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Sex advice: I spank my wife for her pleasure, not mine

Should a reader ask to involve someone else in a bit of play? Our sex experts advise

Q I spank my wife for her pleasure, not mine. But I got excited when she was spanked by a friend as a joke. Should I ask if we can involve someone else?

DR THOMAS STUTTAFORD

A Your wife may share with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the 19th-century Austrian writer, the ability to derive sexual pleasure from suffering pain. The last part of von Sacher-Masoch's name is forever commemorated by the term masochism that is applied to this sexual behaviour. Similarly the Marquis de Sade is remembered by the term sadism. Sexual sadism is a desire to obtain sexual excitement from inflicting pain or humiliation.

Sadism and masochism, popularly known as S&M, often coexist. In many cases there is evidence in foreplay that the partner of the accepted sadistic or masochistic person has similar tendencies. Usually these will be complementary to the other's inclinations.

Not surprisingly, men who display a greater than usual propensity to being oppressively dominant often display sexual urges that include fantasising about or actually inflicting physical suffering or emotional humiliation on their partners. They frequently team up with women – or, if homosexual, with men – who have complementary urges to be dominated.

These people have often had a difficult childhood, lack self-esteem and feel unworthy. In later life they want to be beaten, smacked, humiliated, bound, urinated or defecated on, treated as an animal or child. Potentially masochistic people may indulge in hypooxyphilia, a dangerous desire for partial asphyxiation.

Spanking is a common practice that should be diagnosed only as sadistic or masochistic when there is a real desire to inflict and suffer considerable pain. The late Dr Anthony Storr, an Oxford psychiatrist who studied sexual behaviour, went as far as suggesting that it was "always possible to detect sadomasochistic tendencies in anyone".

Often foreplay includes play-acting, with spanking as a noisy simulation of beating. Your wife's desire to be spanked wouldn't qualify as representing a masochistic streak in her personality unless it was well established, of at least six months' duration, and unless the spanking produced obvious evidence of sexual stimulation. In extreme cases, masochistic people are unable to be aroused, let alone to have an orgasm, without suffering pain.

If your wife is truly masochistic, she is relatively unusual in one respect. Research has shown that 95 per cent of sexual masochists are men and that only 5 per cent of women derive sexual pleasure through pain. Even this minority isn't always entirely masochistic; one in three of them is occasionally sadistic, often biting and scratching more vigorously than is usual.

Whatever your sexual habits, asking a third person to share them often leads to trouble. Have you thought of the consequences if your wife preferred to be smacked, and whatever else may follow this, by your guest, rather than by her husband? Sex with a new partner may seem to her exciting for a while, but by the time boredom with a new lover has set in, she may have left you.

Your observation that you derive a thrill from seeing your wife spanked by a friend is interesting. Psychologists teach that sadomasochism in its various guises could stem from the pleasure in childhood, long since forgotten, that the person may have experienced when seeing others punished.

Dr Thomas Stuttaford, The Times doctor, spent many years working in a genitourinary clinic

SUZI GODSON

A I am trying to think of the last time I was spanked by a friend in front of my husband as a joke. Hmm. Nope. Not a sausage. It's just not the kind of thing that crops up in the circles I move in. When my husband and I get together with friends we have drinks, dinner, even a bit of middle-aged dancing if we're at a "do", but no public spanking, jokey or otherwise. I don't wish to cast aspersions on your wife's good character but, between you and me, to lie across a person's lap and have them rhythmically beat your posterior is an act of such great intimacy that I wonder whether you have considered the possibility that the incident might not have been a joke at all?

As a woman, my immediate instinct on reading your letter was to question whether your wife, a self-confessed spankophile, might not also be ten steps ahead of you when it comes to third-party involvement. That's not necessarily a bad thing. It simply means that not only will she greet your suggestion with enthusiasm, she probably has a volunteer lined up already.

Many dating agencies, such as Passion.com, offer "couple looking for" as an option in their search engines, so finding an extra pair of hands for a threesome has never been easier. However, although your wife is clearly an excitable woman, before you give this idea the green light, I would urge you to consider how you will really feel if you expose your marriage to sex with a third party.

The threesome is an appealing and enduring fantasy but not one that translates easily into reality. Even when all three participants are consenting and fully aware of the consequences, jealousy frequently sabotages prospective liaisons or damages the primary relationship. If you are deeply attached to your wife, it may be difficult to watch her being intimate with another person and even if the third party is a woman, the potential discovery that your wife has bisexual tendencies may feel even more threatening. And if the person involved is a friend, the friendship, and the marriage, could be ruined.

