

The Second Genders: Utopia and Dystopia in *Stranger Things* Omegaverse Fanfiction

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Abstract

This thesis uses textual analysis to determine how Omegaverse fanfiction makes use of utopian and dystopian elements to critique gender roles and patriarchal power structures. Omegaverse (short for ‘Alpha/Beta/Omega Universe’) is a world-building trope that applies wolf pack dynamics to human biology and society. By creating a new gender system, Omegaverse separates traditional gender roles from physical sex and reintroduces a magnified version of these same roles under new descriptors. In doing this, fans have created a world that can be used to write entertaining stories that may also function as a feminist critique. Through the use of utopian and dystopian elements, these stories express attitudes toward and desires for the patriarchal societies we live in. That is why this study analysed Omegaverse within the tradition of feminist critical dystopia, a genre that is known to express feminist critique through the means of fiction. This thesis uses three works produced in the *Stranger Things* fandom as its case study. The analysis revealed that Omegaverse is similar to feminist dystopia in the kind of conflicts it depicts, namely anxieties over societal oppression and loss of bodily control to technology and biology. Omegaverse’s conception of patriarchy appeared more complex than those of feminist dystopia during the first and second wave of feminism. In its depiction of gender oppression, these fanworks can be seen as reflective of fourth-wave feminism, a natural progression onto the traditionally published dystopia of the 20th century. Although the works appear to be set in a dystopian society, they usually have a happy ending. By allowing the characters to find the perfect love in an imperfect world, the works express a utopian desire for a healthy, equalitarian relationship. By examining how societal and interpersonal gender relations are represented in Omegaverse fanfiction, this study contributes to the existing body of literature around Omegaverse, fan practices and feminist dystopia.

Keywords:

Fanfiction; Feminist critical dystopia; Utopian literature; Omegaverse; Stranger Things

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Introduction

Who Let the Wolves Out?

With the incoming tide of the fourth wave of feminism, there has been a resurging amount of media attention dedicated to feminist talking points.¹ We see this in the discussions around diverse (media) representation and in online activism campaigns, such as the #MeToo movement.² This Zeitgeist is also reflected in the stories we tell, for example, the popular Hulu adaptation of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.³ Stories like these are more than mere entertainment. They use fiction to hold a mirror to our contemporary society and show where we could go wrong.⁴ This applies to professionally produced fiction, but also to stories written by amateurs on the internet.⁵

Fanfiction can be defined as “texts [...] based on another text that are not [produced within or meant for] professional publication”.⁶ The vast majority of fanfiction writers are heterosexual women.⁷ Notably, a significant subgenre of fanfiction by these authors is dedicated to (often sexually explicit) male homoerotic relationships, better known as slash-fiction.⁸ Although fanfiction's primary purpose is to entertain, it also has the potential to address and examine pressing political issues.⁹ As I will demonstrate in this thesis, the

¹ Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* (Houndsmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 7.

² Miglena Sternadori, “Situating the Fourth Wave of Feminism in Popular Media Discourses,” in *Misogyny and Media in the Age of Trump*, ed. Maria B. Marron (London: Lexington Books, 2020), 31-2.

³ Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, “Culture - Why The Handmaid's Tale Is so Relevant Today,” *BBC*, April 25, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180425-why-the-handmaids-tale-is-so-relevant-today>.

⁴ Shirley Neuman, “‘Just a Backlash’: Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and The Handmaid's Tale,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2006): 859.

⁵ Kristina Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World*, ed. Anne Elizabeth Taylorson (Dallas, Texas: Smart Pop Books, 2013), 289.

⁶ Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 5.

⁷ See Bacon-Smith and Hall, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, 4; Kustritz, “Slashing the Romance Narrative,” 371; Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek Popular Science and Sex in America*, 101.

⁸ Anne Kustritz, “Slashing the Romance Narrative,” *The Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2003): 371.

⁹ Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” 282.

fanfiction trope ‘Omegaverse’ is one of the frameworks that fanfiction authors have at their disposal to work feminist critique into their writing.¹⁰

Omegaverse (short for ‘Alpha/Beta/Omega Universe’) is a world-building trope that applies wolf pack dynamics to human biology and society. Although the trope is believed to have originated from the *Supernatural* fandom, it has since spread into other writing communities and is now widely applied throughout the world of fanfiction.¹¹ Omegaverse’s central characteristic is its invention of secondary genders; other than being either male or female, characters within Omegaverse are also Alpha, Beta or Omega.¹² This results in six new ‘gender combinations’, although most stories centre a romance between a male-Alpha and male-Omega lead.¹³ These new genders separate traditional gender roles from physical sex and reintroduce a magnified version of the same roles under new descriptors. The classic male gender role is inflated to become the dominant, territorial Alpha and the traditional female role is amplified in the submissive, maternal Omega.¹⁴ There is also a Beta-gender, which doesn’t have any unique characteristics.¹⁵ The secondary genders determine aspects of the person’s anatomy, behaviour and their role within the society, thereby overriding the traditional sex binary.¹⁶ This also affects the role of sexual identity in Omegaverse, namely what is perceived as homo- and heterosexual.

Through fans’ continuous collaborative reinvention of the world and its features, Omegaverse has grown into a complex political and interpersonal script in which a story can take place.¹⁷ Omegaverse is essentially a society in which gender stigmas and inequalities are blown into extremes.¹⁸ Topics such as prejudice, structural discrimination and rape culture

¹⁰ Milena Popova, “‘Dogfuck Rapeworld’: Omegaverse Fanfiction as a Critical Tool in Analyzing the Impact of Social Power Structures on Intimate Relationships and Sexual Consent,” *Porn Studies* 5, no. 2 (September 2018): 181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2017.1394215>.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 181.

¹² *Ibid*, 181.

¹³ *Ibid*, 181.

¹⁴ Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” 289.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 289.

¹⁶ J.T. Weisser, “Transmasculinities and Pregnant Monstrosity: Hannibal Omegaverse Fan-Fiction.” *The Feminist Journal of the Centre for Women’s Studies*. n.p. Accessed January 3, 2020.

¹⁷ Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” 294.

¹⁸ Popova, “‘Dogfuck Rapeworld,’” 188.

play a significant role in many incarnations of the trope.¹⁹ As such, I argue that Omegaverse conventions fit into the tradition of feminist science fiction, especially feminist critical dystopia, a genre that is known to express feminist critique through the means of fiction.

The conventions of Omegaverse give fans a unique opportunity to play out feminist themes and gender issues on male characters within a homoerotic relationship.²⁰ This makes Omegaverse more than a means to explore sexual fantasies. It can also be a tool to critique patriarchal power structures.²¹ In the context of feminist dystopia, patriarchy can be broadly understood as a societal structure where “the half of the populace which is female is controlled by the half which is male”.²² Omegaverse stories can be seen as a reflection of a broader debate around the societal, interpersonal and reproductive relationship between man and woman.

By examining the societal and interpersonal gender relations in Omegaverse fanfiction, I aim to contribute to the existing literature around Omegaverse, fanfiction as a whole and feminist science fiction. I will do this by analysing a select number of Omegaverse works through the tradition of feminist dystopia. The central question in this thesis asks how utopian and dystopian elements are applied in Omegaverse fanfiction to explore and critique patriarchal gender norms and relationship scripts. As a case study, I will analyse three fanworks based on the Netflix series *Stranger Things*. I will elaborate on this choice in the method section of this thesis. Firstly, I will discuss different aspects of utopian and dystopian literature and where feminist critical dystopia fits into this tradition. Then I will elaborate on the way that texts construct fictional realities reflective of our own. Finally, I will discuss how utopia and dystopia in fanfiction have been studied in the past and how this case study connects to this existing body of literature before I move on to the method and the analysis.

¹⁹ Ibid, 182.

²⁰ Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” 291.

²¹ Ibid, 294.

²² Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 34, quoted in Anne Gilarek, “Marginalization of the Other: Gender Discrimination in Dystopian Visions by Feminist Science Fiction Authors,” *Text Matters-A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2012): 222.

Theoretical Framework

Utopia and Dystopia

Utopia and dystopia both fall under the utopian tradition. Although they appear to be drastically different genres, utopia and dystopia are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. They both express a desire for a better way of being.²³ Utopia does this by fleshing out an ideal society, a “good place that is no place”.²⁴ Dystopia does this by creating a world that appears worse than our own.²⁵ Because utopian and dystopian narratives share their objective, to question and critique our societies, they often appear in relation to each other.²⁶ Utopia need dystopian elements or unfulfilled desire that could be resolved or fulfilled in order to create tension and drive the plot forward.²⁷ Dystopia have plenty of conflicts to draw from. In this case, the utopian element is the expression of desire.²⁸ It is the promise of a better way of being that motivates the characters to resolve the problems of the dystopian world.²⁹

Feminist Critical Dystopia

Along with the rise of feminism developed a subgenre of dystopian novels in which women expressed their dissatisfaction with the political climate.³⁰ Ildney Cavalcanti has dubbed this genre the ‘feminist critical dystopia’, although she argues that ‘critical’ might be redundant, as all dystopia criticise our world in one degree or another.³¹ In these novels, gender oppression

²³ Fátima Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17-23.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁵ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist fiction: Feminist uses of generic fiction*. (Cambridge UK and New York, 1990), 125.

²⁶ Anne Gilarek, "Marginalization of “the Other: Gender Discrimination in Dystopian Visions by Feminist Science Fiction Authors." *Text Matters-A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture* 2.2 (2012): 223

²⁷ Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” 6.

²⁸ Chris Ferns, "The Values of Dystopia: The Handmaid's Tale and the Anti-Utopian Tradition." *The Dalhousie Review* (1989): 373.

²⁹ Ildney Cavalcanti, "The writing of utopia and the feminist critical dystopia: Suzy McKee Charnas’s Holdfast Series" in *Dark horizons: Science fiction and the dystopian imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan, Raffaella Baccolini (2003), 50-1.

³⁰ Gilarek, "Marginalization of ‘the Other’,” 222.

³¹ Cavalcanti, "The writing of utopia and the feminist critical dystopia,” 47.

is often the central source of conflict.³² Unsurprisingly, it is most often women who end up in marginalised positions. Anna Gilarek characterises the societies portrayed in feminist dystopia as ‘androcentric’, meaning that maleness is the default and women are made to be the estranged ‘Other’.³³ In the context of feminist dystopia, Lucy Sargisson defines the Other as “marked by difference”.³⁴ They are the strangers in their own society, defined by their deviation from what is considered to be the norm.³⁵

Zeynep Atayurt has noted a shift in the type of conflict in feminist dystopia during different waves of feminism. Atayurt states that before and during the Cold War, dystopian fiction portrayed a menacing, totalitarian government as the antagonistic force.³⁶ After the war, these political anxieties gradually made place for more personal conflicts, such as illness, genetics and economic failure. In feminist dystopia, these issues often translated to anxieties around the female body, primarily about losing control over it thanks to genetic experimentation or (lack of access to) reproductive technologies.³⁷ These shifts suggest that the subject of feminist literature changes along with the talking points of the time.

Catachresis as a Utopian Device

Usually, utopian and dystopian literature do not address the problems of our world in a literal way. They use catachresis, a metaphor that applies a word in a way it is not ‘supposed’ to be used, often as an absurd or far-fetched substitute for something else.³⁸ Catachresis can exist within a line (microtrope) or be extended over the entire text (macrotrope).³⁹ Dystopia,

³² Judith A. Little, *Feminist Philosophy and Science Fiction: Utopias and Dystopias* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007), 16.

³³ Gilarek, "Marginalization of 'the Other'," 222.

³⁴ Lucy Sargisson, "Contemporary Feminist Utopianism: Practicing Utopia on Utopia," *Literature and the Political Imagination*. Ed. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (New York: Routledge, 1996), 247.

³⁵ Sargisson, "Contemporary Feminist Utopianism," 247.

³⁶ Zeynep Atayurt, "Fay Weldon's The Cloning of Joanna May as a Feminist Dystopian Burlesque," in *Womens Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, ed. Sharon Rose Wilson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 73.

³⁷ Atayurt, "Fay Weldon's The Cloning of Joanna May as a Feminist Dystopian Burlesque," 73.

³⁸ Cavalcanti, "The writing of utopia and the feminist critical dystopia," 49.

³⁹ Elzbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, "Catachresis—A Metaphor or a Figure in Its Own Right?" in *Beyond cognitive metaphor theory: Perspectives on literary metaphor*, ed. Monika Fludernik (New York NY, Routledge, 2011), 43.

especially feminist dystopia, are overtly catachrestic because they depict fictional conflicts that may appear absurd and extreme at first glance, but are often reflective of real-life issues.⁴⁰

In the case of Omegaverse, catachresis can be used to understand the construction of the new genders. Omegaverse borrows its terminology from wolf pack dynamics and lupine zoology.⁴¹ The titles Alpha, Beta and Omega originate from Richard Schenkel's study on captive wolves.⁴² He observed a dominance hierarchy wherein he dubbed the pack leaders 'Alphas'.⁴³ Those lowest in status were the 'Omegas', subservient to every other member of the community.⁴⁴ The ones in between were labelled 'Betas'. The existence of such roles in wild wolves packs has since been disproved, but these social roles are still part of the collective imagination around wolves.⁴⁵ This mythical hierarchy has even been extended to humans, especially in corporate cultures where the 'Alpha male' is frequently seen as the archetype of success.⁴⁶ Other ways in which Omegaverse overtly refers to lupine biology is in the prolific use of scent as an identifiable characteristic, the act of submission and the concept of 'rut' and 'heat', the point in one's 'mating cycle' when the individual is most fertile.⁴⁷

In Omegaverse, the terms Alpha and Omega can be seen as a macroscopic catachresis. They are used throughout the text to build a fictional reality where Schenkel's terminology stands in for the gender roles as we have come to know them in Western society. We can tell that 'Omega' is a substitute for the traditional role of females, for example, by the fact that Omegas, whether they be male or female, are able to conceive, thereby taking over the female reproductive role. Through these similarities, Omegaverse is able to invent a new gender system that still invokes an association in the reader, without explicitly referring to its real-world equivalent.

⁴⁰ Cavalcanti, "The writing of utopia and the feminist critical dystopia," 50.

⁴¹ Weisser, "Transmasculinities and Pregnant Monstrosity," n.p.

⁴² Richard Schenkel, *Expression Studies on wolves: Captivity Observations*. 1946. (accessed December 3, 2019).

⁴³ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 41.

⁴⁵ See Mech, "Alpha Status, Dominance, and Division of Labor in Wolf Packs." and Schilder et. al "Dominance in Domestic Dogs Revisited".

⁴⁶ See Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," Ludeman and Erlandson. *Alpha Male Syndrome*; Maclean, "Gender, risk and the Wall Street alpha male."

⁴⁷ Weisser, "Transmasculinities and Pregnant Monstrosity," n.p.

Gender and Textual Performativity

The concept of textual performativity can further help us to understand how gender is constructed through language and texts. Judith Butler famously argued that genders are not transcendental categories but that they are highly situated and that they are constructed as we are performing them.⁴⁸ By referencing certain gendered gestures and behaviours, such as the way we dress, move and speak, we reaffirm and thereby help constitute those same categories we are referencing.⁴⁹ She builds on Foucault's work to argue that gender is not fixed, but something we all govern, on each other and on ourselves.⁵⁰

Where Butler states that gender is performed and constructed on the body, Susan Lanser argues that the same can be done on the page.⁵¹ The meanings embedded in these textual realities are influenced by and will, in turn, affect our collective imagination around, for example, the dynamics of gender.⁵² Even catachrestic models of gender as we see in Omegaverse can contribute to our conception of the genders they reference.

