



In Their Own Words

This is a collection of over 550 comments made on the 2008 *Survey of Discrimination and Violence Against Sexual Minorities* conducted by Susan Wright in cooperation with the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom. These comments are only a sampling of the persecution that regularly occurs against BDSM and polyamory practitioners. NCSF runs 6 programs that are designed to help our constituents fight against discrimination and persecution – please donate now to support NCSF so we can continue to fight for your rights!

I. The following comments were made in response to the request: *"Please use this space to describe any significant experiences of discrimination by professionals that you have had."*

1. **Mental Health Practitioners** (63 comments)

"My therapist suggested that I needed to go to a different therapist who could provide more intensive therapy for my BDSM lifestyle."

"The therapist refused to continue to see me until I acknowledge that I was being 'Abused'."

"I was told that my depression was due to my participation in BDSM activities and lifestyle practices. That if I stopped the 'negative' behaviors then I would feel better. Instead I stopped seeing her and continued to full recovery. I am also so proud of my involvement that I did a speech in my women's studies class about how submission is not a sign of a weak woman, and I worked hard to dispel a lot of the myths attributed to living in BDSM. I am also writing a book about my life and how this has helped me in my journey for self discovery and self worth."

"I was made to feel like I am not normal and a social deviant. I felt uncomfortable and felt I could not freely be myself or talk openly about issues concerning myself to my psychologist. I spent more than half of one of my sessions trying to defend myself and my position in the BDSM community."

"As a mental health professional I have witnessed misunderstandings and misdiagnoses by my colleagues for service users with alternate sexual practices."

"Mental health practitioner for the Veterans administration's comment was that she did not want to get involved in my games. She looked at my BDSM lifestyle as counterproductive to my mental health and thought it was caused from a dysfunctional relationship with my father."

"I was told by several mental health professionals that my desires to inflict pain on another, albeit willing participant, was deviant and I needed to deal with my anger and bigotry issues."

"After finding out about my interest in BDSM, my psychiatrist stated that I 'cannot be ruled out as a danger to myself or others due to her interest in BDSM'."

"My therapist and I had to agree to not discuss my BDSM life as she has extremely different opinions (not accepting opinions) about such a life."

"My therapist (MSW) was totally flummoxed and astounded by both my bisexuality and the fact that I consider myself a switch. Once I told her about these things, she focused on them almost entirely, neglecting the issues at hand (I didn't have a problem with my bisexuality or my BDSM interactions at the time, they weren't causing any problems in my life/job/family...but my husband's severe alcoholism *did*). She decided she wanted to write a book on her patients' bisexual and BDSM lifestyles, and it got to a point where I couldn't believe I (and my insurance company) were actually paying her to do research for a book. I really needed the help with separating from my husband, learning to detach, learning to put my needs first, and not prurient interest from someone who was supposed to care."

"I told a psychologist once about my involvement with BDSM and he told me that he thought it was unsafe and not a wise choice. I told him that it was indeed safe, and he seemed to just roll his eyes and move on."

"I was in therapy for six months and didn't feel safe enough to tell my therapist about my SM orientation."

"I was simply misclassified as being 'disturbed' by a non kink-aware counselor. I have since found a kink-friendly counselor and my experiences with her have been more positive."

"A psychiatrist declared me 'unwilling to improve' and refused further treatment once I revealed to him I was a Dom and into D/s. Said it showed 'abusive tendencies' and referred me to social services. They weren't a lot better about it."

"I left one Psychologist because I didn't need to be told that I was 'wrong' anymore."

"They tried to tell me what I did in my private life was wrong and would affect my treatments and gave me their general disapproval opinions and attitudes every-time once they knew."

"I have seen two Mental Health Therapists who insisted that my sexuality was the source of all my problems. I became more depressed under their care. My current therapist is more accepting, and I am happy and much more functional now. My former minister (who was an OUT practicing Lesbian) was horrified by both my Polyamory, and my Leather activities. Somehow the sexual revolution must have ended once Lesbians were allowed. I am amazed at the hypocrisy. In counseling sessions I was told I must not practice my lifestyle with others in my church, including partners I'd been with for years. My current minister is much more understanding, and respects the agreements between my husband, my partners and I."

"Psychotherapy took a most useless discriminatory and damaging route when BDSM inclinations were brought out."

"She told me I was sexually confused, that I had a sexual problem. To her my sexual orientation was an illness. It was true that I had emotional problems, but not BDSM-wise/it had nothing to do with BDSM."

"My BDSM partner was hospitalized at a mental institution. My involvement in the BDSM community and/or practices was questioned and then it was questioned whether or not I should be allowed access to visit my partner. He was not institutionalized for anything to do with BDSM, he was suffering from severe depression and suicidal tendencies. I found it very difficult to obtain or access affordable counseling for myself following this event. There was one counselor available at an extremely high rate (\$160/hour). While this counselor could price herself at this rate because she was good at her job, she was still the only counselor available in the area that did not treat the BDSM or any other 'alternative' community as 'deviant'."

"I have been treated as though my sexuality was a mental issue and/or the cause of abuse..."

"I was told my involvement in the BDSM lifestyle made me a sex addict and I thought such for a long time. In the SAA 12 steps or any other 12 step programs involving sexual addiction participation in SM activities qualifies you as a sex addict. By an LCSW I was told that my being in the BDSM lifestyle was linked to my past abuse history."

"I interviewed a therapist. I told her that I was having some relationship issues. My wife [now ex-wife] had suicidal tendencies and I needed help dealing. I was up-front and told her I practice BDSM and she immediately went on a tangent about sexual addiction and told me about some sex addict camp out in Arizona (run by some guy who publishes his own work) that she thought could help me. The conversation was ridiculous and completely ignored the very real problem of my fear that I was going to come home to a dead wife. She went on to say that she was going to compile a list of male therapists who could help me because I was too 'dangerous' for female therapists. I had lost all respect for her at that point and asked what she would do if I was bisexual. She shot me a worried glance and asked if I was. I just raised an eyebrow. She said she was going to have to find some really good therapists. I told her not to bother and left. I eventually found a fantastic therapist and SHE has been unbelievably helpful and has somehow managed to thwart my sex addict tricks. <- That's sarcasm by the way. :)"

"I was told by a licensed psychologist that I was a sick individual, and that if I did not get help immediately, and change the way I lived, that I would never have a productive life, and that I would never find any happiness. By fitting into the 'norm' I would be a more socially 'productive' person, and I would be able to live a 'normal' life."

"Psychological/psychiatric health care professionals who cannot provide adequate counsel due to their negative BDSM and alternative lifestyle bias."

"My experience was not discrimination with respect to results, and I was provided the complete service. However, the counselor spoke disapprovingly of BDSM practitioners when my response to her questions revealed my interest in BDSM. I felt she was uninformed about BDSM and had stereotype knowledge of it. This experience occurred in 1998."

"I was told that I had problems within myself because I enjoyed BDSM and I needed help for it."

"Mental Health Professional that I was psychologically unsound. That no one in their right mind would consent to 'those types' of activities."

"As for the Mental Health Practitioner, the individual would continue to come back to my kinky life to focus on that as the problem and frequently pointed out that these deviant practices were an indication of issues I needed to resolve and should quit any kink/fetish activities cold turkey and not look back."

"Professionally trained psychiatrist and myself a patient - only minor - didn't go into details but mentioned my sexuality was not run of the mill, so to speak. Raised eyebrows at me and facial expression indicated disapproval. I ceased discussing it."

"Told I was only involved in it due to feeling bad because of divorce and needed to stop and just deal with the divorce. That being involved with BDSM was only going to keep me feeling inferior. I never returned."

"I had a psychiatrist for a short time and when I came out to her during a session she became very distant and judgmental towards me. I quit seeing her after soon that."

"My husband and I went to a marriage counselor/therapist to discuss the impact of BDSM in our marriage. I couldn't suppress my desire for that type of interaction any more and he was not interested in it. The counselor was a licensed professional and said she didn't discriminate against those of us who have alternative views of sexuality, but she tried to discourage my interest in it. She tried to make it seem like a fault of mine that needed to be corrected. We eventually quit going to her because I was not comfortable with her prejudices. We moved and I found a different mental health person who is kink-friendly. I am now in therapy with her and am making much more progress."

"I attended marriage counseling with my wife, when she had first found out about my BDSM activities. The Psychologist, who has a thriving practice in an affluent suburb of Houston, did not facilitate an open and honest discussion when BDSM was mentioned. She sided with my wife who asserted that it was aberrant, unnatural behavior. The DSM and the mental health practitioners are supposed to have accepted that alternative expressions of sexuality are not deviant."

"I needed to explain repeatedly to my psychiatrist that I was not in an abusive relationship. The ins and outs of powerXchange. I think he finally got it...that I wasn't being abused."

"My therapists have all basically said that my sexual desires were unhealthy. These reactions ranged from being blatant about the unhealthy nature of my desires to more subtle eye rolling."

"Psychiatrist dropped me upon learning I was active in the BDSM community."

"I have had counselors decide that my being interested in BDSM was a way of retraumatization or evidence of unhealthy behavior. They have treated this aspect of my life in much the same way one might expect them to treat an addiction, which seriously damaged the therapeutic relationship and prevented me from gaining the help from them I was seeking in the first place. Also I have had them make similar assumptions about my being polyamorous."

"Loss of trust with the therapist... she no longer closed the door when I came out as a BDSM practitioner. Would frequently tell me BDSM was not 'me'."

"It was my daughters therapist she has a PhD in child psychology. She told my daughter that what I was doing was against the law and hindered our mother/daughter relationship. My daughter was 16 and found out about me from her father my ex-husband. My husband divorced me because of my sexual choices. He feels the world of BDSM is perverted and crazy."

"After an off-hand comment made by the therapist about "those sick people who beat each other," I was put into a position of being unable to talk about any connections I had to BDSM. I also felt that it was unsafe to discuss that I was raped by a partner (which was something I needed to talk about) because we had been involved in a dom/sub relationship."

"A therapist I saw in San Francisco from 1992 to 1998 had a very strong reaction to my involvement in BDSM. This was surprising because she had been so understanding and supportive of my choice to do sex work. In early 1998 I began getting more involved in BDSM and shared this with my therapist. We had arguments about it. She told me it was "disgusting" and that I was "killing live cells" -- as if I wasn't doing this every time I went out in the sun or brushed my teeth. Her attitude toward me changed dramatically. She had been very helpful as a therapist until I came out to her about BDSM. I ended the therapy shortly afterward."

"My experience is minor and mostly has resulted in therapists not wanting to work with me, or deeming the root of my issues as my 'deviance'."

"I have had substantial difficulty finding counselors that are willing to work with me because of my kink. Additionally, as a teenager, I had a therapist who spent substantial time trying to convince me that kink was bad and I should stop. She also told me I was not queer."

"I come right out and tell mental health and physical health providers about my BDSM activity (in a general sort of way.) I have had several occasions where I was basically told that they could not 'help' me unless I was able to give up these practices..."

"I was told by the domestic violence therapist (as well as the rest of the group of women that were there for the group session) that if I were to stay in the BDSM lifestyle it would be expected that I will be abused... and also that I should be submissive to no man. Pretty much the therapist just let it be a men-bashing session as well as telling me that I practically deserved to get beat on if I choose to stay in the BDSM lifestyle."

"I was told by a couple different mental health people that they considered alternative 'sexual practices' and/or BDSM practices to be a mental problem stemming from childhood abuses or problems."

"I have been told that I am not a suitable patient by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who was being contacted for therapy services. She believed that my sexual practices were contrary to health and she would not provide me therapy if I chose to practice."

"I've had therapists and shrinks insist on analyzing my avowed masochism as pathology and/or self-hatred and when I told them that I was fine w/it, didn't want to be judged, and had other issues I had come to them for they ignored my comments and insisted in viewing every issue in my life through the lens of BDSM 'pathology'. Needless to say, I have since changed mental health professionals."

"I have had therapists that, as soon as I told them about my SM orientation, suddenly saw all of my issues as coming exclusively from that aspect of my personality."

"A Mental Health practitioner though I was 'sick' and 'a Control freak' because I tell women in My Service what to do."

"Medical doctor trying to 'cure' me based on outdated information (DSM, the former version)."

"I was assaulted by someone in the scene. I attempted to talk about the experience with my therapist, but she became visually and verbally distraught over the fact that I participate in BDSM. Instead of processing the trauma, which had nothing to do with safe, sane, consensual BDSM play and everything to do with someone being an abusive asshole - I had to worry about protecting my therapist from discomfort about the leather scene."

"When I did therapy in the past, especially with lesbian feminist therapists, it seems with 90% of the therapists I had (all womyn), I had to educate them on the leather lifestyle, and the DIFFERENCE between abuse and safe, sane, consensual S/M. I got tired of having to educate one after another, especially when I employed interns who usually only last 6 months before going off to another program. There were some therapists I had that I followed longer than that, but got tired of how they would keep mixing things up and assuming that my interest with BDSM had to do with my 'anger' issues. I was very clear that my anger/rage issues that I was working on at the time were quite separate from my sexual proclivities to dyke leather sex, and worked my hardest to keep them out of the Scene. I also had to unravel for myself anger/abuse issues and my own sexual proclivities...sometimes they got muddled, for myself, but my therapists in their ignorance could not see the difference between anger/rage/abuse issues and BDSM, thinking one is the outgrowth of the other...or at least making that assumption. There were a couple times I had to go to a leather therapist, though they were far more expensive, just to get clear on some of these issues, even if I only saw them for a couple sessions. I don't go to therapy anymore."

"I did tell one psychologist about it, and at the end of our client/doctor relationship she lashed out at me and this was one of the things she implied was not healthy. But she wasn't acting at all professionally anyway, and was an AWFUL therapist."

