

Anne McClintock

In *Sex*, Madonna has her wits, if not her clothes, about her. The scandal of *Sex* is the scandal of S/M: the provocative confession that the edicts of power are reversible. So the critics bay for her blood: a woman who takes sex and money into her own hands must—sooner or later—bare her breast to the knife. But with the utmost artifice and levity, Madonna refuses to imitate tragedy. Taking sex into the street, and money into the bedroom, she flagrantly violates the sacramental edicts of private and public, and stages sexual commerce as a theater of transformation.

Madonna's erotic photo album is filled with the theatrical paraphernalia of S/M: boots, chains, leather, whips, masks, costumes, and scripts. Andrew Neil, editor of the *Sunday Times*, warns ominously that it thus runs the risk of unleashing "the dark side" of human nature, "with particular danger for women."¹ But the outrage of *Sex* is its insight into consensual S/M as high theater.² Demonizing S/M confuses the distinction between unbridled sadism and the social subculture of consensual fetishism.³ To argue that in consensual S/M the "dominant" has power, and the slave has not, is to read theater for reality; it is to play the world forward. The economy of S/M is the economy of conversion: slave to master, adult to baby, pain to pleasure, man to woman, and back again. S/M, as Foucault puts it, "is not a name given to a practice as old as Eros; it is a massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the end of the eighteenth century, and which constitutes one of the greatest conversions of Western imagination: unreason transformed into delirium of the heart."⁴ Consensual S/M "plays the world backwards."⁵

In *Sex*, as in S/M, roles are swiftly swapped. At the Vault, New York's amiable S/M dungeon, the domina Madonna archly flicks her whip across the glistening leather hips of a female "slave." The domina's breasts are bare; the slave is armored. Contrary to popular stigma, S/M theatrically flouts the edict that manhood is synonymous with mastery, and submission a female fate. Further into the album, a man genuflects at Madonna's feet, neck bound in a collar, the lash at his back. But the domina's foot is also bound, and the leash straps her hand to his neck. The bondage fetish performs identity and power as twined in interdependence, and rebuts the Enlightenment vision of the solitary and self-generating individual. The lesbian with the knife is also the lover; scenes of bondage are stapled to scenes of abandon, and *Sex* makes no pretense at romantic profundity but flaunts S/M as a theater of scene and surface.



Photographs by Grace Lau, 1993

Hence the paradox of consensual S/M. On the one hand, it seems to parade a servile obedience to conventions of power. In its clichéd reverence for formal ritual, it is the most ceremonial and decorous of practices. S/M is “beautifully suited to symbolism.”⁶ As theater, S/M borrows its decor, props, and costumery (bonds, chains, ropes, blindfolds) and its scenes (bedrooms, kitchens, dungeons, convents, prisons, empires) from the everyday cultures of power. At first glance, then, S/M seems a servant to orthodox power. Yet, on the contrary, with its exaggerated emphasis on costume and scene, S/M performs social power as *scripted*, and hence as permanently subject to change. As a theater of conversion, S/M reverses and transmutes the social meanings it borrows, without finally stepping outside the enchantment of its magic circle. In S/M, paradox is paraded, not resolved. This essay is pitched at the borders of contradiction.

Against Nature: S/M and Sexology

In 1885, the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing coined the terms *sadism* and *masochism*, and medicalized both as individual psychopathologies of the flesh.⁷ Sadism, for Krafft-Ebing, was an aberrant and atavistic manifestation of the “innate desire to humiliate, hurt, wound, or even destroy others in order thereby to create sexual pleasure in one’s self.”⁸ Nature was the overlord of power, but had, in its wisdom, seen fit to ordain the aggressive impulse in men, not women. “Under normal circumstances man meets obstacles which it is his part to overcome, and for which nature has given him an aggressive character.”⁹ “Normal” sexuality thus merely enacts the male’s “natural” sexual aggression and the female’s “natural” sexual passivity: “In the intercourse of the sexes, the active or aggressive role belongs to man; woman remains passive, defensive. It affords man great pleasure to win a woman, to conquer her.”¹⁰ Yet women, for Krafft-Ebing, are indirectly to blame for male sadism, for their very shyness provokes male aggression: “It seems probable that this sadistic force is developed by the natural shyness and modesty of women towards the aggressive manners of the male.”¹¹ Happily, however, Nature designed woman to take a refined pleasure in man’s rough victory: “Woman no doubt derives pleasure from her innate coyness and the final victory of man affords her intense gratification.”¹²

The task for medical sexology was to police a double boundary: between the “normal” culture of male aggression and the “abnormal” culture of S/M, and between “normal” female masochism and “abnormal” male masochism. The first contradiction—between “natural” heterosexuality and the “unnatural perversions”—was primarily managed by projecting the “perversions” onto the invented zone of race. Sexologists

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like Krafft-Ebing demonized S/M as the psychopathology of the atavistic individual, as a blood-flaw and stigma of the flesh. S/M, like other fetishisms, was figured as a regression backward in time to the “prehistory” of racial “degeneration,” existing ominously in the heart of the imperial metropolis—the degeneration of the race writ as an individual pathology of the soul.

Thus, for Krafft-Ebing, decent doses of male aggression are a *fait accompli* of nature. Genuine sadism, however, exists in “civilized man” only to a “weak and rather rudimentary degree.”¹³ While sadism is a natural trait of “primitive” peoples, atavistic traces of sadism in “civilized man” stem, not from environment or social accident, but are awakened from a primordial past: “Sadism must . . . be counted among the primitive anomalies of the sexual life. It is a disturbance (a deviation) in the evolution of psychosexual processes sprouting from the soil of psychical degeneration.”¹⁴

Like Krafft-Ebing, Freud agrees that the aggressive impulse is “readily demonstrable in the normal individual.”¹⁵ Again, the “normal individual” is male: “The sexuality of most men shows an admixture of aggression, of a desire to subdue.”¹⁶ But for Freud, the difference between aggression and sadism is one of degree, not of kind: “Sadism would then correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and has been brought to the foreground by displacement.”¹⁷ Masochism, however, presents a more subtle riddle. For Krafft-Ebing, since masochism is simply Nature’s way of saying that women are destined for a passive role in society, masochism is natural to women, but not to men. Freud, however, sees the “most striking peculiarity” of sadomasochism as the fact that “its active and passive forms are regularly encountered together in the same person.”¹⁸ Male masochism, moreover, is by no means an uncommon phenomenon. Freud, however, manages this contradiction by identifying male masochism as, more properly speaking, “feminine.”¹⁹ The heterosexual distribution of “male” aggression and “female” passivity is sustained, if precariously.

By contrast with unbridled sadism, however, consensual and commercial S/M is less a biological flaw or pathological variant of “natural” male aggression and “natural” female passivity, than it is a historical subculture that emerged in Europe alongside the imperial Enlightenment. Far from being a primordial manifestation of racial “degeneracy,” S/M is a subculture organized primarily around the symbolic exercise of social risk. Indeed, the outrage of S/M is precisely its hostility to the idea of nature as the custodian of social power: S/M refuses to read power as fate or destiny. Since S/M is the theatrical exercise of social contradiction, it is



self-consciously against nature, not in the sense that it violates natural law, but in the sense that it denies the existence of natural law in the first place. *S/M performs* social power as both contingent and constitutive, as sanctioned neither by fate nor by God, but by social convention and invention, and thus as open to historical change.

