

An Exploratory-Descriptive Study of a Sadomasochistically Oriented Sample

CHARLES MOSER AND EUGENE E. LEVITT

Demographics, sexual behavior, and self-perceptions of a self-defined sadomasochistic (S/M) sample of 178 men are described. These men either returned a questionnaire published in an S/M magazine or completed a questionnaire after being solicited at an S/M support-group meeting. The composite respondent was heterosexual, well-educated, relatively affluent, interested in both dominant and submissive roles (switchable), and engaged in a wide range of sexual activities, both S/M and non-S/M. Most of the respondents first acknowledged interest and engaged in S/M acts as a young adult, after other sexual orientation issues were settled. Although most respondents were satisfied with the S/M aspect of their sexuality, a small percentage (approximately 6%) expressed distress concerning their behavior, and 16% had sought help from a therapist regarding their S/M desires. These data are generally similar to those obtained from a similar investigation of a West German sample (Spengler, 1975, 1977). The data from a smaller sample ($N = 47$) of women collected at the same time are described briefly.

The term *sadomasochism* (S/M) is usually construed to refer to an association between sexual arousal and physical and/or psychological pain (Haeberle, 1978; Katchadourian & Lunde, 1972/1975; Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965; McCary, 1967/1973).¹ The physical pain is caused by behaviors which range from pinches, slaps, and bites to behaviors that may produce lesions or draw blood. The psychological pain encompasses feelings of helplessness, subservience, humiliation, and degradation. The psychological pain is brought about by verbal abuse.

¹The problems of defining sadomasochism precisely are discussed by Moser (1979). They include the facts that (a) the pain experience itself is altered during sexual arousal, (b) not all pain is arousing to avowed sadomasochists, and (c) some S/M experiences (e.g., restraint) are not painful.

Charles Moser, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Sexology at the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, San Francisco. Eugene E. Levitt, PhD, is Professor of Clinical Psychology in the School of Medicine, Indiana University, Indianapolis.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Charles Moser, PhD, Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, 1523 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.

bondage, and "being forced" to do various acts. The range of behaviors and the paucity of previous research led us to decide on self-definition as an S/M participant as the least biased criterion for inclusion in the study.

Behaviors which appear to have some S/M characteristics occur in preliterate societies as well as among infra-human animals (Ford & Beach, 1952; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). They appear transhistorically in complex societies from Ancient Egypt (Bloch, 1935; Ellis, 1903/1936) to the present, and in Indian (Kokkoka, 1150/1965; Malla, 1500/1964; Vatsyayana, 450/1964), Oriental (Wedek, 1962), and Arab (Eulenberg, 1934, cited in Ellis, 1936) cultures. Unambiguous case examples of S/M have been reported in European literature since the late 15th century, and various S/M behaviors and fantasies are relatively common in contemporary civilizations (Hamilton, 1929; Hariton, 1972; Hunt, 1974; Kinsey et al., 1953; Sue, 1979).

General population surveys have not adequately established the proportion of the general population that identify S/M as part of their sexual pattern. Additionally, it is not clear if any specific behaviors can be classified as S/M unambiguously. Nevertheless, several studies suggest that S/M behavior in the United States is not rare and possibly common.

Hamilton (1929) interviewed 100 married men and 100 married women, 55 of whom were couples. He found 51% of the men and 32% of the women remember a time when they derived "pleasant thrills" from inflicting pain on either animals or humans, with 33% of the men and 19% of the women still reporting some trace of this tendency. He also found 28% of the men and 29% of the women remember a period of time when they derived "pleasant thrills" from pain being inflicted on them by other persons, with 20% of the men and 27% of the women still reporting some trace of this tendency.

Kinsey et al. (1953) found that 24% of the men and 12% of the women had at least some erotic response to sadomasochistic stories, and 50% of the men and 54% of the women had at least some erotic response to being bitten.

Hariton (1972) examined the fantasies during marital coitus of 141 married suburban women. She found that various submissive fantasies had incidences ranging from 19% to 49%, and these fantasies frequently recurred in 2% to 14% of the women, depending on the fantasy.

