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The Fusion of Sex and Violence

The popularity of Madonna's song "Hanky Panky (A Little Spanky)" and the rash of TV news-magazine shows recently on masochistic sex and bondage and discipline clubs, may reflect society's intrigue with those who enjoy pain, humiliation, or domination during sex. Of course, Americans may just be interested in sex of any kind or, possibly, anything that is taboo.¹

How many people actually take part in masochistic behavior? Barbach and Levine (1980) concluded from a study of a sizeable but non-random sample of women that their most frequent sexual fantasies were about being dominant or submissive, including forms of bondage or spanking. Actual bondage was by far the most popular acted-out fantasy (p. 124). As one woman put it:

One of my sexual fantasies that I always wanted to live out was having some sadomasochistic sexual experiences. Although I didn't want to be whipped and permanently damaged, I did want to feel that my partner was controlling the sex and that his control came in the form of physical demands, by either hitting me, tying me up, handcuffing me, or mild beatings. My lover at the time was also into that so it was great! It made our sex intense and arousing. I eventually outgrew the fantasy, but I really enjoyed it when I was going through it. (pp. 124-25)

Denise A. Donnelly is co-author of this chapter.

Kinsey et al. (1953) estimated that 12 percent of females and 22 percent of males became sexually aroused by masochistic stories. In response to one mild masochistic activity—biting—55 percent of women and 50 percent of men became sexually aroused, according to Kinsey. That was two generations ago, and many aspects of sex have changed since then. One of the purposes of this chapter is to provide a more recent estimate, but the main purpose is to try to understand why some people enjoy this type of sex. We theorize that the more a person was spanked by presumably loving parents as a child, the greater the chance that he or she will link love and violence and, therefore, want to be dominated, humiliated, or spanked as part of sex. The fusion is greatest when the parents are warm and affectionate.

A link between spanking and masochistic sex is not a new idea. Jean-Jaques Rousseau (*Confessions*, 1928) attributed his need to be spanked for sexual arousal to being spanked as a child. Rousseau was sent off to school at age eight and boarded with a minister and his sister. The minister's sister, Miss Lambercier, was a very loving and affectionate woman who nevertheless frequently used corporal punishment. As Rousseau puts it:

She had often threatened it [spanking], and this threat of a treatment entirely new, appeared to me extremely dreadful; but I found the reality much less terrible than the idea, and what is still more unaccountable, this punishment increased my affection for the person who inflicted it. All this affection, aided by my natural mildness, was scarcely sufficient to prevent my seeking, by fresh offenses, a return of the same chastisement; for a degree of sensuality had mingled with the smart and shame, which left more desire than fear of a repetition. . . . Who would believe this childish discipline, received at eight years old, from the hands of a woman of 30, should influence my propensities, my desires, my passions, for the rest of my life, and that in quite a contrary sense from what might naturally have been expected? . . . When I became a man, that childish taste, instead of vanishing, only associated with the other. (pp. 19–23)

Freud (1961) saw childhood experiences and conflicts as contributing to adult masochistic preferences but did not specifically implicate corporal punishment. He saw masochism as a “need for punishment at the hands of a parental power” (p. 169), thus suggesting a link between corporal punishment and masochism.

Gibson (1978), Krafft-Ebing (1895), and Money (1986, 1987) also argued that being spanked as a child can lead to an adult interest in sexual activities that incorporate pain and humiliation similar to those experienced at the hands of parents. Philip Greven makes the same argument on the basis of historical data.

In the 1970s, when I first began to study why physical assaults were so common among married and cohabiting couples, this was my line of thinking:

Learning about violence starts with corporal punishment, which is nearly universal. When corporal punishment is used, several things can be expected to occur. First, and most obviously, is learning to do or not do whatever the punishment is intended to teach. Less obvious, but equally or more important are three other lessons that are so deeply learned that they become an integral part of one's personality and world view.

The first of these unintended consequences is the association of love with violence. Corporal punishment typically begins in infancy with slaps to correct and teach. Mommy and Daddy are the first and usually the only ones to hit an infant. And for the most part this continues throughout childhood. The child therefore learns that those who love him or her the most are also those who hit.

