

**CONSENT IN VANILLA AND BDSM SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS:
CONCEPTUALIZATION, VIOLATIONS, AND REPERCUSSIONS**

By

Myles Alexander Davidson

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Approved: Dr. Skye Stephens
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Jay Healey
Internal Examiner

Approved: Dr. Patrick Carolan
Internal Examiner

Approved: Dr. Brandon Sparks
External Examiner

Date: August 15, 2023

Abstract

Consent in vanilla and BDSM sexual encounters: conceptualization, violations, and repercussions

Myles Alexander Davidson

Abstract: This mixed-methods thesis examined the consent process, consent violations, and repercussions of consent violations in BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, and Sadomasochism). In Study 1, the impacts of practicing in an organized BDSM community and an interest in sexual sadism on consent violation victimization and perpetration were examined in three distinct groups: members of the general population, BDSM practitioners not attached to an organized BDSM community, and BDSM practitioners attached to an organized BDSM community. Results of Study 1 suggested that while practicing in an BDSM community was not protective against consent violations, an interest in sexual sadism was positively associated with consent violation perpetration. Study 2 built on the findings of Study 1 by exploring how consent is negotiated and how consent violations are dealt with in BDSM communities through open-ended survey questions. Results of Study 2 demonstrated that standard practices exist for negotiating consent and managing consent violations. Furthermore, stigma serves as a significant barrier to reporting consent violations both inside and outside BDSM communities. The implications of these findings and future directions for research are discussed.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1 – General Introduction.....	1
Sexual Sadism, Paraphilic Coercion, and the Agnostic Continuum	4
Defining Sadomasochism.....	4
Manifestations of Sadomasochism.....	7
Sexual Sadism and Paraphilic Coercion	7
Consent Models in BDSM Practice	9
<i>Safe, Sane, and Consensual (SSC)</i>	10
<i>Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK)</i>	10
<i>The 4Cs</i>	11
Purpose of this Thesis.....	11
Chapter 2	13
Study 1: Consent Negotiation and Violations in the Context of BDSM Practice.....	13
Consent in BDSM Practices	13
Consent Violations	15
Where BDSM is Practiced.....	17
Present Study	19
Method	20
Sample	20
Measures.....	21
<i>Demographic Questionnaire</i>	21
<i>BDSM Interest and Engagement</i>	22
<i>Agnostic Scale (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020)</i>	24
<i>Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV; Koss et al., 2007)</i>	24
<i>Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form Perpetration (SES-SFP; Koss et al., 2006)</i>	25
<i>Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale – Short Form (MCSDS-SF; Reynolds, 1982)</i>	26
Procedure and Data Analysis	27
Results	29
Intercorrelations between Measures of Interest	29
Differences in Consent Violation Victimization and Perpetration	29
Association between Sexual Sadism and Consent Violation Perpetration.....	35
Discussion.....	36
The Role of the BDSM Community.....	36
Sexual Sadism as a Risk Factor for Consent Violation Perpetration	41

Limitations.....	44
Chapter 3	46
Study 2: The Experiences of Community BDSM Practitioners with Consent Violations and their Repercussions.....	46
Consent Negotiation in BDSM Practice.....	46
Consent Violations and Repercussions	48
Present Study	51
Method	52
Measures.....	52
<i>Consent Questionnaire (Author-generated)</i>	52
Procedure and Qualitative Analysis	53
Additional Considerations.....	55
Results	55
Consent Negotiation Norms	56
<i>Pre-scene Negotiation</i>	56
<i>Ongoing Monitoring for Consent Withdrawal</i>	58
<i>Variability in Negotiation Practices</i>	59
Methods of Consent Violation Management.....	59
<i>Standard Community Responses to Consent Violations</i>	60
<i>Harm Reduction Practices for Consent Violation Victims</i>	61
Challenges in Dealing with Consent Violations	61
<i>Intra-community Challenges</i>	62
<i>Extra-community Challenges</i>	64
<i>Stigma Encourages Silence</i>	64
Culture of Privacy.....	66
Discussion.....	68
Consent Negotiation Practices.....	69
Consent Violation Management	69
Challenges with Managing Consent Violations.....	71
The Role of Stigma in the Decision to Report	72
Limitations.....	74
Chapter 4: General Discussion	76
Summary of Findings.....	76
Implications	77
Future Directions	80

References	82
Table 1.....	94
Table 2.....	95
Table 3.....	97
Table 4.....	99
Table 5.....	100
Table 6.....	101
Figure 1	102
Figure 2	103
Figure 3	104
Appendix A	105
Appendix B	106
Table 7	108
Appendix C	109
Table 8	110
Table 9	111
Appendix D	114
Table 10	116
Appendix E	117
Table 11	120
Table 12	121
Appendix F	122
Table 13	123
Table 14	125
Figure 4.....	127
Figure 5.....	128
Appendix G.....	129
Appendix H.....	130
Table 15	131
Appendix I	133

Chapter 1 – General Introduction

BDSM is an umbrella term that refers to alternative sexual practices including bondage (B), bondage and discipline (BD), domination and submission (DS), and sadomasochism (SM; Jozifkova, 2013). Despite the term suggesting a homogenous group, a recent systematic review on the practice of BDSM suggested BDSM encompasses a wide range of practices that exist on a behavioural spectrum (De Neef et al., 2019). The BDSM spectrum places individuals who only have BDSM-related fantasies at one end of the spectrum, and those who engage in BDSM behaviours regularly at the other end of the spectrum (De Neef et al., 2019). At its core, BDSM is defined by the sexual attraction to pain, physical and psychological restriction, corporeal limitations, power imbalances, or some combination thereof (Turley, 2016). For the purposes of this thesis, BDSM refers to any sexual practices containing the key components of bondage, discipline, domination, submission, and sadomasochism.

There are a wide range of behaviours that are part of BDSM practice which include bondage, the application or reception of intense pain, fantasy role play, and unequal power dynamics, the lattermost of which is considered the foundational behaviour in BDSM (De Neef et al., 2019; Turley, 2016). In their systematic review of BDSM, Brown et al. (2020) identified that the behaviours most often encountered in BDSM include bondage, breast play, breath play, caning, exhibitionism, fetishism, flogging, forced sexual activities, humiliation, obedience training, paddling, pinching, role-playing, sensory deprivation, spanking, and whipping. In that sense, BDSM is a broad range of behaviours that may extend to other paraphilic domains (e.g., exhibitionism). Regardless of the nature of the activities, BDSM behaviours have been shown to be utilized as both a means of preparation for a sexual encounter (i.e., foreplay), as well as the

goal of a sexual encounter itself, the latter of which is the most common practice (De Neef et al., 2019).

There have been various terms used to describe those who practice BDSM. In this thesis, the term BDSM practitioner will be used to refer to anyone who engages in BDSM-related activities at least once per month. In their review of BDSM, Jozifkova (2013) explained that BDSM practitioners are described most often based on the roles they play in an encounter. For instance, dominant practitioners may be referred to as “dom”, “dominant”, or “dominatrix”, whereas submissive practitioners may be called “sub”, “submissive”, or “slave” (Jozifkova, 2013; Williams et al., 2014). Practitioners who engage in sadomasochistic activities may utilize the terms “sadist” and “masochist” to denote their specific roles (Jozifkova, 2013). An alternative, simplistic way to identify one’s position in a BDSM encounter is referring to oneself as either a “top” (dominant), “bottom” (submissive), or “switch” (willing to fulfil either role; Jozifkova, 2013; Williams et al., 2014).

Studies on the prevalence of BDSM have generated different prevalence rates (De Neef et al., 2019). For instance, studies asking about BDSM encounters in the last year have reported prevalence rates as low as 1%, whereas others asking about lifetime practice of BDSM have reported rates as high as 47% (De Neef et al., 2019). In general, it is estimated that 8-10% of people engage in some form of BDSM activity regularly (Brown et al., 2020; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Turley, 2016). The prevalence of BDSM-related fantasies appears much higher, however, as almost three-quarters of people report having some form of fantasy that is consistent with BDSM behaviour (Brown et al., 2020; De Neef et al., 2019). According to Alison and colleagues (2001), around half of all BDSM practitioners are submissives, whereas the remainder are equally divided between dominants and switches. As BDSM practice becomes more accepted as

an alternative expression of sexuality, these rates are likely to increase as reporting these interests and behaviours becomes less stigmatized (Jozifkova, 2013). Due to the paucity of literature in this area, however, true prevalence rates are difficult to identify.

The practice of BDSM continues to be stigmatized as the fusion of pleasure and pain is considered a significant deviation from what is thought of as the typical courtship process in Western culture (De Neef et al., 2019). An additional reason for this stigmatization is the erroneous belief that BDSM consistently involves non-consensual sexual interactions, and that those who practice BDSM are more likely to engage in sexual violence both within and beyond the confines of BDSM encounters (Holt, 2016; Yost, 2010). These beliefs can lead to the ostracization of BDSM practitioners in public social spheres, and this ostracization has been associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (De Neef et al., 2019). Despite what is known about the stigma facing BDSM practitioners and its potential consequences, relatively little research has been conducted that examines the consent process in BDSM communities.

Given the above-mentioned stigma and misconceptions, it is important to explore the role that consent plays in the BDSM process and how it can help protect against sexual consent violations in the practice of BDSM. While both consent violations and consent have been studied extensively in the sexuality literature, they remain underexplored in the context of BDSM, with few studies examining consent in any detail (e.g., Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). Thus, the goal of this thesis was to better understand how consent operates in BDSM practice, particularly within the context of BDSM communities. Prior to an exploration of the literature in this area and the rationale for Studies 1 and 2 (see Chapters 2 and 3), the theoretical framework informing this thesis will be introduced.

Sexual Sadism, Paraphilic Coercion, and the Agnostic Continuum

To better understand the practice of BDSM, it is important to understand the origins and conceptualizations of sadism and masochism. As denoted by the acronym, a subgroup of BDSM practitioners have an interest in sexual sadism and masochism. Sexual sadism and masochism, often referred to collectively as sadomasochism (SM), were first defined by Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Sigmund Freud, respectively (Berner et al., 2003; Freud, 1924; Krafft-Ebing, 1886). In his seminal work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing (1886, p. 68) defined sexual sadism as “...a feeling of sexual pleasure up to orgasm as well as the urge to humiliate living beings and even inflict on them pain and wounds.” Freud considered Krafft-Ebing’s conceptualization of sexual sadism to be an outward version of what he saw as inner self-destructive behaviour, or sexual masochism (Berner et al., 2003; Freud, 1924). These definitions became widely accepted by the middle of the 20th century and subsequently informed the development of standardized forms of measurement for these behaviours.

Defining Sadomasochism

The most widely accepted definitions of sexual sadism and masochism can be found in diagnostic manuals. For instance, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR; APA, 2022)* defines sexual sadism as recurring and intense sexually arousing fantasies or urges involving the physical or psychological suffering of another person. The *DSM-5-TR* also defines sexual masochism as recurring and intense sexually arousing fantasies or urges that involve being humiliated, beaten, bound, or made to suffer by another person (APA, 2022). It should be noted that while sexual sadism and masochism are considered paraphilias, they are not and should not be considered disorders on their own. To qualify for Sexual Sadism Disorder, an individual’s fantasies must be acted upon with a non-

consenting person, or they must bring about some associated distress or impairment in social or occupational functioning (APA, 2022). Similarly, to qualify for Sexual Masochism Disorder, an individual's fantasies must bring about some associated distress or impairment in social or occupational functioning (APA, 2022). As such, without distress or an accompanying impairment, an individual with an interest in sexual sadism and/or masochism does not have a disorder, and it is important to highlight that even the inclusion of these constructs in the *DSM* is heavily debated (e.g., Wright, 2010).

There is clearly a debate on the conceptualization of sexual sadism and masochism as paraphilias worthy of inclusion in diagnostic manuals. In contrast to the *DSM-5-TR*, the previous iteration of the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10; WHO, 2016)* defined SM as a disorder characterized by a preference for sexual activity which involves the receipt or infliction of pain, humiliation, or bondage; however, in the latest iteration of the *ICD (ICD-11; WHO, 2019)* sexual sadism has been reconceptualized to only include non-consensual sexual sadism, and sexual masochism has been removed entirely. These changes were due to the controversy around whether certain paraphilias should be included in diagnostic manuals, with those who argued for their removal suggesting that the presence of paraphilias does not guarantee the presence of problems of awareness or stress (as reflected in the new *DSM-5-TR; Ahlers et al., 2009*). Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that, based on current definitions, over half the population meets the *DSM* criteria for having at least one paraphilic interest, calling into question how rare or "atypical" certain paraphilias (such as sexual sadism) are (Joyal, 2015). As such, the most recent versions of the *DSM* and *ICD* reflect changes in how both paraphilias and paraphilic disorders are conceptualized.

Outside of the different diagnostic manuals, SM remains difficult to conceptualize in the literature (Hucker, 1997). Most conceptualizations of SM through the years are based almost exclusively on research with clinical samples (Berner et al., 2003; Cross & Matheson, 2006; Weierstall & Giebel, 2017). Similar to both Sexual Sadism Disorder and Sexual Masochism Disorder in the *DSM*, early psychoanalytic approaches conceptualized SM as a psychopathology manifested through sexual cravings for pain that are both inward (masochism) and outward (sadism; Hucker, 1997; Weinberg, 2006). Presently, SM is most often conceptualized as non-paraphilic sexual arousal toward the infliction or receipt of pain, physical restriction, humiliation, degradation, or bondage (Alison et al., 2001; Hucker, 1997; Williams, 2006), which contrasts with its conceptualization as a paraphilia in the *DSM-5-TR*. Despite this, SM practitioners suggest that SM is an eroticized, consensual exchange of power that does not have to contain pain, humiliation, or degradation (Cross & Matheson, 2006). Other theorists have conceptualized SM as an escape from self, equating SM with other leisure activities (Baumeister, 1988; Cross & Matheson, 2006). It should be noted that most of the conceptualization work to date has focused on sexual sadism exclusively (e.g., Mokros et al., 2012), and most of the literature on the conceptualization of sexual sadism occurs outside the context of BDSM, such as in the context of forensic settings, and may therefore not be generalizable to BDSM practitioners.

In summary, while much of the older literature took a pathological approach to describing sexual sadism, the current literature focuses on differentiating between the sexual interest and the sexual disorder. Given the recent cultural shift toward sex-positivity and destigmatizing alternative sexual practices, it is important to position this thesis accordingly. In keeping with this shift, sexual sadism in this thesis will refer only to the interest (i.e., the paraphilia) and not the disorder (i.e., Sexual Sadism Disorder).

Manifestations of Sadomasochism

An interest in SM is manifested through both behaviours and fantasies and is often comorbid with other paraphilias (Hucker, 1997; Sandnabba et al., 1999). Krafft-Ebing (1886) originally subclassified sexual sadism into eight distinct categories: lust murder (i.e., sexual homicide), necrophilia, injury to women, defilement of women, symbolic sadism (i.e., indirect harm toward victims), ideal sadism (i.e., sadistic fantasies), sadism with objects, and sadistic acts with animals (Hucker, 1997). In the present literature, a variety of behaviours have been identified as indicative of an interest in SM including dominance and submission, the infliction of pain, deliberate humiliation, fetishistic elements (e.g., clothing), and ritualistic activities (e.g., bondage; Cross & Matheson, 2006; Hucker, 1997; Sandnabba et al., 1999). Furthermore, it is believed that fantasies play a significant role in SM; however, this relationship remains underexplored (Sandnabba et al., 1999).

Sexual Sadism and Paraphilic Coercion

Another point of contention in the literature concerns how sexual sadism relates to a preference for sexual coercion. In the past, there have been two research camps that have emerged in relation to sexual sadism. The first includes those who classify all acts related to sexual sadism as being indicative of either sexual sadism or paraphilic coercion (paraphilic coercion referring to sexual arousal toward controlling and dominating an unwilling victim; e.g., Cross & Matheson, 2006; Freund & Seto, 1998; Thornton, 2010). Researchers in this camp believe that behaviours involving control and domination over an unwilling victim are distinct from the behaviours typically associated with sexual sadism (Freund & Seto, 1998; Longpré et al., 2020) and are instead part of the courtship disorders. The courtship disorders, according to Freund and Blanchard (1986), refer to anomalies that arise in the four phases of normal courtship

behaviour: locating partners (voyeurism, or the sexual arousal toward spying on strangers without their consent), the lead up to a sexual encounter (exhibitionism, or the sexual arousal toward exposing one's genitals to an unsuspecting person), foreplay (frotteurism, or the sexual arousal toward touching the genitals of an unsuspecting person), and sexual intercourse (paraphilic coercion; Freund & Blanchard, 1986). In support of the theory that sexual sadism and paraphilic coercion are distinct, the camp argued that the arousal patterns of individuals who have sexually assaulted women and individuals with an interest in sexual sadism are distinct, with the former group demonstrating a preference for non-consent and the latter group demonstrating a preference for sexual violence (Harris et al., 2012; Seto et al., 2012).

The second camp contains those who classify all acts related to sexual sadism and paraphilic coercion under the umbrella of sexual sadism (e.g., Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020). Those who adopt this perspective argue that the arousal patterns of individuals who have sexually assaulted women and individuals with an interest in sexual sadism have significant overlap (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020). To rectify the uncertainty in the literature, Longpré et al. (2020) examined the constructs of paraphilic coercion and sexual sadism to determine if they represented distinct taxons or were instead distributed along a continuum. Building on the work of Knight and colleagues (2013), Longpré et al. (2020) conducted a latent profile analysis on 680 individuals who sexually offended to test whether a continuum approach was a viable explanation of coercive sexual behaviour. Their findings supported the notion that paraphilic coercion and sexual sadism were not distinct but were instead differential manifestations of the same paraphilia which could be distributed along a continuum. This new continuum was called the agnostic continuum.

The agnostic continuum suggests that sexual sadism and paraphilic coercion are distributed along a continuum of manifestations that include fantasies, urges, and behaviours (D’Orazio & Flinton, 2021; Longpré et al., 2020). As it is currently conceptualized, non-coercive sexual fantasy is the least severe form of sexual sadism and is manifested through the sexual arousal toward inflicting pain and suffering onto consenting partners (Longpré et al., 2020). Paraphilic coercion is situated at the center of the continuum and is manifested through the sexual arousal toward forced sexual acts (D’Orazio & Flinton, 2021; Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020). Lastly, severe sexual sadism is situated at the opposite end of the continuum from non-coercive sexual fantasy and is manifested through the sexual arousal toward inflicting pain and suffering onto non-consenting partners and may also include a sexual interest in brutality, mutilation, torture, and killing (D’Orazio & Flinton, 2021; Longpré et al., 2020; for a depiction of the continuum, see Figure 1). It has been argued that severe sexual sadism is extremely rare and is most often exhibited through sexual homicide (Mokros et al., 2019). A key takeaway from the literature on the agnostic continuum is that paraphilic coercion and sexual sadism are not distinct and should therefore not be classified as two separate constructs (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020).

Consent Models in BDSM Practice

There is clearly significant debate about the relationship between sexual sadism and sexual coercion. A related issue pertains to consent and how consent operates in the context of BDSM. Although consent is defined in various ways, the key elements of consent are that it is malleable, ongoing, and freely given by all parties to a sexual encounter (for examples of how consent is defined in the literature, see Table 1). Over time, consent negotiation in BDSM communities has been guided by three different consent models: Safe, Sane, and Consensual

(SSC), Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK), and the 4Cs (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021). While SSC was initially adopted to combat stigma toward BDSM communities, it was eventually discarded in favour of RACK, which itself has been replaced by the 4Cs (Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021; Fanghanel, 2020). Each will be briefly discussed in turn.

Safe, Sane, and Consensual (SSC)

At its core, SSC highlights the three principles required to practice BDSM ethically. First, BDSM practice must be safe, meaning it must exist without threats to the well-being of participants (Nielsen, 2010). Second, BDSM practice must be sane, meaning it must occur within the reasonable limits of the ongoing scenario (Nielsen, 2010). Lastly, BDSM practice must be consensual, meaning it must only occur with the explicit consent of all participants (Nielsen, 2010). Despite the initial popularity of this model, it has been argued that it is too strict and may inadvertently exclude some common BDSM practices (e.g., behaviours that involve consensual physical harm; Williams et al., 2014). As such, it was replaced in the following years by other models (Williams et al., 2014).

Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK)

RACK can be considered a modified version of SSC that was conceptualized to more accurately reflect how ethical BDSM is practiced (Nielsen, 2010). The RACK model chooses to adopt the term “risk-aware” instead of “safe”, thereby preventing the exclusion of any common BDSM activities that may be considered objectively unsafe (Nielsen, 2010). Despite this major difference, the two models are largely identical in all other respects. In essence, RACK argues that BDSM is practiced ethically when its participants are risk aware and when consent is given by all participants (Nielsen, 2010). Although it is seen as a step up from SSC, it has been largely replaced by the 4Cs (Williams et al., 2014).