"I have also had mental health professionals, including both therapists and psychiatrists, drop me as a patient when they found out I engage in these activities. On one occasion, a therapist threatened to have me sent to a hospital because she saw marks on me and did not approve of my explanation for them."

"I've had a mental health 'professional' refuse to even try to understand the poly nature of our family and insist that I needed to get out of the relationship before he would 'treat' me."

"My poly slave spouse desperately needed counseling psychotherapy last year for depression born of loss of sexual responsiveness in the aftermath of a hysterectomy. She went to a local family counseling center. Her therapist told her after relating to her for five minutes that she needed to leave our family and quit living her lifestyle if she had any hope of 'recovery.' She never went back and we have managed to get past this on our own, but she found this experience devastating at a time when she needed support caring and expertise, not judgment."

"Neither my psychiatrist nor my therapist has a clue about BDSM. They don't seem to judge me over it, and the therapist seems genuinely interested in learning, but sometimes it just takes too much effort to teach her."

"I am a member of several communities. I am a person of color, all three of my children are GBLT so I am active in that community as a concerned parent and I am active volunteer in many BDSM organizations. In my search to find a therapist who was knowledgeable of these communities or at least aware/friendly was very difficult. As I interviewed prospective therapists, I encountered varying degrees of hostility. I am happy to say I did find a therapist who was open-minded and willing to learn about the various communities I belong to."

"My therapist refused talking with me about this part of myself."

"Health care practitioners incessant questions as to what lengths I might go to that might be a threat to the life/quality of life of those who entrust themselves."

2. Medical Doctors (64 comments)

"At a hospital, was asked to talk to a psych nurse because of my involvement in a loving BDSM relationship."

"My doctor even though he was advised of my lifestyle decided that he would take it upon himself to call the police when I had bruises on me. It took me a long time explaining to the detectives as to why it wasn't domestic violence. My husband was even brought in for questioning."

"I have had one doctor ask me to find a new doctor once my sexual lifestyle was discussed."

"My Doctor is especially hard to talk to. If I complain about pain she questions me and my practices."

"One medical Doctor refused to continue treatment after I showed him bruising."

"When examining me the doctor asked about marks left by a violet wand session several years ago. After explaining to him what they were he indicated any other marks or bruises would result in reporting by him of my husband as an instigator of domestic violence and that he would have to consider call CPS since we had a young child in the home. I had been a patient of his for quite some time as had my husband."

"When I told my medical professional about my lifestyle choices, they wanted to refer me to a mental health specialist. When I refused, their approach then changed to disrespect and lack to slow to respond when I needed to reach them for medical reasons. A definite message that they didn't want me around."

"On more than one occasion I went to the doctor with bruises all over my arms. She repeatedly handed me women's shelters pamphlets, even after I explained to her that the bruises were from

consensual BDSM sex. She said the next time I came in with bruises, she would report it. So I went to a new kink-friendly doctor."

"I was not treated as well by a Doctor as I should have been, but was perceived as being at fault for whatever happened to me, including any illness that I might get. I felt 'dirty'."

"I have been put through questioning that was unnecessary given the reason for my visit to the doctor because of their seeing marks from play/body modifications, including the assertion that I had mental issues."

"Direct inability to provide proper medical care do to her own bias... I was submitted to unnecessary medical testing."

"I have had medical doctors and gynecologists refuse to treat me because they saw marks on me they suspected were from these activities, or because they saw my body piercings and didn't approve of them. I have had a gynecologist refuse to give me birth control because she believed that it encouraged 'your kind of people' to be promiscuous."

"I hurt my shoulder throwing a flogger. When asked I told the truth. He refused to treat me and asked me to leave (of course he still charged me my co-pay and billed my insurance)."

"My doctor gave me a dirty look and then went on about how being poly is very dangerous."

"Osteopath noticed bruising (self-inflicted at the time) during a treatment and became very uncomfortable. I said that I had fallen down some stairs but her whole demeanor towards me changed and I did not continue to see her. Her tone and questioning was extremely disapproving although I suspect she assumed spousal abuse as opposed to BDSM related practice. Either way, her attitude was not conducive to continuing treatment."

"My doctor invoked St. Peter and then my mother in an attempt to make me feel guilty after I told her that I am polyamorous. She then sabotaged the screenings that my partner and I needed."

"Due to bruises left from a scene, a Dr. was unwilling to give me a full exam."

"Had to explain marks on skin to dermatologist in detail before he would agree not to file a spousal abuse report."

"I went to get a sonogram on my breasts for screening lumps that turned out to be hematomas cause by a Dom's excessive breast torture. After it was found to be this, the radiologist turned up his nose and walked out of the room. I was treated as a nothing person from then on."

"My primary care physician suggested that my husband's low hormone level was caused by his constant state of submissive. A notion that I find difficult to believe."

"PSA test indicated a trip to a specialist. Advised the urologist of my lifestyle, he then advised me against my particular lifestyle, refused further treatment, but waived non insured office fee."

"I had one doctor who refused to provide me with services in connection with body modification issues."

"I've had one doctor refuse to allow me to have my partner with me in the exam room/consultation room simply BECAUSE He was "not" my husband."

"Was hassled by my gynecologist because of the bruising on my breasts and torso. Have also been grilled by my primary physician due to ligature marks on my wrists and neck."

"The provider seemed very suspicious that domestic violence was involved even though both partners were present."

"A Doctor wrote an adverse medical report on a compensation case simply because he thought being a dominant meant I was homosexual."

"When asking for info regarding a body piercing, they were easily offended. When we tried to explain our dynamics and that all decisions regarding options for health treatment are made by my partner- the doctor was uncomfortable and wanted to leave quickly. When we spoke to him about consensual S&M and that certain marks may be visible at the time of my appointments, but are not signs of abuse, he became very agitated, embarrassed and couldn't get out of the room quick enough. We even took the time to provide him with literature designed for health care providers explaining a bit about our lifestyle. (Medical Practitioner's Guide to Kink active patients)."

"I've had professionals, such as doctors and mental health care providers take me less seriously, and not acknowledge my BDSM experiences.... presumably in attempts to deny them for my sake (which ends up being very unproductive in the end)."

"I was seeing one doc for several years, this doctor retired and the new doctor when I explained that I was in a d/s relationship brought to light that it was against God's law and would very likely have to be reported to the law because it was assault. I walked out of his office and went to the chief of staff to explain it was consensual and got a new doc ... the same happens with a new group counselor 2.5 yrs later. She did call the law on a group member that stated that he and his wife liked to bite and draw blood [and he had marks <G>] she was gone in 2 weeks."

"I had a small-minded set of doctors who were personally horrified when I told them I was into the BDSM lifestyle. One of them in particular tried to leverage my illness against me to stop this 'disgusting' lifestyle. She was actually trying to convince me that my illness was because of this behavior that she did not approve of and that it would improve if I dropped all this participation on the community. She was an idiot and a bigot and I changed to another facility so I did not ever have to be subjected to her backwards thinking again. She was also a very bad physician. The medical problems I had were in no way related to the BDSM lifestyle and nothing that I did there could have or would have made a difference in my recovery. You have to be careful who you tell what to because you never know how they are going to misunderstand and interpret the information. Assholes are to be found everywhere in this world. I try not to give people any extra knives to stab me in the back with."

"I had to change doctors because he saw some bruises from playing and wanted to file a report for abuse. Now I am careful about playing before a doctor's appointment...."

"I had an injury that was due to a sexual activity and the doctor who was doing the follow up care (my at that time family care doctor) decided that I must have some sexually transmitted disease and also did not have a nurse in with him when he did a pelvic exam to test for "said STD. I filed a complaint about it with the medical board but the complaint was dismissed."

"When a doctor at my University saw bruises on my ass, I explained that I am involved in the SM lifestyle. I told her about safety, consent, and mutual responsibility. She told me that she didn't like that idea and was obviously confused and repulsed. She acted the same way when I told her that I have multiple sex partners. I explained that I always use protection, but she was still completely negative and judgmental."

"While I don't really feel that I was discriminated against, when I finally got up the nerve to tell my doctor that I'm kinky, he made a comment along the lines of 'of course, there are issues of morality' but he didn't actually say anything that was specifically negative. This probably had nothing to do with his decision to move to another practice, but I don't really know. What I do know is that after developing a level of trust over about 12 years (partly due to a situation with my cancer diagnosis 7 years ago), it's going to be hard for me to reach that level with whoever my next doctor is."

"I was injured during a fetish photo shoot and had to go to the Dr's... and he wanted to know how I got hurt... told him... and he said I didn't really deserve to get pain meds then since I brought it upon myself. Granted he did give them to me eventually."

"I don't know if I would call it 'discrimination' but there is always an air of disapproval and condescension when I go in for my regular STD checkup and I disclose all my current partners."

"Assumption that sexual practices has contributed to post surgical infection."

"I have piercing and tattoos and the Dr. felt that it was inappropriate and refused medical services and I was sent to another facility where my insurance was refused."

"I was out as a kinky gay man to my general physician who would ridicule me on a regular basis."

"Receive lectures about monogamy when I go for my STD testing, have had social services called for bruises."

"[Facility name withheld] says they are kink sensitive, but it took a lot of doing to explain to my lesbian doctor that no one was hurting me and my problems were of a different nature. She finally accepted my explanations, solved my problems and treated me well. However, I will not go back for services there unless in an emergency."

"My medical concerns and questions were never answered directly and thoroughly. I was always upfront and honest with my primary-care physician about my involvement in 'the scene'. But, when he asked me a question about a 'scene' related bruise or mark, and I told him what it was, he always shook his head and made a 'face'. He also sometimes kept me waiting for over 2 hours

at a scheduled appointment, and then would only spend less than 5 minutes with me! I have since changed primary-care physicians."

"My medical doctor refused to keep seeing me, he was LDS and uncomfortable with my involvement in BDSM practices."

"Limited understanding by medical professionals not involved in BDSM."

"Medical doctor: I changed doctors after a visit to my doctor (for a sinus infection) at which my doctor spent 45 minutes trying to send me to therapy for domestic violence because he caught a glimpse of bruises on my legs. I gave him a brief explanation of consensual BDSM practices, but he wasn't interested. He argued with me for most of an hour, and never even gave me treatment for the sinus infection I came in for. A few days later I got a referral from a friend in the local kink community to a kink and poly-friendly doctor in my area."

"I was once 'lectured' by a phlebotomist when taking an STD blood test when UI answered that I had multiple sex partners and engaged in 'dangerous' play. She tried to convince me I should change. I don't consider this serious, but it was annoying and a bit unsettling coming from a medical professional and someone I was relying on to maintain some level of confidentiality."

"The police have harassed me due to bruises that my doctor called about."

"Was worried about lump in scrotum & went to have it checked out, per cancer ads; doc queried my personal/sex life at length, then told me that 'some people get hypochondriacal when they feel guilty about what they are doing, sexually.'"

"The doctor was not able to ignore some bruises that were from SM, and missed a Lyme tick bite for 4 weeks."

"Had gynecologists freak out & refuse to treat me when they saw labial piercings and heavy butt & general bruising/cane marks. They insisted I was sick and needed help and/or in denial about being abused by a husband/boyfriend and interrogated me about their name. When I told them bruises were consensual & recreational they told me I was pathological & told me to get another doctor as they refused to treat me anymore (even though I was having a gynecological emergency totally unrelated to BDSM stuff. "

"Comments about my mental health by MD who could only assume I must be mentally ill given my BDSM activities - he had spotted needle marks from suspension scenes."

"By Medical Doctor that I was in denial that I was in an abusive relationship and was being coerced into the activities."

"Disapproval by doctor, made me feel uncomfortable."

"I am afraid to go to the doctor with bruises or marks."

"The discrimination I have experienced has largely been from medical professionals who believe that having multiple sexual partners is irresponsible and dangerous, without ever asking what sort

of safer sex precautions I take with those partners or what my sexual practices with them look like. That includes my family doctor and I also extend that to include blood-drive policies and the employees and volunteers who implement them."

"Have been discriminated against by medical professionals when marks were shown on my body - and explained to them they were consensual marks. Was asked to not return to their practice."

"OBgyn doc referred me to counseling because of bruising."

"Have experienced discrimination at the doctor's office, being refused Hep A and B vaccination, as I was told that my risk level couldn't justify it because of my demographic."

"Dr., specialist, refused to treat me. Non emergency."

"Medical problems from my clinic. They didn't like my lifestyle and tried to blame my medical conditions on my lifestyle. They displayed biased negative attitudes & behavior towards me because of their personal belief system. They even tried to force me to drop my lifestyle because they didn't approve. They were assholes and I changed my medical group because of the way they tried to bully me around. Screw them and their personal opinions. It's my life."

"Repeated discrimination by therapists - being told that I'm only submissive because I'm a survivor of abuse; that being submissive is a pathology; that I'm a sex addict because of my sexual orientation."

"Harassment by the forensic medical doctor who did my daughters exam. Upon entering the room to give the medical history he began bashing me for my lifestyle, and accusing me of not caring about my daughter. He said he did not like my Sir because of what he had been told and what he read, without ever having met Him face to face. I was subjected to an hour of this badgering and trying to defend myself to a professional who was to do a medical exam only. At the end of it all the doctor stated she had not been penetrated but that she had a stretchy hymen and he could not rule out fingering. He also stated that the home atmosphere was not conducive to her wellbeing. This man did not even ask my daughter any questions."

"I was treated with skepticism about medical problems at a clinic that was touted as for the LGBT community. Eventually it worked out, but for a short time there was a feeling of condemnation."

"Medical personnel had adverse reactions to my lifestyle choices and treated me with disrespect and slow to respond once they found out."

