Full Length Research Paper

The character of female gender imagery and culture memory in disciplinary fetish internet sites and voluntaristic associations

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Gender is an ongoing performance, one in which scripts change over time, and one where plot twists, requiring each person to exhibit theatrical talent, spontaneously contrived or calculated from 'second nature' yet the female gender role stereotypes which focus on submission are of late subject to disdain.

A four year qualitative research project explored three related contexts where females are generally submissive, and males always dominant: (a) Real world theaters where corporal punishment melodramas are staged, including voluntary associations and 'therapeutic' professional practices; (b) Internet web-sites, the employees of which film such melodramas as acted by professional models and sell them, and (c) The actual imagery of both, where events in these productions are photographed or drawn and exhibited on the internet. All three contexts are shown to be idealized spaces where social roles that are not available either empirically or ethically in wider social reality can be portrayed.

Key words: Gender, role performance, disciplinary theater, internet, erotica.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The concept of gender is wholly a social construction, as opposed to sex, which is at least partially physiological. Most humans are born male or female, but not at all boys and girls, let alone men and women. Gender is, in fact, an ongoing performance, one in which scripts change over time, and one where plot twists, from rising action, climax, and denouement require each of us to exhibit much theatrical talent, spontaneously contrived or calculated from 'second nature' (Potter, 2008). Butler famously argues that gender should be seen as a liquid consciousness, one which adheres to various social surfaces in different ways (Butler, 1990; Vaughter, 1976). None of us are wholly masculine or feminine, and as such all of us experience the 'trouble' of defining gender, both within ourselves and in relation to others (Ritter, 2004). Gender as a series of contiguous social roles, sometimes supporting one another, sometimes conflicting also calls to mind Goffman's equally famous understanding of role performance in general, where for example, only the finished product is ideally exhibited, and perhaps, just as ideally, certain roles or more widely normative ideals are sacrificed for the maintenance of others (Goffman, 1959). That we are aware of the ambiguity of the drama of social reality, as well as our own usually middling dramatic efforts, allows the ideals of role performance to be portrayed in other less normative circumstances (Hartman et al., 1988; Wachs, 2005). Away from the diversity of audience, and the shifting and wavering focus of ourselves and our co-actors, ambiguities may be bracketed out, and the sometimes disconcerting understanding that society itself is oft but a fragile conjuring of the sorcerer's apprentice inhabiting each one of us, is allayed.

The cases

One of the most curious of these alternative theaters,
where idealized versions of normative social roles are played out in front of a discerningly focused and appreciative audience occurs within the disciplinary theaters of both physical reality and cyberspace. Here, adult men and women did the psychic apparel of what they may have been as children or adolescents, or what they perhaps feel that they should have been, or further, what they themselves desired to be but could not. That these persons remain aware that they must perform is made clear by the presence of an idealized and simplified set of norms concerning gender, age, and authority, the transgression of which results in physical coercion of a ritual and sometimes satirical kind. In the study that follows, three major social contexts are respectively explored where females are both dominant but generally submissive, and males always dominant: (a) Real world theaters where corporal punishment melodramas are staged, including voluntary associations and ‘therapeutic’ professional practices; (b) internet web-sites -divided into two forms, type one being labelled ‘British’ and type two ‘American’ - the employees of which film such melodramas as acted by professional models and exhibit them on cyber-space, usually for a price, and (c) The actual imagery of both (a) and (b), where events in these productions are photographed or drawn and exhibited on the internet.

All three contexts are shown to be kinds of idealized spaces where social roles that are not available either empirically or ethically in a wider social reality can be portrayed. Yet the mere function of such spaces as allaying the wider problem of liquid gender and ambiguous authorities- who is whom and who can tell me what to do, who am I and who am I to tell you etc., is only the most visible feature. It will also be shown that these kinds of fictive socialities serve as bastions of a moral rearguard, so to speak, which exhibits both nostalgia and mourning for another kind of popular social fiction, that society itself is somehow better, that values were somehow higher, and that gender was somehow more respected and natural, in some other time and place.

It is perhaps trivially true that all forms of socialization, whatever their respective cultural contents, require some kind of coercion, sometimes physical, to ensconce and thence reproduce themselves. The essence of the youthful human being is paradoxically that they are not fully human, that is, not full members of their respective societies. We are not born knowing the norms and forms of social life, and some of us never quite accomplish their learning. Most of us claim partial success, and in an ‘organic’ society with a highly specialized division of labor, can survive and even flourish in our own parochial niches. The social distribution of knowledge, of which Schutz speaks as a manifestation in part due to multiple realities and in part emanating from the diversity of forms of rational action (Schutz, 1967), strongly underscores the social fact that we run our lives on a need to know basis, and can rely on others to do the same. In other words, we play our roles in good faith, and a large portion of that faith is directed toward those others, ‘contemporaries’ or ‘fellow-persons’, in that we believe that they too will honor their end of the social bargain, and society will live on as it has. No doubt we are often betrayed by this kind of faith, but seldom often enough to provoke some kind of revolutionary consciousness in ourselves, or more generally. Yet the fact that we so suffer betrayal often enough to make us realize that trust and faith cannot be certain, and that the human condition is one shot through with not only the existential angst of mortal life, but more mundanely, with other persons simply not living up to their responsibilities, makes all of us a potential audience for social contexts where the theater of life is telescoped and the actor fully aware of what they should and should not do. The theater which most fully exemplifies this general yearning for an ordered society, where one receives one’s ‘just desserts’ for good or bad behavior, where norms are transparent and one may be caught fully in a lie, are the voluntary or professional associations which enact corporal punishment as the major event, or climax, of role performance.

Hypothesis

Stated succinctly, the purpose of the paper was to identify the ideal type characteristics of the female image within idealized submissive contexts. It was surmised that the definition of the ‘feminine’ underwent fewer transformations from normative and generalized everyday life in order to take its place as the major trope within disciplinary fetish social contexts that is usually assumed. The threshold between reality and fiction was imagined to be often slight. In unpacking the research question, it was to consist of trying to understand the growing popularity of such fictions, the gender equity of their audience, and the interest in their performance by amateurs and professionals alike.

METHODS

A four year study was undertaken using ethnographic and other qualitative methods to investigate these contexts. Participant and passive observation, interviews and the content analysis of imagery, as well as an ideal type analysis of a large sample of relevant internet sites was accomplished. Spanning English speaking countries comprised fifty-five persons from the major disciplinary role types, including forty women and fifteen men. Both amateurs and professionals were interviewed. Amateur participants hailed from the voluntary associations, while professionals worked

1 cf. Schneider (2000) for a similarly conducted project with a more general ambit of genre, but also with the applied purpose of ‘rehabilitation’. For a pre-internet study the addresses the fantastic narrative of desire in erotic imagery, cf. Brosius et al, 1993.
within the context of the internet erotic industry. There were 25 amateur participants, 20 women and 5 men, and 30 professionals, including 20 women and ten men. As well, three hundred web sites from around the world were analyzed, and a sample of eleven thousand images, drawn from the internet, as suggested by actors and other subjects, or chosen by the researcher as exemplary, forms the basis of the analysis of the sub-cultural context and manifestations of female role performance presented here.2

THEMATIC RESULTS

The themes that were found to be salient include: (1) The relationship between desire and suffering, power and submission, (2) The self-alienation of subjectivity as a reflection of structural alienation of labor and general human consciousness, (3) The ironic liberation from sexual and coercive taboo via creative melodramas, and (4) The construction of intimacy in anonymity. If there is true violence in any form of coercion, the spaces of violence held within the fictions of these kinds of theaters are not so much imaginary, but mimetic, as are the costumes, scripts and even emotions. The theater is not real, yet it is surreal and therefore as well not completely at the mercy of the imagination. Rather, one is entertained by the plot because one knows exactly what to expect.3

There is also the problem of why one would advance oneself to practice such behaviors, either as a profession, or as a leisure activity. By far most actors interviewed stated that they had not been abused as children, specifically and physically. If there was an acceptance that mild child physical discipline did not constitute abuse, almost all also said that they were not subject to this either.4 Indeed, the link between acting out disciplinary fantasies and fictions and being a real victim of them as a child seems tenuous at best.5 For example, Stekel (1963) stated that those who practice the fetish, or have an addiction to the behavior, of sadism and/or masochism maintain a fundamentally retrogressive view of their own history as biography and of the history of society more generally. These persons supposedly have a neurotically defined need to relive again and again certain traumatic moments in their socialization through often theatrical projections and reconstructions which set the scenes for exchanges of power and desire.6 After four years of qualitative research, one may both admit to this hypothesis and yet also refine and sometimes refute it. A key question one may ask at the very beginning of those who indulge their desire in these manners is simply, why would one put oneself at physical and emotional risk, sometimes at the mercy, theatrical or otherwise, of other, often professional, strangers? The multitude of responses to this key query suggests that for the native participant, things are not so simple. Enjoyment and suffering have long been linked, and the pleasure one may feel at someone else’s pain is so plentiful in society at large that such melodramatic schadenfreude as one encounter in the disciplinary sub-culture may be seen as an insignificant reflection of larger structures of domination and enslavement. Indeed, most of us may prove immune to the most sensitive and ethical gentleness to which human beings are at least theoretically capable of orienting their actions given the alienated status of most labor and vocation, and the anonymous social interactions of modernity. Krafft-Ebing, who early on in the history of psycho-pathology, notices this trend, states that one might ultimately take perverse pleasure in the

