A RESPONSE TO THE 2005 HOME OFFICE CONSULTATION ON THE POSSESSION OF 'EXTREME' PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

By Barry Slemmings
former chairman of SM Pride

"The Internet reflects all views and all lifestyles. It therefore follows that part of the Internet will always reflect our lifestyle and our community. We cannot be legislated away with the stroke of a pen because a few people still do not understand us. We are your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters, your sons and your daughters."

- see 1.14
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Barry Slemmings.
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Former Spanner Trustee.

Numerous television appearances include Modern Times for BBC2, Channel 5 News, The Michael Cole Show for Living Channel and the CH4 documentary about the annual Skin Two Rubber Ball.

With his daughter Emma he also appeared in Secret Suburbia for Living Channel talking about BDSM lifestyles and the impact of having a BDSM parent.

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http://www.thebdsmsite.org/comingout.htm
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PROPSTALS to criminalise individuals for possession of so-called 'extreme' BDSM images are viewed with deep concern by many members of the UK's consensual BDSM community. Criminalisation for possession represents a gross intrusion into the private lives and sexual tastes of a substantial law-abiding minority - a minority which has caused police little cause for concern over the many years of our existence.

1.1 I am a 51-year-old disabled former journalist. I am the father of three adult children and the grandfather of five youngsters. As a father and a grandfather I have natural concerns for the moral welfare of my family. Three of my grandchildren have regular Internet access at school.

1.2 For the last 12 years I have been a member of what some might call the UK 'sado-masochistic' community but which we call the adult consensual BDSM community. BDSM is a compound acronym which stands for Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism, Masochism. As a member of the UK BDSM community I served as the chair of SM Pride [1998 to 2000] and as a Spanner trustee. SM Pride is one of the campaigning groups set up in the wake of the infamous Spanner case [Regina V Brown and others] while Spanner Trust is the senior fund holding and campaigning body for the UK BDSM community. [See BDSM and the law in the blue appendix].

1.3 I came 'out' to my family - including my elderly widowed mother - as a heterosexual sadomasochist in 1997. Many people in our community are now doing the same, borrowing from the gay and lesbian experience that coming out means a more honest existence, signifies self-acceptance and is a personal stand against the sexual prejudices of more mainstream [what we call 'vanilla'] society. Once people discover a minority group has a human face former stereotypes become eroded and are eventually replaced with a more balanced view of other people's lives.

1.4 We live in age of enduring stereotypes. Some people still 'know' French men wear stripy jerseys and sell onions; some people still 'know' lesbians are masculine women who smoke pipes; some people still 'know' gay men are 'camp' and not good at sports. In the same vein some people still 'know' BDSM is about 'a few freaks who enjoy beating each other up'. In each of the above cases the informed truth is very different from the ignorant stereotype.
1.5 I would draw the following to your attention...

a) Statistics going back to the days of Kinsey suggest that around 10 per cent of sexually active adults are BDSM or BDSM inclined [see also yellow appendix page A]. To put that in human terms, if you know 100 friends and relatives then at least ten are likely to be interested in BDSM. My own experiences as SM Pride chair coupled with increasing sales of BDSM accessories [see d) below] suggest that this figure may be significantly higher. A world-wide 2003 survey by the Durex condom company found that 38% of UK nationals had used handcuffs or bondage as a sexual stimulant, the highest percentage in the world for this kind of activity. The same survey also found 42% of UK nationals had used pornographic materials.

http://www.durex.com/cm/gssContent.asp?intQid=7&intGSSYear=03&intMenuOpen=8

b) BDSM equipment is now regularly available in the High Street. The Ann Summers chain of stores devote a section of each shop and their catalogue to BDSM equipment - including gags, whips and canes - and this reflects that company's own market research into contemporary consensual adult sexual tastes in the UK.


c) The BDSM community has a network of well advertised, low-key social events held in vanilla pubs, wine bars and restaurants. These events are called 'munches'. To date there are 136 such monthly munches in the UK alone. [see illustration - blue appendix] This means that the BDSM community meets regularly in at least 136 parliamentary constituencies. In addition we support around 30 openly advertised fetish clubs such as the world famous Torture Garden. Our community is now large enough to support four-day events at Olympia [Erotica] and two-day events at London's Barbican Centre [Skin Two Expo] plus monthly fetish fairs in London, Birmingham, Bristol and other major cities. We even have a BDSM pub and a BDSM coffee bar.

