

Partner Selection, Power Dynamics, and Sexual Bargaining in Self-Defined BDSM Couples

Bert Cutler

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Clark Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair

Brad Sagarin, Ph.D.

Marianna Beck, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the many individuals who have shown courage in being different. They add to the richness of life and demonstrate the wonderful relationships we each can create for ourselves.

ABSTRACT

Nature of this Study:

The participants at any of the country's many SM clubs and conferences demonstrate the prevalence of quality long-term committed Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, and Sadistic & Masochistic (BDSM) relationships. This is in contrast to much of the academic and some of the BDSM (bondage & discipline, dominant & submission, and sadomasochism) lifestyle literature, which denies the likelihood of these relationships. This dissertation explores the lives and relationships of 33 individuals (consisting of 17 heterosexual couples) who defined themselves as active participants in the BDSM lifestyle. Each couple has been in a committed relationship and has practiced sadomasochistic and/or dominant and submissive behaviors as a regular part of their relationship.

The relationships are examined in general, how they met and selected each other, the power dynamics within the relationship, and the nature of sexual/SM bargaining within and outside of a BDSM context.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Dynamics of BDSM Relationships

1.1 Nature of this Study

SM has a long history of being poorly understood in Western culture. Until the last 20 years, Sadomasochism (SM) was believed by academia to be restricted almost exclusively to the male gender. Much of the literature today continues to reflect the presumption that relationships between individuals with an SM orientation are rare and non-functional. My personal observations have been that SM relationships are numerous and often highly functional. The nature of this study is to interview individuals in long term SM relationships and evaluate the dynamics of these relationships, including partner selection, power dynamics, and sexual bargaining.

1.2 Definition Of Terms

This is basic research into the nature of SM relationships. There is now a sizable SM (also known as BDSM) community that has been organizing itself since 1971, the year of the formation of the Chicago Hellfire Club and the Till Eulenspiegel Society, the first explicitly SM organizations [Gay and Heterosexual respectively] (Bienvenu, 1998). Since that time, the SM community has built up a vocabulary of terms that are meaningful within the community. This study will use the terminology of the community, when at odds with the meanings of the academic or medical terminology.

24/7: Involved in BDSM twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Full time.

Aftercare: After a scene, the bottom is often in a blissful state and needs loving attention. The community has developed the concept of Aftercare, where the partners take time together before attempting to go on with their lives. This can be as little as a few minutes of cuddling to extensive holding. Touch is usually involved. If the scene involved a cathartic experience, the aftercare may involve listening and giving assurances.

B&D: Bondage & Discipline.

BDSM: The term “BDSM” is a concatenation of the abbreviations for Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, and Sadomasochism. This is a relatively new term used by the studied community. Because the term Sadomasochism has negative loading in society, some BDSM practitioners wish to separate SM from D/s and B&D, hence the term BDSM.

Bottom: The individual who is receiving the stimulus or appears to be following orders.

D/s: Dominance and submission. Refers to the power exchange which may occur without the physical stress of SM.

Dominant: The individual who is “controlling” the Bottom. A subclass of a “top.”

Flagging: The use of symbols to signal others of their BDSM interest and roles. Some common symbols are colored handkerchiefs worn in left or right back pockets, with the colors defining specific interest (e.g. Black is heavy SM, gray is bondage, purple is piercing, etc.) The left pocket signals the top and the right the bottom. The left/right flagging is also used with arm-bands, with keys worn on the belt, and sometimes with a single nipple ring on the left or right.

Kinky: A description of BDSM activities or individuals with an SM orientation. Considered less socially loaded than “Sadomasochist.”

Leather and Leathermen: Terms frequently used by the gay male community to describe behaviors that typically include SM activities. Also referred to as “Leathersex.” Because of its ambiguous nature, “leather” will be used only when the term “BDSM” or “SM” is inappropriate due to the cultural values of the respondent.

Masochist: The individual who is receiving the stimulus. May be a lover of pain as a sexual stimulant, or may use the intensity to fly or travel to ecstatic states. A subclass of a “bottom.”

Master: A top with extensive apparent control.

Polyamory: Loving many. Polyamory is a term describing intimate and sexual relationships involving more than two individuals.

Power Exchange: An alternative term for SM or BDSM. Used to denote the consensual giving and taking of power and the responsibilities of mutual caretaking that goes with the exchange.

Sadomasochism: The original term refers to all orientations and activities studied here (all BDSM).

Safeword: A phrase, known by the couple and used (usually by the bottom) that will stop the scene. In role-playing, the bottom could shout “stop,” “ouch,”

“don’t,” etc., and the top would continue. But when the bottom utters the safeword (such as “red”) the scene will be adjusted or stopped immediately. Frequently players use the colors of traffic signals: red to stop the action, yellow to slow down or alter the action, and green to indicate that all is well.

Sadist: The individual who is giving the stimulus. A subclass of a top.

Scene: A defined period of time when a Top and Bottom engage in a BDSM session. Also known as “Play” on the West Coast and “Work” on the East Coast.

Slave: A bottom who has consented to be extensively controlled.

SM: Also written as S/M, S&M, and occasionally Sm. Sadomasochism. Consensual exchange of power where the bottom receives some form of intense stimulation from the top. Not to be confused with the Freudian or criminal detective use of the term where there are no safewords, no consent, and harm is intended.

Submissive: An individual who wants to be taken care of and to be given behavioral structure by a Dominant. A subclass of a bottom.

Switch: An individual who enjoys both Top and Bottom roles.

Tools: Implements such as floggers, whips, canes, clamps, etc. Known as toys on the West Coast.

Top: An individual who is providing the stimulus, orders, or structure.

“Top” and “Bottom”: Refer to the role preference of the individuals, where the sadist, dominant, or active partner is called the Top, while the masochist, submissive, or passive partner is called the Bottom. Individuals in this study may demonstrate any combination of sadomasochism (the exchange of pain/discomfort/intensity), domination & submission (the exchange of power/control), and active & passive roles (who initiates the activity). All roles are considered to be participating in BDSM behavior. In the gay men’s culture, the terms refer to the inserter and insertee.

Toys: Implements such as floggers, whips, canes, clamps, etc. Known as tools on the East Coast.

Vanilla: Refers to individual values or behaviors that are outside the BDSM community, straight (non-kinky) people or activities. The BDSM community members often consider their BDSM orientation to be their authentic selves, and will use the term “vanilla” to describe the part of their lives where they need to conform to the larger society’s views.

1.3 Limitations of this Study

This study was confined to interviews of heterosexual individuals in long-term SM relationships. The sample was gathered from members of a single SM organization. As a result, I did not collect data from couples who did not volunteer for the study, and I may have left out individuals who were less comfortable in their relationships. Because the individuals recruited all belonged to the same SM organization, any subcultural differences between this and other areas of the country would not show up in the study. I did not explore any differences that might occur between heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian SM relationships. This study also does not investigate differences in the transsexual and inter-sexual communities.

No attempts were made for longitudinal studies: thus, no mapping of changes in the relationships was made over time. All the data are based on self-reports, and was confirmed only by looking for congruity between the partners in separate interviews. I also did an informal check of the self-reports against my personal observations at club meetings and play parties and found no discrepancies.

Chapter Two: Review Of Literature

2.1 Academic Literature Review

In evaluating the academic literature, I find two types of writings. There is a body of writings, primarily by earlier researchers, which has described SM behaviors as paraphilia-as a pathology. This group of researchers has either discounted paraphilic relationships (Krafft-Ebing, 1886) or has described such relationships as pathological (Freud, 1938; Money, 1986). A second group of researchers has described and analyzed SM behaviors and has applied no moral judgments to the activities (Gebhard, 1969; Spangler, 1977; Karmel, 1980; Weinburg, 1995; Moser, 1996). I can find no descriptions of relationship dynamics from either group of academic researchers.

2.2 SM Community Literature Review

Evaluation of the literature written within the BDSM community shows a similar pattern to academic studies. One of the first SM community authors (Townsend, 1972) reported few long-lasting SM relationships and suggested that leathermen are best off selecting non-leathermen for primary relationships and getting their SM needs met outside that relationship. Baldwin (1993) wrote a number of articles referencing long lasting working SM relationships within the gay leather community of Los Angeles. Baldwin provides numerous anecdotes about such couples whose relationship roles and SM roles were fluid, reflecting the needs of the individuals and their circumstances. More recent SM community writers have implied

working relationships (Brame, 1993; Califia, 1993, 1994; Bean, 1994; Abernathy, 1996; Campbell, 2000) and have given considerable advice about negotiations and protocol. All of the writings from within the SM community are anecdotal in nature; no hard data on relationships could be found within this body of literature.

The lack of good reliable data on SM relationships, when coupled with observations that such relationships have been workable, sets the stage for viable studies. Several researchers (Gebhard, 1969, Weinberg & Kamel, 1995) have suggested that the SM subculture has its basis in the culture of the larger society, and as such, is worth studying to understand the larger culture. I believe that a better understanding of SM relationships will highlight issues within relationships in the larger culture.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Sample Selection

The respondents in this study are 17 heterosexual couples in self-defined BDSM relationships who engage in sadomasochistic or dominant & submissive behavior as a regular part of their relationship. With one exception, all have been in the relationship for at least one year. The duration of the relationship in question ranged from six months to 18 years, with an average of 5.5 years.

The initial respondents were all members of the Arizona Power Exchange (APEX), a Phoenix, Arizona, BDSM education, support, and fellowship organization.

This study is inclusive as to role. That is, it did not screen out on the basis of gender role (Top or Bottom). The study is exclusive as to orientation. That is, it did not include alternative gender orientations including gay, lesbian, transsexual, or intersexual individuals.

I used convenience samples. As couples were identified, I made requests to interview. The couples were then self-selecting. Within that sample I used a snowball technique, where in several cases respondent couples reported to their friends their interview experiences and recommended participation in the study to other qualified couples.

I had previously done an analysis on some of the profiles of the APEX community and selectively compared the general community responses in areas that

overlapped with this couple study. That original study included 138 respondents, or 78% of all attendees of 5 different APEX events (Cutler, 2000).

The average age of APEX members for women and men was 39 and 45 respectively. The average age of the respondents in this study was 40 and 48. Given that the younger members of the community are less likely to be in a long-term relationship, the respondent age range and mean seems to be representative of the APEX group.

The following chart compares the primary role reported by APEX members in 2000 and that of the respondents of this study in 2002.

	Prime Role	Initial Study	Current Study
Men	Top	47%	76%
	Bottom	23%	12%
	Switch	30%	12%
Women	Top	21%	18%
	Bottom	58%	71%
	Switch	21%	12%

Figure 1. Primary Orientation, Original Study vs. Current Study

This study has a larger percentage of top men and bottom women, as compared to the original APEX study.

The following chart compares all role interests of APEX members (2000) and the respondents of this study (2002).

Gender	Prime Role	Initial Study	Current Study
Men	Masochist	69%	56%
	Sadist	86%	75%
	Dominant	91%	94%
	Submissive	68%	41%
Women	Masochist	83%	80%
	Sadist	62%	41%
	Dominant	71%	50%
	Submissive	91%	90%

Figure 2. All Interests by Gender, Original Study vs. Current Study

Again, when compared to the original study, this study has a lower population of dominant women / submissive men, as compared to the APEX population, measured in 2000.

There is a fair amount of membership turnover at APEX, with a history of about 2500 members over the organization's 15-year history and about 400 active members at any one-time period. The population is self-selecting and changes according to other available venues, the presentation of the current leadership, and BDSM community politics. At the time of the original study, the APEX population was in the process of becoming less oriented to transgender and female tops. Thus a difference in the gender/orientation mix between the original study and the current study is understandable. As a note, the most recent population changes ~ with alliances between APEX and The Universal Brotherhood of Leatherlords, the primary gay leather club in Phoenix, AZ ~ reflect more inclusion of the men's community into APEX.

With the caveat of the gender/orientation mix, I believe that this study contains a reasonable cross-section of the APEX population. From observations at

Thunder in the Mountains (a national annual BDSM event held in Denver), Living In Leather (a national annual leather event held in different major cities), and the Leather Leadership Conference (an annual national event held in major cities), I perceive that the studied population reflects the heterosexual BDSM population across the U.S.

3.2 Methodology of Analysis

Potential couples for the study were identified by their presence at APEX meetings. I presented to them that I was working on my Ph.D. in Sexology and doing my dissertation on BDSM relationships. I further explained that each member of the couple would be interviewed separately, followed potentially by an interview with the two members of the couple together. I then asked if they would be interested in being interviewed for the study. If there was a positive response, I exchanged contact information or scheduled interviews. At the initial meeting, the research was explained, including the possible risks and benefits of participating and the potential for emotional damage or discomfort. If both members of the couple continued to wish to participate, each partner was asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix A). No couples declined at this choice point.

Initially the couples selected to be interviewed were to be all genders and gender orientations. However, APEX is a largely heterosexual community. I chose to restrict the pool of respondents to fit the convenient base of respondents. Several one-of-a-kind interview opportunities were available (e.g. a female partnered with an intersexual person), but were not pursued for this study.

I conducted all but one interview with the assistance of my wife, Nadine Cutler. We are a couple living a BDSM lifestyle with an acknowledged top and bottom relationship. It was initially expected that some individuals would be more comfortable answering questions directly to Nadine as a submissive woman. It turned out that Nadine's presence was sufficient in building trust and comfort in the

respondents. I was able to take the lead in all interviews. Nadine took parallel notes and interjected questions or asked for clarification as she saw opportunities that I had missed. Her questions, although sparse, were highly significant and made a real contribution to this study.

Initially I video taped the interviews. This process turned out to be unwieldy, both in the interview and, more prevalently, in the transcription process. All further interviews were recorded on audio tape. While the taping was presented as optional to the respondents, none declined to be taped. The tapes were transcribed over the course of the study, the transcribed answers were spot checked against the field notes, and the verbiage was used as part of the analysis.

The interviews with each individual were conducted using a variation of the form developed by Kinsey and his associates (Pomeroy, 1982). See Appendix B. This format allowed for consistency in the questions asked and facilitated rapid recording of field notes so that I could maximize my focus on the answers and any nuances. This approach worked well, and as experience in interviewing was accumulated, it was apparent that a few of the questions did not produce results or needed further elaboration. The form was modified slightly over the first few interviews. I then went back to previous respondents and performed a follow-up interview to fill in potential gaps in the data.

The interviews started with simple questions such as age and occupation, then moved into lifestyle identification. Relationship issues were asked around the middle of the interview process. The last question regarded rituals. This provided a forum for

the respondent to discuss areas of the relationship that were particularly satisfying, thus ending the interviews on an upbeat note.

Initially, after completing the individual interviews, a joint interview of the couple was conducted. I saw little new data from these joint interviews and the joint interviews were abandoned. Any data so collected at those times are not contained in this study.

The participants' interview field notes and tape recorded media were all identified with only a couple-number. These coded identifiers are the only link between the forms and the participants. Upon completion and acceptance of this dissertation and any follow-on studies, the code identifiers will be destroyed by shredding.

Most of the individuals in APEX are far more comfortable with their identity than people were even 10 years ago. Most of these couples openly play at BDSM events. Many of the respondents have revealed very intimate details in group settings. Several of the couples have taken part in photograph play parties. During the interview process, I watched to see if I could detect any reluctance regarding the taping process. In two separate interviews I saw a single glance at the audio recorder. The glance was not overt and I chose to not acknowledge any potential issues, but continued taping the interview. The apparent discomfort appeared momentary and the interviews continued on course. In both occasions, the glance occurred during the time of the question regarding whether the respondent had any secrets from his or her partner.

The quantitative analysis was performed by use of Excel spread sheets. For qualitative analysis, I perused the respondents' transcripts, using anecdotal responses to highlight what conflicts arose, what feelings they expressed about their partner when such conflicts arose, and what methods they used to resolve conflicts. I also looked for anecdotal responses about new areas the respondents incorporated into their sex patterns which were not of interest to the individual respondents prior to the present partner.

All confidential data, including identifiable field notes and video tapes, are maintained in a locked cabinet at my home office for the duration of the study. These materials will only be viewed by myself, by Nadine Cutler, and as necessary, by members of my dissertation committee. At the completion of the study and after any publications of the research are completed, all video and audio tapes will be bulk erased and any identifiers that could link the respondents to the data will be destroyed.

All quotations attributed to the respondents have been modified for brevity and to hide the identity of the individuals. When it is relevant to compare the answers of both partners, the quotations are shown without a line break between the two quotes.

Chapter Four: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

4.1 Couples Overview

The study involved 33 respondents, all in heterosexual long-term BDSM relationships. The primary orientation for the majority of the respondents was male top, female bottom. All respondents were happy with their SM orientation. All respondents believed that their orientation was not changeable. The single biggest factor mentioned in having a good working BDSM relationship was good communication. The areas of change most wanted were more SM playtime and more integration of BDSM into daily living.

It is clear that the need for a working BDSM relationship was extremely important to most of the respondents. All but two respondents reported flagging their interest in dress, mannerisms, or bumper stickers and the like. Many respondents discussed taking risks to get what they wanted in a working BDSM relationship.

4.1.1 General

The couples interviewed consisted of 17 heterosexual couples from 16 households. One household consisted of one male with two females; the SM relationships were between the man and separately with each of the two women, a

wife and a lover. The women did not consider that they had an SM relationship with each other.

Seven couples are married. Four couples were engaged to be married at the time of their interviews and six have no marriage plans. All four engaged couples have subsequently become married. The three couples with no marriage plans report they have a life commitment. One couple reported that the collar is considered stronger than a wedding band. In the nineteen months since the first interview, all couples are still together with the exception of one automotive-related fatality.

The average age of the men was 48 (range from 35 to 70); the average age of the women was 40 (range 20 to 53.) Thirteen of the couples were male dominant. Two of the couples were female dominant. Two of the couples were male dominant switches. The primary mode between the partners were complementary. For example, no duel top couples were interviewed. However, in one couple the woman identified as bottom within the relationship while she topped outside the relationship and identified generally as a dominant. For both duel switch couples, the male identified as top leaning switch and the female identified as bottom leaning switch.

All tops, male and female, considered themselves dominant. 67% of the top men and top women considered themselves sadistic. All bottoms, male and female, considered themselves submissive. All of the bottom men and 75% of the bottom women considered themselves masochistic. Also, 33% of the top men and 67% of the top women considered themselves masochistic whereas 17% of the top men and 67%

of the top women also considered themselves submissive. Not surprisingly, all switch men and women identified with all orientations. See Figure 3.

Primary Identification	Sadistic	Masochistic	Dominant	Submissive
Top Men	67%	33%	100%	17%
Top Women	67%	67%	100%	67%
Bottom Men	0%	100%	0%	100%
Bottom Women	25%	75%	33%	100%
Switch Men	100%	100%	100%	100%
Switch Women	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 3. BDSM Interest by Primary Identification

4.1.2 Sexual Activity

The respondents substantially agreed as to the rates of sex and SM within each couples. On average, the men said that they had sex 2.51 times a week while the women reported 2.50 times a week ($r=0.66$). For rates of male and female SM activity, the men reporting activities 1.43 time a week and the women reporting 1.54 times a week ($r=0.80$). Men reported mixing their sex with SM 58% of the time ($r=0.70$) compared to women reporting 55% ($r=0.55$).

The men and women reported their masturbation rates of 2.20 and 4.47 times a week, respectively. These masturbation statistics include one man who reported that he masturbates 10 times a week, one woman who reported twice daily, and one woman who reported masturbating 4 to 5 times a day.

One of the men and 4 of the women reported always doing SM activities when having sex. Thus 5 out of 33 individuals (29%) would qualify for the classical definition of paraphilia, where SM activity was required for sexual satisfaction.

When practicing SM within their own homes, 5 of the men and 6 of the women (33%) reported always having sex as part of any SM play.

There appears no correlation within the couples as to masturbation or solo SM practices.

The number of sexual partners in their life varied from 9 to “300 to 400”; the number of SM partners varied from 1 to 200+.

4.1.3 SM Activity

The age at which respondents knew they were kinky varied from 9 to 53, with an average of age 20 for the men and 18 for the women. At the time of the interview, the male respondents knew they were kinky for 21 years and the female respondents knew they were kinky for 16 years.

Submissive Woman: For a long time I would have described myself as kinky, but not into BDSM, and that is probably largely due to the way BDSM is portrayed in the media. For a long time it was “I’m a little bit kinky; I like being tied up or whatever.” I put kind of a barrier between me and them. I’d always been drawn to things that were a little bit fetishy in terms of aspects of like hard rock dress or something like that – leather and black. I was a little bit drawn to men who seemed a little bit dangerous – kind of like a little bad-boy-ish. I think that was all sort of related. Then later I got interested in sensation and such, like flogging and clamps and other kinds of striking implements.

Dominant Woman: Age I knew I was kinky? Oh god. <pause, breath> I was ten. My friend’s mother had a Sidney Sheldon book and I of course got hooked on the sex parts and they weren’t exactly typical sex. They were a little bit kinky. I found I kept going back to them again and again and again. It just went from there. All my friends in high school were busy getting high, and getting drunk, and I was busy reading every sex book I could get my hands on.

Half of the respondents had tried the complimentary role at least once; six of which disliked the switching experience.

Submissive Woman: At the time I was enjoying being in top role, but once the endorphins stopped I realized it's not what I truly want. But when the PMS kicks in and the right mood swing is there, and if he's being just annoying enough, not a problem. But like I said, I was not a safe top. So it wasn't a good thing to continue. And to be honest with you, I really don't like being in top headspace very often. I do it too well, but underneath is the actual me who wants to be the submissive. I'm just a real headstrong feisty Irish Submissive.

When asked if they were happy with their BDSM orientation, on a scale of 1 to 10, the average happiness quotient was 9.34.

All the respondents said they would recommend exploring SM to anyone who was considering it. One said she would caution the friend to avoid bad relationships when they did.

All but one respondent thought an SM relationship was required or extremely important in their lives. That one stated that they could have found satisfaction in a more traditional form of D/s relationship, such as being a nurse married to a doctor.

When asked if they had any regrets about the BDSM lifestyle, 13 volunteered that they wished it hadn't taken so long to come out of the closet. 8 respondents wished that they didn't have to be secretive about it or they feared they would hurt a family member with the knowledge. 3 respondents regretted hurting others in order to explore their BDSM interests. 1 respondent talked about the loneliness felt before coming out of the closet. No respondents expressed regrets about being in the lifestyle.

Submissive Man: [Do you have any regrets about your BDSM interests?] That I didn't get more involved earlier in life. Not going through the – not the seven year itch, but the – I'm getting old, you know. Why didn't I start doing this when I was in my twenties? I could have enjoyed it a hell of a lot longer.

