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# Assume the Position: Exploring Discipline Relationships

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# ASSUME THE POSITION: EXPLORING DISCIPLINE RELATIONSHIPS

by

MELISSA TRAVIS

Under the Direction of Wendy S. Simonds

## ABSTRACT

Discipline relationships are consensual adult relationships between submissive and dominant partners who employ authority and corporal punishment. This population uses social media to discuss the private nature of their ritualized fantasies, desires, and practices. Participants of these relationships resist a sadomasochistic label of BDSM or domestic abuse. I conducted in-depth interviews and narrative analysis of social media to explore experiences and identities of people in discipline relationships. The sample includes social media bloggers and past and present participants in discipline relationships. I compared explanations participants give for wanting and participating in discipline relationships. I combine identity theory, constructionism, post-structuralism, and critical feminism as an analytic frame to understand this practice sociologically. I found gender differences in the media format and communication style of participants, but the ritualized expressions for discipline relationships remain consistent regardless of gender. The social process of community identification for participants includes coming out, educating others and “inviting in.” The online community provides a forum for relationship negotia-

tion techniques, and encouraging the embrace of non-normative sexual identity. Participants use social media to form a nascent social movement that resists normative views of sexuality and relationships in the dominant culture.

INDEX WORDS: DD, adult sexual spanking, taken in hand, consensual spanking, wife spanking, husband spanking, submissive husband, submissive wife, traditional marriage, narrative analysis, consensual nonconsent, corporal punishment, online communities, blogging, social media, nascent social movements, emerging online social movement, discipline sexual identity, BDSM, sexual spanking, wife led marriage, domestic discipline, domestic violence

ASSUME THE POSITION: EXPLORING DISCIPLINE RELATIONSHIPS

by

MELISSA TRAVIS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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2013

ASSUME THE POSITION: EXPLORING DISCIPLINE RELATIONSHIPS

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this project with gratitude to those who have fearlessly blended scholar and mystic, blessed life in others, and created space to nurture, enlighten, protect, and show the way.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

**LILLY:** I've always wanted discipline since childhood. Since I was probably six years old – when I can reparticipant having fantasies about being disciplined.

**RON:** I've always fantasized about spanking a woman and controlling her in a way that made her feel complete. Like rescue type fantasies – where I take care of this strong independent woman who needs me to help her. Finding someone who needed it [discipline] too was just a – click. When we [my wife] met, we clicked. We've had a domestic discipline relationship since the very beginning because it works for both of us. It just works.

**LAUREL:** He [my boyfriend] would say he spans me because I have behaviors that need modification. I would say I do it because it makes me feel better! That may be somewhat selfish but it takes me to a new place. It [receiving discipline spanking] makes me feel protected and cared for.

**CHRISTY:** Discipline reinforces our separate responsibilities and allows him [my husband] an outlet he never had when I start going back to being Miss Bossy Pants. It's also opened up communication much more than before. It helps keep things running smoothly without the power struggles we used to have. My husband doesn't always buy into it but he knows it's something I want.

These interview participants illuminate a range of reasons why they want corporal punishment, discipline, and control in their lives. Some people have always wanted a relationship involving consensual adult spanking and control (Aunt Kay 2001; Vivian 2009a; Wakeman 2008). Other people have grown into the idea of seeking such disciplinary relationships after a life of longing and fantasizing about them (Forbes 2011; Vivian 2009a). Others want a better marriage or relationship and believe if their partners were in charge of leading the household, their lives would run more smoothly (Aunt Kay 2009; Clint 2011; Mister Loving DD 2006). The search for this type of relationship containing spanking, discipline, and control is ongoing for these people (Aunt Kay 2001). For people who identify as in need of spanking and discipline as part of their sexuality, the answers to understanding it are often found in coming to terms with their identities, seeking discipline relationships, and possibly establishing some form of a spanking or discipline lifestyle (Forbes 2011; Markham 2005; 2007, Vivian 2009a, 2009b).

Attempting to define what discipline relationships are Clint (2011: loc 175) writes: "If you were to ask a dozen different Domestic Discipline couples what their definition of Domestic Discipline was, you would get a dozen very different, and very unique answers." I found names and labels similarly complicated in this study because writing about discipline lifestyle participants also involved the complexity of their sexualities, relationships, and culture. For example, limiting the discussion to only a relationship practice stymies a discussion about beliefs. Similarly, focusing entirely on identity ignores their relationships, community, and cultural practices. Because it involves spanking, discipline lifestyle sexual identity necessarily requires having (or desiring) a discipline relationship with another person. When examining discipline relationships, I distinguish what people do (their discipline practices) from what they want. I identify what they call themselves because names are important to the meaning making (and pleasure seeking) process. I also identify the reasons why they say they want this type of relationship and the explanations and beliefs they hold about spanking and discipline. Additionally, I explore not only the discipline relationships they want with a partner, but the relationships they have with themselves, with others, their community, and within the broader culture.

In *Consensual Spanking*, Jules Markham (2005:9, 131- 143) describes the disciplinary aspects of consensual adult spanking as different from erotic or foreplay spanking some couples use to explore their sexuality. Markham's premise is that the disciplinary lifestyle she calls domestic discipline "is about working together to set boundaries and to enforce them through corrective behavior and spanking . . . [to] restore harmony" to the relationship (2005:135). Markham (2007) later states that the distinguishing factor from other forms of couples' counseling and relationship improvement techniques is physical discipline. She states, "Advocates of DD (domestic discipline) argue that, when implemented correctly, the loving consistent use of discipline acts in a positive way to enhance communication, deepen intimacy, and reinforce relationship commitment." (Markham 2007:5).

Most discipline relationships occur between two people who agree that one partner has authority over the other (Clint 2011; Wakeman 2008). This authority often includes the right to act as the head of the household and make decisions within the relationship, for the family, or for the submitting partner (DWC 2007; Mr Loving DD 2006; Markham 2007). The dominant partner frequently engages in acts of physical discipline, such as spanking, when the submitting partner does not obey the rules or conform to the standards the couple has agreed are important (Markham 2005; 2007). Though discipline is frequently corporal, discipline can also include non-physical forms of punishment such as lecturing, writing corrective lines or standing in a corner (Mr Loving DD 2006; Markham 2007). Other practices vary depending on each couple's rules or codes of conduct (Markham 2007; Wakeman 2008). Disciplinary practices, though different for every couple, are consensual and private (Markham 2007).

Discipline lifestyle relationships are most visible online as heterosexual married couples, with a male dominant and female submissive partner (Markham 2007; Wakeman 2008). There are less visible relationship configurations, including: male submissive and female dominant, queer, and same sex discipline relationships (Punishmentbook 2007; 2008; DWG 2007). For example, performing an online search for "gay domestic discipline" I found an online dating site at [www.gaydomesticdiscipline.com](http://www.gaydomesticdiscipline.com) for gay-identified people seeking discipline relationships. It reads: "If Spanking is More Than a Game to You, You Have Come to the Right Place! Meet Gay Men Near You Who Prefer Domestic Discipline Relationships!"

### **1.1 Useful Terms**

Before I begin examining discipline relationships, I would like to establish a few useful terms that come up when reading the everyday jargon central to this lifestyle. Definitions, explanations, practices, and names for the various consensual discipline relationships and lifestyles vary. Though domestic discipline or (DD) is a widely understood term, in this study I refer to discipline lifestyles or discipline relationships as umbrella terms to encompass the pluralities of the sexuality, relationships, and practices.



Discipline relationships involving authority of one partner over the other are also called “Head of Household” (HOH) (LDD 2006; Markham 2007) or “Taken in Hand” (TIH) (Sara 2013; TIH 2007-8). People also refer to it as “That or This Thing We Do” (TTWD) (Punishmentbook 2008; Sara 2013). Men in relationships with women as the dominant partner might say they are in “Wife Led Marriages” (WLM) or “Female Led Relationships” (FLR), (About FLR 2013) or as having a “Disciplinary Wife” (DWC 2007) as the head of the household. Other derivatives of domestic discipline are “Christian Domestic Discipline” (CDD) (Kelley 2007) and “Loving Domestic Discipline” (LDD) (Mr Loving DD 2006; 2007: Clint 2009).

Though they view themselves as outside the sphere of *BDSM* (bondage & discipline sometimes written as b/d; dominance & submission sometimes noted as D/s, and sadism & masochism, sometimes written as sadomasochism, or s/m, SM, or S&M) (Brame, Brame, Jacobs 1996; Weiss 2006; Weiss 2011), adult sexual spankers (Forbes 2011; Plante 2006) and participants of the discipline lifestyles often use language of derived from the *BDSM* vocabulary. People who are involved in *BDSM* consider themselves to *play* or be *practitioners of SM* (Weiss 2011). These types of play activities take place in *scenes* that occur in either private or public spaces.

By contrast, participants in the discipline relationship community consider their activities to be real, with a long-term partner, and not play. Incidentally, the desire for long-term relationships, authority, discipline, and punishment as consequences for breaking rules distinguishes participants of discipline relationships from those of *adult consensual spankers*. Adult sexual spankers enjoy spanking as a sensation and find it arousing, but go to public spanking parties and clubs recreationally, will seek multiple spanking partners, and do not necessarily seek relationships for authority, punishment or control (Markham 2005; Plante 2006; Forbes 2011). Many people who practice spanking admit to being *spankos* – short term for spankophile or someone who enjoys giving or receiving spankings. Another term loosely identified with *BDSM* is *kinky* – someone with deviant or erotic tastes that go outside *vanilla* or mainstream conventional (heteronormative) sexuality (Plante 2006).

Because the language of BDSM arises throughout the discipline lifestyle community it may be difficult to read this without invoking a sadomasochism or BDSM sexual identity. However, I chose to distinguish the discipline relationship sexuality and lifestyle the way participants preferred. I came to understand the same way I might understand a woman who self-identifies as having a lesbian or queer identity without imposing lesbian identity on someone who identifies herself as queer or label free. Words and terms will often be used that have a slightly different context in discipline relationships than in BDSM.

Participants often distinguish between being submissive and *submitting* to authority (TIH 2004). Submitting means *surrendering* to desired authority and control – most often in the form of corporal punishment and spanking. In this study I use *submissive* and *dominant* partner to mean the discipliner and the one who desires discipline -- but these are not consistently used throughout the discipline relationship communities and some participants might contest the use of my language for being overly sadomasochistic. I use them as more gender-neutral terms. I considered using *discipliner* and *disciplinee*. I chose *dominant* and *submissive* because in some instances participants were not part of a discipline relationship and although they desired discipline had not received it. In these instances the term *disciplinee* seemed inappropriate but *submissive* still felt applicable. In rare instances, partners *switch* – which means they desire to both give and receive discipline and take turns providing and receiving discipline from each other (Markham 2007).

Unlike in a BDSM scene, in disciplinary relationships there is no *safe word*, or way to stop discipline once it begins. Ostensibly this is because discipline relationships are a lifestyle and while a spanking is temporary submitting to authority and control lasts the course of the relationship. What constitutes discipline contains many facets. Types of disciplinary spankings include *maintenance* to keep a partner in check; these are often weekly or monthly to ensure the submissive partner feels controlled, centered, and cared for and create a dynamic of authority for the dominant partner (Kelley 2007; DWC

2007). *Reminder spankings* or *pre-emptive punishments* serve to keep the submissive partner aware of their past misbehavior. These are intended to keep the submitting partner out of trouble and discourage rule breaking. *Punishments* are harsher than maintenance because it is given after an infraction of established rules. "The purpose is to teach a lesson." (Kelley 2007:39).

Most couples use spanking as a primary form of punishment. Not all couples use *non-spanking punishment*. Those who do might include *mouth soaping*, *corner time*, *written lines*, or other *loss of privileges*. Many couples make formal or informal agreements between each other -- listing the expectations of both parties, rules, what constitutes misbehavior, clauses on the frequency of maintenance, consequences for misbehavior, and types of expected punishment. These agreements are called *discipline or spanking contracts* (Markham 2007). Not every couple uses a spanking contract. One form of misbehavior that is usually considered punishable is *bratting* – which is consciously or unconsciously misbehaving in order to gain attention or get spanked. Bratting is a discouraged behavior and widely used term.

*Non-disciplinary spankings* are not necessarily used within discipline relationships. These types of spankings can also be used by sexual spankers and might be used in discipline relationships if a partner desires spanking and the dominant partner chooses to give them. None disciplinary spankings include *good-girl* or *good-boy* spanking which are spankings as rewards and have appeal only to people who find spanking desirable or erotic. *Stress-release* spankings which are generally requested by the submissive partner to release stress and not for any rule infractions. *Erotic* and *sensual* spanking used for sexual turn on as foreplay.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

In this study I examine the people who desire consensual discipline as part of their relationship practice and frequently their sexual identity. Ultimately, this study is a cultural exploration about what gives participants in the discipline relationship community sexual pleasure, barriers to their sexual satis-

faction, and the means they take to remove those barriers -- using a sociological lens. Because most readers will be unfamiliar with this population, I first introduce them. I hope to offer insight into how participants find a name for their sexual identity. I describe what naming their identity means to them and how they come to understand their identities by refusing some names and labels and adopting others. I explore main explanations participants give (or refuse to give) about their sexual identities and the beliefs they hold about gender norms. These beliefs and explanations are important for two reasons. First, they inform the meanings people make about their sexual identities over time. Second, they also inform the communities people choose to affiliate with online and the way participants create and consume culture.

I seek to answer my initial research question: "Who is doing discipline relationships and why?" I use narrative analysis as my methodology and draw on identity theory, social construction theory, and post-structural, critical, queer and feminist theories to frame and interpret my data. Using interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives on gender and sexuality, social media use and communication, social processes, and social movements I explore discipline relationships, communities, and culture. My data sets include 1) narratives from in-depth and e-mail interviews 2) discipline relationship blogs and online community forums 3) second hand data from a survey about disciplinary wives published online (DWC 2007) 4) 30 discipline relationship manuals.

The participants I interviewed described their sexual identities by sharing with me their intimate sexual lives. Most of these were shared as narratives, which I call stories. They offer insight into their culture and communities by sharing their blogs, their stories, writing discipline romance novels, posting graphic art, and making almost inexhaustible indexes of spanking and discipline stories about the life and relationship they desire. They use online social media to and communities to discuss their lifestyle, concerns, and give and receive advice. I found it useful in understanding their fluid lifestyle and identities more by reading many (over 30) of their discipline manuals. Many of the participants wrote or con-

sumed enormous numbers of discipline and spanking lifestyle manuals. Some manuals describe how to come out, some how to give or receive proper discipline, and some explain why a relationship might improve if couples followed certain disciplinary techniques.

If these participants sought validation or defense for their lifestyle, they found it both creating and consuming their culture (and by giving me plenty to examine). In some instances, participants read and write blogs and stories as a passionate hobby. This cultural consumption reflects a dedication and defense of their mostly invisible sexual identity. At times such cultural consumptions feels like a nascent social movement – with participants defending their rights to sexual freedom and to exist within dominant culture.

Their stories, like all human interaction and study of culture, can be messy, confusing, even insightful. I discuss their culture, romance novels, manuals, rituals, and the consumption of what participants create. Their stories culminate as a people seeking sexual barriers they find the barriers causing them sexual dissatisfaction become an impetus for action and resolution affecting change. The solutions they seek are political acts expressed online and offer insight into the hegemonic normative sexuality reproduced within the dominant culture.

### **1.3 Importance of the Study**

This study contributes to a better understanding of alternative and hidden sexualities. Consensual adult sexual spanking and discipline lifestyles have often been thought to be either abusive or BDSM, but this is a community being examined in a new way. While discipline relationships may seem unpleasant to some and compelling to others, understanding the cultural, historical, social connections that inform this lifestyle brings new understanding to areas of the sociology of sexuality, relationships, marriage, family, social psychology, identity, online culture, communication, and social movements.

I have sought to show the meanings individuals, groups, and communities create about their private desires; and attempted to describe their practices, beliefs, and explanations for them. Narrative

methodology centers on the participants and how they construct their narratives rather than on the story the researcher wishes to tell (Hunter 2010). This study engages a feminist research approach to hearing the details of lived experiences. Using narratives as stories allows new insight into the identities and meanings participants have of their own lives – including surrounding power structures and their ensuing resistance to such power.

Narratives are influenced by culture, expectation, social control, and the socially constructed meanings from others (Hunter 2010). I hope to show the socially constructed meanings influencing the narratives participants choose to tell and compare them to their online narratives. Comparing the narratives of these groups and communities provides a window into the social process of how online discipline lifestyle communities develop and change over time. Social forces also influence the narratives they tell each other, write about, and tell me. Because of normative language of gender and heterosexist power is more visible I attempt to depict submissive men and queer voices in the discipline lifestyle.

Engaging narrative analysis of written stories online, I attempt to decode the power structures inherent in discipline lifestyles with a sociological lens. I provide insight into structural strategies, normative language, reproduction of binary gender, and power. Another key contribution of my study is gender differences using social media to express similar ideas in graphic and pictures and to written and verbal language. I have provided insight into the “inviting in” and “coming out” process as a visible extension of sexual self-identity using social media outlets. Lastly, I have contributed to the sociological understanding of social media by connecting sociological analysis of both verbal and nonverbal as constructions of social media and social media as social space. These all change over time and are not static.

Ultimately, I attempt to show the different ways participants navigate the barriers to their sexual pleasure and overcome dissatisfaction in their intimate personal lives. Barriers causing dissatisfaction are expressed as any cultural, psychological, relationship, health, or structural barrier limiting sexual sat-

isfaction or sexual pleasure (New View Campaign 2012). I attempt to show the various ways participants express their dissatisfaction and seek resolution to their personal lives as a series of political acts. These acts, from blogging, writing romances, giving and receiving advice and support, increase visibility, educate, and seek solutions to their intimate personal problems. These solutions culminate in a nascent but emerging social movement for the discipline relationship sexuality and communities.

#### **1.4 Organization of Chapters**

The organization of this study is based on how people come to their sexual identity; the beliefs and meanings they have about their sexuality, and the practices and relationships that emerge from those beliefs. In the second part of this study I examine the group process; how participants use their blogs, and comment in online social media groups and communities to establish and navigate their lifestyle. In the third part of this study I examine the culture participants produce. I examine manuals, discuss discipline romance novels, and locate art, rituals, and implements within the dominant culture. Each chapter traces barriers to participants' sexual pleasure, causes of sexual dissatisfaction, and the solutions at removing barriers they employ. In Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives, I review the literature and outline my theoretical perspectives. In this chapter, I discuss historical uses of discipline including religious, punitive, and medical contexts for discipline and punishment. I also discuss the historical cultural significance of voluntary discipline versus punishment. In Chapter 3 Methodology, I outline the methodology, discussing narrative analysis, the basis of stories, visual images, validity, my sample and demographics, and limitations of the study. In Chapter 4 Discipline Relationship Sexualities, I explore discipline relationship sexualities, how participants name their identities and create reasons and explanations for the practice of discipline. I also highlight belief systems popular in discipline communities. In Chapter 5 Discipline Relationships (Online and Off), I discuss how participants actually do discipline relationships both online and offline. Discipline activities are conceptualized as a combination of ritualized fantasies and practices that create both emotional challenges and intimacy in discipline

relationships. In Chapter 6 Online Space as Public Space, I explore virtual space as public space investigating how participants interact online and navigate their various relationships. I also position online discipline communities as sites of nascent and emerging social moment where participants work for visibility and sexual and relationship equality for their non-normative practices. In Chapter 7 Discipline Culture, I discuss discipline culture as objects and symbols created by participants. Specifically I highlight graphic images and discipline romance novels, both important symbols of discipline culture. In Chapter 8 Conclusion, I make my concluding remarks – highlighting acts of participants as political acts creating visibility and removing barriers to their sexual and relationship practices.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In *Sex is Not a Natural Act*, Lenore Tiefer (2004) claims the “perpetually ambiguous and moral status” of sexuality (specifically women’s sexuality) delegitimizes sexual pleasure as scholarly topic (Tiefer 2004: 212). Scholars and the media often follow dominant cultural religious, medicalized, and psychological models when portraying sexuality and sexual pleasure (Tiefer 2004; Weiss 2011). When examining sexuality, social scientists often ignore “sexual pleasure” as a scholarly topic, finding it both “politically dangerous” and empirically difficult to study (Tiefer 2004: 217). Sexual pleasure and barriers to sexual satisfaction are women’s problems. Women’s problems become social problems and require political solutions (Jackson and Scott 1996). *A New View on Women’s Sexual Problems* (New View Campaign 2012) locates women’s sexuality outside the norms of medical and clinical models. Sexual dissatisfaction stems from economic, cultural, relational, emotional, psychological, or health concerns (New View Campaign 2012). By understanding these sources of dissatisfaction (and possibly offer insight, education, solutions, or policy recommendations) researchers can remove barriers, sustain access to sexual pleasure, and improve sexual lives.

Most people consider sex and desire private deeply personal matters (Weiss 2011, Tiefer 2004). What one keeps secret becomes sharable with the right person or in the right situation. It takes intimacy and trust to share sexual desires (Newmahr 2011). Expressions of sexuality are socially constructed, socially controlled, regulated, complex and often contradictory (Jackson and Scott 1996; Plante 2006; Weiss 2011). Margot Weiss (2011: 230) portrays sexuality as a “social relation of power,” containing hierarchies of communities within a broader political socioeconomic context. She also portrays fantasy as imagination. Understanding fantasy and imagination gives insight into the variations of availability of erotic expression within the dominant culture (Tiefer 2004). More to the point, the dominant culture influences how we express and construct our imagination (and erotic fantasies) because “culture has a life of its own” (Simonds 1992: 216). Sexuality, desire, pleasure, and the erotic, (especially the non-

normative or transgressive), have been constructed around restricted access -- “The parts of the body we eroticize are the parts we guard” (Newmarh 2011: 175). What is intimate is also highly guarded (Newmahr 2011). Intimacy is linked to “meaningful disclosure,” consent, trust, and unrestricted access (Newmarh 2011: 175-178). Intimate sexual self-disclosures are located in the cultural contexts of pleasure, meanings, relationships, and heteronormative power. When non-normative sexuality is viewed through a filter of mainstream dominant culture it results in identity boundaries and normalization similar to the “normalization through freak show” discussed by Gamson (1998:19). In the consumer culture today, if representations of non-mainstream sexuality are not considered useful or stimulating or transgressive enough they are called “disappointingly normal” (Weiss 2006:121). Margot Weiss (2006: 128) believes normalizing policing of sexual boundaries causes people to voice their resistance to “ways sexual strangeness is disciplined out of existence.” People desire representations of nonnormative and transgressive sexuality as a protest of such constraints (Weiss 2006). Discipline relationship sexuality can be read as transgressive, resisting sexual boundaries, and in some ways disappointingly normal (depending on the gender dynamics).

Little is known about people who engage in consensual disciplinary relationships. There has been a dearth of academic research about discipline lifestyles, which I undertake in this study. Scholarly articles generally label consensual adult discipline as sadomasochism or BDSM, even if the participants in the articles do not see themselves as such. In “Sexual Spanking, the Self, and the Construction of Deviance,” Rebecca Plante (2006) labeled sexual spanking BDSM even though her participants denied the identity of BDSM – proposing their reasons as stigma avoidance rather than a unique sexual identity in the fluidity of sexualities. Similarly, when describing the terminology of BDSM and her ethnographic community Margot Weiss (2011:viii) lumps spanking communities and people interested in formal discipline in with BDSM even though her own participants saw them as distinct from the BDSM community. In *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy*, Staci Newmahr (2011:196) also distinguishes

spankers as “not quite real participants of the SM community.” She goes on to describe the symbolism of spanking as discipline and punishment, but admits she cannot understand a desire for spanking or why people want it or do it. Her feminist analysis locates spanking in violence and love associated with parent-child relationships and spanking play in the heteronormative gendered language of victimhood and inequality rather than sexuality and identity or an activities that brings someone sexual gratification and pleasure. She admits that she excludes spankers from her analysis because they do not fit with the rest of her BDSM identified participants.

Desire for discipline is often confounded with childhood abuse, domestic abuse, or pathologized rather than placed in the context of sexuality or relationships in scholarly articles. Some articles call for the removal of sexual paraphilias as psychological disorders (like desires for discipline and spanking and non-normative sexualities in BDSM) from the DSM (see Kleinplatz and Moser 2006; Weinberg 2006). Some research mentioning adult discipline or consensual spanking gives therapy perspectives (see Nichols 2006; Kolmes, Stock, and Moser 2006), criminology or pathological stance (Plante 2006). For example, performing a search using the term, “consenting wife spanking,” I found, “Adjudicating Sex Crimes as a Mental Disease” (Hamilton 2012). One of the top citations for consenting wife spanking is *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (Straus with Donnelly 2004). This book debates effectiveness of corporal punishment of children and possible psychological ramifications in adulthood; giving accounts of childhood spanking which turns adults into sadomasochists. Some academic research contextualizes the stigma, deviance and social discourse surrounding BDSM (Newmahr 2011; Plante 2006; Stiles and Clark 2011; Weiss 2011; Williams 2009). However, research does not include consensual discipline as a relationship choice or a sexuality identity outside of the BDSM construct.

In contrast, a growing body of pop literature, discipline romance novels, relationship and marriage manuals, and online communities (Appendix A Discipline Relationship Books & Social Media Examined 2003-2012) focus on disciplinary lifestyles as a relationship movement (ALDD 2006; Kelly 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Mister Loving DD 2006; 2007; Markham 2005; 2007; Wakeman 2008). Discipline relationship blogs online social media discussions, and Internet group forums play a central role for many discipline relationship participants. These online social media are how participants publically, yet anonymously, identify, express desire for, and discuss their involvement in discipline lifestyles (Travis 2005). The meanings of discipline lifestyles change for individuals and within these groups depending on how people navigate and explain their desires (Travis 2005). Individuals (Natty 2008), couples, and communities develop, revise the language, labels and symbols used to describe discipline lifestyles (Travis 2005). These public online communities are juxtaposed with intensely private aspects of sexual behavior (Catania 1999).

## **2.1 Corporal Punishment & Discipline Throughout History**

There is no known time where some form of corporal punishment has not been used (Anthony 1995; Cooper 2001). Throughout recorded history, experts prescribed some form of corporal or physical discipline (either voluntary or punitively) for religious purposes, marital harmony, military order, rearing pious children, education, controlling slaves, and criminal punishment (Collins 2001; Scott 1968). Other claims for the benefits of physical discipline or corporal punishment include reinvigorating muscular energy, curing insanity, instilling moral health, and providing commercial services (selling spanking services) (Anthony 1995; Cooper 2001).

It is difficult for historians to distinguish what are recorded as voluntary religious discipline (often called religious flagellants) and what are punishments for misdeeds (Cooper 2001). In *Flagellation & the Flagellants*, William Cooper (2001:18) describes the historical linguistic controversies between the Latin word *disciplines* to distinguish between voluntary whippings for penance versus punishment. He

surmises the first of the word use was for punishment followed by penance but it is difficult for historians to tell (Cooper 2001: 17-18) because of its obscure and circuitous history embedded in Latin phrases. Art is also strewn with images of people being whipped. Indeed, separating voluntary discipline from involuntary punishment is complicated.

Historically, the conflict over discipline was not whether to hit or not, but where on the body to hit someone. Experts of the day, religious authorities and doctors, argued over the application of physical discipline – discussing at length how and where to apply physical discipline. Religious leaders said it was morally necessary to save the soul while doctors advised about the application, duration, and purposes for physical discipline and punishment. There were two types of discipline - “upper discipline” and “lower discipline” administered (Cooper 2001:19-21). Upper discipline meant striking the back and shoulders while lower discipline meant hitting hips and buttocks. Tertullian (160-225 AD) commented extensively upon upper and lower disciplines in the Christian area of Greece and Rome. Shakespeare (1564-1616) was still joking about lower discipline and spanking in *Hamlet* when he coyly makes reference “rear of affection” and to prodigal maids unmasking their beauty to the “moon” (Shakespeare, Act I, Scene III).

*Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,  
And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
Out of the shot and danger of desire.  
The chariest maid is prodigal enough  
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.  
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.*

In medical journals, doctors advocated lower discipline, because loss of blood (presumably more likely with upper discipline) could hurt the brain. Voluntary flagellants who followed the advice of doctors) often stopped hitting themselves on the upper back and began “slashing their loins” with knotted chords (Cooper 2001:21). A cultural acceptance of lower discipline became more common for both giv-

ing punishment spankings and for voluntary discipline (religious self-flagellation). Today we understand punishment spankings and self-discipline to be smacking on the bottom because of this cultural adherence to lower discipline.

During this time (monastic early to mid-Christianity), religion and medical authority intersected. The culture of voluntary discipline and curative corporal punishments grew. Few people questioned the value of corporal discipline. The important questions at the time, rather, were how hard and long discipline should be applied. Religious leaders judged if and how corrupting (or edifying) it was for men to witness the corporal punishment of women and vice versa (Cooper 2001). Evil spirits were often whipped out of people, as were unchaste thoughts, or women's "wanton wiles" (Cooper 2001:55; Scott 1996). Corporal discipline, such as flogging, was used during interrogations to elicit confessions (Scott 1996:124). Whipping for medical corrective measures using sticks, rods, or switches on the backside was decreed a cure for many ailments, from bedwetting in boys to infertility in women (Scott 1996).

Tales and memoirs of school punishments and being whipped by a governess abound in memoirs and narratives. These are found in both old boarding school and modern day school accounts (Anthony 1995; Cooper 2001). Though corporal punishment was legally banned in the U.K. in 1986, it is still legal in many states in the U.S. and throughout the world. Spanking both as school punishment and parental discipline, still occurs throughout the U.S.; and parental spanking in the U.S. is normal cultural practice (Greven 1992; Parker 2012; Straus 1994). Some people consider not spanking one's child to be neglectful parenting (Greven 1992:197; Parker, 2012; Straus 1994). Perspectives on parenting and spanking centers around moral, religious, cultural values – forcing parents to choose between child experts and values in the raising (and spanking) of their children (Parker 2012). The decision to spank or not to spank often places children's authorities – (pediatricians, psychologists, and educators) in contest with people's religious and cultural values (Parker 2012).

People who are attracted to spanking and flagellation are also likely to construct positive histories of spanking (Plante 2006). They also “plunge themselves into a world gone by, perhaps one that never existed” to create and satisfy spanking desires (Anthony 1995:310). Sexual activities linked to punishment and discipline become more visible when people with a spanking fetish write or record them publicly. (Anthony 1995; Cooper 2001: 522; Scott 1996). In 1919, sex researcher Havelock Ellis noted one patient who directly linked being whipped with “his first sexual thoughts” (1995:289). Ellis (1995) also published a young woman’s account of her sexualized desire for corporal punishment and spankings. Although Ellis believed her desires to be a treatable sexual deviation modern spanking aficionados often shun the idea of seeking treatment, preferring instead to give in to their desires (Brame, Brame, and Jacobs 1996).

Depictions of husband and wife spanking also fill volumes of published erotic literature, art, and historical narratives. (Anthony 1995:117; Cooper 2001). One historical account by Cooper (2001: 521-523) appears around mid 1800-1900’s in the UK. He describes a newlywed wife who grew tired of her submissive and attentive husband and requested a beating with a rod. The husband, believing her to be ill, called the doctor. The doctor listened to her desire and then, “prescribed the birch.” The wife, after receiving discipline from her hesitant husband, was “completely cured” of her melancholy and “violent longing” (Cooper 2001:521-523). The story identifies the crux of this study entailing desire for discipline, illustrated in yearning for and finding pleasure in receiving physical discipline from one’s partner.

This type of marital physical discipline also has a rich history in cultural depictions of the household through movies, comics, art, and books (Cooper 2001; Markham 2007; Wakeman 2008). Older TV shows and movies often showed women being spanked by their husbands. *McLintock* (a 1963 movie with the poster featuring John Wayne with Maureen O’Hara over his knee) was loosely based on *The Taming of the Shrew*. Desi regularly spanked Lucy on *I Love Lucy* (which aired 1951-1957). Comic strips and advertisements also frequently showed husbands spanking their wives (Anthony 1995).

In the last twenty years images and representations of discipline and non-normative sexuality in the popular culture have become increasingly mainstream and viewable on television, magazines, online, movies, and in the news (Weiss 2006). More recently, *The New Yorker* (1996) ran a piece entitled, "Unlikely Obsession," by Daphne Merkin who confessed her desire for spanking. Newer movies and advertisements sometimes slip in such cultural references. In music, Justin Timberlake had the hit, "SexyBack" with the words, "I'll let you whip me if I misbehave" (Released in 2006 by Jive Records). *The Secretary* and now *50 Shades of Grey* present spanking and discipline as a central erotic focus in heterosexual relationships. Such media representations only occasionally depict men over the knees of women, but occasionally they do. The more people see representations of non-normative sexuality in popular culture, the more visible it becomes (Weiss 2006).

Social acceptance of male physical dominance, patriarchal rule, and normative gender create cultural scripts and powerful institutions (Holloway 1986). These cultural scripts provide interpretive lenses through which participants of society gain understanding about corporal punishment. People connect information to meaning and create our "culture's stock of knowledge" (Cerulo 1998:35). Thus, we construct meanings about a strict catholic nun with a ruler, a disciplinarian father, or perhaps what it takes for a husband to be a real man or to have authority in one's house. These cultural constructions of discipline and authority require us to understand multiple meanings and have many interpretive lenses and scripts in place (Cerulo 1998).

The normalized representations of alternative sexualities in mass media and the shifting cultural acceptance of discipline and spanking as a legitimate sexuality layer with these cultural scripts of about punishment and dominance. The dominant culture still holds the gaze over and defines what is normal against what is not normal (Weiss 2006). By becoming more visible non-normative sexualities follow the rules of sexuality constructed within and defined by the dominant culture.



## 2.2 Language, Power, & Gender

In this study, as in life, it is impossible to separate power, gender, and language because they are intertwined. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as well as *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I* (1978), Michel Foucault describes the body as a place of productive power and control. Foucault (1978) views power dynamics not only at the personal level relationships but also on a macro scale. Such power exchanges are implicit in any exchange, especially institutional and structural (Butler 1989). This type of structural power exchange is important in understanding how cultural values are made and then destroyed.

Judith Butler writes, “The position that the body is constructed is one that is . . . immediately, associated with Michel Foucault” (1989:602). According to Butler (1989), Foucault engages a paradox of bodily inscriptions both directly and through the use of metaphor. These inscriptions can be our collectively lived history (Bouchard 1977; Butler 1989, Foucault 1977). Or the inscriptions can be cultural narratives (Foucault 1997), where the pen of history symbolically destroys the body, but the inscription of “culture” and “cultural values” are born (Butler 1989: 604). In her work on Foucault’s volumes of *History of Sexuality*, Johanna Oksala (2007:70) writes: “our conceptions and experiences of sexuality are in fact always the result of specific cultural conventions and technologies of power and could not exist independently of them.” Geoffrey Evans-Grimm (2011:9) states, “In his discussion of discipline, the body, and society Foucault used an intellectual archeology of the prison system to examine these relationships.”

Foucault (1977) describes how individuals create themselves, and how through bodily inscription, they also create history (Butler 1989). Self-creation is a positive use of power (Hurley 1980), within which individuals transform their bodies through discipline to create and recreate themselves (Foucault, 1984). The body must be disciplined to gain self-control. For relationships to work they must be disciplined. This discipline happens with community discourse and through panoptical control over others (Evans-Grimm 2011; Oksala 2007). Such discipline produces Foucault’s (1977:138) subjected and prac-

ticed “docile bodies.” These forms of power and discipline show not just relationship to the body within the dominant culture but interactions of power expressed in relations to oneself and one’s own sexuality.

In addition to being culturally portrayed as passive and devalued, Laura Fingerson (2006:84) says, (women’s) bodies are where power is negotiated. Evans-Grimm states, “In viewing women this way [as a place where power is negotiated] it becomes almost a responsibility for men to control and direct the female body” (2011:25). Connell (1996:217) views such hegemonic power as creating and enforcing masculine and feminine appearance and behavior. This power is also negotiated on mens’ and boys’ bodies. Masculinities and femininities are socially constructed (Connell 1996:220; Holloway 1996). Boys and girls are taught to know what is masculine and what is feminine.

Gender is a performance (Butler 1989; Evans-Grimm 2011); something we do (Lorber and Moore 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987). People often confuse and conflate gender, sexuality, and sex organs (Lorber 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987). History, culture, religion and intersecting identities inform how people engage in gender performance and how they make sense of their identities (Collins 1999; Connell 1995; 1996). These cultural forces are also important in the reproduction of gendered narratives, institutions, and discourse (Connell 1987; 1995; Hearn 1987; Tong 1998).

We cannot separate power from gender; they inform each other (Evans-Grimm 2011). The gendering of bodies is a cultural product and is not natural (Lorber and Moore 2007). Normative gender is constructed through both language and culture (Lakoff 1973; Lorber 1994; Lorber 2010). When gender is reinforced by the social norms of language and culture, what is seen as “natural” is privileged (Evans-Grimm 2011; Lakoff; 1973; Lorber 2010:117).

Though there are multiple masculinities in hegemonic culture; some are given more visibility and “honor” (Connell 1996:209) while others are “subordinated or marginalized” (Connell 1992:736). At the same time, what it means to do masculinity can be a lived “layered” contradiction to what a man

feels and desires (Connell 1996:210). Some men work very hard to construct an image of gender normativity (Connell 1996:210). Women's submission remains historically imbedded in cultural and religious adherence to masculine dominance (Armato and Marsiglio 2002; Coontz 2005). Proponents of gender essentialism justify male dominance by characterizing men as strong and powerful, and women as weak and passive, and cite measurable attributes, including socio- and psycho-biology to support this idea (Philaretou and Allen 2001). Connell (1992:749) sees navigating gender and sexual non-normativity as both disruptive and creative. When people disrupt the normalizing gender and sexuality discourse in the dominant culture, they create new ways of thinking and a new language to talk about their identities.

According to Wakeman (2008:66), "real world practitioners of domestic discipline see men and women as distinctly different." She continues, "Perhaps at its core domestic discipline is a way of embracing traditional gender roles." One of her interviewees, Paul, says that theoretically a man can be the submissive or the relationship can be same-sex, but usually the women are submissive. Paul also admits that he finds the "patriarchal stuff a bit creepy" but that domestic discipline works very well for him and his wife. Wakeman (2008:66) surmises male-female dominance is linked to both power and the equally pervasive cultural taboo of erotic spankings.

### **2.3 Religion & Masculine Authority**

Admonitions about proper application of physical discipline are also seen in religious literature: "He that spares his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastens him early" (Bible verse – Proverbs 13:24). Similarly, the Quran (Quran – Parameter 4:34) indicates that obedient wives and beating them for lack of submission is expressed in this passage:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence what God would have

them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them first. Next, refuse to share their beds. And last beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means of annoyance: For God is Most High, great above you all.

Many fundamentalist religious groups – especially those embracing corporal punishments, and cited by CDD literature – encourage submissive wives and authoritarian husbands. Amato and Marsiglio (2002) discuss Promise Keepers (PK) a group encouraging men to become “spiritual leaders of their families.” By placing men in the role of both the spiritual and literal head of the household other similar Christian Men’s Movements continue to grow. Groups such as the “Lion’s Roar Men’s Summit” and “K.I.N.G.” focus on masculinity, maturity, and Christ-like principles. The Christian Men’s Movement’s leaders author books with titles like *Maximized Manhood* (Edwin Cole 1982), *Real Man* (Edwin Cole 2003), and *Husbands and Fathers: Rediscover the Creator's Purpose for Men* (Derek Prince 2000). These groups endorse gender essentialism, heteronormative views of masculinity, personal responsibility, and conservative Christian values (Amato & Marsiglio 2002). “A Quiverful” movement pushes couples to procreate to fill God’s army. A parallel women’s movement focusing on submissive women and traditional feminine-gender roles appeared. Proponents of this family value movement suggest women read titles like, *Liberated Through Submission* (P.B. Wilson 1995), *The Excellent Wife* (Martha Peace 1995), and *The Total Woman* (Marabel Morgan 1975).

#### *Religion and Domestic Abuse*

Many CDD and religious discipline relationship participants refute the notion they are involved in abusive relationships by saying that what they do is consensual (Wakeman 2008). Adherence to traditional or fundamentalist religious practices may contribute to partner abuse (Burriss and Jackson 1999). Social and religious pressures to control one’s wives have led to wife beating. (Bowker 1983). Saving women from themselves (Coontz 2005, Wakeman 2008) has been the purview of an “abusive fundamentalist religious right” (Greta cited as a participant in Wakeman 2008: 68).