Cursory checks with the police will reveal that these are all responsibly organised and have NOT required police attendance.

By contrast the police attend my local public house once or twice a week to deal with alcohol-induced violence yet alcohol remains on sale and the licensing laws have even been liberalised in recent months. Alcohol plays a part in many violent crimes - including murder. Consensual BDSM does not.

d) Servicing the needs of the BDSM community are more than 120 UK companies providing elaborate dungeon equipment, fetish clothing, lifestyle jewellery, night clubs and entertainment, whips, canes and accessories. A 2001 estimate of the size of this business suggested that - at that date and excluding ALL pornography - BDSM in the UK generated a turnover of around £30 to £32 millions. Part of this includes valuable export trade. Our monthly night clubs and London's prestigious annual Rubber Ball attract many foreign visitors and much tourist revenue for hotels and restaurants while overseas BDSM visitors are in the UK.

These BDSM companies are respectable and well run, they employ staff and pay their taxes. One has a walk-in showroom just off London's Oxford Street.

These are just a few random examples:
http://www.fetters-leather.com/index.cfm
http://www.rob.nl/html/london.html
http://www.regulation-london.co.uk/
http://www.skintwoclothing.com/x-catalog/
e) BDSM is an established, well documented, loving and consensual sexuality [see select bibliography - blue appendix] where adults may explore their darker fantasies in a safe manner. Many of us have discovered that the sexual experience can be greatly enhanced by restraint [bondage] or by pain [sado-masochism]. If this last appears odd to you, try running your hand under cold water and then under hot water. The one experience radically alters the perception of the other. We have discovered that the same receptors in the brain which deal with pleasure can also be stimulated by the body's own morphines [endorphins] which are the body's natural response to pain. The simplest form of this sado-masochistic expression is the love bite [known in the U.S. as a 'hickey']. If you wish to understand sado-masochism simply consider that we have taken the love bite to more sophisticated levels. In addition to bondage and sado-masochism [or sometimes instead of] are other fantasies of personal submission, control or 'giving oneself to another person. Because some of us choose to emphasise the submission element over the sado-masochism or the bondage elements the compound acronym BDSM has grown up [see 1.2] as the most accurate way of describing our diverse, multi-layered and multi-faceted lifestyle.

1.6 I have read the Home Office consultation document on proposed changes in the law on possession of so-called 'extreme' images. I note with deep concern that even this document is unable to provide a coherent argument in favour of a law against possessing or viewing such images. On page 7 the consultation document admits; "We do not yet have sufficient evidence from which to draw any definite conclusions as to the likely long term impact of this kind of material on individuals generally, or on those who may be already predisposed to violent or aberrant sexual activity." The sub-text here appears to be: "We don't like other people's rational sexual choices so let's make them illegal anyway and never mind the human rights of those silly BDSM people..."

1.7 The consultation document refers to one recent tragic case where a convicted murderer was linked to extreme images he accessed from the Internet. I understand this man was not a member of our community and BDSM itself did not feature in the case. Yet the consultation document proposals could profoundly affect our community, our lifestyle and our human rights to view or possess images which reflect our lives, our sexuality and our artistic tastes.

1.8 We are not a violent community. Our watchwords are SSC - Safe, Sane, Consensual. Psychological studies in Canada have been unable to establish any correlation between psycho-sexual criminals and the BDSM community. Indeed such studies actually suggest the two groups are at opposite ends of the human spectrum. [see yellow appendix page B]. In the 1980s the American Psychiatric Association removed 'S&M' as a category in its Diagnostic And Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Homosexuality had likewise been removed in 1973. [see yellow appendix page A]. To cite a UK example, when a man called Fred West joined a noted UK BDSM club he was banned on the first night because of his unacceptable conduct towards young women. He had merely TOUCHED them and spoken to them inappropriately. Some years later police discovered he was the Gloucester serial killer. This illustrates the wide gulf between the BDSM community and the criminal psychopath. It also illustrates that we are self-policing and highly responsible. We will not tolerate abusive behaviour or the infringement of a person's right to give - or withhold - their informed consent.
Ms Singh takes a photograph of herself wearing her favourite ball-gag and she e-mails this picture to her boyfriend with a message saying: "Just for you." Again three offences have been committed by a loving and private message.

