

# JOURNAL OF POSITIVE SEXUALITY

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*THE JOURNAL OF POSITIVE SEXUALITY* is a multidisciplinary journal focusing on all aspects of positive sexuality as described in the Center for Positive Sexuality's purpose statement. It is designed to be accessible and beneficial to a large and diverse readership, including academics, policymakers, clinicians, educators, and students.

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## Evaluating the State of the Journal: Past Successes and Future Plans

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### Abstract

In this brief editorial, we evaluate the state of the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* and reflect on the journal's past successes and future plans. We consider the journal's relevance as illustrated through its unique character and approach, as well as through its impact as demonstrated according to various journal metrics. We highlight recent changes to our Submission Guidelines and conclude by discussing future plans for the journal.

### Introduction

As the *Journal of Positive Sexuality (JPS)* begins its fifth year, we want to take this opportunity to reflect on the journal's past successes and future plans. Since its inception in 2015, *JPS* has established itself as one of the premier outlets for timely, relevant, and accessible research that intentionally bridges the often frustratingly-isolated contexts of the academic, professional, and community study and practice of sexuality. Unlike any other journal, *JPS* seeks to integrate knowledge and wisdom from these different contexts and create a product that can be commonly understood and broadly applied.

As such, *JPS* is unique in its appreciation of a wide range of perspectives, approaches, and topics. To borrow from the language of our recently updated Submission Guidelines, not only does *JPS* “encourage submissions from diverse epistemological perspectives,” but we also “welcome a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, as well as theoretical and conceptual essays.” Further, the topics appearing in *JPS* have firmly established it as one of the most diverse and cutting-edge sexuality journals in the world. From articles addressing some of the most important controversies of contemporary sexuality (e.g., debates about pornography), to articles investigating broad interdisciplinary concerns (e.g., sexuality and aging), to articles illuminating lesser-known sexual practices (e.g., recreational sounding with habanero juice)—*JPS* has explored sexuality from the mainstream to the deviant, and from the widely-known to the esoteric.

## Journal Metrics

In its first four years, *JPS* has published 37 articles from 49 different authors. These authors have included students, professors, researchers, clinicians, and community members. They have represented a wide range of academic and professional disciplines, including anthropology, business, counseling, criminology, gender and women's studies, health and medicine, history, political science, psychology, sexology and sexuality studies, social work, and sociology. Many of these authors have also been members of sex-positive communities, groups, and organizations, including advocacy and service organizations as well as fraternal and interest groups related to LGBTQ, BDSM, kink, and vampire communities.

Since the publication of the journal's first issue in 2015, article views and downloads have steadily risen. In 2015, there were close to 5,000 article views and downloads. In 2016, this doubled to around 10,000. In 2017, this increased to nearly 35,000; and in 2018, this further increased to over 70,000. Some of the journal's most popular articles have included: "A Failure of Academic Quality Control: *The Technology of Orgasm*" by Hallie Lieberman and Eric Schatzberg (published in 2018 with over 46,000 total views and downloads); "No Pain, No Gain? Therapeutic and Relational Benefits of Subspace in BDSM Contexts" by Dulcinea Pitagora (published in 2017 with over 10,000 total views and downloads); and "Sexual Activity and Older Adults: Stigma, Overall Health, and Research" by Samantha Tupy, Matthew Schumann, and Xiaomeng Xu (published in 2015 with over 9,000 total views and downloads). Notably, journal readers have come from all over the world, including not just the United States and Canada, but also from the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and other countries in Europe, Asia, and South America.

Alongside these views and downloads, additional evidence of the journal's impact comes through multiple reports of articles being used as required reading in various college and university courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Similarly, journal articles are being distributed by professional and community groups not only to their members but, in some case, also directly to clients in various professional and clinical contexts.

