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24/7 SM Slavery

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SUMMARY. This study describes the nature of 24/7 SM slavery as practiced within the SM (sadomasochistic) commmunity. These SM participants, who attempt to live full-time in owner-slave roles, represent a small proportion of those with SM interests. SM slaves have not been studied systematically to determine if and how they differ from other SM practitioners. An online questionnaire was used to obtain responses from individuals who self-identified as slaves. A total of 146 respondents participated, 53% female and 47% male, ranging in age from 18 to 72. We explored the depth of their relationships, how well they ap-

proximated "slavery," and how their relationships were structured to maintain distinct roles. Data showed that in long-term SM slave relationships, a power differential exists which extends beyond time-limited SM or sexual interactions. Owners and slaves often use common, daily life experiences or situations, such as the completion of household chores, money management, and morning or evening routines, to distinguish and maintain their respective roles. In addition, contrary to the perception of total submission, results revealed that slaves exercise free will when it is in their best interests to do so. These relationships were long-lasting and satisfying to the respondents. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www. HaworthPress.com> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

The present study describes the nature of self-defined 24/7 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) sadomasochistic (SM) slavery relationships. Do such relationships exist or are they an elaborate fantasy? Are the relationships viable? If so, how are they sustained? What kinds of interactions and structures characterize SM slavery? In this study, the phenomenon of SM slavery will be examined from the slave's perspective. The key characteristics of SM slave relationships will be explored. The term "slave" is used throughout this article to describe the self-definition of these individuals. We will examine the differences between traditional slavery and these relationships in detail.

SM is a colloquial term used to describe an interest in giving or receiving intense stimulation, bondage, or the purposeful enacting of dominant and submissive roles, usually for sexual gratification. There are numerous schema for categorizing SM behavior, interactions or relationships. One schema is by differentiating between SM interactions that are part-time or time-limited versus those that are full-time and long-term. Time-limited SM encounters are circumscribed by rules and roles that are established only for the duration of that encounter. Such "scenes" (SM interactions) are often built around a theme which defines the participants' roles and the parameters of behavior. These scenes can occur within the context of established relationships, which are self-defined as sexually conventional, and on occasion incorporate an SM

scene. For example, a couple may decide to role-play a school mistress and naughty school boy; these roles provide the framework within which the encounter transpires. Once the scene or the encounter has ended, the rules and the roles are abandoned and no longer apply. The ordinary, egalitarian status of the participants is resumed.

SM, which is limited to some or even all sexual interactions within a relationship, is sometimes referred to as, Erotic Power Exchange (EPE) and does not extend into other areas of the relationship. Others choose or find that their SM interests color other aspects of their relationship, aside from sex. Some relationships specifically choose to incorporate their SM interests as a basis for the entire relationship, in all domains. Some of these relationships strive for "total power exchange" (TPE), also called "total power transfer" (TPT), in which the submissive partner consciously yields all control to the dominant partner. SM slavery relationships are a subset of these TPE relationships; in this type of relationship the submissive person "chooses" to be seen as a slave and identifies as such. Other TPE relationships are created around other roles (e.g, parent-child, often called daddy-boy or boi regardless of the sex of the individuals).

Individuals interested in any activity display different levels of interests. This spectrum includes mere acknowledgment of an interest or participation in an occasional event to incorporating the interest into their identities. SM is no different. Accepting an identity of "slave" does not imply that the person is actually a slave. Continued participation in the relationship and identification as a slave is voluntary; forced slavery is clearly illegal and unenforceable.

In long-term SM relationships, the adopted rules and roles are expected to be in place indefinitely. They extend beyond discrete "scenes." There may be SM or sexual encounters where the roles are more explicit, but once that scene is over, the power exchange is still in place. Rules and roles are expected to remain in force whether or not the partners are engaging in what viewers might recognize as overtly sexual or SM interactions. Full-time, SM slave relationships, the topic of this study, are prime examples of this second SM subgroup.

