. Female fans, as the subject produced by the patriarchal power relations, appropriate the gender normalization they have been experiencing in real life to create the dominant/submissive pairing of John and Sherlock. By doing so, they are able to gain the knowledge about their oppression and subordination, which helps to set themselves free.

5.1 The Construction of Gender Identity and Sexed Body in the Dominant/Submissive Slash Pairing

The gender identity and sexed body of John and Sherlock are constructed based on the gender normalization of the heteronormative two sex categories. As previous analysis shows, the linguistic signs which are used to construct Sherlock and John carry no privileged meanings but function as raw materials only getting meanings in a certain context with surrounding signs. The linguistic signs construct Sherlock hardly overlap with those construct John. In other words, when certain linguistic signs construct Sherlock into the category of femininity, as their opposite or surrounding signs, John is constructed into the category of masculinity.

The signification process of linguistic signs reveals that the essence of gender identity and sexed body is deconstructed with no central meanings to determine

what is true or not true about the two sex categories. As Butler argues that sex is no longer as assumed to be a prediscursive production, accordingly, the cultural implications imposed on gender is no longer making sense. Consequently, a male body is able to be signified as feminine while a female body could be filled with masculinity.

In the case of Sherlock slash fan fiction, Sherlock's male body is deconstructed and re-established into the category of femininity whereas John's male body is reinforced as being constructed into the category of masculinity. To distinguish their construction, an array of different linguistic signs are assigned to each category. The signification of these linguistic signs indicates not only the normative perception of the gendered male and female in heterosexual discourse but also their sexed body are constructed and being sexed by heteronormativity. Here, John and Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body are constructed and temporarily fixed through themes "Gaze and Pleasure" and "Violence and Protection". Within these themes, different linguistic signs place John and Sherlock into the opposite sex through the process of signification. If John puts his "gaze" on Sherlock, Sherlock is not allowed to gaze back; if John obtains his "pleasure" through erection, Sherlock's erection must be avoided or gaining him nothing; if Sherlock is the object of violence, he is not capable of protecting himself but only allowed to be protected by John. In such an oppositional construction, the gender identity and sexed body of John and Sherlock temporarily obtain closure on their fixation based on the assumption of heteronormative two sex categories. This construction reveals not only the content of the two sex categories but also how they are assigned and determine what male and female are to support and sustain heteronormativity.

5.2 The Reenactment of Gender Norms

In the theory of Gender Performativity, the conception of gender no longer presumes a subject governing the body, determining its performance, assigning unique features to each sex. It breaks the old presumption of gender by arguing that gender identity is not something done by a subject but rather the outcome of

enacting and reenacting gender norms.

The respective construction of John and Sherlock into the category of masculinity and femininity is determined by their performances rather than a pre-given subject governing their body. Since they both have male bodies, for example, in theme “Gaze and Pleasure”, “erection” is what John and Sherlock both have, but this erection does not give them both the male gender identity. Instead, only when John puts his erection inside Sherlock’s body and obtains pleasure can he be assigned the male gender identity, whereas only when Sherlock consents to the act that “John gets inside of his body” and through which he obtains pleasure can he be given the female gender identity. Therefore, in the discourse of slash fan fiction, the body is being sexed not according to any pre-given subjectivity but is the outcome of performances. Consequently, the performance of feminization by Sherlock’s male body is sanctioned and sustained in slash fan fiction, which served to be the challenge to heterosexual norms.

What’s more, Butler points out that the concept of performance should not be taken as some simple actions, but it is “the reiterative and citational practices” of the heteronormative structure of sex and gender (Butler, 1993: 12). What is reiterated and cited in the case of Sherlock slash fan fiction is the gender structure of the heterosexual two sex categories. For instance, in theme “Violence and Protection”, John is gendered as male for protecting Sherlock, his performance reiterates and cites the “protective” and “powerful” feature of masculinity while Sherlock is gendered as female for being protected, “being protected” reiterates and cites the “weak” and “powerless” feature of femininity. This enactment and reenactment of gender norms is also constructed and sustained in theme “Gaze and Pleasure”. In other words, once John and Sherlock are attached with masculinity and femininity respectively, they have to constantly enact and reenact these gender norms to assure and sustain their constructed gender identity and sexed body which are dominated by heteronormativity. The gender relations between John and Sherlock are being established unequally to maintain the domination of heteronormativity. However, this very same construction simultaneously challenges the heteronormativity because the opposite two sexes that are sanctioned in heterosexual discourse are now replaced by the same sex.