Consensual *S/M* insists on exhibiting the “primitive” (slave, baby, woman) as a *character* in the historical time of modernity. *S/M* stages the “primitive irrational” as a dramatic script, a communal performance in the heart of Western reason. The paraphernalia of *S/M* (boots, whips, chains, uniforms) are the paraphernalia of state power, public punishment converted to private pleasure. *S/M* plays social power backward, visibly staging hierarchy, difference and power, the irrational, ecstasy, and the alienation of the body as being at the center of Western reason, thus revealing the imperial logic of individualism, but also irreverently refusing it as fate. *S/M* manipulates the *signs* of power in order to refuse their legitimacy as *nature*. Hence the unstinting severity of the law in policing commercial *S/M*.

Nothing to Use but Your Chains: Fetishes in the Land of Fem-Dom



Photograph by Grace Lau, 1993

Some feminists demonize heterosexual S/M as the sanctioned exercise of male tyranny: “Patriarchy and heterosexuality attempt to freeze power, to make one side always passive. . . . It is the origin of masochistic and sadistic positions.”²⁰ For other feminists, even lesbian S/M is “self-abasement on all levels that renders wimmin unable to execute truly femi-

nist goals.”²¹ Kathleen Barry in *Sexual Slavery* denounces S/M as “a disguise for the act of sexually forcing a woman against her will. . . .”²²

It is also commonly thought that men who pay for commercial S/M pay to indulge in the sadistic abuse of women. Yet the testimony of dominatrixes reveals precisely the opposite. By far the most common service paid for by men in heterosexual S/M is the extravagant display of submission. In most commercial B&D (bondage and discipline), men are the “slaves,” not the women. As the dominatrix Lindi St. Clair says, far from being the vicious unleashing of male dominance, S/M is typically “the other way round.”²³ Allegra Taylor agrees:

Amber can call on the services of a couple of “submissive” girls who themselves enjoy being beaten, to service the needs of the few “dominant” men who want to dish it out rather than take it, but the majority of her clients come and pay a lot of money in order to submit, to relinquish themselves, to suffer.²⁴

Who are these men? “Proper gentlemen who know how to behave.” Amber’s regulars include “solicitors, Harley Street doctors, senior police officers, business executives and churchmen. They come to be punished, humiliated, frightened and tormented to the limits of their endurance.”²⁵

Kelly, an Australian B&D specialist, claims her clients are “mostly businessmen, middle-age upwards. They were all well dressed, you wouldn’t pick them in the street, they could be your boss at work. B&D seems to attract that kind of clientele, as though people in authority want that taken away from them.”²⁶ As Lindi St. Clair testifies:

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Tantalising Mistress Charlotte

An awful lot of men . . . want to dress up in what we call rubber-wear, or leather, or they want to be tied up, and put into bondage, or spanked, or caned, or they want to dress in ladies clothing, or they want to be urinated on, or they want to be abused by a dominant female . . . and none of this involves straight sex. . . . All these men are married, with families. . . . They'd never admit it to anyone.²⁷

Far from male sadism being the norm, she says: “There’s a few of what are called ‘masters,’ who want submissive girls, but I’ve never come across that. It’s very, very small. It’s the other way round.”²⁸ Bonnie, an Australian prostitute, writes, “In New Zealand and here it’s much the same, usually they’re guys who want to get a beating.”²⁹ Says Kelly: “There are those who are just happy grovelling around the floor begging for mercy.”³⁰ This verdict is confirmed again and again: “in the world of the sado-masochist, there is nothing ‘abnormal’ about a male being passive and submissive.”³¹ Indeed, male passivity is by far the most common phenomenon. What is the meaning of this conversion?

The Domestic Slave

Prostitutes testify that men frequently enact scripts framed by the “degradation” of domesticity: paying large sums of money to sweep, clean, launder, and tidy, under a female regime of verbal taunts and abuse: “‘Domestic’ slaves want to be drudges and set to work cleaning, shopping, ironing, etc. . . . One elderly gentleman of seventy does the best domestic



work I have ever seen. Another slave tried to get rid of him, and they would bicker over who would wash up, peel the potatoes, or sweep the floor.”³² Some dominas keep “pets,” who pay regularly to do their housework for them. During her trial in 1987, Madame Cyn Payne calmly confessed to the court: “Well, I’ve had one or two slaves,” she said. “It’s someone who does all the housework and painting and decorating, and in return he likes a little bit of caning, insults, and humiliation.”³³

Similar testimonies abound. Lisa, an Australian prostitute, remembers a domestic “slave” who liked nothing so much as to “crawl around the floor doing the vacuum with a cucumber up his bum.”³⁴ Kelly remembers, “Another guy came around each week and paid to do our laundry.”³⁵ Another paid to empty the bins of condoms and tissues. The eighteenth-century prostitute, Ann Sheldon, records in her memoirs “a person of very gentleman-like behaviour” who had a fancy for being roundly beaten with dishcloths while doing the washing up:

looking over the kitchen-door, I saw the good man, disrobed of his clothes and wig, and dressed in a mob cap, a tattered bedgown, and an old pettycoat belonging to the cook, as busy in washing the dishes as if this employment had been the source of his daily bread—but this was not all; for while he was thus occupied, the mantua-maker on one side, and the cook on the other, were belabouring him with dish-clouts; he continuing to make a thousand excuses for his awkwardness and promising to do the business better on a future occasion.³⁶



What are we to make of these rituals, belonging as they do in the realm of the fetish?

In their secret society of the spectacle, male “slaves” enact with compulsive repetition the forbidden knowledge of the power of women. In cultures where women are the childraisers, an infant’s first identification is with the culture of femininity, which enters the child’s identity as its first structuring principle. But in these same societies, boys are tasked with identifying *away* from women, that is, away from a founding dimension of their own identity, toward an often abstracted and remote masculinity—identity, that is, not through *recognition*, but through *negation*. Masculinity thus comes into being through the ritualized disavowal of the feminine, predicated on a host of male rites of negation. Nonetheless, identification with the culture of women survives in secret rites, taboo and full of shame.

By cross-dressing as women or as maids, by paying to do “women’s work,” or by ritually worshiping dominas as socially powerful, the male “slave” relishes the forbidden feminine aspects of his own identity, furtively recalling the childhood image of female power and the memory of maternity, banished by social shame to the museum of masturbation.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, as in Western culture at large, male identification *with* the mother figure is seen as pathological, perverse, the source of arrest, fixation, and hysteria, rather than as an inevitable aspect of any child’s identity. For Freud, the mother is seen as an object the child must try to possess and control, rather than a social ideal with whom

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to identify. For boys, active identification is allowed only with men, thus complex, dynamic patterns of identity are split into two distinct gendered categories. For men, the disjunction between women as object-choice, and women as desirable to identify *with*, is split and unresolved, policed by social shame and stigma.

It is not surprising, then, that cleaning rituals figure so often in the land of Fem-Dom (Female Domination). Male floorwashing, laundering, footlicking, and bootscrubbing rituals fill the fantasy columns of Fem-Dom magazines such as *Mistress*, *F-D Xtra*, and *Madame in a World of Fantasy*. Perhaps these expiation rituals symbolically absolve the “slave” of sexual and gender shame, in elaborate absolution scenes that are replete with Christian overtones. Sex can be indulged if guilt can be atoned for, through the ritual washing of floors, feet, and lingerie—“masochism as expiation for the sin of sexuality.”³⁷

The domestic fetish also brings into crisis the historic separation of the “male” sphere of the market, and the “female” sphere of the home. By paying handsomely to perform household services that wives are expected to perform for free, male “slaves” stage, as outrageous display, the social contradiction between women’s paid work and women’s unpaid work in the home. If the middle-class cult of domesticity disavowed the economic value of housework, and exalted the home as the space for the elaborate display of leisure and consumption, domestic S/M does the opposite. In the ritual exchange of cash and the reversal of gender roles, domestic S/M stages women’s work as having both *exhibition* and *economic* value. The social disavowal and *undervaluation* of domestic work are reversed in the extravagant *overvaluation* of women’s dirty work, and the remuneration of women for the supervision of men’s labor.

