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ABSTRACT

The misconception that sadomasochism (SM) is violence or abusive behavior has resulted in significant persecution against SM-identified individuals in the form of discrimination, harassment and physical attacks. Historically, women who practiced SM were targeted within the feminist movement due to official opposition against sadomasochistic practices led by the National Organization for Women (NOW). Current statistics of incidents of discrimination, harassment and physical attacks against SM-identified individuals and SM groups are compiled by the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF). Sources include published literature, surveys, NCSF reports, media articles, and data available on the Internet provided by SM groups and activists.

Discrimination of SM-Identified Individuals

By Susan Wright

For the purposes of this essay, sadomasochism or "SM" includes a wide range of alternative sexual practices including: consensual power exchange, body modification,

roleplay, and physical and emotional stimulation in a sexual context. The term "SM groups" refers to non-profit membership organizations which provide social and educational opportunities for SM-identified individuals to gather and learn about safer sex techniques.

The SM community in America consists of over five hundred SM groups that promote consensual SM behaviors in weekly, monthly and annual events (NCSF, retrieved 3/10/03). There are over two-hundred-fifty weekend SM events that are produced every year by SM groups and businesses in accordance with local, state and Federal laws (Rhodes, retrieved 2/26/03). These events include SM conferences, camps and retreats, leather contests for bars, cities, states, regions and International titles, "Runs" (gatherings) held by fraternal clubs, and street fairs.

In addition, the development of the Internet has enabled adults who are curious about SM to access important educational forums both in-person and on-line. Numerous businesses cater to the needs of sadomasochists by selling books, clothing and equipment.

The growth of this subculture can be seen in mainstream marketing strategies that target adults who have an interest in SM. This includes advertisements in major magazines by Dove Bars and Absolut vodka, as well as a Dannon Yogurt commercial featuring a couple with the wife dressed as a French maid, highlighting one common role-play scenario engaged in by SM-identified individuals.

Despite the prevalence of this subculture, the social stigma against SM is so pervasive that individuals tend to hide their sexual preferences from their spouse, family, friends, medical doctors and/or mental health professionals. Many sadomasochists are "closeted," meaning they conceal their sexual desires or behaviors for fear of being

judged, persecuted, and discriminated against. In one recent survey of adults who were members of an SM group, seventy percent of the respondents claimed they did not reveal their interest in SM (NCSF, 1998, p. 2).

Because individuals conceal their SM practices, there are few real-life representations of ordinary SM-identified individuals. Thus the stigma against SM is perpetuated by media stereotypes and religion-based moralistic opposition.

SM and the Feminist Movement

Lesbians became visible leaders in the early feminist movement, which supported political, economic and social equality of the sexes (NOW, retrieved 2/26/03). The National Organization for Women (NOW) passed a conference resolution in 1971 resolving to work toward the goal of lesbian rights through education and legislation (NOW, retrieved 2/26/03). However, this embrace of lesbian rights within the feminist movement did not include SM-identified women.

Feminist Opposition to SM Practices

Feminists throughout the 1970's were caught up in the so-called "sex wars," a decades-long conflict carried out in both the media and legislatures to determine feminism's position on sex. Some vocal feminists rejected pornography and sadomasochistic practices, while other feminists supported pornography and SM as issues of personal freedom. Sexual freedom topics were questioned for inclusion by some feminists for the April 24, 1982 Barnard conference "The Scholar and the Feminist," in New York City (Vance, 1984).

Members of the National Organization for Women passed a conference resolution entitled *The 1980 Delineation of Lesbian Rights Issues* (SM Policy Reform Project, retrieved 2/26/03). This resolution stated that NOW rejected sadomasochism along with pornography, public sex, and pederasty, because these issues "violate the feminist principles" upon which NOW was founded.

In particular, *The 1980 Delineation of Lesbian Rights* stated "sadomasochism is an issue of exploitation and violence, not affectional/sexual preference/orientation." This belief was further expanded in NOW's 1982 "Concept Paper on 1980 Conference Resolution" which was attached to the original resolution (SM Policy Reform Project, retrieved 2/26/03):

Sadomasochists seek to legitimize and provide a premeditated structure for violence. NOW opposes any repressive legislation concerning private consensual sexual activity between adults. Nevertheless, NOW opposes institutionalized violence as well as social structures which encourage or advocate the use of physical and psychological violence or domination among individuals. This opposition to violence precludes support or advocacy of sadomasochism as a feminist issue.