2 The ethical challenge of such a research endeavor cannot be underestimated (cf. Loewen 2010iiii). The researcher participated in the action of theaters in a minimal manner, taking cues from the acolytes present. At the time, the researcher was a founding member of an R3 Institutional Research Board, and has been since a member of an R1 University Ethics Board. Yet this research was also conducted covertly for periods of time, exposition occurring after scenes and interactions were committed to record. These covert records have since been destroyed. As well, of the 11,000 images collected and culled from participants, there were twenty or so that were identified as criminal - that is, they apparently photographically displayed minors being physically coerced - these were not included in the analysis and were destroyed upon receipt. There were also about the same number of amateur photographs which could be interpreted as non-consensual, although the persons in the scene were adults. These were included in the content and ideal types analysis but were later destroyed. The entire archive of images has since been destroyed.

3 Research participants commented on these themes throughout the research process. “The actors are already in their element, because they want to suffer the consequences for their actions. The rule-breaking is part of the scripts we dream up, usually petty things, of course, and thus their are rules about breaking the rules, if you will. Generally, all of our models have this kink, they enjoy being punished, erotically, psychologically, or otherwise, and we write scripts - and pay salaries - around each of their thresholds. Often, a girl who is a little timid at first becomes our most stoic performer. (from interview, male internet site director, USA 2009).”

4 This sense of discipline, often associated with ‘traditional’ societies, but really only getting under way in earnest with the agrarian civilizations, is still contested regionally in the English speaking world today. Thirty out of fifty states in the USA, for example, allow corporal punishment of minors by parents or guardians, including the use of implements. Twenty of fifty allow such practices in schools, public and private, and all fifty allow spanking with the hand, as does Canada. Most European countries are, however much more wary of such practices in their legal codes.

5 And yet this is a perennial question that site directors and other potential employers ask of their aspiring talent, mainly for the titillation of their audiences. These interviews or excerpts therefrom, are duly published on the net as part of this genre’s marketing strategies. It is interesting that more normative sexual or erotic sites do not have the same ability to market in this area. By comparing the question and response regarding the how and why of possible childhood discipline with a corollary question concerning sex or molestation of children and one can immediately understand the normative difference. Yet it is also important to note here that most mainstream erotic photo hosting sites - for example ImageFap.com - bar searches using keywords specifically associated with criminal pornography. A quick test of such a term as ‘children’ will bring up a warning page, including the threat that one’s IP address has been recorded! Yet other terms, such as sons, daughters, teens, students, schoolgirls, can readily be used to search these sites, obviating the sense that they are completely serious about the problem of child exploitation.

6 Yet the entire tradition of therapy within psychopathology may be itself charged with a ‘blaming the victim’ desire, especially in relation to female patients. For an analysis of this problem cf. Penfold and Walker, (1983). They remind us that “Sex roles or gender roles are culture bound or ethnocentric concepts, and the large volume of research on sex differences that supports sex-role stereotypes is the handmaiden of social myth.” (Ibid: 112).
rationalization of all things in contemporary society, including matters of eros, and thus, if the pleasurable feelings increased to passionate intensity, inhibit any opposing ideas with corresponding feelings of disgust; the influence of such opposing concepts may be impossible on account of the absence or loss of all ideas of morality, aesthetics, and law. This loss, however, is only too frequently found where the spring of ethical ideas and feelings [ ] has been poisoned from the beginning (Krafft-Ebing, 1893: 56).

In other words, perhaps all of us are potentially 'up-market' for the sirens of disciplinary theater. On the other hand, most of us apparently do not participate in nor view such activities. That is, given the vast preponderance of sites and spaces where persons can theatrically act out violent passions against one another, yet there remains the majority which does not. At least, we do not act out in these specific spaces that natives have given the label of disciplinary theater. There exist many other more socially sanctioned spaces of similar violence, in the schools, in the home or even in correctional facilities. It is wryly ironic that these are most often the very spaces which are mimicked, both on the internet and in meeting places, by natives who wish to possibly relive and perhaps attempt to control earlier traumas.

Description of data and analytic commentary

Context A: Voluntary associations

There is little doubt that most of us encounter frustrating, even infuriating situations throughout the life course. These are almost always caused by other humans, who, like ourselves, also feel the ebb and flow of social relations, sometimes going our way and sometimes not. Much of the modern character of these social relations can be outlined in the usual structural terms such as alienated consciousness, rationalized institutions, and the like. Yet there are counter-structural spaces, tangential to the sanctioned scenes of the day to day, which provide a 'carnival' or "mardi gras" effect (Taylor, 2007). The theatre of cruelty, so celebrated in De Sade and others, also presents to us a kind of kindness; a forgiving space where one may regress to either a child or a subservient of some other type, or yet attain the status of a master against all of the realities of a denying social fabric. The theme of erotic pleasure and schadenfreude is not enough to explicate participation in these theatres. Many professional actors as well as members of voluntary organizations suggested that a particular concept of freedom, one linked to movement away from the puritanically defined public consciousness, led them to engage in otherwise risky behaviors:

"What do I get out of it? Well, I will tell you – it is a form of freedom, a liberation from the real freak show, that is, society in general. I reject any judgement from that realm, and desire to exist as what I am, and be taken for that at face value. I enjoy it, whether I am in control or someone else is, because my pleasure and freedom is linked to the knowledge that they are also in that headspace. we live in a society of hypocrites, who beat their kids but frown on our recreation" (from interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2008)

Such a typical statement is at once reflective of the roles actors would like to have in the mundane sociality of work and home, and thus give themselves during the circus of recreation, and also of their role as rebel. This second role is both ironic and authentic to the newly fictive space of discipline, because one can act such rebellion with the very purpose of being controlled by a discipline that they would presumably eschew in real life. A new definition of leisure is perhaps in the making, where acolytes construct longitudinal fantasy worlds of role-play and fetish which sometimes last for decades.

"I have been involved in the disciplinary scene for about twenty years or so - got into it during high school, and yeah, they hit us there, but that was not the real reason. I did not get off on hearing some other kid be punished, like some of these girls did, but more on the sense that society was itself an arbitrary fiction - whose rules? And who rules it, you know? I figured that out pretty early, and just said, well, I want my own world, not this. So here I am, and of course it can not replace my day job, unfortunately..." (from interview, male voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

A common demarcation line that appears as a motif in many interview dialogues is that nascent interest in alternative lifestyles begins with the patent disinterest in those normative. This line is usually drawn in institutional sand, and the institutions are almost always family and school. As would be seen subsequently, this presents many ironies in terms of the themes that the 'alternative' world seeks to replicate. The level of involvement in the voluntaristic aspect of the disciplinary subculture ranges from casual users to permanent residents, kinds of 'addicts' who for less reflective reasons cannot stop such behaviors even if they wanted to:

"I often feel a real guilt; like these are guilty anti-social extravagances and I can not stop doing them. Why should I stop - not one of my peers says I should - maybe it is my upbringing, which often forbade the pleasurable use of the one's own body let alone someone else's. But why not? I say, what real harm is done? I lose more sleep over worrying
about it than I lose sleep practicing it. Everyone here wants to be here, there is no actual coercion, even though as soon as we are on stage coercion is one of the main fixes!" (from interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2008)

This typical comment raises the problematic point of consensuality. This will be explored in greater detail subsequently, but for now, suffice to say that the participants' view was universally that of individuated consent, even though some professionals in the disciplinary theaters, sex industry workers for example, suggested that they felt they had run out of socially sanctioned economic options when they originally took on the task of portraying themselves as dominant, subservient or both. The dual bookends of 'why am I in this' and 'why do I feel bad about it' are often used as frames for actors' commentaries on the subculture of which they are a part. It is more rare, though not unknown, to have a participant question why they feel good about it, since the pleasures taken from the scenes involved have the inertia to return persons to those scenes, suggesting that Stekel's 'trauma' might have been reinterpreted, even at the semi-conscious level of physiological feeling, as somewhat less than traumatic. Krafft-Ebing himself suggests that the cases of desireful discipline he himself observed and treated were often brought about by the bodily renegotiation of pain inflicted in childhood, and even cautions parents against the use of all forms of physical punishment. No doubt few enough have taken heed over the past century or so. Yet against this, unless some deep suppression is involved that the researcher is not competent to evaluate, participants many more times than not eschewed any such motivations:

"I was never abused as a kid, not physically or any other manner I can recall. I think that is similar for many of us here. No one really mentions that as a source or as a motive. I knew other kids got hit, of course. But I do not do that to my own children, and we keep this space strictly separate from the domestic space - in fact, its pretty much the opposite. What motivates me, then? I think its fun, my spouse and I really get off on it, though he would as well never make it real, you know? It nonsense, really, just playful harmless fun" (from interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2009)

Such members of the disciplinary subculture often met and formed long term relations within its boundaries, and set up the more mundane spaces of sociality as almost the inevitable consequence of being together and having to work for a living. The participants' argument begins at this point to sound like all other attempts of deviant subcultures to ingratiate themselves to us 'normal folks':

"Hey, we are just like you guys, just a different kink. What is the problem, why can people not understand that? I bet a lot of stuff happens in middle class bedrooms we never hear about anyway - we are more honest about it, though yeah, we still have to take it underground a little. There is a double standard, but really, we have jobs and kids - who are not here - and wives - who are! - and follow sports just like the rest of you schleps do! Hey, I know you are the one asking the questions, but mind if I ask what turns you on." (from interview, male voluntary association member, USA, 2008)

The fear of rejection, the appeal against exposed hypocrisies, and the plaintiff of normativity are all leitmotifs for the voluntaristic participant upon which to hang his or her apparently still deviant act. Why do these subjects feel, perhaps fittingly, downtrodden by a sociality which though it may censor, plainly is at least tolerant of a theatre and an industry which is part of a larger arena generating billions of dollars a year? First a professional, and then an amateur, respond to questions of this kind:

"Let us face it, at base its a job like any other, more fun sometimes, depending on who you get to play with, but sometimes a big drag - not everyone is good natured about it - you get some real freaks in here sometimes - the kind of guys - some women too, god help us - the kind of guys who in another age would have been Gestapo officers, that sort of thing. So the regular folks who have their own hang ups and maybe never really liberate themselves from them should not think we are just plain hedonists, always out for a quickie, like. It is really hard work sometimes." (from interview, male professional dominant actor, USA, 2009).

The professional workers in the disciplinary genre of the erotic industry are faced with the same problems all service sector employees must face; the face of the general public masks a dangerous array of diversity. The public, socially sanctioned interactions of the day to day have many, mostly unwritten, rules that hold such potentially conflicting diversities in check (Berger, 1963; Goffman, 1959; Smith, 1987). The disciplinary scene has codes of written policies which are affected before the

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7 This is a very early example of a very contemporary question, as in note 2 above. Whatever may be said of the parochial nature of his idea of pathological sexual behavior, such an exhortation is worth noting.

8 In particular, Smith suggests questioning the objective relationships which are assumed to hold amongst persons of similar cultural backgrounds, as they tend
theatre takes place. This is in marked contrast to the ways of most amateurs:

“The pros, they take the spontaneity out of it because they are concerned with the contractual relations of the event. Now sure, if it was just anybody joining, us, people we had no clue about, for instance, we might want to lay down a few guidelines, but have you seen some of their lists of do’s and don’ts? It is just like going to work, which I guess is what they are doing. Here, we know the kinks and we like each other - the group grows over time slowly, as new friends are met or people’s kids get old enough to get into it - we are very strict about actual age and all that, do not get me wrong on this, but mainly, the younger people form their own groups anyways, they do not want to play out scenes that could have really happened, you know. It is not like what some people say about it, we are not into pretending we like the idea of child abuse.” (From interview, male voluntary association member, Britain, 2009).

This informant continued by saying that he felt that the larger society was simply projecting its own dark realities on an easy target. Many such participants in fact referred to their activities as being used as a scapegoat for real violence in society, such as physical and emotional abuse of children and women. Why then, if this is ostensibly a concern, do so much of the disciplinary scene and its theatrical scenarios replicate precisely these forms of violence?

**Context B: Internet sites**

**Type one internet sites; 'British':** We can turn from the basic subjective setting and commentary concerning the real-world voluntary associations to their actual form as well as that of their professional cousins before returning to these and other questions implicit in this dialogue in concluding remarks. Such an analysis serves as a detailed example of the problematic representation of selves that the members of this subculture participate in, and thus have to in some way mediate and justify if even only to themselves. The internet provides the major conduit for persons interested in experiencing the disciplinary scene in both a vicarious and a direct manner, and most groups that have regular meetings advertise their whereabouts using the World Wide Web. As well, the sexually oriented erotic industry boasts a plethora of sites exploring every ‘kink’ in the topography of disciplinary fetish and desireful violence. No attempt at a qualitative social commentary would be complete without such an overview, and the researcher was in fact directed to perform just that by many involved in the circuit:

“If you are looking to find the type of person who comes to us, you need look no further than the front door. Almost every woman out there can do this, can play these roles, they are already socialized and the basic scripts are already there. In fact, the actors here write their own script, make suggestions for scenes, and where do you think that comes from? Sure they suggest their favorite kinks too, but the main thing is that being a girl here means simply being much of what it means to be a girl in the real world.” (From interview, female internet site director, Britain, 2009).

There may be thousands of sites of the general disciplinary genre, including those that have, over four years of monitoring, become defunct, been updated or replaced, or been subsumed within larger collections of sites. This last fate is often reserved for ‘free sites’ that are voluntarily given over to ‘pay sites’ for a fee and a percentage of future profits, the ongoing return of which these latter sites are bound to make. A sample of three hundred sufficed to generate two major types. The first type, which we have called ‘British’, is both in ethos and presentation qualitatively different from the second type, or ‘American’.

The ‘British’ type of disciplinary fetish site sits more squarely within the theory of retrogression that Stekel propounded previously. This is so due to the high incidence of theatrical representations of institutions such as schools, reformatories, and prisons which, even if such scenes of punishment and submission were played out in actuality in the past, by law are no longer allowed, and may not even be tolerated by the majority of the general population.

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9 When asked exactly what kind of thing they look for when those so like ourselves walk in that front door, the site directors in this study uniformly suggested the ability to ‘pout, look innocent or angelic, be a brat, be a poor liar, whine, and be defiant’. In other words, to be both sweet and naughty pending the scripted circumstance. All these role stereotypes together suggest a version of the female truncated in adolescence.

10 These terms should not be taken entirely to refer to the usual stereotypes about cultural differences that may exist between the two actual countries, but suggest more of an atmosphere. Most other sites emanating from national origins the world over, including sources from all continents except Africa, fit well into one type or the other. The European sites exhibit ‘British’ tendencies in form and presentation of content, and the Pacific Rim sites appear often more ‘American’.

11 In spite of the occasional Conservative Party call for the return to corporal punishment in British public schools, the trend seems to be edging away from this form of social coercion. Conservatives might be ironically pleased to see, rather, that at least the theater of such events is alive and well and growing at an accelerated pace within the sexually oriented industry, especially on the...
Type one sites all share the following eight major characteristics. 'British' sites are primarily nostalgic. They exhibit a longing to relive a past that, though not out of mortal memory, has indeed apparently passed in terms of general political and public sanction. Users of these sites are invited to share such nostalgia, and sometimes the invitation is direct and based on an actual field site. A number of internet sites serve as merely advertising for actual places of theatrical pettiness and correction that one can sign up for, much as one might play a round of golf. Some even provide school uniforms to wear on site, and a list of rules, based on samples from the public and private school system in Britain from the 1930s to 1950s, is taken to be the template for correct behavior whilst employed in this theatre. However much freedom there exists in one paying to be treated as a child and subject to archaic and ridiculously picayune rules is an open question. If an actual place of discipline is not offered, type one sites offer panoply of would-be places set in sentimental locations such as country estates, mock castles and corrections facilities, and some employ photographs of real buildings either since demolished, turned to other purposes, or temporarily abandoned. Viewers are thus exhorted to imagine themselves as either captive or employed within these romantic walls and thus subject to, or practicing, a variety of disciplinary devices and behaviors. Once again, this apparent contradiction between longings for liberation through the submission to an authoritarian space is remarkable, although Fromm's (1969) analysis of the imposing nature of true human freedom and our turning away in anxiety from it is suggestive here.12

Given this preoccupation with nostalgia, the retrogressive ethos of the 'British' sites exudes a primarily historical character. This is particularly convenient for the performance of the female gender role stereotypes that provide the aesthetic attraction in the scenes and actions conducted either on site or in studio. The fashion of femininity has for centuries attempted to highlight the sexual proclivities of being female, from charming girlish mischief to supposedly infuriating haughty churlishness. Both of these poles, along with the performances of the spectrum which may lie between them, are eminently punishable as they represent a challenge to patriarchal forms of social control, as well as exposing the source of such control to actually desire such kinds of transgressions (Barthes, 1983).13 This theater of history may be played over and over again without end. Such a formal cycle may be associated more generally with those nation states whose past glories far outshine their present predicaments. Britain is no doubt a case in point, but it is hardly the only one, as type one sites come from almost every region of the globe. The romanticism of a trip down ‘memory lane’ is due to the actual memory of real physical coercion and discipline often having been used in Britain and other countries. It is no surprise then to find the fictional re-enactments of such petty melodramas as the main stock in trade of the type one sites.