1.13 Once we criminalise possession of BDSM imagery we risk criminalising more than 10 per cent of the adult population in the UK. Given that our police forces are currently over-stretched dealing with all the existing laws, PLUS the world-wide threat of drugs and terrorism, does it make any sense to give the police yet a further added burden...? policing the nation’s photo albums and computer hard drives on the unsupported supposition that our consensual lifestyle is somehow connected to violence.

1.14 BDSM is a loving sexuality in which adults voluntarily explore the darker side of their fantasies with consenting partners. BDSM crosses all gender boundaries, all sexualities [hetero, gay, lesbian, bisexual], all ethnic groups and all religions. The Internet reflects all views and all lifestyles. It therefore follows that part of the Internet will always reflect our lifestyle and our community. We cannot be legislated away with the stroke of a pen because a few people still do not understand us. We are your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters, your sons and your daughters.

1.15 I would remind you that the last 'knee jerk' legislation in response to violent crime was the post-Dunblane banning of hand guns which Westminster politicians promised us would cut gun crime.

I am no supporter of privately owned hand guns yet I note that far from cutting gun crime, gun crimes actually escalated several-fold following the hand guns ban. Thousands of hitherto law-abiding owners of hand guns lost their firearms while the British Olympic pistol shooting team now travels to Belgium to practice its sport.

This is the true cost of ill-conceived 'nanny state' legislation. Many people suffering because of the actions of one sick man and the desire of politicians to be seen to be taking some sort of effective action without weighing up the true consequences of such legislation on ordinary people who wish to abide by the law.

I would suggest that strong parallels exist between the Dunblane matter and the legislation currently under consideration. The legal 'goal posts' on possession of BDSM images should NOT be moved.

1.16 I firmly support Option Four - no action - and would be willing to serve on any working party or advisory group both as a responsible parent and grandparent and as a vocal and long-time member of the UK BDSM community.

Our voice must be heard in this matter.

Signed: [Signature]

Dated: 28/11/05
BDSM AND THE LAW IN THE UK

The consensual BDSM community in the UK exists in an almost unique and - at times - rather unsettling 'grey' area with regard to both the criminal and civil law. The defence of consent has been both rejected AND accepted in two landmark cases. The Spanner case and the Wilson case.

Background: The history of modern prejudice against BDSM appears to date back to the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in 1886. Prior to this date BDSM appears to have been accepted as an eccentricity (especially among the rich) and as a form of non-penetrative 'safe sex' at a time when syphilis was still a killer disease. Among the working classes the sexual act itself was often referred to as "a bit of slap and tickle" which implies BDSM was also acknowledged and practised even by the poor and less well educated.

In *Psychopathia Sexualis* Krafft-Ebing chose to examine sexual deviancy and his work became a standard for more than 100 years. Unfortunately he also chose to make adverse moral judgements on the sexual differences which he studied and described and this in turn led to the stigmatisation of all masturbators, gay men, lesbian women, bi-sexuals, transvestites and the transgendered, as well as BDSM people. He popularised the terms masochist and sadist.

In more enlightened times the stigmas against many of these groups have faded away - for example male homosexuality was finally legalised in the UK in 1968. Some less enlightened UK professionals still cling to Krafft-Ebing's views on BDSM but the American Psychiatric Association removed S&M from its list of mental disorders during the 1980s [see yellow A].

THE SPANNER CASE: It was against this background that Manchester police carried out their search of homes in 1987 which led to the discovery of numerous video tapes of consensual BDSM sessions among gay BDSM men. This was known to police as 'Operation Spanner'. 16 men were charged and a further 26 were cautioned. Many of those charged were charged under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act for which there is NO defence of consent. Despite clear evidence of consent being offered all 16 Spanner defendants were convicted.

Appeals followed and at the 1992 House of Lords appeal even Lord Denning said that BDSM activity was acceptable so long as the injuries were only 'transitory and trifling'. Consent was again ruled to be no defence. The Spanner men lost their appeal. A 1997 appeal to the European Court of Human Rights was also lost.

Complicating the Spanner decision are two other cases...