Switch Man: I think that when I went through the phase of deciding that I am kinky, that I think I went through a phase of wanting to be out to people. And that there are a couple of people that I came out to in maybe a somewhat insensitive way in terms of the ways that made them uncomfortable. I regret that.

Switch Man: If there was a regret – I'm not sure I would classify it as a regret – is just as much a growth – it's that I did not earlier on in my life identify how important that was to me as being part of my life and really participated in the lifestyle at a much earlier time. I think I would have been a much happier individual during those years if I had.

Submissive Woman: I wish I could have gotten into the lifestyle earlier: intelligently into the lifestyle when I was younger. I did have my little vain attempts when I was younger. When I still had the body of a twenty-year-old and could handle doing all the things that I need to do. And now I'm pushing forty and going "I have to do what? My knees are killing me."

Switch Man: There were a couple of people that I've been involved with – like lovers from past –where if I had it to do over again, I think I could have pushed things further. I remember one in particular where there was a point where a partner was somebody who was a much more experienced player than me, and she got into a very submissive mood which was unusual for her. I look back on that and I'm like "Wow, if I had that opportunity now, I could really have some fun with it." I sort of look back on it like "Ohh, opportunity kind of wasted."

Switch Woman: I wish I had more time to do it. Once I realized that other people who were normal did things too, then everything was fine. There was a friend of mine in graduate school who gave me like the Beauty books and the Story of O. The fact that they were published was for me enormously freeing. Even if there's parts of them that are silly and ridiculous. But the fact that this is published – which means there's a hell of lot of people – suddenly made it okay to me.

When asked if they could leave the lifestyle, none said they could.

Switch Woman: There are some activities that I could give up and there wouldn't be a problem, but there are certain fundamental things I don't think I could. I bet that you can't guess that one of them would be bondage. <laughs>.

Submissive Man: [Could you change?] No. Tried. <laughs> I've been me all my life. I've been the way I am ever since puberty. I've always enjoyed cross-dressing before I even met my first wife. The degree was a lot lesser back then. I don't think she ever knew. At times it was painful, back then, when I was unwilling to accept it.

When looking at of the respondents and at all the respondents' desired roles, the percentage of couples wherein there is no conflict in each SM or DS combination is shown in Figure 4. Here, conflict is defined if one partner wants an activity that the other partner specifically does not want. It is interesting to note that there is a high percentage match for both sadistic/masochistic roles, and for dominance/submission, and that there is 0% conflict for male dominance/female submissive roles.

Male Sadism Female Masochism	Male Masochism Female Sadism	Male Domination Female Submission	Male Submission Female Domination
71%	71%	100%	82%

Figure 4. Couple match by primary role, as defined by no conflict, by each area of interest

In some of the interviews, the respondents volunteered stories about memorable scenes they have had. These vignettes provide an insight into specific interests and the interplay between the partners.

Submissive Woman: I'm physical – I love to wrestle – only if I can lose. I better lose. Cause if I can win I'm gonna be really pissed. But I love physical activity like that cause it gets the adrenalin going.

One time I grabbed the rabbit flogger and just went at him. And he's just like <her eyes widen>. So I went and got him one and I said "Come on; let's go." So we basically had like, I stick my butt out – he nails me and then I turn around and, wack, and nail him back. And of course I couldn't hardly hurt him at all with that rabbit flogger. After the first ten minutes, his face was like "I don't believe you're hitting me. But after he got through realizing that I was not topping him, he FINALLY HIT ME. And it was just like <sharp inhale through nose> okay, that one sunk in, do it again. It was fun, because he'd never really let himself go that much. It's like a pillow fight with floggers.

It was fun because it pushed his limits a little, and I enjoy that he actually says that we are pushing his limits as far as my limits. So much of the writings talk about pushing the submissive's limits, but they don't really say much about the dominant's limits. And I love that cause I mean –most girls fantasize about the big rough man. But I don't want to be thrown across the room. I've been in that relationship before, it didn't work out too well. And I'm not a gorian slave girl like on-line and in the books and everything. Those are fine for fantasy, but this is reality.

Dominant Man: A friend did a mini-clothes-pins on my partner that went on for – I don't remember how many hundred he put on her. She was building higher and higher and higher and I was somewhat involved providing support for her. There were other players and the energy just kept flowing and flowing.

Just the tremendous build and then I took them off with a three-tail whip. My friend wasn't happy about [that] because I destroyed a bunch of his mini-clothes-pins. It was one of those special times that I think there were eight or ten people in one way or another involved in this scene. And it was just such a tremendous experience for everybody who was there. The whole dungeon was quiet. The whole dungeon was stopped. And even though they weren't part of the scene or participating in the scene, people fifty feet away were feeding off of it. And to me that's what it was all about. That's that pinnacle you wish you could reach more frequently. Perhaps if you reached it more frequently, it wouldn't be so exciting though.

4.1.4 First SM Experiences

The first age at which SM activity occurred with others varied from 7 to 69, with partners of ages from 7 to 70. The average age for the first partnered BDSM activity was 27 for men and 24 for the women. These first events include a variety of circumstances. One respondent reported using self-bondage to attract the attention of the female babysitter. Several respondents reported masochistic feelings while receiving spankings. One respondent reported cross dressing activities. One respondent reported use of a professional dominatrix when there was no other availability outlet. One respondent reported having father's workmate pretending to be a mentor. 27 of the 33 respondents reported they enjoyed their first encounter; however some reported a "scary elation," "hated that he did [the activity] in that [the forbidden activity] felt good," and "liked it until she saw the marks." 4 respondents reported disappointment, awkwardness, or disconnectedness with their partner.

The male respondents have been practicing BDSM activities for an average of 21 years, the women for 16 years. Note that for the men on average, BDSM activities preceded self recognition as kinky, while for women the BDSM activities followed after self recognition. Approximately half the women in this study were practicing BDSM before Money's (1986) treatise. This data is in direct contradiction to Money's belief that so-called paraphilia is restricted to the male gender.

Dominant Woman: My first SM? Pretty much I would label my stepfather tying me up and tying my legs up and he would tie me up and have sex with me. That's why to this day I can't wear necklaces or have my feet tied up. Because he would hold me down, he would tie my feet, get them bound in the sheets. And I can't stand to have my feet covered up

real tight, I can't have the sheet tucked in. I hated that he did it and I hated the fact that it felt good at the same time. I mean it hurt like hell the first few times he penetrated me obviously, but then sometimes he would make it feel good and that was so messed up in my mind. I never understood why it would feel good when it was so bad cause I was a bad little girl for liking it; it was my fault cause I liked it.

Submissive Woman: I would have to say my first SM experience was probably with my first lover at eighteen. That I could actually convince somebody to do something to me that I would consider a true SM experience. I begged him to tie me up. So I wanted bondage and so I thought – get him to tie me up while we were making love. And didn't go really well. <laughs>. He kept saying that he was going to hurt me, he didn't want to hurt me. I kept explaining that that was the point. So we had a little difference in communication there.

Submissive Woman: I was probably twenty-six or twenty-seven and it was my birthday. And the man I was living with at the time – we were laying in bed – I didn't have any clothes on, and he said I needed my birthday spanking. And he spanked me with his hand on my butt and I loved it. A lot!

Submissive Man: My partner is my second wife. With my first wife, I was not honest. She never knew. So when my partner and I started getting interested I came right out to her. "Hey, this is what I like and how I am and the way I like to play and the way I think things ought to happen." And she kind of said "Hm, okay." And the rest is history. We started playing shortly thereafter and played more and more. I believe all I actually did was cross dress for her, and I believe she spanked me. It was wonderful to realize the fantasies. That there really was somebody out there that would not be put off by my inclinations. That would play with me. It was great.

Dominant Man: I was nineteen, twenty. It was a pro dom. It was a water sports enema session. It seemed like a lot of money at the time. <laughs> It's like a lot of years of thinking about it and reading about it and what little erotica that was available at that time. And then to finally fulfill what to that point had been largely fantasy was very rewarding.

Dominant Man: I think probably about twenty. I was adding bondage to otherwise pretty conventional sex. I tied her up and went down on her and then we had sex. I found it pretty satisfying, pretty exciting.

4.1.5 Out of the Closet

When asked if they were “out” regarding their BDSM interests, the responses varied. All couples were recruited for the study from within the BDSM community, thus having like minded acquaintances. Some individuals considered that they were closeted even though they had friends and family who knew, while others felt totally out under some circumstances. 22 out of 33 respondents were out to at least some family members. 7 respondents said some of their co-workers knew, 24 said most friends knew.

Submissive Woman: My daughter and I have a very open relationship except for about this. Although I know, and she’s told me, that she doesn’t want to know what I do. You know, I’m her mom – she’s not supposed to know those things. She’s even said, I don’t care if you guys are into handcuffs or those weird rubber masks – I don’t want to know. We went to the Ren Faire and I have a dress collar. And I was in costume and wearing my dress collar. And she’s looking at it on the drive over there. And she says “your partner gave you this?” Yeah. “I know what you guys are into.” And that very day on the way home she was looking for something in my purse, and I have the keys to his apartment on a handcuff key chain. And she pulls it out. And she looks at it, and looked at it and she just put it back and didn’t say a word.

Dominant Woman: I am out to most of my friends. Most of them are in the lifestyle. Those that aren’t that have been close, they kind of know. I’ve never really blatantly said, “Oh, here, look at all my toys, come look at my dungeon,” but they know. Yes.

The SM literature is all over and in the bathroom. So we have to go through the house when the kids come. Only because the kids want to look at them. “Get out of our books!” His son is thirty so when he comes over he’s like “Hey, Dad, you finished with that one yet?” <laughs> His children know; we’re out to his children. His daughter will say, “What’s this rope on the coffee table?” and her husband pokes her and says “You have to ask!?” And she’s like, “Oh, yeah, sorry.” <laughs> That happened when they came over when we first moved here. And it’s like, “Well, we didn’t know you were coming. You’ve got to take what you get when you just don’t call first. You never know how we’re going to be dressed.”

Submissive Man: I came out to my family completely. Everybody in my family knows now. So it makes things a lot easier.

4.1.6 Flagging

All but two individuals reported that they gave some signs (flagging) to the outside world of their BDSM interest. These varied from display of piercings, collars, handcuff earrings, fetish dress, logo T-shirts, bumper stickers or auto license plate frames, and actions such as calling the top “Sir” and walking behind the dominant.

Dominant Woman: Usually my partner always wears his collar when we’re together. Fortunately now this attire is pretty normal. People don’t think of it as fetish attire anymore. When they see you in it they just think it’s fashion.

Submissive Man: It occurred to me about fifteen years ago that if I stay in the closet, I’ll never meet anybody. So I got a bumper sticker [“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but whips and chains excite me”] and started wearing chains and that kind of stuff and gradually we met people.

Submissive Woman: My engagement ring is the BDSM symbol that we picked up. My partner wears such a ring and we both enjoyed the symbolism within it so he got me that as our engagement ring. When we are in public I tend to do the one step behind and to the left. I try to observe submissive protocol out in public, whenever I possibly can being discreet and whatnot. Today I’ve got on my little bells that I actually bought for belly dancing but I have found that my partner has taken a liking for them almost in a slave way even though we do not really embrace slave. But it almost helps reinforce – it makes him smile now when he hears the little tinkle.

Submissive Woman: I wear whatever the mood strikes me. So if I feel like wearing fetish to go to dinner, I will. If it’s appropriate according to my master. I wear my collar out in public without a problem. I would say I’m associated with a lot of dark things, whether that could be considered gothic or lifestyle depends on the person doing the interpretation.

Dominant Man: She proudly wears her collar and we go out to dinner. Personally, whether vanilla people notice, doesn’t really affect me one way or the other, other than just being slightly amusing. Some people, of

course, you'll catch their eye and you see the spark of recognition. Other people, we kind of get a kick out of the horrified looks that we get cause she is significantly younger than I am. So when we go out, we're kind of accustomed to people looking at us because of our age difference. And we have kind of the ongoing joke "Well how much did I pay for her company this evening?" It doesn't trouble me or it doesn't particularly excite me. It's just amusing.

4.1.7 Knowing Their Partner

There is good agreement within the couples as to their rates of doing sex ($c = 0.66$) and doing SM activities ($c = 0.7$).

Of the respondents who reported knowledge of the masturbation habits of their partners, men and women had a high correlation of the rates (men had a $r=0.93$ and women had a $r=0.91$.) This result is misleading, however, in that men in average under reported their partners masturbation rate by 2.9 times a week, and women under reported their partner's masturbation rate by 0.8 time a week. A high percentage of individuals reported not knowing their partner's masturbation rates (3 men and 10 women.) That the respondents know considerably less about their partner's masturbation rates is very interesting in light of the high level of intimate detail known by the respondents in the area of SM interests.

The respondents were asked who initiated sex. Most answered, "I do," or "they do," and six respondents answered by percentage. There is no agreement within the couples as to which partner initiates sex ($r= -.012$). Six couples agree who usually initiates sex, while 8 couples report differently. On average, men reported initiating

sex 44% of the time and women reported they initiate sex 44% of the time. Thus, both genders described the partner as being the primary initiator of sex.

There is some agreement as to who initiates SM activities ($r=0.25$): eleven couples agree on who initiates SM activities, while 5 couples report differently. On average, men reported initiating SM 65% of the time and women reported men initiate SM 53% of the time.

The respondents were given a list of SM activities and were asked to rate their interest in each activity on a scale of ± 2 . The respondents were then asked to rate their partner's interest using the same scale. See Appendix B for the interview form and the list of SM activities being considered for these statistics. Figure 5 tabulates for each couple the correlation of the real match between the partners (REAL MATCH), the respondent's perception of how well they think they are matched (PERCEIVED MATCH), and a correlation of the actual interests of the partner and the perceived interest of the partner (KNOWLEDGE OF PARTNER). Blanks in Figure 5 indicate there was not enough data to calculate a correlation value, as when the top did not provide sufficient data regarding their bottoming interests.

For example, in couple #1, the match in interests is $r=0.17$ for the male top/female bottom activities and $r=0.62$ for the list of female top/male bottom. Each activity is considered a match if both partners want to do the activity, both partners do not want to do the activity, or both partners doesn't care. Thus, for couple #1, there is a better correlation of interest in the female top activities than in the male top activities. In couple #1, the man's perception of desired activities of his partner lead to

his perceived match in interests of $c=0.17$ for male top activities and a perception of their match, $c=0.32$, for female top activities. For this couple, then, the male perceives less of a match in female top activities than actual. The woman perceives a correlation of $c=0.58$ for male top activities and $c=0.49$ for female top activities, thus over estimating the correlation for male top activities and under estimating the match for female top activities. When comparing the actual interests of each partner against the perceived interests, the couple's understand of their partners interests is high ($c=0.79$ for male top activities and $c=0.80$ for female top activities. In summery for couple #1, they had a good understanding of their partner's interests and there is a modest but positive match in actual interests.

#	REAL MATCH		PERCEIVED MATCH				KNOWLEDGE OF PARTNER			
	M Top	M Bottom	M Top	M Bottom	M Top	M Bottom	M Top	M Bottom	M Top	M Bottom
	MALE		MALE		FEMALE		MALE		FEMALE	
1	0.17	0.62	0.17	0.32	0.58	0.49	0.79	0.80	0.66	0.62
2	0.56		0.60			0.41		0.73	0.35	0.69
3	0.19		0.47			0.27		0.49	0.58	
4	1.00	0.48	-0.31	0.32	0.77		0.68			0.61
5	0.49	0.29	0.37	-0.25		0.69	0.61	0.72	0.67	
6		0.27		0.54	0.54	0.69	0.47	0.35		0.68
7	0.41		0.82	0.84		0.59		0.51	0.79	
8	0.79	0.94	0.58		1.00	0.79		0.59	0.71	0.94
9	0.41	0.68	0.49		0.37	0.55	0.51	0.77	0.64	-1.00
10	0.08		-0.01	-0.41		0.50	1.00	0.32	0.39	-0.22
11	0.24	0.68	0.24	0.60	0.27	0.37	0.49	0.54	0.44	0.83
12	0.48	0.17	0.50	0.39	0.54	0.69	0.68	0.54	0.46	0.68
13	0.40	-0.80	0.38	-0.51	-0.58	0.45	0.61	0.76	0.39	0.97
14	0.29	-0.65	0.45	-0.73	-0.54	0.41	0.85	0.76	0.67	0.87
15	0.29		0.34			0.36		0.60	0.75	0.81
16	0.34	0.42	0.42	0.39	0.60	0.03	0.52	0.63	0.84	0.76
17	0.29	0.84	0.36	0.28	0.75	0.50	0.76	0.79	0.69	0.99
TOTAL	0.40	0.33	0.37	0.15	0.39	0.49	0.66	0.62	0.60	0.59

Figure 5. Correlation of Listed SM interest, by couple, for all roles

Summarizing the above chart and looking at the real match in interests for only the primary role, the correlation of interests between the partners was significant. That is, the couples had a significant positive correlation in interests from the presented list. See Figure 6.

	Male Top/ Female Bottom	Female Top/ Male Bottom
Real Match of Interests	.36	.34

Figure 6. Correlation of Matching Interests in the Preferred Role

The comparison between the individual's interests and their perception of their partner's interest calculated a perceived match – how compatible do the respondents think they are. The intent of this calculation is to evaluate how matched the respondents thought they were with their partners. Note that many of the respondents did not provide extensive answers on the activities outside of their preferred roles.

	Male Top/ Female Bottom	Female Top/ Male Bottom
Men Perception of Matching Interests	.37	.15
Women's Perception of Matching Interests	.49	.39

Figure 7. Correlation of Perceived Partner Match in SM Interests

When we compare the correlation of the real match in interest (Figure 6) to the perceived match (Figure 7,) we find that tops of both genders had a good grasp of

the match, while bottom men under estimated the match and bottom women over estimated the match.

Each individual's perception of their partner was compared to the real interests of the partner, thus creating a calculation of how well each understood the other's interests. The knowledge of their partner's interest against an arbitrary list is substantial.

	Male Top/Female Bottom	Female Top/Male Bottom
Men Knowledge of Partner's Interests	.66	.62
Women's Knowledge of Partner's Interests	.60	.59

Figure 8. Correlation of Knowledge of the Partners' BDSM Interests

Summarizing the above three tables, the couples have a high correlation of interests ($r=0.35$ average) and a very high correlation of knowing their partner's interests ($r=0.66$ average).

I expected that knowledge about their partner's BDSM interest would increase over time. The calculations of correlation between the duration of the relationship and the knowledge of their partner show a modest correlation. See Figure 9.

	Men		Women	
	Male Top Activities	Female Top Activities	Male Top Activities	Female Top Activities
Correlation	0.28	0.21	0.18	0.06

Figure 9. Correlation of Respondents' Knowledge of Partners' BDSM Interests vs. Duration of Relationship

These modest correlations suggest that most of the disclosure by the partners happens within the first year of their relationship, with the men learning more over time than the women. To check if there was a role influence, the correlations were examined for male top couples, with no significant change.

Figure 10 displays the individual correlation of respondents' knowledge of their partners BDSM interests vs. the duration of the relationship. Series 1 is men on male top activities. Series 2 is men on female top activities. Series 3 is women on male top activities. Series 4 is women on female top activities.

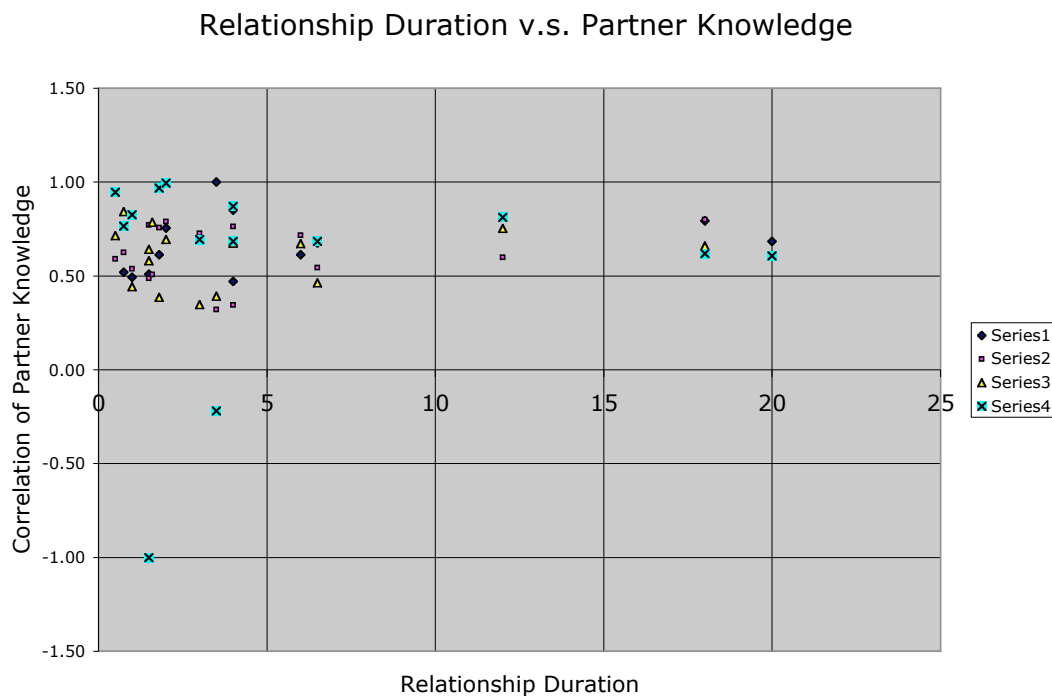


Figure 10. Plot of Correlation of Respondents' Knowledge of their Partners' BDSM Interests vs. Duration of Relationship

It would appear that these couples were highly disclosing of their BDSM interests very early in their relationships. We will see this conclusion supported in the

text of the interviews. See section 4.2.2 “Meeting Their Partner,” and 4.2.3 “Partner Selection.”

4.1.8 Secrets From the Partner

7 of 33 individuals have secrets from their mate (no two in the same couple had secrets). Bottom men showed a larger probability of secrets from their partner than other groups. Reasons given for secrets included: avoiding confrontation about former relationships, sparing the partner’s feelings, stating that what makes masturbations fantasies good is that they are secret (2), stating that their partner has not yet asked. No respondents indicated having sexual or BDSM relationships outside their committed relationship without their partner’s knowledge.

Submissive Man: I haven’t told her about the homosexual things; I haven’t told her that. I’ve told her I fooled around on my former wife, and I told her that I was experimenting with being submissive for the first time. I don’t think I told her about homosexuality.

Submissive Woman: I have no secrets from my partner. I try to be as blunt and open as I possibly can. And I told him even if it’s something that I didn’t think we’d ever going to be able to try, I’ve told him what I’m interested in. I’m pretty much an open book with him.

