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Themes of SM Expression

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SM (also known as BDSM, i.e. Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission and Sadism and Masochism) is a term used to describe a variety of sexual behaviours that have an implicit or explicit power differential as a significant aspect of the erotic interaction. Of course there are other sexual interactions or behaviours that have an implicit power differential, but that power differential is not generally eroticized in non-SM interactions. Sex partners may even disagree if a particular interaction or relationship constitutes SM, each seeing it from a different perspective. The boundaries between SM and non-SM interactions are not always clear, which is why self-definition is crucial for understanding SM phenomena.

Colloquially the set of SM inclinations has been referred to derisively as an interest in 'whips and chains', but is much more complex and varied than suggested by that description. Practitioners use both numerous academic terms and jargon (e.g. S/M, B/D, WIITWD [i.e. what it is that we do], D/s, Bondage, Leather, Kink) to refer to these interests. They have been labelled controversially in the psychiatric literature with diagnostic labels such as paraphilia, sadomasochism, sexual sadism, sexual masochism and fetishism. There is no evidence that the descriptions in the psychiatric literature resemble the individuals who self-identify as SM participants or that SM participants understand the implications of adopting the psychiatric terms as self-descriptors.

Judging from the proliferation of SM themes in sexually explicit media, references in mainstream books, film and the news media, as well as academic studies and support groups, it is reasonable to conclude that SM is an important sexual interest for a significant number of individuals. To further the study of SM, it is important to understand the range of SM activities and different subtypes of practitioners.

This chapter is an attempt to discuss the range and types of SM themes commonly identified in SM practice. It is our hope that understanding the different manifestations of SM will lead to a more complete understanding of this genre of sexual expression. Throughout this chapter we will use quotes from SM practitioners. These were obtained during fieldwork for other research projects; no new investigation was undertaken for this chapter.

Serious study of SM or, for that matter, any set of sexual proclivities reveals precisely how diverse sexual behaviour is. However, the range of sexual behaviours (limited only by human, physical capacities) is dwarfed by the range of sexual *fantasies* and *desires* which are unlimited.

The set of SM themes delineated below is an introduction to some of the more common manifestations of SM interactions. It is important to recognize though that the finely detailed nuances of a given individual's desires can never be understood, no matter how carefully one observes, without also listening attentively to the individual's erotic hopes and dreams (Kleinplatz, 2001, 2006). These are unique to each participant and would be infinitely more difficult to categorize. Simply stating that this person is into 'humiliation' while that one wants 'to be possessed' does not begin to capture the individual or interpersonal experience. The inadequacy of labels to convey the subtlety of the meanings embedded in a given fantasy or interaction becomes especially glaring when confronted with two or more SM participants, each involved in superficially similar behaviours (e.g. being bound and flogged) but wherein each seeks an entirely different experience (Kleinplatz, 2001, 2006).

The subjective aspects of SM require their own taxonomy. Motives and intentions are complex and cannot ever be deduced from observation alone. Given that the range of intentions is as vast as imagination itself, a taxonomy of the inner world of SM participants is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Roles

At the most basic level, SM practitioners adopt either dominant or submissive roles or given roles at different times. Individuals who choose the dominant role often refer to themselves as 'top', 'master', 'mistress', 'domme', 'owner', 'S', 'dom', 'dominatrix', 'sadist', among other terms. Those who adopt submissive roles often use the terms 'bottom', 'slave', 'sub', 'subbie', 'property', 'm', 'owned', 'masochist', and so on. Those individuals who are interested in both roles are called 'switches' or 'flexible' (or in some circles, more archaically as 'versatile'). The terms 'top'

and 'bottom' are also used to describe non-SM sex acts; for example, when gay men engage in anal intercourse, they may refer to the inserter as the 'top' and the insertee as the 'bottom'.

Our choice to use the terms 'dominant' and 'submissive' was at least partially arbitrary (relying upon convention) and in the hopes of minimizing confusion for the reader. Many SM practitioners feel strongly about the terms used to describe their interests and at least some will object to our choice. Nevertheless we believe we have chosen the most descriptive and least offensive option.

Individuals who adopt a particular label do not necessarily participate in the same, associated activities, nor does use of the same label by two people imply that they assign identical meanings to their labels. SM practitioners often argue amongst themselves about what these labels actually mean and about differences between these labels. There are clearly regional differences, differences among groups, differences due to sexual orientation and between men and women. For example, some people would say that a 'masochist' is interested primarily in physical sensations, a 'submissive' is primarily interested in psychological domination (but with limits) and a 'slave' is primarily interested in providing service or in experiencing psychological domination without limits. In reality, the same individual could adopt any of these terms, without any change in behaviour.