All SM relationships have several common attributes: The relationships are consensual, both partners agree to the general power differential framework of the relationship. The partners overtly state their limits, that is, what will or will not be allowed. These limits can be "hard," not to be broached, or "soft," some exploration is possible. Some individuals feel that the process of setting limits gives the submis-

sive partner too much control, which is contrary to the premise of these relationships. TPE relationships are often described as consensual non-consent. Although these relationships are reportedly without limit, the process of deciding to enter into the relationship is such, that the submissive partner rarely finds the dominant's desires incompatible with his or her own.

A key element of SM "slavery" is the desire of the slave to allow the other partner (the owner) to control all aspects of his or her life. Mundane behaviors such as being able to go out alone, when and what to eat, where to sit, and what to wear (usually associated with everyday life rather than with sexual interaction), become tinged with SM undertones by virtue of the continuing dynamic among the participants.

These relationships are poorly understood by SM participants themselves or sexological researchers. It is unclear why someone would willingly and totally submit to another person or what appeal such relationships hold. It might be assumed that slave relationships share little in common with those of a more egalitarian nature. This belief bears investigation.

Much of the existing literature related to sadomasochism tends to be focused on time-limited or scene-specific SM interactions (Kamel, 1983; Kamel & Weinberg, 1983; Sandnabba, Santilla, & Nordling, 1999; Scoville, 1985). Research to date has failed to provide specific or detailed information about SM slavery as a distinct subgroup of SM relationships. SM slavery is referred to in indirect and inferential ways only. At best, such literature has taken scene-specific dynamics and made general inferences to Owner/slave roles and lifetime relationships. Whether or not existing findings can be extrapolated accurately to SM slavery is not yet known. This is the first study of which we are aware that has focused primarily on this type of long-term relationship.

Many authors discuss the key characteristics of scene-specific SM interactions and cite the importance of consensuality (Ernulf & Innala, 1995; Kamel, 1983; Kamel & Weinberg, 1983). The consensual nature ensures that neither party involved is subjected to activities or behaviors to which they have not agreed beforehand. In this way, ". . . either party has the ability to withdraw their consent at any point during an SM encounter" (Truscott, 1991). This is an important consideration in this study. Slavery entails a full-time relationship in which the slave has given up all rights to participate in decision-making within the relationship. How does this fit with the emphasis on consent? How do the participants create an environment in which both the appearance of a total power exchange and the slave's active consent to participate co-exist?

Some commentators have suggested that long-term SM relationships are not viable nor likely to last (Baumeister, 1989, 1997). There is no reason to assume, however, that deep and caring feelings are counterproductive to the establishment and maintenance of long-term 24/7 SM slave relationships, as is suggested by others (Brame & Brame, 1993; Gosselin, Wilson, & Barrett, 1987; Moser, 1988).

METHOD

Participants

The sample was recruited via the Internet and participation was voluntary. Respondents were required to be 18 years of age or older and to self-identify as "24/7 slaves." A total of 153 individuals responded; 7 questionnaires which did not meet the inclusion criteria or failed to complete basic demographic data were not included in the final analyses. This left a total of 146 respondents, 66 males and 80 females. City or country of origin was not collected. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 72, the mean age was 38 (SD = 10.1). The duration of respondents' slavery relationship ranged from 3 weeks to 22 years; the mean duration was 41.2 months (SD = 49.3) and the median was 24 months.

Respondents were primarily white, accounting for 94% of all respondents. There was one African-American, one Hispanic, and one Asian respondent. Six people (4%) indicated that they belonged to groups other than those noted, including "American Indian" and Métis (a Canadian people who trace their ancestry to the French and to Native Canadians). As indicated earlier, 53% of respondents were women, 46% were men, and 1 was a male-to-female transsexual. There were no female-to-male transsexual respondents in this study.

Although respondents self-identified as heterosexual (41%), bisexual (26%) or homosexual (33%), it is not clear whether this self-identification reflected "intrinsic" interest or actual behavior. There were two male respondents who self-identified as heterosexual, yet their questionnaires indicated that their owners were male and that their sexual contact was exclusively with men. Of the 66 male respondents, 51 were involved with another male and 15 with a female. Of the 80 female respondents, 74 were involved with a male and 6 were involved with another female.