Some ministers believe that, “wife beating is on the rise because men are no longer leaders in their homes” (Coontz 2005, Ehrenreich et al. 1986:157). Such religious leaders cite feminism as a cause of divorce and the breakdown of modern relationships. Because of fundamentalist decrees that promote absolute male domination and rule within the home (Armato and Marsiglio 2005), there is little resistance to this idea from those who follow fundamentalist religious teachings, perhaps because they fear being ostracized, or perhaps because they believe these decrees (Ehrenreich et al. 1986).

Religious dicta for patriarchal control and male dominion further inform male power throughout the gendered language of religion (Champagne 1997). Religious defense of such power reproduces both the gendered head of household and real men narratives, as well as the institutional power structures. Especially extreme are women who in crisis who are turned away for lack of services, lectured for lack of faith, or not believed at all (Jones 2000).

When women turn to religion, their minister, priest, or rabbi for help with domestic abuse they need help. Many times this backfires and the abused women are told to have “good family values” and be a dutiful wife rather than given real support (Jones 2000:242). In the Jewish culture, some rabbis encourage wives to strive for *shalom bayit* or “peace in the home.” (Horsburgh 2005:211). They discount reports of violence because it does not fit the romanticized views of a good Jewish family. Religion and clergy can be helpful in educating and preventing violent men and for offering services to women and families (Jones 2000).

#### **2.4 U. S. History of Wife Beating, Sex & Intimate Violence, & Domestic Abuse**

Responses to sexual and intimate violence in the United States changed over the years. Family violence became known as a social problem. Awareness of family and women’s violence increased over the last few decades. Social movements organized around women’s violence helped make new laws and support programs (Richie 2005).

Estimates of the extent of abuse vary from expert to expert (Gordon 2002). In her work on the domestic violence, Linda Gordon (2002) posits conceptions of family and women's violence as both socially and politically constructed. Naming and language regarding women's abuse is culturally constructed. Ann Jones (2000:84-86) problematizes the neutral academic language used within sociology and psychology when discussing family and domestic violence. Jones (2000:87) states, "Rarely in the authoritative literature does a man hit a woman: in the gut for instance, or in the face, with his fist, hard . . . hard enough to make the blood run down the page. In real life it happens all the time." Many feminist writers prefer the term "battered woman" when writing about violence against women (Jones 2000; Solokoff and Dupont 2005). In addition to the language, Karen Cerulo (1998) examines how people create meaning about and cognitively perceive violent acts. Cerulo (1998:128-129) discusses the narrative point of entry and "passive verbs emphasize that victims plight by returning readers and viewers to the victim's stance." People who read the passive voice get the "double impact" of the victim's point of view and react more empathetically to the victim's of violence (Cerulo 1998: 128).

Victim blaming occurs when experts study, target, and treat abused women and children, rather than focus social efforts to also stop violent abusers (Jones 2000: 139). Allowing for an intersexual understanding women's experiences brings an equally important discussion on domestic violence as not just only women's or family problem. Structural issues, such as race, poverty, ethnicity, culture, age, and language also inform battered women's needs (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). Social and cultural inequality, racism, and classism, also inform the perception of violence and women. Violence against white and higher class women is perceived as more deviant and bad, and violence against subordinate non-dominant groups as more normal (Cerulo 1998: 24). Gordon (2002) reminds readers that women are sometimes the abusers, while Sorensen and Thomas (2009) report intimate partner violence and battery also occurs between same sex and trans partners.

## 2.5 Deviance & Labeling

Use of social media and the Internet as anonymous space to discuss sensitive topics is a common practice among many alternative lifestyle communities. These alternative lifestyle communities use online communication (social media) to discuss their lives publicly within a forum that creates the illusion of anonymity and privacy (Adler and Adler 2008). Internet users are likely to discuss socially taboo details about their identities and lifestyles (Adler and Adler 2008; McKenna, Green and Gleason 2002) and may express deviant desires online they would not likely express offline. In her discussion on Arab Spring, Julie Wiest (2012) points out that younger people moved away from politics as the immediacy of the movement wore off. Instead, they used online social media to discuss their sexuality and other culturally deviant and taboo topics that were important to them.

Privacy and safety are important issues for participants of alternative lifestyle, including discipline lifestyles. Participants are aware of their perceived deviance from social norms and the surrounding stigma associated with participation in their lifestyle. These people are quite cautious to remain anonymous, even when appearing in public. Many sexually deviant groups use the Internet as a primary source for exploring and re-defining themselves and their online groups (Durkin, Craig and Quinn 2006; Kendall 2002). Concepts of deviance, labeling theory, and social control are important in understanding how group processes work. These theories are also good at explaining why people behave or feel certain ways about themselves. For example, sexually deviant groups might maintain anonymous online features to avoid stigma. Participants of "out" non-normative sexualities (like BDSM) generally engage in stigma management techniques. But people who are not "out" general avoid such techniques by keeping and maintaining anonymous online identities (Brown 2010; Falk 2001).

## 2.6 Self-harm & Stress Release

People sometimes engage in self-harm to feel more in control of their environment by controlling their body's physical reaction to pain (Muehlenkamp et al. 2005). Some people engage in self-harming behavior as a reaction to their own distress or negative feelings (Muehlenkamp et al. 2005). They also engage in self-harm to relieve stress or control feelings of frustration (Hodgson 2004; Muehlenkamp et al. 2005). Researchers of self-harming posit that certain people feel better after experiencing pain because it enables them to achieve a catharsis or a feeling of renewal (Hodgson 2004). Some participants in the discipline lifestyle say they feel a sense of stress-release and a sense of cleansing when they engage in spanking and other physical discipline (Travis 2005; Forbes 2011).

Other participants of discipline lifestyles report feeling better after disciplining their partners; the act of administering physical discipline creates an adrenaline rush and sense of connection (Mister Loving DD 2006). Strauss (1994:163) contends one reason a parent might spank a child is to relieve parental stress about negative situations or to feel more in control. Consensual adult physical discipline might also be a sublimated (or not so sublimated) form of stress release offering a sense of control over seemingly uncontrollable situations.

## 2.7 Symbolic Interaction, Identity, Constructionist Perspectives

To account for human behavior, Hebert Blumer (1969) coined the phrase "symbolic interaction," which is based on meanings, language, and thought. The premises of symbolic interaction are: People act based on meanings they create; meanings arise out of social interaction with others and society; and meanings are modified through interpretation and used to deal with others (Blumer 1969:1-14). In symbolic interactionism, people can not only recognize themselves as agents but can also recognize themselves as distinct and as having a relatable selves (Blumer 1969:12-13). Baird (2009:10) writes: "Meanings are central to symbolic interactionism and identity theory." . . . Meanings attached to symbolic interactions are the key to understanding an individual's identity and behavior." Self-meanings



are central to a person's identity (Stryker 1980: 70). To understand someone's behavior we must first take into account "the defining process" of his or her motivations (Blumer 1969:16) (i.e. expectations, needs, motives, culture etc.). Researchers often investigate meanings and identity negotiation at the individual, group, community, or societal level (Blumer 1969:16).

Identities, as well as people's narratives, are socially constructed (Riesman 2000). Principles of self-identity formation and group-based identity and behavior are similar (Deaux 1992; Stets and Burke 2000). People in a community all bring different meanings "formed, sustained, weakened, strengthened, or transformed" through a social process (Blumer 1969:19-20). These concepts inform how people create not just their self-identity, but how individuals and groups bring meaning and identity to their communities (Blumer 1969). People construct their fluid and changing identities through story telling, demonstrating for themselves and for others who they are and who they are not (Riessman 2008:8). Groups of people use common stories to create identities, purpose, and belonging for participants (Riessman 2008:8). Symbolic interaction, identity theory, and notions of social construction all link to how people engage in social processes and make meanings over time and social space.

## **2.8 Post-Structural/Critical/Queer**

By understanding the way different identities intersect with each other and within different cultural contexts sociologists benefit from post-structural, critical, and queer theoretical challenges. Sociologists may also benefit by becoming more holistic, investigating outside our areas of interest, shedding functionalist roots, and eschewing the dichotomy of "deviance" versus normal (Stein & Plummer 1997:338). Critical and queer theories use multiple, often intersecting critiques and rejections of normalizing systems of knowledge (Sullivan 2003).

Queer theories have other important implications for this study and for sociology at large, problematizing "real life" and reality when and questioning whose reality we experience (Sandoval 2000). Queer theorists insist upon the critique of universal truths and categories. This means that sociologists and

other scholars who invoke queer theories in their research recognize inherent differences in perspectives, historicize their views, incorporate cultural reflexivity about what truth they represent, and give voice to the “other.” (Sandoval 2000).

To complicate normalized systems, queer theories resist definition: “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. Queer then demarcates not a positivity but a positionality [against normativity]” (Halperin 1996:96). Specifically, queer theories “critique normalizing ways of knowing” (Sullivan 2003: vi), and criticize categories, normalization, and assimilation (Esterberg 1997). Queer theories disrupt and transgress fixed classifications, reject and deconstruct binary categories, (Esterberg 1997) and criticize normalized truth cast as formal knowledge (Sullivan 2003).

These post-structural, critical, and queer perspectives inform the interactionist perspectives that I use in this study to examine the changing meanings of power and social forces. Though interactionist and social constructionist perspectives are not as predominant in queer theories as in other sociological perspectives, these perspectives inform the development of identity performance and identity navigation (Stein and Plummer 1997). They challenge linguistic codes and categories, and inform postmodern deconstruction theories (Stein and Plummer 1997:337). Gender and sexuality are constructed and situational.

People who identify as queer often have no language or name for doing what they are doing (Sullivan 2001: 231). Similarly, participants of an unnamed or alternative sexuality also challenge the normalizing categories of dominant culture. Foucault (1978) uses the term “bio-power” to discuss the cultural drive categorize according sexuality. Creating disruptions in these categories challenges the dominant culture’s form of social control, acceptance, and understanding of sexuality (Weiss 2006:119). Disruptions happen in form of “compulsory visibility” or the non-normative sexuality being seen by the normalizing forces within the dominant culture (Foucault 1977). “It is the subjects who have to be seen. Their

visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them (Foucault 1977:187). Participants express power rather than gender as a way to explain their desires, but they still remain anonymous, visible, and gazed at under normalizing powerful gazes. We have been “force-fed an exclusive image of family” (Sullivan 2001:241). This also holds true for how to do relationships and sexuality. As Sullivan (2001:241) states, “the power of this image lies in the insistence with which its ‘veracity’ is defended, even when empirical evidence to the contrary presents itself.”

## **2.9 Impression Management & the Cyber Second Self**

Erving Goffman (1967:19) states that individuals act in their own interest and focus on “impression management” to maintain their identities (Prus 1996). He sees society as a stage and individuals as the actors (Goffman 1967:19). On the “front stage,” individuals conform to the structures of society, and act in order to be perceived a certain way (Goffman 1967:22). By appearing socially acceptable and living up to their roles, people on the front stage attempt to meet expectations. The back stage is where people relax these roles, behaving with little regard for societal expectations (Goffman 1967:22).

Goffman believes individuals are always acting by taking specific roles defined by the “generalizable others,” and we are constantly in the process of negotiating or saving face (Goffman 1967). Similarly, Goffman sees people as taking others into account when deciding how to act (Prus 1996:80). More importantly, understanding how people manage front and back stage is key to understanding how people manage their “second selves” (Turkle 1995). Sherry Turkle (1995) discusses the sociology of online identities. She notes the possibility of dialoging with the identities we create online and distinguishes them from our offline selves. Turkle makes the case that even when the author of online content is offline their online identities (the “second self”) can interact be interacted with by other people. If a user’s second self is not engaged while the author is offline, for example, if they do not receive blog comments, (or are excluded an online discussions), they may feel personally rejected. Online relationships, communities, and interactions may feel as real to participants as offline in-person interactions (Turkle 2012).

### *Social Media Use & Blogging*

The porous, permeable nature of content on the Internet and in online communities (Porter 2004) creates a unique opportunity to analyze sociological phenomena. Bloggers are both the subjects and creators of artifacts in their work (Royer 2005, 227). Offline gendered power relations influence how people interact in online communities because they are an online reproduction of everyday life (Wilson and Peterson 2002, 453). Female bloggers tend to create more personal content and have more of an “orientation towards social aspects” than male bloggers (Liu and Chang 2010).

Dominic Royer discusses blogs as “the great I am” (2005: 226) in his research: “Individuals who blog often assert that ‘my blog is me’” (2005: 226). Relationships formed via online communities and interactions can feel more trusting, intimate, self-disclosing and closer than relationships that are developed offline (Henderson and Gliding 2004). Using self-analysis and group formation, participants are also able to “play” online and pretend to be someone else (Kendall 2002). This “play” can be problematic when bloggers are accused of being fake or espousing harmful or dangerous views.

### **2.10 Nascent & Emerging Online Social Movements**

The dominant culture sends powerful and contradictory messages (Johnson and Klandermans 1995). Such inconsistent and contradictory views lend themselves to new language (frames, views, symbols) and challenges to the dominant culture (Johnson and Klandermans 1995:5). Such challenges question the meanings, categories, and concepts embedded into the structures of the dominant culture. These challenges collectively turn into social movements. Discussing the culture of the women’s movement, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1995:163) write, “All social movements, to varying degrees, produce culture.” In this study, I examine the ways people navigate their sexuality by removing barriers to dissatisfaction and obtaining sexual pleasure throughout their lives. Many of these methods involve collective online practices (i.e. questioning dominant cultural categories and values by blogging, heightening visibility, and celebrating and pursuing their sexual pleasure even in the face of normative disap-

proval) I read as political acts -- resulting in a nascent social movement. When a group has common experiences and interests they form a collective identity and solidarity (Taylor and Whittier 1995). This creates a shared network of meaning and in budding movements, a place where change can begin to take place.

Each society has constructed ways to express social discord and political strife, and to begin social movements (Arrow 1994: 19; Tilly 1995; Wada 2012). Tilly (1995: 42) calls these moments "repertoires of contention." People learn how to do things like march in public, break windows, riot, strike, and even write blogs. "Modular repertoires" transfer to different contexts (Tarrow 1998: 30). Some researchers consider "modular repertoires" (or transferrable repertoires) theoretically interesting because such repertoires involve many people and purposes and reasons for confrontation (Wada 2012: 544-545). In diffusion studies, researchers examine how people's behavior is transferred collectively (Wada 2012: 546). By using certain Internet sites and social media sources, people stop being strangers to each other (Tarrow 2010:215). They adopt "master frames" to interpret and label what feels most significant to them (Snow 2004:390). Master frames "color and constrain the orientations and activities of a broad range of activists, groups and organizations" (Snow 2004: 390). Social movements follow not only cultural environments but also master frames. Wada (2012:548) believes that once "activists in a social movement are connected and share the same frame, the action repertoire they employ have a greater chance to become modular" (or transferrable to new situations and communities). In this way, users of online social media and discipline communities might create a nascent social movement. Using a master frame of identity and repertoire of contention they build resistance and cohesion using their collective discipline sexualities to interpret information and transfer in the form of resistance and visibility online.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

Of sexuality research, Tiefer (2004: 23) writes, “The major constructionist project is to define and locate sexuality in personal, relational, and cultural, rather than physical, terms.” In effect, to study a sexual lifestyle and desire empirically, one might seek to define not just the sexual identity, but also the relationships, desires, problems, and the culture of that sexuality. Margot Weiss (2011:7) asserts, “It is not enough to contextualize it within a specific social, cultural, or historical moment; we must, instead map the complex and often contradictory social dynamics that produce and are, in turn reproduced within particular sexual cultures, practices, and desires.” These, and other, methodological challenges affect the way qualitative researchers engage their research (Creswell 2003; Hunter 2010; Poole et al 2003). Researchers employ sound methodology in sexuality research by observing the respondent’s environment, interviewing, and using content analysis of their manuscripts, or using online accounts (Poole et al 2003). One qualitative method, narrative analysis, allows researchers to systematically study personal experiences and meaning (Riessman 2000). The “big stories” for many people involve their sexualities and sexual stories (Plummer 1995:4).

#### 3.1 Narrative Analysis

Narrative and story are often used synonymously when discussing narrative analysis. People who do narrative analysis methodologies examine intention and language - meanings and people who make meaning. Catherine Riessman (2008:11) calls this examining the “how and why” incidents are storied, not just looking at the content within the language. In fitting with ethnography methodology, it is nicely suited to exploring meanings, identities, and how people construct themselves.

Of narrative analysis Riessman (2008:21) sums up the wisdom of Mishler (1986) and Neander & Scott (2006:297) when she writes, “It is generally acknowledged in the human sciences that ‘the researcher does not *find* narratives but instead participates in their creation.” These narratives are stories

-- events and experiences, both of which can be recorded and explored by the researcher. Rather than simple coded and rote-like surveys, participants “jointly construct the narrative and the meaning.” (Riessman 2008:23).

Riessman (2000:1) explains the shift from “code-able categories” – and “attempts to control meaning” to narrative analysis as a reflection of participants “conversational storytelling” (Mishler 1986). By moving to feminist practices which employ a more sensitive understanding of how participants organize meaning in their lives (DeVault 1999), researchers can avoid reproducing dominance and power in their investigations (Riessman 2004:4-5). In her work on coming out stories, Marni Brown (2011:68) discusses the intersection between theory and methods. “Influenced by the relationship between symbolic interactionism and post-modern theoretical frameworks, many narrative analysts recognize multiple social meanings, motivation, and power.” (Brown 2011:68).

Using narrative analysis also allowed me to employ my original theoretical approaches more easily because narrative analysis “takes as its object of investigation the story itself.” (Riessman 2000:4). I do not listen to only the narratives of my participants but also consider the story I construct as this study, understanding it from a sociologically and from my own social location. I have not performed auto-ethnography, but interviews and online ethnographic work. Narrative analysis and feminist perspectives allow me to analyze this study as one necessarily informed by (my own and my participant’s) surrounding historical, cultural, and structural forces (Plummer 1995). Within an understanding of these methodological approaches, I used narrative analysis to observe and analyze the cultural contexts of how people shared intimate sexual stories to make sense of their discipline lifestyle identities, their relationships, and struggles with their lives. I also explored their discipline lifestyle culture using themes from the various narratives I found. I explored the narratives and methods participants employed to overcome barriers to their sexual dissatisfaction and frustrations in their lives and to pursue sexual pleasure.

### *Visual & Performance Analysis*

Not all narratives must be spoken or written. Susan Bell (2006:32), recalling Becker's (2000) call for a sociological examination of visual images states, "Visual images are so thoroughly embedded in our worlds that not to take them seriously, and not to work at making them part of analysis, is to reduce our understandings of subjects' worlds." Fantasy and imagination expressed through images matters because it also gives insight into the broader culture.

Researchers can use narrative analysis to interpret visual images, art, and sound as well as written words and interviews (Riessman 2008:3) People can tell a story with images or about the images using a story (Riessman 2008:141). Creff (2004) looks at archived photos and writings, interviews and documents to see representations of Japanese during WWII. Bell (2002) investigates archived photographs and writings from an artist experiences to focus on illness experiences. Tamboukou (2006) investigates paintings and archived letters from artist archived letters to investigate space, spatial themes, and identities of that artist. Luttrell (2003) uses activist ethnography to investigate body and space in how people create visual art about stigmatized labels. Pini and Walkerdine (2001) use video diaries to perceive invisible lines of class and normative performance in the UK. By understanding how narrative analysis are used to explore visual images, I also examined graphics and visual images, the time and space changes that occurred on websites and within social media, and the way discipline relationship communities produce cultural materials that are meaningful to them. Visual images also create a double significance because they heighten visibility within the dominant culture.

### **3.2 What is a Good Story?**

Mark Freeman (2002:9) says stories are sense-making tools, which "inevitably do things – for people, for social institutions, for culture, and more." The things narratives do have different purposes depending on which culture or institution uses them. People use stories to argue with each other, justi-



fy themselves, persuade each other, engage an audience, entertain, mislead, and connect to the flow of power in the outside world. (Riessman 2008:8).

Of narratives Roland Barthes (1966:79) says:

Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there no where is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing cultural backgrounds. Narrative is, in short, international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Stories link events and have consequential ideas (Riessman 2008:6). Stories can be used for multiple purposes but for the purposes of this study, I focus on identities as narratives from the perspective of Yuval Davis (2006:201): "Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others are who they are (and who they are not)." Who they are not is especially important when participants of discipline relationships specifically define themselves as different from another group or sexual practice (such as victims of abuse or BDSM).

People often say they know a good story when they hear one (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Good stories might raise status among peers when gathered around the table. They are told to children at bedtime before getting tucked in. Some stories enhance one's masculine identity in the dominant culture. When accused of exaggerating a story, the story itself is confronted. The accused must withstand examination or perhaps face shame, mockery, or even imprisonment. People often begin stories with, "remember when. . . ?" Telling stories entertains people. All cultures contain stories, myths, narratives, folktales and tell them to each other (Barthes 1966). We might know a good story when we hear one. But we do not always agree on what makes a good story. Good stories are often situational, discipline, or profession specific (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). In this study, I situate the analysis of participant narratives within a broader sociological framework. First, I examine the individuals who come to name and make meanings of their sexual desires and discipline lifestyle identities. Secondly, I exam-

ine the group processes of online discipline relationship social media groups and communities. Thirdly, I examine the discipline relationship culture within the context of the dominant culture.

### **3.3 Who Tells a Story? Who Listens? Why Do They Matter?**

Plummer (1995:87) writes, “For narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear . . . for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics.” There are many ways to tell a story and ways to make meaning out of stories. A good storyteller holds their audience captivated. As researchers we tell stories to our audience, but we also listen to the stories we are told. We listen for ways participants tell a story, ways they make a good story to fit the dominant culture, to mitigate stigma, to make meanings about their lives. We listen for ways storytellers justify their actions, deal with problems, or explain how and why they do what they do. Using visual and performance analysis we see narratives contained in the cultural products participants create and consume.

Narrative meaning is not concealed in the text -- the reading itself sometimes changes the story and makes it meaningful (Iser 1993). Readers attempt to change their circumstances by reading and telling stories (Riessman 2008; Simonds 1992). C. Wright Mills laid the foundation for making public issues of what are personal troubles. Using a narrative format, sociologists can bring hidden dimensions of power into the readings and telling of stories. Social arrangements are historically and culturally specified. Using stories, narrative analysts investigate the power inherent in the dominant culture.

These stories can be told through as little as one case study or hundreds of interviews. (Riessman 2008). There is no such thing as a fake story. They are simply stories that researchers analyze. Some stories are fantasies and must be analyzed as such (Riessman 2008:135). Stories are located in participants’ meaning and identity. Identities are performed and can transform each other through performance. (Riessman 2008). Dominant culture affects individual imagination. This in turn in turn, affects the mass availability of erotic images (Tiefer 2004) and identity performance. It also affects how

we make and consume cultural products because culture, though ever changing also “has a life of its own” (Simonds 1992:217).

### 3.4 Truth(s) & Validity

Gillian Rose (2001:2) writes: “Interpreting images [and textual narratives] is just that, interpretation, not the discovery of their truth.” Qualitative researchers often face practical concerns about validity. I might ask myself, are my participants’ stories truthful (or trustworthy)? I might seek to ensure that my own methodology is consistent (internally valid). In her discussion of qualitative methodology and validity, Wendy Simonds (1992:9-10) points out that qualitative researchers almost seem to (“defensively” and “apologetically”) defend rather than describe their research methodologies. We, as a discipline, seem to fear that the lack of statistical significance and hard science behind narratives. We seem to believe that using stories indicates a lack of dedication to our field or discredit our scholarly credibility.

Rachel Naomi Remen (2006:xxxix-xl) writes, “All real stories are true.” Although they are full of bias, they are unique. “The best stories have many meanings.” The meaning each person makes of those stories might even be different than what the tellers intended. Remen (2006: xl) continues, “All stories are full of bias and uniqueness; they mix fact with meaning. This is the root of their power. Stories allow us to see something familiar through new eyes.”

In my narratives, there is no grand narrative. There is there a great overarching truth. Instead, when listening to my participants, I heard many stories. The stories I found became the source material for this study. Because I worked with social media, I found I didn’t have the best consistency in the beginning. While I made extensive notes I would few months later, the website or blog would be gone. Many of the discipline websites and blogs I researched shut down over time. I saved and printed many pages, but I could never print them all. I made notes about significant ones and kept the quotes and dates of importance. Many times, I went to search for a conversation or example and found it missing from the web. Until I got used to this type of abrupt ending, I would find it jarring and relying on my

memory or a note was not enough. Simply talking about how people, participants, communities and even their stories and blogs disappear is difficult to describe to you as part of my methodology. Beginnings and endings of stories within stories are not always clear or transparent. Like the circuitous trajectories of my participants' lives, some abrupt halts to blogs or communities are sometimes vague, complicated and frustrating. It is research.

Once this started happening (websites disappearing), I learned to print out the pages and highlight quotes, comments, and community interactions I found important or salient. I learned to date everything. And I learned that letting go of many participants whose story I followed was part of the story itself. I grew fond of particular participants and I also grew familiar with some of them. The people who wrote and commented frequently felt like people I knew personally. When participants stopped writing or commenting or died, I went through my own sense of shared grief, especially when I was going through similar personal issues in my own relationships or life. I had to learn that new people and blogs replaced the old ones, but it made for terrible continuity when I was following a story or couple closely. The couples change. They break up. They change their identities and names. They get outed. They get tired of having this identity lead their lives. They got sick. They died. They had kids. They got bored. Sometimes they wrote about it. Sometimes they simply stopped writing and the absence of words or posts is all I found.

I also learned that people and communities create social space. Lurking (reading online only as opposed to delurking and becoming an active participant) (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka 2004) there without interacting is the ultimate panopticon. I needed them more than they needed me. (It instilled for me the reciprocal confessional power of the researcher and the subject. The gaze and the gazed at.) And without them (even with their knowing permission and invitation) this research would have been impossible. In my appendices I have listed the communities, blogs, and manuals I investigated. What is online is unstable, not fixed, and goes away quickly. It gave me a new respect for creating social space and

community. Additionally, blogs and communities can be locked, so what was once public domain can also fluidly change. They are like identities and the people who navigate online communities changeable and not permanent. While I chose to read these areas with permission I did not read private, member only areas, considering them not public domain, regardless of permission was granted or not.

Telling how I found stories and who shared them with me is not enough. When using narrative analysis my framework is informed by intersectional, interactionist, queer, feminist, and constructionist ideologies. We never know anything fully. Everything involves positionality. Dorothy Smith (2010) uses standpoint theory to highlight how a world of research is both constructed and constrained. Sociologist's worlds are framed by men's perspectives and if we used a women's standpoint (or any standpoint, such as an alternative sexuality, or a different race's or culture's standpoint's), we can find it easier to both observe and problematize the inequalities. Smith (2010:525) states, "The only way to know a sociologically constructed world is to know it from within." By allowing our positionality, and framing our standpoint as researchers, we can better observe the sociological world. When I observed the discipline lifestyle, I immersed myself as an ethnographer, doing participant observation. I conducted interviews to gain a better understanding of how and why participants desire a discipline relationship. I also went online, at the invitation of my participants, to observe how participants engaged in their online social space. This allowed me to better understand their communities and the discipline lifestyle culture. It also gave me a better and more nuanced understanding of how and why they distinguish and separate themselves from other groups.

When I first heard about discipline relationship communities, I was doing a research paper on BDSM for a class on deviance and social control. I found a link for domestic discipline and though it seemed to pertain to BDSM sexuality and sociology the author of the site, Vickie Blue (2003) denied it. She insisted she and others into DD and domestic discipline were more into "old fashioned domestic discipline." Perhaps because of our dominant cultural scripts, discipline specific labeling of sadomaso-

chism, or because of my own beliefs, it took me quite a while to come to see my participants as a more nuanced sexual identity than BDSM participants. Until I was able to see discipline relationships as having a separate and distinct sexual identity, I was not able to really hear their narratives as distinct from dominant BDSM power and violent sex themes. After taking a year off, I came back to their stories. I read their manuals again. I read their blogs and re-read their interviews. My participants did not always agree with each other, but I came to understand them as having a distinct sexual identity from BDSM and to recognize the various social groups and communities online. It was also much easier, after a break, to investigate the ways my participants interacted within the discipline relationship culture, and how their culture continues to recreate the discipline relationship community. Taking time off gave me time and distance of a new perspective and to allow the communities to change and grow. It also gave me the ability to separate myself from my own political, sexual, and relationship concerns in order to understand the stories arising within discipline relationships.

### **3.5 Participants**

Initially I located my interview participants by asking online bloggers and discipline lifestyle group participants to interview with me. I also asked them to post my contact information on their blogs so people who read their blogs could contact me. Several discipline relationship communities reposted my request for interviews with people who are specifically interested in domestic discipline or discipline lifestyles. I obtained a snowball sample of interview participants through their recommendations of me to other readers who practiced discipline relationships or read their blogs. Initially I contacted five participants I knew to be influential in the discipline lifestyle community and had highly read blogs. Two of them refused to interview with me, but posted my call for interviews on their blogs, which generated e-mails. I was contacted (via e-mail) by over 130 people initially interested in interviewing with me. I conducted 36 interviews; (N=16) face-to-face, (N=18) e-mail, and (N=2) via telephone. My interview schedule is located in (Appendix B Interview Schedule).

Participants encouraged me to read their public journals and blogs and sent me links to specific topics. I also performed historical content analysis of manuscripts taken from publically available domestic lifestyle (N=8) online groups and communities as well as resulting comments, (N=29) blogs, (N=6) discipline romance novel websites, (N=5) discipline and spanking artists, (N=12) spanking and discipline audio, video, and graphic websites, and (N=30) discipline manuals between 2003-2012 (Appendix A Discipline Relationship Books & Social Media Examined 2003-2012). In 2007, an online community known as *The Disciplinary Wives Club* (DWC) posted secondary survey data regarding submissive men and dominant women involved in the discipline.

I obtained permission from the owner, Aunt Kay to use her secondary survey data as part of this study. Her research was conducted at almost the same time I did mine in 2007. In (Appendix C Disciplinary Wives Club Survey) I include survey information as well as links to a summary and a full report of her data. While my study examines mostly dominant men and submissive women and a few queer identified women, the DWC includes predominantly submissive men and dominant women. The DWC data were a rich source of secondary material and gave me nuanced insight into the discipline lifestyle as a sexual identity. The quotes and content in her data so paralleled my own initial findings (of submissive women) I came to realize that these submissive men also had a discipline identity. It also helped me realize it was not merely explained away as BDSM or as a way to dominate women, but as a sexual identity and relationship practice that stands on its own and must be investigated that way.

### **3.6 Demographics**

Twenty-six women and ten men from the U.K., the U.S., and Western Europe participated in face-to-face and e-mail interviews. Two couples gave interviews both alone and face-to-face. All but one participant self-identified as (N=28) white or Caucasian, (N=1) one as biracial, (N=1) one as Finnish,

and six reported no race. Reported incomes were between \$22,000 and \$110,000 U.S. Dollars, and at least half of the participants did not report this. The majority identified as (N= 23) straight or heterosexual, four as (N=4) bisexual women and one as a (N=1) bisexual man, and one as (N=1) queer woman, and (N=7) reported no identity. The majority of respondents reported (N=30) monogamous marriages or partnerships and some form of discipline relationship; (N=2) reported polyamorous and in discipline relationships; (N=2) reported single but seeking discipline relationships. Twelve (N=12) participants reported having children, (N=9) did not respond to this question, and the rest (N=15) said they did not have children. (After reading their blogs upon invitation, I know that many of these participants do have children, some only on weekends, and that navigating ways to have a discipline lifestyle without letting their children find out is a stressor in their current relationships. Religious identity includes (N=12) Christianity, (N=2) Catholic, (N=3) pagan, (N=4) agnostic, and (N=4) atheist. Eleven (N=11) did not respond to this question. Over half (N=23) identified as feminist, including three men.

### **3.7 Limitations, Challenges, and Considerations**

Dealing with online recruitment brought a slew of methodological challenges. The Internet creates almost limitless boundaries and demographics even when dealing with a specific sexual identity. My demographic was international and people responded from all over the world. I decided to give people who could meet with me for face-to-face interviews primary consideration. Secondly I gave people who were willing to do phone interviews and then e-mail interviews consideration. I did not consider other types of communication, though I was asked to communicate via messenger and other social means. I needed standardized communication and limiting my communication limited my demographic.

In another instance, a participant planned an overseas gathering of women on her blog, arranging to do a group interview with me at my university. No one showed up but the woman, my chair, and myself. The anonymity of the Internet took over and later people e-mailed me and said they were not



comfortable with coming to a larger city, or walking around in downtown Atlanta where we met. One couple agreed to meet and interview with me at a restaurant the day after the failed social gathering. They only knew the woman from online and while they were willing to meet with me, they did not wish to be outted to my chair or especially other people they knew so intimately online. Slowly, much more slowly than the original landslide of 130 responses might indicate I set up and conducted interviews.

An important limitation in this study is the secrecy surrounding discipline relationships and the subsequent lack of access to “out” participants. Most people consider discipline relationships a private activity, making it impossible to tell who actually does it and who does not (as well as what kinds of sexual activities they might engage in). Sometimes during interviews respondents might have responded differently to cover up their lifestyle or beliefs because they may have felt embarrassed. For example, they might not have admitted their frustration at their relationship not going as well as they wanted it to go when they were using domestic discipline as a relationship tool to improve communication. Such limitations make reporting bias within transgressive sexuality research one of the biggest methodological concerns requiring many strategic models to navigate (Catania 1999). One important way to deal with this methodological concern requires using Internet resources to penetrate closely guarded sexual lifestyles and behaviors (Mustanski 2001). To minimize this limitation, I used historical research techniques, (with blogs and online group forums). I also used anonymous e-mail and phone interviews when face-to-face when interviews were not available (or when requested).

At first, I found it intriguing the difference how different demographics interpret informed consent from IRB. All my participants were very understanding and expressed very clearly either in written or verbal their consent for this study. Later, I realized for these participants, consent is a big part of their lifestyle. Participants spend a great deal of time discussing consent and what it means. Additionally, some participants contacted me and asked me to reply from my official .edu school account to make

sure I was legitimately a graduate student. I responded from my student account the three times this happened. Each time it was a woman who was also in academia.

#### 4 DISCIPLINE RELATIONSHIP SEXUALITIES

**JILLIAN KEENAN:** But when I started college and got my first personal computer, everything changed. In online anonymity I found a community that shared my interest and insecurities. I wasn't looking for partners to "play" with (as it's called); spanking, to me, is as intimate as sex, and not to be shared with someone I didn't love. I just wanted a forum to express my otherwise inexpressible side. "What did you all do before the Internet?" I asked a woman in an online forum. "The brave ones looked for personal ads," she replied. "The rest of us were lonely." . . . Online strangers satisfied my desire for community and understanding — almost. And I stopped feeling like a freak — almost.

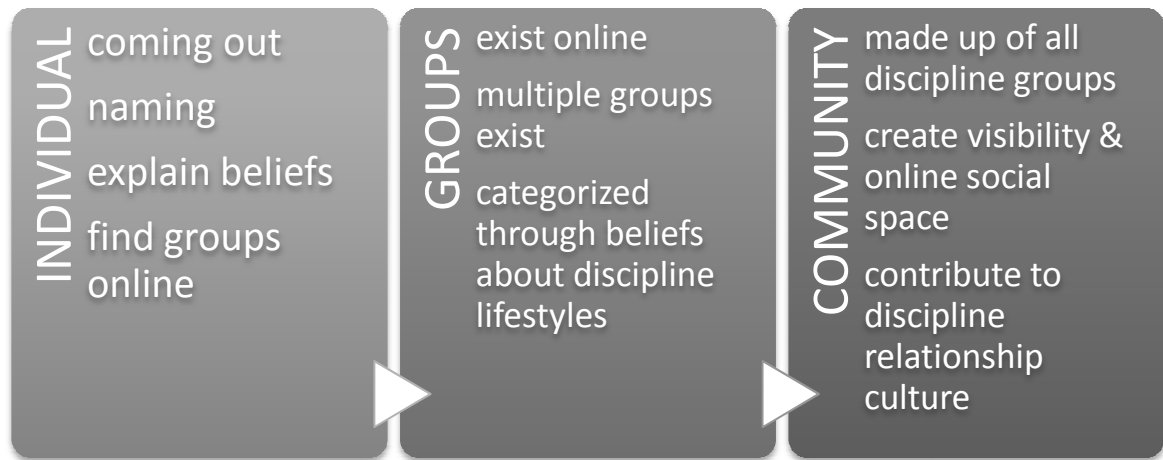
In her *New York Times* expose about her spanking and discipline desires, “The Courage to Reveal a Fetish,” Jillian Keenan (2012) discusses her use of online resources to find ways to talk to like-minded people. Every participant of this study uses similar social media -- blogs, groups, and discipline communities -- to discuss their interest in discipline relationships. I came to see discipline relationships as sexuality expressed as identity and through relationship practices. And I came to view specific actions and behaviors (namely discipline) couples do in their relationships as indicative of discipline relationship sexuality. In this chapter, I explore the identity process, beliefs and explanations about discipline relationships, and how participants define and name discipline relationships.

Both George Herbert Mead (1936) and Georg Simmel (1950) lay important foundations for understanding group processes and group identity formation. Simmel (1950:40) writes: “in any human society one can distinguish between its content and its form. The other is that society, itself, in general refers to the interaction among individuals.” Simmel was interested in how people interacted with each other, and the exchanges they made. Such social interactions are especially important for understanding online communities. These interactions involve shared understanding. Mead (1934:47,49) describes such shared interaction as “mind”:

Only in terms of gestures as significant symbols is the existence of the mind or intelligence possible; for only in terms of gestures which are significant symbols can thinking- which is simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures- take place . . . Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience – not communication by mind.

Mind, or shared symbols and language, creates what Blumer (1928:349) calls the “generic group process.” The discipline group process is depicted in Figure 4.1. Participants explain why they want and need discipline and how they name their identities and “discipline lifestyle choice”. Participants also engage in (usually online) conversations in this ongoing process of shared discussions about identities and meanings. Online discipline groups solidify the larger discipline community. Participants create discipline culture, and in turn, the culture takes on a life of its own. I give examples of the discipline re-

relationship group processes as lived experiences in more detail in Chapter 5 and the discipline relationship culture in Chapter 6.



**Figure 4.1 Discipline Relationship Group Process**

#### **4.1 Who am I? Discovering Discipline Relationship Identity Online & “Coming Out”**

All participants express a need or strong desire for discipline. They report childhood fantasies involving discipline and authority and describe knowing early on in life that they were “different.” Participants report not having a name for what they felt, and describe this knowledge of difference as similar to gay sexuality. They describe pouring over dictionaries and books as children and finding passages about discipline and spanking fascinating. They say even having or hearing conversations about spanking and discipline make them “feel a zing” that other people do not seem to share.

Some participants report exploring the BDSM scene (either online or in real life) in the past. None of the discipline relationship participants find BDSM satisfying enough to fulfill their desire for discipline and authority in a relationship with their partner. All participants report finding discipline relationship discussions online and from these areas finding a name for their identity. In this way, participants also had a type of coming out process. Not only to other online participants, but sometimes, to themselves. In her blog, one participant, Natty, compares delurking with coming out as gay:

In many ways I think the act of delurking on soc.sexuality.spanking [an older internet site pre-blog] five years ago really was a form of coming out, complete with coming out narrative, as it is for so many people introducing themselves in online forums. And the relief and euphoria that accompany finding other people like you probably is similar in some ways to the excitement T. felt when he first started dating and fucking guys, even if it lacks the pain and profound lifestyle change being gay was for my Arab-Catholic godfather.  
(Natty 2007 <http://nattyspanked.blogspot.com/2007/11/coming-out.html>)

Natty's quote shows how she shifts her view of non-normative discipline sexuality from within the dominant culture to within a non-normative culture. The dominant culture informs discipline culture, but more importantly, it informs how participants understand their sexuality, especially before they come out to themselves. When participants explore the online community they often report recognizing themselves. Carla, a submissive woman in a discipline relationship explains, "Once I, myself, understood that it was discipline and leadership I desired, not just spanking, I realized immediately what I had been truly fantasizing about most of my life." Carla's decision to do something about it was sparked by finding people online to talk about it, reading discipline stories, and ultimately, making the decision to seek a partner who could meet her need for discipline. Until Carla found the online discipline community and came out to herself, she defined her discipline needs and wants using the language of the dominant culture rather than the discipline relationship culture.

Like Carla, Ella says she was 40 years old and married almost a decade when she finally discovered discipline relationships online. She had always assumed she had a "sexual fetish" when she found a discipline relationship community by performing a Yahoo search for "How to Spank." She and her

husband had explored erotic spanking but it always left her feeling “unfulfilled and empty,” as though she were “emotionally missing” something in her life. Hoping to find a way to explain her desire for discipline and authority, not just sexual spanking, Ella read the *Loving Domestic Discipline* articles from the online community and found a way to “relay my true feelings to my husband.” Relieved to finally have a language help her, she wrote a letter to her husband telling him that she did not have a sexual fetish but actually she wanted his authority. “I wanted my husband to take charge and assert his authority.” He read her letter and they talked about it. When he realized she wanted more than sexual spanking he understood her “true feelings” they began practicing a discipline relationship that fulfilled Ella’s desire for discipline and authority. Ella and her husband now read and contribute to domestic discipline communities and practice an LDD relationship.