Fanfiction as Utopian Literature

When it comes to fanfiction, utopian narratives have received far more academic consideration than dystopian ones. Scholars are not entirely to blame for this divide. Fanfiction is typically written as a fulfilment of the fans' wishes that are not met in traditional media.⁵³ The majority of fanworks, therefore, bend toward the unattainable and the utopian.⁵⁴

Fanfiction's utopian tendencies are best exemplified in the way romance, especially homoerotic romance, is written. Anne Kustritz argues that women are drawn to the writing

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, London: Routledge, [1990] 2006), 190.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵¹ Susan S. Lanser, "Sexing Narratology: Toward a gendered poetics of narrative voice," in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 3. ed. Mieke Bal. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 127.

⁵² Ruth Page, *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (NY, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 117.

⁵³ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 23.

⁵⁴ Anne Kustritz, "'They All Lived Happily Ever After. Obviously.': Realism and Utopia in Game of Thrones-Based Alternate Universe Fairy Tale Fan Fiction," *Humanities* 5, no. 2 (September, 2016): 8.

and reading of slash-fiction because it tells romantic narratives outside of the gendered power relationships inherent to heterosexual romance under patriarchy.⁵⁵ In traditional media, romances often play out between an active male hero and a beautiful but passive female lead, whereas slash-fiction brings together two male protagonists who are assumed to be on equal footing.⁵⁶ The focus of these stories is on character and the parity of the partners.⁵⁷

Some works within the slash-genre have been characterised by Elizabeth Woledge as ‘intimatopic’. These are narratives wherein the focus lies on the exploration of intimacy in all its possible forms.⁵⁸ Platonic, romantic and sexual love all flow naturally from one into another without the need to label them.⁵⁹ According to Woledge, this kind of intimacy is enabled by a homosocial setting, a group that consists mostly or exclusively of people of the same gender.⁶⁰ Because everyone is of the same gender, there are no options *but* homosexuality.⁶¹ This also diminishes the need for sexual identity since there is no concept of heterosexuality to distinguish oneself against. Through these means, intimatopic slash-fiction creates homoerotic utopias that exist independently from the gender hierarchies and stigmas of our world.⁶² Although Woledge never explicitly labels intimatopia as a utopian genre, I will treat it as such in the context of this thesis. I argue that by removing the characters from our sexual labels and stigmas, Intimatopic literature creates a ‘good place that is no place’, a queer paradise that is yet to be reached.

⁵⁵ Kustritz, “Slashing the Romance Narrative,” 371.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 371.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 377.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Woledge, “Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream,” In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2006), 99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 100.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 103.

⁶² *Ibid*, 103.

Fanfiction as a Critical Tool

Omegaverse appears to be directly at odds with the claims made by the aforementioned scholars, as the trope invents new inequalities where there should be none. Especially in subgenres such as mpreg (male pregnancy), which is a common aspect of Omegaverse narratives, scholars such as Åström and Weisser have argued that fanfiction reproduces the same heteronormative gender scripts which others claim it subverts.⁶³ By making one of the men pregnant, the story forces that character in the female reproductive role and essentially recreates heterosexual gender dynamics within a same-sex relationship.⁶⁴ Åström argues that mpreg has great potential to queer gender and sexuality, but in reality, the trope often results in “conventional stories set in a very unconventional universe”.⁶⁵

In the context of the present study, it is worth noting that the texts discussed below were probably not written with patriarchal critique as their primary concern. These stories were written in the first place to entertain and, judging by the explicit nature of the texts, to arouse. As scholars, we have to acknowledge that fanfiction, although critical in some instances, is not radical by default of it being ‘scribbled in the margins’.⁶⁶ Although we cannot assume all of fanfiction to be subversive, it would be a waste not to recognise the critical potential that a trope such as Omegaverse holds.⁶⁷ If anything, it might be more interesting to study what is revealed about these fans’ implicit attitudes towards gender inequality while they are writing to entertain.

⁶³ See Åström ““Let’s get those Winchesters pregnant: Male pregnancy in Supernatural fanfiction”,” and Weisser “Transmasculinities and Pregnant Monstrosity: Hannibal Omegaverse Fan-Fiction.”

⁶⁴ Åström, ““Let's get those Winchesters pregnant”,” n.p.

⁶⁵ Ibid, n.p.

⁶⁶ Anne Kustritz, “Domesticating Hermione: The emergence of genre and community from WIKTT's feminist romance debates,” *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 3 (August 2014): 446.

⁶⁷ Busse, “Pon Farr, mpreg, bonds, and the rise of the omegaverse,” 294.

Method

Textual Analysis

As I will be approaching fanfiction from a literary perspective, I will use textual analysis as my research method. Alan McKee has defined this as “an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of a text”.⁶⁸ Textual analysis looks directly at media objects and tries to discern how they create meaning. It is one of the ways by which we can begin to understand the meaning-making processes of the societies we live in.⁶⁹

To study the most likely meaning of a text, the researcher must be familiar with the text as well as its context.⁷⁰ Milena Popova has defined this context in the case of Omegaverse in the following subcategories:

- The canon of the media text;
- The (Western) patriarchal power relationships that Omegaverse references;
- The general conventions of Omegaverse fanfiction;
- Other texts and ideas created and shared within the fan culture surrounding the source text (also referred to as ‘fanon’).⁷¹

As illustrated above, fanfiction has a layered context. This is because fanfiction is inherently intertextual; it refers explicitly to a source text.⁷² According to Mafalda Stasi, fanfiction also contains ‘secondary intertextuality’.⁷³ The fanworks also refer to fanmade paratexts that are circulated within the fandom. ‘Fanon’ can be understood as the set of overarching ideas that can be derived from these paratexts. In order to comprehend all these layers of intertextuality, the researcher must be familiar with the source material as well as the fan culture surrounding

⁶⁸ Alan McKee, *Textual analysis: A beginner’s guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003): 1.

⁶⁹ Jane Stokes, *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 54.

⁷⁰ Bonnie S. Brennen, *Qualitative research methods for media studies* (New York, Routledge, 2017), 218.

⁷¹ Popova, “Dogfuck Rapeworld,” 181.

⁷² Mafalda Stasi, “The Toy Soldiers From Leeds: The Slash Palimpsest,” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2006), 120.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 126.

it.⁷⁴ While conducting their research, scholars need to balance their dual role as an academic (who is knowledgeable about specific cultural theories) and a fan (someone who has in-depth knowledge of texts and their communities).⁷⁵

In my textual analysis, I have used qualitative marking. This means reading the text, underlining key phrases and passages that jump out in order to identify themes.⁷⁶ Based on these initial selections, I looked for similarities and differences within and between the texts and grouped the quotes into themes and subcategories. Where some quotes applied to multiple categories, I placed them in the section that I found most specific and coloured the excerpt in the colour of the adjacent category. These results can be found in the appendix.

Selecting the Corpus

Since Omegaverse is a broadly applied trope across fandoms and does not point towards a specific case study,⁷⁷ I have chosen to conduct my study within a fandom in which I am actively participating, the *Stranger Things* fandom. Its most popular pairing at the moment of writing is that of the characters Billy Hargrove and Steve Harrington.⁷⁸

To collect material, I took to fanfiction platform *Archive Of Our Own* and searched for works tagged with the *relationship* Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington with the *additional tag* ‘Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics’. I filtered the results to show only completed works and had them sorted on ‘kudos’ (‘likes’ on *Archive of Our Own*). I decided to use kudos as a metric because these are, in my opinion, better able to show which texts are most relevant within the fandom than the number of hits on a particular work. After all, hits only show how many times a title has been clicked on. Kudos are a deliberate sign that the reader has enjoyed the work.

This search query was performed on October 7th, 2019. Because the goal of this study is to

⁷⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁶ Gery W Ryan and H. Russell Bernard, “Techniques to Identify Themes,” *Field Methods* 15, no. 1 (2003): 88-9.

⁷⁷ Popova, ““Dogfuck Rapeworld,”” 181.

⁷⁸ On Januari 23, 2019, Harringrove has ranked up a total of 4232 works published under the tag ‘Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington’ on *Archive of Our Own*. In 2019, Harringrove made it to number 31 on the top 100 most popular ships on microblogging platform *Tumblr*.

look at Omegaverse at a trope level and because every author applies the trope in a slightly different way, it would not suffice to look at just one text.⁷⁹ This is why I selected three fanworks from the top five results that each have a slightly different take on Omegaverse. To illustrate this, I have provided an overview of each story below, but first, I will give some information about the source material and the fanon of the fanworks that will be discussed.

A Brief History of Harringrove

Stranger Things is a Netflix original sci-fi series which takes place in the 1980s, currently on its third season.⁸⁰ Because the fanworks were all published in 2018, before the release of the most recent season, I will only address the canon of series two in which Billy's character was introduced.

The relationship between Billy and Steve was not part of the main series but has been constructed by fans. The show's creators intended for their relationship to be antagonistic.⁸¹ Billy spends the best part of season two shoving Steve around during basketball practice, asserting his strength over him. Steve, however, shows no interest in reciprocating this rivalry, instead preoccupied with his deteriorating romance with girlfriend Nancy.

In the final episode, Billy shares a scene with his father wherein the man physically abuses him and calls him a 'faggot'.⁸² This, along with Billy's seemingly unexplained fixation on Steve, has led some fans to believe that Billy might be gay and that his posturing was merely a defence mechanism to compensate for its threat to his masculinity. Many fans empathised with Billy's situation and hoped that he would get a redemption arc.⁸³ They imagined him accepting his sexuality and finding love as an important part of his healing process.⁸⁴ Since Billy already seemed interested in Steve, who was single by the end of the

⁷⁹ Popova, "Dogfuck Rapeworld," 182.

⁸⁰ *Stranger Things*, Netflix, July 15, 2016.

⁸¹ "Episode 2: Mad for Max," *Beyond Stranger Things*, Netflix, October 27, 2017.

⁸² "Chapter Nine: The Gate," *Stranger Things 2*, Netflix, October 27, 2017.

⁸³ Chris van der Vegt, *Humanizing the Human Antagonist: Stranger Things' antisubfandom and the morality of shipping*, 5. March 28, 2017.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

season, it was quickly decided who Billy's love interest should be. Their last names were combined to form the shipname 'Harringrove'.⁸⁵

Summaries of the Works

Because of the boys' antagonistic relationship in the series, a significant part of Harringrove fanfiction (Omegaverse or otherwise) is dedicated to the reconciliation of their rivalry. The narratives follow the common 'Enemies (to Friends) to Lovers' trope, which describes an arc leading from apologies and peace offering to the growth of mutual trust and intimacy which culminates to the characters having sex and admitting their feelings for each other.

In *Nine to Five* by Fanflick, Omega Steve starts working as Alpha Billy's secretary. Steve has to take the job to pay for his artificial Beta scents. The two gradually grow closer together. Once Billy discovers that Steve is not a Beta, but an Omega on blockers, he starts to make serious attempts to court Steve. They get together after Steve's father spikes Steve's coffee with aphrodisiacs, which are supposed to trigger his heat. The goal was for Steve to bond with one of his father's business partners but instead, he bonds with Billy, who ends up impregnating him. The story ends with the two of them getting married.

In *Suppressants* by FemmeSteve, Omega Steve's heat is set off by Billy's rough play during basketball training. Billy suggests that Steve might be sensitive to the presence of an Alpha, simply because he has not had sex in a while. The two agree to hook up in the hopes that it will sooth Steve's instincts. After this initial meet-up, Billy asks Steve on a date where they end up having unprotected sex. For a moment, they fear that Steve might have gotten pregnant, which turns out not to be the case. They court each other and move to California, where they have a child.

⁸⁵ The term 'shipping' is derived from the word 'relationship'. To 'ship' two or more characters is to express an interest in how a relationship between these character might play out. The 'shipname' is a combination of the characters' first and/or names. They can be used to describe and find fanworks as well as to identify fellow fans.

In *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)* by Brawlite and ToAStranger, which will henceforth be referred to as *Wicked Game*, Billy and Steve are both Alphas. A significant part of the story is dedicated to them coming to terms with their attraction for each other, which, due to them both being Alphas, is encoded with double homosexuality. Initially, they can hide their interest as asserting dominance over each other, which seems typical for Alphas their age. The further they get into their relationship, the harder it becomes to hide their relationship and ignore the conflicted feelings about their sexuality. By the end, they are bonded and living together.

The works vary greatly in length, from 12.000 to 110.000 words, so in this analysis, one might be discussed in more detail than another.

Ethics and Transparency

Because the object of this study is user-generated content, the privacy and consent of the creators need to be taken into consideration. In my opinion, the study of fandom will inevitably decontextualise the works that are produced within a trusting fannish environment and expose the texts to an unintended audience. For this study, I was able to get permission from all authors whose work I analyse. They have received a proof copy of the study and were invited to give feedback before the final submission of this project.

Analysis

For this analysis, I will be discussing different aspects of Omegaverse based on theme. I start out with the social aspects of the Omegaverse gender system, such as sexual identity and gendered prejudice before moving on to biological elements, primarily the dystopian function of mating cycles. After painting this initial picture of the oppressive structures of Omegaverse, I will go into the Othering of specific demographics in Omegaverse society, the role that masculinity and patriarchy play in these narratives and how this connects to the tradition of feminist dystopia. Finally, I will discuss the utopian endings of Omegaverse fanfiction and the desires they express.

Normalising and Redefining Homosexuality

Upon first glance, Omegaverse holds some utopian potentials. Homosexuality, as we understand it, is erased or at the very least engendered to mean something different. In these narratives, a relationship between two men or women appears to be as normal as a relation between a man and a woman, as long as one is Alpha and the other Omega or if they are both Betas. The couples have complete access to every aspect of a conventional heterosexual life as we understand it, one where they can have children and never face any bigotry for their sexuality. We could argue that Omegaverse contains some utopian elements in the sense that the trope expresses a desire for something that is absent in our culture: societal and biological equality of sexual orientations. There is, however, an equivalent of homosexuality in Omegaverse in the form of what is described by Steve in *Suppressants* as ‘something other than a traditional alpha/omega relationship’.⁸⁶ Every text discussed here addressed some concept of queer sexuality, such as the Alpha/Alpha relationship in *Wicked Game*. It was also hinted or explicitly stated that there is an equivalent to homophobic attitudes in Omegaverse society.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Femmesteve, *Suppressants*, 30. Accessed October 7, 2019.
https://archiveofourown.org/works/13902006?view_full_work=true

⁸⁷ See Brawls and ToAStranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 68, 146-7; Fanflick. *Nine to Five* 58, 2; Femmesteve, *Suppressants*, 30;

Although the new gender system naturalises some ‘same-sex’ relationships, it becomes clear that Omegaverse is not a world without inequality, sexual stigmas or bigotry. In effect, Omegaverse can be seen as a funhouse mirror that twists and magnifies the problems of our own society without solving any of them. Even within the ‘traditional’ relationships described in these works, the struggle over dominance between Alpha and Omega formed the central conflict of the plot. This may in part be contributed to the character’s antagonistic relationship in the canonical material. However, as I will demonstrate, there is more at play than a simple high school rivalry.

Miso(me)gyny

In traditional feminist dystopia, women are almost per definition the oppressed group.⁸⁸ This same principle seems to apply to Omegaverse. Not unlike the wolves in Schenkel’s original study, Omegas find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They face constant marginalisation at the hands of Alphas in particular. Omegas are perceived as delicate, emotional creatures who are both physically and mentally weak in comparison to the other genders. One example of this behaviour can be found in Billy’s inner monologue in *Suppressants*, right after Steve has asked Billy to give him some space on the basketball court.

