

# Notes from Consent Rocks Listening Sessions for Kinksters of Color

## Introduction and Caveat

In late 2017, after an incident at an event that revealed some severe shortcomings in the racial sensitivity training for Consent Rocks Crewmembers, the organization implemented a plan for “Listening Sessions” for people of color to talk about their experiences in the kink scene both in general and in particular in terms of consent incidents.

The format was relatively simple: A space was set aside for the event, and it was publicized in the community for several weeks (in some cases, months) before the event. An effort was made to make the event as accessible as possible in terms of time and finances.

At the appointed time, a Consent Rocks representative was in attendance, along with whoever else chose to attend. Non-POC were informed that this was, for them, a “listening session.” While there are many levels of intersectionality when it comes to experiences in the kink scene, the expectation was clearly set that white people would respect the intent of this space to be a platform for POC voices only.

The speakers who chose to share their experiences were able to decide whether or not questions from the audience were allowed. All of them were agreeable to this. The Consent Rocks representative had two jobs: take notes, and keep any non-POC voices from occupying the time. The only exceptions to this were when the POC speaking asked questions of the white people in the audience, and then an effort was made to keep the answers concise.

Four sessions were held, at the following events:

1. Fapcon, Calgary, AB
2. Cleveland GRUE, Cleveland, OH
3. Austin GRUE, Austin, TX
4. Kansas City Center for Inclusion, Kansas City, MO

Consent Rocks would like to thank all of those who participated in these sessions, where difficult experiences and topics were addressed and explored. This is emotional labor, and the willingness of kinksters of color to share was generous and brave.

The organization hopes to use this information internally to revise our training materials and improve our ability to serve the community as a whole and in particular kinksters of color. This transcript is provided to the community as a whole with the hopes that others can learn from it as well, whether personally or as part of an organization.

Most importantly: **This is not the end of the listening.** If anything, it is barely the beginning. By no means should any of these experiences be taken as the defining experience of people of color in the scene, because “*POC experience varies widely across and within scenes*” as lochnessia, a Diversity and Accessibility Coordinator for a kink event, said. We are grateful for their help in preparing this document as well as WhiskyTangoFoxy and RealBoyMuppet for their advice and support during this project. Any errors are the fault of the transcriptionist, not any of those generous people.

As an organization, Consent Rocks found these sessions invaluable, but the fact is that there are many platforms where POC are talking about their experiences, and it is the responsibility of non-POC to find them and learn to listen without centering themselves in the experience. A good start is the POC Advisory Committee Reading Room (<http://pocadvisory.org/reading-room/>) but again: that is only a start.

Do the work.

## **Caveat - from Gray Miller**

For these four listening sessions, I was the note-taker and host. That means that this is *not* a first-hand record of the experiences of people of color in the scene. To get that, you would have had to be there, listening to the voices, seeing the expressions on the faces, and watching the way people acted and reacted as they shared and learned from those who chose to come and speak.

No, this is far from an accurate record. This is *my* memory of *my* own notes from *my* experience listening to the speakers.

That means it's triple-filtered, at least, and subject to all of the bias of my privilege of a cisgendered heteronormish white dominantish U.S. male. There are almost certainly errors and presumptions, even with sections where I have been able to check the speakers to verify the accuracy of the transcript.

However, if there is a section that you, as a reader, object to, need clarification on, or have some other need to respond, the best place to start is locally, because that's where the change needs to start. Please respect the privacy and time of those who spoke, and think twice before disturbing them with questions — and for pity's sake, preface any question with something like *"Do you have the time and energy to answer a question about race for me?"*

And be prepared to accept a *"no"*.

I still hope that it may be useful to others — I have changed several of my own behaviors based on what I learned. The biggest lesson learned, though, was that there's a lot of work left to do. I want to humbly thank those who have shared their experiences with me, some friends, some not, but all valuable.

Gray "Dancer" Miller

December 28, 2017

Madison, WI

## Listening Session

### FAPCON 4, Calgary, AB

Six attendees were in came at first; one self-identified person of color, WoodenTiger69 ("WT") and five non-POC. One left during the talk, as noted below.