The domestic-slave fetish—inhabiting as it does the threshold between private and public, marriage and market—embodies the trace of both historical and personal memory, exhibiting, without resolution, the social contradiction between the historical disavowal of women’s labor, and the personal memory of women’s power. Male “slaves” throw into question the liberal separation of private and public, insisting on exhibiting women’s work, women’s value in the home: that space putatively beyond both slave labor and the market economy. Exhibiting their “filth” as *value*, they give the lie to the disavowal of women’s work and the middle-class denunciation of sexual and domestic “dirt.” At the same time, however, the slave-band brings into the bourgeois home the memory of empire: the clanking of chains and the crack of the whip. The fetish slave-band—mimicking the metal collars worn by black slaves in the homes of the imperial bourgeoisie—enacts the history of industrial capital as haunted by the traumatic and ineradicable memory of slave imperialism.

Male TV (transvestite) “slavery” thus veers between nostalgia for female power—embodied in the awful spectacle of the whip-wielding domina; and the ritual negation of female power—embodied in the feminized male “slave” as the nadir of self-abasement. In the process, however, the spectacle of the male “slave” on his hands and knees, naked as a newt and scrubbing the kitchen floor, throws radically into question “Nature’s” edict that differences in gender entail natural divisions of labor.

Some men play the submissive role only when dressed as women, doing “women’s work” costumed as housemaids or nannies. A question then arises: Do men indulge in submission only when dressed as women and slaves, dogs and babies? Would heterosexuality be flung into confusion if men performed domestic work in Dacron suits and Leonard from Paris ties? After the *via dolorosa* of the S/M session, the domina bears witness to the resurrection of manhood. “Finally, it was all over. . . . Dennis got up and gingerly put his pants on. He was instantly transformed into a normal, confident, assertive man. . . . We all stood around chatting and having a cup of tea.”³⁸ Is the heterosexual male thus left finally unimpaired, to be reassembled again in boardroom and bedroom?³⁹

Yet not all “slaves” cross-dress when doing domestic work. As one writer grumbled in *Madame in a World of Fantasy*: “Dear Candida, I know you like to give all tastes a share in your magazine, but the portion given to those interested in men that are feminised is way over the top.”⁴⁰ Many “slaves” retain their male persona and perform domestic work as an elaborate reversal of gender *agency*, but not of gender *identity*. It is therefore important to stress that S/M does not constitute a single subculture, but

rather comprises a cluster of circulating genres, some of which are distinct, some of which overlap.

In S/M, social identities shift libidinally. In her ground-breaking book, *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber invites us to take transvestites on their own terms, not as one sex or gender, but as the enactment of ambiguity itself: not even so much a “blurred sex,” as the embodiment and performance of social contradiction.⁴¹ She contends that the “specter of transvestism” throws into question the very notion of a fixed and stable identity, challenging any easy binarity of “female” and “male.” The cross-dresser represents the “crisis of category itself.” Garber thus sets herself against the “progress narrative” theory of cross-dressing, which attempts to uncover a “real” desired identity, either “male” or “female” beneath the transvestite mask. Rather, the transvestite is the figure that inhabits the borderland where oppositions are permanently disarranged.

Cross-dressing celebrates the peculiar freedoms of ambiguity, rather than the fixity of one identity. For many, the allure of transvestism is not the transformation of man-to-woman, or woman-to-man, but the subversive parade of man-*as*-woman, woman-*as*-man. Cross-dressers often desire not the security of a perfect imitation, but rather the delicious impersonation that belies complete disguise: the hairy leg in the lace suspender, the bald pate in the bonnet. In “tranny” (transvestite) publications such as *The World of Transvestism*, a man’s hirsute calf protrudes beneath the silken skirt, the shadow of an erection pressed against the lacy lingerie. One TV writes: “I agree with what you have said, Brian, about contrast—male with female. Long black fishnet stockings, frilly suspender belts, pretty frocks and finally see-through panties that when one raises one’s frock, the big erect penis bulging the silky flimsy material can clearly be seen.”⁴²

The Dirt Fetish

Domestic S/M is organized in complex and repetitive ways around the fetish of “dirt.” Why does “dirt” exert such a compulsive fascination over the S/M imagination?

The dirt fetish embodies the traces of both personal and historical memory. Dirt may recall, as personal memory, punishment during toilet training for being out of control—of one’s feces, one’s urine, one’s erection and ejaculation, one’s wandering, desirous fingers. Fecal dirt smeared by children on themselves, their walls, their cots, or their siblings can embody a variety of inchoate passions: rage, curiosity, an attempt to reach out and influence the world, frustration, and loneliness. If unaccountably pun-

ished for such acts, the emotion may be arrested, destined to recur compulsively for ritualistic reenactment. In the dirt fetish, the fetishist takes control of perilous memory, playing memory backward, in an excess of desire, and disarranging the social compact between sexual transgression and dirt. If fetishists, as children, were punished for being *out of control* of their “dirt,” in the rebellious circus of fetishism they reenact, in reverse, an *excess of control* over “dirt.” If, as children, an obscure logic of parental rebuke equated erotic pleasure with “filth” and “smut,” meriting swift retribution, then, as adults, the S/Mers invert the logic, equating dirt with an exquisite excess of erotic pleasure, reenacting “toilet training” in an exhibitionist parody of the domestic economy of pleasure and power.

S/M also embodies a *historical* memory trace. Since the nineteenth century, the subculture of S/M has been denounced by reference to the bestiary and the iconography of “filth.” But nothing is inherently dirty; dirt expresses a relation to social value and social disorder. Dirt, as Mary Douglas suggests, is that which transgresses social boundary. A broom in a kitchen closet is not “dirty,” whereas lying on a bed it is. Sex with one’s spouse is not “dirty,” whereas the same act with a prostitute is. Boxing is not “dirty,” but S/M is.

During the nineteenth century, the iconography of “dirt” became deeply integrated into the policing and transgression of social boundary. In Victorian culture, the bodily relation to “dirt” expressed a social relation to labor. The male middle-class—seeking to dismantle the aristocratic body and the aristocratic regime of legitimacy—came to distinguish itself as a class in two ways: it earned its living (unlike the aristocracy), and it owned property (unlike the working class). Unlike the working class, however, its members, especially its female members, could not bear on their bodies the visible evidence of manual labor. Dirt was a Victorian scandal, because it was the surplus evidence of manual labor, the visible residue that stubbornly remained after the process of industrial rationality had done its work. Dirt is the counterpart of the commodity; something is dirty precisely because it is void of commercial value, or because it transgresses the “normal” commercial market. Dirt is what is left over after exchange value has been extracted. Dirt is by definition useless, since it is that which belongs outside the commodity market.

If, as Marx noted, commodity fetishism exhibits the overvaluation of commercial exchange as the fundamental principle of social community, then the Victorian obsession with dirt marks a dialectic: the fetishized undervaluation of human labor. Smearred on trousers, faces, hands, and aprons, dirt was the memory trace of working-class and female labor, unseemly evidence that the production of industrial and imperial wealth lay fundamentally in the hands and bodies of the working class,

women, and the colonized. In this way, dirt, like all fetishes, expresses a crisis in value, for it contradicts the liberal dictum that social wealth is created by the abstract, rational principles of the market, and not by labor. For this reason, Victorian dirt entered the symbolic realm of fetishism with great force.