The 4Cs

The purpose of the 4Cs framework was to build on the existing foundation laid by SSC and RACK by adding the components of caring and communication (Williams et al., 2014). As the name suggests, it contains four central elements that must be present for BDSM practices to be ethical. First, there must be Consent given by all parties, and this consent must be explicitly given for all components of the BDSM scene. Second, there must be exceptionally strong Communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Third, there must exist an ethic of Care, meaning the participants in a BDSM scene must adopt attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with respecting the well-being of the other participants. Lastly, Caution must be employed by all participants to ensure that the boundaries and identities of all players are respected (Williams et al., 2014). It has been argued that one of the main benefits of the 4Cs, aside from ensuring the ethical practice of BDSM, is that it destigmatizes the practice by eliminating any misperceptions that may be held by non-practitioners (Williams et al., 2014).

Purpose of this Thesis

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the consent process, consent violations, and repercussions of consent violations in the context of BDSM. To accomplish this, a mixed-methods approach was used across two studies. Study 1 (Chapter 2) explored consent violations in three groups using an anonymous survey-based methodology: non-BDSM practitioners (general population), BDSM practitioners who are not attached to an organized BDSM community (non-community BDSM practitioners), and BDSM practitioners who are attached to an organized BDSM community (community BDSM practitioners). Study 2 (Chapter 3) used the same methodology as Study 1 to further explore consent violations and repercussions in the context of specific BDSM communities by analyzing open-ended text responses to the above-

mentioned survey. Although it employed a mixed-methods approach, this thesis relies more heavily on quantitative methodology. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the individual studies, inclusive of a literature review on the consent process and consent violations in BDSM and an outline of the methodology.

Chapter 2

Study 1: Consent Negotiation and Violations in the Context of BDSM Practice

Consent is the feature that delineates the boundary between the practice of BDSM and coercive sexual encounters (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Fanghanel, 2020; Kaak, 2016). The inability to negotiate consent is thought to help identify practitioners of BDSM who are more likely to commit sexual offenses (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). Consent negotiation is key to the prevention of consent violations because of the importance of boundary pushing in BDSM, including some behaviours that are suggestive of coercion [e.g., consensual non-consent (simulated sexual coercion); Beres, 2007; Fanghanel, 2020]. Since consent in BDSM is far more complex than consent in traditional sexual encounters, it is important to briefly discuss the ways in which consent in the context of BDSM has been conceptualized.

Consent in BDSM Practices

Much like the blanket concept of consent (see Table 1), consent in the context of BDSM lacks one clear definition (Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021). It is often conceptualized as a consensual exchange of power between two or more individuals, whereas consent in vanilla sexual encounters involves, at minimum, an implied yes or no until consent is withdrawn. Consent in BDSM situations is significantly more complex; for instance, in addition to setting boundaries for how far each participant is willing to go during a sexual encounter, consent in BDSM must determine what is pleasurable to those partaking in a scene, what activities are permissible, and what role everyone will play in the scene (Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021). While consent in the practice of BDSM may be much more complex than in vanilla sexual encounters, it remains no more clearly explained in the literature.

There are various forms of consent that exist in the BDSM process. In general, BDSM activities encompass three levels of consent: consent to the encounter (surface consent), consent to the contents of the encounter and what the safeword will be (scene consent), and consent to the boundaries of an encounter and whether consent can be intentionally violated (deep consent; Fanghanel, 2020). A safeword acts as a function by which consent can be immediately withdrawn by any party involved in a BDSM encounter (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). In general, consent is required for every act in a BDSM scene and must be obtained before each act can be initiated (Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021). The above-described process is not always present, however, and may be replaced with blanket consent. Blanket consent refers to the submissive party giving full consent to the dominant party to perform whatever acts they desire under the agreement that a safeword be used in the event of discomfort (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). This version of consent allows the submissive party to give up control without running the risk of a potential consent violation (Beres & MacDonald, 2015).

In 2020, Dunkley and Brotto provided the first comprehensive systematic review of the consent literature in relation to BDSM. In their review, they identified that consent in the practice of BDSM is a fluid process that does not have a clear beginning or end. As such, the boundaries of a BDSM encounter can be blurred by power differentials and a lack of communication between practitioners. Further exacerbating this lack of clarity, practitioners who are interested in consensual non-consent may find themselves aroused to consent violations even when they did not desire such violations to occur (Fanghanel, 2020). Numerous explicit safety measures exist in the consent process that are designed to make these barriers more salient. One is the negotiation process which includes discussions about locations, behaviours, and safewords (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Kaak, 2016). This negotiation process

may begin several weeks before a BDSM encounter and may continue after the encounter has been completed (i.e., debriefing; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). As BDSM relationships develop, it is thought these explicit means of communicating consent become less important and are exchanged for nonverbal means (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Eastman-Mueller et al., 2021).

Consent Violations

Given the inherent challenges in the consent process, consent violations can occur in BDSM practice. According to Wright et al. (2022), consent violations in the context of BDSM refers to any actions, sexual or otherwise, that violate the pre-negotiated boundaries of a BDSM encounter. Similar to the general population, violations of consent are thought to occur at a high rate in the BDSM subculture. For example, according to a systematic review, approximately 30 percent of BDSM practitioners have experienced at least one instance of consent violation (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020).

In a large-scale study, Wright et al. (2015) surveyed 4,598 self-reported BDSM practitioners to examine their experiences with consent violations. When asking these practitioners to self-disclose their experiences with consent violations, they found that consent violations were reported for 29% of participants. In the context of BDSM clubs and events, these consent violations were reported as occurring at a rate of 36%. These results should be interpreted with some caution, however, as only one-third of participants responded to the question about consent violations in the context of BDSM clubs and events. While many practitioners surveyed (40%) reported having their consent violated in the context of BDSM only once, a sizeable number had experienced five or more consent violations (17%). In terms of the most common violation type, one-in-three practitioners whose consent was violated reported being raped by their scene partner. In terms of perpetration, only 3% of participants reported

having violated the consent of another BDSM practitioner. When asked for reasons for the consent violation, most reported that the violation resulted from miscommunication. Consent violations were experienced almost exclusively by bottoms and were committed almost exclusively by tops (Wright et al., 2015). To date, this is the only study that has surveyed perpetrators of consent violations in the context of BDSM.

By comparison, rates of consent violations are thought to be higher in the general population. Although difficult to find an exact prevalence rate, a systematic review by Dworkin et al. (2021) identified international rates of consent violations in the past year as ranging from 0 to 59%. The rate of lifetime consent violations ranged from 0 to 78%, dependent on the nation. In a follow-up study to the Wright et al. (2015) survey, Wright et al. (2022) compared rates of consent violations between 2996 BDSM and non-BDSM practitioners by asking participants to self-disclose whether their consent had ever been violated. Participants in the BDSM practitioner group were asked “Has your consent ever been violated during kink/BDSM/Leather/Fetish or non-monogamous activities or relationship?”, whereas those in the non-BDSM practitioner group were asked “Outside of an alt-sex context, were you ever sexually assaulted as an adult?”. They found that the prevalence of consent violations amongst BDSM practitioners in the context of BDSM was identified as 26%, whereas the prevalence of consent violations amongst non-BDSM practitioners was 34%.

Overall, limited research has suggested that the prevalence of consent violations may be similar amongst BDSM practitioners and the general population; however, a lack of comparable research in this area precludes a definitive conclusion. Similarly, the aforementioned studies did not examine whether the location where BDSM is practiced (i.e., at home or in a community setting) has an influence on consent violations. Since this thesis aims to assess whether the

location of BDSM practice influences consent violations, a discussion of the different places where BDSM is practiced is warranted.

Where BDSM is Practiced

It is possible that the location where BDSM is practiced may impact rates of consent violations. BDSM is most frequently practiced privately in the home; despite this, there exist dedicated BDSM communities where practitioners can practice outside of the home with others, usually in a club setting (Brown et al., 2020; Weinberg, 2006). The number of BDSM practitioners who practice at BDSM clubs or dungeons is largely unknown but has been estimated as being between 1 and 4% (Brown et al., 2020; De Neef et al., 2019). BDSM practitioners report being involved in organized communities for a variety of reasons that include desiring a sense of belonging, social networking, sexual and personal development, and sharing knowledge about sexuality (Graham et al., 2016; Holt, 2016).

Despite how few BDSM practitioners belong to specific BDSM communities, it has been reported that practicing BDSM in the context of organized BDSM communities can be beneficial in many respects, which could extend to being protective against consent violations. Although research is limited, some studies have found that practicing BDSM in the context of a BDSM community can be helpful for alleviating negative feelings associated with BDSM stigma, largely because BDSM communities are accepting of alternative sexual practices (De Neef et al., 2019; Jozifkova, 2013). Moreover, BDSM encounters in the BDSM community are associated with the development of emotional connections, many of which help foster long-term relationships between practitioners (De Neef et al., 2019; Jozifkova, 2013). Beyond stigma alleviation and relationship development, BDSM communities also help provide new and experienced members with information on how to practice BDSM safely, how to develop

romantic relationships with other practitioners, and how to cope with BDSM interests in other contexts (Jozifkova, 2013). Of note, not all gatherings between BDSM communities are to fulfill the goal of sex; in fact, some may simply be social gatherings that are designed to engender support and friendship between practitioners (Jozifkova, 2013). In all, practicing BDSM within the confines of a BDSM community appears to have several benefits for BDSM practitioners.

Of greatest relevance to the present study is the potential protective factor that BDSM communities may play in preventing consent violations. For example, organized BDSM communities can provide practitioners with education and services to both prevent and respond to consent violations and other adverse outcomes (Wright et al., 2015). In addition to this common practice, BDSM communities who meet in shared spaces often employ the help of dungeon monitors, or individuals who volunteer to help prevent community rule violations (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). In line with *routine activities theory*, dungeon monitors may serve as a form of capable guardianship in the context of BDSM communities, and therefore a deterrent to consent violations (Hollis et al., 2013). Klement et al. (2017) found that practicing within a BDSM community was associated with lower levels of benevolent sexism, rape myth acceptance, and victim blaming in comparison to non-BDSM practitioners. As such, it follows that BDSM communities may see lower rates of sexual violence; a point that has been reported previously in the literature (Wright et al., 2022). When asked about the entirety of their experiences, 60% of participants surveyed by Wright et al. (2015) reported feeling safer on average practicing at BDSM clubs and events compared to mainstream society. To date, there has been no research conducted on how BDSM communities may be protective against consent violations or a comparison of consent violations amongst the general population, those who practice BDSM privately, and those who practice BDSM in kink communities.

Present Study

The current study aimed to assess the roles of one hypothesized protective factor (practicing BDSM in an organized community) and one hypothesized risk factor (an interest in sexual sadism) in consent violation victimization and perpetration by examining consent violations in three distinct groups: non-BDSM practitioners (members of the general population), BDSM practitioners who are not attached to an organized BDSM community (non-community BDSM practitioners), and BDSM practitioners who are attached to an organized BDSM community (community BDSM practitioners). Since BDSM communities have been shown to play a protective role in the practice of consensual BDSM (Wright et al., 2022), it was hypothesized that prevalence rates of consent violations (victimization and perpetration) would be lowest in those who practice BDSM in a community compared with the other two groups. To ensure that the results were not driven by potential confounds, age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding were controlled for in analyses. These variables were selected as they have been identified in the literature as being influential when examining consent violation victimization and perpetration (Abbey et al., 2001; Elliott et al., 2004).

In addition to this main hypothesis, sexual sadism has been shown to be a robust risk factor for sexual coercion (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Robertson & Knight, 2014). Since possessing less severe forms of sexual sadism has been associated with being sexually attracted to forced sexual acts (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020), less extreme forms of sexual sadism may play a key role in consent violations in the context of BDSM. As such, it was hypothesized that an interest in sexual sadism would be associated with consent violations such that BDSM practitioners who fall toward the middle of the agnostic continuum (i.e., having an interest in paraphilic coercion) would be responsible for most of the consent violations in the

context of BDSM practice. In particular, it was hypothesized that the Coercion and Power subscale of the agnostic continuum would be associated with sexual violence perpetration in this sample.

Method

Sample

Three distinct groups of participants were recruited for this study: members of the general population, non-community BDSM practitioners, and community BDSM practitioners. Members of the general population referred to anyone who did not regularly practice BDSM or BDSM-related activities and who possessed a less than mild sexual interest in BDSM. The regular practice of BDSM activities was defined as at least one BDSM encounter per month (Sandnabba et al., 2002). Non-community BDSM practitioners were anyone with a moderate-to-strong interest in BDSM or those who self-reported regularly (i.e., at least once a month) engaging in at least one of the core BDSM-related behaviours (i.e., bondage, domination, discipline, submission, and SM). Community BDSM practitioners were anyone with a moderate-to-strong interest in BDSM or those who self-reported regularly engaging in at least one of the core BDSM-related behaviours in the context of an organized group who gather (either in-person or virtually) to engage in BDSM-related activities.

An *a priori* power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the required sample size for this study. The only comparable study to the present study was conducted by Wright et al. (2022) in which most of the observed effects were small-to-medium. As such, a small effect size was chosen for this power analysis. Using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with three groups, an estimated small-to-medium effect size ($F =$

0.175), a type-I error rate of $\alpha = .05$, and statistical power ($1 - \beta$) of .80, it was determined that $N = 318$ total participants were required for this study, meaning $n = 106$ participants per group.

The initial sample recruited for this study consisted of $N = 473$ participants. Of these, 212 did not complete the survey in its entirety and were excluded from the analyses. Most of these individuals dropped out of the survey after the first few questions. An additional 13 participants failed at least one attention check, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 248$. Attrition was evenly distributed across all study groups. The mean age of this sample was 28.53 ($SD = 7.72$). In terms of group membership, most of the sample were non-community BDSM practitioners ($n = 125, 50.4\%$), with the next largest group being community BDSM practitioners ($n = 63, 25.4\%$), and the smallest group being members of the general population ($n = 60, 24.2\%$). 75 participants (30.2%) reported being previously involved with a specific BDSM community despite not being currently involved with one¹. Lastly, 132 participants (53.2%) reported having an interest in becoming involved with a BDSM community. Additional descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 2.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic variables of interest were captured through an author-generated questionnaire and included self-reported group membership (general population, non-community BDSM practitioner, community BDSM practitioner), age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and number of sexual partners. These demographic variables have been utilized in former studies of a similar nature to characterize samples (e.g., Wright et al., 2022) and were

¹ To determine whether these individuals would influence the results of the statistical analyses, a separate set of data analyses were conducted with these individuals grouped into the BDSM community group. When doing so, the pattern of results remained consistent with the main findings.

therefore utilized for this purpose in this study. To measure number of sexual partners, participants were asked how many sexual partners they have had since the age of 14. Although self-reported group membership was used to classify participants into their respective groups for data analyses, three classification analyses were conducted to assess convergence between self-reported group membership and self-reported BDSM interest and engagement. Appendix A contains the results of these analyses.

BDSM Interest and Engagement

BDSM interest and engagement was measured using the sadism and masochism subscales of the Paraphilias Scale (Seto et al., 2012). The Paraphilias Scale was developed to assess interest in a variety of paraphilic behaviours, including those consistent with the practice of BDSM. The scale consists of 38 items that describe different paraphilic behaviours, and respondents were asked to describe their arousal to the behaviours on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from -3 (very repulsive) to +3 (very arousing). Participants were also asked to identify lifetime engagement in these same activities on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = once or twice ever; 3 = once a year or more on average; 4 = once a month or more on average; 5 = once a week or more on average). Two sets of total scores were calculated by taking the means of both the arousal scale and engagement scale items. The Paraphilias Scale was validated with several community samples where internal consistency was shown to be fair for the biastophilia subscale ($\alpha = .76$) and good for the sadism ($\alpha = .84$) and masochism ($\alpha = .83$) subscales (Seto et al., 2021). Further, four published studies using the Paraphilias Scale have found evidence of convergent validity (Seto et al., 2021). In this thesis, scores on the Paraphilias Scale were compared against the group membership question to assess for differences between self-reported

group membership and actual interest and engagement in BDSM-related activities (see Appendix A).

BDSM engagement was also measured using the SadoMasochism Checklist (SMCL; Weierstall & Giebel, 2017). The SMCL was conceptualized to assess engagement in SM activities. Items for the measure were populated through reviewing published studies on BDSM practice and by consulting with BDSM practitioners. The checklist contains 24 behaviours that are scored across two domains. First, participants were asked to what degree they have engaged in a specific behaviour, with possible scores including 0 (no experience), 1 (masturbation fantasy), and 2 (practice in real life). Second, participants were asked their personal sexual gratification received from the behaviours on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). Both the submissive (Submissiveness Scale) and dominant (Dominance Scale) versions of this measure were administered to participants to capture different facets of BDSM interests and behaviours. Total scores for each scale were calculated by summing the scale items. This scale was normed on a sample of 652 German BDSM practitioners. In this normative sample, internal consistency for the Submissiveness Scale was shown to be strong ($\alpha = .96$). Similarly, internal consistency was shown to be strong for the Dominance Scale ($\alpha = .89$). Convergent validity has been established between the SMCL engagement and sexual gratification scores for both the Submissiveness and Dominance Scales. In this thesis, scores on the SMCL were compared against the group membership question to assess for differences between self-reported group membership and actual interest and engagement in BDSM-related activities (see Appendix A). Scores on the SMCL were also used to assess for differences in submissive and dominant interest and engagement between the study groups (see Appendix B).

Agnostic Scale (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020)

The Agnostic Scale was developed to measure sexual sadism as a dimensional construct. It contains 30 items measured on five-point Likert scales (1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often, 5 = very often) that are meant to capture four facets of sexual sadism: Physical Violence (e.g., “I have purposely hurt someone physically during sex”), Coercion and Power (e.g., “I have thought about forcing someone to have sex”), Bondage/Humiliation (e.g., “I have humiliated someone during sex”), and Killing (e.g., “I have strangled someone during sex”). For data analysis, the scores generated by the scale were recoded into 0 (scores of 1), 1 (scores of 2 and 3), and 2 (scores of 4 and 5) and were then tallied across each subscale. Higher scores on any given subscale denote a stronger presence of that feature of sexual sadism, with more severe forms of sexual sadism appearing when all subscales are high. The Agnostic Scale was normed on three different samples comprised of over 2000 community members, university students, and non-sexual offenders. Internal consistency for the scale has been shown to be strong ($\alpha = .93$), and interitem correlations have been identified in the moderate-to-strong range ($r = .41 - .72$). Because of the novelty of the Agnostic Scale, its psychometrics were evaluated using a confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether sexual sadism is comprised of four facets (see Appendix C). The Agnostic Scale was used in this thesis to determine whether the presence of different forms of sexual sadism was responsible for group differences in consent violation perpetration in the context of sexual activities.

Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV; Koss et al., 2007)

The Short Form Victimization version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) by Koss and Oros (1982) is a 10-item measure designed to identify victimization by way of past unwanted sexual experiences. Six different categories of experiences are measured: no

victimization, coercion, noncontact, contact, attempted rape, and rape. Scores were generated by asking participants how many times they had experienced each event in their lifetime, with response options including 0, 1, 2, and 3+. A total score was computed for the scale by summing the items, with higher scores suggesting greater experiences with victimization (Anderson et al., 2018). The dichotomous question assessing rape victimization was not considered in this total score. Participants who endorsed consent violation victimization were also asked in what context (non-BDSM encounter, BDSM encounter, BDSM encounter in a BDSM community, or both a non-BDSM and BDSM encounter) the consent violation took place. Interrater reliability for the SES-SFV has been established as being moderate ($r = .41 - .53$; Anderson et al., 2017), and internal consistency has been shown to be strong ($\alpha = .92$; Johnson et al., 2017). When assessed for convergent and divergent validity, the SES-SFV has been shown to be positively correlated with similar measures ($r = .12 - .52$; Anderson et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017) and negatively correlated with dissimilar measures ($r = -.12 - -.23$; Anderson et al., 2017). Unlike past studies which have relied on author-generated dichotomous (yes/no) questions to measure consent violation victimization (e.g., Wright et al., 2015, 2022), a validated multi-item measure was used in this study. Specifically, the SES was chosen as it tends to have high levels of concordance between endorsed items and the lived experiences of respondents (i.e., true positive rate; Littleton et al., 2019). Total scores on the SES-SFV were used in this thesis to assess total consent violation victimization history and were employed to determine if membership in an organized BDSM community was protective against consent violation victimization.

Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form Perpetration (SES-SFP; Koss et al., 2006)

The Short Form Perpetration version of the SES (Koss & Oros, 1982) is a 10-item measure designed to identify the perpetration of unwanted sexual experiences and what

techniques are used to perpetrate these experiences. Respondents may be categorized into six different groups depending on their response patterns: non-perpetrator, unwanted sexual contact, attempted coercion, coercion, attempted rape, and rape. Scores were generated by asking participants how many times they had used each technique within their lifetime, with response options including 0, 1, 2, and 3+. A total score was computed for the scale by summing the items, with higher scores suggesting greater experiences with perpetration (Anderson et al., 2018). The dichotomous question assessing rape perpetration was not considered in this total score. Participants who endorsed consent violation perpetration were also asked in what context (non-BDSM encounter, BDSM encounter, BDSM encounter in a BDSM community, or both a non-BDSM and BDSM encounter) the consent violation took place. Internal consistency for the SES-SFP has been shown to be favourable ($\alpha = .98-.99$, $\rho = .67$; Anderson et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2017), and interrater reliability has been identified as falling in the moderate range ($r = .59 - .69$; Anderson et al., 2018). When examined for convergent and divergent validity, the SES-SFP has been shown to be positively correlated with similar measures ($r = .14 - .57$; Anderson et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2017) and negatively correlated with dissimilar measures ($r = -.16 - -.29$; Anderson et al., 2018). This measure was chosen for use in this thesis as past studies have relied on author-generated dichotomous (yes/no) questions to measure consent violation perpetration (e.g., Wright et al., 2015, 2022). Total scores on the SES-SFP were used in this thesis to assess total consent violation perpetration history and were employed to determine if scores on the Agnostic Scale were associated with consent violation perpetration.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale – Short Form (MCSDS-SF; Reynolds, 1982)

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) was designed to assess the impact of social desirability on self-report assessment. The original scale consists of 33 items

measured as either true or false. Because of its extensive use in social science research, it is considered both a valid and reliable measure. The short form of the MCSDS (MCSDS-SF) contains 13 items and has been deemed to be a viable substitute for the 33-item version. Reliability analyses for the MCSDS-SF have determined it has an acceptable level of reliability ($r = .76$), and interitem correlations fall within the moderate range ($r = .32 - .47$). Concurrent validity for the MCSDS-SF has been determined to fall within the same range as concurrent validity estimates for the original measure ($r = .41$). Given the sensitive nature of some of the questions asked in this thesis (i.e., self-reported consent violation victimization and perpetration), the MCSDS-SF was used to control for socially desirable responding amongst participants.

Procedure and Data Analysis

This study received clearance from the ethics review board at Saint Mary's University (REB #22-083). Members of the general population were recruited using social media (e.g., Twitter) and recruitment posters posted at five sex education shops throughout Halifax, as well as on campus at Saint Mary's University. The latter two groups were recruited from two different websites: FetLife and Reddit. On these sites, subforums that permit research projects being shared amongst their members were targeted. In total, the study was promoted on three Reddit forums and eight FetLife forums. Additionally, emails were sent to various BDSM clubs across Canada to request that recruitment posters be put up on site, with two sharing the poster with their members. To be eligible to participate, participants had to be at least 18 years of age, had to reside in Canada at the time of the study, and had to have access to an electronic device capable of accessing the Internet to complete the survey.

Prospective participants who were interested in participating in this study were invited to complete a survey on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Participants were greeted with an

informed consent form that highlighted the purpose of the study, what information would be gathered from them, and any potential risks and benefits to their participation. Participants who consented to participating in the study then completed the survey. First, participants were asked a series of demographic questions. Next, participants completed the Paraphilias Scale and the SMCL. Third, participants completed the Agnostic Scale. Fourth, participants completed both the SES-SFV and SES-SFP. Lastly, participants completed the MCSDS-SF. At this point, participants who self-identified as belonging to an organized BDSM community were invited to complete several open-ended questions exploring their experiences with consent and consent violations in their BDSM communities, as well as how these violations were managed. Following the completion of the survey, participants interested in receiving compensation were redirected to a separate survey where they provided their email address to enter a draw for one-of-five \$100 CAD Amazon gift cards.

Data analyses began with two one-way ANOVAs to determine if there were significant group differences in experiences with consent violation victimization and perpetration using total lifetime SES-SFV and SES-SFP scores². The ANOVAs provided a test of the first hypothesis prior to considering any potential confounds. Next, two one-way ANCOVAs were used to determine whether controlling for age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding had any impact on the results of the ANOVAs. Lastly, a multiple regression model was used to test hypothesis two, whether Agnostic Scale scores were associated with consent violation perpetration (total lifetime scores on the SES-SFP). The hypothesis was first tested by entering just the scores on the Agnostic Scale prior to considering the potential confounds. Next,

² Total lifetime scores on the SES-SFV and SES-SFP measure the total number of instances a participant has experienced each behaviour since the age of 14 rather than simply measuring whether a participant has experienced any given behaviour at least once since the age of 14.

a separate regression model was created by entering the predictor variables in two blocks. First, age, number of sexual partners, and scores on the MCSDS-SF were entered into the regression model to control for several possible confounds, followed by scores on the four subscales of the Agnostic Scale. Bias corrected and accelerated bootstrapping was employed for all statistical tests to combat normality violations (where applicable). All statistical tests were conducted at $p < .05$ and were accompanied by 95% confidence intervals and relevant effect sizes.

Results

Intercorrelations between Measures of Interest

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all study variables are presented in Table 3. Of note, the correlations between consent violation victimization and the predictors were all significant, and effect sizes ranged from medium to large. Additionally, the correlations between consent violation perpetration and the predictors were all significant, and effect sizes ranged from medium to large. The direction and magnitude of the coefficients suggested that interest and engagement in sexual sadism and masochism were positively associated with both consent violation victimization and perpetration.

Differences in Consent Violation Victimization and Perpetration

Table 4 depicts the results of the one-way ANOVAs. Results of the first ANOVA suggested that significant group differences existed with respect to consent violation victimization, $F(2, 27) = 5.73, p = .004, \eta^2_p = .05$, and constituted a small effect. Examination of the pairwise comparisons suggested that consent violation victimization was significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners ($M = 48.20, SD = 25.21$) than members of the general population ($M = 32.09, SD = 26.62, p = .003, d = 0.27$). Consent violation victimization was also significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners

than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 37.97$, $SD = 26.41$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.39$) and the effect size was small. The difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population was non-significant ($p = .18$, $d = 0.22$). It is notable that even though these results were significant, the group comparisons produced small effects.

Results of the second ANOVA suggested that significant group differences existed with respect to consent violation perpetration, $F(2, 230) = 4.74$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .04$, and constituted a small effect. Examination of the pairwise comparisons suggested that consent violation perpetration was significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners ($M = 49.95$, $SD = 28.88$) than members of the general population ($M = 33.38$, $SD = 30.94$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.55$), which was a medium sized effect. Consent violation perpetration was also significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 36.72$, $SD = 33.82$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.42$) and was a small effect. The difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population was non-significant and the effect size was negligible ($p = .55$, $d = 0.10$).

The above results for consent violation victimization and perpetration across the groups were next examined while controlling for potential covariates (age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding). Thus, two one-way ANCOVAs were conducted. Table 4 depicts the results of these ANCOVAs. Results of the first ANCOVA suggested age [$F(1, 211) = 1.08$, $p = .30$, $\eta^2_p = .01$], number of sexual partners [$F(1, 211) = 0.15$, $p = .70$, $\eta^2_p = .00$], and socially desirable responding [$F(1, 211) = 0.79$, $p = .37$, $\eta^2_p = .00$] were not significantly associated with consent violation victimization. Significant group differences with respect to consent violation victimization remained in the presence of the covariates, $F(2, 211) = 5.88$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, and constituted a small effect. Examination of the estimated marginal means

suggested that, in the presence of the covariates, consent violation victimization remained significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners ($M = 48.14$, $SD = 25.26$) than members of the general population ($M = 31.51$, $SD = 26.52$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.64$). The difference between community BDSM practitioners and non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 37.48$, $SD = 26.61$) also remained significant ($p = .02$, $d = 0.41$). Lastly, the difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population remained non-significant ($p = .14$, $d = 0.22$). Thus, the pattern of the results remained the same when controlling for these specific covariates. It is notable, however, that even though these results were significant, some of the group comparisons produced small effects.

Results of the second ANCOVA suggested age [$F(1, 215) = 0.63$, $p = .43$, $\eta^2_p = .00$], number of sexual partners [$F(1, 215) = 0.24$, $p = .63$, $\eta^2_p = .00$], and socially desirable responding [$F(1, 215) = 1.29$, $p = .26$, $\eta^2_p = .01$] were not significantly associated with consent violation perpetration. Significant group differences with respect to consent violation perpetration remained in the presence of the covariates, $F(2, 215) = 4.26$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2_p = .04$, and constituted a small effect. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that, in the presence of the covariates, consent violation perpetration remained significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners ($M = 49.78$, $SD = 29.28$) than members of the general population ($M = 32.98$, $SD = 31.08$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.56$). Consent violation perpetration also remained significantly more prevalent amongst community BDSM practitioners than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 38.04$, $SD = 34.00$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.16$). Lastly, the difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population remained non-significant ($p = .24$, $d = 0.19$). Thus, the pattern of the results remained the same

when controlling for these covariates. It is notable, however, that even though these results were significant, some of the group comparisons produced small effects.

Post-hoc Analyses

For the purposes of exploration, two 4 x 2 between-subjects factorial ANOVAs were conducted to determine if the context in which the consent violation took place (in a non-BDSM encounter, in a BDSM encounter, in a BDSM encounter within a BDSM community, or in both a non-BDSM and BDSM encounter) had an influence on the previously identified group differences for consent violation victimization and perpetration. Since these analyses were focused only on BDSM practitioners, members of the general population were excluded. Table 5 depicts the results of these factorial ANOVAs. Results of the first test suggested that, in the presence of context, there was no longer a significant main effect of group on consent violation victimization, $F(1, 125) = 1.57, p = .21, \eta^2_p = .01$. There was, however, a significant and medium-sized main effect of context, $F(3, 125) = 5.28, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .11$. No significant interaction between group and context was identified, $F(3, 125) = 2.30, p = .08, \eta^2_p = .05$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that consent violation victimization was reported as occurring significantly less frequently in non-BDSM encounters ($M = 37.92, SD = 23.97$) than in BDSM encounters ($M = 50.71, SD = 21.47, p = .05, d = 0.56$), in BDSM encounters within a BDSM community ($M = 58.76, SD = 16.05, p = .002, d = 1.02$), and in both non-BDSM and BDSM encounters ($M = 53.24, SD = 17.38, p = .02, d = 0.73$) and were all large effects. The difference in consent violation victimization occurrence between BDSM encounters and BDSM encounters within a BDSM community was non-significant ($p = .16, d = 0.42$) but produced a small effect. Although non-significant, the interaction between these two variables is presented in Figure 2 for interested readers.

Results of the second test suggested that, in the presence of context, there was no longer a significant main effect of group on consent violation perpetration, $F(1, 97) = 0.06, p = .80, \eta^2_p = .00$. There was, however, a significant and large main effect of context, $F(3, 97) = 5.54, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .15$. No significant interaction between group and context was identified, $F(3, 97) = 1.49, p = .22, \eta^2_p = .04$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that consent violation perpetration was reported as occurring significantly less frequently in non-BDSM encounters ($M = 52.96, SD = 19.40$) than in BDSM encounters within an BDSM community ($M = 71.31, SD = 19.77, p = .004, d = 0.93$) and in both non-BDSM and BDSM encounters ($M = 66.16, SD = 20.08, p = .04, d = 0.67$) and were a large and medium effect, respectively. Additionally, consent violation perpetration was reported as occurring significantly less frequently in BDSM encounters ($M = 53.13, SD = 13.50$) than in BDSM encounters within a BDSM community ($p = .006, d = 1.07$) and in both non-BDSM and BDSM encounters ($p = .04, d = 0.76$) and constituted a large and medium effect, respectively. Although non-significant, the interaction is presented in Figure 3 for interested readers.

To determine whether the differences observed with respect to consent violation victimization and perpetration could be explained by gender, two factorial ANOVAs were conducted. The results of these analyses can be found in Appendix D. In brief, gender was only significantly related to consent violation victimization in that women reported more instances of victimization than men. Despite this, the group differences for consent violation victimization and perpetration remained in the presence of gender. Furthermore, there was no interaction between group membership and gender.

To determine whether the differences observed with respect to consent violation victimization and perpetration could be explained by pleasure gain from submissive and

dominant activities, respectively, two additional ANCOVAs were conducted. The results of these ANCOVAs can be found in Appendix E. For victimization, when considering age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, gender, and pleasure gain from submissive activities as covariates, the group differences observed were no longer present. Furthermore, pleasure gain from submissive activities was a significant covariate. For perpetration, when considering age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, gender, and pleasure gain from dominant activities as covariates, the group differences observed were no longer present. Furthermore, pleasure gain from dominant activities was a significant covariate.

Follow-up regression analyses were conducted to determine whether pleasure gain from submissive and dominant activities were significantly related to victimization and perpetration, respectively. The results of these analyses can also be found in Appendix E. Results of the perpetration model suggested that, in the presence of covariates (age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, and gender), pleasure gain from dominant activities was significantly related to consent violation perpetration.

Lastly, additional descriptive statistics and ANOVAs were run to determine which items from the SES scales were potentially driving the observed group differences. An examination of these tests can be found in Appendix F. In summary, members of the general population tended to score lowest on all the items, with non-community BDSM practitioners scoring moderately and community BDSM practitioners scoring the highest. Despite this, no clear patterns were identified that could clearly demonstrate which types of behaviours (e.g., forced intercourse) or tactics (e.g., using threats) may have been responsible for the identified group differences with respect to consent violation victimization and perpetration.

Association between Sexual Sadism and Consent Violation Perpetration

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether scores on the Agnostic Scale were associated with consent violation perpetration while controlling for age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding. Prior to conducting that analysis, an initial model was tested with just the Agnostic Scale scores. The initial model with just the Agnostic Scale scores was significant, $R = .80$, $R^2 = .64$, Adjusted $R^2 = .63$, $F(4, 228) = 101.62$, $p < .001$, and constituted a large effect. Agnostic Scale scores accounted for 64% of the variance in consent violation perpetration. Examination of the regression coefficients suggested that both the Coercion and Power ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa $CI [1.95, 4.08]$) and Physical Violence ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa $CI [1.96, 4.84]$) subscales were positively associated with consent violation perpetration, whereas the Bondage/Humiliation subscale was negatively associated with consent violation perpetration ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = .02$, 95% BCa $CI [-1.16, -0.13]$). There was no association between the Killing subscale and consent violation perpetration ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = .14$, 95% BCa $CI [-0.24, 2.20]$).

Table 6 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis while controlling for age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding. The model containing just the covariates was not statistically significant, $R = .10$, $R^2 = .01$, Adjusted $R^2 = .00$, $F(3, 217) = 0.73$, $p = .54$. When adding the Agnostic Scale scores, the model became significant, $R = .80$, $R^2 = .64$, Adjusted $R^2 = .63$, $F(7, 213) = 53.91$, $p < .001$, and constituted a large effect. Agnostic Scale scores accounted for 64% of the variance in consent violation perpetration when controlling for age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding. Examination of the regression coefficients suggested that both the Coercion and Power ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa $CI [1.88, 4.24]$) and Physical Violence ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa $CI [2.01, 4.97]$) subscales were

positively associated with consent violation perpetration, whereas the Bondage/Humiliation subscale was negatively associated with consent violation perpetration ($\beta = -0.12, p = .02, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } [-1.18, -0.04]$). There was no association between the Killing subscale and consent violation perpetration ($\beta = 0.14, p = .26, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } [-0.55, 2.17]$).

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to determine whether participation in an organized BDSM community was protective against consent violations, as well as whether an association existed between sexual sadism and consent violation perpetration. Results of the study failed to support hypothesis one as consent violation victimization was reported significantly more often amongst community BDSM practitioners than non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population; however, there was a non-significant difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and the general population. Hypothesis two was supported, however, as an interest in sexual sadism was shown to be positively associated with consent violation perpetration.

The Role of the BDSM Community

In line with the literature, consent violation victimization and perpetration rates were found to be similar between members of the general population and non-community BDSM practitioners (Wright et al., 2022), which remained when controlling for several potential confounds (i.e., age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding). In short, this finding suggests that being a BDSM practitioner does not make someone more likely to be a victim or perpetrator of a consent violation than someone who does not practice BDSM. As such, this counters some of the stigma associated with BDSM that suggests BDSM practitioners are more dangerous than non-BDSM practitioners (Holt, 2016; Yost, 2010).

Contrary to the first hypothesis, community BDSM practitioners reported more instances of consent violation victimization and perpetration than both members of the general population and non-community BDSM practitioners. These differences remained when controlling for important confounds (i.e., age, number of sexual partners, and socially desirable responding). At face-value, the most obvious interpretation for these findings is that there are simply more consent violations that occur in community BDSM encounters than in other sexual encounters. It should be noted, however, that this explanation does not fit with past literature (e.g., Wright et al., 2015, 2022), especially since non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population in this study reported similar instances of victimization and perpetration. It is important to note that although this explanation of the findings should be considered, it is not meant to suggest that practicing in a BDSM community leads to a heightened risk for consent violation victimization and perpetration. Instead, it suggests that more research is needed exploring what elements of practicing BDSM in an organized community may explain the observed group differences.

There are also several alternative explanations for the observed group differences. For instance, there may be a cultural component at play that is influencing the reported consent violation rates. It has been established that BDSM communities take consent violations seriously, suggesting a strong desire to report consent violations amongst the larger subculture (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). By contrast, this culture does not exist amongst the general population, meaning many sexual assaults go unreported (Scurich, 2020). Previous research has demonstrated that organized BDSM communities can provide practitioners with education and services to prevent and respond to consent violations (Wright et al., 2015). Furthermore, because of the importance of consent negotiation in BDSM communities, as well as greater openness with respect to

discussions of sexuality, it may be the case that community BDSM practitioners are simply more comfortable disclosing consent violations when they occur compared with members of the general population. Increased comfort with discussing consent and alternative sexual practices could have directly impacted willingness to disclose consent violations in the context of this study. Although social desirability was controlled for in analyses, it is important to recognize that a greater openness to discussing consent violations may not fully map onto social desirability. As such, the high rates of consent violations reported by community BDSM practitioners in this study may be reflective of community norms and consent education rather than a “true” difference in prevalence.

It is also possible that the way consent violations were measured in this study may have contributed to these findings. Past studies have relied primarily on single-item questionnaires when examining consent violations (e.g., “Have your pre-negotiated safeword/safesign and/or your pre-negotiated limits ever been violated in a BDSM scene or relationship?”; Wright et al., 2015). Alternatively, this study utilized a psychometrically validated multi-item measure to assess consent violation victimization and perpetration (i.e., the SES-SFV and SES-SFP; Koss et al., 2006, 2007). Furthermore, while these single-item questionnaires tend to ask dichotomous (yes/no) questions about whether someone has ever experienced/perpetrated a consent violation, this study asked participants to quantify the totality of their experiences with consent violations by describing which consent violation behaviours they had experienced/perpetrated and how many times they had experienced/perpetrated them. The utilization of a multi-item quantitative measure in this study may have resulted in a greater disclosure of consent violation incidents given the breadth of consent violations that are covered by the various items. In contrast, asking a single and general question about consent violations (e.g., has your consent been violated, have

you been sexually assaulted, etc.) may lead to underreporting and may fail to capture a fulsome picture of what consent violations look like in both non-BDSM and BDSM contexts. This interpretation of the findings must be qualified by the consideration that research on the SES has shown it performs equally as well as single-item measures assessing sexual violence (Littleton et al., 2019). Despite this, consent violations are a complex array of behaviours, meaning it is crucial to ask about a wide range of behaviours when trying to establish prevalence in various groups.

Another consideration related to measurement is that the classification analyses conducted in this study showed divergence between the measures used to assess BDSM interest and engagement and the self-reported BDSM interest and engagement question (see Appendix A). This suggests that the question used to group participants does not correspond with objective measures designed to capture what it means to be interested in BDSM. As such, the group differences observed in this study may be an artefact of the way the study groups were created. Future research may want to examine this divergence in more detail to determine what is different between endorsing items on BDSM-related scales and self-identifying as a BDSM practitioner.

Yet another explanation for the findings may lie in the findings from the Agnostic Scale. As previously mentioned, sexual sadism has been established as a risk factor for perpetrating sexual violence (Robertson & Knight, 2014). Since sexual sadism is a core component of BDSM, it is possible that the observed differences with respect to consent violations are driven by sexual sadism. As will be discussed shortly, certain forms of sexual sadism (i.e., an interest in sexual coercion) appear to be positively associated with consent violations, whereas others (i.e., an interest in bondage) are not. In fact, past research has shown that most sexual sadists do not

employ physical restraints in the context of rape (Healey et al., 2013), suggesting that bondage is not a key element of sexual sadism in the context of sexual violence. As such, it may be the other elements of sexual sadism (i.e., simulated sexual coercion, aggressive physical activities) that explain the observed group differences rather than an interest in bondage, which are supported by the current findings.

In the regression model (discussed below), scores on the Agnostic Scale accounted for around 60% of the variance in consent violation perpetration. As such, it would be reasonable to believe that the elements of sexual sadism significantly associated with consent violation perpetration could be driving the group differences observed in this study. A follow-up exploratory ANCOVA was conducted at the conclusion of this study to see if adding the significant Agnostic Scale subscales as covariates would eliminate the observed group differences with respect to consent violation perpetration. When entering these subscales as covariates, the observed group differences were no longer significant. This finding demonstrates the importance of sexual sadism in explaining consent violation perpetration within the context of BDSM; however, as the current study was not longitudinal, future research is needed to determine which elements of sexual sadism are predictive of consent violation perpetration.

The *post-hoc* analyses examining consent violation context may shed further light on the group differences observed in this study. Results of the *post-hoc* analyses demonstrated that more instances of consent violation victimization and perpetration were reported as occurring in both non-community BDSM and community BDSM encounters than in non-BDSM encounters. This finding is notable as the effect sizes for these difference tests were large. This counters past research showing that numerous BDSM practitioners who experienced consent violations reported having their consent violated in a non-BDSM encounter (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020).

