

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING LIFESTYLE AND PROFESSIONAL
DOMINATRICES: A DIVISION BY TRIBUTE

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my mom. One of the people who has always been there and has always been proud of me. You have helped make me into the woman I am today. You have shown me no matter what my interest is I should not be ashamed I should try to pursue it, unless it is illegal. I love you and thank you for always letting me be me.

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In the realm of BDSM there are a few different roles. There is a dominant, which is a person who controls a BDSM scene. There is a submissive, which is a person who gives up control to the dominant during a scene. In a BDSM scene, there must always be a person who is playing the role of a dominant and a person who is in the role of the submissive. This study looks at two different identities associated with the dominate role, lifestyle and professional. This study aims to compare and contrast the two identities on their backgrounds, how they identify themselves, and their views on tribute. Tribute is receiving either gifts or money in exchange for BDSM services. Two theories, social constructionism and exchange theory, were used to create the interview questions for this survey. For this study I interviewed four lifestyle dominatrices and three professional dominatrices. Data from six blogs, three lifestyle dominatrices' blogs and three professional dominatrices' blogs, were used as well. My findings suggest that in discovery of, and in BDSM play, the dominatrices are similar and that the defining difference between lifestyles and professionals is the acceptance of money. My findings also conflict a little with Viviana Zelizer's theory that the receiver of a gift is necessarily submissive to the giver.

Robert Aponte Ph.D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

With the release of the movie Fifty Shades of Grey, based off the bestselling book trilogy, the general public was been exposed to BDSM. What BDSM stands for is bondage, discipline/dominance, and sadomasochism (Arthur 2001). Sadomasochism is the term for deriving pleasure from giving/receiving pain or humiliation. The one deriving pleasure from giving pain is referred to as a sadist (Hucker 2011). The person who derives pleasure from receiving pain or humiliation is referred to as a masochist (2015). There are components that must be present for an activity to be considered a BDSM scene (Weinberg, Williams and Moser 1984).

The first component is the presence of dominance and submission. The second component is role playing. The third is that it must be consensual, a voluntary agreement to enter into the interaction between those involved. A mutual definition must be present about what is to occur, this is the fourth component. The final component is a sexual contact, though it is not shared by all who participate in SM behavior.

As the first component states, there must be the presence of dominance and submission, which means at least one person must assume the role of dominant and at least one person must accept the role of submissive. There are also people who identify as a switch; someone who switches back and forth between the dominant role and submissive role. This is often suggested to couples when they are exploring BDSM (Sez 2000). Men and women can identify as anyone of these BDSM roles. There are also other identities depending on whether money is accepted or not during play. Those involved in BDSM may identify as either a “lifestyle,” someone who does not accept money to practice

BDSM, or a “professional,” someone who does accept money to practice BDSM.

However, relations between lifestyles and professionals are not especially harmonious.

Lifestyles have criticized professionals for accepting money because they believe it changes the true nature of a BDSM relationship to a business relationship. Some feel that professionals are not genuinely interested in BDSM. Money in the BDSM community is also referred to as tribute, which can mean either money or gifts (2014). Another area of tension that lifestyles have with professionals is that they believe professionals should not be able to come into the various kink networks to find submissives without paying. I was made aware of this conflict between lifestyles and professionals through a friend who is a professional dominatrix (a woman who is dominant). After doing a bit of research it is apparent that this conflict indeed exists online. I wanted to know if this conflict exists in the real world between lifestyles and professionals or only online.

In the area that I studied, there is a BDSM group which is open to those who practice BDSM, but does have a few stipulations. One of the rules is that they do not want any solicitation; this includes pay for play, hookups, personal ads, etc. (2008). The BDSM group has a discussion set up on their Fetlife page (Facebook for fetishes) to explain why they do not allow soliciting. Posts that are about any of the solicitation possibilities listed above are said to distract from the true purpose of the group (alive_she_cried 2012). The pay for play rule could exist because of the conflict that exists between lifestyle and professionals. This conflict between the two is one focus of this paper. I want to compare and contrast lifestyle dominatrices and professional

dominatrices, and see where they are similar and where they are different. I also want to look at how the two groups feel when it comes to whether tribute is moral or not.

Research Questions

1. How are lifestyles and professional dominatrices of women similar or different?
2. What are the characteristics that make someone a lifestyle or professional?
3. Do the two groups dislike each other?
4. How do lifestyles view tribute and those who accept it?
5. What kind of tribute, if any, do lifestyles accept and is it voluntary?

Theoretical Background

Social constructionist theory helped provide a background for the discussion of how these two types of dominatrices (female dominants) construct guidelines to be either a professional or lifestyle dominatrix. Then social exchange theory and gift exchange theory is utilized to explain the role of money and tribute in the relationship between dominant and submissive. This section will include an analysis of some of Viviana Zelizer's (1989, 2000) work to understand the difference between money and how it structures and changes relationships. Tribute, which is what money and gifts are referred to in the BDSM community, will be explained further to give an understanding of why this topic needs to be studied.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism describes how reality is socially constructed through categories and guidelines that have been created, agreed upon, and implemented by society as truths (Boswell 1989, Delamater and Shibley 1998). Often times this theory is

used to explain how either non-practitioners construct ideas about those who practice BDSM, or how those who practice justify this behavior as acceptable. An example of this is asking professional dominatrices how their work is different from prostitution. The answer given in one study is that practicing BDSM is constructed as an art form (Lindemann 2010).

Social constructionism looks at how those who are part of a community begin to accept the guidelines that society creates for the group. Homosexuality and sexual orientation are examples of this. In the present, sexual orientation is accepted as part of a person's identity, because it has been socially constructed to be that way (Bohan and Russell 2003). Applied to those who participate in the kink community, the labels of dominant and submissive have been created by this community to turn behavior into an identity. It is expected that a person who claims to be a dominant/dominatrix is to display the behavior of being in control of a scene, likely perform sadistic behavior, but not partake in masochistic behavior (lunaKM 2015). This is a social construction of what this role is to be. Not all dominatrices have to possess complete control of a scene. The dominatrix could just be interested in performing sadistic behavior on a masochist, and so the submissive has control. Similar guidelines are expected of those who claim to be submissive. The submissives are expected to give up complete control and display masochistic behavior, but they could want to just give up control and not be hurt. An example would be someone who enjoys being restrained (bondage play). When one hears that someone is a dominatrix, those are the images and guidelines they associate with that title, because that is how that role has been constructed. It is the same with the term submissive as well. These identities have been created to be socially meaningful, and to

help organize the experience (Kitzinger, D'Augelli and Patterson 1995). To this group, identities help normalize their behavior, and create common ground when talking to others in the community, to help establish relationships.

One area where social constructionism has not been used with the BDSM community is how they create guidelines to split people into identities other than just dominant and submissive. For example, among those who are dominatrices, there is a split between what are called “lifestyle” dominatrices (those who do not get paid to dominate) and “professional” dominatrices (those who do get paid to dominate).

Exchange Theories

Few studies have used social exchange theory to describe exchanges in BDSM relationships. Social exchange theory has been described as actions that are contingent on rewards between two or more people (Emerson 1976). There are both economic analyses and noneconomic analyses of social exchange theory (Emerson 1976). All who are involved in the exchange are doing it to generate a benefit by exchanging behaviors or goods that could not be obtained on their own (Lawler 2001). In social exchange theory, a behavior does not necessarily have to be exchanged for a behavior. There are a couple common features of social exchange theory that exist today like reciprocity and equity. Reciprocity is defined as giving benefits to another in return for benefits received (Molm, Schaefer and Collett 2007). Equity is expecting a reward that is in proportion with what one is exchanging (Morgan and Sawyer 1979). The desire to have equity in exchanges is displayed further through the obligations that are created from exchanging gifts.

Social exchange theory has also been described as a series of interactions that generate obligations (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). A more specific example of social

exchange theory is Marcel Mauss' gift exchange theory. Obligation is created because those involved in the exchange have a relationship (Mauss 1967). The receiver will feel a sense of obligation to return the kindness if the relationship is meaningful and likely to continue. Two types of obligation exist, the obligation to repay gifts received, and also the obligation to receive them (Carrier 1991). In society it is perceived that gifts are given freely, and there is no obligation to repay them. Mauss found that this is not the case. An obligation to repay the giver often exists. There are different ways to repay the giver for the gift. A material gift does not necessarily create an obligation on the receiver to return the favor with another material gift. Mauss believed that a gift could be any object or any service (Carrier 1991). Labor can be used as a form of exchange for gifts.

Exchange theories are used in many different fields including the field of sexuality (Sprecher 1998). Often times, when social exchange theory and gift exchange theory are applied to the field of sexuality it is applied to prostitutes. The theories are easy to apply to prostitutes, because there is an explicit exchange between the client paying and the prostitute receiving the payment (Sprecher 1998). It is also used when looking at how people choose a romantic partner or in the exchange of sex with a partner. The concept of giving gifts or special favors in exchange for sex may explain some of the sexual behavior in exclusive relationships (Sprecher 1998). In these relationships there is often a concern of how money or gifts will change them.

Viviana Zelizer's *The Social Meaning of Money: "Special Monies"* (1989) describes how money can have different meanings in different relationships. The article focuses on exchanges of sex and gifts in the different relationships (Zelizer 1989). The article sets up how in different sexual exchanges there will be different prices based on

the activity, and whether the one paying finds it worth the money. She also discusses how the acceptance of money can make the receiver submissive to the giver. In the BDSM community it would seem that the receiver, in this case the dominant, would still be dominant if not more so. They receive money to be a dominant, which is something they may already enjoy doing.

In her work, *The Purchase of Intimacy*, Zelizer (2000) discusses the concept of money changing a relationship with a number of different types of relationships, including sex workers. For example, she looks at live-in boyfriends as one of these relationships. The boyfriends contribute money and other goods to the family they are living with, along with helping out with any children. In return the boyfriend gets a place to live, meals, sexual companionship, and a chance to be a like a dad. She found that in this sort of relationship it is not the quantity of money that made the relationship better it is the quality of the relationship that influences the boyfriend to contribute more of his money to the household (Zelizer 2000). She also explores four other types of sexual relationships in Brazil (Zelizer 2000). All of these relationships are different forms of exchanges. She found that in all of the relationships there is the possibility of “treating.” She defines treating as a way for working-class people to obtain financial help, gifts, and access to entertainment by exchanging a variety of sexual favors (Zelizer 2000). The sexual favor could be as simple as flirting all the way to intercourse. The point is that the more sexual the favor is, the higher the payoff. One of the main points behind treating is that it is not a form of prostitution to those who employ it, though many on the outside would likely disagree. To those who accept treating in the form of exchange for sexual activity say they are not doing anything wrong, because it is not necessarily money. The

logic is that those giving want to give the gifts. Often times the sexual favor is performed then they are paid back with some extravagant gift later.

Tribute

When it comes to BDSM, money is given to professionals for them to participate in a scene or some type of domination with a submissive. There are also exchanges that occur in this community that are not just money, but other types of gifts. These other gifts are similar to Zelizer's idea of treating, except in the BDSM community it is called "tribute" (2014). Tribute also covers the exchange of money, and that is how it differs from treating. The submissive gets to be dominated, a behavior they wanted from the dominant, and in exchange gives tribute as payment. Professional dominatrices are not the only ones who accept tribute or even expect to receive tribute of some kind for their domination, some lifestyles do as well. The difference is that lifestyles only want gifts, no money. The acceptance of money is the big divider between a lifestyle and a professional.

Professionals will work in a dungeon (a space where professionals hold sessions with clients and have BDSM devices they share), if that is an option where they live. At a dungeon, the owner of the dungeon typically sets the prices, but the dominatrices can set their own hard limits (something will absolutely not do). If a professional dominatrix does not have a dungeon to work at or she has her own private one, she will set the price of her sessions. Setting the price allows the dominatrix to raise prices based off of what is being asked for in a scene; thus keeping with the idea that the quality of the relationship dictates the quantity of tribute being given. Sometimes, these professionals will accept gifts and other forms of payment from submissives.

The concern from lifestyle dominatrices about professionals is that money and tribute change the true nature of the relationship between a dominant and submissive. They fear that this may create obligations in the relationship. Similar to what Mauss (1967) believed, but in a different context. Zelizer's (2000) work looks at how money changes a relationship for those who accept treating, because the more they want and accept the more they are expected/obligated to do in return with sexual favors. Lifestyles are concerned that accepting tribute ruins this because then the dominant is willing to do behaviors they do not usually partake in so they can get more money. A change in the relationship between a dominant and submissive cannot be measured only; it can only be asked about, so I will look more at the concerns lifestyles have and if it matches up to what professionals describe.