Although countless women engage in threesomes, the majority of those who propagandise on behalf of the joys of *ménage à trois* are male. Men are better able to dissociate sex from love and a brief trawl through any chatroom tackling the subject of threesomes reveals that most of the casualties are female. Women get involved in threesomes for all sorts of reasons but often it is either a way of pleasing/holding on to their partner, or a way of masking the

dwindling of sexual desire within the relationship. Rather than face facts and address the cause of the sexual lag, they agree to a dash of "stranger sex" and hope that a temporary solution will cure a more permanent deficiency. Needless to say, a relationship that is on shaky ground anyway will almost certainly hit the rocks under the added weight of a third party.

From your letter I can't tell whether you and your wife have a solid relationship, but if you do, I'd advise you to keep your naughty little fantasy to yourself and, as your penance, buy your lovely wife something that she will enjoy. Coco de Mer's Teach me a Lesson wooden ruler, £6, springs to mind (www.coco-de-mer-shop.co.uk).

Suzi Godson is author of The Sex Book (Cassell, £16.99) and The Body Bible (Penguin, £16.99)

E-mail your sexual dilemmas to body&soul@thetimes.co.uk or write to Body&Soul, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1TT

I don't know why he doesn't spank her himself. The sight of my partner bent over a chair with her jeans and knickers down with my own handprint on her redening bottom really turns me on.

Ray, Brid, England

Not a good idea! Wifey needs spanking as sexual foreplay. Hubby lets Friend spank her. Wifey and Friend start to meet. Wifey feels so fulfilled that she falls in love, and puts on a show for Friend. Hubby is forced out and finds someone with similar sex preferences (I hope!)

John Arkwright, London,

Rubbish! I would not rank marital spanking as being in the same league as sadomasochism. It is lower down the spectrum and between consenting adults a very rewarding form of sex, if you haven't tried it don't knock it Dr T. and somehow I think your experience here has come from your text books.

Joan Arthur , Lincoln, UK

Dude. Just ask her and not the world!

Steve, London, United Kingdom

What would make all of these responses, and the original article, more illuminating, would be to quote some sources. So I will start the ball rolling by mentioning Havelock Ellis's Love and Pain - which (though old) tends to suggest that women are more sexually submissive and masochistic.

Guan, Norwich, UK

Wonder where the experts were chosen from. Ordinarily physicians don't offer psychiatric opinions or marriage guidance. The ideas about normal and abnormal human sexuality are a bit dated, to say the least. What's a paraphilia? Something your shrink doesn't enjoy.

Sandra, Vancouver, CA

Spanking is a great method to stimulate sexual excitement but it doesn't always mean the persons involved also are into BDSM. BDSM is more of a lifestyle where many different

activities stimulate us not just sexually but emotionally and intellectually. I love to spank but only with consent.

Robert, New Orleans, USA

Reading all these responses has been torture....ggnnnnnahhhh !!!

thank you

pete, wirral,

My late wife was into being spanked and caned, I was apprehensive about it at first, as she really needed a considerable amount of pain. She had a female schoolfriend who also enjoyed it. They relate their desires to being caned at school in the early sixties. The resulting sex was mindblowing.

Dave, St Petersburg, Russia

I have a spanking/domination fetish (I like to be the spankee), and I don't have low self-esteem. If anything, I find that it's far more common for masochists (or "bottoms") to have higher self-esteem and be more secure in themselves. People would not willingly submit if they were insecure.

Morgan, Penrith,

To these male "experts" who ascribe being spanked as desiring to be dominated, that has been researched (I can't reference it immediately) : that is not the case. The desire to be spanked is not the same as the desire to be dominated sexually. "Women are submissive" is just not true.

Jen, Gold Coast, Australia

My woman enjoys spanking, and I enjoy giving it. MOST of the women I dated prior to marriage enjoyed spanking. Despite all the psycho babble, the reason women like it is simple. Because it heightens the level of dominance/submission of the sex.

I prefer to make her bring me a ruler. The hand is heavy

john, maryland, USA

As a female masochist with a high pain threshold and deeply submissive bedroom tendencies, I take great umbrage with the assertion that I suffer from 'low self esteem and self worth'. This is utterly untrue. I know exactly who I am and am happy with myself; I'm a successful professional with a large group of supportive friends and a healthy attitude towards personal relationships. True, all too often I meet partners through specialist internet dating sites, but that's only to ensure we are sexually aligned before the off. In every other aspect S&M (or D/s) relationships are just the same as any other.

My worry is that articles taking this tone perpetuate an already strong instinct in humans... that of damning or judging something they don't know about or truly understand.

EG, LONDON,

A friend who 'spanked' my wife's bum would have little chance of survival, and if he did survive, my wife would make sure I regretted it.

We have a fulfilling sex life with lots of fantasy and mystery but that is because we are open about our desires.

Leave out a third person, that is only appropriate if and when you are at a lap dancing club

asif raza, london, south east

Re: "(Being spanked and being ravished continue to be two of the top erotic fantasies for women, despite all the politically correct feminist attempts to convince us that the sexes are no different psychologically.)"