As the nineteenth century drew on, the iconography of dirt became a poetics of surveillance, deployed increasingly to police the boundaries between “normal” sexuality and “dirty” sexuality, “normal” work and “dirty” work, “normal” money and “dirty” money. “Dirty” sex—masturbation, prostitution, lesbian and gay sexuality, S/M, the host of Victorian “perversions”—transgressed the libidinal economy of male-controlled, heterosexual reproduction within monogamous marital relations (clean sex which has value). Likewise, “dirty” money—associated with prostitutes, Jews, gamblers, thieves—transgressed the fiscal economy of the male-dominated market exchange (clean money which has value). Prostitutes stood on the dangerous threshold of work, money, and sexuality, and came to be figured increasingly in the iconography of “pollution,” “disorder,” “plagues,” “moral contagion,” and racial “filth.”

Men Babies in the Land of Fem-Dom

S/M is haunted by memory. By reenacting loss of control in a staged situation of excessive control, the S/Mer gains symbolic power over perilous memory. By reinventing the memory of trauma, S/M affords a delirious triumph over the past, and from this triumph an orgasmic excess of pleasure. But since the triumph over memory is symbolic, however intensely felt in the flesh, resolution is perpetually deferred. For this reason, the fetish, the scene, will recur for perpetual reenactment, and compulsive repetition emerges as a fundamental structuring principle of S/M.

By many accounts, babyism is a common fetish in commercial S/M. As Allegra Taylor says, “There’s a whole area of deviant behavior called Babyism where the client likes to dress up in a nappy, suck a giant dummy or one of her breasts and just be rocked.”⁴³ In trade parlance, a “babyist,” or “infantilist,” pays large sums of money to be bathed, powdered, put in nappies, sat in playpens, or wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes. The Fem-Dom magazine *Fantasy* explains: “We often have requests for stories of poor (un)willing creatures who wish to return to the beginning of their existence and be completely babyfied, dominated entirely. . . .”⁴⁴ Anne Sheldon’s eighteenth-century gentleman who fancied being beaten while doing the dishes liked the two women who beat him afterward “to skewer him up tight in a blanket, and roll him backwards and forwards upon the carpet, in the parlor, till he was lulled to sleep.”⁴⁵

Enough men like to be rocked and “nursed” to give dominas a steady trade. As St. Clair attests, “‘Babyists’ need mummy Lindi to dress them in nappies, bibs, bonnets and booties, to powder their bottoms and breast-feed them.”⁴⁶ Another domina runs a two-story building: at lunchtime, businessmen arrive, discretely take off their clothes, don giant-sized nappies with giant-sized nappy pins, and spend large sums of money to sit for an hour in giant-sized playpens, sucking bottles, before redressing, then returning to the hurly-burly of high finance.

Babyist scenes in F-D mags feature grown men in outsize frilly baby wear, strapped into baby cots, or gazing wide-eyed at the camera from behind their dummies. A typical magazine fantasy runs as follows:

he began to feel, not just his mummy’s child, but his total dependency on her. . . . He sighed contentedly. Babba had been his childhood name. . . . Now he was to be Babba again. . . . From the next day, all baby hair was removed. Mummy bathed him, dried him, put baby-oil between his legs. . . . Bobby, at home, has become a baby again.⁴⁷

Male babyism holds up to society a scandalous, accusatory hybrid: not so much man-*into*-baby, but man-*as*-baby, baby-*as*-man. Contradictions are exhibited, but not resolved. In these scenes, men surrender deliriously to the memory of female power and their own helplessness in their mother’s or nurse’s arms. If men are socially tasked with upholding the burden of rational self-containment, perhaps in the babyland of Fem-Dom they can fleetingly relinquish their stolid control, surrendering responsibility and authority in an ecstatic release of power.

Babyism may also grant men retrospective control over perilous memories of infancy: nightmares of restraint, rubber sheets, helplessness, inexplicable punishments, isolation, and grief. The rubber fetish seems associated, for some, with inchoate memories of rubber diapers, wet beds, and mortification. F-D magazine fantasies reveal aching images of childhood as a bewildering limbo of denial, discomfort, parental rage, and neglect. One babyist muses: “The problem probably stemmed from my early childhood. I was an only child and my mother left home. . . . My father was away fighting the war . . . and I was thus brought up by an aunt. . . . She would cuff me round the ear at the slightest excuse.”⁴⁸ Another fetishist recalls: “But in the depths of my mind there lurked a more sinister side of myself, an obsession to be dominated and humiliated as a child, forced back to the cradle by beautiful, cruel women, normally nurses or nannies.”⁴⁹ This writer’s masochism began at boarding school, when he was ridiculed for bedwetting. When punishment failed to cure him, the school nurse subjected him to a public circus of mortification: “. . . she gathered the boys around . . . while she removed my shorts

and underpants. With a captive audience, she pinned me into a bulky nappy. . . . ‘There,’ she beamed, ‘Baby has a nappy on at last.’ . . . My humiliation was complete.”⁵⁰

Now, however, as an adult, in his F-D theater of conversion, the babyist converts the incapacity to control body functions and the failure to preserve the boundaries between child and adult into the imperative to lose control, and to blur the boundaries between adult and child. Through the control frame of cash and fantasy, perilous memories of *loss* of control are reenacted under circumstances of a scrupulous *excess* of control.

In their secret nursery for Goliaths, babyists ritually indulge in the forbidden, nostalgic spectacle of the power of women. The land of Fem-Dom is frequently described by men as a “feminist” utopia, a futuristic paradise in which women are “fully liberated and universally recognized as the Superior Sex.”⁵¹ The voices of martinets, scolds, and governesses crack through the pages of these magazines: “‘This is exactly what you deserve, my boy. A good smacked bottom!’ she said sternly, just like a strict governess.”⁵² The Agony Aunts of F-D columns are similarly vituperative: “Disgusting creature though you are, you have my permission to write again,” snaps one.⁵³ “You sound a miserable worm to me . . . and deserve all you get,” barks another.⁵⁴

The “naughty husband” fantasy appears frequently, in which callous men are punished for domestic infringements. A STRICT BOTTOM SMACKING WIFE writes: “A little wifely discipline is often necessary. I am sure that many wives have often felt like turning a misbehaving young husband over a knee and smacking his bottom!—the thing is to do it.”⁵⁵ “I am a firm believer,” writes another “wife,” “in petticoating and nursery treatment as a means of reminding a troublesome husband that he is still subject to maternal rule.”⁵⁶

Perhaps in these expiation rituals, men pay not only to surrender gender responsibility, or to gain control over perilous memories, but also to be symbolically “absolved” of guilt for the everyday abuse of women—only to resume their authority once more as they return restored from babyland. As Gebhard suggests, “The masochist has a nice guilt relieving system—he gets his punishment simultaneously with his sexual pleasure or else is entitled to his pleasure by first enduring the punishment.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the “feminist” utopia exalted by these men is a paradise arranged and organized for male pleasure. In the private security of fantasy, men can indulge secretly and guiltily their knowledge of women’s power, while enclosing female power in a fantasy land that lies far beyond the cities and towns of genuine feminist change.


Criminal Justice: The Policing of S/M

On 28 January 1987, at the height of the celebrated trial of Madame Cyn Payne, Sergeant David Broadwell dragged into court a large, clear, plastic bag and exposed to the titillated courtroom the taboo paraphernalia of S/M: whips, belts, chains, a dog collar, and assorted sticks and leather items.⁵⁸ For days, police and witnesses described the “naughtinesses” at Payne’s party: spankings, lesbian shows, elderly gentlemen cross-dressed in women’s evening clothes, policemen in drag, and lawyers, businessmen, and even a Peer of the Realm waiting in queues on the stairs for sex.