Finally, in terms of research impact, according to Google Scholar, *JPS* articles have been cited a total of 91 times. Some of the most cited articles include "Introducing a Multidisciplinary Framework of Positive Sexuality" by D J Williams, Jeremy N. Thomas, Emily E. Prior, and Wendy Walters (published in 2015 with 26 citations); "Sadomasochism without Sex? Exploring the Parallels between BDSM and Extreme Rituals" by Brad J. Sagarin, Ellen M. Lee, and Kathryn R. Klement (published in 2015 with 15 citations) and "Does BDSM Power Exchange among Women Reflect Casual Leisure? An Exploratory Qualitative Study" by Emily E. Prior and D J Williams (published in 2015 with 13 citations).

## Changes to Submission Guidelines

Beginning this year, some adjustments have been made to our submission guidelines. In addition to minor clarifications regarding our style expectations and review processes, we are now specifying that while *JPS* has a preference for shorter manuscripts (2,000–3,000 words), we

are also considering longer manuscripts up to 10,000 words. For all manuscripts, we are now asking authors to include a brief abstract (fewer than 100 words).

Our main intent here is to continue our emphasis on concise, accessible articles that appeal to as broad an audience as possible. At the same time, we want to allow for more traditional manuscripts, especially those that seek to bridge the academic, professional, and community study and practice of sexuality. We want *JPS* to become a leading destination for innovative and boundary-pushing scholarship, and we hope that our readers will continue to send us their best work.

### Looking to the Future

As we move forward, we plan on publishing a minimum of two issues per year, typically appearing in March and September, with additional issues possible should the number of submissions allow. In general, we prefer to mirror the brief character of our articles by likewise producing concise and easily-readable issues of three to six articles each. We note that as an entirely online and open-access periodical, *JPS* maintains a complete archive of all past articles.

In the near future, we are also looking to further increase the indexing and database availability of *JPS*. Beginning in 2018, the journal is now listed on Ulrichsweb (ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com), and this is the first step in *JPS* being listed in other periodical databases such as ProQuest and JSTOR. With such increased listings, *JPS* will be more readily identifiable and available not only to institutional, public, and private libraries, but also to corporate and government entities.

In conclusion, we want to thank our excellent Editorial Board for the time and energy that they have given over the last few years to establishing, developing, and strengthening the journal. On behalf of all of them, we are optimistic that we will see continued growth in the impact, readership, and scope of the *Journal of Positive Sexuality*.

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## Pornography Use by Kinky Gay Men: A Qualitative Approach

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### Abstract

This study examines how kinky gay men consume and engage with pornography. Drawing on 28 in-depth interviews with self-identified kinky gay men, this study examines how pornography was discussed as a useful tool for exploring sexuality. Pornography consumption was complex and played an important role in the development of kink desires for almost all participants, being used to: explore sexual kinks; learn how to perform activities safely; and help consolidate sexual desires. Limitations and implications of this study are considered, particularly regarding the conceptual framing of pornography consumption and considerations for the future with kinky individuals.

### Introduction

The study of pornography is contentious and complex (McNair, 2013), with research typically examining the potential harms of pornography use, such as negative views towards women or the potential for pornography addiction. The assumptions inherent in these types of questions still proliferate despite research repeatedly indicating the negative consequences of framing pornography through a lens of risk (Ley, Prause & Finn, 2014; Williams et al., 2017) as well as the lack of any correlation between pornography and addiction (Kohut, Baer & Watts, 2016; Træen, Spitznogle & Beverfjord, 2004). The cultural harm narrative attached to pornography is viewed as detrimental not only when pornography is actively sought out (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), but even when it is viewed unintentionally (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). The assumption in research that pornography negatively affects individuals' behaviors and attitudes towards sex has been called the *negative effects paradigm* (McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

Research is beginning to move beyond this paradigm and related frameworks of risk to instead explore alternative perspectives on pornography (e.g. Neville, 2018; Randall & McKee, 2017; Thomas, 2016) such as recognizing pornography as a form of entertainment or a visual artifact to be analyzed. In an earlier article, we advocated the use of a leisure framework to research pornography (McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

Drawing on various disciplines and established theories, leisure science researches leisure *experiences*—these can include activities, spaces or times (Kleiber, Walker & Mannell, 2011). A leisure framework has been usefully applied to kink behaviors, understanding kink as an activity individuals engage in, and recognizing the unique space in which it occurs (see Williams & Prior, 2015). Moreover, a key element of leisure is that it is intrinsically motivated and non-coerced—something which is stressed in relation to kink engagement (Pitagora, 2013).

