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1

Introduction

This book aims to deconstruct the social construction of ‘Sadomasochism’, revealing it to be a mystification of social reality via insights into the ‘lived realities’ of consensual ‘SM’ practitioners obtained through ethnographic research of the author. It moves beyond the de-familiarization of the social constructions of ‘sexuality’ and ‘Sadomasochism’ and exposes their functional relationships to power.

While the substantive focus of this work is on the social construction of ‘Sadomasochism’ as well as the ‘lived realities’ of consensual ‘SM’, there are broader relevancies of this topic in relation to the knowledges concerning our own ‘lived bodies’. This book therefore provides a critical and engaged contribution to contemporary debates about the ‘body’ (e.g. Blackman and Walkerdine 2001; Brennan 2004; Butler 1990/1993/2004/2005; Diprose 2002; Falk 1994; Featherstone 1993; Murphy 1997; Shilling 1993/2003/2008; Turner 1996/2008; Welton 1998 etc.) and ‘sexualities’ (e.g. Beasley 2005; Califia 1988/2001; Califia and Sweeney 1996; Foucault 1990; Grosz and Probyn 1995; Jeffreys 1991/1993/2003; Weeks 2003 etc.). In particular, the last sections of the book can be read as a contribution to the debates surrounding the notions of ‘New Intimacies’ and/or the ‘postmodernization of intimacy’ (Giddens 1990/1991; Plummer 1995/1999 in: Browning et al. 1999/2003; Weeks et al. 2001) within late modern times.

The ‘bodily practices’ (Mauss 1979) of consensual ‘SM’ can be related to a variety of broader socio-cultural phenomena and meanings (e.g. Beckmann 2001a,b/2004/2005; Langdridge and Butt 2004; Langdridge and Barker 2007; Taylor 1997; Taylor and Ussher 2001). The book’s contemporary relevance not only derives from the fact that an earlier article (2001) by the author received many positive email-responses of practitioners of consensual ‘SM’ internationally and led to many invitations to guest-lecture at diverse universities, but also because it has been frequently cited by other academics and was called ‘groundbreaking’ (Langdridge and Butt 2004) as it was not only one of the first academic pieces of work that depathologized consensual ‘SM’ but further as it was based on qualitative, ethnographic research

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that has been rarely conducted within this context. As this part of my work generated such positive responses it seemed appropriate to shed light on this social research project in its full complexity.

Sawicki's (1991) notion of a 'politics of difference' included the important suggestion to see differences as resources and in my opinion this piece of work, based on reflections of field-experiences and 'subjugated knowledges', illustrates that the 'bodily practices' of consensual 'SM' and their practitioners have a lot of resources to offer that stand in stark contrast to the reductionism of decontextualized commodified 'kink' that is marketed in consumer society.

While it is evident that elements of 'SM' and of fetish culture have become part of capitalist consumerism and thus of mainstream society, it is important to acknowledge that this development has obviously impacted on the ways in which the 'bodily practices' of consensual 'SM' are 'lived out' and interpreted. Capitalism's proliferatory imperative led to the commodification and proliferation of representations of 'sex' as well as 'kinky sex' (see also Beckmann 2001).

Saner (2008) confirms as well that there occurred a 'mainstreaming' of 'somasochist' representations in the media as well as of BDSM [Bondage Discipline, Dominance and Submission, SadoMasochism] behaviour forms. Despite the positive side-effects of greater access to tools, outfits, clubs, and so on, that were triggered by this (s)exploitation of 'kink' for commercial benefits, this trend cannot in itself be interpreted as representing a greater understanding or openness for the whole variety of these 'bodily practices' as they remain selectively criminalized and as in contrast to the mainstream commodified "'SM" as package' "a large number of the erotic practices of the Kink community are not genitally focused; some don't even involve the body. The importance of headspace, the inner experience of sexual encounters, which is so important to Kinky sex, is barely recognized." (Dominguez 1994: 63). Thus, the important existential, interrelational and political dimensions of consensual 'SM' play are totally absent from public representation.

