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Living Kinky

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Living Kinky

Abstract

Current research around BDSM bondage-discipline, domination-submission, and sadomasochism (BDSM) and kink often serves to pathologize behaviors we now recognize as a part of healthy sexual expression for individuals, couples, and poly groups alike. Kink can be defined as sensual, erotic, or otherwise sexual behaviors that are considered unconventional within the context of a society, and while these behaviors have been depathologized with the release of the DSM-V, much of the existing research has been slow to reflect these changes.

Through a phenomenological approach this study offers a glimpse into the lived experiences of five self-identified kinky individuals (n=5) with consideration of their identities, relationships, and individual experiences. Findings will inform social work practice, research, and also provide a deeper understanding for other service providers working in a therapeutic setting.

Introduction or Background

Kinky sex practices may be defined as any sexual, sensual, or otherwise erotic behavior that falls outside of what may be considered “normal” within a given society (Rehor, 2015). Practices- often referred to as play, include bondage, impact (spanking, flogging, whipping, or hitting), watersports (pee play), domination and submission, group sex, age play, exhibition, fetishism, and a myriad of other forms of sensation or role play. It is safe to assume that if you can imagine it, there is someone somewhere who is into it- in fact there are probably many someones, and they have all found their way to the internet.

While there is ample quantitative research around sexual practices, there is scant qualitative research on the topic of alternative sexual expression. Current research that delves more deeply into the lives of kink practitioners is most often presented in the form of case studies that serve to pathologize sexual interests and behaviors in alignment with past diagnostic criteria of Paraphilic Disorders as written in the DSM prior to the most recent revisions thereof (Downing, 2015).

Question/Objectives

In an attempt to understand the shared experiences of kinky people. This study asks the questions, *What are the lived experiences of kinky individuals?*

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Themes

Theme One: Stigma vs Acceptance

“People didn’t talk about sex when I was growing up, my parents are very religious. I had a lot of shame around sex.”

“I used to be really bad about keeping secrets, except for when it comes to this”

“We [kinky people] are everywhere- I used to think I was the only one, but then I found my tribe”

Theme Two: Development of Sexual Practice

“I discovered kink poking around the internet during middle school.”

“When I did actually start having sex it quickly became boring because it didn’t involve kink”

“I do think that being sexually compatible with someone is important- I’ve had generally better sexual experiences with people who share my interests in terms of kink. “

Theme Three: Empowerment Through Sexual Expression

“This new relationship is really pushing the envelope of what I'm able to communicate and what I'm able to relate to, and it's the same for her so it's like this deeply intimate wonderful place to be in.”

“I was sexually assaulted when I was 14, I had a really hard time navigating how reenacting and bondage was really healing for me because I had all the power. I experienced some judgment when I shared this, but *honestly that was the most healing thing I did to get my power back.*”

Methods

Phenomenology

- A phenomenological approach to this study allowed for participants to share information about their individual experiences through a semi-structured interview process. Raw data is analyzed through coding and meaning making to provide the essence within the shared experience of subjects interviewed (Creswell, 1998).

Social Constructionism Theoretical Frame Work

- Social Constructionism emphasizes the relationship between societal norms and individual beliefs and behaviors, as well as the perception thereof (Andrews, 2012).

Participants

- Five individuals were interviewed following recruitment at a kink social event as well as word of mouth via snowball sampling.
- All participants were between the ages of 19 and 43
- Participants ranged in gender identify and expression as well as relationship status and style.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary results of the study have reviled themes within the lived experiences of kinky folks. Through the identification of Stigma vs Acceptance, Development of Sexual Practice, and Empowerment through Sexual Expression the experience of each individual interviewed is represented.

For many people sexual expression is intrinsically tied to identities, it can be a source of shame, curiosity, connection, liberation, and empowerment. It plays an important role in how individuals relate with partners and the world around them.

Discussion/Conclusions/Next Steps

Existing published literature focuses on sexual behavior and pathology, rather than focusing on the experience of kink as it relates to identity and relationality.

These findings highlight the importance of connectedness and communication within sexual expression, regardless of the behavior being studied.

Opening up the conversation around alternative sexual expression is essential to providing supportive and effective services to those who seek them.

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