Apparatus

A survey instrument was developed for this study (available from the first author, P.D.). The final survey contained 49 questions covering a wide range of topics including basic demographic information, household tasks, rules and rituals, sexual behaviors, and questions related to satisfaction with the slave experience.

Given the focus on 24/7 slavery as opposed to scene-specific SM interactions, questions regarding everyday activities issues were deemed important. It is with the purpose of capturing the dynamic within such relationships that specific situations were selected for inquiry. For example, questions included: Are you bound or tethered in any way while you sleep? Do you have any bank accounts in your name only? The aspects these questions attempt to explore are not typically relevant within time-limited SM scenes. These questions do, however, hold the potential for elucidating information regarding an unequal distribution of power.

The study received necessary approvals by the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. Prior to implementation, the survey was reviewed by leaders of the SM community to ensure that the questions were unambiguous, non-offensive, and that the questionnaire was adequate in detail and comprehensiveness.

Procedure

The survey was posted on the Internet at a commercial site (FormSite. com), specifically catering to survey research; this site allows anonymous survey submission. Requests to participate and general information about the project were posted on one SM Web site, distributed to several SM community leaders so that they could solicit participants, and sent to a variety of SM organizations and online SM groups to solicit their members. The survey was available on the Internet for a period of three months in 2001.

RESULTS

Everyday Life

We assumed that slaves would be expected to do the usual household chores. The data revealed that slaves are most often responsible for me-

nial day-to-day tasks, but were not exclusively responsible for these (see Table 1). Some tasks seemed to be divided along stereotypical gender roles. For example, 30% of the female versus 82% of the male slaves took out the garbage. Conversely, male owners were more likely to drive the car than female owners and female owners were more likely to do laundry than male owners. There was little difference in tasks that are generally considered to be gender neutral (e.g., shopping, paying bills).

Rituals, Rules and Discipline

The establishment of rituals was another method of reinforcing the slave's role. The use of rituals was reported by 86% of the respondents. Receiving discipline (e.g., punishment) was cited by 67% of the sample as the most meaningful of these rituals. Discipline can be physical (e.g., spanking), psychological (e.g., standing in the corner), or both. Other rituals involved the particulars of going to bed, greeting one's owner, and getting up in the morning. Many respondents indicated that they were bound or tethered for sleep, and there was often a ritual associated with the tethering. Collars are also a common symbol of SM slavery and were often used to signify formal ownership. Rituals concerning the collar (e.g., putting it on, taking it off, asking permission to wear it) were also quite common.

The data revealed that the vast majority (99%) of all respondents had rules (see Table 2). These rules involved limitations or obligations

TABLE 1. Division of Common Household Chores by Number of Respondents[1] and Percentage (%)

Chore	Individual Responsible		
	Slave	Owner	Shared/Other
Taking out garbage	77 (53)	21 (14)	47 (32)
Doing housework	103 (71)	1 (1)	41 (28)
Cooking	92 (63)	14 (10)	38 (26)
Cleaning up after meals	110 (75)	3 (2)	31 (21)
Doing laundry	98 (67)	7 (5)	39 (27)
Balancing bank accounts	49 (34)	60 (41)	35 (24)

[1] N = 146

TABLE 2. Number[1] and (%) of Respondents with Formal Rules Surrounding Daily Activities

Rules	
Have any rules	144 (99)
Touching one's body	95 (66)
Dressing rules	91 (63)
Speaking to owner	75 (52)
Sitting rules	71 (49)
Being bound when sleeping	64 (45)[2]
Bathroom use	64 (44)
Speaking to others	59 (41)
Eating rules	59 (41)
Eye contact with owner	41 (28)
E-mail use	36 (25)
Contact with friends	33 (23)
Telephone use	32 (22)
Contact with family	21 (15)

[1] N = 146, unless otherwise specified
[2] N = 143

applicable to the slave that are in place at all times and in all situations. Among respondents, 85% reported that they participate regularly in established rituals (see Table 3). Approximately two-thirds of the respondents (67%) cited receiving discipline as a ritual, but it is unclear if the other respondents were not subject to discipline or if it was just not ritualized. Other key ritual areas included going to bed, greeting one's owner, and getting up in the morning. Rituals described by respondents ranged from extremely simple to very complex. An example of a simple ritual is, "Kneeling beside the bed, handing M [Master] my collar, letting Him padlock it around my neck, then asking permission to sleep beside Him."