3. Child Custody or Divorce Proceedings (26 comments)

"A judge granted my former husband supervised visitation on the basis of two pictures of me bound with rope that happened to be over 10 years old...my former husband didn't have to prove anything..."

"Child's therapist recommended against allowing child to visit my home or even hotel room in separation/divorce."

"Loss of custody and supervised visitation ordered because I was deemed to be in a 'Perverse' sexual lifestyle 'outside of the confines of the social moral norm'...no kidding...that's what the judge said."

"Religious persecution by a 'Christian Based' therapist who projected his own beliefs onto my BDSM practices, requiring draconian measures to 'cure' me which resulted in divorce and loss of custody of my child."

"My ex-wife attempted to use my involvement in the community as the reason as to why I should only be allowed supervised visitation at the beginning of divorce proceedings. This was granted based upon her complaint. When the case was to be heard (6 months latter) I said I would I present a video tape of her spanking me as part of our mutual play. She withdrew her complaint but was not punished in any way for filling a false complaint. I on the other hand spent thousands of dollars on visitation and additional legal defense."

"[State withheld] Department of Family and Protective Services - Child Protective Services. We are foster parents and were persecuted by CPS because of our lifestyle. They did take our children for three weeks until our attorney was able to get a court date. A Texas District Family Law Judge ruled against the State of Texas on three separate occasions. There was no evidence or reason to remove the kids, CPS said there was Risk of Sexual Abuse because of our lifestyle. CPS's own investigation came up negative, although the disposition claimed Unable to Determine Sexual Abuse and Unable to Determine Neglectful Supervision. They had no intention of returning the children at all. We were luck we had room on a credit card to pay the attorney's fees to be able to get our children back and the adoption finalized."

"My ex used the fact that I (and actually he at one point) enjoyed the BDSM lifestyle to mean that I was damaged, mentally ill, and violent and screwed up my custody. He now has legal custody because I ran out of money to fight. I had to concede custody of my son to a psychotic asshole while I raised the money to fight."

"I experienced discrimination in my divorce/custody case involving my 3 children. My ex received custody of 2 of the children and I only received the youngest child, 2 at that time, because the father said he didn't want him as he couldn't "control" him."

"My divorce attorney was very interested in fetish details regarding my Mistress/spouse for what appeared to be his own gratification rather than for what was important to my case. He seemed to make light or use a joking manner with accompanying facial expressions of my being a submissive during mediation and 'her wearing the pants' or a 'role reversal' going on between us when talking with the mediator in negotiations, rather than being forthright in dealing with the subject. It's a bias here in Texas that clearly isn't understood regarding stereotypes about the roles which men should take. The court appointed psychologist who did the psych evaluation on us and our children during the divorce brought it up numerous times. My spouse was my Mistress who became verbally & emotionally abusive in front of our children, but lied and claimed she wasn't my Mistress; stating that it was my fantasy alone. I finally asked the psychologist what my being sexually submissive had to do with my ability to care for my children. He admitted it didn't have any bearing on it. That was the last I heard about it from him. In his final report, my submissiveness/kinks were still made mention of using a quote from her, thus using it against me

and putting me in a negative light to the court. She stated had stated in a session with him that I was 'into humiliating and disgusting acts of S&M' which was part of what he weaved in the report to help put me in a negative light. Had we gone to court, the context in which it was used would have been difficult to overcome; helping to create a negative bias against me in regard to visitation and custody with my children. However, I did have an original signed copy of our D/s contract to show that it was consensual and that things went both ways despite what she'd said to him. In essence, she perjured herself in order to discredit me during our divorce."

"My first divorce lawyer withdrew from my case when my ex started detailing my bedroom practices."

"I had one lawyer that wouldn't represent me in my divorce because he knew that I was bi-sexual and didn't want to have to defend me in court if it came up with custody."

"DSS in the county I live in has taken a report of BDSM and polygamy against us and turned it into a hunt to remove my Sir and other members of our family from the house. They are seeking for me to denounce the lifestyle and have taken my child from me. They exhausted our finances so that finding a lawyer that we can afford is very difficult at this time. I have lost my job due to DSS disclosing things to the school board, however I can not prove this. I have been put on a list in [state withheld] called the Responsible Individuals List, this list keeps me from seeking employment in the state in my field of bus driving, child care, or teaching. We need help badly from the community, and I just don't know how to go about pulling things together to get my family back together and clear our names."

"When CPS came to our door, they went to my 2 older sons schools talking to them about my kids and what us grown up do. One of the places was the local Baptist church. I am not too sure, but I feel like so people have talked about what it is we do, since we are in a town of 8000."

"We are currently getting ready to fight against my husbands ex wife who found out about our BDSM involvement and has now decided that based on that we are not fit parents."

"I haven't lost custody yet. But my ex is using my lifestyle as a means to gain custody [primarily to avoid paying support] I have lost my Maintenance because of giving a home to my Master while he went through His divorce proceedings due to IL law. And while NOTHING inappropriate is EVER done in front of my son, my ex is pursuing full custody and my lawyer is having a hell of a time. I find out in three weeks if I lose custody."

"Been reported to Child Services and investigated simply for having an adult website. Our children were pulled out of class at school at questioned by social workers. After questioning the children, no further action was taken."

"State DHR is investigating my family, they are "concerned" if my children are being exposed to my lifestyle. Even though I have continually explained the kids are NOT aware of my lifestyle."

"My ex-husband tried to take my children. Since I am very careful and for the most part, not active, he could not prove anything regarding activity near the children. Instead, he falsely accused me of using drugs in order to have DHS come in and take my kids and investigate me more thoroughly."

"Social Services removed my children because they said I was a sexual deviant even though my interest and participation in the bdsm lifestyle was not why they were removed. It was because of a spiteful ex boyfriend."

"Persecuted by children's attorney, guardian ad litem and therapist because I engage in online chat with others who enjoy the same activities and because I have an online profile. I am the non-custodial parent."

"The states child services is 'concerned' that my children might grow up to be into the same things I am into. They want to try to find a way to prevent this. So they have family therapists 10 hours a week in my home, an individual counselor for me, one for one of my children and one for family therapy. They also claim they are concerned as to the degree of exposure my children see of my lifestyle (which is NONE, I do not do any kink in front of my children), so then they are concerned if they are being adequately cared for if I go out to scene, which I have a almost 17 year old child who serves as my sitter on the rare instances I do go out. Then they are concerned well, is the person u meet following you home, which could endanger your kids. Seems just anything they can think of."

"My ex tried to use that info against me in a custody battle."

"We had CPS contact us because of what i put down on a Collarme.com ad and on a profile, that was brought to their attention by Master's X wife. W/we were looking for a nanny/maid slave for own home. Since we were in the lifestyle we wanted the 3rd person to be in the lifestyle also. But the funny part is that we deleted the ad, and the profile 3 months prior to CPS showing up, she had kept the info that long. I have become an advocate for slaves with children in the home who practice BDSM. After what we went through I have tried to educate myself on what can and can't be done."

"My ex husband has threatened to sue for custody of my son because he feels that my polyamorous lifestyle is unhealthy and has told him so in front of him. He told my son himself that he was living an unhealthy life. Mind you, this is coming from a man that has gone to prison for drug manufacturing, possession and domestic violence."

"My partners spouse, of which he was separated from. Abducted his children to the UK. She called my family from the UK and told them that he was a pedophile and beats and fondles children. She was deported with the children back to the US, but now, because of the allegations, he is having a custody battle with her. The final decision will be made in 30 days from yesterday, March 6th. He does not have the funds to represent himself, but her parents have funded a very expensive lawyer."

"I have to be careful of my art and writing. I have been involved in two custody battles and do not intend to have to face a third. My involvement in the fetish community has to remain understated until my children are no longer in danger. At that time I may or may not be able to really come out to the world due to my job and simple habit. I have maintained a pseudonym for fetish art and another for writing and have little to no connection between those names and my day to day life. All payments go through a third party checking account. I have done this to protect not only my children, but those in my life who might fall under censure for knowing/loving/playing with me."

4. Law Enforcement Officers / Courts (22 comments)

"Unable to practice my sexuality properly due to the UK's Spanner ruling."

"I was accused of a major crime that I did not commit. They ruined my life and outed me to everyone, including family, and employers. I was forced to move to a different city as I was unable to get a job, and re-take all exams in a different state so that I could change professions and use my college degree. It cracks me up that I was a Pro Domina and am now a HS teacher. If they only knew... I'd be fired immediately."

"I was raped by a roommate a year ago. The detective on the case was convinced that it was a scene just because I was involved with BDSM, and that I reported it as rape because I was a spiteful ex-girlfriend."

"Brought rape charges against an ex of mine when I was 22 - and due to agreeing that we participated in S&M/BDSM activities there was 'no way' to prove that it was rape - this all from MY lawyer."

"Police refused to make a report after being mugged."

"I was assaulted by two carloads of thugs in a non BDSM related incident. I reported it to the police. Partly because I was wearing BDSM regalia, mainly a leather vest with pins, I was arrested. I had been injured by flying glass during the attack. The responding paramedics gave me only the most cursory examination and were extremely rude to me and to my wife. My wife, who was a witness to the assault was handcuffed, threatened with firearms, and sexually assaulted by the Illinois State Police. I was eventually acquitted of Reckless Conduct for the offense of being attacked."

"I was arrested and abused."

"While the experience did not directly happen to me, a woman who I assisted out of a criminally violent relationship was denied a restraining order because the court believed the abuse was consensual based upon her BDSM lifestyle."

"I was sexually assaulted and because I was engaged in SM, my claim was not taken seriously and I was blamed for the incident. In the SM community, 'No' still means 'No.' People do not understand that."

"After being violently assaulted and robbed by a former boyfriend, I went to make a report with the police. When the police questioned the perpetrator, he notified them that I am a professional Dominatrix and am involved in S&M practices. Upon finding out about my involvement with the fetish community, the law enforcement officers dismissed my complaint, explaining that I 'probably liked to get beat up'."

"Visited by police to check out our home due to complaints by local church group."

"My spouse and I were visiting an area dungeon for a play party. The local police showed up due to conflict between the dungeon owner and someone else. The someone else had called the

police and told them what was occurring at the location. The play party had to end and everyone left due to threats of arrest by the local police."

"The stalker I mentioned previously was let go scot-free, and continues to harass my family more than a decade later. More recently, I tried to file a domestic violence complaint against my same-sex partner and the police refused to even take the complaint because my partner told them I participated in BDSM with other people."

"The local police. I worked as a reporter for ten years. One officer knew my preferences, and at times he stated that if any of his fellow officers found out they would certainly use that against me to prevent me from printing stories about the police department. The local sheriff had me falsely arrested three times to prevent stories and harass me so I don't doubt it was true. I worried they would find out and press false charges of prostitution against me even though it was totally unfounded."

"In 2006, I was sexually assaulted on the job by a male coworker. Denver police questioned my attacker, who immediately brought my ALT.com membership to their attention. My boyfriend, my employer, and the courts all were given this information, including login name and profile info. The impression given was that since I was into the Lifestyle... that I "asked for it" and the attacker walked away losing only his job. I fought for a full restraining order, and won, my attacker admitting everything in court. Denver Police and my employer treated me disgracefully, finally causing my resignation."

"My partner was murdered and once the police found out I was a Pro Domina, they accused me of the crime."

"My daughter was molested, and because of my lifestyle, the courts refused to prosecute the man who did it."

"Now I have a Police Notation that I am a 'Character of Interest'. Even though I previously held 'a High Grade Government Security Clearance', failed My last Security Check simply because My Name was noted in the Police System."

"Members of law enforcement kept a watch over me & my practice, as well as the BAR association trying to find reason to disbar me... which did not work."

"Friend of a man arrested, interviewed by the FBI regarding his and my consensual relationship. I believe because BDSM was involved, they ignored evidence that he was not guilty."

"My testimony against a stalker who published prostitution ads in my name was discounted partly because I'd mentioned D/S a few times on the internet. Being polyamorous didn't help, either."

"Forced into 'assessment' as an 'abuser'."

5. Other Professionals (10 comments)

"Been asked by lawyer why dressed in leather and refused service when told that BDSM is my lifestyle."

"I had an attorney who sold me down the river because of his feelings towards me as a lifestyle person."

"An attorney would not help us fight our case because of our lifestyle, and recommended we 'take a plea' even though we had done nothing wrong."

"Lawyer not wanting to take my case and acting unprofessionally by blushing and making bad jokes."

"I cannot be certain. However, it may be that a wrongful death claim/suit related to my mother's death was advised by an attorney to be handled differently, or followed up inadequately with respect to directly relevant witness testimony, because of my involvement with and participation in, our local munch. (The man blushed to the ears at the mere word 'kink'.)"

"I was refused dental treatment and the nurse sprayed me with anti-bacterial spray and everything I touched."

"Dentist refusing to treat for being BDSM-Leather wearing."

"I work part-time as a contractor for a company that has an on-line sex toy store. I work with the fetishwear and lingerie vendors, write product descriptions, and put the products up on the site. My first year, the accountant I usually work with at my tax-preparation center was so offended by what I did; he insisted that there was not a 'job category' in the IRS database for what I was doing and he couldn't file my taxes. I had to go back to the desk, ask for a manager, and have someone else do my taxes."

"Possibly, legal services were diminished because of my participation."

"Just in general, including my family, has given me disapproving looks and 'reasons' why I shouldn't be a submissive. I went to a domestic abuse group and had my collar on and they about had a cow because I was being submissive to a man and that I was letting him hit me and tie me up and all that stuff. (my Dom wasn't the reason I was at the group, I was dealing with issues of being raped from BEFORE I was living with my Dom) I never went back to the group after that first time."