Submissive Man: There are a few things we haven’t really discussed. It’s more been an inability for me to be able to open up as fully as I need to or would like to. There was some things from the previous marriage that I’ve never really been well able to discuss. My partner can be vain and jealous and she has a tendency sometimes to get extremely angry about things if she thinks that I’m putting somebody else ahead of her. It’s been kind of ... hard to talk about some things. I don’t like confrontations, so I try to avoid them.

4.1.9 What Works

When asked what works in the relationship, they listed: communication (19), mutual support (14), openness or honesty (9), lifestyle (7), physical/sexual attraction (4), humor (3), love (2), religion (1), and intimacy (1).

Several values appeared frequently in the interviews. There is a perception that dominance and submission directly relates to intimacy. There is a high value placed on communication and full disclosure within the couple. There is pride in being able to read their partner and to explore needs until both parties have their needs met. Throughout the interviews, the respondents expressed pride in their relationships and pride in their partner. In the respondents descriptions of themselves and their partners, there were no denigrative indications toward either role.

Dominant Woman: The fact that he worships me. Mmm, that's one thing, and the fact that when I do mess up and make the wrong decisions even though I probably should have probably listened to him, he's not real judgmental. He just says, "Oh well, we'll make it". And I've never had the kind of relationship before. Well, to a certain extent I have, but not to this extent. And ... he's good in bed. <Laughs> That's important, too.

I think that's his mission in life, not to make me mad. And that goes with S&M, that goes with anything. He knows he'll make me mad if he doesn't tell me if he doesn't like something.

Switch Man: I think that she's discovering or maybe I've done a good job of conditioning, that nipple play has become a hot button. I am not upset about that. I think that that's something that has become more so as we've done it more. At this point it's one of those things that facilitates her orgasms.

Switch Woman: I had actually not a whole lot of interest in receiving pain, initially. I think that there were some – like with the nipple thing –reading the Beauty books, which in some parts are sort of ridiculous, but there are some aspects, like they did some things with like clamps and bells. So there was like a little bit of interest but it wasn't like a thing. And now we do that a lot. I think he's trained me to respond to it or something.

<laughs> It's that whole Pavlov's dog thing. It really does work, well. Having something done that you don't like while having an orgasm can – eventually you end up associating the two.

Submissive Woman: There's not real boundaries as far as walls that are constructed of things that we can't do or shouldn't do. There's this tremendous sense of openness. And that deals with our sexuality; that deals with just about anything. If it's on my mind I say it. There's something I'm wondering about, curious about, want to try, want to know, I can put it out there. And there's really no holds barred on that.

Dominant Man: When I say that we communicate a good deal, a lot of probably ninety-nine percent of it is nonverbal. I read her extremely well. Intuitively I know generally where she's at. I know when she can and needs to be pushed farther and I know when she's at a spot we need to back down from. And I think that develops out of having a relationship with someone and understanding them.

But we've always had that even from the very first, from the very first day. That was what I think one of the most endearing lines she ever said. I didn't have a play bag with me – a soft cowhide belt I had on. And I whipped her with it. And after I finished, she laid back on the bed and she had this huge sigh and she had this wonderful look – which I've grown to love – and she says “Thank God, I was afraid you weren't going to do it hard enough.” I mean, what a wonderful line. She had been in relationships with people that she tried to get to participate. They were, “Well I'm afraid of hurting you,” and she found that very unfulfilling.

Submissive Man: [What about your relationship that works?] The fact that we're both so willing to do these kinds of things and play these kinds of games and the fact that from my own personal point of view that I've found a partner who is willing to experiment to try a bunch of this stuff. Only recently have we discovered APEX. It has broadened our horizons as far as the lifestyle has gone, immensely, in the three, four, five years we've been going there.

Dominant Woman: With my first husband we never did BDSM at all, it was torture for me. We never even discussed passing gas. His was such a puritanical background, it was too smothering for me, I couldn't handle it, I couldn't be me. With my current partner, I'm me. What you see is what you get. I don't have to hide and pretend I'm somebody else. To me that is what sexuality is, is being able to be open and free.

Submissive Woman: My parents spanked me as a child. I was afraid spanking in play was going to bring up past events, and it was going to have

problems. It hasn't yet. <laughs> I'm digging that. I didn't think waxing would be as much fun as it is. I was doing the, "Okay, for you honey," and it turned out being much more fun. I had no idea that rope bondage would be as much fun as it is.

Dominant Man: In the very beginning, I was a very big "NO" on anal play. But with my present partner, I have discovered how extremely sensitive her ass is and it's just so much fun. Just turns the intensity and heat up that much more.

Submissive Woman: I'm actually teaching my partner how to bite. He comes from a very nice family, very good Norman Rockwell school of BDSM type thing. And I'm like "Bite me" and he's like "What? But it'll hurt." Yeah.

I believe it is not good to repress things. I think if this is the way you're wired, at least find out about it and do it safely. I would say explore it but also do a hell of a lot of reading and talking and everything before you ever try anything, you know, so. But heck yeah, this ain't a bad lifestyle.

Submissive Woman: When we first moved in together, there were so many activities that we had to do to get the house straight. We didn't actually do an S&M scene and I recognized and he recognized that it was beginning to affect how we interacted with our communication. That more of the vanilla miscommunication patterns were taking effect than our previously two-and-a-half-year developed S&M DS communications. And so we sat down and we made specific efforts to make S&M time for ourselves because of all the dailiness we were having to do that was being done, more and more, without an S&M component to it. And so that's when we recognized how much it had to be a part of our life. Because of the structure and good communication it gave us – as well as energy.

The very close connection of some of the respondents was disclosed beyond the BDSM context.

Submissive Man: When we met, both our now former marriages were on the rocks. So together we crawled into a bottle of booze and drugs and partied and carried on for ten years. Whether we were drowning our sorrows or exploring new horizons or what – I don't ever question why we did what we did. God, we covered a lot of area.

Her boss got sober about six months before we did. And after one particular binge, when she called in sick two or three times and finally went to work with a hangover, her boss just happened to be in the right place and she said "I gotta go to one of them meetings. What's it like?"

And he said, "I'll come over at five o'clock and pick you up and take you to one." And she promptly forgot about it. He showed up at the door and loaded her in the back of his little VW and away they went. Took her to an AA meeting. And it took about three to four maybe five months for the entire process to assimilate us both.

I stopped drinking right away because I didn't want to encourage her. I realized my wife, she had a drinking problem, by God. So I quit drinking in support of her. But I kept smoking the pot. And I'd go to meetings, "I'm not drunk. I'm sober." I was stoned. That's what I'm saying. It took three or four months of the process and the indoctrination. We got drunk together, so we got sober together. Sometimes it takes two of us to make one whole person. That's my partner and I.

4.1.10 Issues

In looking at relationship issues, related questions were asked at different points in the interview process: "What are the relationship issues?", and "What are your concerns for the future?" A related question: "What changes would you like to make in yourself and in your partner?" was also asked and discussed in the Power Dynamics section

4.1.10.1 Relationship Issues

Relationship issues reported include: BDSM related (14) [defining their BDSM relationship (6), wanting the partner to be more aggressive or "Tippy" (6), more play time (2),]. Other issues included better communication (8), polyamory (6), wanting to change partner's habits (5), aging and health (3).

Dominant Woman: I wish he'd stand up to me just a little more, and I've told him that. But I've learned a little more about how to kind of make that happen without being mean. And I'd wish he'd stand up to other people, learn how to in a productive way. Of course, I need to learn that, too.

I'd love for him to be a self-motivator. He is to a certain extent with some things, but not really. He'd rather that I'd put everything down, and then he does it. Well, he asks for it [a honey-do list]. I get tired of it sometimes and then things just don't get done.

Submissive Woman: My biggest concern is he may never be able to be the dominant he hopes to be. My every hope and dream is that he is. But I need someone strong in my life. That is a concession I will have to make if I need to. Cause I'm not changing partners. My concern for me is that I will not be able to submit the way that I want – and not necessarily the style. I will not be able to discipline myself or be disciplined to be the submissive that I want to be.

Submissive Woman: I don't know if I have any concerns. We joke together, "Are we going to become jaded. Is there something we haven't done? Will we get bored?" I think from my perspective there's a little bit of insecurity thinking, can I fulfill all his fantasies or enough of them to keep him interested for a lifetime, or is there going to be the new better submissive model that'll come through?" I think that would probably be my concern.

Dominant Man: To be a good top or dom takes not only some physical energy, but for me it takes a great deal of mental and psychological energy. And, and in some ways that's much more taxing than the physical. And sometimes, with all the work pressures, all that stuff, it's just hard for both of us to get there. And that's probably more my responsibility than hers because she can flip into sub space without the same energy expenditure that it takes me to be purely in top space.

4.1.10.2 Concerns for the Future

Concerns for the future include: aging or health (14), living logistics (5), becoming bored (3), commitment (1), lifestyle issues (3), polyamory (4), loneliness (2), and communication (1).

Dominant Man: That I'm not able to become sadistic enough to yank her in line and keep her in line, not being able to meet and exceed her expectations.

Dominant Man: Probably the only significant fear that I have in our relationship is the long-term fear of being alone again. Losing what I have

spent a lifetime looking for. And that's born less out of any issue in our relationship and more out of my history. Because she is the third person that I'm been married to, I've got a history of relationships. And so I suppose I have a practical recognition that what you think is permanent today might not necessarily be. So that's my biggest fear.

Submissive Man: That something will happen to her or to me and we won't be together. I know I want to be with her forever.

4.1.11 Risks Taken

One of the open-ended questions I asked was "What risks have you taken in the relationship?" I believed that this question would elicit information that was indicative of the importance of the relationship and/or relationship factors.

Submissive Woman: I think the first risk that I took with the relationship probably would be the trust that the relationship would survive the – seeing other people phase when we started the relationship. We had a relationship, but it was not a fully committed relationship. So that was a big risk, thinking "Okay, here I have found the perfect master I've been looking for and now I still have to share him with some other people." And that was scary. So was probably the first risk.

The second risk is pushing the relationship. And I use the word pushing carefully because I feel that I did push for a sense of permanence where we were going with the relationship. I think that was a significant risk because it was at that point that I had to be willing to accept the fact that maybe we weren't on the same page. And that was probably one of the greatest risks. And being able to follow that through to a marriage and a commitment – which is not something I was ever able to do with anyone else. So that's pretty risky.

Dominant Man: The simple establishing the relationship was extremely risky for me. At that time and place because she was a subordinate. There was a very significant professional risk with me becoming involved on any level with a subordinate – let alone an alternative lifestyle level with a subordinate.

Submissive Woman: I have quit my job, making the most money I've ever made in my life – which wasn't much but it was for me – moved into another county. When I was in very lesbian mode, I never would have done this. If you would have told me, "You're going to drop everything

and move in with this guy and he's going to provide for you," I would have went "Oh, bullshit." You know, how stupid could I be? I went past that and did it.

As for risk for him? First time he's ever lived with a woman. Scared to DEATH. And he told me that he was very sacred, what if we don't 24/7 well? And so we were being each other's positive motivator. "I'm not giving you up." It's like "This is going to work!"

Dominant Woman: I think the biggest risk as couple that we've taken is telling each other some of the things we think and that have happened in the past that we've never told anybody else, you know, and feelings about things. Because I think that's one of the biggest risks that anyone can ever do is telling someone something so secret that nobody else ever knew and you just know that nobody'll ever like you if they find that out. And it may be something really bad.

Dominant Man: After I got divorced from a former marriage, I continued seeing my counselor for close to a year. I wanted to learn more about myself. I wanted to learn more about why I felt, believed, and did the things that I did. And it was a year of self-imposed self-discovery, which I felt was very important to me at the time. And looking retrospectively it was.

At one point in this relationship, we were having predominantly non-lifestyle issues. And I said, "I'm not hearing what you say. Let's go to a counselor and get an objective third party view to hear both of us and give us some assistance in working through the issues."

It was a risk in terms of the outside world. First day, first session with the counselor, we said, "We want to make one thing perfectly clear. We are in a BDSM, DS relationship. It is a factor of our life, and we're not here for you to change that. And if that's not okay with you, then we will seek out a different counselor. If that's something you're all right with, then we can sit and talk. Your choice." We really approached it that way.

And the counselor said, "Well what do you mean by that?" And we told her and she said "Oh, that's fine, I don't have a problem with that." And we continued on. So - in a sense that's a risk because that's a risk to an outside world, but it wasn't a risk between us.

4.2 Partner Selection

In examining partner selection, I first looked at the respondent's perception of the origin of their BDSM orientation. I then looked at how the respondents met, and the stories they told about why they were attracted to their partner and how they decided this was "the one".

4.2.1 Perceived Origins of a BDSM Orientation

Reason for SM interests: no understood reasons (16), family role model (10), medically related childhood events (3). Some other reasons given include: past abusive relationships, corporal punishment at home and school, religious upbringing, vampire fantasies as a 4 year old, and Disney movies.

18 of 33 said they had some form of abuse in their background. This reported abuse varied from yelling to sexual molestation. Reported abuse included: emotional (13), sexual (6), religious (1), and medical (3). All sexually abused respondents were women, 5 by the father figure and 1 by a baby sitter. Three women told of being raped later in life and none of them reported their rape being related to their BDSM orientation.

There seems to be no correlation as to the perceived reason that an individual has a BDSM orientation and which BDSM role they now live.

Submissive Woman: I have a theory. I've been in several abusive relationships and I think for me for whatever reason I felt I needed something like that. Once I found BDSM and found out I could control. I could negotiate how things went. I liked that better. It's much healthier for me.

One of my relationships was definitely physically abusive. We'd verbally abuse each other and then we'd kiss and make up. Although we'd push each other around – we never would strike each other. I always considered it rough sex. In fact until I got on-line and found out there was a whole lifestyle, that's – I just considered I like rough sex, including spanking. It wasn't really bondage but he would, with my long hair he would push me up on the bed till my hair was caught underneath me and then he'd hold my hands out and I couldn't move. I couldn't move my head and then he'd ravage me. And I loved it.

Dominant Woman: I was really raised by my brother who was open, and by my sister who was very pure and went to church because my mother was off doing her little thing. I bonded with my older sister who just moved back here. She is very Church of Christ Christian. To her, I have to be this good little girl who goes to church every Sunday. The thought that oh my god, I'm going to die and go to hell ... I am who I am, and I've learned to just answer the right questions to the person that I'm with. She doesn't have to know everything. Yes, I go to church on Sundays, thank you very much. I've learned to play the game, you might say.

My stepfather started having intercourse with me when I was seven till I was thirteen. Then when I was fifteen I was raped by a stranger. Fortunately he didn't kill me. After he was going to court he asked for a continuance, and when he was out he went out and raped and killed the next little girl. So I was very lucky that I didn't get killed by him.

It did kind of goof me up while growing up. I think I knew too much about sex at too young of an age. I never really had a childhood.

Submissive Woman: I don't know if it's so much a question for me as to why. I don't think I ever asked why, I just always accepted the fact that I've been different since I was very young. And somehow I instinctively knew that the thoughts and fantasies that I have had were probably not mainstream, and I should keep them quiet. Just that way since about the age of four. I knew I was kind of sneaking something behind my parents' back. It started with the power of Dracula. I would get up in the middle of night to watch vampire movies when my parents were asleep. Because I was obsessed with looking into his eyes and knowing the power he had. Back in those days they ran on the weekends, so – Bela Lugosi movies and things like that.

Submissive Man: [Have you ever asked yourself the question, "Why me?"] Oh yes. [And did you come up with an answer?] Not even close.

Submissive Man: I've asked myself why I am kinky and not really sure if I actually know, but I think I've developed some answers. My parents used corporal punishment. And they would say that "I'm doing this because I love you." While I was going to school there was corporal punishment and I saw other children being spanked and had the paddle used on them, and it was very exciting to see that. And the few times I got paddled in school, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed – the memory of it is probably better than the actual experience of it at the time, but I think that helped plant the seed.

Dominant Man: I think probably my interest in water sports – and enemas specifically – started out as a child, cause I was raised in the Midwest and every kid got enemas from their mother. And probably by the time I was eight or nine I started finding pleasure in that. As I grew older and wanted to reproduce some of those feelings I'd had as a child, reading lifestyle or non-lifestyle related magazines, any reference to enemas or water sports were primarily in the BDSM community sort of umbrella. So as I started learning about that and getting more into it and learning "well, gee there are other ways of satisfying people, other ways of being satisfied." It's sort of just a learning process.

With each step I learned that "well, gee, while I do like these things that again classically are considered submissive activities, I also enjoyed predominantly dominant activities with submissives." I enjoyed giving them. Then that led to learning "well, gee, I can give pleasure and I can get a kick out of spanking someone." And then that step moved to "well, gee, I could flog somebody, or whip someone and that could be pleasurable for both people" and sort of expanded from there. And by my nature, I tend to be both personally and professionally a person who likes to be in control of things. And so it fit with my personality and it became a learning process as I moved through the various realms of understanding of the lifestyle.

Dominant Woman: [Looking back from this point in time would you consider you were a target of abuse of any kind?] I had a cousin who was older who tried to put his hands on me a couple of times, but it wasn't traumatic. It wasn't any big deal, it was just "Quit, Billy." Like that. Go away. So I don't think of it as abuse, even though he was older. He just tried and I said no.

Submissive Woman: Being bitten is one of the things I started learning about when I started having sex that kind of pushed me toward SM. I have a tilted uterus and I am built a little strange. So a lot of times having sex with a man would be become painful. I learned to feed off that

pain and I learned endorphins are a hell of a lot of fun. I started finding out biting was a hell of a lot of fun and I actually complained when people didn't bite me hard enough. Or gave hard enough hickies.

Switch Woman: I had braces on my feet when I was a kid. I wonder if the whole bondage thing came from that. I had these on my feet for six months. And my mother was a very loving, wonderful caring person. And so I'm not sure if that just makes me feel – there's a sense of safety that seems to occur.

Dominant Man: I don't really ask why am I this way. It's just – I am this way. I come from a very normal Norman Rockwell family. My upbringing, it was like, "That's taboo, that's perverted." But there were certain images that kept sticking in my mind.

Submissive Woman: I ask myself lots of questions. I'm also bipolar, so why am I this way? Why was I born this way? Why was I born with bisexual-slash-lesbian tendencies? Why was I born submissive when I have balls of chrome most times? Why after dating all these women do I really want to find a master dominant that is a male? Which was actually my most underlying fantasy and never wanted to admit it for many years. But I don't know if it's nature versus nurture or a combination of both. I was raised on Disney movies where if you're the good little girl and everything the Prince Charming comes and takes you away. And I found out after many years of trying that it doesn't happen. I learned to wipe my own butt and stand on my own two feet. No matter how ballsy and how feminist separatist I got there was just always that very dark kinky side that always wanted to do the submission. The one butch girlfriend I had didn't have a clue when we got together. She denied it the whole time that we were together, but she would make the most beautiful butch top. She was a perfect walking dominant. And I would submit constantly to her. And she would look at me and go "What the hell are you doing?" She would put me down for it. I gave up – basically just wondering if I was born that way. But I do know that I need and I want and I desire to serve and submit and make him happy and it just yanks my chain. It gets me totally hot to do it. So I can't argue too much past that. I'm an incredible sexual being. I figure "Well what the hell. That's it. So let's do it."

Submissive Woman: My first SM experience was unsatisfying because he didn't know what the hell he was doing. <pause> And he also wasn't into it like I was. I wanted to play; I wanted to already do the submissive thing and the typical female – I was raised on Disney movies so it was

always the <sigh> maiden-type thing “take me away and just rape me all day long” wasn’t there.

Switch Man: I just find some of those activities to be exciting. That’s not much of an answer, but that feels like some of the ways that I’m wired. BDSM may have its origin to some extent in unresolved feelings in terms of my power dynamics of my relationship with my mother. At this point I feel a lot more resolved about a lot of my feelings about my mother – and my interest in BDSM hasn’t lessened. So if that’s where it comes from then – to some extent – then so be it.

4.2.2 Meeting Their Partner

When it came to the stories of how they met, there was 100% congruity as to the circumstances of their meeting and very high congruity as to the details. Typically, the individuals within the couple would even use the same phraseology. It is apparent that the couples have told and retold their stories of their meeting and have bonded to where their mythology is an important part of their relationship. It is interesting to note that 8 out of the 17 couples first became aware of each other through the internet.

Switch Woman: We met through friends. Some of his college friends were my graduate school friends. So we met through them.

Switch Man: We met originally through mutual friends who were my friends in college, her friends in graduate school.

Dominant Man: We originally had met on-line, but we had no interest in each other. When we met at a [BDSM] conference, that’s when we began our relationship. And one of the things that we found out about ourselves is that we’re complex. In that having been late bloomers into the lifestyle that we had more time invested in the vanilla side than in the BDSM side and so had a lot of issues and baggage from the past.

I didn’t aggressively pursue her, but when we were at our conference, I said, “You need to come to the room and wake me up.” And that was my test. Just to see if she would do it. And she came in and woke me up and I didn’t come to full consciousness, but I just reached up and grabbed her

and pulled her into bed with me and went back to sleep. She stayed in bed until somebody came and knocked on the door and then she had that “Ohmygod” and jumped up and out of bed. That was what woke me up. We spent the night before talking, for probably about five hours, just her and I. I guess there was a pursuit but it was never threatening.

Submissive Woman: We met each other first on-line but we weren’t interested in each other. I just knew him as any other person and just had normal discussions. We all had reservations to meet at a small conference set up by the channel people in conjunction with the local BDSM club. And that was my first real time stepping into the life.

And so that’s when I met him for the first time was at the airport there. I went with one of the people to pick him up. And there was a chemistry. When on-line, I had promised him I’d bring him something and I didn’t bring [it], and so we started that mind-playing off of each other right there at the airport. We didn’t scene together but we had a lot of discussion time alone and we had dinner alone and talked a lot. There was a big connect there.

When we picked him up and drove to the hotel, we got out the car right away and I was trying to clean up the back seat of this woman who was driving us. And so I bent over and I was cleaning up something off the floorboard, and my antennae started going and I looked up and there was Sir standing right behind me. And here I am, of course, bent over and I immediately stood up like “UH OH, too much of a target.” He just had the grin on his face that said, “Click,” and it was just total electricity. And he still talks about that expression on my face and just that whole feeling you can get from that. And that weekend was very powerful like that constantly.

I’ve never sought anybody in the lifestyle. When I went to the convention, I was going there for part research, part I wanted to see. I didn’t understand that you could have S&M without sex. Part of it was just “Who are these people? What kind of a person is into this stuff,” – outside of me. So part of it was that whole curiosity. The connectivity between Sir and me that weekend was a surprise.