It is not rare for some individuals to take on unusual identities or disavow any SM identity regardless of their behaviour (see Plante, 2006). For example, 'dominant bottoms' are individuals who direct their partners to stimulate them in specific ways under the former's control (e.g. 'give me five strokes with a cane on the left buttock'). Others engage in spanking while insisting that their activities are in no way related to SM (Plante, 2006). Some individuals 'top from the bottom', meaning they subtly direct the scene.

Commonalities

SM interactions or relationships characteristically begin with negotiation, wherein the limits (i.e. what is forbidden) are discussed. Isolated interactions almost always involve this negotiation process, but once a relationship has been established the negotiations are reinstated when changes in the relationship or a desire to change the focus of their interaction are contemplated. Limits can be subdivided into 'hard limits' (never to be tested) and 'soft limits' (where some exploration is permissible). Transgressing someone's limits is a serious faux pas in the SM

community. The negotiation process is an important part of establishing a relationship. Many participants and groups have standard limits, for example, no children, blood, 'scat' (i.e. faeces) or permanent marks. There are limits that are rarely mentioned, but nevertheless, communicated. For example, while the fantasy of being sold as a slave is common, few 'slaves' are permanently sold or given to another. When relationships end, 'slaves' negotiate the termination of their relationships and are usually released (Dancer, Kleinplatz & Moser, 2006).

SM is said to have five common features (Weinberg, Williams & Moser, 1984): the appearance of dominance and submission, role-playing, mutual definition, consensuality and a sexual context for the individual.

The emphasis here is on the *appearance* of dominance and submission, because the actual power in the relationship is much more subtle. The power dynamics are much more complex than one person simply being in charge while the other follows his or her lead. *Role-playing* involves the assumption of specific roles that give the appearance of dominance and submission.

Mutual definition refers to the way the participants jointly define the relationship or interactions. Although they do not necessarily call their activities SM or some similar term, they recognize that such behaviours differ from 'vanilla' (i.e. non-SM) relationships. Someone who self-defines as dominant cannot go around barking orders at acquaintances or strangers and survive in our society. Similarly submissives who say they are always submissive do not fall to their knees in front of strangers without some negotiation. There are venues where there are agreed-upon rules and the participants do not necessarily negotiate explicitly; rather, one's presence conveys agreement to participate. These venues often use symbols (e.g. coloured ribbons) to indicate the specific liberties allowed; negotiation is needed for other acts not covered by the accepted rules.

SM is *consensual* by definition. Just as the difference between consensual coitus and rape is consent, the difference between SM and violence is consent. Non-consensual acts are criminal.

By our definition, SM involves a *sexual* element or context. There are people who do not define their activities as sexual; for the purposes of this chapter, we are not including them in this discussion.

Bondage

One method of exerting power is to restrict the movements of the other partner. Some individuals prefer specific materials (e.g. rope, chains) or

manner of bondage (e.g. tight bondage which prevents any movement or looser restraints to allow struggling). Other materials commonly used include plastic wrap, strips of cloth, masking tape and string or twine. Usually great care is taken to prevent blood supply disruption or nerve compression from being affected. Some individuals like to fight, squirm and try to escape; others find the experience comforting and relax into it. In some cases, one is restrained by solely psychological suggestion. For example, being told not to move may suffice or being tied in a manner from which the person could, theoretically, free him or herself.

Some bondage is applied over clothes, but complete or partial nudity is common. For some, the added vulnerability of being naked is important whereas for others, it is the process of being bound that is erotic. Sometimes the genitals are covered by the bondage and at other times they are made conspicuously vulnerable. Being bound implies an inability to escape which is heightened by the vulnerability of being touched intimately. For others, the inability to touch one's genitals when contact is desired creates a different type of vulnerability.

In some cases, the bondage is focused on a specific part of the body such as breasts or wrists. Specialized devices exist to specifically bind wrists, thumbs, ankles and so on. This genre includes devices that prevent sexual access (e.g. chastity belts, gags, butt plugs) or which serve as a reminder that the submissive is no longer in control of those bodily areas. In some cases, the primary purpose is to prevent the wearers from stimulating themselves; in other situations it prevents individuals from sexual liaisons with others. In still other situations, it reminds submissives of the control the dominants have and their dependence on their dominants.

Some bondage occurs in conjunction with clothing. For example, there are belts that lock and prevent removal of clothes. Similarly locks can be used to prevent the undoing of zippers or buttons. It is also possible to make a rope or chain harness that does not typically prevent access or limit motion, but the wearer knows that it *could* be used to immobilize him/her. Others enjoy the aesthetic look of these devices and wear them as fashion statements. Still others use them as reminders of the nature of their relationships or status differences. In this genre, piercings, whether permanent or temporary, can be used as an element of bondage. Some individuals would include corsets, similar garments and extreme high heels as elements of bondage. They can be worn by both sexes, prevent movement and restrict certain functions (e.g. sitting, walking, taking a deep breath).