CLUB WHIPLASH: a 1994 police raid on Club Whiplash at Putney led to Mr Martin Church appearing in court charged under the 1751 Disorderly Houses Act. On March 29, 1996, Mr Church was cleared by a Southwark Crown Court jury. The jury decided that the Disorderly Houses Act did NOT apply to a BDSM club even after hearing detailed evidence of many and varied consensual activities seen by undercover police investigators at the club. The case cost the prosecution an estimated £285,000 in costs and no further police raids have ever taken place against BDSM clubs. *Regina V Church* is now regarded as a landmark case. The number of openly advertised BDSM clubs proliferated after the Church case and more than 30 fetish and BDSM clubs continue to operate today.

THE DONCASTER BUM BRANDING: this was the February 29, 1996, Appeal Court decision in the matter of *Regina V Alan Wilson* of Doncaster - popularly known as 'The Doncaster Bum Branding'. Mr Wilson had been convicted under the same 1861 Offences Against The Person Act which
has been used against the Spanner 16 [see above]. He and his wife had acted out a scene from The Story of O [see bibliography] where the heroine consents to be branded with the initials of her master. Mrs Wilson fully consented to being branded and the matter only came to police attention after the Wilson couple told their neighbours of their loving act. Mr Wilson was convicted at Doncaster Crown Court but on appeal the judges [including a woman judge] cleared him of the charge.

In this second case the judges were satisfied that Mrs Wilson not only consented but had instigated the activity and that the original trial judge had misdirected himself in line with Spanner [see above] saying that consent was no defence. The judges also criticised the prosecution for ever bringing the matter to court, saying the case served no useful purpose.

The prosecution accepted the Appeal Court verdict and the matter was NOT appealed to the House of Lords which leaves the Wilson result as a useful precedent while the Spanner case - as the decision of a higher court - still holds sway.

In other areas, doctors and nurses enjoy a legal protection to inflict 'bodily harm' on consenting patients as part of their treatment.

Body piercers and tattooists enjoy a 'Common Law' right to injure and mark consenting customers.

Sportsmen such as boxers and wrestlers enjoy a 'Common Law' right to injure opponents in the ring.

Strangely this common law exemption has never been extended to consensual sexual activity. If an average teenager gives his or her partner a lovebite on the neck it could be argued that the law has been broken. Is a love bite 'transitory or trifling'? [see Spanner above].

In December 1995 the Law Commission issued a second consultation document recommending that BDSM, short of causing serious or permanently disabling injury, should be legalised.
Informed Consent

The leading UK BDSM website
73908 members 3402 listings 14509 pictures 326686 posts
128 members online now 3067 online last 24hrs

Proving the actual size of the UK BDSM community is notoriously difficult given that many more BDSM people exist 'off-scene' than 'on-scene'. Most off-scene people are 'Mr and Mrs Acacia Avenue' types who would be horrified at the thought of ever attending even a pub 'munch' let alone attending a BDSM club or fetish fair. They might just screw up enough courage to go into Ann Summers if there is one in their local high street. In 1.5 c) and d) I used the number of UK munches and the amount of commercial activity as an indicator of the size of the UK BDSM community.

At the time of the completion of this submission Informed Consent [the premier UK lifestyle BDSM website] had nearly 74,000 active members and had been visited 3000 times in the previous 24 hours. [see above] Informed Consent has a large and active 'personals' section so this implies that up to 74,000 UK nationals are currently SEEKING a BDSM relationship. Established couples tend not to advertise or maintain a profile.

By contrast the California-based Bondage.com [see below] publishes its own statistics which show it has nearly 45,000 UK members. Again these are mostly people seeking relationships. The number of people actually in happy BDSM relationships is thought to be many times higher than the combined Bondage.com and Informed Consent memberships.

You may note that the UK makes up the majority of the 'Europe and the UK' section. This may be partly explained by the fact that Bondage.com is an English language site. The high figure for 'Oceania' (compared with Africa or Asia) may be explained by the presence of Australia and New Zealand and those countries' large English-speaking populations. Not listed here, there is even a group of some 90 BDSM people seeking relationships in Gibraltar.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

SCREW THE ROSES, SEND ME THE THORNS
by Philip Miller and Molly Devon  ISBN 0-9645960-0-8
The common sense and indispensable guide to BDSM written in the style of a car repair manual. Well illustrated and stressing safety issues.

CONSENSUAL SADOMASOCHISM
by William Henkin Ph.D and Sybil Holiday CCSE ISBN 1-881943-12-7
Similar to the above but unillustrated I have recommended this book to several health care and social workers wanting to understand BDSM clients.

DIFFERENT LOVING
An in-depth look at the BDSM lifestyle.