Steve better be grateful. So grateful that he’ll stop squaring up to him and pretending that he’s anything but an omegan bitch. [...] Billy should have shoved him into the backseat of the Camaro and shown him how a real omega acts.⁸⁹

There is aggression and resentment in Billy’s choice of words. In his eyes, respecting Steve’s personal space seems like an act of mercy, rather than one of basic manners. In this fragment, Billy also uses the phrase ‘real omega’, which is a recurring theme between the texts. ‘Omega’ is shown to be more than a biological role. It is also a social role, paired with its own set of behaviours and gestures. In this, we see an understanding of gender quite similar to the

⁸⁸ Cavalcanti, “The writing of utopia and the feminist critical dystopia,” 47.

⁸⁹ Femmesteve, *Suppressants*, 8.

one described by Butler. This can be further illustrated by a sneer that Billy throws at Steve in *Wicked Game*:

"Walks like an omega, talks like an omega, blushes like an omega. Where's the line, Harrington? At what point do you just give up and admit that you practically are one, for all intents and purposes?"⁹⁰

These two fragments demonstrate how gender is policed within the Omegaverse society. Steve is put down when he does not adhere to the rules of his gender, whether he is a feisty Omega or a compliant Alpha. Regardless of the gender of his target, Billy uses Omega-unfriendly language to put down his fellow man.

In the author's note of the chapter, this last quote appeared in, the writers mentioned 'misogyny' as a content warning.⁹¹ Misogyny can be defined as "the hatred, dislike of, or prejudice against women".⁹² The use of the term in this context supports the idea that 'Omega' can be seen as a stand-in for femininity or femaleness. In the context of Omegaverse, I would suggest we call these attitudes 'misomegyny'. As we see, misomegyny can be used to target Omegas as well as Alphas. In the quote from *Wicked Game*, Billy tries to insult Steve by calling him an Omega, using it as a threat to his 'Alpha-hood'. This emasculation is also used by Steve's mother in a scene from *Nine to Five*, where she punishes Steve's father for drugging their son in an attempt to trick him into bonding with a business partner. She promises Billy and Steve to make her husband 'the Omega of the house', forcing him to do the housework as she will take over his job to provide for the family.⁹³ This punishment suggests that being an Omega is, at least to an Alpha, the most shameful thing a person could be.

⁹⁰ Brawls (Brawlite) and ToAStranger, *What a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 6. Accessed October 7, 2019. https://archiveofourown.org/works/13531590?view_full_work=true

⁹¹ Brawls and ToAStranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 21.

⁹² Mary Kosut, *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media*. (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2012), 234.

⁹³ Fanflick, *Nine to Five* 58, Accessed October 7, 2019. https://archiveofourown.org/works/13362057?view_full_work=true

Hormonal Peril

Omegaverse is most overtly dystopian in its portrayal of mating cycles. Omegas especially appear to be at their most vulnerable when in heat. Hormones take over their bodies to the point where they are unable to consent meaningfully to the sex that their bodies demand. The most extreme example of this appears in *Suppressants*, where Steve begs for Billy to impregnate him on multiple occasions, whether he is in heat or simply aroused. Billy is appalled. He asks Steve if he is sure that it is what he wants and warns him of the consequences.⁹⁴ However, the moment they are finished, Steve comes to his senses, panics and begs Billy to bond with him, claiming that his parents will kill him if he has a ‘bastard child’.⁹⁵ The loss of control is blamed on Steve’s biology.

He knew it wasn’t Steve’s fault. It was just his nature, but God, Billy had let it happen. He was supposed to be strong. He was supposed to keep shit in check and hold it together.⁹⁶

All agency and responsibility are stripped away from the Omega and instead placed on the Alpha. Heat is generally characterised as a period of great need and dependency.

Accompanying a partner through heat or rut is frequently described as ‘helping them through it’,⁹⁷ suggesting that these are moments of crisis, a burden the person cannot carry on their own.

Constance Penley proposed that women like writing mating cycles and other ‘fuck or die’-tropes because they enjoy the idea of men going through a hormonal cycle just like women do, thus forcing the theme of menstruation onto a male body.⁹⁸ This correlation becomes most apparent in *Nine to Five*, where Steve actually gets abdominal cramps as soon

⁹⁴ Femmesteve, *suppressants*, 24.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 24.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 24.

⁹⁷ See Brawls and ToA Stranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 122; Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 48, 50, 55; Femmesteve, *suppressants*, 14.

⁹⁸ Constance Penley, “Brownian motion: Women, tactics, and technology,” *Technoculture* 135 (1991): 158.

as he starts going into heat.⁹⁹ Marianne Gunderson has also connected the Omega heat to the way menstruation is portrayed in feminist literature.¹⁰⁰ She observed another parallel to menstruation, namely the abundance of ‘slick’ that Omegas produce when they go into heat, which mainly functions as an anal lubricant.¹⁰¹ The uncontrolled ‘leaking’ during menses has historically been held as proof or a physical manifestation of women’s lack of control over their emotional, feminine minds.¹⁰² According to Gunderson, a similar misogynistic stigma is mapped onto the Omegan body in heat, by a loss of mental, physical and sexual control.¹⁰³ In this aspect, heat cycles and the subsequent risk of unwanted pregnancy connect to the second wave of feminist dystopia as described by Atayurt, where anxieties about the body and loss of control over it are a recurring source of conflict.¹⁰⁴

Atayurt also lists (lack of access to) technologies surrounding the female body as a structural source of anxiety in feminist dystopia.¹⁰⁵ In Omegaverse, these technologies take the form of ‘suppressants’ or ‘blockers’, which function as birth control but predominantly as a means to curb (or lessen the intensity of) the heat or rut. They also tend to weaken the person’s natural scent or replace it with a Beta scent. These medications play a most significant role in *Nine to Five*, wherein Steve has to accept a job at his father’s company because he can no longer pay for his suppressants.

Life as an omega in hiding was much tougher than Steve could of [sic] ever imagined, most of his money went towards his suppressants. Money that should of [sic] gone to groceries, furniture, or college tuition had to paid [sic] for his artificial beta scents.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Marianne Gunderson, "What is an omega? Rewriting sex and gender in omegaverse fanfiction," (Master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2017), 38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 38.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 203.

¹⁰³ Gunderson, "What is an omega?" 40.

¹⁰⁴ Atayurt, "Fay Weldon’s The Cloning of Joanna May as a Feminist Dystopian Burlesque," 73.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 2.

Suppressants are more than just birth control to Steve. They are a necessity. Being out as an Omega would attract a lot of unwarranted and even malicious attention from Alphas. Steve has to hide his true gender if he wants to live a safe life. This puts an unnecessary strain on his finances, one that an Alpha male would never have to deal with.

When it comes to rut and sex in general, Alpha appear more in control than their Omega counterparts. In *Suppressants*, Billy stays fully present during sex, whereas Steve is slurred into a primal Omegan instinct to mate and reproduce. This does not mean that rut is smooth sailing for the Alphas. Early in *Wicked Game*, Steve goes into his first-ever rut. The scene mirrors a lot of the same tropes that are used in ‘first heat’ (or first period) narratives. The experience is described as incredibly shameful and humiliating. Steve is acutely aware of his own body and scent, feels incredibly vulnerable and out of himself.¹⁰⁷ When Billy notices Steve’s nerves, he tries to reassure him as follows: “At least we don’t have it as bad as Omegas, right?”¹⁰⁸ This seems to be the underlying message that runs throughout all of three fics. Alphas have far from an ideal life, but it is better than what the Omegas have to put up with.

Everyone has Gender Trouble

Although Omegas appear more marginalised on a societal level, Alphas are also frustrated with the stereotypes surrounding their gender. This conflict becomes apparent in the following exchange from *Nine to Five* wherein Billy is trying to apologise to Steve for rejecting him when he still thought that Steve was a Beta.

“I have to behave a certain way or else I will be seen as weak. I can't be weak, not anymore.” Billy confessed and hoped it was enough for Steve to forgive him.

"You know nothing about feeling weak. You don't know what it is like to be an omega in the world today. Where you aren't even human anymore, but an object like

¹⁰⁷ Brawls and ToA Stranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 36.

accessory created for an alpha. For my whole life everyone else decide [*sic*] what they wanted for me, and I had to follow their instructions." Steve calmly explained with a hint of fury underneath. [...]

"I do know what it is like being weak, no really I do," Billy started and noticed Steve rolled his eyes. Steve saw him as this self-assured alpha who had the world in the palm of his hands, but truthfully he was just another puppet in society.¹⁰⁹

Whereas Omegas have to fight to be seen as strong and intelligent, Alphas struggle to uphold the strength and dominance that is expected of them. Although Billy does not face the same level of dehumanization as Steve, he too feels constricted by the way that his behaviour is regulated by those around him. This pressure from Alpha coworkers can be seen as a part of a culture of 'toxic masculinity', defined by Terry Kuypers as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence".¹¹⁰ It is a societal ideal of manhood that prescribes a rigid social code of 'masculine' (or in this case, Alpha) traits such as hyper-competitiveness, self-sufficiency and (hetero)sexual entitlement.¹¹¹ Even though he's at the top of the company, Billy fears he might lose this authority as soon as he shows cracks in his mask of 'Perfect Alpha'. This need to be perceived by his coworkers as competent, strong and, most importantly, heterosexual is what leaves Billy feeling like he's "just another puppet in society".¹¹²

This same culture of masculinity is at the root of Billy's internalised homophobia in *Wicked Game*. The story opens with the phrase "Billy always knew that he was broken".¹¹³ This returning theme of 'brokenness' and 'unnatural attraction' refers to his feelings for other Alphas. Within a toxic masculine culture, the male (Alpha) gender role is intrinsically linked

¹⁰⁹ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Terry A. Kupers, "Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 6 (2005): 714.

¹¹¹ Bryant W. Sculos, "Who's Afraid of 'Toxic Masculinity'?" *Class Race Corporate Power* 5, no. 3 (2017): n.p.

¹¹² Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 25.

¹¹³ Brawls and ToAStranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)* 2.

to heterosexual attraction to women (Omegas).¹¹⁴ To fail in this aspect is to be a fundamentally defective Alpha.

The fact that Omegaverse addresses a masculine dissatisfaction with gender roles is an interesting shift compared to traditionally published feminist dystopia, which strongly posits women as the oppressed and men as the oppressors.¹¹⁵ From this sampled body of work, we cannot confidently claim that Omegaverse narratives favour the Omega/female perspective. We spend roughly the same amount of time following the thoughts of the Omegas as the Alphas. Steve and Billy are both protagonists, both victims to one degree or another. They live under the same oppressive system but it affects them differently.

The Patriarchy of Omegaverse

Although Omegas are structurally oppressed within these Omegaverse societies, it is not certain whether they can be described as *the* Other. For that to be the case, Omegaverse would have to be an androcentric society, meaning that ‘maleness’ is naturalised to be considered the norm, thereby making femininity alien and foreign. However, Omegaverse has invented its own ‘default’ gender, the Beta. If we consider Betas the norm, then Alpha and Omega are both Others, due to their radically divergent biology and behaviour. Despite their throned position on the social hierarchy, Alphas are ‘marked by difference’ in all the same ways as Omegas.

In recent years, gender studies have moved away from the monolithic concept of gender oppression used in the feminist dystopia that were published during the first two waves of feminism. Rather than conceptualise patriarchy as men oppressing women, it can be understood as a society wherein masculinity is valued over femininity.¹¹⁶ This new definition explains how men can still be oppressed under patriarchy through toxic masculinity, namely

¹¹⁴ Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 844.

¹¹⁵ Sargisson, “Contemporary Feminist Utopianism,” 246.

¹¹⁶ Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or an Us,” in *Women’s Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, ed. Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), 29.

by being punished for their perceived ‘feminine’ traits or behaviours.¹¹⁷ This conception of patriarchy is less about individual perpetrators and more about societal attitudes that seep into our personal beliefs and social order.¹¹⁸ In this depiction of gender oppression, we see an ideology more nuanced than the dichotomous philosophy of feminist dystopia from the 20th century. This intersectionality, the notion that different identities intersect and layer on top of each other,¹¹⁹ is most notable in *Nine to Five* when the text discusses the specific role of male Omegas. In this story, male Omegas are rarer than female Omegas and therefore seen as “a sign of pure power”.¹²⁰ This lands Steve a lot of unwarranted attention from his Alpha coworkers and even puts him at risk of being roofied at work.¹²¹ Steve would not have been in this position if he had been either an Alpha or a woman. This specific workplace harassment is produced at the intersection of his male and Omega identity.

Intersectionality along with an emphasis on diverse perspectives are characteristic of the third to the fourth wave of feminism.¹²² The latter is characterised primarily by taking third-wave discourse into the digital sphere.¹²³ The fact that this ideology shows up in the fans’ writing is not entirely surprising, as the works have all been published online in the late 2010s, well into the fourth wave. Just like earlier feminist dystopian novels, these works of fanfiction can be understood as a product of their time.

Ambiguous Personal Paradise

The dystopian world of Omegaverse is rarely transformed through the narrative. Some dystopian elements, such as mating cycles are biological and can hardly be resolved. However, the social aspects of the dystopia, such as misomegyny and toxic masculine behaviours, are not dismantled either. Because there is no apparent perpetrator, no evil

¹¹⁷ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 844.

¹¹⁸ Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System,” 26.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media: Third-Wave Magazines on the Cusp of the Digital Age* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 74.

¹²⁰ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 30.

¹²² Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave*, 17.

¹²³ Ealasaid Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” *Political Insight* 4, no. 2 (2013): 22.

government to overthrow, the transformation is mostly personal. In both *Suppressants* and *Nine To Five*, the characters start with strong prejudices against the other gender, especially Alpha Billy against Omegas. By the end, he has a loving, respectful relationship with Steve, but it seems like he has made an exception for Steve rather than changed his mind about Omegas in general. Especially in *Nine to Five*, Billy keeps reaffirming that Steve is ‘not like other Omegas’.¹²⁴ Rather than resolve the problems of Omegaverse, these characters find utopia in their relationship with each other while the oppressive structures of the society remain unchallenged.

Interestingly, in Omegaverse, the dystopian elements sometimes beget the utopian. Heat cycles are often used as a means to force two characters together. The sexual experiences that are shared during the heat or rut form a turning point in the plot. We see this in *Wicked Game* when Billy reflects on spending his rut with Steve.

Billy knows, suddenly, that this was too much to ask of Steve. To ask of both of them. A quick blowjob, or a handjob between friends isn't too much, would've been fine. But this, spending hours fucking and tangled up in each other? It's too much to try and pull himself away from. It's gotten complicated and now Billy doesn't know what to do.¹²⁵

Sex is described as something so personal and altering that the characters cannot return to their ambivalent relationship from before the heat or rut. In this way, sex mirrors the function it has in intimatopic literature, where it is used to increase intimacy.¹²⁶ In these works, mating cycles (and sex in general) function as a plot device that stirs the characters towards intimacy. That initial spark always ended in a long-lasting, monogamous relationship. Although the experience of heat and rut is clearly distressing to the characters and may end in unwanted or unexpected pregnancy, it usually leads to a conventional happy ending that doesn't transform the dystopian society at large.

¹²⁴ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 22, 49.

¹²⁵ Brawls and ToA Stranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 148.

¹²⁶ Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 104.

Intimatopic Desire

As stated earlier, utopian literature is guided by a desire that may or may not be fulfilled at the end of the story.¹²⁷ In the stories analysed here, this appears to be the desire for a stable, loving relationship where one is valued and understood as an individual rather than by the qualities of their gender. These equalitarian values are stated quite explicitly by Billy in *Nine to Five*.

