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‘It started when I barked once when I was licking his boots!’: A phenomenological study of the experience of bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, and sadism & masochism (BDSM)

Volume I of II

EMMA LOUISE TURLEY

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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Abstract

The research presented in this thesis aims to explore the lived experience of participating in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission and sadism & masochism (BDSM). Traditionally, psychologists have researched this phenomenon from an external perspective, conceptualising it as pathological. By employing a phenomenological approach, I aim to understand this multifaceted phenomenon from the inside, by listening to the voices of those who engage in BDSM.

The research is separated into two stages. For the first stage of empirical work I interviewed five practitioners of consensual BDSM about their experiences. This stage was designed to be particularly broad and exploratory with the aim of understanding more about the subcultures associated with BDSM, and also to inform the second, more focused stage of research. The findings were analysed using the descriptive phenomenological approach. The subsequent stage involved interviews with nine practitioners; including four that were previously interviewed for stage one. The aim here was to elucidate the specific constituents of BDSM that held erotic significance for participants. The template approach was utilised as the method of analysis.

The complexity of BDSM is illustrated by the subtle variations in the erotic scripts of participants. The co-creation of fantasy was of central importance to the experience, as were measures employed in order to maintain the fantasy and ensure its success. The notion of authenticity was fundamental to the experience, which ensured all participants were invested in the erotic scene and allowed immersion into the bubble of fantasy and the exclusion of the ‘real’ world. A sense of care, trust and partnership were vital in order to achieve the erotic atmosphere, concepts that appear contrary to the kinds of sexual activities involved.

This research presents an exciting account of the lived experience of BDSM, illuminating the erotic diversities and nuances related to this phenomenon. It is also the aim that this research contributes to the increasing body of work that investigates and reports BDSM from non-pathologising perspectives.

Disseminated findings

Papers

Turley, E.L., King, N. & Butt, T. (2011). 'It started when I barked once when I was licking his boots!': a descriptive phenomenological study of the everyday experience of BDSM. *Psychology & Sexuality,* 2 (2), 123-136.

Presentations

Turley, E.L. (September 2011). Using phenomenology as a methodological approach. Department of Speech Pathology & Therapy Seminar Series. Manchester Metropolitan University.

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Turley, E.L. (June 2009). Researching BDSM. Postgraduate Research Conference. School of Human & Health Sciences. University of Huddersfield.

Glossary of Terms

BDSM	Bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, sadism & masochism
SM, S/M	Sadomasochism
D/s, D&s	Dominance & submission
B&D	Bondage & discipline
Top	A partner that is in charge of a scene
Bottom	A partner that has relinquished control during a scene
EPE	Erotic power exchange
Vanilla	Non-BDSM sex and/or sexual practices
SSC	Safe, sane & consensual
RACK	Risk aware consensual kink
Switch	An individual who enjoys assuming both the dominant and submissive sexual role
Munch	An informal social gathering of BDSM practitioners
24/7	A full time erotic power exchange relationship

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis examines the lived experiences of individuals who engage in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission and sadism & masochism, generally known as 'BDSM'. The decision to undertake research in this area arose as a result of a combination of factors; my personal interest in the topic, my discomfort at the general opinion towards practitioners of BDSM, and the desire to understand more about what it is like to participate in this subculture. This chapter will outline my interest in the phenomenon under investigation and summarise some of the key issues surrounding perceptions of BDSM, provide a discussion of the problem of definitions and delineate the current legal position. I will then explain the structure of the thesis.

1.1 My interest in BDSM

My first encounter with BDSM was through the documentary 'Fetishes' by film-maker Nick Broomfield. Having been a fan of his previous work, I was keen to watch his latest instalment when it premiered on Channel 4 in 1997. I was vaguely familiar with fetish, my understanding as a naive 14 year old was that it involved people who were 'into' whips and leather. The documentary was shocking to me initially, but after subsequent viewings I concluded that everyone there found enjoyment on some level and therefore it must be acceptable to participate in those activities. The documentary, along with my emerging bisexuality, sparked an interest in unconventional sexualities and I continued to casually watch and read around the subject.

During the second year of my undergraduate psychology degree I was given an article to review for a piece of coursework; Taylor and Ussher's (2001) paper 'Making Sense of S&M'. It was revelatory to me that academics actually researched these areas of sexuality, and I read further from the reference list of that paper. However, when the time came to select a subject for the final year dissertation, I was too apprehensive to opt for anything related to BDSM, and perhaps concerned about what the staff and other students would think of me if I decided to research sexuality, especially BDSM. I had become aware that some public perspectives regarding BDSM and those who participate relied on negative social stereotypes, as the case of former Formula One president, Max Mosley, illustrates. Mosley was outed by the

now defunct ‘The News of World’ in 2008 in a report which exposed his BDSM activities, and claimed the scene in which he was participating was based on a Nazi concentration camp fantasy. The article depicted Mosley and his sexual activities in a particularly malevolent and stereotyped manner, and contained various references to the ‘Nazi’ context of the BDSM;

> *In public he rejects father’s evil past, but secretly he plays Nazi sex games in £2,500 dungeon orgy...Today we expose Formula 1 chief Max Mosley as LIAR as well as a pervert who revelled in a chilling Nazi-style sado-masochistic orgy with five hookers...*

Other headlines used by the newspaper included;

> *Secret tapes reveal vile Mosley’s true depravity’* and *‘Sick games WERE like death camps*

Mosley successfully won damages against the newspaper, refuting the Nazi element of the story. However the impact of the story caused Mosley to resign from his position the following year.

After reading articles in the lay media and the academic psycho-medical literature I was uncomfortable with some of the depictions of BDSM practitioners I encountered. Such articles and papers may continue to perpetuate misinformation that can result in serious consequences for individuals that choose to engage in consensual BDSM. As a psychologist, I am interested in people and in their lives, and I hope that by focusing on the lived experience of BDSM this thesis can contribute to the growing body of research that does not demonise this practice, but rather aims to understand it.

Having discovered phenomenology during my degree and its focus on lived experience, I recognised its potential for studying topics I found interesting. Phenomenology changes the kind of research question that can be asked by drawing attention to *what it is like* to experience a particular situation. I questioned ‘what is it like to experience BDSM?’ I wanted to understand what was arousing about engaging in these traditionally non-sexual and non-erotic activities and practices. It is noteworthy here that I recognise that the ‘sexual’ can be different from the ‘erotic’, although there may be an overlap between the two concepts and they

are in no way mutually exclusive. The literature often uses these terms interchangeably, however, for the purposes of this thesis it is useful to explain how the terms will be applied. The ‘erotic’ in this work is understood as a broader atmosphere of arousal and sexual desire, while the ‘sexual’ is related to acts, practices and physical contact which is characterised or distinguished by sex. Phenomenology enabled the investigation of the lived experience of participating in BDSM in order to generate understanding of the phenomenon and gain unique insight into the experience as lived by the practitioners. I have introduced ‘phenomenology’ here without explanation; this will be discussed in great detail throughout the thesis, but particularly in chapter three.

Despite my interest in the lived experience of the phenomenon, I do not practice BDSM, and am not part of any BDSM community; therefore my position is of a sympathetic outsider. The advantages and limitations of this position will be discussed in depth later in the thesis, however it is important to establish my researcher position from the outset.

1.2 Defining BDSM

According to Moser (1988), there is no universally accepted definition of BDSM, although these types of activities usually involve an exchange of power and/or the application of pain or other intense sensations, usually within a sexual context (Barker, Iantaffi & Gupta 2007). The acronym ‘BDSM’ illustrates the assorted consensual activities involved in the experience of participating in BDSM; bondage and discipline (B&D), dominance and submission (D/s) and sadism and masochism (SM). Practitioners and authors also often use the abbreviations S/M, EPE (erotic power exchange) or WIITWD (what it is that we do) to describe and discuss the same range of sexual practices and activities. The term BDSM is commonly used and accepted amongst practitioners, and is the term that will be used throughout this thesis. I will also use the term ‘practitioner’ throughout this work in order to refer to those individuals who participate in consensual BDSM. Regardless of definition, BDSM-related practices are highly individual and subjective, and it should not be assumed that ‘one size fits all’, as inclinations vary from person to person (Barker, Iantaffi & Gupta 2007).

As mentioned, BDSM is the umbrella term used to describe a set of consensual sexual and/or erotic practices which usually involve an eroticised exchange of power and the application or receipt of painful and/or intense sensations. The range of BDSM-related activities is wide. Table 1 provides some examples of BDSM-related practices as listed on the Fetish Information Exchange website.

Table 1: BDSM-related activities as listed on fetishexchange.org

Activity	Explanation
Bondage	Involves the submissive partner being tied up with restraints
Breath Control	A dominant partner controls the breathing of a submissive partner by limiting their oxygen intake
Electro Play	Involves the application of an electric current to the breasts and/or genitals by the dominant partner
Humiliation	A submissive partner is made to feel ashamed as the dominant partner insults their dignity
Nipple Torture	Involves the application of pain or intense sensations on the nipples of a submissive partner, usually through the use of clamps
Watersports	Involves the submissive being urinated on by the dominant partner
Role Play	Partners assume dominant or submissive character roles, the submissive partner can act the role of a person or animal
Bloodsports	Activities that break the skin causing it to bleed, such as cutting with razorblades
Spanking	Involves striking a submissive partner's buttocks with a hand or implement such as a paddle

This brief list is designed to illustrate the variation within BDSM practices, and is certainly not exhaustive. The complexity of BDSM should not be underestimated,

and this thesis aims to elucidate some of that complexity in order to illuminate the phenomenon. There have been few studies estimating the frequency of individuals with BDSM-related interests and while the figures vary, these studies have illustrated that BDSM practice is not particularly rare. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard (1953) reported that 22% of men and 12% of women sampled had some sexual reaction to BDSM stories, while Moser and Kleinplatz (2006) propose that about 10% of the population is involved in BDSM. The widely accepted view within the BDSM community is that it is a meaningful lifestyle choice rather than a series of sexual encounters, and whatever form the BDSM takes depends totally upon the fantasies and boundaries of those participating. BDSM is considered a way of life to those involved, whether it is on an individual level or as part of the BDSM community; a sub-culture with its own language, terminology and code systems (Barker et al 2007). It is also important to highlight that, despite popular opinion, the BDSM community places a very strong emphasis on safety and consent during all aspects of BDSM, from meeting a new partner to being aware of one's own limits and boundaries.

Some authors (e.g. Wright 2006) argue that in order for activities to be conceptualised as BDSM, they must be consensual, however this issue of consent is less straightforward than it may initially appear. Various perspectives surrounding consent are espoused on BDSM online networks and discussion boards, such as those featured on Informed Consent (see www.informedconsent.co.uk/boards). Existing inherent power structures in some relationships may lead to an abuse of consent (for example an older top with a younger bottom), and consent may not be taken as seriously in less formal BDSM scenes. In more structured BDSM there are dungeon managers ensuring the safety of those who are playing, and BDSM practitioners often provide sexual references vouching for partners, however for those who exist on the fringes of the community, consent may not be a central issue (Newmahr 2011). It can also be that case that individuals consent to be involved in a BDSM scene without consenting to specific activities, as this forms part of the erotic experience for them. There can be instances, as with any sexual community, where problematic issues arise.

However, for BDSM, non-consent is frequently positioned as the norm by the lay media. A common misunderstanding is that because of the nature of the sexual

practices, many of the activities are forced upon individuals against their will. This is not the case. The BDSM community places safety and consent as central to enjoyment, and the slogans ‘safe, sane and consensual’ (SSC) and ‘risk aware consensual kink’ (RACK) express this clearly. These issues of consent and safety will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

1.3 Pathologising perspectives

For many years academic focus on BDSM has centred on its categorisation as a form of psychopathology; a notion stemming from the medicalised conceptualisation of sex held by Victorian sexologists. Indeed, BDSM features as a classification of psychiatric disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV) (APA 2000) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10) (World Health Organisation 1992). Despite the lack of evidence supporting this perspective (Gosselin & Wilson 1980), practitioners of BDSM are considered in the same terms as rapists, paedophiles and murderers. Foucault (1978) argued that notions of perverse forms of sexuality are the product of the exercise of power by the ruling classes for the purpose of self-affirmation. The knowledge of sex by more powerful members of society contributed to the development of a normalisation of human sexuality and therefore determined what was ‘normal’ and what was considered ‘pathological’.

Spinelli (2006) argues that Victorian assumptions and biases about sex continue to dominate Western views on sexuality, including what are considered ‘normal’ and ‘perverted’ sexual activities. The Victorians examined sexuality in terms of diseases, illnesses and cures to distinguish between the ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. Spinelli (2006) also notes that unless the purpose of sex is viewed as simply a means to conceive children, (which is rarely the case in modern Western society), then biology and naturalness cannot be cited as a guide to what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviour. Certain sexual activities that were once considered to be ‘abnormal’ or ‘perverse’ are now perfectly acceptable. For example, in certain states in the U.S., oral sex between consenting adults was a criminal offence thirty years ago (Mahoney 1983), however, in Western societies this is considered acceptable sexual practice and has become normative. Spinelli (2006) adds that the basis for pathologising opinions was formed on dubious biological theories, and therefore the

tradition of categorising other forms of sexual expression as 'perverse' should be challenged. With an ever increasing body of non-pathologising work, I hope that that a progression of attitudes will result in a re-evaluation of what is currently considered 'abnormal', and BDSM will become more accepted in the same way that views on homosexuality have evolved. Giddens (1992) supports this view of evolving attitudes by highlighting the increasing individualisation of society along with a widening sphere of social acceptability, rather than something that is predetermined by biology, psychology or religion.

The ambiguous legal position surrounding the practice of BDSM serves to perpetuate pathologising perspectives. In the U.K. BDSM is not illegal, however, there are aspects of BDSM that may provoke a legal response as certain expressions of BDSM challenge the normative standard of the ways people ought to behave towards one another, which is the basis of UK law (Weait 2007). The infamous Spanner Trials are testament to this (www.spannertrust.org). In 1990 a group of sixteen gay men who were practicing consensual BDSM were prosecuted and found guilty of assault. The dominant partners were found guilty of assault while the submissive partners were found guilty of aiding and abetting assault against themselves. Some of the men were fined, and some were sent to prison (White 2006). Ridlinger (2006) also cites numerous trials of this nature in the U.S.A., where the legal status of BDSM is also unclear.

1.4 The current study

In order to investigate the lived experience of engaging in BDSM, this research employs a qualitative framework. A qualitative approach is most appropriate as its inherent flexibility and participant focused nature can capture aspects of the social world in a way a quantitative approach cannot. More specifically, a phenomenological methodology was utilised in order to elucidate the experience of BDSM participation.

The research was separated into two stages, each will be discussed in turn;

Stage 1

This stage of empirical work was designed to be exploratory in order to familiarise myself with the world of BDSM and to gain insight into what it is like to engage in

BDSM. The main aim of this stage was to focus down the wide area of interest for the purpose of honing specific research questions for the subsequent stage of work. Semi-structured interviews with five participants were analysed using the descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi 1985), and the findings were reported in the form of individual structural descriptions; these were then amalgamated into a general structure of the experience of participating in BDSM.

Stage 2

The findings from the first stage illustrated a surprising absence of accounts of eroticism. The lack of discussion of sexual pleasure and eroticism caused me to question what exactly was erotic about BDSM? Answering this question became the main aim of this stage of research. Written participant accounts were used for the purpose of tailoring interviews for each participant, based on their BDSM interests. Data were analysed phenomenologically using the template approach (King 2012). The scale and complexity of findings is testament to the rich experiential descriptions given by the participants and elucidates the eroticism of BDSM.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured around the two separate studies in order to highlight the methodological shift which arose as a consequence of the first study.

Chapter two contains a review of the literature. The background to the phenomena under investigation is detailed here. The literature review draws on research outlining the early voices in the study of BDSM and the arguments presented by the psycho-medical literature for recognising BDSM as pathological. It then provides an overview of the reconceptualisation of BDSM, focusing on BDSM and the media and BDSM as a therapeutic endeavour. This chapter will conclude by highlighting gaps in the current knowledge, thus providing justification for the research along with the general aims of the study.

In chapter three I provide a detailed exposition of phenomenology. I trace the development of the approach from its founding father Edmund Husserl, through the various evolutions and divergences into a research methodology. I will focus on the

theoretical background to the method and elucidate the philosophical underpinnings and methodological assumptions.

Chapter four deals with the methodology relating to the first stage of empirical work; here the research design and the methods utilised in stage one are detailed. The theoretical, practical and pragmatic issues are presented. I will discuss the rationale for this stage of work and introduce the descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi 1985), justifying the importance of description at this stage. The research aims of this aspect of the research are presented, and finally the ethical issues are discussed.

Chapter five contains the findings arising from the first stage of empirical work, which Giorgi refers to as the 'individual structural descriptions' of the experience of participating in BDSM. These are the particular features which are fundamental to the lived experience of the phenomenon under study. The 'general structural experience' is then presented; which is an amalgamation of the common experiential features. The chapter concludes with some personal reflections relating to conducting the research and working with the research participants.

The sixth chapter presents the methodology for the second, more focused stage of empirical work. Again, the research design and the methods employed are detailed, and changes from the design used in stage one are highlighted. The rationale for this aspect of the research is outlined, along with the sampling strategy and data collection method. The shift from a descriptive phenomenological approach to an interpretive phenomenological approach is negotiated here. The chapter also presents the research aims for this part of the research, along with a biographical overview of the participants. This chapter discusses the analytical method of template analysis (King 2004/2012) and the phenomenological research tool of imaginative variation. The ethical issues pertaining to this stage are addressed.

Chapters seven A and seven B contain the detailed analytical findings of the second stage of work. Due to the scale and complexity of these findings, the chapter has been portioned into two related parts. The reason behind separating the findings into two less lengthy chapters rather than maintaining one long chapter is for the purpose of ease of readability. The findings are presented in terms of themes, concluding with a reflexive theme relating to my personal contemplations on aspects of the findings.

The eighth chapter focuses on my personal reflections of stage two of the work relating to the practicalities of carrying out the research, along with some reflections on the use of the phenomenological method to explore BDSM. This material has been separated out from other methods chapters as a means of highlighting the issues arising from my use of phenomenology for other researchers.

In chapter nine the main findings are summarised, and a discussion of these findings is offered in relation to the existing literature. The original contributions to the field arising from this research are highlighted, along with the implications of the findings. The chapter closes with some conclusions drawn from the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Literature Review

This chapter will evaluate the existing research on BDSM. The literature review will present research arising from differing perspectives, exploring how this phenomenon is understood by the dominant psycho-medical perspective, and how emerging research is attempting to challenge this view. Gaps in the literature will be identified, providing a clear rationale for the research detailed in this thesis.

2.1 Foundations of contemporary understandings of sexuality

This section will outline the main developments in sexuality research, for the purpose of contextualising the topic of BDSM. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive account of sexuality theories, however, some important theories which impact on the study of BDSM will be briefly presented here. These are evolution theory, sexology, psychoanalysis and social interactionism. These are the theories that have historically influenced academic thinking and public perceptions around sex and sexuality. I will not include Foucault's or the post-structuralist theories, as these have mostly impacted upon academic and activist communities rather than on lay-understandings, however, the main ways that these approaches affect my research are highlighted later in the thesis.

The literature relating to BDSM is set in the wider tradition of sexuality research, and it is important to recognise the ways in which these theories have become cemented into mainstream knowledge. It is on the basis of theories of sexuality that many academic and lay-opinions are formed about sexual 'normality' and 'abnormality', and I intend to illustrate this by presenting an overview of the theories along with the ways that they impact on academic thinking and public perceptions of sexuality and BDSM.

The Theory of Evolution:

The Theory of Evolution as proposed by Darwin (1859) was hugely influential on understandings of the functions of sex. In *The Descent of Man*, published in 1874, Darwin argued that sexual selection was crucial to survival; the exclusive function of sex was to ensure genetic survival through the production of offspring. Evolutionary theorists contend that sexual enjoyment is simply a motivating factor to encourage more sexual activity for the purpose of reproduction. Darwin's theory is generally

supported by the academic and scientific communities, and is used to inform medicine, biology, psychology and anthropology, among other disciplines. This wide scientific acceptance of evolutionary theory also, in the main, infuses through lay-understandings of sexuality. Darwin's ideas locate heterosexuality as the norm, and position sex for the purpose of ensuring genetic continuation through biological reproduction as natural. Evolutionary psychology also places heterosexuality as central, and argues that various sexual selection processes have evolved in order for individuals to attract the most suitable mates for the purpose of reproduction and genetic continuation. This theory proposes that evolutionary mechanisms produce sex differences in terms of partner selection, sexual jealousy, reactions to infidelity and parenting (Swami 2011), once again positioning them as 'natural'. It is these notions of 'normality' and 'naturalness' which inform mainstream opinions of sexuality, and sexual behaviour which falls outside of these parameters is often labelled as 'abnormal' and 'unnatural'. Although in late modernity sex for pleasure rather than reproduction is not generally considered in terms of abnormality, societal expectations remain focused on heterosexual marriage and reproduction (Weeks 2003).

Critics of evolutionary psychology contend that it does not account for engagement in the many alternative sexual practices, such as BDSM, not intended for the purpose of reproduction (Weeks 2003). Indeed, non-penetrative sexual activities are features of individuals' sex lives, and penetrative sex is just one sexual activity along a spectrum of many. A major critique levelled against evolutionary theories is that they are simplistic and reductionist in explaining human sexuality, and cannot account for the subjective complexity of sexuality and the variety of meanings and practices encompassed in sexual practices (Abramson & Pinkerton 2002). Individuals are reduced to their biology and genetics, which are privileged above environmental experience and choice; a particularly deterministic perspective. Evolutionary theory is often misused and cited in arguments based on the naturalistic fallacy; arguments that claim validity on the basis of conclusions drawn from 'natural' facts, from the assumption that what is 'natural' in inherently right and that which is 'unnatural' is inherently wrong. I would argue that this forms the basis for many of the anti-BDSM arguments citing naturalness and abnormality as lay explanations of why the practice is 'wrong'.

Sexology:

Darwin's focus on sexual origins and taxonomies stimulated an interest in individual sexual behaviour (Weeks 2003). Victorian sexologists, such as Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing, examined 'sexual diseases' and developed a classification system for a range of 'sexual types' which are still used; namely homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual. Sexologists also categorised forms of sexual desire including sadomasochist and fetishist, and situated these as perversions in need of treatment and cure (Bristow 2011). Sexologists assumed that a sexual perversion was an illness over which the individual had little control, and perpetuated the view that sexual perversions were pathological (Krafft-Ebing for example labelled homosexuals as abnormal degenerates). Various sexual taxonomies were produced, each explaining in detail the definitions of sexual perversions and pathologies, the most well known of which is Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis,* which will be discussed later in this chapter. Other sexologists including Bloch, Fréré and Moll attempted to elucidate the 'abnormal' sexual practices of both humans and animals, and expose the various sexual perversions and degenerations that existed (McLaren 1999). In the main, the origins of the psycho-medical perspectives towards BDSM remain situated in Victorian sexology. The very notion that certain sexual behaviours and activities are 'abnormal' and 'pathological' originated with early sexology and these notions still exist within academia and medicine, as do the detailed classification systems in the form of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM) and *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD). As a result of these perpetuated psycho-medical perspectives, lay-opinion tends to concur with the 'experts', resulting in a negatively biased public recognitions of 'perverted' sexual practices such as BDSM.

There is no doubt that early sexology was pioneering, and was highly influential in enabling a more open discussion and debate around sex. Some sexologists, such as Ellis and Hirschfeld, were far more understanding and sympathetic towards non-heteronormative sexualities. However, the main legacy left by these early sexologists is the idea of the sexual perversions. Modern sexology continues to consider sexual normativity and orgasm to be centrally important, and in many cases non-normative sexuality is pathologised (Tiernan & McAuliffe 2009). According to Weeks (2010), sexology remains preoccupied with quantifiable data and tends to group sexual

activity under headings such as ‘frequency of sexual partners’, ‘normative orientations’ and ‘fertility’, thus aligning sexual behaviour with presumed natural conditions, which propagates public perceptions of sexual ‘naturalness’. It is the case that many sexologists offer no insight into the cultural or social conditions that influence notions of sexuality, and simply focus on its medicalisation (Weeks 2010).

Psychoanalysis & Freud:

Psychoanalysis was the first theoretical perspective to offer an account of the reasons why sexuality should be understood separately to reproduction. As a result of this separation, psychoanalysts were able to formulate developmental models tracing erotic pleasure to infancy. Psychoanalysis had a great impact on academic thinking at the time, and theorists such as Stoller and Benvenuto continue to study sexuality from this perspective. Freud (1920/1953) argued the conventional perception stating that the desire for opposite-sex relationships emerges at puberty and leads to reproduction was too narrow to account for human sexuality. Freud (1920/1953) contended there are three neglected issues that sexuality studies had not accounted for. He noted that homosexuality was widespread, that some individuals disregard their sexual organs or their usual use, and finally, that young children frequently take interest in their genitals. As a result of these observations, Freud (1920/1953) concluded that sexual life begins in infancy, that the ‘genital’ and ‘sexual’ have different meanings, and finally that sexual pleasure involves the development of erogenous zones that may or may not lead to reproduction. Freud’s thinking was particularly innovative, as he widened notions of what could be considered sexual, however, Freud also positioned individuals as damaged if they failed to successfully progress through the various stages and complexes he proposed.

Freud (1905/1962) discussed how the unconscious represses various sexual drives in order for the individual to maintain their identity. He theorised two independent structures: the Oedipus Complex and the Castration Complex, which became the foundation to his exploration of sexuality (1920/1953). Freud dismissed sexologists’ accounts of sexuality as narrow, and also opposed evolutionary theorists, arguing that individuals’ sex lives frequently involve behaviours not related to reproduction. Freud (1920/1953) focused on four bodily areas he contended were connected with

sexual pleasure and were derived from universal biological functions; the mouth, the anus, the phallus and the genitals. Infants progress through five phases, referred to as psychosexual stages, to achieve normative (hetero) sexual development. Freud theorised that children must progress through these stages, known as the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital, to ensure normative sexual development; which for him was a heterosexual orientation.

The Oedipus Complex (1920/1953) accounts for male children's psychosexual development, and is experienced during the phallic stage of development. First, the child perceives his mother as the object of sexual attraction. This however, is expected to arouse the father's anger and rivalry, and the child predicts that this will result in his own castration. The child internalizes the rules pronounced by his father, and thus identifies with him. This results in the formation of the super-ego. The father now becomes the figure of identification; as the child wants to avoid castration, he relinquishes the attraction for his mother, shifting his sexual attention to alternative objects of desire. If this stage is negotiated successfully, according to Freud, the child will enter a period of latency before puberty, when the child then becomes predisposed to heterosexual desire. Female sexuality is more problematic for Freud, as female children must negotiate the Oedipus Complex differently from male children. Later in his career Freud, in collaboration with Jung, developed the Electra Complex to account for female psychosexual development, although it is considered to be more ambiguous than the Oedipus Complex (1920/1953). Freud (1905/1962) contended that any deviation from the prescribed psychosexual stages will result in some manifestation of psychopathology.

Most strands of psychoanalysis continue to frame the heterosexual individual as being 'normally' developed, while non-heterosexual sexualities are considered 'deviant'. This contributes to the naturalistic fallacy argument I mentioned earlier; Freud's ideas of instinctual drives and successful negotiation of natural stages and complexes has permeated into societal attitudes. Although psychoanalytical perspectives have less influence on academic thinking than previously, strands of modern psychoanalysis that continue to pathologise non-normative sexuality and sexual practices attempt to treat and cure through psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Psychoanalysis is responsible for contributing to the mass of literature which

positions such individuals as sad, mad or bad, reinforcing perspectives of deviance and abnormality which inform public opinion.

Social interactionism:

Gagnon and Simon (1973) argued that sexual expression and activity were akin to any other social process; they are learned interactions. The psychoanalytical concepts of libido and instinct drives were rejected in favour of a scripting approach to sexuality. In contrast to many previous theories of sexuality, the scripting approach did not examine the sexual in terms of pathology, normality or deviance, aiming instead to understand all aspects of sexuality. The complexity and variety of sexual interactions cannot be attributed to nature or morality, rather, the act of sex requires a system of complex social learning which enables the existence of multiple sexual meanings in a range of situations. According to Gagnon and Simon, it is the preoccupation with 'naturalness' that conceals the social aspects of sexuality. However, it is not 'nature' that governs sexual behaviour and sexual excitement; it is in fact learned social processes, or social scripts that are responsible for sexuality. Gagnon and Simon contend that 'all human sexual behaviour is socially scripted' (1973:262). The sources of sexual scripts originate in the applications of social attributes; hence it is the social aspects of sexuality rather than the physical aspects which provide the sexual script.

For Gagnon and Simon (1973), particular scripts are learned for all behaviours, and it is the script which defines the situations, the actors and the behaviours which are appropriate for particular circumstances, including sexual circumstances. Gagnon and Simon (1973) claim that a sexual script contains all of the social learning related to all aspects of the sexual situation, and if the sexual script is absent then sexual activity will not occur, even when all other ingredients for sex are present. Sexual scripts provide a guide for whom to have sex with, when to have sex and in what order activities should occur as well as the instances when sexual behaviour is appropriate. Individuals involved in sexual activity do not feel that they are simply enacting a well rehearsed script however, and Gagnon and Simon theorise that scripting occurs on three levels; cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic. Briefly, cultural scripts form the basis of culturally appropriate sexual behaviour, and these cultural scripts are interpreted on both interpersonal and intrapsychic levels, which

account for the diversity and subjectivity of sexual expression. The interpersonal element of sexual scripting is responsible for the mutually shared understanding of complex sexual activities, while the intrapsychic dimension enables individuals to derive personal meanings related to eroticism and sexual arousal.

In a sexual situation, the sexual script must be present to enable the recognition that what is occurring is sexual in nature. Gagnon and Simon use the example of a gynaecological examination, which involves many of the same events and behaviours of a sexual encounter; however as the attributed social script is not a sexual script there is no resulting sense of eroticism or feelings of arousal. Gagnon and Simon (1973) propose that sources of arousal originate from a collection of complex layered symbolic meanings, which can be organised and interpreted differently by different individuals, the same act or object may hold distinct erotic meanings for the actors involved. They note that non-conventional sexual activities or behaviours, such as BDSM, involve the symbolic reinterpretation of meanings enabling a transformation into something sexually significant.

The scripting approach offered academic thinking an alternative to the pathologising perspectives of previous theoretical positions. Gagnon and Simon offered a critique of Freud's legacy and illustrated the social nature of sexuality, which was particularly influential on the work of other sexuality scholars such as Rubin, Weeks and Plummer. Although Gagnon and Simon's model did not become the dominant perspective on sexuality in the social sciences, it presented a radical approach to the conceptualisation of sexuality. In terms of public constructions of sexuality, it is difficult to estimate the effect of the sexual scripting approach. It is possible that a theory which was more accepting of sexual diversity did influence mainstream notions of sexuality, although, as illustrated in the following section, the default position is often the pathologising position.

2.2 BDSM as pathology

According to Barker, Iantaffi and Gupta (2007) BDSM is one of the most demonised forms of consensual sexuality. Sexual sadism and sexual masochism are still classified as 'paraphilias', a set of psychiatric disorders within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM-IV), in need of treatment and cure (Langdridge & Barker 2007). Abramson and Pinkerton (2002)

note that there is a duality surrounding sexuality; the aspect of sex for procreation and the aspect of sex for pleasure. They argue that there has always been tension between the procreative and pleasurable aspects of sex, and the failure to resolve this conflict has resulted in pathologising certain types of non-reproductive sexual enjoyment. Victorian sexologist Krafft-Ebing's work, *Psychopathia Sexualis,* published in 1886, constructed various sexual behaviours, including sadomasochism, as pathological, and this legacy remains the basis for the continued perception of consensual BDSM as a pathology (Beckmann 2001). Krafft-Ebing was the first to employ the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' drawing on the work of the Marquis de Sade, whose writings contained frequent instances of sexual brutality, and von Sacher-Masoch, who explored his own interest in pain and submission through his novels. Spinelli (2006) argues that Western views regarding 'normal' and 'perverted' sexual relationships and activities continue to be informed by Victorian assumptions about sex. Kleinplatz and Moser (2005) make a similar point, arguing that Western clinicians consider normative sexuality as monogamous, procreation-oriented, young and able-bodied. In addition, Willig (2008b) argues that many psychologists perceive 'risky' sexual practices, such as BDSM, to be manifestations of pathologies within the individual because 'normal' individuals would not behave in a manner that risked their health. Behavioural choices that challenge health models lead to a conceptualisation of these 'risky' behaviours as a product of psychopathology. Willig (2008b) contends however, that there exist various and diverse rationalities behind engaging in the behaviours.

Unfortunately, research examining criminal sexual behaviour, such as rape and sexually oriented murder contribute to the notion that consensual BDSM is pathological, as frequently the theorists do not make clear distinctions between consensual sexual sadism and masochism, and offenders who engage in non-consensual sexual sadism. This problem is demonstrated in the following quote taken from 'The relationship between serial sexual murder and autoerotic asphyxiation'.

> The paraphilias are sexual disorders involving recurrent, deviant fantasies, urges and behaviors [sic]. They are considered deviant according to societal norms, falling at the outer limits of the sexual behavior [sic] continuum…The findings from this study support the

> supposition that crime scene behaviors [sic] often reflect the paraphilic disturbances in those who commit serial sexual homicides (Myers et al 2008:187)

Despite dominant psycho-medical discourses situating BDSM firmly within the realm of pathology, various research studies have concluded that BDSM practitioners are no more dangerous than those who do not participate in BDSM. Dietz (1990) distinguishes criminal sadists from BDSM practitioners by a number of criteria. Criminal sexual sadists secure unwilling, non-consenting participants who force sexual acts on their victims and remain emotionally detached throughout. Dietz argues that BDSM practitioners display none of these criteria, and are not psychologically abnormal; a claim supported by findings from a range of studies.

Cross and Matheson (2006) argue that, in the main, current academic understandings of BDSM position it as pathological and/or misogynistic. They highlight the consensus between medical and Freudian viewpoints which treat BDSM as a symptom of mental illness or maladjustment. For Freud (1906/1953), enjoyment of sadism resulted from a weak super-ego, enabling the id to be expressed via sexual violence, while masochists suffered from a modification of the inherent death instinct. The psycho-medical model also perceives sexual interest in BDSM as a problem to be solved (Willig 2008b). Cross and Matheson (2006) argue that some radical feminists regard BDSM to be essentially misogynistic, positioning all BDSM in terms of repetition of a heterosexual patriarchy. To assess these views of BDSM, they administered a questionnaire containing elements of the Sexual Guilt scale, the Sexual behaviours Inventory (SBI), the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI), the Feminist Attitudes Scale and the Locus of Control Scale (LOC) to 93 self-identified BDSM enthusiasts. The results indicated that none of the academic perspectives of pathology or misogyny were supported by the data. Similarly, Connolly (2006) tested 32 self-identified practitioners of BDSM for types of psychopathology including personality disorders, obsessive-compulsion, psychological sadism and masochism and post traumatic stress disorder by administering a questionnaire and psychometric tests. Connolly concluded that on measures of clinical psychopathology and severe personality pathology, the sample was comparable to published test norms and to DSM IV estimates for the general population. Denman (2004) distinguishes between transgressive and coercive sex,

describing transgressive sex as sexual behaviour that attracts social disapproval or legal sanction, whereas coercive sex involves activities in which one party has not consented. Denman concludes there is no evidence to support a connection between transgressive sex and pathology. Despite this lack of evidence, the dominant, pathologising positions espoused regarding BDSM and its practitioners influence the perception of the general population, resulting in the perpetuation of common stereotypes and negative views.

Stockwell, Walker and Eshleman (2010) used the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP) to assess the attitudes of non-BDSM identified individuals and BDSM-identified individuals towards mainstream sexual terms and BDSM-related terms. Results indicated that the group who had no experience of BDSM exhibited a preference for mainstream sexual terms, and displayed a negative attitude towards the BDSM terms. The BDSM-identified group exhibited positive attitudes towards both sets of sexual terms. Stockwell, Walker and Eshleman (2010) argue that increased exposure to, or experience of, BDSM assists in establishing positive attitudes towards non-mainstream sexual practices. Yost (2009) arrives at a similar conclusion while developing the Attitudes about Sadomasochism Scale (ASMS), which attempts to measure stereotypical and prejudicial attitudes towards non-traditional sexual practices. The ASMS was administered to a sample of 213 students. These results indicate that practitioners of BDSM are considered to be overtly violent, aggressive or passive depending on sexual role assumed, and possessed undesirable attributes. BDSM activities occurring during sexual encounters were judged to be unacceptable, though Yost considers this to be as extension of anti-gay, lesbian and bisexual prejudices which were also questioned during the assessment. In line with the previous study, Yost (2009) reported that participants who had prior knowledge of BDSM, for example via their own involvement or the involvement of a friend, displayed more positive attitudes towards BDSM. The more participants knew about BDSM prior to the study, the more positive their attitudes were, which is consistent with the notion that increased knowledge leads to a more realistic and accurate perception of BDSM. I argue that it is necessary to conduct non-pathologising research into this phenomenon in order to challenge the perceived link with mental illness and criminality.

To summarise, evidence illustrates that less knowledge of BDSM is related to more negative attitudes and misunderstandings; by engaging in non-pathologising research it is possible that these negative perceptions will become weakened and eventually replaced by more tolerant attitudes. Currently, BDSM-identified individuals are at risk of victimisation and discrimination as a result of these prevalent negative perceptions. Stiles and Clark (2011) investigated the difficulties that arise from being a member of a stigmatised subculture, using a qualitative framework of interviews and observational data obtained from seventy three BDSM-identified individuals. One of main issues reported by participants was the need to maintain a level of secrecy regarding their BDSM proclivities. The findings of the study revealed that fear of negative consequences was the main reason behind concealing BDSM-related interests, and various methods of stigma management were employed to do this. Stiles and Clark outline five levels of concealment ranging from 'absolute concealment' to 'fractional concealment', with each level revealing more information to others regarding participants' interest in BDSM. The final, sixth level was 'open' indicating no concealment. The primary reason for the concealment was identified as for self-protection; participants were concerned about stigmatisation, resulting in threats to family life, friendships and job security. I contend that it is unfair that as a result of the stigma and stereotyping attached to BDSM, and proliferated by the psycho-medical literature, individuals with an interest in BDSM must employ complex stigma and impression management strategies in order to protect themselves against discrimination and victimisation.

2.3 Feminism & BDSM

The relationship between BDSM and feminism has a long and convoluted history. Again, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail all of the developments and key players in the various debates and the acrimonious sex wars of the '70s and '80s, however I will present an overview of the main issues and points of dispute relevant to this thesis. Broadly speaking, there are two feminist camps; the pro-sex and anti-SM positions. Briefly and rather crudely, the pro-sex camp argue that BDSM is an example of healthy sexual agency while the anti-SM camp contend that any and all instances of BDSM perpetuate the power differences and inequalities between men and women (Deckha 2011). The mutual exclusivity of the anti-SM and pro-sex

approaches was central to the feminist sex wars, and still remains valid to anti-SM feminists and academics (Ritchie & Barker 2005).

The main points of the anti-SM feminist argument claim that all forms of BDSM are incompatible with feminism because BDSM represents repetition of violent heteropatriarchal relationships. Califia (1980) contends that BDSM is perceived to be the essence of misogyny, sexism and violence by anti-SM feminists, such as Dworkin and Griffin, who argue that lesbian BDSM is symptomatic of self-hatred and internalised homophobia (Ritchie & Barker 2005). Pro-sex feminists argue that sexual freedom is a centrally important element of women's liberation, and consensual BDSM is a valid form of female sexual expression (Rubin 1984). Using consent as a defence against these claims is dismissed by anti-SM feminists, who contend that the issue of consent simply permits the physical enacting out of the internalised hatred (Deckha 2011). Anti-SM feminists also claim that apparent consent is utilised for the purpose of concealing the operation of sexual power, and argue that consensual contracts between men and women can never be equitable (Califia 2000). By engaging in BDSM these inequalities are internalised and replicated, thus reinforcing heteropatriarchy (Langdridge 2006).

Research conducted with members of the BDSM community refute anti-sex feminist approaches to BDSM; Taylor and Ussher's (2001) findings highlighted the use of BDSM to ridicule, undermine and destroy patriarchal power, while Ritchie and Barker (2005) report that engaging in BDSM can make explicit concealed gender dynamics. The pro-sex feminists argue that female practitioners of BDSM have something that oppressed women do not; choice. This is what separates women's consensual BDSM from subjugated experiences (Ritchie & Barker 2005). Califia (1980) contends that sexual roles during BDSM are acquired rather than forced upon individuals, which is situated in opposition to the women whose world is confined to housework, sex and childbirth and who cannot exhibit choice as a result of the operation of sexual power. Ritchie and Barker (2005) concur, reporting that choice was a feature of their research findings; the choice to submit is present during BDSM but this is absent in male dominated society. Moore and Reynolds (2004) argue that the many women reporting positive and fulfilling heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian BDSM experiences are ignored by the radical, separatist branch of the feminist movement. Moore and Reynolds posit that this does not represent the claim made by anti-SM

and anti-pornography feminists that they support and recognise women's voices. It appears as though the voices of some women are privileged over the voices of others by anti-sex feminists.

There is a growing body of research aiming to challenge the connections between BDSM, misogyny and pathology, and to explore BDSM practices and communities from a non-pathologising perspective (Langdridge & Barker 2007). However, despite increasing acceptance from academic circles, the general public remains far less accepting; continually informed by the media, the psycho-medical profession, anti-SM feminist discourse and religious organisations claiming that BDSM is an unnatural and/or repressive sexual practice (Yost 2009, Stiles & Clark 2010). I speculate that reconceptualising BDSM may assist in altering these attitudes and lead to a less misinformed view of BDSM and its associated practices.

2.4 Reconceptualising BDSM

Research investigating BDSM in a non-pathologising manner has been conducted from various theoretical and methodological perspectives. I will present an overview of some of these perspectives, examining the early voices in BDSM research and more recent literature, which understands the problematic nature of categorising BDSM as pathological and instead conceptualises the phenomenon in different ways.

2.4.1 Early voices

Stoller's (1975) work examining BDSM related fantasy and the erotic imagination provided a rich and empathic account aimed at understanding those who participate, even recognising the concept of 'consensual' BDSM (Stoller 1991). Despite drawing on the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, frequently referring to 'perversion', Stoller (1975) did not consider perversion in terms of a description of behaviour. Butt (2005) re-examined Stoller's (1975) research from a phenomenological perspective, and argues that it attempts to make sense of the erotic imagination in a way that does not pathologise BDSM. Stoller argued that perversion is ubiquitous; that more or less every person and every erotic act can be described as 'perverse'. Butt (2005), draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to understand this point, and argues that the ambiguity of the lived world enables individuals to experience a host of opposing

emotions together, as is often experienced during BDSM; for example feelings of humiliation and embarrassment coupled with sexual excitement and anticipation. Stoller‘s (1975) work is certainly ambiguous; his persistence in the use of psychoanalytic discourse and the language of pathology appears contradictory to his sympathetic portrayal of BDSM enthusiasts. However, this early research is useful in that it exposed the workings of the erotic imagination, illustrating the ubiquitous nature of what Stoller referred to as ‘perversion’ (Butt 2005).

Rubin argued in favour of a theory of sex which aimed to ‘identify, describe, explain and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression’ (1984: 275). According to Rubin, however, particular aspects of Western thought restrain the development of such a theory, and as a result perpetuate commonly held assumptions about normative sex. She argues that in Western cultures, there is a hierarchy of sexual value which ranks and categorises sex as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, the more normative the sexual behaviour, the more elevated the position. ‘Good’ sexuality that is highly ranked should be marital, heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial. Ranked low on the hierarchy of sexual values are behaviours which are unmarried, homosexual, non-procreative, commercial or involving the use of pornography, sex toys and unusual roles. BDSM falls well out of Rubin’s ‘charmed circle’ of sexual behaviours and languishes very near the bottom of the hierarchy, in the ‘outer limits’. Rubin contends that there is a need for an anthropological understanding of different sexual cultures, to move towards an inclusive sexual theory. Reflecting on ‘Thinking Sex’, Rubin (2010) reinforces this point, calling for a building of coalitions through mutual respect and appreciation of differences in order to understand the complexity and nuances of sexuality and to resist dogma and oversimplification. Rubin’s work is effective in examining the various discourses surrounding sexuality and highlighting the ways sexuality is categorised. However the hierarchy presents a particularly American view. Although Rubin applies her model to the Western world, it does not account for the cultural differences that exist between Western countries and is in danger of overgeneralising. Widmer, Treas and Newcomb (1998) argue that variations in attitudes towards sexual practices and activities are evident among different Western cultural groups, Rubin’s hierarchy may not be as applicable to less conservative Western countries.

2.5 Sexual stories

Plummer (1995) argues that at the dawn of the 21st century, sex has become the Big Story. The once limited nature of storytelling has become revolutionised by a sexualised media; modern methods of communication, such as television and the internet, have enabled once constrained sexual stories to reach the masses. Plummer posits that people are 'narrators', and the proliferation of sexual stories has awarded such narratives a celebrated privilege in modern society, with people urged to 'tell all' about their sex; *'We have become the sexual story tellers in a sexual story telling society'* (Plummer 1995:5).