These [and other listed] indirect lessons are not confined to providing a model for later treatment of one's own children. Rather, they become such a fundamental part of the individual's personality and world view that they are generalized to other social relationships . . ." (Straus, 1978: 453-4)

While the connection between childhood spanking and an adult interest in pain, bondage, or flagellation has been argued theoretically and is supported by some clinical case evidence, we have not been able to locate research that tested this proposition in a segment of the general population. This chapter makes a start on filling that gap in knowledge. It is only a start, however, because it is very difficult to establish a cause-and-effect link between spanking and certain adult behavior, such as masochistic sex. Definitive evidence requires an experiment in which parents agree beforehand to be assigned to one of two groups, but without knowing which one. Half of the parents, chosen randomly, would be put into a group that is assigned to spank under certain conditions. The other half

would be in a group instructed to never spank or hit in any way. When the children are adults, their level of interest or participation in masochistic sex could be compared. Obviously, no one would conduct an experiment like that because of the serious ethical, technical, and practical problems. Fortunately, the question of whether spanking leads to masochistic sexual interests, or whether masochistic sexual interests lead to spanking is not as critical as whether spanking leads the child to be aggressive or the child's aggression leads the parents to spank. Parents do spank children who hit other children, so it is important to find out the cause and the effect, that is, to determine whether spanking to control aggression tends to make the child even more aggressive in the long run. Cause and effect also is important when it comes to the relationship between spanking and masochistic sex. We think it is less important however, because parents are not likely to know about whether their children are engaging in masochistic sex and it is therefore not something for which they are likely hit their child.

Lovemaps

Money (1986 and 1989) introduced the term *lovemaps* to refer to the routes that an individual's mind must follow to arrive at sexual pleasure and satisfaction. The lovemap is a template in the mind that determines what is erotic, pleasurable, and sexually satisfying. Under average childhood conditions, the lovemap is heterosexual and relatively uncomplicated. But when lovemaps are "vandalized," the child comes to connect erotic arousal with acts that for most people have no sexual connotations. Money considers lovemaps most vulnerable from ages four to nine. He believes they can be vandalized by adults who punish and humiliate the child for engaging in sexual rehearsal play or when the child is prematurely introduced to sexual play, especially with infliction of harm or pain (Salkin, 1990).

Money argues that because the centers of the brain that process feelings of sexual arousal and feelings of pain are in such close proximity, when they are stimulated simultaneously many times over a long period of time, the brain can no longer separate the two. So feelings of sexual arousal and pain become forever woven together. This fusion is especially likely because the most common

age for spanking is two to six, which substantially overlaps the age that Money regards as most vulnerable for lovemap vandalism.

Sexual Scripts and Other Influences

Money's theory hinges on a neurological link between brain centers that process feelings of sexual arousal and feelings of pain, but to date there is no direct neurological evidence. Even if there were such evidence, it would not mean that spanking and neurological fusion are the only ways of producing masochistic sex. For example, Gagnon (1977) argues that sexual behavior is based on learned sexual scripts, or mental scenarios for behavior. These are mental plans that take into account past, present, and planned actions. Scripts help determine which course of behavior we will take and set standard ways of behaving in given settings (Byer and Shainberg, 1991). As people mature, they develop sexual scripts through their sexual experiences and erotic contacts with others. Sexual activity generally follows these scripts, which tell them what is exciting sexually. So, if a person learns to associate pain or humiliation with love or pleasure, sexual scripts may develop that require pain or humiliation to become sexually aroused.

Glickauf-Hughes and Wells (1991) attribute the development of masochism to growing up in a hostile, intrusive, and unpredictable environment. They argue that masochism is caused by two types of influences. The first is early deprivation, such as erratic nurturing, a weak parent-child attachment, and the parent's inability to meet the child's needs. The second is growing up in an unpredictable environment where the child is punished and praised for the same behavior, where parents are ambivalent or inconsistent, and where parents are more concerned with their own needs than those of their child. In these households, children often are treated badly under the guise of love. They may come to associate mistreatment with love, regardless of whether the parents spanked.

Lynn Chancer (1992) argues that masochism is a product of a society, such as that in the United States, that is characterized by domination and subordination in most spheres of life. Chancer's theory suggests that masochism is more likely to occur in a society with a rigid class system, male dominance, and other unequal social relationships. This type of society produces masochistically inclined

people regardless of whether they have been subjected to experiences, such as spanking, that fuse love and violence.