*Full disclosure: WT and Gray are friends both personally and also have worked together professionally. Apart from one question from WT that Gray answered and the occasional question from the attendees, invited by WT, he was the only person who talked.*

The U.S. and Canada kink scenes are different, and the Alberta kink scene in particular is different than others. WT has not had a lot of issues connected to race in the scene. *"I brush microaggressions off* he said - but other POC don't.

WT serves on the "Conduct and Competencies Committee for his profession, and he noted that when an issue is brought before them, the first thing they have to do is find out if there is a conflict of interest and, if there is, recuse themselves from that incident. It was his understanding that the Consent Rocks Crew responding to the incident was friends with the inciting group?

*At this point Gray relayed information that has been publicly acknowledged and stated in several posts' comments: that the RambleGRUE Ops Staff had been friends with the inciting group, but that aside from having met the other Attendee before in the scene, the Consent Rocks Crew had not known anyone well.*

WT was satisfied with this explanation, and remarked: "I don't know what happened - just the fallout."

- The Attendee brought up concerns that were not addressed.
- This looked like **deflection**, which happens a lot, and usually looks like a micro-aggression followed by *"This isn't what I meant..."*

At this point WT's shared (with her permission) an experience with his partner, Adarailona, who is white.

- She said one day, in a discussion about race, *"Well, I don't see color."*
- WT's response was to explain that was a racist remark, because *"it erases my culture and identity."*
- He knew she didn't *mean* to be racist - but voice and the words used is important.
- What she meant was *"I don't judge based on color"* - but cultural relevance is important.
- Often people who are confronted with their microaggressions become defensive, or "too guilty". It's better to make it a learning experience.

*Adarailona gave explicit consent for her name and this story to be included in any public reports.*

*"RambleGRUE's listening is not done."* Open listening is needed, and any curt, defensive language will shut things down due to emotion.

Education in non-micro-aggression for non-POC would help - but that will vary by region and context. WT states: *"I'm Jamaican - not African-American. But really, I'm CANADIAN."*

*"Where are you from?"* is the most common micro aggression he is faced with. He will answer *"I'm Canadian"* and people usually say *"That's not what I meant."* He says *"I know - but that's what you said"*

*"I tend to play it off - but maybe it's time to show up and say something."*

Other people jumping in (online) when things are charged makes it difficult to have conversations, especially among cultures (such as Jamaican) where discussions are already loud. This is cultural relevance again.

The goal seems to be to make a safe space (for POC) inside another safe space (for Kinksters). This means that becoming more inclusive requires exclusivity.

However, simply creating a space only for POC is not adequate. *"I have a non-POC partner. I would not go to a POC-only space."*

This seems to be similar to the experiences of gay men in pan spaces: feeling watched, feeling in the minority, would prefer to be surrounded by peers.

Writings exist about the rise of pansexual play spaces, and *"those work for me - but I'm used to being the only POC. Others might feel isolated."*

Jamaica's coat-of-arms is "*Out of Many, One People*" - but even with that it is still not a safe space for LGTQI.

"*A Safe Space for POC means I can't bring my partner.*" Can we do the TNG thing? (Asked by attendee). WT said no, it's not the same - a POC has more traumatic experiences than a TNG-type gathering, and besides, being an interracial couple brings its own unwelcome attention. However, more than one safe space might work.

**The intent of the safe space is important.** Needs to be to create a safe space, not to segregate - needs to be a *choice* for the people it's created for.

That will be a segment of a segment of a minority - and kink demographics tend to already have lower percentages of POC. Calgary, for example, is 8% East Indian/Philippino, but only 3% Black.

"I can't speak for anyone else. I'm the only POC who showed up, and I can only speak for myself."

More people need to stop being defensive when called out on micro-aggressions.

- Having to continue to correct people is emotional labor, but it's labor that needs to be done to help things change.