"Out of Role"

Owners and slaves often portrayed or carried out the elements of their relationship differently depending on their settings and surroundings.

TABLE 3. Number[1] and (%) of Respondents with Formal Rituals Surrounding Daily Activities

Rituals	
Have any rituals	123 (85)[2]
Receiving discipline	98 (67)
Arising in the a.m.	70 (49)
Going to sleep	76 (53)
Entering the owner's presence	57 (40)
Eating	45 (31)

[1] N = 146, unless otherwise specified
[2] N = 143

These changes are referred to as "forms" or "conduct modes." For example, one respondent stated that regardless of circumstances, "i am never out of role but that doesn't mean that everyone around me knows i'm a slave. i serve my owner at work but no one there has any idea of my slavery." The roles are in place but no one need know but the owner and slave.

The demands of working, activities of daily living, and social prejudice against SM practitioners often require the owner-slave couple to be surreptitious about their relationship. In many instances, slaves would say that they were always "in role," but there are times when the slavery was less formal. Although slaves may be required to address their owners as Mistress or a similar honorific at home, Kathy is the usual form of address among work acquaintances or family. A simple neck chain worn at work may replace the more obvious collar required at home. This more relaxed or less formal aspect of the relationship was most commonly reported when visiting family, when at work, and when sick. More than 75% of the male owners, all of the female owners of males and 4/6 female owners of females allowed their slaves out of role under some condition (see Table 4).

Respondents' comments provided additional insight into the question of role. One reported being allowed out of role "when out in the world with Him [owner]." Another is allowed out of role only in part, stating, "Within parameters at work, i still have duties i must perform even at work." Other respondents referred to differences in how they embrace their slave persona based on where they are or who is present.

TABLE 4. Number[1] and (%) of Respondents Who Indicated Situations When They Could Be Out of Role or Refuse an Order

Out of role	
When sick	47 (32)
When with family	76 (52)
When at work	69 (47)
Refuse order	
Risk of bodily harm	63 (43)
Risk to job	47 (32)
Risk of arrest	58 (40)

[1] N = 146

Limits and Safewords

Approximately half of all respondents (51%) reported being able to refuse orders at some time (Table 4). Comments received from respondents flesh out these results. For example, one wrote:

> ... If my Owner tells me to do something, he trusts that i'll do it, and i do. In turn, i trust him not to ask things of me that are truly beyond me, or things that will damage me physically or emotionally. While there are no situations where i have the "right" to refuse an order, he is aware that i will nevertheless refuse any order that compromises my principles, consequences be damned.

Another wrote, "The concept of limits and safewords do not exist in the M/s [Master/slave] relationship with which i am involved." A third respondent wrote, "... i trust my Master and He knows my needs and limits therefore this is no issue for me." A last respondent wrote what appears to be a contradiction. He first stated, "... i would submit to Her in all things, even when those things were hard on me or even at times hurt me, but that i would mold myself to Her will." Later, he wrote, "Do i have rights and limits, some limits ... rights, no. Mistress will listen to me, if things bother me, but ultimately She will do what She desires to do, and it is my job to either figure it out and realize how to make it work or leave ..." This slave initially said that he would submit to his mistress

completely, yet later stated that if he could not find a way to make the relationship work, he would leave. This is a telling contradiction.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of limits and safewords (i.e., a word or gesture that indicates one participant needs to stop the scene) are part of most SM relationships, although some slaves would state that limits or safewords are antithetical to the concept of slavery. None of the respondents reported use of a safeword, but that does not mean that they were unable to communicate the need to stop a scene. It only implies that a designated safeword was not used.

We also enquired about the how malleable the slave's limits were. We found that almost three-quarters (74%) had engaged in behavior that had seemed inconceivable at the start of the relationship. "Pushing limits" is common within SM relationships. The sense of surrender and belief that the "slavery" is real, is confirmed when slaves participate in behavior that previously seemed beyond them. Given the data on relationships that ended because the dominant partner had gone too far, this maneuver can prove to be risky. Nevertheless, such behavior appears to be common.