There also is the possibility that inherited behavior patterns can lead a child who was spanked to masochism as an adult. Imagine a parent who is genetically inclined toward being masochistic. If this tendency can be inherited, his or her child is more likely to have those traits than the children of other parents. If masochistically inclined parents tend to spank more, that might be a part of the link between spanking and a tendency to masochism.

There are probably other processes that might explain masochism as well. For this book, however, the most relevant theory is the effect of spanking and other legal forms of corporal punishment.

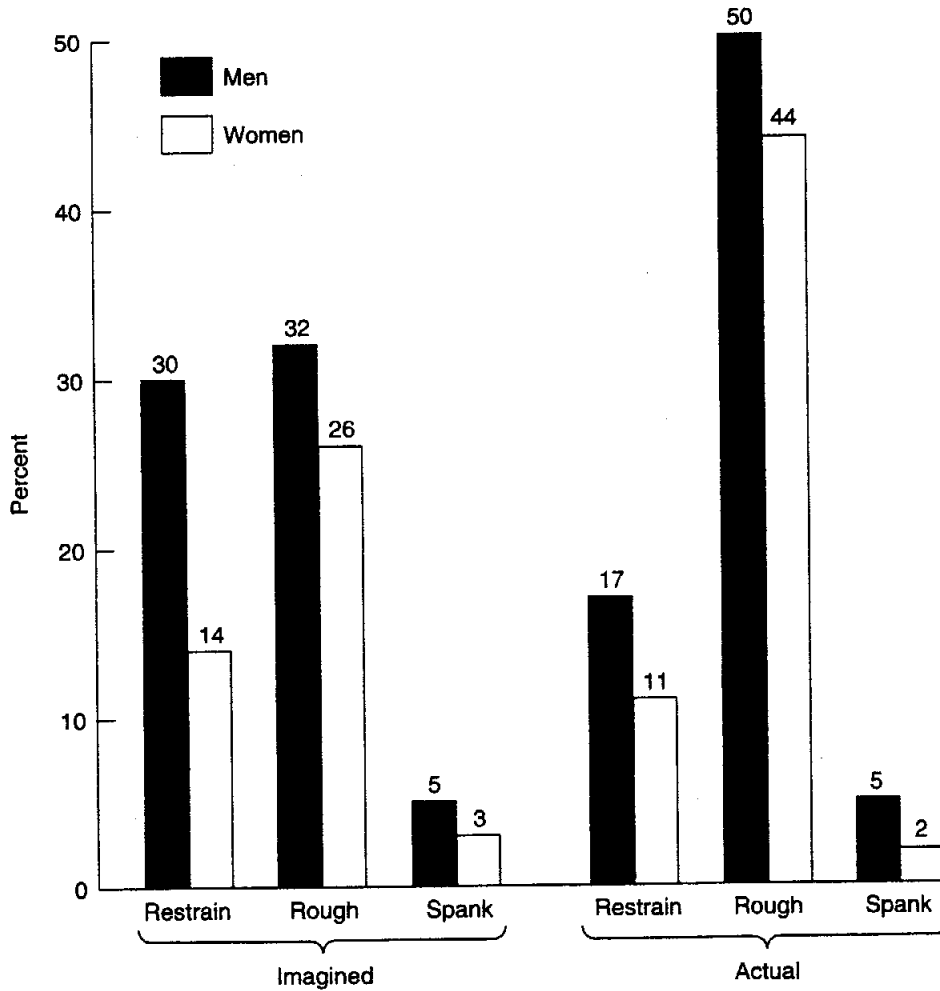
Masochistic Sex Among College Men and Women

This chapter is based on questionnaires completed by 455 students (163 men and 292 women) in sociology and psychology classes at three universities and colleges in the Northeast (see Appendix C for more information on the sample). The questionnaires asked the students about relationships with parents while growing up, including how often their parents used corporal punishment. They also were asked about their current sexual practices and interests, including whether and how often they had been sexually aroused by thinking about or doing a number of masochistic sexual acts.

When this study was planned, we were worried about using a college student sample. We were afraid that given their age, there would be too few who had been aroused by a masochistic act or fantasy to provide enough cases for reliable statistics. Our worry turned out to be unnecessary. In fact, the opposite occurred—the numbers were unbelievably high. An amazing 61 percent of the students said that they had been sexually aroused while imagining or doing one or more of the three activities in the Masochistic Sex Index (see Appendix C for information on that measure). Then we remembered that a little more than half of the people studied by Kinsey had been aroused by one mild masochistic activity—biting.

