

Foreword

We congratulate the editors and authors of *The Power of BDSM: Play, Communities, and Consent in the 21st Century* for creating this new groundbreaking volume. Researchers in the area of BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism), colloquially called *kink*, have often had to contend with clueless and often hostile institutional review boards. We salute the contributors to this book for their fine achievement as well as for what the nature, tone, and focus reveal about the current state of BDSM/kink research.

There is a matter-of-fact, almost ordinary tone in describing the kinds of inclinations, behaviors, interactions, and identities that would have been considered bizarre even in the professional literature 10 or 20 years ago. Scholarly writing on BDSM/kink used to be almost conspicuous in its clinical tone, as if to ward off the possibility that the research enterprise could be perceived as salacious. Paradoxically, although this volume incorporates appropriate attention to stigma and its consequences, that stigma is now clearly less than universal. There is remarkably less here about external obstacles, such as being pathologized, subject to legal penalties, ostracized by friends and family, than in previous research volumes. Correspondingly, there is minimal emphasis on the importance of advocacy for BDSM communities. The focus of this book, ostensibly on what were previously seen as unusual or even deviant sexual proclivities, could very well be on other leisure activities/hobbyists, such as stamp or coin collectors.

Whereas previous books on BDSM/kink tended to have a heavy emphasis on psychopathology among practitioners—or, more correctly, attempts to correct and demonstrate the lack of evidence for the assumption that psychopathology is rampant among practitioners—there is no longer a need to devote space and energy to such archaic debates. Similarly, we are relieved to see that there is no discussion of the origins, let alone “etiology,” of BDSM interests. In this volume, it is as nonsensical to discuss the reasons for enjoying rope bondage or pup play as to explain why people like to play hockey, listen to music, or engage in oral sex.

This book takes an international focus, often in areas and countries that have previously been neglected by researchers. To their credit, the editors have curated a volume that is geographically and methodologically diverse. Contributors come from Portugal, Australia, Sweden, Germany, the United States, and South Africa. Rather commonly, research participants were recruited via the internet. The role of the web in both the research and the formation of online communities warranted its own chapter (see Chapter 2).

Many of the contributors mention that future research should include the participants who are hardest for scholars to identify and access, that is, those who are referred to, sometimes derisively, as "bedroom players." Indeed, there is understandably minimal attention to those who practice in private, outside the organized world of BDSM communities. Sometimes that is related to monetary considerations and the need for professional privacy. It is also true that some practitioners still think they "invented" and do not participate in the larger BDSM community or smaller special interest groups. In addition, some individuals must still stay in the "closet" rather than risk exposure to licensing boards, family, or social sanctions.

In keeping with a reduced need for explanatory theory and research, the contributors are less likely to be mental health professionals (i.e., clinical psychologists and psychiatrists) and more likely to be using descriptive, sociological, or psychological lenses. Research into BDSM presents some special methodological problems, and this volume seeks to identify those problems and present some solutions. There is a nice array of ethnographic research including the participant-observer stance and an entire chapter devoted to consideration of the position of the BDSM researcher in fieldwork (see Chapter 15). There is substantial attention to the personal perceptions and experiences of the researchers. The ethnographic contributors all went through ethics or internal review boards before undertaking their endeavors, with informed consent; although such a statement would be boilerplate in all human research domains, it remains noteworthy that the participant-observer stance has been normalized in the study of BDSM.

Interestingly—and perhaps correspondingly—this volume is less concerned with the sexual aspects of BDSM desires and activities than one might expect. Kink is depicted as distinct from sexuality, sexually arousing inclinations/fantasies, practices, or identities. On the contrary, there is a striking emphasis on kink as leisure and sheer, delightful play, even in such formerly controversial areas as age play.

Simultaneously, the editors and authors address a phenomenon that has been used historically as a means of using BDSM to heal the trauma of past experiences. Contributors describe this taboo endeavor clearly, no one is suggesting that clinical therapy for such trauma, but they acknowledge it can be therapeutic for some patients. Authors use these experiences, and the emotional healing process from sexual trauma.

The field of BDSM studies has expanded to look at the romantic aspects of BDSM and how it is obtained. The authors also discuss the expression of other diverse sexualities.

The editors have encouraged the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and they have succeeded as they discuss the effects of and how to measure and influence the mores of the field of our societies, and these issues are understood within communities. BDSM practices, how power differentials in BDSM scenes, and how to guard against such abuse, are discussed.

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often in areas and countries that researchers. To their credit, the editors are culturally and methodologically diverse. In Australia, Sweden, Germany, the United States, and Japan, research participants were recruited via the Internet in both the research and the book. This volume has its own chapter (see Chapter 2). Future research should include the need to identify and access, that is, those who practice in private, community, and workplace settings, as "bedroom players." Indeed, research should include those who practice in private, community, and workplace settings. Sometimes that is the need for professional privacy. It is not that they "invented" and do not participate in smaller special interest groups. Stay in the "closet" rather than risk social sanctions.

Explanatory theory and research, clinical health professionals (i.e., clinicians) are more likely to be using descriptive research. This volume presents some research into BDSM presents some research into volume seeks to identify those researchers. There is a nice array of ethnographic research, stance and an entire chapter dedicated to the personal perceptions of the researcher. All ethnographic contributors all went through the process of undertaking their endeavors, and their statements would be boilerplate in any study of BDSM.

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Simultaneously, the editors and authors have begun to tackle academically a phenomenon that has been somewhat shrouded historically: the use of BDSM to heal the trauma of prior sexual violence. Courageously, the contributors describe this taboo endeavor and its transformative effects. To be clear, no one is suggesting that clinicians should recommend BDSM as therapy for such trauma, but they acknowledge that engaging in BDSM can be therapeutic for some patients. A sympathetic therapist may be able to use these experiences, and the emotions they generate, as part of the client's healing process from sexual trauma.

The field of BDSM studies has expanded and is growing. This book also looks at the romantic aspects of BDSM and the critical issue of consent and how it is obtained. The authors also discuss how BDSM is integrated into the expression of other diverse sexualities.

The editors have encouraged the contributors to write from intersectional perspectives, and they have succeeded admirably. The chapters are cutting edge as they discuss the effects of and how racism, sexism, and violence permeate and influence the mores of the BDSM community. We are all products of our societies, and these issues affect how BDSM is practiced and understood within communities. BDSM practitioners are now keenly aware of how power differentials in BDSM scenes and relationships can be subverted and how to guard against such abuse, beyond simple consent.

Excitingly, this book is populated by new ideas, contributed by a crop of new, young researchers. This book is an important next step in the quest to understand BDSM. We cannot wait to see what these editors and authors contribute to the burgeoning field of BDSM/kink studies in the years ahead!

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