The Study

The idea for this paper of comparing and contrasting professional dominatrices and lifestyle dominatrices spurred from talking with people in the local BDSM community when I worked at Lovers' Lane and looking at posts on BDSM community websites. There is a conflict between the two groups about what makes a person either a professional or a lifestyle, and whether it is moral to accept tribute in exchange to dominate someone. This conflict has lead the local BDSM community to exclude professionals from participating in events or meet ups. As for professionals, they want to eliminate the assumed characteristic that they do not truly enjoy BDSM, and that it is immoral to accept tribute if someone is willing to give it. There is a struggle between the two and they seem to dislike each other. The lifestyles seem to dislike professionals because they are accepting money for something they believe should be a behavior

practiced only for pure desire. The professionals seem to dislike lifestyles because of their instant judgements. These judgements are what is currently expressed on the internet.

CHAPTER TWO. METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design (Esterberg 2002) to collect two types of qualitative data – private open-ended and semi-structured interviews and blogs to explore the similarities and differences between professional and lifestyle dominatrices. The data included seven semi-structured private interviews and six blogs.

Interviews and Recruitment

Study participants had to be females age 18 or older, participate in BDSM and identify as dominant. I aimed to recruit an even number of lifestyle dominatrices (e.g., those who did not solicit money from submissives) and professional dominatrices (e.g., those who did solicit money from submissives).

Women were recruited through personal networks at local Kink community events and through a study ad posted on the Fetlife webpage networking site. One participant was a friend of mine (convenience sample), 2 were recruited at a Kink Community event, 3 through the Fetlife site, and 1 through snowball sampling. Participants were asked for their favorite Saturday Night Live (SNL) cast member or a name they liked if they did not know an SNL cast member to use as an alias.

Semi-structured qualitative and face-to-face interviews were conducted in private settings. Given the stigmatized nature of BDSM, it was critical to use a method where the women could share privately about their experiences. The use of qualitative interviews (Kvale 2007) allowed for asking directly about their experiences, from their perspectives, and the use of open-ended questions provided the women with the opportunity to elaborate on any topic that needed more explanation. Interviews were digitally recorded,

lasted between 25 and 90 minutes, and resulted in single spaced transcripts ranging from 7 to 14 pages. At the end of the interviews participants received a \$25 Visa gift card as a thank you for participating.

I created a semi-structured interview guide to answer the research questions. The questions were crafted based on my review of BDSM message boards and previous interactions with those who practice BDSM. In addition, the creation of the interview guide was informed by the theories of social constructionism and social exchange theory to ensure that I explored how the women constructed meaning around BDSM and tribute in their dominatrix relations. The lifestyle guide (27 open-ended questions) and the professional guide (25 open-ended questions) were nearly identical (see Appendix A and B). Both asked a series of identical demographic questions (i.e., dominatrix type, relationship status, age, and sexual orientation). While most questions (Questions 1-19 and the last question) were identical, the rest varied due to their different roles as professionals and lifestyles.

The bulk of the interview guide (Questions 1-19) was grounded in social constructionism theory and was designed to discover how the women understood the meaning of being a dominatrix and the differences between the two types. The first two questions explored their identity, how they labeled themselves, and the kinds of characteristics that make someone a professional or a lifestyle dominatrix. Questions 3-6 were asked to get a bit of background on the dominatrices to find out if lifestyles and professionals are similar or if they are mostly different. Questions 7-12 explored the meaning of submissives, their experiences with submissives, and any concerns lifestyles have about professionals and their relationships with their submissives. Questions 13-16

were designed to address how the two groups think about each other. Questions 17-19 were grounded in exchange theories and explored the meaning of tribute, which is one of main focuses of the study. The final question asked if they had any final thoughts they wanted to share.

Exchange theories were also used to guide the final set of questions about the meaning of tribute; these questions slightly differed depending on whether one was a lifestyle or professional dominatrix. For the lifestyle dominatrices, Question 20 explored how they would react if a submissive gave them an extravagant gift. Questions 21-26 explored whether and how accepting tribute causes issues between the dominant and submissive. For the professional dominatrix interviews, questions 20 and 21 focused on how much sessions cost and if that changed based on the submissive's desires. Finally questions 22-24 for the professional, aimed to explore Zelizer's concept of losing dominance and how that might be experienced by the professionals.

Blogs

The reason I chose to also use blog data was because I initially thought I may not be able to recruit my desired minimum of six women (my target sample) who were willing to complete private interviews. However, I was successful in that regards and even completed one additional interview. Rather than fill in for missing interview data, the blog data, written by dominatrices, helped support the data collected from the interviews. As with the interviews, I aimed to include at least three professional blogs and three lifestyle blogs.

I sampled blogs by doing a simple google search with the key terms of either 'lifestyle dominatrix blog' or 'professional dominatrix blog' which led to hundreds of

blog entries. While plenty of options came up in these searches, most did not meet the sampling criteria needed to be included in the study. Blog study inclusion required that the writer explicitly state on their blog what type of dominatrix the writer identified as, be updated or written in the past ten years, and also be able to answer a little over half of the questions (i.e., 14 questions) that are part of the interview questionnaire for their self-identified dominatrix type. The reason a blog only had to be able to answer 14 interview questions was to ensure that the data covered most of the study's topics and because none of the blogs could answer every question. Of the demographic interview questions, only the women's relationship status and dominatrix type were consistently provided. I created aliases for the blog authors using some of my favorite female SNL character names. Blog data was cut and pasted into word documents and ranged from 3 to 7 pages of single spaced transcripts.

Participant Descriptions

Table 1 summarizes demographic information for the seven interviewees and Table 2 summarizes demographic information from the blogs authors. For the interviewees, all were white, and three identified as professional and four identified as lifestyle. Participants ranged from age in the late 20s to early 70s. Two identified as queer, three as bisexual, one as pansexual, and one as lesbian for sexual orientation. Four women were married, two were in relationships, and one was single. The two who were in relationships and were in polyamorous relationships.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Interviewees

Alias	Professional or Lifestyle	Age	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Status
Kate	Professional	late 20s	queer	single
Tina	Professional	early 30s	bisexual	married
Farley	Lifestyle	early 40s	pansexual	in relationships
Rachel	Professional	Late 50s	bisexual	married
Martina	Lifestyle	late 30s	queer	in relationships
Maya	Lifestyle	early 70s	lesbian	married
Amy	Lifestyle	early 30s	bisexual	Married

The blog authors consisted of an equal number of professional and lifestyle dominatrices.

Half were single, two were in relationships and one was undetermined.

Table 2. Demographic Information for Blog Writers

Alias	Professional or Lifestyle	Relationship Status
Baba	Professional	Single
Debbie	Professional	in Relationship
Jodi	Lifestyle	Single
Mary Katherine	Professional	Not Sure
Pat	Lifestyle	in Relationship
Penelope	Lifestyle	Single

Coding and Analysis

Interviews were transcribed nearly verbatim by me. I did not include “ums” and “uhs” in my transcripts. I imported the transcribed interviews and blog data into NVivo. I then did descriptive analysis of the data through open coding techniques (Kvale 2007). Open coding analysis first began with taking notes of emerging themes and data rich quotes were written and highlighted during the proof-reading of the transcripts. NVivo nodes (i.e., storage place for quotes) were created from the emerging themes and data that fit within the theme was placed in the correct node. Once NVivo coding was finished, I then wrote analytic memos for each theme to explain what was found and included quotes that support the findings (Esterberg 2002). Throughout the analysis process both NVivo and Microsoft Word were used to manage the data.

This thesis used a few techniques to ensure the quality of the data findings, a.) It has been peer-reviewed at many stages by my thesis committee; b.) There is a reflexivity section; c.) triangulation of two sources of data through recorded interviews and use of blog texts which provided rich and thick descriptions from the perspectives of the women themselves (Merriam 2002). Recording and doing near verbatim transcriptions myself helped to ensure that the participants' answers were accurately captured and analysis was able to give these answers context. The members of the thesis committee who reviewed this project have expertise in theories of sociology, the sociology of sexuality, and qualitative methods and edits were made based on their feedback. These edits helped improve the quality of the study.

Reflexivity

With any qualitative study, it is important to reflect on any possible bias that may occur during the study (Merriam 2002). I am not involved in the BDSM community and do not practice BDSM. I do, however, have a curiosity about BDSM and am friends with a couple of dominatrices. My own experiences with female friends biased me to choose only women to interview for this study. The other reason I only interviewed women was because, from previous everyday interactions I have had with the male dominants, they have asked me to be a submissive or attempted to treat me as such. This led me to believe that if males were interviewed there would be a risk of this happening during the interview, which would make the interviews difficult for me to conduct. Similar issues have not occurred with female dominants so I felt much more comfortable limiting my study to women. Such power and control issues were not an issue that arose during the interviews for this study.

I also became interested in studying this topic because I have friends who are professionals and friends who are lifestyles. I have heard about the conflict through a couple of these friends. This could have led to a potential bias when asking questions and during analysis but to avoid this I tried to make the questions open-ended and nonleading. I also tried to keep a similar demeanor in all the interviews. Finally, as I am more of an outsider rather than an insider, I may have lacked certain insider type understandings on the topic and so may have missed areas to probe because I lacked such insider knowledge. At the same time, not knowing anything may have been an advantage as the women were more likely to elaborate on the topic with me to make sure I fully understood their experiences and perspectives.

Findings Overview

This study aimed to better understand the similarities and differences between women who identify as either a lifestyle or professional dominatrix and how they view tribute. The rest of the thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 3- Discovery and Description of Their Dominant Side, Chapter 4- Play, Submissives, and You, Chapter 5- Opinions of The Other, Chapter 6- Money and Tribute, Chapter 7- BDSM and Preferences, and Chapter 8- Conclusion.

CHAPTER THREE. DISCOVERY AND DESCRIPTION OF THEIR DOMINANT SIDE

One purpose of this study was to discover how, if at all, lifestyle and professional dominatrices are similar and/or different. This chapter partially answers research question one, it focuses on the similarities between lifestyles and professionals. When asked to describe themselves all the women answered similarly. The only difference was in the order that they would describe themselves. The lifestyle interviewees would first qualify that they were not professionals before stating that they were lifestyles, whereas the professionals did not deny an identity before stating they were professional. Both types of dominatrices gave similar answers about their universal characteristics, why they are not submissive, their childhood play, and their BDSM behaviors during their teenage years. An unexpected theme that emerged was that both lifestyle and professional women mentioned that someone helped them find their dominant identity. Both the interviews and blogs were similar in these respects.

3.1 Describing Themselves

When I asked the women what adjective they would use in front of a dominatrix in describing themselves, none of them initially used the terms professional or lifestyle, and instead used other adjectives such as, “fierce, dom, domme, poly, pan, top, dominant, femme, and therapist in latex and leather.” In fact, for some of the women, I had to specifically ask which type they identified with, to verify that I was using the correct set of questions. For example, after I asked Tina a second time what adjectives she prefers and if she was a professional or lifestyle dominatrix she stated,

Fierce...professional yeah. I mean I can give you as many fun adjectives as you want...I would say fierce. Just the general description was a therapist in latex and leather (Professional Interview).

Some women also expressed that they preferred being called “dom or top” instead of dominatrix or domme when asked what adjective they would use in front of dominatrix.

Amy, for example, clarified the difference and why she preferred “dom” as follows,

I would classify myself as dom. A dominatrix to me implies that you do it professionally. For me it is kind of the same if you spell it dom or domme, I think the spelling is more a personal choice. For me I prefer dom, it’s just more me (Lifestyle Interview).

Farley had a similar explanation, and went on to describe how she did not like dome because it implied too much of a feminine role.

I don’t really consider myself a domme. I consider myself more of a dom and definitely the top role, because I enjoy the control aspect of it and the submission of somebody else to me is just exquisite. To me a dominant is more of a centered feel and a domme may have more attributes of being feminine. Where a dominant may not necessarily be a feminine role, but it is the lead role (Lifestyle Interview).

The lifestyles would also often qualify first that they are not professionals, before stating they are lifestyles. Farley started by describing herself with different adjectives.