The setting or equipment used can also serve as an important aspect of the eroticism. To be tied in a semi-public place (e.g. an SM party)

or in a place where he/she can be discovered (e.g. a mountain trail) is important for some. Others find that how they are positioned is the key aspect, for example, having one's legs spread or buttocks displayed can be crucial. Some individuals especially enjoy being bound to large devices made for such purposes (i.e. a 'T'- or 'X'-shape). Being bound to a bed is common and several commercial and homemade devices are available to facilitate this.

Some individuals enjoy being enclosed in a device that does not restrict their personal movement but prevents escape. Cages are a primary example of these devices but, more simply, a cuff with a long tether would allow movement about a room or an apartment but prevent submissives from leaving the area. Similarly leashes can prevent someone from wandering too far from the holder. Body sacks (i.e. a large cloth bag that can be tied to prevent escape) are also popular.

For some the process of being tied or tying someone up is the essential turn-on. After the person is immobilized, he/she is quickly untied. An entire evening may be spent tying and retying someone in different configurations. For others, it is the feeling of being immobilized that is erotic. In such instances, the submissive would not be untied until after the scene (i.e. erotic interaction) is completed. Some individuals sleep in some type of bondage every night.

There is a style of bondage called Shibari or Japanese bondage where the aesthetic of the bondage is important. Shibari practitioners practice tying someone up to be able to do it quickly, with a flourish, and to make sure the knots and ropes follow certain aesthetic principles.

Another specialized style of bondage involves suspension – tying the person so that they are suspended in air. Obviously this requires appropriate equipment and special safety considerations.

It is considered extremely bad form (not to mention dangerous) to leave the immobilized person alone. In case of fire or other emergency, quick release mechanisms incorporated into the bondage or special scissors are available to free the person quickly. For some individuals, SM without bondage is unthinkable and for others it is a special occasion when the participants have adequate time for preparation and execution of an elaborate tableau.

Discipline

Some individuals' arousal is linked to the notion of being disciplined for violation of pre-arranged rules. One aspect of this is referred to as 'corporal punishment' although the discipline can be psychological rather than physical. An important component of these scenarios is

mutual agreement that the dominant partner can and should discipline the submissive partner. Sometimes the submissive partner feigns resistance and needs to be 'forced' and at other times submits 'willingly'. The submissive partner may deliberately 'provoke' the 'warranted' discipline. However, at other times, discipline is meted out for its own sake, despite the absence of 'need' for punishment or infraction of rules.

Although dominants may appear to be imposing their will on 'unwilling' submissives, by definition, all SM is consensual; if the submissive was not willing, the act would be an assault and legally actionable; this is actually quite rare in organized SM communities. In the feigned 'unwilling' situation, the submissive wants to be subdued and fights being overpowered. In almost all cases, the submissive will lose, but there are instances when the tables are turned. Also switches may use these struggles as a mechanism for deciding who will play which role, in which case roles may switch several times during an encounter.

Discipline can take the form of spankings, paddling, whipping, caning or the use of other implements. Psychological discipline, including standing in the corner, denial of privileges and 'humiliation' also occur. The dominant is expected to be in control of the extent of the punishment, the pain inflicted and the severity of any marks left. A dominant who loses control would not be thought of highly. It is not uncommon for the dominant to apologize for an errant blow that leaves an unwanted mark or accidentally hits an area without prior agreement.

Another type of discipline has a military style. Individuals often choose to join an organization or group that requires members to 'earn' privileges and respect by adhering to a specific code. These are found in both male/female and homosexual/heterosexual contexts. Uniforms and other symbols meant to show membership in the group are earned by the participants. This structure is sometimes useful in helping members develop useful personal traits (e.g. responsibility, cleanliness, honesty). It is not uncommon for these groups to sponsor community service in one form or another or to come to the assistance of individuals in need.

There is a historical precursor of these militaristic groups which is referred to as 'Old Guard' (see Baldwin, n.d.). The modern SM movement traces its organizational inceptions to gay motorcycle clubs that began after World War II. After the war, many GIs returning to the USA recognized their homosexuality and decided to reside in larger cities. Some of these men found the black leather motorcycle chic to be particularly attractive. In addition, some of these men were also interested in

SM. The use of the term 'Leather' as a synonym for SM traces its roots to these groups. The Old Guard had a rank order structure, borrowed from their common military experience, though they were closer in appearance to the 'Rebel without a Cause' genre.