"*I get looked at a lot. There are things we do to fit in to the everyday world, but in kink spaces we should be allowed to be ourselves, but I think POC can't always do that.*"

When traveling, TSA often subjects WT to racial profiling - in fact, sometimes the Agent looks surprised when he *isn't* "randomly" selected for further searching.

"*My experience as a POC in kink has never prevented me from being comfortable - but that's only me.*"

"I'm not racist BECAUSE..." is a racist statement.

Eddie Murphy's skit "White Like Me" ([https://youtu.be/l\\_LeJfn\\_qW0](https://youtu.be/l_LeJfn_qW0)) is still relevant (it aired in 1984).

"*I have privilege among POC because I'm male.*" Society is structured around privilege, which makes it difficult to make people see it.

Needing to make disclaimers all the time makes it difficult, but it's important to recognize that POC are not a monolith - even when there's a listening session and "*I'm the only one there.*"

After what happened, "...*as a POC, I will not look at RambleGRUE as an event to go to.*" Is there anything that could change that view? "*Not really, but...*"

- Listening groups are important "*So that I can speak my truth, which may not be your truth.*"
- Should people step down? "*It sends a message if they don't. It might be seen as an admission of guilt, but might also be seen as not having educated themselves in the issues.*"

"*You don't have a right to my emotional labor - but if I'm not willing to put it in, what does that do for my right to have things change?*"

To make a POC space safe, don't have any bullies there.

"*It's important to have Consent Rocks. Use these experiences as an opportunity to learn. If everyone just leaves, then how will they learn?*"

## Listening Session

### GRUE Cleveland

Two self-identified people of color in attendance: BoodahBear & Pop Tart (*names used with permission*)

Five non-POC attendees also in session.

Much of their experience in the scene is around polyamory.

**Boodah** felt that there is a stereotype that he's experienced in three years of public involvement in the scene and half his life being kinky.

He currently is involved in Lake Erie SPANKS group.

His experience has been relatively good. "I'm a people person...I've seen people be stand-offish...the news doesn't paint us in a good light. I walk around with the paddle and people cross the dungeon."

Also, POC are afraid to come to SPANKS - "...so I will be standing off by myself."

Currently rules are being changed in the group so as not to tolerate any racist behavior.

**PopTart** "Every party or munch, I look around and think *I don't belong here*. You remember me because I've never seen anyone who looks like me. I stick out." As biracial, she "never fits...I was not white enough for the white kids, too white for the black kids."

"I was told the kink community was accepting. I've seen people be reluctant to speak to me...I've yet to be treated poorly."

Also: "I've yet to be at a kink event and see any POC there besides my husband." There are POC in the online group, but "they're scared."

Question from audience: *What can be done to help that?*

Depends on group leadership.

Leaders should meet people and introduce them around, make them feel welcome, don't let them be isolated.

"I wish there wasn't a focus on race - but more a focus on 'we accept everyone'." Inclusiveness should be across the board, not just about race.

Other areas that have tried: "Club Utopia" in Youngstown, the Detroit scene — more POC there. "They figured it out." Nashville, not so much. To look at Let, Cleveland has lots of POC - but they aren't coming out.

"I wish there wasn't a focus, but this is never going to change." In a sub culture where we're already looked at as different than the rest of culture, it should be safe to be different.

"I would not go to a POC event. I personally would feel it would become a continuous divide." The problem is just getting people out. What do you see at an event? All white people!

Events that single POC out often have wording in a certain way that sounds like they're talking down.

*Question: what kind of language is that?*

Not 'black'. When you say POC, don't default to 'black'. Include mixed-race, etc. "Non-white-identifying people" might be good. After all, the basis of the kink community is that you're not "vanilla".

Have leaders reach out to people.

*Question (from a community leader): How can we make you more comfortable about coming to the party?*

Don't focus on the "coming" RSVPs. Focus on the "maybe" coming.

*What's keeping you back?*

Feeling that you don't fit in. It would be more comfortable "...if there were even ONE other POC who I didn't show up with."

Boodah: "I see all kinds of [POC] on Fet, and I'm like: where are you hiding?" Leaders reaching out would help — that one connection, easing fears, answering questions, introducing..."