Stein (1974) studied (by surreptitious observation) men who patronized call girls. She observed 1,242 men with 64 call girls and categorized these men into nine types based on the apparent goal of the interaction. The "slave" category accounted for 13% of her sample. It is important to note that none of the call girls was a professional dominant, nor did they advertise this service.

Hunt (1974) did a questionnaire survey of sexual behavior involving 2,026 respondents in 26 cities. He found 4.8% of the men and 2.1% of the women had obtained sexual pleasure from inflicting pain, and 2.5% of the men and 4.6% of the women had obtained sexual pleasure from receiving pain. Of these individuals, approximately 60% to 70% from each category reported obtaining sexual pleasure in that way in the last year.

Playboy (1976) contracted an independent research organization to survey 3,700 randomly selected college students from 20 colleges. They found 2% of the sample had tried and liked inflicting or receiving pain during sex and another 4% would like to try it. Another 3% of the sample had tried and liked bondage and/or master-slave role-playing. Of the total sample, approximately 12% of the women and 18% of the men indicated a willingness to try either or both of these behaviors. Also 5% of the men and 8% of the women reported sexual fantasies of infliction and/or receipt of pain.

Since the definition of S/M is not exact, speculation concerning the true incidence of S/M in the population is difficult. Nevertheless, using the lowest estimates and extrapolating from the studies reviewed above, it is clear that millions of people in the United States are involved in behaviors that most would classify as S/M. The large number of people involved and the paucity of research concerning the behavior suggests that further research is needed. The purpose of the present study is to describe a self-defined S/M sample: to ask who these people are, what do they do sexually, and how they feel about it.

There is a considerable body of clinical, theoretical, and speculative literature on sadomasochism (Levitt, 1971; Moser, 1979). However, there are few studies of S/M identified individuals. The only large-scale attempt of this type was carried out by Spengler (1975, 1977) in West Germany. Gosselin and Wilson (1980) did include a substantial number of sadomasochists (133 men and 25 women) in their sample, but they were primarily concerned with comparing various aspects of personality characteristics and the fantasy content of different groups of sexual variants.

Spengler (1977) studied 245 West German men by questionnaire sent to advertisers in S/M contact magazines and to members of participating S/M clubs. Spengler's subjects were roughly evenly divided among individuals who self-defined as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. He found that his respondents did not usually confide their S/M interests to family, friends, colleagues, or even their wives. The median frequency of sadomasochistic experiences was approximately five per year, with four to five different partners. Approximately 40% of the sample was involved in a relationship with a sadomasochistic partner for over a year. Spengler found that most of his sample had found a way to positive self-acceptance; the rate of attempted suicide is less than that of homosexual men in West Germany (Dannecker & Reiche, 1974, cited in Spengler). Spengler found that most of his respondents alternated between the "passive" and "active" roles; exclusive role preference was rare. He found that 16% of his sample desired to have sex exclusively with S/M, with another 64% desiring sex predominately with S/M or equally with or without S/M. He further noted that 15% of his sample could attain orgasm only through sadomasochistic activity. Again, Spengler compared his sample to a sample of homosexuals (Dannecker & Reiche, 1974) and found that masturbation frequency did not vary significantly. He did find that the highest masturbatory frequencies occurred among those who were most active with partners. He also found that the sadomasochistic "coming out" occurred later than the average homosexual "coming out."

Our purpose was to investigate sadomasochism further by developing and studying a U.S. sample using a variation of Spengler's sampling tactics. Note that we collected data before Spengler's work was known to us. Although the similarity between questionnaires and sampling strategy are remarkable, it is not sound to compare results of two different surveys of different populations from different cultures statistically. Nevertheless, the similarity of the results is so striking that we believe that their comparison is worth further exploration.

Method

Respondents

The respondents were 178 men and 47 women, including 71 men and 23 women who attended a meeting of the Eulenspiegel Society in New York City and 18 men and 11 women who attended a meeting of the Society of Janus in San Francisco, both S/M support groups. Addi-

tionally, one man and six women found out about the study and requested to participate. These 90 men and 40 women all responded affirmatively to the question, "Do you define at least part of your sexuality as S/M?"

Another 88 men and 7 women completed a survey form printed in the *S/M Express*, an S/M-oriented magazine. These respondents were not asked the self-definition question, but the circulation of the magazine is so restricted that there is little chance that it would ever find its way into the hands of persons other than those with an S/M orientation.