This official stance against SM had a serious affect on women who engage in SM practices. NOW compared SM to the "social structures which encourage... violence or domination," meaning the patriarchal hierarchy. Anti-SM feminists claimed that the patriarchal society conditioned women to take on certain roles, and sadomasochists were condemned for perpetuating those power relationships in their sexual behaviors (Linden,

1982, pp. 4-5). Militant feminists tried to forcibly root out forms of patriarchal behavior by attacking and harassing SM-identified women.

At the 1993 March on Washington, a nationwide survey was initiated by Female Trouble, a women's SM group in Philadelphia (Female Trouble, retrieved 2/26/03). This survey exclusively focused on the lesbian community and documented a pattern of abuse against SM-identified women by lesbians (Keres, 1994).

As documented in the results of the survey entitled *Violence Against SM Women Within the Lesbian Community* (Keres, p. 3):

Reactionary lesbian feminism ... created a confrontational atmosphere within our community that targets SM women and they have duped and intimidated many women in the lesbian community into looking the other way when SM women are attacked. Touting themselves as the harbingers of "truth," they have sought to inflict their dogma upon a diverse and complex lesbian community, audaciously claiming the right to dictate and control the sexual expression of lesbian women.

Of the 539 SM-identified women who took part in the survey, over half reported they had experienced some form of physical assault or discrimination within the lesbian community because of their SM practices (Keres, p. 23). The surveys found twenty-five percent had suffered physical assault, including being hit, shoved, jabbed, chased, spat upon or objects thrown at them by women in the lesbian community. Another thirty percent were refused admittance or ejected from social, recreational, political, educational and spiritual groups within the lesbian community (Keres, p. 8).

It did not matter what SM role these women took, they were condemned as being violent simply because of the way they expressed their sexuality. The violence occurred both against women who were "bottoms" (25% preferred to receive stimulus) as well as the women who were "tops" (29.6% preferred to give the stimulus). Violence also occurred against the plurality of women (42.9%) who liked to "switch," meaning they played both top and bottom roles (Keres, p. 36).

It is ironic that some lesbians found it acceptable to act violently against an SM-identified woman because she was, by their definition, guilty of violence. This use of violence, ostensibly to end violence, was not questioned within the greater feminist community during the decades prior to the late 1990's.

SM Compared to Violence

The feminists who supported NOW's anti-SM policy did not present research concerning the nature of power-exchange dynamics in SM behaviors. Instead, they quoted a few people who had encountered abuse during SM encounters, and generalized those accounts in order to condemn all SM practices (Linden, 1982, p. 16).

Some SM-identified individuals confused the issue by claiming their sexual practices involved violent emotions. SM-identified author Tina Portillo stated in the *Leatherfolk* anthology (Portillo, 1991, p. 50): "Instead of using violence to expel energy the way I did in my younger days, I choose SM as the vehicle for expressing the emotions that threaten to overwhelm me."

However when the practices themselves are considered, there are clear differences between SM versus abuse. The typical pattern of abuse includes the intentional

intimidation of one partner to coerce or isolate the other. Abuse is unpredictable and out-of-control behavior. Abuse also tends to be cyclical in nature, escalating over time, and is characterized by calm periods between the episodes and promises that the behavior will never happen again (Abuse Counseling and Treatment, retrieved 2/26/03).

SM, on the other hand, is desired, consensual behavior. The participants freely consent to a power exchange, and can withdraw that consent and stop the interaction at any time (Houlberg, 1993). Limits and the level of desired stimulation are discussed, and communication takes place before, during, and after SM activities. Sadomasochists seek out opportunities to engage in these activities, and sometimes plan for weeks prior to an SM encounter. Sadomasochists make efforts to ensure their practices are as safe as possible.

In any group of people there will be individuals who are abusive in their relationships, but SM itself is not inherently abusive. Sadomasochists do not force or coerce their partners though the behaviors may imitate those activities. The goal of SM is to engage in mutually satisfying sex (Leather Leadership Conference, retrieved 3/10/03).