Along with these attempts at historical adolescence, comes the classic British trait of ebullient self-satire. It is often said that no one ‘does the British like the British’, and the arena of disciplinary fetish is no exception to this theatrical rule. The scripted desire and ritual theatre plays upon itself as a play. To represent yet more authentically the institutional disciplines of bygone decades, and aside from all of the stereotypical girls in uniform who parade across type, one sites in an endless male fantasy of prettified submission, actors are hired who, in their mundane lives, may have actually played the role of teacher or master, and of course, pupil as well. One somewhat sardonic example is fairly typical:

“Actually I got into the education system just a bit too late to partake in that old school way of correcting students. So, you may have a point in terms of my training and the direction of my hobby, as I call it, as I was trained with the expectation that I should be able to domineering, a bit of a bastard with the girls and boys, when I had to be. Not able to practice what they preached in the actual schools, I found an amusing sidelight in the disciplinary theatre. Not that we get paid much. In fact, the girls are the stars of the show of course, and they make good wages - but here, indeed, they really pay for it. Sometimes I wonder what can possess these young ladies, when I witnessed children shy away in terror when I was at school. Of course we were younger and there was no money involved, just fearful tyranny, which we at this establishment eagerly mock!” (from interview, male professional dominant actor, Britain, 2009)

The type one sites are thus also fundamentally theatrical, although the action on stage is real enough to produce differing degrees of physical injury and emotional outburst, as may be witnessed on any example of this kind of internet site. This is confirmed by the sheer number of images that focus on the chagrin of the females being disciplined, specifically shown on their

12 Also cf. Gadamer 1996 on this point. It is of note that, in commenting upon Heidegger’s concept of anxiety, that one confronts this when one is in the presence of ‘nothing’. That is, it is the absence of sense and meaning that promotes the ultimate anxiety in human beings, not the threat of risk or danger alone.

13 Molm (1985) found that gender had consistent and significant effects on how the use of power its legitimation influenced the perception of the powerful person or authority.
faces, as will be discussed in more detail subsequently. Any viewer will confirm what the most recent interviewee suggests in terms of the reality of the unreality of the spaces and rituals involved. Indeed, this is what we pay to see in any theatre. That of disciplinary fetishes is no different to this regard.

The reproduction of structures in a culture which were historically omniscient gives the type one sites a very large potential market and perhaps also popularity. Thus another characteristic which is a hallmark for the 'British' sites is that they are institutional in format and formula. Schools and correctional facilities of all kinds are played upon as the grand stage of the stiff upper lip of female adolescent rebellions and consequences. Suggestive nomenclature provides unnecessary clues as to what occurs 'inside' these places of discipline. 'Boarding schools for Girls', 'Reform schools for Girls', in their minorities are at once nostalgic and fully present in that one is forever sentenced to enjoy the humiliation and suffering of commercially attractive mainly female youth. Viewers are asked 'teasing' advertising interrogatives such as 'Have you never wished to see a row of those gum-chewing airheads bent over for a good bare-bottom thrashing?' Well, perhaps we have wished for this, but the question that remains is an ethical one. The theatre of quasi-voluntaristic assent does not mimic the aimed for historical scene of abusive authoritarian coercion even though it strives to do just that. Along with these lines conjuring wishful analogic thinking - perhaps we are angry at our spouses, our kids, our own students and would love to ritually vent etc. - we are reminded at the entrance to these sites that 'all our models are professional and over eighteen, proof is held on file', and the like. Ironically, the type one sites give themselves a more challenging task in having to immediately overcome our incredulity and skepticism regarding the authenticity of what is to come.

Hence these sites are also characterized by their voluntaristic nature, although the voluntarism is questionable both in the structural sense of real economic options for young women, and in the sense that once signed on, the actors receive remuneration and thus can no longer be considered 'volunteers' in the charitable or philanthropic sense of the term. Yet the voluntary character more importantly refers to the scripted scenes which are played out on the screen. More so on, type one sites than type two, as will be seen subsequently, girls are given scripts where they declare themselves worthy of punishment, or that they deserve discipline. This kind of dialogue enhances the perception that the actors are willingly submissive, and have internalized the thresholds of right and wrong which guide the theatre and which, unlikely as it may be, they continually and sometimes deliberately cross to keep the 'plots' and action moving along.

Another characteristic unique to 'British' sites is their theme of therapy. This is part of a specialized trend within the disciplinary genre, and includes something akin to 'physical therapy'. Testimonials are presented as part of the marketing of such sites, which are almost always real places to which one can go for 'treatment'. Most importantly, this self-reporting comes from clientele who at least always claim, once again, not to have been abused as children. Persons similar in interest to the moonlighting schoolmaster above take up paid positions as disciplinarians to adults who feel they deserve some correction for whatever misdemeanors they may have committed in the mundane world, real or imagined, and often known only to themselves. This sub-species of type one is not entirely benign and conscience driven, however:

I lost both my parents at a relatively young age, and as part of the mourning process I guess, I return to a surrogate parent, who disciplines me in the manner that I got used to, with some affection, in childhood. It is both comforting and comfortable to regain that lost interaction that can never truly come again. And yet I realize it is something that I eventually intend to overcome, as I am certainly no longer really a child.

(from interview, female professional submissive actor, Britain, 2009).

The aforementioned suggests there can be both comfort and security in authority. Type one sites perhaps use this structural theme of socialization to prevaricate their variations. Finally, 'British' sites are highly professionalized in that they represent a disciplinary-disciplined clientele and have created a novel employment base for young people. Corporeality as commodity is marketed, and authority as therapy is offered as a vehicle for emotional subsistence.

Analysis of ethical problems identified in type one internet sites

Though marked by a satirical 'tongue-in-cheek' humor, the rationalization of violence in type one sites leads to further problems which the researcher might critique. One may question the regressive tendencies which motivate both actors and clients to return to an ostensibly abusive childhood, institutional or otherwise. As well, a patent longing for the structures and strictures of authoritarian personalities and institutions suggests a kind of imam- turity on the part of those involved. As the most recent interviewee mentioned, there is at present a form of empathy for the suffering past self that the present self

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14 Perhaps the sex industry in general shares a dubious employment position with other institutions like the military in countries without mandatory service, whose recruits traditionally come from marginal class and ethnic positions within each nation's social strata.
would like to represent. The situation is never quite the same, but the basic physiology of pain and the senses of sight, smell, sound and feeling recreate enough of the original platonic ideal as to feel free in the cave of ritual imagery. Even taste may be involved, as the food served at the actual institutions represented as real spaces of regression and discipline often mimics the diets of the old school cafeterias or 'tuck-shops' themselves.

Furthermore, this subculture of nostalgia, or a subculture which plays upon nostalgia as both an erotic and a thanatic vehicle, perhaps endangers the progressive and more humane socialization of succeeding generations. Are all the adults who wish to submit to discipline also not disciplining their children in private? How can the researcher be sure of this, when clients and actors in this realm always claim to be aloof from this blurring of genres?

“I had been a liar if I say I had not thought of it, of course. Especially when my daughters reached that age where they started looking like the girls I work with on site - and acting up like them too, I may add. Of course, they were doing it in actuality. They truly were acting authenticly to their age and gender, and not just play-acting, although there is probably a lot of that in it as well. Parent can not always tells which is which. But I have never, ever crossed that line, although it might have meant I was more severe with my colleagues at work than I might have otherwise been.” (from interview, male professional dominant actor, Britain, 2009)

Doubtless real domestic tribulation can add flavor to the fictions of these unique workplaces. Unfortunately, the researcher perhaps would have to engage in covert activity far beyond human sciences' ethical premises to ultimately put these kinds of suspicions to rest. Participants both amateur and professional certainly had the air of sincerity on this and other topics, yet this air must be placed beside the perspective of the sincerity striven for, and often attained, by their theatrical stage presences as authoritarians and even sadists.