So then afterwards, he had given me his phone number. And I hadn’t called him; I saw him on-line a couple times, but about five days after I got back from that weekend – I had a huge reaction to it, a huge calling for submission. I was driving home from work one day and I immediately had this need to submit. It was like this physical, guttural “I HAVE to submit.” It floored me, with the strength of it. And I flew home and called him up and said, “You gotta help me! I don’t know what’s going on. It’s like this physical addiction right now. I’m going nuts.” And he used his voice to talk me through it. I mean, he dommed me through it, got me into a calm place, and then we examined what had happened. We took the next three

months to get to know each other. I visited him in May of that year. We knew each other from December on-line, we met physically in January, and by May I visited him in a one-on-one DS weekend. And that was the first of our monthly weekends together.

Switch Woman: It was only after we'd actually slept together that we brought up – we could kind of joke – we both knew that we had some toys, but I'm not sure that they were anything other than like the kind of dildo-vibrator sort of like more vanilla type toys. We were at his house – so I kept bugging him to show me his toy collection, so he did. And you know when he had like cuffs and nipple clamps, and it's like "Well! <laughs> We have some discussions to have here!" So. Like I really like these. We were going to just have a casual friendly sexual encounter, which became three days of – or four days – which involved some playing.

Submissive Woman: I answered his Yahoo personal ad. It was listed under BDSM. Loving dominant seeks little miss submissive. And the first thing it said is, "A submissive is not a doormat. She is a gift. The submission is a gift. I will respect her limits." I had been looking through the New Times, always looked for a BDSM relationship. Then I found personals on the net – found BDSM personals – must have gone through three hundred in one night – just screaming through them – and most of them were "Come suck my cock; you will be my slave; yada yada. yada." Either that or they were really wimpy. And then I find this one that is very nice but not too nice. It is very honest and open, and the only problem I had with it was it was from out of town. Wrote him that night. Four days later we met in person. And the rest is history.

Dominant Woman: He met me through my ad in the paper. I never saw him professionally – I get even nervous when I talk about it. But I told him when we first met, we can do the S&M thing but you're a married man. "Yeah, but, I'm not a happy married man." But you're still married and I won't break up anything like that.

Submissive Man: She wasn't a pro-dom at the time. It was more as a escort. And I called her ad and we talked and in some way or another I knew that she was into S&M cause one of the first things I asked her was, "Do you like to spank men?" And she said, "Yeah." And she told me later that she didn't even know at the time that she did. <laughs>

Submissive Woman: I was working in a entry-level position at his company. He was high-level management. Cannot really describe how I knew he was in the lifestyle. Just knew. In lighthearted conversation one day the term "slave" was being thrown around the office, in terms of

fashion slave. He muttered from his computer -- I was the only one in earshot -- "So are you?" And I said "Yes I am." That point he knew I was in the lifestyle and asked me about it later. Pretty risky business, though. He took a big chance.

4.2.3 Partner Selection

One of the areas I wanted to examine is how individuals select a specific partner. Again, I used several different questions.

When asked what was the initial attraction to their partner, the answers included: lifestyle interests or demeanor (15), physical (9), "energy" or presence (7), honesty (6), playful (1), taboo (1), and humor (1). The text of the interviews shows that these values were important even if they were not named at the time of the specific question. When asked what was it that made the partner "the one," the answers included: lifestyle intent (10), "chemistry" (7), honesty or trust (5), friendship (2), playful (1), and physical (1).

Underlying many of the reports were stories of having been in a vanilla relationship before, having been unhappy and not having their BDSM needs met, and being committed to now having a BDSM relationship where their needs could be met.

Submissive Woman: We kind of have the daddy/girl thing going for us usually. It's just kind of enmeshed in our relationship, so that didn't even occur to me that that's role-playing. That's what works for us. Er, works for me and works for him too I guess. Cause he tucks me in and makes sure I have my teddy bear. He's my protector and I'm his little girl, you know. We take care of each other.

Dominant Man: From the moment I met her there was just that energy that was just intoxicating about her. It was never a conscious pursuit because she was in an emotionally vulnerable point and I wasn't

going to confuse her by pursuit. And so it just evolved on its own to a place where we realized we were to that point.

Submissive Woman: We lived for a little over two years by monthly visits. And so we had a dominant submissive relationship long distance, talking daily, morning wake-up calls, night-time tuck-ins. Any time anything happened during the day, if it was an emergency I had to call him up and share it. And he would give me instructions on what he wanted me to do. Even if it was, "Okay, we'll talk about it when I get back." He wanted to know what was going on. And so we always had very stringent rules about how we negotiated while we were apart. And he helped me get through some really bad times.

[Why did you say "This one?" And stay?] Because he met my needs. Specifically my need to be able to leave at any time. And he trusted me enough to allow me that freedom. When we first got together, he wasn't the one. I had no intentions of having "the one" or sticking around. We only looked at it on very short-term basis and before you knew it, two years had gone by. And then it was like "Oh okay! Now we're starting to talk about living together some time" and that's when I realized I had no desire to go.

Dominant Woman: How I really got into it was when we first started dating, he said, "Look before we go any further, I have these things about me you really need to know." And he sat and told me and he was so terrified and I sat and started laughing, not at him, but oh thank you god for sending this wonderful man to me. Then I started telling him all the things that I had wanted to do. They were the same things and it was okay that I could dress him up as my little doll and put a little nightie on him and send him to bed. That was his favorite thing. That's how I knew it was okay because my partner wanted to do it.

Switch Woman: He bit me before he kissed me actually. And I think the fact that I gasped made him think "Oh this is gonna be good."
<laughs>

Switch Man: I knew she was kinky during our first couple of days of having sex with each other. She asked me something about if I had any rope and that got us into that discussion. I think I bit her before I kissed her for the first time.

Dominant Woman: The very first thing that attracted to me, when I first met him, I walked into our friend's home. He was sitting at the table and he was talking about how he wished he wished he had a tongue like Gene Simmons. And I said "Oooh" <laughs>. That was the first thing that attracted me, was that I knew he like oral sex. And he wished he had a

longer tongue to do it with. And that was it. I said, "I want that man." <laughs> And I got him. He thinks he lured me, but I said I knew I wanted him. <laughs>

Submissive Woman: Believe it or not, his looks did not attract me when I first met him. And he knows it. But his kindness, his thoughtfulness, his understanding on-line as well as in person. And his sense of humor all the way around. He is a goofball, and so am I.

Dominant Man: BDSM was a – shall we say – a prerequisite cause I was in a long term marriage that did not involve the lifestyle. I actually made the resolution to myself that I would go through life without a full time or permanent relationship rather than with a partner who was not into the lifestyle. It was a conscious thought and it was a conscious requirement of mine for a long-term committed relationship.

We actually had a BDSM relationship before we had an emotional relationship. So I would say that was certainly one of the primary attractants first is that she intuitively knew that I was a dominant and I intuitively knew that she was a submissive. And that was very exciting for us to discover each other. And then the relationship started off as being purely a DS, BDSM relationship that evolved.

Submissive Woman: I was observing him in a work setting, but immediately I was attracted to his power. The way he took command of a situation at all times. Coupled with the way that he treated everyone with respect – including me. And that was very impressive because I was basically a nobody in the office. I was somebody that you really didn't need to pay attention to or really show respect to.

Submissive Woman: We had a long distance relationship. For sixteen months, he came down almost every weekend – I'm talking about maybe four weekends he did not. Even when I asked him to stay up there, he said, "No, I need to come home. Home is where you are."

Dominant Woman: He said "ya-all" on the phone one time. <Laughs> He had a southern accent and it seemed like at that point I needed a little bit of anchor. And plus he kept telling me, "you're not submissive". That's what I needed to hear. "You are not submissive."

I never would have said it before, but his gentleness. I've always gone for bad guys – the bikers come up to me in bars, but his gentleness, you know, and the fact that I had this feeling that he would step out in front of a train to save me. That has never happened before. I think that, too, that he absolutely worships me – you know, if we're gonna be real truthful here that's one of the main things.

Submissive leaning Switch Woman: He is a dominant-leaning switch. Actually that's what he said to me when we first talked about this. And I was like, <stage whisper> "Thank you, god."

Submissive Woman: I grew up in a family where I didn't even trust my own parents. And I don't let people near my back. Actually this is how I knew. We always met out in public for the first month. And I never let anyone touch my back or anything because that's my vulnerable side. And I let him sit behind me, and he put his arms around me, and it felt right. That was it – when I realized that I could give him my back, allow myself to be vulnerable to him, and I did not feel threatened.

Dominant Man: The way she makes me laugh. The way she loves old airplanes. And the way that even though I am five foot eleven and three-quarters and she is five foot four – the way we fit together so well when snuggling. And the way we touch each other.

Submissive Woman: He had everything on the list. There was also the fact that our BDSM interests were very compatible. Because the other times I have done things like that, I've usually been just indulged. They're just not doing it right when they're indulging you – it's entirely different. It's a different energy. I didn't realize how important it was to me because I never before had a partner who was as into it as I was.

Switch Man: I found her physically attractive – was one of the things. I liked how she smelled. I respected her, I found her very interesting intellectually. I liked the fact that she was kinky. I liked the fact that she could talk about sex and what she wanted.

Just as couples had a well established "how we met" stories, a number of couples have a well established "why we were attracted to each other" stories.

Dominant Woman: He's interested in about everything, but butts is the top. He tells me "Oh the very first thing I noticed about you were your eyes." I go "Um hm." He goes, "I won't lie to you – it was your butt." <laugh>

Submissive Man: Her eyes – no, it was her butt. <laughs>

Submissive Man: I thought she was very pretty. She let me touch her. While we stood in the garage and revved up the Harleys. At my buddy's

house on New Year's Eve, here's this girl I didn't know and she cuddled right up to me and I got me a handful of heinie and thought, "What could be better than this?"

Dominant Woman: What attracted him to me was I had this one-piece jumpsuit on and I had a pair of shoes on that had really high heels and they looked like boots but they were the shoes back then in the 70s. And they were really stacked high and I was looking like a fox. We were out there in the garage listening to the bike roar and vibrate, and he reached over and touched my ass. And he said "Ohhh" and I let him touch it, cause I knew I wanted him. And that was it.

4.3 Power Dynamics

I had a set of questions that were designed to examine the power dynamics of the couples. I was looking for indications of the power imbalance/power exchange as reflected in the stated roles, the power they assign to themselves and to their partner, and changes they want to make in their partner and themselves. The high availability of safewords indicated agreed upon limits to the power exchange. (See the section on Sexual Bargaining for more on safewords.)

In this section I examine the power dynamics of BDSM couples, first focusing on the SM and sexual domain. This included their chosen roles, switching between roles, and whether the respondents defined their SM relationship as 24/7. The examination of power dynamics is then extended into daily living. An attempt to look at the couples' definitions of their relationship was explored by looking at the rights of the top to punish the bottom for perceived wrong doings, and whether they held the concept of the top owning the bottom. Finally, I looked at how each couple negotiated for the daily things in life and the changes each partner wanted.

In describing their personal power, the tops response included: total control or final say (7), sex (9), punishment (3), dress (4), finances (3). The bottoms responded that their tops had power in the domains of all areas (6), finances (4), sex (2), outside activities (3), and dress (4).

When asked to describe their personal areas of power, the bottoms responses included: food (1), healthcare (1), homemaking (4), outside work (6), personal or family finances (6), major purchases, ability to voice opinion, relationships with kids or family

(3), dressing the top (1). The tops responded that their bottoms had control of: healthcare, veto of BDSM activities (3), relationships with children or family (4), job (6), personal or family finances (5), dress (2), household (2), day-to-day life (2).

When asked about areas of personal and partner's power, there was substantial congruity as to who had the power, and no major areas of contention for any of the couples.

4.3.1 Sexual / SM Power

4.3.1.1 General

In all couples, a common thread is the appearance of a power exchange in SM scene space. Frequently they talk of absolute control in the scene. At the same time, there were detailed discussions about the top taking care of the bottom. It should be noted that in most couples, the dominant / submissive nature of the relationship made the boundaries between SM power exchange and the power dynamics of daily living very fluid.

Submissive Woman: I think I have a fair amount of personal power in the lifestyle in the sense that I am allowed to voice my opinion and it is taken under consideration. He has the final say, but if there's somebody I would like to play with or not like to play with, or if I have feelings that I don't want him to play with somebody for whatever reason I may have, I can state my case. He'll listen. And I have a certain amount of power. I mean, I've said there's absolutely no way I want to play with so-and-so. He respects that.

Dominant Man: In terms of power issues lifestyle related, I pretty much retain all the power there. I choose to allow my partner to be a little less constrained than some doms keep their submissives. That being said, I exercise absolute control over who she plays with, or if she plays with someone. If it's someone that I'm uncomfortable with and she might want

to play with somebody, my “No” is an absolute. And she would never think of doing that without my permission.

Dominant Woman: The collar goes on Friday when he comes home from work and he takes it off Sunday. That is 100% on the weekends. He comes home from work on Friday. When he gets out of the shower, he brings me the collar and I put it on him. But during the week, it's not a continual thing. Some days yes he comes home, he's been fantasizing all day long, he comes in and he's like "Oh, Hon, you kept me in wood all day." And I'm like "What?" And "Oh, oh, okay." Cause I'm not always on. It depends on what I'm doing when he comes home. And there are times and days where I've done nothing but fantasize and I do meet him at the door with a collar. Instantly when he comes in I'm ready. So there are exceptions to the rule. He is not a true slave, he's a submissive, you know so he's not expected that the minute he walks in the door he's in servitude.

Submissive Man: Cock and Ball Torture. It's the Torture thing, pain. I don't like it. I don't mind if she touches and fondles and occasionally abuses, but when she's reaching for ropes and clamps, and things like that, I really get "Uh uh, I don't like it." Don't like nipple clamps for that same reason. Sometimes it happens and sometimes it don't. Sometimes I go ahead and give it – oh or sometimes it's taken. Sometimes she does things knowing damn well it will piss me off.

Submissive Woman: We went through a period there where I was initiating sex. And it got to a bad place mentally for Sir. He took it that my asking him for sex was becoming a critique of his not offering sex enough. And that's not the way it was meant, but we had to negotiate and discuss then what was bothering him about that. We got to the point that where I said “Okay.” If I want sex, I can let him know that I'm interested. I can tell him maybe verbally or get snuggly and let him know, but it's still completely up to him. I would signal readiness. Then the sex may or may not happen.

Submissive Woman: I was passive about blades and cutting. I was intrigued when I saw some artwork of other people who had been cut. But I was not really hungry for it. And then Sir started cutting on me with knives – or drawing on me with knives, scraping on me. And I realized I liked it. And so I grew into it. But it was not something I originally had a desire at all to do.

4.3.1.2 Roles

When asked to briefly define their role and the role of their partner, answers within each pair of respondents were largely congruent. BDSM subculture terminology is somewhat imprecise and debated. Two bottoms referred to their partner's role as a Master. No top used that term. In one couple, the top referred to their partner as a "slave," the bottom referred to themselves as a submissive and used the term "Master" for their top. Later in the interviews the respondents were given the opportunity to define their roles in detail. These responses were quite specific and varied from couple to couple.

Submissive Man: I tend to define myself in a first comment as being an ass kisser and a boot licker. I am a submissive to women – I'm not gay – I am subservient. I'm not a masochist. I'm not a pain puppy, I'm not a pain slut, I don't like intense pain. I enjoy cross-dressing a lot. I enjoy wearing clothes and it puts me in a different persona that is always submissive. When I don't want to deal with business anymore and write out checks or take care of feeding the dogs that kind of jazz, I'll take my street clothes off and change clothes and become much more submissive and docile.

Submissive Woman: He calls me his submissive, or he'll refer to me as "my submissive". On my collar it says, "My beautiful [Scene Name]" and that's his pet name for me. While I feel I've had some interactions lifestyle related, I've never been called [Scene Name] until he entered my life and GAVE me that name.

Dominant Woman: I'm dominant but it gives me such responsibility that I can't be as dominant as I would be in another relationship, because I know that he would do anything in the world I wanted him to, and I could get him in bad, bad trouble so I have to watch everything. I can't even be as mean as I want to be because he would take it, and so that takes the fun out of it – like cheating at solitaire or something. So I'm absolutely the most dominant one in the relationship, but it makes me to the point where I can't be.

Submissive Man: I'm submissive, also masochistic. I love the pain. We've played with me being a top, and it just doesn't feel right to me. It feels much better to be a submissive and on the bottom.

Switch Woman: We have a very egalitarian relationship. I would say we only have well-defined sexual episodes of power exchange. Because for me it's VERY important that it's egalitarian. That's actually extremely important. I think that's because he is a truly egalitarian male. I think that's one of the reasons we got together.

Dominant Woman: [Were you working as a pro-dom at that time?] Yes. But I didn't know that I was really dominant. In my private life I was submissive. And in my work, professional life I was dom. And then my partner showed me that I didn't have to be mean to be dominant. Cause I couldn't quite put that all together. I read some of Cleo Dubois things about the goddess and all and it just struck a chord and I thought, hmm, maybe that's just what I need.

Submissive Woman: I am submissive. Also masochistic. In the beginning I would have said not, but I'm turning into a little bit of a pain slut these days. At least my ass is. So, it's changing. I was a lesbian for fifteen years. I'm dominant when I used to be at my work. So outside of the role I'm more dominant than I want to be. But I'm a pretty ballsy woman at times so – let's put it this way, I aspire to be a submissive. I'm rather headstrong. When I'm PMSing being a sadist is not a problem. Show me the person and how much pain they want.

Dominant Man: I'm a dominant. I am discovering that yes I do have a little bit of a sadistic twist. I don't like pain. The few times that I tried playing as a submissive, I did not enjoy it and with one particular person I actually switched roles. I kind of turned the tables and got back on top of the situation so to speak.

4.3.1.3 Switching

It could be unnerving for an uninformed bystander to watch the top tell the bottom, "beat me." This study found that such combinations are not uncommon.

33% of the top men (n=14) and 67% of the top women (n=3) considered themselves masochistic while 17% of the top men and 67% of the top women also considered themselves submissive. This data, while limited, provides some support to Baumeister's (2000) erotic plasticity model, which suggests that women are more flexible in their erotic roles than men. Some of the respondents told of having tried the other role, and it just didn't fit them.

Dominant Man: I've participated in certain submissive activities but generally not in a submissive role. Typically, I'm more the one that's directing things. So I would say it's what's normally classified as submissive activities but I tend always to be in the controlling role of it. One of my favorite activities are water spots, so that would include golden showers, that would include enemas, that would include pretty much all facets of water sports. And sometimes I find it satisfying to be on the receiving end. And that typically is viewed as being a submissive role. But typically for me it's not a submissive role.

Dominant Woman: I am a top that bottoms. More masochistic, some submissive tendencies. I think that I find it really hard to be submissive because I might become submissive. I feel that I have the tendency to be real submissive – too submissive, in a way. I had a relationship – it wasn't in the S&M community, but the last relationship I had was a real power struggle. And as powerful as I am a woman – that man had me where I couldn't even plant flowers without asking him where. It wasn't consensual, is the thing. I didn't realize it was happening, till it was already happened. And that is the pity, and all. Consensuality is the whole thing. That's why I find it really hard to be real submissive. But I do bottom; I like that.

Submissive Woman: My dominant side is something that remains separate. It's something that could come out but Sir and I keep her separate. Cause my dominant side is not very nice. When I've done my dominant side in chat, there's really no sense of care of the other person and so I'm not in a sense of comfort to be able to let her role-play. And I don't know if I ever will. So Sir keeps her under wraps. Part of what I recognize in my vanilla life is that I attempt sometimes to overtake and take control. And it's not really a wish to take control. It's a "prove to me that

you're strong enough to remain in control so that she can go away." She's my warrior and protector.

We have certain venues where that part of me can come out. She's very competitive, so when we play pool, we recognize that's my dominant side that comes out. And he tweeks her specifically as a female dominant when we play pool. And she responds female dominant. But for everything else she remains separate.

4.3.1.4 Twenty-Four / Seven

There is good agreement between partners as to whether the couple is in 24/7 relationship ($r=0.83$). 10 of the 17 couples said they were 24/7 (full time) in the BDSM quality of their relationship. One couple was split as to whether they were 24/7 (the bottom woman said they were 24/7,) and 5 couples said they were not 24/7. The couple that makes a living in the BDSM community reported that they were not 24/7. It should be noted that many of the couples went on to define 24/7, saying that of course there are dishes to wash and children to feed, and that 24/7 means there is at least a background BDSM presence in their lives that shows up in the little things of life.

Dominant Man: It is 24/7 even though the activity or practice of some of the rituals don't occur all the time.

4.3.2 Power Dynamics in Daily Living

Regarding finances, in 8 couples the man is the primary breadwinner, in 4 the woman is the primary breadwinner, and in 7 expenses are shared relatively equally. There is no pattern as to income source and power dynamics between top and bottom roles.

12 of 17 couples report that the top has control over the bottom in some form in daily life, 2 couples report that any control is only for the duration of any play scenes, and 3 couples disagreed as to whether the power exchange extends into daily living. In all cases of disagreement, the bottom said the top has control in daily matters. Over all, 94% of the men and 88% of the women said the power exchange extended into daily living.

Submissive Woman: When it came to the house, we both decided which house we wanted. We went through a whole process together talking about how we'd do it. We both put a lot of input in and then Sir said "Okay, this is how we're gonna go then." And usually, I'd have to say, 99% of the time, I have absolutely no objections to it because he listens so closely to what my needs and my wants are. He makes sure that whatever is going on is meeting both of our needs and some of our wants.

Submissive Woman: I have told my partner that as my master he can request for me to wear whatever he wants me to. And he is so sweet right now. He says "Whatever makes you comfortable."

Switch Woman: I would say we have a very egalitarian relationship. It's very like a very peer-type relationship – which is, I guess, another way of saying egalitarian. But I think of egalitarian more in terms like the way – division of labor and things like that.

Dominant Woman: Pretty much he's turned his whole will and life and care over to me. He does what I say. When he comes home and talks to me about work and I tell him, "Well then do this or do that." That's more – not lifestyle, that's more me being his lifetime partner, you know, his wife. And I give him suggestions, "Well, okay, that's obviously not working. Well, have you thought about doing this?" So and then he says "No I never did. Okay, I'll try that."

If he wants to go to the store, he tells me pretty much every single solitary thing he's gonna to do. He is my true submissive. He's not a slave, but he is my true submissive. If I want him to wash the dishes, by god he's gonna wash the dishes right then and there. He's gonna stop what he's doing and he's gonna wash those dishes. And he does. Yes, I have full control over him after working hours. All his free time is my time.