In view of the Kinsey study findings, our finding concerning another mildly masochistic activity, being sexually aroused by “Engaging in playful fights and being physically rough with a partner,”

CHART 8-1. More men than women are aroused by masochistic sex.



is not out of line. Almost half the students we studied (46 percent) reported being sexually aroused by a play fight. A much lower but still very large number—29 percent—said that they had become excited by imagining a play fight.

Nor did we find a large difference between the number who had been sexually aroused by imagining and those by engaging in the other two activities in the Masochistic Sex Index. Twenty percent of the sample became sexually aroused while imagining “Having a partner restrain me as part of sex play” and almost the same percentage—13 percent—became excited while actually being restrained.

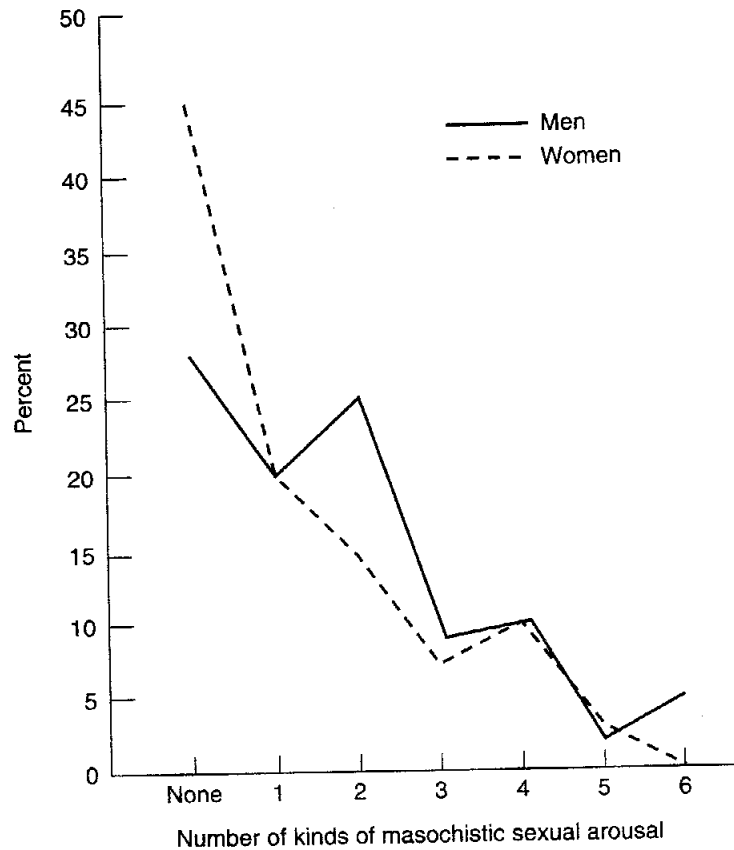
The least-frequent type of masochistic activity was “Having a partner spank me as part of sex play.” Just over three percent of the students were sexually aroused by being spanked, and an equal number were aroused by fantasies of spanking.

Chart 8-1 compares men and women on mildly masochistic behaviors and indicates that more men than women had been sexually aroused by imagining or doing each of the three. The differences between men and women are somewhat greater for fantasizing about masochistic sex (shown in the left half of Chart 8-1) than for actually taking part in it. That is, men are more likely to fantasize about masochistic sex than women, but when it comes to actual behavior (the right side of Chart 8-1), there is less of a difference between men and women. The biggest difference is in fantasizing about being restrained. Almost a third of the men became sexually aroused fantasizing about being restrained, compared to one out of seven women. The smallest differences between women and men were in actually engaging in rough sexual play. The rate for men (50 percent) is only 14 percent greater than the rate for women (44 percent).

The percentages in Chart 8-1 also can be used to calculate the ratio of men to women in fantasizing or imagining masochism. These calculations show that men are 2.1 times more likely to fantasize about being restrained than women, but only 1.5 times more likely to become excited by activity engaging in this behavior. Men are 1.2 times more likely to fantasize about playful fights or rough sex play than are women, but only very slightly more likely (1.1 times) to become excited while engaging in playful fights and rough sex play. Finally, men are 1.7 times more likely to fantasize about being spanked than women, and 2.5 times more likely to become excited by actually being spanked as part of sex.