Sexual and SM Activities

We found that sexual and SM activities were varied and extensive. Except for physical impossibilities (e.g., female-female couples did not engage in penile-vaginal sex), the repertoire of the slaves was extensive and all relationship types engaged in all possible combinations and communications of sexual and SM interactions. Common SM activities included bondage (80% of participants), spanking and whipping (83% of participants), and 73% of paticipants were the recipients of "tit torture." "Cock and Ball Torture" (CBT) was common for male slaves, with 81% reporting participation. In contrast, only 58% of the female slaves reported "cunt torture."

All the relationships were sexual. It was not uncommon for a slave to take a role sometimes characterized superficially as "dominant"during in sex. For example, 21% of male slaves of female owners took part in penile-anal sex, 43% engaged in penile-vaginal contact and 36% were orally stimulated by their owner. Masturbation (self-stimulation) with orgasm was reported by 54% of the sample and without orgasm by 51%. We assume that masturbation without orgasm implied that orgasm was forbidden as part of the relationship at least part of the time.

The gay leather scene, which is related to SM but not synonymous, is known for its interest in "fisting" (placing one's hand in his partner's rectum). Surprisingly only 38% of the male-male relationships indicated this occurred; the female-male relationships reported only slightly lower rates, with 29%. In contrast 83% of the female-female relationships and 23% of the male-female relationships included vaginal "fisting."

Ability to Leave

Historically, a distinguishing characteristic of traditional slavery has been the inability to leave. Almost half the respondents (70/146) had had a previous owner. We inquired into the reasons and circumstances in which these prior relationships ended. These relationships ended for a variety of reasons, including the owner's death, the slave's dissatisfaction, the owner's dissatisfaction, or mutual agreement. The respondents indicated that they initiated their release in 69% of the instances, while termination was initiated by the owners in 24%. In the remaining 7% of cases, termination was mutual or no data were reported.

Of the 48 slaves who initiated their own release, 8 (17%) left because their limits were not respected, 5 (10%) left because the relationship was stale, 13 (27%) left because they felt unsafe in the relationship, 5 (10%) left because of risk for bodily harm or death, 9 (19%) left because the relationship was no longer fulfilling, and we lacked data to classify the remaining 8 (17%) respondents.

One way of reinforcing the role, creating a sense of dependence, and limiting the ability of the slave to flee, would be to limit the slave's access to money. This was not a common method for these couples. Over 60% of the respondents had their own bank accounts, almost 40% had joint bank accounts with their owners, and 15% had a joint bank account with someone other than their owners. Only three respondents had no access to a bank account in their own names.

Satisfaction

A large majority of respondents (88%) indicated that they were satisfied or completely satisfied with their current relationships. Additionally, almost 71% of the sample indicated the relationship was more satisfying or significantly more satisfying now than when it began. Nonetheless, when asked if they would seek other owners if their current relationships ended, 50% of the respondents indicated that they would not.

DISCUSSION

This section will explore the major characteristics of 24/7 SM slavery, focusing on four distinguishing themes or features: (1) The relationship reinforces the slave mind-set. (2) The participants must often fulfill the slavery aspects of the relationship surreptitiously. (3) The relationship is structured to safeguard the slave. (4) The relationship contract parallels conventional relationship arrangements.

The Relationship Is Designed to Create and Reinforce the Slave Mind-Set at All Times

The most prominent feature of these relationships is their pervasiveness and all-encompassing nature. In order to make 24/7 SM slavery "real," non-scene-specific aspects of daily life must be structured by an unequal power differential. Getting up in the morning is an unremarkable part of most people's day. Within an SM slave relationship, however, it is often an opportunity, carried out faithfully every day, through which the boundaries of the relationship are reaffirmed.