II. The following comments were made in response to the request: *"Please use this space to provide any information about the above questions, or to explain any situation in which you feel you have been discriminated against as a result of your involvement in BDSM-Leather-Fetish activities."*

1. **Work-related** (68 comments)

"After outing myself by appearing as a witness in a court case where a woman was wrongly accused of sexual assault, I had two cases of loss of business, and one case where I was asked to do work outside of normal hours because of unstated objections by a female staff member."

"My upper level of management saw a tattoo that represents the lifestyle and told me that it was inappropriate."

"Once my coworkers found out I was Kinky, even though I created the program that kept them all employed, I was turned down for promotion."

"I was turned down for a job because my tongue is pierced. I keep the bar out when I'm at work now."

"Government Agency my husband works for told him and myself to stop our activity in the local BDSM group, or risk him losing his clearance. He has been with this agency for 18 years."

"Potential customers have Googled me and opted not to hire me because of my SM related photography. One Fortune 500 company cancelled a job the night before because one of their executives discovered my SM photography on the Internet. I'm very out with it, so it's very easy to find. An assistant in the marketing dept of a major law firm that I had worked with for many years discovered my website and was able to have her superiors stop using my services."

"Fired from a past job after being called a woman-beater, my supervisor was an ex-girlfriend from a previous vanilla relationship."

"Told by straight supervisor to immediately cease 'celebration' of bdsm, in spite of mandate to provide services to entire community."

"I am a retired member of the US Air Force. I lived in fear of discovery my whole military career and managed to avoid it. It is virtually certain however, had my cross-dressing, bisexuality (myself and my spouse), swinging, exhibitionism or voyeurism been discovered my career would have been destroyed. Even now that I am retired I must still be careful since I work for the federal government as a civilian contractor and hold a security clearance. Coming out while I am in government employ would lead to questions on my periodic reinvestigations as to why I did not divulge my lifestyle choices earlier. The answers to those questions would again ruin my career. I am NOT a threat to national security because if push came to shove and someone attempted to blackmail me (the typical reason they say persons of non-traditional lifestyle are a threat) I would out myself and take the consequences rather than violate my clearance. Regardless though, this constant threat of loss of career and livelihood has impacted me in countless negative ways and I do not understand why we are considered such a threat."

"Fired from two jobs that found my interests online, and manipulated their company computer policies to use as reason to fire, even though it was not done on the job."

"My husband was out at his place of work for seven years without repercussions. He had just received a substantial \$4.00 an hour raise and had always received outstanding performance reviews. When a new facilities manager was hired last year that all changed. This new manager 'took issue' with our lifestyle, cornered him in private and told him he was a sick fuck and in serious need of psychiatric counseling. He then proceeded to go on a witch hunt and managed to find a 'semi-legit' reason after several months to have him terminated."

"I think the most critical issues were those around my counseling license and now my current position as Sr. Mgr of a mental health/substance abuse program for HIV+ persons. After all this, I'm 'out' to staff as it seems they always tell new staff. In my program, it doesn't seem to be much of an issue because we work closely w/GLBT community and are very open/accepting of different lifestyles. It's the upper mgt's perception that I might create PR problems for the Center if this is more public. I'm currently seeking new employment. Therefore, after long years of being truly Out...I've gone back to using just a scene name at events and requesting that my picture and real name not be on the Internet. It's frustrating but seems very necessary at this point."

"I have been denied participation in various government projects because: (1) prior public persecution by the print and broadcast media; (2) one or more individuals objected to my inclusion due to my BDSM activities."

"I would have been licensed ten years earlier had I not had such problems with my supervisor at the battered women's shelter where I had worked for two years before somebody outed me."

"A co-worker doesn't talk to me anymore after seeing me ride the Leather Pride truck at the Pride parade."

"I live and work in [state withheld] as a mid level manager in a factory. [State withheld] is a right to work state, which means the employer can and will fire you at any time for any or no stated reason. A few months back 4 of our best people were fired...for the crime of wife swapping. Mind you there is no per say policy about fetish related activities, but the message came through loud and clear. If they would fire a wife swapper, I figure they would draw and quarter a Dom."

"Denied employment at [name withheld], and was harassed by the staff during a pre-employment drug screen, talked about and pointed out in my presence by the staff, about my personal business."

"I was fired from two jobs just after them finding out about an online adult toy store I own. One stated I went against some policy, and the other found out and tried to state I ran my business while on their computers at work, which was insane, as all the ordering/emailing/etc is done through a 3rd party. My only involvement is getting a check every month."

"Anonymous contact to newspaper, story went on the newswire around the globe; NCSF could not help because of the 6 month clause where an employer can end a contract without cause. Even though my work had been excellent and documented. The town of [name withheld] -- most of the people, shunned me, refused service or reduced quality of service; there was especial condemnation from a church in the community who stated I could not separate my personal life from my professional life. And, they suggested that I would molest their children; their children were not safe with me."

"As a professional, I am very cautious about public appearance, even though I live and practice in a very accepting city. My concern is about state repercussion should any of my actions (such as at Folsom St. Fair or similar venues) be perceived as "unbecoming" conduct with potential loss of license."

"Lost my job."

"I was refused employment in another state because I was honest and told them that I was a submissive and lived a M/s lifechoice and my S.O. is my Master when asked about my relationship status."

"Did not get job"

"In the work place, the official company dress code was changed to not permit the wearing of any leather clothing, with the exceptions of coats and jackets at anytime while on the premise. Even though I am also an avid motorcyclist who wears motorcycle leathers for safety, I must be in 'acceptable business attire' prior to entering the building where our offices are located. The wearing of leather jeans on 'jeans Friday' is strictly prohibited. Further, I was demoted with loss of pay for wearing leather jeans prior to an official change in the dress code being made. Just for clarification, I never wore 'inappropriate' clothing, at anytime, when meeting with current or potential clients. It is interesting to note, however, that one of the large, and very conservative, insurance companies that I had a contract with, allowed leather jeans on jeans Friday."

"I was unable to continue working for a company I started training with because the gentleman training me was part of the BDSM community and was frightened that I would out him. He fired me without cause."

"On wall street had one uptight bitch find fault with my jewelry, so I didn't wear it to work anymore. It was a slave bracelet..."

"The way I got let go was that the company laid off 25 people of which I was one of them. A week later they called back 24 of them. When I approached the shop steward, I was told that there was no way I was going to win this case even though they knew they wanted me out because of my lifestyle. I was too young and did not have the financial resources to fight back. Three years later the company went bankrupt. KARMA IS A BITCH!!!!!"

"I was 'moved' into a position where a multi-million dollar loss was credited to me and I subsequently lost my job as a result of the performance evaluation. I had made the company above average \$\$ on all projects before this one, and was told going into it that I would not be credited for the loss as it was known company wide and practically industry wide that the project was initially underbid and poorly managed. All because the word got back to management that I was involved in 'kinky' sex. It ended my career as an electrician/project manager."

"After I came out at an old job I experienced a lot of sexual harassment and social stigma there as well as not receiving a pay raise so I quit since there are no laws in my state that protect against harassment based on sexual orientation in the workplace. I told one of my professors who I was also doing research with that I am involved in the gay-straight alliance at my school and he took me off the project, firing me, and still refuses to talk to me. "

"I worked for a college teaching in a local prison. The governor of the prison withdrew my security clearance. My contract stated that if my clearance was ever withdrawn then I would be given notice and lose my job. I am now unemployed. Someone I worked with reported to the security in the prison that I was on a website."

"A co-worker expressed his displeasure and horror at 'these freaks' while dancing about, waving his hands, making a variety of faces. I commented on his prejudice and he told me off. Since his is a senior manager and the other right wing religious nut of the office didn't back me up I shut up out of fear."

"As a psychologist, I specialize in working with people in alternative lifestyles. I also teach at a university, and know for certain I would not receive teaching assignments there if my lifestyle was known."

"I am an instructor with a county school board here in Florida. I believe they have some type of morals clause. I believe this clause would, if invoked, cause the loss of my job and professional certification should my sexual practices come to light."

"I was asked to not show up to an event because they thought I used it as a cover for BDSM work."

"Because I do entertainment with the [name withheld] Erotic Arts Festival I have had families not use me services because I supported such an event."

"I can't say that I've been discriminated against much. I don't come out to anyone who has authority over me. I teach in a public institution, and I fear the repercussions and job loss if I were to be outed there."

"I was outed to several of my clients who have now refused to come back to me for services."

"I was fired from my job."

"As a good friend of a professor currently being discriminated against at work because of her BDSM/sex work affiliations, and as a friend of other sex workers in the BDSM community, I incur collateral damage at work. I am excluded from work functions in which I've participated in years past, I am met with frowns in the hallways at work or am denied a simple greeting, and I am, in short, conflated with bigoted colleagues."

"Co-workers refusing to work with me."

"When I worked for a large company it caused some serious problems and ended up with the union filing a complaint about a "poor" write up I got."

"My co-workers discovered my Lifestyle due to a friend letting something slip accidentally. After that I received several propositions and still do. That happened in 2002. Word always spreads quickly in my area and so now, most of my community knows. I am usually ignored, frowned at, or propositioned when I go out of the house."

"I endure insulting comments from co-workers about 'perverts'."

"Professionals who saw me as less 'together' because I participate in kinky sex and am a visible member of the Leather/Fetish community."

"Now, as a writer, when I read things in the New York Post where they say 'we will write about anyone wearing a Dog Collar,' as a Journalism Student, that scares the shit out of me. I mean, how could I ever apply for a job (upon graduation) for a company where I will be in fear of wearing even something as vanilla-ish as my daily collar, if I know they will Mar my name on international headlines like that poor man from Canada! I will respect him by using his scene name, I believe it was Robert."

"Loss of business at work caused by negative gossip."

"I have lost 1 job – teaching children to dance as I have a BFA in Dance degree and another offer rescinded – teaching high school level dance once it was learned I owned an Adult novelty shop which also sells BDSM gear."

"I have a reasonably high profile job in a large corporate company. If I was known to be submissive this would definitely be career limiting, and difficult for me to continue to work there."

"I was investigated by state board of nursing."

"Coworkers did a long and hard search to find our (partner's too) AOL profiles, print them out and bring them to work to share with everyone."

"Threatened with job loss."

"I was negotiating a new job. Someone that knows about my lifestyle casually mentioned it to someone at the new company. . . . I didn't know at the time. I couldn't figure out why they dropped their offer by over 30%. I found out later. When the person that mentioned it was thanked by the person at the company."

"A former employer found out that i went to International Mr. Leather weekend. Not long after that, he found 'evidence' against me and fired me. Other's that had the same 'evidence' against them were merely given a written reprimand."

"Subject of gossip in the workplace that made for uncomfortable working environment."

"Job was threatened if bd/sm blog was not taken down."

"When I was in my 20s, co-workers found out about my involvement in the SM community. Though I never discussed it at the office, my personal life became office gossip fodder and it damaged my advancement opportunities. I was explicitly told by my supervisor that my credibility as a manager had been damaged and while I wasn't in danger of losing my job, that I wouldn't ever advance professionally at the company."

"Manager threatened me with loss of job. Except that some of the middle and lower management knew me well and stood up for me."

"Lost profession/shunned"

"My experience was an indirect experience of discrimination. My husband/Master lost his job because of his involvement in the leather lifestyle."

"Wasn't hired for job."

"In my last job, I was denied promotion because of my known involvement with the BDSM community, It was not considered appropriate behavior for a Supervisory level employee. My current job has denied promotion because of 'personal behaviors/values associated with non work activities' however I can't get that in writing."

"Lost job due to police revealing I had contacted [not attended] a massage parlor."

"Assumption that I am sexual in all aspects of my life and therefore am not capable of keeping healthy boundaries or acting in a professional manner."

"A manager was told I was active in the BDSM community. He called an emergency meeting with the middle management to discuss my termination. I was immediately informed by coworkers/middle management to lay low until it clears up. Do not discuss my activities, do not reply to any comments made to me by others. Do not wear leather to any off duty event that will be attended by other coworkers. Luckily the people that told me this were friends trying to help me. It is my understanding that without their help I was to be terminated. But the manager found strong resistance to my termination by people that really knew me for who I am, and my past merits in our company."

"Banned from work's social events."

"Disciplinary in work and questioning concerning my private life which I had mistakenly told someone in work about. I had taken time off sick and was told that my 'deviant practices' were believed to be contributing to the sickness (which was in actual fact a viral infection)."

"I lost my job because my employer received information by a third party that i am involved in the BDSM community."

"I attended and competed at IML for the International Mr. Bootblack Contest. I made no secret about where I was going or what I was doing there. Shortly after returning from my trip, my boss found a reason to fire me...albeit a very minute discrepancy. One that several people had merely been written up for on their first offense. As such, he chose to fire me instead. At the time, I did not see the two being related to each other. However, a couple of years afterward, I came to find out through a reliable source the true reason he had fired me."

"Lost a high level job in Florida when the company found out that I was active in the local D/s community."

2. Family and Friends (58 comments)

"Came 'out' to one gay friend, who was horrified. I had stood by him for years, even financially supported him for several years. I thought that he, of all people, would be more understanding. It still makes me very sad."

"I've lost friends because of my BDSM practices. In [state withheld], I have been unable to come out to friends because I may lose their friendship."

"My family calls me 'sick' and lost to the 'devil'."

"Spousal dis-affection"

"Loss of family"

"Loss of friendship"

"Breakdown of long-term relationships with intimate partners"

"Some of my husband's family wouldn't attend our wedding because it was held in a building that is normally used as a BDSM club even though there was nothing there the day of our wedding that would allude to what is usually done there."