Langdridge and Butt (2004) suggest that stories of BDSM are an example of emerging sexual stories which are now having 'their time' to be heard, received and reproduced within the social world. Sex is becoming a more acceptable topic of discussion (Plummer 1995), and media representations of sex are becoming commonly visible. Beckmann (2001) contends that normative sex has long been utilised in the media in television, film and for marketing and advertising purposes, and now advertisers are exploiting the 'perversions' as an innovative marketing tool. Weiss (2006) reports that mainstream media representations of BDSM are on the increase, and these representations have saturated popular culture. BDSM-related themes can be seen in:

- Film – Secretary (2002), The Pet (2006)
- Fashion – Jean Paul Gaultier Autumn/Winter 2009-2010 collection, Gareth Pugh Spring/Summer 2007 collection
- Television – Buffy The Vampire Slayer (1997-2003), CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (2003), Bones (2007)
- Documentaries – The Sex Researchers (2011), BDSM: It's Not What You Think! (2008), Fetishes (1996)
- Literature – Different Loving: An Exploration of the World of Sexual Dominance and Submission (1993), Concertina: The Lives and Loves of a Dominatrix (2007), A Breed Apart (2011)
- Music – Placebo – Leni (2000), Britney Spears – Slave for U (2001), Rihanna – S&M (2011)

- Marketing – Häagen-Dazs ice cream (1996-1997), H&M (2007) Wonderful Pistachios (2009)

According to Weiss, this increased visibility does not result in progressive attitudes of acceptance however, instead these media representations serve to reinforce sexual boundaries. Weiss (2006) concluded that mainstream media representations lead either to; acceptance of BDSM via normalisation, (which implies that BDSM is only acceptable within normative sexuality), or understanding via pathologising, (which suggests that BDSM is the symptom of a damaged mind). Wilkinson (2009) agrees, arguing that only certain forms of BDSM have become visible, and only on limited conditions. She contends that the very reason such imagery is included in commercials is precisely because of the controversy it will court, leading to increased publicity for the advertiser and product. I contend that such depictions in the media actually serve to reinforce the 'otherness' of some BDSM practices. Barker, Iantaffi and Gupta (2007) argue it is BDSM imagery, rather than the sexual practices, that have become mainstreamed, while 'real' BDSM practitioners remain marginalised. Weiss concurs, contending that representations of BDSM in the media allow safe exploration of the unusual and the kinky from a secure normative position. Wilkinson (2009) however, celebrates the inclusion of mild BDSM representations in the mainstream, arguing that a diluted version is preferable to no version. Califia and Sweeny state conversely,

> While it's nice to have people admire our clothes and to hear jokes about handcuffs during prime time these media references too often include damaging and dangerous stereotypes about us. When latex, leather and metallic accessories are taken out of context, we get ripped off so the viewers at home can be titillated. (1996: xiv)

Weiss (2006) examined non-practitioners' understandings of representations of BDSM in the film '*Secretary*', and concluded that the portrayal of the characters' BDSM relationship was domestic and sanitised. Weiss argued that in '*Secretary*' BDSM was not represented as something genuinely subversive, erotic or fun, instead the film conformed to the safe, romantic archetype. Burr (2006) examined representations of BDSM in the television sci-fi series '*Buffy the Vampire Slayer'*, a show praised by academics for its rejection of stereotypical gender roles. Burr's

(2006) findings concluded that despite the positive portrayal of women and the inclusion of *some* non-normative relationships, BDSM was depicted as being aligned with evil or pathology. It is also noteworthy that often increased visibility goes hand in hand with increased antagonism (Weiss 2006). Wilkinson (2009) posits that another issue regarding increased visibility is the link to increased normalisation. The increased visibility of the diluted version of BDSM could lead to this account becoming normalised and accepted, while less visible forms of BDSM remain 'othered' and demonised. It would appear that the media representations of BDSM are superficially less condemning of milder practices, however, only 'acceptable' forms of the phenomenon are depicted favourably.

2.6 Current research

Research conducted mainly during the last decade or so has broadened its focus, and there now exists a variety of studies investigating various aspects of the BDSM subculture. Although the literature is not extensive, focuses include, but are not limited to, BDSM practices, BDSM interactions, and the characteristics of BDSM practitioners. The range of research methods has also expanded to include qualitative studies, as well as the traditional quantitative methodologies. Both approaches can achieve informative and interesting results and findings, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of this phenomenon and illuminating the complexity of BDSM.

A number of studies have attempted to elucidate the characteristics of BDSM engagement, and although these do not focus on the lived experience of BDSM participation, they are centred on the direct experiences of BDSM practitioners. Alison, Santtila, Sandnabba and Nordling (2001) distributed a questionnaire to 162 male and 22 female participants for the purpose of mapping the relationships between the individual acts engaged in by members of the BDSM community. Taken from previous research, four sexual themes were used to categorise participants' sexual behaviour: hypermasculinity; which involved acts including watersports, rimming and fisting; the administration of pain, which included acts such as electrocution, caning and hot wax; humiliation, which involved verbal humiliation, flagellation and gagging; physical restriction, which included wrestling, bondage and chains. Results indicated that both heterosexual men and women engaged in

significantly more behaviours related to the humiliation region of the map, while gay men engaged in significantly more behaviours related to the hypermasculinity region. Alison et al concluded that the four sexual themes were qualitatively different, and the various facets of BDSM adopt different functions and meanings for men and women. Santilla, Sandnabba, Alison and Nordling (2002) next examined how the behaviours contained within the four thematic categories represented different scales of intensity. They investigated behaviours within a particular sexual scenario and how the behaviours progressed over several encounters. The aim was to understand whether there is an ordered structure for BDSM behaviours, therefore attempting to reveal a specific order to behaviours and whether certain BDSM behaviours would usually proceed others with a higher intensity. Santilla et al concluded that there is a specific cumulative pattern for BDSM behaviours, and activities are not combined randomly during scenes. They compared the cumulative behavioural structures to sexual scripts.

Expanding on this research, Nordling, Sandnabba, Santtila and Alison (2006) examined the relationship between sexual orientation and sadomasochistic preferences. A sample of 162 self-identified males, recruited via BDSM organisations, completed a questionnaire that was specifically formulated for this research study. It was reported that gay males had their first BDSM experience at an older age than their heterosexual counterparts. There were clear differences in the preferences of gay and heterosexual men in this particular study, with gay respondents favouring leather, anal sex, dildos, specialist equipment, wrestling and uniform scenes. Heterosexual proclivities were focused on verbal humiliation, sensory deprivation, cross dressing and role playing. Gay men were sadistically orientated with a preference for masculinisation of their sexual behaviour, while heterosexual men adopt more submissive roles with an emphasis on humiliation and pain. These studies suggest that BDSM can be conceptualised as a set of inter-related behaviours, where individuals give different prominence and personal meanings to the sexual themes.

My review of the literature suggests that there is less research exploring women's BDSM behaviour and experiences, and women are certainly neglected in the Alison et al studies mentioned above, which can lead to a research bias privileging male viewpoints and experiences above those of women. Tomassilli, Golub, Bimbi and

Parsons (2009) administered a survey to 347 self-identified lesbians and bisexual women in order to explore the prevalence of ‘kinky’ sexual behaviours. As part of the ‘kinky’ behaviours, the authors included four activities; bondage or domination, sadomasochism, asphyxiation or breath play and photo or video exhibitionism. (For the purposes of this literature review, the results related to exhibitionism will not be reported as this phenomenon is generally not considered to be part of BDSM). The sample population was of self-identified lesbians and bisexuals, rather than self-identified BDSM practitioners, in order to investigate individuals’ behaviour who may not identify with a particular subculture and also to enable comparison between those who do not participate and the women that do. Tomassilli et al (2009) reported that nearly half of the women questioned had engaged in some ‘kinky’ behaviour as outlined by the authors, and bisexuals were more than twice as likely to have participated as lesbian women. Interestingly, despite reporting their engagement in these behaviours, half of the women did not recognise those behaviours as BDSM. The women that had engaged in ‘kinky’ behaviour were significantly younger than those who had not, and those who had participated came out about their sexuality earlier and were younger at their same-sex sexual debut than non-participators.

Kleinplatz and Moser (2006) examined common manifestations of BDSM related interactions, while recognising that the fine grained differences between individuals’ desires can never be categorised completely. The manifestations identified were roles; the adoption of the dominant or submissive role, with some participants opting to adopt these roles flexibly by switching. The researchers note that the adoption of the same label does not suggest that practitioners attach identical meanings to their labels however. For example it is noteworthy that some participants who use bondage enjoy tight bonds that prohibit movement, while others favour looser restraints that allow struggle, highlighting the variation in personal meaning of the experience. Discipline is a feature of a BDSM interaction according to Kleinplatz and Moser, where the notion of being disciplined due to a violation of some pre-arranged rule is erotic. Another key manifestation is dominance and submission, and the feelings obtained from these roles can be the source of the eroticism. There must be a clear power dynamic that resonates with the participants present in the experience. Physical pain is identified as a common manifestation of BDSM practice, although this is a specific type of pain within the BDSM, pain outside of the sexual context is

rarely eroticised. Kleinplatz and Moser (2006) contend that humiliation is the most problematic area of BDSM to accurately describe. The subjectivity of humiliation is emphasised, as what one individual considers to be deeply humiliating has no effect at all on another. The researchers argue that fetishes, which are characterised by sexual arousal towards an inanimate object, are commonplace in BDSM interactions. They note that the objects alone do not usually elicit arousal, but do so if they are worn and/or used by a partner. Finally, Kleinplatz and Moser claim that the relationships involved in BDSM play a key part in the interaction. They contend that there is no typical BDSM relationship, and that any and all combinations are possible, including alternative relationship styles, a triangle for example, where all three partners interact sexually. The complexity of BDSM interactions is highlighted through these categorisations, and it is recognised that there is a range and intricacy of sexual themes that constitute varied and subjective experiences (Kleinplatz & Moser 2006). From their previous research Moser and Kleinplatz (2007) produced a taxonomy in order to categorise the subjectivities involved in BDSM, capturing the subtle differences that exist beneath the broad practice headings; they examined roles, commonalities, bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, symbols, physical pain, humiliation, fetishes and relationships. Moser and Kleinplatz argue that due to the complexity of BDSM, this taxonomy is necessary in order to account for the huge differences and tiny nuances in BDSM. They do recognise however, that creating a comprehensive taxonomy is challenging for the very reasons highlighted. Weinberg (2006) contends that the same sexual interests can be expressed in divergent manners, with different meanings for those involved. I concur with Moser and Kleinplatz's point regarding the usefulness of a classification of practices for the purposes of explicating the diverse and subtle differences that are present in BDSM. I would also argue that such a taxonomy would be of benefit to researchers and assist them with studying this phenomenon. However, by categorising behaviours and activities there is a risk of excluding, and therefore 'othering' individuals and activities that do not conform to the categories outlined.

Research utilising surveys and questionnaires can be particularly useful when studying 'invisible' populations or groups that are difficult to access. The BDSM subculture is one such group, often requiring an establishment of trust, or interaction over a long time period with key community members before entry is permitted.

Questionnaires and surveys have the advantage of allowing anonymous responses, eliminating the extensive process of negotiation often required to access this community. It is possible to gain statistical and demographic information about the population under study, as well as assess attitudes and behaviours, for example questionnaire research has revealed that BDSM practitioners tend to be white, well educated and have higher than average incomes (Sandnabba, Santtila & Nordling 1999, Moser & Kleinplatz 2006). However, aside from the low return rate common with questionnaire research, the main issue with this method of data collection is that the researcher is removed from the process. Relying on accounts given in a brief questionnaire does little to illuminate the subtleties of BDSM, and it is usually not possible for the researcher to follow up on interesting responses. Removing the researcher in this way places an additional barrier between researcher and researched, and also eliminates the possibility of direct, first-hand accounts from participants. Although such studies can reveal useful information about BDSM, the quantitative approach cannot explore the depth of individual experiences. The following research adopts a qualitative approach to studying BDSM in an attempt to understand the meanings and subjectivity of this phenomenon for practitioners.

Ernulf and Innala (1995) conducted a content analysis on 154 messages from an online bondage discussion group, in order to investigate how participants experienced sexual stimulation from bondage and the differences between individual participants' sexual encounters with bondage. Three quarters of the posts were written by males, with the majority identifying as heterosexual. The messages studied described bondage in a variety of terms, which again emphasises the subjectivity involved in BDSM. Many of the posters distinguished between bondage and other BDSM-related activities such as discipline, dominance and submission and sadomasochism, although in a third of message board posts sadomasochism was referred to as occurring alongside bondage. The posts commonly described bondage as play, or mentioned that it was representative of an exchange of power. Less common were descriptions of bondage as a means to enhance sexual pleasure or fantasies, or concentrated on the physical sensations of being bound. Issues of safety and trust frequently occurred in the posts, including information regarding the rules and standards of play and advice regarding the consequences of rule breaking. Also posted were discussions of the characteristics of a 'good' top or bottom, again

with safety and trust as central to descriptions, along with sensitivity and care. This study was conducted in 1995, when the internet was a relatively new phenomenon for laypeople and access was still restricted by economic status or geographical location.

The technological advancement and increased accessibility of the internet along with the development of broadband has enabled individuals with unconventional sexual interests to connect with others with similar proclivities. As a result BDSM websites, including those containing personal advertisements have increased. Wysocki and Thalken (2007) conducted a content analysis of personal ads that appeared on a BDSM/alternative lifestyle website in the form of member profiles. They analysed eighty profiles in total, forty five belonged to men and thirty five were posted by women, with posters ranging in age from nineteen to sixty six. The main difference that arose between the previous study by Ernulf and Innala was the inclusion of photographs. Technological advancement has enabled individuals to upload images onto the internet relatively quickly and easily; a process not available at the time of Ernulf and Innala's study. The photographs appeared alongside the text and formed part of the personal advertisement, and more than one photo could be included. Many of these photographs were face shots, and more women than men included facial photographs on their profile. Also common to women's profiles were photographs of themselves wearing lingerie or BDSM-related clothing, and although present, photographs of naked breasts and buttocks appeared less frequently. Wysocki and Thalken reported that images of exposed vaginas were particularly rare, which is in contrast to the male profiles. Genital photographs appeared regularly on profiles, the most common being photos of erect penises, or masturbation shots; also the size of the penis was frequently mentioned in the textual portion of the advert. More women than men discussed enjoyment of the submissive role in their profiles, while a higher portion of men reported favouring switching between both roles. The nature of the interaction varied between profiles, with a specific group requesting erotic internet based exchanges only. This group discussed erotic email communication along with performing and watching sexual behaviour via webcam, and many stated that they had no inclination to meet with their online partners. The other main group were seeking face-to-face interactions for the purpose of actively engaging in BDSM activities. The range of activities reported

in the profiles were typical to BDSM; interest was expressed in role play, bondage, domination and submission, humiliation, rape scenes and cross dressing. As in Ernulf and Innala's (1995) analysis, rules were frequently mentioned as part of the profiles, such as holding the initial meeting in a public place and always taking a mobile phone to meetings.

Moving away from the content analysis of message boards and personal advertisement, but remaining with web based research; Langdridge and Butt's (2004) study used a hermeneutic phenomenological framework to examine BDSM websites in order to investigate the discursive constructions of sadomasochistic identities. A systematic search of the internet was conducted over a period of two years, using three major search engines and a wide variety of search terms and key words also links from particular sites were followed to further expand the search. A considerable amount of useful and diverse material was generated including; personal accounts, health education resources, support groups, LGB resources, lifestyle magazines, academic writing and pornographic writing and no distinctions on the basis of sexuality or lifestyles. Using Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion, Langdridge and Butt examined the meanings of sexual stories of dominance and submission, and identified two main discursive themes; rejecting pathology and negotiating consent. The studied texts actively rejected the common psychological objections that BDSM is a form of psychopathology. Primarily, the texts rejected the notions that interest in BDSM occurs as a result to some childhood trauma, and that BDSM practitioners were incapable of forming satisfactory relationships. The issue of the negotiation of consent also emerged from the data, highlighting the explicit nature of the contracts that exist between participants. It was emphasised via the slogan 'safe, sane and consensual' that open communication and consent were fundamental to BDSM endeavours. Although this research adopted a phenomenological approach to the study of BDSM, the research focused on the experience of BDSM as represented through the medium of internet websites. This is certainly a novel and innovative method to gather data which has produced some enlightening findings, but as with the previous research, the researcher is again removed from the phenomenon under investigation. By utilising secondary resources as this study and the earlier content analysis studies have done, researchers are limited to items that have already been produced. Also, it is possible for the

researchers' own agenda to influence the types of data gathered and the analytical process, though this may also be the case during direct research with participants.

Research which involves direct, in-depth contact with participants can avoid the limitations associated with questionnaire based research and the use of secondary sources as data. The following research studies use ethnography and interviews; methods which place the researcher in direct contact with the participants, and with the phenomenon under investigation.

Little ethnographic research has been conducted which investigates BDSM. Van Lieshout (1995) examined gay cruising encounters occurring at a motorway rest area and nearby forest in The Netherlands. Van Lieshout originally frequented the area in order to meet with leather men for BDSM sex, later he became a participant observer and reported that recruiting participants was problem free due to his pre-established role. Van Lieshout described the various areas which were designated for different activities, such as making contacts and engaging in orgies, and likened these spaces to those present in leather bars. Various courting practices were followed which contained implicit rules, and if these were violated the encounter was stopped. Van Lieshout (1995) noted that sexual roles and interests are often demonstrated non-verbally via clothing, colours and the placement of symbols. Interestingly, this area served as a kind of cultural and community setting providing certain social functions, such as meeting with friends, as well as sexual functions. The social aspects were also highlighted by Moser's (1998) ethnographic research at BDSM parties, which spanned twenty years. Couples and individuals were able to meet and socialise while exhibiting their own style without fear of discovery. Moser noted that inherent rules and etiquette were always present at these parties and governed acceptable activities, prohibited activities and confidentiality. A noteworthy point from Moser's (1998) ethnographic observations is the lack of penetrative sexual intercourse taking place at these parties. This behaviour is not prohibited, yet attendees reported a preference for avoiding full sex, preferring to keep this aspect private.

Beckmann (2001) utilised a combination of feminist ethnography and unstructured interviews in order to understand the current social construction of BDSM as perverse and criminal. By becoming a participant observer, Beckmann was able to

gain access to the secretive BDSM scene in London and recruit sixteen participants for interview, as well as gather observation data over a one year period. Data were collected at BDSM parties, semi-public BDSM events and at a nightclub suggested by participants, who were men and women across sexual orientations. Beckmann's (2001) findings suggest that the traditional psychological and criminal constructions of BDSM are incorrect. Five main 'motivations' for participant engagement in BDSM were theorised by Beckmann. BDSM was framed as an alternative to genital sex, with both heterosexual and homosexual participants reporting enjoyment of non-penetrative, genitally focused sex. Interestingly, BDSM was considered a form of safer sex and a means to experience sexual pleasure while also avoiding the risk of STIs and pregnancy. Beckmann's (2001) participants also described how engaging in BDSM enabled them to experience bodily sensuality in a way not possible during vanilla sex, and the way that BDSM can act as a cathartic or relaxing experience. Finally, the lesbian and gay participants conceptualised BDSM as a way of transgressing the stereotypes of lesbian and gay sexuality that are commonly perpetuated. Beckmann concluded that these contemporary constructions of BDSM should counter the traditional medical and criminal notions, which continue to pathologise practitioners of consensual BDSM.

Ethnographic research involves direct, and often intimate, contact with participants of the BDSM subculture as researchers become deeply immersed in the social world of the participants. Researchers are able to directly interact and converse with participants as well as observe, often private, behaviour, which generates particularly rich qualitative data for analysis, and perhaps provides a more holistic perspective of the phenomenon under study. However, the main difficulty with conducting ethnographic research is gaining access to the study group, which can be particularly difficult if researching from the position of an outsider, with no prior link to the community. As mentioned, 'hidden' populations are usually secretive about their behaviour and sexual activities for fear of persecution and/or prosecution, and even when access is gained to a sexual space (a BDSM club for example), there is no guarantee that a researcher will manage to recruit participants. Also, ethnographic research can be considered ethically unsound as frequently deception is fundamental to the success of data collection and informed consent cannot be obtained from participants. Interview studies are generally judged to be more ethical

than ethnography, and although researchers can still experience difficulty with participant recruitment, this is less problematic that attempting to infiltrate a 'hidden' population.

Taylor and Ussher (2001) investigated the social construction of sadomasochism by exploring the experiences of twenty four self-identified BDSM practitioners; fourteen of whom were male and ten were female, ranging in age from twenty two to sixty five. No distinction was made regarding sexual orientation and a variety of sexualities were included. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and was interrogated using discourse analysis to identify particular themes within the data. The findings distinguished four definitional discourses that reflected the manner in which BDSM was defined by the participants. These were consensuality, an inequitable balance of power, sexual arousal and compatibility of definition. Consensuality highlights once again the importance of consent to practitioners of BDSM, as participants clearly separated these activities from coercive and forced sexual activities. The unequal balance of power during BDSM was a central feature to participants' definitions of BDSM, although whether this was fixed or fluid differed among practitioners. Sexual arousal must be present during the scene and BDSM must occur within a sexual context. Finally, compatibility of definition refers to the subjectivity in the interpretation of behaviour, participants did not all recognise the same behaviours as being BDSM-related. Taylor and Ussher highlight the importance of firmly positioning future research within the actual experiences of those who engage in BDSM, and conclude that currently there is no single psychological theory to adequately account for BDSM, a conclusion echoed by Chaline's (2007) sexual scripting approach to BDSM. While Taylor and Ussher (2001) had direct contact with participants, they employed a social constructionist methodology for their exploration of the world of BDSM, as did Beckmann's (2001) research. I contend that an approach which enables the examination of the lived experience of BDSM in real detail and depth is necessary, and has been omitted from the existing literature.

In summary, the existing literature which has researched BDSM from a non-pathologising stance has illuminated various aspects of this complex phenomenon. The quantitative investigations into BDSM have provided insight into the various BDSM-related activities and diverse sexual proclivities, while also highlighting the

role of sexual orientation in BDSM and the range of relationship styles that can exist between practitioners. Internet based research has proved a valuable contribution to studies of BDSM. By examining the content of online message boards and personal advertisements, researchers were able to examine the constructions of BDSM identities and activities. The ethnographic research, although rare, has provided useful illuminations of BDSM-related interactions between practitioners in detail. The following section will provide justification for the current study, in light of the existing non-pathologising literature.

2.7 Rationale for the current study

The existing research examining BDSM from a non-pathologising perspective has provided great insight into BDSM. These studies have shunned the stereotyped perspectives that much previous psycho-medical and criminal research have relied on and reiterated, and approached the topic from an angle which has revealed many important contributions for the field. Much of the current research on BDSM is quantitative in nature, and although qualitative investigation of BDSM is increasing, more work of this kind is necessary in order to explicate and understand the complexity of this phenomenon. Adopting a qualitative research framework recognises that the positivist and empiricist assumptions of quantitative research will produce a specific type of knowledge, one which is related to the search for 'truth' and 'facts'. Qualitative research in contrast, is concerned with meaning and the ways in which individuals make sense of their worldly experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), therefore description and interpretation are privileged while concepts of cause-and-effect are redundant.

Although the qualitative methodologies employed in existing BDSM research have generated interesting and informative findings, this review has identified that a study of the *lived experience* of BDSM is absent from the existing research. There appears to be a lack of research asking 'what is it like to participate in BDSM?' The existing literature has identified that BDSM is a particularly subjective and nuanced form of sexual expression; however, there is limited research which has attempted to explore these subjectivities in terms of individual experiences. As a result of this omission, accounts elucidating the meaning of participating in consensual BDSM are under-researched. I contend that employing a phenomenological approach to

investigate the phenomenon of BDSM as lived by participants, will help to address the gap that currently exists in the research field.

The phenomenological method is an inductive, richly descriptive research method with the aim of describing the nature of experience as it appears to experiencers; practitioners of BDSM in this case. Grounded in philosophy, phenomenological psychology is particularly concerned with the diversity and variety of human experience, and the manners in which individuals impose meanings on their worlds (Spinelli 2005);

> Phenomenology is interested in elucidating that which appears and the manner in which it appears. It studies the subjects' perspectives of their world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects' consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings. (Kvale 1996: 53)

By utilising the phenomenological method for this research the experience of BDSM *as lived* by participants will be illuminated, providing valuable and original contributions to this field.

2.8 Research objectives

The broad aim of this piece of research, therefore, is to use the phenomenological method in order to elucidate the lived experience of engaging in consensual BDSM. Encompassed within this aim are a number of general research objectives:

- To generate phenomenological understanding of the lived experience of BDSM participation.
- To explore in detail the erotic experiences of BDSM practitioners.
- To contribute to the emergent non-pathologising body of literature investigating BDSM.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has presented a review of the research literature investigating consensual BDSM. An overview of sexuality research was provided as a means to contextualise the prevalent pathologising views, which were also discussed. Early

research which reconceptualised BDSM away from psychopathology was reviewed, along with contemporary quantitative and qualitative research. The review identified an omission in the existing literature; research which investigates the lived experience of BDSM participation. This provides the rationale for the current study, which was outlined, along with the general objectives of the research. The following chapter will focus on phenomenology, explaining the grounding in philosophy and then tracing its development into a research methodology.

Chapter 3

Phenomenology

Phenomenology

Phenomenology provides the philosophical underpinning to this research. This chapter will provide an introduction to phenomenology; detailing its historical progress from the founder, Edmund Husserl, through the various developments and distinctions of the existential turn of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. It is important to recognise from the outset that phenomenology is not a single philosophical position, but a rich tapestry of approaches, thus this chapter will explore both the transcendental and existential traditions, tracing the development and diversification of the approach. This chapter will also provide a rationale for the particular phenomenological methods selected for this research, which are discussed in detail in chapters four and six.

3.1 An introduction to phenomenology

Phenomenology was developed by Continental philosophers, such as Husserl and Heidegger, during the first half of the 20th century, making it a relatively modern philosophical approach which is still expanding. Anyone encountering phenomenology for the first time is initially likely to feel confusion at the array of approaches and methods offered under the umbrella of 'phenomenology', each with differing views and opinions, along with a vast lexicon of phenomenological terminology. However, once the concepts are grasped, phenomenology offers a radical departure from conventional philosophical traditions by shifting the focus to lived human experience. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited as the founding father of the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, and it is *his* phenomenology which acts as the basis from which the other strands of phenomenology originate (Moran 2000). The various phenomenological branches, while occupying a phenomenological continuum, have developed different variations and emphasis, some of which will be discussed later in the chapter. Initially a mathematician, Husserl studied philosophy under Brantano, who was formulating a 'descriptive psychology' (Moran 2000). As a result of his studies in psychology, Husserl became disillusioned with what he termed 'psychologism', referring to the methods employed by the natural sciences as a mode of investigating human existence (Hammond, Haworth & Keat 1991). Husserl argued that the methods used by the natural sciences were not appropriate means of examining human experiences, and

proposed that a rigorous new method was required for this purpose that would focus on the 'things in their appearing' (1931/1967). This method was transcendental phenomenology.

Husserl's phenomenological focus was to describe a particular phenomenon as it appeared to the experiencer's consciousness (Hammond, Haworth & Keat 1991), aiming to identify the universal eidetic structures, or essences, of that phenomenon (Husserl 1931/1967). Husserl argued that by identifying these experiential structures, the phenomenon under investigation becomes elucidated making it possible to understand how the phenomenon appears to the consciousness of the experiencer (Husserl 1931/1967). Phenomenology is interested in direct human experience, thus questions the notion of an 'objective reality' in which the objects in the world exist independently from conscious awareness (Spinelli 2005). Husserl (1931/1967) argues that any 'true' reality would be unknowable, therefore it is the subjective human experience that becomes reality for the experiencer. It is only our experience of the world that is knowable to us, rather than some objective reality existing 'out there' (Spinelli 2005).

> *The objective is the manifest presence of what appears and can be recognised only subjectively by the person who is perceiving it*
> (Husserl, 1936/1970:314)

Husserl (1936/1970) also rejected the dualistic notion of an inner self and an external world, rendering the popular Cartesian dualism of a separate mind and body redundant to phenomenologists (Kockelmans 1994). Husserl argued that this separation is impossible as any description is always a description of an experience of *something*, as opposed to an isolated, detached observation.

3.1.1 Intentionality

The fundamental feature of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, and subsequent strands of the discipline, is the concept of intentionality. This refers to Husserl's notion that human consciousness is always directed towards something, and that consciousness and the objects of consciousness are inseparable (1936/1970). Put more simply, whenever human beings are conscious, they are always conscious *of something*. There is always a *focus* of consciousness which

exists in the world, therefore there is a relationship between consciousness and the object of consciousness, making the self and the world inseparable (Spinelli 2005). As mentioned, Husserl rejected Cartesian notions, including Descartes' view of consciousness, which argued that consciousness is directed inwards to inner states; instead Husserl proposed that consciousness was actually directed outward towards objects in the world (1931/1967). Husserl contended that if Descartes' assumptions regarding inwards directed consciousness were correct, then it would not be possible to have contact with the world because consciousness would not be intentional, and therefore would not be conscious of anything (1931/1967). Consciousness, according to Husserl (1936/1970) is turned out to the world as it is *always* focused on objects in the world. It is the relationship between an individual's consciousness and the world which Husserl wanted to study through transcendental phenomenology.

The act of being conscious of something is pre-reflective according to Husserl (Moustakas 1994), as human beings' focus is on *what* is being perceived rather than *how* it is being perceived. Husserl termed this intentionality (1936/1970). Husserl identified this as the structure of consciousness, and termed the two aspects the noesis and noema, which form intentionality (1936/1970). He argued against the traditional philosophical distinction between subjects and objects, or the knower and the known, instead describing conscious experience as a correlation between what is experienced and how it is experienced, rather than as separate processes (Moustakas 1994). Noema describes the object of consciousness; *what* is experienced, while the noesis describes the act of experiencing; *how* it is experienced.

While not to suggest that the noesis and noema are separate, Idhe (1986) uses the following representational diagram to aid understanding:

There is a correlation between what is experienced; the phenomena, and the way in which it is experienced; the subjectivity (Idhe 1986). The noesis highlights the way in

which the phenomena is experienced, for example remembering or perceiving, illustrating the way in which the object of consciousness is approached, while the noema describes the meaning of the object of consciousness (Hammond, Haworth & Keat 1991). For Husserl, the relationship between the phenomenon (the object in the world) and the way the phenomenon appears to consciousness provides insight into the intentional experience (Moustakas 1994).

3.1.2 The natural attitude & the epochē

In his work *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl presented his phenomenology as a form of transcendental idealism, which was fundamentally opposed to the philosophical realism that claimed the existence of an external world, separate to one's knowledge of it (1931/1967). Realists argue that the world will always exist independently of one's knowledge of it, and also that all objects, including human beings, can be legitimately studied by the empirical sciences to discover an objective truth about the world (Spinelli 2005). Husserl argued that people could not be separated from the world and that realism was a result of the natural attitude; everyday assumptions about the nature of the world and of reality. For Husserl (1931/1967), human existence was characterised by the natural attitude which is the most basic method of experiencing the world and includes all the assumptions and judgements made about the world. He also noted that people were unaware that they were living in the natural attitude as it is the dominant, pervasive and effortless way of being (Moustakas 1994). Husserl (1931/1967) contended that people should not take for granted the traditional concepts or principles that were established via other scientific and philosophical approaches, as these cause human beings to live in the natural attitude.

Husserl contends that the natural attitude obscures the lived experiences in the world, concealing intentional focus. He argued for a process of disengagement from the natural attitude in order to allow a neutral, unbiased exploration of the lifeworld (Hammond, Haworth & Keat 1991). Husserl (1936/1970) believed that by employing specific phenomenological methods, an unbiased view of the lifeworld could ensue. By suspending all presuppositions and judgements about everyday experiences of the world, the natural attitude will become bracketed and therefore will no longer obscure lived experience; Husserl termed this the epochē (1936/1970). The epochē

is derived from the Greek word meaning to withhold judgement or to abstain from the usual, and is used to refer to the process of attempting to suspend presuppositions regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Langdridge 2007). Once engaged in the epochē and all presuppositions and prejudgements have been suspended, it becomes possible to view phenomena from various perspectives, which in turn enable the essences, or structures, of experience to be identified. For Husserl (1931/1967), this allowed individuals to transcend their own experiences and to view the world anew, as if for the first time. This presuppositionless examination of the world would highlight the things in their appearing, thus enabling the previously obscured world to become clear (Husserl 1931/1970). The process of engaging with the epochē for the purpose of this research will be discussed further in chapter four.

The subject of engaging with the epochē, and how far complete transcendence is achievable, is widely debated among the various schools of phenomenology. There are two broad phenomenological parties with differing viewpoints regarding the epochē in practice; the transcendental school and the existential school. Transcendental phenomenologists, such as Giorgi, closely follow Husserl's work, and argue that the epochē is attainable and complete experiential transcendence is possible. Existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty however, contend that it is impossible to engage completely with the epochē as it is not possible to bracket all presuppositions about the world because people are inherently *in* the world. Existential phenomenologists instead attempt to engage with the epochē in order to become critically aware of their presuppositions and judgements about the phenomenon under investigation, and force the natural attitude to become explicit.

Husserl (1936/1970) also identified other phenomenological methods for the purpose of elucidating the manner in which phenomena appear to consciousness; the phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. Briefly, by engaging in the phenomenological reduction, phenomenologists are able to describe the experience of consciousness in as much depth as possible, having stepped outside of the natural attitude through the epochē (Spinelli 2005). Imaginative variation is a further stage aimed at explicating the structures of experience, and is best described as a mental experiment. Features of the experience are imaginatively altered in order to view the

phenomenon under investigation from varying perspectives, Husserl (1936/1970) argued that this process will reveal the essences of an experience, as only those aspects that are invariant to the experience of the phenomenon will not be able to change through the variation.

3.1.3 The lifeworld

A fundamental concept in Husserl's phenomenology is the lifeworld (or *lebenswelt*). The lifeworld appeared in its current form in Husserl's later work during the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, though it was alluded to previously (1936/1970). Husserl argued that the lifeworld was the basis of all concrete and meaningful experiences as they are experienced and perceived. It is the horizon of all experiences, and the background from which things appear meaningful (Moran 2005). Experience is grounded in everyday, lived experience of the world and meaning takes precedence. Husserl (1936/1970) conceptualised the lifeworld as pre-reflective, meaning it exists prior to any thought about it; as conscious beings, we always inhabit the lifeworld. Consciousness is directed outwards, towards the lived world (Moran 2000). Husserl described the lifeworld as a collection of overlapping worlds, rather than a single lifeworld. He argued that the 'homeworld' is that which is closest to us, containing all familiar lived experiences, which was extended to an alien or 'foreignworld' containing those unfamiliar horizons (Moran 2005). There is debate among phenomenologists whether this focus on the lifeworld was a shift away from Husserl's transcendental position, or whether it is another layer of meaning uncovered by the reduction (Macann 1993). Despite these debates, what is clear is that the lifeworld should be the foundation for all phenomenological investigations (Langdridge 2007).

3.2 The existential turn

Martin Heidegger, a pupil of Husserl, developed his own version of phenomenology, which deviated dramatically from his tutor's transcendental phenomenology. Less emphasis was placed on consciousness, and the focus became the investigation of human existence in the world, termed as *Dasein,* or being-in-the-world (Moran & Mooney 2002). There was a shift from Husserl's epistemological focus to ontological concerns as Heidegger's version of phenomenology altered from a description of consciousness to the hermeneutics of Being (Heidegger 1927/1962). *Being and*

Time, published in 1927, is regarded as one of the strongest anti-dualist investigations of human existence. It examined how humans encounter the world while always being situated in context, and at the same time projecting forward towards the future (Moran 2000). This seminal work reflected on the meanings of being human, ever entwined with the world, rejecting traditional, metaphysical methods of understanding Being. Heidegger (1927/1962) argued that this common way of investigating existence was actually an everyday set of assumptions about reality and the nature of the world. According to Heidegger (1927/1962), these need to be exposed simply as assumptions in order to enable the exploration of the many ways humans relate to the world. Heidegger aimed to investigate the way Being was revealed through the structures of existence, which was for Heidegger, via interpretation.

Heidegger transformed Husserl's phenomenology into a hermeneutic phenomenology, arguing that the phenomena of existence always require interpretation (Moran & Mooney 2002). Existence is not separate from the world and it cannot be accessed from objective viewpoints because it is always *someone's* existence, it is always specific to someone (Heidegger 1927/1962). Contrary to Husserl, Heidegger argued that the interpretation of existence cannot be neutral and the involvement of the 'enquirer' must be recognised. Only human beings are concerned with questioning existence, and understanding what it means to be a questioner or an enquirer reveals the exclusively human mode of being-in-the-world (Moran 2000). Arguing against the metaphysical stance taken by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, for Heidegger, existence occurs in time; it is inextricably temporal in nature, and is spread between the past, present and future while being limited by death (Macann 1993).

For Heidegger, being-in-the-world is a unitary phenomenon because humans 'dwell' in the world and are concerned about projects within the world (Moran & Mooney 2002). *Being and Time* was a radical reconceptualising of traditional philosophical approaches to human existence, and Heidegger wrote of 'destruction' and 'reconstruction' in order to get back to the things themselves; questions of existence, while also acknowledging the situatedness in history (1927/1962). By destroying the traditional, everyday meanings of existence and then recreating them, Heidegger argued that the nature of Being becomes clearer. As mentioned, existence cannot be

investigated directly because each person experiences the world in their own way, in their own mode of being. Heidegger contended that understanding human existence is not universal but specific to individuals (Macann 1993). Dasein is always entwined with the world, therefore being human is being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/1962), and people are always world-involved rather than existing side by side with the world (Moran 2000). Though traditional philosophies favoured theoretical encounters with the observed world, Heidegger (1927/1962) argued that humans' primary experience of the world is through the use and availability of objects, for tasks generated by human interests, meaning people's relation to the world is always interpretive. All experience is interpreting, and also encountering things that have already been interpreted (Moran 2000). For Heidegger, interpretation is relational through the way we interact with other people and objects, rather than distanced by verbal reflection (Moran & Mooney 2002). This permanent situatedness in the world meant that Heidegger did not believe that it was possible to transcend experience, and suspend presuppositions about the world, as Husserl's work had suggested. The epochē was a fundamental aspect of transcendental phenomenology, but was an impossible ideal for Heidegger, as a fundamental property of Dasien is that it is always *in* the world (Macann 1993).

3.2.1 Features of Dasein

Heidegger (1927/1962) detailed the key features of Dasein in *Being and Time*, outlining the elements of being-in-the-world that are fundamental to human existence. I will briefly summarise these features, drawing on Moran (2000) and Langdridge (2007):

Dasien – is the subject in Heidegger's phenomenology, it refers to individual existence, and is the person specific mode of Being. Heidegger (1927/1962) contended that humans inhabit a particular understanding of themselves, and that each individual's life consists of a set of possibilities given by the culture they were born into, as well as the ability to choose possibilities of their life. The ontic qualities of Dasien can be investigated through empirical investigation.

Temporality – is the feature concerned with time, and how people's experience of time is central to human existence because existing always involves the past, the

present and a projection of the future. Dasein is continually projecting itself towards the future and towards the many possibilities of life.

Facticity – refers to the limits of existence. Human beings are born into a world that predates their own existence, which historically and culturally limits possible ways of being.

Mood – is the basic mode of Dasein, human beings' pre-reflective way of experiencing the world. This is not a psychological state, rather it is the usual manner of being tuned in to the world, the non-reflective everydayness.

Being-towards-death – is the ultimate limit to human existence because existence always ends in death, and death is the end of all potential possibilities. This awareness is hidden until a realisation occurs due to some interference with everyday life, such as a traumatic event. The realisation of being-towards-death causes anxiety, but these emotions must be confronted while forging a meaningful life and recognising the limits and temporal nature of existence.

Care – results from Dasein's concern for things that exist in the world. Being-in-the-world means being involved in the world and engaged with other people and things.

Authenticity – the mode of being when the world is not taken for granted and Dasien recognises the inescapable reality of being-towards-death. Humans usually live inauthentically in the world, living in common everydayness with reduced anxiety, however, when confronted with being-towards-death it allows human beings to engage with the various possibilities of existence.

Being-with – emphasises the social nature of Dasein, and how the fundamental experience of being-in-the-world is always an experience of being-with others meaning all experience is relational, rather than a solitary pursuit.

Discourse – is the way human beings communicate their experience of existence. Heidegger stated 'language is the house of Being' (1927/1962: 217); through language the meaning of the world is expressed and understood.

It is apparent that Heidegger modified Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, giving it an ontological basis concerned with human existence in the world. Table two provides an overview of the main differences between the approaches;

Table 2: The main differences between Husserl & Heidegger's phenomenology (adapted from Laverty 2003)

Husserl's Phenomenology	**Heidegger's Phenomenology**
Alternatively known as transcendental or descriptive phenomenology	Alternatively known as existential or hermeneutic phenomenology
Epistemologically focused	Ontologically focused
Questions relating to knowledge	Questions relating to experiencing and understanding meaning
Not concerned with cultural or historical context	Culture and history are inseparable from existence
Concerned with *how* we know what we know	Concerned with what it means to exist in the world
The universal essence of consciousness is shared	Culture, history and language is shared
Meaning can be extricated from the experiencer	The experiencer cannot detach themselves neutrally from experience
The epochē and reduction are employed to achieve a presuppositionless state	The hermeneutic circle is employed to understand interpretive acts

This existential turn taken by Heidegger inspired various Continental philosophers, such as Sartre and de Beauvoir, to further modify phenomenology, creating multiple existential phenomenological approaches. The next section of this chapter will focus on the work of the French existential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

3.3 Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was hugely influential on the development of phenomenological psychology. Though less well known than his contemporary Sartre, Merleau-Ponty's version of existential phenomenology underpins the majority of phenomenological psychology. His radical description of the primary experience of embodied human existence presented in his challenging seminal work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962), aimed to offer corrections to 'distorted' explanations of experience provided by mainstream scientific and philosophical traditions, including the Kantian and Cartesian paradigms. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) recognised that these mainstream positions all assumed a dualism; a separation of mind from body, of body and world and of self and other. Fundamental to his version of existential phenomenology was the collapsing of these dualisms. Following Heidegger, reuniting the subject and the object (or the self and the other), and more radically, eliminating the distinction between body and mind which had been problematic for both Descartes and Husserl, Merleau-Ponty introduced the concept of the body-subject (Langer 1989). The removal of these traditional dualisms remains Merleau-Ponty's most original contribution to phenomenological psychology.

Langer (1989) notes that much of Merleau-Ponty's work originated from empirical studies based in psychology, which enabled Merleau-Ponty to ground his phenomenological approach in 'lived' data rather than abstractions. As a result, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) reinterpreted phenomena such as the experience of phantom limbs, and more famously, a patient named Schneider who was no longer able to behave voluntarily due to brain damage sustained in the Great War. By including these examples in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty illustrated how his phenomenology was grounded in the world, thus able to investigate the Lifeworld through describing human existence and the modes of being, which come prior to any conscious reflecting or theorising (Matthews 2006).

As with the previous philosophers' writings, this section is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of Merleau-Ponty's complete works, however, some of the key features of the approach will be discussed in order to provide an understanding of his phenomenology and its relevance for this thesis, beginning as Merleau-Ponty began, with the primacy of perception.

3.3.1 The primacy of perception

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) immediately attacks the dichotomies and dualisms present in empiricist and idealist theories of human perception. These theories posit that all perceptual information is located 'out there' in the world and perceptual understanding exists cognitively 'inside' the mind of the perceiver (Langer 1989). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) however, viewed perception as human beings' primary mode of contact with the world, describing perception as our direct, pre-reflective involvement with the world. For Merleau-Ponty, human beings have to be involved with the world on a more basic level than other theorists contend, because *existing* in the world comes prior to *knowing* about the world (1945/1962). This primitive worldly involvement must be described before it is possible to understand meanings reflectively (after thought), as human beings first have a practical relationship with objects in the world and once this is experienced, the world can be explored in a more theoretical manner (Matthews 2006).

Empiricists are interested in the effect of objects on the sense organs; how our bodies perceive things in the world. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that this view positions human beings simply as passive receivers of external stimuli and cannot accept it as a philosophical account of perception. This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty discounted the importance of science, however, he accused the natural sciences of encouraging an objective view of a 'real' world when this was not always appropriate (Butt 1998). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) argues that a scientific theory must be based on empirical evidence, yet this evidence is based on what we perceive, therefore this stance assumes we understand what perception is. For Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), perception is not knowledge about the world but is the way human beings access the world on which knowledge should be based. Science arrives at an objective account by transcending individual perspectives and detaching from the world, however, as Merleau-Ponty argues, perceptions are always experienced subjectively (Matthews 2006).

Human beings are always situated in a particular historical, cultural and spatial period and it is necessary to understand these subjectivities in order to understand subjective experience (Moran 2000). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that the way we perceive an object is always affected by its relation to other objects;

perception is not insular, objects have meaning to us in the way they relate to other things in the world. This situated perception causes objects and the world to appear ambiguously to human beings. The situated perspectival perception of distance and angle means that objects we directly perceive, prior to thinking about them, are ambiguous. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that our pre-reflective experience of the world comes before our thinking about the world, and all perceptions occur within a specific horizon in the world, situated in time and space. The world is perceived as a meaningful and structured whole, rather than as something abstract, but as the place we exist, therefore the meanings we give to objects do not exist 'inside' our minds nor 'outside' in the world, but in the space between ourselves and the world (Langer 1989). Many meanings can be assigned to objects, my meanings will differ from your meanings, and objects can carry multiple meanings and perceptions at the same time. Idhe (1986) illustrates this using the Necker Cube, an optical illusion which can be perceived in different ways and also in many ways at the same time. The Necker Cube is not perceived only in one specific way, and the mainstream perception of the cube is not the only way of perceiving it. The world presents itself in varying ways, and this ambiguity allows the world to be open to different meanings, and it is our interaction with the world that emphasises its ambiguous nature (Butt 2005). Merleau-Ponty recognised that experience is always of a meaningful world, and perceivers are *in* the world but not in the same way as other objects. This is because for Merleau-Ponty, we are embodied subjects (Matthews 2006).