"Steve, I don't want just a housewife. If I am ever going to bond with someone I want them to be my partner, someone who has equal power in the relationship."¹²⁸

Another example would be Billy and Steve's bonding in *Wicked Game*. Although the boys start out posturing and battling for dominance, there is great emphasis on the mutuality of their submission to each other, once they get to that stage in their relationship. Neither has dominance over the other. "The footing is even," Billy states near the end. "Even skewed in Steve's favor."¹²⁹

In this aspect, these stories express the same wish as the fanfiction described by Kustritz and Woledge. This time, equality is not enabled by a homosocial setting. In Omegaverse, there are even more genders than are generally acknowledged in our Western society. The characters, at least in *Nine to Five* and *Suppressants*, are of different genders and experience conflict because of that. Even in *Wicked Game*, the characters experience a struggle for dominance even though, or likely because they are both Alphas. None of these characters start on an even playing field, but at the end of the story, they all achieve the intimatopian dream. In this way, Omegaverse narratives work towards intimatopia, even though they start in a different place. They achieve equality despite a patriarchal social structure that makes them prejudiced against each other.

¹²⁷ Ferns, "The Values of Dystopia," 373.

¹²⁸ Fanflick, *Nine to Five*, 38.

¹²⁹ Brawls and ToA Stranger, *what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)*, 157.

Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

This study set out to determine how Omegaverse employs utopian and dystopian elements to critique gender and patriarchal power structures. I would characterise the trope as primarily dystopian, motivated by and building up to utopian ideals. In the use of heat tropes, Omegaverse mirrors a lot of anxieties surrounding a loss of bodily control, similar to professional feminist dystopia. Alphas display toxic masculine behaviours, such as aggression, sexual entitlement and use of misogynistic language against Omegas as well as their fellow Alphas. In this way, everyone in society is oppressed by the idea that feminine qualities are inferior to masculine qualities. Although the world of Omegaverse appears dystopian for the most part, all these works find their ‘Happily Ever After’. Like most dystopian narratives, they are driven forward by a utopian desire,¹³⁰ namely the want for a loving relationship wherein one is treated and understood as an equal. In this sense, Omegaverse mirrors a lot of the same desires expressed in utopian genres of fanfiction, only through different means.

Perhaps Omegaverse can be understood as the dystopian equivalent of the utopian romance described by Kustritz and Woledge. Both Omegaverse and Intimatopic fanfiction boil down to the expression of a desire (a loving, balanced relationship dynamic) but they go about this differently. Utopian slash-fiction enables healthy relations by removing them from patriarchal relationship scripts.¹³¹ These stories play out in a homosocial utopia that is not accessible to heterosexual individuals.¹³² Instead, Omegaverse tells us that equality is not a pipe dream, that even in a world much worse than our own, one where some genders are heavily stigmatised and people become slaves to their biology, it is still possible to find love. Even in that dystopian world, the intimatopic dream can be actualised.

¹³⁰ Ferns, “The Values of Dystopia,” 373.

¹³¹ Kustritz, “Slashing the Romance Narrative,” 371.

¹³² Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 103.

When it comes to the tradition of feminist critical dystopia, we can conclude that Omegaverse reflects a natural progression upon the first two waves of feminist literature. Its intersectional understanding of oppression along with the fact that these narratives are shared and produced within the digital sphere make these works and the ideas that are expressed in them reflective of fourth-wave feminism.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In this study, I used textual analysis to explore the way fanfiction produces meaning. Although it is a good way to explore the meanings embedded in a text, it doesn't tell us anything about the writers' intentions.¹³³ To create a more comprehensive understanding of the texts it would be necessary to use a combination of methods. To understand the fans' pull towards Omegaverse as a critical medium, one could conduct interviews with the authors. To understand the reception of a text, one might perform a discourse analysis on the work's comment section.

It is worth noting that this study has only examined a bite-size portion of all Omegaverse fanfiction that is available. Although I tried to select my corpus material in a way that would be reflective of the diverse body of work, it might only be reflective of the fandom that I decided to examine. It would be interesting to explore the dystopian takes on Omegaverse within other fandoms and see how the results compare to this study.

Even within the selection of fics that I examined in this thesis, there are topics that I have not been able to discuss at length, most notably, the role of homosexuality in Omegaverse. As the appendix suggests, there was much more to consider than I was able to address within the confines of this project. It would be worth dedicating an entire study to the way in which Omegaverse fanfiction uses catachresis to queer homosexuality and homophobia.

¹³³ Stokes, *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*, 56.

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Appendix

	Nine to Five	page (1-80)	key words	notes
Omega				
Examples of Omega behavior/traits				
Soft/Delicate	Steve was way too pretty to be in charge of the school, with his bright smile and soft features. Billy swore he looked like an omega.	7	"Too pretty", "soft"	
	Billy took a moment to take a look at Steve, he hasn't changed a bit. He just had this aura of brilliance, and when he smiled at Billy it left him feeling breathless. Those eyes always warm and tender, compared to his past lovers who only looked at him with carnality and nothing else.	14	"warm", "tender"	
	Karen with her perfect curls, baby pink lipstick, and blue eyes made her look like a doll. She was a textbook example of a perfect omega	29	"baby pink", "like a doll"	
	[Steve's clothes] smelled heavenly to [Billy] like a mixture of freshly baked cinnamon rolls and cookies out of the oven. It made his mouth water and he wanted more. Secretly he thought Steve would smell of freshly cut grass or rain since he grew up in a forest area, but instead he reminded him of a loving home.	36	"heavenly", "a loving home"	Steve's scent brings sweet, warm, domestic associations
	Even though he was male, products such as make up and lingerie targeted the omega community. Women wore it of course, but male omegas saw no problem in using it. Steve knew it sort of made omegas focus on body image, but he was curious to say the least.	44		female beauty standards translate onto the Omega gender
	Unsurprisingly, a male omega employee approached [Steve] first. "Hello, do you need help today?" Mark said as Steve eyed the displays. Mark was petite and wore a pale pink lipstick, he seemed cheerful and eager to talk to Steve.	44	"petite", "cheerful"	effeminate and queer-coded male Omega
Submissive/Compliant	Billy started, "Karen is full of herself and I would never bond with her." Steve rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right! What's wrong with her? She is submissive, dedicated, and the perfect omega. The perfect omega for the perfect alpha."	38		Submissiveness is part of the 'perfect' Omega archetype
	"This isn't how it was supposed to happen! You were going to be a good little omega and get fucked by Mr. Louis. Now you are telling me you are fucking bonded and pregnant with this asshole's baby!" Mr. Harrington didn't care people were staring, he needed to tell the happy couple how far this relationship ran.	57	"good little omega"	
Emotional(ly fragile)	"Saying sorry to an omega is one of the hardest things to do. You made yourself look like an asshole and that idea is now embedded into their minds. The best thing you can do is explain yourself, hopefully they are the less prissy type. Julian in my math class is such a nightmare omega," Max started, and Billy let her go off topic.	23		Omegas are characterized as easily hurt and unnecessarily stubborn
Seductive/Manipulative	Karen being the excessive type of omega that she is, started to talk big about how she would seduce Mr. Thompson [Billy] into bonding with her. "All I would have to do is meet him at his apartment before my heat fully starts and then he is mine." She smirked at Steve, as if she knew something he didn't.	26	"excessive type of Omega",	Karen is the wrong type of Omega, the one that confirms all the worst stereotypes. Is she the exception or is she the standard? There was another Omega coworker, Emily, who appeared less stereotypical.
	These items helped in seducing possible mates, and Steve wanted to look his best for Billy	44		Omegas are supposed to be passively seductive while Alphas take the initiative
Calming presence	Steve placed his hand on Billy's shoulder. "It was an accident, take it easy." Steve instantly calmed Billy down, and an older needle worker stepped in to give them a discount on the suit.	13		
Out of control of one's body	Male omegas when bonded would have a sex drive equal to their partner, and would absolutely remain loyal to their partners no matter what happened. The idea of being with someone who openly cheated and somehow staying with them made Steve want to vomit. Therefore, Steve knew he had to hide his true sex if he wanted to live a carefree life.	2-3		Male omegas are described as turning into meat puppets as soon as they are bonded. That's pretty fucking dystopian if you ask me.
Heat	"It's drugged, your dad sold you to Mr. Louis. Steve, you will be in heat in less than an hour," Billy watched as Steve opened his mouth, but said nothing. "We need to get you somewhere safe before you lose control." Billy grabbed his wrist and Steve couldn't help, but let out a small gasp. Billy's smell started to intensify, and Steve couldn't deny how turned on his touch. "Fuck, I am starting to feel it." Steve commented as he noticed Billy smelling the air around him. He started to feel warm, as if he was huddled under a bunch of blankets. Then all of a sudden his underwear was moistened by his slick, he had no control over how much slide out of him.	48-9	"before you lose control", "no control over how much was sliding out of him"	Here's one of those parallels to periods where mental control and bodily control go out of the window at the same time.
	Steve was about to say something, but then came the horrible cramps. It felt as though a knife was slowly carving into him, he forgot how horrible abdominal cramps were. "Please, fuck me. Billy, I need it. I want it and I want you. Please, help me." Steve couldn't stop himself from crying, this was pure agony. Billy finally giving in to his instinct kisses Steve, trying to be as gentle as he can be.	49-50	"horrible cramps", "Please, help me.", "pure agony"	The cramps are quite an overt reference to menstrual pain.
Expectations of Omega behavior				
Not like other Omegas	Steve would never agree to that arrangement. Steve isn't just any omega, he has his personal goals and dreams that don't include Billy.	22	"not just any omega"	Billy seems to award Steve more personhood than the average Omega, who, in his eyes, does not have any aspirations that don't include serving their Alpha
	"I need your help, how do I make an omega fall in love with me?" [Billy] blurted out instead, and gained a chuckle as a reply. "Um, yeah that is up to you. Not all omegas like bad boys, and there isn't a guide out there to ensure that they will fall in love with you." Max explained as Billy groaned.	23		Max suggests that Omegas are not all one and the same. You actually need to get to know them in order to know how to court the specific Omega you want.
	"I never asked to be like this," Steve whispered to himself. Billy was now confused. "What are you talking about Steve?" Billy asked before Steve continued. "An omega, but I just feel like everyone is expecting me to fit in this perfect mold. The perfect boyfriend, the perfect son, and now the perfect omega. All my life people wanted something out of me that I just couldn't give."	38		There are pressures and expectations that Steve can't conform to. He feels the governing of his gender and feels lesser because he doesn't meet the standards that are thrust upon him
	[Billy] never told anyone he ever loved them, but Steve was the exception.	49		

Misomegyny	Life as an omega meant two things, that they would be housewives or always seen lower than alphas. Even though omegas birthed the children of the world, they were seen as helpless or fragile. Steve didn't want to be labeled as such, especially when his father loath his status from the beginning.	2	"always seen as lower" "seen as helpless and fragile"	It is explicitly stated that Steve disagrees with the societal stigma. Whether he actively tries to subvert it, is unclear.
	Carol, [Billy's] last secretary, got fired after they got caught fucking on his desk. He got a pat on his back while she probably will never work anywhere near Wall Street again. The world is unfair to say the least, but he shouldn't complain.	5		Double standard, Alpha privilege
Societal Omega oppression	Steve tried to live on his own right after high school. He told his father that he could make it through college and get his degree without him. However, life as an omega in hiding was much tougher than Steve could ever imagine, most of his money went towards his suppressants. Money that should have gone to groceries, furniture, or college tuition had to be paid for his artificial beta scents.	2		Being born an omega is a financial burden. Alpha's don't appear to need these products to the same degree
	Even though he was outed as an omega, that just made Steve lead on the fake beta mask. He needed to repel any alphas at work, and not accept anything edible. Steve packed his own snacks and lunch that he secretly signed in the flaps of the package. One way an alpha might try to woo and bond with an omega is to put aphrodisiacs into their food or drink.	30		It seems like it's not unusual for Alphas to drug Omegas into loving them. That's date rape. That shit's pretty fucked up.
	To ensure no one connected the dots before the wedding, Billy made it company policy that all omegas wore scent blockers. A rule that many omegas wanted for a long time. The business gained praise when they started to provide suppressants along with the scent blockers, and saw a rise in applications. Ensuring a safe space for omegas, and proper co-worker relationships. Alphas would be given punishment for messing around with employees, even Billy could get in trouble if he wasn't careful. However, he had nothing to worry about since Steve stopped working there for over a week now.	61		This seems to advocate for socialised health care. It does appear mandatory, which you might argue is less progressive since the Omegas are not given a choice. But it says in the text that the Omegas wanted it like that, so who am I to tell them otherwise.
Omegas as possession	There seemed to be an idea that having a male omega as your partner was a sign of pure power, male omegas were definitely rare and special in multiple ways compare to the female counterpart.	2	"a sign of pure power"	Male Omegas are like a nice car or watch. They are fun to show off, but not lovable.
	"If you don't go on a blind date that I picked out for you, then what is the point? What good are you to me if you can't even do this?" Mr. Harrington turned red in the face.	42	"What good are you to me if you can't even do this?"	
	"I am not here as a way for you to climb up the ladder. I am your son!" Steve hated all it all boiled down to him being an omega. It reminded him how he would never be enough for his father, but at this point Steve no longer cared.	25	"you aren't even human anymore, but an object like accessory for an alpha"	The position of the Omega is always subservient, more a toy than a living being with goals and aspirations
	"You know nothing about feeling weak. You don't know what it is like to be an omega in the world today. Where you aren't even human anymore, but an object like accessory created for an alpha. For my whole life everyone else decide what they wanted for me, and I had to follow their instructions." Steve calmly explained with a hint of fury underneath.			
Alpha				
Examples of Alpha behavior/traits				
Strength	He has a bunch of workers helping him, but Billy wanted to prove his strength to Steve along with showing off his muscular physique. Steve can't help, but stare at his broad shoulders as he moved Steve's bookshelf into the guestroom.	33	"muscular physique", "broad shoulders"	Billy wants to show off his strength and Steve is into said strength
Providing	Now, Billy was never know for his giving nature at all. Which made it more unusual to say the least that he liked giving Steve gifts. Maybe it was the way Steve's eyes would widen in awe or whenever Steve gasped out thanks for such expensive presents. Either way Billy was starting to get addicted to treating Steve to the finer things in life.	14		This is a sugar daddy fic, so we can assume this is more 'providing' than the typical Alpha would do. Still, it seems to be an Alpha trait to want to take financial care of you partner and family.
	There was something charming about knowing that a piece of you is on this person, that no matter where they went they would always be reminded of your existence. Billy couldn't wait until his suits came in, then Steve would be wrapped in the finest of fabric that only Billy could give him.	20		The fact that the gifts are supposed to remind Steve of Billy, that Billy essentially 'marks' himself on Steve's body with gifts and clothing, gives this a possessive edge as well.
	Steve needed Billy now more than ever, and a part of him loved that he wasn't alone. Yet, his omega side reminded him that Billy was the perfect alpha. Ready to fulfill any of Steve's needs from emotional to sexual, but either way Steve agreed to move into Billy's apartment. He wasn't falling for Billy, right?	22		The perfect Alpha is one who caters to his Omegas every need. In this aspect, the expectations are not that different. Still, it seems as if this generosity is an exceptional quality for Alphas and more or less expected of Omegas. Alphas don't lose anything by providing to an Omega. Omegas are more expected to compromise their own needs and desires in order to fulfill those of their partner.
	Billy also started to pay for his suppression medicine, along with stronger scented beta products.	40		
Rut				
	"Then I will go to his apartment when he is in his rut and then he will bond with me!" She frowned as she stabbed her salad, sounding a little bit terrified.	26	"fucked to death"	This suggests that Alphas are not gentle when in rut, maybe even aggressive to the degree that Omegas might come in harms way
	"Yeah, then get fucked to death because we all know how gentle alphas are during their ruts."			
Agression	It took a while, but eventually Billy made it to the top of the food chain. He was more aggressive than the other alphas on the floor, and could charm his way into anything. Being a New York stockbroker came easy to him, and for a while he was happy about all the money he was making.	3		Billy's aggression is seen as an asset in the field he chose
Possessive/Controlling	Billy made sure to make Steve get a coffee for him. Staring out of the window he watched Steve run out to the nearest coffee shop to get his latte. This sense of power over Steve aroused Billy, and knew tonight he was going to pound into the nearest girl as soon as he got off of work.	8	"this sense of power over Steve aroused Billy"	Dominance is a turn on. Yet, because Steve is Beta, Billy plans to redirect his attraction in a way that is socially acceptable (heterosexual)
	The phone started to ring and Steve answered it before slamming it back down on the hook.	31		Aggressive feelings towards competition. Interest from other Alphas increases possessive behaviour
	"Another alpha." Steve explained as he rubbed his temples. Billy hated how hard all the other alphas were trying to get with Steve, he was going to kill all of them. The rest of the day was filled with revolting alphas winking at Steve before Billy would block their view and send the deadliest glare he could. Billy wished he could just rub his scent on Steve to tell all of the other alphas that Steve was his, but knew that Steve would hate that.	55		
	Billy smiled, imaging the mark once it properly healed. No more alpha admirers trying to come between them.	61		
	Billy has gotten quite possessive lately, but personally Steve loved it.			
Protective	Personally Steve wouldn't admit it, but he let out a high yelp when the pin came into contact with his calf. Before he could even make a comment, Billy nearly jumped from his chair to grab the poor tailor by the collar.	12		Billy displays unnecessarily aggressive behavior when there is no real threat of Steve getting hurt.
	"Watch it or else you are in deep shit!" Billy hissed out as the young beta muttered out an apology. "Not to me airhead, to him!" Billy pointed at Steve while keeping one hand on the young suit maker.	40	"always be there for Steve"	
	Steve's natural scent was irrepresible, and the alpha inside wanted no one else to know this smell. He promised himself to always be there for Steve no matter what.	40		
	Work became manageable since Billy looked out for him, firing any alphas who overstepped the boundaries and hiring betas to fill in the empty slots.	40		Billy removes Alphas from the workplace in order to protect one Omega, his Omega.