"Loss of friends and strain on family relationships."

"More on a personal level. I have lost many friends because of it."

"Shunned by partners due to kink desires... Insulted and made fun of without the other person knowing I am kinky..."

"My child and partner have limited information about my kink practices but disapprove. I am sure it would also be a problem in my workplace."

"I've just had people judge me harshly and make obnoxious comments."

"Loss of some friendships, discord within relationships with lovers"

"General people being rude for no reason at a convention."

"Judged as nuts by family and friends. Perhaps I am not competent?"

"Some people being complete jerks and not being friends with me anymore."

"Loss of Friendships and invitations to social gatherings. Loss of partners and potential partners when I discussed my lifestyle."

"Estrangement from my parents."

"Lost my friend of 35 years when I came out to her and my son thinks it is terrible, neither wants to learn about it."

"Many times have I been sent persons attempting to 'save' me from the devil as some members of my family are 'born again' Christians and feel the call to 'save' me."

"Son in law is very much against myself or my husband keeping the kids for the night or weekend, says he is afraid we will discuss "that kinky crap" with the children."

"Loss of 'life long' friend due to being involved with an 'evil pervert'."

"I experienced this only indirectly as a result of things that happened to a new submissive when she was involuntarily outed to her family, profession and community in 2000. Despite severe obstacles we were able to continue our relationship and are presently married. However, we are still dealing with the results of her involuntary outing then, both in terms of relationships with her family and legally."

"Loss of friends, although this doesn't have a cost-basis, it does affect income in the long run, since much of what I do is referral based."

"My family persecutes me daily for my lifestyle."

"People turned back on me and started saying that "stuff" you are into. Discrimination mostly by people i had considered friends and came out to them..."

"Loss of vanilla friends..."

"When I started to come out to my friends, several of them would no longer speak to me, or allow my children to play with theirs. I had perceived them as VERY open minded so I was shocked and surprised by their reaction. I think they probably were frightened by misinformation they had heard about BDSM."

"Loss of friends"

"Alienation from former friends and some loss of close family ties."

"While I don't feel that my divorce settlement was affected by my bdsm activities, I do feel that it contributed in a major way to the divorce after 30 years of marriage. My family has also become rather cold towards me."

"Not quite discrimination but you don't seem to have a category for this and it is still a negative effect: loss of many-years-long friendships after the person/s discovered I'm kinky. It is one of the personal consequences of stigma."

"I lost friends because of my lifestyle choice and had the pastor of my church ask me to quit coming when a church member found out that I was a slave..."

"Loss of friendships"

"Coming out about SM ended a 14 year live-in hetro relationship, could have been an easy way to end a vanilla relationship too. I don't know."

"I lost my best friend, cause I came out to her."

"Acquaintances who discovered my proclivities refusing to associate with me."

"Gossip, hostility of friends and family"

"Some people that I was introduced to stopped the conversation and walked away after learning of my BDSM interests."

"Familial ignorance and assumptions that I am 'sick'."

"Dumped by girlfriend"

"My Son and ex-daughter in-law refuses to allow me to see my grandchildren 1. I am bi-sexual 2. I am a submissive living in the BDSM lifestyle"

"Treated poorly by peers and can not talk openly about relationships."

"I had to quit my job as a professional submissive because of fear of family finding out and likely disowning me or at least losing all respect for me."

"Social snub by individuals with pre-conceived notions about what it is I do in my free time."

"Lost friendships"

"Colleague and friend repeatedly called me and accused me of being a bad person."

"Friends - saying I am sick, strange, etc."

"It broke my mother's heart when I told her that I had participated in BDSM activities. She couldn't understand how it wasn't abuse, even if it was consensual. She saw it as violence and saw no other way of looking at it. She made me feel like there must be something wrong with me to not see it like that. She saw my interest in bdsm as directly related to my self-esteem and self-respect, and thought that I had to be lacking in each to be able to enjoy it. With regards to exhibitionism, she just couldn't understand how anyone would want to express their sexuality publicly. She couldn't express it but she was overcome with shame that I had put my sexuality out there in the world for all to see and begged me to never tell anyone else in the family. Other friends have just refused to speak to me after I told them and said that it was sick and wrong and that there was nothing that I could say that would make them feel otherwise."

"'Friends' who 'disappeared'."

"Generally perceived as a laughable person for my tastes and preferences. No physical violence or direct discrimination, but double-entendres and dual meaning comments."

"Loss of friendships, loss of volunteer positions"

"Probably caused divorce due to desire for bdsm with vanilla wife who criticized me for it and mocked me."

"Discrimination amongst peers."

"While I don't know that it counts as harassment, when I shared with a group of friends that I had a great time at Folsom in San Francisco, when I explained what it was, I certainly got some strange looks, and I continue to get a bit of mockery for it. <shrug> I get teased for some of the literature I like to read. Granted, it isn't nearly as awful as it could be, but sometimes the little things hurt too, you know?"

"Loss of relationship (not divorce)."

"I have not come out to many people. Initially, as I have a pretty liberal group of friends, I thought I could be more open, but I learned quickly it was better to keep quiet. The one friend who is vanilla, but I trusted to be my safe call has almost become estranged from me because of it. I think she thinks I'm going off the deep end, and is confused why I haven't involved my dom in my regular socialization. I've always been an open book, but I've decided it is best to keep quiet."

3. **Housing** (9 comments)

"Loss of housing."

"I was thrown off section 8 because they found out I was a Dominant and using my apartment for play. Of course they used another excuse, but everyone around me got their apartments remodeled while they were there, I had to move. And they weren't even in my section of housing yet. This came about 2 months after they found out about me."

"I experienced some difficulty in obtaining an apartment when prospective landlords/landladies discovered I wrote books in the aforementioned gay/gay-BDSM genres. I received comments such as 'well, this is a family-oriented neighborhood, and we're sure you wouldn't fit in here', etc. Anxiety over finding a place to live will certainly make it very hard to be creative!"

"We once came out to some neighbors who we perceived as being a lesbian family. It turned out that they were fundamentalist evangelical Christian women who share a condo. Shortly thereafter we began receiving anonymous false complaints against us from our condo association."

"Haughty neighbors"

"Have been evicted from a home and a trailer park."

"Verbal abuse at work due to being perceived as gay due to wearing leather motorcycle jacket for working in field and possibly due to my habit of 'flagging'."

"Evicted from a flat share by force."

"A relative that I was renting an apartment from had me move out."

4. **LGBT** (9 comments)

"Harassed at Bart station after Dyke March by two minority males.. also many times feminist organizations and individuals in the distant past would have nothing to do with me, or actively censor because I was into leather...lesbians physically threatened me in the bars, not so much in California, but when I lived in Colorado."

"Shunned by other Lesbians"

"It has been devastating to learn that some gay and lesbian folks reject me as a leatherwoman because I am not a lesbian. No matter what I do or how hard I work for the leather community, I will not be accepted based on my sexuality. Pretty ironic don't ya think?"

"Social isolation, even among other gay men."

"South Asian GLBT and vanilla lesbian communities have not accepted me due to 'extreme' sexual practices."

"I find your survey to be very interesting and admirable. I have not experienced discrimination or harassment from the 'straight' world from my involvement with the community, but I have experienced discrimination within the LGBT community. I find it worrisome that dialogue about race and sexuality aren't more deeply discussed in our community."

"Refused use of local GLBTQ center for Leather gathering."

"The discrimination had more social ramifications as it was considered "politically incorrect" for Lesbians to be involved in S/M as it was seen as violence towards women. It was a matter of perception that led to losing friends, community."

"Harassment by others in the lesbian community – this was years ago, though."

5. **Miscellaneous** (26 comments)

"Discrimination can be more subtle than these options above... in my case I was slowly edged out of a dance performance troupe."

"The one person in my school that I talked to about My BDSM interests told me not to tell anyone. Explained to me we do not discuss such things with our clients or other massage therapists/teachers."

"There are two levels. One is general discomfort. The other is refusal of service. I have experienced both."

"I wear leather boots & gear all the time. Others have told me that it's not appropriate."

"Mostly just people making fun or hitting on me because they assume that being leather means being easy. I am lucky in that I am well protected by my leather family and in my personal relationships."

"Routinely have issues with TSA employees either doing carry-on screening or when they inspect checked luggage. When fetish gear is in the luggage they have been known to vandalize my baggage."

"Excommunicated from church group."

"Denial of membership in various women's/feminist organizations that otherwise I would have felt connected to. Censorship in feminist/lesbian feminist/radical feminist or separatist presses and events Actual harassment and threatened by vanilla dykes(early 1980's, bar scene, not in California) Harassment on the street and in the BART station by men."

"Thrown off the committee of a football club."

"Loss of insurance benefits because of my preferences."

"In 1984 I was a volunteer coordinator of a fundraiser for disadvantaged children/teens. When the major investor found out I was a bdsm sex educator she pulled out asap, saying, "What do we know, perhaps she keeps the kids in cages!" She would not talk to any of us after that, and the other investors lost interest as well."

"Discrimination from other lesbian women claiming I was involved in abusive behaviors because of my involvement in BDSM."

"Just being different is enough to be ostracized from many social occasions. I came to the Pagan community in the belief that I would be more readily accepted there but found even more deeply entrenched antipathy toward alternative lifestyles than in mainstream society."

"Discrimination from within the BDSM community because I am a submissive woman ... putdowns and remarks made by supposed men who consider themselves Dominants..."

"My fraternity has discriminated against me."

"I was never again notified of when my deaf persons group meets again. I am a member of a number of BDSM groups and admitted that I would be gone on a given date because I would be attending a BDSM function (play party). They use a "slap the face" motion to indicate BDSM."

"Not allowed to volunteer for an organization involving high school students."

"Refused services"

"After training with a local domestic violence organization, I was denied the opportunity to volunteer within the organization because the founder said my lifestyle 'perpetuated violence toward women.'"

"Although I have not been outright refused membership, or overtly harassed, there has been 'talk', and my son is excluded from some groups because of my PERCEIVED involvement in 'non-mainstream' activities. No one has ever asked me to confirm or deny my involvement, it is assumed and I am 'guilty by association', as is my child."

"I've faced difficulty as a female 'minority' in the leather community."

"Discrimination within the community for being a female Top and lesbian."

"Been asked to not return to restaurants."

"Received horrible service at a restaurant due to my group's admittance that we were attending a local convention. We never stated the purpose of the convention, but were asked if we were 'one of those people'."

"Being turned away from a coffee bar I had frequented regularly for many years - accused by the management of being a 'sick twisted sexual pervert' and being asked if I was aware that 'people bring their kids in here and it is unacceptable for them to be exposed to a monster like you'."

"Second instance: While eating out with my Dom at a well known restaurant, I deferred ordering to him (a few years ago this would have been acceptable good manners), but our waitress was lesbian. She took offense at this and throughout our meal made it a point to always go to me first for requests, totally ignoring him and placing her back to him, showing her total lack of respect to him as a person."

III. The following comments were made in response to the statement: *"Please use this space to describe any experiences of business discrimination you've encountered."*

1. Against nonprofit clubs and events (38 comments)

"I am part of a leather group that does a leather event every year. There have been several hotels that have told our group they did not want our business due to the nature of our group. Mind you our event brings in over 350 people - that is hotel rooms, catering, etc they are giving up."

"Long story with a happy ending, we found a better place to hold our munch and are now doing so...and the last restaurant lost \$87,000.00 a year in income that was generated by hosting our group."

"The press stalked us from early morning, but the police helped us thwart them. The neighbors also harassed us and tried to shut us down. I was the chair of this particular part of the event and had to wear a disguise for fear of being harassed further. Many years ago I was also videotaped at an event by the Marshall's office and could have lost a license to teach and it would have ruined my career."

"Our local bdsm group was refused hotel/conference room rental services and local resorts/campground providers have done the same when trying to find locations for our events based entirely on the nature of our activities. (Situations where activities may be in public view or

view of other patrons, and other legitimate concerns are removed from consideration of harassment. I'm just thinking of the back-assward jackasses that had no real excuse other than they just didn't like 'those' type of people).

"Finding a place to hold events is extremely hard. If the Landowners are told it is an Alternative Lifestyle group and that we will be meeting at the property once or twice a month, then we are denied a chance to lease property. It has to be done under another guise such as an art studio or photography studio."

"We were part of a play party at a local dungeon where the police were called by a neighbor. The police ordered the event to end with a threat of arrest."

"Venues and hotels refused to have us there. Charities refused our money. Religious groups boycott companies associated with us."

"We were denied ongoing use of a space when it was discovered it was for bdsm/kink workshops, when we'd already used it with no problems. This made it very difficult for us to continue doing the workshops (we were all volunteers) as we needed wheelchair accessible space which is hard to come by in our area without having to pay for it, and didn't have funds. We had no human rights discrimination rights either as members of the kink community."

"At events I've assisted with, I've been harassed by protesters and religious groups. However, this was confined to picketing and being yelled at, when I've been at gay/lesbian events where I have been involved in a 'leather' portion of the event."

"Several groups meet in the area and they have moved or actually vanished because of this practice."

"We have been unable to secure multiple venues, because the hotel chain refused to rent to us, or increased the price to where it was un-affordable."

"We were treated shabbily by a restaurant that we had Munched. Until they realized that we were a BDSM group (which you wouldn't notice, cause we know how to behave in vanilla environments), we were treated better. The minute that figured out what we were talking about in a private room of the restaurant, they treated us disrespectfully."

"Hotel refused to host the event, canceling at the last minute. This forced us to relocate to a very miserable and crude warehouse space which was far from satisfactory."