A leisure framework can be applied to pornography: individuals are intrinsically motivated and freely choose to interact with pornography; it is an activity which users often devote special time to in a private space (McCormack & Wignall, 2017). The utility of this framework for pornography is that it recognizes how pornography can be personally meaningful for its users, demonstrating benefits reminiscent of other leisure pursuits (Stebbins, 2015). A leisure framework caters to an alternative discourse about pornography, which acknowledges both the potential risks *and* benefits of engaging in such activities for the practitioner and society. This perspective has already been effectively used to study sexual practices, such as sex in later life and kink practices (Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2017; Prior & Williams, 2015; Wignall & McCormack, 2017; Wignall, 2017).

This study moves beyond the negative effects paradigm, addressing the gap in knowledge of how individuals with kink interests interact with pornography. Specifically, the research will address *how* and *why* pornography is used by participants in relation to their kink desires and explorations.

## Methods

This study was part of a broader project researching the experiences of gay and bisexual men who identify as kinky but differ in their levels of immersion in kink subcultures. For this study, I draw on 28 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with self-identified gay men ranging in ages from 21 to 62 ( $M = 27.6$ ). Three participants identified as non-white and twenty-five as Caucasian. All participants were UK residents at the time of data collection. Participants identified with various roles within kink subcultures, including leather, dominant, switch, and pup.

I created a profile on geolocation “hook up” apps and socio-sexual networking sites aimed at gay and bisexual kinky men to recruit participants. A message providing details of the research was sent to prospective participants, with further information given if interest was displayed. I used established connections with prominent members in various kink communities to act as references for participants as well as for snowball sampling.

Interviews covered a range of topics related to kink identities, communities, and activities, as well as participants’ interactions with kink websites. Pornography was not initially a focus of the interviews but was explored further given the central role it played for most participants. The themes presented in the following sections were not the result of questions about pornography but questions around discovering kink interests, exploring kink desires, and engagement in kink communities, with follow-up questions about pornography related to participants’ initial responses. All interviews were analyzed using a modified-grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), and data were coded into themes.

## Results

Pornography was central to these kinky gay men’s sexual lives. While pornography consumption ebbed and flowed in their sexual lives, 25 participants spoke about its importance for discovering and exploring sexual desires. The dominant narrative was that while perusing the



links found on vanilla pornography sites, participants discovered kinky pornography—which then led them to the types of kinky pornography that they found most appealing. Given that the interview questions focused on sexual history and practice, and not pornography per se, its centrality is an important finding in and of itself.

### *The Role of Pornography in Discovering Initial Kink Interests*

When participants were asked questions about their general routes into kink (e.g., when did your kink desires first develop?), pornography was highlighted as a dominant path for 19 participants. These participants gave a strong narrative of “stumbling” upon kinky pornography. Participants described having kinky videos suggested to them while watching non-kinky pornography on tube websites or peer-to-peer platforms. For example, when asked where his kink interests began, Oliver said:

Looking at porn aged 11 or 12, I had too much access to the internet. It was kinky porn I was watching. It tumbled from vanilla porn and then you get to the more interesting porn... I don't know what I was thinking; maybe that it was more interesting than the other stuff.

Similarly, Peter said:

When I was coming of age, so was peer-to-peer networking, and you could have easy access to other peoples' porn. I downloaded porn, saw random videos I wouldn't normally come across, and then just liked it... I moved to more restrained [bondage] and kinky porn. Some people might have thought it too much, but I wanted to see how far I would go getting aroused by it... It was just exploring.