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Expectations of Alpha behavior				
	"I hate how I acted, but it is hard being the head alpha here. I have to behave a certain way or else I will be seen as weak. I can't be weak, not anymore." Billy confessed and hoped it was enough for Steve to forgive him.	25		Toxic masculinity, whereas weakness is expected of Omegas, it is not an option for Alphas, especially Alphas in a leading position in the company.
	Billy needed to convince him that he wasn't one of those people who will control Steve, and actually spoke up about his past. "I do know what it is like being weak, no really I do." Billy started and noticed Steve rolled his eyes. Steve saw him as this self-assured alpha who had the world in the palm of his hands, but truthfully he was just another puppet in society.	25	"just another puppet in society"	
	"I just wanted you to know that I am not one of those scumbag alphas, and that even though you are who you are I am fine with being friends with you." Billy awkwardly coughed as Steve laughed.	25	"not one of those scumbag Alphas"	Not like other Alphas. In contrast to other Alphas, Billy claims to be able to be friends with an Omega without pursuing them (although he does end up pursuing Steve)
	"Is that why you seduce so many omegas? To act like you are this great alpha when in truth you are still afraid?" Steve noted as Billy's shoulder brushed against his. "Yeah, actually" Billy murmured.	39		Billy is permissuous because it's expected of him. It isn't entirely clear what Billy is afraid of. In the sentences before this, he talks about how he is a terrible Alpha because he doesn't care about anyone but himself. Maybe he feels like he's not a good Alpha so he just tries to conform as much as he can in order to convince those around him that he is good enough.
Privilege	Billy Hargrove on the other hand was having the time of his life, as an alpha he knew he had it easy in life.	3		
Societal/interpersonal relations between genders				
Alpha/Omega				
Dominance	There are a couple of ways to ruin the ego of any selfish alpha, but Billy picked the worse way to do it. The old way of thinking looked down on families where the omegas made more than the alpha partner. Plus the fact that he probably won't be able to obtain another high level position job again due to his illegal practices. The cherry on top is how Mrs. Harrington promised to make him basically the omega of the house. Being under house arrest meant that he would be the one waiting for his omega every single day. He had to do the dishes, clean the house, and do the cooking for now on. He seemed to be given a weak excuse for a punishment, but in his mind it is the worst kind of infliction an alpha could face.	58		Being an Omega is the most shameful thing an Alpha can be. The Omega role is described that of a passive housewife. Alphas get to have freedom, fun and ambition while Omegas are chained to the kitchen.
Alpha/Alpha				
Battle for dominance	When Billy first heard of the infamous 'King Steve' he instantly knew he had to dominate him in everything, but that was before he actually laid eyes on him.	7	"dominate"	When Billy assumes Steve is an Alpha, his first instinct is to assert dominance. Not just in one aspect, but in every possible way.
Queer sexuality				
Internalized homophobia	Billy comprehended that he liked omegas, but all of them were female. Billy has never even met a male omega before in his life, and never felt anything towards another man until he saw Steve. Either way he had a reputation to uphold and falling for beta Steve would ruin it. Still, that didn't mean Billy couldn't have some fun with his new secretary.	8	"he had a reputation to uphold and falling for beta Steve would ruin it"	Billy is straight because he's an Alpha and he's into Omega women and being with a Beta male would "ruin his reputation", but is that because he's a man or because he's Beta?
	Billy in the past had been with beta males, but that was way back in California. His father never liked it and repeatedly abused him because of it. That's why once he reached Hawkins, Billy denied himself from even trying to seduce Steve or anything that wasn't remotely omega. Even though he would have wet dreams that seemed to always be focused on the tall beta, with his flush face and doe eyes. After leaving Hawkins to New York, Billy still hasn't flirted with any male betas. He hated how much he tried to fit in, to conform in order to succeed in his work.	18		Billy knows he's attracted to Beta males, but he doesn't feel like he can act on that attraction. It's not just a societal standard that's been punched into him. He actually fear that his career will suffer if he 'comes out' as queer

Homophobia	Only the most close-minded and old fashioned people believe in omegas bonding with alphas. People like his father believed in those type of ideals, but knew it would be troublesome for Steve to be openly an omega if he wanted a job at the company.	2	"only the most close-minded and old fashioned people"	Homophobia is clearly characterized as old fashioned and outdated
	Billy shoved Steve out of his arms when he noticed a familiar businessman walk through the door, he loath himself for obeying the rules society enforced on him. He felt his heart drop when he turned back to Steve who was frowning at him, before walking out of the store.	21		
	"No. Steve listen to me! It looks weird for me to have my arms around a male beta. everyone think I	21		Does it only make Billy's life a living hell?
Monogamy	[The hostess of the restaurant] is everything Billy likes, but for some reason Billy feels no need to seduce her.	9		When Billy finds his one true love interest, all interest in other potential mates fades
(i)	"Don't sleep around or else the omega is going to think you are only interested in sex." [- Max]	23		Omegas value monogamy more than Alphas. Otherwise Billy wouldn't sleep around.
D H C	On Friday nights Billy would usually go down to a local club to drink overpriced liquor and flirt with anyone who caught his eye. Instead of doing that he is helping Steve move into his spacious apartment, lifting up heavy boxes to get the job done.	33		Billy chooses providing for Steve over the attention and affection of many
	It churned his stomach of how many omega smells filled [Billy's] bed as he got closer, a range of fruity to vanilla attacked his nose. Steve couldn't stand it, and ran out of the room.	36		Promiscuity is repelling to Omega's
	"But I want to change, make myself a better alpha." Billy spoke up after a few seconds of silence. Steve lifted his head and looked at Billy. "Then you should probably burn your bed." "What?" Billy scrunched up his face, feeling quite perplexed by Steve's statement. Steve can't help, but laugh with his entire body at Billy's confusion. "Your bed reeks of omega. man! If you want to be a better alpha and nab that omega you better get a new bed. Smells overwhelming and sends out the wrong message." Steve spelled out before standing up.	39		Promiscuity is repelling to Omega's
	Billy didn't seduce any omegas, openly ignored them and paid attention to Steve. Every time he brushed his fingers against Steve's hair or fixed his tie for him made Steve feel wanted.	43		
Dreams of the future C	Somewhere in the back of his head, he knew he wanted a family of his own. With children he would protect and a partner to reassure him that he picked the right path in life. However, he shrugged it off assuming that idea was created by society to fit in with everyone else. Billy never needed anyone, he was fine on his own.	4	"protect"	Billy questions whether he wants a family because he is told that's what he should want or if he actually wants to be a dad. There is a social proponent here.
	Secretly, Steve seemed to have dreams centered around children, from being pregnant to teaching kindergartners. His favorite was having his own child, without his front teeth, smile at him while handing him a picture. Steve vividly remembered the stick figure drawing of their family, with "daddy" having heart shaped eyes looking at the figure titled "mommy". He pondered if it was an instinct reason behind it, or if Steve honestly wanted a child someday. He couldn't dispute how his heart was brimming when he knew he had a child.	16	"daddy" having heart shaped eyes looking at the figure titled "mommy".	It isn't entirely clear whether Steve sees himself as 'daddy' or 'mommy'. Still, the fact that it's a man and a woman is pretty traditional
	How about asking him out on a romantic date? He could show his affection with a lavish meal for the two of them and a promise to be the best alpha he can be. Billy started to daydream about the possibility of being with Steve, to buy him diamonds and have someone greet him after a hard day at work.	22		providing
	the idea of giving birth to something you created sort of sounded appealing to Steve, but he really shouldn't daydream about it.	27		Maternal instinct, Child wish
	"Jeez, you sound like a mom boasting about her child. Do you want kids then Mr. Mom?" Billy coughed. Personally he wondered what Steve wanted for himself in the future, and hoped he can give him everything. "Yeah, well I don't know. I mean a part of me really like the idea of kids, but I would have to find the right alpha. Someone who likes me for me and such. I just, I really want to go college and being in a relationship would probably ruin that dream." Steve sighed as he folded his last pair.	34		Child wish
S E Belonging	Billy started to muttered things such as "Mine, my omega" over and over again. Steve whispered back to him "Yours, alpha." and loved the wide eyed look he gave before affectionately kissing him.	52		This is mostly the Omega belonging to their Alpha. No one says anything about Billy belonging to Steve or being 'owned' by Steve.
Bonding	Steve Harrington, the one and only, made Billy ache for him. The alpha inside of him demanded he take and mate him already, but Billy knew better. Steve deserved someone better and good who made him happy, Billy only desired to be that person one day.	47		Bonding is not a choice you make lightly. You need to be sure that you'll be happy with the person you're with. Billy doesn't deem himself deserving
	With a low growl Billy bites down on Steve. His thrusts becoming rougher and faster as he slides his tongue between the flesh his teeth surrounds. [.] Without much thought Steve himself bite deep against Billy's neck, making the alpha howl in both pain and pleasure. And with that Billy finally climaxes giving Steve one particularly harsh thrust that forced him to cum alongside with him.	51-2		Bonding is mutual in this story. Do they have to bite each other or is this optional?
Mind-melting T	Steve didn't have to explain because they both had this level of understanding between them. They felt whole and for once in their lives they comprehended what they were missing.	59	"understanding between them", "felt whole", "they comprehended what they were missing"	Similar to the idea of soulmates. You find someone who 'completes' you. Suddenly you realized what places were lacking and how they fill them up.
	When someone compares to past relationships, they often realize an omega is not the strongest and feelings. Nancy was the type to voice her problems and never really allowed Steve to share his.			
	"What do you mean by that? If you found the right alpha then he would let you do whatever you wanted, since it is your dream and all." Billy asked as he helped Steve grab the sheets for the bed. "Yeah, that's true. But I have heard how possessive alphas are, no offense, I just worry that I somehow find myself trapped in a relationship. You do know that the moment I bond that means I will forever be tied to that alpha no matter what?" Steve huffed as he threw his pillows onto the bed. "Yeah, yeah I have heard. Well, either way it should be up to you. Promise me that if you take an alpha that it is out of your own freewill, not what your father says or even what the alpha might say to you." Billy nervously fiddled with shirt.	35		Emphasis on how Steve should have freedom in his choice in mate and what he choses to do with his life once he's bonded.

	suppressants	page (1-33)	key words	notes
Omega				
Examples of Omega behavior/traits				
Soft/Delicate				
Submissive/Compliant				
Emotionally fragile)	Steve felt a well of raw emotion climb up in his throat for the pair. He chalked it up to his omegan nature. Always the softer of the sexes.	30	"the softer of the sexes"	Emotion is detached from the circumstances and is instead characterised a stable character trait
	Max and Billy ended up sandwiching Steve between them while the omega cried. "I don't get it. Is he sad that Trevor presented as an omega?" Max muttered into her brother's ear. "No, he's just really emotional these days," Billy responded, rubbing Steve's back softly.	32	"really emotional these days"	Do Omegas get more emotional with age? Is it because when they mature into their second gender, the characteristics become more prominent?
Seductive/Manipulative				
Calming presence				
Out of control of one's body	He couldn't believe he just got off to Billy Hargrove. "It's not my fault," Steve said aloud to no one, "it's just my biology."	20	"It's just my biology."	
	"Are you gonna knot me?" Steve asked sweetly in return, pulling a deep groan from Billy's throat. "Jesus, are you gonna ask me that everytime I get my dick in you?" "I want it," Steve whined in response, obviously high on sex and pheromones.	23	"high on sex and pheromones"	Steve is no longer himself during sex. He's completely taken over by his Omegan instincts
	[Billy] knew it wasn't Steve's fault. It was just his nature, but God, Billy had let it happen. He was supposed to be strong. He was supposed to keep shit in check and hold it together.	24	"just his nature"	In contrast to Omegas, Alphas are able to keep their sense with them during sex. Therefore they are responsible for what happens
Heat				
	Slick was sliding down his leg at a slow pace. He couldn't believe this was happening. He hadn't had a heat since he was eleven! He locked himself into a stall with a whine, pulling his shorts down and pulling toilet paper from the dispenser beside him. He began to try and clean himself up, his heart beating in his ears. Why here, why now?! Someone was gonna smell him and tell, god, he's going to be humiliated	4	"humiliated"	Heat is a stressful and humiliating experience, out of control
	"Don't you realize how embarrassed I am? That was my first heat in literally years, and it happened at the worst time possible. To top that off, a complete asshole was the only one there that was able to help me out," Steve bit out, watching Billy's face fall, "The very same asshole who probably caused me to go into heat in the first place!" He exclaimed, flushing red.	7	"embarrassed"	Steve's body did things he didn't want it to do. It got aroused by someone Steve feels no emotional attraction to
	"You have to stop, or I'll have to quit the team," Steve told him, voice still that embarrassingly soft tone, "It's just our biology, it's nothing we can help," He added, looking away.	8	"It's our biology, it's nothing we can help", "embarrassingly"	his biology is actively stopping Steve from freely going about his life. It's holding back opportunities in a way that Alphas don't experience.
	They were practically chest to chest, neither of them fully clothed and both of them glaring holes through the other. Billy was seething, his shirt clenched in his fist as he stared Steve down. He watched as Steve's stance began to falter, his brown eyes growing worried. "That's enough," Steve said softly, already moving away again. Billy grabbed Steve's wrist before he could, locking eyes with the omega. His arousal had started to permeate the small space. Steve was wet. Steve could tell the very moment that Billy realized, his knees buckling. Billy held him up easily, using his arms around Steve's waist to hold Steve to his person. "Fuck, stop," Steve breathed out, making no move to stop Billy himself. "I can't fucking believe you, Harrington," Billy muttered, closing his eyes as he inhaled deeply. Steve whimpered and squirmed weakly in Billy's hold. Billy could overpower him if he wanted. He could shove Steve into a wall and yank his shorts down, exposing his shame. Steve thought about all of this with a groan. It was wetting his underwear, gathering quickly and Steve couldn't fucking believe himself either.	11	"I can't fucking believe you", "overpower", "exposing his shame", "couldn't believe himself either."	The Omega body is portrayed as weak and fallable. Billy isn't affected by arousal in the same way that Steve is.
	"It's just because you're an alpha. Not because I like you, or anything," He grumbled just loud enough for the other to hear.	12		There is a detachment between what Steve wants and what his body wants
	"You're not...put off by me, are you?" Steve asks.	12		Steve assumes that Billy is put off by Steve's leaking body.
	It had been [Nancy's] duty as his alpha to help him through his heats.	14	"help him through his heat"	The idea that heat is something you need help or assistance with in order to make it bearable
	Max had been visiting them when [Steve and Billy's son] presented as an omega. He was 12 and had burst out of the bathroom crying, reeking of his first heat. "Aunt Max, I'm dying!" Trevor had screamed.	32	"I'm dying"	First heat (period) as a moment of crisis --> Simone de Beauvoir
Expectations of Omega behavior				
Not like other Omegas	Steve could hold his own on the court and always shoved back. He had never fallen limp beneath Billy and submitted like he was programmed to. Steve was full of fire and bite, and Billy was still shocked that Steve Harrington was in fact, not an alpha. He was an omega.	2	"like he was programmed to do."	Steve's behavior is characterized as natural for an Omega
	"You don't smell like one." Billy pointed out. "Or act like one." Steve scoffed and rolled his eyes. "I'm on suppressants, dickhead. Try not stereotyping people."	2	"stereotyping"	
	"God," Billy groaned in disappointment, "Don't horror movies make you horny? Don't they make all omegas horny?" "Stop stereotyping me," Steve grumbled, "You should have told me you didn't want to watch a movie!" He exclaimed.	22	"stereotyping"	Billy tries to generalise Omega character, which Steve rejects.

