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Social Construction of Sadomasochism and Fetishism

Sadomasochism and Fetishism are two elements of a category of sexual behaviors that are classified as paraphilia. These behaviors have been pathologized by institutions of majority society, but are embraced by a healthy subculture composed of individuals who practice these behaviors in the context of functional consensual relationships. These behaviors form the basis of alternative sexual identities. These alternative sexual identities are derived from attributes of mainstream sexuality and reflect other elements of society. The behaviors and identities do not exist as merely personal attributes or deviations; they exist in a social context and have developed their own culture. Sadomasochism and fetishism are social constructs.

What is sexuality? From where does sexual desire emerge, and what controls the form that sexuality takes? Various fields offer various explanations, often coinciding with a universe that is centered on their own discipline. As such, there are biological, psychological, and social explanations for sexual behaviors. In Western culture, sexuality is a relatively new concept. Some form of sexuality or another has existed for the span of human history, but it has gone unacknowledged and uninvestigated until recently. Gay rights and gay liberationist movements have brought non-normative sexuality to the consciousness of public Western culture, often forcefully. Such a conscious acknowledgement of non-normative sexuality is resisted, with

society only desiring to reaffirm the heteronormativity of the patriarchal structure which has become comfortable and safe. There is a history in Western culture of not embracing sexualities that do not result in procreation. Such attitudes have affected all homosexual sexual acts and acts determined to be sodomy conducted by heterosexuals. In American culture, the desire to maintain the population after colonization of the United States created a pro-procreation atmosphere, deterring any sexual activities that put energy of the libido toward anything other than the production of children. In the nineteenth century in the United States, several states enacted legal sanctions against men for masturbation, citing it as a cause of moral degeneration and insanity (Aggrawal 4). Bringing sexuality into the sphere of public discourse has exposed a wide array of sexual behaviors that do not correspond to the traditional views of sexuality. It isn't just homosexuality that has been brought into the light, but other deviations as well. These deviations include people having sex for pleasure, women initiating sexual activity, multiple partners beyond the dyad, men masturbating in women's lingerie and a diverse assortment of other alternative eroticisms and gendered transgressions. Normative sexuality is by far no longer normal.

Sexuality is social. While there may be biological drives for humans to procreate, there is a more essential need to establish communities, specifically to establish small intimate social units. Steven Seidman states "Individuals and groups give meaning to bodily sensations and feelings and make erotic acts into sexual identities" (Seidman 3). One of the key components of any social group or culture is a shared meaning. Meanings are created between people. Whether in language, or in actions, that meaning is conveyed through symbols. As such, sexuality has to be more than a tool for reproduction; it must be a social structure through which intimacy is created and individuals can identify emotions that they have been conditioned to expect.

Forensic and Medico-legal Aspects of Sexual Crimes and Unusual Sexual Practices
contains a list of 547 sexual deviances (Aggrawal 369-382). This list classifies all forms of
sexual activity and sexual attraction that are not related to penile-vaginal intercourse, or penile-
anal intercourse for gay men, into special categories of paraphilia. Paraphilia is not a negative
term in its etymology, being derived from the Greek language, and having a meaning of "parallel
to love," but it has become almost a pejorative term, being seen as something that is associated
with a psychological illness, or being associated with some type of sexual impurity (Agnew 148).
This book, along with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* classifies
deviant sexualities, or perversions into categories, which in turn create pathological conditions
(American Psychiatric Association 535). These examples represent one of the ways in which
society creates sexualities. By classifying them, they come into existence and therefore must be
compared and gauged based on the accepted norms of the society in which they exist. Clinical
institutions, such as the American Psychiatric Association (APA), and legal institutions, such as
the body of laws created by governments of sovereign states, seek to normalize behaviors that do
not match their template of behaviors that are considered to be normal.

Two categories of deviant sexualities that have reached some level of prevalence in
popular culture in the Western world are sadomasochism and fetishism. The APA splits
sadomasochism into separate classifications of sadism and masochism for diagnostic purposes,
further classifying the behavior. The APA assigns the numbers 302.83, 302.84 and 302.81 to
sadism, masochism and fetishism, respectively (American Psychiatric Association 563-571).
These numbers represent classifications in the multi-axial diagnostic system utilized by
psychologists to identify the level of distress that a mental illness is likely to cause for their
patient (American Psychiatric Association 27). Most practitioners of sadomasochism and

fetishism do not report any distress as a result of their sexual activities (Agnew 152). I will focus on sadomasochism and fetishism because of their shared elements, how well they represent traits common to most paraphilia (Gebhard 71), and their social prevalence and resulting availability of data. It is not my intention to render invalid or anti-social any paraphilia or other sexuality by exclusion.