These divergent findings highlight the need to consider context as a primary study variable in future studies on consent violations as a full examination of context was beyond the scope of this study.

While gender had no impact on observed group differences, both submissive and dominant identity did. Specifically, the results of the *post-hoc* analyses demonstrated that pleasure gain from submissive and dominant identity eliminated the observed group differences with respect to consent violation victimization and perpetration, respectively. Together, these findings suggest that pleasure gain from submissive and dominant activities may be better predictors of consent violation victimization and perpetration than being a member of a BDSM community. It is important to note, however, that these findings do not suggest that identifying as a submissive or dominant BDSM practitioner creates an undue risk for consent violation victimization or perpetration. Instead, it is important to further explore what behaviours are associated with being a submissive or dominant BDSM practitioner and which of these behaviours may be associated more strongly with consent violations than others. This is especially relevant given the findings discussed below suggesting that an interest in sexual sadism is associated with consent violation perpetration. Thus, future research should examine specific BDSM-related behaviours that are linked to consent violation victimization and perpetration, as well as what links exist between dominant interest and sexual sadism.

Sexual Sadism as a Risk Factor for Consent Violation Perpetration

As expected, and in line with hypothesis two, scores on the Agnostic Scale were found to be associated with consent violation perpetration. In particular, the Coercion and Power subscale was positively associated with consent violation perpetration. This is in line with past literature suggesting coercive elements of sexual sadism denote a disposition for sexually aggressive

behavior (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020; Mokros et al., 2019). This study adds to the literature by showing that the relationship between an interest in sexual coercion and sexually aggressive behaviour extends to the practice of BDSM.

Interestingly, the Physical Violence subscale was also positively associated with consent violation perpetration. This was unexpected as individuals who endorse items on the Coercion and Power subscale are thought to have a preference for coercive sexual activity, whereas those who endorse items on the Physical Violence subscale are thought to have an interest in the more extreme manifestations of sadism (i.e., gratuitous violence, torture, etc.; Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020). Given that the measure of consent violation perpetration used in this study focused on coercive sexual acts (e.g., forcing your partner to engage in sexual behaviours against their will) rather than more sexually violent behaviours (e.g., purposely injuring someone during sexual activities), the Physical Violence subscale was not expected to be so strongly associated with consent violation perpetration as it was. Despite this, the finding demonstrates that more severe manifestations of sexual sadism may be predictive of consent violation perpetration, particularly having an interest in sexual violence.

An additional finding of note was that the Bondage/Humiliation subscale was negatively associated with consent violation perpetration. This bolsters the other findings in this study suggesting that those who endorse coercive sexual interests are more prone to violate someone's consent. As a result, the differences in consent violation perpetration between groups identified in this study are likely driven by an interest in coercive sexual behaviours or physical violence compared with less extreme forms of BDSM (i.e., bondage), lending credence to the agnostic continuum. It should be noted, however, that the literature on the agnostic continuum states that an interest in bondage should have no relationship with consent violation perpetration (Knight et

al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020). It is possible that there is a relationship between items on the Bondage/Humiliation subscale and consent negotiation practices that creates an atmosphere protective against consent violations; however, further research on the items of this subscale is needed to determine why the negative association was observed in this study.

Although the results of this study generally support the agnostic continuum, there are some limitations behind this theory. Most notably, the novelty of this theory means it has far less empirical support than older, more established theories concerning sexual sadism. This is further compounded by the fact that earlier validations of the Agnostic Scale in community samples could not be replicated in this study (see Appendix C). Additionally, while the pattern of findings in this study suggest that more severe forms of sexual sadism are associated with consent violation perpetration, it is unclear why the most severe form (i.e., the Killing subscale) was not associated with perpetration. Lastly, it is important to note that there are some strong correlations between Agnostic Scale items from different subscales, suggesting a potential issue with how these subscales have been conceptualized. Despite these limitations, the agnostic continuum was still chosen for use in this study as the Agnostic Scale remains the only dedicated measure of sexual sadism that has been validated for use with community samples.

This study is the first to draw a link between sexual sadism and consent violations in the context of BDSM. Specifically, this study shows that it is possible those with an interest in coercive sexual activities and physical violence may be at increased risk of perpetration in BDSM communities; however, caution is needed in interpreting these findings as they are correlational. In the same way these interests have been used by clinicians to identify those at risk of sexual offending (Eher et al., 2016; Kingston et al., 2010), this information can be used by BDSM communities to identify potentially risky players. This is not to say that an interest in

coercion and physical violence are inherently dangerous, but instead that they have the potential to be associated with consent violations under the right circumstances. Future research must work to determine exactly what combination of factors can lead to consent violations when an interest in coercion and/or physical violence is present in a BDSM encounter.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be mentioned. First, as with many studies employing an online survey methodology, this study suffered from a low response rate and response fatigue. Second, as this survey was cross-sectional in nature, no causal inferences can be made about the direction of the effects. For example, it is possible that consent violation perpetration may be predictive of sexual sadism and not vice versa. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine the predictive relationship between sexual sadism and consent violation perpetration. Third, a smaller than expected sample size led to underpowered statistical tests. As such, all results must be interpreted in light of some caution. Fourth, although participants were asked to disclose how many sexual partners they had in their lifetime, they were not asked to provide an estimate of the number of sexual encounters they had been in. Since the base rate of sexual encounters may potentially confound with one or more of the variables measured in this study (e.g., victimization and/or perpetration history), future studies must incorporate this variable as a primary study variable. Lastly, given the uniqueness of BDSM identity (i.e., top, bottom, or switch) to each BDSM practitioner, participants in this study were unable to be classified according to their preferred role. As such, group comparisons based on preferred role could not be performed. Future research should ask participants to identify which role they tend to play in BDSM encounters because of the impact that pleasure gain from submissive and dominant activities had on the group differences observed in this study. This would allow for a

more fulsome exploration of how BDSM identity may impact a practitioner's experiences with consent violations.

Chapter 3

Study 2: The Experiences of Community BDSM Practitioners with Consent Violations and their Repercussions

There has been limited research on organized BDSM communities, especially in relation to the experiences of their members with consent negotiation and consent violations. Due to the paucity of literature in this area, there is a need to further explore the experiences of community BDSM practitioners and the consent negotiation process. There is also a need to gather information from those who have experienced both consent violations and their repercussions within the BDSM community context. Prior to a discussion of the current study, research on the experiences of community BDSM practitioners with the consent negotiation process will be presented, followed by an exploration of how consent violations are dealt with in BDSM communities.

Consent Negotiation in BDSM Practice

Most of the research to date that has examined consent in the context of BDSM has been of a qualitative nature. One of the studies that adopted this approach was conducted by Beres and MacDonald (2015). In their study, they interviewed five BDSM practitioners about how sexual consent is negotiated in the context of BDSM. They found that BDSM practitioners report consent as an ongoing process that does not end with the conclusion of a BDSM encounter. In particular, feedback may be sought by practitioners for the purposes of debriefing after a scene has concluded. This debriefing process serves a multitude of functions, including discussing activities that one of the parties was uncomfortable with but not willing to bring up during the encounter. They also reported that although the consent process in BDSM can be quite rigorous, not all practitioners choose to adopt such an approach. In turn, the failure to utilize in-depth

consent negotiation processes may facilitate the perpetration of consent violations, whether intentional or not.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the use of the various consent models (i.e., SSC, RACK, the 4Cs) is paramount in the practice of ethical BDSM (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). In line with these models, BDSM practitioners stress the importance of giving consent freely and in the absence of coercion (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). It has been argued by BDSM practitioners that consent is the key to separating abusive practices from ethical play (Holt, 2016). As such, BDSM encounters that involve more severe forms of play (e.g., consensual non-consent) require more fulsome negotiations (Holt, 2016). It should be noted that since it is ongoing and malleable, the consent negotiation process and how it materializes differs between participants (Holt, 2016). Despite these differences in negotiation, there are generally three common ways for consent to be withdrawn during a BDSM encounter: the stoplight method (i.e., red light, green light), the use of a signalling word (e.g., “stop”), or the use of body language (Kaak, 2016). Although these are the most common methods used for consent withdrawal, the prevalence of each tactic and how they work in the context of BDSM play remain largely unknown.

Communication has been identified by BDSM practitioners as key to the practice of consensual BDSM (Holt, 2016). This communication must begin prior to a scene and continue throughout to ensure that consent has not been violated (Holt, 2016). Some of the ways practitioners have identified in which communication can be used effectively include monitoring verbal and non-verbal cues, discussing safewords, and debriefing after a scene is complete (Holt, 2016). Practitioners who have experienced consent violations in the past report that communication becomes even more important to them after these violations occur (Holt, 2016).

Despite the importance of communication to the consent process, limited research has examined what this communication looks like in practice.

A study by Kaak (2016) examined conversational phases in the BDSM consent process by interviewing 14 BDSM practitioners. According to the participants in this study, four distinct, non-mutually exclusive conversational phases exist in BDSM consent negotiations. The first is **Style** and refers to such BDSM scene elements as the type of play to be done, the sensations to be elicited, the intensity of the sensations, and the toys to be used. The second is **Body**, which includes such elements as areas of the body where play is acceptable, positions to be assumed, what touches are allowed, and whether any safety concerns exist. The third is **Limits**, which refers to the boundaries of each practitioner, as well as the general boundaries of the scene. Finally, **Safewords** refers to how a scene will be ended should one of the parties become uncomfortable or unwilling to continue. These conversational phases exist to ensure that any practices undertaken in a BDSM scene are fully consensual. As noted in Chapter 2, however, consent violations in BDSM encounters do still occur. Thus, it is important to explore the experiences of BDSM practitioners with consent violations and repercussions.

Consent Violations and Repercussions

As mentioned in Chapter 2, consent violations in the general population and in BDSM practitioners are thought to occur at a comparable rate. A closer examination of consent violations amongst BDSM practitioners, however, demonstrates that those who practice within an organized community may experience consent violations to a lesser degree than those who practice outside of organized communities (Bowling et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the results described in Study 1 revealed that community BDSM practitioners reported consent violations significantly more often than both members of the general population

and non-community BDSM practitioners. Given the discordance between the literature and the findings of Study 1, it is important to explore potential reasons for the heightened levels of consent violations seen in the community BDSM practitioner group.

In their study, Beres and MacDonald (2015) determined that while most of the community BDSM practitioners they interviewed had experienced consent violations, none had experienced them in the context of community BDSM encounters. This is consistent with the notion that many BDSM practitioners feel their community is a safe space in that it provides both physical and emotional safety for its practitioners (Graham et al., 2016). By practicing in a community, participants have reported feeling protected from encounters with predatory individuals and feel as though the police do not often need to be contacted to deal with consent violations (Holt, 2016). Aside from these findings, relatively little is known regarding the experiences of community BDSM practitioners with consent violations and the repercussions of such violations.

BDSM communities, like society at large, have their own strict rules for how consent violations are punished (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). According to BDSM practitioners, consent violations are dealt with primarily within the community to avoid the involvement of the outside world (Holt, 2016). This approach is used to avoid unintended consequences such as increasing stigma toward BDSM and a loss of anonymity for practitioners (Holt, 2016). When outside entities are involved (e.g., the police), the lack of personal information known about practitioners makes it difficult to hold them accountable (Holt, 2016).

One way consent violations are dealt with in BDSM communities is through vigilant justice, which involves stopping an ongoing violation from continuing (Holt, 2016). Another way is through community sanctions, which may include being blacklisted from one's own

BDSM community, as well as the larger BDSM community (Holt, 2016). The blacklist is a permanent sanction, meaning anyone placed on it remains there for life (Holt, 2016). Other common safeguards provided by communities include submissive women's forums, emotional support hotlines, and revealing the identities of consent violators to the broader BDSM community (Haviv, 2016). The goal of these measures is to protect the reputation of both the specific BDSM community where the violation occurred, as well as the broader BDSM community (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). Despite what is known, many gaps in understanding remain in terms of how consent violations are policed within BDSM communities.

When consent violations occur, very few practitioners report them to someone in a position of authority (e.g., dungeon monitor), and even fewer report to the police (Bowling et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2015). In fact, while a sizeable number of BDSM practitioners report consent violations to informal sources (e.g., friends), just as many choose not to report to anyone (Bowling et al., 2022). It has been argued that this underreporting is due to negative public perceptions of some BDSM practices (e.g., consensual non-consent) and the potential unintended consequences that may come from reporting (e.g., loss of employment; Holt, 2016). A qualitative study conducted in Israel identified a variety of reasons that consent violations in BDSM communities go unreported, including fear of victim blaming, a desire for anonymity, shame for practicing BDSM, a lack of understanding of BDSM by the public, and the difficulties of proving a sexual assault (Haviv, 2016).

More recently, Bowling et al. (2022) conducted a study on reasons for not reporting consent violations to a formal source (e.g., police, therapist, etc.) in kink communities in the US, as well as recommendations for how to improve reporting. They found that most individuals who did not report believed their experience was not serious enough to warrant being reported. Other

commonly cited reasons for not reporting were that it could cause potential trouble for the reporter, confusion about the reporting process, not wanting to get the perpetrator in trouble, difficulty identifying when a consent violation has taken place, and wanting to handle it without the help of others (Bowling et al., 2022). With respect to the recommendations, participants in this study stated that there needs to be changes to the way that those in positions of power (e.g., police) interact with members of kink communities, and efforts must be undertaken to reduce the stigma placed on BDSM practitioners by outsiders (Bowling et al., 2022). Additionally, participants identified a need to shift the culture in kink communities to make it more acceptable to talk about consent violation incidents (Bowling et al., 2022). In spite of the work that has been done to date, there is a need for further research into the reasons that consent violations in BDSM communities go unreported to the police, as well as factors that might facilitate such reporting.

Present Study

The main goal of this study was to gain a richer understanding of community BDSM practitioners' experiences with the consent process, how consent violations are managed, and repercussions of said violations, all of which are particularly important given the results discussed in Chapter 2. Another goal of the study was to inform the literature about the experiences of these practitioners using their own voices, thereby preventing any misrepresentations of their experiences and any potential further stigmatization. Lastly, this study aimed to broaden the literature on BDSM communities with hopes of informing future studies in this area. As this study utilized thematic analysis to explore the research questions, no *a priori* hypotheses were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Method

Study 2 represents the qualitative component of this mixed-methods thesis. The sample used for Study 2 was a subsample of the participants from Study 1 and included only those who self-identified as practicing BDSM within an organized BDSM community. For further information about the sample, please refer to the methodology and results sections in Chapter 2, particularly those sections that reference BDSM practitioners who are part of a BDSM community. The methodology contained herein focuses on several additional open-ended questions designed to explore consent negotiation and violations in BDSM communities.

Measures

Consent Questionnaire (Author-generated)

This questionnaire asked participants four open-ended questions about their experiences with consent and consent violations in the context of their BDSM community (see Appendix G). Participants were first asked to describe how consent is typically negotiated between BDSM practitioners in their respective BDSM community. Next, participants were asked how consent violations are typically dealt with in their BDSM community and who the people are who typically hold the responsibility of dealing with consent violations. Additionally, participants were asked whether they believe their BDSM community adequately deals with consent violations. Third, participants were asked whether any outsiders, such as the police, are ever involved in addressing consent violations in their BDSM community, as well as when they believe it is important to involve outsiders in dealing with consent violations. Lastly, participants were asked what barriers exist to involving outside forces in dealing with consent violations in BDSM communities. Specifically, participants were asked to explain why a community would choose not to get external forces involved in dealing with consent violations.

Procedure and Qualitative Analysis

Please refer to the procedure section of Chapter 2 for an overview of the procedure employed for this study. In addition to the survey completed in Study 1, community BDSM practitioners were asked several additional open-ended questions exploring their experiences with the consent process, consent violations, and how consent violations are handled, all within the context of their BDSM communities. Following the completion of the survey, participants who were interested in receiving compensation were redirected to a separate survey where they provided their email address to enter a draw for one-of-five \$100 CAD Amazon gift cards (the same draw as Study 1).

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the contents of the open-ended survey questions. Thematic analysis refers to the coding of qualitative data and the identification of themes from these codes based on what the codes have in common (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This data was collected and analyzed after Study 1 data had been collected and analyzed.

To conduct the thematic analysis, the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) were followed. First, the open-ended survey questions were read three times and notes were taken regarding initial observations. These notes captured initial reactions to the open-ended responses and highlighted any links that could initially be drawn between the responses and the literature consulted for this study. The primary researcher discussed any initial observations with the supervisor prior to moving into the next stages of the thematic analysis. This discussion allowed for a shared exploration of what the general trends in the responses were and helped clear up any differences in interpretation between the primary researcher and the supervisor.

Second, an initial set of codes was generated to capture important features of the questions. In a second coding round, the codes were combined and reduced to facilitate the

creation of themes. Given the manageable number of responses, no analytic software was required to assist in the coding process. Instead, all coding was carried out in Microsoft Excel. Throughout the coding process, the primary researcher reflected on their own biases to ensure that the coding was not being influenced by any pre-existing beliefs.

Third, an initial set of themes was created based on the existing codes. As with the coding process, only Microsoft Excel was used to assist with theme creation. Prior to comparing these initial themes with the data, the primary researcher reflected on how the themes lined up with the literature, as well as what themes were unique to the data collected. Next, these initial themes were compared against the data to determine if they accurately captured what was being conveyed by the data. Based on some discordance between the themes and the data, an additional set of themes was generated and compared to the data. This new set of themes more accurately described the data. Once again, these new themes were also compared with the literature to assess how well they reflected previous research.

Fifth, this set of themes was refined, named, and reduced to the most parsimonious list possible. Additionally, subthemes were created for each theme (where appropriate) to facilitate data description. With feedback from the supervisor, the themes went through three iterations of naming and grouping before being finalized. The primary researcher attempted to name and describe the themes using language that would avoid stigmatizing the respondents. Additionally, the language used was meant to reflect the language used by the participants whenever possible. Lastly, the narrative being told by the data was established and compared to the existing literature. The outcome of this entire process will be discussed in the subsequent sections. The codebook produced during this thematic analysis can be found in Appendix I.

Additional Considerations

The primary researcher is a masters' student in forensic psychology with a background in sexual sadism and sexual offending prevention. The supervisor is an academic with both a forensic and clinical background who specializes in pedohebephilia and child sexual abuse prevention. Neither the primary researcher nor the supervisor are members of an organized BDSM community. Their identities as outsiders (with respect to participants' communities) were important to consider when interpreting the open-ended responses provided by participants in this study, as well as how their identities may have impacted the willingness of participants to be open in their responses. Despite participants being made aware that this study was designed to prevent further stigmatization of BDSM practitioners, the current sociopolitical climate in North America may have impacted the degree to which some participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts with the research team. Lastly, while direct quotations from participants were provided, the interpretations of these quotations were inevitably influenced by the identities and assumptions that the research team brought to this study.

Results

A total of 22 participants from the initial sample of 63 community BDSM practitioners responded to each of the questions, resulting in a response rate of 35 percent. Participants who responded to the open-ended questions had significantly more sexual partners and had significantly more experience with submissive activities than participants who did not respond (for a further examination of how responders differed from non-responders, see Appendix H). Initial coding of the responses generated 76 codes. After reviewing these codes, the number was reduced to 49 by collapsing various codes that were similar. As these codes were analyzed and grouped in resulting steps, four themes relevant to community BDSM practitioners' experiences

with consent negotiation and consent violations emerged: (1) consent negotiation norms; (2) methods of consent violation management; (3) challenges in dealing with violations; and (4) culture of privacy. Below, narrative excerpts are provided to illustrate the themes from the participants' perspectives³.

Consent Negotiation Norms

The first theme, *consent negotiation norms*, described the different standards that BDSM communities follow when negotiating consent. Identified within this major theme were three subthemes: (1) pre-scene negotiation; (2) ongoing monitoring for consent withdrawal; and (3) variability in negotiation practices.

Pre-scene Negotiation

The *pre-scene negotiation* subtheme focuses on discussions about consent that take place before a BDSM encounter begins and what those discussions entail. Most participants highlighted the importance of engaging in either face-to-face or written conversations about consent prior to an encounter. One participant reported engaging in both practices to maximize clarity and to establish norms for future encounters: "Even when I negotiate predominantly verbally, I send a written document to people to sign off on if we will be playing frequently". From a review of these responses, participants did not show a preference for one form of communication over the other.

Regardless as to the type of communication, all participants reported that it was necessary to discuss several distinct facets of a BDSM encounter during consent negotiation. In total, four pieces of information were identified as important to discuss in pre-scene consent negotiation.

³ Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, etc.) is not provided alongside the narrative excerpts as participants did not provide consent for this information to be shared, and this is not typically done in qualitative analyses. Further, the BDSM subculture is small and there was concern that community members may be able to identify each other if the information was shared.

The first was the content of the encounter, or what the practitioners intend to engage in. The second was “soft limits”, or any activities that may sometimes be acceptable, as well as “hard limits”, or any activities that are never acceptable. The third was any potential risks to practitioner wellbeing, such as a medical condition. The last was the need to develop a safeword.