Our male subsample turned out to be demographically similar to Spengler's (1977). We found a mean age of 38.2 years and a median age of 36, compared to Spengler's median in the 31-40 age bracket and approximate mean of 39 years. Both samples were better educated than the general population—70.2% of our sample were college graduates; another 24.7% had attended college. Spengler found 25% had completed college and another 15% had attended. The yearly income levels were also higher than the general population—33.3% of our subjects earned at least \$25,000 per year and another 33.1% earned between \$15,000 and \$25,000—compared with 54% of Spengler's sample who earned over 1,500 Deutsche Marks per year, a comparable amount.

The mean age of the female subsample was 32.0, with 38.3% having graduated from college and 44.7% having attended college. Only 8.8% of the female subsample earned more than \$25,000, with another 13.3% earning between \$15,000 and \$25,000.

Approximately 95% of our sample was white. Although 43% of the men did not indicate a religious preference, 25% indicated they were Protestant, 15% Catholic, and 12% Jewish. Similarly, 62% of the women did not indicate a religious preference, with 11% Protestant, 11% Catholic, and 6% Jewish. Only 11% of the men and 9% of the women reported attending church as often as once a week, and 52% of the men and 62% of the women indicated that they never attended. Spengler (1977) did not report on either of these factors, but it may be assumed that his sample was largely Caucasian.

Instrument

The instrument² used was created specifically for this study. It contains 57 major items as multiple choice, one word fill-in, or checklist

²Copies of the instrument can be obtained from the senior author.

questions. These include demographics (11 items), sexual identity or behavior (16 items), attitudes and responses to the S/M behavior (7 items), and the respondent's attitudes concerning S/M in general (4 items). There were 19 items that are not reported here, including one item which was ignored by most respondents and a psychological functioning inventory.³ The survey form took between 10 and 30 minutes to complete, with most respondents taking approximately 15 minutes. The data were collected during the calendar year 1978.

Procedure

The *S/M Express* reprinted the survey in its December 1977 issue. *S/M Express* is a tabloid-type newsprint magazine containing explicit photographs, drawings, articles, stories, and advertisements which depict, by the magazine's own admission, sadomasochistic activities. The publisher of *S/M Express* claims a circulation of 20,000, so a response rate of 88 persons is approximately .5%. Although this appears quite small, no other study using a mail-in survey preprinted in an explicit magazine could be found to use in comparison. The editor of *S/M Express* included a short note which indicated that he knew the senior researcher, felt that it was a worthwhile study, and encouraged readers to complete and return the survey.

The surveys handed out at the meeting of S/M support groups were preceded by a short talk by the senior author in which it was indicated that the results would comprise his doctoral dissertation and that the purpose was to describe a self-defined S/M sample. At that time people were asked the self-definition question, "Do you define at least part of your sexuality as S/M?" Only those responding positively were included in the study. Some potential respondents asked about the meaning of the term S/M. It was explained only that S/M was another term for sadomasochism and that the potential subject's own definition was the important determinant. All the individuals at the Society of Janus meeting and approximately 85% of the individuals at the Eulenspiegel meeting completed the survey.

³The same psychological functioning inventory used by Weinberg and Williams (1975) was implanted in the present instrument. The results indicated that S/M identified individuals functioned as well as Weinberg and Williams' sample and the control group. Problems with comparing slightly different versions of the inventory, size of the sample, and inability to match subjects on all demographic criteria make statistical analysis inappropriate.

Results

Males

Subjects located themselves on each of two continua, based on how they thought of themselves rather than on behavior. The classical 7-point continuum of heterosexual-homosexual orientation (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948)⁴ and an analogous 7-point continuum of dominance-submission were used. The present sample was largely heterosexual, with 84.8% indicating they were exclusively or predominantly heterosexual (Kinsey 0s, 1s, and 2s), whereas 12.9% indicated they were exclusively or predominantly homosexual (Kinsey 4s, 5s, and 6s). Only 2.2% of the sample responded that they were equally homosexual and heterosexual (Kinsey 3s), and a total of 7.8% of the sample indicated that they thought of themselves as having significant homosexual and heterosexual components (Kinsey 2s, 3s, and 4s).