The sex trial, conducted in a blaze of publicity, exposes its own structuring paradox, staging in public, as a vicarious spectacle, that which it renders criminally deviant outside the juridical domain. Ordering the unspeakable to be spoken in public, the sex trial takes shape around the very fetishism it sets itself to isolate and punish. Through the prostitution trial, transgressions in the distribution of money, pleasure, and power are isolated as crimes, and are then performed again in the theatrical ceremony of the trial as confession. The judiciary is a system of ordered procedures for the production of “Truth.” It is also a system for disqualifying alternative discourses: the disenfranchised, feminists, prostitutes, fetishists. By being obliged to speak “forensically” in the courtroom about their illicit activities, prostitutes rehearse, as spectacle, the taboo body of the woman who receives money for sex. The more she speaks of her actions in public, however, the more she incriminates herself. But in its obsessive display of “dirty” pictures, filmed evidence, confessions, and exhibits, the sex trial reveals itself as deployed about the archival exhibition of the fetish. Under his purple robes, the judge has an erection.

The sex trial and the flagellation scene mirror each other in a common liturgy. There is, first of all, the Chamber. In the trial, this is the Court; in S/M it is the Vault, the Dungeon, or the Schoolroom. The first rite is exposure—in the trial, the accused is exposed before the crowd; in the flagellant scene, the “slave’s” buttocks are bared. The Judge, like the Dominatrix, is theatrically costumed, while the judge’s wig, like the prostitute’s wig, guarantees the separation between self and body, and thereby the “impartiality” of the trial. Both Judge and Dominatrix are paid money to exercise the right-to-punish, while fetish elements are common to both: theatrical costumery, stage, gavels, whips, handcuffs. The second rite is restraint—the accused is penned in the dock, the “slave” is tied, or bent over the block. The third element is the charge, for which it is also necessary that there be spectators, voyeurism being an indispensable element in both scenes. Next, it is crucial that both accused and “slave” participate verbally in their trial, in the plea, the interrogation, denials, and confession.

LOCAL




Judgement Day
937 2499

Warnings are given, sentence is pronounced, and execution takes place. Only then is the logic of pleasure and punishment reversed: the trial displays illicit pleasure and power for punishment; S/M displays illicit punishment for pleasure and power. The trial exists to produce the sentence of rational Truth, while in S/M Truth becomes orgasm, the word is made flesh. S/M thus emerges as a private parody of the public trial: public punishment converted to private pleasure.

If the sex trial isolates “deviant” sexual pleasure for punishment, commercial S/M is the dialectical twin of the trial, organizing the punishment of sexual deviance for pleasure. If the sex trial redistributes illicit female money back into male circulation through fines, commercial S/M enacts the reverse, staging women’s sexual work as having economic value, and insisting, strictly, on payment.

Consensual S/M brings to its limits the liberal discourse on consent. In 1990, the notorious Spanner investigation became an estimated £2.5 million showcase for the policing of gay S/M in Britain. On 19 December

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REPORT FOR PUNISHMENT
937 2499

1990, fifteen men were sentenced at the Old Bailey by Judge James Rant for willingly and privately engaging in S/M acts with each other for sexual pleasure. Eight of the men were given custodial sentences ranging up to four and a half years. On 19 February 1992, five of the men failed to have their conviction overturned by the Court of Appeal.⁵⁹ The presiding Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, ruled that the men's consent and the privacy of their acts were no defense, and that S/M libido did not constitute causing bodily harm "for good reason."

By contrast, activities such as boxing, football, rugby, or cosmetic surgery apparently constitute, in the eyes of the law, well-recognized cases of licit, consensual bodily harm, for they are conducted for "good reason," that is, for the profitable public consumption of "natural" female vanity, "natural" male aggression, and the law of male market competition—for the proper maintenance, that is, of heterosexual difference. In violent contact sports, men touch each other in furious and often wounding intimacy, but the homoerotic implications are scrupulously disavowed.

Perhaps even more revealingly, Feminists Against Censorship, the gay rights group Outrage, Liberty (formerly the National Council of Civil Liberties), and others, have pointed out that the sentences meted out by Judge Rant for consensual S/M exceed, in many cases, those meted out for the violent, nonconsensual rape or battery of women, or for cases of lesbian and gay bashing. As Alex Kershaw notes, "In 1988, for example, a man was fined £100 at Carlisle Crown Court for sado-masochistic assaults on women."⁶⁰ Suzanne Moore sums it up: "In other words when a heterosexual woman says 'no' she really means 'yes,' but when a homosexual man says 'yes,' the law says that is not good enough."⁶¹ The Spanner trial throws radically into question the law's putative impartiality in the adjudication of consent.

The outrage of consensual S/M is multiple. It publicly exposes the possibility that manhood is not naturally synonymous with mastery, nor femininity with passivity. Social identity becomes commutable, and the boundaries of gender and class open to invention and transfiguration. Men touch each other for pleasure and women wreak well-paid vengeance. Perhaps most subversively of all, eroticism is sundered from the rule of procreation: the erotic body expands beyond the genitals to include nonprocreational sites—anus, ears, feet, nipples—of life-saving potential in the era of AIDS.⁶² At the same time, the power dynamics and erotic implications of social ritual are visibly and flagrantly explored. As Pat Califia says, "In an S & M context, the uniforms and roles and dialogue become a parody of authority, a challenge to it, a recognition of its secret, sexual nature."⁶³ In S/M's house of misrule, woman is judge and jury, man is penitent, the master does the slave's bidding, and the sacred is profane.

S/M is the most liturgical of forms, sharing with Christianity a theatrical iconography of punishment and expiation: washing rituals, bondage, flagellation, body-piercing, and symbolic torture. Like S/M, the economy of Christianity is the economy of conversion: the meek exalted, the high made low. Mortifying the flesh exalts one in the eyes of the Master. Through humility on earth, one stores up a surplus stock of spiritual value in heaven. Like Christianity, S/M performs the paradox of redemptive suffering, and like Christianity, it takes shape around the masochistic logic of transcendence through the mortification of the flesh: through self-abasement, the spirit finds release in an ecstasy of abandonment. In both S/M and Christianity, earthly desire exacts strict payment in an economy of penance and pleasure. In S/M, washing rituals and the pouring of water effect a baptismal cleansing and exonerating of guilt. These are purification rituals, a staged appropriation of Christian pageantry, stealing a delirious, fleshly advance on one's spiritual credit—a forbidden taste of what should properly be exaltation in the hereafter.

The Right to Punish

The historic subculture of S/M emerged within the Enlightenment, alongside what Foucault has identified as a new technology of the power-to-punish.⁶⁴ During the Enlightenment, as Foucault argues, penal reform shifted the right-to-punish from the whimsical, terrible vengeance of the sovereign to the contractual “defense of society.”⁶⁵ The spectacle of punishment no longer lay in the sumptuous rage of the monarch, which had taken effect as a series of ostentatious mutilations of the criminal’s flesh—floggings, brandings, beheadings, flayings, quarterings, and so on. Punishment now lay in the visible representations of an abstract, bureaucratic power, which took effect as a series of ritual restraints—detention, incarceration, regulation, restraining, restrictions, fines, and, in some cases, rationalized and limited corporal punishment. An array of techniques was devised for adjusting punishment to the new social body, and a host of new principles were laid down for refining the art of punishing.⁶⁶ In the hands of an elite bureaucracy, punishment became legitimated, not as personal revenge, but as civic prevention. Punishment became the rationally calculated, causal effect of the crime, and the administrators of punishment were figured as no more than the dispassionate ministrants of rational law.

