

## **Female Masochism, Jouissance, and (Re)workings of Trauma: An Ethnographic Study of the Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism, and Masochism Scene in Post-WWII Japan**

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**Abstract :** This ethnographic research interrogates female masochism within contemporary Japan, focusing on fifteen female BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism, and Masochism) practitioners who identify as masochists, bottoms, and/or submissives. The study employs semi-structured interviews with these practitioners, representing diverse backgrounds and ages, to explore the intersection of sexuality and individual and/or collective trauma. The study focuses on a specific group of sadomasochists who, as survivors of gender and sexual violence, reenact their trauma through BDSM practices. This exploration draws on feminist performance studies, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, and affect analysis to highlight the complexities of female masochism. In a cultural milieu that often reduces female masochism to mere compliance with heteropatriarchy, this study argues that specific masochistic practices transcend submission, serving as vital strategies for confronting trauma and dismantling entrenched cultural narratives. Engaging with Lacan's concept of feminine jouissance and the notion of "creative masochism" in the context of Japan's proximity to the imperial US, the study facilitates a nuanced exploration of female masochistic enjoyment. The study shows that these practices can act as both a means of survival and a mode of resilience, challenging dominant narratives that portray masochism solely as a form of subjugation, drawing on feminist performance studies, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, and affect analysis. It interprets masochism as a complex terrain of affective engagement, where shared suffering and consensual pain foster transformative possibilities. By analyzing BDSM as a cultural site, this research reframes masochism not only as a personal negotiation of pain but also as a broader allegory for Japan's ongoing geopolitical self-positioning. Central to this analysis is the concept of "creative masochism," which positions masochism as both a metaphor and a practice through which Japan addresses its historical subordination to the United States. This framework allows for a deeper understanding of how participants' lived desires intersect with national narratives, illuminating the relationship between personal experiences and larger socio-political dynamics. It incorporates sadomasochistic metaphors into Japan-U.S. interactions, reflecting underlying patterns of submission, resistance, and cultural negotiation. Additionally, this research examines the effects, affects, and limitations of masochism within the post-WWII Japanese context, providing insights into how masochism can reshape one's relationship with their surroundings. This study challenges the notion that female masochism is entirely subsumed by hegemonic structures, revealing instead that subjects can assert their autonomy within their experiences of pleasure and pain. The consensual enactment of violence within these encounters emerges as a complex and ambivalent process, wherein pain transforms into a generative force for reimagining alternative forms of sociality and belonging. Additionally, the research identifies contradictions and connections between the personal and political, examining how kink practices shape participants' daily lives and identities, and vice versa, highlighting the profound impact of these practices on their sense of self and community. Ultimately, it reaffirms agency in the face of pervasive heteronormative power dynamics, suggesting that masochism can serve as a site of both resistance and redefinition.

**Keywords :** female masochism, BDSM, Japan, masochism, trauma, sexual violence

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