

The purpose of this study is to highlight experiences of living in a relationship where BDSM is being exercised. The acronym is an umbrella term for bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadomasochism. The study is based on interviews with persons who define themselves as BDSM practitioners. The overall questions of this study are: How does the BDSM practice appear in everyday life? How did the practice start and how has it developed over time? What is included in the sexual BDSM practice? The empirical material has been analyzed with interactionism as the theoretical framework.

The picture that emerges is complex. To define oneself as a BDSM practitioner might mean different things for different people where the extent of the practice, what it consists of and how integrated it is in the lives of people might vary from person to person. But despite differences there are also recurring, common patterns in the stories of the informants. All of them describe the practice in positive terms. To a great extent the practice has to do with sexuality where an explicit power exchange, an assuming of dominant and submissive roles and an everyday life filled with rituals, rules and agreements are described as being key elements. Punishment, in the forms of physical pain or humiliation, is common when the rules are not obeyed. All the interviewees use safe words to make sure both are comfortable about what's happening. The most common tools are whips, bonds, chains and locks, paddles, clamps/clothespins, knives, butt plugs and ropes.

There is a concern among the informants to find and to form strategies to cope and to adapt the BDSM role to other roles and here the parental role is the most apparent. Also an ambition to create a balance between the personal norms and the norms of the BDSM culture and those of the overall society can be seen. The interviewees express a search for answers to why one practices BDSM. In this process they return to experiences, almost exclusively of a destructive nature, and they wonder if these experiences have affected their sexuality and their preference for BDSM. Even though the attitude in society actually has become more accepting, for example with the help of media, recent research and the fact that sadomasochism is no longer considered a disorder in Sweden.