These, however, as will be seen especially in Chapter 3, do not only provide an example of an *ars erotica* but further provide examples of the application of 'sexual ethics' that in contemporary times, according to Plummer who refers to Weeks (1995) and Seidman (1997), should be: "...bound to meanings, contexts, recognition of diversities, respect, the importance of consent, responsibility and the consequences of acts" (Plummer in Browning et al. 1999: 442).

The crucial importance of education in relation to 'sexual ethics' is confirmed by recent findings of the Sex Education Forum (Bell 2007) that found that commodified 'sexualized bodies' and stereotypically 'gendered' porn have seemingly replaced other forms of education in terms of 'sexualities' and relationships in contemporary Britain. The findings of a new survey of British teenagers conducted in 2008 confirmed these concerns

and revealed: "...when it actually comes to sex education [people, *sic*] have no idea about sexually transmitted infections; they are not particularly clued-up about contraception; they have no idea about what they'd do if they got pregnant." ... "They're massively overexposed to pornography on the internet, in magazines and over their mobile phones. That's where they're getting their sex education from" (Hill 2008: 10). The consequences of such problematic learning resources become evident when one considers that sexism, 'sexual' exploitation and gender stereotyping appears to be an increasing problem within UK schools (Curtis 2008: 17) that problematically gets related to "...misogynistic attitudes linked to gang culture" (Curtis 2008: 17). Upon critical reflection (see also Chapters 4 and 5) this destructive attitude is not isolated to a specific group in UK society but has become part of mainstream consumer culture's 'conditions of domination' without being acknowledged as such. In contrast to these problematic sources consensual 'SM' emphasizes and facilitates negotiation, empathy and communication which clearly are existentially important, not only to allow for 'safe sex' or prevent pregnancies but most crucial of all, in order to establish a context for genuinely consensual pleasure.

The highly publicized case of Mr Mosley's engagements with the now 'normalized' commodified world of 'SM' in 2008 (e.g. Pidd 2008) should remind us that the indirect and selective criminalization of consensual 'SM' 'body practices' that began with the *R. v. Brown-case* ([1993] 2 WLR 556; [1993] 2 All ER 75; 1994] 1 AC 212) and the following decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ([1997] Cr App Rep 44) have as yet still to be revoked; thus, the case this book makes is as relevant as ever, as: "Crime has no ontological reality. Crime is not the *object* but the *product* of criminal policy. Criminalization is one of the many ways to construct social reality" (Hulsman 1986: 71 – emphasis in original). It therefore follows that the attribution of 'negative labels' (such as 'criminal') depends on the intervention of official agencies of social control and negotiation processes that are decisive in terms of the success of applying these 'labels'. The 'criminal status' is negotiated during organizational processes and is therefore deeply influenced by power relationships. In the context of Mr Mosley's case, McSmith stated in *The Independent* on 25 July 2008 that: "The implication of yesterday's judgment by Mr. Justice Eady is that people who have sexual habits others might find bizarre or unpalatable have the same right to privacy as anyone else" (McSmith 2008: 8) This observation and the findings of the ethnographic research presented in this book definitely challenge the legitimacy of upholding the existing law.

As argued in Chapter 3 the 'conditions of domination' set up by conventional society mentioned by Chancer (1994) are, in the context of consensual 'SM' practice, replaced by negotiated and consensually agreed upon 'limits'. Thus consensual 'SM' 'body practice' does not even qualify as violence or as being a stabilizing factor for societal power relationships which

was/is an accusation voiced against consensual 'SM' by some feminist scholars (see Chapter 2).