Misogyny			
	Billy was beginning to get frustrated. Every pathetic omega in his life had always quivered before him and bowed their heads. Not Steve.	4	"pathetic"
	Steve better be grateful. So grateful that he'll stop squaring up to him and pretending that he's anything but an omegan bitch. Seriously, he'd been so weak that all Billy had to do was knock him around a few times and he totally soaked his shorts. Billy should have shoved him into the backseat of the Camaro and shown him how a real omega acts.	8	"omegan bitch", "so weak", "show him how a real omega acts."
	"You want it?" Billy found himself saying. "You want me to knot you? Without claiming you first? Give you a bastard child?" Billy was trying to deter Steve from asking, but it came out wrong. It made Steve moan louder, ride him harder and nod frantically.	24	
	"Everyone will call you a slut," Billy whispered. "Everyone will know I put my kid in you," "Please," Steve whispered back, eyes rolled practically into the back of his head.		
	[Steve] was an omega, he was programmed to beg like a whore. They all did it. Steve wasn't different. He wasn't special.	24	"beg like a whore"
			Slutshaming. Steve is just like every other Omega and they are all useless whores.
Societal Omega oppression			
Omeegas as possession			
Alpha			
Examples of Alpha behavior/traits			
Strength	"[Max]'s a big, strong alpha like me," Billy said in a slightly teasing voice, "She can take care of herself."	31	"big, strong", "she can take care of herself"
Possessive/Controlling	[Billy] liked the idea of having sent Steve into an unexpected heat. The friction between them was so unbearably hot that it had fucked with Steve's very function	8	
	Billy realized with a jerk that he had started stroking his cock. He felt guilty. God, Steve was so pathetic... He squeezed his dick and kept stroking, unable to shake the image of Steve beneath him. Where he belonged.	8	"pathetic", "Steve beneath him, where he belonged."
			Billy quite literally gets off on the idea of putting an Omega in their place and establishing his dominance over them
Societal/interpersonal relations between genders			
Alpha/Omega			
Dominance	Billy did not try to hide his interest in Steve's sex. Now that he knew that the other was an omega, he was constantly on him. He just wanted to get Steve to show a bit of his true nature, maybe submit a little like he was supposed to. It just wasn't natural the way Steve fought back.	4	"true nature", "like he was supposed to", "wasn't natural"
	The way Steve rebelled against his nature did things to Billy's insides. He wanted to put Steve in his place. To pin him somewhere by the neck until Steve was done playing big boy, until he was whimpering and tilting his neck to the side, passive beneath Billy. Submitting to the alpha.	4	"against his nature", "passive"
	Everyone had stopped playing to see what happened next. It wasn't new to them, obviously the boys fought all the time, but this was an omega pitted against an alpha...	11	
			It's clear than the Omega is assumed to be weaker, but not if anyone feels called to come to Steve's aid because of this perceived weakness
Queer sexuality			
Homophobia	"California is more diverse. What if the kid's gay?" "You mean, what if he doesn't want a traditional alpha/omega relationship?" Steve blinked, the idea foreign to him. "Yeah, exactly. That's a thing," Billy said. Steve blinked again. Billy had a point. He'd want his baby to grow up in a welcoming community, and Hawkins was unfortunately, not always that. It made him a little sad.	30	
	Max came out with her partner Lucas a year after that. She had done it over the phone. "He's an alpha," She had told her brother, voice a little shaky. "Cool. I wouldn't tell my dad, though," Billy had responded.	33	
			The subtext is that Alpha/Alpha is the Omegaverse equivalent of gay
Courting			
	It showed. Everyone knew what Billy was doing, but nobody dared say anything. It looked too close to a fierce courting rather than a lasting fight between two boys. Why wouldn't the new king of Hawkins High try and make the old one his bitch?	4	
	[Steve] was thrown heavily into the bed, where he bounced for a moment with his eyes wide and trained on Billy. "You just threw me like I was nothing!" Steve complained, watching as Billy crawled to where he was on the mattress. "Don't omegas like that?" Billy mused as he came to kneel between Steve's legs, "To be reminded how big and strong their alpha is?" "You're not my alpha," Steve bit out, tilting his head up for the kiss that Billy offered him.	15	
	Billy began to court Steve properly after the events of that night. Not out of obligation, but of his own raw need to keep the omega as his. Steve knew that.	29	
			Real romance does not follow out of obligation, but from a desire to belong

Submission			
Equality/ mutual submission	"What if I'm pregnant?" Steve said softly. Billy closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. He brought Steve even closer, wrapping an arm around him. "I won't leave," Billy said, touching Steve's scent gland with the pad of his finger. "I'll be here for you. We both messed up."	27	"We both messed up."
Monogamy			
Dreams of the future	Since being bonded, they found themselves awake at night whispering about their future together. Billy would kiss the scarred tissue of Steve's scent gland and tell him about California and how nice it was. [...] "We could raise the kid there. Let it grow up next to the ocean. I ate that shit up when I was a tot," Billy said.	30	Child wish
Bonding	Steve could be his. [Billy] could force a bond so easily and have him forever. Steve would hate him for a while, but he would eventually give in. As any omega would. Steve wasn't just any omega.	17	A bond is something for the Alpha to take. It doesn't have to be mutual
	"We're going to wait. I'm not going to bite you just because you're scared. We'll be miserable," Billy responded. He didn't think it was true.	26	Bonding is not just a practical thing. It ought to be an act of love.
	The pregnancy scare only brought them closer if anything. It was a reminder to them that there was a great possibility that they would be bonded somewhere along the line.	29	
	Billy would tease him about bonding, pressing his teeth delicately into Steve's gland so that the omega would squirm and push him away. Steve loved it. It just showed him that Billy wasn't scared. If he thought back far enough, he'd remember that Billy was never truly scared to be bonded to him. They wouldn't say it for a while, but they already felt bonded at that point in their relationship.	29	
Intimacy	when Steve got his next heat, Billy was right there for him. It was the closest Steve had ever felt to someone before. Not even Nancy had made him feel so secure in himself and their relationship.	29	"closest Steve ever felt to someone", "secure"

	what a wicked game you played (to make me feel this way)	page (1-243)	key words	notes
Omega				
Examples of Omega behavior/traits				
Emotional(ly fragile)	"I seem to remember me wanting you there was the problem. Like some stupid, swooning omega desperate for a knot, right?"	44	"stupid", "swooning"	Billy compared Steve to an Omega during his rut
Misogyny	"Walks like an omega, talks like an omega, blushes like an omega. Where's the line, Harrington? At what point do you just give up and admit that you practically are one, for all intents and purposes?" - Billy to Steve	5		Performativity of gender. Billy compares Steve to an Omega to humiliate him and attack his masculinity
	"Hey, Steve -- you an omega? Why didn't you tell me? I could've sworn you were an alpha." [...] Tommy is grinning and huffing out a short laugh too. Then another, like he's in on some joke that isn't being told. "I can see why you'd make the mistake," Tommy says, and his eyes are mean, his tone bitter the way it always is around Steve.	189		The subtext is that Steve is an inadequate Alpha, that he isn't assertive and dominant enough and might therefore be mistaken for an Omega. And no one wants to be an Omega.
	"Steve, man." Tommy croaks, and Steve makes a face, chin breaking a little bit. "Do you let him fuck you like a bitch, too?"	190		Being on the receiving end is a shameful, demasculinizing position. Then you're 'the girl in the relationship'.
	"Tell your fuckin' girlfriend to apologize to me, first." Tommy thrashes, bares his teeth, clutches at Billy's wrists with his hands.	191		When Tommy hears that Billy's boyfriend gave him a mark, he assumed that it was a male omega. Now that he knows it's Steve who is in a relationship with another Alpha, he calls him a girl. Interesting layers of demasculinisation.
Alpha				
Examples of Alpha behavior/traits				
Strength				
Aggression	[Steve going off blockers] doesn't change anything. Not until much, much later when he's hiding four kids in the Byers' house and staring Billy Hargrove down on the front lawn, feeling more angry, more protective of something than he ever has in his life. He postures. He actually postures, and then he lays his fist into the side of Billy's face, refuses to back down, and realizes-- much, much later, after his face is beaten in and a bit swollen and the world is safe again-- that maybe Nancy was right about all of that they mess with your natural instincts stuff. He realizes that maybe something has changed.	1	"angry", "protective", "posturing", "refusing to back down"	
	What Billy wants to do is to take Tommy's sneering, sniveling face, and smash it straight against the locker. Because no one talks to Steve like that, because no one looks at Steve like that. So, that's exactly what Billy does. He grabs Tommy by the back of the neck and shoves him hard, until his face slams against the cold metal of the locker. His blood is boiling, his heartbeat racing. All he's seeing is red. All he hears is the sick crunch of Tommy's nose meeting unyielding metal.	189		Billy defends Steve when Tommy uses misogynistic language against him
	There's something that comes alive in Billy when he sees the blood pouring out of Tommy's nose. It stokes the fire inside him, burning bright and hot and fervent.	190		
	[Steve]'s already heard [Nancy's] lecture on proper displays of aggression, coupled with her stupid ways alphas court potential mates rant when she'd approached him at lunch and pinched his side hard [...] Billy'd spent lunch getting dressed down by the assistant principal for outrageously aggressive alpha behavior before getting a slap on the wrist and being sent on his way, catching Steve right before the end of lunch period and kissing him stupid like he just couldn't help himself before rushing off to class again.	195-6		The aggressive tendencies of Alphas is not indulged, but they also don't face any severer consequences for it
Hunting/Chasing	Billy's eyes always tracked him through the room, like a predator after prey. He always found himself catching Steve's scent in the hallway, drug-dulled and cliche as it was, and found himself following, lead entirely by instinct to hunt him down. To trail, to chase. The desire was there, finally -- unignorable	5	"like a predator after prey", "hunt him down"	literal predator behaviour. Here we see more lupine aspects feeding into the Alpha gender role, but potentially they are also meant to say something about the male gender role as purchaser in relationships
	It's fast, the way Billy veers them off of the track and tackles Steve to the grass, tangling them both in a mess of limbs. Billy holds him down, pressing him to the ground, panting, like Steve's his prey	81	"Like Steve is his prey"	This is playful
	Steve doesn't know how Billy manages to do it. How he always makes Steve feel like he's something to be devoured, just by looking at him.	84	"devoured"	
Possessive/Controlling	Steve tosses sweatpants at him before he can even think to dig in his own bag for clothes. "What, you want me to smell like your property?" Billy says, raising his eyebrows. But he slides off his briefs, towels himself off, and slides the pants over his legs, pleased to be wearing something of Steve's. "How very alpha of you." When he looks back up, Steve has slid his own pants on and pulled a sweater that looks ten years old and is stretched and worn and absolutely ridiculous looking, but Steve is staring at him, head cocked to the side, with dark eyes. "I like it when you smell like me."	109	"smell like your property"	Claiming property with your scent is characterised as an Alpha thing. And Steve does indeed like the feeling. Seems to intersect with 'belonging'
Protective	But he can't help his stupid fucking desire to want to protect Steve, to want him to be safe and happy. Even if he keeps going about it all wrong	44	"want to protect Steve"	
	You didn't have to do that, I can take care of myself. No one's ever really defended me like that, I'm supposed to be able to take care of it myself	54		
	It's dangerous, getting as attached as Billy already feels. But he can't help it, it's in his nature -- at least, kinda. Alphas are supposed to get attached and protective and tied down. He knows that, biologically. But that's only with omegas -- otherwise, society says that alphas are meant to be strong loners. Aloof and uncaring. It was an easy image to uphold, before Billy met Steve.	104	"attached and protective and tied down"	(it's in his nature) vs (society says) intersection of the biological and the performative
	And he can't lie and tell himself he just wants Steve's body. Because Billy cares. He cares about how Steve is feeling, what he's thinking, how he's doing. He wants Steve to be happy and safe and fucking protected.	168		A turning point: Billy admits that their relationship is more than physical. He cares for Steve on an emotional level. He doesn't just want to contribute to Steve happiness, he wants to keep his safe from harm or other things that might make his life less joyful
	If you think I'm going to let that sniveling alpha wannabe get away with calling my boyfriend a bitch, you're wrong," Billy says.	192		
Providing	Billy and his open shirt and his tight jeans and the ridiculous, subtle posturing he's doing right now. The hand that finds his hip, the way he stands as close as he can get, the fact that he got Steve's drink for him and then made a show of it. Steve feels sort of ridiculous, getting all flustered just because Billy is, in a way, doing. But he can't help the pleased, tingling warmth that spreads through his chest.	51		Steve likes to feel taken care of
	"Okay. Good. Because I want you, too, and--" Steve wets his lips. "And I wanna give you everything you need." I want to take care of you, he doesn't say. I think I want to give you everything.	116	"take care of you", "give you everything"	