Dominance and submission

SM interests generally do not predict whether someone is dominant or submissive in daily life. The stereotype of the powerful businessman who hires a dominatrix to humiliate him is more the exception than the rule. There is no shortage of powerful businessmen who want to be dominant during sex as well as at work. Professional submissives are available (Sisson & Moser, 2005) and some businessmen – among others – do use their services. Low-income men usually cannot afford to hire either a professional submissive or dominant, whether male or female.

The feeling of being either dominant or submissive in a relationship can be the source of eroticism and create the atmosphere for specific sexual or SM acts. Common scenarios include 'owner' (i.e. 'master' or 'mistress')–'slave', 'teacher–student' and 'adult–child' (only involving chronological adults) role-plays. Although these role-plays can be maintained throughout the duration of the relationship, they are clearly different from the reality of actual parent–child or teacher–student relationships. For example, in general, teachers do not cane students, let alone as a prelude to engaging in a variety of sex acts. Similarly real slave owners tend not to treat their slaves as cherished objects (Dancer, Kleinplatz & Moser, 2006).

Some participants use these roles as a fleeting element of a sexual interlude, often lasting for just a few minutes. The rest of the relationship is devoid of SM role-play. For others, the role-play provides the context for the SM and, sometimes, even for the relationship itself. That is, they find the roles create the erotic backdrop for the relationship; without these roles the partner would cease to be attractive.

In the same way that some individuals want sex to occur in the context of a committed relationship, some individuals want their SM to occur in the context of a committed SM relationship. The context of the relationship assumes many different forms. For example, some submissives want to be seen as treasured possessions, trading obedience for being taken care of and nurtured. Some might, for example, comment that they like old-fashioned relationships, with the male as head of the household. Similarly female-dominant relationships have

the same style, with the man worshiping the woman on the pedestal. Variations of the treasured possession theme occur in same-sex LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) relationships.

Many submissives will report that they are looking for 'my one', that is, the person to whom he/she can be utterly devoted. Once they have found 'the one', they will be obedient in exchange for care. They will report they love their dominants in a romantic context. Others define their devotion in terms of being the maid, chauffeur or abject slave. They expect to be treated as an inferior and without expecting romantic love in return. One ritualized type of male-dominant and female-submissive relationship is called 'Gor', styled after the science fiction novels of John Norman. In these relationships, chattel slaves (usually women) have no rights or privileges; Goreans believe that male dominance and female submission is the natural order. Nevertheless slaves are disciplined for misbehaviour – not sexual reasons. A well-trained slave wants to please her master and demonstrate her obedience.

Another stylized form of male dominance and female submission is known as 'Christian Kink', based on the religious belief that men should be heads of the household. 'Domestic Discipline' has a similar bent, except that either partner can be the disciplinarian. Similar themes are played out in same-sex LGB relationships.

Another theme involves a parent-child relationship, though in sexualized form. 'Daddy-boy' (also spelled 'boi'), 'Daddy Dom' (usually involving a female submissive being treated as a little 'princess') and 'Mommy-girl' (also spelled 'grrl') relationships occur. Of interest, the 'Mommy-boy' dynamic is less common and often cast as an 'adult-baby' relationship. Even though these terms denote the gender of the participants, one cannot infer the sex of the participants from this language; lesbians often employ the 'male' terms and some men use the 'female' terms. Adopting any of these terms does not mean that participants' relationships are necessarily founded on identical premises – just that some individuals find some aspects of the genre resonate for them.

There is no indication that these individuals are searching for minors or re-enacting incestuous acts from their childhood. Some individuals fantasize about being slaves at hard labour. There are reports of individuals who have done this for weeks at a time, but we are unaware of anyone who does this on an ongoing basis. The common theme in all these relationships is a clear power dynamic that resonates with the participants.

Symbols

However an SM relationship is characterized, symbols of the relationship and commitment are often used. This is similar to how non-SM relationship participants exchange rings, pins, other jewellery and often marriage vows. These symbols and rituals include rings (both for fingers and for pierced body parts), collars, formal ceremonies, being marked (e.g. by wearing a collar, being pierced, tattooed, scarification by cutting or branding), signing contracts and protocol agreements.

The giving or receiving of a collar can be an elaborate process. Individuals will discuss the meaning of a collar to them at length. If the relationship ends, there are discussions of what to do with the collar, how it should be returned, and so on. Although there are several symbols that suggest an SM relationship, wearing them can signify a fashion statement or that the individual has an interest in SM, but not necessarily that the person is involved in an SM relationship. Often one cannot discern if someone is dominant or submissive from dress or comportment. Submissives stating that they are 'collared' indicate that they are involved. It is usually appropriate to ask if the symbol denotes the person is in a relationship, similar to the etiquette surrounding a woman in a singles bar who is wearing a wedding ring. In some cases, an individual can have a 'vanilla' relationship, but still be searching for an SM partner or vice versa.