Creating such a power differential within non-SM and nonsexual activities and tasks replaces or augments the ropes and chains of the time-limited scene. The bondage of SM slavery *is* the responsibility for menial tasks; it *is* the more subtle public form even as much as it is the collar and the shackles which bind to the slave every night. Owner and slave who try to maintain the slave relationship based exclusively on the interactions within a discrete SM scene risk running into difficulties when they leave the dungeon and pay bills, do chores, or decide in which restaurant to eat. The power exchange that is so clearly demarcated in the scene can lose its power outside of such a structured environment unless it is formally considered and applied to other daily situations.

Although the data demonstrated that slaves are most likely to be responsible for menial day-to-day tasks, a finding which was not unanticipated, we did not find that the slave was overwhelmingly responsible for these tasks. Slavery typically entails servitude. Cleaning up after meals is not generally regarded as a sexual act, but it can be constructed as part of the owner-slave relationship. This differs from scene-specific SM, where the activity is typically focused on overtly sexual and/or overtly SM interactions between the participants. Responsibility for household tasks, though characterized by a power differential in SM slavery, is not generally factored into time-limited scenes. Unique to

24/7 SM relationships, however, the power exchange does not end when the SM or sexual scene has ended. Rather, it is one example of how the power exchange helps to maintain and support the relationship outside of these scenes.

Just over 50% of all respondents are bound or tethered while they sleep. Although bondage is a common aspect of SM scenes, restraining the slave while "nothing is going on" serves as a symbolic representation and heightens awareness of the power differential. This may be important for the owner and slave in their attempts to realize as fully as possible their respective roles. Bondage during the night may appear on the surface to be an extension of an SM encounter and could be part of a time-limited scene. The SM slave relationship can use these obviously ritualistic demonstrations to reinforce the overt power differences desired by both partners. Similarly, rules existed in the relationships of 94% of the respondents. These included involvement in such areas of life as where to sit and what to eat. The application of restrictions beyond a time-limited scene further confirms the 24/7 nature of this type of SM relationship.

Established rituals existed in 86% of respondents' relationships. Rituals are a part of everyone's life, whether SM focused or not. The types of ritual described in this study relate primarily to non-scene-specific activities (e.g., getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, or greeting one's owner) and are intended to heighten the awareness of the structure and pervasive nature of these relationships.

The Participants Must Often Engage in Their Relationship Surreptitiously

The second element involves the need to modify the overt representation of one's slavery when in public as another means by which the slavery can be maintained 24/7, outside of the traditionally viewed scene or sexual encounter. Within the confines and structure of one's home, the owner and slave roles can be embraced with relative ease. Most people, however, will have to interact with and join the outside world at some point. This is similar to the issues that homosexual-identified individuals report when having to be "in the closet." By altering form (as defined below) both owner and slave can still feel the boundaries and structure of the established slave relationship. Failure to do so can result in role and boundary confusion.

Respondents do not cease being slaves when they are apart from their owners or outside of the slavery household. Rather, they alter their be-

havior in order to fit in with the world around them. The behavioral expectations change even while their status as slaves remains intact. This change in expectation is often referred to as "form" within the SM community (e.g., private form, public form, or friendly form). In "private form," the slave is bound by the strict rules of the relationship and these would be in effect when alone together in the owner's space as well as in the presence of others who are aware of the arrangement. "Friendly form" may be in effect in such places as leather bars where the dress, demeanor and appearance of the owner and slave would be understood for what they are and viewed sympathetically by casual onlookers. Some rules might not apply so as not to bring undue attention to the couple (e.g., nudity), but other rules would be enforced. "Public form" rules would apply to situations in which the owner-slave relationship would not be understood or accepted by those present. Behavior or speech that might reveal the relationship status would be avoided, but other rules which would not be obvious to onlookers would still be in force. Thus, owner and slave weave their relationship and their power imbalance throughout the course of the day in many different ways and in a variety of settings.

More than 75% of all respondents indicated that their owners allowed them (i.e., slaves) to be out of role at certain times or in certain situations. The concept of whether slavery constitutes a role which one can move into and out of is avidly debated by participants. Comments ranged from "I'm often out of role, life's demands require it for us on a regular basis," to "OUT OF ROLE? This is NO roleplaying here . . . this is 24/7."