3.3.2 Embodiment

As noted previously, Merleau-Ponty dismisses the Cartesian view of the body as simply another object in the world, countering this disembodied position by dissolving the dualism between body and mind, claiming that human beings are embodied subjects (Langer 1989). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1963) contends that bodies give us a situation in the world, meaning my perspective on the world is determined by where my body is now; human beings are inextricably connected to the world through our bodies. The body is not something to be objectively observed, but is in fact something that is lived and something fundamental to our engagement with the world. By adopting a flawed, dualistic philosophy and splitting subject and object, it would be impossible to account for our interactions with the world since

consciousness is expressed by embodied activity, and embodied activity is permeated by consciousness (Langer 1989). Being able to think, consider, reflect, imagine, is only possible because of our embodied nature; we always take the perspective of the body to carry out these actions. Also, embodied behaviour in the world is always directed by consciousness, being able to walk to the park, to go into town, involves a conscious element. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) illustrates this point using an example of a tennis player. Initially, learning to play tennis involves careful consideration of where to place the feet, where to position the arm with the racquet and how hard to return the ball. Gradually, these very conscious actions eventually become 'habituated' by the body-subject and thus require less and less reflective consideration until the tennis ball is returned without reflective consideration (Butt 1998).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) discusses the ways that living bodies place demands on their surrounding environment, for example a living body requires food, drink, oxygen and sexual activity, among other things. Science views living bodies as biological organisms to be observed and studied from a detached position, but for Merleau-Ponty, these needs should be studied from the position of our bodies because that is how they are experienced and how meaning is given to other objects in the world (1945/1962). Hunger is something experienced by our bodies, and a piece of bread is recognised as able to sate the hunger, whereas a plank of wood is not recognised this way. It is only through our bodily understanding of the world that such meanings can be assigned (Matthews 2006). Human beings are both objects and subjects, *in* and *of* the world (Butt 1998). Living bodies respond to and are engaged with the world and as a result can initiate actions on their environment and meet their needs and desires (Matthews 2006). It is important to remember here that Merleau-Ponty does not contend that this occurs 'inside the head' of an individual, but between them and the world.

The body is the vehicle of subjective experience according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), therefore subjectivity can only be expressed through the body, as without a body subjective experience would not be possible. As mentioned earlier, human beings must have pre-reflective experience of the world before objective knowledge of it is possible, Merleau-Ponty contends that we must also have primary experience of our bodies subjectively, before they can become objects of study

(Matthews 2006). It is useful to note here that viewing the body as a lived body and also as an object of science does not amount to Cartesian dualism; Merleau-Ponty argues that it is simply the same body viewed from different perspectives (Matthews 2006). In a series of radio talks given in 1948, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of feeling angry to illustrate how we are embodied subjects. He imagines that someone is annoyed with him and is expressing this via aggression, shouting and gesticulation, and he questions where this anger is. Merleau-Ponty contends that the anger is not inside the person's mind, somewhere hidden, but is in 'in the room', 'it is in the space between him and me that it unfolds' (2004:83). It is the meaning that the gestures and expressions hold for both parties, which are not located in the internal mind but in the space between people and the world. It is the very fact that we are embodied subjects that enable the types of thoughts and feelings we experience (Langer 1989). To return to the brain damaged Schneider, he no longer felt attached to his body as a result of his injury and felt unable to interact with others as he could prior to his difficulties. For Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), Schneider experiences these problems because all behaviour is the product of embodied subjectivity, and as Schneider no longer felt embodied, he was not able to behave as he could before his embodied connection to the world was lost (Langer 1989).

3.3.3 Sexuality

Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) views on sexuality are of particular importance to this thesis, as it is from his phenomenological perspective that BDSM is examined. Merleau-Ponty again drew on the experiences of Schneider, who also experienced difficulties with sex. He was only able to participate sexually if his partner took the initiative indicating that the structure of his erotic experience had been changed since his brain injury (Langer 1989). Merleau-Ponty points out that as Schneider's genitals are uninjured, a mechanistic approach to sex therefore could not explain his sexual difficulties. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that the sexual meaning has changed for Schneider, a naked body or an erotic film labelled as 'sexual' lacks any sexual significance for him. This change occurred at the same time his own body-subject was damaged; Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that we can use the sensibilities of our own bodies to appreciate, sexually, another body-subject. We find others attractive because our own body-subject can appreciate another body-subject, but because Schneider's own body-subject was damaged, he could not

recognise the sexuality present in another body-subject (Langer 1989). Contact through the body is the way in which objects hold meaning, therefore we are able to experience the world and others in the world as having sexual meaning because our bodies are equipped with sexual organs and sexual desires. Our own bodies are the bodies through which our sexual feelings and thoughts interact with other objects in the world (Matthews 2006).

Despite its essentialist nature, Merleau-Ponty was sympathetic towards psychoanalysis (Butt 2005) and was fascinated by some aspects of Freud's work, though disagreed with other aspects (Matthews 2006). He rejected the objective position adopted by Freud however, along with the causal associations between cognition and behaviour (Butt 2005). Merleau-Ponty attempted to view psychoanalysis through a phenomenological lens, so rather than viewing sexuality as a biological drive, he viewed sexuality as an 'atmosphere' that can hold myriad meanings for us, and frames perception (Butt 2005). Merleau-Ponty argued against Freud's positioning of the libido as the centre of human existence, because that would indicate that sexuality is identified with genital activity and libido must then be conceptualised as a drive towards genitally oriented goals. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that this cannot be the case because not all human goals are genitally oriented, and instead suggested the concept of the libido should maintain a connection with sexual activity, but not be limited to sex (Matthews 2006). It appears that some of Freud's ideas are incorporated into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology when he posits that the resolution is located in the body-subject; existence is grounded in biological life and needs and these needs are allocated personal meanings for each of us; the biological requirement for sex adopts a personal, bodily significance as a result of our embodied engagement with the world (Matthews 2006, Langer 1989). Sexuality characterises our bodily experiences as both a subject, for ourselves, and as an object, for others thus illustrating the ambiguous nature of existence (Butt 2005).

Merleau-Ponty's innovative approach to sexuality has proven popular with contemporary scholars who have adopted his version of phenomenology to investigate various aspects of sexuality and gender. For example, Ahmed (2006) examined sexual orientation through a Merleau-Pontyean lens, Heinämaä (2003) employed some of Merleau-Ponty's ideas to investigate sexual differences and

Rubin (1998) used Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a method of studying transgender identity. The anti-dualist, embodied nature of Merleau-Ponty's work offers a refreshing approach to the study of sexuality, providing an alternative to the traditional methods available to researchers.

3.3.4 Temporality

In his version of existential phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) focused on the dimensions of temporality and spatiality in human existence. While not denying the usefulness of space and time as a universal framework, Merleau-Ponty recognised that these features can also be experienced subjectively (Langer 1989). Following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty placed more emphasis on temporality in his phenomenological psychology, arguing that embodied experience is temporal in nature, as adopting a 'God's eye view' is impossible (1945/1962). Time should not be considered as a stream consisting of the past, the present and the future, rather the past and the future are only defined by their relationship to the present, while the present is defined by its relationship to experience. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) contends that for embodied subjects time and space are not simply objective concepts, but the medium in which human beings exist. Humans could not consider time, without existing *in* time, Merleau-Ponty referred to this as 'historical time' (Matthews 2006). Temporality must be considered within the context of human projects; as embodied subjects, we each have a number of projects that we are engaged with, and these projects are viewed in terms of past experience and future fulfilment of those projects. The present always contains the structure of the past because we are embodied subjects and our past choices have become 'sedimented' in the form of habitual behaviour in the lived body (Matthews 2006). As with Husserl and Heidegger, time is viewed by Merleau-Ponty as a condition of existence, rather than an objective framework (Langer 1989).

3.4 Phenomenology applied to research

> *From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings.* (Van Manen 1990:5)

The aim of phenomenological research is to explore the lived experience of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience that particular phenomenon, in the case of this research, the individuals who practice consensual BDSM. Phenomenological researchers endeavour to 'return to the things themselves' by focusing on how the phenomenon under investigation is experienced in the lived world (Van Manen 1990).

Phenomenological researchers should adopt an open attitude and approach the research with a sense of wonder and discovery (Finlay 2006), which should be maintained throughout the research process. The choice of data collection method should be driven by the aim of elucidating participants' experiences of phenomena in the form of rich, descriptive data which can then be analysed in the selected phenomenological tradition. The data is interrogated in the manner directed by the selected phenomenological approach, and involves interrogating the life world in order to arrive at a rich description of the experience which in turn, may provide new and subtle understandings of the phenomena and impact upon our own life world, and the lived world of others. Phenomenological psychologists question 'how is this phenomenon experienced?', 'what is it like to live through this experience?', 'what does this experience mean to the participant?'. Researchers want to encourage the participants to be as vivid as possible in their descriptions of experience, and this can be achieved through various creative ways (see chapters 4 and 6 for a discussion of ways to accomplish such descriptions). Depending on the phenomenological approach selected, researchers engage (to varying degrees) with the epochē and phenomenological reduction in an attempt to bracket their presuppositions about the phenomena under investigation. The broad purpose of this process, regardless of the phenomenological position adopted, is to attempt to view the world differently, so the manner in which the life world is experienced can be clarified and elucidated.

As mentioned, there are many strands of phenomenological approach for researchers to choose from, though this choice should always be driven by the research aims of the project and the type of knowledge the researcher seeks to achieve from the research. The various approaches have their own philosophical underpinnings, data collection methods and methods of analysis, along with varying

ways to present research findings. Table 3 summarises the main phenomenological approaches applied to research:

Table 3: A summary of phenomenological approaches (adapted from Rodriguez 2009)

Approach	Research Methods	Scholars
Descriptive Phenomenology: Husserlian approach focused on elucidating the essences of an experience via the epochē and reduction, in order to clarify the structure of experience.	Researchers compare participants' written descriptions or interview transcripts of the experience under investigation. Individual and general structures of the experience are produced.	Amedeo & Barbro Giorgi at Duquesne University
The Sheffield School: A descriptive approach following Giorgi, while also including elements of existentialism. Phenomenological descriptions are interrogated using the seven fractions of the life world.	Researchers interrogate interview transcripts, focusing on the existential fractions of the life world, including those termed: sociality, embodiment & project and how these manifest in participants' lived experiences.	Peter Ashworth & colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University
Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology: Van Manen's four existentials are understood through a fusion of participant-researcher through the language of the interview, within the hermeneutic circle.	Allows the researcher to select the most appropriate methods of data collection & analysis. Provides six basic guiding steps for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research.	Max Van Manen at The University of Alberta
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A hermeneutic approach. Less emphasis on description with a focus on interpretation, engagement with mainstream psychological literature and the double hermeneutic.	A thematic analysis of interview transcripts, focusing on the lived experience of the phenomena while also recognising the role of the researcher's interpretation. Studies usually focus initially on a single case.	Jonathan Smith at Birkbeck University

Critical Narrative: A hermeneutic approach based on the philosophy of Gadamer & Ricoeur placing the interpretation of text as the central focus.	The narrative and thematic components of text, in the form of interview transcripts, are analysed. The researcher also employs Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion in order to interrogate the text critically using social theory.	Darren Langdridge at The Open University

Although to the inexperienced, phenomenology can appear as a wide array of approaches, each with its own terminology and methods, this family of paradigms offers researchers new ways of doing research and a fresh way of seeing the world. Regardless of these differences, there is a shared aim to 'return to the things themselves' in order to describe the experience of a phenomenon as lived in the world.

3.5 Critical perspectives on phenomenology

A major criticism levelled against phenomenology is the naive manner in which the role of language is understood. As a result of the types of data collection methods used, such as interviews or written accounts, phenomenological analysis is usually focused on texts. Language is the means whereby participants express their experiences to the researcher, and phenomenology assumes representational validity of language (Willig 2008a). Phenomenology's understanding of language contests that meaning is not *produced* through language, and instead accepts that meaning is *revealed* through language (Cosgrove 2000). Phenomenology argues that language is a means to structure our experiences of the world, and serves to make explanation of experience possible (Turner & Wainright 2003), rather than a means to construct society. Social constructionists argue that the role of language is performative, due to the fact that talk and text are used to achieve certain objectives and to perform certain tasks within social interactions (Burr 1995). Phenomenology however, accepts that language is representative; a communication tool for the purpose of relaying and explaining information relating to our experience of the world, and as a result, discourse reflects and describes rather than creates the

social world (Cosgrove 2000). Willig (2008a) notes that such a naive conceptualisation of language can be criticised for not engaging with its constitutive role. It is worth noting here that some phenomenologists have attempted to integrate language, or more specifically discourse, into phenomenological approaches, indeed Heidegger stated that 'language is the house of being' (1927/1962: 217). The implications of this critique in terms of my research have influenced my choices with regards to the method, and later in the thesis I will explain my attempts at overcoming this issue.

The concept of the epochē is fervently debated both within the various phenomenological camps and within the wider realm of qualitative research. It is contended that it is never possible to subscribe to Husserl's version of the epochē, where the researcher must completely suspend all presuppositions about the phenomenon under study (Hammond, Howarth & Keat 1991). The claim that this is unattainable has been refuted by many phenomenological psychologists, who argue that the reduction as intended by Husserl, allows for the elucidation of experiential elements of a phenomenon (Ashworth 2006b). Using the epochē as a means to become critically aware of presuppositions, as advocated by interpretive stances, is an effective reflexive practice. It can be argued that the epochē is an early example of reflexivity, aiming to understand the impact of the researcher on the work. Indeed the use of the epochē underpins the justification for the use of one particular phenomenological approach in this research; descriptive phenomenology (as discussed in chapter 4). By making presuppositions explicit and then setting them aside at the outset of the research process, researchers can become aware of their everyday, common assumptions and go beyond them. Doing this enables researchers to engage with the data and question it from a different perspective than otherwise would be possible. The taken-for-granted aspects of the world are challenged through the use of the epochē, and I would argue that this fresh perspective leads to insightful analysis and findings.

3.6 Summary & concluding remarks

This chapter has illuminated the philosophical underpinnings of the chosen methodological approach for the research documented in this thesis. It is apparent that phenomenology consists of a rich array of approaches with varying foci, though

all are related to elucidating lived experience of phenomena in the world. The rich philosophical origins of phenomenology aim to ensure that researchers remain grounded in the lived world of their participants. Phenomenology is the ideal methodological approach to explore the experiences of BDSM practitioners, as the focus is on extricating rich descriptive detail of the direct lived experience of participants. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology also takes account of bodily experience and bodily connection to the world, and as BDSM is a bodily activity, this approach is particularly suited to investigating BDSM. The next chapter will introduce the selected approach for the first stage of research, descriptive phenomenology, and will provide justification for this selection.

Chapter 4

Descriptive Phenomenology

Stage One of Empirical Work

Descriptive Phenomenology - Stage One of Empirical Work

This chapter will introduce Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenology, discussing his critique of the natural science model adopted by mainstream psychology, and his transfer to the implementation of the human science model and description as a means to study lived experience. This PhD thesis contains two stages of empirical work, with stage one of the research informing the second stage, which will be discussed in chapters six and seven. Here I will discuss the rationale behind the first stage of the empirical work, and the use of descriptive phenomenology as a methodological framework. I will present the research aims of this initial stage of research, which will be justified by the design and a biographical sketch of each of the research participants will be presented. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ethical issues involved with this stage of research.

4.1 Research aims

This first stage of the PhD research will employ a descriptive phenomenological methodology in order to produce an understanding of the lived world of BDSM. The aims of this study are as follows:

- Stage one of the empirical research aims to examine how the participants understand the lived experience of BDSM.
- To explore various aspects of the experience of BDSM from the perspective of those who regularly engage in BDSM.
- To provide myself with a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of BDSM, while learning how to interact with the people involved in this world and gather interview data effectively.
- To inform the second stage of the empirical research, leading to a more focused topic of investigation.
- To generate a phenomenological understanding of the phenomenon of BDSM.

This stage of empirical work is particularly exploratory in order to gain insight into this complex phenomenon.

4.2 Descriptive phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology, as advocated by Amadeo Giorgi, takes a Husserlian approach to understanding lived experience. This methodology is concerned with the *description* rather than the explanation of phenomena, and is in essence, a 'return to the things themselves' (Husserl 1931/1967). The assumption held by descriptive phenomenologists is that the description of experience is a valid source of knowledge that contains insight into everyday phenomena (Becker 1992).

4.2.1 The critique of the natural sciences model

Giorgi became disillusioned by mainstream psychology's lack of understanding surrounding the investigation of human experience, contending that the exploration of everyday lived phenomena appeared to be "on the fringe of psychology" (1985: viii). He argued that traditional psychology had become preoccupied with achieving a natural science status, focusing on objective, quantitative enquiry while ignoring the role of meaning-making in human life. Giorgi (2006) questioned the appropriateness of the traditional, positivist research methods that were dominant within psychology, along with the objective, detached knowledge this approach produced. He argued that the natural science model was designed for the purpose of studying inanimate physical objects within the natural sciences, and as a result is limited when applied to *social* scientific research.

Giorgi (1985) criticised the dominance of experimental methods in psychology, arguing that due to the prioritisation of the experimental method and the focus on the 'observable' and 'measurable', the study of human experience was neglected. The epistemological position of positivist empiricism is based on the assumption that knowledge about the world can be derived from observable facts or 'truths' regarding inanimate physical objects. Giorgi (1985) argued that human beings should be studied differently from inanimate objects because, following Husserl, humans are intentionally conscious beings. The struggle for objectivity and active avoidance of researcher reflexivity is in direct conflict with the phenomenological view that meaning is co-created between researcher and participant (Giorgi 2006). By adopting this natural sciences model of research, psychology has completely removed the study of human experience from the subject.

Giorgi (1985) turned to the human science model to study human experience as an alternative to the natural science model, which removed psychology from its appropriate context. The human science model emphasised the importance of a continuous dialogue between the subject matter and the methodological approach, unlike the natural science model which prioritised method above all else (Spinelli 2005). Giorgi (1997) argued that social scientists should adopt this model in place of the traditional, positivist approach to research. He noted the interpersonal nature of research, suggesting that both the researcher and participant are experiencing and creating meaning together during the process. The aim of descriptive phenomenological research is to describe and capture the nuanced experiential aspects and variations of a phenomenon, rather than to generate impartial, detached knowledge.

4.2.2 The use of description

Giorgi (1985) proposed that qualitative analysis of description can produce compelling and useful psychological research, and that this was the most appropriate method of investigating phenomena. For Giorgi, description was an underutilised analytical tool which was not considered as a useful basis for research by traditional psychology.

In reaction to the "*lopsided development*" (1985:5) of psychological methods, Giorgi proceeded to apply a phenomenological framework to psychology in order to study lived phenomena by analysing the psychological meaning of personal experiences. Important aspects of individuals' everyday lived experiences are often overlooked according to Giorgi (1985), but in order to do justice to the lived aspects of phenomena, description is necessary to know *how* something has been experienced. In descriptive phenomenology the aim is to capture as closely as possible the way in which the experience takes place (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008). Giorgi (1985) argues that it is enough to describe 'the things in their appearing', and the intention of the analysis is to discern the underlying structure of the experience of a phenomenon in order to capture the essence of that experience. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) contend that phenomenological psychological research aims to clarify situations lived in everyday life, as opposed to reducing a phenomenon to objective variables in a controlled context. The lifeworld is the world as it is lived, and

therefore, should be the foundation for all phenomenological psychological research (Giorgi 1997).

4.3 Selecting a descriptive approach

As discussed in chapter three, there are two main strands of phenomenology; transcendental phenomenology and existential phenomenology. The following section will justify why a transcendental approach in the form of descriptive phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology for this stage of empirical work.

Giorgi (1992) contends that both descriptive and interpretive approaches are legitimate choices of research method, but emphasises that the selection of method should depend upon the particular circumstances and research interests. There is no doubt that the interpretive phenomenological approach has become the dominant phenomenological research method in the UK (Smith & Osborn 2008), however, the choice of method should always be driven by the aims of the research. Giorgi (1997) argues that the descriptive method is often overlooked, as researchers opt to employ the dominant method of interpretation within phenomenology, meaning that other phenomenological approaches are not given due consideration when designing research (Giorgi 1992). Giorgi acknowledges that interpretative methods *are* useful approaches within phenomenology, provided they are employed under the correct context.

In both the transcendental and existential phenomenological schools there is a focus on the lived experience of the lifeworld, an area of study neglected by traditional psychology, and there is a shared rejection of the Cartesian dualism of the scientific tradition. Kvale notes that;

> *A phenomenological perspective includes a focus on the life world, an openness to the experiences of the subject, a primacy of precise description, attempts to bracket foreknowledge and a search for invariant essential meanings in the description* (1996:38-39)

I suggest on this basis that the selection of a phenomenological approach should be viewed as a pragmatic choice, accounting for the needs of the study, as opposed to an ideological choice about the superiority of one approach over another. Two features of the purpose of this stage of research are reflected in the aims presented earlier; one aspect concerns the understanding of the phenomenon of BDSM, while the other research aims relate to my own learning regarding BDSM and its practitioners. The descriptive phenomenological approach endeavours to elucidate the essential structures of the experience of a particular phenomenon, and Giorgi emphasises that the subject matter of his phenomenological approach is the *phenomenon* rather than the individual who is experiencing the phenomenon (Giorgi 1985). As this initial stage of empirical research was exploratory, using this phenomenon-focused approach enabled a clear description of the structure of the experience of BDSM. Giorgi (1992) contends that meanings can be teased out through precise description, and this can explore the variety of experience which can exist within a phenomenon, thus addressing one of the purposes behind the research aims. The other purpose of this stage reflected in the aims was related to advancing my own learning about the phenomenon of BDSM and developing my research skills in preparation for stage two of the empirical work. As the descriptive approach is philosophically well grounded it provided an opportunity to connect the theoretical positions with the practicalities of engaging with the various phenomenological techniques relating to data collection and analysis.

4.4 Design

The following section will discuss the research design for this stage of work, and will focus on issues relating to the method of data collection and the sampling strategy. I will also present a brief overview of Giorgi's (1985) analytic procedure.

4.4.1 The use of semi-structured interviews

Giorgi (1985) suggests collecting written descriptions of an experience of the phenomena under investigation, and using these descriptions as the data for analysis. According to Giorgi (1985) these written accounts should contain a description, including as much detail as possible, of the experience. In later work, Giorgi (1997), along with Todres (2005) sanction the use of the interview as an

effective method to collect these concrete descriptions. I argue that the use of semi-structured interviews was a more appropriate method of gathering data for this stage of work as the interview process enabled further questioning and elaboration in order to abstract as much information and detail about the experience as possible. Kvale distinguishes research interviews as a 'professional conversation' and continues with this definition; '*an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee'* (1996:5).

Interviews provide privileged access into the world of the participant, and the ability to explore the many features of an experience (Kvale 1996). As the aim here was to explore various aspects of the experience of BDSM for those who participate, the use of semi-structured interviews as opposed to written descriptions, still allowed for rich descriptive detail along with the advantage of being able to probe further and question more deeply when necessary. The outcome was a richer, more detailed account of experience than would have been produced by analysing written descriptions, in which there is no opportunity for further illumination of particular topics (Wimpenny & Gass 2000). It was possible to gather specific information pertaining to the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the experiencer, and I would contend the interpersonal nature of an interview situation has unique potential for gaining access to experiences. Finlay (2006) describes the interview process as an embodied intersubjective relationship, and given the bodily nature of BDSM participation, the embodied encounter of an interview was better positioned to glean richer, more in-depth description than written accounts of experiences. Through our corporeal commonality, the participants and I were able to develop a shared understanding of the experience, something which would be impossible to do without such an embodied encounter. Interviews are inclusive, unlike written descriptions, as the participant engages in dialogue with relation to their experience of their social world (Kvale 1994). It is the interaction that encourages the emergence of new concepts and topics, which, in light of the research aims, developed the exploration of various aspects of the experience of BDSM. When conducting research interviews phenomenologically, working within the phenomenological reduction to suspend the natural attitude allows for openness to the phenomenon, and the uninterpreted descriptions are suitable for a descriptive phenomenological analysis.

4.4.2 Participant interviews

The interviews occurred at locations convenient to each participant, and lasted between forty five minutes and an hour. The interview schedule consisted of ten core questions, in order to allow the participants to elaborate when necessary and introduce and explain topics important to them and their own experiences of BDSM. Table four presents the core questions used in the interviews:

Table 4: The core interview questions

When did you first become aware of your interest in BDSM?
How did you first become aware of it? [Examples/instances]
How did it make you feel? [Thoughts & emotions]
Can you describe your first experience of BDSM? [who/where/when/what/how]
Can you describe what you particularly like about participating in BDSM?
Tell me more about adopting the role of a dom / sub / switch [Examples]
How do you feel when you assume this role? [Emotions, thoughts, physical sensations]
Have you noticed any differences in your life since becoming involved in BDSM/ the community?
Can you tell me how you think BDSM practitioners are perceived by people outside of the subculture?
What do you think about vanilla sex?

During the interview I aimed to elucidate the participants' history in the BDSM subculture, including when and how the interviewee first became aware of their feelings towards BDSM, if and how they made first contact with the community and their experiences of engaging in BDSM, along with discussing their feelings around these issues. The interview covered participants' feelings and experiences of their role as a dominant/submissive/switch, and whether they assumed this role outside of

their BDSM play. In addition I asked the interviewees what they enjoyed about BDSM, and what, if anything, they gained from being part of this subculture. I was also interested in investigating how BDSM practitioners perceived vanilla sex, and their thoughts surrounding this. The interview schedule was used flexibly and loosely, depending on the trajectory of each specific interview.

4.4.3 Sampling

Sampling strategies vary widely in qualitative research. Patton (2002) identifies sixteen different strategies for obtaining a sample of participants, and argues that the type of sampling strategy employed should depend upon the aims of the research. As the purpose of my research is a phenomenological investigation into the BDSM subculture, the phenomenological nature of the study sets the parameters. I will discuss below the issues involved in selecting a sampling strategy suitable for the purposes of my research.

Purposive sampling & selection criterion

The selected participants should have regular, lived experiences of the phenomenon; in the case of this research, the participants should engage regularly in consensual BDSM practices, and have done so for at least six months. It was necessary to include regular engagement as a selection criterion in order to achieve a rich and detailed description of a recent experience of BDSM participation.

Breadth versus depth

Patton (2002) illustrates the contrary positions when deciding upon the focus of a study. In order to achieve breadth, it is possible to examine an experience in less depth but with a larger number of participants. For depth, the experience is examined more deeply with a smaller number of participants. I opted for the latter. I aimed to explore the phenomenon of BDSM through detailed, in-depth analysis with five participants. The purpose of this study is not to generate generalisable results, but to describe and understand the lived experience of those who participate in BDSM, and a small sample size was suitable given the rationale and methodology of the research.

Snowball sampling technique

There is not one ‘correct’ sampling strategy, but a decision on which type to select should arise from the suitability of the sample to recruit participants who are appropriate for the study given the research aims and methodological approach. The most effective sampling technique for this research is a snowball sample (Flick 2006). Snowball sampling involves consulting with well situated individuals within the community or group of study, in this case the BDSM community, in order to recruit participants. The recruited participants will then recruit further participants and so on and so forth.

Apart from the one participant I knew personally prior to beginning the research, the others were recruited via snowballing. In order to recruit participants I contacted a key informant in the BDSM community; an academic in this field. As BDSM practitioners have their own social network, the key informant and already recruited participants provided the names of others who were added to the sample. This procedure enabled access to this group which may have otherwise been limited. I consulted each research participant following their interview, along with the key informant, regarding the recruitment of individuals they knew personally who may have been interested in participating in the research. Each participant had already participated in an interview with me, and therefore would have experience and insight into what participation entailed. They were able to discuss this with the potential participants they had in mind for the research. If the individual was interested in participating, the original participant either passed my contact details on to them or passed their contact details on to me, depending on the preference of the potential participant. If the potential participant was not interested in taking part after discussing the research with me, then no further action was taken. When recruiting participants with the assistance of the key informant, the process remained the same, however, the key informant had not participated in my own research but was aware of the details of the research. There was an extended process of negotiation between myself and the potential participants, involving a period of discussion about their willingness to participate, what participation involved, their consent and the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The potential participants were then able to discuss their involvement before agreeing to participate. If after discussion they

decided not to participate, I thanked them for their time and interest and their details were deleted.

Table five provides an overview of the participants' characteristics:

Table 5: Table of Participants' Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Assumed Role in BDSM	Approx. Age
Tom	Male	Gay	Submissive	Mid 20s
Joe	Male	Gay	Dominant	Early 40s
Steven	Male	Heterosexual	Dominant/Switch	Early 30s
Annie	Female	Bisexual	Submissive/Switch	Early 20s
Polly	Female	Heterosexual	Switch	Early 50s

As alluded to earlier, the small sample size is not considered problematic for a descriptive phenomenological study; Giorgi (1997) contends that a sample of three accounts of the phenomenon under investigation can generate a structural description of experience. Idhe (1986) notes the issue of adequacy, which is relevant to this argument. Idhe claims that achieving a goal of a 'complete' account of a phenomenon is unobtainable, however, more variation presented within a description leads to a more adequate description of a phenomenon. The aim of this phenomenological research is not be representative of the general BDSM population, but to examine the lived experiences of a small number of BDSM practitioners. I would argue that the quality of the data and the work done to elucidate the detail is key, rather than the number of participants employed. The participants were recruited based on their sexual orientation, gender and role(s) assumed during BDSM play. With the exception of Joe, all participants were white, and all participants were British. Tom and Joe were part of a triangular BDSM relationship at the time of the data collection.

Although this sampling technique was the most suitable strategy given the aims of this stage of research and the nature of the phenomenon of interest, as with all types of sampling there are certain issues that must be acknowledged. The main limitation with the snowball sampling strategy is that by asking current participants to suggest participation to other people in their social circle, it can lead to the sample consisting

of individuals who are similar to each other. The sample may, for example, consist only of individuals that practice BDSM in certain club venues. This is a problematic issue as it may be the case that all participants have similar experiences of BDSM because of their shared social circles. It is likely that a homogenous sample of this nature will not reach those practitioners participating in BDSM on the fringes of 'safe, sane and consensual'. As mentioned, Tom was the only participant not to have been recruited via a snowball sample, however, Tom recruited Joe to participate, while the other participants were drawn from the key informant's snowball. This avoids some of the issues associated when all of the participants are recruited from the same snowball.

4.5 Participant-Researcher relationship

In light of the intimate and personal nature of the interview topic, it is useful to consider the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Given the focus of the research, it was clear that there would be intimate engagement with the participants' sexual lives, therefore, the quality of the researcher-participant relationship was paramount to the success of the interviews. I needed to establish rapport along with a sense of trust and personal compatibility. I also had to demonstrate my trustworthiness and openness to the participants, along with the explication that I would not judge them in any way.

I knew only one of the participants prior to conducting the research. The participant was a friend of a close friend of mine. I did not know any of the other participants prior to them contacting me to volunteer to take part in the research. Gradually through numerous emails, telephone conversations and instant messaging conversations we developed a rapport. We did this by discussing general ideas regarding BDSM, its legality and sex in general, along with more broad conversations on various topics. I was careful not to discuss in much depth my specific views regarding BDSM; however, it was important for the relationship that participants were aware of my general sympathetic opinion. When we met to conduct the interview we were not strangers but had already become acquainted. To maintain the relationships I endeavoured to use accessible language, having attempted to bracket my psychological pre-knowledge through the epochē. I engaged in self-disclosure regarding my bisexuality and same sex relationship as a

reciprocal response to participants' own disclosures. I also hoped this would set the platform for a free discussion of the intimate and personal details of the experiences. This established relationship allowed the participants to talk openly about intimate, and usually private, experiences and their associated feelings.

4.6 The interviewees: Biographical sketches

I will present a brief biography of each participant interviewed for stage one of the empirical research, providing details on their background and information relevant to the research.

Tom

Tom is a white male in his mid-twenties, who works as a health professional. He describes his sexual orientation as gay, and his role during BDSM play as a submissive. Tom participates in BDSM with two men, Joe, who is also a participant in this study, and Nathan, who Tom considers to be his boyfriend. Tom engages in BDSM with Joe and Nathan separately and also as part of a threesome. He has been participating in BDSM regularly for a year, and has also participated in BDSM related pornographic modelling. Tom lives in the North West of England.

Joe

Joe is a mixed race male in his early forties, whose work can be defined as professional. He describes his sexual orientation as gay, and he assumes the dominant role during BDSM play, although he is occasionally submissive. Joe engages in BDSM with men he meets in specialist online chatrooms, and also with Tom and his boyfriend Nathan. Joe met Tom in a BDSM orientated chatroom and introduced him to Nathan, whom Joe had participated in BDSM with for four years. Joe describes himself as single. He has been interested in BDSM for twenty years, although he has only been actively participating for ten years. Joe lives in the North West of England.

Steven

Steven is a white male in his early thirties, whose work is described as technical. Steven's sexual orientation is heterosexual, and the role he assumes during BDSM is a switch, although he is usually the dominant partner. He participates in BDSM

with women with whom he is in a relationship, and his engagement in BDSM has become more active with his most recent partner. Steven has had an interest in BDSM since the age of eight, although did not participate in BDSM until he was seventeen years old. Steven is single and he lives in the North of England.

Annie

Annie is a white female in her early twenties and works in administration. Annie describes herself as a bisexual polyamorous woman, meaning she has relationships with more than one partner. Annie's primary partner is Robert, and she has other secondary partners, she participates in BDSM with some, but not all, of her partners along with people she meets at specialist 'play parties'. She has been participating in BDSM since she became sexually active at sixteen, and her primary role is submissive, although she does occasionally switch roles. Annie lives in South West England.

Polly

Polly is a white female in her early fifties, and is a former sex worker. When Polly worked selling sex, she specialised in BDSM, particularly in the areas of discipline and domination. Polly would switch between the dominant and submissive role, depending on her client's needs. Polly describes her sexual orientation as heterosexual, she has occasionally participated in BDSM in her personal life. She lives in the North of England and is currently single.

4.7 Managing the data

Transcription is often considered to be the first stage in the process of qualitative data analysis, and as such it is valuable for researchers to carry it out themselves (Smith 2008). By doing all transcription myself I was also confident that each transcript had been subject to the same method of transcription. Transcriptions occurred as close to the interviews as possible, and each interview was transcribed within four days. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to preserve each participant's natural way of speaking and no corrections were made to incorrect syntax or grammar. After some consideration I decided to maintain local dialect, although no participant spoke with particularly pronounced local dialect so this was unproblematic. As people do not speak in the same way they write language, it was

tricky at times to decide where to place commas, full stops and other punctuation on the transcripts. Kvale (1996) describes the process of transcription as a process of interpretation where judgements must be made on the basis of meaning in the move from the spoken word to the written word. I opted for a simple transcribing process, as very detailed transcription such as for conversation analysis is not of additional benefit in a phenomenological analysis. Kvale (1996) emphasises that, in effect, transcriptions are conversations abstracted from context, and therefore during the process of transcription researchers should be mindful of the research context and also of each individual participant.

As mentioned, the process of transcription was relatively straightforward. The interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The initial 'I' represented myself as the interviewer, and the initial of the participant's pseudonym was used to indicate the participant's responses. A brief pause was characterised by '...', while a longer pause over about three seconds long was '*(long pause)*' or for a particularly lengthy pause was '*(very long pause)*'. If something was said during the interview that was unclear on the tape or missing from the tape it was indicated thus '*(inaudible)*', and I also indicated identifiers of emotion, '*(laughing)'*, '*(smiling)', '(upset)*', '*(sarcastic)*' etc. Identifying features such as small towns or city districts were edited in order to maintain anonymity, and larger cities or more general areas close to the original location cited in the interview such as North Wales or Manchester were used as replacements.

Personal observations and reflections were written into a reporter's notebook during the interviews in the form of abbreviated notes. I also took notes directly after each interview with reflections on my performance, a general sense of how I felt the interview had gone and anything else I felt was important. I was careful however, not to make interpretations and simply to note the things in their appearing. Making the notes was particularly useful after the interview with Steven, which I found perplexing and quite frustrating (see chapter 8 page 243 for further elaboration on this). These notes were used for the purpose of producing case summaries for each interview. The summaries captured something of the context of each interview, and were a record of my immediate thoughts and reactions. They acted as a trigger for remembering important moments and more generally to transport me back to the context of the interview. I have found that it can be the case that interview transcripts

feel tremendously decontextualised once the time has come to begin the analysis. These case summaries help to avoid the transcripts becoming disembodied, decontextualised conversations far removed from the research process. Finally, all transcripts were stored on my personal computer, which was only accessible by myself.

4.8 Overview of analytic procedure

I followed Giorgi's procedure to analyse the interview data for the purpose of elucidating the essences of the phenomenon of BDSM as experienced by those who regularly participate. For the purpose of clarity and for ease of comprehension, I will provide a brief overview of the stages involved in the analytic procedure. A detailed description of this procedure will follow in chapter five.

- *Stage 1* – Read the transcript for a sense of its whole meaning
- *Stage 2* – Deconstruct the text to obtain relevant meaning units
- *Stage 3* – Interrogate the meaning units for the structurally important aspects of the phenomenon
- *Stage 4* – Synthesise the meaning units into essential essences of the phenomenon in order to produce a structural description of the phenomenon

4.9 Quality of the work

Issues of reliability and validity are generally considered in relation to quantitative psychological research, and arguably are redundant concepts in qualitative research. As King and Horrocks (2010) note, there are no universally agreed criteria in place for assessing the quality of qualitative work, and given the epistemological and methodological diversity, this is unsurprising. Willig (2008a) contends that any quality evaluation must be compatible with the epistemological position of the research, and this is an important point given the range of philosophical and methodological approaches available to qualitative researchers. There is much debate within qualitative research regarding which methods can most appropriately assess quality. There are broadly three positions; those who apply quantitative criteria to qualitative work, those who use a separate criteria specifically designed for qualitative research and those who argue against any fixed criteria (King & Horrocks 2010).

I would argue that given the historic tension between approaches, the use of quantitative terminology and concepts to evaluate qualitative research only serves to reinforce the dominance of quantitative methods and undermine the efforts of qualitative psychology to be perceived as credible and rigorous in its own right. Many researchers call for a set of evaluative criteria designed specifically for qualitative research, however, this has proved a difficult endeavour considering the diversity and methodological debates that exist within qualitative psychology. There have been numerous efforts that attempted to devise an appropriate evaluative tool, (see Lincoln & Guba 1985, Schwant & Halpern 1988). The final position regarding assessing quality in qualitative research contends that it is simply not possible to formulate criteria. This position is generally adopted by postmodernists who argue that as there are no limits on the ways language can construct reality, it is not logical to attempt a criterion that assesses a particular version of reality. King and Horrocks (2010) make the important point however, that for those researchers who aim to connect the non-academic world with their research, a lack of evaluation may be problematic.

The language of qualitative research is more appropriate in describing and grasping the central concepts of qualitative approaches, and therefore I contend is more than suitable in evaluating qualitative research. In light of the paradigmatic differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, I will evaluate this research in line with the second of the positions outlined above; a qualitative specific set of criteria. Drawing on criteria devised by Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) and Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) I have devised my own set of criteria for assessing this work based upon the philosophical principles and the methodology:

- The importance of fit: Themes presented by the researcher should fit the data well. The researcher should provide clear justification of the ways aspects of a phenomenon have been categorised.
- Reflexivity: The role of the researcher should be acknowledged throughout the research, along with the researcher's own impact on the research and the impact of the research on the researcher.
- Documentation: A comprehensive account of what was done and the reasons why throughout the research process should be included.

- Sensitivity to negotiated realities: Attention should be given to the ways the research is interpreted by those who generated the data. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) note that this differs from participant validation, as the aim is not to seek agreement but to generate awareness of participants' reactions and viewpoints.
- Situating the sample: Participants and their life circumstances should be described for the purpose of providing background information, and enabling the reader to assess the relevance of the findings.
- Owning one's perspective: The researcher should disclose their own values, assumptions and position in order for the reader to be able to consider potential alternative interpretations.

The quality of the work will be assessed using this criterion in chapter eight.

4.10 Conducting 'sensitive' research

'Sensitive' research topics deal with subjects that are intimate, discreditable or incriminating (Renzetti & Lee 1993). BDSM can fall into the category of intimate, as participants are discussing their personal sexual experiences and it can also be considered incriminating due to the fact that participating in consensual BDSM can still be considered an illegal practice in the U.K. Renzetti and Lee (1993) argue that the use of the term 'sensitive' is prevalent in the literature, and used as though it were self-explanatory. According to Renzetti and Lee (1993) sensitive research usually involves some level of cost to the participant and possibly also to the researcher. They cite the example of some wrongdoing being discovered and sanctioned. This is clearly an unwelcome consequence to research participation. In the case of my research, the majority of participants kept their interest in BDSM closeted from family members and friends outside of the BDSM scene. As mentioned, conducting sensitive research may also have unwelcome consequences for researchers. Many researchers investigating aspects of human sexuality (especially those with negative connotations) have reported on their stigmatisation by colleagues, university administrators and students (for example Plummer 1983, Troiden 1987). Indeed, I have found myself stigmatised by colleagues, peers and students for conducting sympathetic, non-pathologising research into consensual BDSM. For example, at the school ethics committee meeting, one panel member did

not want to sanction my work based on the assumption that practitioners of BDSM were likely to be more dangerous than non-practitioners.

Renzetti and Lee (1993) argue that it is the relationship between the topic of research and the social context within which the research is conducted that can lead to a piece of research being judged as 'sensitive'. The current research is set against a background of ambiguous legality and general social disapproval, a social context that positions this topic as sensitive. It is possible to argue however for any topic depending on context, to be a sensitive one. Renzetti and Lee (1993) cite a framework consisting of areas that might lead to a topic being deemed to be sensitive:

- Research that examines some private sphere or delves into a deeply personal experience.
- Research where the topic of study is concerned with perceived 'deviance' or social control.
- Research that impinges on the vested interest of some powerful person.
- Research that deals with something sacred to the research participants.

The current research broaches three of these areas. In order to arrive at a general structure of the experience of BDSM participation it was necessary to collect direct accounts of the participants' BDSM participation, which involves delving into their private sphere and asking them to share personal experiences of sexual activities with me. The sexual practices discussed are regarded by many academics as well as laypeople to be 'deviant' and 'abnormal', and as a result both participants *and* researchers in this field are often stigmatised. The argument regarding classifying consensual BDSM as a pathology has been addressed elsewhere in this thesis (see chapters 1 & 2). The final area that the current research encounters is that my research deals with an activity considered by my participants, and others, to be a significant part of their lifestyle. Many practitioners of BDSM consider their participation to be a lifestyle choice that reaches well beyond their sex lives, impacting their lives in general. Renzetti and Lee (1993) argue that research into perceived 'deviant' activities remain among the most sensitive topics to research because research participants are likely to fear being identified, stigmatised and/or incriminated in some way as a result of their participation. It is the role of the

researcher to account for these factors when addressing the ethical issues of a piece of research.

4.10.1 Ethical issues

All research is regulated and controlled by a range of guidelines and legislation. One such area of strict legislation concerns the ethical issues relating to research participants. There are numerous guidelines that provide the basis for good practice in social scientific research, regulation specifically relating to this research comes from the British Psychological Society (BPS) who have published ethical guidelines that all psychological research should adhere to. There is also a need for researcher awareness of the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Data Protection Act 1998. Each set of guidelines aims to protect the research participant from harm and ensure professional research practice.

Phenomenology and ethical issues

There is congruence between the phenomenological method and ethical guidelines. Both aim to cause minimal impact upon the participants' lifeworld and both refrain from imposing judgement upon participants. The phenomenological technique of horizontalisation treats all aspects of experience as equal (Spinelli 2005) and refrains from imposing judgements regarding importance. Ethical guidelines prohibit a judgemental attitude towards the research topic and participants. It is noteworthy that by adopting the phenomenological attitude and entering the epochē, that all preknowledge about the topic is bracketed and set aside, and this includes knowledge of research ethics and ethical guidelines. As part of my psychological knowledge, these concepts must be suspended. However, the natural congruency that exists between the phenomenological method and ethical issues allow me to act in an ethical manner in line with guidelines throughout the research.

Confidentiality:

- The participants were assured verbally of confidentiality on numerous occasions throughout the recruitment and interview process, and also via email correspondence and the participant information sheet (see appendix 1).
- The tape recordings of the interviews were kept separate to the participants' details. The recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of the

PhD, in line with the University's guidelines, and the anonymised transcripts will be archived by the University of Huddersfield.

Anonymity:

- To protect participants' anonymity, any identifying information was edited or changed. This included names of locations, workplaces and other people. To ensure participants were satisfied with the level of anonymity each was encouraged to read their transcript, which a few participants chose to do.
- The participants were all assigned a pseudonym and all related information and transcript was stored under the participant's pseudonym. I gave each participant the option of choosing their own nom de plume, again a few decided to do this while others left that decision to me. During PhD supervision sessions, the participants were always referred to by these pseudonyms and only I am aware of their true identities. All other identifying information, such as contact details and consent forms, are kept in a sealed blank envelope in a locked cabinet in my home office.

Informed consent & participant's rights:

- The full purpose of the study was explained to all participants who contacted me registering their initial interest to volunteer to take part. This was done both verbally and via email (I felt that the informal nature of email was better suited to this group than more formal invitation letters). The research was detailed on the participant information sheet, which participants received before they agreed to take part.
- Participants' right to withdraw from the research at any time was explained numerous times, from initial contact, on agreement to participate and before and after the interview took place.
- Participants were given opportunities through the data collection process to ask questions, this could be via the telephone or email, or when we met to conduct the interview.
- Participants signed a consent form outlining the nature of their consent. A blank copy of the consent form can be found in appendix 2.

Protection from harm:

- The interview involved participants discussing enjoyable, sexual activities. However, as BDSM is an emotive experience, and following advice from the school's ethics committee, I had details of various helplines and online support groups in case of any distress. However, these were never required.