What is sadomasochism? Some researchers in the field of sexology state that it is easier to define what sadomasochism is not, than to define what constitutes sadomasochism (Moser and Kleinplatz 4). There are however some basic criteria that have been determined in the social sciences to give consensus on the topic and make it intelligible as a category of identity. The basic criteria are the appearance of dominance and submission, role playing, consensual activity, shared definition/meaning of the experience, and a sexual context. Moser and Kleinplatz note that not all five criteria appear in all circumstances of sadomasochistic relationships. The most important factors were determined to be the dominance and submission and the consensually of the activity (Moser and Kleinplatz 4). The component that is most expendable on the list is the involvement of a sexual context, as sadomasochism does not always have to be directly sexual (Newmahr 317). While most sadomasochistic experiences are sexual and lead to sexual satisfaction, it is not uncommon for the experience to not end in orgasm (Ernutf and Innala 633). Sadomasochistic behaviors often involve elements of pain, such as flogging, paddling and punching or beating (Newmahr 313-314). Another common element is bondage, which involves using rope, metal restraints, or other materials to bind the masochist. The levels of restriction to movement vary depending upon the interests of those involved (Ernutf and Innala 648). It is the addition of the bondage component that has resulted in sadomasochism being frequently referred to by the acronym BDSM, indicating Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism and

Masochism (Weiss 104). The concept of consensual power exchange is central to the functioning

of the sadomasochistic relationship. Role playing is also a common component, but is not

necessarily required (Ernutf and Innala 633). There are clinical definitions and social science

definitions for what constitutes sadomasochism, but only the individual participants can

determine whether or not to accept the labels of sadist and masochist or to integrate those labels

into their identity.

What is fetishism? Fetishism is a less complicated category of behavior than

sadomasochism in terms of definition, while also containing more intricacies and contradictory

elements. In the most straight-forward definitions, without the complications of sadomasochistic

elements, fetishism matches its clinical definition. Fetishism is a sexual arousal and often sexual

interaction with a non-living object (Lowenstein 137-139). Gebhard separates fetishes into two

categories. The first category is that of media fetish, in which an individual is attracted and

becomes aroused by a material, or a certain texture or attribute of a material. This is

demonstrated through leather, rubber, latex and other similar fetishes. The second classification

is a form fetish. Form fetishes are for certain types of object forms, the most common of which is

the shoe fetish (Gebhard 72). Fetishism becomes polluted as a term when connected to a formal

name for a sexual activity which is in itself contradictory. One such example is the paraphilia

crush fetish. It is not technically a fetish as it does not result in arousal from an inanimate object

or non-sexualized object; it is instead an erotic reaction to a small object or creature being

crushed (Aggrawal 373). The paraphilia itself is not a fetish by the formal definition because the

attraction is to the action of being crushed, not to the object being crushed. One possible reason

for the promotion of crush to a fetish is the involvement of shoes, boots or other accessories for

the activity. Over time the definition of fetish has been mutated to include several paraphilias

that have been related to fetishes. Shoe fetishes exist in the space of a fetish because an attraction

exists to an object for sexual arousal. A foot fetish on the other hand exists in the order of

partialism, but because of the relationship between the foot and the shoe, they have become

linked under the heading of fetishism. This link is also maintained because many of the fetishists

who are attracted to footwear also have partialism for feet. Also, over time partialism has been

more closely defined with fetishes because they exist as an object desire that is not related to a

traditionally sexualized part of the body (Lowenstein 139). Fetishism often involves

masturbating with the object of desire, whether directly rubbing the object over the genitals, or

by stimulating the genitals by other means while looking at or rubbing the object (Epstein 81-

82). Culturally fetishism has become equivalent to paraphilia, but in the present context it will

be used only to identify desires toward objects, including partialistic desire.

Sadomasochism intersects with fetishism when certain materials (media) or objects

(forms) are used in a way that displays power or control between two people. Perhaps the

clearest intersection of fetish and sadomasochism noted in research is the 'leather' community.