RITUALS OF LOVE
by Ted Polhemus and Housk Randall ISBN 0-330-33093-4
Interviews with lifestyle BDSM couples chosen from across a broad spectrum of the community.

BOB FLANAGAN: SUPERMASOCHIST
Superb in-depth look at the life of a controversial and disabled member of the community. See films below.

TIES THAT BIND
by Guy Baldwin M.S. ISBN 1-881943-09-7
Written from a gay perspective this collection of articles contains much that can be applied to any sexuality or gender within the BDSM community.

A DEFENCE OF MASOCHISM
by Anita Phillips

COME HITHER
by Gloria Brame

SM 101: a realistic introduction
by Jay Wiseman

THE SM EXPERIENCE: BOUND TO BE FREE
by J.J. Madeson

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS KINKY
by Dossie Easton and Catherine Liszt

also...

THE STORY OF O
(fiction) by Pauline Reage

THE CLAIMING OF SLEEPING BEAUTY, BEAUTY'S PUNISHMENT, BEAUTY'S RELEASE
(all fiction) a trilogy written by Anne Rice [writing as A.N. Roquelaure]

SELECTED MAINSTREAM FILMS:
Good mainstream films on BDSM are rare.

PREACHING TO THE PERVERTED (18)
A light-hearted and stylised look at the British BDSM club scene starring Tom Bell, Christian Anholt and Ricky Tomlinson. A thinly disguised version of the Spanner case. Many members of the British BDSM community and fetish club scene co-operated in the making of this film.

SECRETARY (18)
James Spader and Maggie Gyllenhaal. A US-made look at the power dynamics between a secretary and his employer. More D/S (domination and submission) than S/M.

SICK (18)
Probably the finest documentary film about BDSM ever made. An intimate look at the life of self-styled US 'supermasochist' and performance artist Bob Flanagan [see also bibliography]. Flanagan was challenged by cystic fibrosis all his life but coped with his condition through a lifestyle approach to BDSM. Re-released in the UK by the British Film Institute.
This article was found on the Internet during my preparation of this submission. It is included here without prior permission of the author [but with full attribution] as the most balanced account of BDSM I have come across which is written by a professional for the benefit of other professionals.

THE PLEASURE OF THE PAIN: Why Some People need S&M

Marianne Apostolides- from Psychology Today, Sept/Oct 1999

BIND my ankles with your white cotton rope so I cannot walk. Bind my wrists so I cannot push you away. Place me on the bed and wrap your rope tighter around my skin so it grips my flesh. Now I know that struggle is useless, that I must lie here and submit to your mouth and tongue and teeth, your hands and words and whims. I exist only as your object. Exposed.

Of every 10 people who reads these words, one or more has experimented with sadomasochism (S&M), which is most popular among educated, middle- and upper-middle-class men and women, according to psychologists and ethnographers who have studied the phenomenon. Charles Moser, Ph.D., M.D., of the institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco, has researched S&M to learn the motivation behind it - to understand why in the world people would ask to be bound, whipped and flogged. The reasons are as surprising as they are varied.

For James, the desire became apparent when he was a child playing war games - he always hoped to be captured. “I was frightened that I was sick,” he says. But now, he adds, as a well-seasoned player on the scene, “I thank the leather gods I found this community.”

At first the scene found him. When he was at a party a professor chose him. She brought him home and tied him up, told him how bad he was for having these desires, even as she fulfilled them. For the first time he felt what he had only imagined, what he had read about in every S&M book he could find.

James, a father and manager, has a Type A personality — in-control, hard working, intelligent, demanding. His intensity is evident on his face, in his posture, in his voice. But when he plays, his eyes drift and a peaceful energy flows through him as though he had injected heroin. With each addition of pain or restraint, he stiffens slightly, then falls into a deeper calm, a deeper peace, waiting to obey his mistress.”Some people have to be tied up to be free,” he says.

As James' experience illustrates, sadomasochism involves a highly unbalanced power relationship established through role-playing, bondage, and/or the infliction of pain. The essential component is not the pain or bondage itself, but rather the knowledge that one person has complete control over the other, deciding what that person will hear, do, taste, touch, smell and feel. We hear about men pretending to be little girls, women being bound in a leather corset, people screaming in pain with each strike of a flogger or drip of hot wax. We hear about it because it is happening in bedrooms and dungeons across the country.

