

Are Slaves Free: A Study of Women's Roles in Gor, a Second Life Community

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In the Second Life virtual community world Gor, based on novels by John Norman, males are the dominant power while females can choose what to be out of three categorized groups. Slaves, Free Women and Panthers are all groups that females can join in this society. However, these groups have many restrictions and one even includes being a slave in full servitude of a male or a Free Woman. Though the hierarchical male society is also burdened with restrictions, one might ask why females, in a virtual community where a woman has free will, would choose to live in a male dominant society or even become a slave. Also, in the community of Second Life, there are multiple worlds. If absolute freedom is available, why would anyone want to reside in a place of restrictive role-play? In real life, women have fought for equal rights, freedom, and independence, but why is this male dominant society in a virtual community so popular? What exactly is freedom and what makes it different in a virtual community as opposed to real life? Also, who benefits the most in this society and is the happiness of one party directly linked to its freedom?

As previously mentioned, the male society also has many restrictions, just as the female society. The male society is broken up into categories including warriors, lieutenants, commanders, first sword, second swords, magistrates and administrators. Males are set up in a hierarchical way based on how long they have been a part of the community and how they “deal with different events,” says one male warrior. The males in Gor are in essence concerned with what are most commonly accepted as “manly” things, being a provider, being strong and courageous (the most valued attributes of the Gor society), and defending citizens. Males also need to attend meetings, wear proper dress, speak in the Gorean language (excluding shorthand), and most of all be strong and courageous, again, to be respected. It is in the most animalistic male nature to concern themselves with hierarchy and strive for honor in society and in

comparison, a women's (or female animals) nature to worry about caring for others or strive to be in demand of others. Though, in Second Life one can choose their gender, in general the male society is reflective of the male dominance in life on Earth. Males do not need to own slaves, nor are they ranked higher because they own a slave or many slaves, whether he/she is good or bad. It is usual, however, to own at least one slave in this society. At first glance, being a male in this society may seem "cool" as one slave puts it, simply because you can own a slave, who are mostly used for sexual pleasures, however another slave declares that males as well as anyone who is not a slave "worries with politics and social order, money etc." Certainly, the one who has absolute control has welcomed these worries upon himself for himself and his slave.

In addition to these worries above, we also must comprehend the goal of the individual male in order to compare and discuss the goals of women in this community. Though restrictions are placed on all women and men, in any community because of a social contract, it is an individual's decision to decide if the restrictions are beneficial and/or feasible. As in Locke's discussion of the social contract, our "tacit consent" in being a part of a community is our obedience of existing rules. Though some of these rules may be restrictive, it is an individual's decision to decide if the freedom and privileges (which Rousseau says are our responsibility to take advantage of while under a social contract) are greater, or more beneficial than the restrictions. However, there are differences in human nature and to each his own. Because the male in this society has free reign over himself despite some governmental restrictions in behavior and demands of the city, we can conclude that a male resides here because of his absolute freedom. This man decides that his freedom and respect in this society outweighs the restrictions. Freedom, as we know it, also coincides with happiness. Because the male in this society may be the freest, can we conclude that he also must be the happiest? What is happiness

in real life and in Second Life? Again, to each his own, but I deduce that happiness, anywhere, is to have a goal. It has been said before but without something to reach or strive for, what good is life, real or second? Because Second Life is a virtual community, no food, drink, or bare necessities are needed, and also an avatar cannot die. Therefore goals in Second Life do not include the natural competition for survival. Money is not even needed, but is desirable in order to enjoy the full pleasures in Second Life (shopping, events, building a home etc.) Second Life is purely somewhere for various pleasures and hedonism, or why else would one join? Thus, everyone in the start of Second Life has full control at first. The basic goal of Second Life is pleasure, whereas the basic goal of real life is survival plus moderate pleasure.