"My husband and I used to put on an event in Florida for bdsm. A hotel had contacted us about having the event at their hotel and we were just about to sign the contract with only 6mths left to go before the event and the main office from the chain called to let us know that we were not welcomed there because a previous group of "alternative" lifestyle (swingers) had held a party there and they had issues. This after us providing numerous references from the different hotels we had held the event at before. We never had any problems with any hotel."

"When there was a new Board of Directors at the Community center we met at for a couple years, they decided they didn't want 'our kind' meeting there anymore. We were told at 8pm the night before our monthly party in which we had the place reserved."

"Was organizing a Leather Conference and ran into business that threatened negative media coverage. Also, several adjoining Business went out of their way to make live difficult during the event. Most things like blocking parking, harassing participants, etc..."

"The organization owning the camp cancelled the rental agreement for the run even though the camp was used for over 15 years for the run. (They hired a new director.)"

"We had the town's fire department show up at the event looking for violations of fire code and generally making the event difficult to produce."

"Picket/protesters, attempts to get event cancelled."

"We were harassed out of restaurants even though we were very polite customers."

"Religious activists shouting scripture, slurs, and threatening violence. Beyond verbal attack however, very little else ever transpired."

"Unable to find &/or keep a venue to hold monthly meetings/demos. We have been told more than once that 'they will not support domestic violence'."

"This community board member tried to use her influence to have our permits denied and scrutinized our event."

"The media should have never been there in the 1st place!!! There was a piece written about it and it was not the coverage one would want with that type of event. A week prior to the event the center director of the 'equality center' said that we would be unable to use the center because the board of directors was not comfortable with the Leather community using the center."

"We had our group meeting in a warehouse. One evening, someone called the cops and the media. We no longer attend meetings at this location because of this and because the landlord found out what we were doing and didn't approve."

"The owner of the venue was warned by the local licensing authority that he could lose his license if he continues to welcome our munch. This was difficult to understand given that our munch was no more than a monthly meeting of friends dressed in streetwear and doing nothing out of the ordinary!"

"Our clubhouse has been the target of several enforcement checks by the city over the years. My city does not allow any such facilities to operate with a city license, and so we must strictly follow a rather bizarre set of procedures to stay operational and comply with the letter of the law. This precludes us from announcing our parties to non-members, prevents us from allowing other organizations to use our facilities, etc."

"A new manager took over the restaurant where the [name withheld] Munch was held for more than a year. Service started going downhill, servers became rude and surly and did not provide adequate service, and eventually we were told we were not welcome at the establishment despite bringing in 17-26 people who paid for drinks and meals twice a month. We had at least one other location turn down our event (in a private room)."

"It is impossible to hold a munch and not expect that people are going to discuss BDSM. Also, the staff often overhear members calling other "Mistress" or "Master". It is common in our community. Our local town is very bible-belted and family oriented. We are family oriented too, but we just have two different kinds of family. (grin) However, we once had a VERY large munch going in the back of a restaurant and they had originally agreed to let us have the entire room one night a month for our meetings. I think that the way some of our people dressed and acted, put off some of the patrons of the restaurant and comments must have been made. Eventually, they started seating more and more people in our room, and then the last night that we were there, they told us that we were not welcome. They hadn't called us or given us notice at ALL, even though they had my number. I had a LOT of people coming from out of town, so a couple of us stayed there and redirected people to a different restaurant that said that they'd be happy to have us -- but also later became less friendly and we lost that venue also."

"Mainly the atmosphere. At one of the picnics, patrol cars made constant runs, and we had beat cops walking amongst the guests, when they should not have been. Made everyone uncomfortable, and people left early. Next years event where not so well attended."

"The owners just didn't want a BDSM group to rent space."

"Expose in Daily News, threats to kick us off campus 12 years ago by other organizations."

"Lost a contract at a hotel for a bdsm conference"

"Wanted to rent a facility for a BDSM vendor fair, and it was all a 'go' until they found out who we were and what we were planning to vend."

"Inability to get fundraising work done due to other community group's biases."

"I have not personally experienced discrimination, but a leather/fetish group of which I am a member have been targeted by the religious right. Offended conservatives contacted our sponsors in protest and tried unsuccessfully to get our permits revoked and our sponsorships canceled."

"Other discrimination was directed at local BDSM people in general but I felt affected by it (an SM café that my local women/trans BDSM group frequents was suddenly refused to use space for seats outside and was reported on in a very BDSM-ignorant and cliché-laden way)."

"One of the local munch groups had been meeting openly at the same bar/restaurant for 10 or so years with full disclosure as to the type of group they were. Recently the business was sold, remodeled, and reopened. The munch group was told they were no longer welcome because this was a *family* place and not a place for *people like you*. Interestingly, where there used to be

low regular restaurant type tables in the room where we met, the tables had been replaced with taller bar style tables."

2. **Against BDSM Businesses** (25 comments)

"Employees of my S&M club were arrested at workplace for false charges of prostitution. Out of fear of being persecuted and exposed in the media, they, and other employees, quit. The business that has been running for 17 years closed down."

"The business neighbors of our BDSM club have repeatedly pressured our landlord to evict us."

"We have been challenged to be a negative impact on the community and to be the cause of declining property values. They stated that their children were not safe because our business was located within miles of their homes."

"It's not MY business but I've witnessed infinite forms of discrimination against the company including but not limited to: - a media frenzy when we moved into the neighborhood where newscasters gave raised eyebrows when discussing the story on TV, clearly judging us as questionable business - community protests when we moved into our present location, stating that we offered 'dead-end jobs' and that we represented 'Sex-ploitation' - a local group of citizens formed that met regularly to discuss how to get us out of the neighborhood - internet provider companies wouldn't let us do email marketing because of the nature of the business - the owner (who is young, healthy and wealthy) couldn't get life insurance because of the nature of the business - credit card processors refuse to work with us because of the kind of content we shoot."

"Have lost credit card processors, thousands of dollars, been denied serviced."

"I have been evicted, refused a credit card and had the police come to my place of establishment to 'ensure' I was not soliciting sex."

"I also had a credit card company who would not allow charges on their card that were for a BDSM equipment company."

"Hotels won't rent conference space to me for fetish events (dance with a fetish theme). Had a very hard time finding a dedicated space to house [name withheld] (we've been there 2.5 yrs now, only landlord that was open to what I was proposing)."

"We were asked to leave the event on the second day and refused a refund by the very person who sold us the booth claiming we were too risqué for the event. We suspect it was based on a complaint by the Christian conservative Amway sales people in the neighboring booth. We were busted at our bricks and mortar location 2 weeks later as well. This occurred in 1987. We managed to resolve to legal issue with deferred adjudication after going before a grand jury and losing over 100K in business and legal fees."

"Negative press articles related to our operation and the Lifestyle in general. Direct harassment by local authorities such as fire department (constant and unnecessary inspections in an attempt

to find things in violation for the purpose of fining us, causing us to spend money, or shutting us down) and police department (harassment of customers by pulling them over as suspected DUI, monitoring our business by parking directly across the street causing distress to our members). Much more...."

"Sad to say that in 2008, there are still many leather phobic individuals and organizations, even in so-called 'liberal' PDX. I have had clubs, bars and spaces denied to me due to one fact: that I was a state leather titleholder. They were open about their prejudice, even though several of my events had made mainstream press coverage."

"When we moved to a new, more upscale neighborhood, there was umbrage among certain business neighbors, who sent over 'spies' to ask us leading questions, like: 'How many PERVERTS do you get each day?' Nice and subtle."

"The charge card company decided they did not like my business and cancelled my charge card processing."

"Paypal discriminates against sexually-friendly businesses and when they realized that my site was a bdsm site they killed my account. Fortunately I did not leave much money with them at any given time; I would have lost all of it. To this day I do not have online payment capability restored."

"Hard to believe but we owned a store in what was perceived to be a gay/leather/pig/BDSM friendly bar, but we lost our right to occupy the space, because the owner of the bar thought that our store was giving his bar a bad reputation a general sense of fear, that if you go to our event, you're going to get tied up, whipped and raped."

"I work for the business, it is owned by my father-in-law, and run out of his home. He has been dropped by credit card companies twice for being an 'adult business' and thus 'high risk'; despite having a less than 1% chargeback rate. He pays much higher rates for card services, as well. The next-door neighbor, while I don't think she has ever bothered to find out what the business actually is, and its impact on the house is minor; simply doesn't like 'the look' of the people who go in and out. She has tried everything from complaining to the HOA about leaves blowing from his lawn onto hers, to trying to change city code for how many cars can be parked in front of a house at one time in order to limit guests at parties."

"I lost the ability to accept credit cards from customers."

"Several banks have refused my business on the grounds that I work in the BDSM lifestyle."

"Finding a venue to host a weekend event for a leather event was extremely trying. Most venues, once they learned the nature of the event found *some* reason not to be available."

"Purchased a membership with [name withheld] so that we could set up our merchant account through them (a standard service that they provide to their members.) We were rejected because we were labeled a 'sexually oriented business'."

"Your previous question asked about being refused service. I have encountered problems on the internet for my website. I used PayPal until they popped up one day and pulled the plug because the website allegedly was adult-oriented. I don't put up pictures and it is a very discreet and tasteful website and yet they said EWW! because it is a BDSM site."

"As for Paypal: After two years of allowing me use them on my [web]site, they suddenly decided it was a TOS violation and that I was unsuitable. They pulled the service. (This has cost me business, no doubt.) But even worse, they also banned ME, personally, for life. (Which makes using Ebay a pain in the neck.) And is certainly some sort of civil rights issue to be sure."

"Unable to get lease for business. Some landlords would not even talk with us once they knew our business."

"Paypal banned me for life, and hurt my business on the net in a gigantic way."

"I had issues with local authorities trying to stop my body piercing business. Claiming it was a house of 'ill repute' banned internet sales from my address as a violation of adult based industry business restriction."

IV. The following comments were made in response to the request: *"Please use this space to describe any significant experiences of violence or harassment you have had."*

1. Violence (8 comments)

"Rape, men seem to think you are there for their pleasure and that you cannot refuse sex."

"Bar fight"

"The harassment and assault I experienced was due to this young man's ignorance about the kink community and its safety regulations. He assumed that because I told him I was a bottom that he could assault me and I'd "like it" :-("

"Assault/Violence"

"Assumption that my services are for hire, or that because I'm in the BDSM community I am "easy" and therefore available for sex with anyone who wants it."

"I have been jumped and beat up when out for the events, based on my fetish attire. The comment was that 'We know you like it...'"

"Mugging/bashing"

"A former boyfriend, who also happened to be a board certified family practice doctor actually nearly killed me. When I told him I wanted to experiment with BDSM with HIM, he literally grabbed me and began to punch me...almost killed me. Needless to say, a so-called friend who is

an MD that treated me afterwards was so sympathetic to him that he told me that I actually 'asked for that type of reaction'...I thought I would punch HIS lights out. "

2. Verbal **Harassment** (29 comments)

"Public harassment by people on the street."

"Very ugly comments from men who are not into BDSM, treat me like a prostitute. The worst was when a taxi driver asked me to suck his dick for paying my ride... Ouch..."

"Verbal abuse"

"Name calling, battery, loss of friend, etc."

"General dislike from the people who knew, taunting and rude comments were made, and I have also been physically attacked."

"Stalking"

"Verbal harassment as well as threats to well being."

"My husband frowns and complains about my interests. Refuses to learn or participate in it. Says it is not his thing. So the lectures I consider harassment. He warned me that if we ever divorced he would use it against me."

"Harassment"

"Verbal Harassment on the street."

"Minor harassment on the street."

"Harassed by stranger on the train, eight years ago."

"While not overt, the wearing of leathers in the inner city can provide anxiety as one gets stares, may overhear loud, not-so-subtle comments and overbearing behavior. In my case, they have not progressed beyond that. (Being over 6 feet tall and menacing may have a little to do with it.)"

"Scorn from other gay men and peers"

"Bullying from other students. (yelling, throwing things, etc.)"

"Looked down upon, gossiped about, made an out-cast in the town I live in."

"The only times I recall being harassed were when dressing for an event, but going to a vanilla bar for a cocktail first. Leers, stares, blown kisses, lewd sounds and gestures, and even sexual offers were sent my way. But, to be honest, I didn't pay them much mind. My usual reaction is to just ignore what's being said/done unless it crosses the line."

"Bullying and denigration"

"Called names"

"Spousal abuse / oppression"

"Verbally attacked"

"I was once told I would 'burn in hell' and was 'a diseased scum bag' because I enjoy multiple partner relationships."

"Simple verbal harassment."

"Had a so called friend spread rumors about me being a whore because of my activities."

"Stalking, Aggravated Harassment"

"It's hard to define what harassment and discrimination are... I self-censor out of fear. It only took a couple times when I was young - being laughed at in the mall, or having strangers point and glare, or having someone follow my car and then drive past menacingly to make me curb my behavior. Now I make a lot of cost/benefit decisions and choose privacy a lot when it comes to my kinkiness, for survival. And I have little kids, so the stakes are high."

"Insults"

"General prejudice, harassment by unfriendly people on the street"

3. **Workplace harassment** (14 comments)

"Generally not respected and/or considered for opportunities. Perceived lack of 'seriousness' in my professional life. Increased levels of disdain evidenced as a result of my coming out as active in such activities. Lots of snotty asides and judgmental 'jokes'."

"As an educator, I was repeatedly required to justify my right to exist due to harassment from some other faculty, parents, and a few students, all manifestations of societal bigotry, merely for openness regarding my sexual orientation. (Note: Any inference of ANY of my sexual practices originated in the rabid minds of bigots. Not once did I so much as intimate any sort of sexual activity.) Never, ever did Administration support my being; never did they defend my Civil Rights against aggressive assaults on my being, based solely on ignorance and prejudice; never did they have the strength of character to refute, deter, or even resist, the numerous personal, 'ad hominem' attacks against me."