Pornography was described by some participants as a “stepping-stone” from vanilla to kink. For example, discussing how he first explored kink activity, Connor said, “Most of my exploration of kink online came by accident. You'd start to watch a [kinky] clip, see where it came from, click that site and just go on.” Similarly, Max said, “I started viewing pornography in general, women and men. I just started exploring unusual things too.... If you're on porn and you get the lists on the side with the categories, you just have a look at them all.”

Some participants discovered their interests in kink through other routes, but no participant stated that pornography was harmful. Contrary to fears of accidentally viewing extreme pornography (Wolak et al., 2007), participants did not express surprise or offense with the content of the suggested videos. Furthermore, no participant expressed concerns with the suggested videos. Instead, the videos were normally described as “interesting” or “feeding curiosity.” Moreover, some participants praised pornography for giving them a route into kink and allowing them to explore their sexuality more fully in a safe environment.

### *Using Pornography for Behavioral Exploration of Kink Interests*

After discussions around how participants were first introduced to kink, I asked how participants explored their kink desires. Although participants discussed several methods, such as

engaging with others or exploring online forums, the majority of participants also discussed using pornography as a tool for *exploration* of kink desires. Participants highlighted the ease with which they could use pornography to explore a wide variety of kinks in a safe environment, free from perceived social stigma, and at their own pace.

After narratives of stumbling across kink porn, participants described a move toward more focused searches to things that particularly piqued their interest. For example, Brian said, “I just watched different things online, and then you see how you feel once you have watched it.” He added, “I intentionally looked for different things. Like, let’s look up some guys in leather and download them and see what I think, then seeing which videos sparked an interest or not—I don’t know if I am going to like it or not until I view it.”

Brian’s narrative highlights a naiveté surrounding kink. While he used initial interests to search for more videos, he was still unsure what he liked and actively sought out new material. Furthermore, his narrative highlights a level of playfulness in searching, much in the same way an individual would try different foods to explore their palette. Brian “praised porn” for allowing a space to explore his desires at his own pace and in private. Anthony also discussed how he began to use pornography as a tool for more focused searches, stating, “You get older and watch more porn videos online and refine your searches more and realize that’s what you’re into... General exploring moved into more focused.”

Gabe highlighted how he considered pornography to be a platform to engage in solo exploration, saying, “It was easier to explore my interest through porn, and because I’m not always the most confident of people, it is easier to explore these things through an impersonal medium.” The lack of another person present meant Gabe could explore kink at his own pace, with no pressure to engage in any kink acts. He said, “That was one of the important things [about watching porn]: I could stop when I wanted.” Arguably, exploring through pornography may have delayed the initial onset of Gabe’s first kink experience, preparing him more for when it did occur.

The benefit of exploring kink without the fear of judgement or stigma was echoed by Connor. He expressed concerns about exploring kink as an older gay man. These concerns stemmed from early experiences with sex. For example, he said, “Before the internet, the other way [of exploring and having sex] was cottaging and saunas—it tended to be quickies with no real chance of developing things.” For Connor, pornography allowed for an easier “journey into kink.” He added, “Without it, I wouldn’t be where I am now, members of these clubs and this exploration, etc.”

For two participants who described early arousal to specific kinks, pornography provided a place to explore their desires more. Dan, who had a foot fetish from four years old, described the ease with which he could explore his interest, saying, “It’s not difficult to come across kink: when you go online to look at porn, they will throw suggestions on the side to keep you on the site.” Similarly, Justin, who was tied up by friends when he was seven, said, “You see one video in the [suggested] links, then another one, and it just snowballs into the kinky porn after a while. I never just actively outright searched it at first, but it developed.”