The kink community needs to be different than other cultures where “POC are even further out of the norm. There’s even more anxiety, because even just talking can be a hazard.”

We need to talk about being inclusive as much as about consent, and how perception of things said (language) differs between ethnicities. “The words I say, the body language, can be [interpreted] totally differently by POC versus White...there’s a natural fear that the POC will be automatically wrong. Nobody’s going to believe I didn’t do this.”

**Pop Tart:** Early in my joining the scene, my boundaries were violated, but I thought “No one is going to believe me.” It was a “pristine white boy.” There were two women of color after me who reported and were not believed — one of whom was socially attacked by the group leadership. “I wondered how many like me had come before — and I was happy that I didn’t speak up.”

When told “You crossed the line” POC feel more defensive and talk themselves into a hole. There’s never a “jury of your peers.”

It’s not just the POC issue — it’s also different for male/female POC.

“Blacks come across as more intense, like the Angry Black Woman stereotype.”

“I don’t see color” doesn’t work. Color exists, I just don’t have to play into it. Everyone has human instinct as they were raised. I myself can choose to treat people alike, and counter our biases.”

Difference between being “Captain Pissy Pants” vs. “Happy People”: like will attract like. It’s a choice to be “cool kids” vs. “my own,” and the club will watch the example set by authority.

“It starts with the leaders to teach the rest. If the leader avoids the POC, then I won’t get in trouble if I do, too. The leader has to take the first step. Don’t judge them or shut them out. It doesn’t have to be an announcement — just introduce the person around.”

**Pop Tart:** I’m shocked, amazed, and thankful that this was a session here at the GRUE. Attention needs to be brought to it. We need to talk about it on Fet:

- How is your experience different?
- Do you have anxiety?
- What can be done?

So much would come out, a laundry list. If enough people post about it, it would hit Kinky & Popular. “But it shouldn’t be in response to an incident like in Philly. That just brings out more hate. How can groups invite POC now? Everybody’s angry! Don’t invite people just to placate.” (*addressing the white attendees at the listening session:*) “I think it speaks volumes that you guys are even in here.”

While non-white-identified people want to be included, it also is important to know that the white people genuinely want us there — that you genuinely want to see a change. If even one more POC comes to an event - “You win!”

To get more POC involved, consider putting them in positions of power — so white people aren’t the only ones making rules. That makes it harder for POC to feel they can bring up issues: “You all golf together — what am I gonna do?”

Example is ONYX: they have open houses, parties, meetings once a month. “We’re out for inclusion!”

A pervasive attitude of inclusion is ok, but not enough. “Common sense” is not pervasive. Some people need to be told.

“Everyone is welcome — except the assholes.” The welcome can’t be two-faced — you can’t change how you act the minute your back is turned.

**Boodah:** “America is in a shambles. I served in the military, I’ve seen that side of it, and it’s not good...I was in the Air Force, almost everyone was white.” Discussions like the Listening session are “...a crapshoot — but if you never talk, they won’t come out.”

“You have a choice to respond to whatever happens, and how you act will come out if you talk when I’m not around...I still smile, make connections, and people make good engagements.”

The Academy of Fetish Arts has a statement about inclusion and harassment. The next step should be to hold a roundtable. The people who show up are interested in the topic.

The following week, look at the people who show up to the party. Ask them: why are you coming to *this* and not to *that*? What is that saying about you? “But you keep telling me how crazy the world is.”

Kink is more than play. For some people this lifestyle is much more than a random party or alter ego.

**Intention vs. Action.** Has anyone else asked about this topic? Not everyone takes it as seriously, even POC. They've been desensitized, and it's easier just to not make waves.

**POC are not a monolith.** "I have a lot of white friends. And they ask me how I feel about the N word, if they said it. I tell them, by definition, the N word when looked up means 'ignorant person'. Since I know I'm not that, I can care less about the word."

"Those who take offense to the word are the ignorant ones. And the ones using the word in a demeaning tone are also ignorant. But if someone wants to walk around saying the word, who cares? It's only a word. Getting mad only gives the word more power."