"The manager makes continuous comments about me in a sexual way, sometimes groping at my hips, 'falling' against my chest (which is done obviously on purpose). And this is usually combined with some mention of whips and chains. He introduced me to a new hire in which he made instantly aware of my way."

"My sexual life being used as a joke at work."

"I was accidentally outed by a coworker that was in the same local munch as I was. My boss quickly figured out that SASM was the name of the local bdsm group and started causing me all kinds of grief. He and several coworkers would proposition me daily and he made it clear he wanted "to try that whips and chains stuff". I reported him but that just made things worse because then the higher ups got involved. I was often invited to go out drinking with "the boys" and was told I'd never get promoted because I refused."

"Verbal harassment from co-workers because of the heel height of my shoes."

"I have been harassed at work by a male employee who left notes on my car. Because I am gothic he assumed that I am into BDSM. I am, on a very mild level, and only with my committed partner. This man assumed I would be available for any interested man and that I would respond positively to such demeaning propositions as anonymous notes left on my car with instructions on how to respond. I notified management, showed them his notes, and obtained protected parking while they worked to find the culprit. These actions scared him away, though he had not yet been identified. Two years later he was caught and outed by another woman whom he was harassing. The notes stated that I 'looked like I was into that sort of thing.' So the harassment was based upon the belief that I was into BDSM. Had I appeared 'normal,' I gather this individual would have left me alone."

"Harassment at job"

"Even more so than the discrimination was the propositions and harassment. Offering to 'keep my secret' for favors of a sexual or BDSM variety with everything from spankings to actual sex. I refused to stoop to their level. In return, I never was promoted to higher positions even though I was the most experienced/qualified in the departments I worked for. I have been involved in radio/dispatch/jail work since I was 17 years old. I have a college education and more training in my background than most officers I worked with and I was only a dispatcher/jailer. (More often known of as Communications/Corrections Officer)."

"After coming out to my ethnicities professor about having sex with women and being interested in BDSM Leather-Fetish practices, she frequently crosses the lines of the professor student relationship parameters by giving me special attention, asking me about my personal sex life and making suggestively sexual comments to me about my sexual orientation, gender performance, and appearance. I have been forced to cease contact with her because of this."

"False accusations and harassment at work."

"Workplace and public place harassment by coworkers and clients"

"I worked for an attorney as a secretary. I was recommended to him by someone he knew was BDSM lifestyle, and he asked me when I first went to work if I was. I was honest and brief in my answer. He was very dominant and at first acted as if it didn't matter, but began making comments about my dominant preference then badgering me as if he needed to prove he was

more dominant, then made a snide remark about me being elected Leather Woman of the Year. I'm heterosexual, but I think he assumed I was gay from the award."

"Harassed at work. Talked about by co-workers. Supervisor did not offer me opportunities and alluded to my practice with BDSM."

3. Threatened with "outing" (4 comments)

"Have been threatened to be outed with my career, family, and neighbors by a disgruntled man who was on the fringe of our life style. And this has been by a guy who a number of us helped him learn how to use equipment, and protocols, and get accepted into rt group events."

"I had a partner and while we were both into bdsm, he often threatened to "out" me to my employers. My employers at the time were a children's services agency, and I would have been fired on the spot, no questions asked."

"Threatened by ex-wife during divorce to "out" me to my employer as I was a Police Officer, now retired."

"I have had people (mostly online) come up to me in a chat room or something and make a comment about some of my likes (because i list them on my profile) and they have chastised me about them. or about the fact that i like to be in a bdsm, d/s relationship at all. I've been called numerous names and have had threats of 'outing' me."

4. Internet harassment (16 comments)

"A long and tedious debate with christonazis on one siode, and feminazis on the other. Apparently, being a male and being interested in BDSM is a crime. Of course, a female with the same interest "has a perfect right" to do so."

"Internet harassment by kinky and non-kinky individuals and groups"

"I've been called a sinner, and a whore by strangers on the street and on the internet. I've gotten hour long lectures by strangers on the religious repercussions of my actions."

"Photos of me from a BDSM-party got out in the internet. People from the university found it and send it to organizations at the university. It end up with people stopped talking to me and talking shit behind my back. It got so bad I quit my studying at the school."

"Blogger vilified me because I am perceived as supporting the agenda of sexual minorities."

"The provider of domain services refused to prolong my account because I was mentioning being involved in the BDSM scene on my former homepage. There was NO adult content on that site by the way."

"I've also been harassed over the net by people in church groups saying that I'm going to go to hell or women who think that I'm being abused and think that I need to get out of the relationship that I am in."

"I have been contacted by individuals who claim they are interested in the life style and at some point voice their disapproval of the life style and continue to send me disapproval emails until I block them."

"I don't consider myself an active practitioner. My interest comes as a writer and collector of vintage erotica (Guyette, Willie and Klaw). Several months ago Yahoo closed down my Geocities site, without warning or explanation. I did have a section on it of John Willie photos, but that was closed off from the main part of the site (which was not by most standards pornographic -- magazines like Gala and Frolic and 1950s pinup photos) and not open to casual viewers (I was very picky about who got the link to the Willie section) and had a meta tag warding off search engine spiders. I can understand their shutting down the whole site but don't appreciate their reasoning or lack of contact."

"This is rather lame in terms of what I've heard has happened to some but nevertheless I believe it applies. In chatting on IRC I was tacked by someone who saw that I visited D/s channels and outed me about it on a vanilla channel. I was not thrown out but I was ignored there afterwards."

"Internet harassment by those whose interest is prurient rather than to be of service in a manner to be negotiated."

"Was a member of Yahoo clubs and also of meet-up groups until I revealed that I was involved in the fetish lifestyle."

"I was called sick, said to need therapy, and accused of (re)enacting abuse because I admitted to participating in queer Daddy/girl ageplay (this took place in an internet forum that is otherwise rather open-minded in regards to alternative genders/sexualities/relationship forms)."

"I had the good fortune to hardly be discriminated against. As for the question in the section 'because of...USA law#...' I don't go on websites of which I feel Big Uncle Sam is watching me.... Since I do a fair bit of business in the USA (Canadian florist/grower) getting across the border, makes me very careful. One never knows of being denied access to the USA. Call it paranoia, but this IS the discrimination I have to deal with. ...then there is always Homeland Security."

"I don't feel I've been discriminated against or harassed--yet--but, as an author of BDSM Erotica, with a website, I worry about 2257 a great deal. I have been careful not to use any images depicting active sex acts or any images that could be considered the least bit compromising containing recognizable models. I worry that in the current climate, and with the current repressive regime, it won't matter, and if the attentions of the government turn to me, I could be scapegoated and in serious trouble."

"Facing imminent new laws in the Criminal Justice Act which will effectively make it almost impossible to view BDSM websites without breaking the proposed 'Violent pornography' legislation."

V. The following comments were made in response to the request: *"If there are certain types of people you are not out to, please tell us the reason why."*

1. Not out to co-workers (20 comments)

"I am afraid of all of the above. That's why I am very discreet about my activities."

"I feel like I have to keep my interest secret because I am afraid of losing my job. I am afraid my family will find out and disown me. My spouse has been understanding. But I am lucky in that respect. I don't surf websites even here at home due to fear that I'll be hunted down and outed."

"None only because I keep it secret from all so as to continue working with children."

"I haven't, but I haven't told anyone that could discriminate against me, either. Everyone in my personal life knows. No one at work knows. I keep it that way, because I have no doubt that discrimination would occur if my employers knew."

"I have been lucky to be at a very tolerant workplace, in a very liberal city of Vancouver Canada. But I still fear, at a low level, that my public profile will still hinder my career development, and draw discrimination from neighbors."

"None. The fear is on my part. I've heard too many jokes about BDSM and those who practice it. It's everywhere. The media picks up fetish dress and society makes it impossible to come out if you wish to keep your job and work for the public."

"I feel I haven't been discriminated against simply because I haven't been out about it. I am fully aware of the potential repercussions of being out as someone into BDSM."

"I have not personally experienced any of this because I do not reveal my personal preferences. What 'they' don't know, can't hurt me - for now."

"I have not experienced any discrimination by my professional peers/clients as I have been very careful to not permit any 'signs' of my persuasions. With all others I am 'out' but I do not broadcast my personal sex life either."

"I felt as though I could not ever open my mouth due to my preferences in the BDSM aspect of my life and caused me to quit a job due to the questions of my 'dating life'."

"None - don't speak of it at work. If they were to find out and anything happens as a result, it's their problem and their loss."

"None. My BDSM is a kink nothing more. I don't define myself by my love of pain. I try not to discuss my lifestyle in professional situations to avoid discrimination as often as possible. I am afraid it will cause me to lose potential opportunities."

"Outright discrimination isn't necessarily part of my experiences, however, I simply don't feel like myself when I have to limit how I behave, and the opinions that I voice. This includes everything from tattoos to lesbian relationships. It is simply a feeling that I can't voice my opinions for a fear of disapproval. I work with conservative middle aged people, and we work with people with hearing loss, which is generally the geriatric population. I do not care for this work environment, however, at the moment it is where I need to be, so I stay here."

"I have rock and roller lifestyle friend who handles my childcare. I am afraid she would stop watching my boy if she knew the "whole" story. To her my hair and clothes are just rock and roll wild child."

"While I have not lost my job due to my involvement with BDSM, if it became know I would lose my job."

"There are a lot of people who don't know that I am involved in BDSM practices because I fear that if they DID know, I would be harassed. As a permanent resident (non-citizen) and teacher I do not want to take risks with my life."

"Just general fear of losing my kids or job based on the activities that I like to do in the privacy of my home or with other like minded individuals."

"I haven't really been discriminated against because I am fairly new to the kinky scene, and I am very private and careful about who I talk to in the scene. If anything I am into were to become public knowledge to my employer, a hospital, I would lose my job on moral grounds."

"I do not feel I have been discriminated against, harassed, or the victim of persecution or violence as a result of your involvement in BDSM-Leather-Fetish activities or businesses. Yet, I do feel there is potential for some discrimination to occur if my place of work were informed of my involvement. The challenge with pinpointing such discrimination is that workplaces may cover up such discrimination by using excuses or other reasons for their actions."

"I answered that I haven't been harassed truthfully, but a big part of that is because of who I am and am not out to. If certain people at my work knew, it would be troublesome. If certain family members knew, there would indeed be problems, but I hide it around some people to avoid this."

2. Aren't out to doctors/therapists (8 comments)

"My GP is judgmental in general, so I fear to tell her. GP's are scarce where I live, so if she 'fires' me I would have trouble replacing her, and I have multiple chronic conditions that need treatment on a regular basis."

"I would feel uncomfortable going to any medical or alternative medical professional, whether it be a doctor or massage therapist with obvious marks on my body like bruising."

"I haven't experienced this but this is because I am firmly in the closet, and only am open with my BDSM friends I trust. One of my major fears is requiring medical treatment at some time when I

am marked or bruised from play. Eg needing a tetanus shot because I stood on a nail, and the doctor needs to view a part of my body for the injection that is clearly marked."

"I have never been directly discriminated against by a medical professional. At the same time, this is because I do not discuss my BDSM activities with them. Consequently, the care I get is potentially compromised because I cannot accurately describe the condition I'm suffering from."

"I haven't run into any problems with my BDSM lifestyle and other professionals because I am very careful to schedule things like doctors appointments during times when I don't have any marks on me, otherwise I think I'd have more problems with it."

"I have not experienced discrimination by professionals, but that is because I have never admitted it. The reason is because of my concern that I will be treated differently, less professionally, and/or substandard care."

"I am not out about BDSM to my doctor or other professionals in my life. I don't think it's an aspect of me that is important for them to know about. If there ever was a reason to be open about it, I would ... and then I might have an experience or two of discrimination."

"None of anyone's business what goes on in my bedroom. Haven't had any reason to tell my dr (yet) (too shy)."

3. Fear of being out – miscellaneous (17 comments)

"None, but I am very discreet due to clearances."

"I am not out partly to preclude this possibility from coming up."

"I keep my sexual expression very quiet because the town I live in is small and narrow-minded. I feel that by 'out'ing myself, I'd be bringing a large amount of trouble into my life that is unnecessary."

"NOT being discriminated against, harassed, or victim of persecution/violence is exactly the reason I am NOT completely "out." Especially being a Female Dominant, I allow vanilla others to assume what they want to, rather than explaining or coming out. The world is simply not ready to be OK with FEMdom/BDSM. Not sure that it ever will be. Obviously, this organization is absolutely needed!"

"Have managed to avoid discriminatory conduct owing to heavily closeted status and exercising high levels of caution (pseudonym, fictitious biography etc) in scene activity."

"The only people who I truly care about finding out what I do is my Family. I do NOT think I could handle the rejection (if) they ever rejected me (or my wife) for our lifestyle."

"I think that the fact that this survey exists is great, but it might be misleading. I have stayed very quiet about my involvement in BDSM and therefore have not faced any discrimination. It might be quite different if I was vocal about it. It is that fear that keeps me quiet, and therefore keeps it in

the closet. I guess if I were honest and open about it, then I would know if I was going to be discriminated against, but I'm not willing to do that because of my perceived thoughts of what others would think. Kind of a catch 22 there, huh? I guess I'm just saying that just because I haven't faced discrimination regarding this, doesn't mean I wouldn't if I let it be known. On the other hand, it's always possible I might not. It just sucks that so many feel that it needs to be hidden. BDSM doesn't hurt anyone that doesn't want to be hurt by it. *wink* Thank you for your time."