Researcher safety:

- The issue of my personal safety was highlighted by the ethics committee. As I would be interviewing participants in their own homes, it was a requirement of the panel that I attended a workshop on researcher safety training. I adhered to the usual precautions when interviewing at participant's homes. I informed my partner of when and where each interview took place, and phoned her after each interview had concluded. I kept a mobile phone with me at all times with the 'emergency message' setting switched on.
- My psychological wellbeing was protected by agreeing to report any difficulties to my supervisory team in the first instance.

4.11 Summary & concluding remarks

This chapter introduced Giorgi's approach to descriptive phenomenology. Giorgi's (1985) descriptive phenomenological approach is derived from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, with an assumption that the description of experience is a valid source of knowledge that contains insight into everyday phenomena. Descriptive phenomenology requires that all presuppositions and prior knowledge relating to the subject under investigation should be bracketed within the epochē (Giorgi 2006). Past experience and pre-judgement form the natural attitude and therefore may serve to bias the researcher, and prevent the phenomenon from becoming clear. Descriptive phenomenology aims to capture as closely as possible the way in which the experience takes place (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008). Giorgi (1985) argues that it is enough to describe the things in their appearing, and the intention of the analysis is to discern the underlying essences that form the experiential structure of a phenomenon. According to Giorgi 'essences' refer to the unchanging elements common to all similar experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. By generating phenomenological data from self-identified BDSM practitioners, this study

aims to produce a general structural description of the experience of engaging in consensual BDSM as it appears to the participants. This chapter traced the argument made by phenomenologists against using traditional methods of investigation of the natural sciences and the application of these methods to the study of human experience.

I demonstrated why the selection of approach was a pragmatic choice and why the descriptive approach was the most appropriate method for this stage of research, as opposed to the dominant interpretive phenomenological methods. The central argument was that in light of the research aims outlined earlier, an approach that produced a clear and unambiguous description of the essential features of experience would be the most useful. The research design was explained with reference to the research aims of this stage. The choice of sampling strategy; the snowball sample, was justified given the 'hidden' nature of the participant group and the problematic endeavour of participant recruitment (Beckmann 2001). The rationale for the use of semi-structured interviews rather than written descriptions as a method of data collection was discussed. Also, the embodied nature of the interview process was alluded to in the context of the research topic.

The nature of the participant-researcher relationship was attended to in this chapter, illustrating the need to establish a rapport and a bond of trust through reciprocal disclosure. In order for the reader to gain a sense of who the participants are as people, I included a brief biographical sketch of each participant. I aimed to capture some essence of who the participants are to remind readers that these are real people, with whom I shared an embodied intersubjective experience, rather than abstract pieces of text. This chapter concluded with a consideration of the challenges involved in conducting research of a sensitive nature. I also outlined and addressed the ethical issues involved at this stage in the research. The process of analysis is fully detailed in the next chapter, along with the individual structural descriptions of each participant's experience of participating in BDSM and the general structure of the experience of engaging in consensual BDSM.

Chapter 5

Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis of Stage One

Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis of Stage One

In this chapter I will introduce the descriptive phenomenological analysis of the first stage of the PhD research. I will begin by focusing on Giorgi's approach to descriptive phenomenological analysis, with an explanation of each of the four stages involved. I will then provide a discussion of my account of the process of analysis, in view of my pragmatic approach to the method. The chapter will present the findings in the form of individual structural descriptions for each participant's experience, and finally I will present the general structural description of the experience of BDSM. The chapter will end with a discussion of some personal reflections relating to this stage of research.

5.1 Descriptive phenomenological analysis

This approach aims to achieve a complete description of the essential structure of the experience of a specific phenomenon. There is no attempt at explanation, and the focus of analysis is centred on description. The purpose of the analysis to focus on the experience of the phenomenon as lived by the participant, while attempting to distinguish the structure of the experience with the aim of producing both individual and universal descriptions of that experience. As this approach subscribes to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, each stage of analysis must be attended to within the phenomenological reduction and the epochē.

5.1.1 The epochē and the phenomenological reduction in descriptive phenomenological analysis

When conducting research and analysis, one should adopt the phenomenological attitude (A. Giorgi 2006) and be in constant engagement with the epochē and phenomenological reduction, as detailed by Husserl. Descriptive phenomenology requires that all presuppositions and prior knowledge relating to the subject under investigation should be bracketed within the epochē (B. Giorgi 2006). Past experience, presupposition and pre-judgement make up the natural attitude and therefore may serve to bias the researcher, and prevent the actual phenomenon from becoming clear (B. Giorgi 2006).

Phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation are used to further elucidate the essence of the experience from the description. The phenomenological reduction is integral to the analytic procedure, and requires the researcher to suspend their natural attitude in order to allow experiences to appear to consciousness anew, this allows the researcher to describe the phenomenon as experienced. Imaginative variation is an optional technique available to phenomenological researchers for the purpose of identifying invariant properties present in the phenomenon under study. According to Giorgi (A. 2006), it is only possible to access the phenomenon through the employment of the phenomenological techniques, otherwise the phenomenon remains obscured by the natural attitude, including empiricism and naturalism. Moustakas (1994) refers to a "purified" consciousness when employing the phenomenological techniques, which places the known world within a bracket, allowing the phenomenon to appear to consciousness in a new fashion. The aim for descriptive phenomenologists is to completely suspend their own natural attitude through the adoption of a *phenomenological* attitude, and to use the phenomenological techniques in order to perceive the phenomenon as if for the first time, to elucidate the essence of the experience (B. Giorgi 2006). Giorgi (B. 2006) notes that another benefit of employing the epochē and phenomenological reduction is to ensure a genuine openness to the participant's experience. This embedded bracketing creates a space where the participant feels free to express themselves and aware that no judgement will be made relating to their experience. This is particularly important for my research, as the participants are discussing very personal and powerful sexual experiences. As phenomenology does not claim an existing truth, experiences are accepted as belonging to the participant, which fosters the non-judgemental attitude and encourages the participant to share their experience (B. Giorgi 2006)

5.2 The analytical process

Giorgi (1985) emphasises the need to use the method heuristically, adapting aspects of each stage of analysis to meet the needs of the research aims. There are four stages involved in descriptive phenomenological analysis, and each will be discussed in turn.

Stage 1 – Read for a Sense of the Whole:

This stage is relatively uncomplicated and involves reading and re-reading the entire interview transcript as a means to understand the language of the describer (Giorgi 1985). As the phenomenological approach is a holistic method, reading the interview transcript allows for a grasp of the overall sense of the meaning of the whole description (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008). This should be done for each interview transcript, and Giorgi (1985) advises that this process of familiarising one's self with the content of the interview should be undertaken as often as the researcher deems necessary. It is worth noting that the text is not interrogated in any way at this stage of analysis, this process is simply about becoming familiar with the transcript (Giorgi 1985).

Stage 2 – Discrimination of Meaning Units within a Psychological Perspective:

This stage of analysis involves the deconstruction of the whole text into manageable segments, while attending to psychological criteria relevant to the research aims (Giorgi 1985), which is in this case the phenomenon of BDSM. These manageable segments are referred to as 'meaning units', and are selected when a segment of text illustrates meaning in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. The meaning units are formed wherever the researcher becomes aware of a change in meaning in the description (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008), and each time there is a shift in the meaning, it is noted on the transcript. Langdridge (2007) adds that individuals will often structure their talk in units of meaning through the use of pauses or breaks, and that these should be attended to during this stage without allowing them to dominate the analysis. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) emphasise that there are no objective meaning units, and that the selection is dependent upon the perspective of the researcher. The meaning units are selected and decided upon by the researcher through a process of clarification through self-correction in light of the topic of research. The psychological attitude adopted is related to setting parameters of the analysis to the subject under investigation, and the focus should concentrate on the information relevant to the topic. Giorgi (1985) advises that while setting limits on the analysis, the researcher should also always remain open so as to allow for discoveries within the data. Giorgi describes this as 'circumscribed indeterminateness' (1985:13), the researcher should consider facts relevant to the topic under investigation while also remaining open minded to avoid excluding other

genuine discoveries relevant to the phenomena under investigation. The analytical stage occurs within a ‘context of discovery’ (Giorgi 1985:14), as the meaning unit is identified initially and the following stages of the procedure reveal its full significance.

Giorgi (1985) argues that the meaning units should be considered as constituents rather than elements of the whole, as constituents can only be understood within context but elements can be understood independently of context. Langdridge (2007) notes that this is an important distinction for the analysis, as the units gain meaning only within the context in which they occur. The meaning units are context-laden and cannot be understood when abstracted from the original context.

Stage 3 – Transformation of Subject’s Expressions into Psychological Language with Emphasis on the Phenomenon:

This stage of analysis draws upon the process of reflection and the phenomenological technique of imaginative variation as a means to elucidate the psychological significance of the meaning units (Giorgi 1985). The researcher is required to interrogate each meaning unit for the aspects of the description that are structurally important to the phenomena using these techniques. Reflection refers to the way in which the researchers reflected on the various possibilities contained within the meaning units, discarding those that did not withstand robust interrogation for insight into the phenomenon. The phenomenological technique of imaginative variation is employed here in order to elucidate that which is fundamental to the experience of the phenomena under investigation. This technique is, in part, how the researcher settles upon those aspects of experience that are genuinely essential to every experience of the phenomenon, and contributes to the formation of the structural descriptions. The process of imaginative variation involves varying elements of an experience imaginatively, in order that the essences of the experience remain. Aspects of the experience are altered, removed or added in order to observe whether the variation significantly changes the phenomenon, in this research of the experience of BDSM. If the variation does not affect the phenomenon, the varied aspect is not essential to the experience of the phenomenon. If, however, changing a specific element of the experience significantly alters the phenomenon, then that element is considered to be an essential aspect of the phenomenon. This stage aims to make explicit the implicit meanings, and it is

this stage that allows the analysis to reveal meanings that are lived but not necessarily articulated in the description (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008). There is a move away from the idiosyncratic detail of the previous stage, to a more general meaning so that the analyses become less situation-specific (Giorgi & Giorgi 2008).

Stage 4 – Synthesis of Transformed Meaning Units into a Consistent Statement of the Structure of Experience:

The final stage of analysis involves the production of an individual structural description for each participant; this is achieved by integrating the insights from the earlier stages to identify the essential elements of the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi 1985). Once an individual structural description has been produced for each participant's experience, it is necessary to formulate a general structural description of the experience. The general structural description is an attempt to determine which constituents are essential across all of the descriptions, and synthesise them in order to encapsulate the essence of the phenomena under investigation.

5.2.1 My account of the process of analysis

As stated earlier, Giorgi (1985) advises that the descriptive phenomenological method should be used heuristically, and I therefore approached the analysis pragmatically, adapting the various stages of research where necessary to suit the purpose of this stage of the research.

To begin the analysis of each transcript, I first read and re-read the entire interview transcript until I felt sure I had immersed myself in the participant's story of their experience of BDSM. There was no particular number of times the reading was necessary, I read until I was certain I grasped the whole experience. At this stage I did not attempt to begin organising the data in any way for further analysis. I attempted to read each transcript within the epochē, and to bracket all my prior knowledge and presuppositions as they appeared to my consciousness through the natural attitude. The aim in suspending my own natural attitude was to enable myself to be open to the participants' experiences of their lifeworlds. I engaged with the epochē by reflecting on and acknowledging the information I was aware of about BDSM. As I am not a practitioner of BDSM, and had limited knowledge, this was

perhaps less difficult than it might have been. I also attempted to suspend my beliefs (substantiated or not) and thoughts regarding the practice of BDSM, the people who engage in BDSM, the level of emotion and the range of sexual activities involved in BDSM. I then made a note of this prior knowledge and of my presuppositions in an attempt to clear them from my mind and experience the phenomenon as if it were new to my consciousness. This was more difficult, even at this straightforward stage, than I anticipated. There were instances when reading the transcripts when I had to resist the urge to search for patterns or themes emerging from the data. I tried to overcome this by taking a proactive stance and revisiting the critical notes I had made about my natural attitude before each attempt at analysis. On the whole it is difficult to judge how successful this endeavour actually was, although doing this made me feel as though I was really trying to engage with the reduction and prevent the natural attitude from obscuring potential new discoveries.

For the second stage of analysis, I began to divide the transcript text into units of meaning, as described earlier in stage two. This stage was time consuming, and at times frustrating, as I needed to re-attempt the division numerous times before I felt confident that the meaning units were divided correctly, considering the research aims of the stage. Some transcripts took fewer attempts at separating the meaning units than others, again there was no specific number of attempts at division. At this point, I also noted on the transcript anything I felt was of emerging importance about the experience of BDSM. Again I encountered difficulty with maintaining the epochē and reduction completely. I was concerned that by noting down items of importance, I would somehow slip back into the natural attitude, or begin making tentative interpretations rather than sticking to description. I attempted to counter this by returning to the divided transcript and re-justifying my selection of meaning units.

The third stage of analysis was the most difficult, as this stage is considered by Giorgi (A. 2006:63) to be the ‘core of the analysis’. As well as engaging in the epochē, I also engaged in the phenomenological reduction, in order to transform the units of meaning and make the psychologically important aspects of the experience explicit. I attempted to employ the technique of horizontalisation to ensure that I treated all of the meaning units with equal importance, rather than impose a hierarchical structure of significance on the data. I managed this by refraining from allowing a particular meaning unit or concept to overshadow the others and by not

placing undue importance on something in particular. I also reflexively explored the accounts of the lived experiences, and used imaginative variation as a means of elucidating the essential elements of the phenomenon. I reflected upon the various possibilities contained within each meaning unit, and then used imaginative variation to interrogate the meaning units for essential aspects of the experience of BDSM. An example of an imaginative variation would be substituting rubber clothing for silk clothing, or harsh, aggressive language for kind, passive language. If the experience is significantly altered by this substitution, the original element is considered to be essential to the experience of the phenomenon. The aim at this stage is to reveal the psychological meanings of the lived experience of BDSM for each participant that illustrate the essential nature of the phenomenon. While absorbed in the epochē and phenomenological reduction, the aim is to remain open and receptive to the participants' experiences of BDSM, rather than to impose any theoretical perspective. It was less problematic to avoid the imposition of any theoretical perspective at this stage. The natural attitude would likely pathologise BDSM, and theories would position the practice as 'abnormal' or 'deviant'. As I have never subscribed to this view, my own natural attitude did not attempt to impose any theory in an attempt to explain BDSM.

Imaginative variation is employed again in this final stage of analysis. The technique is used to interrogate the transformed meaning units to explore what exactly is essential to the structure of the experience. Imaginative variation was performed when arriving at the individual structural descriptions, and also the general structural descriptions. By using my imagination to vary specific aspects of the experience of BDSM discussed in each transcript, it was possible to elucidate the essential structure of this experience. Aspects of the experience were altered, removed or added in order to observe whether the variation significantly changes the phenomenon of BDSM. If the variation did not affect the phenomenon, the varied aspect is not essential to the experience of BDSM and was not included in the general structural description. If, however changing a specific element of the experience significantly altered the phenomenon, then that element was considered to be an essential aspect of the phenomenon.

Generally, I found the process of the adoption of the phenomenological reduction and the epochē problematic in practice. I felt as though I was unable to remove

myself from all of my past experiences, and bracket them separately from my consciousness. Complete and total suspension was not possible for me but I was successful in so far as becoming *aware* of my presuppositions and potential biases, but complete judgement-free knowledge escaped me. Although I did find these concepts useful additions to the process of analysis, I felt as though the transcendental achievement of a 'God's eye view' (Merleau-Ponty 1945/1962) was impossible to attain.

The following figures illustrate the transformation of the data in line with Giorgi's analytical approach.

Figure 5.1: The process of data analysis – Tom's transcript

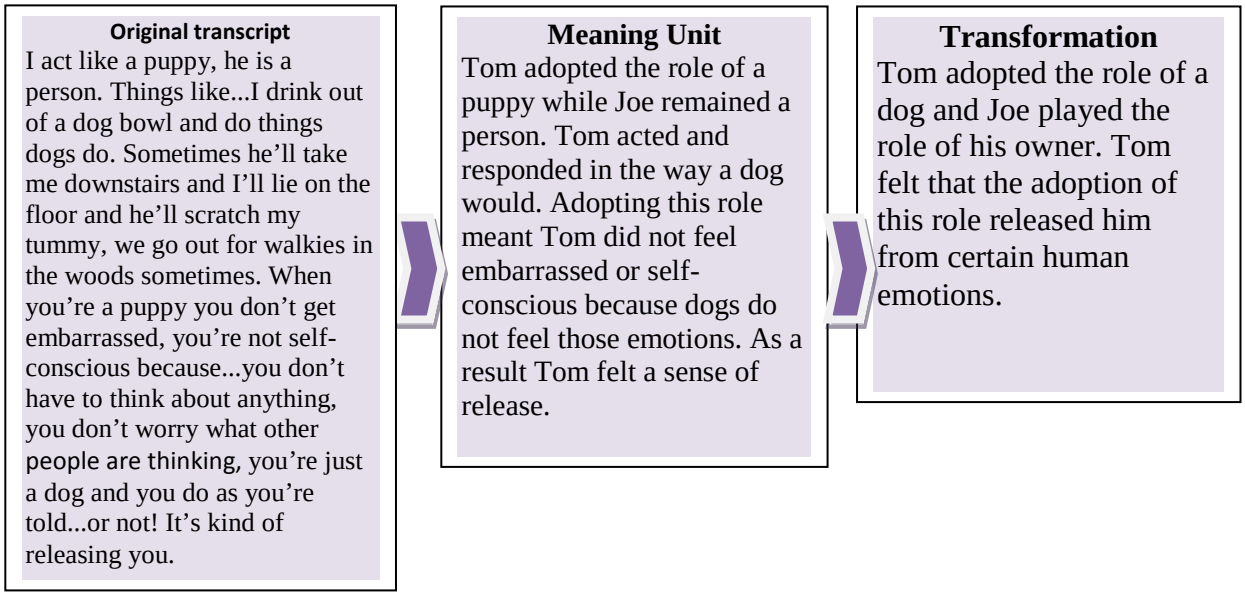


Figure 5.2: The process of data analysis – Joe's transcript

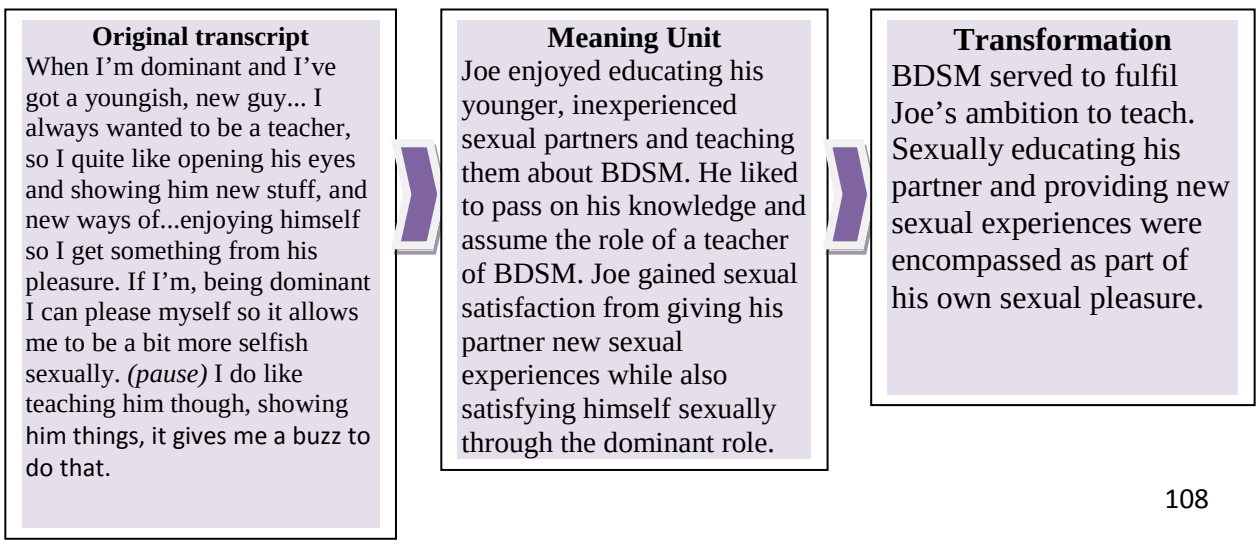
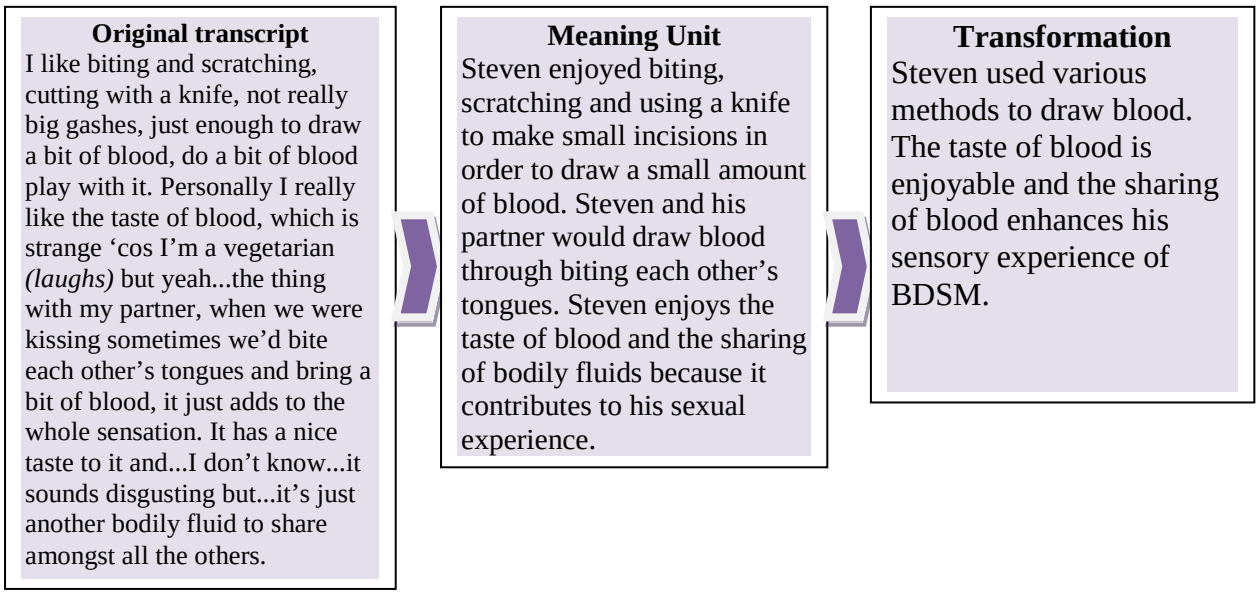


Figure 5.3: The process of data analysis – Steven's transcript



5.3 Writing the structural descriptions

The structure of the experiences embodied in each of the five interviews was written as individual structural descriptions, in the form of third person narratives. I divided each structural description into essential structures of the experience for the purpose of clarity and in order to inform stage two of empirical work. This second stage will be discussed further in chapters six and seven. Each of the individual structural descriptions were interrogated in the manner explained in order to elucidate the commonalities of the BDSM experience for four of the participants; Tom, Joe, Annie and Steven. I concluded not to include Polly's individual structural description, as this experience was not about engaging in BDSM for pleasure. Polly's participation in BDSM was for the purpose of earning money rather than for the enjoyment of the practice. Polly's interview was, however, insightful in its own right and her individual structural description has therefore been included in this stage of research.

5.3.1 Individual structural descriptions

The individual structural descriptions of each participant are discussed in turn;

5.3.2 Tom

For Tom, puppy play as part of BDSM is a way for him to engage in a stimulating sexual adventure, where his sexual need for thrill and excitement can be fulfilled. Tom and his partner engaged in puppy play, with Tom assuming the role of the puppy and Joe assuming the master's role. Through puppy play Tom is somehow able to shed his humanness, and therefore experience sex which is liberated from human restrictions such as embarrassment and self-consciousness. Tom felt relaxed and calm as he rolled over to have his stomach tickled, enjoying the attention from his master. Tom barked in appreciation, aware that this was his only means of communication, this limited capacity of self-expression was sexually arousing to Tom as his ability to communicate had been altered by the adoption of this sexual role. Tom was aroused by the lack of power and control he had over himself; because he was a puppy he had to behave as he was told to by Joe and this lack of responsibility had a soothing effect on him. The lack of social constraints on Tom to behave as a person meant he was able to fetch his lead and beg to be taken for 'walkies', and sitting patiently while Joe carefully attached his collar, tag and lead led to feelings of sexual excitement and anticipation but also happiness that someone was taking this level of care over him. Tom is able to receive comforting contact like this during the play, without being required to respond in a socially acceptable manner. Once the collar was tightly attached on Tom's neck, he and Joe went out into the woods to play as master and dog, Tom was incredibly sexually aroused and the risk of discovery was exciting to him and enhanced these feelings of eroticism. His role as a puppy felt natural to Tom, and he relished his time running naked in the woods with Joe, as this gave him a sense of emotional release and allowed him to escape into a fantasy world. This role play is not simply a case of Tom *acting* like a puppy, Tom felt as though he was the embodiment of a puppy, as though he had transformed. His thoughts became less complex and were focussed on more primal matters such as satisfying his sexual desire, his willingness to be debased and to obey Joe at all costs. During this scene, Tom felt completely detached from his human self, and he felt as though he *was* a puppy both physically and psychologically; this detachment was very sexually satisfying for him. Tom and Joe had very fulfilling sex outside in the woods, appealing to Tom's sense of exhibitionism, and the threat of discovery was a constant source of arousal. When

they returned home, Tom drank some water from his dog bowl and curled up by the fire, requiring time to emerge from the role and to readapt to his human self. This had become a more significant sexual experience and was the ultimate act of submission on Tom's part.

5.3.3 Joe

Joe was excited about seeing Tom without Nathan, and when he arrived Joe immediately made him change into rubber chaps and wear a leather hood over his face. Joe attaches erotic meaning to these clothes and is aroused by seeing an attractive man wearing them, knowing he is about to submit to Joe's every whim. Because of Joe and Tom's deep reciprocal trust in each other, they do not have to use a safe word in their BDSM. From the outset, the lack of a safe word makes this a more erotic experience for Joe meaning he is genuinely in control of his partner and of the situation. Joe feels strongly that incorporating a safe word is allowing the submissive partner to retain a proportion of control, rather than relinquish all power to Joe and as a result is less sexually exciting for him. Having a safe word causes the exchange of power to become illusory. Joe obtains his most powerful sexual thrills from 'true' domination and anticipates this experience will be particularly erotic due to the lack of a safe word. Joe orders Tom to the playroom, where he must kneel in front of him, simply the visual image of Tom's vulnerability and submission arouses Joe. After ordering Tom to remain in that position, he retrieved a pair of metal handcuffs and fastened Tom's hands behind his back, experiencing a rush of power while doing so. The main point of eroticism for Joe was the awareness that he did not really need to restrain Tom physically, such was the length of his psychological submission to Joe. Joe ordered Tom to give him oral sex, his favourite sexual activity. Part of the enjoyment arises from the ability to act selfishly during the play while also judging Tom's limits. He grasped Tom's hair in order to inflict some discomfort and also to gain control over Tom's physical movements, making him relinquish every aspect of control. Joe continued to thrust deeper into Tom's mouth, aware that Tom is aroused by having his limits tested. Tom's arousal is important to Joe, despite his dominant position. Joe orders Tom to take him deeper into his throat until he began to gag, and Joe relished the power he was wielding over Tom, his own arousal increasing as the situation progressed, knowing that Tom was really enjoying himself through his own loss of control. The knowledge that Tom trusts him

enough to completely submit in this way is as arousing for Joe as the BDSM is itself. Once Joe had orgasmed, he decided to experiment with fisting, as this is something Tom had expressed interest in trying. Joe was aware that this requires trust and relaxation. Tom had never attempted this, so Joe assumed the role of educator, dropping the harsh tone of voice, speaking in a more caring, yet still direct, manner. Joe was confident that the status difference between them was maintained with Tom remaining in bondage with his hood in place. Joe was aroused by his dual role as dominator and educator, teaching Tom the approaches and techniques involved in fisting. Their secondary roles as teacher and student aroused Joe and enhanced the eroticism of the session for him. Joe relied on his skill to judge when Tom had reached his limits, only exceeding them when he judged it was appropriate; seeing Tom's achievements was thrilling for Joe. Tom enjoyed experimenting with boundaries, and was eager to totally submit to Joe, and having a partner that was so keen to genuinely relinquish control was particularly erotic. Once Joe concluded that Tom had gone far enough, he stopped the fisting and untied Tom. Joe lay on the bed holding Tom quietly and reassuringly, feeling close to Tom, until he felt Tom had recovered sufficiently from the powerful submissive experience.

5.3.4 Annie

Annie and her primary partner Robert were at a play party at the house of a mutual friend. Annie was acting the role of Robert's slave, which was a common way they played. Annie was wearing a leather collar, which she regarded as a symbol of her submission to Robert. Annie always wore this collar during submission, and it elicited feelings of being very controlled, which in turn were erotic. Annie enjoys feeling as though she belongs to Robert as his possession, and wearing the collar continually reinforces her position as slave. Annie was wearing a short skirt and dark coloured vest top. The clothing was not erotic for Annie, as her focus was fixed on the symbol of her submission; the collar. Annie had been sitting at Robert's feet for most of the evening watching the other people play on the various equipment, becoming very aroused at the scenes of dominance and submission, however, she was not permitted to speak to Robert to convey this. This inability to communicate with anyone without being given explicit permission by Robert was part of Annie's humiliation as his slave. When someone spoke to her, or if she wanted to speak, she had to look to Robert in order for him to grant her permission, which had not been

given during the course of the evening. Although Annie felt humiliated at this requirement, the humiliation was very erotic for her. By relinquishing control to Robert, he could behave in any manner he decided towards her, and on this occasion had chosen to humiliate her in front of the other party-goers. Annie felt totally controlled, and removing her ability to communicate gave Robert even more power over her, increasing Annie's arousal. She enjoys feeling insignificant and subjugated when her status is reduced from an equal in the sexual partnership to a sex slave. As the evening progressed Robert ordered Annie to stand up and strip, he did not explain his reasons for this request, eliciting a flash of excitement for Annie. Seeing Robert display his power and status elicited an increase in Annie's arousal. Initially Annie felt reluctant to remove her clothing in front of the other people in the room because many were strangers. She experienced joint feelings of dread coupled with anticipation at the unknown pleasure she was about to receive. Annie was not able to refuse Robert's order as she was his slave and all orders were to be obeyed; she also wanted to illustrate to the others that she was a good slave to Robert, obeying him at all times. Slowly Annie removed her outer clothes, and after another stern command from Robert, she removed her underwear so she was naked. Annie could feel the many pairs of eyes that were now staring at her, intrigued at what was about to occur. Annie's emotions were mixed; she felt nervous, inadequate and exposed but she very much wanted to please Robert, and portray herself as a great slave, worthy of his attention. Robert ordered Annie to touch her toes ten times, leaving her feeling particularly humiliated as the other dominants and even some slaves laughed at her. These feelings however, were tinged with an erotic edge and gradually the humiliation became a source of arousal. Her awareness that everyone in the room was looking at her made her feel attractive and special, and also that they all knew Robert owned her and had the power to enforce his will on her was sexually exciting. Annie felt completely controlled and under Robert's charge, all her own will had been quashed, and Annie now felt confident to obey any order Robert commanded. Robert led her over to the wooden frame that was towards the centre of the room and tied her wrists and ankles to it with thick, rough rope. The feeling of restraint added to Annie's eroticism, and while she still felt a little anxious about the voyeurs, she was determined to take whatever Robert decided to inflict. As was usual, they had not discussed the content of the play beforehand. Having no knowledge was preferable to Annie as the fear of the unknown enhances her sexual

experience. Annie believes she would enjoy the play much less if she had any input because her submissive position dictates that she does not choose. Robert began to flog Annie on her back and buttocks, the tingling pain causing a pleasurable sensation enabling her to let go of her earlier reservations. Robert then ordered the slave of another dominant man who was watching to join in with the play. The slave began biting Annie's breasts causing her moderate pain. This pain was experienced as pleasure as a result of the sexual atmosphere, along with the fantasy that she was really Robert's slave. The slave's owner also approached to participate, and took over the flogging from Robert, who proceeded to pull and squeeze Annie's clitoris. Annie was now oblivious to everything except for the physical and emotional sensations she was experiencing, leading to a particularly powerful orgasm. Annie was pleased that she had been able to overcome her initial difficulties and relinquish herself to Robert's control and as a result she felt attractive, important and nurtured by Robert, who was now lavishing praise on her for doing so well.

5.3.5 Steven

Steven had decided to adopt the role of the submissive, with his then partner assuming the role of the dominant. Steven enjoys the unpredictability of BDSM with his partner, as roles and activities are negotiated during the session rather than agreed beforehand. Steven felt as though he wanted to submit as generally this is a more powerful experience for him, and he felt able to trust his partner to dominate him for the first time during their relationship. Steven was wearing regular clothes, but removed them prior to the BDSM beginning. The role of clothing during BDSM is unimportant to Steven, preferring that both partners are naked throughout. Steven's girlfriend knelt on his lap and began kissing him roughly, biting his tongue in order to produce a small amount of blood; something Steven particularly enjoys. Steven enjoys both the pain sensation and the taste of the blood in his mouth, the sharing of the blood between himself and his partner is also arousing for Steven, viewing it in the same way as sharing other bodily fluids during sex. As the kissing becomes more intense, Steven's partner begins scratching his skin with her sharp fingernails, leaving red marks all over his body, much to Steven's delight she then bites him hard enough on his chest to draw blood. She smears the blood across his chest and licks some off his skin, increasing Steven's arousal. This is something Steven enjoys very much but does not often trust partners enough to allow them to do it to him, as he

requires a profound level of understanding and trust in his partners. Using a riding crop Steven's girlfriend begins to spank him on his buttocks and thighs, increasing the amount of pain inflicted slightly with each lash of the crop, until she was inflicting moderate pain. With this increase in severity, Steven begins to enter a euphoric state, enjoying the painful stokes on his body, but relishing the breaks between lashings, as this is where Steven's ultimate pleasure lies. This is where he experiences the euphoria, which for Steven is akin to the higher state achieved during meditation. These extremes are the reason Steven prefers to submit rather than dominate. Steven's partner introduced a short whip to alternate with the riding crop, causing him more severe pain. Steven perceives this pain as a psychological and physical challenge to be endured and overcome. During this act of submission Steven retained some element of psychological control, rather than relinquishing everything to his partner. Steven challenges himself to endure and overcome the pain, rather than to respond in an animalistic manner by shouting out and expressing the extent of his pain. By psychologically controlling the pain Steven can re-enter his euphoric state, his senses becoming hyperaware and really feeling alive. Steven is able to convert the negative experience of pain and through controlling himself and his responses, the pain becomes a pleasurable experience. After Steven's partner has finished and the pain has ceased, Steven experiences feelings of profound and peaceful relaxation. Steven enjoys experiencing the two extremes of intense pain and intense relaxation so closely, and can only experience this through BDSM. Steven felt their shared experience had strengthened the bond between his girlfriend and himself, deepening the level of trust between them, thus allowing them to further cement their relationship.

5.3.6 Polly

Polly had returned to prostitution after a 20 year break, specialising in BDSM. She was meeting one of her regular clients, who worked as a tax inspector. He arrived at Polly's flat on time, and negotiations began on the content of the play. As they sat down for coffee, Polly knew the session would not be challenging for her, and she felt pleased about this. The client wanted the usual mix of domination and humiliation. After taking payment for the hour long session, Polly and the client separated and she changed into a PVC costume and six inch red stiletto shoes; she despised the tight PVC costume and cheap shoes but wanted to dress in the most

appropriate way to please her client. Polly never used her real name when working and for this client had invented a pseudonym that represented her harsh character. She carefully applied lots of make up in her compact mirror, attempting to evoke her working persona and separate from her non-working self. She always made a conscious effort when working to look as different as possible. While dressing, Polly prepared the mental agenda of how the session would proceed and what activities she would include on this occasion. She was eager to ensure that while staying with the client's theme, his experiences varied in order to maintain his custom. When she returned, the client was waiting on the floor, dressed only in the patterned apron he had brought with him. Polly immediately accused him of looking at her disrespectfully and so administered the first punishment, a hard slap across the face. Polly was not at all aroused, but reminded herself of the money she would earn from the session; she considered sessions such as these to be easy money. Polly ordered the client to clean her bathroom, as she was aware from previous encounters of this client's preference for toilets. Polly considered this aspect of her work as a perk, as it meant she rarely had to clean. Polly watched while the client cleaned the bathroom, interrupting from time to time to criticise and scold him for poor work. The client became increasingly aroused and Polly eventually ordered him to start cleaning the kitchen. Polly increased the verbal humiliation, and began kicking the client when his work was sub-standard. After some time, Polly used her stiletto heels to step on the client, who cried out in pain and promised to improve the cleaning. During this time Polly began to daydream about how she would spend the money earned from this session, and eventually decided to purchase some shoes she had seen recently while shopping. When the client had almost finished his cleaning tasks, Polly launched a tirade of verbal humiliation on the client. She noticed that his erection was prominent under the apron so told him he was not permitted to orgasm and instead inserted her stiletto into the client's anus. Polly was aware she was clock-watching, and doing things to fill up the remaining time, she inserted a butt plug into the client and attached weighted nipple clamps over the apron. She could see the client was enjoying the moderate pain and she also wanted to keep physical contact to a minimum. She continued to verbally humiliate the client, telling him his attempts at cleaning were not good enough, and her mind wandered back to the shoes she intended to purchase with the money from this session. As the hour was ending, Polly finally allowed the client to orgasm on the kitchen floor. She left the room while

the client changed back into his business suit. Polly liked that any other social interaction was avoided by the client, and that there was no direct sexual contact involved. When he had changed, the client paid her an extra thirty pounds for her to telephone him during the following week, and then left the flat. Polly instantly went to shower and change, leave her work persona aside and return to being herself until her next client later in the evening.

The following section presents the general structural description of the experience of participating in BDSM for the purposes of recreation, and does therefore not include Polly's individual structural experience.

5.4 General structural description of the experience of BDSM

The BDSM experience facilitates a temporary escape from the complexities of the everyday. Practitioners are able to leave their world of reality behind and focus on the physical and emotional sensations elicited by BDSM. They experience a sensory indulgence as mundane complications of life are suspended while attention is focused on their body and/or the body of their partner, resulting in a powerful sexual sensation. BDSM allows escape from the expected human responses to certain concepts such as pain, and a new way of experiencing physical and emotional sensations emerges as a consequence of this escapism. Experiencers assume the role of explorers, navigating through the multi-faceted sexual worlds of possibility, and it is the engagement with these worlds that stimulates the creation of fantasies.

The sexual world of fantasy encourages individuals to create new and multiple identities through the adoption of roles and the acting of scenarios. The escape into fantasy however, must have some level of authenticity to be enjoyable. Despite the fact BDSM is by its nature, entwined with acting and pretence, there is importance placed upon the genuineness of the assumed roles. In order for the experience to be completely engaging, there must be an element of truth within the fantasy. If the assumed roles are acted inauthentically, the fantasy becomes transparent and unbelievable. There must be genuine components present to ensure the fantasy is successful. Pretending a role as opposed to genuine engagement with a role is not sufficient to create an authentic BDSM experience. Despite the BDSM practitioners' awareness that the scenario is fantasy, there is a necessity for a presence of some hook to reality for the BDSM to be enjoyable.

Participation in BDSM allows the experiencer to create their own set of rules, which reject conventional social norms in terms of both the act of sex and intimate relationships. These is no need to behave intimately or sexually in a manner deemed to be acceptable by society, as BDSM experiences permit the transcendence of social norms and expectations surrounding sex and gender roles. BDSM experiences allow practitioners to modify common social constructions about sex, pain, dominance and submission, and create a new set of rules and codes of conduct more suited to the subculture of which they are part. The rebuttal of society's expectations leads to a sexual openness between those involved, which is unobtainable from the experience of vanilla sex. The aims and roles of the BDSM are explicit from the outset of the encounter, and the sexual expectations are perceived to be different from vanilla sex. Self created rules authorise a sexual freedom, and BDSM practitioners are able to experience the kinds of sex they enjoy without the constraints placed on sex by society.

The experience of BDSM is not simply a sexual experience for those involved, although this aspect of BDSM does play a significant part in the overall experience; there are many layers of meaning involved for BDSM practitioners. Firstly, the experience of BDSM allows for exploration of different aspects of an individual's personality, not usually experienced during their everyday lives. Through adoption of roles and the acting out of characters and scenes, BDSM participants are able to gain new and diverse experiences of themselves. Secondly, the experience of BDSM enables practitioners to relate to and interpret their own experiences outside of the sexual context. The BDSM experience can be meaningful in other ways, alongside the experience of a satisfying sexual encounter, in terms of a spiritual, cathartic or therapeutic experience. In addition to the differing experiences contained within the BDSM experiences, there are also outcomes which are separate from sexual satisfaction, and these can relate to the relationships involved as part of the BDSM experience, or to the individual self.

The sexual context of the BDSM experience enables the impact of certain emotions and sensations to be transformed. Feelings, both physical and emotional, that would be interpreted negatively are transformed into enjoyable experiences within the sexual context of BDSM. Such feelings would not be considered in pleasurable terms outside of this sexual context. The BDSM context has the effect of altering the

elicited feeling from the (usual) negative interpretation to the positive and enjoyable interpretation. The negative feelings can manifest positively within the sexual context of the BDSM experience.

The experience of BDSM allows the individual to inhabit a less restricted body, unconfined by the complexities of humanity and human emotion. Physical sensations elicited by BDSM provide an embodied contrast to the sensations experienced during everyday life, including the experience of vanilla sex and BDSM enables new ways of experiencing the body.

5.5 Positional statement and personal reflexivity

The purpose of this section is to illuminate my position during the data collection and data analysis stages. This section will also serve to act as part of the 'audit-trail' for critical readers. Rather than navel-gazing, this section will illustrate my engagement with the data and the wider process of research through reflexivity. Willig (2008a) argues that reflexivity is a fundamental part of any qualitative research. She describes personal reflexivity as the process of reflecting upon the ways our own values, experiences and position has influenced the research and how the research may have influenced the researcher. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) argue that employing reflexivity can address the critique that qualitative research is not scientific or rigorous as a result of the subjective position of the researcher. I have taken a reflexive stance throughout the thesis, and this section relates to the data collection for stage one of the empirical work.

The position I adopted was one of role based phenomenological researcher. I was the research instrument here; the person I am enabled the research, through the relationship developed with the participants. My role during the data collection was that of a phenomenological researcher, immersing myself in the philosophy of this method and engaging in the various phenomenological techniques required. I also position myself as an 'outsider researcher'; as noted above, I am not a practitioner of BDSM nor am I particularly familiar with the BDSM community. I do have an interest in things sexual, including BDSM, but would not regard myself as au fait with the various practices and activities related to it.

Reflections related to myself

Myself as the interviewer

When I began the research, I was very aware that perhaps I would be viewed by the participants as being in a position of power or authority as part of the researcher-participant relationship. I was not comfortable with this from outset and I was anxious that this may affect my performance during the interview. It was a concern to me that the participants may tell me things so as to appear socially acceptable, especially given the general socially disrespected nature of BDSM. Another huge concern was that the participants would regard me as a 'tourist', simply visiting their world before returning to my own as a result of my position as an outsider researcher. I worried about whether they would they take me seriously? Would the participants be as open with me as they would with an insider researcher? Would I come across to them as inexperienced in matters of BDSM? Would the participants feel able to be as open and as graphic as desired as a result of my subject position? As we embarked on our shared journey I realised that this was not the case and that my concerns were unfounded, and probably the result of my own insecurities and anxieties rather than anything else. The participant's involvement in the project was driven by genuine interest and a shared desire to contribute to the de-pathologising of BDSM.

Myself as a sexual being

Having been part of a same-sex relationship for many years I never considered myself as being 'into' BDSM. Despite engaging occasionally in sexual activities I now perceive to be part of the BDSM spectrum, at the time I did not interpret these activities as such. I position myself as a non-practitioner of BDSM, and as previously mentioned my position was as an outsider researcher, as I had no experience of engaging with the BDSM community and I was only fleetingly familiar with some of the practices involved in BDSM. Other sexual activities along the spectrum of BDSM were completely alien concepts to me at the beginning of this stage of research. Part of the process of building rapport involved some self-disclosure, though the levels and intensity differed between interviews depending on my own level of comfort with each participant. I felt it was the right thing to do to offer some self-disclosure, considering the amount of disclosure on the part of the participants. The amount and content of the information I disclosed about myself was tempered by a judgement made about how relevant my own information was to the conversation, how

comfortable I felt revealing certain details to certain participants and an awareness of not wanting to 'take over' by imposing my own experiences on the participants. By sharing with the participants that I was perhaps a *non-conventional* sexual being, given my same sex relationship and interest in erotic minorities, this enabled a level of trust to transpire and the sense that although I was not a practitioner of BDSM, I may be judged by others in the same fashion as BDSM practitioners are often judged. I felt that this led to feelings of solidarity between myself and the participants, and coupled with my aim of producing research to support the non-pathologising literature, we developed a trusting, warm and reciprocal relationship.

Myself as a psychologist

My position as a psychologist meant I was required to bracket all psychological and theoretical knowledge, and that the related way of thinking had to be resisted. I am unsure whether I was entirely successful on every occasion. I did encounter many things, such as unfamiliar sexual terms and activities, without presupposition because I did not have any pre-knowledge of these things. However, it was very difficult to work within the epochē and set aside all pre-knowledge related to psychology, which has been my topic of study for the last eight years.