Trevor was introduced to kink through a friend who invited him to a kink event. He described going to pornography afterwards as a place to further explore kink at a pace that suited him. He was able to explore a variety of kinks and discover his own interests: “I was watching more porn than I had ever watched in my entire life. More bareback, group, and kinky porn really. It looks more naughty and intimate; they look into each other. The kinky porn was just better—I find it hot.” Trevor’s description of kinky pornography as “naughty” highlights an understanding of the subcultural nature of kink—a feeling that what he is doing is somehow *wrong* and different from what everybody else does. He may have chosen to explore kink more through pornography than attending other kink events for this reason.

Josh, who was also introduced to kink through another person, similarly used pornography afterwards to explore kink more thoroughly. He said, “I went away looking for porn after having [kinky] introductions to sex... There is a lot of things that feeds my sexual [kinks] through casual watching of porn.” Josh’s initial perception of kink was very Old Guard (see Rubin, 1998) and he labelled kink as “dirty and seedy.” However, his perceptions of kink and the meanings he ascribed to kink changed through exploring pornography. Kink for Josh now means “a selection of sexual extras or additions I am into.” As Trevor notes, through porn, he has a “better understanding of what [he is] into.”

### *Benefits of Interacting with Pornography*

Participants framed their pornography use as unproblematic, with some participants emphasizing the benefits of pornography by introducing them to kink and helping them explore their kink desires. While it should be emphasized that pornography is not an accurate representation of kink or sex more generally, it should be recognized as a resource being used by individuals to explore their sexuality (see also McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

The ways in which participants describe their pornography use is reminiscent of other leisure activities. For some, pornography use was an “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997, p. 18) while others invested time and energy into using pornography to explore their kink desires. Indeed, for some, pornography was a tool for engaging with a broader kink subculture.

Ethan spent time living abroad where he had little access to kink in person. Pornography on a blog was useful to help him exploring kink interests and also to “keep him in the loop” about kink. He said:

There was a blog site I used to read, a guy’s experiences of kink and such. I wasn’t wanking to it really, but it was very interesting to read. I used it to learn about kinky sex, find out what existed, etc. The blog gave an indication that there was this subculture, people into it, there were places they went, roles, etc. He talked about all his experiences... I was living vicariously.

Ethan was exploring kink as well as the broader kink subculture through the blog.

Other participants highlighted benefits of engaging with pornography, such as interacting with an online community. For example, Luis created videos on YouTube related to foot fetishism. While these videos did not display nudity or sexual practices, Luis deemed these videos to be pornographic as he knew “other people would tell him they cum to them.” He said, “I created a YouTube account at 18, a fetish based one, and started to get lots of follows, views and comments... I still use YouTube now to post videos and talk to people.” Through YouTube, Luis was able to explore his kinks, but also interact with a broader kink community.

Oliver was the only participant who actively dismissed the use of porn, regardless of its platform, as a means for exploring kink. He said, “The nitty gritty kinks you don’t need to explore in porn.” Instead, he focused more on Old Guard kink traditions, where kink was something that had to be experienced and that could only be done through active engagement with others. Oliver works in a kink-based sex shop and deals with a wide range of individuals with kink interests, which may inform his standpoint.

## Conclusion

Pornography use can be understood through the paradigm of leisure. Rather than the participants passively watching pornography, it was described as being actively consumed and used in multifaceted ways, intensifying kink interests by some and providing a platform for exploration by others. Although research has acknowledged pornography as a tool for exploring sexuality (e.g., Rothman et al., 2015), it has neglected the educational aspects of pornography. This study demonstrates how participants identified their kink interests in a safe space online before engaging in activities in person. As such, watching kinky pornography may have delayed or prevented engagement in kink activities (McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

Participants’ descriptions of pornography are reminiscent of other leisure experiences: they engaged in the activity in a specific space, often described as a safe space; they dedicated time for their pornography viewing; and they described positive feelings after watching it. This study supports moving beyond the negative effects paradigm and framing pornography as a leisure experience.