Penal reform, as Foucault sees it, had the centrifugal effect of multiplying and dispersing punishment as an “art of affects”: the penalty must have its most intense effects on those who have not committed the crime.⁶⁷ The link between crime and punishment must be publicly seen to coincide causally with the operation of rationally administered Truth. The Enlightenment technology of punishment thus had two aims in view: to get all citizens to participate in the “contractual” punishment of the social enemy, and to render the power to punish “entirely adequate and transparent to the laws that publicly define it.”⁶⁸ Punishments became less ritual marks violently gouged into the flesh than *tableaux vivants* designed to be witnessed by the general public as representative of the mechanics of natural law.

Under this regime, schools came to serve as miniature penal mechanisms, with forms of discipline borrowed directly from the juridical model: solitary confinement, flagellation, petty humiliations, and an extravagant attention to rule. Public mortification was meted out according to a theatrical liturgy of floggings, restraints, and deprivations, with the undeviating precision of machinery.

The scandal of S/M, however, is that it borrows directly from the juridical model, while radically *disarranging* the right-to-punish. S/M stages the right-to-punish, not for the civic prevention of crime, but for pleasure, parading a scrupulous fidelity to the *scene* and costumery of the penal model, while at the same time interfering directly with the rules of *agency*.

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Hence the intolerable affront embodied in the dominatrix and her client. How can punishment be established in the minds of the public as a logical calculus of criminal *cause* and penal *effect*—the rational execution of Truth—if members of the general public can take up, on whim, the birch, the rod, the handcuffs, the whipping block, and declare sentence not for the prevention of crime, but for the delirious excess of pleasure? For it is as subversive of the modern penal economy to enjoy a punishment without having first committed a crime, as it is to commit an unpunished crime.

Hence the unstinting severity of the law in policing consensual S/M. Penal reform, despite its egalitarian, civic-minded cast, placed the restricted exercise of the penal right in the hands of a few elect institutions and a few elect actors: judges, prison wardens, schoolteachers, army courts, and parents, as proxies of natural law. Whatever else changed, however, punishment remained a male right: the judge, the jury, the prison governor, and the executioner were, until very recently, all men. Wives of elite men might punish slaves, servants, and children, but only as proxies of male law.

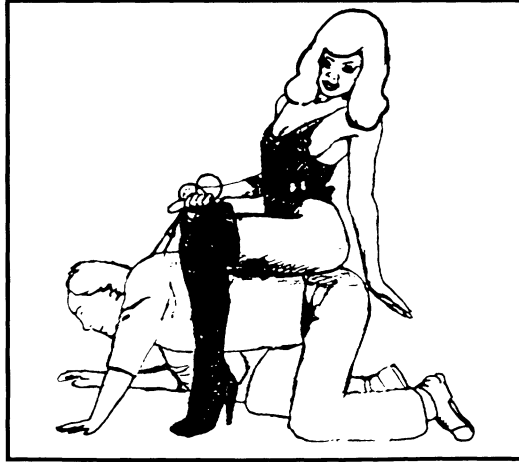
By contrast, heterosexual commercial S/M flagrantly subverts the gendered economy of the right-to-punish, putting the whip and the money in the woman's hand, and exhibiting the man on his knees. With even greater effrontery, lesbian and gay S/Mers parade punishment not as the dutiful exercise of civic prevention, but as a recreational theater of power, denying the state its penal monopoly and provocatively exposing the right-to-punish not as Reason's immutable decree, but as the irregular product of social hierarchy.

The legal denunciation of consensual S/M flies out, then, not as a human cry from the heart, a refined shrinking from the infliction of pain and the spectacle of torment, but as the jealous wrath of the penal bureaucracy challenged in its punitive monopoly. In sentencing S/Mers to bondage and discipline, floggings and ritual humiliation in Houses of Correction, the law, far from exhibiting refined disgust at the exhibition of pain, is merely asserting its jealous right over the penal regime.

S/M as a Theater of Social Risk

Most consensual S/M is less “the desire to inflict pain,” as Freud argued, than it is what John Alan Lee calls “the social organization of sexual risk.”⁶⁹ One could also call S/M the *sexual* organization of *social* risk, for one of S/M's characteristics is the eroticizing of scenes, symbols, contexts, and contradictions which society does not typically recognize as erotic: domestic work, infancy, boots, water, money, uniforms, and so on. Contrary to Robert Stoller's notion that S/M sex is the “erotic form of

MAKE NO MISTAKE.... She's in Control



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hatred,” a great deal of S/M involves neither pain nor hatred.⁷⁰ The ritual violations of S/M are less violations to the flesh, than they are symbolic reenactments of social violations to selfhood, which can take a myriad of shapes and emerge from a myriad of social situations. S/M publicly performs the failure of the Enlightenment idea of individual autonomy, staging the dynamics of power and interdependency for personal pleasure. As such, S/M rituals may be called *rituals of recognition*. In these rituals of recognition, participants seek a witness—to trauma, pain, pleasure, or power. As Lee puts it, “Each partner served as an audience to the other, and in the process, contained the other.”⁷¹ The prevalence of voyeurism and spectators comes to represent a transposed desire for social recognition. In commercial S/M, the domina acts as an official, if forbidden, witness—to private anguish, baffled desires, and the obscure deliriums of the flesh.

In many respects, S/M is a theater of signs, granting temporary control over social risk. By scripting and controlling the circus of signs, the fetishist stages the delirious loss of control within a situation of extreme

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control. For many S/Mers, loss of control as *memory* is mediated by a show of excess of control as *spectacle*. As a result, S/Mers depend deeply on what Goffman calls “control frames,” by which to manage the staging of social risk.⁷² John Alan Lee explores the ways in which gay S/M culture attempts to limit the “great potential dangers involved” in S/M: through the screening of partners, the shared understanding of costume signals, color coding, the reciprocal negotiation of scenarios and ground rules, scripting, the use of signal words or “keys” to indicate limits, and the confirming of consent during the scenario.⁷³ Mastering the control frame—the scene, the script, the costume, the magazine, the fantasy, the exchange of money—is indispensable to the sensation of mastery over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities.

Indeed, it is often not so much the actuality of power or submission that holds the S/Mer in its thrall, but the *signs* of power: images, words, costumes, uniforms, scripts. The self-styled “hands-on healer,” Sara Dale, says her clients want often only to hear the snap of her whip through the air.⁷⁴ Lindi St. Clair writes: “Men wanting a fantasy liked to be in kinky ‘theme rooms’ and ‘pretend’: for example they would talk about certain props or scenarios, although in reality they wouldn’t be interested in doing such things at all.”⁷⁵ Many clients are helplessly fascinated by fetish images of authority—handcuffs, badges, uniforms—and most dominas have racks full of costumes: “‘Uniformists’ desire to wear or be serviced by someone wearing a uniform—military, medical, police, traffic warden, or any other persuasion. The most popular are schoolgirl’s and French maid’s.”⁷⁶ Allegra Taylor, visiting a Dungeon, recalls:

I was still amazed by the sheer volume of props and costumes. It was like a theater warehouse or a film set. Hanging on pegs on all the walls and corridors were hundreds of outfits—nurse’s and policewomen’s uniforms, gym-slips, black rubber knickers, dozens of pairs of boots . . . anything you can imagine having a fetish about.⁷⁷

Other clients are enthralled by the verbal *representation* of desire, and like nothing so much as to send their “literary Mistresses” letters, fantasies, and scripts: “Dear Madame Candida, If you find you have the space, would you kindly print the following humble letter. . . . Madame, may long you reign.”⁷⁸ In one Fem-Dom magazine, large white spaces are left beneath photographs of male “slaves,” accompanied by the schoolmarmly instruction: “I am asking you to write beneath each photo what you imagine Madame Sheena is saying to her slave.”⁷⁹ Here, does the voyeur identify with Madame Sheena, her slave, or both? Identity shifts libidinally.