The dominance-submission continuum (0 = *exclusively dominant*, 6 = *exclusively submissive*) was more evenly balanced between the dominance and submission poles. Of the sample, 43.6% indicated they were exclusively or predominantly dominant (0s, 1s, and 2s), and 42.5% were exclusively or predominantly submissive (4s, 5s, and 6s). There were 44.2% (2s, 3s, and 4s) of the sample that indicated that they had significant components of both dominance and submission in their self-definition. Only 8.6% indicated that they were exclusively dominant, and 7.5% indicated they were exclusively submissive. The indication is that our sample tended to be "switchable," interested in both dominant and submissive roles. (The term "switchable" is commonly used in the S/M support groups to define those interested in both dominant and submissive roles; other synonymous terms include "dual" and "middle.")

The expression "coming-out" has the same significance in the S/M milieu as among homosexuals. It denotes the entire process of recognizing the S/M inclination and adoption of an S/M-oriented identity. This psychosocial-ideational activity is distinguished from the first S/M experience, as it is for homosexuals. Both the first experience and the "coming-out" seem to be phenomena of adult life (Table 1). However, "coming-out" may also occur during adolescence: 26% of the sample reported a first S/M experience by age 16, and 10% indicated that they came out between the ages of 11 and 16.

On the average, first experience occurred at age 23 and "coming-out" at age 26 (Table 1). This difference is statistically

⁴In the Kinsey scale 0 is exclusively heterosexual, 6 is exclusively homosexual, and 3 is equally homosexual and heterosexual.

Table 1

The Onset of Sadomasochism

Age	West German ^a sample	Present sample	
	"First awareness"	"First experience"	"Coming out"
10 or younger	7%	12%	4%
11-12	10	4	6
14-16	25	10	4
17-19	15	9	12
20-24	20	22	20
25-29	12	22	22
30 and older	11	21	32
Estimated overall mean	20.3	22.9	25.9
<i>N</i>	237	178	178

Note. Chi-squares indicate that differences among all three categorizations ("first awareness," "first experience," and "coming out") are significant at the 1% level or beyond. The chi-square (6, $N = 415$) for West German "awareness" versus the present study's "first experience" is 35.74, $p < .001$. The chi-square (6, $N = 415$) for West German "awareness" versus the present study's "coming out" is 61.58, $p < .001$. The chi-square (6, $N = 356$) for the present study's "first experience" versus the present study's "coming out" is 17.77, $p < .01$.

^aWest German data from Spengler (1977).

significant. Nevertheless, first experience preceded coming-out for only 36% of the sample, and for 26% coming-out preceded first experience. For the remainder, the two circumstances occurred within the same year.

Also listed in Table 1 are some similar data collected by Spengler (1977). An estimated mean age at "first awareness" of S/M tendency is approximately 20 years. Spengler's "first awareness" is not comparable to first experience in our sample nor is it the same as "coming-out." Regardless, age at first awareness in the Spengler sample is significantly earlier than either age at first experience or age at "coming-out" in our sample. These three criteria together may provide a more complete measure of the "coming out" process.

It was hoped that describing the respondents' behavior would yield information helpful in constructing a precise definition. We attempted to operationalize a definition of S/M by inquiring about participation in sexual behaviors falling into three categories: specific S/M behaviors, S/M role-playing behaviors, and sexual behaviors not specifically S/M. Percentages reporting having tried and enjoyed each behavior are shown on Table 2. The behaviors were listed on the survey form, with room to indicate behaviors not on the list. No new behaviors were reported.