Then when asked which one she was, she stated, “Poly and pan... Yes, I’m not professional (Lifestyle Interview).” This pattern of qualifying that they are not professionals was also apparent in the lifestyle blogs. For example, Pat explained, “I am not a professional dominant. The only thing you can hire me to do is write for you. Thus [I’m] a lifestyle (Lifestyle Blog).”

In contrast, some of the professionals, both interviewees and bloggers, would describe themselves as both professional and lifestyle. For example, Mary Katherine stated, “I describe myself as a professional when first meeting someone, but also identify

as lifestyle because I practice being a dominatrix in my sexual life as well (Professional Blog).” Similarly, Rachel said, “I am a lifestyle dominatrix as well as a pro dom. I see both sides of the fence (Professional Interview).”

The two professionals I interviewed who worked at big dungeons did not describe themselves as also being lifestyles. They only described themselves as professionals and did not preface this by emphasizing that they were not lifestyle.

When it describing themselves the women had many adjectives. It can be surmised already that there is tension between lifestyles and professionals because some lifestyles mentioned that they are not professional before saying they are lifestyle. However, this tension may only be felt by lifestyles as some of the professionals described themselves as also lifestyles or did not feel the need to qualify that they were not lifestyles.

3.2 Universal Characteristics

When asked whether there were universal characteristics for their dominatrix type, none of the lifestyles were able to identify anything universal about being a lifestyle. Instead, they described more broadly some universal characteristics that makes a woman a dominant, a feature shared by both lifestyles and professionals. For example, Martina stated that being dominant is, “The ability to lead. The ability to get respect without commanding it (Lifestyle Interview).” Maya noted, “I am going to use the word confidence and consent (Lifestyle Interview).”

The only universal characteristic that the professionals mentioned was getting paid for their activities. They also listed characteristics that make someone a dominant. For example, Kate said, “be domineering in general conversation (Professional

Interview).” One characteristic that both lifestyles and professionals agree on is that BDSM is part of their life and that they enjoy it. Amy, for example, stated “I do this because it is something that I really enjoy. I don’t do this for money and I don’t do this for a living. It’s just a part of my life (Lifestyle Interview).” Similarly, Rachel noted, “I don’t think there are any universal characteristics actually. We all have our own reasons for getting into it. Some of them for money, some because we enjoy it, and some for both (Professional Interview).” The only characteristic that makes a dominant either a professional or lifestyle is the acceptance of money, this is the answer I found for research question two.

3.3 Why I am not a submissive

Given that most of the women strictly identified as dominants, I probed to discover why they are not submissive. While some just stated they did not enjoy it, others provided additional reasons that they elaborated on through short stories of what happened when they explored both roles of BDSM and settling on the dominant role. Amy, for example shared that,

There was one time when we were trying out handcuffs we put them on him and it was great. Put them on me and I about had a panic attack and I was like “Okay, this is clearly not my orientation. I cannot do it that way” (Lifestyle interview).

Similarly, Kate noted, “Until others let me practice on them [I didn’t know]. [Now] I am a sadist” (Professional Interview).

For others, exploration was not needed. It was obvious what role was truly them from the start as Martina explained,

I have no desire what-so-ever to give up my control to somebody else. It was a no brainer. It wasn’t even a question. It is something that doesn’t appeal to me on any level. Maybe there are trust issues that I couldn’t get

past. I'm not sure. I just cannot imagine a situation where I would give up control (Lifestyle Interview).

Rachel said that she is submissive, but only to her husband. To everyone else she is dominant. Tina described herself as a “switch,” which is a person who is both dominant and submissive, in her personal life. In the professional sphere she is only a dominatrix, because she is not comfortable being a submissive professionally. Otherwise she likes to switch roles with her husband to keep things exciting and avoid predictability.

3.4 Childhood Play

Every one of the women interviewed, and some of the bloggers, recalled some kind of childhood play activities that they believed were signs that they were going to be a dominant. This was one experience shared by the study participants regardless of whether the women were lifestyles or professionals. For some, the childhood play was like the BDSM activities they perform now. For example, Mary Katherine explained, “When I was a kid I would tie my barbies up and have the other barbies do horrible things to them in elaborate roleplays (Lifestyle Blog).” Similarly, Penelope said,

I was being nosy at my grandmother's house as a young child and found a lot of shiny clothes, chains and things, [that] I didn't recognize in her wardrobe, along with some mail order catalogues for the same sort of items. I had no idea why she had such different looking clothing and accessories in her wardrobe but something about it appealed [to me] (Lifestyle Blog).

Rachel likewise said, “My cousins [said] ‘I remember when you used to always tie us up and we would get away and you would catch us and then you would tie us up again’ (Professional interview).” Similar to Rachel's experience of having control, Tina's childhood memory was being given a BDSM torture device as a gift for a Halloween

costume; Tina wanted to dress up as cat woman as she had an admiration for the actress and her powerful role as cat woman. Tina wanted the same costume for Halloween.

So when I was eight *Batman Returns* [the movie] came out with Michelle Pfeiffer as cat woman and I thought she was the most awesome thing that went from this meek little individual to, I'm going to kick your ass with this whip and awesome, awesome, costume. So for Halloween that year I dressed up as cat woman. My parents went somewhere and bought me a real whip. I'm eight and you wonder why 10 years later I became a dominatrix. I still have the whip from when I was eight.... I think at first it was trying out a costume and then it became, oh I'm not just going to be strong, confident, and controlling when I'm wearing this. I'm going to become strong and confident and in control all the time (Professional interview).

Others did not have childhood memories that were practicing BDSM behavior, but they did recall similar experiences of having to be in control. For the other women, they discussed remembering that during make believe scenes they had to be the one in control and the leader of the scenario that was being played. Amy, for example shared,

When I was a kid and would play school with my friends I always had to be the teacher. I always had to be the one in charge of what was going on. I was the one who always had to tell my friends what to do. I hated having somebody else tell me what to do and be teacher. I had to be in control (Lifestyle interview).

Martina had a similar experience,

I have always been really bossy and always been the leader. When we played games at school I was always the teacher, I was always the doctor when we played doctor and nurse. If we played store I was always the manager. I have just always been in charge of things (Lifestyle interview).

3.5 Kink Coming Out in Teenage Years

Many of the women mentioned that by the time they hit their teenage years that they began with what they would now label "kinky behavior", like restraints, humiliation, and pain. Often times at that age they were not aware that it was kinky and just thought they enjoyed rough sex. Amy, for example, said, "I think I kind of flirted with it a little

bit in high school. Just kind of flirting with handcuffs or being called names just sort of stuff like that (Lifestyle interview).” Similarly, Martina stated, “I think just when I was getting into sex and sexuality when I was a teenager I always liked what would be described as rough sex (Lifestyle interview).”

Others were more specific when describing sex in their teenage years, using labels traditionally associated with BDSM. Maya explained, “I can certainly remember as a teenager engaging in self bondage, because at that point in time I would have never been comfortable with doing it with anyone else (Lifestyle interview).” Kate started seeking out BDSM experiences by the time she was 13.

I think that I had been involved lifestyle wise on a personal level since I was 13. I started sleeping with guys in order to fulfill a personal blood fetish and so I exercised seeing how much pain and torture these guys would put up with to fuck me, which is pretty devious (Professional interview).

Pat engaged in what she called “light kink play” as a teenager, “When I started dating in high school, light kink play and exchanging fantasies with my then boyfriend was part of it (Lifestyle blog).

Only two women clearly knew by the time they were teenagers that they wanted to be dominatrices. This is different from what is discussed above, because the women above did not know they were dominatrices yet; they only engaged in activities that they later associated with being a dominatrix. Baba stated, “I’ve wanted to be a dominatrix since I was a 16-year-old Goth chick (Professional Blog).” Mary Katherine said, “I decided when I was 15 to become a dominatrix after reading an article about a dominatrix and I’ve been hooked on the kink lifestyle ever since (Professional blog).”

3.6 Others Helping Them Find Their Dominance

Five of the women, three interviewees and 2 bloggers, mentioned that other people, specifically a male person in their life, helped them discover their dominant preference. For Amy, it was her husband she explained,

It really wasn't until my husband and I got together, while we were still dating. We kind of started to experiment a little more. I don't think either of us identified as kinky before that. It was just something that happened when we were exploring and getting to know each other. It kind of started off as light bondage and stuff like that, then we figured out pretty early on that I could not be a bottom or a sub or be bound (Lifestyle Interview).

Farley and Rachel had first initially discovered their interest in BDSM, but did not share how they discovered their interest in BDSM. However, they did describe how a long-term sexual relationship with a man helped them discover they preferred being dominants. Farley said,

When I came on to fetlife I tried to disclose myself as a switch. I was picked up by a submissive and we had a 15 month relationship and he said "you know you're not a switch right?" That was in the first two weeks. I said "I don't know I thought I liked to be spanked" and he said "no, you're not a submissive at all." He had decades of experience on me so I trusted his opinion. We were into exploring my dominant personality and it really increased my confidence (Lifestyle Interview).

Rachel's experience was comparable to Farley's,

I started out as a submissive. I really thought that was my role. I married a dominant. He picked up on a lot of little things about me and said "you know you say you're a submissive, and I know you will always submit to me if I ask you to, but I think you would make a better dominant than a sub." So he got a guy online one day and said "get on here and talk to this guy" and I got on there and started talking to him and telling him what to do. It was like bam, you know what this is really fun. The more I did it the more I enjoyed it. He created a monster (Professional Interview).

These three women had started relationships with men that later helped them discover their dominant role. For another woman, Jodi, a man's first message to her was asking her to be his dominatrix and that is how the relationship started.

I turned on my Yahoo Messenger and started chatting with friends and just trying to get myself back out there in the singles scene. I did not know what I was getting into that night when someone messaged me asking "would you like to be my Mistress?" This is where life took a turn for the kinky for me (Lifestyle Blog).

These women discuss how it was more than just exploring BDSM, that typically the person they were exploring with mentioned how the women were more dominant rather than submissive. Some of their partners asked them to dominate them right away. As for the rest of the participants they did discover their dominant side on their own because being dominant feels natural to them.

CHAPTER FOUR. PLAY, SUBMISSIVES, AND YOU

The five components of a BDSM scene are consent, roleplay, mutual definition of the play, a person who is dominant and a person who is submissive, and that there is some sort of stimulating component. There is evidence in this study that the stimulation component of BDSM does not always have to be a sexual form of stimulation. It could just be mental stimulation and not sexual at all. In this chapter play activities, hard and soft limits, how one finds a submissive, how the women feel when performing different BDSM activities, and what happens when ending a relationship are discussed. Chapter four also answers research question one, this chapter has both similarities and differences between the two. As with the previous section, the findings explored similarities and differences between lifestyles and professionals.

4.1 Play Activities

The women were asked “what are common BDSM activities that they do with their submissives?” Some of the blogs also had information about BDSM activities they like to incorporate into their play. Several activities that were commonly included and mentioned by the women were; impact play, torture, humiliation, bondage, and cross-dressing men. Impact play was stated by all the interviewed women and is often what society thinks of when picturing BDSM. Impact play includes the usage of whips, paddles, and other devices to hit and spank a submissive. Humiliation is any form of embarrassment. Bondage commonly uses ropes, handcuffs, chains, and tape to restrain someone. Torture is a general term that could have any of these activities occur in a scene. Cross-dressing men involves putting men in dresses, lingerie, makeup, and wigs.

At least one of the women discussed that the type of play depended on their mood and the environment that they are in. Six of the women discussed bringing a special or unique factor into their play. For example, Amy noted

I recently got complimented for hitting my husband with a rubber chicken during a scene, which was pretty fun actually. I also have hit him with glow sticks, like the long glow sticks that you bend to make a neckless. I will hit him with those and he hates those because they are so thin and painful, but their fun and it's a party (Lifestyle Interview).

Rachel brought in needles to her play, "I love needle play if I can get somebody to go along with it. It's really not that painful. It is a mind thing, because everybody is afraid of needles. The trick is you only take a little pinch of skin and put the needle in real quick (Professional Interview)." Penelope has noted in her blog, "My favorite fetish accessory to use on a submissive is a long tailed flogger. Such versatility and the luxurious types are so beautifully weighted (Lifestyle Blog)." Maya also described a unique factor she enjoyed bringing into her play. Maya said, "Anything involving sensory deprivation or stimulation. Anything involving electricity, because I am sort of viewed as, I don't like to use expert, but electricity skilled person" (Lifestyle Interview).