Understanding and viewing non-normative sexuality through (their own) non-normative lenses enables participants to understand their own unnamed desires and come out. Darnell Moore (2012) describes the process of accepting one’s non-normative identity and educating others as “inviting in.” Inviting in involves political acts and allows participants to move beyond the labels inscribed by the dominant culture. Educating each other about discipline relationships allows participants with a discipline sexuality to invite each other in and come out. As I alluded to in my introduction, I view the acts of removing barriers to sexual pleasure as political acts. Barriers include unfulfilling and non-existent relationships, health issues, sexual shame, cultural values, and difficulties processing their identities. Coming out and inviting in also allows participants to discuss their sexuality framed through their own discipline relationship culture.

Most participants describe various paradoxical and contradictory reasons for needing discipline. For them, receiving discipline fills more than erotic needs. It is within the context of a relationship that participants desire authority and discipline to bring them pleasure and satisfaction. To have a discipline relationship, one must necessarily have a willing and consenting partner who actually practices disci-

pline. Without all these elements, one has no discipline relationship. Instead, one has a non-normative sexuality, no one with whom to receive (or administer) discipline, and more barriers to sexual pleasure. Discipline is more than just sex or spanking for participants. When asked whether they found discipline sexually arousing most participants indicate that spanking and discipline is central to their sexual identity but discipline is not just sexual for them. While not all participants believe discipline and spanking erotic, but also connected to intimacy, control, emotional connection and their sexuality in some way. In the following section I explore the explanations and reasons members give for desiring discipline.

#### **4.2 Why Do I Want Discipline? Explanations and Reasons for Needing Discipline**

Once participants come out to themselves about their needs and desires for discipline relationships, they reasons to explain why they want discipline in their lives. Participants base their explanations and reasons on their cultural values and political beliefs. I explore these beliefs in the next section – “How and Why to Practice? Beliefs about Discipline Relationships.” As participants come to understand how to describe and express their desire for a discipline relationship by creating a language for it they further embrace the language used within discipline relationship culture. Most participants used, at one time or another, all the culturally dominant themes in the discipline community to explain why they wanted discipline. However, depending on their circumstances, participants tend to distinguish one or two reasons why they need discipline more than others.

As I came to understand discipline relationship as an identity, relationship, and culture, I recognized the inherent contradictions in using only one explanation for desires or identity. I also found it important to understanding how participants explain barriers and dissatisfaction in their personal lives and the actions they take to solve them (through online discussions, talking with their partners, and sometimes, identifying and their needs and why they have them). Broader discipline tropes for why people want discipline relationships include: enhancing communication, repairing relationships, modifying behavior, releasing guilt and stress, feeling safe and protected, and re-parenting their inner child.

Naming their identity and creating explanations for why they desire discipline relationships often happens at the same time. It is often similar to recognizing that one is not a lesbian, but is in fact, bi-sexual, or perhaps queer. When dialogue occurs between participants on their blogs or online discussions, I saw how their identities are fluid, and can be expressed and change over time.

It is important to note that the explanations and reasons for discipline relationships intersect and overlap. Their explanations are not distinct or concrete. People can express multiple explanations over time as they experience multiple desires and needs. I created the categories and names for explanations and beliefs to better understand my participants and to describe discipline relationship sexuality in my research. While most of them use the terms I finally took to create the names, they would likely not recognize or categorize themselves this way. Participants loosely organize themselves organically online by picking communities and affiliating with friends of similar beliefs. The vast differences between the different participants led me to recognize how they do similar behaviors and activities (discipline) but often for very different reasons. Some participants say one thing and do another (either consciously or unconsciously) while others seem more straightforward about their reasons for wanting discipline. With this in mind, I hope to show how participants explain their reasons for wanting discipline and how these explanations create meaning in their choices.

***Explanation: Enhance Communication & Repair Relationship***

Promotes communication, builds trust and respect.
Saves or enhances relationship and brings harmony back to a difficult relationship.
Removes resentment rather than letting it build
Releases bad feelings for harming relationship.
Allows aroused couples to have sex and restore more intimacy.

**Table 4.1 Explanation for Wanting Discipline: Communication & Relationship Repair**

The most popular explanations for desiring a discipline relationship are to enhance communication and to repair relationships. Many participants believe spanking and discipline promote intimacy,



trust, and communication. Markham (2007) describes removal of resentment and restoration of harmony. Participants who use contracts follow explicit rules and written agreements. Participants explain that relationships run better because dominant partners automatically win any fights by having the “ultimate authority” and “final say” in the relationship. They believe discipline removes the potential for built up resentment and bad feelings from harming the relationship. Connecting by cuddling, kissing, and reassurance after discipline is also important (Markham 2005:141-142).

Sites and manuals dedicated to discipline lifestyles explain how to use discipline effectively. One such site is the Disciplinary Wives Club (DWC 2007), dedicated to submissive men who seek dominant woman who are the head of the house (HoH). It mirrors the Taken in Hand (TIH) site where the men are considered natural HoHs. This quote from the DWC explains one perspective of submissive men fairly well:

First of all, let's look at the facts. Men in our culture are generally raised with the idea that everything be done for them, or some variation on that theme. But they also realize that is the definition of a Brat! That is why the best of them acknowledge and ask for spanking. Too bad they will never change enough to the point that they no longer require over-the-knee reminders of this. The problem is that men who feel thus entitled can be overly insistent and demanding about their spanking desires.

Communication is the basis of relationship. No one likes to be blamed, put down, ignored or in any way made to feel less than her partner. Open communication is a lot more than just telling her what you want. It is about hearing and deeply feeling what she wants. Simply, you have to give to get in this world. (DWC 2007)

No matter what discipline lifestyles are called or who is submissive or dominant, people using this explanation give fairly standard explanations using terms like “repair,” and “communication.” One submissive man who is currently in a discipline relationship gives this explanation: “I believe this [discipline] is the best way to resolve issues within a relationship. I believe it requires love, commitment, and a general understanding from all parties for it all to work” (DWC survey 2007). In her telephone interview, Janet, submissive woman in a discipline relationship says: “When it’s working it [discipline] saves

the relationship.” She describes feeling never feeling happier, more loved, or more taken care of. However, when it isn’t working, she feels their relationship lacks both “connection and communication.”

“Discipline is a tool” is a common refrain and one I heard in many contexts, not only for repairing a relationship but also for many reasons connected to receiving discipline. In the context of relationship repair, participants use the metaphor of discipline as tool repeatedly. For instance, Kathy, views a breakdown in relationships as being both repaired by discipline and calls discipline a tool to achieve that connection. She also believes her discipline relationship saved her marriage:

I consider DD as a tool we use to achieve that connection and spiritual bonding when it breaks down. Take a computer for instance. When it breaks down you call a computer repair person as a "tool" to fix it. Yeah, you pay and it hurts, but it does the trick and you are up and running again in no time. We do consider DD a blessing. It saved our marriage and our sanity, that’s for sure!

When I asked participants to describe exactly how discipline saves a relationship, many repeated the trope without giving real examples. The idea that discipline saves the relationship is expressed and repeated throughout manuals and interviews. However, many more participants appear frustrated when discipline does not work or disappointed with a lack of willing partner to participate with them. Perhaps saving the relationship is more of a fantasy or hope than a reality. For these people, the strong desire to remove barriers to intimacy in their relationships, believe what they have been told about discipline, and have their discipline needs met combine into an almost futile self-help experience of saving themselves and saving their relationship. These participants appear to listen to the stories with good outcomes and ignore the bad outcomes. Participants, (often submissive partners), say something more, often less articulated. When a submissive person in a relationship asks for spanking and discipline to meet discipline needs, they receive authority and a more fully invested partner. This dominant partner contributes to the relationship and makes a reciprocating emotional investment. Thus discipline allows both dominant and submissive partners to be more vulnerable and intimate with each other. Against the framework of male dominance and female submission, this story sounds like a mere reproduction of

patriarchy in the dominant culture. But I extend discipline relationship sexuality beyond gender when I view same sex partnerships and submissive men who seek partners. These submissive participants must all navigate the barriers to their discipline relationship sexuality. In this way, getting one's partner to take more responsibility for a relationship or be more active and do their share of the emotional labor becomes the subtext to many people's discipline stories. Using discipline fills both needs – their sexual needs and getting absent partners more involved.

***Explanation: Behavior Modification***

Used as a guiding principle for proponents of deterring and punishing misbehavior
Belief that discipline lifestyles are useful for providing corrective corporal discipline.
Submissive partners want to change behavior and be held accountable for actions.
Dominant partner's role is to provide moral and behavioral guidance through punishment as persuasion.

**Table 4.2 Explanation for Wanting Discipline: Behavior Modification**

Some participants give the definition of discipline relationships as behavior modification or correction (as opposed to relationship repair). Almost all participants use some variation of behavior modification as a reason for desiring discipline. They either say they require discipline to correct behavior, add structure, or they wish to correct a partner's "misbehavior." Participants who explain the need for discipline based on behavior modification often list specific behaviors they want to correct. Submissive men and women invoke the explanation as a need to change their behavior and be held accountable for their actions, similar to attending the gym with a workout buddy. They want their dominant partners to discipline and punish their bad behaviors (and sometimes offer praise and rewards for meeting goals and good behavior). Other participants say the accountability of behavior modification makes them feel safe and that structure makes them feel in control. Both submissive and dominant participants use similar explanations, though their language varies depending on their belief and how they frame their justification. Sometimes they say discipline reforms "feminine misbehavior" (LDD 2006) or "deter[s] male entitled attitudes" (DWC 2007).

In her interview, Holly said, “Domestic discipline is not just spanking, it is accountability. It involves the man holding his spouse accountable for her responsibilities and her behavior.” Tanya says discipline works for structure but describes behaviors she wants to modify rather than emotions: “It [discipline] works best as a way of giving me structure. It wouldn’t work as a way of keeping me from feeling negative emotions or struggling with my various [emotional] issues but it works for concrete things like whether I have eaten or being unacceptably rude—that sort of thing.” Discipline offers structure and control – both appears to give these participants comfort and a feeling of safety.

During our phone interview Lilly, a submissive woman in a discipline relationship, describes discipline, control, and sexuality this way:

I think it’s a complex issue. There is a sexual element to it [discipline] even most definitively a sexual element, even if I’m not thinking of sex when I establish that goal or being disciplined. But I’m sure probably a great deal of why I was initially fantasizing about it [discipline] since I was a kid had something to do with sexuality on a level I don’t completely understand. I think some of it reflects that. I tend to like order and particularly being someone who is ill a lot of the time, having someone there to help with that [order and control] is very helpful.

In her discussion of SM sexuality, power, consensual violence and eroticism, Newmahr (2011:127) writes: “Even when SM is not understood as sex, it is sexually relevant for participants.” Using Newmahr’s framework of sexual relevancy I build on the idea that discipline relationship behaviors are sexually relevant to participants even when they claim there are nonsexual or asexual elements to their discipline needs. For Lilly, control and discipline are intimately connected. While she acknowledges the sexual elements for discipline she also expresses a desire for control. Lilly says that she is chronically ill. Because of illness she does not always know how her body will react or what health crisis she will deal with. During Lilly’s interview (and on the periphery of some participants who deal with stressful life events) I hear her not-quite-articulated desire not only to be controlled but also to have more control over her life. Lilly deals with MS and goes to physical therapy. She says navigating health issues is difficult for her, especially because few people understand what it’s like. Lilly is also highly edu-

cated (twelve participants report having Bachelor's degrees, seven report Master's degrees or being currently enrolled in a graduate program, ABD status, or having an advanced or graduate degree). Most submissive participants say they needed or wanted discipline during school to maintain deadlines. When participants (like Lilly) describe their education they say they have especially deep need for discipline and control during their stressful times and find classes, thesis, dissertations stressful. Receiving discipline enforces the structure and controls "the chaos" these participants feel they lack (and want).

Participants often use intent laden words such as "modifying harmful or negative behaviors" to describe behavior modification. For example, Jodi, a submissive woman says, "My spouse doesn't spank me for his pleasure. It's to correct my behavior." She says they do not use formal rules in their household, but Jodi says she needs to be respectful at all times and "control her tongue." She herself asked for a discipline relationship because she wanted her husband to "hold me accountable for my actions since I can't seem to control my temper on my own." Ella also says she and her husband use discipline to control her "negative behaviors and make me accountable for choices and decisions that are negative." She believes discipline "corrects and deters negative behavior that is harmful to the woman, man, or family." In her case, Ella says overspending harms her family and when she receives punishment, it clears the air and helps her. She gave a very detailed account of how they use discipline and rules in their household. She provided a sample of her discipline contract with lists of rules, punishments, and behavior improvements she has noticed, as well as a sample of the journal she keeps.

***Explanation: Guilt & Stress Release via Self-harm***

Spanking emotionally cathartic (Vivian 2009b 43).
Desire for spanking transcends sexual orientation and gender of the discipliner
Perfection seeking. Displayed in good girl good boy phenomena.
Search for wholeness and cleansing.
Element of self-harming similar to cutting or over-exercising (Wakeman 2007:68 ; Natty "Take it all Bitch" via Punishmentbook 2008).
Sometimes desire self-harm or masochism for the sensation alone – which offers a cathartic and endorphin release (Forbes 2011: 6)

**Table 4.3 Explanation for Wanting Discipline: Guilt & Stress Release (via Self-harm)**

Participants who use these explanations emphasize catharsis, cleansing, and letting go of control (often through receiving control and discipline). Earlier, I discussed the notion of unconscious drive for perfectionism and rescue fantasies. Some participants who want discipline openly acknowledge this drive for perfectionism and the desire to remove guilt or stress by receiving discipline. When participants discuss guilt, they sometimes talk about it as generalized guilt and, other times they name it more specifically, like the guilt from damaging a relationship or from “harming themselves” by holding themselves back or not meeting their own standards. For these participants, receiving discipline allows a cathartic release and becomes a mechanism for removing their guilt. Some submissive participants explain a desire for discipline to relieve the stresses of their daily lives. They talk about asking for (and sometimes receiving) “stress relief spankings” from their partners. Stress-relief spanking fits within the dynamics of discipline relationship the same way erotic spanking or “good girl/good boy spanking” does. They can be used but are not necessarily part of the power dynamic of the discipline relationship. However, some participants report that not receiving discipline or receiving inconsistent discipline creates stress and tension. This led me to view wanting and receiving discipline as a type of imposed self-harm to receive sensation or catharsis (Forbes 2011).

Participants describe perfection as seeking as a search for wholeness. Some express this search as a desperation or longing. Natty writes, “in my heart I was desperate to be a good girl.” (Punishmentbook 2005). The search for wholeness often involves the removal of tension (guilt or stress) and a type of catharsis or renewal. In her interview, Janet talks about using discipline to get rid of her “nagging feeling of unresolved guilt.” For her, discipline works if she breaks established rules or if she feels bad because she “was bitchy” to her partner. She says, “I’ve never had anything better for getting away unresolved guilt.” Janet also describes “unconscious bratting” in a relationship as “human nature.” She describes “unconscious bratting” (as opposed to purposeful bratting) as occurring because

“you’re unaware and stressed out.” Janet says a discipline relationship “is a stress reliever. It allows me to cry and rant and get emotions out. It’s up to me to know when I need stress relief.” Janet believes “safe boundaries and safe consequences” from discipline as well as the erotic components of spanking make discipline compelling for many people.

Natty, blogging in the *Punishment Book*, (2006) connects guilt and punishment to her own sexuality when she writes: “On some level, guilt can also (and maybe even instead of) produce arousal or excitement, especially when connected to punishment, instead of just shame.” Natty’s attraction to discipline for arousal resonates with many submissive people. In the DWC survey (2007) this submissive man says: “It is the forgiveness afterwards which was never given in my life. All sins lived a life of their own forever. . . .” I consider these statements not just explorations of their own sexuality (and seeking sexual pleasure as political act in themselves), but deeper reflections of the dominant culture. Guilt and punishment take on ritual significance. Participants’ search for forgiveness indicates a culturally imbedded drive for purification and cleansing through punishment.

***Explanation: Feel Safe & Protected***

Makes submissive partner feel safe & content
Express need for protection by authority figure
Makes dominant partner happy & satisfied to care for submissive partner’s needs
Shared vulnerability & intimacy. Spanking emotionally intimate (Vivian 2009b 44).

**Table 4.4 Explanation for Wanting Discipline: Feel Safe & Protected**

When a discipline relationship works well, (when partners meet each other’s needs for discipline) submissive partners express feeling safe and whole. Dominant partners often express feeling happy and complete when they are able to fulfill their partner’s needs for discipline. In her manual, Vivian (2009b) believes the intimacy of consensual spanking builds trust, and releases tension, fostering this

sense of safety. In my interview with Demi, she repeated the words, “I feel safe, I just feel safe,” like a mantra. Later, her partner Liam said to me, “I feel good knowing that Demi trusts me.” Janet described a similar feeling of safety and satisfaction in her discipline relationship saying: “I’ve never been happier in a relationship. I’ve been married and divorced and in a serious relationship. I’ve never felt more safe, more loved, more taken care of when it’s working and I think he feels the same way. . . . And the whole thing feels safe and balanced and right.”

In many ways feeling safe and happy (by meeting sexual and relationship needs) makes sense. In the same way participants express frustration and dissatisfaction when they meet barriers to their sexual pleasure express satisfaction and contentment when they no longer experience these barriers. Submissive participants express fantasies about safety. They even express feeling safe just fantasizing about having their needs met. Specifically, they believe a discipline relationship would make them feel safe, even if they have never been in one before. This submissive man (DWC 2007:27-28) talks about his views of a relationship and spanking saying:

Before the spanking (I imagine) it is the knowledge that I could be spanked that is arousing. After the spanking, with a warm, red bottom, I would feel her love. During a spanking, it just hurts! But the most important thing is the maternal nurturing aspect of being watched over, taken care of, and disciplined, and loved in it.

The quote shows how deeply fantasy about discipline forms the narratives for people desiring a discipline lifestyle. Another submissive man expresses similar views. In his case, the desire to feel understood and be vulnerable surpasses or equals his fantasy about a discipline relationship that he expresses here:

The idea of being across a woman's lap to receive a spanking is overwhelming, and the sense that she has total control and possession stirs me profoundly. The sense of trust and commitment also penetrate my soul and make me feel very close and loved by the woman. While the feeling may be humiliating I also somehow feel protected. Amazingly this comes from only professional sessions, so I imagine the feelings would be even more profound in an actual relationship. I hope I find one.



It appears that the fantasy of discipline becomes mixed with the idea of protection. Not only submissive men, but also submissive women express this desire for protection. One submissive woman commented on a now defunct blog, "There is also the sexual aspect of it, there is nothing more appealing than a dominant male figure loving me enough to protect me, because to me domestic discipline is a form of protection." Protection, safety, and authority appeal to these people. (I ask, protection from what or whom? I wait to hear the larger story within these explanations). Escapism from life becomes more apparent when contextualized with fantasy rather than real discipline experiences. Janet talks about women who use fantasies to escape reality and not communicate to their partners:

Some women have this fantasy that they don't have to communicate or negotiate and their partner will do everything right and everything will be great. They invariably get crushed. This woman writes about it saying 'This is what I want and what I want you do to.' And she got this terrible response from her husband. She was devastated. And I'm like, what did you expect? You're literally asking him to change and do something he could go jail for and you don't want to talk about it with him? That's really not fair to him is it?

This escapist fantasy of discipline relationships often becomes a central focus for participants. It is similar to people who obsessively focus on any fix for the (cultural ills) problems in their life. Weight loss, plastic surgery, discipline -- anything can become a central focus people fantasize about as a mystical fix to all problems. Rather than fantasize, Janet says women should focus on reality. She says work, like communication, and dealing with getting a discipline relationship right corrodes the fantasy that discipline relationships "just happen." Accepting the reality of experiences rather than mystical fantasies (instant connection, soul mate) reduces the mythic proportions of the discipline relationship. By accepting reality, the lived experiences of discipline relationships (like feeling understood and building trust) might potentially come to fruition.

Participants who accept the reality of their experiences still express satisfaction in their relationships (when their discipline relationships go well). Dominant partners (like Ron) express deep satisfaction feeling they provide a sense of safety and protection and stability for their partners. The Boss ech-

oes this sentiment of mutual happiness and trust in discipline relationships. He describes how disciplining a woman makes the woman feel safe and content, which makes the man feel happy as well.

The way serious disciplinary spanking works is not by acting as a deterrent, but in this more indirect way. It makes the woman feel an incredible sense of peace, contentment, and passionate love, and that makes her want to do anything and everything she can to please her man. And when his woman loves to please him and is peaceful, happy and always wanting him, the man is happy and relaxed too. (TIH 2003)

At a Surrendered Wives workshop, the leader, Laney, also discusses this mutual happiness in discipline relationships. Laney describes the ideal relationship submissive women should have with their partners. She repeatedly says that allowing your husband to make you happy is allowing him to fulfill your wants. “Women have wants, husbands want to make their wives happy. Ninety-eight percent of the time, I’m getting what I want. The odds are in my favor. If I say what I want, and don’t repeat it, he’ll hear me and try to make me happy. It’s when I nag him that he shuts me off and doesn’t listen.” (Field Notes 2006). In The Surrendered Wives’ workshop Laney talked about letting go, saying “I can’t” and allowing husbands their masculinity. She talked about trusting your husband to protect your needs and being vulnerable to him and expressing appreciation to him when he does a good job for you. Laney said: “Men like to make their wives happy. Women want to be cared for and protected. It’s simple really.” I found these ideas of pleasing and making people happy contradictory until I recognized the overarching story in my field notes. Feeling understood and meeting unmet needs, feeling safe and feeling happy comes up repeatedly in interviews.

***Explanation: Re-parenting & Lost Childhood***

Care-taking inner child with focuses on a loving parent who made us the center of the universe and made our needs the first priority.
Memories or fantasies of childhood spankings flavor the current desires
Express need for affection, attention, love, forgiveness, and cleansing
Spanking therapy helpful in “re-parenting” and giving loving discipline and desired structure. Can be healing process from childhood abuse if done by trusted disciplinarian (Vivian 2009a :36)
Problematically, it can re-trigger trauma of childhood abuse for people who have been sexually or physically abused (Vivian 2009b:158)
Spanking can heal damaged parts of the psyche (Vivian 2009b:42).

**Table 4.5 Explanation for Wanting Discipline: Re-parenting & Lost Childhood**

In many ways this explanation feels the most complex to understand and describe. Some participants explain a desire for discipline as caretaking of their inner child or healing damaged parts of their psyche (Vivian 2009b:158). Some say memories and fantasies of childhood spanking and discipline (or missing discipline from their childhood) flavors their current desires. For these participants, this regression to childhood allows participants to express their need for affection, attention, trust, love, and to (re)build or re-live and heal the boundaries of childhood. Some participants want to cry like children and feel comforted afterward. Others felt too responsible as grown ups, so releasing the chains of responsibility through spanking and discipline momentarily allows them a way to connect to their childlike sexuality and at the same time temporarily give control to someone else. For many participants, the boundaries of safety and giving up control seemed blurry. For example when a submissive man says, “I don’t know why, but it [discipline] makes me feel loved. It’s a need for affection.” (DWC survey 2007), I understand this as a childhood need for love and affection. Citing his childhood, this submissive man describes how his relationship with his wife improved after his wife began spanking him. “My wife is the only woman who has ever spanked me. I explained my childhood (or, more correctly, my lack of a childhood), and the anxiety I still feel today. I eventually asked her to spank me to help relieve that anxiety. We both saw an immediate improvement and spanking has become a regular part of our relationship.” (DWC survey 2007:38). Participants see loving parents as people who “does this for your own good,” and say, “it hurts me more than it hurts you.” Seeking discipline to feel loved, participants desire the safety that childhood and a loving parent represents.

Tanya describes her own inner children and subsequent need for discipline and structure:

I craved firm consistent, safe limits most of my life. I really wanted that feeling of safety that went along with having rules and boundaries and consequences for my actions. . . . It became clear that I am multiple. There are a lot of teenaged and younger parts [inside me] and they all have a non-sexual relationship with my partner. We found that for all of them, having clear lim-

its and rules was helpful. Not all of them need the same things but since [partner's name] already had structures in place, we modified it to meet the needs of the various parts of me.

Few people specifically express their identity as “multiple” the way Tanya does, but many say they want nurturing or need discipline for their inner child. Lilly also considers her desire for spanking and discipline a way to parent herself by providing discipline. She explains that her sexuality expresses itself as a child in need of a parent. “That doesn't mean that I am a child. If I was, this whole [discipline] construct would be entirely inappropriate.” Lilly says she was expected to be a “little adult” as a child, and believes that the lack of a strong parental figure impacted her desire for discipline and spanking. She says, “I don't know that it would have affected if I was interested in spanking -- but it has in this particular form of spanking.” Understanding sexuality and identity allows participants to not only come to terms with their desire for discipline, but also explore bigger meanings like, “why?” That so many participants using a re-parenting explanation have neglectful or abusive pasts points to two things. Firstly, when reaching to understand themselves and make meaning of non-normative sexuality participants use popular psychological tropes such as traumatic childhoods and absent parents (after they get over feeling sexual shame). Secondly, most people are not asked to defend or make meaning about their normative sexuality or identity. I wonder how many participants would search so hard for explanations of missing childhoods or absent parents if they did not feel compelled to create these explanations for their discipline relationship sexuality.

Lilly continues to explain how she feels about discipline:

There's an element of feeling childlike and coming from a place of feeling cared about. It's not exactly a parent child relationship but there is an element of that -- a flavoring of it. For me particularly I didn't grow up with my father and my mom wasn't particularly parental and I always wanted parents growing up and I think my personality expresses itself from a place of childhood and longing for that parental role I didn't get growing up.

By describing how their child (and teen) parts who want discipline and structure Lilly and Tanya express one of the common explanations why participants say they want discipline. Tanya talks about fantasizing about discipline as a child and wanting to go to boarding school to have more discipline, structure, and a

sense of having people show they cared about her. For her, as for many of these participants, the discipline represents structure that heals the wounds of uninvolved, neglectful, or abusive parents.

Understanding discipline from this perspective complicates sexuality and sexual pleasure. When discussing the childlike parts of her as distinct from her adult sexual parts, Tanya minimizes the sexuality of children (and possibly her own sexuality). Vivian (2009b:42-23), discussing how spankings can heal the wounded inner child by giving submissive people a second chance to deal with “absent, neglectful, or overtly abusive parenting.” She touches on the erotic nature of spanking, but tacitly ignores what it means to be a child. Perhaps touching on the power dynamics of parent-child relationships requires the silence of children’s real sexuality and the tacit ignoring of how children (and adult women made to look like children) are often sexualized. Vivian (2009b:41) writes the “emotional release” of a spanking gives her “permission to be all girl.” Perhaps her language is accidental or unconscious. Though, I cannot help but wonder at the infantilizing language to discuss submitting to a discipline (shifting from men and women to “all girl”) when discussing an actual spanking.

As many participants talk about re-parenting or wanting to heal by recreating discipline from a lost childhood, none delve into the sexual nature of children in general. But children do have sexuality. They are not suddenly sexual beings because they turn a certain age. And as children we constantly explore our sexuality and our sexual boundaries. Childhood sexuality is problematic only because of the ease by which children are abused and victimized by people in power over them. Yet, in our culture we do not discuss children as sexual beings; rather, people in power market and commodify children’s sexuality. Perhaps because participants express their sexuality through discipline looking at the sexual nature of children and childhood spanking feels more compelling and more taboo for them to discuss (or even admit to themselves). I asked each participant if and how discipline relationships were like spanking a child. Participants expressing their desire for spanking and discipline to recreate and heal their inner child, often ignore (or explicitly deny) the sexual nature of children. But some acknowledge the po-

tential sexual nature of spanking and how children might find it confusing. Participants who want discipline to recreate childhood or re-parent say they want to feel vulnerable. None of my participants discussed wanting to explore their sexuality innocently or freely. Perhaps their sexuality is linked not only to the quest for discipline but in some ways because receiving sexual (and asexual) pleasure means allowing (and expressing) their child identity. But there is no language (not even academic language) to discuss adults both fearing and using the needs and sexuality of their own inner child (not as role play, age-play, and not as BDSM) as an expression of their identity. Using discipline to explore their inner-children by recreating nurturing safety, and admitting they find childhood and childlike vulnerability erotic is something I see participants of discipline relationships adding to the discussion of sexuality and sex research.

#### **4.3 How and Why To Practice? Beliefs about Discipline Relationships**

Beliefs and values, (filtered through both the dominant and the discipline culture) about discipline, relationships, religion, and politics inform the explanations and reasons participants offer. These beliefs are as contradictory and diverse as the participants of discipline relationships. Some participants critique the gendered language of the dominant culture. Other participants resent the invisibility of discipline relationships within the broader culture and seek a unified language and discipline relationship identity. Some participants express their dissatisfaction at feeling forced to figure out how to live a non-normative lifestyle on their own. Many more participants chose to be out online but choose not to disclose their discipline relationship status to most people in order to stay “respectable and credible” with the outside world (Sullivan 2001: 245).

Most participants loosely organize around online communities with the same belief systems. That is, participants with religious beliefs often post more on communities dedicated to CDD or LDD; participants with politically active feminist views often post on the *Punishment Book* or blog solo. I de-

scribe the different beliefs religious, archetypal and energetic, hardwiring, and politically active feminist and attempt to show how these values and beliefs influence participants.

### **Religious Beliefs**

Give scriptural, (usually Biblical), reasons
Husband determined head of household, wife submits to husband and God.
Often labeled Christian Domestic Discipline (CDD)
Couples must be married and both partners Christians to have a CDD relationship
Blame feminist movements for divorce rates and breakdown of marriages
Belief if husbands disciplined their wives all marriages would be more stable.

**Table 4.6 Beliefs about Discipline Relationships: Religious**

Participants who base their value system (thus discipline relationships) on religious dictums emphasize living “God assigned roles” in their marriage (Kelley 2007: 9:53). They explain their desires as revolving around their religion (usually Christianity). Most CDD manuals focus on Bible verses and religious reasons to practice discipline relationships. Bulldog (2011a:loc 88) author of two CDD manuals, *Order of Marriage and Christian Domestic Discipline*, writes, “as a husband, you are the head of your household. You, not your wife shall be held accountable by God for the condition of your household.” Throughout his manuals, Bulldog (2011a and b) gives numerous Biblical verses about wifely obedience and submission and a husband’s duty and Biblical commands requiring men to maintain authority in his home. In the first chapter, “My Advice to the Husband,” Bulldog (2011a:loc 64) cites Ephesians 5:21-27 “Be in subjection to one another in reverence to Christ, wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord, our owner. For the husband is lord and master of the wife in the same manner Christ is Lord and Master of the Church.” He continues to write about wives’ duties and husbands’ freeing wives from spiritual defilement (presumably through discipline and spanking). “I’ve never known a Christian woman who believed in observing the Biblical role as well as duties of a wife, who was looking for a weakling. She was looking for a MAN.” [emphasis his] (Bulldog 2011a:loc64).

According to Bulldog, (and many CDD communities) a real man loves his wife enough to discipline her and shows his love through his authority. Failing in manhood means failing not only God, but

masculinity. In *Understanding Christian Domestic Discipline*, Leah Kelley (2010:loc:54) points to the fall of Eve and makes women complicit in upholding both Biblical masculinity and femininity when she writes:

If you can separate what modern culture has taught you from what the Bible actually teaches, you might just come to understand that the *husband was sanctioned by the Lord to be the authority in a marriage, and that authority is not true authority without the means of that enforcement* [emphasis hers]. Furthermore you might come to see *that discipline is strongly associated with love in the Bible* and that *corporal punishment was Biblically sanctioned* [emphasis hers].

By associating discipline and punishment with love, masculine authority with delivering that love, and feminine receptivity with receiving that love -- CDD proponents essentialize gender and make discipline relationships a religious imperative. Kelley (2007:9) describes wives as being Biblically instructed to be respectful and submit to their husbands, saying they are “ordained by God” to create a better marriage. Kelley also points out that husbands are forbidden to be “harsh” to their wives and must and behave lovingly. But a loving husband disciplines his wife, and a good wife submissively accepts and receives discipline from her husband. These basic principals describe the beliefs around CDD for participants who practice discipline relationships for religious reasons.

When I spoke to participants who adhered to CDD practices, many of them express similar theological beliefs, denying any correlation between similarities to non-Christians who practice discipline relationships. For these participants it seems “being not of the world” and saying they keep a “God-centered marriage” matters most -- even if they do and say similar things to non-Christians. For example, during her interview, Allison explained the differences between typical discipline relationships and CDD relationships. She points out that in regular discipline relationships, “one party has authority over the other, usually by spanking. A CDD or Christian Domestic Discipline relationship is practiced inside a marriage with the husband being the one in authority according to scripture.” Allison (and many CDD participants) uses the language of scripture to justify the desire for discipline and authority. She de-



scribes why she wants a CDD relationship, focusing on religious mandates and tropes found within the dominant culture. Her values are characteristic of most proponents of CDD:

Since God is a loving God and He created us [women] to be followers, it is inbred in us to be happiest in that role. Part of the curse was that we would no longer easily follow our husband but rather try to control him. Since we have a sin nature, we have a hard time submitting and willing following. But we are still happiest when we do exactly that. CDD puts us back into the place where we can submit and willing follow; thus we are happy again. That is why we are so peaceful after discipline and why we can curl up in his lap and feel forgiven and clean. All our rebellion with all its ugliness is gone.

Allison sounds almost like a minister. Until I probe her for deeper explanations and answers, her responses sound almost rehearsed. Then I remembered many religious people learn rote explanations and rhetoric by attending church and listening to sermons and ministers. Participants of CDD communities create even more religious rhetoric behind their discipline relationships because they spend so much time justifying and defending their discipline relationship desires as God-centered rather than as a sexual desire. For many of them, acknowledging their sexuality is sinful so saying discipline is Biblically mandated reframes their desires as positive rather than undesirably “of the flesh” and “of the world.” For instance, when I ask Allison about actual CDD practices in her home, she states: “CDD is not an idol. It is not supposed to occupy all your thoughts. The main focus is on keeping a Godly marriage and household. CDD is only a tool that keeps the correct balance of power and authority in marriage according to Holy Scriptures.” During our interview, Allison (and most Christian participants) takes care to subtly remind me that religion and God center her desires. Differentiating themselves from “worldly desires” and “desires of the flesh” is important to CDD participants. Without these distinctions (Christian discipline versus non-Christian discipline) CDD participants cannot maintain a God-centered home.

Again, the idea of discipline as a tool comes up in the context of balancing power in a marriage. Yet, Allison, in a nod to The Ten Commandments, suggests discipline should “not be an idol.” In her own way, Allison criticizes other women who allow their desire for discipline and sexual pleasure to be great-

er than their desire to serve their husbands and serve God. Within the context of discipline relationship and the blaming and controlling nature of religion, it appears easier for some women (like Allison) to chastise women who want discipline. This chastisement appears even more apparent when they feel sexual urges for pleasure or relationship desires then feel guilty for putting their spanking and discipline desires as an idol before God, one “occupying all their thoughts.” I have already discussed the cycle of guilt and release in the guilt and stress release section. With an understanding of how the (real or fantasized) process of guilt and release work I recognize a certain amount of religious guilt comes imbedded in our culture.

Adding to the religious guilt and blame, many CDD participants use the trope, “don’t be unequally yoked” -- yoked means both to a non-Christian and to a man who does not offer proper discipline and authority (not a real man). The implication for religious participants means a “good Christian” and a “real man” necessarily offers authority, leadership, and the discipline his wife wants and needs. And a good wife and a good woman naturally wants that leadership and wants to submit and accept this leadership. A “real man” as Kelley (2010:loc 54) states, has not only God and scripture to back him, but the “means of that enforcement.” In this case, he has bigger muscles, more power, and the ability to overpower and discipline his wife, even if she resists him (*Taming the Shrew* combined with religious authority to back it up). The tropes throughout the CDD manuals and communities seek to explain the benefits of CDD community membership. That there were fewer divorces when men spanked their wives more, hence, if more men spanked their wives, women would be more submissive and more content with masculine authority; more submissive women would result in fewer divorces, and thus, happier marriages and homes. CDD religious tropes blame women and shame men.

I heard no discussions about abuse in marriage and divorce. Many sources say that a real man does not abuse his wife, purportedly because “he is accountable to God for his actions.” Instead, the messages of CDD question the masculinity of men who cannot or will not discipline their wives. In his

interview, James, a dominant man in a CDD relationship says giving his wife discipline, authority, and leadership is his “responsibility and duty as a husband.” In other words, a real man submits to God’s authority first, and maintains his home according to God’s command. He says he offers his wife guidance, disciplining her for her misbehavior because she requested it. James believes his authority reflects “Christ’s marriage to the Church,” and he has a right and a duty as a husband to maintain his household. To do otherwise reflects poorly on himself and his principles. James sees no inherent contradiction in disciplining his wife for her misbehavior even if he makes mistakes or does not live up to all the rules in the household (and receives no punishment). “That’s the way it works in our household, I don’t need permission to give my wife what she needs.”

Not everyone who practices religion uses religion to contextualize discipline relationships. Not all religious participants practice CDD. Some participants choose other types of discipline relationships. Some religious participants gave more nuanced or contradictory accounts of CDD or religious tenets on discipline when I asked them more in-depth questions about their religious beliefs and discipline practices. Or (not unexpectedly) sometimes participants’ day-to-day lives are different than they say. Some people say discipline brings them spiritual connection to their spouse but are not religiously dictated. During our interview, a submissive woman Kathy said, “I don't know anyone who uses DD as a way of being right with God. To be right with yourself and your partner, yes. The few Christian DD sites I've seen years ago have since disappeared [our interview was in 2007] or decided that DD wasn't ordained by God.” Kathy felt connected to her partner by using discipline but falsely ascribes the change in her beliefs to the change in the CDD sites. The CDD sites remain active and strong even in 2013. Their message remains the same. Their manuals remain as firmly dedicated and with Kindle and electronic publishing, more CDD manuals exist now than in 2007 when our interview took place. If Kathy felt very attached to religious beliefs to explain how and why discipline relationships should be done, not only would she be in a CDD relationship but her value system and online communities would reflect that.

Some participants feel vehemently anti-religious. Their views sometimes shift from religious practices after they leave the church. While some might still believe in biological or archetypal reasons for masculine dominance, others change their minds about discipline entirely. Janet discusses her stance with me in our first of two interviews:

I have a problem with the way Christians approach it [discipline relationships] because for the most part in general the Christian Church promotes the 'a man should be lord over the woman because she's inferior and too stupid to govern her own behavior.' They even put out pamphlets saying that. I get nervous for woman who are part of it [DD] for that [reason]. Because it [religion] perpetuates that woman are basically too childish and irrational and men have to do that for them. I'm like – no it's about being empowered not disempowered. I would be very suspicious for anyone who does it for a Christian point of view.

Perhaps her vocalized disenchantment with religion is silently echoed in the angry outbursts CDD women report. As they search for ways to “control tempers” and “hold their tongue” CDD women often seem quietly disenchanted and angry. I also heard from people who became disenchanted with religion entirely especially after life changing experiences. One submissive woman, Donna, became widowed after a twenty-two year discipline relationship marriage. She now says she practices “atheism the best and most scientific way I know how.” After her former husband died, Donna moved to a different region of the country and left her church. In her second marriage, they used discipline, though less regularly, but Donna no longer attributes her desire for it to religious mandates.

The world makes us want and need many things. It gives us many ways to meet those needs, even discipline and spanking if we so desire. In my case, I have so desired in both of my relationships. Thankfully, I have been blessed with two dominant men who have disciplined me when I want it and sometimes when I don't. And no, there is no God to explain why this works for me though in my youth I might have thought that.

By expressing her shifted perspective on religion, Donna recognizes she changed her views but not her discipline relationship sexuality or identity. Another woman who left her church, Audrey, said: “Five years ago I lost my identity by leaving the church I grew up in and I felt very lonely and isolated. My heart told me I belonged to my husband and that he was my authority instead of the church.” Audrey says she rejects the former teaching of her church because she “didn't feel it in her heart.” Instead, for

Audrey, it appears her discipline relationship become a type of religion for her. She exchanged her seemingly co-dependent relationship with her religion for one with her husband, with her life revolving around her husband's authority and submission to him.