The fact that, according to your statistics, more women fantasise about being spanked and being dominated is not conclusive proof that women are innately born different psychologically to men, as you imply - rather, it could just be a result of social conditioning, in which women are encouraged to be submissive. Or perhaps they may have been more likely to be physically punished as a child by their father and it's a complex reenactment of that power dynamic. You're always on dodgy ground when you start arguing that 'women secretly want to be ravished' - I believe feminists call it the rape-myth. I'm a woman and I find it dangerous and insulting.

R. Henry, Stoke, Staffordshire

What's most questionable here is the assertion, with no evidence or references, that 95% of masochists are men, and only 5% are women. That seems completely backwards.

Poll after poll of sexual inclinations has shown that most heterosexual men tend to be sexually dominant, while most heterosexual women tend to be sexually submissive. (Being spanked and being ravished continue to be two of the top erotic fantasies for women, despite all the politically correct feminist attempts to convince us that the sexes are no different psychologically.)

The usual correlation is that masochism goes with a more submissive sexual orientation, and sadism goes with a more dominant sexual orientation; so the numbers here seem backwards.

Not that all submissive women are masochists, probably most are not. But I would guess that more women tend towards mild masochism, and more men tend towards mild sadism. Maybe for extreme S/M it's reversed, if males have a higher tolerance for severe pain.

Dee, LA, USA

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The "experts" in this column are uninformed about this topic and show a serious lack of education beyond very old psych. books. The folks responding are much wiser. If the "experts" read anything on power exchange, they would know that such fantasies and practices are commonplace and not a sign of any psychopathology. Those that are troubled by this in themselves or a partner may bring this up in therapy or "help" columns, so perhaps this is why these "experts" see it as psychopathology. The few freaks who commit hideous crimes and are truly sadistic also bring bad press, but this has nothing to do with BDSM in healthy people; would a killer minister means all clergy are homicidal?

The research shows most folks who have kinky tendencies are no different than anyone else in terms of their psych. adjustment, and perhaps if people were more aware of their sexuality and hooked up with partners who shared their sex map, more than a minority of marriages might survive.

John S, Exeter, US

I am truly a bit confused here. I do not understand why the subject of this question was turned around from a man asking a question about arousal in general....to the backgrounds of kinky people...

Instead of aiding him with his situation...it seems a lot was said about how people who participate in BDSM are abused and have low self esteem.

I do not have a doctorate, but it does not take one to see the flaw in this logic.

There has never ever been any study done to suggest that people who engage in BDSM activities were any more or any less traumatized as a child...either by being abused, bullied etc....

We really do not know where fetishes, kinks--and that includes sado-masochism as a consensual BDSM activity--come from.

I think the situation in this question should be his enjoyment. I don't think he should feel obligated to spank his wife if he does not like it. And, yet....he seems turned on by the idea of it. (will continue in another post)

k, knoxville,

Typical tabloid article.

Did we learn anything aside from the respondents'™ sexual insecurities?

Sadly no.

steve, Derby, UK

Research has shown that 95 per cent of sexual masochists are men and that only 5 per cent of women derive sexual pleasure through pain. Even this minority isn't always entirely masochistic; one in three of them is occasionally sadistic" This is an interesting statistic

because (assuming that the "occasionally sadistic" women are not masochists) it suggests that 3.3% of women, and 63.3% of men are masochists, together accounting for a third of the total adult population...

Ben Pritchett, Oxford,

I usually have a great deal of respect for Dr. Stuttaford, but I do wonder about his 'research' in this case. A pretty high percentage of the sado-masochists I have met, myself included, have had perfectly normal upbringings and happy childhoods - this is just something that has always been with us. Personally I tend to the view that traumatic childhoods make people more inclined to manifest their interests in a public way, so it is not a high percentage of sado-masochists that have unhappy childhoods, but a high percentage of those who are visible rather than happily getting on with it in private.

I also find that a much higher proportion of women are masochists than that that he suggests. I think he would find a quick bit of research on some of the better internet sites would reveal plenty of happy, well adjusted people of both sexes enjoying sado masochistic play with no problems at all. Quite a lot of them are even Times readers.

Withheld, for obvious reasons, Kent, UK

In speaking of masochists, DR THOMAS STUTTAFORD, says:-

"These people have often had a difficult childhood, lack self-esteem and feel unworthy."

While there can be many reasons for masochistic tendencies, to claim they are "often" the result of a difficult childhood, lack self-esteem or feeling unworthy is grossly simplistic at best, downright wrong at worst - and distinctly insulting to many of the genuine, intelligent, imaginative and admirable erotic masochists that I have had the pleasure and honour of meeting over the last 20 years or so.

I would politely suggest this gentleman resists the temptation to make such all-encompassing and inaccurate statements without first taking the trouble to learn that the hell he's talking about.

John Chew, Horley, Surrey