

INTEREST IN BDSM/FETISHISM AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Racionale/Background: Bondage, Discipline/Domination, Submission/Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) and Fetishism have been scientifically perceived as a variant of human sexuality and not a pathology. However, there is still some lack of knowledge and stigma, which leads to confusion between BDSM / Fetishism and sexual or physical abuse. In the present work, we intend to contribute to the field by considering the meanings and experiences about BDSM and Fetishism and their interrelationship with romantic relationships.

Questions: What challenges do people interested in BDSM/fetish perceive that they face within a romantic relationships?

Methods: This cross-sectional qualitative study takes a participatory research approach. The questionnaire, comprised by 12 open questions, was developed in collaboration with members of the Portuguese BDSM/Fetishist community and was available through an online platform. After approval by the Institutional review board (IRB) and pilot testing, links to the questionnaire were distributed within the BDSM/Fetishism fora, newsletters, and closed groups within social networks, but also in generalist social networks and using "snow-ball" sampling method. There were 86 valid responses. In this study, we used thematic analysis, focusing on the participants' perceptions of the unique challenges posed to people who are interested in BDSM within the context of their romantic relationships.

Results The participants had in average 33.31 years old, 37 males (M=35; DP=1,47) and 44 females (M=31,9; DP= 1,49). Thematic analyses highlighted that self-disclosure and acceptance of BDSM/fetishism were a major concern, with challenges in maintaining a relationship with a person with no interest in BDSM/fetishism. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 23, and thematic analysis via Nvivo 11.

Conclusions: Mismatched expectations about how to interact sexually with partners are complex and non-dichotomous (e.g.: when partners are kinky but their preferences are similar rather than compatible). There is a tendency to morally invest non-kinksters as being less 'open', and kinksters often disavow responsibility in terms of mismatched expectations due to the implied moral superiority. This can be seen as a reaction to stigma around BDSM/fetishism, and it can also hamper interpersonal acceptance.

Key Words: BDSM, Fetish, romantic relationships

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