I treat him [my husband] respectfully but not as an equal. We used to have long philosophical and theological debates that would go on for hours. It was great fun but we were definitely treating each other as equals. This now conflicts with my submission to him because I can't be under him and be equal to him at the same time. I don't want to go back and forth like that, being submissive when he's spanking me and on equal ground when we are talking or debating.

Audrey and her husband also lost most of their friends: "Our old friends avoid us even though they don't know he spans me. But they know he is in charge and it makes them uncomfortable." Audrey says her friends worry that she is "downtrodden" and are "irritated" by her changed relationship with her husband. She said to me, "It would be nice if we found at least one other couple here in [my large Midwestern city] to be friends with. Where they also live the same way with the man being head of the household." Audrey admits she "lost her identity." She appears to miss connection and friendship, seeking friends to replace the lost friendship of her husband and former social life. Audrey also appears to miss connection and relationship with herself. When searching for a (lost) sense of self-identity, perhaps it makes sense to search for one in the intimacy and vulnerability promoted by discipline to explore (rather than silence) her deeper needs.

Most participants reporting finding religious reasons for discipline online as a way to save their marriage or be more submissive wives. Jodi, a submissive woman in a discipline relationship, attends church, and maintains a regular blog as a way to understand her own beliefs about marriage and discipline.

I started searching the Internet for ways to control my tongue and to be a better Christian wife as God intended. I am a Catholic and I try to follow God's instructions on how wives should submit to their husbands. My mother always taught us girls to defer to our husbands on issues. We've always gone to church and Biblically speaking we're commanded to do just that.

For Jodi, anger and frustration, rather than peace bubbles over in her marriage. Most women in religious marriages do not overtly express their anger to me. Instead they focus on the peace and content-

ment they feel after receiving discipline. For some, the underlying message is to save or repair their marriage by getting their husband involved. Others use discipline to control their temper or disrespectful attitudes. Many participants talk about feeling trapped. Perhaps they feel trapped by religious dicta where women's equality is non-existent. Perhaps they feel constrained by maintaining images of happiness where moods, or tempers and displays of anger seem unfeminine and "against God." Perhaps they feel trapped in marriages with uninvolved partners or authoritarian partners and blame themselves (for doing femininity wrong) by not being submissive enough or accepting discipline correctly and being bad wives.

Some participants contextualize their religious beliefs and values by separating their discipline relationships from their religious beliefs. These participants unequivocally express their religious faith but deny using CDD or any form of discipline in their relationship based on their religious values. Christy, a submissive woman in a discipline relationship says she "finds submission easier" when she receives discipline than when she does not receive it. Rather than a religious edict, Christy believes discipline "is a choice that each couple makes. -- I am closer to both God and my husband than I have ever been when there is discipline in our relationship." Christy says: "I am religious and believe in the Bible. I don't believe the Bible either condones or condemns discipline between a husband and a wife, although it is clear on the wife's being called to submit in all things." Other religious participants express similar views. They refute being in a CDD relationship but give nuanced beliefs of submission and religious practices with their desire to receive discipline:

In her interview, Naomi says:

I generally describe myself as a progressive Christian. Yes I believe in Jesus Christ the only son of the Father and in the Holy Spirit as a creating, loving, and conscientious being. I believe that he calls us to live just, upright lives. And by that I mean that we are called as humans to respect, value, love, and embrace all of creation in all its magnificence and all its horror. The destruction of our planet, poverty, and starvation are a sin of the human race and we are all responsible for it. Do I think that Jesus or the disciple Paul ordained that the man in a marriage between Christians would be a Head of the Household and the woman would be a submissive? Absolutely not. But neither does the Scripture prohibit such a relationship. Paul taught us to live by our faith

fully within the society we were born into. Jesus taught us that women have value, are loved by God equally as men.

Both Christy and Naomi state that God did not specifically command them to receive discipline, but they both felt compelled to give detailed religious arguments. Similarly, Ella, a far more conservative submissive woman in a discipline relationship also describes her Christian views. She embraces her religious beliefs but refutes Biblical precepts as a commandment for discipline:

My husband and I are both born again evangelical Bible believing Christians. Regarding DD in relation to our faith – we both subscribe to the scriptural commands of the headship of a husband and the required submission to that by his wife. We do not in any way believe that the Bible gives express permission or advocates the use of physical discipline or spanking to achieve that end. But we do believe that we do not displease God in any way and through the use of Loving domestic discipline as a tool to encourage our individual roles as a husband and a wife as God intends us to be. There are Christian sites that we believe to contort or misinterpret scripture and use that misconception as their reason for spanking. It simply is a bogus reason Biblically speaking. Spanking and DD is a tool that we feel we incorporate in a way that does not distort God’s command but enhances it as it relates to our marriage.

In this way, all these participants showed me how Christian they are and how their beliefs organize their lives. While they say they reject a Biblical commandment for discipline, they embrace the religious perspective of wifely submission. While non-CDD religious participants say they reject a Biblical commandment for discipline, they embrace the culturally ingrained religious perspectives of wifely submission, and beliefs about the correct way to do masculinity and femininity, marriage, and family. Even if people do not practice a CDD lifestyle, subscribing to conservative religious practices influences how participants see discipline, submission, and women’s status in the context of heteronormative relationships.

### ***Belief in Male/Female Archetypes & Energy***

Belief in male female archetypes
Recaptures primal fundamental energy between the two sexes
Belief in collective consciousness
Male-oriented spankings are sexual and porn centered. Female-oriented spankings fill emotional needs, including primal need to be loved and protected. (Vivian 2009b : 35, 63)
Male-oriented and female-oriented spankings have nothing to do with sexual orientation. Gay men or submissive men can desire a female oriented spanking (Vivian 2009b : 36-37)

**Table 4.7 Beliefs about Discipline Relationships: Archetypes & Energy**

Some participants believe “archetypal primal energies” explain how and why discipline relationships should be practiced. Many participants also mix the language of energy, archetypes, and multiple beliefs. Understanding what participants mean when they use hardwiring is comparable to understanding people’s political beliefs when they say they are social liberals but fiscal conservatives. The meanings people make about energy and archetypes change depending on their beliefs about masculinity authority. Not everyone who believes in male-female energy believes the same the thing about how and why discipline relationships should be practiced. Participants espousing beliefs in “male-female archetypes”, the collective consciousness, and fundamental energies use more Jungian terms.

During our interview Janet describes how and why archetypal energies work and why domestic discipline works for her:

This [spanking and discipline] takes the relationship back to some pretty archetypal energies. Masculine energy is pretty outwardly directed. It’s slaying the dragon or sticking out. Male parts stick out. Male sex act is being aggressive. Female energy is taking things in. Female parts go in-- in the sense of being able to absorb the energy around you. Yielding. The strength of yielding, and that’s femininity, it’s strength. And DD is like living that in an extreme way. Being in touch with my feminine power, when I allow it to work, I wind up feeling more powerful, more confident, more effective in the real world. When I stop trying to be the boss at home too. And I hear many women say that they have more career success when they do DD at home.

Participants who embrace archetypes and energies believe men and women who allow their energies to mix with each other (through discipline) support each other. For some participants, the gender of the dominant and submissive partner matter less than the actual receptiveness or dominance. For example, Vivian (2009b: 33-34) offers this explanation:

When I say your partner wants a female-centered spanking, this doesn’t necessarily mean that your partner is female. In our culture, which so devalues and diminishes the feminine and ridicules men who want to explore their feminine side – gay and straight – who do feel the emptiness of the missing feminine aspect to their nature and instinctively are drawn to spanking as a way to explore the softer sides of themselves.



For other participants, conflating gender with energy matter a great deal. Mr Loving DD (2007:3) of the *Loving Domestic Discipline* blog and author of two discipline manuals opposes the view of gender separate from energy:

The reason that heterosexual intercourse is so pleasurable for the couple is because of the flow of masculine and feminine energy it creates between the man and the woman. The man feels the joy of his woman's feminine energy surrounding him and surrendering to him, while the woman feels herself penetrated, possessed and protected by her man's masculine energy. Sex is the most common area in which this two way flow of masculine and feminine energy takes place.

Mr Loving DD (2007:5) believes this energetic sexual connection exists primarily between heterosexual couples. Expressing views similar to religious tenets about masculinity and femininity, he continues:

"This energy flow is inhibited by negative actions, beliefs and attitudes on the part of the woman, and by the man's failure or inability to take control of the misbehaving woman." The solution, for Mr Loving DD and many participants who adhere to LDD as a solution to the energetic problem, "Loving Domestic Discipline . . . is ideal for encouraging the flow of masculine and feminine energy. The reason for this is fairly simple. The disciplinary process of spanking the woman is obviously going to require the submission, either willing or forced, of the woman." In his first manual, *LDD*, Mr Loving DD (2007:3) writes a great deal about balancing the energy between men and women: "The wonderful intimacy that most couples experience after a disciplinary session is due to the unobstructed flow of energy between the man and the woman." But in his second manual, *ALDD* (2006:15) [Advanced Loving Domestic Discipline], he becomes ever more hostile towards women. "When the woman is put into a state of submission, humility and obedience by being humiliated, she is restored to her feminine self. She is restored to her very best self and made into a whole woman again." What exactly is a whole woman? And how is she restored through being humiliated? Seth's language harkens to "real men and real women." His increasing hostility does not go unnoticed by participants or online community members. One reader, Christian, writes:

My guess is that most people reading here, while they may have Mr Loving DD's first book (LDD - Loving Domestic Discipline) have NOT read his second book, (ALDD - Advanced Loving Domestic Discipline.) This book is truly a travesty and basically negates anything positive from the first book, which is questionable enough. ALDD is nothing but a guide to the most vicious of BDSM techniques. ALDD recommends, among other things, urinating in her mouth and requiring her to drink it as a punishment technique. If two women need to be disciplined together, the HOHs can urinate together onto the floor and the two women can lick up the comingled urine. . . . The author of this book has nothing to do with Domestic Discipline.  
<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2006/12/cautions-about-loving-dd-blog.html>

When participants compare his work to BDSM they reject Mr Loving DD's discipline relationship identity. He is, after all, the man who coined the term "LDD" and started the once popular *Loving DD* blog. Calling it "vicious" refutes Mr Loving DD's discipline relationship authority. Vivian cautions her readers in "Cautions About the Loving DD Blog" warning readers about "warning flags" on his site:

One of the more comprehensive sources available online regarding Domestic Discipline (DD) is the blog "LovingDD." The author, who goes by the unfortunate pseudonym of "Mr. Loving DD," has a lot of helpful insights into this topic and I would recommend reading his material. (Speaking for myself, I've found his posts on male/female energies to be particularly insightful).

That said, there are some warning flags that bear considering when reading his blog and since posting to his site requires me to reveal what I consider to be inappropriate personal details, I thought I'd share them here in hopes that they will help anyone interested in learning about DD.

Forty-two subsequent comments followed, as readers discuss the LDD blog and manuals. Vivian warns a woman who admits to posting to his site. Readers reply, "When I first visited the LDD site I felt that he did not even actually like women." Aquariux follows up to reject misogyny:

I don't claim to be any expert in DD and haven't studied carefully the LovingDD blog but I would be deeply suspicious of any man claiming to have any natural superiority or any rights on women. DD can only be a (beautiful) gift that a free woman makes to the man she chooses and who deserves it. Besides, some of the treatments that earlier comments mention are deeply repulsive. Ladies, please avoid this sort of guys. We are not all like this!

The idea that women need men to be whole or maintained comes up in several interviews. I asked Seth, a dominant man, how single women can cope without masculine energy to direct them:

Women are able to cope without male energy to help them, just as men are able to cope without a feminine presence. . . . How do single women cope with their own natural behaviors when there is no man to help balance them out? They get by as best they can. They may seek out other sources of protective, caring, guiding masculine energy. This might be a religious leader or

a spiritual leader. It might be a father or uncle or brother. It might even be a female friend whose outlook is rather masculine. . . . But most heterosexual people feel a need and a desire for the close companionship of someone of the opposite sex. A woman's feminine energy is just as important for the man as his masculine energy is for her. The woman's energy can nurture, soothe, heal, inspire and support the man. The man's energy will do surprisingly similar things for the woman, except via very different means. Discipline, for example, will ultimately help to soothe and heal the woman, but via a dramatically different route.

The notion that both partners find each other “soothing” comes up in multiple interviews and in many online communities. Seth never explained exactly how women might find discipline soothing. But for participants like Carla, receiving discipline “is the only way I’ve found to feel unreservedly fulfilled while in a relationship with a man.” Carla feels energetically “connected” to her husband. She refers to “sides” of their relationship: “I’m the nurturing side and he’s the one that brings money and control. DD integrates love and discipline, which works best for both of us.” This side she refers to is what Vivian (2009b) calls, “softer” or more feminine. For Carla, money and control are archetypes of masculinity. When they describe the intimacy of deep connections in their quest for completeness, participants use Jungian terminology. By cloaking it in the mystical language of energy and connection, participants reproduce the gendered norms of the dominant culture.

### ***Belief in Hardwiring***

Many people use the term hardwired to describe biological determinism.
Some believe people have instinctual desire to do aggression and violence and spanking gives permission to do so.
Belief that men have more of instinctual desire for violence.
Use terms like “inner caveman” and “lizard brain” (Vivian 2009a: 55-57).
Often involves socio/psycho-biological views using words like “instinctive” and “survival”.

**Table 4.8 Beliefs about Discipline Relationships: Hardwiring**

Participants who believe in hardwiring, (a term most of them use for biological determinism) often see their needs for discipline, as well as masculinity and feminine behavior as fatalistic. They often say, “It’s just the way I’m wired” to describe why they want discipline. Though their opinions vary on how discipline relationships to conduct discipline relationships, participants who believe in hardwiring generally believe spanking and discipline manages repressed violence. Audrey says it bluntly, “Men dominate women through sex. No other area. Simply sex.” By her own admission, she (and many submissive people) feels happier in a discipline relationship. For the men and women who believe they are hardwired for a certain amount of violence, adhering to the violence of discipline spanking makes sense. For these people, giving in to the “instinctive” violent urges of their sexuality requires less effort (and less soul searching) than denying their “instinctive natures.”

One notable difference I found with participants who believe in hardwiring (compared to other belief systems) is a lack of justification. Cloaking their belief in biological determinism, they use the language of science. These participants offer socio-or psychobiological explanations, using terms like *innate*, *instinctive*, and *survival of the species*. Like religious participants, who cite the Bible, these participants offer the authoritative backing of science. Instead of justifying their beliefs or inward meaning, these participants focus on social critiques. They criticize the lack of social acceptance for discipline relationships and the cultural taboo of living in “traditional relationships.” For example, in her manual Vivian (2009b:41) writes:

In carrying out consensual spanking we are stepping into these traditional primal sex roles, thus triggering deeply held, powerful, often long repressed sexual desires and urges for dominance and submission we may not allow ourselves to feel or even be aware of in our hyper-civilized culture where men and women are often pressured to equal in all ways.

Vivian continues, saying that we as a culture “have done much to shame men (and women) out of this natural aggressive tendency. In a well-meaning effort to ‘cure’ men of the desire to do violence we have told men that this physical aggression is at best socially unacceptable and at worst, evil.” This smacks of backlash against feminism and gender equality. Participants dislike the stigma as too traditional if they

are normally progressive; likewise, they believe they live in too moralistic a society if they are more conservative.

Janet describes her dilemma:

I work in progressive political community where everyone wants to be tolerant. But they don't mean it. They're tolerant when they agree with it and intolerant when they don't. Gay lifestyles are OK because we agree with it. But domestic discipline we don't agree with so we would just say they're all abused women. It's unfortunate that I work in a tolerant community and see the hypocrisy. If I didn't I wouldn't be as outspoken about it all.

In Janet's educated and progressive world, men are supposed to be calm and restrain their violence.

This contrasts from the "real men use authority in their home" (and by proxy discipline if they choose) world of conservative CDD religious dogma. For highly educated participants (like Janet), the desire for violence and scientific reasons for wanting discipline come easy. Instead, a more compelling and complicated task involves dealing with the intense scrutiny of their educated and influential social peers (outside the discipline community).

Holly, in contrast, lives in a more conservative community. She subscribes to the apologetic, contradictory, "I'm not a feminist but" vision of equality:

I believe women should get equal pay and have the right to vote and all that stuff, but I really think women were created to stay home, not to work, and that's the conflict that arises in women when they do. If women would just admit to themselves they need domestic discipline - but they are just too confused by our society to know it or admit it. A woman is not a second-class citizen and should be respected for her mind and intellectual abilities but that does not mean she has to take on the world and show that she is as good as all men. I do not think women should fight in wars. We were created to nurture and care for not destroy. I also think we would all be better off if society had not changed so much. If women had not gone off to work in WWII. And maybe if we did not have a lot of rights we do. If this were the case the family unit would be more the way God intended.

Here, Holly criticizes "society" for the degradation of traditional family values. Only one year before our interview she worked outside her home and earned as much as her husband. Though she chose to stop working, Holly does not appear to see that she had the choice. Holly's critique is (a spin on criticizing society as too liberal) society changed and men and women would be better off it had not. Holly feels that the internal conflict women feel to work come from societal pressure. Essentially, women are

bamboozled into not asking for discipline or even recognizing they want to be submissive and stay home and give up their rights. Holly paradoxically wishes away the very rights that gave her the choice to have or not have discipline in her life. Many participants in her school of thought (more conservative, less feminist, and seemingly women-blaming) overlook their freedoms and bitterly mourn a “traditional submissive women with her doting disciplinarian husband” world that never really existed. Rather than see the increase in divorce as a right to remove themselves from abusive or unpleasant relationships, such participants attribute divorce to lack of submission or lack of God in marriages. They do not recognize that those rights only keeps people in hostile and abusive situations. These participants seek the good old (heteropatriarchial) days where mythical blissful marriages erase abuse and bad marriages entirely.

A more centrist criticism of society comes from a man, LDD-4-me, who identifies as dominant but occasionally switches with his partner to receive discipline as well. On his blog he writes:

What seems to perplex many people is why is it that they feel the desire to be spanked. How can it be that many of these same people may never have had the experience of having been spanked as an adult, or for that matter some were never spanked as a child either, yet they crave it so intensely. What’s truly ironic is that society today has taught us that we should feel free to practice our lives however we wish, yet at the same time has told us that the act of giving yourself to someone else to help provide discipline is wrong. It’s really surprising that those who often profess to be so tollerent [sic] and open minded are unwilling to understand that a woman, or for that matter sometimes a man would willingly submit to physical discipline from a partner. I suppose the simple fact is they just can’t seem to understand is that the basic act of submitting to a spanking from a partner can, and often does make a person stronger and renewed.

(<http://ldd4me.blogspot.com/2007/08/perplexing.html>)

The idea that discipline makes submissive partners stronger, more confident, renewed, refreshed, and soothed recurs throughout interviews, blogs, and community discourse. Participants in this community describe discipline as a tool. These words are political words used by people who feel oppressed by secrecy and shame. When they blame society participants feel constrained by a cultural adherence to 1) not hit or be hit (disciplined) 2) to see discipline as automatically abusive and 3) to not want to consensual violence and non-normative sexuality. They feel constrained by the stigma, medicalization and

pathological ideas (and language) used to describe people who want or do [consensual] violent sexuality (discipline). They feel the social pressure necessitating a sense of shame and secrecy about their discipline relationship sexualities. In essence, they do not like feeling like secret freaks even if they have come to terms with their identities. Participants do not choose a radical hyper-sexual lifestyle (like BDSM) or push the margins of their sexualities. They want to find potential partners without explaining to their current partners they are not crazy, they just want discipline. When they criticize an amorphous intolerant society, participants are really expressing their reaction to feeling oppressed by the misunderstood nature, and invisibility of having non-normative discipline relationship sexuality.

***Politically Active & Feminist Beliefs***

Refuse to apologize for desires
Often use feminist arguments i.e.) my body, my choice
Self-reflexive & considers other cultural, gendered perspectives
Observes paradox
Recognize fluidity of gender, sexuality, transforming relationships
Make visible what is not visible – (heteronormative, heterosexist power structures)

**Table 4.9 Beliefs about Discipline Relationships: Politically Active & Feminist**

Participants who subscribe to politically active and feminist beliefs rarely use specific consistent labels but all of them identify as feminists. They often have a “my body, my choice” stance, and have internal conversations and use self-reflexive experiences and events during interviews and discussions. Most of these participants consider wider cultural and gender perspectives before stating opinions about discipline relationships. They also observe paradox, recognize fluidity, and attempt to make visible what was not before. In addition, their beliefs sometimes offer critiques of structural power and inequality. Though participants rarely give edicts about how or why discipline relationships should be done, most offer beliefs about life in general and how people should be treated.

When I asked Tanya if she was a feminist and how she defines feminism she responded politically:

This is a huge question. Yes I am a feminist. Feminism is the fundamental belief that women and men should be equal but there's a lot more to it. It's a belief that women are capable, intelligent, strong, able to determine what works for themselves. It's a commitment to being all of who I am, and to encourage others to do likewise. For me, feminism is tied into other things. Pretty much all of my anti-oppression beliefs. So it goes along with being anti-racist, anti-classist, et cetera too. It's tied to the goal of ending oppression and giving all people the right to self-determination. It's tied to giving people support in healing from the things that have hurt us. And in finding ways of preventing the various hurts that people experience. Like racism, classism, sexism, child abuse, domestic violence). I spent three years working in anti-domestic violence work and can see that domestic discipline for me is really different from domestic violence.

I separated participants with this belief participants who labeled themselves as feminists but gave apologetic responses to feminism and social equality. I interpreted the politically active and feminist beliefs and behaviors as political solutions falling into this category. Answer's like Tanya's with political views about equality express how she thinks discipline relationships should work but how people should be treated. Participants have interesting conversations with each other online. For example, contributors of the *Punishment Book* all express varying views and perspectives about discipline relationships, but their beliefs and comments critique heterosexuality as "the norm." Dyke Grrl (also known as Jigsaw Analogy), an openly queer participant converses with Natty about discipline relationships. Together they criticize the dominant culture and that of discipline relationships as "genderizing." They continue their conversation using links and comments with Dyke Grrl's critique of essentialized gender, feminism, and spanking posted on Natty's blog:

And if you have the same issues when gender is taken out of the equation, then perhaps not all DD is rooted in misogyny. . . as a lesbian couple (and not butch/femme, so in no way replicating traditional gender roles) we seem to go through a LOT of the same process as male top/female bottom [M/F] couples. . . . I mean, if your definition of feminism is that behaviors are not necessarily rooted in gender, then talking about how something that some people justify based on misogynistic gendered notions can \*also\* be seen as separate from that, and that DD can be something about meeting needs that some \*people\* (as opposed to some \*women\*) have. (<http://nattyspanked.blogspot.com/2008/03/some-homework-on-feminism-and-spanking.html>)

Dyke Grrl's maintains the position that DD meets needs other than gender but the defense for using DD is rooted in misogynist, illustrating queer and feminist beliefs. By contextualizing power and making her



own needs and life visible Dyke Grrl (and many conversations on *The Punishment Book*) exemplify this belief system. By creating visibility, these participants problematize bigger social problems. They do not blame themselves or others for these social problems, nor do they offer a defense or justification for wanting equality. Their overarching belief reflects this view: People deserve equality; people live with barriers to their sexualities and freedoms; this problem needs to be solved.

When blogging about the “Slap Happy” article by Wakeman (2007), who interviewed her, Natty (*The Punishment Book* 2008) writes that her partner, “A” believes there are far more submissive men and “female tops” in discipline relationships than is apparent online:

It does have me wondering what is different about F/M [female dominant, male submissive] domestic discipline that it doesn't express itself online in the same way that M/F [male dominant, female submissive] does. Men do not seem to be articulating submissiveness, nor are women articulating dominance in the same ways and in the same amounts as submissive women. Is there still a strong societal standard against men expressing submissiveness and women domestic dominance?

Natty (*Punishmentbook* 2008) also cites an e-mail she received on her blog, asking "Is it true that societal forces make it more likely that a woman will consent to spanking than a man?" She responds:

I would argue that I think the societal force is more along the lines of making woman feel less comfortable dominating (or rather, our form of domination has traditionally been in manipulation rather than in blunt force) so that it is very difficult for submissive men to find a partner willing to provide the strong female hand they need and desire. I mean, it's a lot easier to slip back into traditional roles than chip away at new, less comfortable ones.

By highlighting the lack of visibility of submissive men and the difficulty submissive men have in finding dominant woman partners, Natty hints at the power of masculinities in the dominant culture. When Natty blogs, she does two important things. She affects political change by engaging in discourse of what a “real man” or “real woman” do challenging the cultural assumptions of discipline relationships in maintaining the status quo. She also writes not just to express her own needs and sexual pleasure but to remove barriers for others. Her political actions speaks to a broader political agenda for many participants with feminist political beliefs.

Statements from submissive woman born in the same part of the country who denigrate or criticize feminism offer opposing comparisons to this belief group. of views of feminism. For example, Jody says simply, “No, I’m not a feminist. They are women who crave power for the sake of being better than a man.” Allison’s stance on feminism goes further: “I am an anti-feminist. Seriously, you don’t want to get me started. I think feminism began with evil roots and the sin of rebellion, and no good fruit has or can come of it. I believe it has no place in the church and has been one of the most destructive forces in our society.” The participants who blame women, feminism, or equality for women’s problems give intriguing perspectives this group often responds to in interviews and in their blogs.

#### **4.4 Names – Contradictions & Contrasts (Not BDSM & Not Abuse)**

**Tanya:** My partner and I often shy away from the term domestic discipline because of the whole Head of Household, subservient woman, dominant man thing that goes along with it. But we do call it DD or discipline or structure or The Rules or “This Thing We Do” among other things.

No language for discipline relationship sexuality or lifestyles readily exists in the dominant culture (except perhaps in online and social media communities). Participants find a language and name it much later as they search for and understand their identity. The language of the dominant culture contextualizes discipline relationships within BDSM and abuse. Therefore, as participants come out to themselves and come to understand and formalize their beliefs and make explanations about why they want discipline in their life they also learn the constructed language of discipline relationships. Medicalized and psychological language generally pathologizes the desire for discipline and spanking – codifying and classifying non-normative sexuality and violent sex practices. Therefore, as they define their own sexuality, most participants use the contested categories of BDSM and abuse to contrast with their identities. For example, a participant might say: “I’m not a slave in a BDSM relationship and I’m not an abused wife with Stockholm syndrome, I want to be submissive to my husband and like to receive the discipline he gives me.”

While many participants involved in discipline relationships (most discipline manual authors) deny that engaging in BDSM is part of their practices, (Blue 2003; Mr Loving DD 2006; Wakeman 2008; Markham 2007) a few participants consider discipline relationships within the realm of a BDSM lifestyle. Dominance, submission, control, power, and consensual discipline, and corporal punishment can take place in both discipline relationships and BDSM (Breslow 1998; Von Krafft-Ebing 1965; Weinberg 2000). Some salient features and terms within discipline relationships like physical discipline and humiliation are all common to BDSM fantasies and fetishes. Perhaps the discussion of BDSM is intimately tied to discipline relationships, not just because of the terminology but because we (scholars, medical codes, psychology codes) have no better place to categorize them. (I wonder too if the reason so many sex, BDSM, and spanking researchers find separating different spanking and discipline sexualities in the literature so difficult is because many of them indicate they are not spanking identified and say they do not understand sexual spanking (see Plante 2006, Weiss 2011).)

Participants often say they feel BDSM connotes frivolous sexuality, while abuse they equate with nonconsensual violence. Yet, some participants do engage in BDSM and some are or have been abused. And most participants use some language (and other symbols) of BDSM to explore and fashion their own sexuality. Naming discipline relationships becomes a matter of contrasts and contradictions. First participants assert discipline relationships are not BDSM. Secondly, they assert discipline relationships are not abuse. Then, they (often) name their brand of discipline relationship (usually based on their belief system).

***Rejecting the Other : (If Not BDSM then Discipline Relationships)***

By rejecting BDSM participants self-define as people in a different category. In her now defunct online site, Vickie Blue (2003) sold discipline lifestyle manuals people could download. The opening to her site read:

We aren't talking about BSDM here. We aren't talking about Master/Slave relationships. We aren't talking about humiliation and degradation. We are talking about real couples and real

people making a conscious decision in a modern world to reactivate old-fashioned values and measures that WORKED and still do. We're talking about couples incorporating discipline into real life. ([www.vickieblue.com](http://www.vickieblue.com)).

In a similar way, the Disciplinary Wives Club (2007) refutes a connection to BDSM and claims old-fashioned discipline. The statement found on their current site states:

The Disciplinary Wives Club (DWC) is an organization whose purpose is to encourage the application of "Good Old Fashioned" spanking and other very traditional methods of discipline by wives and committed partners. It is our experience that the vast majority of relationships that have a maternal discipline orientation are truly happy, healthy and long lasting. We are based in a simple philosophy of love being the driver of everything in a good relationship. We leave B&D and S&M to our wonderful friends who enjoy that. We do not get into the "slave/mistress" model. ([www.disciplinarywivesclub.com](http://www.disciplinarywivesclub.com))

Both of these sites, one committed to submissive women and one to submissive men, tout "old fashioned values." During our interviews, participants often used words like "traditional couple" and "traditional relationship" to describe their desires for discipline. In their own way, participants of discipline relationships do more than reject BDSM eroticism and labels. They embrace words and language of their own to describe what a discipline relationship looks like. For most participants this entails both monogamy and privacy. People who practice BDSM often do so in public. But most participants in discipline relationships do so very privately.

During our interview, Mr Loving DD, speaks about public versus private issues in discipline relationships:

Loving domestic discipline is practiced by couples in the privacy of their own home. It is also not meant to be a sexual kink per se, although it does obviously contain some sexual content. Because LDD is a lifestyle which is based on real discipline for real misbehavior, it is also less easily explained away as a sexual kink. Many LDD people may feel more private about their LDD practices than BDSM people would feel about their BDSM practices for that reason. There may be a feeling among LDD people that their lifestyle would be less acceptable to the general public.

In his view, participants practice discipline relationships privately because sexual kinks are more easy to explain and more socially acceptable. Perhaps participants feel this element of social stigma attached to their discipline relationships. But I wonder how many participants fear the stigma and how many pro-

tect what feels intimate and sacred to them. When I asked participants about BDSM and discipline relationships, they often gave me rote responses like, “BDSM is more sexual, and domestic discipline is about love.” As participants described how discipline made them feel or how they practice discipline in their lives, the differences they see between BDSM and discipline relationships become more apparent.

For example, Carla explains why she and her husband do not do discipline in public. “There’s no discipline in public. But then again we consider discipline very intimate. Doing it in public would be unnecessarily humiliating and we like to keep most things private anyway.” She also talked about finding discipline relationship communities after visiting BDSM communities online after searching for information about spanking and discipline:

I kept longing for male dominance. I began to go into D/s chat rooms and I shyly participated in a few BDSM communities. I read a few books. And I knew it wasn’t for me. I felt a need that went beyond the kink. Sometimes entirely unrelated to it. What I wanted was more domestic, less gadgetry, no scenes, no role playing. Something monogamous, intimate and in a way very very traditional.

Many participants did not judge BDSM as deviant or bad or sinful. Rather, they find BDSM less compelling because BDSM feels more playful and transient and temporary than discipline relationships. They do not see BDSM as sacred. In both fantasy and real life, participants feel discipline more intimate and personal, thus more sacred to them. Perhaps participants practice their discipline relationships more privately and refer to them as less sexual because the dominant culture sells sex and uses sexuality as a commodity. Participants willingly sell their manuals and discipline romance novels but not their faces or their ways to identify themselves. Perhaps what participants resist selling is the essence of their true selves. One can commodify sex, but not ideals. But it is not possible to sell safety or vulnerability and intimacy participants yearn for, nor is it possible to sell the level of trust that goes into wanting and establishing a discipline relationship. BDSM and discipline relationship sexuality can be commercialized and produced. But they protect what they value -- vulnerability and intimacy. Participants protect their vulnerability by keeping themselves (and their identities) secret and safe. Participants commodify

marketable discipline products, or things they see as less sacred or precious to them as individuals and to their identify.

In an attempt to distinguish BDSM from discipline relationships lifestyles The Boss created a test to distinguish the two:

However you translate it, most will agree that BDSM is about power exchange and sexual gratification. For many this type of relationship includes deep spirituality as well, but for many others BDSM is just about sex. So if both DD and BDSM are sub-categories under D/s that leaves the question I keep getting from people-- which is which? This is a sticky area and a lot of folks will disagree, but for me I can easily categorize activities with a simple test. I ask myself, 'Would Ricky have done that to Lucy on the old *I Love Lucy* show on television?' If the answer is yes, then I am dealing with a DD behavior. If the answer is no, I am likely dealing with a BDSM behavior.

Let's run a couple items through the test: Would Ricky make Lucy wear a collar out in public? No. (BDSM) Would Ricky tell Lucy what he wanted for dinner and what time to have it ready? Yes. (DD) Would Ricky scold Lucy if she spent too much money? Yes. (DD) Would Ricky tie Lucy to the bed? No. (BDSM) Would Ricky put nipple clamps and butt plugs on Lucy? No. (BDSM) Would Ricky spank Lucy for being a brat? Yes. (DD)

You get the idea. It isn't foolproof but it will get you in the right ballpark more than 90% of the time. Ricky and Lucy are actually a nice example (albeit comedic) of a traditional DD couple. Television shows of that era often depict these kinds of relationships, and for some DD couples it is a return to that sort of lifestyle that they crave. ([www.collarpurple.com](http://www.collarpurple.com) 2004)

Participants often take approaches like The Boss's to define for themselves the differences between BDSM and discipline relationships. But for some participants, especially for those who practice both BDSM and discipline the definitions and practices become more complicated. For Tanya and her partner, contextualizing BDSM and discipline became important in their relationship:

I don't see the discipline part of things as being strictly or always an expression of my sexuality. It touches a different part of my brain. It's more tied into feeling safe in my relationship and feeling as though there are limits on my behavior. When [my partner] and I have engaged in BDSM it's been more temporary and more clearly sexual. For her comfort we generally don't do BDSM anymore. At least not the spanking parts of it because she needs a clearer separation between the spankings she gives in a non-sexual context and those she had given in a sexual context.

While Tanya, who does have a discipline relationship identity, can distinguish between sexual and non-sexual spanking, her partner cannot. Some participants themselves make less distinction be-

tween BDSM and discipline than others. Demi and Liam, a couple who say they have both discipline relationship and explore BDSM with each other have a difficult time separating the two. Demi explains: “I’m his submissive wife. What we do works for us. Using a bunch of labels other than to say risk aware, consensual, and not abuse, just makes it more confusing.” Similarly, during our interview, Lilly says she too, believes realize the distinction she made between BDSM and discipline relationships might be diminishing:

That’s a tricky one. I still haven’t quite. [pause]. I don’t know which way to come down on. Generally when we think of BDSM, it’s very clearly play and something that is obviously sexual. With DD the intent is not play and not necessarily sexual. And I don’t know anyone who does DD who doesn’t have a spanking fetish – or some element of sexual arousal when it comes to being punished. In some ways, it might be a sub-fetish within BDSM. And I’m thinking a lot about DD and D/s because in some ways they are almost identical. I suppose there are some differences, but they seem so much the same that it’s hard to know how different they really are.

For Lilly this change came about gradually. She recently began spanking her partner for play, though he still spanks her for discipline. When she started giving him sexual spankings, she began looking at discipline relationships through the lens of BDSM and sub-fetish of D/s rather than meeting her sexuality needs she once did. Lilly’s views shifted fluidly to accommodate her spanking her dominant partner.

### ***Rejecting Non-Consent : (If Not Abuse then Discipline Relationships)***

I asked my participants, “How is a discipline relationship (or domestic discipline or whatever name they used) different from abuse? If it’s not abuse, what is it?” Participants responded according to their own beliefs about discipline relationships. Most participants gave rote responses mentioning consent. Participants occasionally state clearly unacceptable and abusive behavior yet describe similar circumstances in their own relationships blurring the boundary between discipline and abuse. Participants who live in unhappy relationships appear more likely to justify or ignore seemingly abusive behavior. I suspect these participants would do the same without the use of discipline in their lives -- clinging to the relationships, ignoring abusive patterns, and blaming themselves for their partners’ bad behav-

iors. For participants using discipline to repair already deeply problematic or rocky relationships, giving their partners free license to hit them (in anger) only seemed to exacerbate the already painful experiences of alienation and missing trust. Not one single participant ever admitted to being in an abusive relationship or asked me for any type of help. Only one participant admitted she had been in a *past* abusive relationship (and had ended it). Most participants express pleasure in discipline relationships, and displeasure if they are not in one.

Participants use consent to describe the willing permission granted by one partner to allow the other to hit or discipline them.

Tanya: Abuse is not consensual. Abuse is not focused on meeting the needs of the person receiving the end of it. Abuse is for the purpose of the abusive one gaining power and maintaining control of the person they are abusing and it is not open to negotiation. With my own DD relationship I know I can always stop a punishment if it is causing a problem for me and I know [partner's name] will listen to my feedback. In an abusive relationship there is not the effort to communicate and to ensure the safety of both parties.

The language of consent, negotiation, communication, and mutuality determines the difference between what is abuse and what is consenting discipline. Lilly says:

I see that consent as absolute the key. Domestic discipline is something that is done between two consenting adults. Both of them have consented. I have known of situations where there was discipline going on but the woman hadn't explicitly given her consent and it didn't seem like she liked the whole thing and I felt in that situation it was very clearly abuse.

Participants often agree that consent for violent behaviors (like discipline) differentiates them between abusive non-consensual behaviors. It also leads to the term, "consenting non-consent" or giving authority for discipline to one's dominant partner throughout the relationship even if a submissive partner does not wish to receive discipline. The CDD website defines consenting nonconsent:

The concept of nonconsensual consent means that consent is given once in the beginning for the duration of the relationship, [underlines theirs] rather than specifically for each individual instance discipline is to be carried out. She is giving consent for him to discipline her at some future time when, at that specific moment, she is non-consenting.

It is based upon consent when the wife is in a calm, relaxed state of mind, not emotionally charged, as she may be during a marital [sic] argument. Essentially, the wife is giving her husband permission to decide when, where, how, how often, and under what circumstances he



may discipline her based on the parameters they have agreed upon in their prior discussions. A wife may withdraw or amend that consent at any time, other than just before, during, or just after discipline.

(<http://christiandomesticdiscipline.com/nonconsensualconsent.html>)

It is easy to see how consenting non-consent might lead to abuse if the dominant partner feels justified in his or her actions or have permission to do so. On the other hand, abusive people tend to abuse their partner with or without consent. And allowing for discussion at a later time maintains the authority and control submissive participants say they want.

Couples fight every day. They scream, throw things, slam doors, but because these fights lack physical contact, this kind of fighting is often not considered abusive. Giving “consenting nonconsent,” which allows one partner to spank or punish in order to “win the fight” and resolve disputes is considered by many in the discipline lifestyle to be a practical solution. However, when the dominant partner breaks the established rules, it compromises the boundaries between abuse and consenting to discipline. When I was reading blogs and talking to participants, I heard numerous accounts of seemingly non-consensual violence and blurred boundaries between abuse and consent. Participants later gloss over, blog angrily, or sometimes justify the rule-breaking misconduct as “mistakes” or “typical of masculine behavior.” Participants rarely discuss these incidents with each other and when they do they do not call such behavior as abusive. Discipline relationship couples explicitly say they protect each other from abuse such as hitting each other in anger. For the participants who use discipline to repair already difficult relationships, maintaining boundaries and keeping anger at bay gets more difficult. For them, the boundaries between abuse and discipline become blurred. Very few participants seem willing to discuss abuse in the context of discipline relationships except to contextualize and frame it as the opposite of abuse.

Within the discipline relationship culture there seems to be a myth that abusive behavior exists only in “bad and undeserving” (non-DD) relationships. This belief also leads to women being blamed for not taking care of their relationships (or picking the right partner). Very few participants offer real an-

swers about how to handle problems within a relationship that did not blame the victim or put responsibility on the woman to change her behavior. For example, when I asked participants, “What if they are already in a discipline relationship but it appears abusive or it is not working?” Participants often give rote or automatic answers suggesting that discipline would fix it over time. The participants most likely to give reflective answers were the most likely to have actually experienced or dealt with a situation themselves. Tanya for example, understands abusive situations because she worked in an anti-abuse area for three years. It helped her contextualize not only her own discipline relationship but abuse using examples and situations. Deborah who lived with and divorced an abusive husband also makes insightful remarks about abusive behavior:

I tell most of my friends I get it, I really do. I understand why it's so compelling. And I understand why you want to stay. But a shitty man isn't going to change just because you love him and just because he's giving you the spankings and discipline you want. An asshole is an asshole even if he's nice once in a while. And if he's drinking or hitting you or if he's cheating on you well – you've got even more reasons why you want to fix your relationship. Everyone out there is telling you why you need to fix it and you believe it. . . . I'm a submissive woman and I like being a good wife. I feel guilty when things don't work. I take the blame for problems I don't create. . . . but you have to leave a shitty relationship. It hurts. You can't turn a turd into gold.