'Leather' is more often associated with a particular lifestyle which embraces sadomasochism,

than with a fetish for leather (T. S. Weinberg, Sadomasochism and the Social Sciences 28).

Leather is associated with dominant masculinity, and thus was treated as a fetish substance when

the sadomasochistic subculture was in its infancy. Since that time, "leather" has been used to

refer to both sadomasochism and a sexual fetish involving masculinized leather costumes (T. S.

Weinberg, Sadomasochism and the Social Sciences 21). The most notable explosion of 'leather'

was in the 1950s when homosexuals in the Mattachine Society revolted against the negative

'sissy' imagery being presented to represent homosexuals in the media by presenting a

hypermasculine leather-clad image, asserting their dominance and aggressive capability (Scott

151). Fetish items are often utilized to heighten the sadomasochistic experience, such as a dominatrix[1] wearing high heels to increase her erotic appeal while flogging or otherwise dominating her partner (Gebhard 73). In recent times, since 1998 (A.L. Enterprises 1), there has been an emergence of a combined fetish and sadomasochistic practice called enforced male chastity, which has not yet been addressed with any depth in scholarly research[2]. The practice utilizes a locking device made of steel, acrylic plastic or more recently silicon to prevent a male from masturbating or engaging in sexual activity not authorized by his partner (Lewis 338). The original intent of the devices was to deter extramarital affairs, but have become a tool for control and objectification of a partner in sadomasochistic practices (A.L. Enterprises 1). For this particular practice it is often men who are most attracted to the concept, and often become aroused at the feeling of a device being installed, even though their ability to achieve erection is often limited by the device (Fairbourne 15). This practice involves both a fetish component and a sadomasochist component as some men are attracted to the feeling of the device, as an object of fetish, while other men are attracted to the sensation of being out of control of something so intimate (Chastity UK 1). The combination of fetish factors with sadomasochism enhances the social relevance of sadomasochism because of the influence of the fetishized artifacts of material culture and the reflection changing patterns that occur in that material culture in elements used in paraphilic behaviors.

There are three primary facets of sadomasochism that make it social. The first is the defining and classifying of the behaviors by society, second is its relationship to other social structures, such as the mirroring of the gender system and the final facet is the development of subcultures. It is possible to envision these facets as strata in a sphere. The social definition of

[1] Dominatrix – a female sadist
[2] An exhaustive search of the available scope of the academic cannon revealed no results.

sadomasochism and fetishism based on their behaviors is the most external factor to the

development and is thus the most distant strata from the core. The relationship of

sadomasochism to other social structures is a middle layer that interacts with both the social

definitions of sexuality as well as the subculture of alternative sexualities. The core of the social

construction of sadomasochism and fetishism is the subcultures in which they exist; they are the

driving force behind a cohesive (but not homogeneous) culture of non-normative sexualities.

Society creates categories and classifications for all aspects of social interaction. One of

the ways in which sadomasochism is a social creation is by being defined by social institutions.

The initial social institution to make an assessment and to attempt to apply labels to alternative

sexualities was the psychiatric medical profession. Sadism in its clinical definition is described

as the sexual arousal from inflicting pain, masochism is a sexual arousal from receiving pain and

fetishism is the sexual arousal from inanimate objects (Agnew 149). These clinical definitions

are simply that, clinical. They are very rigid and specify only a single component in each

category. Individuals in sadomasochist relationships and individuals who have fetishes would

likely not agree with such monolithic definitions of their sexual identity. For example, Agnew

defines sadism and masochism separate from bondage (Agnew 149), erotic interests which for

some are inseparably linked. The development of a sadomasochist identity is not rigid or

predictable, but is instead open to interpretation by the individual (Moser and Kleinplatz 2). The

clinical definition for fetishism excludes a sexual attraction to parts of the body, limiting it only

to non-living objects. Individuals who have such an attraction, called partialism, often consider

themselves to have a fetish (Lowenstein 135). The defining characteristic of sadomasochism that

is omitted from the clinical definitions is the element of power exchange (Newmahr 316).

Traditionally power exchange was defined in sadomasochism as giving a partner the ability to

inflict pain, but in more recent times as sexuality has developed to a level where relationships could form purely based on interpersonal attraction and shared interests, erotic power exchange of sadomasochism has changed to be nearly equally about emotional and physical forms of power (Landridge and Butt, The Erotic Construction of Power Exchange 68-69). There are some individuals who participate in sadomasochist activities, but do not identify as sadomasochists, such as individuals who identify themselves as "sexual spankers". They engage in pain-exchange activities similar to sadomasochism, but do not engage in power exchange or any other aspects that would connect them to that identity (Newmahr 317). While not identifying with sadomasochism, the clinical definition would include those individuals that engage in categorically sadomasochistic behaviors.