Table 2
Percentage of Total Sample Participating in Various Sexual Behaviors

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Tried</u>	<u>Tried and Enjoyed^a</u>
Homosexual acts ^b	43.5	26.0
Group sex	40.1	29.4
Swinging (mate swapping)	22.0	17.5
Cross dressing	37.3	29.4
Fetish behavior	60.4	51.4
Incest	6.2	5.1
Bestiality	9.6	4.5
Burns	17.5	8.5
Humiliation	67.2	55.9
Branding	10.1	7.3
Tattoos	6.8	5.1
Enemas	42.3	29.9
Dildoes	56.5	48.0
Cock bindings	46.3	35.6
Leather	49.2	42.4
Mask	27.6	20.3
Piercing	14.7	11.3
Pins	18.1	13.6
Bondage	77.4	65.0
Boxing	6.2	5.1
Hot wax	37.3	24.3
Ice	41.3	26.6
Spanking	81.9	66.1
Whipping	65.0	49.7
Wrestling	28.2	22.0
Scat (coprophilia)	12.5	8.5
Water sports (urolangia)	44.6	33.3
Chains	52.6	40.7
Rubber	30.5	19.8
Hood	27.1	19.8
Biting	40.1	31.6
Face slapping	39.5	30.5
Kissing ass	58.2	48.0
Gag	49.2	36.2
Rope	64.9	54.2
Handcuffs	54.2	44.6
Blindfold	53.1	42.4
<u>Role Playing</u>		
Teacher/student	32.2	25.4
Guardian/child	19.8	16.4
House servant	30.5	25.4
Master/slave (mental trip)	68.3	57.6
Master/slave (physical trip)	60.5	52.0
Master/slave (combination)	46.3	38.4

^aThose who reported not enjoying the behavior might have either disliked the behavior or felt it was a neutral experience; we did not distinguish.

^bAlmost entirely oral-genital behaviors.

Among the specific S/M behaviors, the most common were flagellation (spanking and whipping) and bondage (bondage, rope, chains, handcuffs, and gags). Such behaviors constitute the essence of the phenomenon known colloquially as "bondage and discipline." Percentages of the sample ranging from about half to more than 80% report having engaged in these S/M behaviors.

Some behaviors causing pain (ice, hot wax, biting, and face slapping), but relatively safe, are fairly common, reported by 37.3% to 41.3% of the sample. Another group of painful behaviors (burns, branding, tattoos, piercing, pins),⁵ which are relatively more dangerous (i.e., more likely to cause medical problems) have been tried considerably less often, reported by 6.8% to 18.1% of the sample.

The term "humiliation" was deliberately left broad and unspecified. The high percentage of the sample reporting such behavior serves to illustrate that psychological pain is as much a part of S/M as physical pain. This is further illustrated by the data on S/M role-playing. These "scenes" are deliberately scripted fantasy activities in which one partner plays a role of a dominant person (teacher, guardian, master) relative to the other partner who plays the submissive role (student, child, slave). The relationship essence of the scene provides a context for the occurrence of various specific S/M behaviors such as whipping, spanking, bondage, humiliation, etc. A majority of our sample had engaged in some sort of master-slave scene. Teacher-student and guardian-child scenes are relatively less common.

A number of true-false belief and attitude statements were included in the survey to understand the S/M-identified individual better. A few members of the sample declined to respond; the percentages responding "true" to the statements in Table 3 are based on *ns* ranging from 164 to 177.

About 95% of the sample found S/M activities as satisfying or more satisfying than "straight" sex, with 30% reporting that S/M activity was essential to a gratifying sexual experience. More than 85% believed that no one could guess their S/M inclinations from their day-to-day interactions, suggesting that the orientation is restricted to private, sexual behavior.

Between 5% and 6% of the sample seemed distressed by their involvement in S/M activities, as evidenced by their response to the

⁵The correlation between pins and piercing is .97; between burns and branding, .93. These coefficients indicate that the correlated behaviors were very probably interpreted as synonymous by most of the respondents.

Table 3

Beliefs and Attitudes: Percentage of the Sample Endorsing Various Statements

	<u>% endorsing</u>
I wish I were not into S/M.	5.8
I have been a patient in a psychiatric hospital.	5.6
S/M may best be defined as a mental illness.	5.1
There have been times when I felt as though I was going to have a nervous breakdown.	32.2
I have sought help from a therapist regarding my S/M desires.	16.1
S/M sex is more satisfying than straight sex.	58.5
S/M sex is as satisfying as straight sex.	36.8
I need to be involved in an S/M scene to have a satisfactory sexual response.	30.2
There is a reasonable danger that S/M play will escalate to a truly dangerous extent.	29.9
From my day-to-day interactions, no one would guess my S/M orientation.	85.6
As a child, I remember getting erotic enjoyment out of being punished.	18.6

statement, "I wish I were not into S/M." Another 5% to 6% admitted to having been a patient in a psychiatric hospital, although not necessarily for reasons related to their S/M orientation. Approximately the same proportion of the sample felt that S/M is, in fact, a form of mental aberration, and more than 16% had consulted a professional person about their S/M inclinations.