Our culture burdens women with shouldering the solutions to their own social problems; minimizing their efforts to find social support in their intimate lives. Very few women (like Deborah) are celebrated as successful for navigating breakups or abusive relationships. Instead, people focus on blaming women for bad past choices.

I came to see barriers to sexual pleasure as a both a women's problem and a personal problem silenced and ignored in non-normative sexualities. I view their actions to remove barriers and express agency as political acts. Participants find out about discipline relationships, coming out, find a name, and make explanations and sort their beliefs mostly concurrently and the process of doing one intersects with and informs decisions about the other. Coming out as desiring discipline and wanting a discipline relationship allows participants to explore their beliefs and explain why they want discipline. It also allows them to name and reject names for discipline relationship sexuality. These definitions from

online become a name, a signifier for their identity. They finally create shared language and discipline relationship culture, thus mutual understanding about their needs. This mutual understanding reflects some commonalities within discipline relationship culture. These participants also have nuanced differences and complexities. I have attempted (by making categories and names for their identity processes and the meanings they make) to describe the differences. In the next chapter I explore how discipline relationships work online and off.

## **5 DISCIPLINE RELATIONSHIPS (ONLINE & OFF)**

Participants use social media (blogs, virtual communities, and private discussion groups) to talk about their private lived experiences. I have never observed (in person) offline discipline relationship behavior. The data I have collected online and in interviews are not necessarily accurate evidence of what people do off-line (in real life) but what they say they do. I have witnessed video footage of discipline sessions, read descriptions from both submissive and dominant perspectives, and interviewed participants about their discipline relationships. I describe how participants navigate current discipline relationships and answer the question, “How do discipline relationships really work?”

### 5.1 Ritualized Discipline (As Fantasy & Practice)

**Naomi:** I fantasize about lots of ritual in a sexual way and about a more intense power exchange relationship. But in the context of our family it isn't practical. Also, I need to be able to function independently and make decisions and he needs me to be able to do that. To be an active parent, manage the household, et cetera. Changing the power dynamic would require more time and energy from him that I don't know he has available. And it would take away some of that independence that we depend on. And I think, in the end, I would feel a certain resentment about the loss of it.

**Markham:** Domestic discipline is a defined ritual that embodies control and submission, acknowledging that we have transgressed from the rules of the partnership. By submitting to your partner for spanking you are saying – I know I did wrong, broke our agreed rules and I deserve to be disciplined. By spanking your partner you are saying – you did wrong, you broke the rules of our partnership, but you have accepted the discipline and I forgive you. (2005:135)

Most submissive partners report fantasizing about having more ritual than they actually have in their lives. I asked participants what it means to them to have (or not have) ritual in their discipline relationships. I also considered the unspoken in their answers. Participants' ritual fantasies may develop into ritualized discipline practices in their relationship after they tell their partners about their fantasies. Rituals are deeply imbedded in participants' early childhood discipline experiences and sexual fantasies. Participants often reported they want consistency along with their rituals. Couples in discipline relationships vary in the amount of consistency and discipline rituals they report practicing. Participants report a preference for knowing how discipline sessions will work and what to expect. Some participants codify rituals within their contracts, others spell out agreements verbally or come to understandings through trial and error over time.

Discipline practices become standardized within communities when participants share them online. Participants also share salient discipline experiences and ritual fantasies with each other during online community discussions. Manuals also codify and techniques and practices. By imbedding their ritualized fantasies within the discipline culture, participants co-create ritual into discipline culture which become tropes. I believe these tropes have both performative and ritualized significance throughout discipline relationship communities and culture. Performance sustains the discipline behav-

ior in a regulated and dedicated way. Doing ritual adheres to the sacred (i.e., powerful and significant) way participants give meaning to their relationships and identity.

Participants report fantasizing about and actually doing as ritual the following: wearing certain clothes during a spanking; using (or holding) specific spanking implements for punishments; taking specific positions during a punishment session; writing lines; mouth soaping; kneeling before or after a punishment; showing a red marked backside after a punishment (often pulling up shirts or keeping pants down to display their buttocks after a session); corner time; putting their hands their head while standing in the corners; and giving/receiving lectures. Objects and practices both create symbolic rituals. Behaviors used in discipline practices create ritualized practices. The rituals and ritual objects of sexuality can be seen as sacred (Laderman 2009:142). What is sacred is special, meaningful, and holds power (Durkheim 1996).

Janet describes her discipline relationship as ritualized. After every discipline session she knows that she will have corner time, which she “considers a meditation session.” Afterward, she says she “apologizes, [and] I feel cleansed and forgiven. . . . We try to keep a ritual. We’ve spent hours and hours talking about that. What implements can be used? What is the ritual? What’s working? What’s not working? It’s predictable. No surprises.” Ritual means knowing what to expect. Calling her corner time, “meditation” lends a spiritual or religious tone to Janet’s corner time. That Janet and her partner spend so much time talking to get their discipline right lends an almost transformative ritualistic aspect to their relationship. Tom Driver (1996:170) writes about the ritualized magic transformation in “*move san*” (removing bad blood) to cleanse and purify: “[making] order and right place suggests also a transformation, since the aim of the cure is to transform.” Creating formal contracts and rules and having a ritualistic way to engage in discipline allows many people who engage in discipline relationships to feel a sense of structure, rules, and consequences. Rules, contracts, and rituals give participants a sense of

what to expect from each other and their relationship. Formal rules and contracts also give participants a greater sense of consistency and concreteness and formality to their rituals and relationship.

Rituals and what they mean are complex and complicated by cultural expectations and social norms. Reading over (private journal entries), blogs, and interview transcripts, I realized the inherent perfection seeking through ritual not just in many of my participants, but within the dominant culture. The use of self-help books, therapy, and the language of recovery and addiction lend themselves to lists, list making, legal talk, and contracts. These create not only accountability language but also a desire to be purged of impurity. Consensual accountability and discipline offers a paradoxical solution. Disciplining behavior (by punishing the body) symbolically harnesses the mind and imagination (and all the chaos and complexity it represents). It uses an archetype of self-sacrifice and mortifying the flesh to gain self-restraint. Ritual punishments and cleansing through punishment are imbedded in our cultural performance of confession, piety, and purification. The cultural quest for punishment and forgiveness also reflects the Platonic ideal towards piety and justice (Stout 2004). In this way, society witnesses both evil acts (and their public punishments), which symbolizes a commitment to justice. Consider Vivian's explanation for her desire for discipline, forgiveness, and feeling cleansed in her blog:

Feeling guilty, then punished or disciplined, and then subsequently cleansed and forgiven, is so much a part of the cathartic, transformative experience of DD for me that without it, it's pretty much just theater. Perhaps minimally satisfying in the moment for its sexual subtext, but without any lasting psychological or relationship benefits.

This cycle of guilt/discipline/forgiveness is one of the many elements that separates DD from more deliberately erotic and sexual forms of pleasure/pain play, and puts it closer to the cathartic ritual pain practiced by many religious movements throughout the ages (starting well before the Catholic monks) as well as traditional parent/child punishments.

As human beings, most of us have consciences -- and a desire to cleanse them periodically. Unfortunately, our culture has precious few outlets for clearing one's conscience.  
(<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2007/07/maintenance-vs-discipline-question-of.html>)

Comparing the need for forgiveness and cleansing to a religious ritual experience Vivian reaches into collective psyche -- exploring religion and parenting for possible cultural scripts. Jeffrey Alexander

(2001), hoping to broaden the sociological discourse of good and evil, examines our cultural drive for punishment and purification. Through offering punishment the dominant (Western) cultural naturalizes evil, which appears to arise from identities and behaviors rather than as “culturally and socially imposed” dicta (Alexander 2001: 169). By essentializing evil, we as a culture create an imperative to root it out and become focused, fascinated and attracted to it. Purification, and the sacred becomes a contradiction to evil and simultaneously compelling. Evil, transgression, and the taboo -- exactly what makes people guilty and in need of purification -- become a simultaneous compulsion and cultural focus. We, as a culture, are transfixed by what defiles us. It becomes almost necessary to do evil and become corrupt (or at least allow for sin and corruption in society) in order for purification to occur (as individuals and culturally).

In his discussion of violent rituals and culture, Rene Girard (1996:241-249) claims: “Violence and the sacred are inseparable.” Girard views sacrifice and violence as the purifying process. Sacrificial acts “substitute for all the members of the community” and as such, “the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of *misunderstanding* [italics his]. The celebrants [or perhaps submissive] do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act. . . . The common denominator is internal violence . . . . the purpose of sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community and the social fabric.” In Girard’s passage I consider three important features of discipline relationships, first that of consenting nonconsent, secondly, the idea of unjust discipline (where submissive partners believe they have been punished unfairly), and thirdly, maintenance discipline (where submissive partners agree to routine ritualized /weekly discipline even if they do not want it or have not earned it). In this way, the submissive partner does not always agree or know how or why they will be disciplined.

Scholars who study culture, ritual practices, and purification do not agree on why and how people do rituals or what rituals mean to people. Even my participants use many reasons and meanings to explore their rituals and what they mean. Perhaps participants who desire discipline individually act out



this discourse of systemic cultural corruption and the quest for purity. When Foucault (1984:247) declared, “Nothing [about social phenomena] is fundamental,” he rejects dialectics involving restorative, curative and legitimating rituals in our culture. He writes: “there are only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another.” Foucault views ritual as less about alienation and social cures. Rather “ritual [for Foucault and Bell] is *not* [italics hers] some basic mechanism for resolving or disguising conflicts fundamental to sociocultural life” (Bell 1996:22). For some scholars like Foucault, rituals occur within our culture but do not happen as oppositional forces or as a reification of old and new. People who perform ritual do so as routine and preconceived actions. Perhaps there is a middle ground between big theory and relations. Vivian writes about the rituals of discipline as a journey connecting to her to herself and to the entire world:

But most significantly, the ritual of discipline is a deeply spiritual process that helps us to realize the effects of our actions on others and their actions on us. Discipline is a ritualizing of the universal emotional journey from anger (disconnection with humanity) to repentance (acknowledging our own humanity) to reconciliation (reconnection with humanity).

In my experience, when it's done well, Domestic Discipline is an experience in finding the divine spark inside myself that allows me to forgive myself and others for being human. Being reminded that my actions affect others in turn reminds me that I am connected to others.

The rules of DD mirror those of life -- when I hurt others, I am hurt, but when I love others, I am loved.

(<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2007/02/ritual-and-little-help-with-long.html>)

Instead of violence and sacrifice, Vivian views ritual as a spiritual journey each person takes regardless of how ready one feels. In her view, doing rituals leads to willingness to submit, which leads emotional availability, psychological openness, healing, and finally, the power to create change even on the unconscious level. Her dominant partner does not automatically forgive, but by using rituals takes a journey of “mercy and understanding” with her. In her writing Vivian invokes both Jungian archetypes of rebirth and renewal and Freud’s notion of oceanic oneness (both leading to wholeness and a center of universal unity). The Jungian archetypes (found in *Man and his Symbols* 1968) Vivian writes about eschewes ritual transformation and violence by embracing the spring, which Jung proposes as loss and

the rediscovery of meaning and (re)connection and restoration. Intriguingly, the rebirth Vivian writes about necessarily involves loss and symbolic death. Both are violent and sundering processes. Though Vivian seemingly speaks in terms of calm and connection; the archetypal ritual process she describes is in itself violent, chaotic, and even personally painful. When she expounds her notion of Freud's oceanic oneness she neglects to write about the discontent Freud assumed humans feel when they are split from humanity and the quest they make towards oneness. (Freud presumes in *The Future of an Illusion* 1927 and *Civilization and its Discontents* 1929 that humans must contain their egos in order to become civilized. This necessarily creates a punishing and restraining effect on the ego and psyche). Searching for inner meaning while striving to connect to other people is an inherently maddening, painful, and internally violent process. Vivian's view of ritual in discipline transforms repressed aggression and split from authority with real submission and reconnection.

Participants also seek violence for ritual purification. Some say they want catharsis. Perhaps by going against the grain of BDSM marginality participants make a commitment to symbolic shame and punishment in the public discourse. When participants describe the difficulties of navigating their relationships or being outted for non-normative sexuality, the quest for visibility and resistance to cultural norms becomes a symbolic act. Thus, they seek public punishment (or censure) for our cultural ills and their stigma. First, such symbolic punishment begins on conscious level, played out as individuals within their relationships where they seek discipline from a partner. The ritualized atonement process deeply imbedded in the culture leads to the second more unconscious level. Here participants bear burdens of stigma and shame, some culturally imposed and some self-imposed. Participants can symbolically (though unconsciously) bear the burdens of ritual cleansing (and the scrutiny and public punishment that comes with it). By seeking purification and atonement for perceived evils of society participants strive for perfection and reach catharsis. Perhaps participants restore and cleanse themselves in an effort to symbolically cleanse our culture of evil.

Foucault (1978) sees such bodily violence and its resulting sexual pleasure as regulated discourse. Weiss (2011) challenges us to see the limits of ritual language and the current conversation about ritual and sexuality as a form of social control. With our limited vocabulary and narrowed understanding about discipline and sexual pleasure we risk pushing discipline relationships to increasingly marginalized status rather than recognizing them as a variation of sexuality and way of doing relationships. Such risk entails the silencing of participants of discipline relationships and silencing the conversation. We would impose normalizing and normalized views about sexuality and marginalized relationships. By ignore sexual differences we would subject participants to categories of our own making and limit our own understanding. Controlling sexual discourse is a form of power that forces people into hegemonic displays of conformity. Listening to intimate narratives creates understanding for new ways of doing relationships and non-normative sexualities. When we understand power, we create visibility and oppose inequalities.

I believe that participants use rituals as key to their sexuality especially to feel cleansed and free of guilt. The rituals are both relations (the way Foucault views them), and a more scripted, even fetishistic quest for pain as purification and cathartic sacrifice. Discipline rituals are expressions and explorations of repressed sexual desires and sexual shame. Participants also use hyper-ritualized discipline, which embraces their longing for consistency, structure, and authority. Participants find these rituals deeply meaningful to their sexualities, relationships, community, and culture.

## **5.2 Power, Desire, & Intimacy**

The complicated nature of discipline relationship sexuality involves understanding names, reasons and beliefs, but also understanding how people who purport to love each other can (violently) punish each other. Many people find it difficult to understand how violent sexuality can be intimate. An early example of a critical feminist view on violence and sexuality is Susan Sontag's critical view of BDSM art. Finding BDSM distasteful and unable to understand how people engage in power exchange rela-

tionships, Sontag (1975) critiqued several BDSM art exhibits: "Sadomasochism has always been the furthest reach of the sexual experience: when sex becomes most purely sexual, that is, severed from personhood, from relationships, from love." In a rebuttal, David Renton (1999) pointed out that Sontag's recognition of a violent society was accurate, but that non-BDSM couples also create sexual violence: "Sontag's failure is to equate the playing out of games based on power with the functioning of real power on society" (Renton 1999:250). Spanking and controlling sexual violence is often classified as masculine and heteropatriarchal (Renton 1999). In his discussion of heteropatriarchy, Kaplan (1996) asserts that labeling violence and dominant sex as bad or negative automatically puts the focus on valuing certain kinds of sexual practices rather than resisting heteropatriarchy. I highlight Kaplan and Renton because they discuss resistance as political acts and point out how quick many people are to label wanting or consenting to violent sex as undesirable.

Christy speaks of discipline as "reducing the power struggles" in her relationship. She recognizes that her husband does not "buy into" discipline but gives it to her because she wants it. But she says that discipline keeps their relationship "running smoothly, without the power struggles" they used to have. She says she tries to leave the discipline and control up to him, but her husband is still not "secure" enough in his role to "dictate the ultimate authority." Christy reports finding "strength in her submission to her husband's authority" and says he is much more attentive and loving to her. She also reports feeling more appreciative of him as well. To get here she says, "I found domestic discipline online. After much research and praying I brought the idea to my husband. I'm sure at first he thought it was just another thing I was demanding he do." Though she wants more strict discipline from him, she says, "I realized many of the problems in our marriage were just as much my fault as his." She sees both their actions as "self-preservation" and says, "I controlled and he went along to get along." She sees changing the patterns as taking time, not just for him but for her as well, recognizing that her husband is not a strict person but she herself finds emotional and sexual release in receiving "true discipline sessions."

Sharing the control and communication rather than demanding it, Christy exchanges power with her husband, and though she is not completely satisfied, she sees the beginning stages of intimacy and connection she says she wants. She receives some discipline and recognizes the invisible power exchange they give each other when she receives discipline and submits to her husband.

Another participant expresses his view on power and willing submission on the DWC survey (2007) "The power aspect best describes the motivation. When you believe that it is the proper order of things for the female to be the head of the household, and therefore the disciplinarian in the relationship. If you are naughty – you get spanked" (DWC survey 2007:28). By revealing their desires for discipline, participants hope to establish intimacy and connection with their partners. The vulnerability of receiving discipline and having their needs met requires trust, consent, and communication. Establishing intimacy requires the fancy footwork of disclosure but also of accepting the other partner's advances without rejecting what they offer. They must navigate reality and not living up to (or seeking) a rape fantasy (or a governess fantasy) when they are not themselves strict disciplinarians. Accepting reality requires accepting the limits of oneself and one's partner. It requires limits on perfectionism and unattainable standards.

#### *Blurring the Boundaries – Violent Acts as Love*

In her manual, Vivan (2009b: 46) explains that getting spanked by a partner moves intrinsic fears of violence, especially of men's violence against women, out to the open. She says spanking allows men and women a "healthy, sexy, fun outlet" for their aggression. Vivian believes consensual spanking allows people to diffuse tension and anger in their relationships. In this way, spanking frees couples to explore healthy ways to express anger, and frees people (especially women) from fears about their partner's anger towards them. Her premise is that a desire for spanking and discipline is also a defense

mechanism against the violent nature of relationships. Consensually controlled violence allows partners a say in how and when they receive the (discipline) violence they want.

The etymology of violence comes from Latin *violentia*, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, meaning not only vehement or physical force to inflict injury but sometimes meaning "having some quality so strongly as to produce a powerful effect" (Harper 2012). It also has roots in violation (*violare*), meaning to break an oath, offend, defile, "to render foul; make unclean or impure" (Harper 2012). To consent has French roots, *consentir* "agree, comply," and be in harmony, and Latin *consentire* feel together and give permission (Harper 2012). In her discussion on violation and violence, Newmahr (2011: 175-179) writes:

Nonconsensual violence (what most people mean when they say 'real violence') transgresses physical, social, emotional and ethnical boundaries between actors. . . . to violate and to be violated are intimate experiences. . . . These conversations often begin and end with the idea of consent, though, neglecting to unpack the ways in which emotional and psychological experiences *change* [italics hers] with consent – specifically experiences of trust and violation. In non-consensual violence, access is experienced as violation. . . . also of trust. . . . The *positive* [italics hers] experiences of intimacy – the warm, positive feeling of connected that has come to characterize all intimacy – is not reciprocal. . . . To be violated is an intimate experience, yet violation changes intimacy. . . . If intimacy is access to pieces of the self that are otherwise inaccessible than even the threat of violation is an inherently intimate space. . . . The granting of trust and the being trusted for these violations of flesh alone are intimate experiences.

I understand discipline relationships and emotional vulnerability by using Newmahr's framework of building trust and consensual violence. The intimacy of building trust puts participants at more risk and more gain. When participants blog about their search for agency and safety in a violent world, they use real examples of how discipline works. Participants say choosing violence to heal memories of violent acts helps them overcome or resist feeling unsafe. Paradoxically this resistance also allows participants a type of catharsis (or perhaps exploration) into violent and erotic (consensual) self-pleasure.

Participants say discipline makes them feel safe and loved. It fulfills their needs and brings them pleasure, allowing them to more fully express the full range of their sexuality. For these participants, not receiving discipline feels more violent and more damaging than the consensual violence they choose.

Laurel is conscious of the blurred line between abuse and consenting discipline. She acknowledges that she will not always want the discipline she has asked for when it is happening, but she also recognizes that she desires it in her life. She explains this contradiction here:

My problem is that something of this nature cannot be completely consensual. You may authorize your husband or boyfriend to spank and punish you, but if you give him that power, you are not going to be consenting every time. I guess the bottom line is that hitting someone in the way spankings are usually carried out would be considered abusive by most outside observers. And to be perfectly honest, it's considered that way by me as well. I don't think it makes a difference whether it's their backside or their face or anything else. But that doesn't make me desire it any less.

By contextualizing consenting violent behavior as potentially abusive yet still desirable, Laurel complicates the nature of consent. Her sentiments reflect the paradoxical nature of "consensual non-consent." She illustrates the significance of "outside observers" on discipline relationships and how such social pressure affects the way many women feel about wanting to receive consensual violent acts. Even knowing other people might consider them abused creates conflict and sexual shame inside many women. The contradictory desire to for normality and discipline comes up throughout the interviews. Carla, for example, says, "I have a political love-hate relationship with my own needs. It may be undesirable by default. . . . I'm not a proponent of alpha male theories, but in my case DD is good for me." For Laurel, the struggle is fear of the perception of abuse and giving up her personal power, while Carla recognizes her the gain. The women, more than the men, seem to have learned to say, "I know this is naughty, or bad for me, I know I shouldn't want it, but I need it." The notion that meeting one's sexual needs is an indulgence for women and an imperative for men is deeply ingrained in the dominant cultural. This puts women in a double bind because they must deal with both their own internal conflict at receiving sexual pleasure and navigating power relations. When participants give up personal power to receive the discipline they desire, they also receive something in return. Submitting to the violent behavior of discipline spanking frees submissive partners to experience their sexuality more fully. As Carla says of receiving discipline, "there's a sense of intimacy I've never experienced anywhere else. I don't

feel threatened. I don't feel hurt, debased, or ignored. I've chosen this so I never fear it. . . . The harder the discipline the freer I feel."

What indicates abuse in an intimate discipline relationship? How/does desiring violent behavior, consenting to it, and feeling a sense of intimacy and fullness draw the line between consent and abuse? How/does feeling rejected and threatened and debased by a violent behavior indicate abuse? Some of the participants, like Diana admitted her marriage was "still falling apart" even after she and her husband agreed to use discipline to repair it. Diana's husband had a child with another woman and Diana felt lost trying to "pick up her life" after the broken trust and his adultery. She said she grew up in a culture where divorces are rare and marriages carry on despite infidelity. Diana feels compelled towards submission and discipline but by her own admission, only asked for a discipline relationship after her own marriage "fell to pieces." She describes her emotionally absent husband and how she feels he misuses discipline:

He can't just wallop me into submission because something in our marriage isn't right. I mean, I'm hurting here and he's trying to make me wrong. He just spanks me. I need more than that. He hurt me; now he needs to fix it, not just spank me when my feelings of betrayal come up. Lately, when I want to talk or be open, he just spanks me. Domestic discipline is about communication and connection, too.

Diana remains in her difficult marriage and maintains her blog because she feels dedicated to both. She never admits her marital problems in her blog. To do so potentially she fears outsiders might mock her or judge her and tell her she is an abused wife. It also opens her to the possibility of judgment from the discipline relationship community who might tell her to surrender to her husband's authority or be a better wife. Perhaps if Diana wrote openly about her real unhappiness and her husband's abusiveness she would have to admit that her marriage is over and discipline failed to save her marriage. I believe many similar blogs gloss over some of the harsher realities, like partners who refuse to communicate but use spanking and discipline to thrust their will on their submissive partners. What goes unsaid is often louder than what is said. To me, the abandoned blogs speak louder than the happy stories. An-



other submissive woman blogged about her husband giving her a spanking she vehemently disagreed with (link lost, note made, 2007). She felt that she had not done anything wrong to earn discipline. Her husband spanked her anyway. She ran away from her husband and locked herself in the bathroom, sobbing and screaming, "I hate you! I hate you!" He responded by saying, "You have turned me into an abuser, I cannot do this with you anymore." Later, they addressed the encounter by agreeing to practice non-corporal discipline only. Though both partners missed physical spanking, as well as the connection spanking provided, they both believed that the threat of abuse was too great a risk. A few weeks after I read about this incident, they posted a goodbye note on their blog expressing a desire to withdraw from public discipline groups and continue their discipline relationship privately. At the time, I suspected they both wanted to change their names because they felt so scrutinized and their blog was so widely read. Several months later, their blog was removed entirely from the Internet. This discipline relationship couple was one of the first couples to blog as a couple and they provided many self-reflexive narratives about their daily life. This differentiated their blogs from common romance novels, how-to blogs, or graphics. Some readers responded to their decision to shut down the blog by calling them cowards and quitters. I wonder if one reason they shut down the blog was because it felt too much like a public performance in the spotlight for their private life to withstand. I also wonder if admitting publically to personal topics like fighting felt too much like spectacle for a couple who said they were dedicated to intimacy. The social control and intense scrutiny of public arena is difficult for anyone to withstand, but sharing private and intimate experiences makes one even more vulnerable.

Janet and her partner attempt to avoid the problem of abuse by instituting a "no hitting above the neck" rule. However, when her partner hit her above the neck (I presume he slapped her in the face), she blogged and also justified the encounter many women would find abusive. She told me about how her partner broke their rule because of "his masculine energy and repressed aggression." Janet said she knew he was angry while she was being hit, but she never thought to end the relationship or

ask him to change his behavior. Instead, she reasoned that she asked her partner for physical contact, and now she needed to live with the resulting aggressive behaviors, even though there was a pre-established rule that should have served as a firm boundary. While it may have occurred to her that crossing their boundary was abusive, she did not admit it either publicly or to me. When I asked her about it, she continued to insist that being hit in the face was an act of male aggression and that men are being pushed into it because they are “suppressing their natural masculine roles throughout their lives.” Later in the interview she said she considered discipline an “an overcorrection for feminism.” Janet’s belief that men are inherently violent and might physically rage and react by hitting someone in the face is not unique. Erasing a partner’s accountability for ignoring personal boundaries Janet makes meaning of nonconsensual violence by describing men as stuffing down their rage. This both infantilizes men with the perception that they lack a locus of control and allows Janet to ignore her own pain of dealing with a partner who crossed her boundaries by making justifications for it as a collective and unexpressed (repressed) violent masculine need. Her belief in an over-correction for feminism merely reflects her social standing and her social location in an upper middle class, highly educated, and incredibly feminist world. Janet does not live in a world without feminism but in a world where most of her cohort has multiple ways to proscribe (and enforce) various feminisms. Disdaining and blaming feminism for “masculine violence” is no different than blaming society or one’s parents for your partner’s bad behavior. Rather than hold him accountable for his abusive and nonconsensual behavior, Janet defended her partner, rationalizing and justifying it. If anything, being hit in the face made Janet even more dedicated to a discipline relationship. She has subsequently written and published several books through an independent publisher about discipline relationships.<sup>1</sup> Her views on abuse, consent, and staying in bad relationships have evolved drastically since our interview (she now believes women should leave rather than stay). Her views on masculine dominance and aggression and violent behavior have not.

#### *Adding Structure to the Relationship*

One way to avoid abuse and add ritual is to make rules and follow them. Written contracts outlining rules and negotiations are often part of discipline relationships (Blue 2003; Markham 2005, 2007). Dorothy Spencer (1936) purportedly created one of the earliest and most widely publicized discipline relationship manuals between consenting adults. Spencer's plan includes agreements and written consent forms to be administered by both the husband and the wife for wrongful behavior or built up tension between spouses (Markham 2005; 2007). Her plan calls for equal disciplinary action for both partners (Markham 2005; 2007; Spencer 1936). Spencer's plan recommends that a single woman to contract with her parents or close relatives for spankings. Similar arrangements are currently practiced in some discipline relationships with the use of a "surrogate spanker" (Mr Loving DD 2007) who administers discipline when the dominant partner is not available to discipline their partner. Spencer's spanking contracts contain detailed descriptions of both the spanking scenario and the rules to be followed.

The language of Spencer's plan is altered based on gender, and depending on which spouse is engaging corporal punishment. A husband spanks his wife with his bare hands on her bare buttocks, but a wife "whips" her husband on his bare buttocks with a belt. Many participants said they use or had used formal contracts in the past and allow changes to be made by verbal agreement, as needed. Adherence to contracts and rules vary with the couples. Some find them very important, and some do not use them at all. Ron, a dominant man in a discipline relationship, says he got his contract from the Internet but changed it to fit his marriage. Ron does not find formal contracts necessary but says his wife needs a written agreement, "She likes things to be concrete, formal, signed, and written down. I do it for her."

Participants often feel that by creating formal contracts and rules, they ritualistically establish discipline, thus the sense of structure, rules and consequences they want. These rules and contracts give participants a sense of what to expect from each other and the discipline relationship. They also expressly give consent for discipline and specifically list behavior, like spanking, the dominant partner

can give. Participants who use them say contracts give a greater sense of consistency, concreteness, and formality to their discipline relationships. A submissive male participant in the DWC survey (2007) says:

I asked my wife to discipline me when I needed it. She was reluctant at first, but after thinking about it, she decided to give it try . . . We created a discipline contract that covers the rules and punishment for breaking them, for example, one of the big no-nos was cursing, breaking that once meant 40 swats of the strap, plus the any other swats due to additional rules being broken. I must say I sure don't curse very often now. . . . We love each other dearly, I am not her slave, nor is she mine, we are equals in our marriage, except when she is dishing out discipline.

Though many participants report having a contract, actually using it or creating rules and having consistency are a different story. During our interview, Janet admitted that simply putting rules into a contract does not mean she will feel good about receiving discipline if she does not agree with her partner before he disciplines her:

Sometimes I have trouble consenting in the moment. It [discipline] seems like a really good idea until the moment comes when I don't think I'm wrong. It doesn't seem fair. It's still a work in progress for me. That's a personal challenge for me. Is being able to abide by my agreement [the contract]. It's an incredibly hard thing to do sometimes.

Rules and contracts do not guarantee perfect discipline relationships. But as many couples report, consistency and following the rules ritualizes discipline. Having a contract never guarantees both partners will agree about the specifics of how to do discipline, but it formalizes the importance of the relationship itself. Participants often refer to bending rules or dominant partners not following through on agreed discipline as "inconsistent discipline." Jodi describes this: "When my husband is inconsistent it doesn't work. Sometimes I'm punished for something and then other times he lets it go. That's frustrating." Janet also talks about how frustrated she feels with inconsistent discipline:

I wish to hell it were [more consistent] and it's partially my fault that it's not. If it were we'd have a lot better relationship, but because we haven't defined the rules, and he defines respect a different way, it's [the discipline relationship] not practiced consistently. When we do our relationship is enhanced like 500%, and the minute we let it go, we fall all the way back into our old destructive patterns and fight and argue and feel emotionally distant from each other.

Participants blame many reasons for why discipline is not consistent in their relationships. Some participants blame their busy lives. Others blame illness, the children potentially overhearing, tiring jobs or even their partner not being entirely on board with the relationship. Regardless, not following established rules, especially for participants who need contracts and very formal structure, leads to frustration. For participants with emotionally absent partners and for whom discipline relationships represent both connection and communication, follow-through and consistency matter a great deal. The participants who use contracts as a way to define their boundaries are, in their own way, establishing protection. Perhaps contracts and expressed rules are political acts, defining participants' sense of selves. Ensuring agency over their lives to have discipline the way they want it removes barriers to pleasure and is a political act. For participants who feel betrayed and frustrated by inconsistent discipline and the lack of adherence to the rules, I recognize two stories. First, I hear participants mourning lost connection and emotionally absent partners. Secondly, I hear participants coming to terms with the reality of discipline over fantasy. Their discipline partners are might not value discipline and consistency the way they do. And life itself brings children, disappointments, travel, illness and unforeseen circumstances that require flexibility to participants who want structure and formality to make them feel safe.

Participants working towards advanced degrees reported asking their partners to help with their structure and deadlines. Some created contracts and others simply requested this discipline verbally.

Haron writes about her partner, Abel during her graduate degree:

I love breaks. Really. But sometimes breaking up is a nuisance, [sic] and up until that morning last week I'd thought it was optional, too. . . . I'd never been in trouble for working too much. This was too weird for words, and I even pinched myself on the thigh, to check whether I was having one of my frequent spanking dreams. "You've been given a timetable," lectured my husband, pushing me up the stairs with a palm between my shoulder blades. "It's there to be observed." Not according to Abel. In reality - according to Abel's version of reality - it was there to help me pace myself. To keep me from burning out. . . . The timetable was binding, you see, and that included the breaks.

[http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/04/paddled\\_for\\_wor.html](http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/04/paddled_for_wor.html)

Structure makes participants feel safe. But it does not always include deadlines. For submissive participants, it includes knowing they are taking care of themselves. “I don't think Abel realised just how bad my work habits are, and how much control I need in order to work out some better ones.” In addition to six-minute discipline sessions for not meeting her thesis goal, he also works out various negations for her web routine. Other participants talk about being “grounded” from the web in order to meet their research goals. This type of structure and authority, (such as enforced breaks and naps and scheduled mealtimes, and no sugar) gives some submissive participants the added feelings of security and belief that the dominant partner cares about them. Mija writes about being disciplined for misplacing an expensive and important methodology book only a few months after her partner helped her organize all of books. After he found the missing book, her partner disciplined Mija as a reminder that “books are too important to be treated like this” (Punishmentbook 2005). Her partner gave her both guilt release and a reminder that the time and effort they put into a system so she would know where her research books were would not fail her at the last moment. Participants report feeling pressure to perform and please not only those in authority, but also not to fail themselves. Some participants say they are, “externally motivated” meaning, they need more deadlines and discipline from their partner. Other participants say they feel safer when they have discipline because receiving discipline helps them focus and offers them catharsis from the stress of performance anxiety.

Participants also seek discipline for structure to deal with health issues. In her interview Lilly talks about the “practical” aspects of adding discipline to her life as she deals with chronic illness:

A friend of mine with MS who is not at all interested in BDSM or spanking or anything - and he has a very dominating personality- but when I explained my relationship with my partner - he was like – ‘Oh my God! That’s so great to have some aspect of your personality be so practical!’ . . . I’m sure there’s also an element that’s connected to my sexuality on some level - there’s an element of feeling childlike - and coming from a place of feeling cared about.

Natty and Angie (Punishmentbook 2006) both write about their dominant partners enforcing discipline in dealing with chronic illness issues. In doing so they add structure to health, enforce rest, and ensure

that they take their medication on time. After Angie recovered from an emergency, she was told she would be punished for disregarding her medication and her health:

I was at once incredibly scared, incredibly relieved, and incredibly proud. It sounds so stupid, but he's just grown into such a wonderful disciplinarian. He never brought it up while I was actually sick, but the fact that he thought about it, and that he knew he was going to bring it up to me when I was well again and that he was going to address the issue with me and punish me for it -- it makes me feel so loved and cared for.

Knowing that their dominant partners care about them enough to punish and discipline them is a common refrain by submissive participants. In addition to adding the structure they crave, participants with health issues also report that discipline makes them feel feeling safer having someone care about their health and safety. Doctors sometimes refer to patients as noncompliant when patients refuse to undergo the advised treatment or consistently take medications. Patients who do this often say it is their only agency, a way to resist and have control over the uncontrollable aspects of their health (Groopman 2008). Ron reports that he tells his wife, "Your doctors orders are my orders." And he fully expects her to comply with both of them and take her medication. Angie writes about her mouthsoaping punishment for refusing to take her prednisone because she finds it bad tasting:

I don't know how long I stood there, trying not to taste the soap, but tasting it anyway; trying not to cry, but losing a couple tears here and there anyway. It wasn't too long, but it was certainly awhile. I knew that when he called me out of the corner there was going to be more pain to come and I was feeling sad for my already-sore bottom, but God I wanted that soap out of my mouth. And I was also thinking, "Geez, I had no idea this is what a mouth-soaping was like. And I bet it gets worse than this. If this is how awful it is, we could use this as a deterrent on the fast-food I've been eating way too much of and I swear, it would work where spanking hasn't." . . . There was a great deal of teeth-brushing and mouth-rinsing after. And then lots of hugs and cuddles and I love yous and promises from me to be soooooooo good from now until the end of time. I just took my Prednisone, and I have to tell you -- it's bad, but it's preferable [sic] to Ivory.  
([http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/07/health\\_safety\\_i\\_1.html](http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/07/health_safety_i_1.html))

For the chronically ill participants, the authority of their partner and structure of discipline makes them feel safe and cared about in a less distanced and paternalistic way than a physician. Doctors orders are often secretive, not team based, and medicalized. While many physicians take their patients into account, many patients feel alienated and distanced from the medical process (Groopman 2008).

Discipline relationships are purportedly communication based, and make participants feel safe and calm. Understanding that their partners will both reinforce their health care orders and discipline them if they fail to take care of their health adds an element of safety and control participants need. Discipline, for these participants is a preferable organization to medicalization

### **5.3 Emotional Challenges of Discipline Relationships**

How people form discipline relationships appears to affect their views of individuality within the relationship itself. Charlene, a 22 year-old submissive woman in a polyamorous relationship with a dominant man and another submissive woman, says she attempts to follow rules and meet expectations regardless of punishment. She says following rules and modifying her behavior meets a “deep seated need” of hers. “I need to be able to do some things for myself rather than for him. Understanding my motivations for actions is important. . . . I get to explore my kinks and sexuality in a way I wouldn’t outside of this lifestyle.” Remaining a whole person, especially in parenting matters remains a theme in Charlene’s interview. She expresses a desire for punishment and following rules her dominant partner sets up without losing herself to him or her family. Other participants appear less inclined to maintain a sense of self and personal identity in their relationships. I am unsure if Charlene’s quest for self individuation (with less us talk and more me talk) is due entirely to her poly relationship, or some combination of her age, education attainment, and political and feminist beliefs. But Charlene’s poly status and family practices and her interview and blog stands out from the others I encountered.

Laurel, a college student involved in a discipline relationship for about a year with her college boyfriend reflects on selfhood and discipline. When she talks about misbehavior, Laurel uses quotation marks, and indicates that her boyfriend spans her for “misbehavior” while she herself finds discipline more personally satisfying because of authority and control. She recognizes that her boyfriend needs to see himself as correcting her for misbehavior. Laurel realizes in order to receive discipline she sometimes needs to make sacrifices about the philosophy of discipline or beliefs about her “misbehavior.”



During our interview, she reflected about her contradictory needs for authority and discipline and her simultaneous firm belief in equal relationships. She admits to “allowing” her boyfriend to correct behavior he finds problematic, occasionally calling a halt to it because “she doesn’t like to be told what to do.” Ultimately Laurel says she and her boyfriend end up renegotiating and: “We always come back to it [discipline] because he’ll say, ‘OK if you really don’t want me to I’ll stop.’ And I’ll say, ‘No no please spank me!’” Laurel also admits she sometimes wants her boyfriend to spank and discipline her because she needs the discipline and cares about her boyfriend, even if she does not like his reasons for giving her discipline.

Participants often distinguish discipline as “useful and real” and not for sexual gratification.

They contextualize BDSM or erotic spanking as what one does for fun or play. Laurel agrees saying:

BDSM doesn’t have that much to do with true misbehavior or punishment but invents situations. DD is more about real discipline, someone really being bad and getting punished for it. We have a non-standard and non-mainstream and non-normal way of conducting a relationship with one person in charge of disciplining the other.

Some people explain that discipline feels necessary to them to change or modify their behavior. On *The Taken in Hand* (TIH) site, one commenter, Stephen, discusses how disciplining his wife changes not only her behavior but improves his own:

Quite often in a taken in hand relationship a wife trusts her husband to be fair when making a judgment about her behavior. It is important to these women that he gets it right. These women want to be held accountable for their behavior. . . I have discovered that taking my wife in hand not only changes her behavior, but it changes mine as well. I feel responsible to get it right. I am as accountable to her about my behavior as she is to me. (Stephen on TIH 2007).

This belief that the dominant partner’s behavior will improve automatically appears frequently throughout the discipline community. Perhaps in addition to getting an absent partner more involved in a relationship, seeking discipline is an unspoken expression of hopefulness in changing a partner’s undesired behavior without demanding they actually change. This paradoxical hope reflects the “topping from the bottom” metaphor found throughout BDSM literature and to which Wakeman (2008:65) refers when

discussing DD in her article: “In such situations, it’s the submissive partner who’s actually in control; the ‘top’ [dominant] is required to have permission from the ‘bottom’ [submissive]” before actually doing any discipline. The submissive partner has “veto power” in the relationship. Without the submissive partner there is no relationship. Submissive partners often both want and fear control. Perhaps they even (unconsciously) want to control their partner’s behavior to avoid dealing with their own. When their dominant partner’s behavior does not change they express frustration.