Submissive Man: As far as matters of the heart go, or our sex lives, or things like that, she is definitely very dominant. And that's okay. I think that's cool. As I've said in the past, it makes my dick hard. And when the thought process goes from the big head to the little head then all else is, "So okay I'll write the check, I don't care." In matters of electric bill, the new tires on the car, that kind of stuff, I would say that we are pretty equal. In day to day lives, things like that. You know, the taking care of business. I don't remember the last time I spent \$100 without talking to her about it, discussing it with her, I mean. So in our daily lives I would say we're pretty equal. But in the bedroom and matters of the heart she's got to play dominant. And I'm submissive and that's quite all right.

Obviously it influences our life everyday because we do live the lifestyle, but she does not dictate that we're gonna have a red house over here we're buying this one I don't care. It doesn't go that way. No. We make all those decisions together. Like the car, that was a together thing.

Dominant Man: I always have veto power in daily issues. But typically, if I say absolutely not, regardless, it would be no. If it's a major purchase, if it's a major decorating whatever, it is a joint decision, it is one we both participate in.

Non-lifestyle, real world power as to who does the dishes and takes out the garbage and mops the floor and mows the grass and trims the bushes and all of that, I think we're probably like vanilla couples. Some weeks we're both pretty happy with things, some weeks that she's pissed off with me because I'm not doing what she thinks I should be doing. And some weeks I'm pissed off at her because I don't think she's doing what she should be doing. But like most people we argue about it and try to resolve it and work through it.

Dominant Woman: We got one of those relationships where I ask his opinion and then we do what I want to. And since he'll do anything in the world I ask him to, I take his opinion into account more than I normally would. But I still pick the house and all that stuff.

He has power by being so submissive. There's a Chinese thing that goes: the stick that's really strong you break, the other one just kinds of bends. Well, he can get me to do things I wouldn't normally do and allow him to do things I wouldn't normally – because I don't have to. He bends. That is his biggest form of power, I believe, over me. And my form of power is I just tell him, and he does.

I think my biggest turn-off in this whole entire world – is somebody that's intentionally mean to someone else. You know people do it unintentionally and I used to and I guess I still have it in me to be mean. Especially to my partner for some reason – I guess cause I want to prove to

myself that I can and he'll still stay. But I used to be mean to him, but I didn't like myself when I was doing it. And it's not just southern manners, you know. <Laughs>

Submissive Woman: I told him from the first letter that kids were non-negotiable – I'm not having them. And he was in the gray area about that; but once he started thinking about it, he told me that he felt he was too old and also not set up for children. So that's when we had my tubes tied.

Submissive Woman: Let's put it this way. He can't make me submit if I don't want to. I realize that's the whole essence of submission, but there are times I look at him and go "I can't."

Dominant Man: I'm a top or I'm the dominant, she's the submissive – but in fact we are – I'll say we are equals.

4.3.3 Rights to Punish, Rights of Ownership

When attempting to evaluate the extent of the power exchange in daily living, two indicators are the rights of the top to punish the bottom, and the concept that the top owns the bottom.

Within the couples there was some agreement as to the rights of punishment of the bottom by the top ($r=0.36$). By gender, 62% of the men and 92% of the women said there was a right of punishment of the bottom by the top. When viewed by role orientation, there were three male top couples where there was disagreement on rights of punishment – in all cases the bottom claimed the top had the right of punishment while the tops did not claim this level of power. In the female top couples, the one disagreement was where the top claimed rights of punishment.

Submissive Woman: I'd say I've been punished twice in three years. It involves a single swat. But it's a ritual in and of itself. We discuss the

offence totally before the actual punishment. And then it's as much of a mental place as it is one physical swat.

Punishment for us can only result if: one, we've already discussed something; two, we've covered it and I already know what my behavior is supposed to do; and three, I specifically didn't act on that. And like I said it's only happened twice.

With the punishment also comes the absolute total ending of that event never to be brought up again.

[Given that you're a masochist and it's a single swat, I take it that it's not a particularly heavy punishment.] No, it gets back into my childhood pretty much with the knowledge of disappointment, which taps into that slave persona, that service. For me it hurts horribly that I've disappointed Sir in some way. I mean I can remember being brought to tears as a child by my father saying, "I'm disappointed in you." And for us the punishment factor is that it's having me recognize that I have disappointed him and he's given me all the tools to work with and I have still not chosen to do it. So therefore it's a willful thing and by doing that willfully I have disappointed him. And so the punishment – the swat is not for the pain so much as for the feeling of recognition that he knows I've done wrong, I know that I've done wrong, he's now <smack> ending that. We've worked out all of it and he's acknowledging that it's over and it's done with.

Dominant Man: Punishment is a cleansing act. It's only done when there's been a serious offense and the punishment marks the end of that offense. She's released of her responsibility from and it doesn't exist in our life anymore as of the culmination of the punishment. I only punished her once.

Dominant Man: Our DS relationship is not a punishment-based relationship.

Submissive Woman: He has the right to punish me. Restricting my computer time. He keeps threatening about sticking me in a corner but that's yet to happen. It's basically been more restrictions of things I enjoy. But it has never been – we need to work on it more. [You're saying you need more punishment?] I need stricter discipline. And he knows I crave it.

There was minimum agreement as to ownership of the bottom by the top

($r=0.1$), with 3 tops (two men, one woman) claiming ownership and 2 bottoms (both

women) claiming being owned, contrary to claims by their partner. By gender, 64% of the men and 50% of the women stated that the top owned the bottom. Several of the bottoms said that they also felt a sense of ownership of their top.

Submissive Woman: I don't consider myself a slave by current definitions as I know it. Although the terminology vacillates depending on who you are speaking to. I'm a submissive not a slave. But I still consider myself owned in the sense that he has the final say on my lifestyle interaction.

I think the power that we have with each other is reciprocal. And I identify with him as my particular master. I do not recognize anyone else as my master. So, sure, I would say there's a certain level – not in the same way, of course, but – I don't have the same level of control. He may say differently, but I don't think I have the same level of control that he has over me.

Submissive Woman: One of the reasons we're a little bit pre-conceived on the notions of master and slave right now because both of us tend to think of a slave as someone who does not have a voice. And he says that he always wants me to have a voice, an opinion, and to counsel him. So – when I first came into the relationship I liked the word slave because it was a romantic notion, and then he looked at me and gave me the astonished look going, "Are you sure?"

Submissive Woman: Part of me wants to believe that I own him too. But to be honest with you, part of me selfishly wants to own him, even though I know as a good subbie I should not. But to deny either part would be lying.

4.3.4 Handling Differences, Negotiation

Another practical area of examining the power exchange is to evaluate how the different couples handled differences and negotiated issues. In handling differences, communication was the biggest factor mentioned. With the exception of two respondents (both from the same couple), all respondents' answers included

communication in either their answer to this direct question or in other areas of the interview.

How they handle differences: communication (23), argue or get noisy (8), use the BDSM lifestyle to handle (6), not rush the process / set-aside until later (6), let it sit / agree to disagree (2), succumb / concede (2), walk away for the moment (2), and use counselors (13).

Dominant Woman: Talk. And it's kind of like a compromise, but if we really have a difference of opinions and it's so far away that we'll never see anything together about it, sometimes we'll just agree to disagree. And the "No" always gets it. If say I don't want him to play with other women, he can but he's just got to go away if he does, and never come back. And if he had something that strong, that he didn't want me to do, I'd expect the same from him, because we ... everybody has limits. And if you feel so strongly about something that you have to do something, well, you either live with it or you don't.

Submissive Male: We pretty much accept that there's gonna be some differences, and we agree to disagree on some things. I'm a Coke drinker; she likes Pepsi.

Submissive Woman: I was trying to talk to someone else about it when they said, "Well dominants tend to get egos and then they say things that hurt you." If Sir says something and my gut reaction is pain and my other gut reaction is "He did that on purpose. He's trying to do this." I have an immediate counter-reaction that says, "He would never do that on purpose to me. He's claimed me - not to hurt me." And it's always made me step back from any intentionality of the pain, so that I could say, "I think I misunderstood because this is what I heard you say and this is what I thought you were saying, you know, hurting." And he recognizes, "no." And so it allows us to get down to a communicative level.

Submissive Male: We talk. We negotiate. We are both recovering alcoholics. That program has taught us a lot about living with each other and how to live life on life's terms, how to deal with day-to-day problems. As adults, as thinking, caring, loving individuals. And I'd like to think that those teachings have nudged us along the line that we try and do most of this together.

Dominant Woman: He's my best friend and I'm his best friend and that works well. That works real well, no matter what we can tell each other. Sometimes it's like husband go away, wife go way, let's just talk as friends, you know. And we've literally done that. We've like "Okay I want to go out for coffee and I want to talk to my best friend." And so my partner's cross-dressing persona comes out, we sit there and we talk, so that we're best friends first and we love each other very deeply so that everything else works well. Without those two things nothing would work well. So I guess that to me that's important: our friendship and our love for each other. And out of that comes everything else.

Even when we're the angriest we have to stop and say, "Look I don't want to be with you right now. I don't even want to be in the same room with you right now. Just let's go away from each other for a little bit until we're in a better mood." And we do do that. And there are times when we're in the car and we're fighting all the way and it's like "I don't even want to be in this car with you right now." And he says, "I don't want to be with you either." So it's like, "Don't talk to me. Why don't you just drive and when we get there we're not going to talk." And by the time we get there we're not angry anymore.

Dominant Woman: We negotiate likes and dislikes or things that are kind of like a "red" you know. And then if one of us has a red, the other one has to live with it because it's one thing you can't do. But it's a lot of negotiation and talking. I find it's a lot easier for people to talk about things that they feel if you turn the lights out so they can't look at ya. So I turn all the lights out and then ask.

And another thing that I do, is whisper things and allow them to kind of percolate and then a while later I'll come back and mention it and "Oh" it's his idea. Sometimes people – if you put something in someone's head and let them think about it for a while, things that they thought they wouldn't like at all, once they think about it, maybe they will. So that little bug in the ear I think is a really good way to negotiate too.

If there's any antagonism or any dispute, we put it to a place of peace, recognizing we made need lots and lots of other discussion about it, but we always put it to a place of peace before we go to bed. And that's only not happened one time and we both recognized that that caused problems by not doing that. So we're both committed to wrapping something into a

place of peace. Even if it's just naming "This is a problem and we need to deal with it." That's a ritual for us.

Dominant Man: [Does one of you tend to lead in what car or house to buy?] She does. I don't have to. I have the final decision. It's very liberating. Because it wasn't what she was used to when she was living the vanilla lifestyle and it doesn't work with her submissive side, she doesn't like [it] sometimes when—especially in the beginning—when I'm "Okay, I'm doing the dishes." Especially if I did any of those traditional housework things. It took awhile for us. "You know I don't mind doing this. Because if you're doing this, you're not taking care of me. So if I do these things, then they're done. You don't have to do them now. All your time [can be] dedicated to worship me." And so it works for us that I contribute in that way even though her traditional upbringing and her submissive side wasn't comfortable with it in the beginning.

She entered into the relationship and she gave her submission. And I took everything else after that. But I promised her that I would protect her and that I would take care of her. And part of that was to make sure she would take care of me. And if I don't take care of her, in all ways, then she won't be there to take care of me. So she's gonna go do belly dancing. She needs the exercise and I'm visually oriented.

Submissive Woman: I have the ability to express my desires either for a specific kind of scene or a specific experience, but it's up to Sir to then decide how and when that takes place, if it's going to take place.

We even brought S&M into motivation to bring him to the dentist. He didn't go to a dentist for years, and I wanted him to be able to have his teeth taken care of. I don't like my feet being played with. So I offered my feet freely for a minute of foot time without my struggling for every minute of pain he had at the dentist. And he went to the dentist office and he specifically found a female dentist with blonde hair. So that when he had to go back to have – cause he hadn't been there for years he had to have periodontal work done in four different quadrants over four different times – he could associate the pain with me. And he built up like four hours of pain in his pain bank for his teeth, which translated into four hours of toe time. And that's anything from mouth, feet, knife, anything. And I have to, from my agreement, give him my feet without any struggle, which is incredibly difficult. I can pretty much zone in five minutes because they're so sensitive. So we bring the power exchange into our lives even [at] that level. It's a part of everything we do.

Submissive Woman: I went through so many head games when I was younger that I try very hard not to do them now because they're a waste of time. The mind games, anything like that, the withholding of

information. I just take anything to him and, “What do you think about?” you know, or “I have a need for” or “I have problems with” or “I think that I’m seeing something in you. Tell me what’s going on.”

Because he was always a little bit more reserved than me so it took a little while to get him used to talking. He was afraid of even opening his mouth because in previous relationships the girl would bolt. He had to get used to that. I said, “I’m not going anywhere. Tell me anything. You know, yell at me. Try not to, but I will take it in stride and we will talk about it.” I got him to open up, I mean negotiation is—is – it’s not even really negotiation, we just talk about it. I don’t really even think of it as negotiating anymore. In scene or out of scene.

Switch Woman: We’re just committed to one another for life, so I think that puts a sense of security around the whole thing. [If something happens] that one of us is unhappy about, we need to deal with it. It’s gonna make one of us unhappy or we’re gonna be dealing with it for a little while, but I don’t have any worry that it’s gonna end our relationship.

Submissive Woman: He even claimed my bitch. I have an ability to be really nasty and he loves me with that [quality] as well. He gave me permission to be everything and all who I am. And he accepted all of it.

I do think that the dynamics in S&M, BDSM is what has permitted that – as well as Sir’s unique giftedness and being open to that. I mean it takes a strong person to allow someone to be the fullness of who they are and agree to work through that and accept that as being okay.

Of the 13 respondents who had been to counselors at some time in their life, 2 used the counselors to get more comfortable with their BDSM interests. None had gone to counseling to be “cured” of their interest. 4 respondents volunteered that they had sought out a kink-friendly counselor.

Dominant Man: Actually the biggest problem we have interpersonally is that my style of arguing and her style of arguing are diametrically opposite. And we had a very difficult time resolving anything. We had wonderful four-hour for five-hour long arguments, with no resolution. And we needed to learn how to argue effectively, and that is an art. I’m a very linear, logical thinker. You know, A leads to B leads to C leads to ... and, and here’s the conclusion. As the therapist pointed out to me, I tend to argue thinking I’m morally correct. She is on the emotional side of it.

When she is emotional the emotions pour out and she is all over the map about what she is upset about. And I don't deal well with that. Give me the issue and I will logically argue through that issue, but don't bounce around. So she has the cornucopia of issues that come flying out and I'm on a railroad track, and those things aren't compatible. At my midlife, I am learning that the issue is rarely the issue.

I'm a fixer by nature. My whole career is fixing something that is broken and bringing order out of chaos. I tend to want to take those skills and apply them to an emotional out-pouring, and herding cats is easy in comparison. It just simply does not work. In fact one of her favorite sayings is when we're in at it is that "I'm not one of your employees." My response to that is generally, "Yeah, if you were, you'd either do what I told you or I'd fire your ass now." None of which is guaranteed to engender open communication at that particular point in time. But I'm getting a little better at listening and she's getting a little better at – actually I'm getting a little better at feeling and she's getting a little better at choosing the right words.

4.3.5 Changes Wanted

When the respondents were asked what changes they wanted in their partner or themselves, they either listed issues in every day life, such as losing weight, or they described how they wanted more time in role or time in play.

Submissive Woman: There's not a lot that I'd like to change. The one thing that I would like to change, though, probably would be the level of intimacy that we're allowed to achieve. I want more of it. But I simply see that as the dynamics of where we are in our lives right now. I would say playtime and intimacy are one and the same because I think we achieve a higher level of intimacy in our relationship when we are allowed to play – or able to play. It's the connection that we make that's very strong. I think frequency would be a good way of defining it. I wish we were able to do that more often in our lives.

Dominant Man: The thing that for both of us is difficult to achieve, because we are not 24/7 DS, is finding the time and the inclination with all of the other pressures that exist on both of us for time energy and mental power to actively participate in lifestyle activities. It's just one of those things that's tough to get prioritized sometimes. Probably the biggest conflict is she probably – in fact she will tell you – cause she tells me – is she would like to have more lifestyle activities integrated in our day-in, day-

out life than what we do. And that typically is for me to initiate since I am in the dominant role.

Dominant Man: I would like us to be able to be less passionate about discussing issues that are passionate.

Dominant Man: I think that the one thing I could possibly modify myself is to be more in tune with her emotions at times. And have better skills at dealing with her when she has an emotional crisis. Sometimes she will have a very emotional issue going on that's troubling her greatly and I can't relate to what she's feeling and not minimize her feelings. So I'd like to have better skills and be more in touch with that.

Submissive Woman: I'm an adrenalin queen. I love adrenalin and endorphin. I'm wired that way. So I wish my beloved partner was a bit more sadistic to get the adrenalin going, but it's still so new so I ain't pushing. Right now he has a real hard time inflicting any pain on me, even if I'm going "Oh god please, help me, give me some - more -now".

I know I need to work on being a better sub and stop being so damn headstrong, and he would like to be a better dominant. And so I mean the main thing is working on that. Because that's what we want to be the biggest part of our lives and right now it's the weakest part.

We've tried setting down rules and of course it's in constant renegotiation. But most of them are more suggestions than rules. He's not real hard on rules - yet. But uh, [Is there a request in there?] Yeah. A little bit, yeah. Oh heck yeah!

Dominant Man: I need to become more sadistic for her. Get away from the Mr. Rodgers way I was raised.

Dominant Man: More her communication to me is, "I'm not happy with things because we're not playing often enough, we're not getting to that space as frequently as I would like and I need to. I need that structure, I need to go to that space more frequently." And of all of the things in our relationship that's probably the one thing that is the most problematic for both of us.

4.4 Sexual Bargaining

The factors used to study sexual bargaining include an examination of compatibility (both in roles and in specific activities of interest), perceived benefits of the BDSM lifestyle (motivation to make it work), safewords, an overview of the reported examples of sexual bargaining, and rituals the couple use to confirm their BDSM lifestyle and their relationship.

4.4.1 Couple Compatibility

4.4.1.1 Compatibility of Roles

For this study, compatibility of roles implies that the interests of one partner do not clash (are not on the “No” list) with the partner’s interests. See Figure 11.

	COMPATIBILITY
Top Men for SM	73%
Top Women for SM	50%
Top Men for D/s	100%
Top Women for D/s	100%

Figure 11. Percentage Compatibility – Non-clashing interest in Primary Roles

The respondents were asked if they were sadistic, masochistic, dominant, and/or submissive. When comparing primary roles, there was 100% compatibility in the dominant/submissive roles of the couple, where compatibility is defined as not having interests in opposition to the partner. For example, the partner is not opposed to the activity. Top men/bottom women were compatible 73% of the time regarding

male sadism/female masochism, while top women/bottom men were compatible 50% of the time for female sadism/male masochism.

For this study, complementary interests means that the partners actively desired to do the complementary action. For example, if one partner enjoys flogging, the other partner enjoys being flogged. See Figure 12. When comparing complementary interests, the correlation is the same as for compatible interests in D/s roles. The correlation is slightly lower only for sadistic men/masochistic women.

	COMPLEMENTARY
Top Men for SM	60%
Top Women for SM	50%
Top Men for D/s	100%
Top Women for D/s	100%

Figure 12. Percentage Complementary Interest – Active Interest in Primary Roles

When comparing all roles (i.e. including masochistic interest for top identified men, etc.) the percentage of complementary interests remains high. See Figure 13. In other words, these couples have a high probability of getting what they want, both in the areas of their primary BDSM interests and in any secondary BDSM interests. It should be noted that this is totally the opposite of John Money’s conjectures regarding the likelihood of working so-called “paraphilic” relationships.

	COMPATIBILITY
Top Men for SM	59%
Top Women for SM	65%
Top Men for D/s	88%
Top Women for D/s	65%

Figure 13. Percentage of Active Interest in All Roles

4.4.1.2 Compatibility by Activity

As discussed in section 4.1.7, “Knowing their Partner,” the respondents were given a list of BDSM activities. They were then asked to rate a list of activities into five categories: strong interest, interest, neutral interest, dislikes, and strong dislikes. The respondents’ answers as a top were compared to the partner’s answers as bottom, and visa versa. Each area of potential interest was defined as a match, a conflict, or a “don’t care” for the couple.

In examining the primary role pair for each couple, there was a correlation of $r=0.36$ for the male top/female bottom interests and $r=0.34$ for the female top/male bottom interests. Because the list contains items that are both prevalent and less common in the community being studied, it is believed that a positive correlation would be expected even if individuals were picked at random. For male top/female bottom couples, the average match in activities was 19.07 BDSM activities out of a possible 29 activities in the list. Not all respondents answered for all categories. For female top/male bottom couples, the average match was 18 BDSM activities out of a possible 29. Male top/female bottom couples have an average mismatch of 4.33 for desired activities and female top/male bottom couples had an average mismatch of 4.5.

The number of activities that were actively sought by both partners was substantial to the point that I consider the couples, from a BDSM interests point of view, well matched.

I had expected to find a positive correlation between the matching activities and the duration of the relationship – I believed that couples would, over time, adapt some or many of the interests of their partners. The data shows quite the opposite, a negative correlation, $r = -0.32$, for top men/bottom women, and $r = -0.12$ for top women/bottom men.

Figure 14 graphs the correlation of areas of interest versus the duration of the relationship. There is no apparent relationship between the correlation of interest between the partners and the duration of the relationship, and it would appear that the match in interest is not a variable with relationship duration.