There was a common theme that many of the women had more than one type of play they enjoyed incorporating into their scenes. The bloggers listed more categories of interest than did the interviews, but they just listed them, they did not share an experience about them like the interviewees did. For example, different things listed included "Bondage, cross dressing, Tease and Denial, Chastity Play, Foot/Leg/Shoe Worship, Fetish Exploration, Scent Worship, Sensory Deprivation, Sensation Play, Tickling, Nipple Torture, CBT/CBB, Ball Busting, Spanking/OTK, Impact Play, Spitting, Golden

Showers, Brown Showers, Role Play, Puppy/Pony Play, Diaper Domination/Forced Regression, Servitude, Objectification, Verbal Abuse, and Humiliation (Bloggers).”

4.2 Willing to do and Hard Limits

Many women who are dominant are willing to do activities that they may not necessarily find interesting but the submissive does. The women discussed that they do have to compromise with submissives because it is not just a take relationship; they also have to give and make sure both parties are enjoying the relationship. This is done by doing some activities that the dominant may not necessarily be interested in, but is not opposed to doing. Some of the women discussed that they did not believe they were interested in a specific activity until they tried it with a submissive. Amy, for example, explained that when her husband first brought up wanting to do cuckoldry (i.e., where the dominant has more sexual partners than just the submissives and then humiliates the submissive about it) with her, she was very unsure about it. She eventually agreed to try it after researching all aspects of it including why her husband would want her to do it.

Amy discusses how it started and why her husband enjoys her taking part in cuckoldry.

So with cuckoldry he wanted to find a sexual partner for me and it is kind of what jump started us with the kink community. So something that he enjoys hearing is how I can get bigger and better men and how I have better lovers than he is. It really turns him on to hear the exploits that I have with some of my partners. There are other forms of humiliation involved that we do as well (Lifestyle Interview).

Eight of the women, four interviewees and four bloggers, described themselves as a sadist or sensual dominant and said that any activity that allows them to be a sadist or to be a sensual dominant they are willing to consider; with some negotiation. Mary Katherine, a professional blogger, described herself on her blog as “sensual sadist and mind fucker” and Pat, a lifestyle blogger, wrote on her blog “I am, in full self-description

a Dominant Sadomasochist.” The bloggers would write a little more about being a sadist than the interviewees. Interviewees usually mentioned being a sadist when describing activities they would do and not go into further detail about being a sadist.

Though these women are willing to negotiate and do activities they may not be greatly interested in that does not mean that they are open to all BDSM activities. They all have activities they will not do. These activities are called hard limits. They are called hard limits because no matter how hard a person pushes the other party will not do it.

Three things were mentioned as hard limits by at least 8 of the women, and in most cases several of the interviewees and bloggers: kids, animals, and scat. When the women discussed these hard limits they would refer to them as “the common hard limits.” Martina said in her interview “the normal that everybody has to say so you don’t sound like a total freak would be kids, animals, bestiality, you know all that. You shouldn’t have to say, but you have to (Lifestyle interview).” Scat is using feces in play, typically a dominant defecating on a submissive. Some of the women did have others that they listed along with these three, but they were unique to each woman. For example, Penelope would “[Not] engage in sexual contact of any kind with my submissives. I will not give permanent marks to a submissive I have known less than a year (Lifestyle Blog).” Debbie noted she does, “not engage in: sex or sexual contact, switching, wrestling, piercing, cutting, any activity that draws blood, any activity that would cause you long-term physical harm, [or] scripted sessions (Professional Blog).” Kate noted, “I don’t do strap-ons. I don’t fuck with men’s assholes, they’re dirty. I don’t know what else to say about that I think men are dirty and I don’t want to fuck with their assholes” (Professional Interview).

Some of the women mentioned foot fetish being a hard limit, which is interesting because some of the other women said this was something they would do. Of the women who said they would do foot play it was not because it was an interest of theirs but it does not bother them. Though the women differ it does seem that there are some hard limits that a majority of the women share.

4.3 How Toys are acquired for Play

All of the women who participated in the interviews were asked the question of “if you want to use a specific item as part of the scene or the submissive wants a specific item used, how does that item become acquired?” Some of the blogs also had data that answered this question. This question was to target whether the women would make the submissives buy all the toys or something else. I was trying to see if lifestyles would make their submissives buy toys that they wanted. The Lifestyles mention that they expect their submissives to bring their own toys to play with, but because of hygiene and they know they are comfortable with them. Farley, said,

They bring it. I prefer them all to bring their own toys. If it is insertables then you know whose been using it. If they have their own items you know that when you have been doing this before you know what you enjoy and you should have your own toy bag. I can provide implements, but you always want to focus on the cleanliness and hygienic possibilities. If you bring your own insertables then you know how it's going to fit inside of you. It doesn't matter who uses it you know it is going to fit inside of you, because you are the only one who has used that and you know that it is your juices. If I show up with a toy bag and open it up you don't know what's inside there, who has used it before you, how long ago someone used it before you. Plus if they buy their own it shows a sense of their commitment to it and ownership of their submission (Lifestyle Interview).

Martina has a relationship with her two submissives and talked about how it is just like receiving a gift in a relationship because she has a romantic relationship with her two submissives. Martina shared,

Since I have long term submissives, I have been with my boy for four years and been with my girl for three years, she has her own toy bag. He has his own toy bag and I have mine. We do go to the bigger events together and we have purchased some of the bigger items together, because some of that stuff gets really expensive. It really is an expensive habit. If he likes something (had to move because of the rain) We all have our own and if it is a big purchase that one of us wants we will talk about all of us going in on it. For the most part we all have our own toys (Lifestyle Interview).

Jodi, a lifestyle blogger, blogged about how there should be a standard across the board about toys for sanitation reasons. Jodi posted,

If you have a Domme that does not request that you have your own sex toys, please make sure that you have your own and that she uses those on you when you do find one to play with. I for one do not ever ask a sub/slave to buy anything other than sex toys. I am not using my dildos on them, they will not use theirs on me and there will be no cross contamination of anything in between.

The professionals mentioned that if the submissive wanted something specific they did not already have that they then had to provide that. There are times where they want a submissive to have a specific item that will only be used on them and make the submissive buy it. If they wanted to surprise a submissive with an item they would then buy it and give it to the submissive as a gift. Kate shared how toys are acquired with her,

It depends if I want to surprise them with it or if I just want them to take care of it. Recently that new sub I interviewed and then decided not to take on. He didn't fit any of the collars I had so he had to buy his own collar and leash because I do not allow men uncollared in my house. There have been times I wanted people to put on a Chasity [belt] and I pick it out then make people buy it themselves.

Debbie, a blogger, blogs about how she will buy gifts for her submissives and they will buy gifts for her. Debbie blogged,

Anything I do not possess and the submissive wants special for them they must provide. If it is a small supply like duct tape or rope it is easy to acquire then I will get it. I have most of these items on hand though. Anything I desire if it is for a particular sub I will get them to buy it if it is something I want to use on them.

One of the professionals I interviewed, Rachel, mentioned that a majority of the time she only uses her own equipment. There were only a few occasions when a submissive would bring something with them that they wanted to use in the scene.

Professionals often had a majority of the equipment that would be used during a scene. The only time items were bought by submissives is when they wanted an item or the women wanted them to have a specific item that touched the submissive's genitals. The lifestyles often required their submissives to have their own toys, but this was more for hygienic reasons and comfort. Also when a large item was desired whether by the submissive or the women themselves they would all contribute money to the item. This was a little different from what I expected. I expected that all the women including lifestyles would make the submissives buy the toys, but I did not expect that it was because of hygienic concerns and comfort.

4.4 Becoming Your Submissive

All of the women interviewed were asked how does someone become their submissive or how do they find submissives. Many of the blogs also provided insights into this question. Some of the professionals and even a couple of the lifestyle blogs mentioned how there is a process of different stages of communication before they agree to dominate a submissive. Baba explained, "They email and then there are information

emails sent back and forth. There is a sit down where there are basics discussed: I sit down with each client for 10 to 15 minutes (Professional Blog).”

Penelope described her process as: meeting with deserving submissives at her whim and if they take her fancy, things will progress further.

I dominate only those I choose, I deem worthy enough to interact with, whether online or honored enough to be in my presence. I have never spoken to one under the age of 30 who is mature enough or experienced enough in life to really fulfil what I want from a sub... I don't look for submissives, they look for me (Lifestyle Blog).

Penelope mentioned characteristics of a submissive that she will not dominate such as; being under 30 and not being experienced in life. If they have any of these characteristics she will not start the communication process. Six of the women also mentioned that one way they find submissives is through different BDSM websites, “I come by my subs through collar space. I have been meeting a lot of subs lately through Fetlife [as well] (Kate, Professional Interview);” “I composed an ad and posted it up on Fetlife (Pat, Lifestyle Blog);” “Usually you put a profile out there and you just let them know that you pro dom and they just come to you (Rachel, Professional Interview).”

Some of the women, like Amy, who were in relationships with their main submissive also dominated others at parties randomly, “For me it was very easy to find a submissive because I am married to him, so that makes it awfully convenient... There is one kid who comes to our parties and we have talked before and done a couple of different scenes (Lifestyle Interview).” Similarly, Marina said,

When I met my boy, it sounds cheesy, but we just clicked. There was the connection there and it just worked for us. We took a long time developing our bond. The same thing happened with my girl. We just met and it just stuck (Lifestyle Interview).

Tina, a professional dominatrix that worked at a dungeon in New York, was the only one who discussed how clients would schedule appointments. She did not have to set up her appointments with clients. The dungeon had a secretary that would handle scheduling appointments. Tina described the process that clients would go through to schedule an appointment,

If you were just scheduling not for somebody specifically you would come in and fill out the form of these are my interests and depending on who was working we might meet with the client or sub before the session. Then he would get a sense of personalities and then who would be most appropriate for the scene that he wanted to play out. Then you would hope that you would connect with somebody enough that they would be a regular and come see you specifically and regularly so you get more money (Professional Interview).

Sometimes when the women accepted a submissive, the submissive would not show up. Three of the women explained what happened: “Then another guy that I was interviewing to potentially be a sub for me we were texting and kept making plans to meet up and he just kept flaking (Amy, Lifestyle Interview).” Jodie noted, “I have had a few successes and a lot more disappointments, but you just have to truck on (Lifestyle Blog).” Kate also had no shows,

Fetlife subs have been more dependable, but Collarspace is definitely a shitty site there are a lot of fake people on there and Fetlifes makes it a little harder because it is like a fetish Facebook so there is a lot more to that one... There is a lot of flakes that are on there even though [Collarspace] generates a lot more source of income (Professional Interview).

4.5 Knowing Them

One area where lifestyles and professionals start to become different is how well they get to know their submissives. Lifestyles typically have a deeper connection and a relationship that includes more components than just BDSM, but this does not mean

professionals cannot have the same. Often times lifestyles are friends or in a romantic relationship with submissives. They all discussed that they want to know their submissives, especially before they play together. For example, Amy noted.

A guy I have topped at a party not too long ago, I don't know him as well. He is not a close friend or someone I hang out with outside of parties. He lives in a different city, so I don't know him as well, but we are on friendly enough terms. Then of course my husband, we have been together 9 years. I know him better than anybody else (Lifestyle Interview).

Martina is also in a relationship with both of her submissives "[I know them] very well. We are in a poly constellation together. It is 24/7 with the boy. I see him every day. The girl is just now moving back into the city, so her and I see each other about twice a week (Lifestyle Interview)."

Deeper connections are not exclusive to lifestyles; professionals can also have deeper connections with their submissives. Some even describe being friends or more with client submissives "I like my clients. I am friends with many of my clients. I love some of my clients as if they were family (Baba, Professional Blog);" "I like to cultivate long-term D/s relationships through which our dynamic evolves and our connection deepens over time (Debbie, Professional Blog)."

Four of the women described why they like getting to know submissives. They give different reasons such as it makes play better and less of a chance of unexpected risks that could occur. Farley explained,

I try to know them on the inside and out, literally and physically...There [are some] that are one hit wonders and think it is [snappy] and to me it's not like that. I don't like that. To me it's a relationship, because I want this to last and I want them to come back (Lifestyle Interview).

Maya also described why she likes to know her submissives she explained, “I would say if I don’t know them quite well I’m not interested in playing and interacting with them. The last thing any good dominant needs is the unexpected that could lead to risk (Lifestyle Interview).”