At first, all who join Second Life are like Plato's tyrant, attaining all the pleasures one can take and eventually, as Plato concludes, miserable because he is continuously unsatisfied. Then a few decide to join communities, such as Gor, out of dissatisfaction and the fear of the Hobbesian state of nature: war. The goal of the Second Life Gorean male is obscure. It is to be happy and to "protect and serve the citizens" said one warrior. However, pleasures are at their fingertips with the ability to own slaves, while their goal is a fleeting moment. It is not often that a male needs to do any sort of defense or do *anything*, or complete his goal in Gor. Much of the day is spent walking, talking and coercing in pleasures with his slave, as heard from Gorean males. One male could not answer the question of why he decided to reside at Gor, only saying that it was because Gor was "organized." I concluded that this statement emphasized the fear of the unknown and the trust in an organized society to subvert chaos and war found in the absolute freedom of the state of nature. Choosing to be in control, such as being a male in the Gor community, is directly aligned with Plato's tyrant and with misery and boredom. Not only did all three men that I interviewed extensively agree that the slaves were the most free and most

happy, implying that they themselves are unhappy to a point, but so did two Free women, one saying “slaves don’t suffer from boredom as others seem to.” This proves the noticeable misery of those with control over others. The same Free Woman also said about Gor, “I don’t think anyone is free,” and though she has lived in Gor for 3 years, she was having second thoughts. Her statement concludes that to her, the sacrifices of personal freedom due to restrictions in Gor, are not worth the privileges, in any role of Gor.

Firstly, we have discovered why many live in Gor, because it is organized and the life of the male in Gor, though free on the surface, held accountable for everything and having no clear goal to work towards. Though the society is male dominant, there are Free Women who can basically do as they please – own slaves, shop, and engage in conversations with friends (as some slaves are not permitted to do with slave friends unless they have permission of their master). These women, however, must dress conservatively, including a veil in some parts, and always be respectful to males (or else be punished by being “collared” or made a slave by the city) meaning never physically harm a male for any reason and kneel when in the presence of a male or if commanded. If these women desire money they can only have mundane jobs, such as goat-keeping or a “similar future of drudgery,” says a slave. The Free Women also have a caste system in which the lowest of the system do not have the chance to make a considerable amount of money or be in a certain profession. All three Free Women interviewed agreed that slaves were much freer and happier because they did not have so many restrictions. One Free Woman however, said that is what she thought at first, but realized that being a slave for her was not fulfilling and neither was being a Free Woman, so she is heading towards being a Panther. Though the Free Women enjoy shopping and talking with friends, as mentioned earlier, it seemed that all interviewed were suffering from boredom. The restricted freedom of the Free

Woman eventually becomes boring and not beneficial enough despite their obedience of the harsh social contract, and as well as their ability to own slaves.

The Panther may seem like the freest and the most beneficial position of the whole society, male or female. The Panther essentially has a distinct goal and has a considerable amount of freedom. One restriction is that the Panthers, or Outlaws, are allowed in only certain parts of the city, including the market. If found elsewhere, Panthers could be collared and enslaved. Panthers are allowed to reside in “The Woods” outside of the city, but are subject to the contract of Gor, so they do not make their own laws. However, if the bridge is crossed to their residence, Panthers have the right to capture and enslave the perpetrator. Thus, in order to enjoy the life of the Panther, one must accept their banishment from parts of the city, including some taverns and enjoyable areas. The Panther’s goal is to find the strongest of a male so that she can submit to him but also find a partner strong enough and as dominant as herself. Another goal of hers is also to eliminate weak men, enslave them so they cannot enslave others. One Panther who’s alt account is a slave, said “she seeks more an equal to bond together and dominate a world together.” Panthers despise weak men and refuse to become slaves or controlled by a man unless he is stronger than her. To prove this, headstrong Panthers, who are wanted by the Gorean male because they “make the best slaves,” challenge visiting males to sword fights or mind games. The true Gorean Panther will step down and welcome being collared once she sees a male who is strong and fit for her. However, she could also choose to enslave the male, which is the danger a male takes in challenging a Panther.

Panther’s generally are free because they can choose their fate, and they are happy because they have a distinct goal to work towards, though the end of that goal is submitting herself to a male. They can carry out that goal because of their freedom and limited but

considerable control, though when they're goal is completed they forfeit their freedom. However, a Panther turned slave believed that "a Panther is a horrid lonely life...not welcome many places on Gor, but wanted very much so by most Gorean Men." A Panther must still obey a considerable amount of rules but are guaranteed a life of loneliness because they are not allowed in the city. One Free Woman who despised slavery and being a Free Woman is currently on her way to being a panther, in revenge of the male dominant society. She said she despised guys who think Gor is "cool," and hated the unfulfilling life of the slave that turns one into a "mindless object of desire." She also avowed that, "Goreans hate feminists, but they've made me one more than ever." Two Panther women said that the Panther is a leader role that can only lead to true freedom and happiness if one is a leader at heart.