In her interview, Deborah admits she stayed in a discipline relationship before her current marriage, hoping her partner’s behavior would change because she was submissive enough and she wanted the relationship so badly. But his negligent behaviors never improved. Deborah reports that her past partner lost his job and dropped out of night school, becoming increasingly angry with her and the children. Rather than modifying her behavior and changing his bad behaviors, Deborah found that ending her old relationship was a difficult but necessary step in finding a new life with a new husband. She now has what she considers a “good and healthy discipline relationship.” Deborah says: “What I have now with [current husband] is so different than what I had with [past partner]. I couldn’t change him. Only [past partner’s name] could change him. I could only change me. But I kept hoping. I just wanted him to want us to work out as much as I wanted us work out.” The trope that dominant partners’ behaviors improve simply because they are involved in a discipline relationship sets submissive partners (like Deborah) up for failure. The submissive partners often cling to hope (and to the relationship) and hope for change in both the relationship and in their partner despite the fact that no change occurs.

One discipline relationship manual author, Vivian (2011:120), agrees with Deborah’s sentiments, writing: “If bigger things are falling apart, spanking by itself will not be enough to change that.” Vivian offers readers several relationship book authors (John Grey, Harville Hendrix, Alison Armstrong). She suggests people work on the root of problems in their relationships rather than rely on discipline, submission, (and the dominant partner’s behavior improving) to fix relationship problems. Vivian also re-

fers to her own blog, "The Disciplined Feminist." In this blog, Vivian examines her own discipline relationship. In one blog entry, Vivian explores the contradictions of wanting a discipline relationship yet dealing with a partner's bad behaviors saying:

Whether or not DD is ultimately a viable lifestyle option remains to be seen -- the surge of interest in this lifestyle seems the beginning of a social experiment in human behavior, sex roles and power in relationships. Time will tell whether or not the Big Problem of how to deal with the dominant partner's transgressions will be DD's undoing.

Blog readers write to her and Vivian responds. In one of her responses, she writes:

Also, it's probably worth clarifying as we all sort through this stuff for ourselves that the problem I have with my partners is not that he's not punished when he does something wrong, but that in general, he refuses even to apologize or admit his mistake.

Were he to take responsibility more often and offer apologies to me when he's done something to hurt me, I wouldn't have a Big Problem with DD. Were he to take more responsibility and apologize more frequently, I'd gladly pay disproportionately on my end (!) when I've done something wrong, in exchange for the enormous benefits of DD.  
(<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2007/07/maintenance-vs-discipline-question-of.html>)

Vivian's advice contradicts the dominant wisdom within the discipline community that discipline fixes a partner's behavior and a relationship. Many discipline manuals offer the idea that discipline itself is a form of relationship therapy, and that by using it participants will enhance communication repair and overcome negative behaviors (Markham 2007). By suggesting books and manuals outside discipline and discussing her own personal experiences, Vivian offers readers a critique of discipline culture. She also expresses concerns about inequalities within the relationship:

As far as I can tell, there is no mechanism within the rules of DD for handling this situation. The rules by which feminine anger is allowed to be expressed feel unequal and unfair to me. . . . If he's angry with me, he gets to *spank* [italics her own] me. . . . But if I'm angry with him, I have no such acceptable outlet. . . . But nobody's perfect. No matter how much we love each other and how well DD works for us, there will always be times when something he does hurts or angers me. That's the nature of an emotionally intimate relationship.  
(<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2007/01/when-hes-wrong.html>)

By reaction to her partner's lack of consequences within DD, offers critique of blind acceptance of inequality, looking instead at the power imbalances within discipline relationships. The entire challenge

and resulting discussion, rather than her views alone, become political acts. In her interview Charlene says something similar about inequality and unfairness:

“I have a hard time with anything I perceive as arbitrary or unfair. . . . Usually I can get my head around it if I can see where he’s coming from, but sometimes I can’t see it. That’s usually when I start to have a problem. I want to know that his leadership is based on what is good for everyone rather than selfish desires.”

Janet also voices these concerns about unfair relationship dynamics. “In my experience men have an awful time admitting when they’re wrong and saying sorry.” She says if men hold all the power a discipline relationship becomes a “one way street.” When Janet feels her partner disrespects her she feels she lacks a way to deal with it in her relationship. Of this imbalance Janet says:

He has discipline but I don’t have anything and that’s not fair. In a relationship that works the way I want he would simply apologize. . . . Domestic discipline doesn’t work when we don’t agree who’s at fault. Later we can work through it logically. But not in the moment and that’s a challenge to the whole arrangement. It’s dangerous for us and this [discipline relationship] when he thinks he right and I’m still mad. I’m like fuck that agreement, it’s a breach of trust and breaking a promise.

Of unfair relationship aspects, The Boss, writes on TIH (2007) that discipline does not have to be fair or equal to promote a good relationship. He describes discipline and taking a partner in hand as effectively solving the problem.

Taken In Hand [discipline] can provide a fabulous means of solving problems, nipping fights in the bud, resolving difficulties, and reconnecting, as I have described here [links to another blog post]. Taken In Hand powerfully brings the couple's sexual connection and core personality aspects (in which this kind of control feels soothing and brings peace and harmony and intimacy) to bear in difficult times and on problems and issues. (Submitted by The Boss TIH 2007) (<http://www.takeninhand.com/is.the.idea.of.fairness.causing.trouble.in.your.relationship>)

The Boss ignores the power abuse other participants describe. The Boss himself had a blog with his partner, Invidia, at *The Collar Purple*. At one time Invidia described a situation where she received discipline she thought was unjustified. They mutually blogged about it and she described feeling that her own desire for discipline and submission was betrayed. The Boss disagreed with her, citing his authority

as his right to discipline as he determined. Ultimately, Invidia reported taking a day to consider her needs, going to work, and then later feeling grateful to have a partner who considered her needs for discipline. Though Invidia later blogged that she no longer felt betrayed, she still said she thought her was unfairly punished and explored her feelings of injustice in her blog entry.

Another participant of the TIH board, Pat, replies to The Boss, saying:

I DO see a problem with one person being spanked for participating in an unpleasant argument when both of them were at fault. Similar to CJ, I could see it as acceptable when it is a matter of reconnecting, and expressing love and concern for each other, but if it becomes a "I'm the head of the household so I will spank you until you admit you were wrong," situation then I think a lot of women who are submissive and want to be Taken In Hand would still perceive that as unfair. And they would be right! It would be an abuse of power.  
(<http://www.takeninhand.com/is.the.idea.of.fairness.causing.trouble.in.your.relationship>)

When online members acknowledge the ability to abuse power within discipline relationships, such collective group conversations create the potential for change and visibility. When participants discuss and debate about power and power exchange within the discipline community they are distinctly political acts involving their own identity, and relationship, and the creation of the belief in equality (if not for gender) at least for their non-normative sexuality.

This examination of relationship dynamics explores not only the frustration and futility of controlling other people (either consensually or trying to control through submission), but also of accepting the inherent resentments and hostilities in many intimate relationships. Discipline relationships are not a panacea for building resentments; rather they extend power, control, inequality, and vulnerability into relationships. Even partners who confess to happiness in their discipline relationships admit to some resentment over unjustness. The paradox of any power exchange relationship is that unequal and unacknowledged power leads to resentment and often resistance. Equal partners wield unequal power (temporarily and through giving and receiving discipline) in the relationship. When there is inequality, or when one partner repeatedly behaves badly or harms the other partner, the relationship breaks down. Harming the relationship or partner indicates a lack of relationship equality, abuses trust, and increases

hostility and resentment over time. The expressed ideology of discipline relationships is: There can be no real authority or control within the relationship without trust and vulnerability. When a dominant partner repeatedly disrespects or abuses the trust of the submissive partner the power dynamics subtly shift from consensual violence to hostile betrayal. Participants must navigate power and trust constantly.

*Blame the Victim (for His Misbehavior & Her Life Conditions)*

Some participants believe the behavior of the dominant partner will get better after the submissive partner's behavior improves. Seth also believes a man's behavior "naturally improves" when he corrects his woman's misbehavior. In response to my probes about the man's behavior improving, abuse, and reciprocal relationship involvement, Seth says:

What happens when a man is clearly inept? That has more to do with choosing the right man in the first place than anything else. But not all LDD relationships are perfect. Some do end, in spite of the contribution that LDD makes to the relationship. Bear in mind that regular relationships end for all sorts of reasons, even those who seem to have had ever advantage from the start.

Seth lists common relationship strains and social problems such as financial stress, children, sexual and health problems, admitting, "Some relationships just implode for no obvious reason. LDD is incredibly effective but cannot do everything." In our two interviews Seth would not answer my questions about men's behavior or exactly how single women get along without men to discipline their "misbehavior." He first blames the victims of many the social problems he lists. Then, he points to women's natural misbehavior, ignoring men's behavior and attitudes entirely. When Seth (and others with his perspective) place women in the position of responsibility they ignores the power men have within the dominant culture. In this way, women are called to solve the sexual and relationship problems in their lives. They are also put in a double bind of being both blamed for problem and asked to solve social problems. By Seth's assessment, a woman with an uninvolved or abusive partner chose poorly. This attitude comes up both online and in interviews.

I received many thoughtful and reflective answers during my interviews. I also received many automatic responses, especially when I brought up social problems (as opposed to life events or sexual desires). These women blaming responses appear to embrace an archetype of Eve as a fallen woman needing Adam to control her misbehavior. One such example, reflecting similar views to Seth, comes from Joyce. When I probe for about her views of a woman living with a non-Christian man who feels threatened in her marriage Joyce replies: "Her behavior and attitudes should be a testament to Christ and should be an example." That an abused woman should save her marriage through Christ-like demeanor requires her to solve her own problem of abuse (or ignore it) rather than leave a harmful relationship. Joyce's automatic response and her unspoken message holds all women (including herself) to unlivable and unattainable standards within both the discipline culture and the dominant culture. These views expressed in the online communities create a dynamic where women bear the burden of solving relationships issues and ignore or dismiss larger social problems. By demanding women's behavior be a "testament" requiring they solve unsolvable problems, participants (and the trope of dominant culture) place women on a pedestal. This pedestal of perfection requires women to criticize each other for life circumstances beyond their own control. Lacking support from each other, women who take actions on their own behalf but fail to live up to preconceived notions of successful (discipline) relationships fall off the pedestal. This idea of failure as a woman and successful femininity becomes a mirror by which both women and men judge other women in the discipline community. The pedestal of perfection necessarily involves alienation rather than social support. When women's images shatter, they suffer humiliation in front of their peers rather than praise and support for trying or dealing with conditions outside their control. The solution offered by dominant tropes in discipline culture is dominant men saving women (through blame and shame) from themselves (and their own misbehavior and inherent bad life choices). Discipline tropes also extol a message of dominant masculinity saved by pressure and conformity to "real manhood." Some participants (like submissive men and dominant women) subvert these tropes, but

discipline relationship communities express hegemonic messages of women's docility and gendered patterns to relationships fairly consistently.

*The Unspoken -- Involving Emotionally Absent Partners*

Participants of discipline relationships use similar rationales, essentially saying, "I want my partner involved, I want them to take more of their share." Paradoxically, while it appears the submissive partners seek loss of control and dominance, many of them simultaneously appear to seek more emotionally accountable and present partners. The underlying unspoken desire to have a formerly uninvolved partner more emotionally involved in the relationship often leads to requests for discipline.

Straight submissive women, especially those with religious or conservative backgrounds, often find using a "masculine dominance as natural" trope easier than exploring their sexuality and discipline desires in more depth. (Submissive men, on the other hand, or queer, lesbian identified, or highly feminist women often investigate non-gendered discipline tropes). Holly and her husband actively use LDD in their relationship. After a previous relationship with a man "lacking strength and character," she was attracted to her husband's dominant personality and strength. "He was determined to be the head of our house and I was more than ready to say, "take it; I do not want the responsibility.'" Holly reports feeling more sexual toward her husband since they began a discipline relationship, and says her husband is more attentive to her as well. She explains many ways her husband pays attention to her and they find resolution in their relationship; ultimately, she gives him her submission as wife. Her husband changed his behavior too. He now listens to what his wife wants and considers her needs for discipline; he reads the journal she writes to him every week; and they find time to discuss and negotiate rules he wants her to follow. Holly successfully involved her uninvolved husband and got him to meet her needs. Though she never said so, she navigated marriage and relationship barriers using discipline. In this way, the trope of "relationship repair" gets repeated (making it easier to overlook and ignore unhappy or unsuccessful stories). The work Holly and her husband do to keep their discipline relationship working also



gets minimized and their relationship itself gets romanticized and idealized within the discipline relationship community.

Tanya, a queer-identified submissive woman, says her partner is not naturally dominant, which contributes to their communication struggles. She says they communicate before, during, and after discipline, adding: "I think a lot of the communication problems are things that would exist independent of discipline and they are things we're working on in couple's therapy. Most things would be a challenge even if we weren't doing discipline in our relationship." Tanya believes discipline in her relationship makes her feel safer and able to trust her partner more. In reply to what discipline does for her partner, Tanya says: "I am calmer and more stable and better able to cope with life, which means I am a better partner for her." Before adding discipline to her life, Tanya and her partner played with BDSM, but her partner often refused Tanya's requests for discipline and punishments. Seeking both counseling and discipline, Tanya hopes to meet her own needs for discipline and also get her partner more involved in the relationship. Tanya admits that her partner struggles with depression. Watching her seek a discipline relationship from her partner (from her blog and in the interview) I saw Tanya's push for discipline as both a claim of her own sexuality and as an almost desperate move for an active engaged partner. Similar statements from other participants led me to hear the unspoken (or not clearly articulated) grief from people missing emotionally absent partners.

#### *Relationship with the Partner and Relationship with Discipline*

Participants who realize their discipline relationships are not working out deal with emotional conflicts over meeting their needs and with solving their relationship difficulties. They report not only struggling with the relationship with their partners, but the relationship they have with discipline. Vivian explores her quest for safety and ritualized discipline with her partner:

When my partner and I added DD to our relationship . . . we realized we had a lot of clearing the air work to do. To accomplish this, we did the traditional "clearing the slate" ritual -- an extended, intense disciplinary session meant to expunge the hurts and betrayals of the past and start us on a new, healthier path together. This ritual was helpful, to some extent. That level of

ritual pain is powerful and it can't help but be cleansing in many ways. But the reality is that one afternoon of DD, no matter how intense and emotional, isn't going to erase years of mistrust, hurt, anger and miscommunication. . . . And so I've been contemplating the possibility that's breaking my heart: That this wonderful, beautiful relationship that feels so right, so complete and so safe in so many ways (in many ways beyond DD) may not be the right one after all. And with that, of course, comes the fear that I may never find anyone else again who understands this need in me as completely as my current partner does. I may find someone else willing to spank me, sure. Easy enough. But as we all know, DD is much, much more than that. Will I be able to find someone else with such a solid grasp of the psychology involved on both sides of a DD relationship? . . . . If he asked me to marry him today, would I say yes, despite the ongoing problems. . . . And that scares me even more. That I want and need DD in my life so much, and that I'm so afraid this is my only chance at having it, that I'd be willing to make a lifelong commitment to a relationship that's so fundamentally flawed just to keep it. Yikes.  
(<http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com/2007/04/when-dds-not-enough.html>)

Vivian receives overwhelming support from participants who sympathize with her about her current struggle with DD and her relationship. At the same time, they also recognize and share with her that DD is “a medicine that can facilitate healing, but it does not take the place of the healing itself. That is where the DD can open the doors, help establish enough trust so the harder emotional work and growth can take place.” Some participants urge her not to sacrifice her more important need for a good relationship just to have DD. Other participants urge her to stay in the relationship because they think DD will heal it. That participants report the need for discipline so badly and the struggle to find it so life-long and overwhelming, they are willing to stay in their problematic or unfulfilling relationships once they have discipline, speaks to just how “whole” discipline makes them feel. Losing discipline then, is not losing just a relationship, but losing part of oneself, one’s core identity, one’s sexuality. Keeping discipline is keeping one’s selfness intact. Discipline meets core needs. When participants urge each other to stay in non-abusive relationships, I recognize the wisdom in all their advice. Some share lived experiences of hurtful partners and others share experiences of living without discipline as equally painful. For example, Lars, advises Vivian to stay in her relationship:

‘Will I be able to find someone else with such a solid grasp of the psychology involved on both sides of a DD relationship?’ Possible, yes. Experience has shown me that the probability is very small. Given that; I am moved to ask: If he understands you and your needs so well, is this relationship truly flawed? I do not make light of the communication problem: he is withdrawing,

and you become more emotional. Go to the root cause, never mind the DD (DD will not solve a communication problem), and solve the problem: why is he withdrawing?

Lars (and others) recognize that finding a partner who understands the power dynamics involved in a discipline relationship is difficult and rare. His advice to Vivian to solve the communication problem rather than worry about the DD dynamic in their relationship is later echoed in Vivian's manual. Swan, on the other hand, answers from the wisdom of living with an ill-suited partner:

I stayed 28 years in a marriage that was "fundamentally" flawed -- and there weren't BIG things that someone looking in from outside might have seen. It was more the "water dripping on rock" kind of flawed that eventually eroded the relationship to the point where I knew I could not continue to pretend anymore. Very late in the game, he and I tried to incorporate DD. That probably extended things by a year and a half. It gave me the sense that there was some hope, but it couldn't cure the underlying issues.

For Swan, and the participants who have lived in co-dependent relationships, their sense of self is more important than discipline to their identities. Other participants, those who truly believe in submission, urge her to make the submissive decision to move past anger and truly forgive her partner. This anonymous woman urges her to forgive her partner, move on, and stop dredging up the past:

It is lovely if it [discipline] starts from a place of trust and communication, but I think it rarely does, and does not have to. It certainly is not in any way workable as a substitution for those things. One of the issues I have recently thought about in my own marriage is that trust is really a decision. At some point you have to take a leap of faith. You have to say I will stop trying to defend and protect myself, I will stop insisting that I need to be right, I will make being happy with my partner my number one goal. I also had to learn true forgiveness, and to stop trying to assess [sic] if my husband was worthy of my trust. If he is, (my husband, your partner) then let it go and get on with the rest of your life. Stop holding him hostage to things you supposedly resolved and got past. You have to let it go to move forward, and that is within your power to do or to not do (and mine too, of course.).

Doing discipline relationships is difficult because intimate relationships by their nature are complicated. Some relationships work better than others. Adding in authority and control and power exchange heightens the risk of vulnerability, volatility, and loss. Participants in discipline relationships use ritualized discipline to structure their lives. Discipline enhances good relationships and the lack of discipline feels painful. Participants often struggle with power when they deal with life and family events.

Participants who use discipline and punishment as a way to ignore communication report feeling less emotionally connected to their partners, though their partners may have already been emotionally absent. Participants who use fantasy to ignore reality often report feeling empty and hopeless and less fulfilled in their relationships. There is a small trend in the online communities where older members advise people to accept reality rather than building up fantasies of the perfect discipline relationship. Participants do the ritualized discipline of their relationships privately but share their narratives online.

## 6 ONLINE SPACE AS PUBLIC SPACE

**SUBMISSIVE MAN:** “I have already found much useful information on spanking blogs.” (DWC Survey 2007:30).

**MIJA:** “It's been almost ten years since I delurked on alt.sex.spanking. This blog, of course, is an example of wonderful connections we've made.  
([http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/11/over\\_the\\_knee.html](http://www.punishmentbook.org/2006/11/over_the_knee.html))

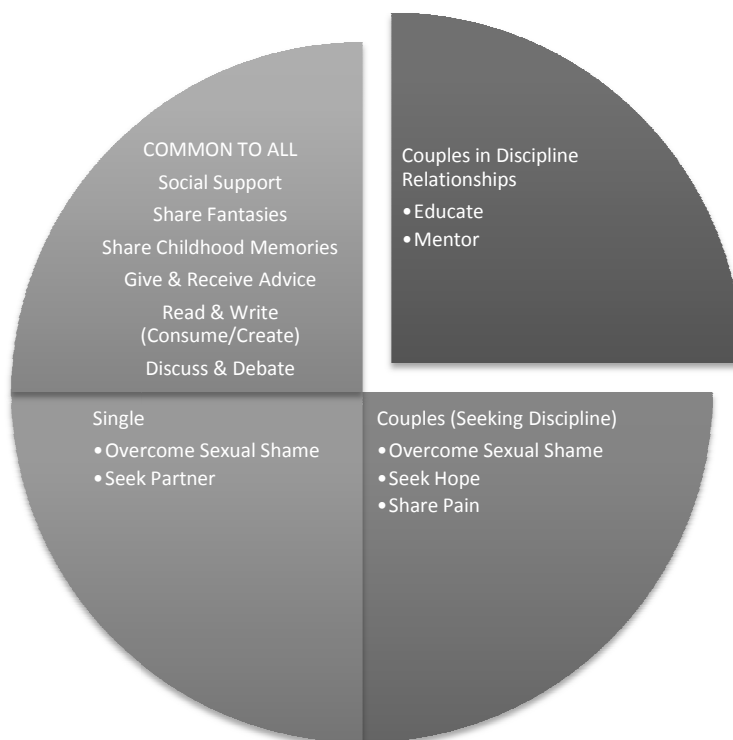
**SUBMISSIVE MAN:** “Meeting other real life DWC couples has always really helped us feel like our lifestyle is ‘normal’ and my wife feels very natural about spanking me.” (DWC Survey 2007:30).

For participants, online space is public space. I base my ethnographic observations on the premise that the users of social media and inhabitants of virtual online communities create public space. My observations for this chapter include what participants say they do and how participants interact with each other as groups online. In the last chapter I discussed how discipline relationships work. In this chapter I look more extensively at single participants and couples in non-discipline relationships (with

one partner who desires a discipline relationship). First, I show the types of interactions participants have with each other and how their discipline relationship status influences their interactions (see Figure 5.1). Second, I describe how participants navigate current relationships and search for discipline partners. In some instances, I show how participants in discipline relationships communicate in virtual communities as they share their lived experiences. As such their interactions function to formalize discipline identities and legitimate their non-normative sexualities and lifestyles. These community interactions have some commonalities and some distinguishing features which depend on participants' relationship status and duration of their relationship. Participants seeking discipline or in shorter relationships generally consider those in longer-term discipline relationships as discipline relationship experts. Participants also boundary police and enforce social mores on participants with non-normative discipline views or suspect behaviors (especially if they refuse to submit themselves to formal community inquiry).

All participants use social media as a form of social support and to make meaning and develop shared language for their discipline relationship identity. Many participants also blog (or read and lurk), and participate in the discussions and debates in online communities. Here, participants share childhood memories, fantasies, give and receive advice, explore beliefs, and sometimes sell products. Single participants sometimes deal with sexual shame and seek discipline partners. Participants in non-discipline relationships also deal with sexual shame, seek hope for convincing their partner to discipline them, and share their pain at being unable to express their full sexuality with their life partner. By the time participants are involved in discipline relationships, they have come out to themselves and already located a partner. Participants involved in longer duration discipline relationships act as educators and mentors to those with less experience in discipline relationships and to those seeking discipline relationships. The commonalities and specific ways participants interact with each other online are depicted in Figure 5.1. Sometimes participants use social media as consumers and other times as creators. Leaving

a comment online is both a creative act and a consumer act. As both a creator and consumer, the participant who comments interacts with the entire community, the original writer (of the blog or online piece), and the outside world (who may not understand discipline relationships or who may be opposed to them). In the non-cyber world (the real world of everyday life), people with non-normative sexualities may find themselves defending or hiding their sexualities. It is rare to see people actively bombarded with defensive and hateful threats on a daily basis in public spaces. Watching this type of hyperpanoptical social control over sexuality allows me to insight into policing and boundary patrolling (by both inside and outside discipline relationship communities). It also gives me insight into the defensiveness and feeling of oppression participants' express about keeping their discipline relationships identity secret. This leads to their simultaneous (sometimes explicitly expressed) wish for more visibility and understanding in the dominant culture.



**Figure 6.1 Discipline Relationship Status and Types of Online Interaction**

## 6.1 Participant Interactions: Blogs & Virtual Communities

All participants generally offer social support, share fantasies, give and receive advice, read and write stories and comments, and offer discussion and debates. I chose to analyze blog postings and virtual communities because participants whom I interviewed often asked me specifically to read their blogs and referred to their virtual communities as their virtual homes. Many times during interviews participants indicated that they felt they had already addressed a topic better in their blogs and that the comments on their blogs would give me greater insight into their lives and beliefs. Participants who do not actively write online, they consume the content and lurk, often delurking at a later time. Sometimes participants mark their delurking as an anniversary of “coming out” or coming to their discipline identities. Mija writes:

I delurked with a story and a very few details about myself, given the name Mija by Bea, who, at the time, was a regular poster. . . . That it existed at all seemed more amazing than I could bear.

At the time I was 29, in the middle of the first year of my MA program and floundering in an unhappy marriage that had taken my 20s and left me feeling far older than I was. My (now) ex husband saw my interest in spanking as "outside any idea" he could have about me. I'd buried my desires deep, only to have them reappear, triggered by writings of feminist Dorothy Allison.

This summer I'll turn 40. I'm in the final year (or so) of my doctoral program. My 30s have been the most wonderful time of my life and I feel so fortunate to have found ASS/SSS, the scene and all that has come from those discoveries.

Ten years ago today I discovered the spanking community. I really believe it was the most significant thing that will ever happen to me.

([http://www.punishmentbook.org/2007/02/10\\_years\\_ago\\_to.html](http://www.punishmentbook.org/2007/02/10_years_ago_to.html))

Mija describes ending her previous marriage, meeting her current discipline partner, and moving to a new discipline life. She considers her online community important and views the ten-year anniversary of her delurking a milestone in her life. In return, commenters congratulate her. I believe delurking and blogging are acts of creating visibility and owning one's right to claim public space for a non-normative identity.

In online interactions participants offer advice, coping techniques, strategies, and support. Often, when a participant (usually the submissive) desires a discipline relationship but has not yet disclosed their desire to their partner or requested discipline they still have hope. Yet, when the dominant partner has not accepted their request (or actively refuses to participate in discipline) participants deal with a loss and grief in their online interactions. When discipline requests are accepted, couples must create strategies for working discipline into their relationship and often seek and follow advice and education by older participants. The different revelations, group support, discipline practices, disclosures, and discussions are often complex. At first glance, what looks like a solicitation for advice, such as, "I need a stress release spanking" or "It's been over a month since my last discipline session" is actually a solicitation for support and may be a subtle solicitation for attention by the partner. This is especially clear if the dominant partner replies to their blog or comment and says, "You won't be saying that tonight." These online interactions, in which participants' identities connect to each other, solidify the discipline relationship group process.

Many of these group interactions are fluid and occur in the moment as comments. They appear to have flexible interactions and shift from talking to partners, to talking to other community members, or addressing unknown outside readers. For example, a woman describes her spanking from the previous evening. She writes, "I love you, thank you for knowing what I need" (web link lost notes made 2007). This message is for her husband, but the same story provides a directive, supportive element for other community members by describing how she and her husband talked about it before and afterward. Additionally, the wife systematizes the relationship by formally putting their discipline relationship process in writing to be investigated and understood not only by the group, but by outsiders looking in. By inviting in the outside world, group members educate and explain their beliefs. Iris makes a similar post at the *Punishment Book* as she shares a discussion between Chris (her disciplinarian) and her:



**Iris:** So I have to admit that even though I probably should be, I am not completely dreading my upcoming punishment. Don't get me wrong, I am dreading it. But I also crave that intensity and intimacy and I've so missed it with you.

**Chris:** It was interesting to read you say that you're not completely dreading the punishment, because I have to admit that I feel the same thing. As we discussed last week before the texting came up, I know we both miss that dynamic, and I'd be lying if I didn't say a part of me was a bit excited by the fact that you are in trouble. I have a hard time admitting that. . . . maybe that's why I've always been so adamant about not "enjoying" punishments. But, there is a part of me, like you say, which does feed off of that dynamic. I think we're both on the same page there. We don't like the actual event. . . . but we both like the situation and what it represents. For me, as I've said before, it's largely the trust. We share something very close and special in that punishment context, and I feel very close and focused on you before, during and after a punishment.

**Iris:** Your trust and care are cherished and valuable pieces of this equation for me too. We have to have mutuality in this, otherwise it wouldn't work.  
(<http://www.punishmentbook.org/2010/10/but-whats-in-it-for-you.html>)

Iris then asks readers, "What do you think?" First, she and Chris examine their relationship and lifestyle, and then by disclosing this commentary to the community they support and "invite in" others in a mentoring role. By teaching and sharing, Iris's post is three things at once, an explanation, systematization for discipline relationships, and community support. This fluidity creates difficult to define boundaries between themes that often intermingle in community interactions.

Sometimes partners read the commentary and respond to their partners both in real life and online. One submissive woman writes: "When I came home from work today I noticed that the loofah looked kinda lonely hanging there, because its mate [the bath brush] was missing! What's the first thing to enter my mind? 'Oh, Shit! [husband's name] has been reading the comments!'" (notes made, blog defunct, 2007). These couples often signal to each other publicly by soliciting and offering advice, or even complaining that they need more discipline. Such methods of expressing private life experiences combine the use of anonymity to express secrete discipline needs and private lived experiences with visible public sharing. In a similar example, a submissive man, Scally, blogs about living in a wife led domestic discipline relationship. Occasionally his wife, Cathy, reads his blog and responds to him. In one example, his wife directly solicits a blog post to which he responds:

Yes babe, I do love that you are creating rules and want to hold me to them. I truly believe in this lifestyle and love that it has become the norm and part of who we are as a couple. It makes me feel so safe and opens my emotions and feelings so much, that I find a beautiful 'me' that I love sharing with you. So I hope that as our lives go on you become stricter, because not only do I know the benefits, but because I know you always to be fair, and you are my friend. That 'Barbara' [fantasy character he writes about earlier] from my childhood was a fictional character that became a dream in my head; you are a reality that is exciting, unexpected, and precious."  
<http://the-good-dd-life.blogspot.com/2011/07/good-dd-life.html>

This response was about how happy he was about signing a discipline contract. His wife wanted him to respond to her post and his response expresses the joy of having a partner willing to discipline him. In the comments people agreed and dialogued. In her comment, Respecting Mistress replies to Scally, "I really love this post because it says everything that's in my head about domestic discipline but I can never articulate. I found it especially interesting how you relate Cathy's increasing strictness and severity is allowing you to open your emotions. It's exactly the same feelings that wash over me in simialr [sic] circumstances." Participants show by example not only how couples in relationships perform discipline together, but also by create discipline communities and formalize discipline relationship language and identities. In the public of virtual space, participants use discipline relationship dialogue as a way of knowing how discipline relationships can be done, even if they disagree with each other philosophically.

Allowing broader discussion and dissent in their virtual communities, participants open discipline relationships up for interrogation. By including interrogation in their comments, communities open themselves to a type of internal review, where they themselves can examine discipline relationships and each other. Consider Anjie's community comment about sexism and the responses to it:

I've decided that I'm very annoyed by people who write incredibly sexist things regarding domestic discipline (or whatever you want to call it - I think for the purposes of this blog WWD, or What We Do, seems to sum it up best). I'm tired of reading long essays describing how best to take a woman in hand, or deal with her "feminine misbehavior" or any of that SHIT. . . . But in a relationship I NEED for my lover to be dominant, I need for him to help me set rules and follow them. And if I were in a same sex relationship I know for a fact I would need the same things. I don't submit to Dave because he's a man. I submit to Dave because he's my lover, and he's earned my respect, my trust, and my obedience (though he doesn't get a whole lot of the latter lately). And I'm tired of the blogs and such out there that would have me believe I need this life-

style simply because I'm a woman. More importantly, I'm tired of them catering to men who believe they deserve to be in charge simple because they are men.  
(<http://www.punishmentbook.org/2005/02/sexism.html>)

Through their comments the community interrogates Angie about her original comment on her beliefs as well as about sexism in discipline relationship. Invidia replies, "Why would you allow someone else's lifestyle choices to bother you so much?. . . . It has nothing to do with me and what's right in my home/community. . . . I'm a huge proponent of free speech." For Invidia, allowing other people to live and let live and grant them the freedom of speech is more than important than silencing them. Mary Jo considers the idea of preaching views:

What I honestly don't get is why it is okay for one side (our side) to preach, but not for the other side? I'm a feminist, on the left, and a secular humanist. I know that influences how I view my own need to be spanked. But if I were a conservative Christian, why would it be less valid for me to view the same need to be spanked through the filter of my conservative world view?

Mary Jo's comment that "our side" (in this case, the left progressive side) "preaches" reflects a similar attitude that Janet expresses about the rigid intolerance and lack of social acceptance discipline relationships sexualities receive among her socially progressive cohorts. Mary Jo then turns to the *Loving DD* blog, (which other bloggers have already written about and which gets a great deal of air time):

I've read the "lovingdd" blog, and I came away feeling sorry for the guy who wrote all that stuff. He comes across as silly and insecure. All that generalizing about "feminine misbehavior," as if he read one too many Harlequin romances in his teen years. . . . and I expect that if a woman reads that lovingdd stuff and it still strikes a chord in her, well then she has found the reflection of her need. There *\*are\** women who think that way, and that's okay with me, if that is their choice.

Her response becomes a choice based response, a type of hate "the belief, but allow the actors their agency response." Intriguingly, Mary Jo conflates fundamentalist religiosity with misogyny when she writes about LDD. Also, Mr Loving DD is consistently firm in his views that LDD has nothing to do with religion or CDD. He expressly removed religion from his discussions of LDD making discipline about correcting misbehavior rather than Biblical precepts. Mija and Anjie both respond to this discussion:

**Mija:** I'm not interested in silencing anyone -- even our friend over at lovingDD. I think the best thing about free speech is it gives us the ability to provide a counter-voice to something that offends or bothers us. That's all I've seen happening here -- someone pointing to something and saying "this bothers me -- it's not what I do or believe -- it seems sexist." All I've seen go on here has been disagreeing with what seems to be one point of view on M/F DD. Censuring is a far cry from censoring, in my opinion.

**Anjie:** For what it's worth, I think it's fine that all sides in this debate are seen and heard.

Both comments appear to bring the conversation back on track, moving the discussion towards sexism (and the LDD blog) and away from religiosity. Mija's last comment is perhaps the most important in this debate. Expressing disapproval is not the same as silencing other people. And in fact, it is not removing freedom of speech, the way Invidia implies. For the discipline community, censoring is the best way participants have of negotiating their identities and practices and in maintaining social control to enforce the standards and boundaries of their new identities. The owner of the LDD site, Mr Loving DD, (who calls himself LOVINGDD) jumps in the fray:

Before anyone gets on their high horse about my Loving Domestic Discipline blog, maybe they should also check out this site, which proposes that MEN (rather than women) need to be regularly spanked for their own good. [He puts link and quotes from submissive male discipline website]. . . .

I don't feel threatened by this site, even though I am a man and even though I disagree with it. So why do you feel so threatened by mine? Chill out, for heaven's sake. I certainly wouldn't waste my time by putting posts on my own blog telling everyone about how much I disagree with this other blog, or about what a poor, deluded, socially retarded fool the person who created the site must be. I would just 'live and let live,' and focus instead on creating something positive on my own site. You don't improve the world by destroying what others are trying to do - you improve it by building better stuff yourself.

Mr Loving DD's tone, while seemingly cordial, is actually argumentative. He tells the all women group not to "get on their high horse" and insinuates that they find him threatening when they express their disapproval with his apparent misogyny. In fact, on his own *Loving DD* (now defunct) blog, he does not allow free comments such as the one he uses to comment. He screens his comments, selecting which comments appear on his blog. Some participants claim he never allows criticism or internal investigation of discipline on his blog, and only allows highly sexual material to appear on his blog. People who

offer criticism of discipline relationships or of his views are not included. These participants worry that he silences any dissent and creates the illusion that his views are superior or more knowledgeable. To his somewhat belligerent comment, Mija ends all discussion with her taunt, "I've really said all I have to say right now on the substance of this entry and how I feel about the sexist writing on LovingDD and some other similar sites. Freedom of speech. . . . they've even extended it to women now." By reiterating Anjie's original post and her feminist views, Mija's response does what most good responses do – they have a humorous finale which sums up the salient or overarching opinion of one or more comments. By adding her last remark, Mija sums up the consensus of both free speech and women's equality, to which the *Punishment Book* is dedicated.

Participants also talk to each offline to give and share advice. Sara, of *Finding Sara* (<http://findingsara.wordpress.com>) shares about her offline discussion with Bonnie of *My Bottom Smarts* (<http://bottomsmarts.blogspot.com>). These types of offline to online discussions happen frequently. In this instance Sara talks about her role as a mentor and educator in the discipline relationship community:

About two years ago, Bonnie of *My Bottom Smarts* helped me to make an important decision. I had an offer in front of me, an offer to publish a book on DD, based on my blog, my years of experience in marriage, in DD, as a long time blogger and as a trained and certified professional psychotherapist. The offer was from a new publishing house that was beginning with online publishing and moving to print material in the future. It was not connected with spanking romance, and there were some serious authors already contracted. After some research I was convinced it was real. After communication with the publisher on what was publishable, what they wanted from me, what I wanted to write, we got down to contracts.

It was then that I emailed Bonnie to ask her what she thought. Had she heard of this publishing house? What were her thoughts on turning my blog into some sort of book...with old and new stuff included. I don't know Bonnie except through her blog, but I respect her. I respect what she writes, the opinions I read, her leadership in our spanking community. She's long been clear on her unwillingness to post ads, to take money at "Our Bottom Smarts" for any facet of what she offers there. She has a real job, a full life, and reached out and eventually helped lead this community because we needed it and for her own reasons, she saw the need and was willing to offer herself and her time.

I began my blog for similar reasons, and as it happens, with Bonnie's encouragement through email. There was a gap at the time in DD blogs that were not overly sexual, not also intertwined with BDSM, or not written by someone with obvious emotional issues that would make me scared to take their advice. I had been living a 24/7 DD lifestyle about 2 years, been on forums, and was not getting the support I needed...and I felt I had some worthwhile things to share. I hoped to share what I had learned on my own blog and to find friends I could bond with and learn from. This blog has brought me all of that. . . . Would publishing be a way of giving back? Bonnie kept her email short. "Why would you charge for what is already available on your blog? Why would people want to pay for that? Why would you ask them to?" Good questions. I ended up not publishing because after consultations with lawyers, the publisher's and my own, there was no way to keep my real identity out of the legal contracts. I still work, have children, a somewhat public life, and I don't want my private life with my husband exposed.

When she writes that she respects Bonnie but does not know her in real life, Sara establishes the profound impact that virtual communities have in the discipline relationship culture. As symbolic places, virtual communities help people create relationships with those of similar social values and discipline interests. These communities also offer the outside world insight into discipline lives, where we can peek into others' lived experiences. When Sara receives a publishing offer, she hesitates on two grounds. The first is outing herself and her husband to the non-discipline relationship public. The second is charging other people for advice. Sara concludes that she feels a part of the discipline community and as such, feels responsible for offering expert support and advice. Her efforts and unpaid labor make her feel she contributes to some thing important and meaningful:

I am in this community because I want to be, because it gives to me, supports me, is a place I can be myself in a way I can't be anywhere else in the world. I answer questions from readers because I want to help them as others have helped me along the way. I try to answer your emails too. I do this because it's a good thing to do. And when I post, you give me feedback tht [sic] helps me as much as it helps you. We are on this journey together.

All the information anyone needs . . . to begin in DD, to continue with DD, in available for free on the web. There are free forums, free places to chat, and now a multitude of sane DD bloggers that would love to get to know you if you're trying to find friends. I have meaningful email correspondence with some bloggers and readers, and have met quite a few in person as well. Some I now consider close real life friends. I have found everything I needed within this wonderful community and never paid a dime.

*Decision made: I don't intend to turn around and charge to help others find their way. I have made money as a therapist and make money as a business woman, but TTWD and DD is unique, special. It saved my marriage,[sic] and if I can help anyone to find their way, I will pass along with good will, whatever I have to share, without looking to profit from it.[italics hers]*

Sara's decision to continue with her free blog shows her love for both the discipline community and how vehemently she defends the discipline relationship lifestyle. Additionally, the words she uses, like *unique* and *special*, show how intensely she feels about discipline relationships. I find it meaningful that women are often called upon to perform unpaid emotional labor even in virtual communities. Sara (and other bloggers) appear to view their blogging as a valuable volunteer act. In this way, receiving money takes away from their contributions to the virtual community and the discipline lifestyle -- perhaps even minimizes the importance of discipline relationships. When commenters encourage her to write a discipline therapy book for couples and sell it, Sara writes:

I agree that I have what it takes to write a professional level advice for couples book and charge for it. But I want to give back to this community that has given me so much. And. . . unless I wrote it with my credential revealed, which would mean ME revealed, frankly, I don't think asking for \$ is ethical!!