Females

Spengler (1977) and Lee (1979) both had difficulty obtaining a female sample from an S/M population and concluded that few women are involved in the subculture if not the activity itself. Spengler believes that women involved in S/M activity do so only at the request of the male partner or for monetary reasons. Also, lesbian spokeswomen have stated, "S/M is a male perversion. There are no lesbians into S/M" (cited in Lee, 1979, *Toronto Gaydays*, August 1978).

Despite these beliefs, we found evidence of a large number of women in the S/M subculture. The present study included 47 women, and several S/M organizations include substantial numbers of women. Califia (1979) reported that there are 200 members of a lesbian S/M club, SAMOIS, which published an anthology of lesbian S/M writings, *Coming to Power* (SAMOIS, 1981). There are S/M social groups which cater to either dominant men and submissive women or dominant women and submissive men. At social functions for these groups, members are usually required to attend with an opposite-sexed in-

dividual. Although there may be more men than women who desire to attend these functions, large numbers of women do attend. Fifty women would not be unusual at some events, and they are not the same 50 at each event. Therefore, we believe both that women are involved in the S/M subculture and are clearly involved in S/M activities. Additionally, Weinberg, Williams, and Moser (1984) did not have much difficulty finding women to interview for their study. Thus S/M is a sexual behavior like homosexuality where a significant percentage of women are practitioners, rather than a behavior like fetishism where women involved in the behavior are quite rare.

Our female subsample is not reported on in detail because of its small size and difficulty in comparing it to any other sample of women involved in variant sexual behavior. Nevertheless, these women tended to be more inclined to bisexuality than the men and to consider themselves more submissive than the men. They appear to be somewhat more experimental than the men, experiencing more different behaviors, both S/M and other sexual behaviors. The female subsample "came out" and engaged in their first S/M behavior at the same approximate ages as the males. The response to the 11 true-false items were essentially identical to the male subsample, except the women were more likely to feel as if they were having a nervous breakdown at times (60.0% to 32.2%), less likely to need S/M behavior to have a satisfactory sexual response (8.9% to 30.2%), and more likely to believe their interest in S/M could be guessed from their day-to-day interactions (34.1% to 14.4%).

Discussion

In any study on sexual behavior, the veracity of the responses must be questioned. Studies of behaviors with a negative stereotype (e.g., S/M) would be even more likely to include responses that are falsified in some way: The respondent might either try to shock the researcher or minimize the severity of the behavior. We cannot claim that the present study is totally devoid of such bias, but several factors suggest that any distortion is minimal. First, the senior author had worked in the S/M community for several years prior to data collection; thus he was well known to many of the respondents. The S/M organizations actively supported the research project both verbally and by providing time during their meetings for distribution and completion of the instrument. The instrument was reviewed by several people active in the S/M community to ensure that the wording would not be offensive and thus reduce negative reactions to the instrument.

And lastly, several respondents indicated either verbally or in writing that they were pleased with the instrument and that they were happy that the project was undertaken. All these factors combined suggest that any intentional falsification was probably minor.

The respondents in both our sample and Spengler's (1977) sample were well educated and affluent, suggesting the possibility that adoption of an S/M identity may somehow be related to these characteristics. Nevertheless, other explanations are more plausible. The sampling strategy could have skewed the sample. The better educated individuals (who are more likely to be affluent) may be more willing to participate in scientific research, more likely to join an S/M support group, or simply more likely to define their sexuality as S/M.

The data indicate that the polarities of S/M are less attractive to sadomasochists than variation between the two poles. Only 16.1% of our sample reported that they were exclusively either dominant or submissive, whereas more than 44.2% were markedly "switchable." Spengler's West German sample was more fixed in its preferences, though still quite "versatile," suggesting that efforts to study dominants compared to submissives may be futile.