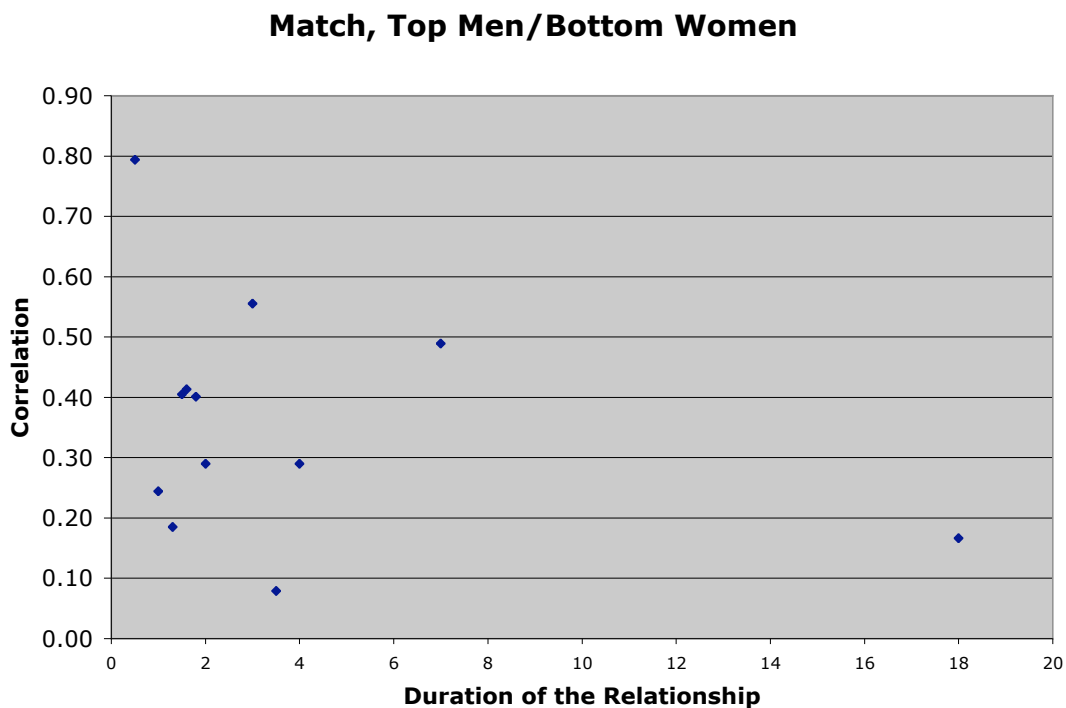


Figure 14. Matching Interests vs. Duration of Relationship,
Top Men/Bottom Women

4.4.2 Perceived Benefits of a BDSM Lifestyle

I believe that the benefits of the BDSM lifestyle, as seen by the respondents, to be an indicator of the value they place on this lifestyle and on having working relationships within it.

When asked what were the benefits of being in the BDSM lifestyle, 31 of 33 respondents mentioned personal growth and self awareness, 10 mentioned that it contributed positively to their relationship, 9 mentioned the connection with the BDSM community, and 8 mentioned better sex.

Dominant Man: The new friendships, the inner serenity, the feeling of community.

Submissive Man: I believe it has contributed to making me more open, more willing to relate. More experienced. By experienced I mean I don't mean just more knowledgeable about floggers or the implements or the lifestyle. I'm talking about better able to deal with life on life's terms, as they say.

Submissive Woman: I have been able to explore any fantasy - basically that I've every wanted. I often joke and say that I live the kind of life that people only fantasize about. I have used the lifestyle to enrich who I am in the vanilla world. At one point I grappled with feeling like I was living two lives, my vanilla life and obviously my lifestyle. And there were times where I felt powerless in my vanilla life and yet very powerFUL in my lifestyle. I've learned to take some of that power from within that I feel I exude as [my scene name] and apply it to my goals and what I want out of my vanilla life. And I think it's worked for me. Actually it was something I discussed with a therapist and felt really comfortable about. She was the person who encouraged me to meld my two personas together to capture that power.

Dominant Woman: [I would think that, being a pro-dom, you would have your fill of BDSM to some degree.] In a way. But in another way, no. The power exchange if it's good is addictive. It's not even sexual with me. It's a totally different thing. If I had to take one or the other there's, hands down no choice, I'd take SM in a heartbeat. You know, sex or S&M - hey. No choice. But thank god I don't have to make that choice.

Dominant Woman: It's given me more self-confidence, self-esteem. Those are two things I've needed badly. It's helped me curb my temper; it's helped me not be as mean. It's helped me learn that as long as things are consensual they are almost always okay. And the consensuality is the absolute key. Oh, and the biggest thing of all ~ people don't read minds. Right there. You have to talk about things; you have to get it out in the open. You have to tell people how you feel about things ~ what you like and what you don't. And ask them the same, and make them tell you even if it's hard. Right there's probably the most important one, right there. Oh and I found I can spank people. <Laughs>

4.4.3 Examples of Sexual / SM Bargaining

I looked at examples of SM and sexual bargaining, by asking direct questions on how the couples negotiated for sex and SM, by examining the various stories told throughout the interviews, and by asking what rituals were used by the couple. The bargaining ritual can be classified into several categories: establishment of roles, initiating SM activity, working through sexual / SM conflicts, and mutual caretaking. There are other rituals that seem to be used primarily for bonding, and they are discussed in a later section.

4.4.3.1 Safewords

A safeword is defined as a phrase, usually used by the bottom, to communicate that their limits were being exceeded, while not disrupting the sense of reality of the power exchange for both parties. Safewords are well recognized by the BDSM community. It is my opinion that safewords developed in the SM community for three reasons: the safety of relative strangers playing together, to facilitate in-scene

communication, and to assure onlookers that all is consensual. When no safewords are being used, the implication is that all is well in spite of outward appearances.

There is total agreement as to whether the couple has a safeword (100%), with 87% of the couples reporting having a safeword. The interview had a follow on question asking if, given a safeword has been agreed to, was it ever used? There is good agreement between the partners as to whether the safewords was ever used ($r=0.62$). Of those who said a safeword existed, 58% of the men and 75% of the women said that the safeword had been used in this relationship at least once.

Submissive Man: I don't believe there's any particular word that is a safeword but I'm sure if I was most sincerely complaining about the activity that was taking place, she would stop.

Dominant Man: A role of mine is to protect her so that she has that feeling of safety to be able to express herself. And I realize that in a submissive headspace sometimes she won't. I mean I've had to safeword for her cause she didn't have it within herself either to say it or to realize that she needed to say. If we get to that point we basically call "baseline". We strip away all veneers and we say "Okay these are just two people that have a problem, and what are the issues?" And you're free to say whatever you want. If it's gonna hurt my feelings then that's fine. If you feel like five minutes ago to say that would have been disrespectful, well now's the time to say it cause you have immunity, so to speak.

Submissive Woman: For me it's all – a lot, not all – about endurance. I'm so stinking tough! Lay it on me! Although one time, I shouldn't say I've never used it. I know one time he was trying to make me say safeword. And he was gonna keep going or I was gonna pass out so I finally went to Yellow. It was a power struggle.

Submissive Woman: We have sort of a generic like red yellow green, though we rarely if ever use them. We usually just say, "You know what, that really hurts." or, "My arm is falling asleep" or whatever. And there's sort of an easiness of slipping in and out that we can sort of tell. But safewords are sort of as a back-up, but we end up not using them.

4.4.3.2 Establishing Roles

Rituals were used to return the partners to their BDSM roles, and to reinforce those roles over time. The rituals are often initiated as much by the bottom as the top. Sometimes the role reinforcement is as basic as returning from job space to the relationship. There is often a quality in these rituals that expresses the excitement of preparing to be with their partner.

Dominant Man: When she's involved in her schoolwork and she can't let go of her schoolwork and she doesn't realize that even though she's closed her books and put her papers away that she's still in student mode – even though we've agreed to try do a DS activity or enjoy that headspace of each other, and then I call her by the name of her student persona. And that clues her in that I'm talking to the student because that student persona is still there. And so we identified our personalities by name so that we can talk to them and find out what they need and allow them to be comfortable enough to let the dominant and submissive side come out.

There is one part of me that she calls "Mr. Fix It," because that has a lot to do with my work. One of the first times when she came to see me, I had wanted to make her this drink. I needed the blender to do that, and I assumed that the blender worked. Which was my mistake. So rather than say when the blender didn't work that "Forget it; next time you come we'll do it," she found herself sitting there watching me disassemble the blender to make it work. We have to let the other person know what we see and that's how we've chosen to do it. It's like "Okay, Mr. Fix It, time to put that away," and that's my clue that "Okay, I'm engaged in the wrong person here, and my submissive is over here waiting and she's seeing this." And that's how it works for us.

There's a part of her that has very strong slave tendencies, but that slave persona needs special care in that [she] can't be put away quickly. So we don't play with her slave persona during the week, because there's no way we can put that person away safely enough for her to resume her normal working life the next day. We use that persona a lot around where she has a limit that is willing to be moved or that can be moved. We can utilize that part of her submission to start to broach play in areas that are difficult for her.

Submissive Woman: Sir sets up a little scene so we'd have Sunday to have after caring, put me back into a better place in case anything went odd with it. And he put together a collar, a beautiful little chain that went down and covered my breasts and around my back. And it was very loose fitting collar but because it was around my throat, there was some hesitancy about the me that doesn't like things around my mouth and my throat. But my slave persona is absolute. She doesn't talk back; she doesn't sass back. She's got no – I don't want to say brattiness – but there's absolutely nothing in her that is different from what's she's ordered. She has total will to do whatever she's told.

Dominant Woman: The clothing helps me with my persona. It's hard for me to be in the dominant mode when I'm wearing bobby sox and gym shoes and jeans. I just can't get into it. I have to have something on sensual that triggers me into my other persona.

Submissive Woman: Every time we are going to go out in social situation, I'm very much a ritual person in the sense of my preparation, getting ready. And for me that begins with switching gears. So it begins with music and the bathing ritual and the focus. The focus turns inward and it begins at looking at myself first of all. Who am I that day? And sometimes I'm feeling more childlike. Sometimes I'm feeling more the dark vamp. So I look for who I feel that day.

And then I go with any special request from Master. Is there something he would like me to wear, something that he has in mind? And that's all part of the ritual. It continues all the way up until I'm being laced in my corset – that's part of the ritual, that's part of the headspace – hooking the garters, putting the collar on. My make-up is a certain way; my hair is a certain way. It's all part of that creation of who I am that night. And to an extent that happens at home, but not to the greatest degree.

There's less of a façade, there's less of a mask put on at home, I can get in the same headspace at home, but I think I have this persona out in the public of who I am next to my master, how I look. And that's very much a part of the way I think. If I were to go out publicly in that space not dressed that way, it produces a different mindset for me. It changes, I think, the way I would respond to him a certain extent. I may react the same way I would when I was at work and that's certainly not the same attention I want to give him.

If we have decided that we're going to party, for example, he usually kind of watches the clock and says, "Okay, are you about to get ready? I'd like you to wear this." That's pretty much it. If he has told me at that point "I'd like you to wear the red dress," that's where it starts, regardless of the fact if we were doing yard work two hours before. There's usually a

verbal indicator at some point. Or it's "I'd like you to wear your black girdle tonight." And that's enough. And then I know. And so generally that's how it works for us.

As far as transitioning in the house, that's a little more difficult. There's less of a boundary, so I can't say we have a particular – it just sort of unfolds.

Dominant Man: D/s has its own language and that is really important when we re-connect. She wears clothes at work. When we re-connect she's not allowed to wear clothes. And so that is a visible signal to both her and I that we know we're not at work anymore and now it's time for you to take care of me. The removal of her clothing is a ritual that says, "This is what part you're in."

4.4.3.3 Initiating SM Activity

To get SM play started, either partner might initiate a ritual that clues the other. The respondents have reported that they feel like they are flirting when using such rituals. Kneeling is one of the symbolic acts frequently used in various BDSM rituals, including initiating SM play.

Submissive Woman: I would have to ask for a scene – which I hated. It was almost humiliating to kneel down and ask him for a spanking. And he'd say, "Have you been a bad girl." And "No, and I want one anyway."

Submissive Man: We don't usually negotiate that I can see. Now I mean we don't just sit down and say "well, you're gonna – we'll do paddles first, whips next, and it's canes last." We just play.

Submissive Woman: I have a whole set of rituals if we're gonna play which at first, when I first started, they were almost necessary. Now it's more habit, like almost my whole Saturday is preparation for Saturday night to play. I cook him breakfast and serve it in a serving style. Later, I kneel down, and I braid my hair, and I stay kneeling until he comes over to me. And he usually yanks me up by my hair and stands me up. I even unbraid it afterwards. And if we play again, then I re-braid it. It's a real trigger for me. And I used to – this is funny – I used to braid my hair all the time for work and now I just mostly put it up in a bun.

Dominant Woman: We have other rituals, like when we play we always start it with I walk in and he's on his knees, on the floor, waiting for his collar.

Submissive Woman: All I have to do is kneel, and he has a hard time walking. <laughs> I'm serious. This man has the best circulation system. His spongiosum works constantly. When I'm with him around the house, I am constantly fondling him, caressing him. All I have to do is hand him a slapper or hand him the flogger or – first time I called him Master, scared the hell out of me. He came running into the bathroom. I swear to god he was like happy and halfway crying and got a hard-on and the whole nine yards. This is what he tells me and I see it in his eyes –he is so honored that someone like me who wants to kneel and submit to this man. I've tried almost damn near anything I've ever wanted sexually, so the fact that I would choose him just gives him a raging hard-on. And I just love it. I am so flattered.

Submissive Woman: He likes face slapping. And with my history of abuse that was a real, real hurdle for us. But we can go there fairly comfortably now. I can think of a couple of times I initiated it because it just felt really right in the way everything was going. I put his hand up to my face. Open palm up to my face. And he knew what I meant.

Submissive Woman: Sometimes I initiate when I'm being really good. And I'm waiting on my knees with a crop in my mouth, sure. <laughs> He seems pretty happy with it. I should do it more often. I would like to do it more often. You know, if I could change things I would. If life wasn't happening everyday and there weren't these constraints of obligation, and we could get lost in it. Sure I would choose to do it much more often.

Submissive Woman: Most of the time, as far as small things, it's me, and it's something simple as calling him master or serving him, which is usually on my knees. Or simple things like wiping him down when he comes out of the shower.

4.4.3.4 Working Through Sexual / SM Conflict

4.4.3.4.1 General SM Conflict

The language and rituals of the BDSM relationship frequently were used when there was conflict. The rituals and roles seemed to simplify the conflicts and kept

both partners out of ego based stands. The couples also reported that they sometimes use naturally occurring conflict to clear up long standing issues or to reconnect with each other.

Dominant Man: I was pretty incensed with her at the party. She knew I was upset and she knew that there was gonna be a consequence. By the time we got home I was over the emotional trauma and I was enjoying the headspace that I was in. I decided to do a vampire scene with her. What that did was it triggered a fear that she wasn't really aware of which was taking markings that were visible at her job. She's out at work but she has this fear of being up in front of people presenting and being visually marked so that people can see. So right in the middle of that scene it triggered a limit - we had to sit down and talk about it. Even after that we didn't really come to grips with what the limit was until we involved a friend. They were able to talk submissive-to-submissive about what happened and what her fears were and what was the real cause and effect of that. What came out of it was she was deathly afraid because she knew I was upset.

Submissive Woman: I tell him that I was slightly led astray because I seriously thought he had more real time experience in BDSM than he did. And once I found out just how limited his experience was, I actually got very angry and said, "You know what, I'm sick and tired of teaching. I've taught men all my life - well, female partners too, but - I'm tired of teaching. I want to be taught." I was hooked by then, so, thank god he was a quick study.

Switch Man: I may be more hesitant and more risk-averse playing with my partner that I would be with other people because I don't want it to go badly. I have a large amount of attachment on the outcome.

Dominant Man: There was a need in her that it was important to her in the DS relationship was that she was allowed to play with other people. It wasn't something I actively sought out. So we had two different needs where since I didn't have the need, I didn't think she needed it either. And she did. It was clearly a place where what each one of us wanted out of our DS relationship was too far apart to just compromise. It doesn't respect the other person in that relationship if each one of their needs is not met. Or one's needs are ignored at the expense of the other person having their needs met. It's not consensual if "It's my way or the highway." So there needed to be negotiation.

It got resolved by her making the subtle point that I was missing all the time which was, “I’ve lived my life for so long and I haven’t had this option. All I want is the option. I want the ability to be able to, not that I necessarily am going to exercise that option.” Because then we were able to negotiate conditions under which I would not only allow her to that but I would be the catalyst for that to happen. She will be nonexclusive when I tell her to. And so always from within that original need she had that I felt totally powerless in, we were able to find my place of power and still meet her needs.

It changed the relationship at the moment for the shock value that the relationship could end if that issue wasn’t able to be resolved. It also changed the relationship from then forward knowing that as insurmountable as that seemed we were able to work through it that everything else is easy by comparison.

Submissive Woman: Scenes with other people? That was nearly a deal breaker. We discussed that for a week. Last year when I first saw a whip wrap at a scene and had such a strong reaction. I mean my seat was dripping wet watching that scene. I recognized that there were things I did want that Sir would not be able to play on me until he got to a different level – if he chose to put that much time and effort into something. And I didn’t know if he would. And that’s when I recognized there were things that I wanted to experience that he may not be able to give me. So I brought it up and he didn’t know if he could ever do that – if he’d ever let go of me enough to let me scene with someone else. And it was a big, big, big discussion.

Four or five hours every night for five days straight we discussed it. Because that opened up then “Well let’s talk. Did we want multiple sexual partners. Did we want multiple sexual scenes. What would it be like?” I mean we went into every aspect of it. And that is one of the strengths Sir and I have is our ability to communicate around everything and so in-depth.

It shocked me in the first night when we were talking about it he said “this may be a deal-breaker. I may have to release you.” And I was like – <gasp> time out – wait a minute – whoa, whoa, whoa, <laughter> that’s not where I was going with this. And when he brought that point, I had to look inside myself, saying “Okay, what if he could never let me play with someone else? What would it be like if I’d never be able experience things unless he got to a skill level that he could do it. And that’s when I realized how much hunger I had for the masochist side and the specificness of different things. This is where that slave person of me was like “Well, we’ll just sacrifice that; you just we won’t have that because you have a fabulous relationship here.”

And Sir was really good. He said, no, that's part of what got me into a long term former marriage and losing so much of myself because I had sacrificed certain parts in order to make the relationship work. And it was only through time that I realized that I didn't want to sacrifice those parts anymore. He forced me to look at myself to say, "For as wonderful as everything is, if I couldn't have whole bodies of things, I would be doing the same thing in this relationship that I had done in my marriage. And he wasn't going to let me do that. And I had to recognize over the course of the next couple of days that <sigh> if I accepted the sacrifice, I would regret it down the road. And so we both accepted it would be the end of the relationship if he also couldn't get to the place of allowing me to play with other people.

And so while I had to accept that, he had to accept the relationship was over if he couldn't with a joyful heart allow me to play with other people too. So it was our deal-breaker. We both had to accept that about ourselves. And he got to a place where he said, yeah, we could. Where he could let it happen, and he had to see what needed to be in place for me to play with someone else. And he did that work in himself so that when my birthday came out, he – it was the first time he had anyone else spank me.

And so from then on out he's set up my birthday scene, this time with four different people spanking me. So he's always been a part of some aspect of the scene when someone else is there. And that meets my need. I don't need to be playing separate from him where he's not a part of it. So we found the place that met both of our needs in that.

Submissive Woman: I've been surprised by some of the things that frighten me at a level and that I like being pushed a little bit beyond that. I can say I only like that because I trust my partner- totally. And when I got pushed outside of it once where I didn't realize I had a boundary, he stopped and we talked about it over the next few days.

Switch Man: I mean I really don't like paddles except that I believe that maybe paddles are one of those places in terms of the power dynamics I find it at times exciting from that point of view. Because if my partner is using a paddle on me, she knows that this is a sensation that I really don't like. And that can be exciting.

Switch Woman: Giving is kind of more fun on paddles. This is something specific for my partner and I because he hates paddles. I have these little heart-shaped ones that he really hates, but there's an aspect of that he likes, too, because he knows that really excites me to like give him something that he really doesn't like. But I think that if my heart-shaped paddles just like fell off a boat, part of him would be very relieved. But if I wanted him to, he'd probably jump in and get them for me.

Submissive Woman: My nipples are very sensitive – that I can’t ever get into a sub space or any kind of zone. And I just – unless I’m in my slave persona where I’ll take anything because that’s mentally where I’ve gone ahead of time – I can’t do some actions without having a good build-up for it.

Dominant Man: In a scene if there’s a difference, I think – typically if it’s something that I’m doing that she finds problematic – whether pushing her too far too fast or creating not good pain but creating a bad pain, she communicates it to me. And I simply adjust what I’m doing. We communicate a tremendous amount through our eyes. I can look at her and look in her eyes and tell you where she’s at. In a scene we communicate. I mean we communicate a good deal.

Submissive Woman: The first time he tried to help me in the kitchen, I threw him out. I considered it a threat to my subbie stature. You know, it’s like “You’re a dominant – you’re not supposed to be in here – this is my thing.” You know. And then once I realized – duh –now I had to get past those pre-conceived ideas that I had about what he should do and what I should do in the house.

Submissive Woman: Once when we were playing around in the first year, my domme side came out. And we were playing at a hotel and I picked up the towel and I wacked him from with my domme side. I actually touched him – which shocked me – and left a welt which really shocked me. And as soon as I saw what I did, I dropped to my knees at his feet and apologized like crazy. And he was livid. We both recognized that when I did that it was my dominant side coming out and at the same time he does not like to be on the receiving end. He admitted that if my dominant side had stood there before him unapologetic we would have had problems. I mean, immediately as soon as I did it went right into my submissive space. But if my dominant side had stayed up there would have been problems.

Dominant Man: One time in particular that REALLY stands out in my mind. She was getting in my face about something, and I was being my typical self – I tend to kind of turn everything in. She was getting in my face and getting very – and she – I don’t want to say stepped over the line – but she <ahem> pushed the right buttons and I snapped – no – snapped a command at her, “Kneel.” And it’s just the way – or I don’t think I said kneel, I think I was just like <he sharply points down> you know, on your knees, now, here. And it was like <finger snap> boom, she was on her

knees right there with her head down. And it was like “Whoa!” <laughs> It’s like “Oh boy, that felt good.”

Submissive Woman: He has found that I can be in like full rowdy-ass mode and all he has to do is go “Kneel.” And I’m right there. And he got a hard-on off of it. And he’s like, “Omygod it works.” And it’s like, <very quietly> “I told you.” He forgets – as many people who deal with me forget – that all you have to do is say one word, and I’m there.

4.4.3.4.2 Polyamory

Considerable BDSM activity occurs in public BDSM community space. Much can be learned from playing with others, including learning technical skills such as how to throw a flogger, how to negotiate with others, and how to work through physiological and emotional issues with oneself and with others. Most couples will at least occasionally play with individuals other than their partners. For the majority of BDSM practitioners, the activities have a sexual component. As a result, one issue many BDSM oriented couples discussed is the boundaries of their relationship with others. Many couples look at polyamory and some find polyamory to be an important part of their interests. Polyamory, for the purpose of this study, is defined as more than two people in a relationship with a commitment that is more than simple play partners. Polyamory may or may not involve sex.

Polyamory is highly likely to bring up issues for members of a committed relationship. Generally the core couple invites into the relationship one or more other individuals. These additional individuals may have an unequal position and are known as seconds, as different from primary. While not a specific question in the interviews, some of the respondents spoke of issues regarding their polyamory explorations.