Clinical and social institutions split on the topics of sadomasochism and fetishism with regards to sexualities in their discussion of identity. In the draft of the DSM-V, paraphilic disorders are given new criteria, requiring that the behavior causes legitimate distress to the individual, or more precisely that the desires for such behaviors are outside of the individual's self-identity (American Psychiatric Association 1). This represents an improvement in the understanding of sexuality by the psychiatric profession. To understand sexuality requires an understanding of identity. In heteronormative penile-vaginal intercourse there is the gender identity of each participant contributing to the experience and to the created meaning of the behavior in the relationship between the individuals. Individuals who are sadomasochist or have a fetish respond in a similar way. The paraphilic interest functions either within the scope of a host sexuality, whether it is homosexual, heterosexual or something else entirely, or it may exist as the only sexual identity. Whereas heteronormative sexualities utilize male and female roles to enact the script of heterosexual performance, sadomasochistic sexualities have their own script

with its own identities and roles. Sadomasochism often involves a dominant (sadist) and a submissive (masochist) partner, which may mirror gender roles, or roles from any other hierarchy of authority that is found in society, present or past (Newmahr 316). Fetish identities are less clear, and require more analysis to extrapolate. The primary roles that exist are that of the fetishist and the fetish object. In auto-erotic situations, often involving masturbation, the fetishist places him/herself in control of the fetish object, making sexual actions towards the object, such as groping, licking, kissing or rubbing the genitals against the object. As I will discuss later, this activity can sometimes be directed at the owner of the object, or the person(s) that the object symbolizes (Gebhard 74). Identity is crucial to sexuality, as it provides a mechanism for the behaviors to take on cultural meaning.

Western culture has in recent times begun to acknowledge the existence of sadomasochism, and as such define it in the scope of being knowable. References to sadomasochism have been made in television drama, television ads, movies and novels (Weiss 106). Additionally, modern life-simulation games allow for sadomasochistic and fetishist lifestyle portrayals (Linden Research 1). One of the more vivid popular culture examples of sadomasochism and fetishism was an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigator* which featured a dominatrix working at a fetish club. Numerous elements of sadomasochist culture were examined and explained by the characters. The lead character alluded to a personal interest in the topic (CBS Productions Inc.). The character's potential interest in sadomasochism is unique in that most portrayals of alternative sexualities are limited to an "Other" character, not a regular character, and the sexuality itself is portrayed as socially accepted within the context in which it is presented (Weiss 106-107). Sadomasochism has reached a level of cultural acceptance, even if it is still considered to be somewhat deviant. Fetishes by name are not commonly mentioned in

popular culture, outside of the context of a documentary (MTV Networks). Fetishes are however more pervasive throughout Western culture than sadomasochism, but the more common fetishes are not treated as a psychiatric problem and are instead allowed in society unfettered. Common fetishes that can be observed in popular culture are heterosexual shoe/foot fetish, pygophilia (buttocks partialism) and mammaphilia (breast partialism). The commonality of the heterosexual foot/shoe fetish was documented by Havelock Ellis. Ellis observed an attraction to high-heel shoes on women by men, and also the efforts of women attempting to attract men wearing shoes with visible toes (Ellis 18-20). Pygophilia appears in the setting of hip-hop music and the surrounding culture. Sir Mix-A-Lot used the vibrant lyrics of "I like big butts" and "that butt you got | make me so horny" to illustrate this cultural acceptance of having a partialism for the buttocks (Mix-a-Lot). References to the buttocks in a sexual way are common in popular music (James 91). These cultural references are undetected as being perversions of normal sexuality, even though they by definition violate the established norms for society.