"It takes a special person to actually talk about it, not rant and rave."

**Question from attendees: Would you be willing to help us with the round-table discussion?**

Pay attention to what's going on in the world. Sometimes we may want to skim the news, because "the world is on fire." But be sensitive about how you address it. The roundtable should be done by a non-white person, because "I don't want to go into a sea of white people."

**Pop Tart:** It's also important to have a male/female perspective. And it's the little things, microaggressions. We're so numb, it's hard for us to pay attention to them. "Do you assume I didn't have a college education? Did you cross the room? Pay attention to yourself, and how you treat [POC]. Think before you blink. Give off a good vibe."

"White people should police micro-aggressions, because Black people would come across as angry. Try saying something like "*I saw that. If it happens again, there will be consequences.* We see that, we think: *Ah, someone understands. Someone will help me.* We need more White people who will stand up for us with positive outcomes. Unlike that incident with the Pristine White Boy, when I saw everyone piling on and it becoming the Woman of Color's fault."

**Transcriber's note:** Boodah, PopTart, and the leaders of the AFA are putting together an ongoing discussing group for POC. They also plan to start having munch/round table in January.

## Listening Session

### GRUE Austin

4-6 self-identified people of color in attendance at various times during discussion. 6-10 non-POC listening (all numbers conservative)

“What is the threshold for nonsense?” The thing that ends up being reported is never solitary; it’s just the thing that broke the camel’s back.

*Question: What can we do to make people feel included?*

Say hello. Or create a space where POC can say hello to each other — the regular space may be cliquey.

*Question: Do those spaces help?*

It’s a lot of emotional labor. Sometimes it’s not worth the risk. I want to feel like it’s not a problem to have our own space. And it’s nice to see more than five people.

(Asian POC talking about creating “POC & Allies” spaces) When you create a space like that, the white boys want to show how Asian they are and now not we are. Don’t make the space “for people who appreciate it.”

*Question: Do you think the issue is access to leadership roles?*

Yes, but the motivation isn’t good if there is a lack of representation. When you start having more diversity, it leads to more diversity.

*Question: What kind of experience makes that better?*

- No Pressure
- Introductions
- I will try to be the POC representative, but that’s emotional labor.

It is nice to see POC as presenters — I like to see people of diversity presenting, rigging, males tying males, etc.

Leadership is a resource question. It is about having the confidence. For example, I’m trying to think of one Woman of Color who tops (*Editor’s note: Shattered Pulse, Indigo, DoNotGoGently*)

*Question: How can photos be more friendly?*

Just tell the photographer that you’re looking for more diversity.

What would make me feel good would be if I knew that an incident had been handled really well. If there’s an awful testimonial...well, sometimes there could be something that didn’t go right, but I couldn’t have asked for it to be handled better. I’d like an opportunity to express that “hey, I’ve got people on my side.”

If no action is taken, it feels like nothing is being believed. I’m looking for action, not reaction. “**We are going to do something**” as opposed to “*What do you need?*”

Take a moment, see how that feels. Use problem-solving language and “holding space” — these are things that lead towards **action**.

We already exist on the margins — we’re either out in the doghouse or putting ourselves there. If someone comes to address an issue, it helps if they meet us “on the road” and walk with them — holding space, creating a container for them to feel safe in. NOT the way a man might come in and talk about “fixing”, instead of simply *listening*.

NOTICE when the default is centering white voices — is this an effort to make white people comfortable? Ask yourself: are you trying to be the white savior, centering things so as to make yourself feel better?

REPRESENTATION can solve these problems. “The rope world is so **white!**” “I don’t want to be the one new Black person. I’m trying to get more people in there, but they need to see more [POC] programs, teachers, staff.

“Somebody has to be the first person.”

“Depends on where you are. I have a different opinion of law enforcement depending on where I am. Other people might not pay attention to that — that’s their privilege. I won’t risk jaywalking — people don’t think about that in terms of rope bombing. What happens if law enforcement shows up?”