One participant summed this up nicely:

Common things that I believe all responsible players in my community agree must be in any negotiation: Safewords, Soft Limits (what we may explore with prior but only carefully, and with a full expectation that won't happen), Hard Limits - doing these things would be a consent violation, Expectations - what either party wants/needs included in the play to make it enjoyable. Other than those negotiation is like spaghetti sauce: everyone has their own particular recipe, and just about everyone thinks theirs is the best.

Additionally, several participants mentioned that there were some necessary prerequisites to ensure successful consent negotiation. First, there is a need to establish trust between all members to an encounter. Additionally, there must be no power dynamics between the players negotiating consent. One participant highlighted the value of negotiating consent when these prerequisites are met: “Being able to negotiate from that position - while also being on an even power level with all involved - is key to healthy negotiation with my community. We actively do our best to ask the difficult questions and work with as much vulnerability and honesty as possible.”

Ongoing Monitoring for Consent Withdrawal

The *ongoing monitoring for consent withdrawal* subtheme described the ways in which BDSM practitioners can avoid consent violations during an encounter. Most participants mentioned that consent is both informed and ongoing. As such, although consent is negotiated at the start, it must constantly be monitored throughout the duration of an encounter. As one participant suggested: “[consent monitoring] is usually accomplished by asking if things are ok, breaking character, asking permission, telling that something is going to happen but leaving room for consent to be revoked.”

Additionally, participants provided a description of several ways consent is typically revoked during an encounter. One method is the use of a previously established safeword. Another is the use of the stoplight method. As one participant explains: “A common one uses colours, so one person saying ‘Red’ means the scene stops immediately, ‘Yellow’ means the scene should not get any more intense, and ‘Green’ means to increase the intensity.” A third method identified by one participant was the monitoring of body language for anything that suggests discomfort.

When discussing ongoing consent monitoring, participants who discussed consent revocation suggested that BDSM encounters are to end once consent is revoked. This would typically occur either after a safeword is used or after a practitioner uses the word “red” (suggesting a desire to end the encounter). One participant explained how invoking either of these leads to the immediate ending of an encounter: “Consent violations are usually managed by ending any sub/dom interactions immediately, typically using a safe word or safe interaction (tapping or poking).”

Variability in Negotiation Practices

The *variability in negotiation practices* subtheme focuses on how consent negotiation can vary in its appearance. For instance, one participant reported that it is usually dominant practitioners that ask for consent, although this is not always the case. Additionally, the level of familiarity between players appears to dictate whether consent negotiation will take place. Several participants noted it is crucial to negotiate consent when players are not as familiar with each other, such as if they are strangers or if they engage in play on an irregular basis. In contrast, players who are very familiar with each other, such as those in long-term relationships, may not negotiate consent as pre-established norms already exist. This was summarized well by one participant:

There are two typical ways. One is between people who are negotiating consent in more casual "no strings attached play", the kind you would see at parties or dungeon events. The other is between people in long-term or full-time dynamics... Within longer term relationships and dynamics, these consent negotiations often don't take place, as they have been established earlier, and the participants trust each other enough not to have them every time.

Methods of Consent Violation Management

The second theme, *methods of consent violation management*, described the different ways in which BDSM communities deal with consent violations when they take place. Identified within this major theme were two subthemes: (1) standard community responses to consent violations; and (2) harm reduction practices for consent violation victims.

Standard Community Responses to Consent Violations

The *standard community responses to consent violations* subtheme focuses on the typical responses BDSM communities have when dealing with consent violations. Many described the first step as reporting consent violations to community leaders. If the consent violation takes place in the context of an organized event, it may be reported to an event organizer. Reporting often extends beyond the community as well, evidence by the fact that several participants mentioned the importance of informing other communities about someone who may be prone to committing consent violations. Some participants noted that BDSM communities often appoint dungeon monitors to step in and stop a BDSM encounter when a consent violation takes place. These forms of reporting and management were summarized well by one study participant: “In a public play space like a dungeon, if an obvious consent violation occurs, monitors who look out for this kind of thing specifically step in and stop it by ending the scene and separating the parties.”

After the reporting of a consent violation, there are several ways in which it can be dealt with by the community. Some participants suggested that consent violators are sometimes given a warning after their first consent violation. More often, however, consent violators are labeled by their community as a consent violator and are shamed for their behaviour. The most extreme form of consent violation management identified was expelling the violator from the BDSM community. Sometimes, this expulsion includes not only the BDSM community in which the violation took place, but also any other local BDSM communities. As will be discussed later, consent violation management may occasionally go beyond community expulsion and include reporting to police, albeit rarely. As one participant suggested: “We have a local club, and if a

member of the club violates someone's consent, they are disciplined; either suspended or expelled.”

Harm Reduction Practices for Consent Violation Victims

The *harm reduction practices for consent violation victims* subtheme describes alternative forms of consent violation management that focus more on harm reduction. One alternative method discussed by one participant was the use of compensation for victims. Most often, this comes in the form of financial compensation paid by the consent violator to the victim. This participant suggested a potential benefit to compensation is that it keeps the consent violation from becoming public: “Some violations involve compensation to the ones being violated if they don't want it to be publicised.”

The second alternative form of consent violation management identified was restorative justice. One participant discussed a group that exists within their BDSM community that is focused on discussing consent with community members. Furthermore, they educate community members on how to use restorative justice in the event of a consent violation. As the participant described: “There is a consent group locally that champions consent and which has set up meetings around restorative justice.”

Challenges in Dealing with Consent Violations

The third theme, *challenges in dealing with consent violations*, focused on the various complications identified by community BDSM practitioners that may arise when managing consent violations. Identified within this major theme were three subthemes: (1) intra-community challenges; (2) extra-community challenges; and (3) stigma encourages silence.

Intra-community Challenges

The *intra-community challenges* subtheme described specific difficulties that exist within or between BDSM communities which complicate how consent violations are managed. A commonly reported challenge identified was fear of speaking out about consent violations. This fear is largely centered around potential repercussions that could arise from reporting a consent violation to someone in the community. A related concern raised by one participant was that while most reported consent violations are legitimate, some reports are made solely with the intent of harming the individual accused. This participant described a situation in their BDSM community where an event organizer had launched a lawsuit against several people who had accused them of committing several consent violations. The participant suggested that others may fear speaking out for the potential of being sued: “Others are understandably afraid of speaking out when such a lawsuit could financially cripple them.”

An additional challenge discussed by several participants was that BDSM communities may not take consent violations seriously. Further, they may actively work to conceal that a consent violation has taken place. One participant suggested that their community ignoring a consent violation is particularly likely if the victim is unlikely to speak up about it: “Some are ignored, swept under the rug if the victim isn't going to be loud about things.”

A commonly cited challenge with managing consent violations relates to ways in which consent violation perpetrators and victims are treated. Several participants discussed how victims of consent violations can be targeted by others in the community for speaking out. There are various ways targeting may take place and include attempts to ruin a practitioner's reputation in the community or attacking their integrity as a person. Furthermore, some consent violation perpetrators may be actively defended by members of the community, even when their

wrongdoing has been factually established. One participant shared a personal anecdote about their experiences with both challenges:

In my own case, following a significant consent violation against someone, I withdrew from the community myself. I addressed the matter with the person who I had wronged and whose consent I violated. I was actively dismayed that there were people coming to my defense and attacking the integrity of the person I had wronged, even as I was trying to make amends.

Several participants made note of the difficulties that exist with reporting consent violations to other communities. One challenge that was raised was the general disconnect that exists between BDSM communities. Some suggested that reporting the identities of consent violators to other communities is made difficult as BDSM communities tend to operate in isolation of one another. Another difficulty with reporting consent violations to other communities is that many community BDSM practitioners adopt pseudonyms or “scene names”. As such, their personal identities may not be known to anyone in the community, making it difficult to report their identity to another community. One participant suggested that while consent violation management tends to work well, these challenges remain largely inevitable: “The system is not perfect, as with our use of fake ‘scene names’ it is harder to inform everyone of abusers and adequately warn people. It is also harder to warn other groups as there can be disconnect between different BDSM communities that also makes it hard for people to warn others about abusers in the community.”

Extra-community Challenges

The *extra-community challenges* subtheme focused on the specific difficulties that complicate dealing with consent violations outside the community. A concern raised by almost all participants was that involving outsiders in consent violation management may result in a loss of anonymity. For instance, involving outsiders may require practitioners to disclose their legal names, something which may not be known to others in the BDSM community. As one participant suggested: “[involving outsiders in consent violation management] involves a lot of people's privacy. Some people will not care, but as long as there is a person who cares about [privacy], you cannot let outsiders participate in the process!”

Several participants raised specific concerns with involving the police in consent violation management. One such concern was that there are no laws related to BDSM in Canada. Additionally, many participants reported that there exists a general distrust of police amongst BDSM communities. This distrust stems from what many refer to as the long-standing mistreatment of those with non-vanilla sexual interests by law enforcement. A related concern is that the police have a history of mistreating members of marginalized groups, something which many participants reported as being relevant since BDSM communities are also marginalized groups. This was summarized well by one participant who reported a desire to keep outsiders out of the consent violation management process: “The police have a history and reputation of upholding power structures and perpetuating violence which disproportionately affect marginalized people.”

Stigma Encourages Silence

The *stigma encourages silence* subtheme described the unique challenge that stigma brings to consent violation management. All participants described that stigmatization is the

primary reason that consent violations are not reported. Many practitioners suggested not wanting to do anything that could potentially increase the stigma that already exists around BDSM. One participant described why stigma would result in a desire to keep consent violation management within the community: “The community sometimes doesn’t want to involve outsiders because of name calling and bad tags. People tend to judge BDSM members differently and when there are issues that involve violations, the community tries to handle it properly just to keep it in-house.”

Another element of stigma that participants suggested complicates consent violation management is fear of one’s identity as a BDSM practitioner being outed to the public. Due to the stigma associated with practicing BDSM, many participants highlighted the importance of keeping that aspect of their identity private. As such, there is an overall desire to not report consent violations to anyone outside the community as this could lead to them being outed as a BDSM practitioner. A related challenge mentioned by most participants was the potential social consequences that could come with reporting a consent violation to someone outside the community. Several participants discussed being fearful of reporting consent violations outside the community due to the impacts it could have on their lives (e.g., loss of employment, loss of social status, etc.). One participant conveyed their frustrations with how these challenges prevent BDSM communities from effectively dealing with consent violations:

Given the culture we are in, and the circumstances we have, this is the best, yet flawed, way to handle issues. We cannot fix these issues until there are changes to our culture that allow us to be more open about our lifestyle choices without fear

of judgement, losing jobs, harassment and ostracization. Until then, we cannot deal with abusers appropriately.

A third and final element of stigma that was raised by several participants related to the stereotypes that exist about BDSM practitioners. In particular, several participants discussed the fact that BDSM practitioners traditionally make outsiders uncomfortable because of their engagement in non-vanilla sexual activities. This is compounded by the overall lack of knowledge that outsiders have about BDSM and its practitioners. For these reasons, participants reported being unwilling to involve outsiders in consent violation management as it would only perpetuate stereotypes and cause further harm. One participant described the potential negative consequences this lack of knowledge could have for community BDSM practitioners: “A degree of shame, as many practitioners engage in unconventional sexual activities. By and large, it is thought that many people still see this as a deviancy of sorts and are afraid that anyone knowing of it could harm their public image.”

Culture of Privacy

The final theme, *culture of privacy*, focused on the way in which BDSM communities prefer to keep their affairs out of the eyes of the public. The consensus from participants was that involving outsiders in consent violation management should be avoided whenever possible. It was the sentiment of most participants that BDSM community organizers are responsible for dealing with consent violations. This often comes in the form of determining what punishment is most fitting for a consent violator and handing out the punishment accordingly. Several participants felt as though their community was well-equipped to manage consent violations and did not need any outside assistance. As one participant mentioned: “We can handle our own internal affairs. No need for outsiders.”

As such, the involvement of outsiders in consent violation management is rare. When it comes to deciding whether to include outsiders, most participants mentioned that it should be at the discretion of both the BDSM community and the victim. Even still, the consensus was that outsider involvement has the potential to cause further harm to all parties involved. This appears to stem largely from the distrust BDSM practitioners feel toward those outside their community. One participant went into detail about why outsider involvement would be avoided even in circumstances where it would be appropriate to have outsiders assist in consent violation management:

Police and outsiders are rarely involved, specifically for fear of being outed and having this aspect of our lives become public. Usually, the community tries to police itself as law enforcement lacks the knowledge and understanding to handle these issues appropriately. Outsiders should be involved when it becomes a pattern or when people are harmed, but the consensus from the community is that nothing will get done because the impression people have of us is that "we enjoy it" regardless, or everyone is an abuser or that we make them feel uncomfortable therefore we should be swept under the rug and ignored.

Despite the consensus that outsider involvement should be avoided, several participants made mention of specific situations where it would be appropriate to involve outsiders. Some suggested that it would be appropriate to involve outsiders when BDSM communities are unable to effectively deal with consent violations on their own. This inability to effectively deal with consent violations relates to the severity of the violation. For instance, several participants mentioned that it is important to involve the police when a consent violation contains either

serious physical violence, stalking, threats, or rape. One participant highlighted how more severe forms of consent violations can trigger a need to involve outsiders:

It depends on severity considered allowable within the community and real laws.

If you verbally degrade somebody and it sets off some mental trauma, you wouldn't have the police brought in because there's no laws against saying mean things. If you beat the hell out of somebody, cops will be notified. If there are threats of violence, especially outside of a BDSM scene, cops will be notified.

One participant mentioned a unique reason why outsiders may be involved in consent violation management. As discussed by several participants, outsiders tend to have preconceived notions about BDSM communities and practitioners that are grounded in stigma and stereotypes. This participant suggested that involving outsiders may provide a way to show those who are not involved in BDSM communities that these communities take consent violation management seriously: “Yes, there are cases where police were involved so as to be open to the public about the BDSM stance on consent violations.”

Discussion

The present study sought to gain a richer understanding of BDSM community practitioners' experiences with the consent process, how consent violations are addressed, and repercussions of said violations. The qualitative analysis revealed that consent negotiation is an intricate process that comes in many shapes and sizes. Similarly, consent violation management is a complex issue that can be approached in various ways. The role of stigma in consent violation management cannot be overstated, especially as it relates to BDSM practitioners reporting consent violations to those in positions of authority or choosing to involve outsiders

when appropriate. Overall, the analysis suggests that while BDSM communities have the best interests of their practitioners in mind, there are several difficulties that complicate how effective their response to consent violations can be.

Consent Negotiation Practices

In line with the literature, pre-scene negotiation and the ongoing monitoring of consent were identified as being central components in the consent negotiation process (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). With respect to pre-scene negotiation, participants in this study highlighted the importance of communication when establishing consent, as well as establishing various aspects of an encounter before it begins (e.g., safewords, limits, and the content of the encounter). These findings mirror previous research with BDSM practitioners on consent negotiation (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Holt, 2016; Kaak, 2016). Furthermore, the manners in which consent is constantly monitored throughout BDSM encounters echoes what has already been described in the literature, including the ways in which consent can be revoked (e.g., the stoplight method; Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Kaak, 2016). Participants in this study also suggested that consent negotiation becomes less important (and consequently less common) as practitioners become more familiar with one another due to the establishment of norms, which is consistent with past research showing that consent negotiation is contingent on the level of familiarity between practitioners (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Holt, 2016).

Consent Violation Management

With respect to the management of consent violations, participants reported that consent violations are reported to those in positions of authority in the community such as community organizers or dungeon monitors. This is in line with past studies which identified these

individuals as being the main avenue for reporting consent violations (Bowling et al., 2022; Holt, 2016; Wright et al., 2015). Furthermore, the results suggested that standard responses exist for when consent violations take place. The responses identified by participants included labeling individuals as consent violators, reporting them to other BDSM communities, suspending them from the community for a period of time, or banishing them outright from the community or from all local communities. These responses echo those identified in past studies on consent violation management in BDSM communities (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Haviv, 2016; Holt, 2016).

A novel finding from this study was that BDSM communities may engage in harm reduction practices for victims when responding to consent violations. Some of the harm reduction practices identified by participants in this study are consistent with restorative justice theory. The central elements of restorative justice include reparation, restoration, reconciliation, and reintegration (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). In terms of the specific harm reduction methods mentioned in this study, one participant described how their community follows a restorative justice approach when managing consent violations, while another detailed how victims of consent violations in their community may be financially compensated by the violator. In all, these findings suggest that restorative justice may be a viable alternative to traditional methods of consent violation management in BDSM communities. As they have yet to be explored in the literature, further research is needed to examine what these harm reduction responses look like in practice, as well as to what extent they align with restorative justice principles and established restorative justice practices.

Challenges with Managing Consent Violations

Participants in this study identified a variety of challenges that complicate the consent violation management process. When it comes to managing violations internally, these challenges include a fear of speaking out, a disconnect between BDSM communities, and the anonymity of BDSM practitioners. Past research on consent violation management has reported similar challenges (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Haviv, 2016; Holt, 2016). An interesting result identified in this study was that consent violators may be defended by others in the community, even in the presence of evidence that a consent violation took place. Similarly, victims of consent violations may be blamed by others in the community for their consent violation if they choose to speak out. This unanticipated finding is in line with past research showing that many victims of sexual assault report experiencing victim blaming and skepticism from those to whom they disclose their victimization (Greeson et al., 2016; Reich et al., 2022), and that this may extend to the BDSM subculture. Due to the overall lack of research about victim blaming in the context of BDSM, future studies must examine the experiences of BDSM practitioners with victim blaming when disclosing consent violations to others in their community.

A significant number of challenges with consent violation management outside the community were also reported by participants in this study. As with previous studies, participants reported a lack of trust in outsiders as the main barrier to reporting consent violations outside the community (Holt, 2016). An additional concern raised by participants was the issue of privacy. As seen in the literature, participants reported being unwilling to involve outsiders as it would compromise the privacy of community members (Holt, 2016). A concern reported by participants in this study that has received little attention in the literature was the lack of BDSM-related laws in Canada. This concern appears to stem from fears that specific

behaviours related to BDSM could be criminalized. Dunkley and Brotto (2020) suggested in their review that some BDSM activities may leave visible injuries on practitioners. Furthermore, BDSM practice can sometimes produce altered states of consciousness which limit the ability of submissive practitioners to withdraw consent, such as in the case of consensual non-consent (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). Since sexual activity that causes significant physical harm and sexual activity with an unconscious person are both criminal in Canada, BDSM practitioners may be criminalized for sexual activities to which they consent (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020). Given the heightened legal risk that BDSM practitioners can face in their sexual encounters, further research must focus on BDSM practitioners' fears of criminalization.

The Role of Stigma in the Decision to Report

One of the larger findings from this study was that stigma encourages silence with respect to consent violations. Participants reported being unwilling to report consent violations to anyone out of fear of being outed as a BDSM practitioner. Furthermore, participants were fearful of the potential social consequences of being outed as a BDSM practitioner, such as potential loss of employment and loss of social relationships. These concerns mirror what has previously been discovered in the literature (Haviv, 2016; Holt, 2016). An important finding reported by participants in this study was that they felt uncomfortable disclosing consent violations to anyone outside the community as it could bring further stigma to their community. This discomfort appears to be compounded by the lack of understanding that members of the general population have about BDSM practitioners, as well as stereotypes that exist about BDSM practitioners. Past research with victims of sexual violence has shown that both stereotypes and rape myths are significant barriers for reporting (Tillman et al., 2010). Given the plethora of negative and

harmful stereotypes and myths that exist about BDSM practitioners (Barrett, 2007), their likelihood of reporting a consent violation may also be influenced by these factors.

The last main finding of this analysis was that BDSM communities operate within a culture of privacy. This culture suggests that community organizers are given the responsibility of dealing with consent violations and, as such, outsiders should not be involved in consent violation management unless absolutely necessary. Situations that would necessitate the involvement of outsiders are consent violations containing significant harm to the victim (e.g., stalking, physical assault, rape, etc.). These findings replicate what has already been established in the literature with respect to outsider involvement (Bowling et al., 2022; Dunkley & Brotto, 2020; Holt, 2016). Distinct from the literature, however, was the suggestion that outsiders should be involved to demonstrate to the general population the lack of tolerance BDSM communities have toward consent violations. This finding is significant as it suggests that BDSM communities can use connections with outsiders to help combat stigma. Indeed, previous research with highly stigmatized groups (e.g., sexual offenders) has shown that positive contact with the community can improve the community's attitudes toward these groups and reduce experienced stigma (Wurtele, 2021). As such, a future direction for research can be to find ways to support BDSM communities in breaking down the stigma they face through positive contact with the general population. As some participants in this study felt that the general population believes BDSM practitioners are inherently sexually violent, positive social contact could help combat these stereotypes and convey BDSM communities' zero-tolerance stance on consent violations.