Rut	He's got all of the symptoms. The fever, the restlessness, the irritation. The need to not be touched, to have his things be his, and the wide berth everyone has been giving him all day. He's been walking around school, reeking of the beginnings of his own rut, all day.	35		A list of symptoms. This sounds a lot like PMS
	He doesn't know what to do. He's never had a rut before. He'd grown up on blockers, never had this crawling, raw feeling suffuse through him like this. He doesn't know what to do. But then he remembers Billy's words-- you should be home -- and he thinks that's right. That he needs to get out of here, go home, where he's safe, where he can control everything, where no one can touch him if he doesn't want them to, where he isn't teetering on the edge of blind violence and raw self-preservation, where he can't be vulnerable. He should go home.	35	"crawling, raw feeling", "vulnerable"	This describes rut similarly to most heats where the Omega loses control and is vulnerable. It isn't clear if he wants to protect himself from others or if they need to be protected from him
	[having to be lead somewhere instead of being able to get there himself] [very aware of his own body and his own scent] [it makes his shoulders pull up, makes his jaw wind tight, makes him want to snarl at everyone who gets too close] [the shame that follows - because he's not like this]	35		The experience of rut is shameful and isolating
	"At least we don't have it as bad as Omegas, right?"	36		Billy to Steve, comparing rut to heat
	"Does that--? Is it easier?" Steve asks. "Sharing it? With someone?" Billy bites back a noise in his throat. "Yeah," he says, sounding choked. "It is. But it's not impossible to do alone. Not like omegas. It just goes by faster with someone else."	37		Again, suggesting that the biological burden on Omegas is higher.
	"I mean, you're going into rut. I figured it would be-- It's instinct to want to--" Steve can't bring himself to say the word breed or mate, and he clears his throat again.	116	"instinct"	Rut comes with the sudden, burning desire to procreate
	Billy can't help but shift on his feet. He's trying to ignore how warm he feels. How dizzy. How weirdly territorial. He makes a fist, clenching and unclenching his hand at his side.	120	"warm, dizzy", "weirdly territorial"	Normal alpha traits are enhanced during rut
	It makes sense. That the rut would be more pronounced with someone around. Someone ready to help and share the moment with. "Didn't like someone in your house," Billy says, and Steve remembers how fiercely territorial he had felt, how protective he had been of his possessions and his space.	122	"fiercely territorial", "protective" "someone ready to help and share this moment with"	(territorial) (possessive) (protective) rut is something you need to be 'helped' through. It's a burden.
	It's not that Billy can't think, can't control himself. He can. He could. But there's something heady and hot about not having to, about just being able to surrender himself to pure instinct.	122	Losing controle	
	There's no real way to make Steve his. Not like if Steve were an omega. But Billy could keep biting Steve's neck until it scars, until Steve is married by him for forever. It's a dizzying thought, forbidden and heavy and hot. A	126	Losing controle	
Expectations of Alpha behavior				
	"Thanks for the chivalry, pretty boy. Maybe you're not the shittiest alpha after all." No. Billy's pretty sure that title goes to him, the alpha with the -- let's face it -- unrepentant crush on Steve Harrington.	12		Shows that Billy's sexuality plays an important part in his own perception of his masculinity and success as an alpha
	Nancy snorts. "He's not subtle." Steve blinks down at her, feels something creep across the back of his neck as he follows her to her locker. "What do you mean?" "The posturing," Nancy replies, and Steve feels a wash of relief as he leans his shoulder against the lockers and she opens hers up to trade out her textbooks. "He's like, the epitome of alpha male stereotypes. And not in a good way." Steve's face scrunches up. "I'm an alpha male." "Yeah, but--" Nancy glances at him, her eyes big, her smile small. "You're like Jonathan. What an alpha should be-- not what society dictates they are."	99		This suggests that there are right and wrong ways to be an Alpha. Billy is performing Alpha whereas Steve is existing as Alpha
Privilege				
Societal interpersonal relations between genders				
Alpha/Omega				
Dominance	He wants nothing more than to press his whole body back against Steve, to nose at his neck and claim his goddamn territory like Steve is his omega-- like Steve is his.	26	"claim his goddamn territory", "like Steve is his"	It is natural for Billy to want to claim possession over an Omega, but that's not something you do with another Alpha. You establish dominance, but you don't feel a need for belonging towards them. There are competition and nothing else
	"Come on, you lump. Fuck, you're gonna be so sticky if you don't let me clean you up." And that's what Billy's offering, isn't it? He's offering to clean Steve up like Steve's his omega, like he's Billy's to cherish and take care of. Goddamn, his instincts really are broken. But he can't bring himself to care.	144		Alphas also take care of their Omegas. Billy is not supposed to want to take care of another Alpha in this way.
	"Pretty sure my boyfriend gave this to me," Billy says. [...] Tommy sneers. "You let some omega mark you up?"	189		It's not the boyfriend part. It's not normal for an Omega to mark their Alpha, even more for the Alpha to allow it. Alphas are supposed to mark their territory on their mate, not the other way around.
Alpha/Alpha				
Battle for dominance	But Steve knows-- he knows -- that whatever is happening is instinct. That he's reacting to an alpha who has proven himself stronger, faster, more capable than himself, and part of him wants to buckle, to tip his head over for him, and the smell of Billy's warmth overpowering his own scent is only adding to that	17	"an alpha who has proven himself stronger, more capable than himself"	A description of the instinct for submission. When another Alpha asserts their superiority, it is in the other Alpha's nature to yield and allow that dominant Alpha to confirm the other's inferiority by biting their neck. Maybe it's also somewhat of a peace offering. I don't know enough about wolf biology for this.
	[Steve to Billy] "I am sick of your posturing bullshit. Being a dick doesn't make you a good alpha, and being an alpha doesn't give you any right to try and make someone submit."	24		Good Alphas don't force submission - they earn it.
	"Yeah, actually. What did Byers do, huh? To make him a good alpha? Since your criteria are so high." "Well," Steve pauses, glancing up at Billy through his lashes and plastering on a tight smile. "He asked. He asked me if I would-- very nicely, actually-- and I said yes."	30		A good alpha doesn't force submission but respects his 'inferiors' enough to ask permission
	It wouldn't be that weird for Billy to bite Steve's neck in public. For Steve to submit to him. But neither of them are posturing, and they're certainly not fighting. And it feels more intimate than that Billy's desire to take Steve's neck under his teeth has less to do with another alpha submitting to him and is far more closely related to the way Billy should want to bite an omega's neck, but doesn't want to.	75	"Intimate"	Billy doesn't want to bite Steve's neck to assert dominance. Instead, it's courting behaviour. The same action has a different meaning according to the gender on which it is performed.
	"What kind of shitty alpha forces someone to submit?" [Jonathan] asks, tone dripping with disgust	155		A good alpha doesn't force submission but respects his 'inferiors' enough to ask permission
Queer sexuality				
Internalized homophobia	Billy's always known that he was broken. There's something wrong with him, something twisted up and turned around, upside down. He knows how the books and movies and scientific bullshit say he should act. How he should feel. The problem is, he doesn't feel that way.	1	"Broken"	Billy is aware that he doesn't conform to the heterosexual norm. Instead of pointing outward, he points inward. The fault is not with society for prescribing a one-size-fits-all approach to sexuality. He is the one that is fundamentally broken.
	Billy cackles, because obviously Steve isn't going to give Billy what he wants. What Billy wants is unattainable. It's unnatural.	5	"unattainable", "unnatural"	Billy has internalised the idea that attraction that is not heterosexual or procreative is unnatural and wrong

Homophobia	He'd thought, for the briefest of moments when he'd met Steve Harrington, that he might've just found someone to appease Neil Hargrove. Turns out -- not so much.	8		This shows that Billy coming home with a boy would not have been a problem, as long as the boy would have been Omega
	"But I guess you finally got what you wanted. So it doesn't really matter." Steve says. "No one else needs to know. Just that I yielded, right?" Billy growls, and the sound is tight and stifled in his throat. He doesn't like, despite everything, hearing that Steve doesn't care. Like it's no big deal. Like they aren't walking through a minefield. And -- Billy can't have it both ways. He knows that. But it still hurts, unbidden and raw.	66		"minefield" suggests that they might get in real danger if anyone finds out
	"You don't get it, Harrington. You don't get to be nonchalant about this, you don't get to not care. What we just did," Billy hisses, "that wasn't normal. It's not okay." He takes another breath and lets Steve go, dropping the contact between them. Letting Steve step back. "People get hurt over that shit. They get killed -- okay? Alphas don't -- not with other alphas. That's just -- the way it is. It's not natural." Billy drags his hands through his hair. "So look -- I don't regret it. I promise you. But people can't know." Steve stares at him, brows furrowed and hands shaking. It sounds outlandish, the idea that someone would get hurt over for something like that. Steve knows it's not normal, knows it's a little unusual, but it's not -- it's not completely unheard of. He knows it wouldn't be easy. Knows he'd get a lot more comments questioning his status if it came out. But Steve doesn't care. He's faced worse shit than a little bit of prejudice. It doesn't scare him. But it obviously scares Billy.	68	"People get hurt over that shit, they get killed.", "unnatural"	It's funny that in this fic, Steve is the progressive one while he grew up in a small town and probably hasn't seen any examples of Alpha couples. Maybe his parents are more tolerant in this fic. Or he's simply immune to the homophobic ideas. At least he doesn't seem to have any internalised homophobia.
	[Billy] wishes it was easier, that it wasn't so complicated. If Steve was an omega, or even a beta, it wouldn't be like this. Hell, Billy could even be something else, too -- he doesn't even care.	70		Longing for equality and safety
	Steve finds himself growing increasingly more frustrated with the fact that he can't walk up to Billy, whenever he wants, and kiss him stupid.	98		Longing for equality and safety
	He wishes, for a moment, that it was easier. That they could do this, be this, outside of the safety of Steve's house too. But he shoves that thought away for the pleasure of Billy's warm skin against his own.	144		Longing for equality and safety
	"I can't just -- we can't --" Billy groans in frustration and buries his face in Steve's neck. "I can't be what you want me to be." His words are mumbled and muffled against wet skin, echoing strangely in the large bathroom. There's a whole world out there that Steve hasn't lived in, that he hasn't experienced. Billy wishes he had Steve's rose colored glasses, too, but instead he has to come home to Neil Hargrove every day for a reminder. He'd love to pretend that things are fine, that they could work out -- but for how long? How long until Billy slipped up, until Neil found out the truth and came after him? Or, worse yet, came after Steve. "Can't we just -- have this?" Billy asks.	146		They can only share this intimacy with each other in private. The rest of the world does not understand
	It's not what Billy wants at all. But what he wants isn't realistic. What he wants is dangerous. There are more people like Neil out there in the world and he's not putting Steve in danger for it. So, Billy just tucks his chin onto Steve's shoulder and takes a long breath, savoring their closeness. The warmth between them. Before he has to let go at some point.	147	"dangerous"	Intimacy
(lack thereof)	[Steve]'s surprised there aren't jeers. Or maybe a few derogatory words. But he thinks maybe everyone is too shocked-- or maybe everyone knows better. Billy's got sharp teeth, Steve knows this first hand.	197		People are holding their bigotry back because they are afraid to catch these hands
Desires and expertations of relationships				
Consent	"Steve," Billy says. And he sounds gone. He feels gone, too. "Stop. I can't. You can't." God, he can't even believe he's saying this, that he's stopping the very thing he wants so badly. But he's not going to drag Steve into this with him. [...] "Why not?" he asks when he finally meets Billy's gaze again. "Because you're not you right now. Your body is a mess or hormones and you -- you aren't thinking clearly." Billy swallows.	41		Billy is not willing to have sex with Steve during his first ever rut. It seems that at least Billy believes it's not okay to have sex with someone if they are surprised by their heat/rut. I can't tell if this is reflective of the culture at large, but it's an interesting dub-con moment.
	"You weren't thinking straight, you fucking dumbass. You would've regretted it. I would've --" taken advantage. Billy doesn't say.	44		
	It's not something that's talked about, much. It's usually waved away with a shrug and a laugh. There's no taking advantage of omegas in heat or alphas in rut -- they always enjoy themselves. Biology helps with that. It's just fact. Billy knows that's bullshit. From first hand experience. And he'd never fucking do that to Steve.	44-5		Apparently this is the standard. Did Billy get taken advantage of in Call? Is that why he's careful with Steve?
	"I need you to know," Billy says. "That you can stop at any time. That I'm still me, and I'll listen. You're not obligated to do anything you don't want to."	115		Billy is still in controle. Quite different from Steve's heat in suppressants
	Because the truth of the matter is that Billy doesn't get girls. He takes 'em out, shows them a good time and makes out with them for a while, and then drops them off by curfew. He always promises another date that never comes -- he's usually enough of a dick at some point to make sure of that. But everyone wants to say they've slept with Billy Hargrove -- so his reputation stays solid and secure. And -- well, Billy doesn't mind that so much. It's convenient. It's better than the truth -- that he can't get it up for anyone but alphas.	23		He performs heterosexuality, but that doesn't make him attracted to Omegas
	There's no amount of proving himself that Billy can do that will make Steve be attracted to him. It goes against the very nature of their biology. Billy is just broken. He can't ask for Steve to be broken, too.	25	"broken"	
	[Steve]'s probably rank with pheromones, his body trying to attract someone close so that he doesn't have to spend this time alone. Suddenly, Billy's flush makes a little more sense. The way he'd crowded him against the lockers, the way he'd tried to bury his face against Steve's neck-- it all makes sense. Kind of. It shouldn't attract another alpha, but maybe it's just threatening. Maybe Billy tried to scent mark him to cover up Steve's own smell, to keep him from attracting some nearby omega that Billy considers his. Or maybe Steve is just broken. Maybe his body is doing the wrong thing.	36-7	"broken"	again, the theme of brokenness. This time it's not about who Steve is attracted to, but who he attracts. He's worried that his rut smells like Omega and that might be why Billy was all over him.
	"My dad beat me -- beats me -- because I'm broken." Billy says. "He doesn't want a bite mark to tell him that." He still won't look back at Steve. "Billy," Steve says, and his name shakes out of Steve's mouth, but Steve waits-- waits until Billy's gaze flicks back up to his, and Steve takes Billy's hand into both of his own. "You are not broken." He practically spits the words. Says them with such conviction that he's shocked it doesn't shatter them both. "You're not broken," he repeats, on a breath, and ducks his head to keep Billy's eyes locked with his own when he tries to look away again. "And even-- even if you were, there is no-- that is not a fucking reason to hit your son. That isn't--" Steve's throat works. His words choke him, and he huffs out a short, sharp breath. "You're not broken." Steve says. "You're perfect. You're perfect-- and, yeah, okay, kind of an	184	"not broken"	They find healing in each other

