

Violent. Demented. Dangerous. KT Chase will tell you she's fed up with these types of uninformed characterizations of sadomasochistic, fetish and leather lives.

"There are so many misrepresentations in the media," says Chase, a local artist and radical sensualist.

Misrepresentations that position leather, SM and fetish as manifestations of a sick mind. Misrepresentations that juxtapose those forms of expression with abuse, cruelty, coercion, and an array of ugly, nonconsensual acts. Misrepresentations that cast a creepy shadow.

For years, Chase and her life partner, Susie Shepherd, have been out and proud about their life choices, which often revolve around SM, leather, and fetish—a trio of descriptives that may jar the uninitiated.

For those who have stepped beyond the bounds of ignorance, however, there is the understanding that SM, leather and fetish traditionally have more to do with erotic journeying, heightened sensitivity, creativity, costume, sex, fun, trust, "safe, sane and consensual" activities, communication and community.

Indeed, there is a whole subculture of radical sensualists here and abroad, attending conferences, networking, coffee klatching, meeting and greeting, growing.

They hail from a potpourri of cultural, economic, racial, ability and gender backgrounds. They're queer and not queer. Some are vanilla, some not. Some are nice, some are schmucks, but most are, like everyone, probably a blend. You get the picture.

"But the public picture is usually one of negative stereotypes," says Chase. "I get so tired of that."

Tired but not defeated. Hence her and Shepherd's willingness to be among the subjects interviewed for a new project launched by two Pacific University professors who are probing the culture of sadomasochism.

"The project is based on interviews with, and oral histories of, members of the region's SM subculture," says Sarah Phillips, a Pacific University assistant professor of sociology.

She, along with faculty colleague Nancy Breaux, assistant professor of media arts, recently received a \$5,000 grant from the Oregon Council for the Humanities to study and produce a documentary video about the state's

SUBCULTURAL STUDIES

Researchers are taking a closer look at Oregon's SM community and documenting the politics of identity by Inga Sorensen

sadomasochism community.

"We plan to interview all of our participants on video in order to create a visual document. It will be accessible to the general public, but it won't rely on the sensationalism of SM. Rather, we want to portray the complicated and subtle processes of identity politics," says Phillips.

She says the study's premise stemmed from an earlier project involving Breaux, who was at the time teaching a video field production course.

The two chose to collaborate on a proposal for a project that takes a closer look at SM culture.

"We're exploring cultural identity, that is, how and why people come to identify themselves in the way they do," explains Phillips.

The duo are also examining what they perceive as a "growing fissure" within the SM community over whether to seek greater mainstream acceptance or maintain an outsider identity.

Phillips says SM—at least its more tangible

Living in Leather contacts, like Chase, for guidance in their quest for subjects and, in turn, answers.

"I think what they are doing now is great," Chase says. "They're doing it in a responsible, educational way, not in a negative, sensationalistic manner. That's why Susie and I agreed to participate."

Phillips and Breaux have assembled a research and video crew comprised of students who will conduct interviews throughout the spring and summer.

The team has already met with Chase and Shepherd at the couple's Northeast Portland home, which houses a "play room."

"[The students] were just in awe," Chase chuckles. "It was like having a room full of children. But let me tell you, they asked good questions and were really seeking accurate information."

Cassidy DeMarco, a junior at Pacific University, is one of those students.

"It was exciting to have an opportunity to actually put a face to a subculture, rather than just studying it in a more academic, removed way," says DeMarco.

He says he was eager to get involved in the project because he enjoys pondering what makes people tick, as well as why they make the choices they make, including choices about identity.

"I'm real curious about that," says DeMarco, who identifies as bisexual.

Phillips, meanwhile, says her initial contacts with the SM community have been encouraging.

"Like most people who have been misunderstood, they want to talk," she says, adding there remains a strong stigma attached even to studying the SM community, never mind actually being a part of it.

Phillips likens the prejudice to once commonly-held beliefs that women's studies, African American studies and gay and lesbian studies were not subjects worthy of serious research.

She feels this project, and the Oregon Council for the Humanities' grant-based endorsement of it, could be a first step in the right direction.

"That's what we're hoping," she says.

By the summer of 1999, the researchers expect to have a completed documentary as well as several papers to submit for possible presentation at professional and academic conferences.



Research subject KT Chase with other radical sensualists who were profiled in the Feb. 16, 1996, issue of *Just Out*

During that period, Breaux's students decided to interview people who engaged in body modifications, such as piercing, and they received permission to interview attendees of the International Living in Leather Conference, which was held in Portland last October.

Living in Leather piqued Breaux's interest in further exploring SM life. Back at Pacific, she talked with Phillips, whose research in sociology has focused on sexuality-related topics such as adolescent HIV/AIDS and nude art modeling.

trappings, like clothes and jewelry—is increasingly being swallowed by the establishment.

"What happens when cultures of resistance get co-opted by the mainstream? We want to explore that," she tells *Just Out*.

These are questions not unlike those being mulled by some members of the gay and lesbian community. What happens when assimilation is at your doorstep? Do you put out the welcome mat or pull the shades? What is lost and what is gained by either decision?

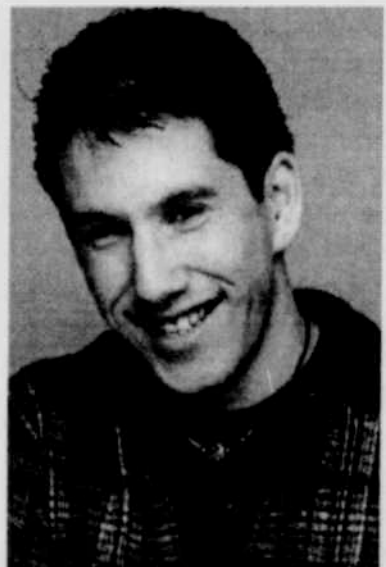
The researchers have in part turned to their

studies were not subjects worthy of serious research.

She feels this project, and the Oregon Council for the Humanities' grant-based endorsement of it, could be a first step in the right direction.

"That's what we're hoping," she says.

By the summer of 1999, the researchers expect to have a completed documentary as well as several papers to submit for possible presentation at professional and academic conferences.



Hosted by
Mr. Gay Portland XX
Mark Hollywood

It's Not Just Another Drag Show SATURDAY, MAY 2, 1998

DOORS: 6:00

Portland Conference Center

SHOW: 7:00

300 N.E. Multnomah Street - Portland, Oregon

across the Light Rail Tracks from the Portland Convention Center

Invited to perform

\$10 MINIMUM DONATION

Tickets available at all Fred Meyer

FASTIXX Outlets or Charge by

Phone 503-224-TIXX.

(Event code: EPTC2MAY)

Darcelle XV and Company; Sinnamen Snapp Rose of Salem;

Antie Milo of Eugene; Poison Waters; Diva of Eugene; Pookie;

Patti O'Dora; La Femme International Misha Rockafeller;

La Femme International Gaysha Starr and lots more

Professionally Video Taped by Portland Cable Access Television

A benefit for the Adria M. Edwards Scholarship Fund and Outside In
Special thanks to **JUST OUT** - Oregon's Lesbian and Gay Newsmagazine



Mistress of Ceremonies
Rose Empress XXXVI
Maria