Finally, it is important to note that not all the consent negotiation techniques, consent violation management methods, and barriers to consent violation management identified by participants in this study are supported by existing literature. For instance, using financial

compensation to manage consent violations has not been reported elsewhere in the literature. Furthermore, while the monitoring of body language is commonly used during BDSM encounters to measure practitioner comfort, it should not be used as a primary method of monitoring for the withdrawal of consent (Kaak, 2016). Since the larger organized BDSM subculture is made up of numerous isolated communities, it is possible that practices engaged in by one community are not endorsed by other communities. Regardless, it is important that research only endorses ideas relating to BDSM communities that are both grounded in empiricism and are not harmful to anyone who may encounter them (such as reporting consent violations to dungeon monitors or community organizers). As such, any consent negotiation tactics, consent violation management methods, or barriers to consent violation management that fail to meet either or both these criteria (empirically supported and do not create additional harm) must be evaluated more critically than those which meet both criteria.

Limitations

This study has a few notable limitations. First, the fact that not all community BDSM practitioners in this sample responded to the open-ended questions may suggest a potential self-selection bias. As such, it is unknown whether individual characteristics played a role in whether a participant chose to respond to the open-ended questions. Second, the coding and analysis was only completed by one person; however, this was somewhat offset by the involvement of the thesis supervisor who reviewed the responses to the open-ended questions and was able to provide feedback on the coding process (e.g., feedback on specific codes, code development) and themes. Third, the open-ended responses were not able to be associated with a practitioner's identity in BDSM encounters (i.e., whether they are a top, bottom, or switch practitioner). As such, it cannot be determined whether there is a relationship between BDSM identity and beliefs

around consent negotiation, consent violation management, reporting to police, and barriers to involving outsiders in consent violation management. Lastly, this study did not undergo a member checking process. As such, the interpretation of the findings may not be consistent with how BDSM communities might interpret the findings.

Chapter 4: General Discussion

Summary of Findings

This thesis examined the consent process, consent violations, and repercussions of consent violations in the context of BDSM. Study 1 sought to assess whether practicing in an organized BDSM community was protective against consent violations, as well as whether an interest in sexual sadism was associated with the perpetration of consent violations. Results from this study demonstrated that consent violations were reported significantly more often by community BDSM practitioners than members of the general population and non-community BDSM practitioners; however, findings were somewhat less definitive when considering the impact of context and other covariates (e.g., submissive and dominant interest). One interpretation of the main effects suggests that BDSM community participation may encourage the reporting of consent violations by making reporting more accessible and acceptable, which may explain why the rates appear higher in this group. This interpretation is further supported by consent education provided to BDSM practitioners by their communities (Holt, 2016). Additionally, there was no difference between non-community BDSM practitioners and members of the general population with respect to consent violation victimization and perpetration, which is consistent with past findings (e.g., Wright et al., 2022). At the very least, this counters the stereotype that BDSM practitioners are more prone to sexual violence than members of the general population (Holt, 2016; Yost, 2010). Lastly, the results conveyed that sexual sadism was associated with consent violation perpetration. As such, sexual sadism may be a useful metric for identifying potentially risky players in the context of BDSM, especially if these players have an interest in sexual coercion and physical violence.

Study 2 explored the consent negotiation process, experiences with consent violations, and consent violation management in the context of BDSM communities. The results of the study revealed that consent negotiation is an intricate process and there is no one formula. As nicely illustrated by one participant, “[Consent] negotiation is like spaghetti sauce: everyone has their own particular recipe, and just about everyone thinks theirs is the best.” Similarly, consent violation management is a complex issue that has several approaches depending on the severity of the violation and the wishes of the victim. The results of this study demonstrate that stigma plays a significant role in whether BDSM practitioners choose to report consent violations to someone inside or outside their community. While BDSM communities have the best interests of their practitioners in mind, there are several barriers and challenges that complicate how effective their response to consent violations can be. Together, these findings demonstrate that stigma reduction should be a key focus to increase the ability of BDSM communities to effectively manage consent violations.

Implications

The results from this thesis have two broad implications, both of which are related to consent violation management. Firstly, and consistent with the literature, the results of Study 1 suggest that consent violations occur within BDSM communities, despite the safeguards that exist to prevent them (Bowling et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2015). As such, it is imperative that consent violation management in BDSM communities protects against further victimization while simultaneously serving as a deterrent against future violations. The results of Study 2 suggest that labeling, shaming, and ostracizing consent violators from the community are some of the primary methods of consent violation management in most BDSM communities. It should be noted, however, that these approaches may not be the best for effectively managing consent

violations. For instance, extensive research has demonstrated that labeling someone as delinquent triggers processes that lead to future delinquent behaviour (Bernburg et al., 2006). Furthermore, shaming and stigmatizing individuals for sexual offending behaviour has been shown to lead to negative psychosocial outcomes for sexual offenders such as a poor self-image, loneliness, isolation, hopelessness, and suicidality (e.g., Evans & Cubellis, 2015; Levenson & Cotter, 2005). To date, there is minimal evidence suggesting that shame is an effective deterrent against future behaviour (Klonick, 2015). As such, shaming the person who has perpetrated may not be the best approach to consent violation management in BDSM communities.

Given the research that ostracization is not an effective practice, there exists a way to modify shaming practices in BDSM communities to be more in line with evidence-based practice. For example, reintegrative shaming, originally proposed by John Braithwaite, focuses on moralizing the perpetrator by shaming the action rather than the individual (Braithwaite, 1989). There are four primary goals to reintegrative shaming: (1) to maintain a relationship between the individual being shamed and the individual doing the shaming; (2) to shame the act rather than the individual; (3) to operate in a context of general social approval; and (4) to end the process with some form of forgiveness (Braithwaite, 1989). This process differs from stigmatization (also known as disintegrative shaming) which forgoes reintegration and instead focuses on shaming the individual for their behaviour (Braithwaite, 1989). Research on the utility of reintegrative shaming has shown positive impacts on delinquent behaviour (Hay, 2001). In sum, BDSM communities may consider adopting a more reintegrative approach to consent violation management to deter future consent violations more effectively while also preventing any victimization toward the consent violator.

Related to the above, a second implication stems from the Study 2 findings about reporting consent violations. Stigma was identified as the primary barrier to reporting consent violations, particularly reporting to those outside the BDSM community in which the violation took place. Participants reported being unwilling to report consent violations to outsiders due to the stigma that could be placed on them or their community by the individual to whom they report. This finding was not unique to this sample and has been reported in other samples of community BDSM practitioners (Haviv, 2016; Holt, 2016). As such, there exists a need to reduce the stigma felt by BDSM practitioners to encourage the reporting of consent violations.

A significant amount of research has been conducted on stigma reduction interventions. Two interventions relevant at the community-level include education and contact (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). Education interventions tend to occur in the healthcare realm and focus on educating the public about specific illnesses while countering misinformation (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). Contact interventions are focused on initiating positive contact between stigmatized groups and members of the public to encourage attitudinal change (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). At present, both interventions have been used in the context of stigma reduction within BDSM communities (Bezreh et al., 2012; Turley, 2022). With regards to research on the effectiveness of these interventions, education initiatives have returned mixed results as stigma attitudes tend to be resistant to change (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). Comparatively, contact interventions have been shown to reduce stigma toward various groups including those with HIV, those who identify outside of the gender binary, and same-sex couples (Boccanfuso et al., 2021; Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Together, given their successful use with sexuality-related stigma, contact interventions may be an especially useful initiative to

reduce the stigma experienced by BDSM communities from members of the public and should continue to be developed.

It is important to note that while the results of these studies have important implications for BDSM communities, work on how to best approach consent violations within the context of BDSM communities should occur with the involvement of these communities. As the results of Study 2 demonstrate, BDSM communities have valid reasons for wanting to keep their affairs private. As such, while outsiders (e.g., academics) can help identify evidence-based solutions to preventing consent violations, these solutions cannot be implemented effectively without BDSM community involvement. Furthermore, any solutions identified as evidence-based must be sensitive to BDSM communities' norms and values. Thus, while outsiders can play a key role in identifying ways to protect community BDSM practitioners against consent violations, the solutions that are put in place must ultimately be community driven.

Future Directions

The main findings from this thesis can be used to inform future directions in research. One such future direction relates to the potential use of restorative justice in consent violation management. One participant from Study 2 mentioned that their BDSM community champions restorative justice approaches to consent violation management. Past research on restorative justice has shown that it has several positive outcomes including less repeat offending and fewer negative psychosocial outcomes for victims (Sherman et al., 2015). When used in the context of sexual assault, restorative justice has been shown to be significantly less victimizing than the traditional court process (Daly, 2006). Despite these positive findings, restorative justice tends not to be used for sexual crimes (Daly, 2006). Based on existing research, however, restorative justice may be a useful alternative to traditional methods of consent violation management.

Given the fact that no empirical literature has examined restorative justice in BDSM communities, future research is needed to determine exactly what restorative justice would look like as a consent violation management tool in this context.

A second future direction comes in the need for a follow-up to these studies. With respect to Study 1, the findings suggest that an interest in sexual sadism may be predictive of consent violation perpetration in BDSM sexual interactions; however, this prediction cannot be established without longitudinal studies that establishes the temporal sequencing of key variables. At present, there has been minimal longitudinal research conducted with BDSM communities, with no studies examining consent violations in this population using a longitudinal design. The results of Study 2 uncovered key findings with respect to how consent is negotiated, how consent violations are managed, and the factors that influence the decision to report a consent violation outside a BDSM community. To better understand the commonalities that exist between BDSM communities, it is important to explore these same aspects of BDSM practice with other communities. As the literature on BDSM remains significantly underdeveloped compared with other areas of sexuality, additional research in these communities should be an area of focus in the future.

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Table 1*Example Definitions of Consent Contained in the Literature*

Source	Definition
Beres (2007)	Any agreement to participate in sex that, by definition, must be given freely. A physical or mental act. An act of moral transformation, turning an immoral act into a moral one (pg. 95).
Beres & MacDonald (2015)	Free and voluntary agreement to participate in sexual activity. Most often communicated non-verbally. Internal feeling of willingness to have sex and the external communication of that feeling of willingness (pg. 419).
Eastman-Mueller et al. (2021)	Consent is implied or assumed until consent is explicitly withdrawn. Consent is most often given by women to men (pg. 2).
Fanghanel (2020)	Consent should be established explicitly, directly, and enthusiastically with an explicit “yes” that conveys a legitimate desire to participate in the activities (pg. 271).
Hurd (1996)	A person must have sexual penetration by another as their conscious object to consent (pg. 100).
Klement et al. (2017)	The critical element that separates healthy sexual encounters from assault (pg. 130).
O’Sullivan & Allgeier (1998)	Situations in which a person freely consents to sexual activity (pg. 96).
Ostler (2003)	Specific behavior, whether it is sexual or not, that reflects sexual consent (pg. 95).
Wright et al. (2022)	Negotiating boundaries prior to engaging in sexual and nonsexual activities (pg. 3).

Note. In the event that a source contains more than one definition of consent, the first definition that appears has been included.

Table 2*Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample*

Variable	General Population, <i>n</i> (%)	Non-Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>n</i> (%)	Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>N</i> (%)	χ^2 (<i>df</i>)
Sex ^a					2.04 (2)
Female	40 (66.7)	77 (62.1)	45 (72.6)	162 (65.9)	
Male	20 (33.3)	47 (37.9)	17 (27.4)	84 (34.1)	
Gender					19.34 (10)*
Woman	40 (66.7)	67 (53.6)	45 (71.5)	152 (61.3)	
Man	19 (31.7)	41 (32.8)	14 (22.2)	74 (29.8)	
Non-binary	1 (1.6)	8 (6.4)	3 (4.8)	12 (4.8)	
Unknown	0 (0.0)	8 (6.4)	1 (1.6)	9 (3.6)	
Transgender	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	
Sexual orientation					22.74 (14)
Straight	50 (83.3)	72 (58.1)	48 (77.4)	170 (69.1)	
Bisexual	4 (6.6)	19 (15.3)	5 (8.2)	28 (11.4)	
Mostly straight	3 (5.0)	10 (8.1)	3 (4.8)	16 (6.5)	
Gay/lesbian	1 (1.7)	7 (5.6)	1 (1.6)	9 (3.7)	
Pansexual	0 (0.0)	8 (6.5)	1 (1.6)	9 (3.7)	
Mostly gay/lesbian	1 (1.7)	3 (2.4)	2 (3.2)	6 (2.4)	
Other	1 (1.7)	3 (2.4)	2 (3.2)	6 (2.4)	

Asexual	0 (0.0)	2 (1.6)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.8)	
Ethnicity					3.75 (2)
North American origins	---	---	---	156 (62.9)	
European origins	---	---	---	74 (29.8)	
Asian origins	---	---	---	12 (4.8)	
Caribbean origins	---	---	---	8 (3.2)	
South American origins	---	---	---	8 (3.2)	
African origins	---	---	---	7 (2.8)	
Latinx	---	---	---	2 (0.8)	
Other	---	---	---	2 (0.8)	
Oceanian origins	---	---	---	1 (0.4)	
Prefer not to answer	---	---	---	1 (0.4)	

Note. ^aTwo participants did not disclose their biological sex. $N = 248$; $n_{\text{General Population}} = 60$; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 125$; $n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 63$. Ethnicity counts and percentages are only provided for the total sample as to prevent the potential identification of BDSM practitioners who come from minority ethnic backgrounds. $*p < .05$.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for All Study Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	Correlation														
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Age	28.57 (6.77)	---														
2. # of sexual partners	8.27 (14.19)	.25***	---													
3. PS ^a – arousal	.04 (1.21)	.08	.27***	(.81)												
4. PS – experience	2.72 (.89)	.13	.13	.60***	(.85)											
5. SMCL-S ^b experience	23.66 (11.08)	.21**	.34***	.71***	.67***	(.90)										
6. SMCL-S pleasure gain	43.90 (21.02)	.20**	.23***	.66***	.63***	.84***	(.91)									
7. SMCL-D ^c experience	22.00 (10.81)	.18*	.19**	.64***	.74***	.67***	.59***	(.90)								
8. SMCL-D pleasure gain	40.64 (21.71)	.24***	.14*	.60***	.72***	.62***	.63***	.86***	(.92)							

9. AS ^d – coercion	8.02 (4.32)	.20**	.08	.45***	.72***	.49***	.50***	.70***	.77***	(83)										
10. AS – bondage	8.46 (6.37)	.16*	.09	.46***	.62***	.48***	.51***	.65***	.74***	.63***				(.75)						
11. AS – physical violence	5.15 (3.73)	.15*	-.05	.30***	.65***	.39***	.44***	.58***	.70***	.75***		.63***			(.84)					
12. AS – killing	7.66 (5.62)	.10	-.12	.32***	.63***	.41***	.54***	.56***	.71***	.75***		.65***		.83***		(.89)				
13. SES-SF-V ^e lifetime	39.57 (26.99)	.06	-.06	.30***	.57***	.34***	.41***	.51***	.58***	.67***		.42***		.65***		.66***		(.95)		
14. SES-SF-P ^f lifetime	40.11 (31.62)	.11	-.02	.29***	.56***	.37***	.40***	.50***	.60***	.74***		.49***		.74***		.68***		.77**		(.97)
15. MCSDS-SF ^g	11.08 (1.99)	-.14*	.10	.16*	-.04	.06	.04	.05	-.03	-.11	-.01	-.18*	-.13	-.06	-.08	(14)				

Note. ^aPS = Paraphilias Scale. ^bSMCL-S = Sadoomasochism Checklist Submissiveness Scale. ^cSMCL-D = Saomasochism Checklist Dominance Scale.

^dAS = Agnostic Scale. ^eSES SF-V = Sexual Experiences Survey Short-Form-Victimization. ^fSES SF-P = Sexual Experiences Survey Short-Form-Perpetration. ^gMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. Alpha coefficients for all scales presented on the principal diagonal (where applicable). $N = 248$. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4*Analyses of Variance and Covariance of the Group Differences in Consent Violation**Victimization and Perpetration*

Variable	General Population, <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>	Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>
ANOVA			
Victimization	32.09 (26.62) ^a	37.97 (26.41) ^a	48.20 (25.21) ^b
Perpetration	33.38 (30.94) ^a	36.72 (33.82) ^a	49.95 (28.88) ^b
ANCOVA			
Victimization	31.51 (26.52) ^a	37.48 (26.61) ^a	48.14 (25.26) ^b
Perpetration	32.98 (31.08) ^a	38.04 (34.00) ^a	49.78 (29.28) ^b

Note. Values with different superscripts denote significant differences at $p < .05$. Victimization

was measured using the SES Short-Form Victimization. Perpetration was measured using the

SES Short-Form Perpetration. $N = 248$; $n_{\text{General Population}} = 60$; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 125$;

$n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 63$.

Table 5

Factorial Analyses of Covariance of the Group Differences in Consent Violation Victimization and Perpetration While Considering Consent Violation Context

Variable	Non-BDSM Encounters, <i>M (SD)</i>	BDSM Encounters, <i>M (SD)</i>	BDSM Encounters within a BDSM Community, <i>M (SD)</i>	Both Non-BDSM and BDSM Encounters, <i>M (SD)</i>
Victimization	37.92 (23.97) ^a	50.71 (21.47) ^b	58.76 (16.05) ^b	53.24 (17.38) ^b
Perpetration	52.96 (19.40) ^a	53.13 (13.50) ^a	71.31 (19.77) ^b	66.16 (20.08) ^b

Note. Only those who practice BDSM were considered in these analyses. Values with different superscripts denote significant differences at $p < .05$. Victimization was measured using the SES Short-Form Victimization. Perpetration was measured using the SES Short-Form Perpetration. $N = 248$; $n_{\text{General Population}} = 60$; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 125$; $n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 63$.

Table 6

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Association between Agnostic Scale Scores and Consent Violation Perpetration

Variables in the Equation	Block 1				Block 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Age	0.33	0.34	0.96	219	---	---	---	---
Number of sexual partners	-0.08	0.17	-0.47	219	---	---	---	---
MCSDS-SF ^a	-1.08	1.16	-0.93	219	---	---	---	---
Agnostic Scale – Coercion and Power	---	---	---	---	3.09	0.54	5.76***	215
Agnostic Scale – Bondage/Humiliation	---	---	---	---	-0.63	0.28	-2.24*	215
Agnostic Scale – Physical Violence	---	---	---	---	3.60	0.71	5.04***	215
Agnostic Scale – Killing	---	---	---	---	0.78	0.48	1.62	215

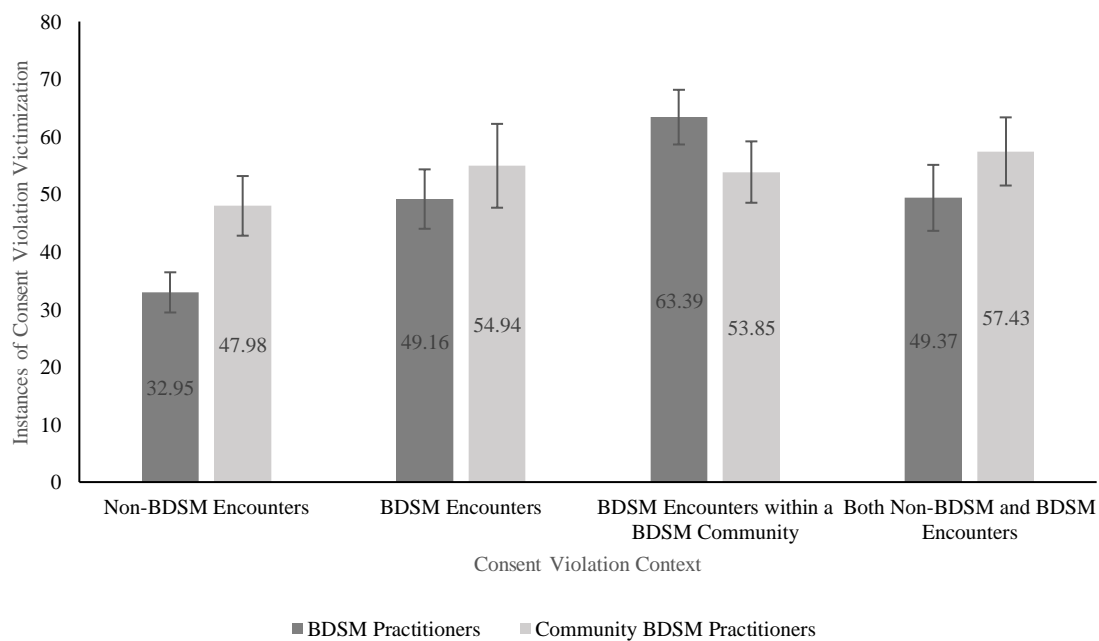
Note. ^aMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. *B* = unstandardized regression weights. * $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$. $N = 220$.

Figure 1*The Agnostic Continuum*

Note. Adapted from Longpré et al. (2020).