Myself as a friend

As mentioned earlier, one of the research participants, Tom, was a friend of mine prior to participating in the research. I knew him reasonably well as he was the flatmate of a very close friend, although Tom was not considered a close friend at the time. I also was aware that my close friend did not approve of his flatmate's interest in BDSM and subsequent sexual activities, and I knew this was a source of ever increasing tension between them. I quickly became embedded into a shared world with the participant, which consequently created tension between myself and my close friend, which eventually lead to us drifting apart. It was difficult at times to situate myself as a naive researcher while asking about the taken-for-granted knowledges of our social world. I had to attempt to bracket this knowledge of our shared world and let Tom's story be in its appearing as something new to me. This was a less problematic task when Tom was discussing his intimate sexual moments but far more difficult when hearing about known-to-us accounts of events. Although I was a friend of Tom's, we were not close friends, and this made it easier to discuss

these sexual moments. I had to manage the interaction carefully, in one sense it was two friends conversing but in the other sense I needed to elucidate important experiential aspects of Tom's descriptions. During the interview Tom revealed to me that he had been raped, which was something I was not aware of prior to the interview. I had to work hard not to expose my utter shock at this revelation and keep the interview on track, while exhibiting genuine sympathy for my friend. I also had to bracket this new knowledge in line with the phenomenological reduction, to ensure that I did not begin to view Tom as an object of pity, something which I found very challenging and testing. As I have some experience of the horror of rape, this elicited some feelings of distress and sadness within me, again something I attempted to bracket with limited success. During the interview I was unsure whether to follow this revelation up with further questioning, and with consideration decided against doing so as this was not the focus of the research, and Tom did not feel this experience had any impact on his decision to participate in, or his enjoyment of BDSM. At times during the interview I found it difficult to negotiate the complex situation but on reflection I believe I coped well with the dualistic nature of our relationship, and as a result of Tom's participation we became very close friends.

Reflections relating to the participants

Husserl's (1925/1977) thoughts regarding supposition in the phenomenological reduction raise two issues that can be applied to the participants. Firstly, that which appears to be appearing *is* actually appearing and second the appearing person *is* actually as appearing. Linking these issues to this stage of research I believe that the participants did present an accurate reflection of their sense of self. I believe I saw the genuine person in all of the interviews and that during the interviews the participants told me a true account of their experience of BDSM *as experienced* and recounted this to me as accurately as possible.

Every participant at some point during the interviews struggled to articulate their point. It seemed that suitable language of description was inaccessible. Participants struggled and grappled with *how* to express their very visceral experiences through language. It is not possible to be totally certain that the language being used by the participants does convey their experience as lived. When the participants were struggling to articulate their lived experience and share that experience with me, they

frequently turned to common-sense discourses, such as clichés and common-sense scientific terminology or explanations, to describe their sexual experiences. The interviews were conducted through our common language of English, and I am aware that this is not a duplication of the direct experiences as lived by the participants. It is however, a direct representation of the events discussed, and I believe that the participants and I got as near as possible to their direct, lived experiences during our shared discourse. Ashworth illuminates this argument thus:

> *...We have to rely on shared understanding of the language being used by the research participant if we have to describe their life-world...We cannot assume a person's life-world is easily and lucidly expressible, but we do assume reciprocity of perspectives...we do assume understandibility* (2006a: 22)

This section discussed some personal reflections of this stage of work regarding myself and the research participants. The shared nature of the research process is evident from these reflections, illustrating the co-created element of the work.

5.6 Summary & Concluding Comments

There are wide ranging potential difficulties that can be encountered with regards to the epochē. It is probable that I did make errors at times and allowed my presuppositions and preknowledge to affect the process of data collection and data analysis. On reflection I found this aspect incredibly challenging, and at times frustrating. After all I have lived in the natural attitude my whole life and I do not doubt that my subjective experiences did impact on the various research activities undertaken for this stage of empirical work. Generally, engaging with the epochē was very difficult; however, despite the problems I encountered, insightful data were obtained leading to a useful analysis. The ultimate aim of the epochē is to achieve a completely open and presuppositionless state; to act as a blank canvas ready to paint participants' experiences as they appear. Moustakas sums up the value of the epochē as *'it inspires one to examine biases and enhances one's openness even if a perfect and pure state is not achieved'* (1994:61).

At the beginning of this chapter I presented a description of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis, including an explanation of the various

stages involved during the process of analysis. I discussed the detail of how I engaged with the analytical process, approaching the stages of analysis pragmatically as suggested by Giorgi (1985). During this discussion the concepts of the phenomenological reduction, the epochē and imaginative variation were described in terms of their role in the research process along with how I implemented them in practice. I outlined and described the practical difficulties I encountered in relation to these concepts during the process of analysis. The chapter then presented the individual structural descriptions for each of the five research participants, before presenting the general structural description of the experience of participating in consensual BDSM. I included my reflections on the research process for stage one at the end of the chapter. These reflections were drawn from my research journal and notes made immediately following the completion of each interview. The next chapter will discuss the key findings arising from the analysis presented here.

Chapter 6

Developing the Interpretive Stage of Research

Developing the Interpretive Stage of Research

The thesis has, so far, focused on the initial, exploratory stage of the empirical work. The findings from stage one indicated that the erotic aspects of BDSM participation were somewhat invisible in participants' accounts. This section of the thesis shifts to the more focused stage of empirical work, specifically, exploring this critical issue of what is erotic about BDSM participation.

This chapter will detail the development of this stage of the PhD thesis as informed by the findings from stage one. The rationale for the methodological shift from descriptive phenomenology to an interpretive approach will be explained and I will justify this shift by outlining the complementary nature of these methodological approaches. The research design for this stage will be described which will encapsulate the analytic method of template analysis, the development of the interview schedule, the use of the phenomenological technique of imaginative variation and the use of participants' written description. The sampling technique will be discussed along with a brief introduction to the participants recruited for this stage. The final part of this chapter deals with the ethical issues I encountered while embarking on this stage of empirical work.

6.1 The development of stage two of empirical work as informed by stage one of research

This stage of empirical work has been informed by the first stage of research (see chapters 4 & 5), which used a descriptive phenomenological approach in order to understand the phenomenon of consensual BDSM. By generating phenomenological data from self-identified BDSM practitioners, the study aimed to produce a general structural description of the experience of engaging in consensual BDSM as it appeared to the participants.

The findings of this initial stage were enlightening in their own right and served the purpose of illuminating the phenomenon of BDSM and providing insight into the worldview of practitioners of this set of sexual practices. These findings also informed the selection of a priori themes (discussed later in this chapter) for the data analysis of stage two of the research. The most striking aspect of the findings was what was absent from the participant's accounts: a description of what was

specifically sexual or erotic regarding BDSM participation. Participants discussed the sexual aspect in terms of an enjoyable and gratifying experience, however, there was a lack of input regarding the sexual triggers and erotic constituents of BDSM. Those aspects of BDSM play that are viscerally sexual were missing in the general structure of the experience of BDSM participation, which posed the questions 'why are they missing?' and' where is the eroticism to be found in BDSM?' A possible answer to the former question may lie in the difficulty participants displayed when trying to articulate their thoughts. All of the participants at some point during the interview grappled with expressing their thoughts verbally in clear and expressive language. Jackson (2003) notes there is a lack of language of eroticism and a difficulty arises from this; representative lexicon of sexual pleasure is constrained. There are linguistic absences when discussing sexual desires, according to Jackson and Frye (1990, cited in Jackson 2003), language relates to sexual acts rather than to feelings, sensations and emotions. Further research to address the latter question is necessary in order to tease out the erotic meaning of BDSM, and from this the research aims for this stage of research were developed.

6.2 Research aims

This second stage of empirical research employed an interpretive phenomenological methodology in order to produce an understanding of the eroticism within the practice of BDSM. The specific aim of this part of the study is as follows:

- This stage of the empirical research aims to gain understanding of what is erotic about BDSM participation.

6.3 Rationale for an interpretive approach

This stage of research moves away from the descriptive phenomenology of the previous stage and takes an interpretive approach to the investigation of the eroticism within BDSM. This shift in approach also leads to a change of research focus; from an investigation of the *phenomenon* of BDSM to an exploration of the *lived experience* of BDSM.

Langdridge (2008) contends that there are no hard and fast boundaries between the descriptive and interpretive phenomenological camps, as the creation of boundaries would be antithetical to the spirit of the tradition. Langdridge also states that

phenomenology encourages creative freedom in research. I have exercised that creative freedom with regards to the approaches selected for each stage of research, opting to draw on both traditions. In the case of the current stage of research it is important to reiterate that the choice of each phenomenological approach was driven by the research aims of the respective stages of empirical work. The purpose of employing descriptive phenomenology in the first stage was in order to gain insight into the phenomenon of consensual BDSM, and to broadly examine this phenomenon in order to familiarise myself with it by actively collecting descriptive accounts from those involved rather than from indirect sources. Langdridge (2008) offers the critique that frequently psychological research has hurried to explain, without first establishing *exactly what* it was interrogating. He proposes that an initial descriptive phase of research would be useful, and that a desire to describe the things in their appearing would determine crucial foundations for research. The findings from the initial descriptive stage of the work *did* determine the basis for the second, more focused stage of research.

Once the first stage was completed, I shifted positions to take an interpretive approach for the second stage of work. In light of the research aims of this stage an interpretive stance was more suitable given what I wanted to achieve with the analysis. I wanted to build on what I had learned from stage one; therefore I did not want to treat eroticism in BDSM as a new phenomenon to be described entirely afresh. Instead of focusing on the phenomenon, I wanted to understand participants' erotic BDSM experiences as lived, rather than extending further description of the phenomenon of BDSM. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) argue that interpretive phenomenological approaches are most useful for examining features of a lived experience, and this stage of work aimed to elucidate the erotic features of BDSM. The intention was to go beyond the descriptive data by using an iterative process of interpretation in an attempt to explicate the erotic meanings present in BDSM experiences. I had also encountered problems with the concept of the epochē during the first stage of work (see chapter 5 page 105 for a discussion), and I was not intellectually convinced that it is possible to suspend knowledge relating to the topic of study and view the phenomenon as if encountering it for the first time. The interpretive approach does not advocate the use of the epochē, subscribing instead

to the position that researchers should challenge their taken-for-granted view of the world.

Traditionally, the descriptive and interpretive approaches have been positioned in terms of a dichotomy in the literature. This problematic dichotomous presentation has neglected the commonalities that exist in the phenomenological approaches, and I argue in the next section that the approaches should be viewed along a continuum, rather than be divided into two separate methodologies.

6.4 Bridging the divide between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology

Phenomenological psychology encompasses a family of methodological traditions, each with their own philosophical positions. These tend to be divided into the transcendental (or descriptive), and hermeneutic (or interpretive), approaches (Laverty 2003). The phenomenological literature commonly emphasises the distinctions between these schools of thought, and while not denying the existence of important philosophical and practical differences, I contend that the commonalities are often overlooked. Speigelberg (1960) implores phenomenologists to consider phenomenology as a movement where understandings are not fixed but rather are dynamic and evolving. The second stage of my empirical work shifts from the transcendental tradition of descriptive phenomenology and takes an interpretive stance, as discussed above. The literature situates this shift as problematic, because rather than framing the various phenomenological positions as belonging on a continuum, the tendency is to accentuate the differences placing the traditions as polar opposites. I intend to illustrate that the transcendental and hermeneutic schools have more that unites them than divides them, and argue why this shift for the second stage of research is appropriate in light of the research aims. Lawler (1998) criticised the fundamentalism concerning the application of methodological approaches based within the phenomenological traditions, claiming more importance was placed on ‘following the right steps’ rather than engaging with the theoretical insights the various approaches can offer. Todres and Wheeler (2001) argue that there is inherent tension in balancing the philosophies of phenomenology and addressing the pragmatic concerns of research. They contend that it is possible to be coherent without being dogmatic, and that there is complementarity to be found amongst the various phenomenological traditions.

The main uniting feature of the phenomenological traditions is that they are all grounded in human experience. Husserl (1931/1960) argued that the lifeworld should be the starting point for all phenomenological inquiry, as the lifeworld forms our experiential frame of reference. Although Husserl's primary concern was epistemological, this concept of grounding all inquiry in the lifeworld permeates through all the phenomenological traditions. This concept has been developed from Husserl's primarily philosophical aim into a methodological approach to elucidate human experiences of the lifeworld by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Giorgi among others. The task of clarifying the aspects of the lifeworld is not a concern of any other research tradition, it is a purely phenomenological endeavour. Researching human experience as lived remains of central importance to all phenomenologists, regardless of which particular school they are aligned with. Husserl (1931/1960) advocated a return to the things in their appearing, arguing for a need to reclaim what had been lost through the use of empirical scientific investigations (Laverty 2003), a stance also adopted by subsequent existential and hermeneutic phenomenologists. This rejection of empiricist, analytical science is common across the phenomenological continuum (Dowling 2007), with phenomenologists concurring with Husserl that the study of lived experience is in not amenable to reductionist, empiricist approaches, and it is only the phenomenological approaches that are able to reveal how we experience the world in which we live (Rapport & Wainwright 2006). Scientific notions of cause and effect are rejected, with emphasis placed upon description and meaning rather than measurement (Todres & Wheeler 2001). Phenomenologists, regardless of whether they position themselves in the transcendental or interpretive camp, fundamentally take a united stance against the Cartesian dualism of the natural sciences, arguing that a human science approach should be employed to study human beings (Laverty 2003, Giorgi 2000). Despite taking a hermeneutic turn, Heidegger retained Husserl's insight regarding the non-dualistic nature of human existence with his concept of being-in-the-world, as did subsequent existential phenomenologists; Merleau-Ponty with his notion of the body-subject and Sartre's idea of nothingness. All phenomenological thinking follows the same train – it is not possible to separate mind and body nor body and world due to the way in which consciousness intentionally relates to objects in the world (see chapter 3 page 56 for a discussion on intentionality).

Another unifying feature of phenomenological approaches is the focus on description and meaning rather than explanation. At the heart of all phenomenology is concrete and detailed description of some phenomenon, and as Langdridge (2008) argues there is a theoretical resistance to notions of explanation within the discipline. The focus is concentrated on descriptions of experiences as lived, as opposed to attempting to quantify or explain experience in cognitive or behavioural terms. It is important to recognise here that the role of description within phenomenology is hotly debated, with transcendental phenomenologists arguing that description is all that is possible within phenomenology, while interpretive positions contend that there is always some interpretation involved in understanding others' descriptions. What is not debatable is that description enables phenomenologists to investigate the lifeworld, and that all phenomenological inquiry is based upon concrete description of human experience. Dilthey's (1900 cited in Harrington 2000) writings further illuminate this phenomenological difference between the nature of understanding and the nature of explanation. Dilthey proposed that human beings take a participative perspective, drawing on the experiential dimensions of their life and that these dimensions require empathic descriptions, which have a different logic altogether from explanations. Dilthey argues that explanations are more useful in a universe which is viewed from a non-participative perspective, where the externalised relationships between things are highlighted. If the world is explained using scientific terms then the individual loses their context and is forced to understand their experiences in a scientific manner (Todres & Wheeler 2001). Explanation forces the scientific, dualistic paradigm on human experience in a way that understanding does not, thus Dilthey's notion of understanding is an inherently phenomenological notion. This lack of necessity for explanation leads to an approach which does not advocate prescriptive or normalising theories, methodologies or other external frameworks (Langdridge 2008). This enables phenomenologists to take an open minded and innovative approach to research, which is required in my work, as it is dealing with currently marginalised practices.

Having outlined the difference between explanation and understanding, it is important to note how these concepts relate to interpretation. Interpretivists argue that it is not possible to gain direct access to participants' worlds and experiences; it is always filtered through the researcher's own perspective and through the

interactional relationship between researcher and participant (Willig 2010). As a result, any subsequent analysis is considered to be an interpretation of the participants' experience of a phenomenon. This notion stems from Heidegger's (1927/1962) shift from an epistemological to an ontological focus. He argued that interpretation is fundamental to existence, as human beings in the world are constantly forming interpretations both explicitly and implicitly. Heidegger conceptualised the hermeneutic circle to describe the circular relationship between understanding and interpretation; that understanding cannot occur without making preliminary assumptions about that which we are trying to understand. Therefore understanding takes a circular route from presupposition to interpretation and back again (Heidegger 1927/1962). This interpretive process has no definite beginning or end point, and is continual as a result of our being-in-the-world. Rather than attempting to bracket presuppositions about the world or about a phenomenon, interpretive phenomenologists work with and recognise the presuppositions in an attempt to further understanding (Willig 2010).

Willig (2010) argues that there are two main kinds of interpretation, depending upon the methodological approach adopted for a piece of research; suspicious and empathic interpretation. According to Willig (2010), suspicious interpretation refuses to take data at face value and instead attempts to discover and reveal the underlying meaning within the data-producing explanations. Empathic interpretation however, seeks to elaborate meaning by focusing on what is presented and thus extending what is apparent via clarification. This approach to interpretation is grounded in the data and involves a whole-part relationship by examining the various constituents of an experience by changing perspectives and attempts understanding as opposed to explanation; this is the interpretive approach taken by phenomenological analysis.

There will always be tension between philosophical positions of phenomenology and pragmatic concerns of research. Van Manen (1990) suggests that the researcher must be creative in finding approaches and procedures that are suited to the particular research project. I have adopted creativity when designing the stages of research while attempting to balance the philosophical and pragmatic concerns. Rapport and Wainwright (2006) argue that phenomenologists should recognise that descriptive and interpretive traditions are not mutually exclusive doctrines, but two approaches that offer different but complementary foundations for research

methodologies. I agree with this position as I have adopted it for my work. The following section detailing the research design will illustrate the paradigmatic shift from description to interpretation.

6.5 Design

This section will describe the research design for stage two of the research. Interpretive phenomenology was employed using participants' written accounts and semi-structured interviews with BDSM practitioners; analysis followed the template approach. The method of template analysis will be detailed along with the use of interviews, the development of the interview schedules and the selection of participants. This section will also provide brief biographical sketches of the new participants along with updates on the original four for the purpose of giving a sense of the participants and some context for the reader.

6.5.1 Template analysis

This method of data analysis refers to a process of thematically analysing qualitative data. King (2012) contends that template analysis is not a single method, but is a group of techniques that can be used pragmatically by the researcher for the purpose of elucidating the meaning of some aspect of experience from the data. Template analysis can be employed to analyse any form of textual data, although interview transcripts are the most common source of data utilised with this method of analysis. Within this approach a coding template is developed in order to summarise the themes arising from the data and to hierarchically organise these themes to reflect their salience within the analysis. Template analysis advocates the use of pre-selected themes, known as a priori themes, which are used to identify themes that are likely to be relevant to the analysis (King n.d.).

6.5.2 Epistemological & methodological stance

Template analysis is a flexible approach which can be employed as a method of analysis within many epistemological and methodological frameworks (King n.d.). This research took a phenomenological approach and therefore is categorised by Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) as 'contextual constructivist', meaning that the assumption is that there are always multiple interpretations to be made of any phenomenon, and these interpretations always depend upon the position of the

researcher and also the context of the research. Thus, due to the contextual perspectives, different analyses of the same phenomena are possible, and indeed likely.

Using template analysis in line with the methodological approach meant it was necessary to maintain a phenomenological stance throughout the process of analysis. During the initial creation through the various modifications of the template it was important to maintain an open attitude towards the emerging themes in the data; this was to ensure that the structure of the template was not fixed too early in the process. During formation of the initial template, the higher order themes were deliberately broad in order to allow iterative redefinition of themes. Also, when deciding on a priori themes, I did not consult existing literature in the field of sexuality, preferring to draw on the findings from the earlier stage of empirical work in this thesis. I was cautious that using existing literature as a basis for the a priori themes would lead to further presuppositions and judgements about the topic. Although template analysis is becoming more widely used, there are few studies that adopt this analytical approach within a phenomenological framework (see Rogers (2010), Rodriguez (2009) and King, Carroll, Newton & Dornan (2002) for more studies using template analysis phenomenologically).

6.5.3 The use of a priori themes

Template analysis advocates the use of a priori themes, which is the feature that separates this technique from other interpretive phenomenological methods. The researcher identifies some themes in advance of any analysis, which have usually been selected on the basis of prior theoretical knowledge, previous research findings (Langdridge 2007) or a wish to focus on specific aspects of the phenomenon under investigation (King n.d.), as is the case here. King also suggests the use of a priori themes when the research topic is already well established and certain themes are expected to be present in the data.

The use of a priori themes can accelerate the initial coding process during analysis, which is often slow and laborious and enables the researcher to make cautious interpretations and can highlight related segments of text at an earlier stage in the process of analysis (Crabtree & Miller 1999). However, researchers should be mindful not to focus exclusively on the a priori themes thus excluding other material

which may not correspond with the a priori themes, but nevertheless may yield other insightful themes. King advises to regard the a priori themes as ‘tentative’ to ensure the researcher does not become fixated on the theme. The a priori themes, like any other theme, can be modified or removed if judged not to be a useful addition to the analysis. King (n.d.) along with Crabtree and Miller (1999) also warn against defining too many a priori themes, as having a heavily pre-defined initial template may prevent the emergence of new or unanticipated themes. It is pertinent here to tackle the accusation that using a priori themes is unphenomenological. Heidegger (1927/1962) argues that it is impossible to stand outside our world, therefore a more useful endeavour than attempting to remove ourselves from our presuppositions is to be explicit about them and about our starting point. The starting point of this template analysis is the selected a priori themes that emerged from the first stage of work, and which will be detailed later in this chapter. Incidentally, the descriptive phenomenologist Ashworth also uses predefined concepts to interrogate data, referring to them as the seven fractions of the lifeworld, which are drawn from the phenomenological and existential philosophers. These fractions, according to Ashworth (2003), are intrinsic aspects of all lived experiences and are used as a guide to aid analysis.

6.5.4 General analytical technique

Here I will present an overview of the techniques employed when conducting a template analysis. King (2004) and Crabtree and Miller (1999) advise the use of this method pragmatically and I will outline the techniques used as part of my own analysis in the latter part of this chapter.

Themes & coding

The defining of codes and themes is a key feature of template analysis. According to King ‘themes’ are ‘features of participants’ accounts characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences that the researcher sees as relevant to the research question’ (n.d:4). The process of coding in the analysis refers to attaching labels to segments of text which identify or are related to themes within the analysis. The process of coding is inductive and deductive, as themes may arise from the data as well as from the pre-existing concerns of the researcher (Langdridge 2007). A feature of this process of analysis is hierarchical coding; groups of related themes

are clustered together to produce broad, higher and more specific, lower order themes (King 2004). This allows the researcher to analyse the data at varying levels of specificity and detail. The higher order themes provide an overview of the main emergent understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, while the lower order themes allow for fine distinctions to be made within and between cases (King 2004). Parallel coding is permitted during template analysis, which allows the same segment of text to be attached to more than one theme at more than one level. This is particularly useful when multiple interpretations of the data are encouraged, and is in the phenomenological spirit of openness and tentative interpretation. King (2012) recognises that certain themes can appear particularly prominent in the data; these are themes which cut across or underpin many of the existing thematic clusters. Classifying such themes as higher order will not capture the way in which they are related to the other themes in the template, and including them as lower order themes in each cluster will not illustrate their importance in the data. King suggests conceptualising such themes as integrative themes; themes which permeate through accounts and highlighting their integrative nature on the template.

The basic approach – producing the initial template

The first step, after defining a set of a priori themes, is to read and re-read the interview transcripts in order to become familiar and engaged with the content. Then the process of initial coding can begin on a sub-set of the data. Sections of text that appear interesting, useful or relevant to the research aims should be clearly marked on the transcript, and where sections of text relate to the set of a priori themes, these should be clearly coded. If something of interest is identified which does not relate to one of the a priori themes, then a new theme should be created, or an existing theme should be modified to encapsulate the material. Themes can be descriptive, and therefore require little analysis, for example a participant explaining their preferred role during BDSM, or they can be less explicit requiring interpretation from the accounts (King 2004).

It is usual that only a sub-set of the whole data set is used to create the initial template, and once the sub-set of the data has been coded, the themes are organised into an initial template. Template analysis emphasises hierarchical coding, where broad higher-order themes encapsulate narrower, more specific themes. In

order to organise the initial template in this way, the themes should be grouped to cover the main emergent thematic areas. King (n.d.) recommends focusing on the areas of most relevance to the research aims at this stage in the analytical process, without producing a very comprehensive template, this is to avoid fixing themes in the template which will inevitably be altered once all transcripts have been coded.

The basic approach – developing the template

The next step in the analytical process is to develop the template as far as possible until it includes all themes relevant to the research question. The initial template should be applied to all remaining transcripts in turn, coding the relevant segments and modifying the template if there is important material emerging which is not already covered by the initial template. King (n.d.) recommends the procedures outlined below to assist in developing the template:

- Inserting a theme – new themes should be inserted into the template when a segment of relevant text is not covered by any existing theme.
- Deleting a theme – a theme should be deleted when material covered under a theme is actually better covered elsewhere, under a different code.
- Changing the scope of a theme – the scope of a theme should be altered when it is too narrow or too broad to be of use or can be promoted to a higher level or demoted to a lower order theme.
- Changing the classification of a theme - a lower order theme should be moved from one thematic cluster to another if this provides a more suitable representation of the data.

As the coding continues across all remaining transcripts, the template is repeatedly modified and re-coded, which King (n.d.) describes as an iterative process that could continue indefinitely; it is the researcher's decision when to stop developing the template. King (n.d.) applies the law of diminishing returns in order to decide when to stop the development of the template; when the gains in analysis become so small that they do not justify the cost of making more revisions to the template. The final template becomes the basis for the interpretation of the data. The account of the way in which I conducted the analysis will be detailed later in the chapter.

6.6 Participant interviews

As in stage one of the empirical work, semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection. Template analysis can be used to analyse any form of textual data, but this method of analysis is particularly appropriate when analysing interview transcripts (King n.d.). The interviews took place at locations convenient to each participant and lasted between one and two hours, interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed.

6.6.1 Developing the Interview Schedule

King and Horrocks (2010) argue that frequently when interviewing within a phenomenological framework, the interviews are not employed in a truly phenomenological way. They suggest techniques to ensure that the phenomenological focus is not lost at the data collection stage, some of which were employed during the interviews for this stage of empirical work and are detailed below.

Using written accounts & individual interview schedules

When collecting data I used a combination of written accounts and participant specific interviews. The research participants were asked to write two descriptive accounts of an experience of engaging in BDSM. One account should focus on a successful and enjoyable experience and the second on an experience of BDSM that was unenjoyable. A specific interview schedule was then developed for each participant containing a small number of more general questions and questions which were specifically informed by the written accounts they had provided. The rationale for using a combination of written accounts and individually tailored interview schedules was to maximise the depth of description of the phenomenon of BDSM. Writing these accounts enabled participants to reflect and focus on their experiences, and think about the detail of what occurred along with their associated thoughts and feelings. As participants were free to select the experiences they wanted to discuss, the participants were not influenced by the agenda of the researcher. King and Horrocks (2010) argue that interviewees can become ‘swept along’ with the research agenda and the dialogue of the researcher, therefore using written accounts as the interview basis minimised the influence of the researcher’s

agenda and allowed participants to express themselves in their own unmediated words (Handy & Ross 2005).

Written accounts alone usually will not produce the depth of information and description required for an interpretive phenomenological analysis. Combining this method with the semi-structured interview method (see chapter 4 page 82 for a discussion of semi-structured interviews) allowed me to probe further, ask for elaboration where necessary and tease out the rich information in order to get to the crux of the lived experience of the phenomenon, in this case the participant's erotic experience of BDSM. Handy and Ross (2005) argue that written accounts are usually temporally ordered, cohesive, focused and particularly self-reflexive, leading to greater depth of detail. Ong (1982) notes that when writing accounts participants can consider the questions carefully before answering, plan responses and they can be written at a pace of the participant's choosing. Written accounts therefore allowed for self-reflection and detailed focus on the topic at hand (Handy & Ross 2005), which in turn, were a stimulus for the participant interviews, thus achieving the level of depth and detail necessary for this research.

Langdridge (2007) and Handy and Ross (2005) contend that producing adequate written descriptions can place pressure on participants in terms of time demands and content of the accounts. This can be countered by providing participants with a clear brief explaining what is required from the written account. I informed the participants of the specific type of experience I would like them to describe, along with a general guide on the length of both accounts and I also specified the contextual details needed.

- A recent experience of BDSM that was enjoyable and considered to be successful.
- A recent experience of BDSM that was not particularly enjoyable and not considered to be successful.
- Details of who was there and where the experience took place.
- Details of what happened.
- Details of thoughts, emotions and physical feelings during the experience.
- About a side of A4 in length per account.

(See appendix 3 for the brief provided to participants.)

King and Horrocks (2010) suggest determining a time scale within which to conduct an interview after receiving the written accounts, as leaving too long risks participants losing the freshness of the experience. They propose a time scale of one week, this will allow time to read the accounts and develop related questions for the interview schedules. I aimed to develop the schedule and conduct the interview within the time frame specified by King and Horrocks where possible. I also asked participants to revisit their descriptions prior to the interview by asking them to read their accounts as I was preparing and setting up for the interview. This served to focus participants' attention and recollection on the events at hand (see appendix 4 for an example of a written account).

The interview schedule contained two types of question; general questions which were addressed to all participants and participant specific questions. The participant specific questions were based on the written accounts and designed to elucidate their individual erotic experiences of BDSM participation (see appendix 5 for an example of a participant specific interview schedule).

Using Imaginative Variation

In order to explicate the erotic constituents of BDSM participation I employed the phenomenological technique of imaginative variation. For the purpose of this set of interviews I used the technique in the traditional manner as outlined by Husserl (1931/1960), which was for the purpose of examining how particular phenomena present themselves to the consciousness of the author or researcher. Imaginative variation is usually only used by the researcher during the analytic process; however, I used imaginative variation as a research tool by asking *the participants* to imaginatively change elements of *their* experience of BDSM. The purpose of this was in order to elucidate those main erotic constituents of the experience of the phenomena. During the interviews I used the erotic aspects given as part of the written descriptions and asked participants to imaginatively alter them in various ways, and consider whether then, the changed element still appeared to be erotic. For example: *'Would it become less erotic if the leather chaps were made out of lace?' 'Would it become a more erotic experience if you genuinely feared for your*

safety?'. The intention is that this technique will clarify what exactly is erotic about particular aspects of the BDSM experience. This was also the rationale behind asking participants to produce two written accounts, one of a positive BDSM experience, the other of a negative experience. King and Horrocks (2010) note that making comparisons can assist participants to clarify at a fine level of distinction, so that participants can distinguish why one particular act presents itself to them as erotic when a similar act does not. It is the fine level of detail and distinction that can be attained that means this technique lends itself well to eliciting the information required for an interpretive phenomenological analysis.

The interview as an embodied relationship

Finlay (2006) argues that during phenomenological interviewing the researcher can become fixated on words rather than on the bodily relationship between researcher and participant, a key phenomenological feature which is often ignored. She contends that because bodies are the subjects of experiences in the world, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee should be recognised as a bodily one. King and Horrocks (2010) concur and advise researchers to be sensitive to the bodily aspects of the interview. I planned to remain aware of such bodily aspects of the interviews by watching carefully for bodily actions and how these correspond to what is being said, and also to have awareness of my own bodily reactions during the interview. I noted anything of interest and referred to these notes during the analysis process for additional insight.

6.6.2 Sampling

As part of the sample for this stage of research, I opted to include four of the original five participants from the first stage of empirical work. Tom, Joe, Annie and Steven all agreed to participate again, Polly was not included at this stage as she primarily practiced BDSM for the purpose of earning money rather than for pleasure, which was a different experience of the phenomenon from the others' experiences. The justification for using the original participants was that a rapport and a trusting relationship had already been established between us, along with my own knowledge of and familiarity with their personal narratives. This pre-established relationship enabled me to build on the information gathered from the first round of interviews in order to develop a more in-depth interview, and glean a more

comprehensive understanding of the difficult topic of eroticism in BDSM participation. Also on a practical level, the original participants were all capable interviewees who were able to provide rich, analysable data. Because of these factors I was able to develop my own techniques for elucidating information during the earlier interviews which proved valuable when interviewing the new participants.

A combination of a purposive and snowball sampling strategy was used in order to recruit the remaining participants required for this research. The BDSM community is relatively self-enclosed and can be difficult for 'outsiders' to access, therefore I consulted with the key informant from stage one in order to recruit new participants for the second stage of empirical work (see chapter 4 page 85 for a discussion of this sampling strategy). The sampling strategy for this stage was more purposive than in stage one; this was because I sought variation in BDSM role, sexuality, gender and age. Due to the difference in methodological approach; moving from a descriptive to an interpretive phenomenological framework, an increased sample size was required. A smaller sample was a justified choice for the initial stage of empirical work, but taking an interpretive stance requires recruitment of more participants in order to collect an adequate amount of data to be able to elucidate the erotic constituents of BDSM. A sample of nine participants was selected on methodological and pragmatic grounds. As the interviews were expected to be lengthy and detailed, it was essential that the sample was not so large that I was unable to analyse each interview transcript in sufficient depth.

The inclusion criteria for this stage was that participants should have been involved in BDSM for the purpose of sexual pleasure for at least six months and have engaged in recent experiences to include in the written account. Table six provides an overview of the participants' characteristics; new participants are highlighted in bold text.

Table 6: Participants' characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Role During BDSM	Approx. Age
Tom	Male	Gay	Submissive	Mid 20s
Joe	Male	Gay	Dominant	Mid 40s
Annie	Female	Bisexual	Submissive/Switch	Mid 20s
Steven	Male	Heterosexual	Dominant/Switch	Mid 30s
Kim	Female	Lesbian	Dominant	Late 30s
Maria	Female	Heterosexual	Submissive	Early 30s
Lucy	Female	Heterosexual	Switch	Late 40s
Patrick	Male	Bisexual	Submissive/Switch	Late 20s
Vikki	Female	Heterosexual	Switch	Late 20s

It should be noted that in this sample there are limits to diversity; all participants, with the exception of Joe, were Caucasian, all participants were able-bodied and all were under the age of fifty. Maria, however, was non-British, and there are a sufficient number of women in the sample. Langdridge and Barker (2007) acknowledge a lack of research focusing on non-white groups of BDSM practitioners and also comment on the lack of non-white writers on the subject. The sampling strategies were designed to recruit a varied selection of participants; however, despite attempting to include transgender and genderqueer participants in the sample to increase diversity, I was unsuccessful in this endeavour. Clarke, Ellis, Peel and Riggs (2010) note that within the LGBTQ community some groups are more difficult to sample than others. They identify older people, non-white people, trans people, bisexuals and also individuals who engage in marginalised behaviour as groups that can be difficult to reach and engage in research.

6.6.3 Interviewees' biographical sketches & updates

Kim

Kim identifies her sexuality as lesbian and she lives in the South West of England. She is in her late thirties and works in the retail industry. The role Kim assumes during BDSM is dominant, and she has been involved in the BDSM community for

around seven years. She is in a long term relationship with her partner, Katy, and they have been together for 18 months.

Maria

Maria is a heterosexual female originally from Southern Europe who currently lives in the North of England. Maria is in her early thirties and works in the education sector. She has been living in Britain for eight years. She is currently single, although has a number of casual sexual relationships with men from the BDSM community. The role she assumes during BDSM is as the submissive partner.

Patrick

Patrick is a white, bisexual man in his late twenties. After attending university in the North East of England, he moved back to his home city of London where he began exploring his interest in BDSM. Patrick works in the service industry, and met his current partner through this job. He describes his relationship with his partner, Jason, as ‘open’, which means they are both able to have sex with other people. Patrick has been involved with Jason for 10 months and has recently moved into Jason’s home. Patrick identifies as a switch, although he prefers to assume the submissive role.

Lucy

Lucy is a heterosexual female in her late forties who lives in Wales. She has been married to Stuart for over twenty years and they have adult children. Lucy is relatively new to BDSM participation, and identifies as a switch. She began participating in ‘light’ BDSM with her husband two years ago, when her youngest child left home. Lucy explains that she had a ‘normal’ sex life with Stuart, but after her children had left home, they both wanted to ‘reclaim’ their sex life and experiment with new things. Lucy only participates in BDSM with her husband, although she is an active member of an online BDSM community.

Vikki

Vikki is a white, heterosexual female in her late twenties who lives in the Midlands. She identifies as a switch, and has no preference for either the dominant or submissive role, as she enjoys both equally. According to Vikki, it is the context of the play and the partner she is with that dictate the roles she assumes. Vikki works

for the local authority. Vikki is currently single, and participates in BDSM with men she meets at ‘munches’ and through online BDSM chatrooms.

Update on the original participants since the interviews for stage one:

Annie

Annie’s circumstances have not changed since she participated in the first interview. Robert is still Annie’s primary partner, although one of her secondary partners discontinued her relationship with Annie. She still works in the Civil Service and lives in the South West of England.

Tom

Since participating in the first interview, Tom began and ended an ‘official’ relationship with Joe. Tom is now in a long term relationship with Peter, who lives with him, and he describes this relationship as ‘exclusive’, meaning their relationship is monogamous. Tom still works as a specialist clinical nurse and lives in the North West of England.

Joe

Since participating in the first interview, Joe and Tom began an ‘official’ relationship, which lasted for around eight months. After the relationship ended, Joe’s contact with Tom became sporadic and their BDSM discontinued. Joe continued his sexual relationship with Nathan, as well as with men he met via BDSM websites, although Joe would like a steady boyfriend. Joe still lives in the North West of England and has retired from his job due to ill health.

Steven

Since participating in the first interview, Steven has moved house and changed careers. He still lives in the North of England and now works in the I.T. department of a large national company. Steven is still single, although is dating women, and he would like a long term girlfriend in the near future.

6.7 The phenomenological analytical process

The basic analytical procedure of template analysis has been discussed earlier in the current chapter. Here I intend to detail how I undertook the process of analysis. King (2004) suggests the pragmatic use of template analysis by adapting the analytical procedure informed by the epistemological position and the research objectives of the work. I conducted the analysis taking an interpretive phenomenological approach, and this is where the first adaptation of the method arose. Working within a phenomenological framework, I employed some of the phenomenological techniques for data analysis. The interpretive approach does not subscribe to the Husserl's concept of the epochē, but does recognise the need to move beyond the everyday taken-for-granted view of the world. Heidegger (1927/1962) argued that individuals are too engaged and entwined with the world for the epochē to be achievable, and later Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) concurred, arguing that it was impossible for people to be able to separate themselves from the world in order to take a 'God's eye view' of it. However, I did use the technique of bracketing for the purpose of remaining open to the participants' world views and to make a determined effort to step out of my own taken-for-granted views. By critically examining my own thoughts and ideas regarding the participants and the data, I was able to engage with the data in a more effective way. I became aware of the ways in which I perceived some of the research participants and the things they told me, and critically examined how this perception might affect the analysis. This proved a useful tool, as without such critical examination aspects of the interpretation would have been lost.

A priori themes

The first part of a template analysis is to define the a priori themes that will be used as part of the initial coding of the data. King (n.d.) suggests using findings from previous research to assist in defining the a priori themes, I therefore used some of the more salient findings from stage one of this research to inform the a priori themes. I opted to use these themes due a combination of the success of the first stage of research, the paucity of literature addressing eroticism and in order to ground the analysis more firmly in participants' accounts. I also considered the research aims of this stage of work, and developed some a priori themes in relation

to eroticism within BDSM. I was conscious that conducting any phenomenological analysis requires an open attitude towards the data, ergo I opted for a few broad a priori themes. King (n.d.) argues that having much of the initial template defined using a priori themes can induce a blinkered effect on the researcher, leading to the danger of overlooking important aspects in the data because it does not explicitly relate to the a priori themes. King (n.d.) recommends restricting the number of a priori themes to avoid this, and my selection reflects this warning. The a priori themes selected based on the previous analysis were:

- The relationships between those involved in the BDSM scenes
- Anticipation
- Authenticity
- Fantasy

The following a priori themes were developed in line with the research aim of investigating where the eroticism lies in BDSM:

- Power & control
- Safety & danger

I began the analysis by reading the interview transcripts through carefully several times. There was not a particular number of readings required, but each was read until I felt I had a grasped a sense of the whole interview and I felt familiar with each one.

Preliminary coding

The next phase of the analytical procedure was to carry out the initial coding of the data. I did this by annotating the transcripts in order to identify relevant information in light of the research aims. When a segment of text was related to one of the a priori themes, it was labelled as such, otherwise a new theme was created to encapsulate the information and coded under a specific heading. When coding the transcripts I looked for particular features that illuminated aspects of the erotic experience of BDSM participation It is common in template analysis to code a subset of data, and then to produce the initial template. Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, the need to remain open to the data, along with the sample size, I decided to

carry out the preliminary coding on all nine transcripts before attempting to produce the initial template. Initially I had decided to code the original participants' transcripts as the subset. I became concerned that if I produced the initial template after coding only the original participants' data, I would find approaching the other transcripts with an open attitude problematic due to the familiarity I had with the participants from stage one. King's guidance advises that the time to stop preliminary coding is when all relevant material has been coded. During my preliminary coding, new themes were still being identified from relevant material in the last transcript, which ratifies the decision to code all transcripts rather than selecting a subset.

Producing the initial template

Once all nine transcripts had been subjected to preliminary coding I produced the initial template. King (2004) argues against producing a particularly comprehensive initial template in order to avoid the danger of reluctance on the researcher's part to make any significant modifications at later stages in the analysis. King (n.d.) also argues that the initial template should cover the emerging themes from the data, but not be overly concerned with the finer distinctions of the lower level themes. It is noteworthy that my initial template is more comprehensive than King suggests, however, this is a result of conducting the preliminary coding of all transcripts, rather than a subset. I listed each theme that was present in each transcript to provide an overview of the coding and also to reveal potentially interesting patterns in the data. In order to achieve the structure of the initial template, I then noted the emergent themes on coloured 'post it' notes, organising and reorganising them into various hierarchies until I was satisfied that the template was representative of the data thus far.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the initial template:

Figure 6.1: The initial template

1. Participants' understanding of their BDSM experiences (higher order)

1. Experiential

1.1 Fusion of experiences
1.2 Meaningful experience

2. Enjoyable

2.1 Element of fun

2. Power/powerlessness (higher order)

1. Eroticism in power exchange

1.1 Sub – dominant partner's power

1.2 Sub – their own powerlessness

1.1 Dominant – all powerful status

2. Role of the submissive

2.1 Pretence of submission

2.2 Expected behaviour

3. Role of the dominant

3.1 Guaranteed sexual pleasure

3. Creation of alternative sexual reality (higher order)

1. Imaginative immersion in fantasy

2. Incarnation as character

2.1 Adoption of sexual persona

3. Authenticity

3.1 Realism

3.2 Believability

3.3 Genuineness

3.4 Sense of propriety

4. Fantasy and reality (higher order)

1. Erotic fantasy – unerotic reality

1.1 Pretence of danger

1.2 Pretence of gender

1.3 Unerotic reality of danger

5. Relationship solidarity (higher order)

1. Relationship dynamic

1.1 Presence of care

1.2 Mutual regard

2. Sharedness of experience

2.1 Investment

2.2 Intent

3. Consent

3.1 Consent

3.2 No coercion present

6. Ritual and symbolism (higher order)

1. Sexual ritual

2. Symbolism

3. Functions of the sexual ritual

7. Sexual transgression (higher order)

1. Breaking taboos

1.1 Enjoyment of socially unacceptable act

2. Sexual freedom

2.1 Unconstrained experience

2.2 Freedom from traditional sexual practices

8. Temporality (higher order)

1. Passage of time

1.1 Incongruent perception of time

2. Build up/ lead to sexual experience

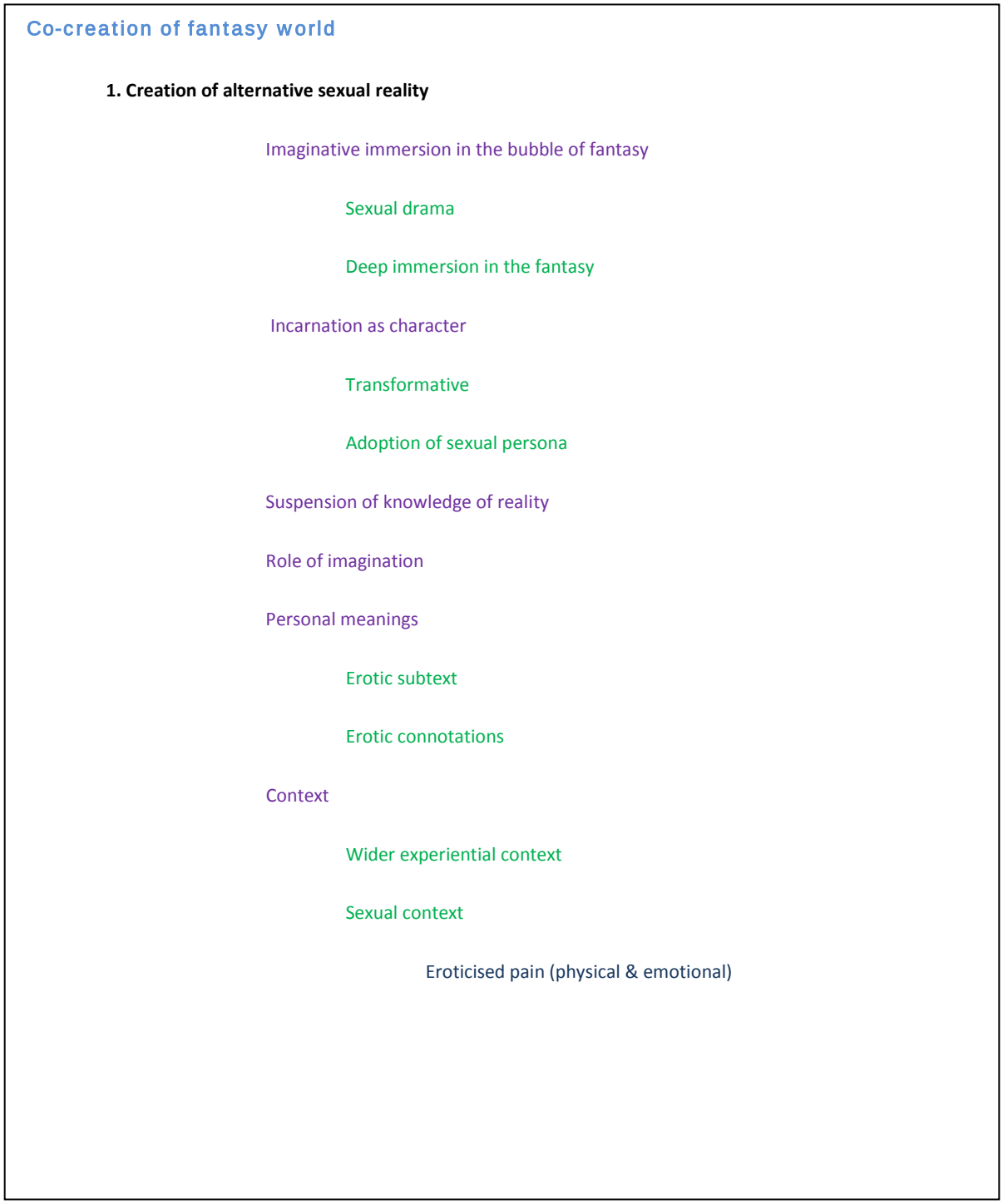
Developing the template

The next step in the analytic procedure is to develop the initial template so that it provides a representation of the emergent themes within the data. To do this I applied the initial template to each interview transcript, all the while applying new themes to segments of text, or modifying existing themes so they included the new material. This was the most time consuming aspect of the analysis, as each time I made changes to the template I adjusted the previous coding. King (n.d.) describes this as an 'iterative process of coding, modifying the template and re-coding'. I felt uncertainty at times when modifying or deleting an existing theme, and I would agonise over how to organise the data in the way that was most appropriate. Using the coloured 'post it' note system was very useful, as it was easy to re-organise the themes or change a classification of a theme. I am sure I would have felt the reluctance to modify the template alluded to by King, had I not utilised such a flexible organisational method. Appendices 6, 7 & 8 illustrate the development of the coding template.