I WANT to help other people find their way. TTWD is too hidden in our modern world today, and too vital to couples that want and need to know. It has always felt like an honor to be accepted and appreciated in this community. Charge \$? Not happening.

Perhaps sharing her advice (and her life and desires) to the world as an anonymous woman as -- as long as she receives no pay-- makes Sara (and other bloggers) feel more righteous. She uses the word "ethical." Sara decides, "I am planning to write that book one day too, but I will not charge for it." By differentiating herself from those who receive money for their advice, Sara establishes herself (and is considered by many) an authority on discipline relationships. Not all participants agree with Sara's perspective, but her justifications and the resulting commentary create an intriguing and complex discussion about what it means to offer visibility and support. By giving and receiving advice from each other, participants also share core beliefs and encourage each other to examine their views. They also support each other and the established discipline community they create. In Sara's blog passage, we also see the tension between being an educated "expert" in non-discipline life and in virtual life. We see the

struggle between revealing the “me” self in a discipline relationship with a husband versus revealing her needs for discipline. Participants can easily discuss the intimate details of their personal life but hide their names and cloak them in anonymity. In many ways their real self, their, “me,” is indeed revealed. Their discipline identities appear very connected not only to their online community but to their blogs (and to the comments and interactions they receive on them).

## **6.2 Navigating Relationship Status: Single & Not in Discipline Relationships**

Online interactions change depending on the status of relationship participants are in at the time. Participants who are single, dealing with breakups of a discipline relationship, or attempting to convince their partner to accept a discipline relationship talk about discipline differently than those who are already in discipline relationships. As I discussed earlier, the process of coming out, coming into a discipline identity as an individual, finding a discipline relationship, becoming part of a practicing discipline couple, and being a member of a discipline group online includes many identities and meanings simultaneously. If participants are single or seeking discipline partners, they also sometimes deal with sexual shame before seeking a partner. Participants who are in non-discipline relationships generally deal with sexual shame, seek hope for a discipline relationship in the future, and share the pain of being in a non-discipline relationship.

### *Thank God for the Internet!: Sexual Shame & Requesting Discipline*

In her discipline manual, Vickie Blue (2003) states, “Most of the time submissive partners report having always known that they desire to be controlled and disciplined. Frequently this desire includes years of guilt and shame about being what they consider abnormal.” Entire areas deal not only with sexual shame but how to explain discipline as a need to partners. Demystifying the language of discipline, often associated with the belief system, generally occurs in the process of coming to terms with sexual shame. When participants read enough FAQ’s demonstrating they are not abnormal, they generally express relief or a sense of calm. One anonymous submissive woman writes, “I was so ashamed of what I



want. . . I spent long nights and days wanting and needing, I felt like something is missing that I need.”

Another woman writes, “Thank God for the Internet! Knowing that I am by no means alone in my desire for domestic discipline doesn't mean that I am sane, but it does mean that I am well . . . not alone!”

(comments recorded, blog defunct. 2007). Expressing communal relief and a sense of shared social support gives participants strategies for navigating relationships. Lilly talks about the past struggle with her non-normative sexuality: “It’s [discipline] something I’ve fantasized about since I was a child. I finally got the point around 1989 when I had the Internet at home. And I felt comfortable typing spanking into Google. And I realized what I was wanting wasn’t freakish or weird.” Words like *freakish*, *weird*, or *alone* all describe sexual shame. For everyone, shining light into the darkness and educating themselves demystifies the confusion. Understanding and creating a language for themselves and creating visibility alleviates some (if not all) the sexual shame associated with their non-normative identities.

In her manual Vivian (2009:11) writes: “Am I really going to have to choose between spankings and being with the person I love?’ Or, maybe worst of all, “is there something wrong with me?’ [emphasis hers] The good news is that you’re not stupid, childish or ridiculous for wanting to be spanked, and there’s absolutely nothing ‘wrong’ with you.” Vivian believes giving back to one’s partner as more important to discipline than in making exhaustive demands. Each mentor has their own technique or advice for submissive partners seeking discipline. Regardless, throughout the online community the theme repeats: wanting discipline is not shameful. The theme reinforces the idea that discipline identities are “normal,” desirable, and worth seeking. On a CDD (2012) board one FAQ illustrates how women can explain this to their husbands:

Make it clear this is a need of yours, not just some passing fancy. Acknowledge it might sound a wee bit strange, but up until the middle of the 20th century it was very common, and even today, thousands practise [sic] CDD. . . Explain to him that wanting CDD does not make you a masochist. You simply want him to have true authority in your marriage. Living in the roles God has created for you is the real attraction of CDD, not the pain/punishment. Spankings/punishments are sometimes necessary but may not be enjoyable for either party. Consider printing off some of the pages on this site which convey the idea you want to express. Sometimes it can be easier than trying to talk when you are nervous or flustered.

There is a great deal of discussion online about finding willing partners, explaining discipline, dealing with shame, and dealing with rejection from partners who refuse. By creating a unified language to remove the sexual shame associated with wanting discipline, online communities collectively reinforce discipline identities. This also creates space for participants to find ways to talk about strategies for asking for discipline, and dealing with rejection from their partners.

### *Dealing With Partner Rejection*

Once participants deal with sexual shame they must either find a partner or, if they are already in a relationship, must request discipline from their partner. While many of the online discussions and comments are dedicated to participants expressing sexual fears and coming to terms with their discipline identities, another section is dedicated to their fears and advice about disclosing their need for discipline to their partners. For those who have partners who refuse or think discipline sounds unpleasant, alien, or freakish, there are areas online dedicated to dealing with the frustration and loss associated with being rejected and living without discipline:

I don't know what would move my wife towards this. I do know that I would rather have my bottom whipped with a well-chosen switch than have my psyche assaulted with ill-chosen words. My wife thinks that spanking me would be all about sex, and she practiced spanking me in bed briefly about ten years ago, but she has stopped that. Disciplinary spankings are off her radar screen. (DWC survey 2007: 29)

When partners reject a request for discipline, submissive partners often continue to discuss discipline within the online community. By seeking social support and comfort, the group solidifies not only a group identity, but also continues to build a collective discipline identity. They are united in their need for discipline. Perhaps it is not only the outside world where they feel oppressed by non-normative sexuality, (by rendering them invisible or challenging them with embarrassment), but also in their relationship with their own partners, who deny their discipline needs, and at their core, their very selves.

Vicki Blue (2003) discusses the problem of rejection in Chapter 8 of her discipline manual entitled, "Broken Dreams: When He Says No."

The reason I wanted to include this chapter is because among [sic] the growing body of work surrounding their lifestyle there is very little writing -- if any-- that addresses not only the heart-break and frustration of a person whose mate refuses to engage in DD. . . . Women like "Mary," who was devastated after a three-year attempt to screw up the nerve to tell her husband she wanted him to discipline her only to have him tell her he thought it was very unhealthy (Blue 2003).

Addressing the rejection of discipline as a "broken dream," Blue (2003) recognizes discipline as integral to not just to a relationship but to a participant's identity. If the submissive partner is not willing to leave their relationship to seek a discipline relationship (and few are), Blue lists stages of loss in accepting that both the discipline identity is integral and "interwoven into who we are." Blue (2003) outlines the stages of grief – anger, loss, sadness, acceptance in discussing how rejected participants might try to deal with never having their discipline needs or sexuality fully met with their current partners. She also brings up many areas to be submissive as a way to sublimate some craving for authority, such as channeling submissive energy into work or school and reading discipline romance novels and stories. She suggests the support areas online to express frustration. Blue (2003) and DWC (2001) also suggest some participants seek outside disciplinary arrangements if their partners are willing and unthreatened by the concept.

Everyone reacts to disappointment in different ways, but it can be especially hard when that disappointment comes in connection with a deep, secret unfulfilled need. Weighing the whole of a relationship against the desire for a disciplinary arrangement is something that a person must face when the partner says "No", but if the relationship is to survive, taking care of yourself is an important step to moving forward.

The idea of incorporating a surrogate (or outside disciplinarian) is an intriguing way to handle the need for discipline. Some participants report allowing their husbands to discipline a single woman when she is searching for a disciplinary partner, but only after they trust her and after knowing her in real life for many years. Once such surrogate discipline arrangement was established by Chris, (who is married to Sparkle), but also agreed to discipline Iris, while she searches for a discipline relationship. Iris writes:

So now I have just what I wished for in my last post: accountability through spanking. Not for everything, of course, and not in the same way I would have in a primary relationship with discipline. But I am being held accountable and I am being punished. I feel safe and cared for and loved. And that's what we're ultimately after, isn't it?

Sparkle and Iris banter and joke online and one day Iris reports finding a disciplinarian. She then navigates the new dynamic of having a primary and a secondary disciplinarian. For most participants who want discipline but are not involved in a discipline relationship, a surrogate spanker is not an answer. Their partners find it unpleasant and feel repulsed by the idea of other people disciplining their partner. Isabel, a twenty seven year old submissive woman in the southeast reports asking her first husband for discipline for several years. She says he refused to read any of the websites she printed out or stories she wrote for him: "I poured my heart out to him, telling him how much I needed him to spank and control me, even if he didn't want to do it my way. I wanted him to understand me." She says she even told him how important their marriage and discipline was to her:

I told him I would do anything to make him happy, anything at all, if only he would listen. He went to a counselor with me but told her he felt violated by the idea of doing something so immoral with me as spanking me or letting someone else discipline me while he watched. I didn't want to cheat, I just needed something he couldn't or wouldn't give me. It was then I knew he would never understand.

Isabel chose to leave her marriage rather than live without discipline. Later, she met her current husband, who is a minister and together they practice a discipline relationship. Isabel says she had no way of knowing she would ever find what she needed, but when she offered to have someone else discipline her and her husband refused, and when he refused to spank her, but called her desires "immoral and sinful" she knew she needed to leave. "I had to get out. I knew I might live forever without finding someone who would take me in hand the way [husband's name] does. But I also knew if I didn't leave my marriage and try to find it, I'd live forever as half a person." Isabel's choice is a rare choice. I have not read or heard of anyone else leaving a marriage specifically in order to find a discipline relationship. A more typical participant, Mija, writes that she was already in a bad marriage and getting ready to di-

voice her husband. But she was not leaving specifically to seek a discipline relationship. I have also heard reports of participants staying in discipline relationships that seem unpleasant or difficult because they have discipline. Leaving an established discipline relationship appears scarier and less promising than leaving an unfulfilling non-disciplinary relationship to seek a disciplinary relationship. Perhaps this is because discipline itself is a difficult quest and leaving loving relationships is hard to do. That people are willing to stay in a non-discipline relationship when they identify as having a discipline identity speaks to the level of fear of leaving, the struggle and internal agony over finding a new partner who does want discipline, and perhaps to the unspoken hope of someday convincing their current partner to give them discipline.

### *Invisible Power – Making Demands*

Not all requests for discipline appear as benign methods to involve distant partners or find a discipline partner. Some participants appear to make demands and seemingly order their partner to control them. In this blog post, "Take me in hand, Please!" from *Desiring Discipline*, the author, (I'll call her D.D. because she uses the same name as the title of the blog), asks herself if her marriage can work (<http://desiringdiscipline.wordpress.com/2012/10/24/take-me-in-hand-please>). She writes about being sexually abused by her father and the impact it has on her emotionally and within her relationship. D.D. blames herself for her negative moods about her twenty-year relationship with her husband, some of which has been sexless. She struggles to surrender to the idea that she cannot change her husband and make him want to discipline her or be more involved in their relationship -- seeking instead to rely on her faith in God's "perfect love" as a spiritual journey. Her husband, on the other hand, refuses to give

her discipline because it does not appeal to him. She writes that she has been the one in control, calling the shots most of the marriage, and that she wants a husband who is more in charge. She describes a conversation between her husband and herself:

[Her to her husband:] "Let's face it. You are setting the agenda here. We have sex only when *you* want to. *You* have the ultimate control. My desire or needs aren't considered. If I approach you even for a mere hug or cuddle, often you will shrink away or tell me you're tired. . . as if the thought of sex with me is sometimes an unpleasant task. When I'm desirous of you, I'm often being rejected. And since you're the one who needs the equipment to be in full working order, I guess you get the last say, huh? I'm tired of being the one pursuing, desiring. I want to [sic] pursued, I want to feel desired by you the way I desire you. And that just makes me feel very sad and hopeless when it seems to go against your grain."

We did a lot more talking on the topic, he as always bringing up my less than perfect housekeeping/organizational skills as something I don't change on. . .

"I guess you're right. I will probably never measure up on those skills to your desires, so how can I expect you to meet my needs in the intimacy department?" I admit through my tears.

Now, I really didn't mean this in any other way than honest. I wasn't trying to manipulate or be sarcastic. I could actually see, that as hard as it for me to get my act together to keep our home ultra-tidy to his specs, it was that hard for him to respond to me romantically or to pursue me. But as I now write those words I uttered, I can see how that might have impacted him.

This is apples and oranges. A tidier home vs. intimacy with your spouse? Hmmmm. Which should matter more in a marriage? God knows I want to do things to make him happy, and the bed has been made 90% of the time lately, my shoes out of the way. He doesn't clean, but he's organized. I get that's his love language, but is it as important as intimacy with your spouse?

D.D. continues to agonize about difficulties with her husband. She expresses discontent about the way he performs masculinity. She writes about how he "hammers a screw into the wood with a drill bit," while she gives him advice. Her husband jokes back, "Do you have a penis?" She pulls her shorts down and responds, "Nope, but maybe you should check." Her husband laughs it off, but in this interaction, she emasculates her husband and speaks to him like a child, using a "patient voice" as though he is stupid. In this instance it is not difficult to see why he might pull away and feel less intimate and desirous of her. Similarly, she wants authority and control so badly, yet she remains in control at all times, refusing to allow her husband any authority, even in the smallest situation. D.D. writes about having patience with him and with her life and herself, but does not see how she limits the possibility of actually

getting what she wants. Ironically, she has actually married someone who resists her quite as much as she demands. In her own words she controls and he resists -- the antithesis of what she wants. She claims she wants a man who controls her and she wants to submit to his authority and receive discipline. Yet she describes herself as an "impatient, carpe diem person." She admits that when she asks for something, she not only wants immediate feedback, but "complete buy-in and agreement": "With this sort of equation going on in our marriage, and all the push-pull it engenders, there's liable to be quite a lot of frustration and miscommunications unless I factor it in. And, surprisingly, I do not factor in his obduracy (isn't that better than saying mulishness?)." Yet, when her husband tried to put his arms around her at church, something she writes, "as all the husbands near us were doing to their wives, something I always envied and which he rarely does I stiffly sat apart from him, crossing my legs in the opposite direction." She resists what she says she wants. She asks for affection and cuddles yet when her husband gives her what she wants, she pulls away. How can he jump into something so big, like disciplining her, spanking her to tears, and giving her authority, when she cannot open to smaller things like receiving his affection? The vulnerability of receiving discipline and authority requires openness to intimacy, not just authority and control.

Again, she describes a situation where she does not allow her husband to be even an equal, let alone the one in charge.

Later that day, we were going through the paces of a mundane household task of shopping for and replacing an appliance, and I was all business. I no longer had the desire to allow him to be HOH. I had this covered. I walked into the store with all the answers, all the measurements, and all the questions. I was going to make the decisions. He just stepped aside and let me take control." Back in the car, he finally called me down on my mood (*and a DD husband has commented this mood would have me right over his knee. . . Gee, I could see how that would cut through all this crap*) [italics her own].

This type of response resembles a fantasy fix. Yes, she wants a man to simply take control and tell her to stop getting in her own way of what she wants. She wants a man to tell her to stop being in a bad mood and spank her for it. She also says she wants to submit to control, and then controls situations,

even when she could be an equal partner. Her language does not seem submissive. In fact, D. D. seems truly conflicted about her discipline desires. She writes about “allowing” her husband to do things rather than “submitting” to his authority. What D. D. has appears to be a rape fantasy, where she is tamed and has her will forcefully taken from her. There is no real submission or consent in rape or force. D.D. struggles with her difficulties in her relationship, unexplored past sexual abuse, and her discipline desires. Though she does not discuss it in detail, the painful realities of unexplored childhood sexual abuse and the push-pull of wanting and fearing intimacy create a double bind for D.D. Vivian (2009b) discusses childhood sex abuse in her manual and talks about how discipline can both heal and bring up possible trauma for people who have not had enough therapy. Moving through these traumas becomes another barrier for participants who want discipline relationships (and even satisfactory relationships with their partners). D. D. like many people, seeks one solution (in her case discipline) and pinpoints one problem (her husband’s lack of authority and control) for multiple areas of dissatisfaction.

However, subtly, D.D. also writes that her husband controls her and calls the shots – she just does not like he does it. Her husband’s methods do not work for her they do not involve discipline, increased intimacy, or vulnerability. She says to him, “You are setting the agenda.” She wants discipline but does not like the unfairness of a partner who withholds sex or affection or is not involved in the relationship. She also does not see that her actions control or rebuff him when he gives her what she says she wants – affection, cuddles, attention or how that might contribute to his lack of willingness to give more. And she does not see that wanting a partner to take her control from her minimizes the communication and authority she says she wants. Looking at her own controlling behavior she humorously writes, “Oh, but how the hell can I look the other way and ‘allow’ him to be HOH?” “Take me in Hand, Husband!!!”

Not so subtly, this type response removes personal accountability for the relationship and pushes the responsibility entirely on the other partner to fix and control the relationship. One participant,



Peggy, a 48 year old submissive woman, sent in an e-mailed response very much like this, writing: “If I don’t turn him off by how I act, I will be very happy to let him be the HOH. . . Discipline is what I was used to during my formative years and am comfortable with [now] so GO AHEAD AND CORRECT MY BEHAVIOR ALREADY!” Such demands for corrective action and discipline combine a fantasy of what discipline represents and a rescue fantasy. This rescue fantasy reflects a desire for both escapism and perfectionism in the dominant culture. Many participants want to be rescued from their lives; they feel alienated with no real solution. They will seek anything to solve it, even another person or the fantasy of what that person (or receiving discipline) represents. In this way, discipline relationship participants shift power, either consciously or unconsciously, to control their out-of-control situations, their relationships with themselves, romantic partners, and their sexual desires. By playing with ideas of control and authority, participants flex their power and sometimes exchange power with their partners, alternately withholding it, resisting it, or begging for it. Often they become fine-tuned at exchanging invisible power even when it hurts them. And participants sometimes forget the life of their relationships depend on a mutually satisfactory exchange of power.

## 7 DISCIPLINE CULTURE

I came to see discipline culture as both informing and informed by participants; it both stands alone and is constantly created by my participants. I also came to see my participants as both constantly creating and consuming discipline culture, and being simultaneously constantly informed by both the dominant culture and the discipline culture. The culture of discipline relationships happens virtually, visually, and through consumed and marketed products. These products can be tangible, like spanking implements and printed discipline manuals, or ephemeral, like a social media site. Some products, like social media, change over time whilst others last a very long time. The changeability of these digital products does not belie their importance. They are important because they are consumed and co-created simultaneously by participants. Often participants consume and create the same (or similar) things; they both buy and sell or both read and write them (i.e., romance novels, blogs, comments, spanking implements, and art.) Participants are invested in maintaining and developing the discipline

culture. Participants feel involved as creators and authors of their own lives and identities. They often collaborate in activities that distinguish discipline culture as distinctive within non-normative relationships.

Participants' involvement in construction and consumption of discipline culture has both freeing and limiting aspects. Their involvement is freeing when their acts are political and each time they co-create and consume discipline culture (even as lurkers), they create visibility surrounding their own identities. For some, this limits the boundaries of discipline relationship identities with self-imposed belief systems. The discussions often create a double bind where participants feel pressure to remain in unsatisfying relationships, or feel socially controlled by their own stated cultural values within specific communities. Sometimes their involvement in the creation of so much discipline culture is a result of wanting a discipline relationship and not having one. Reading and writing about discipline often becomes a way for participants to fantasize about discipline relationships. In this way, some portrayals of discipline culture are a master frame intersecting with fantasized ideals and must be interpreted as such. Which portrayal is more accurate? The participant who wants discipline and writes about it or the one who lives in a discipline relationship and writes about it? The discipline culture is made up of both of these portrayals. Both are often consumed and created either ritualistically or as gifts to online friends as tokens of connection and friendship.

### **7.1 Ritualized Objects of Desire**

Objects and symbols of ritualized discipline art and images permeate discipline culture. Symbols and rituals occur in the virtual communities as written words, comments, blogs, art and then move offline into the real world for sale as books, paddles, spanking implements, and clothing. When concrete objects appear in the physical space, ideas and desires become more than ephemeral. They manifest as symbolic artifacts giving group identity a tangible symbolic reinforcement. For example, people can purchase a spanking implement from their favorite paddle maker with their favorite spanking art engraved

on it. These illustrations also depict profane-turned-sacred material objects (such as paddles, straps, and belts) that are iconic in the discipline lifestyle. Other iconographic illustrations ritualize spaces (such as corner time) or positions, or spanking objects. These ritualized spaces, objects, and activities take on both active and ritual iconic importance within the discipline culture.

For example, when hand-drawn images of a disciplined woman standing in a corner are painted onto a paddle (see figure 7.1) three things happen. First, there is a ritualized icon of the discipline practice. Second, the icon is superimposed as a symbol on the object of the practice. Third, it is produced as a ritualized object (a spanking implement for ritualized discipline.)



**Figure 7.1 Spanking Implements with Spanking Graphics**

This spanking implement in Figure 7.1 (wooden paddle from Can-iac <http://www.cane->

iac.com/items/patty-s-paddles~straps/honeywaitingharderdouble-detail.htm) is a simulacra embedded back into reality. What happens when the real turns into a picture that is turned back into a tangible object? What happens when a spanking paddle is decorated with roses in the same way a holy object is given sacred illustrations? The symbolism, sacredness and importance of the object is reinforced. Participants creating these items both reproduce discipline explanations and allow a discipline language to develop. The developing language creates space for the community, a social movement, and new ritualized symbols. By creating concrete elements the individuals move from symbolic to physical manifestation of their community, creating a public example of a private lifestyle.

### *Gendered Language as a Cultural Product*

Men and women use and write discipline manuals and blogs differently. Self-help and submissive men's manuals are generally geared more towards self-improvement for becoming a better higher quality person (i.e., DWC manuals). Submissive women's manuals are often geared towards helping them understand their desires for discipline and what their dominant partner wants (i.e., to trust them and to be trusted or their submission, e.g. Vivian & Kelley). Manuals geared toward dominant partners (i.e., LDD, Bulldog) explain men's responsibility to take women in hand and why women need masculine authority. People often use gendered ways of expressing selfhood and relationship desires (Simonds 1992:192).

During interviews, what is said is often less important than what goes unsaid. Men often responded with fewer words. However, men blog, comment, and write manuals as active participants in the discipline community. Differences between how men and women communicated during interviews led me to examine the differences in their blogs. Men's blogs (both submissive and dominant) use fewer words and more graphics than most women's blogs. Men often use graphical images alone, while women use them as enhancements. Women's blogs have more stories about every day life and more

discipline romance novels. Men and women often say similar things -- they just use different modes of expression

*Graphic Images as (Nonverbal) Narratives*

Participants use both verbal and non-verbal narratives to communicate discipline rituals and relationships. Investigating human behavior using nonverbal, verbal, and written language to has a long history in the social sciences. By looking at images, Cooley (1926), building on the work of Dewey, made culture and images a central focus of his work. Cooley believed that sociologists should study how people think as well as what they do. Because people think in both language and images, sociologists should study both (Cooley 1928:316). When examining the narratives that participants share, I see stories of bodily desire, needs, expressions of emotionality, and identity navigation, ritualized discipline, and guilt and shame, punishment, and coming out into a discipline lifestyle. Graphics, videos, and sound clips can be analyzed into narratives in much the same way as verbal and written stories (Riessman 2008:142).

When I encounter non-verbal and graphical images I ask myself – “What is really being expressed here? Is this a childhood being relived? How do I know?” I look for signifiers and symbols. For example, the positions themselves or items in the images might indicate childhood, vulnerability, or re-parenting. Such an image might have stuffed animals and drop-seat pajamas and display vulnerable diaper position (feet up) or over the knee (OTK) position for spanking. These are more connected, child-like vulnerable positions. If the submissive partner is lying over the bed, sofa, or pillow for discipline I recognize a more disengaged, disconnected form of punishment often associated with catharsis, or misbehavior discipline. If I see harsher discipline that leaves more physical marks, I interpret a desire for guilt release, catharsis, more punishment, or self-harm. Sometimes the narratives of real photographs and actual discipline sessions allow me to see into how participants sound or look during discipline sessions. Other times, participants post hand-drawn sketches of fantasies or their computerized images. I

see and hear the story of graphics, much like Cooley invites us to do – as incorporating discipline cultural with the activities and discipline behavior of my participants.

See Tables 1 and 2 for examples of graphic images that create a narrative of discipline relationships. (Figures are listed in Tables 1 and 2 as panels – artists and graphics are attributed in the Notes.)<sup>ii</sup> All but one image depicts red or marked backsides – which are often part of or incidental to the actual graphic. In this way the image itself symbolizes spanking punishments as an inherent part of discipline. Secondly it also ritualizes showing one’s red marked ass as part of the vulnerability and submission to discipline. Participants often post graphics containing elements important to their ritualized discipline as a function of either fantasy or as part of their lived experiences -- submitting evidence of recent punishments.

The graphic images in figures 7.2 through 7.7 depict ritualized discipline including writing lines, mouthsoaping, standing in the corner, and putting hands on one’s head in the corner. The frequency with which such images occur online shows not just how dedicated participants are to maintaining these rituals but how the visual representations themselves realistically sustain the fetishized discipline. The culture is constructed and then becomes part of what sustains the fantasies and language – imbedding itself back into the erotic images participants use to create and sustain discipline relationship identity. As such the images speak to the both the urgency and longing for ritualized discipline.

The position of vulnerability in Figure 7.6 shows a childlike helplessness and is in fact called, “diaper position.” Participants often use this position to increase submission and create a feeling of helplessness in the submissive partner. Participants ritualize discipline positions, using certain positions for erotic or sexual spanking, good girl/good boy spankings, stress release spankings, and actual punishments. Names of positions, and what they mean and signify, reveal a great deal in the images as well as in fantasies and actual discipline relationships of participants. Each image in Figures 7.8, 7.9, 7.12, and 7.13 depicts OTK spanking but the images also reveal narratives about the artist and the meanings of the

spanking in the graphic. For example, in Figure 7.8, the artist humorously uses a wife-spanking comic set at a marriage counselor, with the caption, “But have you tried this approach.” With a smiling wife and husband finally clued in, the comic indicates a discipline for relationship repair theme.



Figure 7.2 Images as Narrative: Ritualized Discipline – Writing Lines



Figure 7.3 Images as Narrative: Ritualized Discipline –Mouth Soaping



Figure 7.4 Images as Narrative: Ritualized Discipline – Corner Time

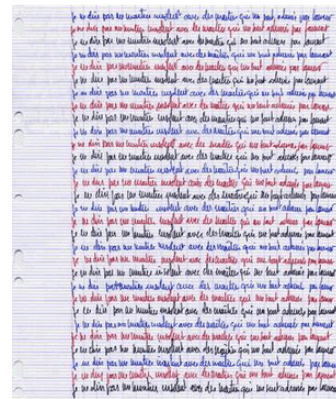


Figure 7.5 Images as Narrative: Ritualized Discipline – Lines





Figure 7.6 Images as Narrative: Diaper Position



Figure 7.7 Images as Narrative: Ritualized Discipline – Mouth Soaping

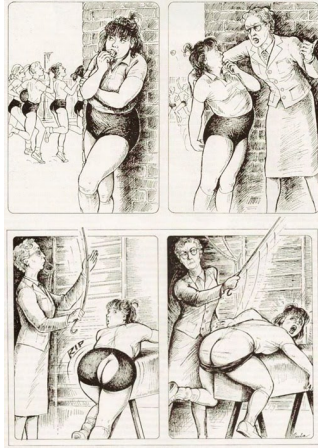
Table 7.1 Panel of Discipline Graphic Images



Figure 7.8 Images as Narrative: Relationship Repair



Figure 7.9 Images as Narrative: Childhood & Re-parenting



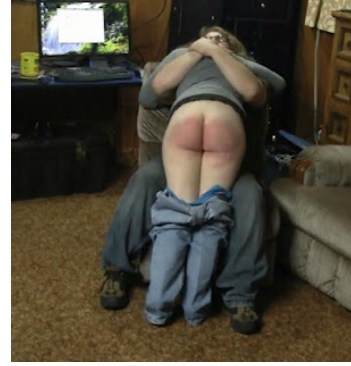
**Figure 7.10 Images as Narrative: Behavior Modification**



**Figure 7.12 Images as Narrative: Archetypes & Energy**

**Table 7.2 Panel of Discipline Graphic Images**

Figure 7.9 includes a graphic featuring two men and was found on a men's spanking men site. It could be a Daddy/bear cub or gay male discipline session. But without the context of gay sexuality, this could also be a depiction of a father son relationship or any sort of mentor–mentee discipline session. The artistic style is reminiscent of Norman Rockwell. The shoes and socks suggest that men are reliving childhood memories. The submissive partner has ejaculate dribbling out of his penis, indicating that this discipline meets his sexual needs. The dominant partner has a beard, which is a symbol of masculinity. The look on his face is not one of anger, but one of concern. The look on the submissive male's face is one of both euphoria and pain. The submissive partner is over the dominant partner's knee, a childish



**Figure 7.11 Images as Narrative: Forgiveness & Connecting**



**Figure 7.13 Images as Narrative: Childhood & Re-parenting**

pose, indicating vulnerability. He is being spanked by hand, rather than with an implement, indicating a less harsh and more tender and caring discipline. This re-parenting and childhood representation speaks to tenderness and a familial sense in the art, recreating the domestic or family situation and discipline ideal of parental safety. In this particular image, the submissive partner holds the dominant partners arm during the spanking rather than being held down or forced. Many spanking and discipline graphics shows the submissive partner reaching back to protect their backside or having their hands forced away from the area being hit – which speaks of consensual non-consent. This image contrasts to that, instead depicting both partners touching each other with their hands, creating more connection and giving each other what they need: safety, trust, and discipline. This graphic image speaks to either a sexual fantasy or a remembered childhood spanking – recalling ideas of the safety and security that the participant feels from receiving a disciplinary spanking. The narrative in Figure 7.13 can be read in much the same way, with the OTK submissive partner and the older authority figure taking a parental role. It depicts re-parenting, vulnerability, and childhood.

The graphic image in Figure 7.12 takes more time to understand because it involves switching partners, both in the OTK position. It shows an example of the male-female archetype and the exchange of masculine and feminine energy in dominance and submission during giving and receiving punishment. In this art, Invidia depicts the dualities of primal energies meeting each other's needs during discipline. This is done using a computer image to render the idea of a three dimensional statue. She creates a simulacrum -- a "hyperreal representation of the real world" (Gameson et al 1992:387). All of these artists use images as the language of discipline relationships. In this way, they all create representations of what discipline means to them. In return, discipline culture reproduces the symbols and language. Participants' interpret and consume artists' constructed ritualized discipline fantasies, and then create more discipline culture.

The images of Figure 7.10 and 7.11 relate to behavior modification and making up, forgiveness and connecting after a discipline session. The behavior modification depicts a “recalcitrant teen” who overeats cookies instead of completing her gym exercises. Her teacher confronts the pudgy girl and then canes her over gym equipment. Before she is caned the submissive partner’s tight underpants rip, adding to the humiliation and emphasizing her weight and sloppy behavior. The behavior modification trope lends itself to self-improvement through accountability and control. The message of the cartoon is that her behavior and bad habits will improve if she is disciplined. In Figure 7.11 the artist creates the message of connection, love, cuddles, and forgiveness after a discipline session. The artist establishes the notion that once a submissive partner is punished, past misdeeds are forgiven and couples can be reconciled. It also depicts the positive touching and connection – pleasure and gentle touching -- to offset the pain of spanking. These examples found on blogs and in spanking communities, (primarily on men’s blogs) create the language of discipline culture. Participants construct the narratives of discipline relationship by graphic images and nonverbally in much the same way as with words.

### *Discipline Romance Novels*

Discipline romance novels, published through independent vanity presses or as serials through memberships, are a salient feature in discipline culture. Over the last ten years I have watched the publication and sales of discipline romance novels grow from a grass roots, blog-based movement to a more formal established network. Discipline romance readers are hungry for content that appeals to them. Not all participants read or write romance stories or novels, but most participants see them and many have read at least one story. Currently on Amazon there are 382 discipline romance novels available in the Kindle section and sixty-four available in paperback editions. A popular romance novel site, *Bethany’s Woodshed* (<http://www.herwoodshed.com>) and her sister site, *Blushing Books* (<http://www.blushingbooks.com>) dedicate themselves specifically to discipline and spanking romance novels. *Spanking Romance Reviews* <http://spankingromance.com> gives readers the latest reviews of

discipline and spanking romance novels and provides links for purchase and author interviews as well as areas for commenting.

In their discipline romance novels, authors develop their fantasies about discipline relationships. These discipline romance novels appear to have some commonalities with and some differences from non-discipline romance novels in popular press. In her book, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Pamela Regis (2003) discusses the history, criticism, and answers to the criticism of the romance novel as diminishing to women and anti-feminiist. Ferriss and Young (2006), editors of *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, continue their examination of romance novels and traditional "chick lit." Embedded in romance novels are archetypes, rituals, and happy endings (Harzewski 2006). Commonalities between discipline and non-discipline romance novels include converting the bad man, ritual death and role reversals (Regis 2003:-39-43). In spanking and discipline romances converting the bad (man) parallels stories of a dominant man converting a wayward or headstrong woman. Authors of discipline romances also have ritual deaths and role reversals as described by Regis – in which both parties express deep love and lose themselves in each other. However, rather than the man, it is usually the woman who was once incorrigible and is later reformed and submissive – usually through discipline and spanking.

Radway (2001: 119-156) devotes considerable attention to what traditional readers of romance novels find desirable. I am not sure what readers of discipline romance novels find to be good or failed romance novels, but I do know that discipline and being tamed are necessary elements. One archetype in both traditional and discipline romance novels is the dangerous man (Regis 2003). In discipline romance novels these men are more often dominant men, or men who find their dominant selves because of a woman who needs to be tamed or brought to submission. In traditional romance novels, dangerous men are often tamed and healed by strong heroines (Regis 2003:171). In discipline romance novels, dominant men often take on headstrong or unruly women and tame them through the use of discipline. One element of discipline romance novels is that submissive women are dangerous to themselves, their

relationships, or behave destructively and must be changed through discipline from a dominant partner. These dominant men are unafraid of emotionality, brave women, or taming a bratty woman. They sometimes include a dangerous man archetype, but also include taming the shrew, and rape fantasies. After she is tamed, both characters have a mutually satisfying dominant man/submissive woman traditional role depiction, which fulfills both partners.

Intimacy is also an important feature of both traditional and discipline romance novels. Radway (2001:150) describes the process of how a romantic heroine has her identity restored after responding sexually and emotionally to the hero. In both traditional and discipline romance novels, barriers to intimacy are removed, trust established, and companionate marriage created (Regis 2003:180; 191). I have not read any female dominant, male submissive romance novels but I have seen graphic art where the illustrations depict much the same story. I have also read short stories on submissive men's blogs, where fantasized depictions using multiple graphics have a type of mini-romance novel effect.

Describing the readers of romance novels, Clements (1998) says, "It's not that there are no men, it's that there are no men she wants to want, or who would want her the way she wants to be wanted." This may be even more true when it comes to the depiction of discipline relationships in romance novels. Using male-female energy and primal archetypes as well as perfection seeking of dominant heroes, authors write about ritualized discipline and submission. Participants find reading and writing discipline romance novels both edifying and cathartic expression of their erotic desires. Writers sometimes write to find a way back to themselves and to their deepest desire – as an exploration of what they want. Discipline romance novels are often written and read by the same small group of women. In contrast to this, most popular romance novel readers consume romance novels without creating them. Radway (2001:17) explains popular romance novel readers:

Fictional characterization, it would seem, is successful for these women because it manages to convince them that even though they know the characters are more perfect than they or their husbands can ever hope to be . . . The women can thus believe in them *and* in the verity of the happy ending that concludes the story." The contents of romance novels can be seen as both a

cultural reaction to women embracing their own sexuality and an effect of feminism on gender relations.

Romance novels allow women to create the story of a life they desire. Similarly, posting fantasies and graphic art on blogs allows the one who fantasizes to demonstrate his/her own validity and sense of self. For example, a submissive man might post a graphic of being spanked by a dominant woman and then of being given corner time. The expression of his desire and the consumption of his blog content has a similar effect. In this example, it is not the woman, but the one who desires, the one who wants, who is creating the story. The reader co-creates through the act of imagining and reacting.

To explore common popular themes in discipline romance novels, I selected the most popular titles from Amazon with five star ratings and positive reviews after a searching for “discipline romance.” The first two volumes include collections of short discipline stories *Once Upon a Knee, Spanking and Discipline Stories Volume 2* by Kiki Faran (Lulu Press, 2007) and *Bare to Discipline, Vol 6, M/F Spanking Erotica Discipline Stories* by C. C. Barrett (Create Space Independent Publishing, 2011). Both of these books contain serials of stories that authors sell online. Formerly such collections were available on blogs or communities in spanking libraries, sometimes for download but often for free. It appears that readers want collections in hand and are willing to buy them online in continued serialized format. Writers of stories and romance novels have found a ready market.

Laurel Joseph wrote two highly rated discipline novels in 2012, both of them Westerns. Excerpts from her books show archetypes of a rough woman being tamed by a dominant man. In *Ransoming Annie* (Blushing Books, 2012):

Annie is angered and shocked when the stagecoach she is riding on is stopped by masked men, searching for her! There is no way she is willingly going to go with these men, but her kidnapper has little patience with sassy girls, and before she can do one thing to protect herself, she is lying face-down over his saddle, and he is applying his hand to her rounded posterior, demanding her obedience to his will! Annie is positive that her powerful Uncle Clay will come to her rescue, but after meeting the leader of the pack of outlaws she wasn't so sure that she would escape the situation with her life!

This passage contains elements of rescue fantasies. Words like *Uncle Clay*, *sassy*, *protect*, *patience*, are ritualized words that symbolize parental roles, and child-like spanking positions Annie as a little girl using re-parenting or childhood characterizations. She meets her kidnapper, who is a rogue and “dangerous man.” He demands obedience and bends Annie to his will – a rape fantasy. These are all ritualized spanking and discipline elements, even including the upturned position of helplessness over his saddle. The other highly rated discipline romance novel by Joseph, *Neighbors for Better or for Worse*, (Blushing Books, 2012), includes a dude rancher who pays a visit to his “spinster” neighbor who is engaging in as yet undiscovered “illegal activity.” The plot, of course, is that her neighbor will find out and correct her misbehavior before she undoes herself. He will do this not because he wants her but because, “he found himself facing the woman who’d nearly unmanned him, he wanted nothing more than to turn her over his knee!” Again, these stories contain archetypes of a tamed woman and a man who corrects her for her own good. Corrected misbehavior is a common theme, coming out in *Little White Lies* by Stevie MacFarlane (Blushing Books, 2012):

Nick was crazy about Maggie, always had been and always would be. When he saw his son for the very first time, he knew exactly who Jason belonged to and what Maggie had done. He was furious at first, but came to realize that a good portion of the blame fell on him. If he hadn't been so stubborn years ago, things might have turned out differently, but Nick is also a realist. The past cannot be relived; it's the present and future that matter. He still loves Maggie and he means to have her, one way or another, and he intends to cure her of her bad habits along the way. As far as he's concerned, Maggie had gotten her way for far too long, and it hadn't served her well. Her children need a father and whether she knows it or not, she needs a husband who will provide guidance and love; he can be all that and more. Nick has no problem applying a firm hand or taking a wooden spoon to Maggie's adorable butt when she misbehaves, which seems to be quite frequently. Who would have thought one knock on her door would change everything forever?

Here we see elements of bratting and corrective discipline -- the misbehaving and stubborn woman who needs a strong man to save her from herself. This passage also contains the idea that a man who disciplines a woman, loves her, and finds her more beautiful and more lovable. In *The Love of the Father* by Leah Kelley (Create Space Independent Publishing 2010), there is CDD with religious themed discipline:



This novella set in the hills of Eastern Kentucky explores what could happen should a beautiful, liberal city girl fall in love with a regular, fundamentalist country boy. Gabe is in a pickle. He's let himself get involved with a girl his whole community would disapprove of. When she begs to go home with him for Spring Break, should he give her a chance or remove her from his life forever? Jayden Brockman is in love with Gabe Williams. She doesn't know why. He's not her usual type. But since she became a Christian, Gabe has been her mentor, friend, and boyfriend. Her heart can't stand the thought of losing him. Contains spanking of adult women.