Figure 2

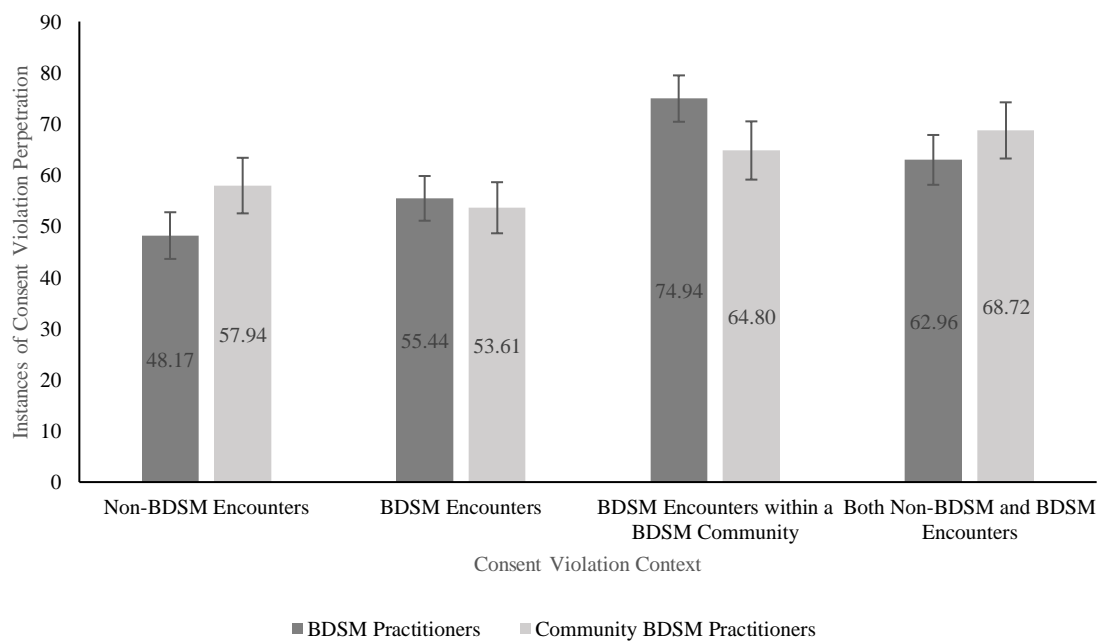
Interaction Between BDSM Involvement and Consent Violation Victimization Context



Note. Interaction between context and group membership n.s.

Figure 3

Interaction Between BDSM Involvement and Consent Violation Perpetration Context



Note. Interaction between context and group membership n.s.

Appendix A

To examine convergence between self-reported group membership and self-reported sexual interest and engagement, three classification analyses were conducted using the self-reported grouping variable, scores on the Paraphilias Scale, and scores on both versions of the SMCL. Specifically, three discriminant function analyses were used to determine if group membership could be predicted from scores on each of the scales.

Analysis one examined convergence between the self-reported grouping variable and scores on the Paraphilias Scale. Results of this analysis suggested that both discriminant functions were meaningful when using the Paraphilias Scale. Function 1 was characterized by a high level of arousal toward, and a high level of engagement in, BDSM-related behaviours, whereas function 2 was characterized solely by a high level of engagement in BDSM-related behaviours. Analysis two examined convergence between the self-reported grouping variable and scores on the submissive version of the SMCL. Results of this analysis suggested that only one discriminant function was meaningful. This function was characterized by high levels of engagement in, and strong pleasure gain from, submissive BDSM-related behaviours. Analysis three examined convergence between the self-reported grouping variable and scores on the dominant version of the SMCL. Results of this analysis suggested that only one discriminant function was meaningful. This function was characterized by high levels of engagement in, and strong pleasure gain from, dominant BDSM-related behaviours. Across each analysis, none of the discriminant functions predicted group membership at even a chance level, with their being particular difficulty in distinguishing between the two BDSM practitioner groups.

Appendix B

Four one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in SM interests between the three study groups. Table 7 depicts the results of these ANOVAs. Results of the first test suggested that the effect of group membership on submissive experience was significant and constituted a large effect, $F(2, 239) = 39.33, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .25$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that members of the general population reported significantly less submissive experience ($M = 14.15, SD = 10.72$) than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 27.26, SD = 9.30, p < .001, d = 1.31$) and community BDSM practitioners ($M = 26.66, SD = 9.57, p < .001, d = 1.23$) and were both large effects. No significant differences were identified between non-community and community BDSM practitioners ($p = .69, d = 0.06$).

Results of the second test suggested that the effect of group membership on submissive pleasure gain was significant and constituted a large effect, $F(2, 227) = 22.51, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .17$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that members of the general population reported significantly less submissive pleasure gain ($M = 29.57, SD = 22.92$) than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 49.82, SD = 17.14, p < .001, d = 1.00$) and community BDSM practitioners ($M = 48.91, SD = 19.69, p < .001, d = 0.91$) and were both large effects. No significant differences were identified between non-community and community BDSM practitioners ($p = .74, d = 0.05$).

Results of the third test suggested that the effect of group membership on dominant experience was significant and constituted a medium effect, $F(2, 239) = 18.30, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .13$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that members of the general population reported significantly less dominant experience ($M = 15.02, SD = 11.82$) than non-

community BDSM practitioners ($M = 22.76$, $SD = 11.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$) and community BDSM practitioners ($M = 26.57$, $SD = 8.85$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.11$) and were medium and large effects, respectively. Additionally, non-community BDSM practitioners reported significantly less dominant experience than community BDSM practitioners ($p = .02$, $d = 0.38$) and was a medium effect.

Results of the final test suggested that the effect of group membership on dominant pleasure gain was significant and constituted a medium effect, $F(2, 225) = 15.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .12$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that members of the general population reported significantly less dominant pleasure gain ($M = 28.89$, $SD = 23.45$) than non-community BDSM practitioners ($M = 42.62$, $SD = 20.66$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.62$) and community BDSM practitioners ($M = 49.68$, $SD = 16.99$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.02$) and were medium and large effects, respectively. Additionally, non-community BDSM practitioners reported significantly less dominant pleasure gain than community BDSM practitioners ($p = .02$, $d = 0.37$) and was a medium effect.

In summary, these findings suggest that BDSM practitioners as a whole have higher levels of submissive interest and engagement than members of the general population, whereas community BDSM practitioners have higher levels of dominant interest and engagement than both members of the general population and non-community BDSM practitioners.

Table 7

Analyses of Variance of the Group Differences in Submissive and Dominant Experience and Pleasure Gain

Variable	General Population, <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>	Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>
Submissive experience	14.15 (10.72) ^a	27.26 (9.30) ^b	26.66 (9.57) ^b
Submissive pleasure gain	29.57 (22.92) ^a	49.82 (17.14) ^b	48.92 (19.69) ^b
Dominant experience	15.02 (11.82) ^a	22.76 (11.04) ^b	26.57 (8.85) ^c
Dominant pleasure gain	28.89 (23.45) ^a	42.62 (20.66) ^b	49.68 (16.99) ^c

Note. Values with different superscripts denote significant differences at $p < .05$. Submissive experience and pleasure gain and dominant experience and pleasure gain were measured using the SadoMasochism Checklist. $N = 242$; $n_{\text{General Population}} = 59$; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 122$; $n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 61$.

Appendix C

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine if sexual sadism is comprised of four unique factors, as per the agnostic continuum. Tables 8 and 9 present the results of the confirmatory factor analysis. The baseline model of a one-factor solution was, as expected, a poor fit to the data. Contrarily, the four-factor model constituted an adequate fit to the data. Despite the increase in fit, the chi-square test remained significant, and some of the fit indices suggested a less than ideal fit. In all, this suggests that a four-factor solution may not be the best solution to describe sexual sadism, and future research should seek to determine whether a different number of factors results in a better fitting model.

Table 8*Goodness-of-Fit Indicators of Models for Sexual Sadism*

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
One-factor	1072***	405	2.65	.81	.80	.08
Four-factor	956***	399	2.40	.84	.83	.08

Note. $N = 248$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 9*Unstandardized Loadings (Standard Errors) for the Four-Factor Model of Sexual Sadism*

Item	Coercion and Power	Bondage/ Humiliation	Physical Violence	Killing
I have fantasized about dominating someone sexually	.33 (.05)	---	---	---
Making someone do what I want turns me on sexually	.30 (.05)	---	---	---
It turns me on to think about overpowering someone sexually	.40 (.05)	---	---	---
I have thought about forcing someone to have sex	.54 (.05)	---	---	---
I have fantasized about sexually abusing someone who is drunk or high on drugs	.58 (.05)	---	---	---
I have attempted sexual intercourse with someone who was drunk or high on drugs	.54 (.05)	---	---	---
I have had sex with someone who didn't want to have sex with me	.59 (.05)	---	---	---
I have threatened to use physical force to make someone go along with sex	.59 (.05)	---	---	---
I have had sexual thoughts about tying my partner to a bed, legs and arms spread apart	---	.84 (.11)	---	---
While having sex, I have used handcuffs, whips, or leathers	---	.76 (.11)	---	---
I have tied someone up while we were having sex	---	.79 (.10)	---	---

I have humiliated others to keep them in line	---	.99 (.09)	---	---
I have thought about embarrassing or humiliating someone during sex	---	.96 (.09)	---	---
I have humiliated someone during sex	---	.99 (.10)	---	---
I have thought about threatening or frightening someone	---	---	.51 (.05)	---
I have daydreamed about how good it would feel to hurt someone during sex	---	---	.56 (.05)	---
I have hurt people for my own enjoyment	---	---	.59 (.05)	---
The more scared a person becomes, the more sexually turned on I get	---	---	.58 (.05)	---
I have purposely hurt someone physically during sex	---	---	.59 (.05)	---
While having sex, I have enjoyed scaring my companion so that they begged me to stop	---	---	.60 (.05)	---
I have thought about choking someone during sex	---	---	---	.31 (.05)
I have thought about torturing someone during sex	---	---	---	.54 (.05)
I have thought about cutting someone with a knife	---	---	---	.55 (.04)
I have beaten someone while I was having sex	---	---	---	.52 (.05)
I have strangled someone during sex	---	---	---	.50 (.05)
I have thought about burning someone during sex	---	---	---	.62 (.04)
I have thought about killing someone during sex	---	---	---	.58 (.04)

I have fantasized about killing someone during sex	---	---	---	.59 (.05)
I enjoy seeing other people getting killed	---	---	---	.61 (.05)
I have tortured animals	---	---	---	.53 (.04)

Note. CFI = .84; TLI = .83; RMSEA = .08. χ^2 (399) = 956; $p < .001$. $N = 248$.

Appendix D

Gender as a Covariate

To determine whether the significant overrepresentation of women in the sample had an influence on the findings from Study 1, two 3 x 2 between-subjects factorial ANOVAs were conducted to assess the relationship between group membership (general population, non-community BDSM practitioners, and community BDSM practitioners) and gender (male, female) on consent violation victimization and perpetration. Due to a limited sample size, only men and women could be considered in these analyses. Results of the first test suggested that the effect of gender on consent violation victimization was significant and constituted a small effect, $F(1, 204) = 9.07, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .04$. Examination of the estimated marginal means suggested that consent violation victimization was reported significantly more often by women ($M = 43.81, SD = 22.67$) than by men ($M = 31.48, SD = 33.13, p = .01, d = 0.43$) and constituted a medium effect. Despite this new finding, the observed group differences remained, $F(2, 204) = 6.09, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .06$. The interaction between group membership and gender was not significant, $F(2, 204) = 1.56, p = .21, \eta^2_p = .02$. Results of the second test suggested that consent violation perpetration remained significantly different between groups, $F(2, 208) = 5.56, p = .004, \eta^2_p = .05$. Furthermore, there was no significant main effect of gender on consent violation perpetration, $F(1, 208) = 0.15, p = .70, \eta^2_p = .00$, nor was there a significant interaction between group membership and gender, $F(2, 208) = 2.15, p = .12, \eta^2_p = .02$.

In addition to these ANOVAs, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether scores on the Agnostic Scale were associated with consent violation perpetration while controlling for age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, and gender. Table 10 presents the results of this analysis. The model containing just the covariates was not

statistically significant, $R = .13$, $R^2 = .02$, Adjusted $R^2 = .00$, $F(4, 201) = 0.84$, $p = .50$. When adding the Agnostic Scale scores, the model was significant, $R = .81$, $R^2 = .66$, Adjusted $R^2 = .65$, $F(8, 197) = 48.30$, $p < .001$, and constituted a large effect. Agnostic Scale scores accounted for 66% of the variance in consent violation perpetration when controlling for age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, and gender. Examination of the regression coefficients suggested that both the Coercion and Power ($\beta = 0.41$, $p = .002$, 95% BCa *CI* [1.83, 4.09]) and Physical Violence ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa *CI* [1.78, 4.81]) subscales were positively associated with consent violation perpetration. There was no association between the Bondage/Humiliation ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = .15$, 95% BCa *CI* [-1.03, 0.27]) and Killing ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = .17$, 95% BCa *CI* [-0.33, 2.26]) subscales and consent violation perpetration. In summary, these findings suggest that gender had a negligible effect on the results of the main study analyses.

Table 10

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Association between Agnostic Scale Scores and Consent Violation Perpetration Considering Gender

Variables in the Equation	Block 1				Block 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Age	0.39	0.39	1.11	205	---	---	---	---
Number of sexual partners	0.15	0.30	0.75	205	---	---	---	---
MCSDS-SF ^a	-1.13	1.32	-0.96	205	---	---	---	---
Gender	-3.11	5.87	-0.63	205	---	---	---	---
Agnostic Scale – Coercion and Power	---	---	---	---	3.00	0.62	5.59*	201
Agnostic Scale – Bondage/Humiliation	---	---	---	---	-0.46	0.32	-1.54	201
Agnostic Scale – Physical Violence	---	---	---	---	3.33	0.73	4.72***	201
Agnostic Scale – Killing	---	---	---	---	0.96	0.68	2.00	201

Note. ^aMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. *B* = unstandardized regression

weights. * $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$. $N = 206$.

Appendix E

To determine whether submissive identity was responsible for the group differences observed with respect to consent violation victimization in Study 1, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to assess for group differences using age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, gender, and pleasure gain from submissive activities as covariates. Results of this test suggested that both gender [$F(1, 184) = 4.75, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .03$] and pleasure gain from submissive activities [$F(1, 184) = 22.98, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$] were significant covariates and constituted small and medium effects, respectively. Furthermore, the effect of group membership on consent violation victimization was no longer significant in the presence of pleasure gain from submissive activities, $F(2, 184) = 2.56, p = .08, \eta^2_p = .03$. This finding suggests that pleasure gain from submissive activities may be a stronger predictor of consent violation victimization than group membership.

To explore this further, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess whether pleasure gain from submissive activities was significantly related to consent violation victimization in the presence of relevant covariates (age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, and gender). Table 11 presents the results of this analysis. The model containing just the covariates was statistically significant, $R = .26, R^2 = .07, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .05, F(4, 187) = 3.43, p = .01$, and explained 7% of the variance in consent violation victimization. In this model, only gender was significantly associated with victimization ($\beta = 0.26, p = .01, 95\% \text{BCa } CI [4.32, 27.51]$). When adding the scores for pleasure gain from submissive activities, the model remained significant, $R = .44, R^2 = .19, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .17, F(5, 186) = 8.95, p < .001$, and constituted a medium effect. This model accounted for 19% of the variance in consent violation victimization. Examination of the regression coefficients suggested that pleasure gain from

submissive activities was positively related to consent violation victimization in the presence of the covariates ($\beta = 0.38, p = .002, 95\% \text{ BCa } CI [0.24, 0.72]$). In summary, these results demonstrate that pleasure gain from submissive activities may be a better predictor of consent violation victimization than being a member of a BDSM community.

To determine whether dominant identity was responsible for the group differences observed with respect to consent violation perpetration in Study 1, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to assess for group differences using age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, gender, and pleasure gain from dominant activities as covariates. Results of this test suggested that pleasure gain from dominant activities [$F(1, 190) = 131.07, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .41$] was a significant covariate and constituted a very large effect. Furthermore, the effect of group membership on consent violation perpetration was no longer significant in the presence of pleasure gain from dominant activities, $F(2, 190) = 0.58, p = .56, \eta^2_p = .01$. This finding suggests that pleasure gain from dominant activities may be a stronger predictor of consent violation perpetration than group membership.

To explore this further, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess whether pleasure gain from dominant activities was significantly related to consent violation perpetration in the presence of relevant covariates (age, number of sexual partners, socially desirable responding, and gender). Table 12 presents the results of this analysis. The model containing just the covariates was not statistically significant, $R = .11, R^2 = .01, \text{ Adjusted } R^2 = .00, F(4, 193) = 0.60, p = .67$. When adding the scores for pleasure gain from dominant activities, the model became significant, $R = .66, R^2 = .44, \text{ Adjusted } R^2 = .43, F(5, 193) = 30.29, p < .001$, and constituted a medium effect. This model accounted for 44% of the variance in consent violation perpetration. Examination of the regression coefficients suggested that pleasure gain from

dominant activities was related to consent violation perpetration in the presence of the covariates ($\beta = 0.67, p < .001, 95\% \text{ BCa } CI [0.81, 1.17]$). In summary, these results demonstrate that pleasure gain from dominant activities may be a better predictor of consent violation perpetration than being a member of a BDSM community.

Table 11

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Association between Pleasure Gain from Submissive Activities and Consent Violation Victimization

Variables in the Equation	Block 1				Block 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Age	0.25	0.29	0.83	191	---	---	---	---
Number of sexual partners	0.08	0.20	0.51	191	---	---	---	---
MCSDS-SF ^a	0.11	1.21	0.11	191	---	---	---	---
Gender	15.31	5.32	3.48***	191	---	---	---	---
Submissive Pleasure Gain	---	---	---	---	0.50	0.12	5.38***	190

Note. ^aMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. *B* = unstandardized regression weights. * $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$. $N = 192$.

Table 12

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Association between Pleasure Gain from Dominant Activities and Consent Violation Perpetration

Variables in the Equation	Block 1				Block 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Age	0.26	0.39	0.74	197	---	---	---	---
Number of sexual partners	0.16	0.31	0.80	197	---	---	---	---
MCSDS-SF ^a	-1.12	1.35	-1.16	197	---	---	---	---
Gender	-1.20	5.99	-0.24	197	---	---	---	---
Dominant Pleasure Gain	---	---	---	---	0.99	0.09	12.14***	196

Note. ^aMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. *B* = unstandardized regression

weights. * $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$. $N = 198$.

Appendix F

To determine which behaviours and tactics from the SES scales were driving the consent violation victimization and perpetration findings, descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs were generated for each of the response options. Figures 4 and 5 depict the group means for the items, while Tables 13 and 14 present the results of the one-way ANOVAs. From these analyses, it was determined that members of the general population tended to score the lowest on the SES scales. By contrast, community BDSM practitioners tended to score the highest, with non-community BDSM practitioners falling toward the middle. This trend was present for almost all the items. Additionally, group differences were identified with respect to the types of coercive sexual behaviours engaged in or experienced by the participants (e.g., forcing someone to give you oral sex, forcing someone to have intercourse) and the types of tactics used (e.g., emotional manipulation, threats). Despite these findings, there appears to be no one category of behaviours or tactics that apply primarily to community BDSM practitioners. As such, there are no specific types of behaviours or tactics (e.g., more coercive versus less coercive behaviours and tactics) that appear to be responsible for the observed group differences with respect to victimization and perpetration.

Table 13*Analyses of Variance of the Group Differences in Scores on the SES-SFV*

Variable	General Population, <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>	Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>
Fondled – threats	0.76 (1.10)	0.99 (1.17)	1.08 (1.16)
Fondled – force	1.07 (1.15)	1.19 (1.16)	1.38 (1.21)
Fondled – manipulation	1.17 (1.24)	1.56 (1.24)	1.51 (1.14)
Fondled – verbal abuse	1.29 (1.20)	1.43 (1.16)	1.56 (1.13)
Fondled – intoxication	1.21 (1.18)	1.38 (1.16)	1.66 (1.21)
Oral sex – threats	0.81 (1.18)	0.90 (1.11)	1.17 (1.24)
Oral sex – force	0.95 (1.16) ^a	1.11 (1.19) ^b	1.52 (1.16) ^b
Oral sex – manipulation	0.92 (1.09) ^a	1.35 (1.22) ^b	1.48 (1.22) ^b
Oral sex – verbal abuse	0.97 (1.08) ^a	1.25 (1.21) ^b	1.56 (1.26) ^b
Oral sex – intoxication	0.91 (1.11) ^a	1.23 (1.25) ^b	1.62 (1.20) ^b
Vagina – threats	0.98 (1.14) ^a	1.17 (1.21) ^b	1.56 (1.30) ^b
Vagina – force	1.19 (1.25)	1.21 (1.21)	1.48 (1.24)
Vagina – manipulation	0.90 (1.12) ^a	1.43 (1.13) ^b	1.72 (1.12) ^c
Vagina – verbal abuse	1.04 (1.12)	1.41 (1.19)	1.37 (1.12)
Vagina – intoxication	0.98 (1.14) ^a	1.35 (1.17) ^b	1.59 (1.14) ^b
Anal – threats	0.77 (1.05)	0.93 (1.17)	1.23 (1.22)
Anal – force	0.79 (1.04) ^a	1.15 (1.20) ^b	1.31 (1.22) ^b
Anal – manipulation	0.68 (0.99) ^a	1.12 (1.21) ^b	1.28 (1.24) ^b

Anal – verbal abuse	0.88 (1.01)	0.97 (1.18)	1.25 (1.15)
Anal – intoxication	0.93 (1.14)	1.06 (1.18)	1.31 (1.21)

Note. Values with different superscripts denote significant differences at $p < .05$. $N = 248$; n_{General}

Population = 60; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 125$; $n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 63$.