SM-Identified Feminists Protest Persecution

By 1996, sadomasochists who were members of NOW began a campaign within NOW to remove the organization's anti-SM policy. An ad hoc project was formed by SM-identified NOW members: the SM Policy Reform Project (retrieved 2/26/03). These SM activists within NOW rejected the organization's attempts to police women's sexuality, claiming it was contrary to NOW's intent to fight for women's right to chose

for themselves, whether it concerned their careers, their lifestyle, or their sexual expression.

The SM Policy Reform Project sponsored a series of educational events at local NOW chapters to explain the difference between SM versus abuse. The sadomasochists "came out" about their SM sexuality to fellow NOW members, and emphasized the importance of supporting education about safe, sane and consensual practices. They asked that NOW refrain from labeling SM as violence and to step forward in a responsible way to help clarify the issues surrounding consent and abuse. NOW members were also made aware of the extent of violence and discrimination against women who practiced SM, which sprang in part from NOW's own anti-SM policy.

Many NOW members responded positively to the campaign to eliminate the anti-SM policy. At the July, 1999, NOW National Conference in Beverly Hills, California, enough signatures were gathered to present an SM-positive statement along with other proposed NOW declarations. NOW's Action Vice-President, Elizabeth Toledo, invited Susan Wright, the coordinator of the SM Policy Reform Project to a breakfast meeting prior to the vote. Birch stated that NOW leaders opposed the SM Policy Reform Statement because it contained language supportive of SM practices.

A compromise was proposed by Birch that the original 1980 Delineation of Lesbian Rights be replaced with a new one which would no longer oppose SM practices, nor would it openly support SM practices. The NOW members who were volunteering to run the SM Policy Reform Project agreed to this compromise in order to remove the anti-SM policy.

With the support of NOW delegates and members at the July 1999 National Conference, NOW's official policy against SM was removed. The new *1999 Delineation of Lesbian Rights* replaced *The 1980 Delineation of Lesbian Rights Issues* that contained NOW's anti-SM policy (SM Policy Reform Project, retrieved 2/26/03).

The 1999 Delineation Of Lesbian Rights is straight-forward and neither condemns nor supports any specific form of sexual expression:

Whereas NOW demonstrates a strong commitment to lesbian rights, and

Whereas NOW's agenda embraces the rich diversity of issues and experiences that impact women's lives,

Therefore Be It Resolved, that NOW reaffirms its commitment to a lesbian rights agenda that was a grassroots strategy to fight bigotry and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation;

Be It Further Resolved, that this resolution replaces the 1980 Delineation of Lesbian Rights.

Though still not openly supportive of sadomasochists, the feminist community is backing away from intolerance and antipathy. Women with differing viewpoints about sexuality are increasingly being listened to instead of censored and dismissed.

However without an SM-positive policy, NOW chapters are not likely to sponsor discussions about SM safe sex techniques. Educational discussions about sexual limits, consent, boundaries, relationships and desires would be a positive addition to NOW's wide range of feminist topics.

It is left to SM groups to provide open discussions about sadomasochism. The SM groups create a safe environment for adults to talk about their sexuality and desires. Through this process, SM-identified individuals can learn how to protect themselves and their partners from abuse and unsafe sex.

Mainstream Perceptions of SM Practitioners

The early SM groups marched in the footsteps of gay liberation groups formed in the 1960's (Rubin, 1981, pp. 196-197). The human rights movement was first known as the homosexual or "gay" movement. In the 1970's, due to the growing strength of the feminist movement, the community was identified as "gay and lesbian." Then bisexuals began to be included: "lesbian, gay and bisexual." By the mid-1990s, transgendered individuals began to be specifically identified as part of the movement when it was self-labeled "GLBT."

The rights of SM-identified individuals were not included in this movement. Therefore, SM groups formed the sexual freedom movement. SM advocates attempted to destigmatize sadomasochism in the same way that the homosexual advocacy effort generated numerous legal and social rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals.

SM groups that performed activism as well as provided educational forums about SM practices for their members included Gay Male S/M Activists (established in 1982), and the National Leather Association—International (established in 1986). Other non-profit membership groups focused exclusively on activist functions, such as DC Sexual Minority Advocates (1998), and Baltimore AT-EASE (1999).

The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) was formed in 1997 to provide an advocacy umbrella for SM groups. Since 2002, NCSF has also advocated for two other subcultures—swing and polyamory (involving non-monogomous relationships)—because they have common legal issues as well as similar difficulties with discrimination and persecution (NCSF, retrieved 12/12/03). NCSF is committed to creating a political, legal, and social environment in the United States that advances equal rights of consenting adults who practice these forms of alternative sexual expression.