The occurrence of sadomasochism and fetishism not having coherent definitions between clinical interpretations and the collective of individuals who engage in the behaviors is a sign of social activity occurring. Clinical definitions for disorders and legal descriptions of illicit activities do not change, but the definitions and meanings of paraphilias have undergone transformation and mutation to fit situations. There is adaptation of the terminology and the behaviors to fit specific social situations and to accommodate various interests not anticipated by clinicians. The interaction between the clinical and majority definitions and the definitions given within the subculture itself is an important social factor. Throughout recorded Western history there are occurrences of groups existing that were contrary to the beliefs and understandings of the majority culture. These range from the handling of Jews in Germany to the persecution of

queers at Stonewall Inn (Moser and Kleinplatz 12). Groups over time have found entrance to mainstream society, each having different levels of difficulty and success at the task. The listing of alternative sexualities in diagnostic manuals or in legal guides to sexuality indicates that the sexualities have become intelligible by mainstream society. While the behaviors and identities themselves are still viewed as deviant, society is aware of their existence and must treat them as a social entity like any other.

Sadomasochism and fetishes display that they are a component of society through the traits that they replicate from the dominant culture. A common comparison that is made is between sadomasochism and more traditional courtship rituals in Western culture is courtship rituals often involve aggressive behaviors, such as biting and scratching. Sadomasochism expands on this behavior and continues the aggression into the established relationship, and makes the aggression a central component through dominance (T. S. Weinberg, Sadomasochism in the United States 50). In emphasizing the enactment of the aggressive activities that are already found in socially accepted courting rituals sadomasochism is enhancing a component of the rituals that typically become less prominent in relationships as the relationships mature. Fetishism is related to aspects of material culture. Fetishized objects are objects that exist in material culture as items or symbols of identities that are already thought to be desirable. That trait of desirability is extended to the level of sexualization (Scott 25-26). Sadomasochism and fetishism take existing behaviors and desires in society that are already somewhat eroticized and extend them to being their own sexualities.

The individual who has possession of the fetish object has control over the fetish item, which is attached symbolically to the masculinity or femininity of its owner or perceived owner. Symbolism of characteristics of an individual's personality through material objects in society

may be a key to the formation of fetishes. Robin James describes fetishism as the expression of abject desire, somewhere between desire for the subject (the person) and the object (the objectified person). The concept of abject desire pairs a judgment of aesthetic with that of social affect (James 93). The pairing of social affect and aesthetic judgment results in the sexual practitioner objectifying a person, literally, through their garments or other associated objects related to their status and their power (James 127). Fetish items such as high heel shoes and lingerie are representative of the sex which they are most commonly associated. Their attribute of being a fetish is derived from their social meaning, which allows them to be sexualized. High heel shoes are associated with feminine females. Typically it is believed that females who consider themselves to be attractive make an effort to draw attention to their appearance through material elements such as high heel shoes, lingerie or other garments. High heel shoes also draw attention to the leg of the individual, a notable area of partialistic interest for some men (Ellis 33). As discussed previously, leather has been associated with masculinity. Articles made from leather that have a clear connection to masculinity, such as leather boots, are often fetishized by homosexual fetishists (and sadomasochists) (Scott 146-148). The attention drawn to the material elements, and ultimately to the person wearing them becomes a part of a social costume. The costume is then associated with sexuality, resulting in the development of fetish desires as a proxy for sexual desires toward the individual wearing the costume or displaying artifacts of the costume. Fetish objects are linked to individual identities or a stereotyped/prototyped image of an identity, and a therefore reflect a sexual interest similar to that in the actual individual or for the stereotype of a prototype individual.

Sadomasochism, fetishism and other paraphilias have some common social elements. The most common element found in paraphilias is an element of gender expression. This gender

expression occurs through replicating sexual hierarchies (sadomasochism), assimilating gender traits (homeovestism[3]), sexual interaction with artifacts of gender (fetishism), or through other objectification of gender (sthenolagnia[4]) (Aggrawal 369-371). Another common trait is risk taking, which occurs in sexuality similar to that of other aspects of society (Wilson 70). Risk taking has certain biological incentives, such as increased endorphin production, but is a social phenomenon similar to drug use. For some risk taking can be sexually exciting due to its relationship with the gender hierarchy and its implications of bravery, stamina or other advantageous traits. Paraphilic risk taking can be directly sexual, such as in desires to commit or be a victim of rape, or it can be completely outside the sphere of traditional sexuality, such as erotic asphyxiation (Aggrawal 359-371). Some traits are similar to those found in normative relationships, such as protection, trust and acceptance (Gebhard 78).