The ROPECRAFT POC Meet Ups really set the tone for the event. “I am filtering them (my POC friends) into an environment that is prepared for them.”

There’s a whole other range of processing with having white tops...

The discount for POC does help.

Having a clear statement of holding space and de-centering. People might not know that your doing a concerted effort, they might not even realize it’s different. Make the space!

The Ratio of POC to white people makes a difference — and meet ups are different than play spaces (in terms of who’s admitted). POC are more familiar with playing in integrated space. “It speaks to who has command over the room — because we never get command over anything.”

*In regard to white people being in a POC centric space:* Introduce them: “Hey, meet my friend!” It’s kind of nice to flip it sometimes.

“I don’t know...is it like a queer space having a het there?” There *is* space for not-mixed spaces, because *everything else* is mixed.

Honor the sacred container — we can support each other! But only if POC feel that the space is intended for them.

This inquiry counts as a demonstration of good work. In spite of what happened, if the RambleGRUE incident led to more talking about race, that’s movement.

“Who is centered is changing.”

## Listening Session

### Kansas City Center for Inclusion

One self-identified person of color in attendance: OldManTerrible (*name used with permission*)

Four non-POC also in attendance; one left before the end of the session due to discomfort.

There was an experience of being at a club where he was teaching classes, and he was mentoring a guy - and the club *knew* he was being mentored by OMT — and they asked the mentee to do the demo. Mentee told OMT: “I told them you were teaching me.”

OMT went to confront owner about the logic of asking the student to do a demo. Owner backpedals, until OMT simply said: “Is it because I’m black? If I’m the one answering questions, why is he a better choice than me?”

Owner continued to back up the mentee teaching, saying things like “I wouldn’t know...”

OMT pointed out: “I’m here every Thursday.” To group: “It was no secret who I was.”

Another experience:

At a club where they required a stamp after paid entry. Upon going to the middle of the club (through the one-way entrance) the club staff checked to see if he paid. “You mean stamped?” Because there was *no way* anyone could come in without paying, so unless he had disguised himself...

Also: “Why didn’t you ask my eight (white) friends I came in with?”

Staff: “Well, I didn’t mean it like that.”

OMT: “I’m here to fuck shit up. It’s what I do.”

Staff member later went on Fet to say OMT was “...so rude.”

From his perspective: “You saw eight people and you come and ask *me* if I paid. You could have just looked at my hand.”

“I used to let it slide. Now I don’t.” When he’s dressed casual (jeans, t-shirt) people write him off, give him the “*What are you doing here?*” look.

“You can’t chalk it up to ignorance when you’re out of space on the chalkboard.”

In Kansas City, there are two routes for POC:

1. BDSM: “*Here’s how you act.*” (i.e. expectations of how a POC will behave)
2. Swingers: “*Faceless dicks*” (i.e., you’re not there as a person, but as an appendage.) “People assume I went to The Red Door (local swinger club). Never been there!”

Either way, unspoken message from other POC: “Don’t fuck it up for everyone else.”

People will mistake OMT for a swinger because they never bothered to look at the other man’s face. This makes them disrespectful, and the reaction of POC is often to put it “on blast”, withdraw from community, and just do stuff at home.

“They treated me bad so I play at my house...” —> which is the same behavior that the community often attributes to “creepers”, thereby giving the POC even more stigma.

Scene’s reaction: “We don’t need to hold your hand or kiss your ass!” (i.e., why should there be special treatment?)

OMT: “But I thought you accepted everybody!”

Scene: “We accept everyone in one big family” but with a big asterisk to note the exceptions.

Microaggressions from women: POC men are over sexualized.

“*I’ve never had one of those before.*”

“*When you gonna do your thing?*” —> they want to watch. This means that several POC won’t come out because they get looked at.

(OMT points at Gray). "They'll trust Gray before me, and he's from out of state! Even though I'm the most well-known person (locally)." White & Asian men get leeway, Hispanic & Black are guilty until proven innocent.

People will ask OMT to present bona fides: "Where's your bag?" They won't ask Gray that.

"Everything I earn, I have to work twice as hard. I have to cut through three layers of trust."