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation is a new organization formed in early 2003 to deal with both international and national sexual freedom issues as well as other health and civil rights issues.

Persecution of SM-Identified Individuals

The on-going pattern of persecution against SM practitioners was documented in the 1998 *Violence & Discrimination Survey* by NCSF which surveyed heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual members of the SM community. Of the over one-thousand sadomasochists surveyed, thirty-six percent had suffered some kind of violence or harassment because of their SM practices, while thirty percent had been victims of job discrimination (NCSF, retrieved 2/26/03).

NCSF tracks requests for assistance and compiles them in an annual Incident Response report. The 2002 report cites eighty-one separate cases with over six hundred total contacts with NCSF staff as they attempted to resolve the incidents (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). Of these cases, forty-seven incidents involved groups, clubs or events that

were challenged by media exposure or law enforcement inquiries based on zoning, alcohol, or obscenity regulations.

In thirty-four of the incidents, NCSF assisted individuals (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). The largest category of incidents involved parents who were engaged in child custody and divorce cases. SM-identified parents continue to experience difficulties in gaining child custody through family court proceedings. NCSF worked with the attorneys who represented parents who are accused of being unfit because of their SM behaviors. In many cases, because of information NCSF provided, the courts decided that alternative sexual expression alone was not significant cause to remove child custody.

Individuals also consulted with NCSF on a variety of other issues including: the legality of obscene materials, guidelines for posting sexually frank information on Internet websites, the laws and regulations pertaining to private SM parties, and dealing with personal media exposure (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03).

Job discrimination continues to be a problem for SM-identified individuals. Examples of job discrimination can also be found in the 1998 *Violence & Discrimination Survey*. One ordained minister who had been involved in SM for several years stated: "I shared with my former seminary roommate details about my lifestyle and interest. She took it upon herself to 'save' me and report me to my superiors. I was required to take a year's leave of absence and to receive therapy." (NCSF, p. 3)

In 2002, NCSF helped more than a dozen people draft and file formal complaints with their employers regarding employment discrimination claims (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). One Tennessee man lost his job because he belonged to a leather club. NCSF referred a Texas man to the EEOC because of racial discrimination. A California woman

contacted NCSF when a job offer was withdrawn when her personal website was discovered. Another woman was dismissed from a private Catholic university because of her private sexual expression.

Discrimination complaints were also made about two Internet companies in 2002 (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). In July, E-bay pulled all of its SM-related material for sale, while Match.com deleted a therapist's ad because it mentioned their poly therapy practice.

One high-profile incident concerned UN Weapons Inspector, Jack McGeorge. McGeorge's participation as a weapons inspector in Iraq was questioned by the Washington Post in a series of SM-negative articles published in late November, 2002 (Grimaldi, 2002, and Rose, 2002). McGeorge's involvement in SM groups, including the fact that he was a past-Chairman of NCSF, was revealed by the Washington Post. Washington Post reporters Grimaldi and Rose questioned McGeorge's credibility and expertise because of his association with sadomasochistic practices, and stated that McGeorge was not qualified to be a member of the UN weapons team.

The SM community rallied in support of McGeorge. NCSF received dozens of cc'ed "Letters to the Editor" that were sent to the Washington Post, NY Daily News, CNN, and Fox News protesting the personal attacks against McGeorge. McGeorge received support from Hans Blix, the Chief United Nations weapons inspector, who retained McGeorge as a member of his inspection team in Iraq (Grimaldi, 2002).

The Ombudsman of the Washington Post, Michael Getler, stated on December 8th, 2002 that he did not find his newspaper's recent articles regarding the UN Weapons inspection team "up to the usual standard" and that James V. Grimaldi "yielded to the titillation factor in featuring McGeorge so prominently." (Getler, 2002)

Opposition to SM Events

The growing prevalence of SM events prompted a new trend in February-May, 2002, when five educational and social SM conferences in the Midwest were attacked by religious advocacy groups: Concerned Women for America (CWA), American Family Association (AFA), and the American Decency Association (ADA) (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). The SM conferences were: Bound by Desire in Michigan, Tribal Fire in Oklahoma City, Beat Me in St. Louis in Missouri, and My Vicious Valentine and International Mr. Leather produced in suburbs of Chicago. These SM conferences provided workshops on safe sex techniques and relationship issues, and included charity functions, social activities, banquets, entertainment, vendors selling SM gear, and role-playing games.