Chart 8-2 which uses all six questions in the Masochistic Sex Index, provides more information on the extent of masochistic interest by the men and women. A score of zero means that the student reported never having been aroused by either imagining or doing any of the three activities. A score of one means that the student reported having been aroused in response to only one of the activities. Scores of 2, 3, 4, and so on mean that the student reported sexual arousal in 2, 3, 4, or more of the six questions. Chart 8-2 shows that men are more likely than women to imagine or engage

CHART 8-2. A much larger percentage of women than men have never been aroused by masochistic sex. However, for those who have been, there is not much difference in the the number of kinds of arousal.

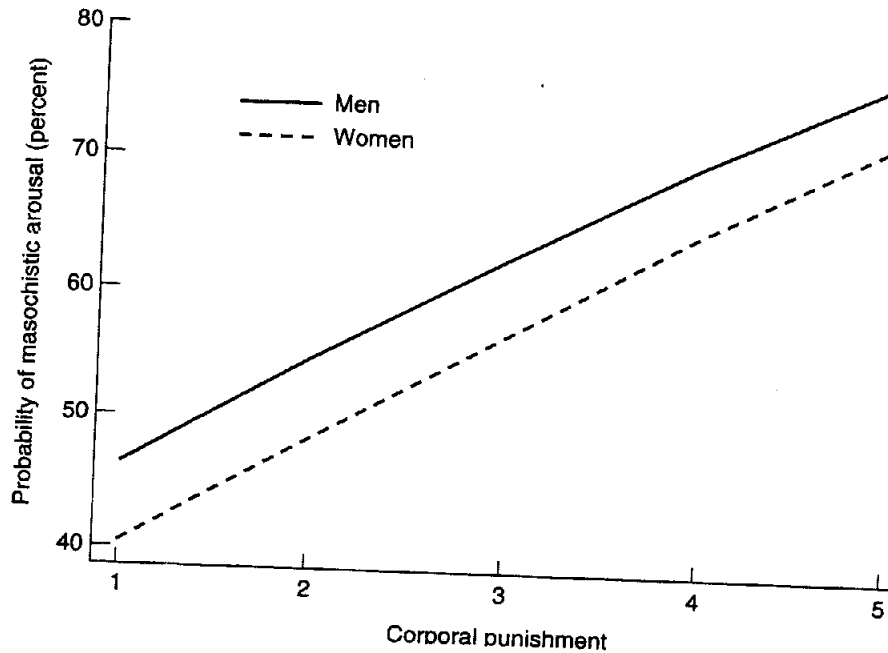


in masochistic behavior: only 28 percent of the men did not become aroused by any of the masochist acts, compared to 45 percent of the women. Putting it the other way, 72 percent of the men were sexually aroused by at least one masochistic behavior, compared to 55 percent of the women. These are important differences, but they should not obscure the fact that the majority of women as well as men had been sexually aroused by masochistic sexual fantasies or acts. Perhaps this reflects the fact that very large percentage has experienced corporal punishment at the hands of those they loved as children and adolescents.

Corporal Punishment and Masochistic Sex

The different statistical figures for men and women and the fact that a majority of these college students had become sexually aroused by masochistic sex are important. But, the main issue for this book is whether there is a relationship between corporal punishment and masochistic sex. Chart 8-3 gives the results of testing this theory (see Appendix C for the details). To create this chart, the students were divided into groups based on the amount of corporal punishment they experienced. Group 1 at the left side of the chart is the fifth of students who experienced the least corporal punishment. The upper line is for men, and the lower line is for women. It is evident that among both men and women, those in group 1 at the left side had the lowest chance of having been sexually aroused by one or more of the masochistic sexual activities we studied—about a 40 percent chance for women and a 46 percent chance for men. Reading Chart 8-3 from left to right shows that

CHART 8-3. As corporal punishment increases, so does the chance of masochistic sex as an adult.



