

# The Psychology of Kink: A Cross-Sectional Survey Investigating the Roles of Sensation Seeking and Coping Style in BDSM-Related Interests

A. Schuerwegen<sup>1</sup>, W. Huys<sup>1,2</sup>, V. Coppens<sup>2,3</sup>, N. De Neef<sup>4</sup>, J. Henckens<sup>3</sup>, K. Goethals<sup>1,2</sup>, M. Morrens<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Forensic Centre (BE), <sup>2</sup>CAPRI (BE),

<sup>3</sup> University Department of Psychiatry Duffel (BE), <sup>4</sup>Europe Hospitals Brussels (BE)

## Introduction

Despite the gaining popularity in mainstream media of the phenomenon that is BDSM—an acronym for Bondage and discipline, Dominance and submission, and Sadism and Masochism—, empirical research on the motives and underlying psychological mechanisms driving BDSM-practitioners is scarce. Both sensation seeking and individual coping styles potentially have an impact on BDSM affinities and activities. Therefore, the current study focused on the potential driving roles of sensation seeking and coping styles in BDSM-related interests and behavior.

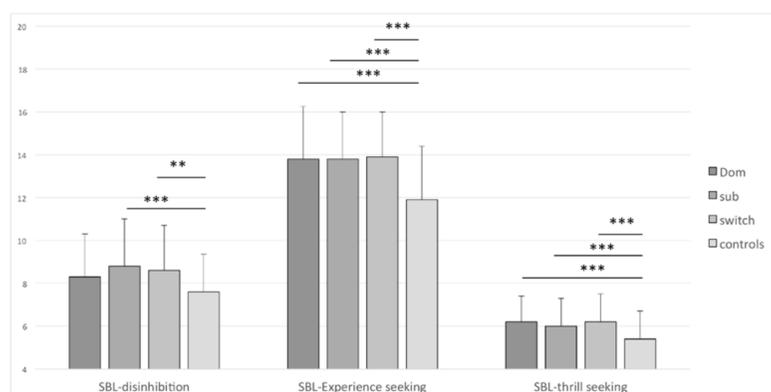
## Method

- ❖ **Sample:** 256 BDSM practitioners;  $M = 40.7$  years ( $SD = 13.4$ ); 53% females; 43% males; 4% other (i.e., genderfluid and genderless); With BDSM-ID's D-type (27%), s-type (50%), switch (23%). Matched control group of 300 participants of the general Belgian population;  $M = 40.3$  years ( $SD = 13.5$ ); 53% females; 45% males; 2% other.
- ❖ **Measures:** (1) Adapted version by Blankers (2006) of the Dutch Sensation Seeking Scale (Feij & Van Zuilen, 1984) with three subscales: Thrill seeking, Experience seeking, and Disinhibition; (2) Coping styles selected from the Dutch version of the COPE-Easy (Kleijn, Van Heck & Van Waning, 2000) reflecting Active problem solving, Support seeking, and Avoidance.

## Results

- ❖ Significant higher Sensation Seeking scores were found in the BDSM group for Thrill seeking and Experience seeking. Higher levels of Disinhibition were only found in subs and switches compared to controls.
- ❖ No significant differences were found between BDSM subgroups.

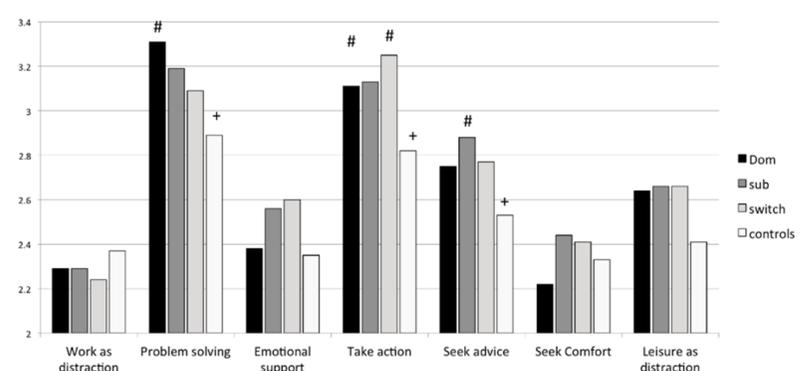
**Figure 1.** Mean levels of sensation seeking reported by BDSM-practitioners and the general population.



**Note:** A Bonferroni correction was applied to define significant group differences between BDSM identities and controls.

- ❖ The BDSM group demonstrated higher levels of active coping and more distraction seeking in leisure activities.
- ❖ Focusing on work and seeking comfort did not differ between groups.
- ❖ Doms/Dommes reported higher levels of active problem solving and taking action; subs to seek advice.
- ❖ Within the BDSM group 29.6% indicated using BDSM to cope with stress.

**Figure 2.** Comparison in coping styles between BDSM subgroups.



**Note:** A Bonferroni correction was applied to define significant group differences between BDSM identities and controls.

## Discussion

- ❖ BDSM community members seem to be more likely to use active coping skills than the general population. These results were mediated by the specific BDSM identity in community members.
- ❖ Members of the BDSM community reported higher levels of sensation seeking. Whether this is associated to higher frequencies of or a higher variety in BDSM practices should be subject to further research.
- ❖ Further research into the link between coping strategies and sexual orientation in general, and between sensation seeking and BDSM is required.