Each of the SM conferences under attack worked with National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) to counter sensationalized media claims made by the religious advocacy groups, as well as resisting action by local authorities who attempted to shut down the SM conferences.

In April 2002, because of the media storm surrounding the St. Louis event, Missouri State Senator John Loudon introduced a resolution to prohibit SM conferences from being held in Missouri, and the matter officially was referred to the State Attorney General and Health Department (NCSF, retrieved 12/15/03). NCSF educated the Missouri State Attorney General about the educational benefits of SM conferences, and the Missouri State Health Department sent an observer to Beat Me in St. Louis who confirmed that all activities were safe, sane and consensual. Beat Me in St. Louis was

held exactly as planned, except for some on-site precautions to protect the attendees from media exposure.

Concerned Women for America pressured Cendant Corporation, the world's largest hotel franchiser with more than 6,400 hotels, into sending a letter in March, 2002, to its franchisees threatening them with reprisals if they booked "controversial" guests or groups that "national interest groups find offensive." (Silverman, retrieved 12/16/03) With My Vicious Valentine and Bound by Desire, the Cendant hotels canceled their contracts. Both conferences were able to relocate to new host hotels immediately prior to the event, in one case moving down the street to a neighboring hotel and in the other moving across the border into Canada.

NCSF conducted a successful media, petition and letter writing campaign that convinced Cendant Corporation to clarify its position in September, 2002, honoring the right of hotel franchisees to host the events of their choice (NCSF, retrieved 12/16/03). As of this date, a number of SM events are being hosted in hotels that are owned by Cendant franchisees.

Opposition to SM events based on moral and religious grounds continued in September, 2003, when Black Rose, a Washington D.C.-based SM group planned to hold their SM conference in Ocean City, Maryland. Black Rose had held their annual conference for seven years in New Carrollton, Maryland, a suburban community eight miles northwest of Washington DC. Black Rose adhered to local laws and regulations, and regularly employed off-duty police officers as security for their event. Black Rose received no mainstream media coverage when their conference was located in New Carrollton.

Yet opposition arose when Black Rose moved their annual conference to Ocean City, a small beach resort town on the lower Eastern shore of Maryland. Two negative media reports were published in September, 2003, by the Salisbury Daily Times and the weekly Maryland Coast Dispatch (Carmean, 2003 and Mook, 2003). These articles quoted two local churches, two Ocean City Councilmen, a parent with the Ocean City Elementary Parent-Teacher Association, and a local business owner who all questioned the appropriateness of the Black Rose conference being held in their “family resort.”

According to the September 22nd issue of the Daily Times, a member of the Ocean City Elementary Parent-Teacher Association claimed to be “appalled that an Ocean City business would host such a group.” “I think this is horrible,” said Tony Keiser. “Ocean City has been recognized as an All-American family resort. It's why so many people moved here from the city with their children.” (Carmean, 2003)

According to the same article, Father John P. Klevence of St. Mary Catholic Church in Ocean City said, “I don't think this is the best thing for Ocean City. I thought we were a family resort. Ocean City doesn't seem to be the spot for this.” (Daily Times, 2003) Ocean City Councilman Joe Hall said that Ocean City “markets itself as a family resort” and he “hopes that image isn't damaged by the Black Rose convention.” (Carmean, 2003)

In the Maryland Coast Dispatch article of September 19th, Reverend Terry Davis of the Ocean City Baptist Chapel was quoted as saying, “The family image of the resort doesn't seem like the family image when you let this kind of trash in. I don't understand how this can get in to Ocean City at all.” (Mook, 2003)

In a Baltimore Sun article published on October 7, 2003, Ocean City Councilman Vince Gisriel Jr. opposed the convention, stating, "I never want to infringe on anybody's constitutional rights, but the effort we make to maintain our quality of life and our family image is priceless." (Guy, 2003)

NCSF countered with the fact that many SM-identified individuals lived in Ocean City, and that these adults were friends, family and co-workers. The Ocean City Police Chief stated in Maryland Coast Dispatch article of September 19th that the activities at the Black Rose conference were legal because they were being held in private (Mook, 2003).