5.3 Gender Parody as Challenge to Heterosexual Norms

The enactment and reenactment of heterosexual two sex categories discussed in last chapter is what Butler calls the Gender Parody. Gender Parody is the imitation of the normative assumption of the two sex categories. The imitation does not presume that there is an original for parodic identities to imitate since subject as the pre-given entity is rejected. Instead, the fact the heterosexual norms as the so-called original needed to be ceaselessly imitated reveals that its domination is not natural but a permanent construction. Therefore, Gender Parody acts as an “inevitable site” to denaturalize and mobilize the heterosexual gender norms.

In Sherlock slash fan fiction, both of John and Sherlock’s construction reiterate and cite the heterosexual gender norms. Such a narrative risks reinforcing and aggravating the heterosexual gender norms which are forcefully imposed on the two sex categories and criticized by many academic researchers. However, this parody does not just mimic the norms but simultaneously confuses and decentralizes the norms, such as the theme “Violence and Protection” discussed above, it denaturalizes the heterosexual norms by ceaselessly imitating them; decentralizes the gender hierarchy of the two sex categories by replacing it with the same sex.

From the perspective of Gender Parody, the feminization of Sherlock’s male body is subversive as the reiteration and citation of femininity in a male body ultimately denaturalizes the male body from masculinity. What’s more, the parody of heterosexual conventions between two male characters is also subversive. Because the gender structure and power structure which imposed upon the opposite two sexes are being confused and decentralized through the parody of these structure by the same sex.

5.4 Women’s Practice of Freedom

As the subject being produced by microphysics of power, women are subjugated to gender normalization in a world of patriarchal domination with their body becoming docile and subordinated to that of man. Under a ceaseless male gaze, women are

confined to the sexual bodily being. In the strategic field of power, however, Foucault argues that where there is power, there is resistance. Therefore, the autonomy of subject is deeply intertwined with the power relations. To resist the gender normalization imposed upon them, Foucault argues that individuals should engage in the practice of the self, which means, rather than finding out a true subject behind the identity of women, women should create a life of women, and create this life within the existing patriarchal power relations by appropriating the gender norms they experience and subject to.

From this perspective, the writing and reading of slash fan fiction should be seen as the creative language and creative culture established by women. Although Foucault has not indicated what specific forms these creations should take, he emphasizes that pleasure is an important part of our culture and “we have to create new pleasure”, “to experiment with pleasure and its possibilities” (1997, 166). This creation of pleasure is vividly shown in theme “Gaze and Pleasure”. When Sherlock is being gazed/inserted by John, he is presented as the sexual being who is signified with femininity whereas John as the one who gaze/insert is signified with masculinity. The construction of binaries gaze/gazed and insert/inserted are the appropriation of heterosexual gender norms which, as the above analysis points out, ultimately denaturalizes and deconstructs these very norms by replacing the heterosexual two sexes with two male homosexual. By doing so, women are able to avoid being disciplined and become the sexual bodily being under the ceaseless male gaze. In the world of Sherlock slash fan fiction, the male gaze is controlled by women and under the function of which another male body is being disciplined. Even though a male gaze is reproduced in slash fan fiction, women are the ones who actually gaze and enjoy two men having sex. In this process, the identificatory positions of female fans are not fixed as previous research shows. Women can obtain pleasure by identifying with the gaze, or the gazed, or both, or neither. The gaze operated by women, unlike the male gaze, is the possibility of a new type of pleasure, the creation of women’s life.

Therefore, women’s writing and reading of Sherlock slash fan fiction should be seen as women’s practice of the self because they are creating women’s pleasure, converting the disciplinary practices imposed upon them and ultimately attaining to

a self-transformation. This practice of the self is the significant practice of freedom where women empower themselves to resist gender normalization by approaching their lives as materials for the creative self-transformation.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I first examine the limitations of the current study and give suggestions for possible future studies, and then I present the conclusion on what I have achieved so far.

