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setting, Stockwell rents out her own private play space near downtown Vancouver, Wash., for about \$200 a night. Customers range from couples and poly groups to small parties.

"Every once in awhile someone will have a birthday play party," she says.

In the front room, or "parlor," a padded spanking bench sits by a window and tasteful art decorates red-painted walls. A brown leather sofa and ottoman adorned with body pillows add an element of comfort.

It also features a wooden whipping post affixed to a small stage-like platform. It's good to have something to hold onto when you're being whipped or on the receiving end of "impact play," she explains.

Walk toward the back of the house, and there lies the "classic dungeon." Standard dungeon equipment furnishes the room – a massage table to the right and a sling that hangs from ceiling. "It's a hammock for fucking, pretty much," says Stockwell. Full-length mirrors line the walls. The only thing missing, she says, is a St. Andrew's Cross, a tall X-shaped crux used to restrain a submissive participant at the ankles and wrists in a spread arm and spread eagle position.

In the back of the house, is Stockwell's favorite play space: the medical room. It's bright, white and sterile, but it's no ordinary doctor's office. Stainless steel instruments lie on a shelf next to a gynecologist's chair. It's in this room she says, she practices needle play and enema play.

Stockwell is "so incredibly out" when it comes to her kink, she's even taken her parents on a tour of her dungeon – but they were forbidden from opening any cupboards or drawers. She didn't feel like explaining what the needles were for.

"I've come out to (my parents) for so many reasons and in so many different ways over the years," says Stockwell. "I've always been a little bit more sexually oriented than my other family members, or than most people that I knew."

Born and raised in rural and conservative areas of Michigan, Stockwell says growing up, she didn't know how to categorize her fantasies – but she did know she should probably keep them to herself.

Her mother, Gwen Stockwell, a school psychologist, says her daughter was always very inquisitive, with a different way of looking at things. She's been supportive of Stockwell's polyamorous relationships and kinky lifestyle. "There's always something new," she says. "She keeps us on our toes."

When Stockwell moved to the Portland area in 2004, she was in her element. "I finally found people who were exploring queer politics and queer lifestyles, found people who were actively and healthfully exploring polyamory," she says, "the kink community here is amazing."

While not all poly people are kinky, and not all kinky people are poly, she says there is a significant overlap between the two communities.

As Stockwell walks back and forth in front of her audience at PCC, she exudes confidence and authority; her inner dominatrix is apparent.

It's a confidence BDSM has helped nurture. She says watching people be present in their naked bodies had a deeply

healing effect on her own body image.

"There are times now where I can just lose track of how I feel about my body in that moment," she says. "These things, like in high school, that I thought would always be there at the front of my mind, 'How fat are my thighs? What can I obsess about on my body?' and now I don't have to do that all the time."

Today, "sexy" is an adjective she uses to describe herself – even on her business cards. But for Stockwell, the kink lifestyle isn't all about being sexy and the act of "bumping juicy bits together." She compares the endorphins released during a good BDSM scene to runners' high.

"That's one of the main reasons I really love BDSM," she says, "when I am really struggling with something – if I can push my body physically – I get emotional relief, I get this feeling of release, and it's wonderful."

As erotic as BDSM may be, not everyone mixes it with sex. "Some people might compare getting a really heavy flogging to getting a deep massage, because our bodies react in similar ways," she says. "For some folks it's a spiritual path, there's catharsis."

Historically, BDSM appears in many religions as a way of challenging the body for spiritual enlightenment, Stockwell tells the students.

The self-deprivation of Buddha, the self and public flogging practiced throughout Christianity and the use of cat o' nine tails during prayer in some strict monastic orders of the Roman Catholic Church – like the Opus Dei monk, Silas, in Dan Brown's novel, "The Da Vinci Code." These are all

examples of using BDSM activities in spirituality.

And then there are those who find relief from chronic pain by subjecting themselves to intentional pain. Stockwell says she finds relief from her own chronic nerve pain for several days after engaging in BDSM play.

"If I'm bottoming to a flogging or to any number of things, my chronic pain actually eases up because my body does all this great endorphin stuff and releases all these chemicals that make my body feel better – and I know I'm not the only one."

While Stockwell identifies as kinky just as much as she identifies as queer, she says it's not a protected status.

"As soon as you get outside the major urban areas, there's still a lot of risk, and there are still places where you can lose custody of your kids – you can lose your job," she says. "If I still lived where I'm from, I would never be as out as I am now."

Her partner, Kat, owns and operates a side business selling sex toys made out of recycled rubber. She has to keep a low profile or she risks losing her day job. For this reason, Stockwell asked we omit her last name.

Oregon's freedom of expression laws make it a pretty kink-friendly place, says Stockwell, but that isn't the case in every state. "There are places where people can be and have been prosecuted for assault even if everything is consensual," she says.

According to NCSF, even when consensual, BDSM activity is frequently "prosecuted under state criminal laws dealing with assault, aggravated assault,

sexual assault or sexual abuse."

Stockwell considers much of what she does to be sexual activism. Through education she hopes to help demystify BDSM by correcting misnomers and emphasizing safety and consent.

One common myth, she says, is the notion that people into kink are trauma and abuse survivors. "Abuse is so rampant in our community," she says, "it doesn't matter what subculture you look at, there's going to be people that have experienced abuse. It's not connected in that way we think it is."

She also emphasizes the importance of full consent, safety and proper etiquette. For example, it's considered very bad etiquette to ask someone at a munch or play party about the details of their professional or family life.

"Ask them what size cock they like up their ass, absolutely, but don't ask them where they work," says Stockwell.

Play parties, she says, can vary. There might be a theme, like rope or role playing. And it's not a free-for-all – most people play with their partners or people they've played with before, she says. Some people go to socialize, some to play and some to watch. Parties usually dedicate spaces for different activities, because, says Stockwell, you don't want to "have somebody chitchatting about their mortgage" right next to somebody who's trying to enjoy "a really good single-tailing."

Also off limits? Touching other people's toys, slaves or other human property without permission.

As medieval and mystifying and as BDSM's façade may seem, Stockwell says participants take it light-heartedly. Her partner's safe word is "French fries," and the reality is, she says, "A lot of times we're laughing our asses off while we do this stuff."



"As soon as you get outside the major urban areas, there's still a lot of risk, and there are still places where you can lose custody of your kids – you can lose your job," says Annamarie Stockwell, standing here next to her whipping post. "If I still lived where I'm from, I would never be as out as I am now."

PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN

Select Portland Kink Events**PDX Queer Munch**

First Thursday of each month
5:30 p.m.
Radio Room
1101 NE Alberta St.

Talking Kink

Discussion panel
Fourth Monday of each month
7 p.m.
Q Center
4115 N Mississippi Ave.

Expanding your BDSM Experience

Class taught by Annamarie Stockwell
(\$20)
Thursday, July 2, 7:30 p.m.
SheBop
909 N Beech St.

SPEEC Launch Party

Saturday, July 18, 7 p.m.
Red Rose Ballroom
1829 NE Alberta St.

Oregon Leather Pride Week

July 31 to August 9
visit: oregonleatherpride.org