Sobering as that may be, there are several other problems that the type one sites present to both their users and to the culture at large. They present a uniformly narrow definition of what can constitute pleasure, in the same manner as an equally narrow theatrical script presents cut and dried definitions of good behavior, feminine sexuality, and justifications of violence. Given that this is one ideal type of merely one genre, there is something in the universe of sexuality and the internet's representation of it for just about everyone, it seems, this flaw is not fatal to the in-group market. In fact, it is precisely this narrowness of erotic definition which attracts paying customers. Yet one must also linger with the wider question that those who consume such a commodity also must, to a certain extent desire their real world fellow humans to perform and present themselves in a similar manner to what can be seen on type one sites. Specifically, one may desire that women should preserve their irresponsible youthful persuasions so that men can preserve their rapidly failing modes of paternal suasion.

Finally, there is the ever-present and perennial problem of the objectification of human interactions, and the specifically objectified young female as submissive student, servant, or recalcitrant truant of some kind. This immediate representation serves only to taint all possible ethical relationships that may in reality have some of these theatrical facets to them. Gender equity is not a concern of type one sites, as in almost all cases those who are mistreated are younger females, and those in charge of meting out maltreatment are older males. It is quite correct to say, with Krafft-Ebing (1893: 56), that "...the concrete and perverse act, monstrous as it may be, is not decisive," for it is the ritual theatre as a mockery of some of the most oppressive structures of recent history that provides the realization that certain cruelty is both available and warranted.

Reactions of research participants to the analysis

What do the participants have to say concerning their possible representation in various media? There appears to be some distinction to be made between those who practice their passions in relative privacy, perhaps with a small group of more or less intimate friends or acquaintances, those who are professionals and further, those who may be said to be obsessed or even addicted to the repetitions of these kinds of pleasures. There is also a smaller group who are professionals but do not hide their disdain for what they do, and perhaps, by implication, another group who dislike what they do but suffer in silence, perhaps as part of the authenticity of their paid role, or as an unrecognized part of their latent mental attitude towards themselves and their pasts.

Responses covered a range of similar issues, including remarks concerning the theatricality of media representations and the disservice it does to the in-group, as well as the apparent service the type one sites provide for 'therapeutic' or employment purposes:

“The stuff you see on the net, well, it s very melodramatic. I have never been to a discipline party where people get so high and mighty as hose jokers do in the videos. Nor do we plaster each other with such severity, most of the time! I think, as with all media, the acts are aggrandized beyond the

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15 This needs to be distinguished from the 'objectivity' of theoretical analysis, where human beings can appear as objects and their conditions be seen as objective because to a point experientially shared, and these same persons' own self-understanding, which can be 'for itself' if also conscious of the objective relations (cf. Marx, (1977 [1852]) for the original distinction).
norms. It simply is not realistic. Now, it might well be realistic to what they are trying to portray, I mean, the schools may well have been as drastic as all that, I do not know”. (From interview, female voluntary association member, Britain, 2008).

Two types of reality are at odds here. Respondents implied that the current subculture of disciplinary theater was not practicing the same kinds of acts, or at least not to the same degree, as the subculture’s commodified representation in media. The most convenient explication of the difference is that the private practitioners have nothing to gain or lose by their practice. They are not trying to market it - as members of small groups almost universally have a prior interest or even obsession with the practices involved - nor do these groups lose materially if they miss a ‘night out’ once in a while:

“My spouse and I have been a little slack lately, really, in attending these functions. Maybe we are getting older, and maybe we do not need the ‘fix’ as much as we used to. It is no big deal though - there are plenty of others to take our place. I do not much look at the net these past couple of years. He still does, and admittedly, we do get some new ideas from what they are doing, but mostly it is geared towards those who may be a bit more obsessed by it, even addicted, given what we have heard about internet sex junkies and all that.” (From interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

Private speakers within the disciplinary subculture were both more passive in their eagerness to market their lifestyle to outsiders than those involved professionally and thus correspondingly less concerned about their rate of consumption of in-group activities, as well as being broadly satisfied that they did not have to compete to share their passions with other groups. What this research found to this regard is that larger cities had at least one ‘power exchange’ group, the public could access through the internet. Participants suggested that what one saw on-line with regard to the truly voluntaristic groups were umbrella organizations that divided into smaller societies with levels of discretion attendant with each division. In both the United States and Britain, there is a heritage of voluntary semi-secret societies, whether philanthropic, benevolent, occult or criminal, that has set the stage for more contemporary content.

Context B type two - ‘American’ - Internet sites: We can now turn to the detailed description and commentary of the type two internet sites, those labelled ‘American’, following which a comparative list will summarize the key differences between the major media vectors for the public representation of the disciplinary genre of the disciplinary subculture. After this, the content analysis of the images will be summarized, and finally, some brief concluding remarks.

Type two sites also exhibit eight major traits. As opposed to the nostalgia of the type one sites, 'American' sites, once again, coming mostly from the United States but also from many other countries and regions, exhibit a strong sense of ‘currency’. Given that a strong minority of state public school systems in the United States still allow for the deliberate and ritualistic physical coercion of children, including those who have reached the legal age of eighteen, thereby constituting what would technically be classified as assault - type two sites are involved in a mimetic present rather than in acts of nostalgia. There is thus also a sense of realism not available to type one sites in spite of their detailed dramatic attempts to conjure this tension. The theatre of the present within type tow sites is more like a reproduction rather than a represencing. Adding to the immanence of type two sites is the apparent practice of much socially sanctioned physical abuse in American homes, as opposed to other developed countries. It is no coincidence that the type two sites concentrate on scenes adapted from home and school. Thus a third characteristic is that of the ‘domesticity’ of the sites, appealing to a vast market who have undergone or perpetrated such acts while growing up, and focusing their lens on representations of private space and the interiority of intimate relations therein. Many actors participating in such activities either as amateurs borrowed from themes represented by type two sites in the genre, or preferring these over the first type, suggesting that they had been both drawn and repelled by associations their recent recreation had with their childhoods, unlike the professionals:

“Yes, we were disciplined fairly regularly growing up - I can not blame my parents, kids can be really annoying sometimes, and our own kids the same way, although we are far less harsh on them than what my husband and I went through. Most of the people we hang out with have similar backgrounds, but do not see that we are reproducing these experiences - as a kid, this stuff is no fun at all, it hurts, and hurts your feelings too. What we do accomplish is maybe to own it, to control it and make it into our own thing rather than being controlled by it, like we were as children.” (From interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

The therapeutic model that may be used in some of the voluntaristic in-group organizations is, however, never represented on type two sites, which are emphatically about a kind of vengeful old testament punishment which is seen as deserved for the victim and even invigorating for the authoritarian. The sense of reality portrayed by the ‘American’ sites was sometimes too much for those, who,
although aware that they had been abused, could not encounter even the media representation of that abuse without trauma:

“I knew she had gone through a lot of violence in her parents’ home, and I thought, rather naively, that we might work through it and own it by looking at some of this fake stuff on the net. She had no interest in practicing it or playing around with it but did think it might be therapeutic - but one look at a couple of sites was enough to traumatize her once again - I felt terrible and disgusted at her past, and never raised the topic again, although she continued living with it, and I then felt kind of helpless.” (From interview, male voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

Such an amateurish attempt at psycho-therapy as revealed previously, becomes much more widespread within the disciplinary subculture given the motives expressed in the previous quote and some of those to follow, all of which are taken as typical of a certain sample of native actors and their proclivities. In fact, the style of type two sites aids the sense that one can come to grips with violence as practiced in reality between persons, because the representation of violence and abusive scenes is highly *individuated*. Violent exchanges occur between two people in almost every case in both the reality of American schools and homes, and the media of the internet for 'American' sites. The notion derived from these scenes, real or surreal, is that of *power* rather than authority. Whereas the type one sites were so imbricated in the institutional ethos of authoritarian discipline, and the scenes often were populated by many ‘anxious’ girls, type two sites invoke the raw inequality of one person dominating another through brute force of individuality, and any institutional space contains merely a convenient privacy for that act of singular dominance. The acts are much less structured, and there are many more scenes that would be better characterized as a form of ‘rape’ than discipline, as there is no theatrical attempt to convey submissive consent, as was often found in type one sites. The ‘child’ to be assaulted is to be so unwillingly, which presumably mimics the real case in home and school:

“The whole get-up makes me feel weak, the short skirts and lace. Girls are taught to be submissive, after all, more quiet and mediating than boys are, these are virtues in the real world in general, but they get old after a while too. Yet the kink is to place yourself in a situation here acting out gets you in trouble. You desire the rebellion, but also desire its reprisal. You can rebel in safety, ironically, because the consequences are not real, or at least, they do not continue to haunt you outside of this context.

