

# Smutty Fanfiction Taught Me More About Queer Sex Than School Ever Could

*Where the education system failed us, our fellow horny teens stepped up.*

**Lauren Strapagiel** — BuzzFeed News Reporter



*Ben Kothe / BuzzFeed News; Warner Bros. Pictures*

Before I knew that I liked women, I knew that I really liked reading about Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley hooking up at Hogwarts.

It turns out a magical school for witches and wizards is a perfect place for secret hookups. From the Room of Requirement to the Gryffindor common room, I read about the pair doing every possible dirty thing in every nook and cranny of the castle. Two girls having sex was just neat, you know?

I was a teen at the time, back in the mid-2000s, the same age as the characters. I'd read about their rendezvous — always teeming with angst, awkward first times, and stolen kisses — at night alone in my dark childhood room, a computer screen illuminating my face.

Hermione and Ginny canoodling under the canopy of a draped dorm room bed taught me, for the first time, how two people with vaginas have sex. While I didn't quite understand why just yet, I was very interested.

I was not alone. Like a lot of other queer millennials, fanfiction was my first introduction to queer sex and provided lessons that my sex ed teachers dare not speak. Where the education system failed us, our fellow horny teens stepped up.

Ginny and Hermione also opened a queer door for Christina Orlando, a 31-year-old queer and nonbinary writer in New York. They started reading fanfiction at 13, finding it at first on the official Harry Potter forums where people would often role-play as their favorite characters. As they dove deeper down the rabbit hole, fanfiction became a way to parse their own queer feelings.

"The first girl that I ever had a crush on, there was a girl in my high school that was a year older than me and it was the first time I was like, *Oh shit, I'm feeling things*," they told me.

The crush in question had a Live Journal where she'd write about her own romantic escapades and those stories became an inspiration for Orlando.

"That's how I learned how to write. I took snippets of her journals and used it to create fiction of Hermione and Ginny hooking up in the dorms," said Orlando.

"[My writing] was horrible and it was really a lot of her stuff that I just stole and changed the names."

For Orlando, queer fanfiction pairings was the first place she learned the mechanics of queer sex — what goes where, what might feel good.

"It was helpful in terms to be me feeling like, *Oh, I do want this*," they said.

"It was foundational, it was very much like I learned a lot and I started to understand myself and I had words and context for that desire I felt."

As Orlando told me about the sex ed she did receive in school, it sounded a lot like mine, even though she was in the US and I grew up in Toronto. In middle school, we learned about periods and puberty and sat through the "miracle of life" video showing a live birth.

In high school, the focus shifted to birth control, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy. Neither of us learned anything about queer sex or even identities, including what safer sex looks like for queer couples.

That's not very surprising, given the time we were in school. Where I live in Ontario, the latest sex ed curriculum has kids learning about both sexual orientation and gender identity by grade eight. That wasn't the case when I was a student. While we did learn about safer sex — including a day we all passed around the same, dry, condom to roll over a wooden phallus — it was all in a heterosexual, cisgender context.

During the mid-aughts in the US, abstinence-only sex ed was the mandate in many states. To this day, Congress funds these programs even though they've been proven ineffective at preventing pregnancies or STIs. It's barely discussed how cisgender men and women have sex, let alone same-sex pairings.

A 2013 survey of US schools found that less than 5% of students were exposed to positive LGBTQ representation in health class. Another survey of millennials, from 2015, found only 12% of students said their sex ed classes included same-sex relationships.

**"There wasn't a lot of lube in Middle-earth."**

For Jessica (who didn't want to use her real name), sex ed growing up in suburban Michigan meant the only mention of same-sex relationships was in the context of gay men and AIDS.

"But never in any conversation on contraception were there any other ways to have sex other than strictly penis in vagina," she said.

Perhaps that's why she started reading fanfiction smut as a teenager. She figured that it was normal for all girls to fantasize about each other and was "vaguely repulsed" by the straight sex that was talked about in class.

"I just thought all women are turned on by descriptions of women having sex with women," she said.

It wasn't just lesbian pairings, though. She actually got her start in fanfiction through Lord of the Rings slash stories ("slash" means there's a male/male pairing).

She remembers one night her mom had seen a scaremongering Katie Couric report about how kids were learning about sex too young.

"My mom comes into the den and sits down and was like, 'What do you know about sex?'" said Jessica. She repeated what she'd learned in school.

"Then she was like, 'Do you know how two men have sex?' and I flash back to the previous night when I was reading about Legolas getting boned by Boromir and I was like, 'No, I have no idea,'" she said, laughing.

"That's when I realized that I was learning something not a lot of other people were learning."



*Ben Kothe / BuzzFeed News; New Line Cinema*

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But that’s not to say fanfiction is an ideal way to learn about sex. After all, teens writing sex scenes for other teens are bound to have some failings.

“There was also a lot of misconceptions — like, no one used lube,” she said. “There wasn’t a lot of lube in Middle-earth.”

Fanfiction’s penchant for angst and drama, while delicious in the moment, also didn’t paint the healthiest image. For Kai (not their real name), a nonbinary trans masculine Canadian, neither fanfiction nor sex ed delivered on what it means to have a happy, queer life.

“Even in fic, queer sex and love were fraught, angsty and secretive, never just fun. The writers of the fic I read could imagine a lot of things, but not what queer love and queer sex would look like outside homophobia,” they said.

“Neither the fic I was reading and the sex ed I received in school set me up well for sex and relationships as a trans adult; neither of them could imagine a happy, boring, normal life that included gay sex, the type of life I’m now overwhelmingly grateful to now find myself living.”

Kai got into fanfiction through Sailor Moon, specifically Sailors Neptune and Uranus (who are a canon couple in the original Japanese anime). In the dubbed English release, the pair were portrayed as cousins, which is disappointing but not surprising considering how few queer characters there were on TV in the ’90s and 2000s.

Sailor Uranus, specifically, had a masculine look and demeanor and Kai devoured stories that explored gender identity and dysphoria, even if those specific words weren’t used.

“The main and most important thing that I learned about queer sex from fic was that gender-nonconforming bodies like mine could be hot and lovable. It made me feel seen, in a way that was both affirming, and also terrifying, because it was in no way safe to be out as anything in any area of my life at the time,” they said.

“It’s wild to think that my first knowledge of navigating dysphoria in sex and relationships came from Sailor Moon fanfiction, but that’s all I had at the time!”

Sex ed today is slowly improving. Unlike when I was teen googling “how lesbians have sex,” it’s far less hard these days to find affirming, accurate information online. fanfiction, meanwhile, is still going strong on sites like Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and the classic FanFiction.net. If you can name a TV show, movie, or book series, you can bet someone, somewhere has written filthy, queer stories based on it.

Although now an adult, Orlando said they still indulge in fanfiction here and there, and they and their girlfriend will send stories they find to each other. And for all its shortcomings, they still say fanfiction was an essential part of their formative years.

“I was very online because I was very lonely in my own life, so I feel very indebted to that experience — otherwise, I don’t know how I would have found myself,” they said.

“I think a lot of us were just lonely queer kids who had nowhere else to go, and we found each other. And that’s very beautiful.”

**Source:** <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/laurenstrapagiel/fan-faction-queer-sex-education>