It was also mentioned by a few sources that many Panthers are runaway slaves who were unhappy with their master, or who were neglected (their master stops playing.) The Panther role thus seems like a role of revenge and of temporary freedom, since you can choose your master who has mastered his own life with strength and courage. However, since the end is being a slave, why would any woman want to live in Gor? The slave's goal is pleasing someone else (extremely degrading to most people), the true goal of the Panther is to find a "manly" man to submit to and to eliminate weak men, and the Free Women live restricted lives with no manifest aspirations. The men also have no good reason to verify their residency in Gor besides that it is "organized," and two males even said that slaves were the most free, undoubtedly. What makes the life of a slave so envied by all? Why do most consider the slave to be the happiest and freest? And why does not this society ever exist in real life?

First, the virtual nature of Second Life must be considered. In real life in general, in order to be something great and to benefit the most, one must sacrifice the most. In order to stay in the

median one must sacrifice averagely. In order to not benefit at all in life, one does not sacrifice much at all. In real life, the sacrifices made by the Second Life Gor females of Panthers and Free Women, such as dressing conservatively or being banished from some parts of the city, are tolerable by the average person if it means gaining freedom. However, in order to gain a large amount of freedom in this community, as concluded by others and myself, one must sacrifice simple everyday freedoms, endure physical punishment and humiliation, and trust the goodness of the Master, as does the slave. This is not tolerable to the average person in real life, though it means being taken care of and not having to pay for anything. However, in Second Life, the role of slave is made easier since one does not physically feel anything if whipped or punished and because of one's freedom to participate in the program and leave when one pleases. Therefore, the huge sacrifices that slaves make, giving their physical bodies to their Master's are not as huge as what they would give in real life, but the benefits are pretty much the same. This is one reason why being a slave on Second Life is attractive though for most the "novelty rubs off," one slave said.

Though the slave must endure an extensive training session and read and study slave ways, after they are sold, they are at the complete care and whim of the Master. They are subject to laws of the city, but basically obeying the Master's command is their role. One slave said that she chose to be a slave because it is "nice to turn over all responsibility here and just go with your feelings and desires." She also said that in real life she is a leader, and not a follower. This suggests that some become slaves in Gor as a relief from the independence and responsibility of everyday life. She also went on to say that the slave "can explore her most carnal desire, her base emotions, and be honest about anything." This slave also agreed that all other roles in Gor have too many restrictions. The freedoms to be honest, explore oneself and to enjoy no responsibility

are only those of the slave. One slave also said that she chose to be a slave not only because of the above but because it gives her a clear purpose in Second Life. She always has a companion and a sense of belonging and importance. This is also reminiscent of Hobbes theory that alone we are fearful and distrust those around us and to avoid this we create a community. Having a companion and being a part of a community is desired because of the sense of importance, protection, and trust it creates. Despite the restrictions of the life of the slave and the assumption that in real life they may be submissive in nature, about 3 out of 5 slaves surprisingly said that they are leaders in real life. 2 said that they enjoyed being a slave so much in Second Life that they joined the real life Gorean community somewhere near Denver.

However, being a slave does not simply give one a sense of belonging or a goal of having someone to serve and always something to do. One must be a slave at heart. The slave's goal is not to serve but to please and be happy while doing it. One slave said that out of all the slaves about 5% are true slaves and the other percentage is wishing to be one, or in it for the ephemeral novelty. One slave, who also is a Panther on her alt account, said that you must believe in your role to be a good slave, and only then will you be truly free and happy. She said, "We are happy with ourselves to see another happy." This seems to also be the goal of Plato's selfless philosopher, to rule for the happiness of others. The true slave seems to be the selfless ruler who has stepped down to the tyrant, but who in her heart achieves the utmost goal of selflessness and love, a different kind of truth in discovering herself. The slave is also often considered weak and merely submissive to the common person, just as a good philosopher is scrutinized. The same slave also mentioned that in the Bible there are numerous statements about submission, and that is why she believes in this lifestyle. This woman has been a slave for 20 years now both in Second Life and real life, and also says that "a slave seeks security, strength in her Owner,