Table 14*Analyses of Variance of the Group Differences in Scores on the SES-SFP*

Variable	General Population, <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>	Community BDSM Practitioners, <i>M (SD)</i>
Fondled – threats	0.73 (0.97) ^a	1.05 (1.19) ^b	1.50 (1.11) ^c
Fondled – force	0.79 (0.97) ^a	0.79 (1.12) ^b	1.20 (1.17) ^c
Fondled – manipulation	1.07 (1.29)	0.96 (1.11)	1.18 (1.09)
Fondled – verbal abuse	0.83 (1.07) ^a	0.80 (1.03) ^b	1.26 (1.17) ^c
Fondled – intoxication	0.96 (1.15)	1.22 (1.17)	1.33 (1.12)
Oral sex – threats	0.93 (1.23) ^a	1.30 (1.29) ^b	1.55 (1.26) ^b
Oral sex – force	0.93 (1.13)	1.12 (1.20)	1.40 (1.20)
Oral sex – manipulation	1.04 (1.15)	1.16 (1.24)	1.53 (1.18)
Oral sex – verbal abuse	0.87 (1.13) ^a	1.20 (1.22) ^b	1.47 (1.23) ^b
Oral sex – intoxication	1.04 (1.24)	1.13 (1.23)	1.49 (1.23)
Vagina – threats	1.11 (1.65)	1.23 (1.51)	1.69 (1.55)
Vagina – force	1.19 (1.58)	1.30 (1.55)	1.71 (1.60)
Vagina – manipulation	1.15 (1.49)	1.51 (1.63)	1.47 (1.48)
Vagina – verbal abuse	0.83 (1.31) ^a	1.48 (1.68) ^b	1.65 (1.60) ^c
Vagina – intoxication	1.17 (1.55) ^a	1.49 (1.59) ^b	1.95 (1.57) ^b
Anal – threats	1.04 (1.18)	1.10 (1.22)	1.42 (1.21)
Anal – force	1.06 (1.28)	1.15 (1.29)	1.53 (1.15)
Anal – manipulation	0.80 (1.05)	1.20 (1.21)	1.31 (1.20)

Anal – verbal abuse	0.96 (1.23)	1.21 (1.20)	1.36 (1.11)
Anal – intoxication	0.87 (1.18)	1.23 (1.25)	1.44 (1.14)

Note. Values with different superscripts denote significant differences at $p < .05$. $N = 248$; n_{General}

Population = 60; $n_{\text{Non-Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 125$; $n_{\text{Community BDSM Practitioners}} = 63$.

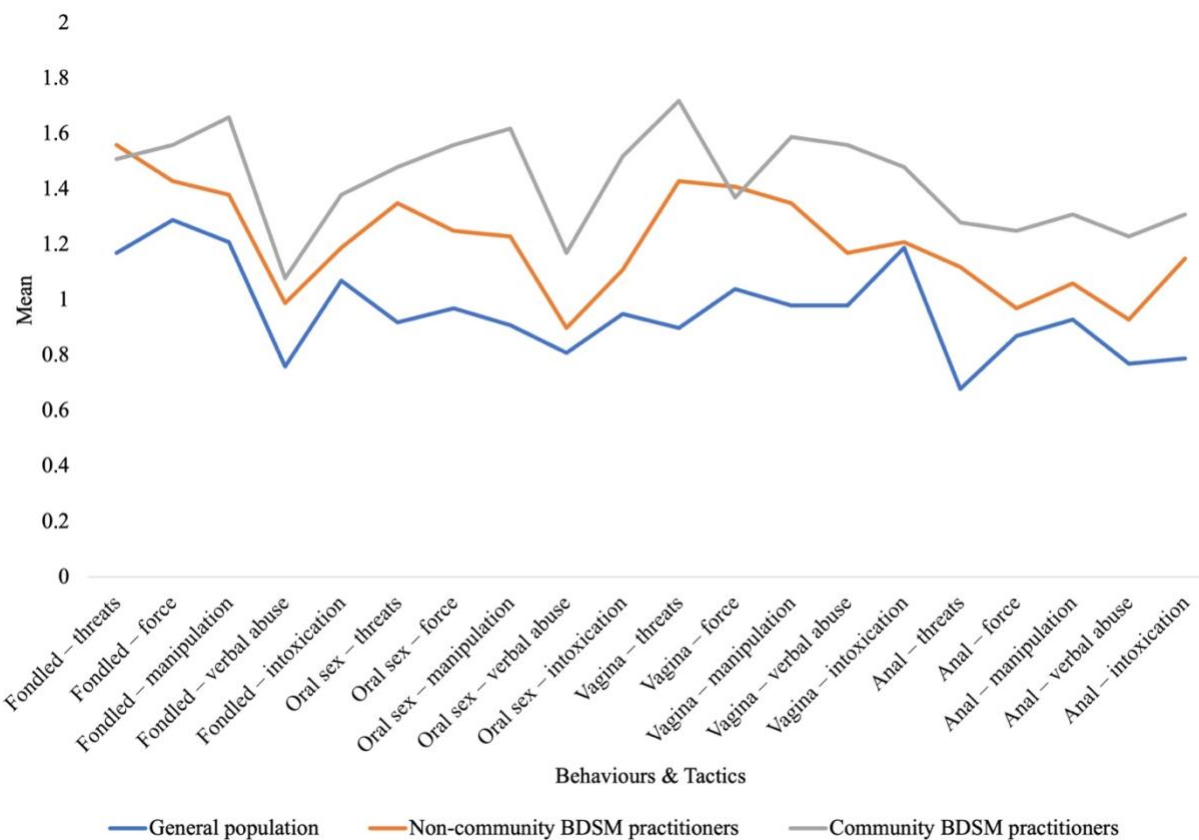
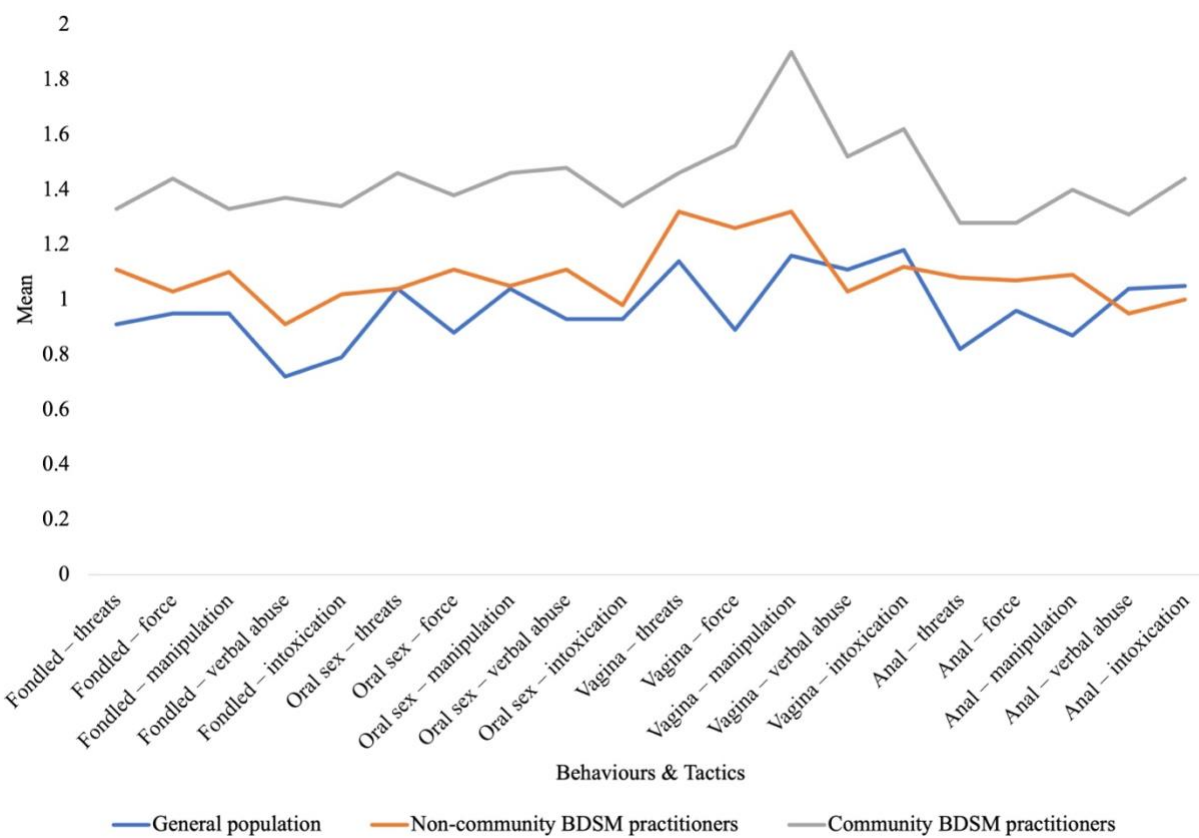
Figure 4*Group Means for Each Item on the SES-SFV*

Figure 5*Group Means for Each Item on the SES-SFP*

Appendix G

Participants in Study 2 were presented with the following prompt:

We are interested in learning more about how consent is negotiated in BDSM communities, as well as how BDSM communities deal with consent violations that come up in the context of BDSM practice in the community. Please consider the following open-ended questions and provide whatever information you consider relevant to answering each. Be mindful to not provide any information that could reveal your identity.

Next, participants were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) Describe how consent is typically negotiated between BDSM practitioners in your BDSM community. Please provide any details you consider important; (2) How are consent violations typically dealt with in your BDSM community? Who are the people who typically hold the responsibility of dealing with consent violations? Do you believe your BDSM community adequately deals with consent violations? Please provide any details you consider important; (3) Are any outsiders, such as the police, ever involved in addressing consent violations in your BDSM community? When do you believe it is important to involve outsiders in dealing with consent violations? Please provide any details you consider important; and (4) What, in your opinion, are some barriers to involving outside forces in dealing with consent violations in BDSM communities? In other words, why would a community choose not to get external forces involved in dealing with consent violations? Please provide any details you consider important.

Appendix H

Several independent-samples t-tests and chi-square tests of independence were conducted to determine whether the community BDSM practitioners who responded to the open-ended questions in the survey differed from those who chose not to respond. Table 15 presents the results of these tests. In summary, results of the independent samples t-tests suggested that those who responded had significantly more sexual partners, had significantly greater paraphilic arousal, had greater experience with submissive BDSM activities, and endorsed a lower sexual interest in the Physical Violence and Killing subscales of the Agnostic Scale than those who did not respond. Results of the chi-square tests suggested that women were significantly overrepresented in the group that did not respond. Furthermore, straight participants and those of North American descent were significantly overrepresented in the group that did respond.

Table 15

Differences Between Community BDSM Practitioners Who Responded to the Open-ended Questions and Those Who Did Not

Variable	Responders, <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-responders, <i>M (SD)</i>	Total, <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>
Age	30.72 (6.68)	27.19 (5.94)	28.25 (7.72)	1.94 (52)
Number of sexual partners	14.89 (10.76)	3.71 (1.60)	8.03 (12.89)	4.39 (14.22)**
PS ^a – arousal	0.90 (1.43)	.06 (0.77)	0.33 (1.10)	2.35 (17.21)*
PS – experience	3.34 (0.98)	3.11 (0.48)	3.09 (0.71)	0.97 (16.43)
SMCL-S ^b experience	31.61 (13.92)	23.98 (5.66)	25.97 (9.50)	2.25 (15.68)*
SMCL-S pleasure gain	52.44 (30.11)	47.31 (10.79)	48.38 (18.78)	0.70 (15.60)
SMCL-D ^c experience	29.94 (11.84)	24.45 (5.58)	26.26 (8.64)	1.88 (16.43)
SMCL-D pleasure gain	50.56 (25.58)	48.14 (11.54)	48.61 (16.56)	0.38 (16.14)
AS ^d – coercion	9.28 (3.95)	10.21 (2.59)	9.62 (3.10)	1.09 (18.30)
AS – bondage	9.78 (8.06)	10.86 (4.98)	10.16 (5.88)	0.58 (17.85)
AS – physical violence	5.06 (3.39)	6.95 (2.36)	6.26 (2.87)	2.49 (52)*
AS – killing	6.56 (5.89)	10.98 (3.12)	9.36 (4.58)	3.01 (16.82)*
SES-SF-V ^e lifetime	43.17 (41.93)	50.81 (11.69)	47.88 (24.58)	0.76 (14.80)
SES-SF-P ^f lifetime	42.00 (46.62)	54.33 (13.76)	49.97 (28.27)	1.10 (14.97)
MCSDS-SF ^g	11.60 (3.02)	10.79 (2.00)	11.09 (1.94)	-0.96 (18.94)
Variable	Responders, <i>n (%)</i>	Non-responders, <i>n (%)</i>	Total, <i>N (%)</i>	$\chi^2 (df)$
Sex				15.86 (1)***

Female	8 (42.1)	36 (90.0)	44 (74.6)	
Male	11 (57.9)	4 (10.0)	15 (25.4)	
Gender				12.94 (1)***
Woman	9 (47.4)	36 (90.0)	45 (76.3)	
Man	10 (52.6)	4 (10.0)	14 (23.7)	
Sexual orientation				26.26 (5)***
Straight	39 (97.5)	8 (42.1)	47 (79.7)	
Mostly straight	0 (0.0)	3 (15.8)	3 (5.1)	
Bisexual	1 (2.5)	4 (21.1)	5 (8.5)	
Mostly gay/lesbian	0 (0.0)	2 (10.5)	2 (3.4)	
Gay/lesbian	0 (0.0)	1 (5.3)	1 (1.7)	
Other	0 (0.0)	1 (5.3)	1 (1.7)	
Ethnicity				27.33 (1)***
North American	38 (95.0)	6 (31.6)	44 (74.6)	
Non-North American	2 (5.0)	13 (68.4)	15 (25.4)	

Note. ^aPS = Paraphilias Scale. ^bSMCL-S = Sadomasochism Checklist Submissiveness Scale.

^cSMCL-D = Saomasochism Checklist Dominance Scale. ^dAS = Agnostic Scale. ^eSES SF-V =

Sexual Experiences Survey Short-Form-Victimization. ^fSES SF-P = Sexual Experiences Survey

Short-Form-Perpetration. ^gMarlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form. *N* = 59. **p* <

.05 ***p* < .01 ****p* < .001

Appendix I

ANONYMITY MAKES IT HARD TO IDENTIFY VIOLATORS TO OTHER

COMMUNITIES: Many players use pseudonyms, making it hard to identify them to other BDSM communities.

BDSM PRACTITIONERS MAKE OUTSIDERS UNCOMFORTABLE: The feeling that those who do not practice BDSM are made uncomfortable by those who practice BDSM.

BODY LANGUAGE: Monitoring non-verbal signs that someone may be wanting to withdraw consent.

COMMUNITIES IGNORE OR COVER UP CONSENT VIOLATIONS: Communities choose to ignore consent violations by ignoring them or sweeping them under the rug.

COMMUNITY LEADERS/ORGANIZERS DEAL WITH CONSENT VIOLATIONS:

Community leaders/organizers decide what the punishment for a consent violation is and carry out the punishment accordingly.

COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS OF CONSENT VIOLATIONS: Financial compensation provided by BDSM communities for victims of consent violations.

CONSENT IS NEGOTIATED IN INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS: Consent negotiation always takes place when practitioners are less familiar with one another.

CONSENT IS NOT ALWAYS NEGOTIATED BETWEEN FAMILIAR PARTNERS:

Practitioners who are familiar with one another and/or who are in a long-term relationship may not negotiate consent as pre-established norms exist.

CONSENT VIOLATIONS REPORTED TO COMMUNITY LEADERS: Consent violations are reported to those in positions of authority in the community (i.e., community leaders/organizers and dungeon monitors).

CONTENT OF THE ENCOUNTER: Discussing what types of activities will be engaged in, what the expectations of the encounter are, and what types of fantasies or kinks will be explored.

DEFENDING CONSENT VIOLATORS: Some BDSM practitioners will defend the actions of consent violators, even if they know the consent violation took place.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN BDSM COMMUNITIES: A lack of communication between BDSM communities makes reporting consent violators to other communities difficult.

DOMINANT PRACTITIONERS USUALLY ESTABLISH CONSENT: During consent negotiation, it is the more dominant practitioners who takes the lead.

ENCOUNTER IS ENDED IMMEDIATELY AFTER A CONSENT VIOLATION: Any BDSM encounter is ended as soon as a consent violation occurs.

EXPLORING POTENTIAL BEHAVIOURS: Determining whether each practitioner is interested in the same types of behaviours and what they will try during a scene.

FEAR OF BEING OUTED: Fear of one's interest in BDSM becoming public.

FEAR OF SPEAKING OUT: Fear of reporting a consent violation due to potential legal repercussions.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANT WELLBEING: Any risks that may potentially interfere with the BDSM encounter (e.g., medical conditions).

INFORMED AND ONGOING CONSENT: Consent is negotiated at the start and must be constantly monitored throughout the encounter.

INVOLVING OUTSIDERS SHOWS THAT CONSENT VIOLATIONS ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY: Outsiders may sometimes be involved in dealing with consent violations to demonstrate that BDSM communities take consent violations seriously.

LABELING SOMEONE AS A CONSENT VIOLATOR: Consent violators become known as abusers in their own BDSM community.

LACK OF FAITH IN POLICE/OUTSIDERS: The feeling that police do not have the best interests of BDSM practitioners in mind. Also, the feeling that police will not take consent violations in BDSM encounters seriously.

LAWYERS: Hiring lawyers to represent you in the event of a consent violation.

MUST ESTABLISH TRUST: All parties to an encounter must be trusting of one another.

MUST REMOVE POWER DYNAMICS: All members to a consent negotiation must be on equal power levels.

NO BDSM-RELATED LAWS: Policing consent violations is made more difficult as BDSM has no relevant laws in the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

NONSENSE: Responses that are non-sensical or irrelevant to the question posed.

NOT ALL REPORTS OF CONSENT VIOLATIONS ARE LEGITIMATE: Some reports of consent violations are false and are weaponized with the goal of harming someone's reputation.

OUTSIDERS CAN/SHOULD BE INVOLVED: Any general mention that outsiders can and/or should be involved in policing consent violations.

OUTSIDERS CANNOT/SHOULD NOT BE INVOLVED: Any general mention that outsiders cannot and/or should not be involved in policing consent violations.

OUTSIDERS LACK KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BDSM: Those who do not practice BDSM do not understand BDSM or its practitioners and/or hold misconceptions about BDSM and its practitioners.

OUTSIDERS SHOULD BE INVOLVED WHEN THE CONSENT VIOLATION IS SERIOUS: Consent violations that involve serious physical or psychological violence, stalking, threats, sexual assault, rape, or death warrant the involvement of outsiders (i.e., the police).

POLICE MISTREAT MARGINALIZED PEOPLE: Historical and ongoing mistreatment of marginalized communities (e.g., gender diverse peoples, ethnically diverse peoples, those with diverse sexual interests, etc.) by police.

POLICE SHOULD BE INVOLVED WHEN THE BDSM COMMUNITY CANNOT DEAL WITH THE CONSENT VIOLATION EFFECTIVELY: If the BDSM community cannot effectively deal with a consent violation, outsiders should be involved.

PRIVACY CONCERNS/ANONYMITY CONCERNS WITH INVOLVING OUTSIDERS: Involving outsiders in dealing with consent violations may cause a loss of privacy or anonymity for BDSM practitioners.

REPORTED TO OTHER COMMUNITIES: The identities of consent violators are often reported to other BDSM communities.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: Trying to reduce the harm of a consent violation by engaging in a restorative justice process between the victim and the violator.

RETRIBUTION AGAINST ACCUSERS: Some BDSM practitioners will attack victims of consent violations for reporting a violation.

SAFEGWORDS: Coming up with a shared word that signifies the withdrawal of consent.

SHAMING: Shaming consent violators for their actions.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BEING OUTED AS A BDSM PRACTITIONER: Potential consequences such as loss of anonymity, loss of employment, loss of social connections, etc.

SOFT/HARD LIMITS: Anything in an encounter that either participant would be unwilling to do. This includes activities that may sometimes be acceptable (soft limits) and activities that are never acceptable (hard limits).

STIGMA TOWARD ONESELF OR THEIR COMMUNITY: Fear that being outed as a BDSM practitioner will bring on stigma, shame, or judgement by others. Also, fear that being outed as a BDSM practitioner will bring stigma, shame, or judgement onto one's BDSM community or the BDSM community at large.

STOPLIGHT SYSTEM: The use of the red-yellow-green light system to engage in ongoing consent monitoring.

SUSPENSION OR BANISHMENT FROM THE COMMUNITY: Consent violators may be temporarily or permanently removed from their own BDSM community, and occasionally the organized BDSM community at large.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION: Having a face-to-face conversation about consent.

VICTIM OR BDSM COMMUNITY SHOULD DECIDE IF OUTSIDERS ARE INVOLVED:

They believe that it should be at the discretion of the victim and/or the BDSM community to decide to involve outsiders in dealing with consent violations.

WARNING AFTER FIRST CONSENT VIOLATION: Some consent violators are given a warning after their first instance of violating someone's consent.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: Having a conversation through text or other forms of written messaging about consent.