This section of my work introduces the central concepts that are touched upon, the approaches which I adopt throughout and guides the reader through the subsequent chapters of this critical criminological work. My definition of 'critical criminology' is not only a necessarily inter- or multi-disciplinary one but also one that is based on a perspective that acknowledges the injustice of contemporary social order (de Haan 1992) and that sees dominant ideologies and discourses as having the potential of limiting human creativity and expression, thus as establishing 'conditions of domination' (Foucault, e.g. in: Kritzman 1990; Lotringer 1996). 'Critical criminology', as critique of ideology as proposed by Hess (1986), is the underlying framework of this book and thus a central focus will be the deconstruction of mystifications of social reality and their relationship to experienced realities as well as their functional relationship to formations of power. Practitioners of consensual 'body practices' labelled 'Somasochism' continue to be in danger of being prosecuted once their enacted 'plays' ('scenes') leave woundings that are not 'trifling or transient'.

Modernity did not only effect a redistribution of violence (Bauman 1992) but also led to a limiting of legitimate pleasures: "Bodily pleasure was reduced to genital, sexual pleasure" (Stratton 1996: 166). As consensual 'SM' (in contrast to commodified 'kink'; see Beckmann 2001) aims at the production of pleasure through the empathetic 'play' with 'lived bodies' which, as will be shown, is not limited to 'sexual pleasure', I consider the term 'body practice' and/or 'bodily practices' to be a more adequate term in order to describe this social phenomenon. Apart from using Mauss' (1979) notion of 'bodily practice' (and/or 'body techniques'), I will also make use of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of 'lived body' which overcomes the 'enlightened dualism' of body/mind that 'haunts' much of the traditional readings on 'sexualities' as well as much of feminist and deconstructionist accounts. The existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty offers, with the concept of the 'lived body', insight into the realms of 'lived experience' which centres around 'being-in-the-world' and intentionality. In "The Visible and the Invisible" (1968), Merleau-Ponty points out that speech is a manifestation of intentionality which is the defining quality of human beings' 'transcendence'. Thus, the concept of the 'lived body' provides space for the potential in human beings to change, to construct their own versions of 'reality' and meaning, and does not discredit them by rendering them subordinate to biological, psychological and/or sociological determinants.

It is further crucial to acknowledge and investigate the interrelationships between 'lived body' and the realm of politics as:

The modern sociological debate about whether the body is natural [outside the city] or socially constructed (under the realm of political

sovereignty) has unfortunately become disconnected from the political. If the sociology of the body is to have an important future role in shaping sociological debate, it needs to embrace the relationship between the political and the corporeal as a major research focus. (Turner 2008: 1)

While the interdisciplinary approach of this book is shaped by my academic and professional background as a former social pedagogue and lecturing critical criminologist, this work certainly contributes to this central sociological research focus. My criminological approach defines the phenomenon of 'Sadomasochism' as a construction of reality rather than a reality in itself (e.g. as positivistic orientated approaches would suggest). Based on this premise, the reconstruction of the development of this 'social censure' (Sumner 1990) can only be undertaken through an understanding of its socio-political and discursive contexts.

Social censures combine with forms of power and economy to provide the distinct features of specific practices of domination and 'social control'. These ideologies help to explain and to mystify the routine targeting of the practices of surveillance and control: explain, because their surrounding discourse tells us something about the specific complaint; and mystify; because censures are often expressed in universalistic language which appeals to general moral principles. (Sumner 1990: 201)

The social censure of 'Sadomasochism' is part of what Foucault (1990) termed the 'deployment of sexuality'. In Foucault's view, power did not and does not operate through means of repression only but may be even more effective (because less obvious) through productive power relations which occur and operate throughout the social body. In 'History of Sexuality', Foucault (1990) shows how the authoritative character of medical, psychiatric and governmental experts' discourses and practices worked to constitute subjects and therefore became an important tool to operate social control. This 'sexual technology' was constituted at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a 'scientia sexualis' and, as Foucault suggests, probably every culture constitutes knowledges about 'sexuality'. This Western 'sexual technology' stands in contrast to an *ars erotica* that, according to Foucault, was constituted in ancient China and was aimed at an intensification of pleasure, whereas the Western *scientia sexualis* did not share this aim but "...rather that of causing relations of power to function in the finest and most intricate elements of the body and its conduct. Sexuality is linked to truth, not because it would be an access to truth, but because truth permits access to sexuality and permits its subjugation as an object" (Foucault in Lotringer 1996: 166/167).