The social structures of gender hierarchies and the power structure of the patriarchal system provide a basis for the establishment of sadomasochist relationships. In the traditional normative application of Western patriarchal tradition, there is a power balance in each relationship and in each family. The most power and privilege is granted to the male by social tradition. This expectation of an unequal power distribution in relationships and in society generally provides the basic concepts required for relationships of dominance and submission, and also for some aspects of violence (Gebhard 77). In most sadomasochist relationships there is a partner that functions as the dominant partner, taking on the traditionally masculine roles of control; however, such a role does not necessarily have the same gender traits as the masculine role. This type of control gives structure to the relationship and provides the submissive partner a

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[3] Homeovestism is a sexual arousal linked to the wearing of the clothing that is socially appropriate for one's own gender (Aggrawal 369)

[4] Sthenolagnia is an interest in licking, rubbing, biting, massaging or touching muscles, typically of a male, in a sexual way (Aggrawal 369)

sense of stability (Lewis 271). Large amounts of data are not available for why sadomasochistic relationships are function, but the same condition exists for normative relationships utilizing dominance as well. It is likely due to the similarities of the function of dominance in both normative and sadomasochistic relationships that there is some related root cause for the relationship structure, likely a social construct (Gebhard 77).

Sadomasochism can be associated with any sexual orientation and can happen between any combinations of male, female, transsexual or androgynous persons; it is primarily a sexuality that is associated with homosexual hypermasculinity (Alison, Santtilla and Sandnabba 258). Homosexual men in Western culture find themselves disadvantaged in the social hierarchy that exists due to a perception that they are not "real" men, as they do not show a level of sexual exceptionalism to or objectification of women (Puar 665). This creates a conflict between the disadvantaged homosexual male and his heterosexual counterpart. Masculinity in Western culture involves power and competition for position on the hierarchical structure. It is not enough to simply be male; there must also be an awareness of position in the hierarchy. Homosexuality forces the male into a marginalized masculinity, which in itself does not represent a subordinated position; it does give the hegemonic masculinity more social power (Hinojosa 181-182). Through sadomasochistic practices it is possible for the male homosexual to establish dominance over another male and therefore take a position in a hierarchy. The sexual arousal to the situation would then be related to the display of the masculine gender identity. An interesting occurrence is that the masochist, or submissive male, in this type of relationship also derives sexual pleasure from being positioned in the hierarchy. Freud suggests that such pleasure may be due to internal sadist desires towards the self, resulting in sexual pleasure being derived from one's own objectification (T. S. Weinberg, Sadomasochism and the Social Sciences 18). This arousal by

objectification is consistent with social expectations that objectification be part of the sexual experience. Gebhard proposes that there this form of objectification, especially when it involves physical pain, is comparable to a sense of martyrdom, or some other release of guilt, which would be interpreted as a noble offering in the context of Western society. He also relates the entire sadomasochistic act as a form of theatrical performance that is conducted for the amusement of both partners. This act allows individuals to separate their involvement from their "real" selves, and as such enables them to take on different roles for the pleasure of their partner (Gebhard 77-78).

Sadomasochism and fetishism share certain values with majority Western culture. Perhaps those shared traits make these alternative sexualities more generally intelligible than other minority groups. Societies manage their mores, norms and values through a variety of sanctions. Alternative sexualities are not subject to formal sanctions in most countries, and most informal sanctions are presented only through negative social stigma. In this social atmosphere it is still not possible to determine how many individuals exhibit traits of alternative sexualities, but who do not directly identify with an alternative sexual identity. The stigma of alternative sexualities is not an entirely negative trait for those sexualities. The stigma and perception of deviance for some may make those sexualities more appealing or exciting. Sexuality outside of procreation has long been viewed as though it is a transgression. All forms of sexuality, including for procreation, is considered by many to be a private matter which is not appropriate for social consideration, even though the norms and values associated with sexuality are derived from socialized norms.