There is no real world memory of events that occur here, just the knowledge that I can get away with stuff that would not fly at work or with friends. I also cansatire the girlish child still within me, and then get back to being a liberated woman.” (from interview, female professional submissive actor, USA, 2009).

The dramatic abilities of the actors may not be as rich in talent as they appear to be, due to the sense that on type two sites - as well as activities which duplicate their style in voluntaristic groups - consist in merely resurrecting scripts well learned in childhood, and thus perhaps also their corresponding mental states.

The fifth characteristic of type two sites indeed is their use as advertising vehicles for just these sorts of 'power exchange' groups. *Community based organizations*, what have been referred to here as 'voluntary associations' of this sort, though present in many countries, are particularly active in the United States. Their activities favor pragmatism over ritual, and they are private and non-theatrical in that there are no attempts to reproduce public institutional settings, nor do they generally document their activities and repost them as further marketing devices. This is simply so because the participants are not professionals, either in the sexuality industry in general or in the disciplinary genres in particular. Usually, groups set up meetings by advertising where those who are already members are meeting for dinner, and invite newcomers to seek them out at such and such a restaurant. Further directions are supplied in the privacy of dinner conversation, which will guide neophytes to more ultimate destinations where they can expect to at least observe, and perhaps participate in, the events of the evening. Restaurants that are used for this dual purpose of sustenance and logistics usually have large private rooms that groups can book in advance, thus sequestering socially unsanctioned discussions of places, times and activities. All of this furtive planning is seen as necessary by members given their social locations and positions in the mundane sphere:

“If my work colleagues knew I did this stuff I would lose my job, it is as simple as that. And it is even more complicated because if you have more than one person involved in the same group who works at the same place - well! But we generally trust each other, I guess both implicitly and explicitly, if you know what I mean. You have to – it is ironic, I guess, because what we actually do for and to each other here is much less dangerous than the dangers we might face from outsiders who would judge us for what we do.” (from interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2009).

Most amateur participants interviewed expressed
similar sentiments. There is perceived to be a large gulf between the values of these very specific and narrowly defined recreational groups and the leisure activities of the 'rest of us'. Various kinds of heretofore proscribed leisure activities have recently become fashionable, such as nudist summer camps for teenagers, ostensibly teaching youth to value each other as a holistic entity, for example. Yet corporal punishment oriented activities have not currently attained even this status. In spite of - yet through this research - discovering a number of more or less public venues in larger and smaller American cities that advertise and host disciplinary events, putting complete strangers into a kind of formal intimacy amongst one another, the general stigma which is levied against such 'knowable' events is still high. Participants suggested various reasons for this, which varied in their intensity from some of the first previous quotes

"Why we are not accepted as just another hobby or something like that, I do not really know. It may be a sensitive topic because it is still so widespread in our culture, I mean, what we do is consensual and fun, but where similar kinds of things go on in the larger society it is neither. It could be considered abusive and violent. By celebrating ourselves in this way we might call attention to people who use corporal punishment as a means of control and distrust, or forcing people to trust you, which is not real trust at all. Besides all that, people might say that we are just plain silly or wasting time. There is just no conventionality about it in general, at least not yet!" (From interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2009).

The idea that wider society, especially in the United States, is built on an hypocritical foundation when it concerns the use of physical violence to coerce children and others while at the same time evaluating recreational practices involving similar actions as 'pornographic' or 'immoral' was a major theme for interviewees. A discussion of the constitutional implications of such in-groups is beyond the scope of the researcher, but it may be said that many participants were very well aware of where they stood over against both local by-laws and national legal codes. All activities of power exchange groups were enacted on private property, often on landed estates secluded from most public thoroughfares, and sponsored by wealthier group members. Food and drink was always provided, though members took care not to mix intoxicants with activities, and the language used within these sites was uniformly civil and non-threatening. This said, it is important to note that these 'power exchange' groups consisted of mostly white, middle or upper middle class professionals, though all claimed to be open to any person regardless of origin or social position, as long as they felt the newcomer could be trusted. The implication of a position where there is at least the hint of the duality of qualified openness is always the same. All human interaction amongst strangers are conducted in this manner. Stereotypes are used as rubrics and templates until we can get to know each other more personally and individually. Perhaps this transition is never truly effected, as there is a strong tradition in symbolic interactionism, for example, that suggests that the performance is all in all, and one never loses all of one's masks to become the 'authentic self' so romanticized in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries before Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche obliterated it.

A sixth characteristic of the 'American' sites, aside from their proclivities as advertising vehicles, is their general commodification. Sites are almost always pay-per-view, and there is a marked absence of sites which name and refer to non-cyber entities, that is, to real physical sites to which one can be bodily transported. The exceptions to this are of course the kinds of amateur venues just detailed, but nowhere in the sample of type two sites is there a suggestion that there is some other place, less surreal, where one can affect the pleasurable dominance or submission that is represented in their media. This may be so precisely because there are so many ongoing real spaces of violence and cruelty in American society at large, contrary to the case in other countries, including Britain, that there seems to be no need to conjure nostalgic replicas, no need for an archive of the immanent present, no need for a reliquary of the rituals of the day to day.

Along with this commodity relation, which also may serve to sell us on the notion that whatever the rationale, physical coercion is acceptable and warranted for those who disobey social norms be they children or would-be children; type two sites are often used as vehicles for the marketing of other activities. These secondary activities are most often the manifestations of other genres of the disciplinary fetish theater or the sexuality industry more generally. Type two sites also most often have 'banner' or other kinds of links to sites which are not specifically oriented to disciplinary fetishes. The melange of masturbatory material is akin to the melting pot of cross-cultural interests. The heights of orgiastic prowess are limited only by the presumed diverse talents and stamina of the individual viewers, be they alone or in groups. It is interesting that when physical realities are indeed advertised, they are surreptitious and individuated. One can contact some other singular person in one's home town or elsewhere for a night of casual sex, for example, rather than rely on the telephone sex industry, one's presumably dormant or absent spouse, or the individual talents just mentioned. Yet we do not see in the 'American' sites the kinds of large scale and well-populated spaces that the type one sites promotes. Acts of sexuality, whatever their fancy and fetish, are remote
from the public eye, between two consenting individuals, and aloof from the social reality of sanctioned coupling. As well, when commodities themselves are advertised, for example, videos of disciplinary scenes, there are always included 'personal' guarantees that transactions will be private and known to no one but buyer and seller, much as with other forms of 'prostitution'. Type one sites are simply not neurotic about such things, and this may not merely be based in different rules of law in different source countries. The internet is notoriously seamless, and the vain and somewhat contrived attempts at self-monitoring - this is an adult site, leave now, etc - are perhaps as laughable as they are ineffective. One is suspicious that at least some minors who access disciplinary sites may feel that adults are having yet another laugh at their expense, especially those children who undergo the suffering associated with punishments in their own lives. Indeed, given that type two sites are generally couched in a very aggressive and vengeful style, one might easily gain the impression that adults actually enjoy hurting persons smaller and less autonomous than themselves, and for some adults, this may be in fact correct. We have already stated that *schadenfreude* is one of the major motives for certain kinds of human relations, and some participants agreed:

“There is a lot of misplaced satisfaction out there. I have seen it and felt it myself. Not only with my wife, but she with me, if we piss each other off, we know we can take it out on each other consensually. Or with the net, if we see someone who looks like someone we do not like, for instance - very petty, yes. There is a streak of sadism in everyone, I think. It may be learned as a child, it may be human nature. But to enjoy beating up your own kids, well that takes it to another extreme, although I do not doubt there are people out there like that - none that we know, thankfully.” (from interview, male voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

All participants agreed that lines should be firmly drawn, but also that it was indeed difficult to draw these lines, either in the heat of the moment or afterwards. Given that a trusting couple has just engaged in at least physically hurting each other, what can one make of the transition from a form of violence to mundanity or the translation of violence into more normative eroticism, or yet to comfort and care?

“What had love got to do with it, I guess! Well, yeah, I guess there is a sense that we also love doing this to and for each other. If your mate is sincere about wanting this or that, you share that with them. It is delicate sometimes, but it gives them a great deal of satisfaction in many ways, and the actual physical scars are for most people very minor, they disappear in a few days or a week as the body repairs itself, and it toughens you up a little too, though not to the point where one should be ignoring pain that might be a sign of something more serious, obviously.” (From interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2008).

The links between discipline and security, trust and power, care and caress, love and lust are in some ways up for grabs in all relationships. The subculture at hand, however, tends to play them out in a more graphic, and perhaps even more honest manner than may be observed within other forms of intimacy. Whether or not this particular form has more integrity and value is a point which is generally beyond the researched horizon. Such are the vicissitudes of the disciplinary lifestyle, one would suppose.