Dominant Man: We have considered at one time incorporating another female submissive into our relationship. That did not work out at that time. And I can't say that it's something that we would never do again. But it would have to be the right person. It wasn't the right person that time. They didn't really understand their place in the relationship that they could not be the primary and that they could not have the same, I hate to use the term pecking order. But they could never have the same exact relationship that I have with my partner. It would have to be fundamentally different. And I don't think that was well understood. It caused a lot of conflict.

Submissive Woman: It caused a problem between me and my partner. It caused a problem between me and the secondary submissive. And to the sense there was a conflict between the secondary and my master, although the conflict resulted in just no interaction at all, ever, again. I mean, the relationship was dissolved immediately.

Submissive Woman: As far as being an actual other submissive of his, there could be a jealousy issue there. Boy, that's an understatement! His original plan with his ex-submissive – she was also bi and they were hoping that his real time partner would be bi and they would be one big happy family. Her and I do not jell. We have not jelled from the beginning and I am not interested in the slightest way-shape-or-form of being with her. I am not attracted to her and I am very jealous. I would be jealous of those two together.

Submissive Woman: We have learned over the years to be very selective about who we invite in close. And we are very discerning about submissives who would try to insinuate themselves between the two of us emotionally, or a dominant who would try to do the same thing. We're very protective of our relationship. I'm probably better at recognizing when that's happening now with other submissives than I was years ago. We enjoy playing with other people but they have to be the right people and they have to be people that respect our relationship.

Some of the respondents spoke of being willing to work with polyamory as a gift to their partner.

Submissive Woman: I think there's a certain level of gift giving when we're incorporating other partners into our play. I would say me being okay with the fact that he's gonna play with other people – although he definitely has the right. I see that as being somewhat of a gift on my part

in the sense that this is my husband and I'm sharing him with another submissive. So it's probably a gift to the submissive and somewhat a gift to him.

But I have the same opportunity on my end of the spectrum as well if there's somebody I choose to play with if I have permission. So I think it goes both ways in our relationship – it's not one side or the other. But I think it can be construed as a gift. I think the level of trust that we have is a gift that we give to each other. Because we walk a much finer line than in a conventional relationship.

Dominant Man: One of the risks I take is I demand to see other people. She puts up with that. She understands that we need to play other places.

Submissive Woman: I understand, and that's what he needs and I want him to be happy, and if that's what makes him happy – I don't see it as taking anything away from us. It really doesn't take anything away from me. And that's how I feel. That him being with another person doesn't take anything away from me. And I'm not really sure where that came from <laughs> because that's not like how I've been in previous relationships at all.

Submissive Woman: I'm a submissive, the primary submissive to my master, currently. At this point we haven't incorporated anybody else into our relationship, so I consider myself primary as if there were perhaps other submissives to follow in the relationship at some point.

4.4.3.4.3 Boundaries and Jealousy

This section first looks at what boundaries the respondents placed on their relationship – what behaviors are expected to be exclusive to the relationship. The second area is how the couple handles jealousy when boundaries, expressed or otherwise, get crossed. Some of the quotes came from the section of the interview set aside to ask specific questions in this arena, some quotes were volunteered during other sections of the interview.

Submissive Woman: We went to a friend's dungeon party, a personal private party – one of the women there had what I thought were physical attributes Sir was always attracted. And I felt Sir was paying attention in a very particular way to that woman which is the first time in four years that his attention has ever been on anyone except me. And that was okay, except he stopped touching me in the ways he usually does when we're out publicly with people. And so I went to a very deep slave headspace and he was acting as a Master in his deepest headspace. He was not asking me to do things; I was getting him drinks of water and just responding very slavish and realized that I didn't like his attention elsewhere as well as I didn't know how to handle it.

In reality he wasn't attracted to the woman as a woman. She just really had nice big boobs in the way he likes them. So he was focusing on what he could do with those boobs. It was an unusual experience for me. That's where "Let's rethink about multiple partners, 'cause what would it feel like to have his interest on someone else." It was fine in theory but to have my first experience of it was like "Whoa let me rethink this."

The place of my insecurity came out because it was combined with the lack of physical behaviors that was a part of my experience with Sir. He always touches me, he always makes sure there's some kind of contact. There's a kiss when I leave even if it's on just going out to get him a drink, It's always an expected kiss and if I don't, I've always been reprimanded for not kissing him. And this night there were no kisses, there were no hand holdings, there was none of the hands on the shoulders, so I was very in a state of disequilibrium.

Submissive Woman: I think exploring other areas of our sexuality in the sense of how many partners we can incorporate into our lifestyle, I think, is a bigger risk than I had ever taken with anybody before that meant so much to me – as far as someone I wanted in a permanent relationship, you know. Fleeting sexual encounters don't share the same amount of risk for me. And so I think it's been difficult for me to – to not get jealous and let go sometimes and share that – that part of my partner – let him experience that with somebody else. This is pretty risky – it can be difficult, but well worth it, I think.

Submissive Man: I've never been – what you call it – a jealous person. So it doesn't bother me that she's doing this in the business. I know she's not doing it on a personal basis.

Switch Man: My partner and I do have boundaries. The vast majority of them are sexual although they don't necessarily mean no genital contact. I can do scenes where I've done clothespins on men. I had this scene

where a friend was considering having a group vaginal fisting done on her, and I had interest in participating in that. My partner and I talked about it. She's like, "Well, it's like god, you have your hand inside her vagina. I mean that seems pretty sexual. But on the other hand it's fisting and so that's where we sort of negotiated that that would be okay." Isn't it interesting? Isn't sex interesting? You know it wouldn't have been okay for me to finger fuck her, but it would be okay to actually fist her.

Submissive Woman: There is some jealousy, there's more hurt because this was somebody that I valued as a friend and I felt a real betrayal. Someone who – the reason they were considered to be brought into our relationship is because I thought they had a fundamental understanding of where my relationship was with my master, and I was wrong. So, so yes, some jealousy, some hurt. I think that's a combination to anger – variety of feelings.

Submissive Woman: The only actual fights we have gotten into have been over his ex-girlfriend. She was trying to make her way back into his life again and I was having a problem with it. There was a little bit of shouting but we both caught each other very fast. I am very verbal so I made sure he did not shut down, and we talked it out. Anytime there is a disagreement, we talk it out. There has been one or two incidences where he has kind of snapped out of frustration and I have retreated and gone upstairs and cooled off. Cause I have a temper from hell so I've learned – cause I really don't want to fix walls anymore, I got tired of that. But I have to walk away. It is a very rare instance.

Switch Man: I had a scene where I was topping a friend and among other things I kissed her. When my partner and I talked about this scene afterwards and I admitted to her that I had kissed my friend and found out what was an assumed limit of my partner was not necessarily an assumed limit of mine. It was kind of funny in this other sense –because when before I had kissed a man at New Years – it was okay. It's contact specific. But it would not have been okay if I had had the same kiss with a former girlfriend at New Year's <laughs>. It would have been a very different thing. I remember my partner was glad I felt bad about it, that I realized this was kind of a transgression.

Switch Woman: Breasts are okay. Kissing's not okay, but that we found out later. <laughs> Kissing and biting are not okay. And there was a time when that wasn't actually defined. He called me up and said he'd done this scene with this woman where they were putting clamps on one other. I think I knew ahead of time that he was going to a party and I knew he would probably play.

What happened that he then brought up that they had done some things like there'd been some biting <laughs>, and he knew we hadn't talked about that and wondered how I felt about that. It kind of bothered me because biting is something that we do a lot. It's actually pretty personal. I said, "Well, I guess it's – I mean I think I'd rather you didn't, but I guess it's okay because at least you didn't kiss her." And then, "Well that was the second thing" he was gonna bring up, so <laughs> so that sort of ended up being more dramatic than it might have been because in order to deal with. I sort of put this frame around it and said, "Well, at least it's not that." But that happened too so it became a little bit more of a thing. He could sense I was upset. I just finally said, "You know what, I think I'm really not okay with this. I said I was okay, but I think I'm really not."

Ironically, that was probably good for us because it helped us clarify where we both were coming from. I think that we respect each other's feelings of jealousy, if we have them.

Switch Man: I think that I have picked play partners for the most part – like not my partner, but other people that I play with – as people that I don't find particularly attractive. That I have done to avoid concerns with my becoming too attracted to them, too turned on by them and that sort of thing. I feel like I do have this freedom to get involved, with other people but yet I am hesitant to get involved with people who really turn me on or that I really feel an attraction to because that would be too threatening to my primary relationship.

Submissive Woman: I don't get jealous. I don't understand it. It's my whole nature, been my nature all my life, to be a jealous person. But I'm very secure in our relationship and he makes me very secure in our relationship. And if I do get jealous, usually it's hormonally triggered. You don't want to talk to me about certain stuff at a certain time of the month. I'll warn him, because I pretty much know when that's gonna come up.

Switch Man: There was this one guy I played with and had a pretty intense scene where I was topping him at a men's party and used a dildo on him. It ended up being a big thing for him. And it was fun for me, but it was not a big thing for me. He kind of got like bonded with me afterwards, and it was only in one direction. My partner sort of laughed at me, "Well, you know, you fucked a virgin. What do you expect?" I found those things to be more annoying but not threatening to us. And I feel bad about them because I don't like when people are feeling all bonded with me and I'm not reciprocating that.

Dominant Man: I used to do a fair amount of piercing of other people. And what I noticed is it was very important to me when piercing a woman that her partner be there and I let her partner be at her head. So you guys – I’m doing the piercing – but you guys are doing the bonding. The possibility that the woman would bond with me after this intense experience felt threatening to me. I wasn’t worried about jealousy of her, it was actually for the self-protection of me.

Switch Man: We as human beings do not have a lot of control over our emotions – sometimes our emotions go in different directions than we want them to. But I do think that we can guide them. If there’s somebody I find myself attracted to, and I’m in a primary relationship, I can do a couple of things. I can spend a lot of intimate time with this person. That’s going to encourage the emotions to get more intense. Or I could say “Okay I feel these seeds of this attraction.” Then I say, “Where do I want this to go?” And I say, “You know what, I don’t really want to encourage these feelings because all that’s gonna do is screw up my first primary relationship.” And so I don’t do that. So if we get together, we get together in groups. We get together over coffee and we don’t have big intimate times. I sort of mold the feelings in a different direction. I know I don’t have a hundred percent control over my emotions, but I can control the environments that will either encourage or discourage certain emotions.

4.4.3.4 Mutual Caretaking

An examination of the text of the interviews uncovered a constant theme of taking care of the partner, be it top or bottom.

Submissive Woman: Masters have gone up to Sir and asked him “Why doesn’t your partner have a collar? Why haven’t you collared her?” That gets into both my asphyxiation and my fear of having things around my neck as well. Sir and I have been married before and neither one of us wish to marry again. We have a strong commitment to each other, but it’s not a marriage. I don’t have a collar and every time someone says something to me, I have the opportunity to once again pledge my submission to Sir by saying “I do have a Sir that I submit to, and he’s my Sir.” It’s always a renewal of our commitment every time I say things like that. It takes the place of a collar.

Switch Woman: I had not a whole lot of interest in receiving pain, actually, initially. Like with the nipple thing –reading the Beauty books which in some parts they did some things with clamps and bells and I was like “Oh, that’s kind of interesting, but–” So there was like a little bit of interest but it wasn’t like a thing. And now we do that like a lot. I think he’s trained me to respond to it or something. <laughs> It’s that whole Pavlov’s dog thing. It really does work, well. Well, and like having something done that you don’t like while having an orgasm can – eventually you end up associating the two.

Dominant Man: I like rubber and various forms. I really like all aspects about it – I like some bondage. I like discipline. But to be honest with you what pushes my button is what pushes my submissive’s button. I can find enjoyment out of a wide variety of activities with a person who’s into them and finds them exciting. And I truly believe in the energy exchange, and the circle of energy and the building of that, and the building of that energy. So if a person gets really excited and turned on by being spanked, spanking that individual would be a real button-pusher for me. If you take another individual who did not find that pleasurable at all or fulfilling or satisfying at all, then I wouldn’t take any pleasure out of doing it. That leads back to the answer to one of my earlier questions is I don’t consider myself a sadist. Because I think a sadist would take pleasure out of inflicting pain regardless of whether the person wanted to have pain.

Submissive Woman: His philosophy is that he plays with me when things are going well. If things are not going well, there’s probably an underlying reason and that’s not a place that we need to go then. Play is not where we need to go.

Sometimes, mutual caretaking looked like taking care of oneself.

Submissive Woman: Solo SM? It’s all in my head. I don’t physically do solo SM –well since I moved in with him I don’t – oh okay I’ll grab the nipple clamps occasionally when I masturbate, but not as much as I used to when I lived on my own.

4.4.4 Rituals

The final question I asked the respondents was to describe the rituals they had in their relationship, both one-time rituals marking special occasions and ongoing rituals. The placement of the question was to allow the individual to remember good things about their relationship, thus leaving the interview with a good and validating experience of the event. The second reason was a chance to view “bonding moments” within the relationship.

Some rituals are used by the couple to re-enforce the SM nature of the relationship. These rituals are not necessarily part of the initiation of a scene, but more about the connection between the partners.

Dominant Woman: One ritual is when he brings me something, he just sits and holds it until it’s time for me to get it. And sometimes I’ll see it there for ages and I just sit and allow him to hold it because I know that that’s a real special thing because it’s his nature to jerk on me and say “here, here, here,” “I’ve got it, I’ve got it” and it’s my nature to say “I want to take it right this second.” But we both just sit there and he holds it and prolonged the moment because it’s not typical of us, and it’s so sweet.

Submissive Woman: We started a ritual while we were separated that if I did items that were minimal offenses, he marked them on the refrigerator. So if I was sticking my tongue out at him verbally on-line or being too sassy he marked it down. We still have a refrigerator board and sometimes it has these little hash marks. It was a play issue as well as a real issue. It allowed me to be who I wanted to be within reason. And it also gave accountability for those choices I made. So that when we would visit, I would see, “Oh, you mean I did it that many times?” You know, there’d be thirty hash marks for something up there. And it was Sir’s choice how he chose to make that consequence a reality. We still tend to do that.

Dominant Man: She loves paddles. She loves to be spanked. We have discovered her ass is a real pain slut. <laughs> It’s like, now I will play, walking around either at the shop or at home and I’ll playfully smack her

on the ass. And she'll just stop, turn around and look at me and go, "Now don't start something you can't finish right now."

Some of the rituals provided by the respondents seemed to be more about maintaining the bond between the partners.

Dominant Woman: When we go out, he always takes my shoes off and rubs my feet no matter where we're at, so that is a ritual. I do not remove my shoes unless they're sandals, I slip out of them; but boots or any other even tennies he takes them off and rubs my feet afterwards, even if it's only two minutes and he's got to go to bed; if it's very late he still takes my shoes off and rubs my feet.

Dominant Man: One of the little rituals is that once her collar is on, her collar never comes off without me taking it off or giving her permission to take it off. That is a ritual.

Dominant Man: One of the rituals that – it's not a hundred percent, but when she is that space, she does not do this everyday all the time, but when she is in submissive head space, she will take my shoes off for me. I'll sit down to undress and she will kneel and take my shoes off. If we are in headspace in a scene or after a scene while we're still in that wonderful place, if I want a cigarette, she'll always kneel and hold my ashtray for me. And that was a ritual that developed very early on in our relationship.

Dominant Man: If we've been a long time without SM – and that's why I said the flogging was important to us – because that's where we begin is if we haven't had a lot of time to play, then that's the ritual we use to re-connect. Because it takes us all the way back through and we use that as a way we're able to re-find each other. Because it's comfortable and it's one of the few things we do that doesn't have a bad experience that comes with it. And so if it's been awhile then that's the ritual that we do. And we have found that this is very comforting. It's even to the point where it doesn't have to be that long. And if we only have 30 minutes we can still do it and she's not gonna fly and I'm not gonna fly but there's that harmony that comes back into us because of how long it's been a part of our relationship. And that was at the foundation of our relationship in DS.

Dominant Man: When I am done taking a shower she is there, holding my towel for me. She presents the towel, saying, "Your towel,

Master.” It warms the cockles of my heart – it reminds me how much I love her. I take the towel, dry off, and hand it back to her for her to hang up on the towel rod. She is a bit obsessive/compulsive and is fussy about how towels are placed on the rod. Like which side of the towel is facing out. I could care less, so she gets the extra bonus of having the towels hung her way.

Submissive Woman: When he gets out of the shower, I am there with the towel. Actually that didn’t start from subbie; I’ve done that for my past several relationships, and they just loved it. So I just did it with him and he went all oozy and everything was wonderful. He does it for me too sometimes, and at first I freaked out. And he goes “What? I can’t wipe off my submissive?” And it was like, “Oh yeah, huh?” Took me a while.

Dominant Man: The one ritual that really meant something to me was when I would get out of the shower, she’d be waiting for me with towel in hand and she would dry me off. That meant so much to me.

Submissive Woman: We do the ritual – well I don’t know if you call it a ritual – but I do ask permission to orgasm.

Switch Man: I don’t think it happens every single morning – but more often than not she brings a big thing of diet coke with her to work. I’ll get up and get that ready for her in the mornings. Particularly if she needs to get up earlier than me I will more often than not get up with her. Occasionally I’ll go back to bed, but will get up and help her with her morning and get her diet coke ready.

Switch Woman: I always take my diet coke with me in the morning. And if we get up at the same time or if I have to leave really early, he will often get my diet coke ready in my big mug.

Dominant Man: She brings me a drink, it’s the kneel, kiss, present. She kisses the rim of the glass, and then turns the rim of the glass and presents it so I will be drinking where she kissed it.

Submissive Woman: I haven’t been very good at it lately but for the most part there I was doing the serving in the morning with the kissing of the cup of the orange juice, serving him breakfast, I do a lot of kneeling, I enjoy kneeling. Unfortunately most of the serious DS has been put on hold because of the craziness at work. But I still try to do submissive little things like that for him. And just to make him feel good. And the smile he gets on his face is worth every second of it.

The respondents also gave one-time bonding rituals. These were frequently a collaring ceremony, in public or in private.

Dominant Man: The collaring actually preceded the marriage by a number of years. And that was very unique and special because I collared relatively quickly – maybe a few months after we initially started playing, the collaring took place within like a two or three month period. That was a one-of-a-kind ritual that occurred with her tied to a tree in the middle of the forest. So it was a very special and something that we never attempted to re-create because it was just too perfect of a moment.

Dominant Woman: [When did you actually commit to him? When you said, “this is it”?] Before I came out – this is where we’re kind of odd. We don’t follow what I hear other people do. Thirty days before I came to visit him, Sir wanted to <pause> have a certain level of relationship with me so that we’d have a certain level of trust for that weekend. And so he took me virtually on-line. How do I say – virtually on-line he claimed me and removed each article of clothing and pledged himself to the care of me – whether it was my hands, my heart, my head, my eyes, my lips. He went through all of me inwards and claimed me for a level of trust. And each place he gave me the opportunity to accept his claim of that, so that I was giving myself to him completely, all the way through. Since then he’s reclaimed me twice, physically, in the same fashion. Which has been our recommitment to each other.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings

5.1 Summary of the Findings

At its most basic level, this study demonstrates that quality long-term functioning relationships do exist for heterosexual BDSM oriented couples. These successful relationships exist for both male top/female bottom and for female top/male bottom couples. These relationships can be fixed role (where the partners do not desire to switch) and can be role-fluid (the SM equivalent of bisexual). The relationships may have a high degree of apparent control of the bottom by the top in daily living or may be egalitarian outside of specific scenes.

In this sampling, all top roles were dominant and most were sadistic, all bottom roles were submissive and most were masochistic.

The respondents had known that they were kinky an average of 23 years, and had their first SM experience on an average 19 years ago. The women had their first experience at an average age of 24 compared to the men at age 27. Some knew they had BDSM desires from early childhood and some respondents came to the lifestyle late in life. On average the men engaged in BDSM prior to recognizing themselves as kinky, while women had the self-realization before they put it into practice. The cohorts are mostly long-term participants in the BDSM lifestyle.

The respondents demonstrate the multifaceted nature of BDSM. Many of the respondents had an active BDSM history over many years, working on finding ways to make their lives work. They have become well educated as to the possibilities and have

worked out the roles and activities that suit them. Most considered the exploration of SM to be an ongoing process and expected that their interests will continue to grow and change.

All respondents state that their BDSM orientation is built into who they are – their orientation cannot be changed. They did, however, demonstrate considerable fluidity within the SM arena, being able to acquire new tastes and being able to shelve some old ones when those interests did not fit with their partner.

The respondents expressed comfort and pride in their SM orientation and varied from very private to flamboyant in displaying their SM interests. The data suggest the respondents have become well adjusted in their uniqueness. The respondents reported they were happy with their SM interests (9.34 out of 10). The respondents stated their primary regret was not having become comfortable with their kinkiness earlier in life.

All respondents expressed being comfortable with who they are and many said it was a difficult journey of self-discovery. Individuals and couples have, on occasion, used counselors to work on themselves or their relationships. Four respondents told of having taken charge of these professional relationships and insisted that the therapists respect their BDSM orientation and focus the counseling work on the client presented issues.

When it comes to sexual matters, the academic community behind the medical and psychiatric professions has been remarkably naive. The denial started with crediting Krafft-Ebbing for having coined the terms “sadism” and “masochism,” when

in fact Krafft-Ebbing acknowledged that the terms came from underground ads used by practitioners of his day to contact each other. Portions of the academic community also claimed that SM was almost exclusively restricted to the male gender. This study, as well as personal observations, confirms that women, as well as men, have a BDSM orientation.

It is apparent that the sought-after SM activities possessed at different times sexual and non-sexual significance for the respondents. The non-sexual significance included couple bonding, stress release, and spiritual quests. Classical academic writings have generally considered SM to be a sexual behavior, and ignored the extensive use of body stress in so-called primitive cultures. The non-sexual connotations reported by the respondents are congruent with writings from within the BDSM community and from writings about non-Western cultures, and are at odds with Freud, Krafft-Ebbing, Money, and the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders.

The respondents have demonstrated the great value they place on their BDSM interests and activities. When asked about the benefits of being in the BDSM lifestyle, the areas of importance, in order, were: personal growth and self-awareness, contribution to their relationship, a connection to the BDSM community, and better sex. Many have made considerable risks to locate others and to have working relationships. They have advertised who they are by use of symbols (flagging) and have indicated their BDSM interests to strangers when they sensed it would be well

received. Similar to those in the gay culture, the respondents have exhibited behaviors of coming out of the closet to family and/or friends.

The single biggest issue for the respondents was getting enough “time in role.” Most couples incorporated BDSM power exchange during their “regular” relationship, not just during scene time. It is interesting that most of the time, if there was a discrepancy in desire, it was the bottom who wanted more play. I speculate that this is because being in bottom space can be an escape from daily pressures and responsibilities, while top space requires taking initiative and responsibility.