Anyone can fuck up a scene, regardless of skin color. It's all based on ability, "...but not everyone gets that through their thick heads."

(Kink) Family should be about interests, not appearance.

Creepers can be anyone, of course, but OMT gets "side-eyed" event when he's calling out the creepers at his own events. After, though, when talking with the woman being creeped on, it "changed her outlook of her city."

"I can count the non-whites on one hand. Me, Dragon...me..." People won't question Gray if he's in the right place. "I've been treated better in Mobile, Alabama than I have here. I'm half Puerto Rican..." (so they only hate him half as much). "I have to worry about that when I go out. You (*indicates white audience*) don't."

Black women have to worry much more than white women. All the single guys will head to her. In the Black kink community, people are afraid to come out of the house.

"The Philly kink scene is 65% POC. Upstate, it's predominantly white. Chicago is predominantly non-white. Cleveland is all black."

"It's double hard for Black males. Kinda hard for Black females."

If OMT goes alone to an event, people wonder even more. There are hurdles to overcome:

- Have a bag of rope/toys
- Overcome the question "*Who is he gonna play with?*" by having play partners set up.
- Overcome "*Does anyone else know that guy?*"

Finally able to enjoy his night, totally accepted. "Gray doesn't have those hurdles - even though he could be a violator!" Trust is extended based on appearance. "I've done it enough to play along with the crowd." The other choice is to go home, and "...if you invite people to your house people assume it's for creepy reasons."

Black and Hispanic men will never admit [that they play at home] because they were treated badly by the community. So they send mass mailers (identical messages to multiple women on fet) and make other men look bad.

"It's not about the Black Panther fight. I'm up here because I work hard. People may not see my face, but they know what I do. I take care of things. [Refers to a local consent violator who was banned] I tell, then I do it."

As one of the leaders of the Consent Kansas City munch, "my duty is to make sure you abide by CKC rules. People will ignore me and pass me over because I'm black."

OMT's kink community experience is "...22 years in various states. It's a pain in the ass...I'd rather put in the work and understand it. It sucks more when you find out that you could have helped but you can't because of how they looked at you."

During the RambleGRUE incident, a WOC was seen as the aggressor by some white people. And then for the first time, on Fetlife, people were coming together in anger. "300 responses!"

That was as surprising as seeing a Black person on Kinky & Popular (*part of the site where pics and essays are ranked by popularity*). It doesn't happen. "I asked John Baku: is there a rule against Black people?" It's like how Italian pizzerias don't put Sammy on the wall.

"I guarantee you, with 10 Black men, if I ask 'were you scared to go to the dungeon...'" the answer is yes.

Another experience: a friend, K, who was a POC, went to Why Knot Wednesday alone. He left about 11pm, and then went again the following week. No one talked to him, and so he posted on fet that he's just tried to talk with some people and was ignored. "What did I do wrong?"

Fetlife group responded with a "mixed bag of assholery."

- "No one's suppose to hold your hand..." etc.

Finally, K said "Fuck y'all. I don't know what I did wrong, but you don't have to worry about me."

Fetlife group then got mad about him being insulted.

OMT told him "For the next three weeks, stand by me when we go there." Took him around, introduced him...then revealed that he was the same guy they'd been abusing on Fetlife.

"The scene didn't have shit to say. What if I hadn't done that? He would have been done with the community, all because people aren't *intelligent*." They know how to treat people, they just don't worry about treating people like that online.

This is the kind of preliminary stuff POC have to do in the community just to be viewed as a person. Sometimes it needs to be non-POC who have to do it.

There's a mountain of things [wrong in the way POC are treated in the scene], and it's not pretty. It's awful. We just don't talk about it. It's not fun, not good, not necessary...but there's no way around it.

If POC are the majority, they become less forgiving of non-POC violators, based on their experience elsewhere. It may be unfair, but it's considered payback.

Men: It's rough, because they worry about being accused.

Women: just as rough because they fear being violated "on the regular" and viewed as oversexualized.