As the processes of the ascription of the label 'Sadomasochism', embedded within this 'scientia sexualis', are aimed at (re)producing socio-political

power relationships, it is evident that it is important to analyse the inter-relatedness of certain ideas about 'Sodomasochism' and its binary construction of 'natural sexuality' that is cast as 'normality'.

This book will necessarily defamiliarize the social constructions of 'sexuality' and 'Sodomasochism' in order to expose the operations of the discourses (religion, medicine, law, psychology etc.) that aim at the objectification, determination and de-authorization of the so constructed 'Other'. Chapter 2 deconstructs modern, reductionistic concepts that are elements of the social construction of 'Sodomasochism' in order to provide a more authentic understanding of the operation of such organizing categories.

This book does not engage in the project of constructing a 'grand theory'. Instead it is committed to a critical exploration of significant concepts that serve as normativizing injunctions which function as limits to human beings' experiences of 'lived body'. The critical analysis of culturally institutionalized conceptions of 'sexuality' as well as their contemporary representations and meanings, but also of 'body' and 'pain', are in this context crucial, as these appear to be the major elements on which the 'social censure' of 'Sodomasochism' is based. The assessment of these concepts was also a central aspect of the 'reflexivity' of the process of social research, as the information gained in the 'field' pointed towards a need to focus more specifically on those normative and reductionistic concepts that appear to be 'destabilized' in many of the 'bodily practices' of consensual 'SM'. As these institutionalized and often still individually and collectively internalized concepts remain powerful (e.g. as they continue to be major tools of subjection within expert discourses and practices, and are still evident in for example many of my students' understandings of themselves and others) the sections within Chapter 2 are necessarily extensive. Such approaches do not tap into the realities of the 'life-world' and thus often join the league of traditional scientific 'disembodied' approaches that ultimately refer to generalizing, often moralizing concepts of 'truth' that create an 'Other'. Shilling's work (1993) emphasizes and illustrates the importance of understandings of the 'body' as always being in "a process of becoming" (Shilling 1993: 5) and pointed to the need to explore and interpret the 'body' as a "phenomenon that is simultaneously biological and social" (Shilling 1993: 100). Amongst others, the concept of 'social flesh' that was coined by Carol Lee Bacchi and Chris Beasley (2000/2002) and that was further explored within the context of 'inter-sex' corporeality by Grabham (2007) goes some way to remedy this lack.

The sections on 'body', 'sexuality' and 'pain' reveal instabilities of 'naturalized' and thus depoliticizing concepts, through the strategy of deconstruction. As all human beings are, to more or lesser degrees, caught up in these 'normalizing' schemes of representation and regulation which result in social inclusion and exclusion, it is crucially important to open up channels that allow for the reflection of meanings, and thus create a distance from identifications with pre-given meanings. This was also a task that

I had to first engage myself with, in order to be 'open enough' for the experiences of my fieldwork.

As obviously not all sources of this complex undertaking can be taken into consideration, this book should not be read as being engaged with the traditional strategy of scholarship which desperately tries to produce integrity. In sympathy with a lot of recent feminist writers, I embrace the notion of the 'fragmentary' which, perhaps because of the renewed interest in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, has gained acceptance within the academic world: "... feminists must explore the meaning of the diversity of sexual practices to those who practice them, to resurrect the 'subjugated knowledge' of sexuality elided within dominant culture" (Sawicki 1991: 31).

Chapter 3 will introduce the reader to the empirical world of consensual 'SM' I encountered in London. I will account for my research design and methodology and my sample-generation as the social stigma that was/is attached to the label and practice of consensual 'Sadomasochism' as well as the selective criminalization of some practices which effectively turned practitioners of consensual 'SM' into a 'hidden population'. In this context there were no predefined sociometric criteria that would have enabled me to selectively include or exclude people from the sample. For some, the sample obtained could be considered to be 'unrepresentative' but "...one is still sampling with reference to the social structure, though this time in an *implicit* manner" (Lee 1993: 66 emphasis in original).