Courting				
	He thinks, instead, that Billy's just been trying to impress him. That he's been doing what any stereotypical alpha would do around a potential mate they were trying to impress. Just-- backwards and too aggressively and all wrong. Which, considering Steve is another alpha, makes a strange kind of sense. Knowing that, or being a little more than halfway positive about it considering how hard and frantic Billy had been against him in the foyer of Steve's house, makes a lot of Billy's behaviors make more sense. Though, it does nothing to excuse the behavior. If Billy does like him, if he does want him, Steve isn't going to make it easy. He's going to have to work for it, just as much as Steve would've made him work for his bared throat. He's going to have to prove he's worth the risk of it. Prove that he's not just some alpha thead following his own knot.	47		Alphas try to impress their potential mate by posturing and trying to get them to submit. Steve makes it clear that this does not work for him. Nancy also disapproves of this kind of courting behaviour, but it's unclear whether the rest of the Omega population agrees.
	[Steve] doesn't look like he doesn't want Billy there. It's a look Steve's been wearing a lot around Billy. Like he's not really sure what to do with him. With the distance Billy's been keeping and the way he's been a little kinder, a little more subtle in his interest-- or, at least, not trying to lick his way into winning Steve over. Like Steve's not sure if he should let Billy keep making a fool out of himself, trying to win over another alpha this way, or if he should take off running in the opposite direction.	49		Being less dominant in his courting gets Billy father, although Steve still isn't sure about Billy
	[Billy acting like Steve is his omega] Because that's kind of what he's doing, isn't he? Before Steve knew better, he thought it was clear Billy was just trying to be the bigger alpha. But now that he looks closely, that's not it at all. But that sort of thing isn't -- well, it's not usual. So clearly Billy's putting in a bit of an effort to hide it. To veil it all under something more mundane.	52		
Submission				
Equality/ mutual submission	It's kind of thrilling, knowing that Billy is chasing him all the time because he wants him. That he kind of wants to be chased-- especially now that Billy's brittle, hard edges have softened some with understanding. That he kind of wants that earnest, hungry, but kind alpha that had been worried about taking advantage that Steve met in his foyer. The one that's been carefully edging around him for weeks, waiting. That he wants to be brought to his knees by that alpha. That he wants to bring that alpha to his knees in return.	50	"being brought to your knees" "bring that alpha to his knees in return"	No one is submitting in the sense that they show the other that they are the stronger one. In this case, submission is a sign of trust.
	[Steve] just knows that he and Billy have a mutual want of the other. Secret as it may be.	77		
	Billy has never felt Steve's teeth on him. It's unexpected. It shouldn't be, not with the way Steve had been pressing his lips on Billy's skin -- but it somehow still is, like Billy had never before considered the possibility. All his instincts should tell him to fight back, to grapple with Steve until Billy's on top, until Billy's teeth are against Steve's skin -- but he doesn't want to. He yields to it with a shiver and a groan, his fingers digging into the flesh of Steve's back, his sides, wherever Billy can get purchase.	87		After Steve has already submitted to him, Billy is able to let go as well. Although Steve is the first to submit/accept bond, Billy always returns the favor eventually
	Billy finds that he doesn't necessarily want to have power over Steve, doesn't want to push past him without a go-ahead that he knows he's never going to get. They're on even footing, now -- and Billy likes that.	156	"even footing"	
	And sure, Billy never truly submitted to Steve. Never bared his neck for Steve to bite into -- but he might as well have. He let Steve scent him, and he instinctively refused to cross Steve, even though Steve's the one bearing Billy's mark. The footing is even. Even skewed in Steve's favor. And isn't that a little terrifying. Steve's the one with the pretty mark, and Billy's the one standing behind him, ready to go to his knees.	157	"even footing"	
	"C'mon, Steve. Bite me. Please." Steve jerks slightly, seizing as his breath catches, and he doesn't pull back but his eyes squeeze shut and he lets out a soft, mournful sound. "Don't," he says. "Don't ask me to -- not if you don't mean it." Billy's fingers tighten in Steve's shirt. His eyes close. He can't take this back, he knows he can't. And he doesn't want to, either. "Do it. Please. I want you to." For all intents and purposes, Billy submitted to Steve a while ago. He just needed to see himself through Jonathan Byers' eyes to truly understand it. "Billy," Steve warns, but then he's pressing another kiss to the tender skin beneath his lips -- And then he's pressing his teeth there. Biting in, delicate and gentle, and then harder. Wanting it to bruise. Needing his mark on Billy. When Steve's teeth hit his skin, Billy's heartbeat kicks up, ready for a challenge, a fight -- instinct, kicking in. When Steve bites down harder, it drains straight out of Billy. Instantly Reality is creeping in around the edges, but he still feels a little boneless, a little weak. He's never once willingly offered his submission to anyone before, never bared his neck for someone's bite. It's been taken, in fights, but the feelings are vastly incomparable. So different.	171-2		
	Billy smiles, feet intertwining with Steve's below the table. "Look, I'm not going to let you keep me like some house-husband, or let you pay my way through school or something -- but I can live with you. I can keep up my side of rent as long as I get a job.	172		Intimacy
	"Look, if you don't want me to do something -- I won't do it. Plain and simple." Billy grits his teeth together, but he's not annoyed, per-say, but he is a little shocked by his own willingness to give like this. And it's not even giving -- it's just wanting Steve to be happy, being willing to compromise for that. "I don't think I would've done that before." Before you, he means. And he feels it, the warmth shared between them, the bond.	221		Equal role in the household, neither having control over the other
	"Same. I give a shit about what you think." Steve says. "And I wouldn't ever stop you doing something you wanted to -- not like that, anyway. There's no harm in making a little extra cash off of your natural... assets."	222		Equality mean being willing to compromise
	Billy feels himself go easy under Steve, submitting to him like he wouldn't have done so long ago. It's so simple now, so natural	222	"natural"	Mutual willingness to give the other space to be their own person
	Billy feels himself go easy under Steve, submitting to him like he wouldn't have done so long ago. It's so simple now, so natural	232	"natural"	It's funny that Billy spends the whole book anxious over his 'unnatural' attraction to Steve. That he describes this moment as 'natural' is almost poetic.
Trust	His eyes drop to Steve's neck, and he pauses a second, before he speaks. "Can I?" Steve hesitates. Hesitates because, as much as he wants it, he's terrified. Scared of giving over and what that might mean later. But he stares at Billy's flush face, at his bright eyes, and hopes he isn't making a big mistake. Tilting his head over, letting it lull to the right. Steve bares his neck for Billy Hargrove. Steve's so close to Billy's neck. Billy should be on guard, but he's not. Instead, it just makes him shiver in a pleasant sort of way	55		Steve still doesn't fully trust Billy yet, but he's willing to take that leap.
	Steve's so close to Billy's neck. Billy should be on guard, but he's not. Instead, it just makes him shiver in a pleasant sort of way	58		
Monogamy				
	"Did I miss anything?" Steve asks, when he finally turns his head to meet his eyes. Billy just shakes his head, eyes bright. "Nah, I got a handful of numbers, though." He digs his hand through his pocket and pulls out a wad of crumpled papers. He clenches his fist, then drops it all to the ground in favor of plucking Steve's cup right out of his hands to take a sip.	51		Billy does this as a way of showing that he has options, but that he still wants Steve exclusively
	He thinks back to earlier in the night, to when Billy had dropped all those numbers at Steve's feet. He thought, at the time, maybe it was Billy saying something like look at what I could have; I'm choosing you anyway, but his own words ring in his ears. You're a heartbreaker, he'd said. And Steve hates to think that he's just lined himself up to be another notch in the post.	67		
	"I mean, sure, you can't tell me what to do." Billy says. "But if [me starting a shirtless lawn mowing service] makes you that uncomfortable, the appeal's kind of gone, you know? No matter how much fun it would be to convince you that I've only got eyes for you."	222		also Equality
	"Chase me." [Steve] says, already slipping away into the water, and he knows that he means more than just this game -- that he means something like forever -- and that the look in Billy's eyes promises nothing less.	243	"forever"	

Dreams of the future	Billy and Steve look for houses. "I know I'm not stupid, Billy. Which is why I'm telling you I've got the deposit. Because I do. For my own place. And, if it just happens to have enough space for two people, then..."	220		They want to live together. No mention of any future kids to expand that domestic life.
Belonging	He's always wanted to belong. To something, someone, and Steve thinks that, maybe, the instinctual side of himself, the alpha side of himself, just wants that to. To have something that's his and his alone, and to be owned in return.	20	"his and his alone"; "his own in return"	
	Because Billy still smells like his. Under the heat of his rut on the horizon, under his usual scent, he smells like Steve's. And he said that he wants him, in no uncertain terms, and Steve feels that light, hopeless flutter of longing in his chest that makes him shaky and breathless and dizzy. Because he's got belonging beating beneath his ribs.	115		
	"Yours", "I'm yours.", "he's his", "Mark me. Make me yours."	123		
	Steve locks up for a moment, for a fraction, his body instinctually stringing tight for a fight. But as Billy stutters down against him, as his teeth lock into place, something in Steve gives. He goes completely lax. Pliant and easy and whimpering, a heady rush of sensation flooding through him until he's completely consumed by it. Belonging.	123-4	Relaxation, Belonging	
	His', "Yours.", "M' yours, Billy." "And you're all mine."	136		
	He's not sure what to call Billy. His friend, definitely. But his boyfriend? His mate? But then he thinks the word lover and the word alpha and the word his, and warmth suffuses through him.	180		
	"Because I'm your boyfriend," Steve says, like he's clarifying something. "Because I'm yours, and you're mine. Because I'm-- because I'm your mate, right?" Billy swallows. His heartbeat pounds in his ears. He never really thought about it like that. Mates are for alpha and omega pairs -- he never considered he'd get to have something like that. He'd written it off entirely a long time ago. "Yeah," he says, finally, tightening his arms around Steve because he feels a little dizzy, a little lightheaded. "You're my mate if I'm yours."	194		
	[...] "Mine." Steve says, kissing the mark again, pressing the words to his skin like a promise. "For as long as you'll have me."			
	"Make me yours", "Mine," Billy says. "You're all fucking mine.", "God. God, Billy -- I love that you're mine."	205-6		
	"Bite me," [Steve] whispers, tangling his fingers into his hair. "Mark me. Make it -- make me yours. Please."	209		
	"I want it," Billy says, nosing at Steve's neck. "I want you to mark me. I want you to take me. I wanna be yours, baby."	232		
Bonding	There's no real way to make Steve his. Not like if Steve were an omega. But Billy could keep biting Steve's neck until it scars, until Steve is marred by him for forever. It's a dizzying thought, forbidden and heavy and hot.	124		
	Something clicks into place. Something restless Steve had never known was stirring settles. Steve gasps, whimpering, and as Billy touches him and rocks into him and bites him -- Steve falls. It isn't violent. It doesn't hit him, like a lot of orgasms with Billy do, but it floods -- soft and hot and certain. He spills out, still gasping, abdomen winding tight, and he clutches Billy close, Billy's name on his lips like a prayer.	209	Something clicks into place"; "Soft and hot and certain"	This describes bonding as something incredibly intimate, rewarding and satisfying. It idealizes the idea of being claimed by and belonging to one single person, presumably until death do them part, also emotional intimacy engendered by and through sexual intimacy
	Steve hadn't thought that was something they could have. Didn't think he'd feel this rush of endorphins, this dizziness, this belonging -- but he does. He feels the chords of his heart reaching out toward Billy's and echoing back.	210		
	He feels centered, in a way he never realized he wasn't, before.	211	"centered"	Being bonded comes with an incomparable sense of peace.
	"Billy, if I could bite into you right now, and bond with you, I would. But the only thing I regret is that we rushed into this in the front seat of your car." He shuffles forward a step. Sees Billy's eyes go wide. His voice dips, with promise. "When I bite you again, when I mark you like you've marked me, I'm going to do it right." Steve says. "When I mark you, and I do mean when, it's going to be fucking perfect."	218		Bonding/claiming is an important/romantic event. You want it to be special. There is a right - or even perfect - way to go about it.
	Steve's teeth pierce his skin and it's like everything slots perfectly into place. The connection between them comes alright, somehow even more beautiful and charged than before. It's not the orgasm that's important, Billy thinks, catching the aftershocks of it as Steve laps at the blood on his neck. It's this, the closeness between them, the bond, the feeling	238	"everything slots perfectly into place"; "connection between them comes alright"; "closeness"	
Mind-melting	Billy feels Steve's breath in his ears, in his skin, in his own lungs. He hears Steve's heartbeat pounding inside his own veins, like part of Steve is sharing that space with him, that awareness, that physicality, Steve's contentment, his surprise, his everything, creeps into Billy's bones. It settles right underneath his skin, weaving itself into the very fabric of Billy's being.	210		There's sharing a conscious. In a way, they've become one in the way that marriage promises. Bonding is a biologically severed marriage.
	For once their shower is quick and mostly just business -- but even then, as connected as they are, the whole experience feels oddly intimate. Running soapy hands over Steve's back, getting Steve's responding thrum of contentment in the back of his skull is -- well, it's a lot. It's not bad, not even a little, but it leaves Billy dizzy and reeling.	210-11	"connected", "intimate", "contentment"	
	"I can feel you," Steve says. "Right under my skin [...]"	213		
	[Billy] happy, he is -- but he also feels so strange and different and unsure. He feels so exposed and it's strange. He's so used to hiding parts of himself that it feels wrong and also a little terrifying to just have someone be able to see him.	213	"strange", "unsure", "exposed", "a little terrifying"	The horrifying ordeal of being known
	"He won't snoop. Knows better. He won't unless you tell him it's okay."	214		Mindmelting isn't scary if your mind is melted to someone who loves you unconditionally
	"What?" Billy says, "like get all up in my head, you mean?" "Yes," El says, tone so sure, so certain. "He cares too much. He's kind. Likes you. All of you. Even the parts you don't. He won't snoop."			
	He likes it, feeling Billy, knowing that he's there, just under his skin. It's jarring as it is totally settling, and Steve revels in the bursts and waves he feels cresting at the back of his skull and in his veins. Billy's his. And he's Billy's. He can see the moment Billy feels it -- Steve's own satisfaction, his affection-- because his eyes go a little wide and his fingers curl a little tighter over his wrist.	216-7	"satisfaction", "affection"	
	"Billy," Steve tugs at his shirt, and he's a bit winded, honestly, by the burning in his gut -- is always a bit floored by how much anger is in Billy. "Enough." And just like that -- Billy goes quiet against Steve. Maybe it's something about Steve's calm, or the way he's gotten overwhelmed with Billy's feelings -- or maybe it's just Billy doing what Steve asks.	224		They can't just feel each other's moods, they can effect them
	"They're not mood swings," Steve says. "Well, what are they?" Lucas asks. Billy rolls his eyes and Steve can feel it. He can't help but chuckle. "We're sharing moods," Billy says. "We feel what the other person feels. It's not rocket science."	228		

Intimacy			
	Billy gets his fingers in Steve's hair before he can even think about it. Before he can think better of something so intimate. "Fuck," he groans, against Steve's lips, breath going ragged.	40	"intimate"
	Because he feels so bare beneath Billy's eyes, so completely vulnerable-- which is ridiculous because they've seen each other naked in the lockers. This, though, feels heavier. Feels intimate. Feels like everything. Especially when Billy looks at him like that. Like Steve is something to be wanted.	86	"vulnerable", "intimate", "something to be wanted"
	He pulls Billy close, kisses the corner of his mouth, his cheek, his brow. He tugs at the shirt plastered to Billy's chest, pulling it up to get at the skin of Billy's abdomen, and he shoves at his waistband, wanting skin on skin. Needing the intimacy.	124	"needing the intimacy"
	Unhurried, tender	134	
	But there's something about the intimacy of a bathroom, of sharing a bath together, that makes the lie feel impossible, all brittle and broken before he can even think up the words.	148	"intimacy", "makes the lie feel impossible"
	Billy knows, suddenly, that this was too much to ask of Steve. To ask of both of them. A quick blowjob, or a handjob between friends isn't too much, would've been fine. But this, spending hours fucking and tangled up in each other? It's too much to try and pull himself away from. It's gotten complicated and now Billy doesn't know what to do.	148	"complicated" Sex was too intimate to stay detached rivals
	And Billy knows, from Steve, that sometimes the bite of pain can be good, can bring another dimension into the sensation, but that's not for now, not for this moment. Right now, Billy wants to feel safe and taken care of, and Steve gives him just that. Makes him feel so secure and looked after and doted on.	235	"taken care of", "secure", "looked after"
	And then he sets a rhythm. It's not fast or rough or hard. It's sweet. Steady and slow, Steve spending more time buried completely in him and pressing in all the right ways more often than not, and he squeezes at Billy's fingers and rocks into him just like that. It's nothing Billy would have asked for, but everything Billy needs. And Steve knows that. Billy knows that Steve knows that -- and it makes it all the more meaningful.	237	"meaningful"