Only one professional I interviewed, Rachel, explained how she does get to know some of her clients well, but if she gets to know them that deeply they typically no longer have to pay to play with her. The other two professionals I interviewed described keeping submissives at a distance and not getting to know them well, because it is a dominant/client relationship. “The subs get to know a side of me overtime, but they will get little peeks into my life. I usually don’t sit around and tell them honest things about my life. I just sort of let them do my bidding (Kate, Professional Interview).” Tina explained how outside of the dungeon she likes to remain anonymous and so do many of the clients. “[I don’t know submissives] that well, which is how I preferred it. You could not even be giving me your real name and that’s totally fine, because after we’re done with this half hour/hour in this room and I see you on the subway platform we do not know each other (Professional Interview).”

When it comes to knowing submissives it seems that lifestyles are more likely to have some type of relationship with submissives outside of the realm of BDSM, and professionals are less likely to do this. The two professionals, who do not describe themselves as also being lifestyles, discussed keeping submissives at a distance. The professionals, who are also lifestyles, described getting to know their submissives more. One characteristic all could agree on is that even if there is no relationship outside of BDSM the dominant and submissive have to trust each other, which has been discussed a

little in the previous chapter. Mary Katherine (lifestyle blog) stated “in order to accept someone hitting you [then] you have to trust that they won’t harm you, and in order to accept hurting someone you have to trust that they communicated what they want.” Trust is a characteristic that will continue to be discussed throughout this study.

4.6 What Do You and Your Submissive Get

The women were asked what they believe they get out of being a dominant and what their submissives get out of being their submissive. The answers were very similar across the board. When the women talked about what they themselves get out of it common answers were that they loved to be in control, they received satisfaction (sexual and mental) from being a dominant, enjoy putting people in pain, having their needs met, getting to help others, and getting to be their true self. Rachel said, "I get that feeling of being in charge of somebody. Being able to make them do what you want them to do. I just get a kind of rush when we get into it. I also enjoy the physical sensation, too (Professional Interview).” In this statement she discusses the control aspect and satisfaction aspects. Another example, Martina noted,

It makes me feel like I am doing a service and I am helping them and that’s a really good feeling. I also really enjoy the service aspect of it, because it makes my life easier. It’s nice to have people who want to do things for me (Lifestyle Interview).

Amy ,a lifestyle interviewee, describes that it has a lot of benefits for her relationship with her husband. She says,

It makes me happy and it makes my husband happy and it brings us closer together. This is just a way for me to be me that feels authentic. I think he finds a great sense of purpose. He loves doing things for me and finding ways to please me. He really enjoys following my lead and becoming the person that he feels he was meant to be.

When the women described what their submissives get out of being their submissive they said many similar phrases when they described being a dominant. Feeling pain, sexual arousal, letting go, working out an issue of some kind, and safety to be themselves were all commonly described attributes given when discussing what submissives get out of being their submissive. Farley noted,

I do believe that what they get out of having a submissive experience with me is that they get relief. They get safety. They may say 'is it okay if I like to wear panties' and I say 'yes, here's a pair now go wear them (Lifestyle Interview).

Another example is Kate, a professional interviewee, who stated, They get to replay some part of their life that didn't go the way they wanted to in a situation that they have more control over. Basically they need to give up control in some way to have control over the situation. They need to replay it with someone they trust (Professional Interview).

A final example is Pat a lifestyle blogger. Pat stated "His willing and enthusiastic consent and his arousal [is what he gets]." This example came from one of her blogs where she described a scene with a submissive that was newer to her.

4.7 Ending It

When it comes to ending a relationship with submissives some of the women were similar with how they ended it, and some of the similarities were shared among both lifestyles and professionals. Professionals did seem to have an easier time ending a relationship with a client, but some lifestyles also had an easy time. Often times, when ending a relationship it is blunt, quick and it is initiated from the dominant. Kate described ending a relationship as;

Usually I just tell someone to fuck off and not contact me again. Usually they piss me off in some way and I'm like nope you're done, fuck you. [I'm] very blunt or ignore them until they go away. And the thing is that ignoring is a fetish and people really like it so you have to be careful about how you use it. (Professional Interview)

Penelope a lifestyle blogger noted the reason she ended a relationship with a submissive, "He annoyed me so much I threw him out last spring." Rachel said, "It's pretty easy actually. When they are a client you just tell them I refuse to see you anymore (Professional Interview)."

For some of the women they explained that they ended it because they ended up being a mismatch with a submissive. For two of the lifestyles it was because interests started to change from what they had been in the start of the relationship. The two lifestyles who did relate this had been in more than just a BDSM relationship with the submissive, making it harder to end it. Farley shared, "In actuality the 15 month one he broke up with me. He mentioned he wanted to be monogamous and I said 'sorry I'm not that way.' It was hard for him (Lifestyle Interview)." Martina also had a similar experience;

I did it once and it is terrible. We talked about it. We just had open communication like we always did and realized our needs and wants weren't meshing any longer. We just had several uncomfortable conversations and it ultimately ended (Lifestyle Interview).

For Martina she is still friends with this submissive. Farley on the other hand does not have a friendship with her ex-submissive. She told me that if she walks into a room and that submissive is there he walks out.

Tina the one professional stated ending a relationship because of mismatch also expounded how it could end for another reason as well.

It could go either one of two ways. Depending on their behavior that is causing the relationship to end, like if they are just being disrespectful or things are just getting too uncomfortable, then you can just simply tell the receptionist/dungeon mom to say I'm no longer taking this person as a client. They're not seeing me again. If it was someone that it just wasn't [working out or if] we had a couple of sessions together and it's like oh this was good, but why don't you try so and so next time. I am going to

offer an alternative because I'm not enjoying my sessions with you
(Professional Interview).

CHAPTER FIVE. OPINIONS OF THE OTHER

One of the main focuses of this study was to find out how lifestyle and professional dominatrices view each other. There appears to be quite a bit of hostility on the internet between the two. That was the inspiration for doing this study. The internet is a domain where dislike and hostility is abundant, and especially between these two groups, so I wanted to see if this was just the opinions of those willing to post on the internet or if a majority of lifestyles and professionals dislike each other in real life. This chapter answers research question three. The chapter discusses how there is some dislike, but there are also likes that both lifestyles have for professionals and vice versa. There has already been tension shown in this study from lifestyles, but this tension is going to be explained further in this chapter.

5.1 Differences between Lifestyles and Professionals

There is obviously a difference between lifestyle and professional dominatrices; otherwise there would not be two different labels. One of the main differences between the two is that for professionals there is an explicit exchange of money or monetary goods to dominate submissives and for lifestyles there is not. I asked the two types of women what are common differences between the two. The three professionals I interviewed mentioned money and a few other differences. For example, Kate stated,

It is really hard to fake or to fool people that you know what you are doing. Whereas if you are a lifestyle dom people don't mind if you are just starting out. They are just like "oh that's cute". You do [also] not have to constantly go out of your way with people and to meet people and promote yourself. You do not have to do those kinds of business things and obviously you do not make any money.

Tina, who worked in a dungeon in New York described differences that are common for those who work in a professional dungeon "Other than money, I think the mentality can

be different. When I clock out at the dungeon I am kind of turning that part of me off versus when your lifestyle it's an all the time thing." Rachel can compare the difference between professionals and lifestyles well, because she is both. Rachel focused more on the difference of the relationships with submissives, "Well you don't get into as deep of a relationship with a client. They are there for an hour. They kind of top from the bottom, because they are telling you what they want as opposed to I'm telling you what we are going to do."

All the interviewed Lifestyles and one blog mentioned that money is a difference. The fact that all the interviewed women said money shows me that the exchange of money is the dividing line between what makes someone a lifestyle or a professional. They mentioned many of the same differences that the professionals did like; pros being able to turn it off when not at work and depth of emotional connection. They did mention a few new differences about the ability to say no and the business part of being a professional. Martina noted, "They would be harder pressed to say no. There is probably less of a connection, and emotional connection is really important [to me]." Maya mentioned lifestyles when describing the differences between the two, "Lifestyles' rarely involves money other than the simple enjoyment of the interaction. One can presume that the professional is doing what they're doing in expectation that they are receiving money."

Pat, a lifestyle blogger, writes that the differences between lifestyles and professionals is that professionals are running a business and be business savvy. "One of them charges by the hour and the other one doesn't. A good answer to the question of lifestyle VS pro is that the latter are sex workers, so you shouldn't do it unless you are

prepared to be a small business owner/independent contractor in a marginalized industry.”

It is apparent that accepting money to dominate someone is a social construction of a professional dominatrix. Another potential social construction is being able to turn off the domination side of them when not working. This would only apply to the “professionals only” and not to those women who identify as both. This is a characteristic that should be studied further to see if it is a social construction of professional dominatrices.

There was a common misconception that lifestyles had about professionals. They believed that professionals did not have the ability to say no to their clients. In the previous chapter professionals disclose that if they are not interested in playing with someone they will tell them no. They can say no if they want to, but the possibility of money swaying their decision will be discussed in the next chapter. Professionals know that they will be receiving tribute for their services as most lifestyles do not. Kate stated that lifestyles do not have to be as experienced as professionals. This is understandable because if you want money then there is the expectation that the service must be worth it. This is not to say that lifestyles are not as experienced, but it is a learning process to figure out domination interests and specialties. All the women I interviewed had five plus years of experience and this statement does not apply to them. Another difference professionals mentioned was that being a lifestyle is an all the time activity as compared to them where they can turn that part of them off when they leave work.

Only a couple of differences were mentioned about what separates them from the other. This made me curious about what they believed made them similar.

5.2 Similarities between Lifestyles and Professionals

If there are differences between the two types then there are likely some similarities as well. I asked both lifestyle and professional dominatrices what they believed were traits the two shared. Three of the interviewees had stated during the “universal question” characteristics that they believe makes someone a dominant, rather than a specific type of dominatrix. Being in charge and participating in specific activities are areas that are common to each other. Amy a lifestyle mentioned, “Another similarity is that if you are going to do this professionally or even to be a lifestyle dom you have to enjoy being in charge. You have to enjoy taking control. You have to enjoy being a leader.” Martina also described two important characteristics, “I think that both are strong and independent females (Lifestyle interview).” Tina a professional noted, “Obviously controlling another person’s actions and just the general categories like flogging and typing people up,” are shared characteristics between lifestyles and professionals.

One lifestyle described how there are some lifestyles who also like to receive gifts from their submissives and that at times it is even required for play. The lifestyle expressing this opinion was not the dominatrix partaking in this exchange. She refers to lifestyles who expect tribute/gifts from their submissives as “grey area prodoms.” What is interesting is that lifestyles who do accept tribute/gifts do not believe they are like a professional at all, but this will be examined more later.

5.3 Hostility from Lifestyles to Professionals

The professionals that I interviewed made known the hostility they have experienced by lifestyles to me. Two of the professionals that were interviewed and two

blogs shared such hostility from lifestyles, simply because they are professionals. Rachel described the hostility and how she tried to combat it;

I know they don't always like pro doms... I know that every time I would go into a chatroom, CollarMe had a great chat room, people were very volatile as soon as you mentioned that you were a pro dom people were on you. Nothing you said was right. If you tried to say there is a need for pro doms in this lifestyle they would say "oh well, you just cheapen it. You are ruining it. It's not right to charge money for this. You're just a sex worker. You're no more than just a prostitute." I have heard it all. I know how they feel (Interview).

Baba, a professional blogger, also has experienced the hostility, but in person and not just online. "It is even looked down upon by many in the leather community. I have known certain leather organizations that have decreed that professional dominatrices could not be given administrative roles." Mary Katherine blogged about what she has experienced and from who; "I personally have experienced a lot of animosity from purely lifestyle domes." It seems that professionals will likely run into hostility, at some point especially online.

5.4 Negative and Positive Opinions of Professionals

The inspiration for this study came from hearing friends talk about the tension between lifestyles and professionals. While I was viewing message boards on BDSM sites it seems that the argument is often started by lifestyles. When asked "how do you feel about professionals" more than half of the lifestyles had negative opinions. Some of the comments had to do with professionals' attitude, ego, and trying to just get things. Pat, a lifestyle blogger's, experience with professionals has been negative, and she describes it as,

When it comes to the pros I feel like a lot of the women with this attitude are pulling rank because claiming you are more dominant this way sounds better than explaining that the average client doesn't get you horny, you

don't need that kind of risk in your life or that you have enough problems with the legality of your profession as it is.