Most of our respondents did not engage in an S/M activity, nor realize this inclination, until a relatively late age. This might suggest that the inhibitions surrounding S/M are more durable and may take longer to break down. Another possible explanation is that in the developmental process, the realization of an S/M sexual preference usually occurs after determination of the individual's gender identity and sexual orientation.

Our subjects appeared to be interested in exploring different sexual behaviors and have attempted a wide range of both S/M and other sexual behaviors. For example, compared to general population estimates (Duckworth & Levitt, 1985), substantially greater percentages of the present sample have engaged in, and enjoyed, group sex and swinging. The present sample also appeared to be more interested in variety than Spengler's German sample, though both samples seemed to be sexually adventurous. Our data do not enable us to determine if the sadomasochistic orientation itself is conducive to a broad range of sexual behaviors or if by violating one sexual taboo it becomes easier to break others.

Spengler (1977) also inquired about behaviors, but much more narrowly. Of the nine behaviors which are roughly comparable across samples, six occurred significantly more frequently in our sample than

in Spengler's: pins (18% vs. 6%), piercing (15% vs. 6%), rubber (30% vs. 12%), cross dressing (37% vs. 14%), urolagnia (45% vs. 10%), coprophilia (13% vs. 5%). Those which did not differ were also the most common in both samples: whipping, bondage, and leather fetishism (see Table 2).

We found no single behavior that all S/M people found erotically stimulating, nor did we find that S/M was a *necessary* condition for a satisfying experience for most respondents. However, in the present sample, twice as many respondents required S/M activity to have a satisfactory sexual response compared to Spengler's (1977) sample (30.2% and 15%, respectively). From our data, sadomasochism appears to be a complex of behavioral phenomena that encompasses a wide variety of specific acts.

A preponderant majority of our subjects were well satisfied with their involvement in S/M activities. Not more than 6% reported that they were emotionally disturbed about their involvement, although another 10%, approximately, reported that they had sought professional consultation about S/M inclinations. The difference in percentages suggests that those who sought professional help were seeking reassurance and permission, although our sampling technique may have excluded those who had negative feelings about the behavior.

It is surprising to find that distress, emotional illness, help-seeking, and negative belief are relatively unrelated to each other. Three of the six correlations are statistically significant, but the largest is only .28 (the correlation between expressing regret about being S/M inclined and the view that S/M is a mental illness). Evidently, the regretful respondents are not necessarily those who consider S/M to be an illness, nor those who have been hospitalized, nor those who had sought professional assistance.

About 30% of the sample believe that ordinary, gratifying S/M activities can escalate into an unscripted event that could cause serious harm. This view clashed with the Lee's (1979) data, suggesting that the S/M subculture contains restraints that act to prevent such escalation. There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy. The most probable is that belief in the escalation hypothesis leads to the precautions that serve to prevent escalation. Belief may exist largely on a fantasy level, thereby lending a significant spice of excitement to the S/M scene without any true danger. Finally, Lee's sample was entirely homosexual; ours was largely heterosexual.

Despite some important intersample differences, the present data

and West German data show considerable similarities. Both studies support the conclusions that S/M identified individuals (a) tend to be relatively well educated and affluent; (b) tend not to identify themselves as exclusively dominant or submissive; (c) accept their interest in S/M relatively late in life; (d) engage in a variety of sexual behaviors, including those that are not S/M oriented; (e) engage in more extreme and dangerous S/M practices less often than other S/M practices; and (f) learn to accept themselves and their S/M identity without major reservations.