The final trait of the type two sites is perhaps the most disconcerting. As many are geared towards the use of amateurs, volunteers, or per diem actors paid for a one shot form of activity and then sent back into their mundane spheres, whether girls taken off the beach in summer or coming in for grocery monies all year round, there is manifestly a problem of *non-consensuality* that appears more directly here than in sites of the first type, though no doubt it also is extant with the latter. ‘American’ sites, however, do not shy away from making this discomfort part of their marketing, with lines like 'She was a little short on the rent money this month, so we took it out of her backside!', or 'Look what these poor girls will put themselves through to get to the end of the month with enough food'. Indeed, the viewer is expected to concur and congratulate these philanthropic sadists, and join in the amusement of exploiting young women who may well be in these very circumstances. These are patently not professional actors, given their lack of commercially viable good looks and physiques. These are truly the marginal young women who, even if they have community support, may only have community within those self-same margins. Type two sites are flush with panoply of ‘girls next door’, in the same way that type one sites parade the well turned out schoolgirl. It is quite obvious that there is a realism which, however unwanted perhaps even more honest manner than may be observed within other forms of intimacy. Whether or not this particular form has more integrity and value is a point which is generally beyond the researched horizon. Such are the vicissitudes of the disciplinary lifestyle, one would suppose.

“The use of real people - well, you know what I mean, not girls who have made a commitment to get involved, like the kink, and are paid fairly well, sometimes thousands of dollars a week, in fact - but girls who actually need the money and could not earn it, they are not cute enough or whatever, or are overweight, though some sites do in fact hire these types more long term because they can take it, yeah, I do not agree with that, it is simple
exploitation and ruins your reputation as a fair dealer - there is sleaze and there is romance, and I am in favor of only the latter”. (from interview, female professional dominant actor, USA, 2009).

There may have been yet more marketing ensconced within the attitudes of participants who had a vested commercial interest to appear more scrupulous than their competitors, but these sentiments were generally repeated by non-professionals as well:

“If I really needed money, well, who knows what I would do, but I hope I would not stoop to that, and those that do are being taken advantage of. We do this because we like it and it is fulfilling; not because we need something material. This is why groups like ours do not document and sell to sex distributors and that kind of thing. It is a point of integrity; that is just not what people are in it for. Whenever we know someone who is down and out, we never recommend getting involved with those kinds of sites or video producers. Now I do know one girl who did that and found out she really liked it, but that is different”. (from interview, female voluntary association member, USA, 2009).

Assuming no rationalization on the part of this person, and on the part of the person referred to as having a kind of 'conversion', then we may safely suggest that participants in the main do not condone 'prostitution' in these and other forms. At the same time, in-group members were also generally non-judgemental about others' fetishes and sexual venues given that their own was also made of glass.

**Analysis of the ethical problems identified in type two internet sites**

While type two sites have the advantage of more gender equity - a kind of equal opportunity violence, so to speak - that type one sites did not exhibit, there were also a particular set of problems associated with their genre that the 'British' sites did not have. They reflect and may be seen as affirming, celebrating or warranting in some way actual present day spaces of abuse and violence. Their vengeful and sadistic style mimics that of a plausible satisfaction of projecting anger on female dependants and minors. The violence portrayed is much less controlled, ritualistic, and sarcastic than the type one sites, and thus one is led to suggest that there may be a preponderance of 'Thanatos over Eros' involved in these activities. The performance of gender here is less like a theater, and more like the anxious improvisation of a threatening social interaction, an assault or something like it. Many more real tears are shed, for example, by female actors or walk-ons in these types of sites' scenes than can be seen within those of type one sites.

Type two sites also provide opportunities for 'abuse for profit', or perhaps worse, abuse for subsistence, as in the latter case where marginal characters appear on makeshift stages just to get by, and in the former, cases where actual scenes of legally non-consensual abuse – genuine criminal pornography, in other words - are sold and posted for further consumption. Most of these involve unscrupulous parents, although their incidence is rare:

“Huh, yeah, that really takes us into the darkest side of all this, does it not? I have heard second-hand, and I know these people in passing, that some parents abuse their kids and tape it, you know, sadists, I guess, and send it into certain kinds of sites. Sometimes the kids are convinced that it is good for them and some parents even pay their kids a bigger allowance out of their ill-gotten gains to keep the ball rolling. Anytime you see under-agers, kiddie porn, on the fetish sites, that is likely what is going on, it is much rarer to have criminal abductions by strangers, the people that are doing it generally, these are people the kids know well”. (from interview, male professional dominant actor, USA, 2009).

Type one sites scrupulously avoid even the hint of this truly disconcerting series of events, to the point of having obviously much older models attempting to portray, in a laughable manner, younger adolescents; 'porn stars in pigtails' as the in-group phrase has it. The most imposing and unethical problem that the sexuality industry faces as a service industry is the use of children, although statistically, it is certainly a minority phenomenon. Yet at least this problem is more readily identifiable than the quasi-voluntaristic problem of lack of structural opportunity for young people, especially girls with marginal class backgrounds, who appear to be involved in the sale and mistreatment of at least their bodies 'of their own free will'.

**DISCUSSION**

**Commentary on the internet sites**

Both styles of disciplinary theater sites share some overarching ethical problems. There is also the problem, stemming from these issues, of the general commodification of violence. The viewer consumes it as erotic gratification, and either directly or vicariously satisfies passions which are inherently unethical, that is to say, are based in the desireful violence of subjugating others to serve our needs. This production and consumption of violence, especially that focusing upon unequal power relations and exploiting the sense those children are
usable because dependant endangers our more ethical sense that all human beings cannot be thought of as objects or as property. Indeed, in many countries, minors still do not warrant full human rights, suggesting that they indeed are not fully human, akin to pets or chattel. Such representations could further serve to reproduce spaces of real violence in the larger society, simply by the implicit exposition that we in general do in fact enjoy perpetrating these kinds of violations against others, especially children and women, but also men. To perform gender according to these kinds of standards transports both equity and equality to a realm at best composed of equanimity. That is, women can feel that they have theatricalized the social expectations of their normative girlhood and rendered it as a means of subsistence, while eschewing it in the wider social drama. This is, of course, but a band-aid response to structural inequality which involves sex and sexuality, comportment and economy. Yet the repression of this knowledge of inequality is manifested but not exorcised. The repetition of scenes of abuse merely sediments them in our cultural consciousness, and affirms their presence and perhaps their sanction as well. As Freud suggested,

It might indeed be said that the sadism which has been forced out of the ego has pointed the way for the libidinal components of the sexual instinct, and that these follow after it to the object. Wherever the original sadism had undergone no mitigation or intermitture, we find the familiar ambivalence of love and hate in erotic life (Freud, 1961: 48).

Perhaps much of our intimacy in the west is defined by the close proximity violence as lust and security as love have with one another. Pleasure and pain are identified as a nexus of desire, therefore as eros and thanatos, this aporetic nexus suggests that the transferential quality of authority and power or control has looped from the general ‘superego’ (mores, correct behaviors, Mead’s ‘generalized other’, for example) back to providing at least some of the erotic mechanisms that frame sadomasochism, and that these mechanisms are the most important ones for these desires to be fulfilled. In fact, the ‘sweet’ aspect of the duet of girlish charm may be seen as erotic, and the ‘naughty’ aspect that identified with the presence of danger. The one flirts with life, the other invites death to come hither.

The institutionalization of desire in both types of these sites suggests the nexus fetish is either (a) self-serving (‘British’), and/or (b) a commodity (‘American’). In (b), there is an ambiguity in the nature of the desire - is it wholly sexual or consumptive? The sale of desire as commodity suggests both transference and objectification:

“There are plenty of people who will do anything for money – that is our society, right? I got lucky, I guess, because when I first started I hated every minute of it. It reminded me of prostitution. It was not due to any bad memories of childhood, my parents never disciplined me - if they had, well, that is another story, because I do not believe it is good for kids in general to go through that. I do know that I would have been used to it in a dangerous way, and that I would not have went through this reflection about what I was doing for money, because that is still all it is for me. I do not get off on just being beaten - I mean - give me a break! And I do not really understand those who do, even though I am serving that market.” (from interview, female professional submissive actor, Britain, 2009).