knowing He is capable of Mastering His ownself to truly Master her,” and another says that they are “proud of their slavery and mastery by men...they have learned their womanhood.” These slaves themselves believe that they are truly free, since it’s their only opportunity to be honest and serve others, which is who they are. They also believe that they benefit the most in this society because they take pleasure in working or serving others. The Kajira Mantra (kajira being the highest slave, as in your master labels you this because you have been good to him) is, “To serve with devotion/bring only pleasure to Him that is served/show honor and loyalty always/remaining true to Him that holds life in His hand/only in this is the true freedom of slavery found.” A slave also said that once a sister slave told her, “Yes, you can cry and yes you can run, that is easy to do but...to stay and keep your head held high...you are a kajira. It may be hard but the benefits and outcome of this is most rewarding.” This proves the yearning for freedom, benefit, and happiness that beholds the truest slave.

Another slave took a different side and talked about why being a slave is actually not selfless at all, and how the freedom and benefits of being a slave in this society is even greater than aforementioned. She actually said that being a slave is selfish. Because of the nature of Second Life, one in the first place chooses to be a slave for one reason or another and thus, it is just to let her be, or let each man accept his role, as Plato says. It’s a slave’s choice to please her master or not, and whether she gets punished or rewarded, “possibly with a lush life of luxury and blissful irresponsibility,” she claims, basically defending the freedom of choice of the slave. Also, since the goal of Second Life is pleasure, what is more pleasurable than walking, talking, serving a Master as a distinct goal, and engaging in sexual activities all while receiving, but not expecting, housing, care, love, clothing, jewelry (such as beads and bells), perfumes (Free Women cannot have), and being “sexy” to all males? In most instances, except one special case,

males and females agreed that the life of the slave is the most free and happiest because of all these things; less worries and more materialistic as well as emotional pleasures. In some cases slaves are unhappy with their masters or are neglected and thus, runaway, but where there is a good master who treats you well and gives you pleasures (materialistic and physical perhaps), there is freedom and happiness. This slave still agreed that one must be submissive and not want to be in control of her body, life, or fate. She said it is most gratifying to be in control of your thoughts only, and that others who want independence or another type of freedom are actually “shackled” in controlling their fate and the fate of others. She actually wrote in her journal that “the freest woman on Gor is a slave because a slave has no control over anybody but herself.”

The most significant point in her journal was the understanding of the selfishness, the personal benefit of the slave. She said, “All is taken care of by her master, allowing a slave to return to the happy state of childhood, reminiscent of the time in her life when she lived with her parents and basked in the joy of being taken care of in all things in exchange for simply obeying their demands and completing their assigned chores.” The sacrifice of freedom over one’s body and life, especially made easier in a virtual community is worth the other freedoms and benefits that slaves have over Free Women and Panthers, agree most in the Gorean community.

However, as deep as role-play can be, when punished, virtual slaves do not physically feel the pain of a whip or physically stand in a cage. They have the freedom to leave the computer and grab a snack and come back. However, there were two cases in which two slaves became slaves in a real life community. One has been there for years. The other decided that the real life community was too harsh, unlike the loving bonds that form between master and slave on Second Life. After also reading the fifth book about slavery in Gor, she realized that the Second Life world was not as harsh as this. About her real life experience she said, “They didn’t

care that I loved them...that I had talents they could use...they just wanted a mindless robot that did nothing but respond to their direct commands.” She has now decided to become a Panther. In real life, this slave community seems almost impossible because of the inherent evil nature in mankind. Plus food, housing and necessities to survive come into play whereas in Second Life, pleasure is the main focus.

Women and men in the Gorean communities both surprisingly share equal amounts of restrictions and all parties have pros and cons. Those who may seem the freest such as the male and the Free Women have the most restrictions that lead them to boring mundane lives. Also, the Panther is a strong, independent and leadership position though one is banished from colorful city life and its end is to enslave oneself. In all interviews, the slaves were the most envied. The slave girls as well as other parties also elaborated on the freedoms and benefits of the slave, such as the sense of belonging, purpose, care, materialistic pleasures, and love. The slave also has the clearest pursuit of happiness, or goal. Whether pleasing the Master for rewards or as in a true slave, enjoying the pleasure of serving, slaves benefit most in this society. But no matter that slaves are the freest, many responses I received believed that all benefit and all are free in this culture if they have found what they are truly seeking. To each his own.