SM participants often sign a contract to seal their relationship formally. Some of these contracts are quite brief; others are very detailed, spelling out the rights and obligations of both parties. Some of these contracts form part of a ritual, signed in front of friends resembling a wedding ceremony.

One aspect of these contracts concerns protocol, that is, the way the submissive addresses the dominant partner. Some of these styles (e.g. calling one's dominant 'My Lordship' or 'My Ladyship') can be humorous even to other SM practitioners. Some submissives always refer to themselves in the third person. In written communication, they capitalize their dominants' names or pronouns and use lowercase letters for submissives. This can lead to written statements such as 'A/all of Y/you attending O/our party...'

Tattooing or other body modification is not uncommon among young people today, whether members of the SM community or not. Usually it is a statement about themselves and/or a ritual commemorating commitment (e.g. tattooing one's girlfriend's name on one's arm) or a

significant event in one's life (e.g. joining the Marines). It seems logical that a significant SM relationship or a confirmation of one's role could be similarly acknowledged.

Physical pain

Many people are under the impression that SM is primarily about individuals who either like to give or receive pain. In fact, the pain or intensity that is part of SM is a specific type of pain. Random pain or pain produced outside of an SM context is rarely erotic or desired. Some clueless individuals believe that a 'masochist' would like to be handled roughly or subjected to painful stimuli outside of a particular SM relationship. This type of behaviour is considered boorish at best and may elicit a violent reaction from the 'masochist'.

Some SM practitioners do not experience the stimulation as painful and call it 'intensity'. There are 'intensity junkies' who desire very specific types of intensity. It is well known that sexual arousal alters pain perception, elevating pain thresholds over 80% (Komarisuk & Whipple, 1984; Whipple & Komarisuk, 1985, 1988); what would hurt in a non-erotic context does not hurt or 'hurts so good' when aroused. The best non-SM example of this is the 'hickey' or love-bite. Someone biting your neck when aroused feels different from someone biting your neck in an unaroused state. Individuals who are not involved in SM often engage in activities that can be considered physically or emotionally painful. Examples of this include long-distance running and enrolment in a graduate program, both of which often involve considerable exertion, pain and sacrifice.

For many participants, it is not pain per se that is arousing but rather the idea of pain. As one stated, '*Actual pain gives me no pleasure, yet the idea of pain does, if inflicted by way of discipline and for the ultimate good of the person suffering it*' (Ellis, 1936: 90). A respondent in previous research once commented, 'I do not get turned on because my lover spans my ass. I get turned on seeing him get turned on spanking it. It is about the power exchange, force and most importantly a mental state that makes me put his desires and needs ahead of my own'.

SM practitioners often have very specific types of sensations that they are seeking. Some prefer 'thuddy' sensations that result from blows from a paddle versus the 'stingy' characteristic of blows from a cane. Other specific types of pain involve needles, tickling and electricity (e.g. from a TENS unit). Practitioners sometimes have very specific preferences in implements, rejecting even somewhat similar implements. Within

a dominant–submissive relationship, the submissive partner may be ‘rewarded’ with the use of a preferred implement and ‘punished’ with the use of a non-preferred implement.

One can withstand more intense sensation if the stimulation is slowly escalated, soft blows slowly increasing in strength rather than starting at a point that is perceived as painful from the outset. Conversely light spankings that are not painful can sensitize the skin over the course of a scene, leave marks and by the end are perceived as painful. Some stimuli are easy to endure for a short time, but are more difficult with longer applications even without a change in intensity (e.g. tickling).

There are preferences not only for specific types of stimulation but also for stimulation of particular body parts. ‘CBT’ (i.e. ‘cock and ball torture’), ‘cunt torture’, breasts, nipples, ‘bastinado’ (i.e. stimulation of the soles of the feet) are particular foci of attention. Sometimes the focus is on a very particular variety of stimulation (e.g. groin kicking), separate from other types of CBT.

It is reported that in Japan, there are businesses that cater only to painful stimulation of the nose, but it is rare to find anyone interested in that type of stimulation in North America or Europe. The theme of the stimulation can also be important. Medical scenarios lead to some specific types of stimulation that the individual seeks within the context of that particular scenario but are rarely of interest when in other settings.

Stimulation can be intense and sometimes marks are left. Most commonly marks consist of a redness of the skin that goes away in a few minutes to hours. More intense blows may cause superficial bruising (i.e. breakage of small, surface blood vessels) and may lead to more pronounced redness. Such marks usually last for days. Deeper bruising leads to the proverbial black and blue marks which also last for days. More extensive bruising over a larger area would obviously last longer.