My research studied the BBC series *Sherlock* Slash fan fiction in terms of gender and power. There are several limitations I should point out before I make a final conclusion on my current study. First of all, the choice of the data might appear too simple. The current study only collected stories which create the binary of dominant/submissive between John and Sherlock. As one of the objectives of this study was to learn the construction of gender identity and sexed body of John and Sherlock, it would be helpful to include stories that are written about Sherlock as the dominant while John as the submissive to see if there are any differences between these two types of stories. Therefore, a comparative analysis might be a possible choice for future studies. In addition, there are various narratives of Sherlock slash fan fiction other than the dominant/submissive dichotomy constructed between John and Sherlock. Thus, a potential future study might examine the power dynamic between John and Sherlock in these narratives to give a deeper understanding of power. And then, the scope of fans of Sherlock slash fan fiction study might also be expanded. As recent studies show, the writers and readers of slash fan fiction do not only include heterosexual woman, but male and female homosexual are also attracted by slash fan fiction. Along with sexuality, age, occupation, social class and race might also have an impact on how one experiences the writing and reading of slash fan fiction. Therefore, a future study might take into account these elements for a more completed study on fans. Lastly, as the discussion on female fans of the current study is totally based on theories, the results might appear too ideal to see women's real-life experiences, their attitude and perception about the writing and reading of fan fiction. An ethnography research might be taken into account for future investigations with the aims of presenting a more comprehensive understanding of the lives of individuals who are interested in and consider themselves as fans of slash fan fiction.

Nevertheless, my study still achieved the goals I set up after an exploration on the gaps left by previous studies. Starting with three research questions, my study focuses on analyzing the texts of Sherlock Slash fan fiction as well as examining its impacts on women's life.

The first research question: how are gender identity and sexed body in the dominant/submissive slash pairing constructed? In order to answer this question, the method of Cultural Analysis of Texts was employed to examine the signification process of the linguistic signs used in constructing the dominated/submissive dichotomy between John and Sherlock. As the findings showed, the linguistic signs construct John and Sherlock barely overlap and only surrounding each other can the construction be completed. Along this signification process, the rigid opposite of masculinity and femininity is constructed and sustained. The findings indicated that the construction of John and Sherlock are based on the heteronormative two sex categories where John, signifies masculinity, is the dominant while Sherlock, signifies femininity, is the submissive. This reproduction of the heteronormative two sex categories between John and Sherlock exemplifies what Butler presents, Gender Parody. Gender parody does not assume that there is a natural subject behind John and Sherlock governing their identity and body, but both of John and Sherlock's gender identity and sexed body are determined by their performances, the performances of enacting and reenacting patriarchal gender norms.

This ceaseless enactment and reenactment of gender norms reveals the fact that heteronormativity is nothing natural and immanent but is permanently constructed, whose maintenance needed to be assured by the imitation of its very own structure of sex and gender. This gives answer to the sub-question of the first research question: how does the reading and writing of Sherlock slash fan fiction subvert heterosexual norms? The answers are elaborated from the perspective of gender parody. By ceaselessly enacting and reenacting the patriarchal gender norms, the construction of dominant/submissive dichotomy between John and Sherlock denaturalizes these very same norms on which it is based. By feminizing Sherlock's male body, the privileged male body is deprived of masculinity, accordingly the assumed coherence between male body and masculinity, female body and femininity

is also challenged. By replacing the opposite two sexes with two male characters, the gender structure between male and female, masculinity and femininity in heterosexual society is also challenged.

The third research question: Does the reading and writing of the dominant/submissive slash pairing empower women? As the findings showed, in Sherlock slash fan fiction, female fans reproduces the male gaze to which they have been subjected as well as the disciplined male body with which the female body are able to avoid becoming the sexual bodily being. Women appropriate gender normalization they experience in real life is, from the Foucauldian perspective, the practice of the self with the aims of attaining to a self-transformation. This practice of the self is also the practice of freedom through which women empower themselves to resist the gender normalization that is always imposed on them.

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