Watching pornography may have had a positive impact on sexual behaviors by preventing potential sexual mistakes and allowing a space in which to explore sexuality; however, more research would be needed to see if this pattern is consistent in a broader population. The dominant narrative of kink assumes the activities are performed in person (Rubin, 1991; Zambelli, 2017) with little research on understanding the role of pornography for kink practitioners (Randall & McKee, 2017). Further research needs to be conducted to understand how pornography is used within other kink subcultures.

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## The Queer Spaces of BDSM and Non-monogamy

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### Abstract

Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork within BDSM communities in Sweden, this article focuses on links between non-monogamy and BDSM. Drawing on Halberstam's concept of queer space, the following questions are investigated: What are the connections between BDSM and non-monogamous communities? How does interaction between BDSM and non-monogamous practices create non-normative logic? The transgression of one norm makes it easier to transgress other norms as well, providing opportunities to find new ways of organizing relationships beyond the norms of monogamy. In order for an individual to be able to fully explore kinks in BDSM practices and at the same time respect the boundaries of a partner, non-monogamy emerges as one logical answer.

### Introduction

Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork within several BDSM communities in Sweden, this article focuses on links between non-monogamy and BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism). Earlier studies by Bauer (2008, 2010), Sheff (2005), and Sheff and Hammers (2011) have explored connections between these communities and point to ideals shared by both communities, for instance, concerning the importance of communication. The present article contributes to this emerging discussion by focusing on the following questions: What are the connections between BDSM and non-monogamous communities? In what ways does non-monogamy become important for BDSM practice? How does interaction between BDSM and non-monogamous practices create non-normative logic? The article contributes to existing scholarship on BDSM by exploring non-monogamous patterns of intimacy within BDSM communities. It also contributes to research on non-monogamous communities by investigating skills that BDSM practitioners have developed concerning communication and consent, which may perform similar functions in non-monogamous relationships. In this study, we use the concept of queer space (Halberstam, 2005) to explore the material. This concept allows a discussion on how communities develop non-normative logics, transcending the ideals of normality, the reproductive family, and the stable couple. In a society where coupling is of paramount importance for how we live our lives, as well as for how we structure the world, the concept of queer space can provide greater understanding for experiences of living outside the frames of normative ideals of relationships and sexuality.

The abbreviation BDSM describes a variety of behaviors that involve an implicit or explicit erotic power exchange. BDSM includes a wide range of activities, practices, positions

and relation types, but also various meanings and purposes (Barker, 2013). It is built on fantasies, daydreams, thoughts and feelings, and the different practices stress taboos, boundaries, prohibitions and social norms (Newmahr, 2010; Weiss, 2011). Practitioners adopt dominant, sadist, submissive, or masochistic roles. If a person wants to be both dominant and submissive, the person is called a switch. For some practitioners, the roles are limited to sexual role-play, while others adopt the roles at all times, also called 24/7 relationships.

In recent years, the research field concerned with BDSM has diversified and studies have looked at these practices from many different angles. Recent studies thus explore issues of communication and consent (Barker, 2013; Bauer, 2008), gender and BDSM (Carlström, 2017; Yost, 2007), as well as BDSM in relation to the surrounding society (Beckmann, 2001; Taylor & Ussher, 2001; Weiss, 2006). Several studies show that BDSM cannot be explained by psychopathology (see for example Richters et al., 2008; Wismeijer & van Assen, 2013; Williams et al., 2017). In their investigation of kink activities as avenues for exploring gender identity and sexual orientation, Sprott and Hadcock (2017) emphasize that kink communities and kink activities can be important elements in healing from shame, isolation and loss.