The behaviors involved in sadomasochism and fetishism can occur in the context of an otherwise normative set of sexual behaviors as an occasional variation, or the behaviors can be

more central to the identity of the individuals involved. The severity and frequency of alternative sexual behaviors have also been observed to fluctuate over the course of an individual's life (Gebhard 73). The level of identification with the alternative sexual identity is often representative of the level of involvement in the subculture. There is a point where the alternative sexuality becomes more than a sexual identity, and becomes a more central component of the individual's overall identity, especially when relating to an intimate partner. The individuals involved in sadomasochism that are most likely to take on their sexual identity beyond their sexuality are those who have committed themselves to a 24/7 slavery relationship. Individuals who adopt that particular lifestyle are almost constantly performing in their role, especially when interacting with each other. The partners in the relationship maintain a power hierarchy in which the dominant partner exercises decision-making authority and traditional masculine roles for the submissive partner(s) in the relationship at all times, without breaking the defined roles. While most sadomasochist relationships result in erotic power exchange only for sexually related tasks and contexts, a long-term full-time slavery relationship extends into all area of daily life, including domestic tasks and matters of finances (Dancer, Kleinplatz and Moser 82). These relationships defy the rules laid out by Gebhard and T.S. Weinberg in their discussions of the theatrical performance of sadomasochism, as the performance never ends and in essence the participants are not able to separate their fantasy from their "real" selves, because there is no distinction. Sadomasochism in this instance is more a matter of identity than a matter of behavior (Gebhard 78; T. S. Weinberg, Sadomasochism in the United States 52-53). In the case of 24/7 SM slavery relationships, the influence of the subculture overtakes the influence of the dominant culture (Stiles and Clark 160).

Sadomasochism and fetishism are the basis for a sexual subculture that has its own vocabulary, symbols, norms and traditions. Specific communities of the sadomasochist subculture attend parties and other social events to explore their sexuality and socialize with other individuals with similar interests. Some communities in the subculture share their interests through parties (C. Moser 20), others find friendly establishments that allow members of their community share their interests in a less formal setting (Newmahr 315). There are numerous festivals, fairs and conferences that occur throughout the year emphasizing different components of sadomasochistic or fetish culture (Folsom Street Events 1; International Mr. Leather 1). The growing popularity of the Internet has provided a medium to facilitate interaction and community-building between individuals with similar sexual interests (Rosenmann and Safir 71; Newmahr 316). The anonymity of the Internet has provided some individuals with an ability to express their sexuality more openly than they would be able to in a more restrictive social setting. This change of expression is due to the hostility of the host culture to members of the subculture. The sadomasochistic and fetish subcultures have a large online presence through discussion boards, online dating sites and other social networking mediums. In having a large Internet presence the subculture has been able to reach individuals that identify with the subculture, but that otherwise would have had no connection to the community. There is also an added benefit of a more developed system for spreading information about traditions and other pieces of culture that may otherwise have been limited to a small group (Rosenmann and Safir 73).

The subculture facilitates the learning of cultural norms and a passing of collective knowledge to involved individuals. Practicing sadomasochism is not unlike practicing an athletic skill or art form, it requires a specific set of skills and some practice for it to be optimally

fulfilling for all involved (Newmahr 322). The most important value that is passed in the

subculture is the value of consensually. A majority of the sadomasochist subculture does not

consider an activity to be sadomasochism if it is not consensual, or if the sadist knowingly

violates the limits of the masochist. To act improperly regarding the consent of the "victim"

violates the rules of the subculture and can result in rejection of an individual from the culture

and a negative reputation among their peers. Other functions of the subculture include the

learning of how to communicate intentions. This ranges from the learning of how to utilize

"safe" words to end a sadomasochistic situation, to how to communicate intentions with regards

to the limitations of what the submissive partner is willing to endure. Newmahr suggests that the

learning process itself is a component of self-actualization for the participants (Newmahr 322-

323).

The subculture that exists for individuals that identify with the sadomasochist or fetishist

identity is heavily gendered. The trends in what is acceptable in the subculture are affected

somewhat by changes in the dominant culture. An example of the types of changes that can

occur can be seen in D. Travers Scott's analysis of changes in the perceptions of sneakers by gay

men in the BDSM/sadomasochist and fetish subculture. His analysis focuses on the changes in

attitudes over the period of time ranging from 1964 to 2007 regarding the association of sneakers

with or against masculinity. The beginning of the study shows a culture of gay men who were

treated as feminized characters by mass media and popular culture. This negative image inspired

a change in the dress styles of gay men, as well as a change in their sexual attitudes.

Sadomasochism and leather culture emerged more forcefully as homosexuals endeavored to be

seen as equally masculine to their heterosexual counterparts. As homosexuals gained more

acceptance the need for a hypermasculine presentation diminished (Scott 148). In the 1990s a

sneaker culture emerged which was counter to move towards a "leather culture". There was also

an associated change in attitude in general culture which made sneakers a symbol of masculine

success rather than that of a feminized masculinity (Weinberg, Williams and Calhan 20).