The presentation of the accounts of my subjects presented in Chapter 3 were mainly shaped by the accumulation of data on specific topics, rather than through directive questions that would have guided my respondents' answers. The main points of emphasis detailed in these accounts seem to have had relevance for most of my interviewees and, to this extent, this ensures a certain degree of representativeness. An important aim of my work is to give the usually silenced or media-sensationalistically distorted voices the space to articulate themselves: "...an experience is neither – true or false; it is always a fiction, something constructed, which exists only after it has been made, not before; it isn't something that is 'true', but it has been a reality" (Foucault in Halperin 1995: 222). In order to account for the diverse realities of the usually 'unheard', distorted and/or de-authorized voices the sections of Chapter 3 make up a substantial part of this book and thus aim to redress the ordinarily existing profound imbalance in terms of space given to 'subjugated knowledges' in contrast to concepts of 'truth'.

Within Chapter 4, I attempt to illustrate both the impact of the social censure of 'Sadomasochism' on individual perceptions of practitioners of these 'bodily practices' and the use that the maintenance of this 'social censure' (Sumner 1990) seems to continue to have for society. The project of deconstruction does not exhaust itself in the deconstruction of concepts, but also engages in the exposure of, for example, socially-legitimized power

relationships which are in many ways contradicted by the realities of consensual 'SM'. 'Sadomasochism' as a social construction serves, for example, to keep existing and sedimented socio-political 'conditions of domination' unchallenged as their immanent inequality is projected onto practitioners of consensual 'SM'. This distortion and 'mystification of reality' is accounted for by an exploration of the inherently unequal structures and relationships of power within capitalist-consumer society which are then compared to the 'lived realities' of consensual 'SM'. Following the demonstration of the 'non-consensual sadomasochistic dynamic' (Chancer 1994) that pervades Western patriarchal, ethnocentric, capitalist-consumer cultures, the effects and aims of institutionalized and legitimized pain-distribution are discussed.

On the basis of the knowledge presented in Chapters 2 and 3, examples of state-authorized exertion of violence within the context of 'conditions of domination' are contrasted with the role and use of 'pain' in the 'bodily practices' of consensual 'SM'. As consensual 'SM' is frequently publicly misrepresented as 'torture' and, further, as one of Lord Templeman's comments within his ruling on the 'Spanner' case were that this "...cruelty was uncivilised" (*Times Law Reports* 12.3.93: 42), the exposure of the contradictions within the social construction of 'Sadomasochism' in Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the practice of torture and its origins in the alleged 'birthplace' of 'civilization', ancient Greece.

Chapter 5 continues with the problematization of fundamental social constructions of modernity. The socio-political operations of the constructed dualisms of 'civilization' and 'wilderness' are explored and their relation to both the social construction of 'Sadomasochism' as well as the 'bodily practices' of consensual 'SM' are revealed. In this chapter I therefore aim to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that operate on various interacting discursive and societal levels that produce and maintain the social construction of 'Sadomasochism'. The 'violence of rationality', in contrast to consensual 'SM' as well as the selective permissiveness of generating harmful 'conditions of domination' and of 'risk taking' within consumer culture, are therefore discussed. This book addresses the apparent hypocrisy that is existing between the way in which elective (normative) cosmetic surgery is represented and legislated and how 'bodily practices' that involve similar "...bloody natures..." (Jones 2008: 186) such as consensual 'SM' are demonized and selectively criminalized.