I select this title not so much for themes but because of the reactions to the book itself. It has a four star rating, rather than a five rating, because one of the detractors writes a vehement and scathing comment against her book, giving it a one star review aimed not at the writing, but at Kelley's beliefs:

If this is Christianity, I'd better find another religion that does not promote wife-beating, and child abuse. Instead of bringing me closer to God and the Bible, this made me seriously doubt the religion in which I was raised. Fortunately neither my parents nor my husband have ever, or would they ever lay a hand on me in discipline. If they even considered it, they'd be looking at a long prison sentence.

The other reviews were complimentary, "Fairly long. Worth the price. [\$9.99] I love Leah Kelley's writing. This is one of her best. Original story line. Makes you feel like a part of the family." The other addresses both the first harsh criticism and also Kelley's religious views. Because most discipline romance novels are more in line with fantasy themes, non-religious readers appear to have difficulty accepting discipline novels like this one due to their religious themes, even if they are well written:

I personally have read quite a few Domestic Discipline stories and think that his was a pretty good one. There was no abuse in the story, it was DD. The only thing I did not like about the story was the way the hero did not really like the heroine, much less love her. He only started to care about her after she conformed to his way of life. Otherwise, this was a good DD story.

Readers appear to react vehemently to Christian romance novels and manuals. Outside reviewers often appear to review books without even reading them or without having much interest in the topic itself. Discipline manuals receive similar reviews. For example, Bulldog's CDD manual receives similar reviews about wife-beating that non-religious based discipline manuals do not receive on Amazon. It appears that religious participants with a discipline relationship sexuality clash with outside cultural perspectives

of religion as violent, misogynist and hostile to women. It is also complex and difficult for feminist proponents of women's equality to criticize some messages without arguing that highly religious women are brain washed, deluded, and abused. Perhaps some participants are co-opted and assimilate cultural values that work against the interests of their own equality. But for proponents of feminism and women's equality to attempt to save fundamentalist and religious women from themselves while ignoring or openly approving of women who choose discipline relationships for non-religious reasons seems hypocritical.

If we really want equality for women, feminists need to work for real anti-oppression and that means allowing that women make choices that we do not always agree with and for reasons that sometimes do not appeal to us. Still we work to uphold women's rights make choices that feel oppressive if we might criticize the institutionalized inequalities that we disagree with and that we see. As one friend observed about the power of religion in our lives, "Religion is like fire, it can cook our food or it can burn down an entire village. It depends on how we use it." Criticisms of women with a religious lifestyle and non-normative sexuality then are also like fire – blatant accusations are misguided and unfair. Such criticisms create invisibility around a population. Perhaps this invisibility is also self-imposed because Christians often choose to be not of the world and say they believe that being recognized as different than non-Christians is a good thing. Feminists who research Christian populations can use standpoint theory and position themselves to understand the disjuncture in different women's lives. Rather than criticize women for their choices and determine who deserves our research time and understanding, feminist research can add value by exploring the fractures and contradictory subjective statements when we examine power structures, inequalities, and women's lived experiences.

The culture of discipline relationships has been described in detail. The process of reading and writing, verbal and non-verbal language, ritualized symbols and objects, discipline romance novels, and gendered differences in creating narratives of discipline culture are act of group identity. These acts are

more than comments and group dialogue. They are more than consuming and creating. The acts of writing and re-writing culture involve self-creation, group and community consumption of the material, and resistance to social-control. These are political acts that create visibility, resist social forces, and attempt to remove barriers to their relationship problems and sexual pleasure. In the sense of cultural inscriptions and values on collective discipline narratives, a Foucauldian (1977; 1997) reading might also be applied. Rather than bodily destruction through the pen, it is imposed and created through social media formats. If the destruction (as well as the discipline) is real, so too is the discipline culture -- which acts to re-create and re-construct discipline norms and ritualized behaviors. Discipline culture is informed by the dominant culture – one that it simultaneously conforms to and resists. This resistance creates in its own small way a belief in (if not a movement toward) social change and acceptance for discipline relationships as a non-normative relationship practice and sexuality.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

Participants of discipline relationships tell their stories of discipline relationships in virtual communities which they create as public space. Here they tell their private and personal fantasies and share real experiences of their personal lives. By creating this community, participants have a place and a language and a real discipline culture, where like-minded people recognize themselves. They come out to themselves, and name their desires and needs. They invite other in and educate each other, creating stronger and more lasting group ties and friendships. Participants align with various discipline groups

and blogs, form explanations, and recognize their own belief systems. Through this process they create for themselves reasons why and how discipline relationships should be practiced. They discuss, argue, and blog, sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing with each other. Single participants seek like-minded partners and deal with sexual shame and the frustration of living without discipline. Partners in non-discipline relationships commiserate and seek support, hope, and advice on how to get their partner to discipline and understand them. Participants in discipline relationships give and receive advice about navigating their own emotionally charged relationships, recognizing that the fantasy of desire is often different than the reality of submission and control. Through social support and fantasies, participants write and re-write their desire for consistent ritualized discipline relationships.

The individuals and couples who interact in the various online communities inform discipline culture and ritualize public space. Participants develop their own language and practices from ritualized discipline narratives. The creation of symbols and language solidifies discipline relationship identity and culture. This culture is both consumed and commodified. In this way, groups have more concrete identities and create more public awareness. Through conversations and blog dialogues the process creates a formal group language of identity both on and offline. When groups must defend who they are they create the symbols, language, and mechanisms for sustainable (though fluid) identities and meanings.

This sustainability and discourse both within and outside of group forums also creates discipline culture. This culture stands on its own and also informs the ritualized language of performance and desire. The couples and relationships create tangible symbols that are left behind and held (e.g., paddles, books, art, blogs, comments) as well as a perspective and philosophy (i.e., the explanations for why they do or want a discipline lifestyle). By reinvigorating the conversation and self-reflexivity of these groups, individuals contributing to the conversation also absorb the meanings into selfness. Words, stories, pictures, art and ideas left on a blog or within social media are then used to shape collective meaning. The groups integrate these concepts for identity into their group self-hood.

As the dominant culture has given rise to people who express their needs for a discipline relationship, the discipline community has also created its own sub-culture. The individuals and groups navigating and creating meanings have the same social process using language and stories. The stories of discipline lifestyle are told and retold, forming tropes. Each person and group then knows how discipline is supposed to be done. Discipline relationship communities have a context for what they have experienced and what they know. This context is one of sexual oppression, secrecy, yearning, invisibility, fear, shame, embarrassment, exploration, and expressing bodily desire. They also have a collective use of social media, (and before the Internet, subscribing to papers and usenets) to meet their spanking and discipline needs.

Sexuality and identity are political. Participants create visibility to work towards a life that brings them sexual and relationship pleasure and remove the barriers (relational, medical, cultural, structural) to that pleasure. These acts solve their intimate personal problems but they are also a response larger social problems – sexual and gender inequalities.

Doing discipline relationships – both online and off – is about creating visibility and solving intimate personal problems. It is also about exploring power, using power over oneself and one's partner, sometimes consciously, and sometimes less so. Even if they do not always see how their own power and behaviors affect their relationships, (or view themselves as using power unconsciously), participants have a better grasp about the language of power than most people in the current culture. They also consider discipline relationships and the ritualized discipline with them as tools. The tools themselves are instruments of power negotiated on the body. These negotiations of power discipline body in ways participants need as part of their sexuality and identity – to create wholeness within them. Mija describes a similar liberating, “soothing” feeling after a her partner's negotiation of power and violence on her body as discipline:

But the thing is, part of me didn't want to. I want to be held accountable. I asked for this. . . . He understood and even agreed I had very good reasons for not having gone to the gym. But that

didn't matter. I hadn't gone and I'd asked him to punish me, to cane me, if I didn't go. I think if he had made the rule, he might have let me off this week. Maybe not. . . .

The first stroke landed like a cut. The thing is, the nursery cane is very very thin and really really stings. That was true last week, but from the start it was clear this caning was a lot harder than the one the week before before [sic]. But, my brain cried, as I considered screaming, my parents are in the next room. So I pulled my hands forward (my arms had been folded behind my back) and started counting off the strokes on my right fingers, one at a time, while on my left I kept track in groups of twelve.

The thing about the thin cane is that it really stings. When Paul used it on me it felt more like a switch than a cane. By the time he reached twelve I could feel the tip marks crossing. The sting was terrible and I fought with myself to lie still. . . . Strange as it may seem, at thirty-six I felt a sense of relief because it meant there were only twelve left. However much they might hurt, I could get through twelve more. Paul sped up and the strokes landed harder still and faster, making me gasp into the sheets. My feet fluttered as I tried hard not to kick. After quite a build-up of pain, it ended in a rush -- an almost "is that all there is?" moment. Then the burn started to soak in.

Paul kept me over his lap as he rubbed some LUSH dream cream into my bottom. It stings, but in a soothing sort of way.

(<http://www.punishmentbook.org/2011/10/caned-again-again.html>)

The pain and power and intimacy of discipline relationships allows participants to express and release their guilt, stress, anger, fear, -- all the emotion that build up during the days and weeks. Navigating discipline relationships is a tool then, not just to discipline and punish submissive participants, but as a cathartic mechanism for releasing tension. The small stresses and pains of daily life may not be so difficult if we carry them for an hour, or even a day, and learn to deal with them in helpful ways. But if participants carry these stresses as guilt, or undisclosed or unmet desire, such burdens become an albatross. These burdens stand between the connection (to dominant partners and to themselves) they want, and discipline becomes the symbol of a path towards that connection.

Participants also look to the past to explain their desires. They use words like *traditional* and *old-fashioned* to describe the type of relationship they seek. They often cite movies and television shows like *I Love Lucy*, and *Leave it to Beaver*. One type of discipline relationship participants often refer

to when describing their ideal household is *1950's Household*. Mari describes the 1950's Household discipline:

The 1950's Household is a harkening back to a different time when the roles of the household were more defined and divorce rates were lower. The husbands generally worked to support the family and the wives kept the house in order and had dinner on the table when their husbands came home. In addition there is an element of "proper attire" as both men and women kept up appearances more rigidly in those days.

In terms of domestic discipline, the idea of taking your wife over your knee was a lot more accepted, and was even displayed in ads and tv. One of the most famous examples of this is the show *I Love Lucy*. In several episodes, Lucy's antics result in her being taken over Ricki's knee.

How prevalent was actual domestic discipline in 1950's households? No one really knows for sure, but as the paragraph above explains it is about a good deal more than the discipline. Although traditionally the head of a 1950's household was male, the ideals can work on any variant. One thing is for sure, this particular brand of domestic discipline certainly had the largest amount of readily searchable photos. . . .



(<http://domesticdisciplinefantasytoreality.blogspot.com/2011/10/different-types-of-domestic-discipline.html>)

Another blogger writes: "The 1950s have been idolized as a time when women knew their place, and men took care of their women. Now it's a fetish. I blame June Cleaver... When you do the vacuuming in pearl and high heels, it starts something wicked in the imagination." (<http://urge.info/1950s-household>)

The men and women who portrayed these roles on television constructed images of family and domesticity. A deeper irony, is that Lucy and June Cleaver are characters. Barbara Billingsley and Lucille Ball, the real women who worked full time on television sets, helped construct the images of family and do-

mesticity, but they were not themselves 1950's stay at home housewives. The language of traditional and old-fashioned domesticity itself often ignores the unpaid labor women perform as actual or valuable work. Additionally, rather than presenting an outrageous and extreme type of sexuality that BDSM dungeons display, participants display a different extreme and outrageous— commitment, monogamy, and 1950's traditions. Participants use nostalgia and romanticized notions of the past to define a type of life they want. They fetishize a past that never existed.

So what does it all mean? In many ways I think participants purposely allow the division between discipline relationships and BDSM without tarnishing or trashing people who play in the scene. Participants are smart about power and they know a lot about BDSM. They also know that non-normative sexualities are lumped together. If they drag BDSM down as bad or over-sexualized, they risk dragging themselves down. I see infighting with each other about beliefs and discipline practices. But participants appear less concerned about non-discipline (vanilla or BDSM) relationship practices.

I think participants want to feel safer talking about discipline relationships with the outside world and safer being out about discipline identities. One blogger writes, "I was outted [sic] at work yesterday. My boss found out about my husband I [sic] practicing DD. Has this ever happened to you? What did you do?" Participants discussed the repercussions of being outed. Fearing job loss or hostility because people know about non-normative relationship and sex practices causes concern for many participants.

Returning to SI, identity construction and meaning making, participants understand the implications of cultural family and relationship expectations. They also understand the potential detrimental consequences for breaking cultural norms or being aligned with BDSM or non-normative sexualities and relationship practices on their professional and personal lives. What Blumer (1969) viewed as defining processes for group motivations, we see explicitly in the anonymity and cloaking throughout the various discipline communities.



Writing about this topic made me worry about my career. I worried about what it might mean to attempt to get published or be taken seriously as a scholar. I never outed myself nor did I talk about my personal life or my sexual desires or how I practice or want to practice my relationships. I never talked about my fantasies in a non-normative way. Yet I understood that writing about such a topic aligns me with it and as such, I too take risks and feel less safe. Researchers on SM also worry about these issues and doing research on sexuality itself is a difficult for scholars. Sexuality researchers know what it feels like to be the school slut. Name calling, sullied reputations, sniggering behind our backs – these issues affect our research in practice, theory, and methodologically (Israel 2002; Poole, Giles & Moore 2003). Many traditionalists in academia frequently contest sexuality research (Poole et al. 2003), and mistrust feminist practices in scholarly research (as described by Reinharz 1992). Throughout the academe, sexuality researchers often hear critiques of their scholarly work, which is described as trivial, titillating, self-indulgent and not serious (as described by Poole et al. 2003). Additionally, sexuality researchers experience institutional social control and self-censure to appear scholarly (Israel 2002). This often results in humorless, over-scholastic sounding research or the use of ill fitting methodologies to fit into the accepted/acceptable pedagogy. This self and other censoring also creates an atmosphere where our personal lives become suspect and our professional careers tarnished and under suspicion based on what we research (Israel 2002; Poole et al. 2003).

If I have these feelings simply writing about a topic, I can only fathom what it feels like to live out loud online with one's sexuality and identity up for public consumption. Discipline relationships challenge us to think about identity, sexuality, and relationship practices as broader and more fluid than current conceptions of BDSM and sexual spanking. The desire for permanence, long-term partnership, (usually) monogamy, and their own set of symbols and language makes discipline relationships an important population for researchers. My own experiences understanding discipline relationships is in-

formed by my politics, my ethnographic choices, my interview participants, and my own sexuality and erotic leanings.

The reasons participants give for wanting discipline sometimes seem like a cover for unexplored sexual shame. Other times, it seems as though participants turn discipline relationships themselves into a type of religion or religious practice. Sometimes participants use reasons that appear understandable and turn their frustration on the limiting social acceptance for their non-normativity. Like many people, participants understand themselves through the frame of dominant culture. As such, they frequently understand their views of sexuality and discipline through a psychological lens, with childhood and parental problems, as well as Jungian notions of energy and archetypes, and self-exploration through pain and processing. These views inform discipline relationship language and influence how participants understand themselves and their sexuality.

In my study I created categories for my participants to help my audience of sociologically minded readers better understand my initial question of who is practicing discipline relationships and why. In return I created categories out of the various fluid explanations and reasons and beliefs that my participants expressed. Problematically, when we create a category it becomes static – both in our minds and on the paper in which we define a person's sexuality. Allowing for criticism (both personally as a researcher and of my discipline), I find it important to emphasize that my participants are more than these categories I have created to understand them. They (and our) sexualities and identities are fluid and shift. Gender and sexuality are performed and they shift. The images I have supplied of how participants ritually perform sexuality are still viewed through our dominant culture. These images must be deconstructed, and are not about my participants but about the "truth" that the dominant culture holds of how to do normative family and sexuality and gender relations.

In many ways my study is also both in gratitude to sociologists and sexuality researchers and an effort to offer additional insight into a language we have established to understand non-normative

spanking relationships. I offer this as a critique against automatically labeling people who prefer discipline and spanking as BDSM. Instead I submit that sexuality and identity must be examined in new ways even if it causes us as researchers to broaden our language and understanding of our participants' consensually violent relationship and sex practices. Deconstructing the medical and psychological and yes, sociological language forces us, as family, sexuality, and gender researchers to expand our research options. It is messy and without the pre-determined linguistic codes that limit and restrain our understanding of our participants requires us to extend our language in telling their stories.

### **8.1 Nascent Emerging Social Movement**

When participants use social media and make themselves and their sexuality, relationships, and culture visible, they create a nascent and emerging social movement. Using the networks of social media and communities they communicate their culture and create a unified and unifying language of discipline relationships. The public space of virtual communities allows participants from many belief systems to come together to discuss, disagree, and solidify areas where they do agree – which is where the movement begins. Where it ends, no one knows. I do know that participants are eager to see themselves as distinct from BDSM sexuality and set themselves apart from other relationship practices.

Mr Loving DD (2007:v) writes that domestic discipline “has spread across the world like wildfire, that’s to the wonders of the Internet.” He also urges readers to give copies of *LDD* to sympathetic friends and family to spread the word about discipline relationships: “In this way the wonderful Loving Domestic Discipline lifestyle will become known and practiced by more and more people, so that others can benefit from the tried and tested techniques.” This proselytizing shows how committed Mr Loving DD is to his book and blog as well as the LDD lifestyle. Similarly, Sara’s willingness to write and publish a book about discipline relationships for free demonstrates her commitment to the discipline community. Mija, who describes herself as a Chicana feminist scholar, explains why her online community writes

about discipline relationships: "There's a lot of stuff about domestic discipline out there on the 'net, but not much any of us felt related to our lives, for reasons that will eventually be discussed in some detail somewhere on this site. The [*Punishment Book*] blog is our attempt to explain it all."

([http://www.punishmentbook.org/about\\_the\\_punishment\\_book](http://www.punishmentbook.org/about_the_punishment_book)). Framing discipline relationships

against sexual spanking yet with the hope of capturing multiple perspectives Mija writes about invisibility and being misunderstood:

One thing I learned from it is that a lot of people into spanking are \*not\* into punishment, either for real life issues or even as something to play with. This makes it hard to talk about the idea of discipline and punishment for real life stuff there. A lot of time ends up being taken up with explaining What It Is We Do and also defending it as "real" in some fashion or another. So we never really get around to talking about how to make it work and how it might work for other people. . . .

As I got to know [contributors to Punishment book] sparkle, Haron, Tasha, Natty and Angie, I realized that we weren't the only people struggling with this issue and how to relate to some of the DD information out there that seemed oh so not us. All of us are in disciplinary relationships (or have been) that are long term. Some of us are married, some of us live with our partner. Some of us are in long distance relationships. All of us have done long distance at some point or other and know that pain and frustration.

([http://www.punishmentbook.org/2005/06/why\\_the\\_blog](http://www.punishmentbook.org/2005/06/why_the_blog))

Mija sees their community as a unifying place where feminists who practice discipline relationships can gather to discuss their mutual concerns, rather than as a venue to explain discipline relationships to sexual spankers or defend against attacks against the lifestyle. Nascent social movements often have leaders who start ideological movements from within communities (Castells 2012). Popular discipline bloggers and writers might be such ideological leaders. Each belief system has such radical differences as to why and how discipline relationships should be practiced. Is this a social movement? I am unsure. There is a belief in equality for the existence of discipline relationships but ideological disparity among various community leaderships. In any social movement, after social revolution happens scholars can examine the movement and its leadership. In this case, because I am presenting this as a still emerging movement, one that might be examined further. If it is a social revolution, the revolution's end results might

be more social acceptance for discipline relationships, and the key players (both historically and currently) are those participants pushing for visibility and acceptance of discipline relationships.

The idea that participants themselves believe they have a movement stems in part from the language they use when during interviews. Some use phrases suggesting movement -- "society isn't yet ready for discipline," "this is a movement" and, "we are heading in that direction." In this way, participants construct, if not revolutionary words, at least the philosophy of imminent cultural change. Some participants explicitly do so when they express a willingness to interview with me specifically because I was affiliated with the academe in the hope that I could offer change to how "the world" views discipline relationships. This is not to say everyone was willing to talk to me. Several people outright refused to discuss any information with me if I was affiliated with an academic institution. One man, Brian, challenges me in an e-mail:

Melissa, As [sic] a sociology candidate, you are almost certainly a feminist and against anything that you think might be even vaguely patriarchal, and what could be more patriarchal than domestic discipline? You are predisposed to a position which would make cdd (Christian Domestic Discipline) seem highly objectionable, if not criminal.

Brian's challenge to me, though charged, never gained discussion online. Most believed discipline relationships worth discussion, even if the scholar disagreed. Several participants who were themselves writing books and blogs about CDD agreed to interview with me because they, "wanted CDD to be clearly represented" and not confused with other types of DD. However, participants who choose not to talk about their beliefs appeared suspicious of my self-disclosure as a sociologist. Another woman who also refused an interview writes, "I'm afraid there's no way I'm in a position to have my real identity released to academia. I have my doubts your advisors are going to go for research based on nebulous Internet people." Intriguingly, it was both the veracity of online research and the topic itself that brought my topic under special consideration with the IRB committee. I had to promise that if any woman admitted she was abused or asked for help I would provide access to a therapist (at her own cost). My advisor

had to go to a special meeting of the IRB to answer questions about my proposed research before it was approved. I had to ensure confidentiality measures in my e-mail by using heading strippers to remove identifying names and e-mail addresses when I communicated with my participants via e-mail. This amused me because my participants were online beings and were used to online anonymity and keeping themselves secret and private. Meeting them in person for interviews was much more difficult, and showed more trust and intimacy on their part. That some (16) participants were willing to meet with me in person shows their dedication to speaking out on behalf of discipline relationships.

Here is what some participants said about their desire to participate in an interview and their hope for more public acceptance for discipline relationships:

**Jodi:** If my information helps the world to understand that traditional roles between a man and his wife make for stronger and more intimate marriages, I'm thrilled to help.

**Seth:** Why do I want LDD to be more accepted by the public? Why do I want others to be more tolerant of LDD and for couples to be able to be out that they are involved in one? Well who wanted want more tolerance for their way of living? I want LDD to be more accepted by the public because I know that LDD is a great way to live and love. I don't think that any consenting relationship should be criminalized or vilified just because other people don't want it themselves. I want more people to have the opportunity to examine LDD and decide weather it suites them or not. If no one beyond the existing practitioners adopt it then that is perfectly fine. That wouldn't invalidate it as a lifestyle. And if more people do choose to life the LDD lifestyle, then this is even better because more people would be experiencing the benefits. More people would have better relationships. That can only be a good thing.

**Erica:** Why do I want DD to be more accepted? I'm tired of pretending I'm not happy as a submissive wife. I'm tired of planning trips to the doctor when I'm scheduling my annuals. [Presumably because she has marks on her backside from being spanked.] [laughs] I just wish people thought of me the way they do being gay. . . . I wouldn't really broadcast what I do. . . . DD isn't even about sex and being tied up. . . . I just think the world isn't ready to let us [discipline relationship participants] have more traditional relationships, even though a few years ago it was normal. . . . I just want other people to understand DD and maybe accept it more, I guess.

Some participants said they are motivated by hope for more visibility and understanding about discipline relationships from the outside world. The tension between wanting to remain anonymous and live a private life, yet have more visibility for their lifestyle requires participants to seek legitimacy, not only of their relationships and identity, but in who legitimizes them. The language and science of

scholarship is one of power. One anonymous blogger who agreed to help recruit for me on her blog said of me to her readers, "I don't see how anything bad can really come of doing an interview. Even if Melissa Travis says bad things about DD in her dissertation we will know not to trust her." In this way she acknowledges the power of scholarship to legitimize discipline relationships in a way that anonymous and hidden participants cannot. By expressing their communal injustice of invisibility, oppression of their sexual identities, and hope for acceptance in the dominant culture, participants pursued hope for change. "At the individual level, social movements are emotional movements." (Castells 2012:13). When these movements transform into political action (like writing manuals, blogging and choosing not to charge, or interviewing in the hopes for more visibility), these emotional acts coalesce into nascent social movements (Castells 2012). The emergence of the discipline social movement occurs as participants overcome their fear and sexual shame, identify with discipline relationship sexualities, discuss it with each other in virtual communities, and express anger at feeling oppressed and repressed. Using social media to increase visibility and communicate are political acts. Each act of removing barriers to sexual pleasure through discipline relationships, increases visibility of discipline relationships as separate and distinct from BDSM and increases visibility of non-normative sexuality and relationships in the dominant culture. Using technology to express discipline relationship identities and hope for more change, social acceptance, participants mobilize around the online public space. The culture they create (in the form of both virtual and real life artifacts) is the legacy participants create in the act of social mobilization.

Creating and producing images and the language of discipline culture sustains visibility, sheds light on discipline relationships, and constructs discipline culture. When participants use social media and make themselves, their sexuality, lifestyle, and culture visible online, they create a nascent and emerging social movement. This emerging social movement is a political act, perhaps expressed, the way Clint writes about it, "as a movement." Or, perhaps it is a cohesive act, with less articulation as an

actual movement, but one that allows participants to use technology as a public space to express their discipline identities collectively. These acts are all political acts because sexuality and sexual pleasure are political. Barriers to sexual pleasure, in this study, are not just women's problems, but are the problems of population of participants with non-normative sexuality (of discipline identity). By seeking visibility, establishing identity, and creating discipline culture where they exist on their own, participants legitimize and defend discipline relationship sexuality as a way of life. In so doing, participants understand themselves as deserving of equality and deserving of freedom of practices, they create a language of movement and one of political motivation. The change they seek looks to the romanticized nostalgic past, old-fashioned and traditional -- one that never existed. They hope for change to live their lives without shame, fear of recrimination, and with more cultural understanding of the discipline relationship identities they create in the present.

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## 10 APPENDICES

### Appendix A Discipline Relationship Books & Social Media Examined 2003-2012

#### Discipline Relationship Manuals

- 1) *How to Scold during Discipline* by Aunt Kay. 2000. DWC.
- 2) *Please Discipline Me! : Persuading Your Partner.* by Aunt Kay. 2001. DWC.

- 3) *Finding Your DWC Partner* by Aunt Kay. 2009. DWC.
  - 4) *Disciplinary Wives Club Handbook* by Aunt Kay. DWC.
  - 5) *Disciplinary Wives Club Companion Guide* by Aunt Kay. DWC.
  - 6) *Order of Marriage and Christian Domestic Discipline*. [Kindle Edition] by Bulldog. 2011.
  - 7) *Order of Marriage and Christian Domestic Discipline Volume II*. [Kindle Edition]. by Bulldog. 2011.
  - 8) *A How-to Guide to Domestic Discipline Boot Camp*. [Kindle Edition] by Clint. 2011. Learning Domestic Discipline.
  - 9) *Christian Domestic Discipline*. 2012. <http://www.christiandomesticdiscipline.com>
  - 10) *The Adult Spanking and Discipline Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Corporal Punishment*. by Governess Gemma Forbes. 2011. Nazca Plains Corporation.
  - 11) *Domestic Discipline: The Book*. by Brother Clarlie Gleason. 2002. <http://drrickdt.topcities.com/ddbook.html>
  - 12) *Christian Domestic Discipline Bible Study for Wives*. by Leah Kelley. 2006. Christian Domestic Discipline Publications.
  - 13) *Christian Domestic Discipline 101*. by Leah Kelley. 2007. Christian Domestic Discipline Publications. (9.99)
  - 14) *Consensual Christian Domestic Discipline*. by Leah Kelley. 2007. Christian Domestic Discipline Publications.
  - 15) *Understanding Christian Domestic Discipline*. [Kindle Edition]. by Leah Kelley. TCM Publications.
  - 16) *LDD-4-me*. by LDD-4-Me and SassyMinx. 2011. - <http://ldd4me.blogspot.com>
  - 17) *Consensual Spanking*. by Jules Markham. 2005. Publish and Be Damned.
  - 18) *Domestic Discipline*. by Jules Markham. 2007. Lightningsource.
  - 19) *Disciplinarian*. by Mistress Nikki. 2006. <http://disciplinarian.blogspot.com>
  - 20) *Advanced Loving Domestic Discipline*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. by Mr Loving DD. 2006. Lulu Press.
  - 21) *Loving Domestic Discipline*. by Mr Loving DD. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. 2007. Lulu Press.
  - 22) *DD Reflections. (First book of DD trilogy)* by T Ross, T. 2010. Lulu publishing.
  - 23) *Increasing DD Submission. (Second book of DD trilogy)*. by T Ross. 2010. Lulu publishing.
  - 24) *DD Lifestyle. (Third book of DD trilogy)*. by T Ross. 2010. Lulu publishing.
  - 25) *Spencer Spanking Plan*. 2008. - [www.spencerplan.org](http://www.spencerplan.org)
  - 26) *The Spencer Spanking Plan: A Cooperative Solution for Domestic Discipline*. 2012. <http://www.spencerplanspanking.com>
  - 27) *A Spanking Good Lifestyle: Domestic Discipline Essays*. By Vickie Blue. 2003. <http://vickiblue.com> and ABCD Webmasters
  - 28) *Book I - How to Get the Spanking You Want: The Complete Guide to Asking for It, Getting It & Making It Better*. by Vivian. 2009. [www.variantbooks.com](http://www.variantbooks.com)
  - 29) *Book II -- How to Give a Spanking: Advice from the Receiving End*. by Vivian. 2009. [www.variantbooks.com](http://www.variantbooks.com)
  - 30) *Book III -- What He Wants: A Man's Seven Secret Spanking Desires*. by Vivian. 2011. Virtual Discipline Relationship Groups & Communities Examined 2003-2012
- 1) A Domestic Discipline Society (ADDS) - <http://adomesticdisciplinesociety.blogspot.com>
  - 2) Christian Domestic Discipline Blog - <http://christiandomesticdiscipline.blogspot.com>
  - 3) Christian Domestic Discipline: The Leading Resource for Traditional CDD Marriage <http://www.christiandomesticdiscipline.com>
  - 4) Disciplinary Wives Club - [www.disciplinarywivesclub.com](http://www.disciplinarywivesclub.com)
  - 5) Fondly and Firmly - <http://fondlyandfirmly.com> (defunct)
  - 6) Loving Domestic Discipline - <http://www.lovingdd.blogspot.com> (defunct)



- 7) Learning Domestic Discipline - [learningdd.blogspot.com](http://learningdd.blogspot.com)
- 8) Taken in Hand - <http://www.takeninhand.com>

#### Discipline Relationship Blogs Examined 2003-2012

- 1) AngelBrat's Blog - <http://angelbrat454.blogspot.com>
- 2) Annie's Woodshed - <http://annieswoodshed.blogspot.com>
- 3) Art of Authority - <http://artofauthority.wordpress.com>
- 4) Blending Lives - <http://stumblingchi65.blogspot.com>
- 5) Breathing in and Breathing Out - <http://breathingin.blogspot.com>
- 6) C's Loving Domestic Discipline Blog - <http://rncblog.blogspot.com>
- 7) Confessions of a CDD Wife - <http://cddwifeconfessions.blogspot.com>
- 8) Consensual Spanking - <http://consensualspanking.blogspot.com>
- 9) Desiring Discipline - <http://desiringdiscipline.wordpress.com>
- 10) (D)ee for Desire: A Journey into the Realm of Domestic Discipline Lifestyle Choices and Love and Commitment <http://dfordesire.blogspot.com>
- 11) Digits and Maryann Domestic Discipline - <http://reocities.com/SouthBeach/Bay/3507/DD.html>
- 12) Discipline and Desire - <http://www.disciplineanddesire.com>
- 13) Discipline and Love - <http://disciplineandlove.blogspot.com>
- 14) Domestic Discipline Dreams - <http://domesticdisciplinedreams.blogspot.com>
- 15) Finding Sara - <http://findingsara.wordpress.com>
- 16) Firm & Loving Domestic Discipline - <http://www.lovingdomesticdiscipline.net>
- 17) Jayda's Musings - <http://jaydasmusings.blogspot.com>
- 18) LDD-4-Me - <http://ldd4me.blogspot.com>
- 19) Loving Discipline - <http://lovingdiscipline4you.blogspot.com>
- 20) My Bottom Smarts - <http://bottomsmarts.blogspot.com>
- 21) Natty's Spanking Blog - <http://nattyspanked.blogspot.com>
- 22) Punishment Book - <http://punishmentbook.net>
- 23) Spanking Bethie - <http://www.spankingbethie.com/blog>
- 24) Subbiehubbie's Blog: The Joyful Life of a Submissive Husband <http://subbiehubbie.wordpress.com>
- 25) The Collar Purple - <http://www.thecollarpurple.com> (defunct)
- 26) The Disciplined Feminist - <http://disciplinedfeminist.blogspot.com>
- 27) The Good DD Life - <http://the-good-dd-life.blogspot.com>
- 28) The Heron Clan - <http://theheronclan.blogspot.com>
- 29) Vicki Blue's Domestic Discipline - <http://www.vickiblue.com> (defunct)

#### Discipline Romance Novel Websites Examined 2003-2012

- 1) Bethany's Woodshed - <http://www.herwoodshed.com>
- 2) Joannie Writes - <http://joanniewrites.blogspot.com> (defunct) and <http://www.joanniewrites.com> - lists of recommended authors from her site.
- 3) Patty - A Creative Spanked Wife / Creative Spanko Wench <http://creativespankedwife.blogspot.com> as well as lists of links from her.
- 4) Vicki Blue's Domestic Discipline - <http://www.vickiblue.com> (defunct)
- 5) Spanking Writers Blog - <http://www.spankingwriters.com/blog>

6) The Library of Spanking Fiction Blog - <http://spankinglibrary.blogspot.com>

(I located discipline romance novels and novellas on <http://www.lulu.com>, <http://amazon.com>, <http://www.google.com> by searching for domestic discipline romance, taken in hand, or other discipline relationship variations. Occasionally, by using known discipline lifestyle romance authors on already listed blogs and websites. I did not keep track of these titles as they are often serial stories and collections made available weekly through participantships.)

## Spanking and Discipline Artists Examined 2003-2012

- 1) Banjo's at BBS Bare Bottom Spankings - <http://banjosbbs.blogspot.com>
- 2) Dave Wolfe at <http://wolfietoons.blogspot.com>
- 3) End Art at <http://www.endart.com> (defunct)
- 4) Patty at Patty's Gallery - <http://www.pattysgallery.com>
- 5) Invidia at The Collar Purple - <http://collarpurple.com> (defunct)

(I located discipline art collections on <http://www.google.com> by searching for domestic discipline romance, taken in hand, or other discipline relationship variations. Occasionally, by using known discipline lifestyle artists and links on already listed blogs and websites I would find more. )

## Spanking &amp; Discipline Audio, Video &amp; Graphic Websites Examined 2003-2012

- 1) American Spanking Society - <http://americanspankingsociety.com>
- 2) Art and Spanking by Chross - <http://www.artandspanking.de.vu>
- 3) Bethany's Library of Spanking Articles - Bethany's Woodshed Library.  
<http://www.herwoodshed.com/library/library.html>
- 4) Cherry Red Report - <http://www.cherryredreport.com>
- 5) Elizabeth Burns Domestic Discipline -  
[http://elizabethburnsdd.com/Elizabeth\\_Burns\\_Domestic\\_Discipline/Home.html](http://elizabethburnsdd.com/Elizabeth_Burns_Domestic_Discipline/Home.html)
- 6) Oshioki. Over Her Knee: The Weblog of a Naughty Adult Boy -  
[http://oshioki.typepad.com/over\\_her\\_knee](http://oshioki.typepad.com/over_her_knee)
- 7) Spanking Tube – <http://www.spankingtube.com>
- 8) Spanking Art Archives - <http://lady.sensualwriter.com>
- 9) Spanking Art - [http://spankingart.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_spanking\\_artists](http://spankingart.org/wiki/List_of_spanking_artists)
- 10) Spanking Blog - <http://www.spankingblog.com>
- 11) The Spanking Spot <http://thespankingspot.com>

**Appendix B Interview Schedule**

## QUESTIONS:

What is DD/domestic discipline?

What do you call it? Why?

How did you get interested in DD and approach it in your relationship?

How long have you been practicing DD?

Whose idea was the DD?

How rules are set up and followed. (Do you have explicit rules? etc)

What kinds of discipline do you use in your household?

Can you describe how DD works in your household?

Why do you do DD?

What does it do for your relationship?

What doesn't work well for you?

Have you ever re-negotiated DD in your relationship?

Does it work better for some things than for others?

Have you ever felt that it was not working? What did you do/say to change things?

How did your partner react to your suggestions?

Was your spouse reluctant to try it or easy to convince?

Is DD practiced consistently in your relationship?

Do you ever feel you need more or less consistent DD than you current practice?

Do you find spanking sexually arousing?

Are you religious and do you practice DD as part of your religious beliefs?

Bratting - what is it? Why does it happen?

Does your family know about this, or have you been "caught" engaging in DD accidentally by your kids, family, neighbors etc -- how did you handle it?

Are you a feminist? How you do define feminism?

How is DD different from BDSM? If it's not BDSM, what is it?

How is DD different from abuse? If it's not abuse, what is it?

How does the law affect how you practice DD?

Regarding previous experiences:

Have you ever been in a DD relationship before this one?

How long did you know you wanted a DD relationship or was it brought to your attention by someone and you tried it?

Were you spanked as a child?

Do you spank your children?

How do you feel about spanking children in general?

How is DD different/similar to child spanking?

Were you expected to be obedient and submissive as a child? How do you think this affects your views of romantic relationships?

Growing up what were your experiences of the marriages of adults who played a significant role in your life during your childhood? (For instance, regarding marriages: How did they get along? What were the power dynamics of their relationships like? Were they affectionate with one another? Do you think they were monogamous? Did they practice DD?

What did they teach you about marriage and relationships?

What did they teach you about your role in a marriage? (i.e., who is submissive, equal relationships, traditional gender roles etc).

What did they teach you about your sexuality and engaging in sexual relationships?

Demographic questions:

What is your education level/occupation?

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your gender?

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your spouse's education level/occupation?

What are your ages?

What is your family income level?

What part of the country/globe are you both from?

What is your religion or spiritual practice if any?

### **Appendix C Disciplinary Wives Club Survey**

Permission was granted in writing by the owner of the site, Aunt Kay, to use her survey data in this study.

**“Survey One**” The first survey, "A Survey of the Disciplinary Wives Club," was conducted in May and June 2007, focused broadly on who we are, how we practice the DWC lifestyle, and how we find partners. The 1,000 participants to that survey generated over 15,000 responses which are presented here:”

[Summary](#)

[Full Report](#)

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**NOTES****CHAPTER 5**

<sup>i</sup> I am unable to discuss Janet's publications or books in detail in order to maintain her anonymity. She is, however a widely read and popular blogger, writer, and authority in both the discipline community and in the non-discipline community.

**CHAPTER 7 Artist and Graphic Attributions**

<sup>ii</sup> Figure 7.2

Lines <http://studentbranding.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/writing-center.jpg>

<http://learningdd.blogspot.com/2011/07/additional-punishments.html?zx=d86849efe1dfed80>

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Figure 7.3

Mouth Soaping

<http://atozfrenchbulldogs.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/soap-in-mouth.jpg>

<http://learningdd.blogspot.com/2011/07/additional-punishments.html?zx=d86849efe1dfed80>

Figure 7.4

Corner Time - [http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_mekdd36ZOy1ri8w9oo1\\_250.jpg](http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_mekdd36ZOy1ri8w9oo1_250.jpg)

Figure 7.5

Lines from unknown discipline site

Figure 7.6

Diaper Position

[http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_m3z06gxDs91qd1m6wo1\\_500.jpg](http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m3z06gxDs91qd1m6wo1_500.jpg)

Figure 7.7

Banjo "Spanked and Soaped"

<http://banjosbbs.blogspot.com/2011/08/flashback-spanked-and-soaped.html>

Figure 7.8

Marriage Repair Comic

[http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_m2qzimTJbw1qzlr06o1\\_400.jpg](http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m2qzimTJbw1qzlr06o1_400.jpg)

Figure 7.9

Artist Unknown 2012 – Posted on <http://www.spanking4men.com>

Figure 7.10

Artist Lynn Paula Russell (aka Paula Meadows) via Toyntanen 2011

<http://toyntanen.blogspot.com/2011/04/weight-gain-and-recalcitrant-teenager.html>

Lynn Paula Russell's site can be viewed: <http://www.lynnpaularussell.com>

Figure 7.11

<http://aboutspankings.blogspot.com/>

Figure 7.12

"Tables Turned" by Invidia (former blogger at the now defunct *The Collar Purple*) Feb 2008

Figure 7.13

Art by Franco "Governess Rachel" Feb 2006 – [http://oshioki.typepad.com/over\\_her\\_knee/](http://oshioki.typepad.com/over_her_knee/)