We use “non-monogamy” as an umbrella concept for a multitude of practices transgressing norms of monogamy. Many of the informants in this study identify with non-monogamy and use concepts related to non-monogamy to describe their practices, but other ways of conceptualizing non-monogamy also appear in the material, such as living in triads, “borrowing” or simply “practicing” with someone other than one’s partner. Previous research has focused on various areas related to non-monogamy, such as sexual orientation (Tweedy, 2011; Hauptert et al., 2017), agreements and trust (Wosick-Correa, 2010), emotions and intimacy (Klesse, 2017), media representation (Rambukkana, 2015), and attitudes toward non-monogamy (Séguin, 2017). Several studies (Anapol, 2010; Barker & Langdridge, 2010) point to experiences of discrimination and stigma in relation to non-monogamy. Relatively little research has investigated the relationship between BDSM and non-monogamy, but there are a few studies that deal with the topic. Bauer (2010) has investigated non-monogamous relationships within the BDSM community and notes that “BDSM queers have developed a sexual culture that produces greater awareness of diverse sexual needs in combination with a higher priority on getting them met” (p. 151). Sheff and Hammers (2011) have investigated race, class, and education among polyamorists and kinksters. Finally, an article by Barker (2005) focuses on activism when discussing non-monogamy and BDSM.

## Methods

The first author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 within different BDSM communities in Sweden. The fieldwork included interviews, observation and participation in meetings, workshops, pub evenings and club ventures, and resulted in interviews with a total of 29 persons defining themselves as BDSM practitioners, of which 17 defined themselves as polyamorous or non-monogamous. The informants’ ages were between 20 and 60. They lived in cities, smaller towns, and in rural areas in different parts of Sweden. Fourteen of them identified as women, fourteen as men, and one as non-binary. Nine identified as dominant and/or sadists, thirteen as submissive and/or masochists, and seven as switches. Twenty of the informants had a university education. Interviews were transcribed in full. We analyzed data

using a qualitative analytical method inspired by thematic analysis as described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). We then interpreted the different categories and components that were prominent in the material in relation to theoretical perspectives and previous research in the field. The project complies with the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (Codex, 2012) and was reviewed by the Regional Ethical Review Board.

### **BDSM and Non-monogamous Scenes: Queer Spaces**

The informants describe the relationship between non-monogamy and BDSM in a variety of ways, but several refer to common denominators between these practices. The informants often mention the importance of communication. Both BDSM and non-monogamy are characterized by clear negotiations and explicit agreements. Several informants also refer to the permissive atmosphere they experience as something characteristic of the communities. Some explain how their polyamorous desires grew through BDSM activities. A switch woman says: “If you already differ from the norm, it’s easier to be open and explore more. If you break one norm you can break another one.” Several informants describe the overlap between the scenes. A polyamorous switch woman points out:

The scenes are blended, probably because of the non-normative approach to relationships. For example, a TPE [total power exchange] relationship is seen as extremely divergent, but also a triangle relationship is different, so it becomes a bit like “we freaks hang out in the corner together.” [laughs]

The informant’s statements are in line with previous research examining the connection between kink/BDSM communities and non-monogamy. For example, both Barker (2005) and Bauer (2010) suggest that polyamorous and BDSM practitioners share similar values of consensuality, communication, and safety, as well as similar transgressions of standard ways of relating. In Halberstam’s words, this could be said to constitute queer spaces—place- and community-making practices that are closely connected to queer subjects, but not in an essential way (Halberstam, 2005). The queer spaces of BDSM and non-monogamy are organizations of community where space is created for living a life that does not fit within the frames of normative ideals of sex and relationships. In a culture strongly characterized by monogamous ideals, BDSM can signify greater freedom because the activities are not seen as infidelity. Practicing BDSM is often of a non-genital character and practitioners may therefore see it as less threatening to primary commitments. Several informants find it important to talk to others about their relations, boundaries, and experiences of jealousy and stigmatization. Many participate in study circles and conversation groups. A submissive woman living with two masters says:

Once a week, I participate in a poly conversation group where we meet and talk about our relationships. We reflect, give and get advice, and support each other. We question and discuss social norms: why do we do what we do? Is it right or wrong and how can we do instead?