Debbie has negative opinions as well, "I have also found and heard that many of these Pro Dominatrices are not real all they are after is people to give them things (Lifestyle blog)." It does seem that Debbie could have been influenced by what she heard from others, though. Farley gives the most detailed account of her opinions and ventilates a little about the reason why.

I think they have an unearthed ego when they come to BDSM events, because they think they are already owed because this is their career. I don't think they understand this is for fun and we are not going to pay you to be here. From the ones that I have experienced they really come off as really negative and have left a bad taste in my mouth... They just seem to come to the events to recruit for their own business. I'm like these people already paid five bucks to get in here chill out. I mean I'm sorry if it is a recession. I'm sorry if I took your business, but you know that is the way it works (Lifestyle interview).

There was an incident with a professional that occurred within the Kink Community that Farley is from that left a bad taste in her mouth. I cannot discuss any more details of the incident, because it could potentially disclose the location of this community and also potentially Farley's identity.

There was one professional blogger that mentioned believing that professionals can have an attitude or ego. Mary Katherine wrote, "I've found that those pros who don't do any lifestyle at all can be a little bit full of themselves." None of the other professionals discussed negative attitudes they had of other professionals.

Not all of the women had personal negative feelings towards professionals. Martina and Maya did comment on how there is an obvious sense of dislike in the community towards professionals. Martina stated, "There is a rift in the community

(Lifestyle Interview),” and Maya stated, “regrettably so many [lifestyle] dominants perceive that it is [only] a source of income [for professionals] (Lifestyle Interview).”

All four of the lifestyle interviews did mention that professionals did provide a service. There were other positive comments as well. Some even mentioned respecting professionals. Other positive distinctions that were stated show that professionals are not doing anything wrong. Martina feels,

Personally I have a lot of respect for them, and I do feel like they are doing a community service that I don't want to do. I feel like there is a place for them in the community. If they are happy with it then I'm all for it... I'm glad that they are there and they can provide a service that I can't (Interview).

Maya states a positive opinion because she knows a few professionals. Maya shared,

I know many of them... The majority of the ones that I respect do derive an income from it but their objective is not the income. Their objective is the pleasure of the interaction with the submissive. The fact that they do derive money from it simply allows them to do this without the interference of other work. The majority of the ones I know live enjoyable regular active lives and do domination as an additional activity. I do know two or three who that truly is their primary activity and income. I feel very comfortable around them, because if the word professional was ever to apply it definitely applies to them (Interview).

Pat postulated the difference between a true professional dominatrix and just a sex worker on her lifestyle blog.

There is a world of difference between a talented Dominant who is financially recompensed for her time and talents, and a sex worker who chooses to incorporate bondage and corporal punishment into the services she offers. Too many people make the mistake of assuming that the two are one and the same.

From the way she describes a true professional it can be assumed that she respects them.

Even on the internet there are some lifestyles who are accepting of true professionals.

5.5 Thoughts about Being a Professional

Since five of the lifestyles expressed positive or neutral opinions about professionals I asked if they would ever be one. Three of the lifestyles did mention how they had thought about becoming a professional. For some there were circumstances that prevented them from doing so. There was one blogger, Penelope, who had been a professional at one point and explains why she is not anymore, “for short periods of time throughout my life as a mistress I have requested payment in exchange for my time and talents dominating submissives... I can’t dominate naturally in return for money per hour or session.” Martina gave a reason, stating, “Yeah, I think I would. If it was legal I would probably do it too,” and Maya describes her location as being a major reason she is not a professional.

[I live in] a rural area and if one were to aspire to be a professional here I would have to pay people to come and see me. That is the complication... As I say, due to the need for privacy, living in a very rural, conservative, Bible belt part of the country it would be very problematic to be professional.

Jodi, a lifestyle blogger, has thought about it, but does not give a descriptive reason why, “I can honestly say that I have thought about going pro, but in reality it would never work”.

5.6 Feelings towards Lifestyles

The three professionals that I interviewed were asked how they feel towards lifestyle dominatrices. I was attempting to learn about two things. First if they disliked lifestyles, and second, if they did dislike lifestyles was it because of the hostility targeted at them. When I asked this question all three began to share how they have personally experienced hostility. The three felt fine with lifestyles and didn’t have an issue with

them, except when they were experiencing hostility. One unexpected result was that Rachel told me she was also a lifestyle, while the two who worked in dungeons stated they were not and expressed why they were not also lifestyles. Kate answered, “Girl power, everyone should be sexually free but it does not speak to me”. Tina gave more of detailed answer why, “Lifestyle is something I respect, but I could never do. For me it was a job that you go to and in my personal relationships I don’t want to be with someone who is submissive to me. I want to be with someone that is equal to me.” Professionals do not seem to have an issue with lifestyles until they are disrespected and have hostility directed towards them. The two professionals who worked in dungeons are not negative towards lifestyles, they just are not interested in being one.

5.7 Reasons Professionals are not also lifestyles

I asked Kate and Tina if they would ever be lifestyles and they said no. One reason that we already talked about is because they perceived it as too much work. What is interesting is that some of the lifestyles that I interviewed mentioned how being a professional seemed like it would be a lot of work, and that is one reason why they do not want to be a professional. Kate and Tina gave explanations of why they thought it was too much work. Kate explained,

No matter how much I try to say I’m not going to dom anymore as a pro dom that’s not true. I have so many other hobbies it just doesn’t appeal to me at all. I tried switching over to lifestyle. It was really time consuming and hard. That person needed a lot from me. It was very draining. Ultimately, it burned me really badly.

Tina also gives a similar answer to Kate’s,

I’m too lazy. That’s a lot of fucking work to be a lifestyle dominatrix. I think that’s another part of it sometimes it can be detrimental dependence streak someone who constantly needs my direction, my approval, my attention, to do things, I don’t have time for that.

Lifestyles and professionals believe that being the other is time consuming, a lot of work, and emotionally draining.

5.8 Professionals who are also Lifestyles

Only Rachel and two professional bloggers described themselves as also being lifestyles. They described how they kept business clients and lifestyle submissives separate. Debbie a professional blogger talks about when she first got onto the scene, “I was attending play parties and pursuing kinky relationships in my personal life. I keep my clients as such and stay known as a professional to those in the community.” Another blogger Mary Katherine explains her current relationships and how they can change, “I have several relationships that started out in a professional capacity that have grown to be much more and I am not against that dynamic change as long as both parties are getting what they need.” Rachel has also had some relationships change from clients to nonpaying submissives.

Mary Katherine and Rachel both share how they are okay with clients later becoming just submissives and changing the relationship dynamic. It is interesting how Rachel who never worked in a dungeon with others is also a lifestyle, and that Kate and Tina, who worked in big dungeons, are not lifestyles. Debbie started her professional career in a dungeon, but is now an independent professional. It is not shared on her blog whether she was a lifestyle then became a professional or if she was a professional first then became a lifestyle later. There is no background on Mary Katherine’s professional beginnings. For the women who worked in dungeons they may not also be lifestyles because BDSM activities were work duty and they only see it as a job. As for Rachel who did not start in a dungeon, it is a bonus that she can make income from it. All of the

professionals mentioned enjoying being a dominant and that having control over others, and they were not just in it for the money.

CHAPTER SIX. MONEY AND TRIBUTE

As discussed previously money is the dividing line between lifestyles and professionals. The only agreed upon universal characteristic for professionals is that they accept money to then dominate a submissive. The last chapter was focused heavily on the tension between the two. This chapter is going to dive a little deeper into the details of money and gifts. The first part of this chapter focuses almost exclusively on information that comes from professionals and the latter half then discusses information from both.

6.1 Cost of Sessions

When it came to cost of sessions there was no commonality among professionals. Every professional had their own price that they listed, but I did not interview any two professionals that worked in the same dungeon. A majority of the professionals that I got data from were currently working independent, of a dungeon. Tina, one of the professionals I interviewed, that did work in a dungeon in New York, mentioned how there was a standard pricing system for sessions, but when there were special requests made then the dominatrix could charge more. She explained why there was a standardized pricing system.

It was a 50/50 split between the dungeon and the dom. So an hour session was 200 and then a half hour session was 90-100 depending on what was going to be involved in it. Tips would range from a standard 20% tip to 100% or more depending on the client's financial stability.

Tips were 100% hers to keep. Tips were not part of the 50/50 split with the dungeon. Costs for four of the women, the other two professional interviews and two professional bloggers, ranged from \$100.00 per hour to \$400.00 per hour. Two of the women won't schedule a session that is less than 2 hours, and three stated they will do

multiday sessions. Debbie (blogger) posted on her blog that for multiday sessions she charges \$3500.00 per day. Mary Katherine posted her opinions about pricing on her blog,

I think that everyone should be allowed to set their own prices as they see fit, if you don't agree with those prices then don't see those providers. I don't think anyone except the provider should set the rates.

Factors that come into play when setting price is what a dominatrix is willing to do, where they practice at (dungeon or independently), and level of experience. The women who are charging \$250.00 or more appear to have fewer hard limits or did not list them on their website. They also lived in cities that are among the top 5 largest cities in the United States; and Debbie mentioned that she has over 20 years of experience and the other two bloggers have over 10. Two of the bloggers mentioned over 10 different specializations and noted that they were willing to give most things a try, besides the three most common hard limits (scat, children, and animals). The two independent dominatrices that I interviewed, Kate and Rachel, were not able to charge as much, because most clients in Indiana are not able to afford consistent sessions over \$150.00 per hour. They also do not specialize in as many categories, and have more hard limits.

6.2 What If They Cannot Pay

Everyone falls on hard times and have to make sacrifices, but if practicing BDSM creates a freeing feeling then it is likely something that will not want to sacrifice. For submissives who ordinarily pay a professional dominatrix, if they are unable to suddenly pay this could cause some issues. Often it is assumed that professionals only want money, so many believe if you can't pay then sessions are done until the dominatrix can be paid again. This opinion is the reason why I asked professionals "if a submissive could not pay what would you do?" The answers given contradict this common assumption made about

professionals. Rachel explained what she would do in this situation, “If they say well money is kind of tight right now I always offer to barter. Can you do some work for me? They appreciate that. [I will say] Come paint my house for an hour and I will trade you an hour session.” Baba blogged what she has done in the past for clients, “I have negotiated and bartered session time for people whose income really cannot meet my standard without dipping into the milk money. Usually they make up for the tribute by cleaning my studio or offering other services.” Kate, a professional who started in a dungeon and now works independently, shared with me what she will do and an experience when she had a submissive who was not forthcoming about their money,

I have accepted other things especially because I do female supremacy it’s a form of worship. People bring me food, coffee, flowers, and produce. The regular that I use to see ran into some money problems and it screwed up our relationship, because I would rather you tell me upfront. If you are honest and upfront with me then I am usually willing to work with people pretty well whether it is delaying or whatever. If you tell me after the fact then we are just done.

All are willing to negotiate with submissives to continue the relationship even if the submissive cannot give money. In Kate’s case a submissive was not honest about falling on hard times and the relationship ended because of it. If the submissive would have been honest from the start they could have renegotiated terms. This is likely the case with most professionals that if a submissive is honest about their finances then they are willing to barter with them. Losing a client because they currently cannot pay is a worse outcome than losing a little bit of income for the time being. This is really only the case for professionals who work outside of a dungeon.

As for the professional dungeons, there is less of a possibility that bartering for play is not on the table. I asked Tina, the professional who worked in a dungeon in New York, what they did when a submissive could not pay, and I was surprised by the answer.

Well generally the money was collected up front, so if they couldn't pay for their services they would never get to the session. We had some of the house slaves start doing that because they couldn't pay for whatever. If you couldn't pay for your session the mistress would still get paid, but your time would be negotiated by cleaning up the locker room and the toilets.

I found it surprising that the dungeon would work with under-paying submissives, so they could still enjoy play in return for cleaning undesirable places in the dungeon.

6.3 If the Price is Right

Only the professionals were asked if there were certain activities they were willing to do if the price is right. None of the blogs directly answered this question. Mary Katherine's (professional) blog hinted at an answer by stating "I think there is only a problem when someone provides things that make them unhappy" suggesting that if it is not a hard limit she will consider it. The three professional interviewees stated that yes there were certain activities they were willing to do if the price is right, but nothing that was a hard limit of theirs. All shared a story of when the price was right. For example, Kate shared one such experience,

The price is right is kind of the real time thing as far as it goes with my subs. If they want a particular scene, because it is not from me then it has to be if the price is right. Recently someone wanted me to do three hours of ball trampling. I charged him \$700.00 that day and then \$100.00 prior to the session online. He brought his own trample table.