References

- BLOCH, I. (1935). *Strangest sex acts*. New York: Falstaff Press.
- CALIFIA, P. (1979, December 27). A secret side of lesbian sexuality. *The Advocate*, pp. 19-23.
- DANNECKER, M., & REICHE, R. (1974). *Der gewöhnliche Homosexuelle*. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- DUCKWORTH, J., & LEVITT, E. E. (1985). Personality analysis of a swinger club. *Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns*, 8, 35-45.
- ELLIS, H. (1936). *Studies in the psychology of sex*. New York: Random House. (Original work published 1903)
- EULENBERG, A. (1934). *Algolagnia* (H. Kent, Trans.). New York: New Era Press.
- FORD, C. S., & BEACH, F. A. (1952). *Patterns of sexual behavior*. New York: Harper.
- GOSSELIN, C., & WILSON, G. (1980). *Sexual variations: Fetishism, sadomasochism and transvestism*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- HAEBERLE, E. (1978). *The sex atlas*. New York: Seabury Press.
- HAMILTON, G. V. (1929). *A research in marriage*. New York: Boni.
- HARITON, E. (1972). *Women's fantasies during sexual intercourse with their husbands: A normative study with tests of personality and theoretical models*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, City University of New York. (University Microfilms No. 73-2839)
- HUNT, M. (1974). *Sexual behavior in the 1970s*. Chicago: Playboy Press.
- KATCHADOURIAN, H., & LUNDE, D. (1975). *Fundamentals of human sexuality* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (Original work published 1972)
- KINSEY, A. C., POMEROY, W. B., & MARTIN, C. E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- KINSEY, A. C., POMEROY, W. B., MARTIN, C. E., & GEBHARD, P. H. (1953). *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- KOKKOKA. (1965). *The koka shastra* (A. Comfort, Trans.). New York: Stein and Day. (Original work published ca. 1150 A.D.)
- KRAFFT-EBING, R. VON. (1965). *Psychopathia sexualis* (F. S. Klaf, Trans.). New York: Bell. (Original work published 1886)
- LEE, J. (1979). The social organization of sexual risk. *Alternative Lifestyles*, 2, 69-100.
- LEVITT, E. E. (1971). Sadomasochism. *Sexual Behavior*, 1(6), 68-80.
- MALLA, K. (1964). *The anganga ranga* (F. Arbuthnot & R. Burton, Trans.). New York: Lancer Books. (Original work published ca. 1500 A.D.)
- MCCARY, J. (1973). *Human sexuality* (2nd ed.). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold. (Original work published 1967)

- MOSER, C. A. (1979). *An exploratory-descriptive study of a self-defined S/M (sodomasochistic) sample*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, San Francisco, CA.
- PLAYBOY (Eds.). (1976, October). What's really happening on campus. *Playboy*, pp. 128-131, 160-164, 169.
- SAMOIS (Eds.). (1981). *Coming to power*. Palo Alto, CA: Up Press.
- SPENGLER, A. (1975, August). *Sadomasochists and their subculture: Results of an empirical study*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research, Hamburg, Germany.
- SPENGLER, A. (1977). Manifest sadomasochism of males: Results of an empirical study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 6, 441-456.
- STEIN, M. (1975). *Lovers, friends, and slaves*. New York: Berkeley Publishing.
- SUE, D. (1979). Erotic fantasies of college students during coitus. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 15, 299-305.
- VATSYAYANA. (1964). *Kama sutra*. New York: Lancer Books. (Original work published ca. 450 A.D.)
- WEDECK, H. (1962). *Dictionary of aphrodisiacs*. London: Peter Owen.
- WEINBERG, M., & WILLIAMS, C. (1975). *Male homosexuals*. New York: Penguin Books.
- WEINBERG, M., WILLIAMS, C., & MOSER, C. (1984). The social constituents of sadomasochism. *Social Problems*, 31, 379-389.

Accepted for publication September 24, 1985

14TH ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
CANADIAN SEX RESEARCH FORUM
September 13 & 14, 1987
London, Ontario

Featured Speaker: John Bancroft

Submissions are invited on topics related to all aspects of human sexuality. All perspectives, clinical, educational, and research, are welcome. Submissions will be reviewed by the program committee. Contributions will be considered within the following categories: a 15-minute presentation; a 30-minute presentation; a 60-minute panel presentation; a 3-hour workshop/symposium. The deadline for submission is May 31, 1987. All participants must register for the meeting; however, presenters will be given the opportunity to register at a reduced rate.

Please submit the following: title of presentation; estimated time required for presentation; four copies of an abstract of 500-1,000 words; name, degrees, and current positions of all presenters; address and phone number of principal author. For further information, please contact Dr. R. W. D. Stevenson, Executive Director, Canadian Sex Research Forum, Sexual Medicine Unit, Shaughnessy Hospital, 4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6H 3N1. Phone: (604) 875-2027.