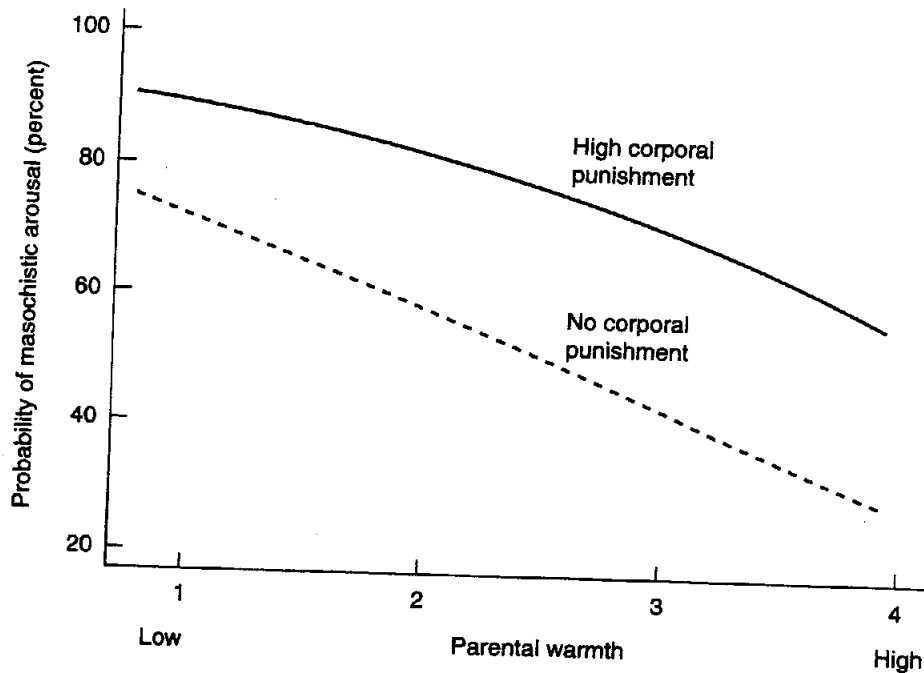
increases in the amount of corporal punishment are associated with substantial increases in the probability of being sexually aroused by masochistic activities. Students in the group who were hit the most (group 5 at the right) were the most likely to become aroused by masochistic activities. The chance of arousal for women goes up from 40 percent at the left side of the chart to 71 percent at the right side, which included women in the high-scoring group. Similarly, for men, the chance of being aroused by a masochistic sexual activity increases from 46 percent for the least-punished group to 75 percent for the most frequently hit group. These percentages hold true even after statistically removing the effects of five types of parent behavior that might explain the increase better than corporal punishment: parental warmth, consistency, monitoring, reasoning, and severe violence or physical abuse. Appendix C describes how each was measured.

In general, Chart 8-3 shows that the more children were hit by their parents, the greater the probability they were sexually aroused as adults by imagining or engaging in certain masochistic activities. Chart 8-3 also shows that, even though more men than women have an interest in masochistic sex, the relationship between this interest and corporal punishment is almost identical for men and women.

So far, we have focused entirely on spanking. Parental warmth and love, also have a lot to do with masochistic sex. Of the six parental behaviors we studied, warmth and corporal punishment are the only two that are related to masochistic sex. The upper line in Chart 8-4 is for students who were in the highest group for corporal punishment. The lower line is for students in the lowest group of corporal punishment. This indicates that high corporal punishment is linked to masochistic sex.

The downward slope of the lines in Chart 8-4 shows that the more warmth and affection by parents, the *lower* the chances of masochistic sex. Both lines slope down, which shows that warmth helps insulate children from masochism regardless of whether they experienced little or no corporal punishment (the lower line) or a great deal of it (the upper line). In fact, lack of parental warmth is more closely related to sexual masochism than anything else we studied.