"My problems with respect to this are less legal than they are cultural. If someone does a search for my name or a username and comes up with BDSM-related content, they may be less likely to offer me a job or support me in other ways. I can't afford such an outcome."

"I am not discriminated against because I stay very discreet. Which is why I am discreet, which is why we need greater privacy laws."

"I keep my involvement in the BDSM community very quiet. If it were to come out at my job (elementary education), I could lose my job and even if I did keep my job, would have many parents upset about my involvement. If my family were to find out, I would be ostracized. If my church were to find out, I might be excommunicated. It is difficult to keep such an important part of who I am a secret."

"I feel that my not having been discriminated against is due to not truly being "out". My wife and I have discussed it and are not comfortable with all family members knowing. We believe most would be very understanding. Yet, we do not want to take the chance. We have no doubts that our co-workers and employers would frown upon our lifestyle at the very least. Hence, only a few close friends and others in the BDSM community know what we do."

"None, because I stay WAY back inside the closet. My family would have cows if they knew, and most likely would bar me from seeing my great niece (age 3) and great nephew (age 1)."

"I am lucky, I have good friends and family. I have never actually suffered harassment. I am, though, constantly aware that my sexual life might interfere with my professional life and I dare not participate in a parade or political event where my name or picture might show up since I believe that would make it very difficult for me to get an academic job in the future."

"I'm tired of feeling afraid of being who I am. I'm tired of having to hide it, and sick of not being able to talk about it."

"My wife and I are not members of any BDSM community. We have just played with this in private at our home. I know that we would have problems if we were open, even with our friends."

"I wonder if my son (used to be married) who is in the Army will receive all necessary clearances (such as security clearances) if they investigate and find out his father is gay and/or involved in BD/SM."

"I feel I have been lucky, but I am also very careful. When dressing in leather, or other obvious "kink" wear, I avoid unfamiliar locations and situations, sticking to the community that I know will

accept me and keep me safe. I never travel to/from these locations unaccompanied, unless I hide or cover up what I'm wearing. It's not that I'm not proud of being a leather man, but I know that dressing in that way makes it very obvious and could attract the attention of those that might hurt or cause harm. Although wearing leather makes me feel stronger and more confident, I'm well aware of how quickly situations can become dangerous, and would prefer to avoid them."

VI. The following comments were made in response to the request: *"If you have any final comments, please respond here."* (17 comments)

"I have over all been lucky and most I have experienced is verbal abuse and confrontations on street level at some events and some on line abuse in chat rooms. Because my wife is very afraid (and rightfully so) that she would lose her job if she was out about being bi and involved in S/m and open lifestyles, she is overall very closeted. She has had to endure hearing very negative remarks about alternative lifestyles in her work environment. The result is that I cannot be as out as I would like to be and our play with others (with one exception) occurs out of our area or at leather events which are closed to the general public and offer a great deal of security."

"There are so many Non-whites like myself who've struggled coming out to our families and what we thought were friends, trying in certain cases rather ineptly explain the how and why we are and have been the way we are regarding our sexual orientation. Society already has and maintains a very negative stigma toward those of us within the larger Gays/Lesbians/Bi-Sexuals & or Transgender community. Now compound that with a profound interest in BDSM and you can just imagine what the overall reaction especially in the Non-white community. I don't think you're going to see too many if any blacks, Latinos, or Asians on a Leash & Collar being led around in their respective community by the Daddy, Sir, Master or whatever he or she wants to call themselves. And need I remind you of the powerful influence the church and it's teachings plays in each of these community's over the centuries."

"Having gone through what I have already been through, and facing what I am now in the current child custody issue, I believe that it is important that when we can, we SHOULD fight for our rights and for the rights of others, to continue to pursue that which makes us feel good about our lives and strengthens relationships. Any adult activity is private and should be shared only with adults. I strongly believe that those who choose to persecute, whether it be BDSM, Gay/Lesbian, Nudism, etc, should be fought and forced to face their own true reasons behind their actions. Most often, it is fear that motivates their actions because they do not understand what it is that they allegedly hate. I don't use the word hate lightly, but people seem to either accept or hate in the BDSM and Gay/Lesbian Lifestyle. There doesn't seem to be much gray area. I sent out a plea for help in the BDSM community with regards to my current battle and I cannot even TELL you how touched I am by the immediate response and support that my husband and I have gotten! My own mother is paying for our defense, my ex husband has already written a beautiful letter of support for us to use in court, and the entire BDSM community has rallied behind us. I have received SO many phone calls and emails that I have been in tears for days over the love and warmth expressed and the information shared by many who have been through this themselves. All of that combined has given us the strength and courage to do what is right and take this to the legal system to further help set precedents for those who will surely follow in the footsteps of persecution."

"Honestly I am very open about being into BDSM. I want people to know that the BDSM Community are just regular people who work and raise kids like any other person. I am open about being a Lesbian for the same reasons. Just regular people who love and accept others for who they are. I actually think to not mention being in love with a woman or that I am a Dominatrix is like I am ashamed of it and I'm not. I don't go around with a sign. When asked what I do I say I'm a Dominatrix, most of the time the reaction is "no way". I'm proud of who I am and the people I know or meet soon find that out. I have to add that I have been very fortunate with the people I meet. I wish everyone could have the positive experiences I have had."

"I lost my federal job based on discrimination of my sexual partners because I was having an extramarital affair (long term, stable and continuing relationship where all are consenting) and my co-worker (who was religious) did not like it. She told my boss who then proceeded to fire me several months later without notice that there was any problem about my behavior or concerns about my position. My work was exemplary and my work evaluation stated so. I enlisted a lawyer and was given my job back after several months of negotiation as well as several thousand dollars later, none of which was ever reimbursed to me by either the woman accusing me or the federal government agency I was fired from. The accuser also attempted to get a restraining order against me and called me a national security risk because one of my partners was a security guard and I could tell him whatever I wanted and he would do it based on my D/s relationship with him. There was a full blown investigation and the charges were dropped after it was proven to be false. I have since been hired to a security position and all has worked out with the original accuser moving jobs shortly before I returned to work. There have been no charges pressed against her for false accusations or the cost and time of the investigation that she caused to happen nor the personal cost that I incurred myself. All because I enjoy an alternative lifestyle that she did not approve. If you are happy then why should others take it upon themselves to make you unhappy?"

"Actually, I feel that I have been fairly well-treated despite my differences. I don't discuss sex at work, and among friends I am accepted. Even most acquaintances seem tolerant of my alternative sexuality. I think that is because I deal mostly with students my own age (outside of the BDSM community), who have grown up with much broader views on human sexuality than their parents or grandparents. To most of them I am no more strange than their gay or lesbian friends and relatives, and like their gay and lesbian relations, I am not ashamed of my sexuality."

"I have been harassed due to my being a Mistress by men who were not submissive or even into the Lifestyle. I have been told I just haven't 'met the right man/Dom yet', more times than I can count. I have been denied ability to rent space for my group to meet. I lost custody of two children in my divorce due to my 'open lifestyle habits' as my ex called them. (Funny thing is that he is the one who introduced me to bdsm). As mentioned before, I have been raped by men who discovered I was into bdsm and thought that meant I would do anyone or anything."

"Mainly just plain and simple, most of what I have experienced in any form of harassment was due to the clothing that I was/am wearing. Collars, leather, chains, cuffs, etc. I just feel it would be easier for the people that don't know about the lifestyle to just ask the person rather than just give them looks or treat them differently, not everyone has the same interest and that's understandable but one thing I think is important to all people is understanding and not discriminating against other people just because of a preference or fetish/kink."

"I feel that, like appearances, people are perceived by their actions outside of work, and often in the privacy of their own homes. Many feel that a submissive cannot be "in charge" outside of their relationships simply because they choose to let their control go from time to time. There will always be hateful people determined to make a concerted effort to change others, for it is far easier to hold up the mirror than look into it yourself."

"Actually, I would to share my story of the reverse ... Because my involvement in BDSM and polyamory led to a profound spiritual awakening, I decided to renew my involvement with Unitarian Universalism. I began attending Arlington Street Church here in Boston, then applied to become a full member. As part of this, I came out to select lay leaders and staff at ASC, including the senior minister. Their response was universally positive, and I've yet to encounter a negative response. They have also encouraged me to begin the process of educating people about BDSM and polyamory."

"I personally have not been affected or discriminated against for being a Furry, but our community on the whole has been looked down upon and discriminated against by the media at large. The MTV Special, Sex 2000 was the worst case of this. The CSI episode about Furies was highly inaccurate and I felt it was derogatory towards the Furry Fandom. Fabric shops have refused business with Furies in fear that they were selling fabric that would be used to make mascot uniforms. Most people assume instantly upon hearing about the Furry Fandom that the community or the person telling them about it is into having sex with animals. Anthrocon, the world's biggest Furry Convention well received in Philadelphia last year, with only a few stories of harassment and injustice against furs. The biggest story was about a Subway shop manager who was running a special to all Furry Fandom members visiting the city during the con. He was assaulted by an individual who was not in the Furry Fandom for not offering him the same discount. This individual returned after being asked to leave the shop to throw a brick at the manager's head and sending him to the hospital. While being carried away by the local authorities the perpetrator was yelling and shouting about how amoral the Furry community was and that they would receive God's punishment."

"I decided not to participate in our alternative lifestyle club's entry in the Pride Parade last year for fear of discrimination at work if I was reported to my bosses. I have to maintain a certain security rating to keep my job and I remember the days when gays and lesbians were kicked out because they were perceived to be easy targets of blackmail and thus be security risks. I changed my mind a few months ago and worked the "dungeon" at the sex trade show in town, but I just wore a French Maid costume and handed out pamphlets on the activities of our club. A co-worker had talked to his supervisor before the event and was told that "education" was ok, but public play was not."

"I would advise others to choose wisely those they confide this part of their Life to. I was 'outed' by a fellow coworker that I trusted with my life. It was a slip of the tongue and not done deliberately, but it outted me nonetheless. I still get strange looks from those I worked with that found out. I am often asked a lot of questions about the lifestyle, and I am shy so it usually make me very uncomfortable, but I do try to talk to people to let them know I am no different from them. I get out of bed each morning, get dressed just like them, go to work, have a family and kids to tend, but, I just like a little more spice in my prsonal life. Some people think that if you want something like Kink, that you enjoy being degraded, humiliated or so on, even to the point of being handled roughly &/or raped. If I had the chance to go back and not be "out", I probably

would take it. Not due to any other Lifestylers, but rather due to those who are ignorant of the Lifestyle. Lifestylers are 100% more honest, trustworthy, friendly, understanding and able to keep secrets to themselves, than those not in the Life. The friends I have made that are other BDSM'ers, are much better, longer-lasting friendships than my non-BDSM friendships."

"I haven't directly experienced discrimination or violence per se. I do, however, feel restricted in that I feel I cannot be who I am. I feel that we, in the BDSM community are simply not understood and therefore we are feared and shunned. I feel we are also not taken seriously and not legitimized as real people who are not just playing games, but who truly feel the importance of our practice in our everyday lives. An example of what I mean is I was seeing a therapist who is not necessarily opposed to kink but whose ideas of kink are somewhat antiquated...on the one hand, when I finally felt safe enough to come out to her about my kinkiness, she of course was accepting of me, but she lacked the understanding and ability to just accept that this lifestyle is very real and very important to me. When we discussed kink and my relation to it, it often became an irrelevant exercise in exploring my past. She wanted to analyze what kink meant to me, while I simply wanted to feel free enough to explore without the Freudian references to my mother. And without feeling as though my therapist was covertly pathologizing my kink."

"I'm lucky enough that I've never faced any difficulty to deal with any of this. The only time my lifestyle was perceived as a problem was by my mother, when she found out I was kinky and that I went to Paddles in NYC. I was 22 at the time, so there really wasn't much that she could do. But she was really angry about it, and attempted to keep me from going to visit my long term boyfriend, who was also my play partner. My dad was more uncomfortable with the knowledge that I was having sex at all, not with the kind I was having - he figures, rightly so, that as long as I'm safe and happy, what I do is none of his business, and not only that, but he doesn't WANT to know at all. (Which makes sense. I don't want to think about my parents having sex or anything sexual activity, and I'm sure they don't want to think about me that way. We all know it happens, but really, we don't need to think about it)"

"I'm not answering all of the questions on this survey .. due to the FACT that the government is now allowed to capture, track, and log all internet communication. A court of appeals ruling allowed evidence to be used to uphold a conviction in which no warrant was executed to obtain internet textual exchanges. In the judge's words, 'all communication over the internet is assumed to be public since it is captured at a public server (ISP provider).'"

"I feel like my husband and I have to live in hiding, we deeply fear being outed because we work in education, in counseling with young children, and with child abuse and domestic violence victims. I give speeches and advocate for victims, sometimes I testify in court. I know that if it ever comes out that I am a practicing sadomasochist I will be vilified and lose my job and my life's work. My husband also works with young children ANY hint that he practices SM would lose him his job, as well. As a result we are isolated from others in the community and have to travel hundreds of miles away from home before we feel safe enough to meet face to face with others like us. Is this violence? Not in the traditional sense, but being fearful, isolated and in hiding is a very difficult way to live."

Gratuitous bigoted comments:

"You must be kidding. Why would you even tell people that you like bondage and leather and deviant fetish stuff? Why would you even bring it up? Unless you are baiting people. You are not victims, you are perverts looking for hand outs and looking for validation. It won't change the fact that this type of lifestyle always ends in sorrow."

"Deviant sexual behavior should not be tolerated. Quit trying to get validation for it. It's sick and perverted."

"Your practices are disgusting. If you don't see that, then that is a sad situation for your - hum - 'community'. Peeing at each other? Disgusting, vile, humiliating, and loathesome."