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Abstract

Kink Trouble: BDSM, intimacies, and inequalities

I argue that kink—encompassing sexual and nonsexual practices that play with power—provides a framework for cultural literacy through which to better understand oppressions and the contexts in which they emerge. Focusing on theatrical, fetish club, and choreographic praxis, I investigate how BDSM takes inequalities rooted in sexual violence and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and retools these forces in public performance. I use qualitative ethnography, theater and performance studies, queer of color, feminist, and gender theories to show how, in kink, seemingly oppressive behaviors actually model consensual exchanges of power that negotiate social traumas equitably across difference.