Half the respondents had no theory as to why they had a BDSM orientation. Those who had a theory varied from abuse (emotional, sexual, religious, or medical) to identifying with normal role models, including teachers and popular media. The question of origins seemed to have been important to some of the respondents in the past. Now, however, the respondents seem to focus on enjoying their relationships and lives. The question of why they have a BDSM orientation seemed to be moot.

Approximately one half the respondents reported some childhood abuse in their background. I used a broad definition of abuse, and have not related this to equivalent rates in the general population. Some of the reported abuse was intense, such as sexual exploitation, whereas other reported abuse was a matter of interpretation, such as the upset at being periodically yelled at by a foster parent. Without a comparable measurement of abuse in the general population, it is difficult to conclude anything about the relationship between childhood abuse and a BDSM orientation.

In the process of partner selection, all of the studied respondents were aware that their prospective partner had BDSM interests prior to selecting that partner for a long-term relationship. There was high congruity between the partners on how they met and often on how they chose each other. It was not uncommon that the partners independently used the same phraseology in describing their meetings. These “getting to know you” stories were told with pride and had apparently been told many times before. Half the respondents said that the lifestyle interests of their prospective partner were the biggest initial attraction.

The couples generally disclosed the details of their BDSM interests very early on in their relationships. For the most part, the respondents were willing to disclose and explore. Given the lack of substantial increased knowledge of their partners’ interests, I conclude that any interest changes that occurred over the duration of the relationship were disclosed as they were discovered. It is interesting to note that women were slightly more likely to increase their knowledge over time, as were the tops of both genders.

There was total compatibility for all couples in terms of dominance and submission. There was high compatibility for SM roles, with $r=0.60$ for the male top couples and $r=0.50$ for the woman top couples. There was a significant correlation of interests between the partners ($r=0.35$) from a fixed list of BDSM topics. The only subgroup that had enough data points to produce a scatter plot (male tops/female bottoms) showed no correlation between a match of interests and the duration of the relationship. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that finding a complement in

BDSM interests was part of the partner selection process. It is also clear, however, that finding “the perfect match” is not the norm.

The relative match in BDSM interests did not correlate with the duration of the relationship, and I conclude that, over all, the individuals did not change their interests to fit their partner. Rather, the couple worked with the BDSM interests of each partner and built on those existing interests.

Those respondents who had secrets from their partner all listed items that could be interpreted as not germane to the domain of BDSM play, although the class of respondent that was most likely to have secrets was bottom men.

It is interesting to note that top men and women had a good grasp of how well their BDSM interests matched the interest of their partner, while bottom men underestimated the match and bottom women overestimated the match. Given that it is the job of the top to know the interests of their partner, the top knowledge is as expected. I see several possible theories as to why bottom men are less optimistic than bottom women in estimating the match they have with their partner. One theory is that bottom women are more able to act out submissive tendencies within socially acceptable norms. A second possibility is accepting Baumeister’s (2000) theory of Erotic Plasticity, where women are more able to mold to their partner, thus more likely to be satisfied.

This study has given hints that there may be some differences between female top/male bottom and male top/female bottom couples. These hints come from the male bottom underestimating the couples’ compatibility, from the potential difference

in the rights of punishment and from the apparent likelihood of male bottoms having secrets from their partner. I speculate that male bottoms grew up with desires that were incompatible with social norms and have internalized that they cannot have what they really want. I leave this question to further studies.

Many respondents told of having not disclosed their BDSM interests when they were in a previous relationship, and of the dissatisfaction that came with the circumstances of that former relationship. All respondents stated that having a BDSM, or some other form of D/s relationship, was very important in their lives. Again, I stress that these successful relationships came from early and thorough disclosure of the respondents' BDSM interests.

Additionally, I am aware of couples that discovered their mutual BDSM interests after partner selection. I am also aware of couples where one partner does not have BDSM interests and the other partner plays outside of the relationship. By happenstance, these alternative scenarios were not included in this study.

The strongest relationship value held by the respondents was communication, with statements that successful BDSM activity required open communication and disclosure. The respondents often demonstrated elegant solutions for communication and for reframing to handle issues. This openness includes the concept of transparency – described as full disclosure of feelings and needs by the bottom to the top. This transparency empowered the top to then make appropriate choices. Respondents frequently told, when they perceived their partner had an issue, of being unwilling to let go until the issue was communicated and worked through. They

directly ferreted out and handled issues. They considered resolution of issues to be more important than the possible embarrassment or discomfort to themselves or their partner. The respondents also valued their ability to read their partners; they had put in considerable time and effort paying attention to their partners and learning what they liked and what were their issues. The respondents had a high degree of knowing their partner's sexual and SM interests ($r=0.6$).

Many of the respondents have learned their skills at BDSM activities from the larger BDSM community. Learning from others and potentially playing with others has required extensive communication about boundaries, jealousy issues, and polyamory. Some of the respondents protected their relationships by defining specific behaviors that are exclusive to the primary relationship. Given that BDSM activities are frequently connected with sex or bonding, issues of what is sexual and what is acceptable have been discussed universally by the respondents.

The respondents showed a great deal of enthusiasm for adventure and enjoyed exploring new areas with their partner. The couples showed a remarkable sense of playfulness and at times displayed an almost childlike glee at their play.

The congruity of the stories of "how we met" and "how we fell in love" indicate that a common mythology was important in the couple's identity. The respondents are well aware that they have co-constructed their reality – that concepts such as ownership and slavery do not fit the "normal" world, and work for the relationship only so long as both parties are in agreement. As part of the co-construction, the respondents frequently used rituals to establish their roles, to bond

with their partner, to initiate SM play, to work through conflicts, and to take care of each other.

12 of the 17 couples reported that the top has control over the bottom in daily living. There was considerable discussion of the top having power, and no discussion of the top being better, or smarter, or of more value, than the bottom. I conclude that the sacrifice of power does not diminish the individual, contrary to social expectations.

When queried whether the power exchange extended beyond scene space and into daily living, ninety percent of the respondents reported positively. Three couples were non-congruent as to whether BDSM extends beyond specific scenes and in all three cases the bottom stated that top had control in daily living.

No tops referred to themselves as a “Master”, yet two bottoms used that term referring to their top. I find that not surprising. Historically there have been tops in the BDSM community who have used the term in a way that presumes power over others and/or use the term to claim that they are “better than.” Thus, tops in quality relationships would steer clear of terminology that had negative BDSM community connotations. However, there is a recent and ongoing change in the BDSM community that is reclaiming the terms “Master” and “slave,” where the implication is an increased dedication to care of the partner, rather than an imperiousness.

There is good agreement as to whether the couple is in a 24/7 BDSM relationship ($r=0.83$), with ten couples stating they were 24/7. The respondents went on to clarify that 24/7 did not mean the bottom was always in restraints, etc. Rather, they meant that the BDSM role was always the context for the relationship, even

when the top might be doing the dishes or taking out the trash. The dynamics were such that each couple had worked out which partner was the appropriate one for the task at hand and did the chores in life as a partnership.

Even in the most stringent relationships, the bottom had the opportunity to state their wishes in daily living, and the top then chose. It was not always apparent how often the bottom had made the choice, and the top merely confirmed the choice.

Over one third of the top men and well over half of the top women were also masochistic – it was not uncommon for the top to order the bottom to apply stimulation to the top. The power exchange was defined by the respondents according to who did the choosing, rather than who received the stimulation.

There was some agreement that the top had the right to punish the bottom ($r=0.36$). In the four cases where the partners did not agree, it was always the bottom who stated that the top had the right to punish. Interestingly, what was defined as punishment for these couples tended to be an acknowledgement that the partners had deviated from their defined roles and a symbolic confirmation that the roles were re-established. The punishment was considered by both partners to wipe the slate clean and negate any perceived wrong doings, similar to religious absolution.

A consistent pattern developed in the interviews. Whenever there was disagreement over how much BDSM play or control should exist, the bottom generally wished to play harder or to define the relationship as more restrictive than the top. In a study on hormonal changes during SM play (Sagarin, Cutler, & Cutler, 2002) we noted, “Bottoms expressed significantly greater anticipation of the evening’s scene

compared to tops.” All the data suggest that the image of the bottom being a “victim” is inaccurate; the bottoms have shown to be at least as willing a partner in BDSM activities as the tops.

A comparison of these BDSM relationships with the culturally approved standard is appropriate. When watching American media, one of the frequent elements demonstrated is that each member of the couple is expected to take care of themselves – a partnership of equals. Negotiations are expected to be an ongoing, never ending process. This is the frontier model of the rugged individualist being applied to relationship. In the individualist model, it is not always prudent to disclose. Thus, the excellent setup for conflict and humor in the entertainment media.

Much of situational comedy humor is based around romantic partners not telling each other what is going on or what they want. This plot is seen repeatedly in the “I Love Lucy” show and other shows. This comedy works because it reflects the prevailing social norms.

In the power exchange model used by some of the BDSM community, the major negotiation is made up front – the top makes the final decisions. In some ways, this simplifies the relationship. There is a commitment to communication and transparency. The top, having full information, can then make appropriate choices. These choices are not always in the bottom’s favor – the top may choose on any occasion to make choices in favor of his or her own self-interest. In order for the dominant/submissive model to work over time, the needs of both partners must be included. This is generally not a problem as tops usually hold that their bottom and

their relationship is precious. We have seen examples where the top tells of not being able to take as much control as he or she might otherwise want due to the responsibility they feel for their bottom. The bottom trusts that the top will see that he or she is taken care of in the larger view.

A summary of the data clearly demonstrates that these so-called paraphilic BDSM relationships can be highly functional. The respondents valued themselves, their partners, and their relationships. All couples expressed considerable good will toward their partners. The power exchange between the cohorts appears to be serving purposes beyond any sexual satisfaction, including experiencing a sense of being taken care of and bonding with a partner.

The subclass of this study that used the power exchange as part of their daily living pattern exhibited three common characteristics that seemed to be part and parcel of the dynamics that made their relationships work. First, the couples disclosed their interests up-front and continued to be transparent in their BDSM needs and desires as an ongoing practice and value. This transparency was exhibited from both the bottom and top roles. In addition, the respondents in both role demonstrated listening to their partners as if the quality of their relationships depended on it. Second, the couples had a commitment to personal growth. This took the forms of communication, of commitment to working things through, the use of counseling if necessary and a commitment to the betterment and personal growth of both partners as individuals. Third, the couples used the dominant / submissive nature of their

relationships as a significant tool for managing their relationships. These D/s relationships, in order to function well, require that both partners get out of ego and pay attention to the needs of the other. The use of rituals in good times cemented bonding and had a flirtation-like quality. The use of rituals and protocol in difficult time returned the respondents to being connected with their partners, and re-established the bond between the partners as being more relevant than the presenting upset.

The co-constructed reality model of Berger & Luckman (1966) appears to hold true for the studied BDSM relationships. Individuals in a relationship, through the use of language, describe the nature of their relationship and repeat that description to each other so that, over time, the description becomes the reality for the individuals. This allows for consistency within the relationship while appearing paradoxical from the outside. One partner may be told by the top what to do at their job, but then have a safeword in BDSM play. The top may make the final decision, and the bottom gets taken care of within the top's choices. The slave may feel cherished and protected by kneeling and obeying his or her Master. The couple may use the terms of Master and slave, yet both know that if the relationship ceases to work, both partners have the option of walking out of the door. The top may get to have their masochistic desires taken care of by being whipped by the bottom, while not losing stature as the one in control. To quote two Masters having a conversation about service, control, and who drives the car,

Master #1, “I always drive because I want to be in control.”

Master #2, “My slave always serves me by driving.”

Put another way, these couples make it up the way it best serves them. In doing so, it is apparent that the power exchange model can be a viable relationship style for the group of individuals in question.

5.2 Areas for Additional Study

This study revealed much about BDSM relationships, much of which is already known within the BDSM community, and has hinted at other phenomena. It also highlights how little we know about such alternative relationships. As such, I see a long list of viable topics for future study.

The study of BDSM relationships could easily become a life work. To be definitive, many more couples are needed with a more balanced population of female tops and switches, as well as from different sections of the BDSM subculture. Theses should include the gay male “Leather” community, the lesbian community, and the transgender communities. Samplings need to be made from different clubs or groups to insure that the interview responses and observations are not regional-specific.

I could find little data as to sexual bargaining within the non-kinky community. This study indicated that BDSM relationships tend to establish values for clarity and transparency within the couple. Because of the potential for disaster in BDSM play, the need for such communication may be higher than for the “normal” population. It is frequently said within the BDSM community that BDSM

relationships are more likely to be closer, more communicative, and more fulfilling than “vanilla” relationships. A similar study on the broader population could be made and the results compared with the SM subculture.

Going into this study, I suspected that I would find that the respondents’ interests had dramatically shifted to meet the needs of their partner. The plot of relationship duration versus the interest match suggests that there is not the expected dramatic shift in BDSM interests. I am not sure if that is accurate. It would be desirable to do a longitudinal study to discover the interest drift over the course of a relationship.

Some respondents did report changes to their erotic interests. This could be a perfect area to test the Erotic Plasticity theory (Baumeister, 2000). Are the erotic changes statistically shared by both partners or does it tend to follow a specific role or gender?

Given the relative high incidence of childhood abuse in the background of these respondents, further evaluations could be done to evaluate the relationship between childhood abuse and BDSM orientations. At this time there is no data to evaluate causal or correlative connections between a BDSM orientation and childhood abuse.

There were a significant number of individuals in the BDSM community who had a long history of being in Alcoholics Anonymous or had been heavy drinkers earlier in their lives. As the study did not ask questions in these areas, the actual statistics are a matter of conjecture. However, the observation is not surprising.

Historically, many members of the gay community share these attributes. This may be a response to having a core orientation that is counter to our culture's values, with the alcoholism being an outcome of the resulting stress.

Some BDSM practitioners have different personas, or different parts of themselves, that they use as personal cues to get each other's attention and to shift conversational forms. This persona model is congruent with the Voice Dialog work done by Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone. This appears to be an intra-couple communication tool that would be well worth exploring further.

In discussion of rituals and in the discussion of SM interests in the areas of tattoos and piercings, it was common to hear stories about rights of passage or reclaiming one's self from the effects of an event in the past. I suspect that studying the meanings of rituals of personal healing through SM and body modifications would be most fruitful (Musafar, 2001).

Many of the couples in this study first became aware of their future partner on the Internet. I have heard many stories from BDSM community members about Internet communication. These stories vary from successfully connecting with others, to comic, to tragic. A study in BDSM internet dating would be a fruitful line of study for a future dissertation.

This study highlighted the use of mythology – stories woven by the couple that help define their relationship and themselves. A study of couple-bonding mythology could be highly useful, as would a comparison between BDSM and “vanilla” mythologies.

The medical model for BDSM behaviors has classified the acts as sexual; yet, BDSM practitioners frequently talk about meanings and experiences that are not sexual. History has consistently shown body stress mechanisms to be a significant vehicle to spiritual quests. I have been involved in hormonal studies that have shown BDSM activities to be more similar to sports than sex, complete with stress relief qualities. There appears to be solid evidence to reclassify BDSM activities to include non-sexual motivations.

Appendix A

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

As research for a Ph.D. degree from The Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, I am conducting a study of couples who have lived in an SM relationship for at least one year.

This is a formal request for you to participate in the study. In making your decision, you should understand the possible benefits and risks. This form gives detailed information about the purpose of this study. Once you understand the study and its potential benefits and risks, you will be asked to sign this form if you wish to participate.

Please ask any questions you have at any point. You may contact the author of this study, Bert Cutler, 480-820-3696, or e-mail bertc@attglobal.net, directly concerning the study itself, or if you have questions about the Institute or authenticity of the study, you may contact Dr. Howard Ruppel, Academic Dean, The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, 1523 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109-4522, 415-928-1133.

Introduction and Purpose:

I am interested in understanding better the dynamics of SM roles within coupled relationships. Regarding your interests in SM, I will be asking you to discuss your personal interests, sexual behavior and desires, and personal details regarding your relationship. I will ask you to discuss your sexual and non-sexual roles. Also, I will ask you to discuss areas that work within your relationship and areas where your desires may not be met.

All participants must be at least 18 years of age.

Procedures:

At the first interview you will be asked to provide an in depth interview. I may be assisted in that interview by my wife and research assistant, Nadine Cutler. I will follow-up with a phone call and request a second interview with you and your partner together. Unless you object, interviews may be video taped. I may request a follow up interview. Each interview may take up to four hours.

Potential Benefits:

By participating in this study, you may benefit from learning more about yourself and your partner. You will also help to advance the understanding of SM relationships by sharing your story. I am most interested in emerging themes throughout the research and how these may be of benefit to others dealing with similar relationships.

In addition, although many researchers have examined various aspects of human sexuality, relatively little work has been done by psychologists on the dynamics of SM couples. I hope that the data from this study will provide new insights into the dynamics of SM relationships.

Potential Risks:

1. Although every effort will be made to help you be comfortable, the questions asked are very personal; and you may experience some discomfort. You may refuse to answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you wish, I will be available for a follow-up consultation at no financial cost to you.

2. While people usually appreciate better understanding, it is possible that you or your partner may discover areas of your relationship that are potentially uncomfortable. Those discoveries may (or may not) affect your relationship in any manner.

3. Being part of the SM community is not readily accepted by society. Although we do not expect any problems, it is possible that unforeseen circumstances occur and your identity or sexual preference could be disclosed. We will attempt to minimize exposure by keeping our records in a locked cabinet in my home office and by not identifying you or your relationship to others.

4. There are expected to be 20 to 50 respondents in this study. While efforts will be made to conceal your identity when using your responses, there is some possibility that you could be identified by your situation.

Confidentiality:

Records concerning your involvement in this project will be viewed solely by myself, my research assistant / wife Nadine Cutler, and by the dissertation committee members: Dr Clark Taylor of the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, Dr. Marianna Beck of Libido Magazine, and Dr. Brad Sagarin of Northern Illinois University. Information gathered in the individual interviews may be discussed with you and your partner in the joint interview unless you specifically request we withhold that information. Files and video tapes will be maintained in a private locked cabinet in my home office and used solely for scientific purposes. Identifiable information will only be viewed by members of the research team and by members of my dissertation committee. Any quotations used in publications will be changed in such a way as to keep the individuals from being identifiable.

No names will be used on my interview notes, only numbers. I will maintain a separate chart that assigns a number to your information. This chart provides me a link between you and my notes. Both the linking chart and the video tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. In order to protect your privacy, the linking chart and video tapes will be destroyed upon completion and acceptance of this dissertation and any follow on publications (estimated to be no more than two years from the date of this interview.) The linking chart will be destroyed by shredding, and the video tapes will be destroyed by bulk erasure. The video tapes will not be used for additional purposes without your additional written permission.

Participants Rights:

Your participation needs to be totally voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from this study, all videos containing your image and voice will be destroyed by bulk erasure. Any notes that have identifiers that could be linked to you will have those identifiers removed. If you still have questions before you participate, please contact Bert Cutler as listed on the previous page.

Consent to be Interviewed:

I agree to participate in the research study outlined above. I am over the age of 18 years. I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I may have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____	____/____/____
Participants Name (Printed)	Participant Signature	Date

Consent to be videotaped:

I agree that my individual and joint interviews may be videotaped.

_____	_____	____/____/____
Participants Name (Printed)	Participant Signature	Date

Appendix B

Research Instrument

Respondent #	Date:	Education				Partner's #
Gender	Age	Occupation				Age
ROLE	TOP/BOTTOM	PERSONAS	PARTNER'S DESIRES	PARTNER ROLE	COMPLEMENTARY INTEREST	DAILY POWER
	Bondage		Bondage			Prime earner
Sado Masoch	Hard Bondage		Hard Bondage	Sado Masoch		Dishes
Dom Sub	Isolation		Isolation	Dom Sub		Housework
Het / Bi / Gay	Role Playing	SECRETS	Role Playing	Het / Bi / Gay		Laundry
OUT	Bite		Bite	PARTNER PERSONAS		Major Choices
Friends	Spanking		Spanking		DIFFERENT INTERESTS	Initiates Sex
Family	Paddle		Paddle			Initiates SM
Work	Floggers		Floggers			Personal Power
	Marks	FREQUENCY	Marks	FREQUENCY		
DISPLAY	Whips	Sex Freq.	Whips	Solo Sex		
Dress	Clamps	% Sex w/ SM	Clamps	Solo SM		
Jewelry	Nipple Play	SM Freq.	Nipple Play	Ike give OS, MS	OPPOSITE INTERESTS	Partner's Power
Car	Wax	% SM w/ Sex	Wax	Ike receive OS, MS		
Action	Electric	Solo Sex	Electric	favorite sex position		
DRESS ROLE	Piercing	% solo Sex w/SM fantasy	Piercing	DESCRIBE REL.		
In Scene	Blades	Solo SM	Blades			NEGOTIATIONS
Home	Cuttings	Ike give OS, MS	Cuttings			In Role
Public	Fire	Ike receive OS, MS	Fire		GIFT GIVING	
	Tattoo	favorite sex position	Tattoo		Self	
EROTICA	Anal	OTHER PARTNERS	Anal			
Books	Vaginal	# Sex	Vaginal	PARTNER		Out of Role
Comics	Humiliation	# SM	Humiliation	Where Meet		
Mags	Public Exposure	Role Differences	Public Exposure			
Video	Service	Satisfaction	Service	Duration	Partner	
Internet	Group	# Long Term	Group	Marriage		MODIFICATIONS WANTED
Chat Rooms	Asphyxia		Asphyxia	24/7		Self
Written	Fear	SELF ANALYSIS	Fear	% BDSM		
Made	Gender Play	Age Knew Kinky	Gender Play	Longest Scene		
	Tickling		Tickling	Safeword	BOUNDARIES	
1st SEX TO ORGASM	Fetish	1-10 Happy w/SM	Fetish	Punishment	Exclusivity	
Age		Recomm SM		Ownership	Other Partners	Partner
P Age Rel	INTERESTS	Want SM Relationship	INTERESTS	Control	Jealousy	
Event	++	Regrets	++	PARTNER ATTRACTION		
Satisfaction		Could You Change			HANDLE DIFF.	
1st PARTNERED SM						RISKS
Age		Counselors		PARTNER SELECTION		
P Age Rel						
Event						
Satisfaction		SM BENEFITS?			CHANGES IN INTERESTS	
				RELATIONSHIP		
CHILDHOOD				What Works		RITUALS
Reason SM						
Who Raised					CONCERNS / WORRIES	
1-10 Religious Intensity				Issues		
1-10 Moral Intensity						
Abuse						
	--		--			

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