Rachel shared about a time that one of her submissive clients wanted a whole weekend, she charged much less than Debbie does for that sort of arrangement. She shared the price she charged for that weekend with me at a later date. Rachel noted,

Someone requested a whole weekend, which I don't normally do. He was willing to pay a lot of money. I can't remember now how much it was. I usually only keep it to an hour, but for the money I thought okay yeah I will do it. As far as an activity I don't do normally because someone said "if you do this I will give you extra", then no.

Rachel agreed to do the weekend, because it was not a hard limit and the submissive did not want new play; just play for a long period of time. Tina, even though she worked at a dungeon, was still allowed to have hard limits. Tina shared,

Anything with bodily fluids costs more, to varying degrees. If you just wanted to be peed on it was maybe 20 bucks more. If it was shitting or vomiting then you were looking at a 350-dollar minimum, because not only do you as a mistress do you have to prepare your body to do that but there's clean up involved. There was a sliding scale.

6.4 Gifts

I asked all the women I interviewed if they had ever accepted gifts from submissives. This question was not exactly about tribute, which is accepting gifts in exchange for play. The lifestyles do discuss their opinions on tribute, which answers research questions four and five. It was a question to see if they did get gifts and a segway into the topic of tribute and accepting or denying it. A couple of the blogs also shared gifts that they have accepted. I expected that professionals would accept gifts and they received similar items as the lifestyles did. Rachel, Tina and Kate all have accepted gifts. Rachel shared a time when she was given a gift from a submissive a few days after play as an extra thank you. She was given "A pair of high heeled boots and a red corset that had bottoms to match." Tina was also given gifts freely, but there was an expectation that went with it. She notes, "A couple of paddles and shoes. Every mistress had an amazon wish list...It was totally self-serving, like shoes and corsets would be [given] because the submissive wants to see you in them." From her answer, it is apparent that a

submissive buying a gift has an expectation to have it incorporated into play, but this does not mean that they will not pay for that play. Kate is the only one who discussed exchanging gifts for play, also known as tribute, but she does have a preference of what is being given “I prefer an amazon gift card, because then no one can know my order or address and they are less likely to flake out on me.” Debbie, one of the professional bloggers, mentioned that she had bought her submissive a gift for being good. “He is always happy to gift me toys, and I had selected a gorgeous CB (cock and ball) leash made of silver and blue onyx. Perfect for an ornately decorated and otherwise naked court eunuch.” This is a common practice among lifestyles, but is a bit surprising for a professional.

A couple of the lifestyles did mention accepting gifts or donations from submissives. They also did say that these gifts were only accepted because it was understood that it is freely given and has no strings attached. Farley shared gifts she has been given and went into a story about one. Farley has been given, “panties, toys, corsets, being picked up from the airport when I go on trips. I have [been given] two cars. For one my car was stolen so somebody brought me a thousand dollar Taurus and left it in my drive way with the keys in it.” Maya has also been given gifts, but she calls them donations. “On occasion people have donated things. One person who actually came here donated, unexpectedly, a complete set of brand new unused leather cuffs and restraints.”

Both of these women may accept gifts or donations, but the gifts are freely given. Penelope, a lifestyle blogger, wrote on her blog how she expects tribute if a submissive wants to get her attention. Then if he is deemed worthy that he must continue to give her tribute if he wants play. She mentions a couple of the things she wants as tribute on her

website, "...plenty of sexy high heels coming to the door on a regular basis doesn't hurt. Write me fantastic content I can put on my websites. Offer your skills and services such as accounting, business acumen or referrals. Be a taxi service, buy my groceries, or pay my credit card."

With Penelope's acceptance of tribute a question appears. What is the limit that makes someone a professional or a lifestyle? As mentioned previously, the definition of a professional is exchanging BDSM services for a monetary value. The definition of a lifestyle is a person that does not exchange BDSM services for a monetary value. It is interesting to see a lifestyle who accepts and even expects tribute for play when this would seem to go against the definition of a lifestyle. Not only that, but she also states on her site that she is not a professional, because she does not accept money. So, is money the characteristic that divides the two or is there disagreement about tribute among lifestyles? This is one of the main foci of this paper along with how tribute is viewed, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.5 Feelings on Money

All of the women were asked if they have ever accepted money from a submissive and if so did they feel it changed anything. Obviously, professionals have accepted money and were in favor of money over other types of tribute, like clothing and shoes. Professionals also did not feel that there was an issue accepting money, because it is understood it is an exchange with terms and conditions. When I asked the professionals if they felt accepting money made them "submissive" to the actual submissive they all agreed that it didn't. Kate replied, "I take them and use them for whatever they have and that includes money. I feel like then it makes me more dominant because I am setting up

the scene and deciding everything and still getting paid for it.” Kate finds that getting paid to humiliate and make someone submit to her makes her more powerful, because if they were not paying her then they would not be getting any play at all. She gets paid and she also gets to play, which is something she enjoys doing. Rachel stated, “I have never felt submissive to any of my clients. If I do feel that way, and they start topping too much from the bottom, they’re out.”

Professionals do not allow their submissive clients to feel dominant during sessions. This does not mean that they do not consider their fantasies and their wants. What it does mean is that during play, the professional must be so good at being in control that the submissive who paid forgets that he paid for the scene. Professionals fulfill their fantasies, as well. Often, they seek out submissives whose fantasies and play interests align with theirs.

What is interesting is that one of the lifestyles who made a negative generalization about professionals, has herself accepted money from a submissive, but as a gift and not as tribute. The other lifestyles who respect professionals and do not have a negative views of them have never themselves accepted money. They don’t judge those who do, but they personally never have. The lifestyle, who had accepted money when asked about whether charging money made a dominant “submissive” to their actual submissive had a potentially contradictory view to her action. Farley said, “I think if they charge, they are submissive to the money, not the submissive.”

Her acceptance of money was not an exchange, it was more of a donation from a submissive when she fell on hard times. She believes those who do accept money as an exchange for play are submissive to the money, because they need to make money and

then can't say no. Penelope explains why she does not accept money for play. She said it was, "Due to the fact that submissives who pay per hour, per session or per activity seem to mistakenly think they hold some power over the mistress involved." This is not an opinion she holds, it is an opinion she found among some submissives.

The other two lifestyle women I interviewed did not believe that professionals are instantly submissive because they accept money. One did believe that a relationship could change if details between the professional and submissive were not worked out well, but just accepting money for play does not necessarily mean the dominant is submissive. Martina was not sure how she felt about this idea because she could see both sides. She said, "If the gift is contingent on play then who really has the power in that scenario? If you are accepting a gift for play then it is really payment and at that point it is payment for services rendered. I don't know if that would necessarily change the dynamic."

6.6 Issues that Tribute and Gifts Create

Lifestyles were asked if they believed tribute and gifts created issues. This section also answers research questions four and five. When I asked about gifts, many started to think of small little material gifts that they did not believe created issues. But, some, like Amy, did have specific issues with asking for tribute. Amy believes,

It really just depends on what the dominant has negotiated beforehand. If it is something where it is an abusive situation then of course I don't agree with that. If it is a situation where a dom will just be like "if you want to talk to me you first must pay me tribute. Here is my amazon wish list." I mean I can see why they would put something like that, because she is trying to weed out the guys who are not serious, but I'm not crazy about the idea.

Amy does not appreciate when dominants want tribute just to talk to submissives, but does understand that it is a practice to weed out unreliable submissives. There are a lot of submissives who will flake out on dominants when going through the initial process before playing. This flaking out has been mentioned earlier in this chapter by Kate and is the reason why she prefers amazon gift cards or money to other forms of tribute. Amy does not agree with this practice and would not implement it. Maya only sees an issue when the submissive has an expectation that play must be exchanged. She said, “If in the eye of the giver they perceive the gift or the tribute to imply some sense of obligation on the part of the dominant then yes there is an issue. If it is freewill, with no strings, then I do not see any issue with it.” Maya can see how issues could be created if a submissive gives a gift and expects service in return when that has not been established in the relationship. She is open to gifts that are freely given. Pat seems to have an issue with gifts and tribute no matter what the motivation is. She has issues because, “just being dominant and a woman in no way means I deserve to be compensated for my interactions with the opposite sex (Lifestyle Blog).” Pat believes that many women who are dominants exploit men, because there are less women who are dominant than men who are submissive.

When I asked if extravagant gifts create issues more lifestyles agreed and said they would question the submissives motivation associated with the gift. Amy said,

If somebody that I have topped at a party a couple of times all of the sudden came up to me and said “hey I bought this gold neckless for you to say thank you for all the topping”. I would question why they are doing this, because we don’t have this kind of established dynamic. I would question their motives and wonder if they are looking at me in a more romantic sense, because then we might have to have a potentially uncomfortable conversation.

Farley also had issues, “Yes, because then there’s a preconceived notion that you owe me, depending on the submissive that you deal with.” There seems to be a consensus with lifestyles who do not expect tribute that gifts that are extravagant, like jewelry, or are not tied to BDSM gear, cause issues. Instantly, dominants question the intentions of the giver, because there are likely going to be expectations tied to such gifts. These lifestyles want to avoid any such expectations, because they do it for the pure enjoyment and any expectation ruins that purity for them.

CHAPTER SEVEN. FIFTY SHADES OF DISAPPOINTMENT

7.1 Thoughts and Feelings towards 50 Shades of Grey

When it came to expressing feelings about the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy, it did not matter if the women were professional or lifestyle- all disliked the book. Among lifestyles, some of the women mentioned that they disliked the writing of the book and it gave an unrealistic view of BDSM. One admitted she would not even read it for these reasons. Amy said,

Ugh don't get me started. Full disclosure I have not read the books and I do not intend to...From what I have read it is just such an unrealistic view of what kink is about. For me it is like "oh great, here is a b.s. representation of what I really like." Fifty shades of Grey is bull Shit and I just can't.

Martina did read them, but was not a fan. Her critique is, "I read them out of curiosity. The writing is fucking atrocious. It is terrible writing. I didn't like Twilight either and it was Twilight without the vampires." Rachel felt similarly, "Awful. So unrealistic it's not even funny." Tina said, "When 50 shades came out I attempted to read it. Not only did the subject matter infuriate me, the awful writing made me, I couldn't get drunk enough to do it." It seems that the overwhelming majority did not like the books, but their critiques did not stop at the writing.

All the professional women I interviewed also stressed how they disliked the books because of how they portrayed BDSM and those who participate in BDSM. Some noted how components that are essential for a BDSM scene to occur are absent in the books. Others had issues with how the dominant (Christian Grey) is written in the book. Kate feels, "[What I do] it is not Fifty Shades of Grey. Violations of someone's trust or their limits, like true violations, are taken very seriously in this community. If you violate

a person it is over for you. We will black list you. The whole thing is play. It's a game. It is not real. No one really worships me." Rachel also shared the issues that she has with the storyline,

The guy has his choice of all the submissives in the world. He has all of the money, he has got all of the toys; and he picks a vanilla girl. Then they make it out that there is something wrong with him. They make it out that he got into it because he was forced into it, so he got into it to work out his frustrations and things like that. It is very unrealistic and it portrays the BDSM lifestyle very poorly. I can tell you in real life, if someone is heavy into BDSM and I mean cannot live without it and they latch up with someone who is vanilla and wants you to get out of it, it's not going to last. You can't give it up. You are hard wired that way.

Tina had many feelings about the books,

Fuck Fifty Shades of Grey. It is not healthy BDSM. It's an abusive relationship. The safe word rule is non-negotiable. Consent is non-negotiable for any BDSM, whether it be lifestyle or pro. That's what BDSM is based on. It's based on trust. It's based on consent. It's based on pathways of communication. Fifty Shades of Grey is the exact opposite of that. There is no communication. He takes advantage of her mental state.

Even though there is a lot of dislike out there for this series some of the lifestyle women I interviewed did mention that it did have one redeeming quality, it got people who were always interested in kink a way to express their interest to their partner. The book made BDSM a common enough topic that those who had never explored it before were able to discuss it and explore BDSM with their partner. Farley said, "I think it's a great gate way PERIOD." Martina can see the good in the series and describes it as such,

I think it served a good purpose, because it did open the door to a lot of people who didn't have access to discussing BDSM before. I think if you can get anybody talking within their relationships between whoever they are with boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife, I think anytime you can get people talking about sex and sexuality it is a good thing. So, I think it served a really good purpose. Also, I think it opened up the flood gates to our community and whether that is a good thing I think is yet to be seen. I think that there have been a lot of hiccups along the way and a lot of people come in un-educated and they come into the scene not without

wanting the education and just want it to be play time and that is a little scary. Specifically, because a lot of our events happen at a bar. There is alcohol which lowers inhibitions.