For over a century, people who engaged in bondage, beatings and humiliation for sexual pleasure were considered mentally ill. But in the 1980s, the American Psychiatric Association removed S&M as a category in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This decision - like the decision to remove homosexuality as a category in 1973 - was a big step toward the
societal acceptance of people whose sexual desires aren't traditional, or vanilla, as it's called in S&M circles.

What's new is that such desires are increasingly being considered normal, even healthy, as experts begin to recognize their psychological value. S&M, they are beginning to understand, offers a release of sexual and emotional energy that people cannot get from traditional sex.

"The satisfaction gained from S&M is something far more than sex," explains Roy Baumeister, Ph.D., a social psychologist at Case Western Reserve University "It can be a total emotional release."

Although people report that they have better-than-usual sex immediately after a scene, the goal of S&M itself is not intercourse: "A good scene doesn't end in orgasm, it ends in catharsis."

S&M: No Longer a Pathology

"If children at [an] early age witness sexual intercourse between adults... they inevitably regard the sexual act as a sort of ill-treatment or act of subjugation: they view it, that is, in a sadistic sense." Sigmund Freud, 1905.

Freud was one of the first to discuss S&M on a psychological level. During the 20 years he explored the topic, his theories crossed each other to create a maze of contradictions. But he maintained one constant: S&M was pathological.

People become masochistic, Freud said, as a way of regulating their desire to sexually dominate others. The desire to submit, on the other hand, he said, arises from guilt feelings over the desire to dominate. He also argued that the desire for S&M can arise on its own when a man wants to assume the passive female role, with bondage and beating signifying being "castrated or copulated with, or giving birth."

The view that S&M is pathological has been dismissed by the psychological community. Sexual sadism is a real problem, but it is a different phenomenon from S&M. Luc Granger, Ph.D., head of the Department of Psychology at the University of Montreal, created an intensive treatment program for sexual aggressors in La Macaza Prison in Quebec; he has also conducted research on the S&M community. "They are very separate populations," he says. While S&M is the regulated exchange of power among consensual participants, sexual sadism is the derivation of pleasure from either inflicting pain or completely controlling an unwilling person.

Lily Fine, a professional dominatrix who teaches S&M workshops across North America, explains: "I may hurt you, but I will not harm you: I will not hit you too hard, take you further than you want to go, or give you an infection."

Despite the research indicating that S&M does no real harm and is not associated with pathology, Freud's successors in psychoanalysis continue to use mental illness overtones when discussing S&M. Sheldon Bach, Ph.D., clinical professor of psychology at York University and supervising analyst at the New York Freudian Society, maintains that people are addicted to S&M.

They feel compelled to be "anally abused or crawl on their knees and lick a boot or a penis or who knows what else. The problem," he continues, "is that they can't love. They are searching for love, and S & M is the only way they can try to find it because they are locked into sadomasochistic interactions they had with a parent."

Linking Childhood Memories With Adult Sex

"I can explore aspects of myself that I don't get a chance to explore otherwise. So even though I'm playing a role, I feel more connected with myself." Leanne Custer M.S.W, AIDS counselor
Meredith Reynolds, Ph.D., the Sexuality Research Fellow of the Social Science Research Council, confirms that childhood experiences may shape a person's sexual outlook. “Sexuality doesn't just arise at puberty,” she says. “Like other parts of someone's personality, sexuality develops at birth and takes a developmental course through a person's life span.”

In her work on sexual exploration among children, Reynolds has shown that while childhood experiences can indeed influence adult sexuality, the effects usually “wash out” as a person gains more sexual experience. But they can linger in some people, causing a connection between childhood memories and adult sexual play. In that case, Reynolds says, “the childhood experiences have affected something in the personality, and that in turn affects adult experiences.”

Reynolds' theory helps us develop a greater understanding of the desire to be a whip-bearing mistress or a boot-licking slave. For example, if a child has been taught to feel shame about her body and desires, she may learn to disconnect herself from them. Even as she gets older and gains more experience with sex, her personality may retain some part of that need for separation. S&M play may act as a bridge: Lying naked on a bed bound to the bedposts with leather restraints, she is forced to be completely sexual. The restraint, the futility of struggle, the pain, the master's words telling her she is such a lovely slave - these cues enable her body to fully connect with her sexual self in a way that has been difficult during traditional sex.