When comparing the templates it is apparent there were many modifications made at each development. Some themes were deleted completely, while others were modified by broadening or narrowing the theme or by reclassifying the level of the theme. For example, the initial template contains the higher order theme 'temporality', through development and modification of the template, this theme eventually became a level two theme encapsulated within the higher order theme of 'the qualities of BDSM participation', which itself had been modified from its original incarnation of 'participant's understanding of their BDSM experience'. The theme of 'fantasy & reality' was reclassified from a higher order theme and became subsumed into the higher order theme of 'co-creation of fantasy world' as a level two theme. Modifications were made on the basis of how best to capture and encompass all of the important elements of the experience of BDSM. Through the development of the template new themes were added, for example; 'presentation to the interviewer', which emerged primarily from Steven's transcript and was developed by revisiting the other transcripts to examine the similarities and differences in the ways participants presented themselves during the interview. Generally the most common alteration that occurred while developing the transcript was that the classification of themes was adjusted; higher order themes were expanded and thus encapsulated

previous higher order themes, which then became lower order themes. I continued this process of organising and reclassifying until I was satisfied that the template accurately reflected the data, providing an account of the erotic elements of the BDSM experience for the research participants. The final template is illustrated in figure 6.2:

Figure 6.2: The final template:



2. Fantasy and reality

- Erotic fantasy – unerotic reality
  - Pretence of danger
  - Unerotic reality of risk/danger
  - Pretence of gender
- Safety in reality
  - Physical safety
  - Emotional security
- Private & public sphere
  - Privacy
    - Practicality
    - Explainability
- Performing for audience
- Exposure of private aspect of self
- Distraction from reality

3. The erotic unknown

- The unforeseen
- Anticipating the sexual scene
- Anticipation as foreplay
- Role of the imagination

4. Ritual and symbolism

- Functions of the sexual ritual
- Symbolism

Expressions of power and powerlessness

1. Interpretations of roles

- Role of the submissive
  - Challenge of endurance
  - Total submission
  - Desired/prized by the dominant
  - Really in control of the scene
- Role of the dominant
  - Utilise skill and judgement
  - Guaranteed sexual pleasure
  - Provide sexual pleasure to the submissive
  - Privileged position of power

2. Eroticism in power exchange

- Eroticism in submission
  - Dominant partner's power
  - Submissive's own powerlessness
    - Lack of responsibility
    - Removal of autonomy
    - Removal of free will
    - Synthesis of contrary emotion - erotic
- Eroticism in domination
  - All powerful status

Adulation from submissive partner

Sexual choice

3. Reward

Feelings of accomplishment

Sexual rewards

The qualities of BDSM participation

1. Fusion of experiences

Allows the experience of impossible/new realities

2. Meaningful experience

3. Exploratory

Sensory experience

Corporeality

Imposed corporeal limitations

Corporeal awareness

Manipulated corporeal sensation

4. Fun

5. Emotive

Fusion of emotion

Building and strengthening of bonds

Positive personal effect

6. Natural

- Non-pathological
- Normal

7. Temporal

- Passage of time
  - Incongruent perception of time
- Anticipation
  - Lead up to the BDSM experience
  - Slow build up to trust and sexual acts/practices
- Taking time to create atmosphere

Facilitators and obstructions to BDSM participation

1. Obstructions to BDSM engagement

- Issues relating to BDSM partners
  - No sense of partnership
  - Reductionist attitude
- Negative influences on eroticism
  - View of self
  - Effect of negative experience
- Problems with fantasy engagement
  - Absence of vital components of fantasy
  - Lack of immersion in fantasy

Repellent features/distractions

Fantasy content

Repellent sensory input

Tipping point

2. Relationship solidarity [facilitator]

Relationship mutuality

Sense of the personal

Presence of care

Mutual regard

Shared of experience

Investment

Intent

Implicit understanding

Communication

Verbal

Non-verbal

Equality

One sided pleasure – unerotic

Consent

Implicit consent & explicit consent

No coercion present

Negotiation

Sexual transgression

1. Breaking taboos

- Enjoyment of socially unacceptable act
- Subverting sexual convention

2. Liberation

- Unconstrained experience
- Liberation from traditional sexual practices
- Freedom from responsibility (sub)
- Freedom of sexual expression

3. Political statement

Contemplative Theme: Presentation to interviewer

1. Self-presentation

- Present an image of normality
  - Rational
  - Non-pathalogical
  - Overemphasis on normalising
- Awareness of pretence/reality not naïve
- Teacher/educator
- 'Nice guy' image/great partner
  - Overemphasising niceness
  - Genuine/subtle
- Private

2. Presentation of the BDSM

Fun

Loving act

Experimental

Confidence/ego boost

Journey of self-discovery

*** Integrative Themes:**

- **Authenticity**
  - Realism
  - Believability
  - Sense of propriety
- **Imagination**

6.8 Ensuring quality of the work

While notions of reliability and validity are somewhat redundant to qualitative researchers, it still remains necessary to demonstrate that the quality of the analysis has been ensured. Willig (2008a) argues that any evaluative criteria employed to assess quality should be compatible with the epistemological position of the research under evaluation. She acknowledges that there is some inherent tension in closely defining epistemological positions; however, as this research adopted a phenomenological approach; a contextual constructivist position was the most appropriate method of assessing the quality of the analysis. As this epistemological position is concerned with multiple interpretations and context, it is necessary to demonstrate that the analysis is grounded in the data; in the experiences of the research participants. Also, there is a necessity for the research to take into account the contextual conditions within which the participants' accounts were produced including personal, situational, social and cultural conditions (2008a). King (n.d.) suggests a number of methods that can be employed to check the quality of the template:

- Independent scrutiny of the analysis
- Participant feedback
- Creating an audit trail

Independent scrutiny of the analysis

King (2012) argues that using some type of independent scrutiny of the analysis can be useful in assessing its quality. There are a variety of methods to check the quality of analysis this way, including the two methods that I employed. King (n.d.) advises that this strategy can be employed throughout the analytic stages of producing the final template. Throughout the developmental stages of the template I consulted with my supervisor on the methodology, who has written extensively on the subject. He briefly coded portions of transcripts, we then compared and contrasted our coding and discussed the similarities and differences. Once the final template was complete, I was required to defend the analytical decisions taken to the said expert, who then offered a constructive critique of those decisions. This was a useful endeavour, and was relatively simple to incorporate into the analytic process.

Participant Feedback

King (n.d.) cautiously suggests returning to the research participants for critical comments on the template. I employed this strategy at the initial template stage and also once the final template was completed. I asked two of the participants, Tom and Joe, to critically comment on the initial template, generally asking whether the template reflected their experiences and whether they could identify their experiences within the template. Later the process was repeated with the final template. The feedback was encouraging and forced me to think critically about the template and to produce a trustworthy analysis. During the process of analysis, I also asked Tom to apply a version of the template to his own and another participant's interview, again requesting critical commentary regarding the themes that were clear and difficult to apply and any other striking aspects he felt were relevant. King (n.d.) notes a potential difficulty with employing participant feedback as a quality assessor, namely that participants may be unwilling to criticise the researcher's interpretations due to the power imbalance that may exist between researcher and participant. I felt this was less of an issue with Tom due to our open style of friendship (see chapter 8 for more on this), though in hindsight perhaps this was more the case with Joe. It was also problematic attempting to provide a clear explanation of what I was requesting of Tom and Joe, although eventually the objective became clear and the processes was successful. I tape recorded the sessions with Tom in order to refer back during the latter stages of the template production, and again found this particularly useful for encouraging me to remain close to the data and the context of the transcripts.

The purpose of these quality control measures is not to seek any sort of 'validation' of the analysis from others, nor to confirm whether the analysis is 'correct'. It is to enable further reflection on the data and the analytical processes undertaken while creating and developing the transcript. I did not ask Tom whether the template was a true representation of his experience because phenomena are open to multiple interpretations. This process did, however, force me to be explicit regarding the analytical decisions and also forced me to consider alternative meanings and interpretations. I used the technique of imaginative variation to consider these alternatives suggested by Tom and Joe, varying the interpretation I had arrived at, replacing it with the alternative suggestions to view the effect of the change on the

phenomenon overall. On occasion the alternate suggestion was worthy of further consideration, and proved a useful analytical tool.

Creating an audit trail

King (2004) recommends that template analysts produce an audit trail of the analytical process, which should take the form of a record of the stages of the analysis and the decisions taken throughout the process. The aim is that this will provide an overview of how the final interpretation was attained in light of the raw data. Although I found it difficult to maintain the meticulous audit trail King recommends, the main aspect of the audit trail for this analysis is in the form of the various progressions of the templates, (see appendices 6, 7 & 8) which illustrate the alterations made at each stage, see also appendix 9 for coded interview transcript.

6.9 Ethical issues

Although this section reflects some of the ethical issues mentioned in chapter four, I argue that as stage two of the research was a separate study, it is important to outline the issues involved during this stage of work. Ringheim (1995) argues that research into any aspect of sexuality or sexual behaviour raises ethical issues that warrant special attention. As mentioned in chapter four, this research conforms to the British Psychological Society's (BPS) ethical guidelines for conducting research (2006) and the Data Protection Act (1998). Joseph (1998) states that good ethical practice should go beyond gaining ethics committee approval or adhering to ethical guidelines, and should involve protracted consideration and careful planning. Clarke, Ellis, Peel and Riggs (2010) highlight that the BPS ethical guidelines centre on protecting research participants from harm. They argue that working with marginalised groups of people, who are generally at higher risk of discrimination and prejudice, may potentially put participants at risk of greater harm. The participants in this research are involved in marginalised sexual practices and therefore the ethical procedures should ensure that causing harm to participants, either directly or indirectly, is avoided. I will outline the ethical procedures that were undertaken in order to ensure participant protection, and also additional ethical issues associated with this research.

Thiroux (1995) summarised the main principles that should govern sex research as; freedom, justice and honesty. The research should promote these principles, and Clarke et al (2010) argue that research which supports a pathologising model of sexuality is fundamentally unethical. This research intends to contribute to the non-pathologising literature on BDSM, where the eventual objective is to have BDSM and associated practices removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM-IV) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10).

Protecting participants from harm and maintaining confidentiality & anonymity

It is a fundamental ethical requirement for all research that participants are protected from the risk of harm. Given the mainstream normative views on sexuality and 'acceptable' sexual activities, it is likely that individuals who engage in alternative sexual lifestyles will experience negative discrimination (Perry, Thurston & Green 2004). The main risk of taking part in this research was that participant's sexual interests would be discovered, leading to them being 'outed'. Many of the research participants were not open about their sexual proclivities with people, including family and friends, outside of the BDSM community. One participant even kept his homosexuality hidden from non-community members. The threat of discovery was very real, and I did not compromise participant privacy at any stage during the research process. Ringheim (1995) reiterates, stating there should be no risk to participants of social ostracism or repercussions from family, friends, employers or the wider community. To protect participants from the risk of discovery, confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Participants could not be recognised as taking part in the research as any identifying information was edited, this included specific geographical locations, names of employers and other people, such as partners' names. The information provided in the earlier biographical sketches was generalised to wider UK regions, pseudonyms were used and other identifying information was excluded.

As in the previous stage, the participants were encouraged to read the transcript of their interview to ensure satisfaction with the level of anonymity. Four out of the nine participants chose to do this. It is important to note here that two participants were not concerned with protecting their anonymity, arguing that they were 'out and proud'

and did not want to be closeted by this research. This was a difficult aspect to manage, as I did not want these participants to feel as though the research was positioning them as 'hidden' or ashamed of their sexual desires. However, after discussing with each of them the BPS ethical guidelines and also the outcome of the school's ethical review, which highlight issues of confidentiality and anonymity for the majority of research participants regardless of the research topic, they agreed to the same level of anonymity as the other participants.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms as a protection measure with the original participants maintaining their pseudonyms from the first stage and the new participants being given, or choosing, a pseudonym. As in the first stage of empirical work, all information relating to the participants were stored under their assigned pseudonym, this included computer based and hard files and interview transcripts. During PhD supervision sessions, participants were always referred to by their pseudonym and only I am privy to participants' true identities. All other identifying information including participant's contact details and consent forms are kept sealed in a blank envelope in a locked cabinet in my home office. Ringheim (1995) argues that the maintenance of confidentiality is especially important in sex research, as a breach may have serious consequences for the participant in terms of family life, career or social standing. The tape recorded interviews were kept separate from participant's details and interview transcripts throughout, and only I had access to these. The one exception was when the dictaphone used to record an interview was faulty and the sound quality was very poor. I was unable to transcribe the interview and called on the technicians at The University of Huddersfield for assistance. One technician attempted unsuccessfully to improve the sound quality of the recording, and thus heard parts of the interview. The tape which contained the recording had no identifying details attached, it simply was labelled with my name and student identification number. I contacted the participant in question to ask permission to send the recording to the technician, explaining that they would hear parts of the interview, and permission was granted.

Informed consent and participant's rights

Riley and Scott (1999) argue that in sex research, obtaining informed consent from participants is paramount due to the nature of the research. Participants must be

fully informed of the research aims, the details of what participation involves and also how the research findings will be disseminated. Informed consent exists to protect the rights of research participants, and these rights should be explicitly stated and repeated frequently. I included information relating to the study on a participant information sheet (see appendix 10), which was distributed to all parties interested in participating and also to the key informant. This sheet also contained information regarding the right to withdraw participation, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and the right for participants to request copies of the finished thesis. The participants were given this information sheet prior to taking part in the interview, but they were also asked to read a copy just before the interview began.

Participants were provided ample opportunity to ask questions about the research or their participation; via telephone and email prior to the interviews and also immediately before beginning the interview. Ringheim (1995) argues the participants should be at ease as a result of full disclosure regarding the research. Through the continued process of negotiation and open dialogue, the research participants were fully informed and appeared pleased to take part in this research. Ringheim warns that participants should not be coerced into participating in sex research by social pressure or monetary compensation. I offered no monetary reward for participation nor did I exert any form of pressure on participants. There were individuals who contacted me with a view to participate, and then withdrew their participation, I accepted their decision and thanked them for their interest, any details were then deleted. Participants have the right not to feel as though they are required to disclose certain aspects that they do not feel comfortable sharing with a researcher (Perry, Thurston & Green 2004). The discussion of particularly sexually explicit or graphic activities was a potential source of difficulty. I discussed with participants prior to beginning the interview that the choice of expressive language use was theirs. Participants could select the level of explicitness to describe their sexual experiences in order to avoid the potential for embarrassment or concern about shocking me. Easton (2005 in conversation with Barker) argues that there is a need to find a language to talk about sex. People are frequently shocked when explicit sexual language is used in academic literature, she contends, but there is a necessity to be able to discuss sex using a common, accessible language. I wanted to ensure the research participants were comfortable with the language we used during the

interview, therefore I gave the participant the onus of deciding what language to use to express their BDSM experiences. There is the danger that participants felt inhibited due to my non-involvement in BDSM and chose not to speak in more graphic tones. If this was the case during any interview, I do not perceive that this compromised the quality of the information obtained.

Researcher safety

As discussed in chapter four, researchers working in the field of sex research, especially where the sexual activities have negative connotations, risk potential stigmatisation by colleagues and institutions. Clarke et al (2010) argue there is also a threat that sexuality researchers are vulnerable to damaging accusations of inappropriate behaviour. Ringheim (1995) concurs, arguing that research into any aspect of sexual behaviour must not create suspicion of voyeurism, and therefore research objectives must be transparent and defensible. I have not been a victim of such stigmatisation beyond what has been discussed in chapter four, and fortunately I have been supported in my research endeavours by the majority of colleagues.

The researcher safety training I received for the initial data collection process was refreshed by revisiting the materials provided. Although the interviews were conducted in participants' homes I did not feel at risk or unsafe at any time when collecting the data. The safety procedures outlined in chapter four regarding interviewing in participants' homes were adhered to for this stage of data collection (see chapter 4 for a full discussion of safety procedures). Also, the agreement was maintained to report any difficulties affecting my wellbeing to my supervisory team.

Dual relationship

As mentioned one of the research participants from the original sample was a friend of mine. Since the first stage of work our friendship had developed, and we had become very close friends. This lead to the formation of a dual relationship (Clarke et al 2010); we had our relationship as friends and also the researcher-participant relationship, and the two had to be managed (see chapter 8 for more discussion on this). Clarke et al (2010) notes that ethical codes of practice tend to discourage dual relationships in research, however, depending on the subject of the research and the level of difficulty associated with recruiting participants, it can be difficult to avoid. I

would argue that the quality of data obtained from having a friend as a participant can outweigh the potential pitfalls, and the shared relationship facilitates the co-creation of a productive and insightful interview experience.

6.10 Summary & concluding remarks

This chapter traced the development of stage two of the research and how this stage was informed by the first stage. Stage one of the empirical work illuminated the phenomenon of BDSM, enabling me to gain insight into the social, sexual and relationship dynamics of this practice. The most striking aspect of the findings of the descriptive phenomenological analysis however, was what was present by its absence; where was the eroticism in BDSM? This lead to the formation of the research aims for the second, more focused stage of investigation.

In this chapter I made the case that despite their differences, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology were members of the same family of research methods, and that they had more uniting features than dividing features. I highlighted the complementary aspects of the methods and explained why the shift to an interpretive phenomenological method was appropriate given the aims of this stage of research. This chapter introduced template analysis as the analytical method of choice for this stage and I also described the rationale for this selection. The research design was detailed including an overview of the basic process of template analysis, along with my adaptation of the method, and the interview process was discussed. The biographical sketches of the new participants were presented alongside updates on the original participants to illustrate the temporal nature of the research stages. Finally, the chapter presented a discussion of the ethical considerations involved at this stage of research. The following chapters will present the findings of the analysis of stage two of the empirical work.

Chapter 7A

The Template Approach: Analysis & Findings

The Template Approach: Analysis and Findings Part A

The following chapters will illuminate the analytical findings arising from the second stage of empirical work. In light of the depth and complexity of the analysis, the findings have been portioned into two chapters for ease of readability. In these chapters I will present the analysis of the interview data, which will be discussed in terms of hierarchical themes. The participants' lived experiences of BDSM are elucidated and their voices expressed in order to explicate where the eroticism exists in BDSM for these participants.

Findings

The chapters will present the findings arising from the analysis in depth. Following King (2004), this will take the form of a full thematic presentation of the findings; I will introduce and discuss in turn each higher order theme along with selected constituting lower classification themes, illuminating the lived experience of BDSM participation.

Chapter 7A presents the following findings:

- Section 7.1 concerns how the BDSM fantasy world is created and maintained by the practitioners.
- Section 7.2 discusses the various expressions of power and powerlessness through role adoption that can exist during power exchange.
- Section 7.3 elucidates the complex and multi-faceted nature of the BDSM experience.

The following findings are discussed in chapter 7B:

- Section 7.5 outlines those experiential aspects that can obstruct or facilitate erotic BDSM.
- Section 7.6 examines the transgressive act of participating in BDSM, and the way this relates to eroticism.
- Section 7.7 contains the integrative themes that are omnipresent through all other themes on the template.
- Section 7.8 considers issues relating to the ways participants presented themselves and their BDSM to me during our interview.

7.1 Co-creation of fantasy world

For the practitioners of BDSM, creating a world of fantasy is a cooperative endeavour, highlighting the consensually created nature of BDSM and also enabling the creation of a whole erotic world of fantasy, where anything is possible. This *co*-creation is integral to a successful, erotic BDSM scene; if a partner is not particularly involved in the creation and maintenance of the fantasy world then it is likely to dissolve and the eroticism of the scene to dissipate. Regardless of role, creating a viable fantasy is a collaborative venture between the people involved, and this consensual co-creation can occur on different levels and at different times during the play.

7.1.1 Creation of the alternative sexual reality

It is necessary for the individuals involved in the BDSM experience to formulate an alternative sexual reality, where usual rules pertaining to sex, gender and possibility no longer apply. This creates the realm of an alternative reality where anything that can be imagined and fantasised is made possible through the separation of the alternative reality from the 'real world'. This is needed in order to create the basis from which the BDSM scene can be played out. An important aspect of co-creating this alternative world is that each participant should completely immerse themselves within the fantasy world. The use of imagination is crucial to enable the practitioners to reach total immersion in the fantasy, evoking the metaphor of a bubble; existing within the real world but protected from its impositions. Kim relates the way that this immersion occurs,

> I am the dominant woman and I want everyone to know that. It also helps to get into the role of Miss Baxter, how she speaks, moves and treats her students. She is a strict, severe and impenetrable woman [....] I can really *become* Miss Baxter, really live through her.

My findings suggest that keeping the real world at bay is vital for the eroticism of the scene, as participants should be totally immersed in the fantasy. Without such level of engagement with the fantasy, participants report a metaphorical bursting of the bubble and the intrusion of the 'real world' which disrupts the scene and may lead to a loss of eroticism. In order to create and maintain this level of immersion, sexual

drama must exist within the fantasies, and this drama must contain exciting sexual practices and acts that are arousing to the participants. The drama must contain actors, dialogue, themes and scenes, however, when coupled with the imaginative immersion, the drama is transformed into a real and visceral experience within the context of the co-created fantasy world, thus becoming an authentic erotic lived experience. The need for total immersion in the fantasy was emphasised by many of the participants throughout their interviews, conveying its importance for the scene's eroticism, because if participants did not feel as though they were completely immersed in the fantasy, then the sense of eroticism was diminished. Some participants described a lack of complete fantasy immersion as prohibitive, preventing any attempt at BDSM, while others were able to progress but with less arousal and eroticism present. Participants required a totally immersive sexual experience in order to attain the highest state of arousal and to achieve a superlative experience. This was echoed by dominant and submissive partners, who argued that they needed to totally believe that the fantasy and the roles were bona fide, and thus become completely emerged in the alternative sexual reality, in order for the scene to maintain its eroticism,

> **Emma:** One of the main parts was when you went outside for the first time as a puppy, why was that a sexier experience...?
>
> **Tom:** Because that's what you do with dogs, you take them for walks! [...] I just evolved into it. It was something that when I was doing puppy play I always went to get my lead and sit by the door, the thing that made it sexier was that it was outside and we could get caught...it was dangerous and I could be discovered [....] You're in a completely different mindset when you're doing that
>
> **Emma:** You said you were wearing a dog collar with a name tag, what did wearing those bring to the experience?
>
> **Tom:** I suppose it was a statement of ownership on Joe's part. I was his puppy, I had a tag on with his phone number, I belonged to him rather than just being anybody's puppy [....] also it was more like a proper dog, so it brought life to the scene [....] although it was a funny gesture, he said 'it's got my number on in case you run away'...it

was...it...what if I really did get lost? I could go home to him. It makes the scene and the role play more genuine.

Emma: One thing I'm interested in is the way you've written it and the way you talk, it's very much you do get into that mindset. Can you tell me about how you experience your thoughts during puppy play?

Tom: It's hard to describe really. It's almost like method acting, if you were going to play a dog in a movie, you would want to get into the mindset of how a dog thinks and behaves [....] When you're doing these things it's very much how a dog reacts to stimulus, jumping up, chasing things. I find it quite hard to get out of as well, I get used to behaving in a certain type of way and with a certain set of responses and when someone wants you to start speaking to them when all you're doing is barking...

Incarnation as character was reported by these practitioners as vital to the creation and maintenance of the sexual reality; a sense of embodying the roles and various characters that appear during BDSM exploits. Many of the participants used specific characters to demonstrate the embodied role, for example Tom used the character of a puppy to illustrate his submissive role in his BDSM, and Kim used the character of a harsh headmistress to demonstrate her dominance. It appears that this goes far beyond simply 'acting out' or 'playing' the characters, as in order for BDSM to be erotic, the participants actually must become incarnated as these characters and roles. To do this they leave their usual selves behind in the real world, and are so immersed in the fantasy that they *become* the character and *personify* them throughout the scene. A transformation occurs; the person from the 'real' world transforms into the role and the character of that particular scene. Akin to a superhero's transformation from their original self to their alter ego character, such is the transformation of the BDSM practitioner. Participants reported feeling this transformation on many levels; practitioners become transformed on a physical level, through movement and stance and on a psychological and spiritual level via thoughts, behaviour and emotion. For example, Tom described his time as a puppy when even his thoughts were transformed into instincts driven by excitement. This element of transformation is key to becoming incarnated as the BDSM character, and leaving the everyday self behind. The alternative sexual reality makes this

impossibility possible through imagination and fantasy maintenance. These sexual personas are only adopted for the purpose of BDSM play, purely for sexual and erotic reasons. They do not feature generally in participants' lives outside of BDSM and exist only within the co-created fantasy world, as the following quote illustrates:

> [....] it does make it more erotic because you can get into it more, and lose yourself in it. You really feel as though everything that's happening is for real, and even though deep down you know it's not, you know the danger isn't real, the point is not to think like that in the middle of it. You want to be swept up in it all, the drama, the danger, the characters, the sex. You want it to...be your reality for that time [....] to be...consumed by it to the extent that you forget about *your* reality and replace it with *this* reality. {Vikki}

In order to create and successfully maintain the alternative sexual reality these practitioners suspended their knowledge of the reality existing outside of the bubble of fantasy. Participants are fully aware that BDSM play is all pretence, and that each are playing roles within a mutually created fantasy. However, in order to create and inhabit this world effectively, participants must suspend their disbelief and forget about the real world that exists outside of the bubble of fantasy. All knowledge of the real world must be suspended to successfully create an erotic experience, despite knowing that the situation is just invented fantasy, this must be ignored in order to have a successful BDSM experience. This dual knowledge must be carefully managed so as not to allow reality to encroach on the fantasy, while an awareness of the pretence is required on some background level in order for participants to feel safe within the fantasy (see 7.1.2 for elaboration on the issue of safety). Many participants illustrated this management with asides, as demonstrated in the following quotes by Maria and Annie;

> Erm...*(pause)* yes...it's...I mean I know it's all fantasy and pretend but...I still have to believe it...it's difficult to explain *(pause)* I know I'm not really there to be used by this guy, to be completely controlled by him and he knows that too. I know in reality he's not cold or...unloving, but the fantasy has to work for me to be able to get into the BDSM. If I thought any of that during the scene, it would put me off, I wouldn't really be able to play out the role because I wouldn't

> believe it. I have to be convinced during the play that I'm a woman there to submit to and be dominated by this man, otherwise it doesn't work for me. {Maria}

> Although it may seem cruel to outsiders, really it's just pretend...I think it illustrates that Robert is in complete control of me, and that's what I find a turn on. {Annie}

Participants' personal meanings play a fundamental part in fantasy creation as the individual meanings BDSM practitioners attach to aspects of eroticism can influence the creation of fantasies. This is what makes each participant's fantasy different, and how the erotic experience is individually tailored to suit those involved. Even apparent commonalities in terms of fantasies are finely defined and contain nuances that another practitioner would not find erotic. Because individuals find eroticism in vastly different things, BDSM can incorporate that which is personally erotic to the participant. The subjectivity involved in the creation of a BDSM scene means that not every BDSM practitioner enjoys the same things, and the differences can be so vast that some would not recognise another's fantasy as BDSM. Certain situations contain an inherent erotic subtext for practitioners, which again varies between participants, for example during Annie's interview she described finding particular scenes within silent movies erotic, while another person might perceive the same scenes simply as entertaining,

> When I'm tied with rope, it...reinforces the lack of escape I think, and my utter helplessness. I used to always think of those black and white movies where the girl is tied to a railway track waiting for the sound of the train *(laughs).* The idea that you are powerless to influence what's going to happen is a concept I find very erotic...

It is possible to incorporate participants' own connections to the erotic into their fantasy, so seemingly regular situations can become intrinsically erotic. For these participants a sexual meaning was attached to seemingly non-sexual items as a result of their own connotations, and these differed between participants. For example Patrick felt that rubber had erotic connotations for him, but leather did not, whereas Joe felt that leather was strongly erotic and Steven did not attach a sexual meaning to any type of fabric. Such things as masks and restraints which may be a marginal feature in vanilla sex, had strong erotic connotations for many of the

participants. The following quotes from Joe and Patrick illustrate these personal connotations,

> With leather, it's the smell and touch and feel immediately makes me think 'this is sexual' [....] a sexual encounter...sort of triggers things, and I think 'that's leather, that smells of sex' and I become aroused as a result [....] The smell of leather is a pleasant smell and evocative of sex. {Joe}
>
> **Emma:** Can you describe what you found erotic about this guy in the surf suit?
>
> **Patrick:** The suit was kind of matt, and that made me want to touch it and feel it on my skin. It was very, very tight on him and it showed off his physique perfectly. I'm good friends with him now actually, and I still tell him how hot he looked!
>
> **Emma:** So it was a wet suit then?
>
> **Patrick:** Yes, a wet suit. It covered his arms and legs. I just wanted to smell it and touch it, and he was really hot!
>
> **Emma:** Does the style of dress make a difference to your sexual experience? Imagine if someone was wearing a clown suit made of rubber, would that be as arousing?
>
> **Patrick:** Yes and no I think. The main thing for me is that whatever they wear is made from rubber. It's rubber that I get a thrill from. The actual costume...can be important but...I love feeling other people wearing it, seeing it clinging to their body so tightly, and smelling it on them. It's that that primarily turns me on, more so than the costume that's made of it. I suppose a clown suit would be a bit ridiculous though.

The final element involved when creating the alternative sexual reality is a contextual aspect. Context is an important part of BDSM, and the conditions under which the BDSM takes place can affect the eroticism experienced by participants. BDSM is a particularly contextual activity, as context dictates much of what occurs. Issues relating to both general and sexually specific context can influence the erotic nature of a BDSM experience. The wider context such as the relational interaction with a

partner before a scene begins, can affect the eroticism of the experience. If this is unsatisfactory, participants may encounter difficulty accessing the eroticism of the scene later on. This wider context must be conducive to erotic BDSM for the participants, and for some of these participants involves strict criteria for them to be able to be open to the BDSM. The more specific sexual context must be satisfactory in order to maintain eroticism and allow the BDSM to occur in a mutually satisfying way. This was an important feature of BDSM reported by many participants. Also the context of the fantasy may not be erotic for the participants, for example, Kim's partner persuaded her to participate in a rape fantasy, and as this context was not sexually stimulating for Kim, the BDSM was not erotic for her:

> The idea that I would have to play the role of a rapist seemed abhorrent to me, I think that was a big part of it. We never really played that way, what we did most often was medical play, where I would play the role of a doctor and she be a patient in for an examination or something similar. It's not like we acted out kidnap plots all the time, that's why I was *so* shocked because she'd never expressed any desire for anything like that before. I found all of it quite horrible, but the worst part was being cast in the rapist's role because...it's something I can't...*(emphatically)* somewhere I didn't even want to go in our role play.

Many of the participants found the application or receiving of emotional and/or physical pain to be very arousing, and it was an integral aspect of their BDSM experiences. However, if the correct sexual context was not present, the giving and receiving of pain was not eroticised. The submissive participants described how the sexual context enabled them to endure and enjoy the pain that was inflicted upon them, but outside of this context, pain was unerotically painful and unpleasant. If the dominant partners did not believe their submissive partner was, on some level, enjoying receiving the pain that was being inflicted, again, the dominant partner's sense of eroticism disappeared. This highlights the necessity of a sexual context in order to transform the experience of emotional and physical pain into an erotic experience.

7.1.2 Fantasy and reality

As discussed above, within the experience of BDSM there is a definite separation between the consensually created world of sexual fantasy and 'real' life. They have very defined boundaries, which, providing the two remain separate, can lead to successful BDSM. However, when these two worlds are merged, or overlap, the BDSM can lose its eroticism for those involved. Reality appears as an intrusion on the scene to some extent, although some semblance of the 'real' world must feature discreetly in order to maintain a sense of safety and security. There is a clear difference between wanting to engage in a BDSM related sexual fantasy and wanting the same event to happen outside of that bubble of fantasy. Participants were clear that that which they consider to be erotic within the context of BDSM, they would not find pleasurable in a non-BDSM context. The co-created fantasy world allows certain activities and scenes to be interpreted as erotic, however, these specific acts are not eroticised outside of the context of BDSM. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

> **Emma:** You mentioned that you were 'unable to object, completely taken over'. Can you tell me more about how that felt?
>
> **Tom:** It was quite scary, but then I wouldn't have allowed myself to be in that situation if I didn't trust Joe completely, although I couldn't see, I couldn't hear and I couldn't speak and I was tied down so I couldn't move, there was nothing I could have done. He could have killed me if he wanted. The fear amplifies the sensation, just the fact you're scared and having adrenaline in your system heightens the sexual experience, I think being scared in that situation amplifies things more than if you were just lying there being able to see. I think it's...a safe fear. There are people who get themselves into that situation with strangers, which is something I wouldn't do. Their fear must be an awful lot more than mine was. It is tempting to find out what it would feel like, but I think I would be *too* scared to relax [....] There was a guy I was talking to in London [....] When we were talking online I used to get really horny talking to him, but just what he wanted to do to me, if I went down there and we did all those things. If I got into that situation with a guy I didn't really know and I gave him authority to do those things, what else could he do? I never

> actually went to meet him because I was too worried 'what if' [....] Even though what he was saying was really horny, if he was to do those things to me I would be scared and quite upset.

The responses to the unerotic reality of certain practices and acts can range from mere indifference to fear, and this varies between participants and personal fantasies. It is the discrete awareness that the scene is part of the pretence of fantasy that enables it to become eroticised. This was emphasised by all of the participants as a key component of the erotic experience. It is the *pretence* of danger; the danger that occurs within the fantasy play, which is erotic. Experiencing such danger in the 'real' world is not a sexually exciting prospect but a frightening one, and the reality of danger loses all sense of eroticism.

An extension of this safe experience of fear, is that BDSM can allow participants to experience sexual engagement with someone of another gender, even though there is no sexual desire to do so outside of the fantasy world. This was a particularly salient theme in Kim's interview, as the excerpt below illustrates. Through BDSM she was able to experience erotic feelings towards the opposite sex, despite identifying as a lesbian, as a result of the co-created fantasy world the scene was occurring in. Again, it is the pretence that enables Kim to interpret the scene as erotic, the reality of sexual engagement with a man does not arouse her in any way,

> **Emma:** I'm very interested in the fact Katy played the role of a boy. Can you tell me about the rationale for this?
>
> **Kim:** *(smiling)* I nearly didn't write about this instance, and that's why. I didn't know *how* I could explain why a gay woman would be interested in pretending her girlfriend is a sixteen, seventeen year old boy. *(pause)* I find the whole concept of genderfucking really intriguing and it's something I like to play around with a bit. When you fuck with gender...it allows you to explore things you never would. As a gay woman, I've never had experience with men, ever. I knew I was gay for as long as I can remember, so I didn't experiment with men like a lot of gay women do, so it's something I would never get the chance to do, nor would I want to might I add [....] it's not that I'm attracted to men or want to have sex with a man or anything to do with that...it's another way to be, another way to change [....] it's

> amazing that you can take on, not just a new persona, but also a new gender. I find it very much to be about exploration. I'm exploring another gender through Katy. It lets me get even further away from myself when I do SM and further into the realm of living through or living as someone else.

Experiences of playing with gender were within the context of emotionally safe fantasies and this was also the case for risk and danger. Participants were clear that risk and danger should remain within the fantasy as pretence, whereas outside of the fantasy bubble it is safety which is important, and participants can return to reality if feeling unsafe at any time. This should be discreetly managed in order to maintain the eroticism of the scene. Submissive participants needed this subtle awareness in order to have a successful BDSM session and to be able to relinquish control to the dominant partner. Participants differentiated between physical safety which refers exclusively to participants' physical safety when using bondage, restraints, breath control, and during corporeal punishment, and emotional safety during humiliation, domination & discipline. Although the participants adhered to the motto 'safe, sane and consensual' in their play, notions of safety differed between participants. Tom, for example, considers the insertion of metal rods, known as sounds, into his urethra to be safe, while other practitioners of BDSM would not share his view.

On those occasions when the concept of BDSM is both a private act and also a public act, there is differentiation between the 'public' nature and 'reality', but they are not mutually exclusive conceptions. Performing BDSM in the sexual spaces of fetish clubs and play parties does not disrupt the fantasy by allowing reality to intrude; practicing BDSM in the public sphere is not necessarily the same for these participants as performing BDSM in the 'real world'. Around half of the participants discussed some manifestation of public BDSM in their interviews, and described it in erotic terms. It is the flexibility of BDSM that allows it to occupy both the private and the public spheres, and participants are able to pick and choose which aspects to expose publicly and which should remain in the private sphere. What is public and what remains private is a continuum, and all decisions are subjective and individual to the participants and the sexual scenarios. The eroticism of engaging in BDSM in front of an audience was discussed by some of the research participants. They are aroused by the performative nature of BDSM and the way in which the bubble of

BDSM can be performed in a ‘real’ world situation without allowing reality to intrude, at clubs with audiences or while working in the sex industry. The element of performance enhances the eroticism of the fantasy for participants, and enables them to exhibit themselves, which is also an enjoyable aspect of the situation. Along with the reality of maintaining safety in BDSM as discussed earlier, there are other elements of reality included in the fantasy in order for it to manage the scrutiny of the viewers, according to these participants. It must be explainable and make practical sense to both groups; participants and observers, in order to maintain the eroticism of the experience. If these aspects are lacking, it can lead to participants experiencing performance anxiety and therefore losing the eroticism of the public situation as illustrated by Kim’s interview excerpt:

> I was having a good time anyway, but it [performing BDSM at a fetish club]...brought something else...added a new dimension to our SM. [....] It gave me such a sexual kick, and...took the SM to a higher or to a new place. I was very aware of the moves I made, and how I slapped Katy and the noises she was making and how I spoke to her...having others watch made me want to improve and do things better and better. It was such a good....boost sexually, which obviously improved the sexual experience I was having. I was a bit concerned beforehand that if people watched us it would...ruin the intimacy of it, change it from being our moment to something else. In reality I think it increased the intimacy between us, because even though we’re top and bottom, it was still us together, us in on the action and they were...still the outsiders, only watching. It made me feel like it was us together putting on a show for them...

Exposing typically private aspects of one’s self to viewers can lower inhibitions and enhance sexual experience, according to these participants. The usually concealed private self, containing things such as sexual fantasies, become exposed through the performing of BDSM, which in turn can amplify the erotic experience, as expressed by Kim above. This was also particularly salient in Annie’s interview when she was publically restrained and flogged by her partner and another submissive in front of strangers,

> It motivated me to endure the pain. It wasn't too severe but it was getting a bit difficult towards the end and seeing Sue taking orders from Robert just made me want to take it and carry on. I do think that Sue's contribution did make for a better sexual experience because it increased the effect of Robert's power over me, which is the thing I find very arousing in BDSM. He was definitely showing his power and the control he had over me, he was able to incite that jealousy in me and use it correctly. That added something to the whole experience.

The world of fantasy can serve as a distraction from the 'real' world, meaning that BDSM is perceived as a pleasant diversion from everyday life, allowing escapism and a good time. It is noteworthy that participants did not frame this aspect in terms of a serious need to escape the drudgery of life, rather BDSM was positioned as an enjoyable leisure pursuit that was exciting, stimulating and erotic.

7.1.3 The erotic unknown

The erotic unknown was a major aspect of the erotic experience for all of the submissive participants interviewed and it refers to the sexual excitement and eroticism arising from the uncertainty of not knowing what is going to happen. This erotic element was salient for the submissive partners rather than for the dominant partners, though imposing this erotic unknown onto submissives was interpreted as erotic by some of the dominant participants. There should be some element of the unexpected involved in the submissive's BDSM experience as this fuels the eroticism of the scene. The submissive partners framed this as fundamental to their excitement, and reported that they achieved a more enjoyable scene when they were completely unaware of what was going to happen to them, this held more erotic significance than if they were consulted or were aware of the detail of the fantasy, as detailed in the following quote:

> I had no idea who would be doing what to me, and that was really horny. They could really hurt me or really abuse me, do whatever they wanted and I'd have no choice in it. I wouldn't be consulted. I would just be there to be used by them however they wanted, I couldn't object and that was a massive turn on. [....] I enjoy feeling like anything could happen... {Patrick}

This sense of anticipation featured prominently throughout the participant interviews, and was expressed in various experiential facets. Anticipating the sexual scene was common among the submissive partners, where they would imagine all the potential possibilities that the dominant partner had in store for them. This often occurred when participants were restrained or blindfolded, and they felt powerless to influence the scene. This was an erotic element for many of the participants as it enhanced feelings of fear and vulnerability, by emphasising their position of powerlessness and helplessness. Anticipation was also framed by many submissive participants as a kind of foreplay, whereby the anticipation and excitement of what is to follow is sexually arousing,

> I was quite afraid really of what was to come. It's always the anticipating when you do BDSM, waiting to see what's going happen to you, imagining all the possibilities, it's very exciting! It was a bit like waiting for the big drop on a rollercoaster, I didn't want it to happen, but I had got on and I couldn't stop it so the best thing was just to try and let myself go and embrace the big drop that was to come. {Annie}

Annie's quote illustrates the way anticipation can be viewed in terms of foreplay, and how this increases her sense of excitement.

7.1.4 Ritual and symbolism

BDSM is filled with many ritualistic and symbolic acts, and all of the participants discussed some aspects of these various rituals and symbolic acts involved in their BDSM. Ritualistic acts were described by these participants in terms of a formal or informal ceremony that illustrated a change of practitioners' status, either elevated to the dominant position, or relegated to the submissive position. Clothes, decoration and regalia, such as collars for submissives and leather boots for dominant partners were used to symbolically denote and reinforce status. The rituals and symbols differed between participants, as did the functions and meanings behind them. However, they were generally designed in order to demonstrate either dominance or submission, and also to differentiate between reality and the bubble of BDSM and to reinforce this separation. The ritualistic and symbolic acts that occur within a BDSM scene would not appear to be erotic to these participants outside of the sexual

scene, however, when practiced within a scene they contribute to the sense of authenticity thus amplifying the eroticism,

> **Emma:** How did you feel wearing the collar?
>
> **Annie:** I always feel very special. [....] It's exciting. I turn from being his girlfriend, to being just his. His servant, slave, his property, anything he wants me to be...it shows I'm ready and willing to submit to his every whim *(laughs)* [....] When the collar goes on, it makes it clear that our relationship has changed from boyfriend/girlfriend to master/slave. As long as I can feel that collar around my neck I know I belong to him and I have to do whatever he instructs.
>
> **Emma:** Can you describe what collaring brought to your sexual experience?
>
> **Annie:** It prepares me mentally for what's to come. It's almost like turning a switch, but not like...It creates a headspace that prepares me for submission, I know I belong to him for however long I wear that collar, and I have to obey him. I do get turned on when he puts it on me because I know I'm about to have lots of attention lavished on me...

In the excerpt above, Annie describes how the ritual act of collaring shifts the boundaries of her relationship and the collar as an object becomes a symbol of her submissive position.

7.2 Expressions of power and powerlessness

Expressions of power and powerlessness deals with the various ways power, status, dominance and submission are expressed by the participants during BDSM. There are a variety of understandings and manifestations of power and powerlessness where BDSM is involved, and this was a crucial aspect of participants' erotic experiences. This is a complex and multi-faceted aspect of the BDSM sexual adventure, and relates to the erotic differences between the dominant and submissive experience. Because the experience of domination is fundamentally different from that of the submissive partner, the erotic aspects of those experiences

also differ; the same BDSM scene offers distinct erotic experiences for each participant dependent on their assumed role for the play,

> I think it [the experience] would just be like having rough sex without some sort of power separation. Even if we were playing the same characters, if we were on an equal footing it would just be having rough sex, or kinky sex. I think for it to be BDSM then there has to be some division of power. One person has to be in control, in the dominant position I suppose, and one person has to have less power or no power, and this has to be there for it to be BDSM, there has to be an unequal balance of power... {Vikki}

This quote from Vikki illustrates the erotic importance of the power exchange that occurs between practitioners of BDSM.