Hopefully it can get better. "All they (event producers) should care about is green." POC should not be treated special, just fairly. "Don't write me off just as soon as I pay your door fee." Didn't "pay to be profiled."

Positive ways of communicating is to "hang with me and let me show you how it can be different." Give it another shot, and be firm, fair, and consistent. "Treat a person like a customer." Engage with them, make them feel welcome, and that takes the uncertainty off of them in the eyes of the community.

NOT special treatment — that will cause problems.

Making admission free makes it super bad.

Look to see if they look like they're not sure, or if they're brand new. In KC, white people rarely engage - so approach them. Speak to people. "Be brave!"

Introductions are important.

## Takeaways

Afterword by Graydancer

It bears re-stating: people of color are not a monolith, and their experiences vary widely between communities and events in the scene. These personal experiences are valid and useful to provide some understanding of part of the problems our culture faces in regards to systemic racism. As a sub-culture, the kink community has no immunity from that racism; what it does have is a tradition of self-examination, a habit of trying to create spaces where everyone's personal sexual expression can be supported and celebrated. As it has been pointed out by several of the speakers, it is hypocritical to provide a haven from intolerance in sexuality and gender while continuing to allow racial insensitivity and bias to go unchecked.

The kink community is not going to fix racism. But it can do better. What follows are a few of the common themes and actionable items that I have personally implemented. These are not prescriptive; other groups and individuals may or may not choose to implement them, and I hope that others will find more ways to improve the spaces so that they are truly welcoming for all.

1. **Introductions.** This is the easiest and most visible theme throughout the speaker's experiences: if the leaders of an event or a group make a point of introducing themselves to POC who are new to the spaces, it changes the feeling. In addition, they should introduce the newcomers to everyone in the group.
2. **Leadership roles for POC.** This is a more complex issue in that it needs to both avoid the potential for tokenization and also not put pressure on people who may already be dealing with the issues of race in the community. Figuring out how to do this is an ongoing challenge, but one strategy is to reach out as an organization to other kink groups that have been established for POC (such as Onyx, Black Beat, or the POC Advisory Committee) simply to establish connections and begin the conversation.
3. **Representation.** Following along with the above, making sure that there are POC visible as staff, volunteers, presenters, models, and in marketing and promotion will help create a more supported space. Also, making sure that the content of the event, party, or class is inclusive and aware of multiple racial experiences. This means "slave auctions", Orientalist views, or teaching based around a non-POC default ("look at how red the skin turns when you spank it", "just grab them by the hair", etc) will need to be re-evaluated. In my own practice, they will simply be avoided completely.
4. **Acknowledging and Mitigating risk.** Of all the things I learned from these sessions, the one thing that I *thought* I understood but discovered I didn't was the level of fear and risk that POC go through every day living in America. As WhiskyTangoFoxy put it, "unequal structural racism still impacts the events and social activities we create for kink events." For example, when there are events where the location is remote and the local law enforcement is an unknown entity there needs to be a way for a person who is feeling at risk to quickly and easily get to a place where they feel more supported. I cannot say what that place looks like, but I am working to find ways to ensure accessibility to transportation from an event or space if needed.
5. **Continuing the Discussion.** These four listening sessions did not solve anything. They did, however, provide a beginning for more conversations to continue to help understand the problem. One of the common frustrations that is expressed when people like me learn this is the common refrain from POC: *we've been saying this for a long time. We need more conversations not because this is new information; we need it because not everyone has learned how to hear it. Privilege allows many to simply shake their heads, say Oh, that's terrible! And then do nothing more. Privilege allows it to be someone else's problem. Privilege prevents those with the power to change things from de-centering themselves in the process (and yes, I'm aware of the hypocrisy of saying that in a first-person writing). One suggestion that has been made is that future discussion be moderated and hosted by POC.*

The discussions will not be easy or comfortable for anyone, but I firmly believe they are necessary if we are going to have any hope of making things better. I personally am sorry that I have not done better in the spaces I have influence; this is my commitment to doing better in the future.

I hope you will, too.

Gray Miller  
"Graydancer"