Hence the importance of scripts and initiation rituals in consensual S/M. Far from being the tyrannical exercise of one will upon a helpless

other, consensual S/M is typically collaborative, involving careful training, initiation rites, a scrupulous definition of limits, and a constant confirmation of reciprocity.⁸⁰ As Paul Gebhard writes: “The average sado-masochistic session is usually scripted. . . . Often the phenomenon reminds one of a planned ritual or theatrical production.”⁸¹ Clients and dominas typically agree on key words, which the “bottom” uses to intensify, change, or stop the action. Many S/M fetishists claim that it is thus the “bottom” who is in control.

Havelock Ellis was the first to point out that much S/M is motivated by love. Since S/M involves the negotiation of perilous boundaries, mutual fidelity to the pledge of trust can create intimacy of a very intense kind. The bond of collaboration binds the players in an ecstasy of interdependence: abandonment at the very moment of dependence. Far from ruthlessly wreaking one’s sadistic will upon another, “the sadist must develop an extraordinary perceptiveness to know when to continue, despite cries and protests, and when to cease.”⁸² Here, “enslavement” is ceremonial rather than real, a symbolic gift that can be retracted at any moment. For this reason, Pat Califia calls S/M “power without privilege.”⁸³

Yet, at the same time, any violation of the script is fraught with risk. If, at any point, control is lost, or the rules of the game transgressed, either of the players can be plunged into panic or rage. Dominas therefore stress the emotional and physical skill, as well as the dangers, involved in commercial S/M: “[it] does take a special kind of person who can do B&D properly because it can get right out of control. You have to keep your cool all the time. . . .”⁸⁴ Untoward changes in the script or collapse of the control frame can plunge clients into extreme distress or ferocious rage. The magic spell can be violently broken, and at such moments dominas face great danger.

For this reason, I remain finally unconvinced by the libertarian argument that all S/M lies in a cloud-cuckoo land safely beyond any real abuse of power. The libertarian view conflates all too easily sexual repression with political oppression in a Reichian celebration of unlimit. But as Califia says, “I do not believe that sex has an inherent power to transform the world. I do not believe that pleasure is always an anarchic force for good. I do not believe that we can fuck our way to freedom.”⁸⁵ S/M’s theater of risk inhabits the perilous borders of transgression, power, and pleasure, where emotions can slip, identities shift, inchoate memories surface out of control, or everyday inequities be imported unexpectedly into the scene. As Sophie, a prostitute, says:

People need to be pretty sure what they’re doing. I don’t want to make it sound like an elitist pastime, but you’re dealing with such deep and potent forces that there is a risk of getting out of your depth. This happened with

my previous lover. The sex we had brought up loads of stuff for her about being abused as a child which would have been a lot better coming through slowly and gently in therapy. I don't begin to have adequate resources to deal with that with a lover. I think S/M sex is good and it can be great, but I'd only want to do it with someone who has extensive self-knowledge.⁸⁶

To recognize the theatrical aspect of S/M does not diminish the risks that may be involved. S/M inhabits the anomalous, perilous border between the Platonic theory of catharsis and the Aristotelian theory of mimesis, neither replicating social power, nor finally subverting it, veering between polarities, converting scenes of disempowerment into a staged excess of pleasure, caricaturing social edicts in a sumptuous display of irreverence, but without substantially interrupting the social order.

In my view, the extreme libertarian argument that S/M never involves real anger or hate runs the risk of disavowing the intense emotional voltage that can be S/M's appeal.⁸⁷ Some dominas confess to potent expressions of feminist anger, outrage, and power when they work: "In bondage you have the power and control," says Zoe, a parlor and escort woman, "and it's quite refreshing to be in that position of total power getting a little anger out and let[ting] your expression out, and it wasn't threatening to the guy asking for it. . . . I gained a lot of confidence out of it."⁸⁸ Kelly explains that she became a bondage specialist because she "enjoyed beating up men." Some dominas, she said,

like inflicting pain perhaps because they have been hurt in their private lives, or where they are suppressed in their home life it is a role reversal, just like the guys the other way around. It is a reversal of the patriarchal system in which they have been suppressed all their lives; they are home doing the washing and ironing with their husbands in the day and they go out of a night and whip guys, and get paid for it.⁸⁹

While such emotions may be unrepresentative, they cannot be wholly dismissed.

An important theoretical distinction therefore needs to be made between *reciprocal* S/M for mutual pleasure, and *consensual* S/M organized as a commercial exchange. Whatever else it is, commercial S/M is a labor issue. While all S/M is deeply stigmatized and violently policed, the criminalizing of sex work places dominas under particular pressure. Sex workers argue that the current laws punish rather than protect them. In Britain, if a domina shares a flat with a friend, she can be convicted for running a brothel. If she pays toward the rent or upkeep of her flat, her friend can be convicted for living off immoral earnings. Yet working alone can be fatal. Moreover, where sex work is a crime, a domina cannot seek police or legal aid if she is raped, battered, or robbed. Clients know this,

so commercial S/M's theater of risk can, at times, become risky indeed, losing some of the collective safeguards that characterize much reciprocal S/M. Nonetheless, sex workers insist that it is not S/M or the exchange of cash that endangers them, but the laws and the context under which the exchange is made. Whatever else it does, commercial S/M throws into question the myth of all sex workers as unambiguous victims. Dominas, like all sex workers, are thus calling internationally for the decriminalization of their profession, so that they can collectively organize to transform the trade to meet their own needs.⁹⁰

On its own, then, S/M does not escape its paradoxes. Within its magic circle, social and personal contradictions can be deployed or negotiated, but need not be finally resolved, for the sources and ends of these paradoxes lie beyond the individual, even though they may be lived with exquisite intensity in the flesh. S/M thus brings to its conceptual limit the libertarian promise that individual agency alone can suffice to resolve social dilemmas. In order to understand more fully the myriad meanings of S/M, it is necessary to understand the social cultures from which it takes its multiple shapes, and against which it sets itself in stubborn refusal. The subculture of collective fetishism is an arena of contestation and negotiation, which does not teach simple lessons in power and domination.

Notes

1. Andrew Neil, *Channel 4*, 16 October 1992.

2. In this paper, I use the term S/M in its broad sense, to refer to the general subculture of organized fetishism. The term S/M thus includes a wide variety of fetishes: B&D (bondage and discipline), CP (corporal punishment), TV (transvestism), babyism, scat, body piercing, foot fetishism, and so on. These fetishes should be seen as sometimes overlapping, sometimes distinct subgenres in a general subculture of collective fetish ritual. Moreover, within these genres there may be distinct forms: there are different forms of transvestism, for example, and different forms of B&D. Indeed, understanding and negotiating these distinctions serves as a crucial source of the pleasure, intimacy, identity, and communality that can be engendered by consensual S/M.

3. The subculture of S/M is not synonymous with the nonconsensual infliction of violence, pain, abuse, or terror. A man does not usually don leather gear, fetish costumes, and makeup before battering his wife. At times, however, the boundaries may blur and distinctions falter.

4. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1965), 97.

5. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); quoted by Thomas S. Weinberg, in "Sadism and Masochism: Sociological Perspectives," in *S and M: Studies in Masochism*, ed. Thomas S. Weinberg and G. W. Levi Kamel (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1983), 106.

6. Paul H. Gebhard, "Sadomasochism," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 39.

7. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Stein & Day, 1965). See Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality, and Identity* (London: Rivers Oram, 1991); also Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), for analyses of the discourses on “perversion.”
8. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 53. Quoted in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 17.
9. *Ibid.*, 27.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 25.
12. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
13. *Ibid.*, 26.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 569. Excerpted in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 30.
16. Sigmund Freud, quoted in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 30.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 31.
19. “I have been led to recognize a primary erotogenic masochism from which there develops two later forms, a feminine and a moral masochism.” Sigmund Freud, *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth, 1924), 255; quoted in Weinberg and Kamel, *S and M*, 32.
20. Juicy Lucy, “If I Ask You to Tie Me Up, Will You Still Want to Love Me?” In *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, ed. Katherine Davis et al. (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1983), 32.
21. Vivienne Walker-Crawford, “The Saga of Sadie O. Massey,” in *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*, ed. Robin Ruth Linden et al. (San Francisco: Frog in the Well, 1982), 149.
22. Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 209.
23. Interview with Lindi St. Clair by the author, London, 3 July 1991.
24. Allegra Taylor, *Prostitution: What’s Love Got to Do with It?* (London: Macdonald Optima, 1991), 42.
25. *Ibid.*, 41.
26. Roberta Perkins and Garry Bennett, *Being a Prostitute: Prostitute Women and Prostitute Men* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 127.
27. Interview with St. Clair, 3 July 1991.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Perkins and Bennett, *Being a Prostitute*, 142.
30. *Ibid.*, 128.
31. Thomas S. Weinberg and G. W. Levi Kamel, “S/M: An Introduction to the Study of Sadomasochism,” in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 21.
32. Lindi St. Clair with Pamela Winfield, *It’s Only a Game: The Autobiography of Miss Whiplash* (London: Piatkus Books, 1992), 65, 74.
33. Gloria Walker and Lynn Daly, *Sexplicity Yours: The Trial of Cynthia Payne* (London: Penguin, 1987), 66. One slave, Payne explained, came every Monday and let himself in with his own key, setting about his housewifely chores wearing only a wristwatch. See *ibid.*, 67.

34. Perkins and Bennett, *Being a Prostitute*, 87.
35. *Ibid.*, 128.
36. Quoted in Neil Philip, *Working Girls: An Illustrated History of the Oldest Profession* (Bloomsbury: Albion, 1991), 112.
37. Gebhard, "Sadomasochism," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 37.
38. Taylor, *Prostitution*, 45.
39. See Weinberg, "Sadism and Masochism," 109; see also Leyvoy Joensen, "Erotic Blasphemy": The Politics of Sadomasochism," unpublished paper.
40. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 15, no. 8 (n.d.), 19.
41. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11, 10. See my essay, "The Return of the Female Fetish and the Fiction of the Phallus," forthcoming in *New Formations*, for a sympathetic critique of Garber's theory of fetishism.
42. *The World of Transvestism* 1, no. 5 (n.d.), 10.
43. Taylor, *Prostitution*, 39.
44. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 14, no. 10 (n.d.), 5.
45. Philip, *Working Girls*, 112.
46. St. Clair, *It's Only a Game*, 64.
47. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 15, no. 8 (n.d.), 49.
48. *Ibid.*, 51.
49. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 14, no. 10 (n.d.), 7.
50. *Ibid.*, 9.
51. *Mistress* 28 (n.d.), 48.
52. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 15, no. 8 (n.d.), 61.
53. *Mistress* 28 (n.d.), 47.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 15, no. 8 (n.d.), 17.
56. *Ibid.*, 37.
57. Gebhard, "Sadomasochism," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 37.
58. See Walker and Daly, *Sexplicitly Yours*, 66.
59. See Clare Dyer, "Sado-Masochists Guilt Verdict Upheld," *The Guardian*, 20 February 1992. See also Alex Kershaw, "Spanner in the Works," *The Guardian Weekend*, 8–9 February 1992, 12–13; Alex Kershaw, "Love Hurts," *The Guardian Weekend*, 28 November 1992, 6–10.
60. Kershaw, "Spanner in the Works," 13. See also Helena Kennedy, *Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), for a searing account of the miscarriages of justice.
61. Suzanne Moore, "Deviant Laws," *Marxism Today* (February 1991), 11.
62. Anthony Brown, one of the men sentenced in the Spanner case, suggests: "Perhaps there's a tendency for S & M activity to have increased, particularly among homosexual men, as a result of the threat of AIDS. To a degree it's a displacement activity." See Kershaw, "Spanner in the Works," 13.
63. Pat Califia, quoted in Kershaw, "Love Hurts," 7.
64. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977).
65. *Ibid.*, 91.
66. *Ibid.*, 81.
67. *Ibid.*, 93, 95.
68. *Ibid.*, 129.

69. John Alan Lee, "The Social Organization of Sexual Risk," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 175–93; Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 23.

70. Robert Stoller, *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred* (New York: Dell, 1975).

71. Lee, "The Social Organization of Sexual Risk," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 189. See also Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 135.

72. Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

73. Lee, "The Social Organization of Sexual Risk," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 178.

74. Interview with Sara Dale by the author, London, October 1992.

75. St. Clair, *It's Only a Game*, 64.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Taylor, *Prostitution*, 38.

78. *Madame in a World of Fantasy* 15, no. 8 (n.d.), 18.

79. *Ibid.*, 42, 43.

80. As Weinberg and Kamel argue: "S&M scenarios are willingly and cooperatively produced; more often than not it is the masochist's fantasies that are acted out." See "S/M: An Introduction to the Study of Sadomasochism," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 21.

81. Gebhard, "Sadomasochism," in *S and M*, ed. Weinberg and Kamel, 37.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Pat Califia, "Unraveling the Sexual Fringe: A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality," *The Advocate*, 27 December 1979, 22. Quoted in Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985), 238.

84. Kelly, "It's Not a Right or Wrong Issue, It's Up to the Individual," in *Being a Prostitute*, ed. Perkins and Bennett, 130.

85. Pat Califia, *Macho Sluts, Erotic Fiction* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1988), 15.

86. Quoted in Taylor, *Prostitution*, 31.

87. See Donald McRae's brilliant account of the power struggle between a domina and a client in *Nothing Personal: The Business of Sex* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992).

88. Zoe, "The Only Way I Can Be Independent," in *Being a Prostitute*, ed. Perkins and Bennett, 108.

89. "I had by this stage recognised myself as a lesbian. I was also on a male hate trip and I thought all men were useless at that stage of my life." Kelly, "It's Not a Right or Wrong Issue," in *Being a Prostitute*, ed. Perkins and Bennett, 127, 130. For others, the imaginative demands are fatiguing, and they prefer the greater detachment that comes with giving brisk sexual services. As Margaret, an Australian prostitute says, "I did bondage sometimes, but it was so damn exhausting I would prefer to do sex than bondage. . . . Some of them wanted to be hit hard and that took it out of me physically and mentally." Margaret, in "It's Not a Right or Wrong Issue," in *ibid.*, 121.

90. See my expanded analysis of the legal issues facing sex workers in "Screwing the System: Sexwork, Race, and the Law," *boundary 2* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1992).