The informant here tells us of the importance of having a space in which to discuss and problematize norms and practices. Finding new ways of doing things means going outside the norm, which requires what Halberstam calls “creating non-normative logics” and organizations



of communities (Halberstam, 2005). In the following, we will go on to discuss how the informants create non-normative logics as they discuss the complex interconnections of BDSM desires and practices with non-monogamy.

### **BDSM Desire and Non-normative/Non-monogamous Logics**

Some informants live with a primary partner and see others to practice BDSM; some live in triads or with several “slaves.” For several, non-monogamy and BDSM are integrated parts of their identity and practitioners understand them as a lifestyle. A submissive woman says:

Poly is my identity. It feels like a basic part of me. BDSM is more like something I do. To be open with my poly identity has been very important to me. Since BDSM is so stigmatized, I choose not to be open about my BDSM preference.

The BDSM community provides various opportunities to practice with other people. Several informants explain that they meet other friends to practice BDSM. One informant, self-defining as male, dominant, and polyamorous says: “It is more common that BDSM practitioners are poly than that poly people are into BDSM. Many practitioners have several aspects of their practice and need different partners to satisfy different desires.” In clubs, it is common that people play together. One purpose in involving additional people in the practice can be to learn. Persons who are skilled and have long experience are often seen as high in the hierarchy. A sadist woman says:

There was a guy at the club who was very good at whipping, and he taught others how to whip. He asked if he could borrow my slave because he thought he had a good body to practice on. I replied that only if I can join because I also wanted to learn. And this was probably the best lesson I ever had.

As mentioned above, one reason that open relationships and non-monogamy are widespread in the BDSM community is that one does not expect to find a single partner who can match all of one’s kinks. Asked if there is a difference between BDSM and vanilla sex when it comes to jealousy, a dominant man answers:

Yes, for me there is. There may be BDSM practices I feel uncomfortable to perform or which I don’t master enough, which means I cannot give my partner full commitment. Then it’s better my partner practices with someone else. There is a difference when it comes to vanilla sex. Then you want the feeling of being good enough.

As illustrated by these examples, the informants thus tell quite different stories about how BDSM and non-monogamy are intertwined in their practice. In the excerpts above, they mention how both BDSM and non-monogamy are transgressions of norms, making it easier to break more norms after having broken one. One informant describes non-monogamy as an identity, in contrast to BDSM, which for this informant is rather felt to be a practice. Informants refer to BDSM as being a skill that has to be learned by training with others but also comment on how there can be no expectation of matching each of a partner’s kinks, so that non-monogamy becomes necessary to make some BDSM practices possible. The various relationships between

non-monogamy and BDSM expressed in these stories thus constitute a form of non-normative logic that offers possible explanations of the relations between these practices. In order to be able to fully explore kinks in your BDSM practices and at the same time respect the boundaries of your partner, non-monogamy emerges as a logical answer. In the same way, to develop specific skills—needed, for instance, for whipping—sharing or borrowing slaves can be necessary to fully explore this part of someone’s BDSM practice.

## Conclusions

Queer spaces offer non-normative communities that can counter societal norms of heteronormativity, monogamy, and vanilla sex. In the analysis above, we highlight how the practice of BDSM creates a logic that entails non-monogamy in order to be able to practice all of one’s kinks. But this is not the only reason for non-monogamy. The informants also point to how one transgression of norms makes it easier to transgress other norms as well, providing opportunities to find new ways of organizing relationships beyond the norms of monogamy. It is important to understand the relationship between BDSM and non-monogamy since people engaging in non-monogamy and BDSM remain, in Phelan’s (2010) words, abject sexual citizens, often unable to claim the relationship rights gained by monogamous vanilla couples. On a societal level, consensual non-monogamies and BDSM practices continue to be demonized, pathologized, and marginalized, with no legal protections for people involved (for example, concerning child-care or relationship status). Broader knowledge of both BDSM and non-monogamy—and the relationship between the two—may thus contribute to greater understanding and tolerance, helping healthcare professionals to avoid making facile assumptions about the sexual practices of their clients.

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