However the local business association and church members put pressure on the host hotel to cancel the SM conference. The event was compelled to cancel their contract with the host hotel when City Solicitor Guy R. Ayres III claimed the conference was illegal according to the Maryland Code that relates to liquor license-holding establishments (Guy, 2003). Under the sub-section regarding nudity and sexual displays, licensed establishments are forbidden from allowing fondling or sexually touching others, a regulation that is broad enough to include touching clothed buttocks. The law also banned flagellation, an activity often associated with sadomasochism. The hotel had a liquor license, so even though no alcohol was served at the annual Black Rose conference, the activities were restricted by the regulation.

Another SM conference that was recently canceled was Fetish in the Fall, to be held in Kenner, Louisiana, a suburb within metropolitan New Orleans on November 20-23rd, 2003. The organizers of Fetish in the Fall contacted the local police precinct, as is standard practice for weekend-long events to ensure that planned activities conformed to local regulations (Doster, 2003).

Police Chief Nick Congemi responded by sending out a letter to fifteen Kenner hotels, urging them to refuse to host Fetish in the Fall because, "I believe that this event seriously jeopardizes the family atmosphere for which Kenner is noted." (Doster, 2003) In addition, Police Chief Congemi authorized Captain Steve Caraway of the Kenner Police Department to broadcast a press release to newspaper, radio and television media in New Orleans, including but not limited to: The Times-Picayune, WWL-TV, WDSU-TV, WWL radio, and the ABC news affiliate. (Kenner Police Department, 2003)

Fetish in the Fall was forced to cancel because of the persecution of Police Chief Congemi, who called the conference "demeaning to women" and "borderline illegal," though he quoted no laws or codes that the event would have violated (Doster, 2003). Despite that fact, no Kenner hotel was willing to book Fetish in the Fall in the face of the Police Chief's opposition.

The Sexual Freedom Movement

The sexual freedom movement rests on the efforts of individuals, SM groups and SM businesses that actively support the right of adults to practice alternative sexual expression. This support is generated through letter-writing campaigns, fundraisers for legal defense funds, assistance during incidents, and media advocacy.

When a private party was raided in Attleboro, MA, in July 2000, SM groups raised over \$30,000 to defend the host, Ben Davis (Pagnozzi, 2001). Davis, a 23-year-old computer consultant was arraigned on 13 counts: Operating a business without a license, assault and battery of a police officer, eight counts of possession of a dangerous weapon

and accessory before the fact of an assault and battery with a dangerous weapon. After two years of legal proceedings, the charges were dismissed.

Another participant at the Attleboro party, Stefany Reed, was arrested for performing consensual sadomasochism under the law that "consent is not a defense to assault." (Pagnozzi, 2001) Police officers charged Reed with assault and battery with a dangerous weapon—a wooden spoon she was allegedly using to paddle a woman. Reed went to trial, and after two years and many thousands of dollars spent on her defense, the charges were dismissed.

Many states still retain statutes that forbid the use of "consent as a defense to assault" during legal proceedings. These statutes were once used to arrest perpetrators of domestic violence before specific state legislation was enacted. "Consent is not a defense to assault" is now increasingly being used to target consensual SM activities which prosecutors deem to be too extreme, as in *New York vs. Jovanovic* (NCSF, retrieved 12/14/03).

Other than assault cases, the most pressing legal issues facing the SM community include zoning, liquor license regulations, and other local regulatory measures which prohibit SM events and businesses from operating.

For SM-identified individuals, legal discrimination comes most often in the form of removal of child custody. The fact that a parent engages in SM practices is regularly used as justification in denying custody of children. Individuals are also routinely fired from their jobs simply because of their SM behavior.

To change the social stigma against SM, NCSF actively engages in media advocacy by producing a weekly Media Update that includes news articles dealing with

SM, swing and polyamory. The NCSF Media Update contains contact information for individuals to write letters to the editor in order to protest stereotypes and derogatory language, or to praise the writer and editors for their fair and balanced coverage of SM issues.

Until the social perception of SM is altered, SM-identified individuals will continue to be persecuted. In order to change the perception of SM practices, SM-identified individuals and SM groups must become more visible. However this provides additional targets for legal and social persecution. Therefore SM-identified individuals are reluctant to come out of the closet, thus perpetuating the negative cycle.

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