The Relationship Is Structured to Safeguard the Slave

Paradoxically, the third key element found in owner-slave relationships was the presence of a "safety net" maintained for slaves and in case the relationship ended. Although superficial appearances reflect a person without rights (i.e., powerless and bound to the whims of another), this appears to be part of the structure, framework, or agreement between owner and slave. The participants in SM slavery go to great lengths to experience their desired relationships but their basic human and civil rights remain and cannot be relinquished legally.

The comments on the survey indicated that limits within the relationship were respected. This allows the slave and owner to state that they do not have any limits or do not need "safewords" within the established framework of their slavery. The lack of "safewords" or "consensual

non-consent" relationships, however, is part of the ambiance of the relationship. The predetermined parameters define and clarify where the "edge" is so that all participants can play freely within these boundaries. Within the space created by the participants, there may not, in fact, be any need for safewords given the deep level of trust and respect established prior to entering into the owner-slave relationship. These limits are not immutable and 73% indicated that they had participated in activities that they had not thought initially they ever would engage in, as the relationship progressed. Conversely, some slaves had left previous relationships because their limits were not respected.

This complexity is illustrated in the management of finances within the SM slave relationship. Many respondents indicated that they turned over any money earned to their owners. The owner often provided the slave with an allowance, thereby monitoring the slave's expenditures, even though most slaves had access to a bank account. The fact that 60% of respondents reported having bank accounts in their own names suggests that these slaves maintain some level of independence in spite of their slavery. This may also suggest the means to support themselves in the event that the slave relationship should end.

While the results clearly indicated that this type of relationship extends throughout the day and the life of those involved, it also provided insight into how it differs from surface appearances or traditional understanding of slavery and servitude. Many responses reflected an assumption that owners would not recklessly push slaves to do physically or emotionally dangerous things, or that slaves could refuse such orders even while stating that they do not have the right to do so. This suggests that slaves could exercise their "denied" rights, if and when necessary.

Furthermore, the data indicated that of the 70 respondents who had prior owner-slave relationships, 48 respondents initiated their own releases from their prior relationships. Thus, notwithstanding the appearance of utter dependence on the owner, the slave is apparently able to exit the relationship if necessary. Approximately 19% (13/70) of those with a previous 24/7 relationship left that relationship because their limits were not respected, they felt unsafe, or both.

The Relationship Contract Parallels Conventional Relationship Arrangements

The fourth key characteristic of SM slavery is the extent to which such relationships mirror more conventional relationships. In all long-term, live-in relationships, the housework must be done, meals must be

prepared, finances must be organized, etc. All homes have routines and parameters for acceptable behavior. Faithfulness to explicit and implicit contracts governing the participants' conduct and the extent to which the individuals involved maintain their commitments affects the quality and duration of the relationship. In marriage, these may be formalized in the marital vows. In SM slavery, these may be articulated in the owner-slave contract. Once the nature of these relationships has been negotiated, the participants are better able to "let down their guards" and to embrace what they have created within the framework set forth together. Thus, at least at the outset, these relationships are predicated on mutual consent.

We did not inquire about romantic feelings of the slave (or owner), but we assume that there is a romantic aspect of these relationships. Most of these relationships have the appearance of romantic couples, as manifested by being allowed out of role when non-scene individuals are present; the slave was not introduced as a servant. The slave is taken to family events and treated as a partner rather than a slave at these times. A traditional slave would have been left at home or eaten with the other servants.

Most slaves are not traded permanently and the process of finding a partner is not simple. The prospective slave chooses very carefully. There are numerous Internet services that attempt to help prospective owners and slaves to connect with each other. Nevertheless, there are numerous e-mail postings decrying the lack of prospective dominant partners who meet the slaves' requirements, thus suggesting that these "matchmaking" services are not overwhelmingly successful. These relationships, like most committed relationships, are meant to be permanent. Despite that intention, most relationships end. One would expect that slaves' movements and access to money would be tightly controlled. We did not ask about how tightly their movements were controlled. Most do have access to money and many initiate termination of their relationships. Again, this pattern is more reminiscent of traditional marriage than of traditional slavery.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their relationships and more satisfied than when the relationship began. Those unhappy with their relationships would have been unlikely to participate in the present study or "slaves" may not have felt it was their "place" to complain. Nevertheless, the level of satisfaction is noteworthy. The participants seemed to like these relationships. There was no indication that anyone was coerced into staying, when the relationship was no longer fulfilling.