Marina is a prime example. She knew from the time she was 6 years old that she was expected to succeed in school and sports. She learned to focus on achievement as a way to dismiss emotions and desires. “I learned very young that desires are dangerous,” she says. She heard that message in the behavior of her parents: a depressive mother who let her emotions overtake her, and an obsessively health-conscious father who compulsively controlled his diet.

When Marina began to have sexual desires, her instinct, cultivated by her upbringing, was to consider them too frightening, too dangerous. “So I became anorexic,” she says. “And when you're anorexic, you don't feel desire; all you feel in your body is panic.”

Marina didn't feel the desire for S&M until she was an adult and had outgrown her eating disorder. “One night I asked my partner to put his hands around my neck and choke me. I was so surprised when those words came out of my mouth,” she says. If she gave her partner total control over her body she felt, she could allow herself to feel like a completely sexual being, with none of the hesitation and disconnection she sometimes felt during sex. “He wasn't into it, but now I'm with someone who is,” Marina says. "S&M makes our vanilla sex better, too, because we trust each other more sexually and we can communicate what we want."

**Escaping the Modern Western Ego**

“Like alcohol abuse, binge eating and meditation, sadomasochism is a way people can forget themselves.” Roy Baumeister, Ph.D., Professor of psychology, Case Western Reserve University

It is human nature to try to maximize esteem and control: Those are two general principles governing the study of the self. Masochism runs contrary to both, and was therefore an intriguing psychological puzzle for Baumeister, whose career has focused on the study of self and identity.

Through an analysis of S&M-related letters to the sex magazine Variations, Baumeister came to believe that “masochism is a technique for helping people temporarily lose their normal identity.” He reasoned that the modern Western ego is an incredibly elaborate structure, with our culture placing more demands on the individual self than any other culture in history. Such high demands increase the stress associated with living up to expectations and existing as the person you want to be. “That stress makes forgetting who you are an appealing escape,” Baumeister says. That is the
essence of “escape” theory, one of the main reasons people turn to S&M.

“Nothing matters except you, me, and the sound of my voice,” Lily Fine tells the tied-up and exposed businessman who begged to be spanked before breakfast. She says it slowly, making her slave wait for every sound, forcing him to focus only on her, to float in anticipation of the sensations she will create inside him. Anxieties about mortgages and taxes, stresses about business partners and job deadlines are vanquished each time the flogger hits the flesh. The businessman is reduced to a physical creature existing only in the here and now, feeling the pain and pleasure. “I’m interested in manipulating what’s in the mind,” Lily says. “The brain is the greatest erogenous zone.”

In another S&M scene, Lily tells a woman to take off her clothes, then dresses her only with a blindfold. She commands the woman not to move. Lily then takes a tissue and begins moving it over the woman’s body in different patterns and at varying speeds and angles. Sometimes she lets the edge of the tissue just barely brush the woman’s stomach and breasts; sometimes she bunches the tissue and creates swirls on her back and all the way down. “The woman was quivering. She didn’t know what I was doing to her, but she was liking it,” Lily remembers with a smile.

Escape theory is further supported by an idea called “frame analysis,” developed by the late Irving Goffman, Ph.D. According to Goffman, despite its popular conception as darkly wild and orgiastic, S&M play has complex rules, rituals, roles and dynamics that create a “frame” around the experience.

“Frames suspend reality. They create expectations, norms and values that set this situation apart from other parts of life,” confirms Thomas Weinberg, Ph.D., a sociologist at Buffalo State College in New York and the editor of S&M: Studies in Dominance & Submission (Prometheus Books, 1995). Once inside the frame, people are free to act and feel in ways they couldn’t at other times.

S&M: Part of the Sexual Continuum

S&M has inspired the creation of many psychological theories in addition to the ones discussed here. Do we need so many? Perhaps not, according to Stephanie Saunders Ph.D., associate director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction at Indiana University, “A lot of behaviors that are scrutinized because they are seen to be marginal are really a part of the continuum of sexuality and sexual behavior."

After all, the ingredients in good S&M play - communication, respect and trust - are the same ingredients in good traditional sex. The outcome is the same, too - a feeling of connection to the body and the self.

Laura Antoniou, a writer whose work on S&M has been published by Masquerade Books in New York City, puts it another way: “When I was a child, I had nothing but S&M fantasies. I punished Barbie for being dirty. I did Bondage Barbie, dominance with GI Joe. S&M is simply what turns me on.”