The focus here is to point to several 'flip-points' of constructed meaning that the social construction of 'Sadomasochism' helps to keep hidden via its function as 'Other'. The project of deconstruction aims to expose: "...the problems which reside in the endeavor to keep meaning pure, to say 'just this' and not 'that', because 'just this' always depends on 'that' which it is not" (Naffine 1997: 89). Through the examination of the consensual 'bodily practices' of 'SM' in their specific historical context which is characterized

by, for example, an increasing 'normalization' of invasive 'body projects' (such as cosmetic surgery, botox, etc.), the 'sexualization' and commodification of younger and younger 'bodies', Chapter 5 will further attempt to define the potential social meanings that the 'bodily practice' of consensual 'SM' has in the context of contemporary consumer and technological cultures: "Indeed, the rational 'enframing' of people and nature associated with technological culture in the West not only erodes meaning from human life, expelling the spiritual and sacred from its borders. It also creates the conditions in which it is possible for other cultural forms of belief to challenge its principles from outside and within its parameters" (Shilling 2008: 166).

Chapter 6 also deals, in a more complex fashion, with one of the thus indicated potential broader social meanings of these 'bodily practices' – a meaning which is located in the longing for 'transcendental states' and/or religious, spiritual experiences through consensual 'SM'. This chapter is also based on empirical research as the results of a self-completion questionnaire on 'transcendental states' through consensual 'SM' will be presented. In adaptation of Jana Sawicki's (1991) understanding of Foucault's politics, which are based on the assumption that differences cannot always be bridged but do not make effective resistance impossible, I employ her terminology of calling the politics that inform my work the 'politics of difference'. My work thus aims at providing a space for the articulation of different opinions and life-experiences of people whose voices often are only to be heard in distorted fashions or silenced and partake in the 'arena of struggle' labelled 'Sadomasochism'.

"Only an examination of concrete, historical situations can determine whether resistance is taking place or the body being 'rewritten' or dualisms being 'transcended'" (Bordo in Welton 1998: 92). Another purpose of this piece of work therefore consisted of establishing the potential of consensual 'SM' as a 'practice of resistance'. "On the basis of specific theoretical analyses of particular struggles, one can make generalizations, identify patterns in relations of power and thereby identify the relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness, safety or danger of particular practices" (Sawicki 1991: 32). Chapter 7 will thus elaborate on alternative readings of consensual 'SM' which will include the possibility to interpret these 'bodily practices' as 'practices of freedom' and also a discussion of the ethics of consensual 'SM' in their relation to Foucault's notion of 'care of the self' (1990 and 1992; also in: Rabinow 1997). As: "one escaped from a domination of truth not by playing a game that was totally different from the game of truth, but by playing the same game differently or playing another game, another hand, with other trump cards" (Foucault in Lotringer 1996: 444).

On the premises outlined above my critical criminological project could also be understood as an attempt to engage in the struggle for a relational and contextual 'justice' for 'lived bodies'. It is highly disturbing that

consensual 'SM' is still classified as pathological within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association DSM-IV-TR (APA 2000). This continuing stigmatization and the semi-criminalization of consensual 'SM' only serve to restrict consensual 'SM' education and facilitate the continuing existence of stereotypes, associated blackmailing and/or the production of decontextualized media-spectacles.

As stated before, the 'subjugated knowledges' of consensual 'SM' can be helpful in terms of generating a 'sexual ethics' not only in terms of highlighting and illustrating the importance of negotiating 'consent' (see also Beckmann 2004 in Cowling and Reynolds 2004) but also in terms of Barker's (in Langdrige and Barker 2007) training/education and challenge to the still widespread stereotypes and myths about consensual 'SM' and the continued predominance of unreflected 'normative heterosexuality'.

This book is also a reflection of my professional and personal development, triggered by the experiences in the empirical field and by the many encounters with my interviewees. During the four years I spent researching for and writing my PhD thesis on which this book is based, I was thus able to further my understanding of my own 'embodied self' in various aspects as: "...it is only through an engaged encounter with the Other, with the otherness of the Other, that one comes to a more informed, textured understanding of the traditions to which 'we' belong. It is in our genuine encounters with what is other and alien (even in ourselves) that we can further our own self-understanding" (Bernstein 1990: 66/67).

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