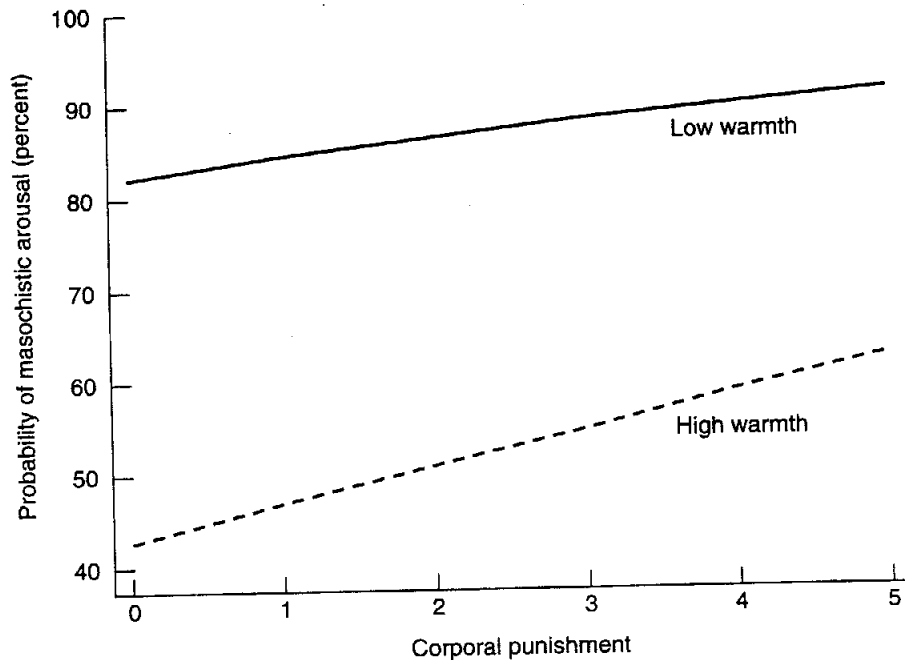
CHART 8-4. Warmth by parents decreases the chances of masochistic sex as adults for children who were spanked and not spanked.



The idea that parental warmth protects children from masochism may at first seem inconsistent with our theory that the effect of spanking is worst when the parents were also warm and affectionate. Actually, we found support for both propositions.² Chart 8-4 seems to be inconsistent with our theory because it shows the effect of warmth when the effect of all the other possible causes that we studied are held constant. When the *combination* of high warmth and spanking is considered, as in Chart 8-5, then the findings on warmth and spanking are consistent with each other.

Chart 8-5 refers to male students. The upper line shows the effect of spanking on masochism when the parents are very low in warmth. The fact that the line is so high up in the chart indicates that these students have an extremely high rate of arousal by masochistic sex. However, reading from left to right, that line does not increase very much as corporal punishment goes up. It goes from about 82 percent at the left to about 91 percent on the right, a difference of only 9 percentage points.

CHART 8-5. The link between corporal punishment and masochistic sex is greater when the parents are warm and loving.



The lower line in Chart 8-5 represents the effect of spanking when the parents are very warm and affectionate. The line is lower on the chart because parental warmth lowers the risk of developing a masochistic sexual interest. On the other hand, if these warm and loving parents also spank, the spanking has a strong effect on the risk of becoming sexually masochistic. The rate goes up from 43 percent at the left to 62 percent at the right. This is a difference of 19 percentage points, which is more than double the difference that is associated with spanking by cold and indifferent parents. What this boils down to is that when parents are cold and indifferent, spanking does not make much difference. Their children are the ones most likely to be masochistic because they do not have much of a chance to know what love and affection are really like. Similarly, children whose parents were the most warm and loving generally had the lowest chance of being attracted to masochistic sex. Among the children whose parents were warm and affectionate, however, the more the parents spanked, the more likely the child was to be aroused by masochistic

sex. Or, as Rousseau put it, when there is “All this affection . . .,” each increase in the amount of spanking is associated with a relatively large increase in the probability of masochistic sex. To put this in perspective, Chart 8-5 also shows that being brought up parents who lack warmth and affection produces a higher rate of masochistic sex than any combination of warmth and spanking.

A chart similar to Chart 8-5 was computed for women, and the results are very similar to those just presented for men. However, both lines are somewhat lower on the chart because as adults, fewer women than men were sexually aroused by masochistic sex.

Conclusions

According to the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association, masochistic sex is “. . . not part of normative arousal-activity patterns. . .” (DSM III-R, p. 279). That may be true in the sense of cultural norms, but it seems to be off the mark statistically. Almost two-thirds of the college students we studied were sexually aroused by at least one of the activities in the Masochistic Sex Index. It appears that at least some masochistic fantasies or behaviors are a common part of the sexual repertoire of the majority of college students, not a rare form of sexual deviance.

There is also the stereotype that women are more inclined toward masochism than men. For sexual masochism, we found the opposite. We found that more men than women have an attraction to sexual masochism.