On occasion there is a desire to place a permanent mark. This motivation behind this is multifactorial: the mark may symbolize a commitment, the seriousness of the relationship, a remembrance of a special time or confirmation of the ability of the submissive partner to endure the pain of placement. For some it has other purposes and does not need to be placed as part of an SM scene.

Permanent marks can be placed in a variety of ways. Knives or scalpels are used to make designs. If the scar is meant to be more prominent, after healing, the scar is retraced with the knife or scalpel. Occasionally cigarette or cigar ash is rubbed into the wound to increase the scarring. Branding, that is, burning the skin, is also used. Brands tend to spread

(become less distinct over time) and are less common as SM symbols. Some individuals have been re-branded to overcome the fading of the original brand.

Tattooing is another popular way to mark someone. The tattoo may only consist of the dominant's name or initials but some submissives have a generic tattoo that says 'slave' or 'property of...' to emphasize the SM nature of the relationship. Designs depicting scenes such as a person kneeling, in bondage, or crossed whips/canes are also popular. Dominants also get tattoos to signify their interests; tattoos such as 'MASTER' or a picture of an individual in a dominant pose are common.

Temporary piercing is also done for the pain or intensity of sensations. Piercings can be made permanent by introducing jewellery (typically a bar or ring) into the flesh. From these rings, other jewellery or a tag can be hung to indicate ownership or status. Temporary piercings rarely become infected. Permanent piercings can become infected, more likely in some sites rather than others. Surprisingly genital piercings rarely become infected, while nipple and umbilical piercings can take months to heal.

Humiliation

'Humiliation' is among the most difficult aspects of SM play to describe accurately. What is devastatingly humiliating to one person is not humiliating at all to the next person. In previous research, one respondent revealed that he wanted to be forced to drink his dominant's urine. He felt that the urine was the 'distillate of the body' and this was a way of ingesting the essence of his dominant's being. Of note, he was interested in drinking only his dominant's urine and felt that being forced to drink someone else's urine would be humiliating. This anecdote illustrates that what is and is not perceived as humiliating depends on the individual and/or relationship.

Contact with urine is relatively common, contact with faeces is less common and contact with vomit is rare. Another form of humiliation is enacted by prohibiting the submissive from washing or bathing. Control of elimination is relatively common, either by requiring the submissive to ask permission or being forbidden from urination or defecation. Along the same lines, but not necessarily experienced as humiliating, is having to ask the dominant for permission to have an orgasm.

It can be seen as humiliating to be required to call your partner 'Master' or 'Lady' or to always refer to yourself in the third person. Denial of various adult prerogatives can be perceived as humiliating. Examples

include control over how the submissive dresses, being forbidden from wearing certain articles of clothing, requiring nudity or having the submissive's food chosen. Forcing a submissive to wear particularly feminine clothing can be humiliating to gay, bisexual or straight men as well to some bisexual and lesbian women. Other methods of setting the tone include shaving the pubis, not letting the submissive sit on the furniture – only on the floor – and requiring public displays of respect (e.g. kneeling, bowing, curtsying). The subjective experience, of course, is unique to each individual.

Sometimes the humiliation is related to the possibility of discovery. Writing something derogatory on the submissive's body in a place that is usually hidden by clothing can accomplish this type of humiliation. Similarly requiring that a man wear bright red toenail polish when he is going to a gym, leaving him open to pointed questions, being shunned by others or being propositioned could be humiliating.

Some physical acts could be seen as humiliating, for example, anilingus, face slapping and foot licking. Nevertheless activities previously considered to be humiliating can become socioculturally normative and accepted behaviours, thus losing their power to confer a particular feeling state; fellatio and cunnilingus are excellent examples of the historical shift in social construction from aberrant and therefore demeaning status to standard and commonplace. In some cultures, being the receptive partner during anal coitus is considered humiliating, although in other cultures the same behaviour occurs without any implication of humiliation.

One very interesting form of humiliation is 'cuckholding' or being a 'cuck'. In this situation, a heterosexual couple seeks another man (the cuckholder) to have sex with the female partner. The male submissive (the cuck) is usually the target of a variety of disparaging comments about his masculinity. He is often made to watch the cuckholder have sex with the female partner. Some of these women are dominant and the sex between the cuckholder and the woman is devoid of SM between them. In other cases, the female partner is also submissive and she and the cuckholder have their own SM relationship. In some cases, the cuck is 'forced' to be 'bisexual' and engages in sex acts with the cuckholder as well or is required to perform oral sex on the woman after the cuckholder has ejaculated in her vagina (or anus). This fantasy is prevalent enough for couples who seek other partners to indicate sometimes that they are not interested in being cuckholded.