7.2.1 Interpretations of roles

The following theme illustrates the differences between the dominant and submissive roles as understood by the research participants, and highlights those specific aspects of BDSM that are distinct to either the dominant or the submissive role. Ideas relating to these roles differed *among* dominant and submissive participants, as well as *between* them, and the excerpts below illuminate some of these differences. For example; Steven's interpretation was that the dominant's primary role is to sexually satisfy the submissive partner, while Joe's aim was primarily to please himself but also to educate his partners. Annie also illustrated awareness of various interpretations that exist of the submissive partner's role. For ease of understanding, these interpretations have been separated between the submissive and dominant roles, though both sets of participants commented on each role.

The submissive role

This section will begin by examining interpretations of the submissive role made by submissive participants. These interpretations contained many commonalities among the submissive participants, and all acknowledged that this role could be very difficult both emotionally and physically, but the sexual outcomes were worth the difficulties. Participants argued that the experiences associated with the submissive

role were more powerful, meaningful and exhilarating than experiences of the dominant role. Incidentally, this opinion was corroborated by Joe, who very occasionally submits, achieving a more exciting sexual experience via this role,

> I get...more of...my sub experiences are generally less gratifying than my dom experiences but when I have a good sub experience it's better than my good dom experiences. There are more peaks and troughs as a sub.

Many of the submissive participants framed their submission in terms of a challenge of endurance. The challenges included being able to endure the physical discomfort or pain inflicted upon them by the dominant partner, or enduring the emotional pain of humiliation and discipline. The endurance was perceived as a challenge that, if conquered, would lead to immense sexual pleasure. For many submissive participants, positioning this as a challenge enabled the participants to endure pain beyond their usual non-BDSM capacity in order to reach a point of gratification, as illustrated by the quotes below:

> **Annie:** Physically, it wasn't *too* painful, I didn't have to stop or anything. It was nice to be able to feel both sensations at once, because the paddle gives a different type of pain than the cane. The paddle builds up the pain, where the cane hurts like hell from the beginning, and it's more of a dull pain. That was interesting, experiencing those two different types of pain simultaneously. I just concentrated on enduring it, which became difficult towards the end.
>
> **Emma:** I'm interested in what you said about trying to withstand the pain, can you tell me about that?
>
> **Annie:** I wanted to show everyone that I *was* a good slave, and I was able to take my punishment. I was also envious Sue had become involved and was being dominated by Robert, so I wanted to please him by taking my punishment well and behaving like a good slave should. [....] I wanted to please him and make him proud of me, and forgive me for my wrongdoings.

Maria recalls how she interpreted her experience of being prevented from speaking as a personal challenge:

> **Emma:** Can you explain what this rule has on your sexual experience?
>
> **Maria:** Hmmmm...I think it improves it. [....] I think this rule adds a challenge too. It's like he's throwing down the gauntlet, challenging me to be a good sub and do as I'm told, no matter how difficult it may be. Sometimes if I do cry out or moan, he'll stop what he's doing as a punishment, to teach me a lesson, and it will make me try harder next time.

Another common interpretation made by the submissive participants was that the sexual ideal was to achieve a state of total submission. The ability to relinquish all control to the dominant partner is perceived as the 'gold standard' of submission, and all of the submissive participants would attempt to do this. There was also the belief that if total and complete submission was attained, a greater erotic experience would ensue,

> **Emma:** You said you'd never been that turned on before. What made this experience better?
>
> **Tom:** It was because I hadn't had *any* control at the vet, Joe had completely taken over. I'd prompted the events so far, the going outside but Joe took over and I had no input whatsoever into what had happened when we got [back] in. Joe decided to take me to the vets and I was in puppy mode so couldn't suggest anything. It was the mystery of what's to come, you've got no idea and you have no choice, you've given up all control and you can't object to it [...] The thing that made it extra horny was that none of it was initiated by me, I was just having all this done to me.

Most participants reported that total submission was difficult to achieve, and was dependent on the relationship between dominant and submissive partners, and the frame of mind of the submissive during the BDSM session. The notion that submissive partners should be desired or prized by the dominant partner was also common to the submissive participants, and this desire evoked eroticism. Some dominant and submissive participants interpreted that it was the submissive partner who was *really* in control of the scene, despite the power exchange, by stopping completely or limiting the range of sexual acts. As a dominant partner, Joe dislikes

this aspect of domination and argues his experience can be limited as a result, he prefers the rare occasions when his partner is totally submissive,

> **Joe:** [....] because what was so satisfying about it was that he trusted me to push himself to please me. I got the impression I could get him to do whatever I wanted and he'd go with that, whereas with a lot of guys who when they're getting near their limit will stop, but with him I felt I could really mould him and do what I wanted. [....] but when it reaches a certain point the sub can stop it. It's less about the...sub being under the control of the dom, he can just go along until he reaches his boundaries. [....] This was probably the most in control I've ever felt with anyone to be honest, mentally, physically he was hardly restrained at all, but mentally I felt so in control, so...empowered to use a buzz word...With him I felt mentally dominant.
>
> **Emma:** So he wasn't actually very restrained?
>
> **Joe:** Yeah, but I felt like I could do have done absolutely anything to him and he wouldn't have resisted and I guess...that was the main thing, it was the mental control he'd completely given up.

The next section moves on to look at the dominant role during BDSM.

The dominant role

The following analytic discussion focuses exclusively on the interpretations of the dominant role, made by dominant and submissive participants. There was general consensus among both dominant and submissive partners that this role could be difficult to manage effectively, due to delicate balance between taking the scenes and the submissive partners to their limits without exceeding them and going beyond the boundaries; there is a need for flexibility and dynamism in domination. Participants adopting the dominant role are less exposed and more protected than those assuming the submissive role. This is because it is the dominant partner that retains all of the control rather than relinquishing power and status, which was preferable to exposing vulnerability for some dominant participants.

Despite the lack of vulnerability, the dominant role can be complicated and difficult to master, and all participants acknowledge the skill involved in quality domination. It was important to both the dominant and submissive partners that skill and judgement were employed during domination, and they described this as a necessity if all involved parties are to have a safe and enjoyable sexual experience. The dominant partner must be able to manage the limits of the submissive, while maintaining the sexual scene and having a pleasurable experience themselves, and all the while appearing in control. The skill of taking the submissive partner right to the edge of their personal limits, but not beyond them, was much discussed and admired by the submissive participants, who acknowledged that this was a difficult task,

> **Emma:** Did it make a difference to your sexual experience?
>
> **Joe:** Yeah, it made a difference in what we did, there are some activities you need to build up to...that would be too frightening or too much of a step for someone very inexperienced.
>
> **Emma:** Can you give me an example?
>
> **Joe:** Erm...there's lots of things...like fisting because a, you need to be mentally ready for it, you have to be very relaxed as well as the physical side of it. Also, the first few times you do it, you have to both be relaxed and it might too much for them. Also, if someone's tied up and I suddenly bring out the whip, it might be too much, physically it might not be but it could be mentally. [....] I guess I have to be more caring and consider his emotions and well-being. I have to tread more carefully, and trying out new things I have to be able to judge how he's coping both mentally and physically. I have to be able to go slower and stop quicker...

A common interpretation of the dominant role by dominant and submissive participants was that dominant partners receive guaranteed sexual pleasure due to their role as orchestrator, director and actor. The dominant participants described this as being integral to their erotic enjoyment of BDSM, and that being the sexual director enabled them to incorporate their own favourite sexual acts and fantasies, guaranteeing them a sexually satisfying BDSM experience.

Both dominant and submissive participants perceived that the dominant partner, along with ensuring their own satisfaction, should provide sexual pleasure to the submissive partner. The participants were keen to emphasise that the dominant role was not a selfish one, as a major aspect of this role involved arousing and pleasing the submissive partner sexually, as well as pleasing themselves, in a manner which is consistent with both roles (rather than in the traditional sexual sense). Annie's excerpt demonstrates this complex element:

> Robert had chosen to use her, knowing what it would do to me, and that hurt...emotionally, so to be hurt that way by someone who cherishes you is very humiliating, yet very arousing at the same time. I found Sue quite attractive, which was worse! She was a pretty slave who was serving *my* master instead of me serving him, because I had been bad and needed to be punished. It was a very clever thing for Robert to do really, and it worked on so many levels. It was humiliating on the surface, and everyone could see that, but it was also personal between the two of us, only we knew how I would feel. [....] I got a sexual kick out of the feeling of being controlled to the extent, where I'd put myself through that horrible experience, of wanting to please Robert so much, is very arousing for me and for him.

The final interpretation of the dominant role is that they are in a privileged position of power that must be respected by both sides. The submissive partner should illustrate their respect and admiration for the dominant partner by engaging and obeying, while the dominant should never abuse their position of power; they should use it for the benefit of themselves and their submissive partners as well. The position should be used flexibly, with the interests of both parties being central to the scene. This is related somewhat to the concept of equality discussed in chapter 7B in 7.5.1 and 7.5.2.

Participants described the outcomes of the various expressions of power and powerlessness in terms of rewards which are received by both the dominant and submissive partners during BDSM. These can be both sexual and non-sexual, and are considered to contribute to the overall eroticism of BDSM for the participants. The submissive participants frequently referred to the feelings of accomplishment

they experienced as a result of engaging in BDSM. This was described differently by all participants, but revolved around feeling a sense of triumph after enduring something particularly difficult or painful,

> He can make things very hard sometimes...but never impossible...and if I've gone through a lot for him, after he'll hold me and tell me he's proud of me and that I did well. {Annie}

These positive feelings were a commonality of the submissive participants' experience, leaving a genuine feeling of pride and success in their wake. Both dominant and submissive participants referred frequently to the sexual rewards achieved during BDSM, and though often this incorporated orgasm, this did not feature in all participants' accounts. Other sexual rewards were discussed in terms of general sexual pleasure, feelings of arousal during a scene and a sense of intimacy. Participants also reported feelings of excitement at engaging with new and different sexual acts and pleasure was considered a reward at attempting them,

> I really did feel very close to my husband during and after this session, I enjoyed the sensations, the pleasure and the love. {Lucy}

7.2.2 Eroticism in power exchange

The previous theme examined the ways in which participants described the distinctions between the dominant and submissive roles. Eroticism in power exchange focuses on what happens in practice when these sexual roles interact. Participants commented frequently on the eroticism involved in exchanging power during BDSM sessions. Experimenting with the exchange of power is a fundamental feature of a BDSM experience, and it is this shift in status, either to the dominant or submissive position, that is key to successful BDSM play. As mentioned earlier, the submissive and dominant partners locate eroticism differently within the same scene, and much of what is considered to be erotic is related to the assumed sexual role.

Among the submissive partners there appeared to be many commonalities between the participants who adopted this sexual role, with the process of demotion to the lower submissive status having a central influence on their enjoyment of the session. The elevated power and status attained by the dominant partner was a constant source of arousal for the submissive participants. The implicit knowledge that the

dominant partner possessed such power was erotic for the submissive participants, and this implicit knowledge which preceded any sexual acts, was a constituent of the erotic experience. The submissive participants' were in awe of the power enjoyed by the dominant partner, and their authority to control and direct the sexual situation. The very fact that the dominant partner could do this as a direct result of their own submission, was another erotic aspect reported by the submissive participants. This highlighted their own lack of power and status, which was also a source of eroticism alongside the dominant partner's power. These dynamics are illustrated in the following excerpt:

> **Emma:** Can you tell me about these feelings of humiliation?
>
> **Annie:** It's a big part of why I enjoy BDSM, I get a massive kick from being humiliated and belittled by my master. It's very difficult to explain *why* I enjoy being humiliated...I can't explain why.
>
> **Emma:** Can you try to think why you find it erotic?
>
> **Annie:** *(pause)* It's...it enforces my position as belonging to him, that he can treat me that way and I don't have any comeback. It serves to remind me that I'm his slave and if he speaks like that it's because I deserve it for nor pleasing him. I wonder...wonder whether part of it is to do with the feeling of being so very vulnerable. It places you in a vulnerable position, and accentuates the feeling of vulnerability. It's evidence of Robert's power though that I think is what I find most...erotic, and evidence of my submission. [...] it's about feeling vulnerable and exposed and knowing how to play with that just enough so it feels sexy...

Submissive participants' powerlessness was framed as a multi-faceted erotic experience, consisting of both the psychological act of submission and also the physical and psychological consequences of this action. In terms of the act of submission, the removal of responsibility was mentioned by all submissive participants as a particularly erotic aspect of submission. The notion of not having to make choices or take decisions was particularly appealing, and participants described this lack of responsibility as a pleasurable contribution to the sexual experience,

> It does feel like you're free. You don't have to behave in the conventional way because all the rules are different. I could just be totally selfish and enjoy this amazing sex. I didn't have to try to please my partner, I was pleasing him by letting him use me how he wanted. I could just bask in the experience of it all. I was under his control completely, I didn't have to think or do anything but let him use me, and I had no idea what might happen to me. {Patrick}

The act of submission also removes practitioners' autonomy, which grants all control to the dominant partner. It is the dominant partner who orchestrates the theme and content of the scene, including the sexual practices that occur. The submissive partners have no autonomy to question the dominants' choices, because the characteristics of the role eliminate their independence and surrender it to the dominant partner during the power exchange. Contributing another erotic aspect to the submissive experience is the abolition of the notion of free will. As this notion of free will is an integral part of Western democratic values, this appears on the surface, to be an incongruous concept from which to derive sexual pleasure, however, it is only erotic within the fantasy of the power exchange. In the context of the BDSM scene, submissive partners must obey dominant partners and submit to their power, and the removal of free will in this context only is an erotic experience for the participants. Allowing this to happen during BDSM leads to wonderful, unexpected sexual experiences, as submissive partners are unable to refuse the dominant's wishes and are therefore likely to engage in sexual practices they would otherwise be inhibited against. This must occur, of course, within the realms of fantasy and consent, an issue discussed later in this analysis (see 7.5.2 for an expanded discussion on consent).

The final aspect of eroticism derived from the submissives' experience of powerlessness is the complex way that contrary emotions are synthesised to contribute to the erotic experience. Submissive partners frequently discussed the range of conflicting and contrary emotions experienced when submitting during BDSM. Emotions that are conventionally considered incompatible and that are not usually experienced together can become synthesised during BDSM and are converted into something erotic for the participants. In the excerpt below, Annie

described how the combination of feelings of humiliation and enjoyment became arousing for her and enhanced her sexual experience within the scene:

> I felt rejected by Robert, which heightened my feelings of humiliation and asserted his power. It emphasised he has the power to do this, to bring another slave in if *he* wanted to, and the fact he had all this power was sexy and that's where the paradox arises. I absolutely hated having Sue join us under those conditions, but really got off on Robert exercising his power muscles. I was aroused as well as feeling like dirt, it's a strange combination of feelings, but BDSM does allow me to feel paradoxical things and that's why it's so fulfilling and so exciting. It's a...fusion of sensations and emotions, and in this case it was humiliation, jealousy and sexual arousal.

The eroticism derived during domination has fewer strata than its submissive counterpart, although it is described as a significant experience for dominant participants. The following explores the eroticism involved in adopting the dominant role during BDSM, and the act of dominance and exercising power over a submissive partner. Dominant partners described the sense of their all powerful status as a main feature of their erotic experience. The eroticism experienced arises from the awareness that they have ultimate power, status and total control, of both the sexual situation and of the submissive partner. This is reflective of the submissives' notions of lack of power and control. Simply acknowledging this status shift is arousing, but also exercising this elevated status by dictating and directing the submissive partner and the sexual scene is sexually exciting, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

> **Kim:** I find the feeling of power so overwhelmingly erotic and sexy and arousing. It's the feeling of holding another person's fate in your hands, and knowing that person will abide by your power, and respect that power enough to let you completely control them. It's such a rush, and that's why I could never switch, because I couldn't do without that rush of power I get from domination. [....] It lets me have that absolute power, and I feel totally in control, in control of Katy and in control of myself, I feel very...commanding *(laughs)* and I enjoy having those feelings I don't have in my real life.

> **Emma:** So what is erotic about feeling so powerful?
>
> **Kim:** I think power is a sexy attribute [....] If you have power then you have respect and authority, and people don't want to go against that. If my partner finds me powerful, and I'm talking about SM here, I have the green light to act like a bitch, scream, shout and swear, and having someone who is prepared to take all the shit you dish out, makes me feel...very special indeed. [....] When I feel so in control, that's what I find erotic, that someone respects me to the nth degree, that they will give me total control over their life.

This *total* control is paramount for all of the dominant participants interviewed and is a central feature of their overall erotic experience; the more control achieved, the better their sexual experience. Another central element to erotically fulfilling domination is the attention and adulation bestowed upon them by the submissive partner. The submissives' desire to please them, along with a high level of respect from their submissive partner, forms part of the erotic experience. Receiving such adoration along with total submission is sexually pleasurable for these participants and forms part of the eroticism of domination. A prominent aspect of domination is that the dominant partners have sexual choice during BDSM. They are the directors of the sexual scene, therefore they can decide on the scenes, themes and sexual acts involved ensuring their sexual needs and desires are met. They are free to impose their sexual will onto the submissive partners, leading to a fantasy of perceived unlimited sexual scope for dominant partners. In the same way that the submissive participants were pleased with not having to decide what to do sexually given the removal of their independence, free will and responsibility, the dominant partners thrive on making all of the sexual decisions and controlling the sexual choices. Ending this section in the participant's own words, Joe explains why this aspect of domination is erotic for him,

> I felt, erm, very in control. The other guy was very submissive and willing to submit to my control, my willpower, erm, what have you. That experience was *very much* dominant and submissive and he was willing and compliant. I remember the session because of his willingness and submissiveness that just sort of...made me feel incredibly powerful, incredibly confident, incredibly wanted, attractive.

> You know, all the ego boosting things when someone submits to you, you're almost...worshipped I suppose. That's such an ego boost, even it's only for a few hours. [....] I felt almost God-like to be honest. It's the big buzz you get from being the dom, and feeling in control of your destiny for once and being important, and top of the tree for once...you're special and that's a big thing for me.

7.3 Qualities of BDSM participation

All participants described the various erotic facets of the experience of practicing BDSM, and the way these aspects could be experienced in parallel. The constituting elements of the nature of participation illuminate the myriad ways that BDSM appears to these participants, and form part of their lived experience of BDSM. There were many commonalities between participants' accounts of BDSM participation and their positioning of eroticism, with all referring to the various participatory features that contribute to the overall eroticism of the experience.

7.3.1 Fusion of experiences

Participants' perceived their participation in BDSM as an avalanche of experience that was unavailable to them through any other sexual medium. This featured in all participants' accounts and was fundamental to participating in BDSM. A key constituent of the experiential nature of BDSM was that it enabled a fusion of experiences to occur; this fusion referred to the shared experiential connection experienced by partners involved in BDSM. Participants' could establish a strongly significant connection with their partner(s) based on this fused sexual experience. Regardless of role and different located erotic elements related to roles, the shared act of experiencing was described as a fundamental facet of BDSM participation. As a result of this fusion of experience, participants reported that they are able to experience impossible and/or new realities; realities that can occur only via participating in a BDSM scene simply because it would be impossible for these to occur outside the bubble of fantasy, out in the 'real' world. Participation in BDSM can enable practitioners to experience things they usually would not be able to; for Tom this involves playing the role of an animal, and for Kim this means her female partner is able to adopt the male gender, allowing Kim to experience a form of heterosexual sex, something she otherwise would never experience. Lucy describes in the excerpt

below how she and her husband are aroused by incorporating historical fiction into their play:

> If you look at BDSM fiction online, there is a category for romantic fiction, and it's very popular. My husband gets a thrill from worshipping me and worshipping my body, and so do I. The aim for us is that we both feel good together and have a good time. My husband likes to do these military re-enactments, has done for years, and he likes to involve this in our play sessions. Something he likes is I pretend to be a rival courtier's wife, and he kidnaps me, binds me and locks me up. I have to beg and plead to be let out, and in reality I don't know how long I'm going to be in there, and when I freed he keeps me tied up and makes me serve him until I fall in love him *(laughs)*. I mean what else lets you both do that sort of thing? {Lucy}

7.3.2 Meaningful experiences

All participants' described participating in BDSM as a meaningful experience. They reported that BDSM is not simply a way of having sex, rather it is an encounter that has meaning which reaches beyond the sexual act. These meanings differ between participants, and there is not one universal meaning referred to by all participants, however, the meaningfulness of the experience is related to the eroticism identified by participants. Tom discussed how the simple act of being collared by his partner during puppy play was a meaningful experience,

> I don't know how to articulate it *(long pause).* Because he...I don't really...it was nice from the point of view that I belonged somewhere, I wasn't a stray dog, I was his dog and I knew he would look after me, and I guess that kind of...was an expression of his care for me that he would buy me a collar and a name tag [...] You wouldn't buy a collar and a name tag for a dog if you were gonna abandon it or mistreat it because everyone would know it was your dog, not that I thought that was going to happen, it was more that he wasn't doing it by half, he was serious about doing it.

This extract highlights the way BDSM was expressed as a meaningful experience by these participants.

7.3.3 Exploratory

Participating in BDSM was framed as an exploratory experience, allowing participants to explore their sexuality, their senses and their bodies in a way not featured in vanilla sex. A fundamental erotic aspect of BDSM participation for all of the participants is the many and varied sensations one can experience, which can be explored and manipulated to provide participants with a multi-sensory experience. The sensory experience can take a variety of forms and can incorporate smells, sensations on the skin, distorted perceptions and sounds. For example, different spanking implements can impose different sensations upon the recipient, as can the various types of application of pain to the skin. Patrick finds the physical, olfactory and visual sensation of rubber erotic during BDSM, and this material features heavily in his play. The various sensory stimulation provided by rubber is an important sexual element of BDSM for Patrick. He recalls how this was what he first noticed on visiting a fetish club for the first time,

> Yes, it's something I'll never forget. The smell of rubber was everywhere, that was the first thing I noticed. I could just smell rubber in the air, which was great because I adore the smell of rubber [....] I enjoy the tactile nature of rubber, it feels so soft on the skin and silky smooth. I love the tightness of it, it just clings to you. I like the restrictive nature of that, and the inescapability, if that's even a word, of rubber. The sound it makes when you're wearing it, or hearing someone else in it. I also like the aesthetic value of it. It hugs bodies so tightly and snugly, which can look amazingly sexy if the person works out at the gym, like me. It shows off all my hard work, and that gets me a lot of attention from people, which I enjoy! The smell is a big deal for me. I love the smell of rubber, and it instantly makes me feel horny. I love the distinctiveness of its smell and it's still a nice smell when it's combined with sweat...sounds awful but it turns me on so much! I also feel very attractive to people, especially guys when I'm wearing it, much more attractive than I usually feel in a regular nightclub out on the pull. It just gives me so much confidence to know I look good wearing it and other people think I look good in it too. I sound big headed now! *(laughs)* but the best sex I've had has been in rubber fetish clubs.

Corporeality is an important exploratory element of BDSM, and being able to use BDSM paraphernalia and activities that explore the bodily relationship with the world and with others featured frequently in participants' accounts. BDSM places exploration of the body into central focus, as much of the experience is concentrated on eliciting various uncommon and unusual physical sensations, participants are able to concentrate on exploring this assortment of bodily sensations and reactions elicited by BDSM. Tom explained the unusual and unique physical sensations that BDSM enables him to experience through the use of sounds and catheters:

> It's the sensation you get from them. There is no other way to stimulate that area. It's a steel rod that goes down the inside of your penis, it's a weird experience, and it feels cold and hard, it's a strange experience. You can stimulate the prostate if you do it right, which is a very enjoyable sensation. It stimulates nerves you wouldn't normally stimulate and you're doing it from the inside rather than the other way round. [....] I like catheter play and they're made from latex, it's a different sensation. The sounds are hard and the cold metal rigidness is a better stimulation. It does hurt a bit and the catheter doesn't and when you've got the sound inside you have to be careful about how you move around and things because you've got this piece of metal inside your body which is restrictive, you get a very different sensation than with something soft...The sensation is nice [using a catheter], it's softer than sounding...

Participants discussed limitations that can be imposed on the body by a partner as an erotic element of BDSM participation. This can take many forms, some examples given by participants include how;

- being restrained leads to a physical limitation of not being able to move
- being gagged prevents communication in the usual way
- being catheterised inhibits natural urine excretion

The corporeal limitations are imposed and controlled by someone else, which is an exciting aspect of the submissive experience and also can elicit unusual psychological reactions, adding another exploratory dimension to the experience,

> I like the fact it makes me feel vulnerable and...helpless. I'm unable to move so I'm unable to resist my husband and his desires, not that I'd want to! It's a very strange experience because you're used to moving when and how you want to, we don't even think about it in everyday life, we just move as and when we want to...When you're tied up or handcuffed you realise how mobile you are, and when it's removed from you, it's removing so much of your power and control. You can't even scratch an itch if you want to, you can't do anything you can usually. So that's an unusual experience to begin with, it's putting you in a position an able bodied person would never normally experience. At times it can be a little painful, if the rope is tight, or if I'm tied in certain positions, but that's fine because I'm not supposed to be comfortable in those situations. {Lucy}

Participants expressed the view that practicing BDSM leads to an increased or a specific kind of awareness of their own bodies, which is not present during everyday life. Participating in BDSM allows an exploration of this different bodily awareness. All of the submissive participants described how through dominant partners' experimentation and manipulation of their corporeal sensations, they were able to erotically explore their bodies in manners impossible during non-BDSM acts. The concept of changing both the appearance and the physical sensations of the body as a result of deliberate, direct and uncommon manipulation was an illustration of the dominant partner's power and status over the submissives. The visual and physical stimulation attained through this bodily manipulation is also an arousing element for the participants,

> I think because I'm tied in strange positions, I feel sensations differently. With Robert, he sometimes does suspension bondage, so sometimes my legs are above my head, and that's a strange experience. Feeling all the blood rush down to my head, and then being masturbated or playing with a vibrator, the sensations are unusual and as a result I focus more on my body than I would usually. I did some breast bondage a couple of times, and I liked to see how the shape of my breasts altered. I have quite small breasts but the bondage made them swell until they were really quite large, and they became so sensitive with the stretched skin. It was exciting

> to see and feel my body in that way. [....]It's actually changing the appearance of the body. Even just down to the feeling of the rope pressing against skin is an out of the ordinary experience, so it does make you very, very aware of your body. {Annie}

Tom also enjoys these manipulated corporeal sensations as part of his BDSM, and he frequently uses drugs to enhance this during play. He described how using ketamine could alter the bodily sensations he felt during BDSM,

> **Tom:** Yeah...one time when he was playing with me and I was tied down and it was like I was in the middle of a massive auditorium, it was hugely expansive, it was massive, and Joe was doing all these things to me and there were hundreds of thousands of people watching, but they weren't really people they were something else. They were all watching and I felt everything was spinning round as well, so it wasn't just I was having this hallucination, what Joe was doing to me in the real world was also happening in the hallucination as well and the things he was doing felt amplified. He was using a dildo, every feel of it and every bump was amplified so it was a different sensation to normal...it's hard to describe. Everything's numb but when you do feel something it's amplified and echoed and...things tend to bounce off. You'd feel something on your leg but it would bounce up your body, things feel quite weird when you're on ketamine.
>
> **Emma:** What does that do to the sexual experience?
>
> **Tom:** It enhances it, you're not just laying somewhere being fucked with a dildo, you're having all these extra feelings and visions going on which makes it more exciting.

These quotes demonstrate the many and varied exploratory elements available to the participants via BDSM participation.

7.3.4 Fun

The enjoyable and fun nature of BDSM is important to the erotic experience for the participants, and although the sexual acts and practices may appear to others as distinctly non-sexual, these participants positioned them as highly erotic. The

enjoyment referred to by participants includes the sexual, physical and emotional pleasure gained from participating in BDSM, and though this enjoyment is not always instant or apparent, it is essential in order for BDSM to be arousing. Despite containing serious scenes and serious acts, participants are completely aware, on some level, that BDSM is a fun pastime. The enjoyable and fun elements of the sexual experience must be apparent to participants, even if this is not reflective of the scene, the motivations in the 'real' world are concerned with pleasure and enjoyment.

> This time, it was very relaxed and very fun. I can do lots of different types of things, be lots of different characters, experience lots of things and have a great time. The point is that we both have lots of fun and have a fantastic time together. {Vikki}

Vikki's quote illuminates how this aspect of fun can feature in BDSM on some level.

7.3.5 Emotive

The emotive nature of BDSM participation featured in the majority of the interviews, and participants described a spectrum of emotion experienced during BDSM, which was related to the acts and scenes engaged in as part of the play. As a result of the extreme emotions involved in BDSM participation, profound emotional intimacy between partners is created, although this does not necessarily have to last for a sustained period, and depends upon the type of relationship that exists between the sexual partners. This appeared as a significantly erotic aspect of the experience to the majority of participants, which could only be attained via BDSM. A lack of perceived emotion can have a negative effect on a scene and destroy their sense of eroticism, according to these participants. On par with the shared experience discussed earlier, the shared emotional experience gained from BDSM participation was highlighted as an erotic constituent. The emotions of each separate sexual partner become connected as they share this unusual spectrum of emotions, and it is the sharing of this emotion which is contributes to powerful sexual experience for the participants. In the following quote Joe describes the fusion that is created between himself and a casual partner, with whom he shared no prior emotional connection. The joint act of BDSM participation created this exchange where they both experienced a range of incredibly strong emotions,

> I felt very protective of him, very, very protective and loving *(pause)* it's difficult to describe....All encompassing I suppose. Everything about him for that period he was with me I was engaging with him, it was all going through me, any emotions he had, any physical sensation he had, so we were very connected...on every single level, emotionally, physically, mentally and I was, at that point in time, the most important person in the world to him, he relied on me for everything. And that's powerful. {Joe}

As a result of such intense emotional experiences, participants described how emotional bonds could be established and strengthened. BDSM can have a positive influence on relationships through developing the emotional intimacy between participants. This was more salient among participants engaged in relationships, rather than very casual partners, and was described as an important outcome of BDSM. Even if a relationship was based solely on BDSM, rather than on any sort of love or fondness, participants reported a creation or strengthening of a bond through the shared emotions contained within BDSM. This seemed especially prominent in the analysis of Steven's account,

> It's knowing you have this shared experience that's unique to you two as individuals coming together as a couple, not as a couple wearing matching cardigans but as a couple sharing this experience. I felt very caring towards Mary and like…we were really close, and had built up the closeness a bit more and I felt very happy about that as well, that we'd increased the bond between us, and had a good session. [....] The main building point of it is having an emotional connection through doing BDSM. I mean I've got friendships, I've got very close and intimate friendships with women who I don't want to be involved sexually with, we have an emotional bond, it does drive their boyfriends insanely jealous, but it's nothing to do with anything sexual. A sexual partner, the bond we share is both sexual and emotional, and doing the BDSM increases that.

The emotional connection established during BDSM participation was an important feature for these participants, and as a result strong bonds were created and maintained.

7.3.6 Temporal

The issue of temporality featured in the participant interviews; a concern with the way time was experienced. Participants described an incongruent perception of time, losing all concept of time itself, or the passage of time, while engaging in BDSM. The sexual scenes can be prolonged or brief, however, the actual passing of time in reality is not reflected in participants' experiences of the passing of time during a BDSM scene. Rather than in 'clock' time, the scene was measured in anticipation by these participants. This anticipatory excitement contained an element of eroticism and the anticipation of the sexual event could influence the success of a particular scene. The time leading up to the sexual act is generally described in erotic terms and is framed as essential to a successful, erotic experience. However, anticipation can be experienced as both a frustrating delay, as in Maria's experience, as well as exciting anticipation. Maria described meeting a man for BDSM, only to have him treat her as a first date, engaging in small talk rather than moving the encounter along to its purpose. For Maria, this was a less than ideal build up to her sexual experience and it left her feeling frustrated and lacking in eroticism,

> Yes, he got me a drink when I arrived, which was fine to break the ice, but then he wouldn't stop talking! It was like we were on a first date, he was telling me about his job and asking me about mine, telling me about his dog even. We both knew I was only there for sex, but it seemed like he was lining me up to meet his folks or something. I was really excited and wanted to start the BDSM session, but he seemed happy just to chat the night away...He was very nice, but we weren't on a date. I didn't expect him to throw me on the bed and tie me up as soon as I walked in, but I was hoping it would happen at some point. The longer we talked, I was aware that the less time we'd have to play and I wanted to play not talk.

Also significant to participants' experience was taking the time to create the correct atmosphere conducive to BDSM in order to create an erotic experience. Tom's own words provide an illuminating end to this section,

> **Tom:** I mean although I love being dominated I can be bossy sometimes, and if I've got an idea in my head that I want Joe to do I would just tell him 'no, do this instead' which he would then do, but

then that makes Joe's role submissive as well because he's taking orders from me, and although it's nice because he's doing what I want him to do, the anticipation's gone then because I know exactly what he's going to do because I've just told him to do it.

Emma: So you don't find that arousing?

Tom: It's not because there's not kind of anticipation or build up or mystery around it.

Emma: That seems like a paradox, because even though you're getting what you've asked for and what you want, you don't enjoy it as much?

Tom: [...] he'll probably do what I want anyway, but it's more of a turn on when he just does it and I don't know what's coming. It's the anticipation of what he might do [....] the anticipation and the thought of it happening amplifies the end result. You're thinking over and over in your head, what's going to happen, and you keep building it up and anticipating it more so when it finally happens it's amplified, and the whole experience is amplified.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has presented some of the findings resulting from the template analysis of the interview data. Higher order themes were described in order to elucidate the erotic components of the BDSM experience. These were the co-creation of fantasy world, expressions of power and powerlessness and the qualities of the BDSM experience. The aspect of fantasy creation is of particular importance in the erotic experience of BDSM, and will be examined further in the discussion in chapter nine. Participants' voices were expressed in the form of interview quotes for the purpose of illuminating the thematic presentation. The next chapter will report the remaining analytical findings.

Chapter 7B

The Template Approach: Analysis & Findings

The Template Approach: Analysis and Findings Part B

Due to the depth and complexity of the analytical findings, I decided that it would aid readability to separate this large body of work into two related chapters. Chapter 7A explored issues of fantasy creation and maintenance, expressions of power and powerlessness and the qualities of the BDSM experience. This chapter will continue to elucidate the analytical findings and will focus on the relational facilitators and

obstructions to BDSM participation and the role of transgression. The integrative themes, (those themes which permeate many of the other themes), are also presented along with the contemplative themes relating to the ways I interpreted participants' presentations of themselves and their BDSM practices to me.

7.5 Obstructions and Relational Facilitators of BDSM participation

Participants frequently described certain experiential features that can obstruct the eroticism of BDSM, converting the experience into something unsatisfying or unpleasant. This dissatisfaction manifested in numerous ways, which will be discussed in this section. The obstructions to erotic BDSM can arise prior to and/or during a BDSM scene, and as a result of these obstructing factors, participants' sense of eroticism is lost. Specific relational facilitators were also discussed by these participants, outlining the features of relationships upon which the presence of eroticism depends. The facilitators refer to the conditions of the BDSM relationship, which have to satisfy the participants in order for the BDSM to be an erotic, pleasurable experience.

7.5.1 Obstructions to BDSM engagement

Participants discussed the issues which inhibit their engagement with BDSM, the reference to engagement rather than participation exists because inhibitions can occur *prior* to any participation. Some of these obstructions appear on the surface to be rather innocuous, however, they can seriously impact on the eroticism of a BDSM experience for participants. There appears to be numerous factors that can obstruct the eroticism of the BDSM experience, making it unenjoyable for one or more of the practitioners involved. This can affect the experience in different ways; a participant may not find any eroticism in the premise of a scene, therefore initial eroticism is not present and does not develop throughout the scene, or an incident may occur during a scene that causes the eroticism that was initially present to dissipate, leading to a non-erotic experience. A common obstruction faced by the participants concerns issues relating to their partners, and the sometimes problematic elements of the relationship between the individuals involved in the BDSM. This does not necessarily imply that the people involved have any relationship outside of the circumstances of BDSM, although some participants were involved with their BDSM partners

romantically. These problematic issues can occur prior to and/or during the sex play, and can completely terminate the BDSM due to the loss of the erotic experience. The issues are generally not created by the partner(s) deliberately, but once present can obstruct participants' engagement and/or participation in the scene. One of the main problematic relational issues raised by these participants was the lack of a sense of partnership. When participants felt as if there was a lack of consideration towards them from their partner, participants found it difficult to become aroused, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> **Vikki:** It became obvious that he really had a fetish for knickers, and that was his main reason for being there.
>
> **Emma:** Can you imagine when this experience might have been erotic?
>
> **Vikki:** I'm not against anything like that. I'd have been up for it had he let me in on the secret. I think it probably would have been an erotic experience if I had been included more. I did feel very much like he only wanted me for my knickers *(laughs)* but it was a shame because it could have been a good time. [....] I felt as though his main reason for getting me there and talking me into meeting him was just so he could use my underwear to get himself off, not so we could have a good time together. I felt it was *his* party I suppose.

The topic of partnership was a common inclusion in most of the interviews, with participants expressing the importance of this element. The feeling that all parties were 'in it together' was particularly salient, and made for a more fulfilling BDSM experience for the participants. If this sense of partnership was not present, or diminished over the course of the play, the eroticism also diminished. There was a necessity for a partner to demonstrate consideration during play, and also to devote themselves, for the duration of the scene at least, to the partnership. For some participants, sexual enjoyment stems from being objectified by their partner, however, the objectification discussed here is different as it elicits unsexual, unpleasant feelings on the part of the participant, rather than erotic, sexual feelings. This unpleasant objectification occurs when a partner is disinterested in the participants' emotions or sexual arousal, and is in fact simply using the participant

selfishly to satisfy their own desires. This reductionist attitude can be upsetting and hurtful to the participants, and therefore inhibits eroticism blossoming in the scene.

> Yeah, if he'd been more interested in me as a person, he didn't care who I was, I could have been anyone. He didn't care who I was, had no interest in getting to know me, what I liked, what my limits were. It was just...he'd come to get paid to do all this stuff to me and didn't care whether I was enjoying it. He'd done it before. If he had been a more considerate person who was more bothered about what I wanted and was bothered about having a good time and me having a good time, then I think it would have been very different. {Tom}

Participants' own interpretation of various features may influence their perception of erotic elements in the BDSM scene, meaning if certain factors are interpreted negatively, the eroticism disappears. These features are not directly related to participants' view of their partners, but instead focus on the myriad other elements that can be interpreted negatively thus losing the eroticism for the participants and making the BDSM experience less engaging. The most common of these negative influences was participants' views of themselves, a negative perception of one's self can generate a negative influence on the BDSM. The view of the self here is not something that is fixed, but something fluid and changeable, and it appears from the participants' accounts that the view of the self can shift quickly during BDSM. A particular activity or practice that participants anticipated would be arousing for them actually causes them to generate an unpleasant self-perception thus ruining the allure of the scene. Negative feelings, such as feeling alone or stupid, lead to a distraction that can quash any eroticism present and create unhappiness and discomfort. The following quote demonstrates the impact that negative feelings may have on a scene:

> **Emma:** How did that influence your decision not to put white powder on Ryan's face then, surely that would have added to the realism?
>
> **Vikki:** *(pause)* Erm...well Edward is pale, but also his skin glistens and I didn't think we'd be able to recreate that...but...I think part of it was practical. It would have meant putting talc on his face, which I don't think would be pleasant, and also it would just come off everywhere. It was Ryan who was more against it than me really...I

> think he was worried about feeling a bit stupid, and it being distracting. I mean I would find it offputting if we put him it on him, and it looked weird or silly or something. I probably wouldn't be able to properly keep in my character, or I might laugh!
>
> **Emma:** Can you imagine what might happen if you did laugh?
>
> **Vikki:** Oh it would spoil things...it definitely would spoil things. And it wouldn't be very nice to burst out laughing at him would it?

A particularly salient theme relating to obstructions to BDSM was when there were problems engaging with the fantasy. As mentioned earlier, the creation of a fantasy world (7.1) and the necessity of complete immersion within that fantasy are essential to the erotic experience. When participants experience problems engaging with the chosen fantasy, difficulties relating to the scene's eroticism arise. It is critical that BDSM practitioners are able to immerse themselves in the alternative sexual reality created, and when this proves impossible, it becomes problematic for the participants to really engage with the sexual scene. One issue is if the fantasy is missing components that participants consider crucial; a vital component can refer to a feature or concept the participants' consider to be important during the fantasy, this may be at the creation stage through to sexual roles through to the sexual acts included. Participants referred frequently to the believability and explainability of the fantasy; every aspect from costume to dialogue to props should always make sense, as Kim's quote illustrates:

> **Emma:** Can you tell me how important the clothing you wore was for your sexual experience?
>
> **Kim:** It was very important. It was important we each looked like we should if we were really a headmistress or a student, otherwise we might have been acting any fantasy. You need action as well as words when you're doing SM, and what you wear can have a big impact on the SM. [...]
>
> **Emma:** Can you imagine if you were wearing plain clothing like you would usually wear...
>
> **Kim:** There's no doubt that the clothes...facilitate the role play. I think it would be very difficult without dressing up. Why would a

> headmistress be wearing jumper and jeans? She would have to dress a certain way for work, so I would have to dress a certain way to play her role. [...] It doesn't make sense to go to the trouble of planning a fantasy and then not going through with it properly and incorporating clothes and things as well. [...] There's no point going to tons of effort just to leave something important out, I think how the scenario is set up is very important. [...] It has to look the part. I've done SM with very little props, but I think if you *can* do it then you should. It does make it all seem...proper I suppose, like it's really happening.

What constitutes a vital component of a fantasy is subjective to the individuals involved, and varied between participants. However, if a component of the fantasy was absent then something of the eroticism was lost for participants. Incidentally, also vital to participants' fantasies was the notion of authenticity, which will be discussed later in this analysis.

The other commonly articulated issue involved a lack of immersion in the fantasy. When participants feel unable to become completely immersed in the fantasy, the experience becomes unerotic. There may be various reasons why participants feel unable to immerse themselves, though often it is because they are prevented as a result of a particular feature of the fantasy such as sounds, dialogue or smells for example. These features may appear clumsy, ill-considered, disingenuous or unrealistic and as a result participants cannot immerse themselves satisfactorily in the fantasy and therefore the eroticism of the situation is lost,

> **Emma:** You said things didn't improve when he asked how you liked to be restrained, can you explain more about this?
>
> **Maria:** He was supposed to be the dominant partner, he wasn't supposed to consult with me about what I wanted. That's the worst thing someone can do because then I feel as though they have no power, where is their power if they have to ask? He should do what he wanted to do, what he enjoyed, not ask me how I like it! I'm supposed to be subservient to him, not have opinions about types of bondage. It's not arousing when I had an expectation that I was going to be dominated by a sadist, and the first thing is I'm asked

> what I prefer to do. I was quite disappointed as I'd been looking forward to the session and I was concerned it wasn't going to be what I expected. [....] he was too nice. I can understand at the beginning, to break the ice but he didn't seem to be adopting his role, getting into character or anything so I found it difficult to get into my role, and turn my mind to being submissive for him. Then for him to ask how I liked to be tied up, he wasn't showing any dominance there, none at all I need to be convinced to believe the fantasy otherwise it's difficult to continue with it. It really turned me off that he expected me to tell him what to do, when a major part of submission is avoiding that very thing.

Often, obstructions to BDSM participation concern those features of a fantasy which do not simply appear as unsexy or indifferent to participants, but are actually a turn-off; a feature which repels the participant and possess no semblance of eroticism. These types of obstructions go beyond simple uneroticism, and are considered repulsive. These features can distract the participant from engaging with the fantasy, and become the participants' focus, which in cases such as Kim's, can become particularly unpleasant,

> Now when I play a role I do the best I can to let that character take over me, but I didn't want to try to feel like a rapist. The thought was abhorrent to me. [....] I tried to imagine what a rapist would do, beyond the obvious, but all I could picture was an onslaught of violence. I didn't feel as though I had truly assumed the role of a rapist, I knew I was only pretending the whole way through. I think she probably knew too, but she chose to ignore it. I was just going through the motions trying to find some little bit of pleasure or satisfaction that I could hold on to, but to no avail. I think I wrote it in the example, I just felt robotic. It was awful, I felt awful. It still bothers me. Really it's an example of how not to role play, because I wasn't into it at all. I had to switch myself off just to get through it.

Participants may have no idea that a particular act or sexual character will seem repulsive to them until the BDSM is underway, however, occasionally participants reported an inkling but proceeded with the scene regardless. The features the participants found repellent varied, and were particularly subjective, but included

certain roles or characters, certain discourse during the scene, and certain sounds along with physical sensations. A repellent feature which often obstructs participation focuses on the content of the fantasy. Specifically, when something within the construction of the fantasy was interpreted as repellent by the participants, which commonly centred around the premise of a fantasy or the assumed sexual characters. The most powerful example of this was during Kim's interview, her partner asked she assume the role of a rapist and for the purposes of the scene Kim was asked to rape her. The above excerpt illuminates her feelings towards this fantasy. Along with fantasy content, the type of sensory input that occurred during some BDSM play became repellent, thus affecting the eroticism of the scene. Participants commented that even when the fantasy premise was erotic, the type of sensory input was able to destroy the scene. This varied between participants but included the feeling of a particular implement on the body, a certain dialogue or sound that occurs during the scene and/or the sight or smell of something particular. Kim's description of the rape scene is illustrated:

> I didn't recognise her like that. Screaming and pleading and writhing against the cable ties, it made me uneasy, even though I knew she was pretending, and she wanted it, it wasn't pleasant to hear that. She was screaming so loud I thought that someone might call the police to report it or something, disconcerted sounds a bit mild to describe how I felt, but I was very uneasy and found it all very disconcerting. The more she struggled, and she did it a lot, the less...close I felt to her. I didn't feel that this was a fun or intimate session, all our intimacy had gone. I felt like I barely knew her...in fact I was disgusted by her and the things she was saying like 'please don't do this, I'm pregnant', and she was really, really into her role, she could have won an Oscar for that performance.