Fetishes are almost exclusively based on ideals of gender, and what makes a "successful" gender

presentation. As mainstream standards for masculinity changed, so did the fetishized

conceptualizations of masculinity that were held by homosexual fetish subculture (Scott 25).

Homosexual men provide a strong example for the importance of gender in sadomasochistic and

fetish subcultures, as it is an integral component of the sexual identity.

Even though sadomasochism and fetishes have mirrored traits that society appreciates

and gives great social power to, there are occurrences where society and the alternative

sexualities clash. A negative social impression has been cast on sadomasochists and fetishists

because their behaviors are often associated with criminal activities and people who are mentally

ill. This identification goes deeper than merely identifying the behaviors as making illegal non-

consensual assaults and identifying the behaviors as psychological deviations. A great majority

of social science literature written about sadomasochist and fetishist individuals is written about

individuals who display these traits who are already institutionalized for crimes, or have for

some reason have had interactions with a psychiatric professional. The individuals with

normative identities in society who exhibit these behaviors or who have these additional

identities have not been extensively studied (T. S. Weinberg, Sadomasochism and the Social

Sciences 19). Beyond the statistical and research oversights in obtaining a true sample of

individuals with an alternative sexuality, there are some paraphilias which would perhaps qualify

as antisocial behaviors. These sexualities involve non-consensual partners, or otherwise violating

the wishes of the partner. Biastophilia is a paraphilia that involves fantasies of rape, and in some

cases execution of rape for sexual pleasure (Aggrawal 371). Some other, more minor social transgressions can also be observed, which may disrupt normal social patterns. While it may be within the scope of the relationship for a 24/7 slavery couple, or a pair of bondage friends to desire to lead a submissive on a leash in public, such activities are not supported by social norms and would likely result in a negative reaction. Such activities are restricted to the sphere of the semi-public in an accepting atmosphere (C. Moser 24).

Sexual identities may be thought of as private, but they are politically engaged identities which are likely to become the subject of public discourse. Jeffrey Weeks discusses the concept of the Sexual Citizen, a being who is allowed to exist in society with sexual identity intact. In identifying sexual identity openly, whether it is normative or deviant, a person becomes a sexual citizen. The complication to this concept is that the identity must be accepted in society for true sexual citizenship. Upon declaring one's sexual citizenship, the individual takes on a group identity, associating with others of a similar identification (Weeks 35-36). Sadomasochists and fetishists who claim their citizenship expose the idea that these alternative sexualities exist, restricting the ability of society to make them socially invisible. A sexual citizen seeks to exist. Such citizenship has been denied to sadomasochists in some societies in the past, to the point of their behavior being classified as criminal. A case in the United Kingdom that is often referred to as the "Spanner case" sought to imprison sadists for the crime of intimate partner violence, and the masochists for compliance with their own abuse. In that case, sexual citizenship was denied by the officers who sought out the behavior, and the courts who ruled that consent of the victim was not enough, as it was the responsibility of the court to decide "what is acceptable in a civilized society" (Landridge 373-375). Sexualities that violate social norms are susceptible to

being removed from the private sphere by force. The result is not sexual citizenship, but an attempt to reaffirm the deviance of sexualities that do not conform to the normative standard.

Normative sexuality in itself is not immune to the perceptions of paraphilic sexual desire. John Money defined a paraphilia which he called normophilia to describe a sexual arousal to the fantasy or action of performing socially normative sexual activity (Downing 276). In defining normophilia in such a way Money placed normative sexuality and other sexualities on somewhat more equal terms. The labeling of normative behavior has not been widely accepted as a practice of theory, but it does represent an important theoretical step. Defining normative behaviors in the same context as paraphilia and giving the attraction to normative behavior a title for clinical diagnosis opens a space between sexualities for discussion of the possibility that there is not a normal sexuality.

Sadomasochism, fetishism and hundreds of other paraphilias have come into existence as alternatives to penetrative sex. For some practitioners they are merely foreplay to make the sexual experience more interesting, for others they represent an activity that goes deeper than penetrative sex. There also exist interpretations between those two extremes. Sexuality is a social construction, even in its most deviant forms. There is no accepted understanding of how or why alternative sexualities exist, but now that they have emerged they are defined by social institutions, they mirror existing social structures and they have developed a component of culture of their own through the building of specialized communities that form a subculture.

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