The diversity encountered in the study of a particular form of the disciplinary theaters no doubt includes all colors of motive and opinion amongst those loyal to the ideals espoused there. Yet most of this variance may be comfortably represented in the ideal types of the major media representation of activities traditionally associated with the genre.\[16\]

**Context C: Internet images analysis**

This data set composed of photographic or rendered images of females receiving or warranted as being available to receive corporal punishment was equally enlightening, given that the categories were at first suggested by participants, and that these same persons attempted to mimic, in the closest possible way, their favorite versions of the role stereotypes beheld within them. The sample of eleven thousand images yielded fourteen distinct categories.\[17\] Participants in disciplinary theater made the distinction between the performance of

\[16\] In sum, then, one can compare type one and type two sites as follows - 'British' and then 'American':

- a) Nostalgic
- b) Historical
- c) Self-satirical
- d) Theatrical
- e) Institutional
- f) Voluntaristic
- g) Therapeutic
- h) Professionalized

- a) Currencies
- b) Realistic
- c') Notions of power
- d) Domesticities
- e) Community based organizations
- f) Commoditized
- g) Generalized
- h) Unprofessionalized

\[17\] These were, in rank order of relative numbers: 1. ‘to be disciplined’ (14.45%), 2. ‘Naughty Girl’ (13.57%), 3. ‘Sweet’ (12.2%), 4. ‘Dancer’ (9.44%), 5. ‘Hot’ (9.2%), 6. ‘Spanked’ (6.29%), 7. ‘Naughty Girls’ (5.73%), 8. ‘Chastised’ (4.97%), 9. ‘Posterior’ (4.73%), 10. ‘Paddled’ (4.66%), 11. ‘Pretty’ (3.79%), 12. ‘Strapped’ (3.78%), 13. ‘Girl’ (3.57%), and 14. ‘Hair-brushed’ (3.42%). The residual, about 1.0%, was either unclassifiable or was thrown out as pornographic. ‘Sweet’ was distinguished from ‘pretty’ by the neutral visage of those in the latter category, as opposed to the innocence exuded in the former. These two categories were in turn distinguished from ‘hot’ by the desirable or lustful visage on the faces and in the body language of the young women in this category.
persons and of objects. These latter were usually the implements which, if punishment other than that with the hand was scripted, were used to discipline female actors or group members. Images that focused on the action of the implement were seen as categories unto themselves, whether or not one could see clearly more than the salient body parts of the persons involved. Perhaps inevitably, the one body part that was ubiquitous enough to generate its own category was the female posterior.

The most important question to ask of female participants regarding the content of these images was simply, ‘when you see this picture, do you see yourself (in it)’? Overwhelmingly the response was affirmative, with the qualification that not every female interviewee had experienced every kind of action or even category scenario the images presented. One typically reflective response will suffice:

“I am not only paid to be that girl, I want to be her, at least, part of me does. It is the quickest way to get attention, first of all, especially from desirable men, and the quickest way to make other girls jealous, though many today would never admit to it. She is not me, of course, but I can be like her, and participate in the same ideal she is supposed to be exemplifying; sweet but also naughty. The sweetness is love, the badness is hate. We are all made up of both, and one can turn to another on a dime of betrayal. With this fantasy, betrayal is made a silly fiction, because naughtiness really is not that bad after all, and one can be eroticly remonstrated for it. The mock violence tells me that love has never in fact left the scene.” (from interview, female professional submissive actor, Britain, 2009).

Indeed, the categories can be conveniently collapsed into these two crucial tropes. On the ‘Sweet’ side, c. 46% of the images were associated by the participants and the researcher as exemplifying characteristics associated with submissiveness, passivity, girlish charm, dutiful comportment, child-like figures or visage, youthful hair styles, costumes such as school uniforms or ballet gear that most adults do not normatively done, and most importantly, ‘emotions’ held within the gaze of the protagonist: innocence, angelic demeanor, contentment, inexperience, desire, and subservience. For many persons, especially males, this ideal type might be considered at times the ideal female. Corresponding to the other key component of the ideal female gender performance are the images within the ‘Naughty’. Here, context C, 53% of the images could be cast in this role, which presents females as either being disciplined in recognition of their always and already naughty natures, or as warranting this response due to their display of pouts, mischief, defiance, disobedience or rebelliousness, usurpation of valid authority, and misuse of their good looks or flattering attire. Engaging in actual sexual relations, especially with other young females, is an obvious act of transgression. The emotions seen on the faces and in the body language of these protagonists include malice, mockery, fear, anxiety, erotic satisfaction or sadism, and recalcitrance.

Enough detail has been provided previously, through both observed data and ethnographic statement to obviate further explication of these proffered types. Their characteristics do share, however, through mimesis or otherwise, traits that inhabit the broader culture of consumption, commodity, and the socially sanctioned placement of both gendered desire and violence, as well as using the most diminutive of female gender role stereotypes as ploys for marketing.

Conclusions

The rise in popularity of fictional melodramas focusing on the disciplinary rituals used to coerce young women stems from both the changing legal situations in many developed countries - corporal punishment of minors is gradually being outlawed - and the lack of change in the social dynamic between young and old. Given that all forms of socialization carry with them a latent violence, as dependent new human beings are acculturated into this or that society without their consent and without much reflective explanation, it is easy to understand why, given the legal changes which disallow the convenience - and perhaps the satisfaction - of physical coercion, that such would find a new home in the surreal world of the internet, as well as an alternative physical world home in adult voluntary associations.

The audiences for such fictions are broad, given much of our previous generations’ socialization included at least

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18 The paddle, the strap or belt, the hair-brush, and the hand were by far the most common means of discipline. Other implements, such as the also common cane, appeared in the ‘chastised’ category. Implements also appeared as threatening props in the ‘to be disciplined’ category, and that of the ‘naughty girl’, to denote the sense that one is aware of the consequences of transgression, both as an audience member and as a theatrical participant.

19 cf. Tiggeman and Boundy (2008) for a detailed though different use this strategy.

20 Out of forty females, only four balked at placing themselves within the frames of the images presented. These cited the uniqueness of their subjective experience of being disciplined as amateurs as being not applicable to the mainly professional or idealized images in the sample.

21 This includes the categories, ‘sweet’, ‘dancer’, ‘pretty’, ‘hot’, ‘girl’ and approximately half of the ‘to be disciplined’ category, where the performance of the female embodies the traits listed in the text above.

22 This includes the other categories not mentioned in the previous note, as well as the other half of the ‘to be disciplined’ category, where, instead of trying to avoid punishment by pretending to be sweet, the girl is either shown to be naughty or prefers to be so not only in defiance of authority but also in desire of discipline.
the real threat of physical punishment for children, both at home and in various institutions, public and private. It may seem odd, or ironic, that a theme of growing up so normative from the agrarian revolution to near own age, should become sequestered - as a kind of anachronistic refugee from history - within the media of the Internet and as a category of 'kink' within the erotic industry more generally. This shift does imply that when such rituals were more normative, they already, and perhaps Always, had within them a sexual content. Given the famous kinship taboo against incest, a near human universal in many modes of production, and further, the regional and historical taboos against sex with those defined as children, one might dare to suggest that the physical punishment of children was also a means to take pleasure form the contact of their bodies, and perhaps also from their discomfort. Sadism is linked with resentment, and revenge thus affected can be linked with satisfaction, including that sexual. In the English speaking world, and beyond, the association with masculinity and risk, danger, even death, and that of femininity with pleasure, comfort, and security, may well be called a structure of consciousness, albeit an archaic, abstract and idealized one (Van Gennep, 1961 for its existential symbolic process). The contiguity between eros and thanatos is well known. In this case, the use of flagellation to induce a form of sexual ecstasy or emotional fulfillment through recovery of treasured trauma - scars of pleasure and scars of pain - has a venerable history. From the Kama Sutra to the Song of Songs, from the walls of Pompeii to the confessions of Rousseau, from the letters of composer Percy Grainger to the pop lyrics of Madonna's 'Hanky Panky', this contiguity is apparently a strong presence in our cultural consciousness.23 One can encapsulate the dual risks of focused and fictive passion that contains itself within the ambit of a theatrical space, by reminding ourselves of the sentiments of both Marx and Freud: "When a love relationship is at its height, there is no room left for any interest in the environment." Freud (1960: 61) suggests that we are insulated from the wider world where such passion is no longer a contrivance, no longer satisfies an individual desire, erotic or otherwise, and no longer is contained within scripted scruple. As well, "When man is opposed to himself, it is another man that is opposed to him" Marx (1977: 83), states baldly the ultimate effect of such unguarded passion, desire, and lust for power over others (Ricoeur, 1992). This combination is a well-known presence in most social landscapes and perhaps in all human institutions. Whatever interpretation is offered for this presence, this research suggests that all such spaces tend to be alienating from an ethical authenticity concerning the individuality and unique identities of human beings, male or female, their needs and passions and the mysteries of desire and the anxieties of mortality, that is, from an authentic relationship with both love and death.

REFERENCES


For an aesthetic genealogy of this phenomenon, cf. Bataille 1989, where the concept of the sacred is linked to spaces where violence has the dual effect of forcing submission to a higher power or authority - the source of the sacred - and of bringing forward from our existential horizon the feeling of immanent death - the vehicle by which one is transported to the sacred.