Maya had concerns, similar to Martina, about a potential adverse effect for those who read the book seeking to dabble in BDSM and going to a kink night at a bar as their first experience. Her advice to avoid this dilemma, is someone casually exploring BDSM should not start by attending a huge party and consuming alcohol. Maya also recognized the good the book did for society, while also weighing how it could confirm common misconception of BDSM. Maya said, “I think on one hand it is a wonderful resource for those who understand what’s real to read it. Regrettably most people who read it, it confirms things they heard than confirming things they knew.” When Maya refers to those who know what is real, she is talking about BDSM practitioners and those who have taken time to understand the real aspects of BDSM

Overall all the women disliked the book. After talking to these women, they had many other fictional books on BDSM that they would suggest be read by those who enjoyed Fifty Shades of Grey. This would give such readers a more realistic view of BDSM. These other books portray BDSM in a more accurate way. My interviewees wished these better books would have been what became popular, so society would have been exposed to true BDSM and not a book that is about an abuser that disguises his abuse in BDSM. None of the blogs had information on how they felt about the Fifty Shades of Grey books.

CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION

This research project was undertaken for the purpose of exploring aspects of the lives of women who engage in BDSM activities, utilizing both social constructionism and exchange as the theoretical approaches. The first categorical division was that between participants in any BDSM encounter—the fundamental split in any such session: dominants and submissives. In accord with this labeling, the dominants are in charge and the submissives are, more or less, the dominants' subjects or followers. The key focus of this project is mainly on the dominant group, exploring their perspectives on their BDSM practices. Within that scope, a particular aim was revealing similarities and difference between two types of female BDSM dominants, the 'Professionals' and the 'Lifestyles.'

It was expected that the key difference between the groupings would be that one of these, the professionals, mainly engaged in these activities for pay, generally money, whereas the other group, the lifestyles, engaged in the practice without any form of payment expectation. Because such payments would sometimes be made in forms other than money, the expression 'tribute' was (and is) used to denote payments more generally. These might include expensive gifts such as fine jewelry. While it was clear all along that the acceptance of tribute was the key item separating the types, there appeared numerous caveats to this idea, as briefly noted below.

The project also sought to obtain insights as to the extent of solidarity or animosity that may have also separated the groups. As might have been expected, there was substantial, though not universal, disunity between the two types. Disdain for the other group was mainly found among the lifestyles. They often bristled at the idea of accepting tribute and were strongly disinclined to be seen that way. Denunciations went

as far as suggesting that the professionals were hardly different from prostitutes, and that they were “ruining” the practice. Still, that amount of harshness was comparatively rare. Some lifestyles were not particularly critical of professionals and understood the need to make a living. Conversely, the professionals expressed few misgivings about their lifestyle counterparts, except when they were being badgered by them. Such badgering or criticisms were largely conducted online, mostly in blogs.

By the same token, however, there was actually variation among the lifestyle interviewees with regard to the prohibition against accepting gifts in all contexts. Some clearly would accept gifts under most circumstances, others would also do so, but only under ‘acceptable’ contexts. Generally put, the idea was that gifts or tribute (short of money itself) would be acceptable as long as it wasn’t “pay” for services, as in prostitution. Considered especially innocuous as gifts, were such items as the sex toys and other props that were utilized in BDSM scenes.

Other additional differences included their relations with their submissives and the types of settings where they typically took part in the activities. For example, professionals generally attempted to –and largely succeeded—keep their submissives at bay, maintaining a client-provider relationship. By contrast, lifestyles usually had relationships with their submissives, though not always as exclusive lovers. In addition, many of the professionals carried out their BDSM for pay activities in ‘dungeons,’ -- facilities organized by another entity, akin to the role of “the house” in Las Vegas gambling halls, and some of the proceeds thereby earned would accrue to the house. Generally, the necessary props were also furnished by the dungeons. The lifestyles, of course, had no such help and that partially explains why they were hardly adverse to

“gifts,” such as toys and props, even as they had issues with other forms of ‘tribute’ -- even beyond money.

There were numerous similarities uniting professional and lifestyles. They engaged in similar forms of ‘play’ during their BDSM sessions. Of course, all the women have their own spin on their play, but for the most part they fit in four similar categories; impact play, humiliation, bondage, and cross-dressing men. In addition, the groups’ expressed similar hard and soft limits—hard limits being practices they avoided at all times, such as engaging in activities with children or with animals. Soft limits, of course, were more flexible boundaries.

There were a number of lessor, but still interesting, findings. One fascinating, though unexpected finding that emerged in the interviews, was how a few of the women realized quite early in their lives –early teenage years—that they were attracted to BDSM practices. In addition, professionals and lifestyles alike were uniformly critical, sometimes vociferously, of the bestselling book, Fifty Shades of Grey, which purported to portray the social world of BDSM. On the other hand, they tended to concede that the books (and subsequent movies) did produce one positive item: it generated discussion throughout society about the BDSM world and helped to bring the practice into a more mainstream position. Finally, in contrast to a position taken by Viviana Zelizer’s work (1989, 2000) our interviewees did not believe that accepting money from their clients, as the professional do, actually makes them “submissive” to their clientele. In fact, the professionals believed that it made them even more powerful than their submissives, because they were receiving money to *exercise power* over them.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the greatest strengths of this project was the theories used to guide the interview questions. The theories helped to provide a basis to compare the findings of this study. Another strength of the work would be the triangulation of sources. This study did not rely on data solely from the interviewees; it also used data from blogs. The blogs and interview data helped confirm one another's findings, and thus the findings as-a-whole, because the two sources provided similar perspectives, within category (professional or lifestyle) in regard to the key questions. The study also benefitted from rich quotes, where little interpretation was needed to derive the participants' views, and it examined a social area with little existing research thus far.

As with all qualitative research, the findings could not be generalized to larger groupings. Another limitation, clearer in retrospect, is that the study probed too many topics. This increased the scope of questioning, but limited the depth that might have been possible with fewer topics to cover. A final limitation is that this study took place in a smaller city where BDSM is largely frowned upon. In a larger city, where BDSM is more accepted, perspectives may have proved even more insightful since hesitancy stemming from stigmatization would have been minimized.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Lifestyle Dominatrix Interview Questions

1. What adjective would you use in front of Dominatrix/domme to identify yourself?
2. What are some universal characteristics that make someone a lifestyle dominatrix?
3. How did you come to find out that you enjoyed BDSM?
4. How did you come to find out that you are a dom rather than a sub?
5. How did you decide you were a lifestyle dominatrix rather than being a professional?
6. What is more your type of domination?
7. What types/categories of BDSM are you not willing/interested in doing?
8. What is a common BDSM activity or behavior you do with submissives?
9. How does one become your submissive or how do you find submissives? (the second way of phrasing this question may be easier to comprehend and to ask probing questions after)
10. How well do you know your submissive(s)? (Relationship outside of the BDSM one or general knowledge about their life outside this particular relationship)
11. What do you get out of being a dom (like feeling) and what do you believe your submissive(s) get from being your submissive?
12. If you want to end a relationship with a submissive how do you proceed?
13. How do you feel about professional dominatrixes?
14. Would you ever be a professional?

15. What do you believe are the main differences between pro dommes and lifestyle dommes?
16. Do you believe there are any similarities between pro dommes and lifestyle dommes? If so what are they?
17. If you want to use a specific item as part of the scene or the submissive wants a specific item used, how does that item become acquired? (Give these examples if they are confused: do they buy it and give it to you, give you the money to buy it, or do you buy it with your own money or another way?)
18. Do you ever get gifts from your submissive(s)? (If they say no ask if they would accept gifts)
19. If so, what kind of gifts do you receive? (only ask if they say yes to question 17.)
20. How do you react or how would you react if a submissive gave you a large sum of money or an extravagant gift? (ex. Expensive Jewelry or a car)
21. Do you think a gift like mentioned in question 19 would create issues? (give examples if they ask for clarification: Like unstated obligations, a loss of dominance, any other kind of issue similar to that)
22. Have you accepted money in a relationship? (If no ask if they would ever accept money?)
23. If so did it change anything in your opinion after accepting? (please explain how)
24. Do you have any moral issues if a submissive gives a gift or money to a dominant?
25. Do you believe that charging money makes a domme submissive to their sub more so than if they did not charge money?

26. Do you believe accepting tribute/gifts makes a domme submissive to their sub more so than if they do not?

27. Is there anything you feel you need to tell me or suggestions or just want to tell me that you feel will enrich my knowledge and the audiences' knowledge about this topic?

How do you feel about 50 shades of grey?

Demographic

Race:

Age Range:

Sexual Orientation:

Does BDSM have to be part of your sex life or sexuality?

Appendix B: Professional Dominatrix Interview Questions

1. What adjective would you use in front of Dominatrix/domme to identify yourself?
2. What are some universal characteristics that make someone a professional dominatrix?
3. How did you come to find out that you enjoyed BDSM?
4. How did you come to find out that you are a dom rather than a sub?
5. How did you decide/get into being a professional dominatrix?
6. What is more your type of domination?
7. What types/categories of BDSM are you not willing/interested in doing?
8. What is a common BDSM activity you do with submissives?
9. How did they come to be your submissive or how do you find submissives? (ask if they have a steady number or do they have one-time clients)
10. How well do you know your submissive(s)? (Relationship outside of the BDSM one or general knowledge about their life outside this particular relationship)
11. What do you get out of being a dom (like feeling) and what do you believe your submissive(s) get from being your submissive?
12. If you want to end a relationship with a submissive how do you proceed?
13. How do you feel about lifestyle dominatrixes?
14. Would you ever be a lifestyle dominatrix?
15. What do you believe are the main differences between pro domme and lifestyle domme?
16. Do you believe there are any similarities between pro dommes and lifestyle dommes? If so what are they?

17. If you want to use a specific item as part of the scene or the submissive wants a specific item used, how does that item become acquired? (Give these examples if they are confused: do they buy it and give it to you, give you the money to buy it, or do you buy it with your own money or another way?)
18. Do you ever get gifts from your submissive(s)?
19. If they say they do get gifts then what kinds of gifts?
20. How much does a session cost with you?
21. If a sub could not pay you for their services how would you react?
22. Are there limits or categories you are willing to do that you are not interested in if the price is right? (ex. Like a golden shower, or diaper play)
23. Do you believe you lose a bit of your dominance over a sub if you charge them money?
24. Do you believe accepting tribute/gifts makes a domme submissive to their sub more so than if they do not?
25. Is there anything you feel you need to tell me or suggestions or just want to tell me that you feel will enrich my knowledge and the audiences' knowledge about this topic?

How do you feel about 50 shades of grey?

Demographic

Race:

Age Range:

Sexual Orientation:

Does BDSM have to be part of your sex life or sexuality?

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Master's Thesis

August 2015- September 2017

“Comparing and Contrasting Lifestyle and Professional Dominatrices: Does Tribute Belong in the Lifestyle”

Committee Chair:

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Presentations

Oral Presentations

Farrington, Elizabeth. “Reasons People Give For Using Condoms (and The Complexity within Relationships).” International Association for Relationship Research, July 2016, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Farrington Elizabeth. “Reasons People Give For Using (or Not Using) Condoms.” Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences 86th Annual Meeting, September 2015, Evansville, IN.

Poster Presentation

Farrington, Elizabeth. “Does Tribute Belong in the Lifestyle: A Comparative Study of Lifestyle and Professional Dominatrices.” IUPUI’s Research Day, April 2016, Indianapolis, IN.

Publications

Farrington, Elizabeth, David Bell, and Aron DiBacco. (2016) “Reasons People Give For Using (or Not Using) Condoms.” *AIDS and Behavior*.

Awards and Honors

David C Bell Theory Fellowship in Sociology

February 2016

Department of Sociology, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

For “Comparing and Contrasting Lifestyle and Professional Dominatrices: Does Tribute Belong in the Lifestyle”

IUPUI Department of Sociology Thesis Expense Grant

March 2016

Department of Sociology, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

For “Comparing and Contrasting Lifestyle and Professional Dominatrices: Does Tribute
Belong in the Lifestyle”