Race relations in the USA provide the backdrop for one variation of the cuck fantasy in which an African-American man is sought out

specifically to be the cuckold for a Caucasian couple. Less frequently, African-American couples specifically seek out Caucasian cuckholders. A particularly extreme form of this fantasy is the 'cuck' who fantasizes about having the woman impregnated by the cuckold. In these cases, the cuck accepts parental responsibility of the cuckold's offspring. Although this particular fantasy is common among those with an interest in this genre, we can find no case of it actually occurring.

There are several other roles that can be seen by others as humiliating including infantilism (i.e. role-play of being a child or infant), even when these roles have divergent meanings to participants. Infantilism is similar to transvestism, in which participants derive erotic arousal or a sense of comfort from dressing in the garments associated with the role. Similarly 'pony play' and other animal play can be seen by observers as humiliating, although the participants derive either erotic arousal or a sense of comfort from assuming the animal role. This is different from 'furrysex', in which two or more partners dress in animal costumes to have sex; the dressing is not necessarily erotic but the idea of having sex as an animal is arousing. In furrysex, the individual adopts a mix of human and animal characteristics, like a cartoon character, rather than trying to assume the role of an actual animal.

Society, in general, does not support humiliation of categories of individuals, so it is not uncommon to have groups founded around some principle that allows for the 'humiliation' of one class of individuals by another. There are male supremacy and female supremacy groups, groups created along racial lines and military-themed groups.

Fetishes

A fetish is characterized by sexual arousal to an inanimate object. In the professional literature, a fetish is distinct from partialism; the latter involves a strong sexual attraction towards a part of the body. Technically one can be a shoe fetishist or foot partialist or both. Within the SM community, both possibilities are merged together and referred to as a fetish. Individuals who enjoy SM accessories often describe their interests as fetishes. They find wearing or touching the preferred articles highly arousing. The articles themselves are rarely arousing, but if they are worn by a partner, it heightens the partner's attractiveness and heightens the eroticism of the sex. For example, pantyhose can be a fetish object, but brand new pairs, never worn, rarely become a focus of erotic interest. The same pantyhose worn by the participant or a partner can elicit a strong erotic response. Similarly an article of clothing that

reminds the person of a partner or a specific erotic interlude can become a fetish object.

Common fetish objects include leather, latex and corsets. At some parties, all guests are required to wear the appropriate fetish material. Several glossy magazines cater to different fetishes, such as smoking, leather, rubber, feet, and so on. The fetish aspect of some SM groups or events has led some discerning participants to comment derisively that it occasionally appears as though S&M stood for Stand and Model. It is not uncommon for several fetishes to be combined. The configuration of women wearing corsets, smoking cigars and with a focus on their feet can be particularly intriguing to some.

It should be noted that the term 'fetish' is usually applied to unusual objects or body parts. Feet are uncommon fetish targets as compared to breasts. Nevertheless there is a similar 'fetishistic' breakdown of attraction to large breasts, small breasts, male breasts, lactating breasts, pierced nipples, and so on. This variation demonstrates the range of diversity in erotic patterns and the nuances that are inherent in the process.

Relationships

Most people believe that SM relationships usually consist of one dominant partner and one submissive partner. In fact, there is no typical SM couple and all combinations of relationships are possible. Sometimes relationships are comprised of two dominants or two submissives. In these situations, the individuals either take turns playing the desired role or a third party (or another couple) becomes involved. In some cases, the new partner joins the couple as a permanent member (creating a triad or poly group) or their participation can be as part of a secondary relationship. Dominance and submission may also be fluid; many dominants will explore submission under the right circumstances and submissives will consider being dominant.

Relationships consisting of two dominant partners living together do exist; usually there is no overt SM play between the dominant partners. Often the dominant partners will have other relationships (whether long term or casual) with submissive partners. In deference to the primary relationship, these other relationships may have restrictions imposed (e.g. no coitus, no kissing on the lips, control over the number of times the submissive is seen) that serve to reinforce the primary relationship.

The dominant partners may play with a submissive, together or separately. In some dominant-submissive relationships, the submissive partners may have their own submissives. They often define themselves as

dominant, but submissive to their dominant. Sometimes the decision to be dominant or submissive is based upon other criteria, such as being submissive to men and dominant to women or how attractive the partner is. The desire for sexual contact with a particularly attractive partner could lead a dominant to take the submissive role. Occasionally one partner uses being dominant to attract partners for the other dominant. It is rare, but not unheard of for a submissive to serve more than one dominant regularly. On occasion an individual is submissive to one partner and that person is submissive to another, resulting in the submissive being submissive to both, but with a rank order.