The most important result of this study is not so much what we found out about the effect of spanking on masochistic sex. It is that lack of parental warmth is even more strongly related to masochistic sex than spanking. Nevertheless, we did find that spanking is linked to how much corporal punishment a child experienced, regardless of whether the parents were cold, or warm and loving. For both men and women, the more a child was hit by parents, the greater the probability of being aroused by masochistic sex. Our research suggests that the widespread use of corporal punishment on American children is one reason for today’s interest in sexual masochism, as shown in this chapter.

These statistics do not mean that spanking and lack of warmth are the only causes, or even necessary causes, of masochistic sex. If that

were the case, there would be no masochistic sex among students whose parents were warm and caring and who rarely or never used corporal punishment. In fact, Chart 8-4 shows that these children have about a 27 percent chance of being aroused by imagining or engaging in masochistic sex. One of the reasons may be that reward for good behavior and punishment for bad behavior are just about inevitable in bringing up children. This can lead children to believe that they are worthy of love only after punishment for being "bad."

In future research, we plan to explore what is behind the relationship between corporal punishment and masochism. Money (1986) believes that this connection exists because of connections established in the brain cells as a result of experiencing love and pain simultaneously during a critical period in the brain's development. This is probably correct, but there is no reason to think that those brain linkages are any different than the brain linkages associated with learning anything else.

Regardless of whether sexual masochism involves a unique type of change in the brain cells, changes that occur with ordinary learning, or inherited predispositions, not everyone who is hit a great deal by his or her parents becomes a sexual masochist. We already know that the warmth and affection of parents affect whether a person becomes a sexual masochist.

We also already know that whether the child is a boy or a girl makes a difference. The statistics in this chapter show that men have higher rates of fantasizing about and participating in masochistic sex. One explanation for the higher rate harks back to the Kinsey studies (1948, 1953). That research uncovered statistical evidence for what everyone assumed—that men have more interest in *every* type of sexual activity than women. Perhaps, as Kinsey suggested, there is a biological basis for this. Or, perhaps it is simply that men and women are socialized differently. Men are encouraged to be more sexual, more daring, and to take more chances than women. So the higher arousal rate by men from masochistic sex may be just another manifestation of their greater interest in sex in general. An equally likely and intriguing possibility is that boys are at greater risk for developing sexual masochism because boys are spanked somewhat more than girls (see Chapter 2). Finally, boys may get less affection from parents, and we have seen that the lack of warmth and affection as a child is associated with masochistic sex as an adult.

The higher rate of sexual masochism among men raises some interesting questions. For example, as mentioned earlier, popular wisdom has it that women are more likely to fantasize about being tied up and sexually ravaged than are men. Consider the so-called "bodice-ripper" novels, for example, which are read almost exclusively by women. It is true that many women in our sample were sexually aroused by masochistic sex, but even more men were aroused, however. Almost twice as many men as women were sexually aroused while fantasizing about being restrained. Perhaps the greater risk of being raped makes these fantasies less palatable for women than for men.

Another interesting difference between men and women is that the gender differences are greater for fantasizing about masochistic sex than for actually taking part in it. This is contrary to the idea that women are more likely to fantasize about sex, and men more likely to do it. However, this may simply reflect the fact that fewer college women than men engage in any kind of sexual act.

Among the many other issues that need to be investigated are whether corporal punishment is also linked to more severe forms of masochism, whether corporal punishment is also related to sadism, and if so, whether the circumstances are similar. We suspect the circumstances are not. Our research so far suggests that when corporal punishment is combined with love, masochism is the result. Perhaps an equal amount of hitting by cold and indifferent parents will more likely result in sadism than masochism. This speculation is an example of how important it is for research on corporal punishment to take into account a variety of other parent behaviors.

Most parents probably precede or follow corporal punishment with declarations of love for their children, at least occasionally. They do not realize the confusing message that they send. Of course, spanking with love is preferable to spanking without love. Corporal punishment without love puts the child at risk of profound damage to self-esteem and for developing a resentful, cold, and aggressive personality, and sometimes even murderous aggression. Fortunately, it is not necessary to choose between styles of parenting that increase the probability of masochistic tendencies (corporal punishment with love) and those that increase the probability of aggression (corporal punishment without love). The alternative is to keep the love and affection, but stop hitting.

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