These were clearly SM couples and the sexual and SM activities within these relationships resembled those in other SM interactions. We did not ascertain how rigorously the "rules" were enforced, how fairly the discipline was meted out, or how the participants responded to the discipline.

There was no indication that the respondents were "battered" in the traditional sense (i.e., suffered significant injury or participated against their will). Nevertheless, it is possible that some spousal abusers could use such arrangements to legitimize or otherwise find support for their abusive inclinations or intentions. Perusal of the relationship advertisements suggests the "slaves" are keenly aware of this danger and perpetrators of domestic violence are shunned in this community. Superficially similar behaviors can be governed by different motivations and goals. These relationships appear to be more similar to traditional marriages than to spousal abuse situations. Nevertheless, the line between marital abuse and traditional marriage is not always clear in the general population. Within the SM community, it also can be difficult to classify. The clarity of the power dynamics entering the relationship may prevent some of the degeneration into abuse that occurs in more ambiguously defined (i.e., conventional) power dynamics.

There is also a subgroup of these relationships that models the power dynamics on religion and traditional marriage (e.g., www. submissivewife. org, groups.yahoo.com/group/dmstcdspln, www.themarriagebed.com/dd. shtml). In summary, this may be a very interesting area for further research.

The desire for ritual within relationships is understandable. People often create rituals in their lives and it is not surprising that rituals would surround any important area of life. Why this is so is beyond the scope of this paper. We often create rituals surrounding going to bed, arising in the morning, eating, etc. When individuals adopt roles or behavior patterns as part of their identities, it follows that rituals would be created to confirm their identities. Various symbols are also adopted to signify one's identity/identities.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study is exploratory and employs a non-random, self-selected sample. It is unlikely that individuals not interested in SM relationships would have found the study. The number of participants who found the study in the relatively short time that the survey was posted on

the Internet suggests that these relationships are more common than previously thought. Also, finding male and female owners and slaves suggests that all relationship combinations exist. We did not explore one owner-multiple slaves relationships nor multiple owners-single slave relationships, but are aware that they exist.

These relationships are satisfying to the slaves, but there is evidence that they can disintegrate. Either slaves or owners can initiate the separation process. Further research on the separation process and what happens to the participants after separation is needed. It is not clear how many of the individuals who indicate that they would or would not seek another owner actually follow through with the spirit of that statement.

Additional research is called for by these results. Future studies should explore the various ways in which forms are structured and used to ensure the continuity of slavery in a variety of settings. Also, several respondents indicated that their slavery is simply who they are, whether they are in a slave relationship at the time or not. Further research should examine whether or not for some participants slavery or submission is akin to a distinct orientation and the extent to which such a belief affects the need for more firmly identified boundaries and parameters.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, SM owner-slave couples exist and the relationships can flourish. The relationships focus on the power differential between the partners, but are between partners rather than stereotypical owners and slaves. The sexual aspects of the relationships are similar to other SM relationships, though the intensity and frequency of these behaviors was not quantified in the present study.

There is no reason to believe that these "slaves" need saving or freeing. There is no indication that they are more likely to be abused than in other relationships. It would appear that some of the shock from disclosing participation in this type of relationship relates to the terms used to describe the relationship, rather than the actual behavior within the relationship.

Another key characteristic of SM slavery is the extent to which such relationships mirror more conventional relationships. Once the nature of these relationships has been negotiated, the participants embrace the roles created within the accepted framework. Thus, at least at the outset, these relationships are predicated on mutual consent.

This study has provided concrete evidence of the presence of 24/7 SM slavery as a unique and definable subset of SM interactions and relationships. Specific measurable characteristics of overall slavery have been identified. Each of the defining characteristics together flesh out the framework without which 24/7 SM slavery would not be possible. This study has revealed that SM slavery constitutes a distinct and fulfilling lifestyle. In addition, 24/7 SM slavery has been shown to provide for very specific and clearly defined needs for those who participate in it.

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