Male submissives may be willing to engage in SM activities with another man ('forced bi') if a woman is present. Female submissives may wish to explore their own bisexuality but enjoy the security of an experienced male dominant to 'direct'. Male-male and female-female couples do attract other partners of both sexes. The idea of having two dominants of the same sex can be erotic.

It is not unusual for one or both partners to define themselves as switches, formally acknowledging that they are interested in both roles. SM roles within the couple often switch, but some couples maintain their roles within the couple and switch outside the relationship. There are also couples among whom the dominant uses the submissive partner to seduce another dominant as portrayed in the classic SM novel, *The Image* (de Berg, 1956/1966). When the new dominant is sufficiently trained, the dominant partner in the original couple becomes his/her submissive. Some dominants seek out submissive partners and then 'order' the submissives to dominate them. Submissives, wary of this possibility, often reject switches as prospective partners or state unambiguously that they are seeking only completely dominant partners.

Couples among whom both are submissive do exist. They often try to please the other by taking turns being dominant, but typically dislike it. They may choose to be submissive to the same person or couple, as this allows them time together and sharing. Occasionally the dominant will control their sexual interactions with each other, even if not present.

Some couples are comprised of an SM-identified partner and a 'vanilla' partner. This state of affairs often results from attempts to live an SM-free life, but after years of attempting unsuccessfully to suppress the SM inclinations, they come to accept them. Often the vanilla partner is aware of outside, SM-oriented relationships and either actively supports them or just prefers to avoid confronting the issue. There are, of course, individuals who surreptitiously engage in these relationships without their partners' knowledge.

Some couples actively seek to have a permanent third partner join them on a full-time basis to form a triad. These relationships can be in the form of a 'V' (vee) or a 'Δ' (triangle or delta). In a V relationship, two of the three partners do not interact with each other sexually. In a Δ, all partners interact sexually. In some triads, both submissives or both dominants are equal in status. In other relationships, an 'alpha' and 'beta' partner or designation exists, conferring different status to different members.

Larger groups also exist, including 'quads', 'constellations' and 'houses'. Quads are comprised of four individuals, along the same lines as a triad. Constellations are groups with many people who have different roles and connections with each other. Houses usually have one person or couple who is the organizer or who actually leads the group. The sexual and SM relationships can become complex very quickly.

SM couples meet and date just as non-SM couples do. They meet through introductions, dating services, in non-SM situations, or at SM events. They occasionally date several people, without committing to anyone. Others view SM play as demonstrating serious commitment. Due to the possibility of running into a partner who has dubious intentions (whether dominant or submissive), in the larger, more public and organized SM communities, potential partners may be vetted in a number of ways. Past partners may be interviewed, initial meetings are arranged and set in public places and these meetings occur without the assumption of any role. Occasionally a friend acts as a chaperone. A first 'play date' may occur at a public SM event/party which allows for safety via observation by others.

That said, one-night stands are not uncommon. One safety measure is to pre-arrange a 'safe call'. The submissive partner leaves contact information with a friend as to where he/she will be and with whom. That person is supposed to notify the police if the submissive does not call by a designated time. Obviously safety is important, but many experienced SM participants who have had numerous partners do not report experiencing any serious problems.

Discussion

This chapter is a beginning. The themes discussed here, that is, roles, bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, symbols, physical pain, humiliation, fetishes, SM relationships and their commonalities, hardly provide an exhaustive description of SM interests and behaviours. The challenge of developing a definitive taxonomy of SM activities,

interactions, meanings and other phenomena is hampered by the complexity of SM – or for that matter any other sexual interest.

For sexologists studying SM, the challenge is heightened by the recognition that roles, fantasies, activities and relationships do not necessarily correspond with one another. Most SM practitioners would recognize the themes described above as descriptive of their sexuality, even if a particular theme is not part of their own sexual patterns or desires. Correspondingly it is fascinating that the same sexual interests can be expressed in such divergent manners. Our field is in need of a model parsimonious enough to account for both the minute and huge differences among individuals who profess to have the same general sexual interests.

Some people engage in the sorts of behaviours and relationships described above without defining themselves as SM participants. There are also individuals who never enact these SM themes themselves, but nonetheless self-identify as SM practitioners. Sexologists will also need to develop models comprehensive enough to conceptualize all of these patterns.

SM is an understudied area of sexology. One reason for this has been the difficulty in defining what types of behaviours and interests are subsumed under SM, how to differentiate them from other sexual and non-sexual interests and behaviours. We hope this chapter will help to demystify SM and will aid psychotherapists, healthcare professionals and others in appreciating the range and intricacy of SM themes and their practitioners.

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