Interestingly, participants described experiencing a tipping point during their BDSM; those specific instances when an erotic experience alters and as a result loses its sense of eroticism for the participants. This phenomenon was widely reported by participants and was framed in terms of an obstruction to the continuation of their participation in the scene. The tipping points had no specified criteria, and were generally described as unpredictable and changeable as the triggers differed with each sexual occasion. At times there was a more gradual decline in the eroticism

which eventually lead to a cessation in proceedings, while on other occasions eroticism of the scene would vanish instantly, and usually there was no specific precursor to these instances. Some particular triggers of the tipping point were reported as involving a sensitive personal issue from the 'real' world in the BDSM scene, developing a sentiment of distrusting a partner, and becoming afraid during the scene. The following excerpts illustrate the various tipping points and the variance between them:

> He would never humiliate me about something really serious...say if I thought I was fat, he wouldn't say 'you fat cow' or 'stupid bitch' or anything like that, that wouldn't be sexy it would just be horrible. The point is to play with things, he knew involving another slave would humiliate me, but it wouldn't *really* devastate me. It's about feeling vulnerable and exposed, and knowing how to play with that just enough so it feels erotic and sexy, not cruel. {Annie}

For Steven, his tipping point appeared if he felt as though his partner's safety had been compromised in any way during the scene, and if this was the case he would be unable to continue to participate in the session,

> Having her restrained, it also means that if I'm whipping her back she's not going to try to move her arm or anything, and potentially you're doing a lot more damage to someone if you hit the wrong way, and I wouldn't want to do that to someone, that's not nice, so part of it in my mind is safety. If she hadn't been tied down there's still a worry that she could move. I can go a little bit further with how hard I'm hitting someone when I know they're not...if I've got a knife I know they're not going to turn around and knock me and me end up with a knife somewhere I don't want it, in a joint or something, that wouldn't be good.

Joe described his sexual tipping point as a partner's dishonesty, as this leads him to question the individual's character and intentions, which for him is not arousing. He described a situation where he met a man for BDSM, on arrival at the man's house, after travelling some distance, the individual was not at home and when he eventually arrived he was drunk, and the photographs he had sent were not representative of what he looked like. This lack of honesty dispelled Joe's previous

sense of excitement regarding the situation, and he reached his tipping point where the situation lost its eroticism:

> **Joe:** Online you get people who get off on cybersex, or arranging to meet and then not turning up so I thought he was just a time waster. You get some people who get sexual kicks from that.
>
> **Emma:** Can you describe your feelings when he turned up?
>
> **Joe:** He was overweight, smelly, erm...I was disappointed. I was in a bad mood by now because I'd gone there all happy, cheerful and horny and I was sat there thinking 'what a ...' You know, my mood had already swung and when he turned up my mood didn't lift because he wasn't what I expected physically, which I can live with as I said earlier, attractiveness is less important when I'm sub. It was another knock on top of not being home and being in the pub. The trust just disappeared and I didn't really want to continue.

Kim's tipping point was related to the level of violence present in the BDSM, she enjoyed inflicting some violence, but once this increased beyond a certain level Kim's sense of eroticism disappeared,

> I also didn't feel comfortable with the idea of punching someone in the face, I'd never done that to anyone and the thought of drawing back my fist and letting fly right into my beautiful girlfriend's face...I couldn't even think about doing. The end point for me was a point where I personally felt uncomfortable inflicting that on another person, regardless of whether that person wanted me to do it, when I had to force myself even to contemplate something then that's when I felt uncomfortable with it and something changed from being a really hot and sexy game to something much darker.

Kim's discomfort is apparent during this quote, highlighting her own tipping point and illustrating how this process of losing eroticism can occur.

7.5.2 Relationship solidarity as an enabler of BDSM

In various terms across the interviews participants referred to the enabling effect of relationship solidarity, and how solidarity can facilitate the eroticism in BDSM. A noteworthy point is that the term 'relationship' as applied here does not necessarily refer to an involved, romantic relationship, and can also encompass a relationship based on BDSM and casual sexual relations. The relational involvement between those participating in the BDSM was of paramount importance to all of the research participants, and was a feature in all of the accounts. Solidarity refers to a sense of unity present between those involved, in order for the BDSM to be successful and adequately erotic. The relational factors were particularly salient throughout the interviews, framed by participants' discussion of both the successful and less successful sexual experiences. Indeed, experiences were perceived as less successful when there was a lack of relational reciprocity and accord. Mutual interest in the relationship from all parties, whether a romantic relationship or a BDSM based relationship, is essential for the erotic experience. If this is absent, it can become difficult for the participant to *want* to engage in play with the other partner(s). There is a necessity for a level of involvement and attachment on the part of the sexual partner(s), rather than detachment and distance. The existing relationship dynamics between those involved dictates the level of attachment, however, participants must feel some sense of the personal in the sexual interaction. If this is missing, it can be problematic for the participant to fully commit to and enjoy the scene. BDSM practitioners must also feel as though their partner(s) care about them on some level, about their welfare and wellbeing and also care about having a fun and enjoyable session, and this issue was a prominent feature of participants' accounts,

> The thing that changed it for me really was...the guy who was doing the stuff to me, Paul, was...it was like he really didn't care whether I was there or not, he wasn't enjoying it and he didn't care whether I was enjoying it or not. He was just doing it for the money, and I suppose I was as well... it sounds silly but he didn't care if he hurt me or what I could take and what my limits were. He could have done anything to me. I mean there were two other people there, he couldn't have done anything too severe, but when he was whipping me it was like he could have gone as hard as he wanted and at one point he was really, really hurting me, but he didn't care. {Tom}

This issue of care was a hugely important element of the experience for many, and they testified that their erotic experience would be negatively affected if they did not perceive a presence of care. Having the reassuring presence of care enabled engagement in powerful and emotional BDSM scenes, which would not be possible if a sense of care was lacking. This may not be expressed through the scenes or the characters adopted for the BDSM, but its existence must be understood in the 'real' world. In a similar vein, there should be mutual regard and respect for one another. If this is absent, it can become difficult for participants to engage with the BDSM.

Along with relationship mutuality, relationship solidarity in the form of the shared nature of the sexual experience was considered an enabler to engagement in BDSM. BDSM is not a solitary endeavour and participants need to feel involved in, and part of the experience. One aspect of this feature is the necessity that all participants should be equally invested in the BDSM, and the experience is equally important to all involved. The session's participants should be completely invested in the play and should ensure everyone is engaged and having a good time, and there should also be shared investment in the successful outcome of the BDSM. This was a prominent feature of the accounts, and when absent it caused problems for participants, making it difficult for them to fully commit to the scene. The intent of those involved in the play should also correspond. All parties must share the intent of creating and maintaining a safe, enjoyable and sexually charged scene for those involved, regardless of status within the fantasy. In the following excerpt, Tom described the dissonance he experienced when a partner's sole intent was to earn money rather than to have a good time:

> I felt very lonely. Those three all knew each other so whenever we had a break they'd all be talking and discussing things and I just sat there by myself with a cup of tea or whatever. There was no kind of effort to get to know me or make me feel welcome or anything, I did, I felt very much that 'this is someone we've got in to do these pictures and he's gonna go afterwards'. It wasn't very nice at all, especially because I was feeling vulnerable and cold anyway, and for them to be so cold to me and emotionally cold it wasn't very nice at all. [....] I mean although the end game was to get some pictures to put on a website, there's no reason why we couldn't have just had fun at the

> same time. I did another shoot with a different couple of guys for a different website and we had lots of fun that day, everybody was getting to know each other and laughing and having fun. I think it's specifically their lack of interest and kind of...lack of emotional involvement that was the problem.

Implicit understanding is an important relational element of BDSM, highlighting the requirement for an unspoken or implied comprehension between those involved. Because BDSM exists within a bubble of fantasy, and bursting that bubble would mean disrupting the fantasy, there must be implicit understanding between those involved regarding the content of the session. Stopping and discussing aspects of the play, as children may do in 'let's pretend' games, would not facilitate successful BDSM, therefore participants prefer a level of implied comprehension between all involved parties. Explicit discussion of characters, actions, dialogue and plot would interrupt the flow of the fantasy, and may disrupt fantasy engagement leading to associated issues. Instead, establishing implicit understanding enables the occurrence of silent negotiations and discussions during the scene, without the threat of disturbing the fantasy. This ensures the safety, eroticism and enjoyment of those participating, and also is a reassuring feature for many participants. Participants explain how this is possible in terms of the existence of a different level of communication between practitioners engaging in BDSM, than would usually exist during vanilla sex. This is because often submissive partners are unable to speak or move, so there must be a different type of communication between those involved, which participants describe in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication. In order to attain a satisfying experience, both types of communication are implicitly understood. If there are communication problems, participants' are less likely achieve total fantasy immersion and therefore will have a less erotic experience as a result, as illustrated by Joe's quote:

> **Joe:** I slowly took over control until I was holding his head, my body, my hands and he was having to submit and do what I wanted. Again, it's the feeling of control and...erm, but the real big thing about it was I could tell that although physically he was struggling to keep up, he wasn't finding it distressing, he was still enjoying it. He was still totally submissive and totally trusting. I think his facial expression, you could see in his eyes, when he couldn't talk the complete trust, complete

> faith. His eyes were watering a little bit, erm, I could see physically he was stressed but giving out those vibes, 'I trust you' vibes, 'I submit to you, you carry on even though I'm struggling'
>
> **Emma:** Can you tell me about these vibes?
>
> **Joe:** [....] part of the experience of being a dom is reading the sub, seeing how he's doing emotionally and reading how he's doing physically, and how he's feeling sexually and adjusting what you do accordingly, so vibes, it sounds like a 1970s hippy word, but it describes...you get vibes off someone as how far you can push them or whether you need to step back a bit, whether you should go heavier or lighter.

Another feature of implicit understanding is trust, which was a particularly salient topic. Participants said that trust should be an implicit aspect of BDSM play and shared by those involved. Although not necessarily explicitly voiced, the implicitness of trust is enough to allow for an erotic experience. Trust between partners must be present throughout an experience; before, during and after play, making it integral to the lived experience of BDSM,

> I think there's something incredibly erotic about showing your vulnerable side to another person because it's something we try to keep hidden most of the time in life. We don't want people to know about that side of us, but here in this situation, I'm letting him see that part of me because I want to please him and...because it pleases me to do that. In the fantasy I have no choice but to be vulnerable, he's the dominant one, he's in charge, he can do what he likes, but if you think of it from the side of reality, what I'm doing is very special. It's not something I often do, nobody does, but I'm allowing him to see that side of me and use it how he wants. I have to trust him. It's a very erotic process I think, a very special process. {Maria}

If trust is not present or has been violated, it becomes difficult for participants to be able to engage with the distrusted partner, leading to an influx of doubt, apprehension and fear. Most serious for participants was a *violation* of trust rather than initial mistrust, as when trust was violated there was a painful sense of betrayal and disappointment, which occasionally had wider implications for BDSM

participation, reducing inclination to engage in future sessions. For example, Joe's trust was damaged by meeting a man who had lied to him, Steven had the same issue when his partner lied about the extent of her BDSM experience, Patrick's trust in the men at his favourite fetish club was violated by a HIV scare, and Vikki lost trust in the man she went to meet because of his attitude towards her. Once trust has been infringed it may be impossible to regain, and therefore if a scene even occurs, it is not likely to be enjoyable due to the absence of trust.

Relational equality appeared important to the participants. Given the unequal nature of BDSM the emphasis on equality may appear contradictory, however, the emphasis on equality actually referred to the need for all involved parties to have an equally enjoyable experience and to contribute equally to fantasy creation. Despite the conditions of inequality that exist in a dominant/submissive relationship, each person should be receiving an equal share of the sexual pleasure, or the eroticism of the situation can be lost. Despite the premise of the fantasy that the submissive partner is not having an enjoyable time, in reality, the submissive as well as the dominant partner should locate pleasure within the scene. This view was reflected by both dominant and submissive partners, insisting that all involved should have a pleasurable experience.

The final relational feature for discussion is the issue of consent. This was a significant element of BDSM according to these participants, who argued that consent should be omnipresent during BDSM. It is also possible for consent to be withdrawn at any time during the play, and this must be adhered to and respected by the other participants. Although this is not directly linked to eroticism, it was paramount for participants' erotic experiences that all involved parties were consenting. It was essential that there was no coercion present at any level in BDSM, regardless of whether participants are in relationships or with casual partners. Participants acknowledge that coercion can take many subtle forms, and recognise that coercion does not necessarily involve explicitly forcing a partner to engage in something against their will. Kim felt she was coerced by her partner into playing along with the rape scene, despite her severe reservations; her partner used various coercive tactics until Kim agreed to participate:

> Cath was only my second girlfriend that I'd done SM with. We'd only recently become exclusive girlfriends, Cath had been seeing other people until about six months into our relationship, and it had been me who wanted her to stop doing that. I was very attracted to her and thought she was much cooler than I was and I was lucky to have her. Now it seems ridiculous, but then she was very important to me. I wanted to please her, and I wanted to give her what she wanted, and I also wanted to hang on to her because I was frightened she would finish with me. I thought the best thing to do would be to do it, and hope that somewhere I would begin to enjoy it. [....] I'd restrained her many times before but not with cable ties. I got them out of the bag that Cath had put together for me, and found them awkward and fiddly to put on [....] After I'd restrained her I slapped her around a bit, but even this, something we did regularly, didn't cajole me into any sort of aroused state, because I knew what I had to do next.

This passage raises the complex issue of consent in BDSM. Although Kim had consented to participate in this scene, it appeared as though she had been coerced by her partner into giving her consent. This issue of consent is not straightforward, and will be discussed later in the thesis. Related to the issue of consent is the issue of negotiation, which should always feature in a BDSM experience. Negotiation can take various forms, with some participants preferring to have a scene planned out in detail before beginning, while others would negotiate during the play.

7.6 Sexual transgression

All participants made reference to the transgressive nature of BDSM. The ability to challenge and transgress sexual norms through participation in BDSM was an intriguing and exciting prospect to many of them, and thus became an erotic constituent of the sexual experience. The notion of participating in a type of sex that was often perceived by outsiders as 'different' and 'strange' was appealing, and the sexual transgression was viewed as erotic,

> Everyone tells us how sex should be and shouldn't be. Sex should be loving, sex should be safe, it shouldn't be with a stranger, or more than one person at a time, it should be clean and sanitised, or it should be diluted. Sex should conform to Cosmo [Cosmopolitan

> magazine] standards where orgasm is the achievement. It should include foreplay and lube and shouldn't deviate. What I'd just done broke all those rules and more! It was sleazy because it was all about sex and pleasure and using one another to get what you want, there was no love, no....fondness or familiarity, it was simply about gaining maximum pleasure and maximum enjoyment. It was dirty, I didn't know these guys, they didn't know me. And we certainly weren't safe, or even careful, we didn't discuss STIs or our HIV status. He was in control and I wasn't. It was taboo because it is. BDSM and fetish *is* taboo, except the cleansed and sanitised versions allowed. I loved the fact that BDSM was all these things to me, and still do. {Patrick}

7.6.1 Breaking taboos

The breaking of sexual taboos by engaging in BDSM was framed positively by participants, and many expressed that this notion was related to their sexual enjoyment; participating in a sexual activity usually condemned was positioned as daring and exciting. Part of the appeal is that by enjoying the acts which are demonised and ridiculed by others, participants felt as though they are challenging the general taboos surrounding alternative sexual practices. Participation in something which is judged negatively by society was arousing, and there was a general sense of pride at this non-conformity, the eroticism of the experience was present in part, due to the presence of the taboo. Many participants reported experiencing sexual enjoyment by engaging in 'unacceptable' sexual practices, viewing participation in BDSM as a rejection of sexual convention. Interestingly, participants reported that by practicing BDSM they were subverting the conventional sexual model, and the notion that they were sexual anarchists was arousing for many. It was this subversion of convention that participants reported as erotic due to their general disdain of and dismay regarding the sexual roles imposed by wider society.

7.6.2 Liberation

The transgressive nature of BDSM participation evokes a sense of liberation in the participants. This idea of total sexual freedom is an exciting and multi-faceted prospect, and it is the endless sexual possibility that inspires eroticism. There were

frequent references to the non-constraining nature of BDSM, comments apparently contradictory to the many activities. Submissive partners described that despite being physically and/or psychologically restrained, they still experienced feelings of sexual freedom from the constraints of the wider world. There are no set constraints in BDSM (although many practitioners subscribe to 'safe, sane & consensual') and no limits can be imposed by outsiders, the only limits are those set by the participants themselves. Practitioners are able to have free choice when engaging in the acts offered by BDSM, and being able to engage sexually this way enables sexual experiences not offered by the conventional sexual experience. The endless potentials of BDSM, and the sheer scope of limitless opportunity were arousing to many of the participants. Also, participants reported that when participating in BDSM they were not constrained by gender or even their humanness, as these static states could be left in the 'real' world existing outside of the bubble of fantasy, as illustrated by Kim's quote:

> It can be a liberating experience because you can leave all your hang-ups with *you* and take on the persona of someone new, and that persona can be anything in the world you want it to be. That's what I like about role play, there's no end to the possibilities, you can conjure people up and mould and shape them how you want. You're not restricted by race, gender, class, ethnicity, intellect, ability, it's like taking a break from yourself, and in a way having lots of new partners. [....] You can have a variety of partners while still having your own it's the same with sex, you can have lots of different sex but without having lots of different sexual partners.

Both dominant and submissive participants described experiencing a sense of freedom arising from not conforming to conventional rules governing sex. BDSM allows sex to be removed from the traditionally genitally focused acts, which allows participants freedom to further explore the sexual potential of non-conventional practices and sexual experimentation. BDSM allows the fulfilment of fantasises which on the surface, are not sexual, but have deep erotic connections for those involved, for example Tom's sexual enjoyment of puppy play. This would not be an option for him to explore when engaging in vanilla sex, but through BDSM he is able to experiment with and fulfil this fantasy. Feeling liberated from conventional,

approved sexual practices leads to a sense of confidence which manifests as a freedom of sexual expression. Participants are able to express their sexuality, sexual desires and sexual enjoyment in whichever manner they choose. Submissive partners described how they did not have to appear visually immaculate at all times; submission gave them the freedom to scream and cry, and in fact, marks on the skin, welts and bruises were a sign of an enjoyable session. Dominant partners were able to behave in a legitimately sexually selfish manner due to the nature of the dominant role, something they felt pressured to avidly avoid during non-BDSM sexual encounters. Sexual norms constrain sexual expression, according to the participants, and BDSM encourages freedom of sexual expression via acts of transgression.

The sense of liberation is extended for the submissive partners, despite the contrary tones, these partners describe feeling released from all responsibility.

> I think that's why I generally prefer to be a bottom or a submissive partner. When you have to decide what's coming next and what to do and what's going to get the best reaction out of your partner, and what they will enjoy, it's just too much pressure for me. It involves too much planning and forward thinking [....] I didn't have to think about what to do next, or plan what toy to use or what type of restraint or anything like that. All I had to do was enjoy myself, and just lie there while this wonderful man showered me with attention and pleasure. There was nothing I could do. I didn't have to respond in a certain way, or worry because it was all taken care of... {Lucy}

As discussed earlier, the submissive experience is an experience of relinquishing responsibility; transferring any and all responsibility to the dominant partner. The submissive participants were aroused by the freedom that came with lack of responsibility, and the meaningful act of surrendering inspired eroticism.

7.6.3 Political statements

For some participants, their engagement with BDSM along with other alternative sexual lifestyles (such as homosexuality, lesbianism & polyamory) was a political statement on their part. Some participants aimed to make certain political statements as part of their BDSM play around feminism and gender roles, and although these

were not directly sexual, the results often produced erotic experiences for the participants. Often participants were making statements against what is prescribed by sections of society such as the church and the media as ‘normal’ sex, and the dictatorial messages conveyed about frequency, positions, type of partners and what constituted promiscuity, as illustrated in Patrick’s earlier quote. The participants disagreed with these common messages, and one way of expressing that disagreement was through participating in BDSM, as indicated by the following quote:

> **Emma:** I’m thinking about this scene in particular though, can you imagine how your sexual experience would differ if Katy stuck with her own gender?
>
> **Kim:** Well it would change the dynamics of the fantasy, so that would change my experience. Let me think *(pause)* I think it would make the fantasy seem more safe in a way. When she genderfucks it makes everything edgier, because we’re screwing with something that is...fundamental. Gender is universal, despite whether you’re gay, straight, bi, trans, queer or whatever, I think most people feel as though they have a gender. It might not fit with conventional categories like boy girl, but I do reckon most people have a notion of gender. To be able to play with that, and do it well, is a skill and then you throw SM to the mix...it adds a whole new dynamic to SM. There’s even more subversion about what is *(inverted commas)* ‘correct’ and ‘normal’ and what people are supposed to do and supposed to be. I enjoy pushing the boundaries of sex when I do SM, and adding the genderfucking aspect as well, definitely pushes those boundaries, which in turn gives me more of a...thrill.

Maria expresses that she wants to use her body in ways of her choosing, rather than in the ways she thinks society dictates that she should:

> I really like the way the pain feels on my breasts, but I think, well...lots of people view breasts as a very maternal organ, there to nurture children. I don’t have children, so why should I view my breasts in that way? I have very sensitive breasts and nipples, so why not use that to my advantage? If something feels good and gives me pleasure, then why not exploit that? I don’t associate my breasts

> as feeding tubes, they are part of my femininity and sexuality and if someone else feels the same, then great. People view breasts for the purpose of feeding babies, so attaching nipple clamps, clips, digging in fingernails etcetera subverts that view.

These quotes illustrate how BDSM participation can be an erotic political statement, enabling self-expression and disengagement from convention.

7.7 Integrative Themes

Throughout this analysis I identified two themes that, following King (2012), were conceptualised as integrative themes. These themes infused through all the other identified themes on the template, with the exception of the upcoming 'presentation to interviewer' contemplative theme. The integrative themes were authenticity and imagination, which are necessary in order for a successful and erotic experience to occur, without the presence of these integral elements an erotic BDSM experience would not be possible. Distinguishing these themes in the analysis enabled a holistic representation of the lived erotic experience of BDSM.

7.7.1 Authenticity

Authenticity was a fundamental element of the experience of the participants. By this I mean that a sense of genuineness was present in terms of participants' desire to participate in the scene and share the erotic experience, along with an authentic aspiration that it is an enjoyable experience for all. Authenticity also refers to the construction of the fantasy; it should feel immersive and unfeigned to all who participate. A sense of authenticity must permeate the erotic experience; from the initial stage of fantasy creation to the scene's conclusion, practitioners should genuinely perceive the lived experience as authentic. This was identified as an integrative theme as the authenticity must feature constantly and consistently throughout the BDSM play. This includes every aspect ranging from the theme of the scene, to the roles and the characters involved in the scene, the props and costumes, the dialogue and discourses, right down to the other people involved in the play. If participants believe a partner or scene lacks authenticity at any point, the eroticism can diminish or be lost completely, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> **Emma:** Can you tell me more about this dungeon you were in?

> **Tom:** Well, it wasn't a dungeon it was like a play room. It was an extension to his house that just kind of had erm...a bench and toys. It was very clinical. Joe's play room is very cluttered, it's got blackout windows and a cage and black netting on the wall, there's bits and pieces everywhere. It looks used, very, erm...you could tell people had fun in there and this place was very clinical. Joe's is nice and warm and a safe environment, but this place was a built extension to his house and it was painted white and had a wooden floor and I think it was so he could pack things up if he needed to. It was like...it wasn't really conducive to what we were doing, it was very light and airy and clean and orderly, not what I was used to, but more than that, it wasn't the kind of environment you'd expect to be doing that sort of thing in. There was a table cloth on the bed and you could have had your lunch in there. It had a plasma screen and a couch in the corner, it was...very clinical and cold.
>
> **Emma:** So how is Joe's room different?
>
> **Tom:** It just feels...nicer and it feels safer. It's quite a small room, and it's always warm [....] Joe's is more cosy. It looks the part as well. It's got a sling in the corner and blacked out windows and there's like army netting on the ceiling and down one of the walls, it looks like what you'd expect a play room or a dungeon to look like, and the other one...just didn't.

There are contributory elements to this integrative theme of authenticity, with participants commenting on the importance of their presence to the quality of the eroticism of their BDSM. One of these facets is the necessity for a sense of realism to the play, which must be reflected in every detail of the fantasy from the props, costumes and dialogue. No matter how unbelievable the scene appears outside of the bubble of the fantasy world, there is a required sense of cohesion within the fantasy in order for it to maintain its eroticism and to prevent the intrusion of reality into the fantasy. The believability of the scene is fundamental to its authenticity; with all those involved in the play genuinely believing, within the realm of fantasy, in the premise and characters of the sexual scene. It must appear to be reasoned, planned and cohesive to participants in order for them to be able to suspend their disbelief and become erotically immersed in the fantasy. Finally, practitioners should feel

certain that there is a genuine desire by all parties to be involved in the scene, if this is absent it may lead to negative emotions such as doubt and mistrust which can obstruct participation by evoking the tipping point, thus damaging the eroticism of the experience.

7.7.2 Imagination

It is necessary that imagination is implicitly present throughout a BDSM experience which is enabled through the participants' imaginative engagement with the sexual scene. Only through the power of imagination is it possible for a sexual scene to be formulated at an embryonic stage, progressing to creating scenes and developing characters, finally forming an engaging and erotic lived sexual experience. This requires work, effort and commitment in order to maintain the sense of eroticism in the experience. The presence of the erotic imagination is fundamental to enable participants to create a bubble of fantasy and to suspend all knowledge of the 'real' world. Maintaining this unspoken pretence of BDSM is dependent upon the imaginative ability to craft a new and exciting world of sexual possibility, where the only limits are those of the imagination. Imagination becomes embodied through BDSM participation, because the BDSM serves as the experiential area where imagination can be acted out. Just as Willy Wonka imagined his chocolate factory into existence, BDSM practitioners can imaginatively live their own fantasies, entering a world of sexual freedom and fun. Kim's words capture this aspect, and provide a fitting end to this section,

> I think that imagination is so important when you do SM, it can be quite difficult to imagine you have complete control over another human being because you don't, you never can. If you can *really* imagine though, that's when it becomes a really great experience.

The importance of these elements to the erotic experience is central to BDSM participation for these participants. They feature heavily in participants' accounts and cut across the existing themes in the template, making them of central significance to the erotic experience.

7.8 Contemplative Theme - Presentation to Interviewer

This theme is not directly related to the erotic experience of participating in BDSM, it explores the ways participants presented themselves and their BDSM to my consciousness. This more contemplative theme arose during the latter stages of the analysis, as initially I felt there was one participant, Steven, who was attempting particularly emphatically to convey specific presentations of himself during his interview. On some level, all of the participants presented an image of themselves to my consciousness during their interviews, though I believe that Steven was attempting this overtly in order to convey a specific image of himself to me. The following discussion offers my reflections on how participants seemed to present themselves to me, in the context of being BDSM practitioners, and provides a further opportunity to interpret the nature of *their* experience of the phenomenon. Approaching the interviews in the phenomenologically oriented manner of being open to the things in their appearing, I was aware of two modes of presentation; the first was the way participants presented themselves to me, along with the nature of the interaction during the interview, and secondly the way in which they framed their BDSM.

7.8.1 Self-presentation

I was interested in how the participants were attempting to present a particular image of themselves to me, and what this image consisted of. Images varied between participants and while some instances were clearly deliberate attempts to influence my perception of them, others seemed less conscious and inadvertent in reflecting their everyday experience of being in the world. I felt that participants' efforts to assure me of their 'normality' interspersed the interviews; they were ordinary individuals with extraordinary sexual tastes, they were not the strange and criminalised people depicted in the mass media. It is unsurprising given the misunderstood nature of BDSM that participants were keen to emphasise to me that the commonly reiterated stereotypes about the BDSM community and BDSM practitioners was not an accurate representation of who they were. They wanted to make me appreciate that they understood what involvement in BDSM entailed, and that they had made a sane and rational choice to include BDSM in their sex lives. They were also eager to make me understand that they were not pathological, but

psychologically healthy individuals who simply enjoyed unconventional, by society's standards, sexual activities as illustrated in the following quote:

> I'd harboured these feelings and this fetish for such a long time, from my childhood even, and there is this stigma around BDSM and fetish, and the people who do that and enjoy that. They're mentally ill, they're sex addicts, depraved, rapists, victims, you know, all of that, and I didn't know if society was right in making those judgements about people like me. Those feelings did dissipate when I began exploring the internet, but I always felt like I needed...reassurance or validation that nice people did these things too. The scene can be incredibly welcoming and friendly, not what I expected at all, so that was a nice part of it too, and I've made many, many friends on the scene. It's had a positive experience on more than one aspect of my life. {Patrick}

I considered however, that one participant appeared to me to be emphasising the normalising of the sexual choice. I believe Steven's attempts to convince me he was a 'normal' man are evident throughout his interview. Despite his prior awareness of my non-pathologising stance, and demonstration of my open and non-judgemental attitude from the first interview with him, he appeared to be reiterating his normality at every opportunity. In the excerpt below Steven explains his proclivity for bloodplay during his BDSM, he also attempts to reiterate his normality this by emphasising that he doesn't have any sexual desire to kill someone nor does he become aroused at the sight of blood on an injured animal. Later in the quote, Steven again attempts to stress his normality by explaining that he doesn't deliberately injure himself for the purpose of drawing blood;

> **Steven:** I find the sight of freshly drawn blood, the smell of it, the taste of it, very, very satisfying. It's strange, it's not like...that's the aspect of it that I think is quite separate from anything else I can think of, it's just the...immense satisfaction, it's something I really like to do. I've not got any fantasies about chopping anyone up or dismembering someone or anything like that. I just like it. [....] I saw a cat get run over last week and it was very unsettling, there was blood on the road, and I stopped the traffic and picked it up and moved it, even though it was still twitching, and that wasn't very nice to see.

> **Emma:** So you only like blood in a sexual context? I mean, is it different if you cut your finger?
>
> **Steven:** Oh no I quite like it when I cut my finger, erm...I'm not in the habit of massively sitting around and cutting myself, I'm not a big Emo...

Despite discussions with colleagues, and much thought devoted to this, I am still unclear as to Steven's motivations for acting this way. The quotations separated from our interaction appear innocuous, however, during the context of the interview I felt that they represented Steven's attempts to impress me with his kindly and selfless nature. Perhaps this was an attempt to ensure that he was depicted in the thesis this way, and was simply an instance of someone who was trying too hard? Steven did, however, make me feel uncomfortable during the interview, therefore, I suggest that the above explanation is rather simplistic. His large stature and generally unkempt demeanour did make me feel a little wary, and I remember mentally re-visiting my interviewer safety training and ensuring I was positioned near a doorway before the interview commenced. Steven did not behave or speak inappropriately at any time during the interview, but his frequent return to constructing himself in a glowing light did force me to question his intentions; was he interested in me romantically? Was he concerned about my general opinion of him? Did he think my non-pathologising stance was his cue to emphasise his own non-pathology for the benefit of my research? Over the course of both interviews, I gathered that Steven is generally solitary and not a member of any BDSM community or network, and BDSM is an activity he only participates in with a serious partner. Perhaps this indicates that Steven may not be comfortable with this aspect of himself, and actually his comments are self-directed for the purpose of convincing *himself* that his enjoyment of BDSM does not make him 'abnormal'? (See chapter 8 page 243 for an elaboration of my reflections of Steven).

Participants made it clear to me that they had an awareness of the pretence of BDSM and were aware of where fantasy ended and reality began. They stressed that even though the ideal was to completely inhabit a fantasy world, this world was a world of pretence. Many comments on this were made as asides, and I consider their purpose was to assure me that they clearly understood where the bubble of

fantasy began and ended, and what was included in the bubble, and what lay outside of the fantasy,

> Robert used Sue in that way to humiliate me, but part of me was secretly enjoying it, but Robert knew that I would enjoy it as well. It's all smoke and mirrors! {Annie}

> I can't physically object to anything he wants to do because I'm in such a vulnerable position, completely powerless to stop him. Of course in reality, I wouldn't want to stop him! I want all those things to happen, but in the fantasy it doesn't matter what I want, so lying there helpless...is arousing. {Maria}

> I mean a part of it is believing, although you know him and trust him, he could really hurt you, not that he would, there's still a possibility in your head. You don't want to believe that you can just take all this stuff off if you wanted, you want to believe you're being held against your will and there's nothing you can do to get yourself out of that situation. {Tom}

These quotes from Annie, Maria and Tom demonstrate the various ways that participants assured me of their understanding that BDSM was a fantasy.

An interesting issue that occurred in Joe's interview was that part of his role outside of his BDSM practices was to teach and educate the inexperienced in BDSM. Joe described this as enjoyable aspect of BDSM for him, though not sexual, and he appeared proud of his abilities to guide and coach in order to get the best out of his submissive partners. I felt as though Joe treasured this aspect of his BDSM, and although he did not perceive this as sexual, it was a significant feature of the experience for him. Over the course of the two interviews, Joe discussed how his social awkwardness along with his closeted sexuality denoted that he had very limited opportunities to meet and interact (both socially and sexually) with other gay men. I consider that Joe's perception of acting as a guiding force to younger men, and the positive sentiments he gains from this aspect of BDSM, compensates somewhat for the lack of social relationships in his everyday life outside of BDSM. I posit that this role of 'educator' allows Joe a non-sexual relational benefit which

meets certain socio-emotional needs that otherwise would be missing from his life, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

> I guess it's part of my make-up, when I'm being dominant especially, I also like to be a bit of a teacher. So to have someone very inexperienced, it gives me the chance to...sounds a bit pig headed, but to give me the chance to teach him and show him the ropes if you excuse the pun! [....] Emotionally, it's the teaching side of it that...I suppose adds to the experience. I was teaching him how to deep throat, and other sexual activities he'd never done before, and taking him places he'd never been before physically or mentally. There was that buzz of taking him to new places. I was teaching him, I was guiding him...

It struck me during the analysis that two participants, Steven and Joe, presented themselves as 'nice guys' despite the contrary image associated with their roles as dominant partners. It appeared to me that Steven continually attempted to depict an image of a 'perfect partner' acting solely in the best interests of his partners rather than his own at all times. I perceived Steven to be overemphasising his 'niceness', and I felt he was very concerned with pressing that image of himself upon me. The other participants presentations of this aspect appeared to me as subtle and unintentional, and therefore, in my opinion, more genuine when compared with Steven's constant reiteration and repetition. Other participants were keen to illustrate that their assumed roles during BDSM were simply for the purpose of sexual pleasure, and beyond the realm of fantasy they really cared for their partners and their safety. The following quotes illustrate the differences between people's portrayals of 'nice guys',

> Certainly when we were in the car I had no interest in him acting submissively and the 'yes sir no sir', so I just chatted to him about general stuff really, what he did for a living, that sort of thing. By the time we got back to the house he was quite relaxed. If I'd have said 'sit there, look down, feet together, keep quiet', that can be quite unnerving and not the way to go about things. I think he was more relaxed when we actually did begin. {Joe}

Joe's quote illustrates the subtle portrayal of this 'nice guy' image, which contrasts with Steven's repetition that he only wants to please his partner because he is a selfless individual:

> **Steven:** It's more the effect the whipping has on my partner, erm...I suppose I'm the sort of guy...I like to go to the gym, I like to go hell for leather on a punch bag, erm...but in BDSM the main aspect is my partner, the other person enjoying it. I wouldn't enjoy tying someone down and whipping them if they didn't enjoy it. The main aspect is if they want to do it.
>
> **Emma:** What does trust mean to you?
>
> **Steven:** Erm...it's an awful lot of trust and erm...it gives me a feeling of self-satisfaction, having lots of trust put in me. It makes me think the person had read me well and they know I'm not some bizarre psycho who is going to go too far. They know I've thought about things and set up these parameters and that I'm not looking to long-term injure them. It's primarily for them to have pleasure...

While some participants, such as Tom, appeared to me as being completely open with me during the interview, I suspected that others maintained some of their privacy. There were some aspects of their sexual experiences that participants did not want to discuss with me. Despite openly and graphically discussing various sexually explicit acts, there were certain portions of their BDSM that remained private. For instance Kim refused to give me an example of the language used by her partner during the rape scene. Of course, this is the participants' right, but I find it fascinating that despite offering graphic sexual accounts of their experiences, there are certain things that cannot be shared, that must remain within the private realm.

7.8.2 Presentation of the BDSM

This contemplative theme focuses on the various ways participants presented their BDSM and related activities to my consciousness during the interviews, in the context of their attempts to present a particular version of themselves to me. It is noteworthy that the various presentations are not mutually exclusive and multiple presentations were communicated by the same participant, emphasising the multi-faceted experience of BDSM.

The most salient presentation of BDSM was its presentation as a fun activity. The majority of participants during their interview conceptualised BDSM in terms of fun and games, and reiterated the playful nature of BDSM frequently. Through the participants' presentations of imagery and discourse, BDSM appeared to me as a fun and enjoyable adult game, a more powerful version of make-believe, where participants could explore themselves and their fantasies. This was reflected in the interactions between myself and the participants; the interviews were packed with smiles, humour and laughter and it was apparent to me that BDSM really was a fun and pleasurable experience for those involved. The excerpts below from Tom and Vikki demonstrate this;

> The thing with puppy play is you also feel quite safe and secure at the time and you get to have fun as well, so there are lots of different aspects to it. It's a nice sexual experience because there's the anticipation which I get off on, you can do all the normal BDSM things but you have it in the context of...you're a different entity so you're having fun, playing fetch, as well {Tom}

> He told me he was a switch, and would like to be dominated. I thought it sounded like a good idea so we arranged to meet up for a no-strings session. I was really looking forward to it, and found it quite exciting to meet in a hotel room, so my mood was good and it was something I was really up for. {Vikki}

The final types of presentation that appeared to me during the interaction and the analysis are concerned with the positive personal influences participants perceive as a result of engaging in BDSM. I felt these issues were significant aspects of the sexual experience for participants as a result of the manner in which they were verbally described and echoed by bodily movement of gesture and expression. The experimental nature of BDSM allows participants exciting opportunities to experiment with their sexuality and/or sexual partners, experiments that they would not otherwise experience without BDSM participation. On analysing the accounts I imagined the BDSM practitioners as explorers and adventurers, travelling to the unchartered territory of sexual experimentation. BDSM also appeared to my consciousness to be a confidence booster for those involved. Some participants, both dominant and submissive partners, reported they felt increased confidence and

raised self-esteem when participating in BDSM. I did not feel as though the participants were purposely attempting to convey BDSM as a technique to improve self-image, rather they were attempting to illustrate the wide ranging non-sexual benefits that can arise as a result of participating in BDSM, as illustrated below:

> Again, it goes back to the ego boost. I can't stress enough how good it feels to have my ego boosted. It increases self-confidence...you feel like you're the most important person in the world, to anyone that feels brilliant. Normally I'm not a very confident person...so have someone put their faith in me it's a huge shot in the arm and it fills me with confidence. When an under confident person feels *so* confident, it gives me a massive buzz, and to feel...loved almost, again it's a buzz. {Joe}

The final presentation that I interpreted relates to the perception of BDSM as a journey of self-discovery. Through the participants' rich descriptions and vivid accounts I became convinced that participating in BDSM enables participants to learn things about themselves, their bodies and sexuality that otherwise would remain undiscovered. This presentation was on the periphery of participants' accounts, however, it was alluded to on many occasions,

> I learned different things about my body. I tend to find that with BDSM, you learn things about yourself and your partner all the time. {Lucy}

I realised that this journey does not take the same form for each participant, but varies depending upon the role adopted for BDSM and participants' own subjective experiences.

The participants' accounts of their experiences of BDSM were rich and illuminating. Each practitioner spoke vividly and candidly of their desire to embark on unconventional sexual adventures, and their portrayals were always colourful and exciting. Often unflinching in description, I have great respect for their willingness to share with me their unique sexual explorations and to enable me to produce this analysis of the erotic experience of BDSM.

7.9 Summary and concluding remarks

Chapters 7A and 7B presented the complete analytical findings in-depth, providing details of each theme appearing on the template. This chapter focused on the themes of obstructions and facilitators of BDSM participation, sexual transgression, the integrative themes of authenticity and imagination, and finally the contemplative themes relating to the various ways participants presented themselves to me. Once again, supportive quotations were included to illustrate the various themes, and to give voice to participants' expressions of their experiences. Discussions relating to the most striking findings arising from this analysis will be discussed in chapter nine. The next chapter will discuss issues of reflexivity relating to this stage of research and also will reflect on the use of phenomenological method for exploring the lived experience of BDSM.

Chapter 8

Reflecting on the Interpretive Stage of Research

Reflecting on the Interpretive Stage of Research

This chapter will focus on my reflections upon the interpretive stage of the research. Specifically, I will first present my reflections related to the practicalities of carrying out the second stage of empirical work. The chapter will then discuss some broader reflections on using phenomenological methods in the study of BDSM. The rationale for separating out this material from other methods chapters is in order to draw attention to the ways that this method can be developed and used by other researchers in the area of sexuality.

8.1 Reflections on the empirical work in stage two

This section serves to illuminate my own position during the second stage of empirical work. As discussed in chapter five, reflexivity is a fundamental element of qualitative research which aims to make explicit the researcher's position and the effect of the researcher on the research and vice versa. As with stage one of the research, my role was as phenomenological researcher and my position remained as 'outsider researcher'.

Reflections related to myself

Myself as interviewer

During stage one of this research I did not feel comfortable with participants' perception of the status difference between us; perhaps being perceived by participants as holding a position of power (see chapter 5 page 120 for further elaboration). Many questions crossed my mind, as I was unsure of participants' responses to me as an outsider to their community. However, these self-doubts diminished during the first round of interviews for stage one and I did not have the same concerns before embarking on the second stage of interviewing. I felt more confident in my abilities as a researcher and interviewer this time around. That is not to say I was not anxious and insecure at times, occasionally the old anxieties and insecurities were present, though this time I was able to rationalise the self-doubt more successfully and understand that it is part of who I am; always unsure and untrusting of my own abilities.

Having the practical experience gained from the first round of interviews proved invaluable, and enabled me to draw on these experiences to assist me in the second stage of research. I had learned how to conduct myself and manage my role, striking a balance between professional and personal and also reacting to the dynamic and unpredictable interview situation. A more self-assured researcher embarked on this set of interviews, and this was reflected in the quality of the data obtained from the participants. I began the second stage of data collection by interviewing the original participants from stage one, this was because we had established a relationship and rapport as a result of the first interviews. I envisaged I would feel more at ease by interviewing the original participants at the beginning, which was indeed the case, buoyed by the general success of these interviews, I then interviewed the newly-recruited participants.

However, the interviews with the original participants were not without incident. The second interview of the batch was conducted with Joe, and as I began transcribing, about ten minutes through the interview, the cassette fell mute, apart from the occasional mumble or muffled sound peppering the silence. The equipment had failed! I was aghast and tried in vain to listen and re-listen to the mumblings, turning the dictaphone's volume up high and holding it against my ear, all to no avail. I could not hear a word. After some time of sheer panic and floods of tears I contacted the university's technicians for help. They assured me they would try to recover the interview by 'cleaning up' the cassette. I waited anxiously for a few days before the news came I was dreading; they were unable to salvage anything of the interview. They guessed that the external microphone had failed and the dictaphone's internal microphone was set down too far from us to record anything adequately. I was devastated as the interview was over two hours in length and had been very successful. I was also aware that even if Joe did agree to another interview, he was relocating to Scotland with work imminently. I felt disappointed in myself, and I felt guilty for asking Joe to do the interview for a second time, especially when he told me after attempt one that he had found it 'hard going' discussing things for so long. I also wondered whether the fact he had heard and responded to the general questions of the interview schedule before would influence these responses. Fortunately however, I do not think this was the case. I did not intend for the second interview to be a replica of the first, and I was open to re-engage with whatever Joe

told me. Throughout the interview I felt particularly paranoid that the equipment would fail again, despite having three recording devices. I was constantly checking and re-checking the dictaphone and digital recorders, which perhaps may have distracted me. I was more anxious this time around and I felt under a lot more pressure to ensure the interview went well, and nothing went wrong. I was also concerned that this interview would not be as fruitful as the first, perhaps because I was worried that Joe would have less patience this time. I did not want to appear unprofessional, but I felt far more nervous this time, and was always very aware that Joe had agreed to give up his time for me *again*. In spite of these difficulties however, the second interview did record successfully and contained plenty of rich information which was useful for the analysis.

Myself as a sexual being

As a result of the first stage of interviews, my horizons had been expanded in terms of the range of activities and practices along the BDSM spectrum. I still position myself as a researcher who does not practice BDSM, although now there are facets of the practice which do appeal to me sexually.

In terms of self-disclosure to participants, my attitude for this stage remained as it did during the previous stage; to offer some disclosure depending upon a judgement made regarding relevance of information, which participant was being interviewed and how comfortable I felt about disclosing aspects of my life to them while also not wanting to impose my experiences on to their interview (see chapter 5 page 120 for a discussion of this).

Myself as a psychologist

Unlike the first stage of empirical work, I was not required to engage with the epochē in the manner called for by descriptive phenomenology. As I have detailed previously, applying the epochē was problematic and something I found very difficult, and I was pleased that template analysis does not insist upon the suspension of psychological knowledge. Throughout the analysis I was able to engage with psychological and theoretical ideas as they arose, which was particularly useful during the analysis.

Myself as a friend

My friendship with Tom had developed further since the first stage of research, and by this stage of work considered Tom to be a very close friend; we saw each other almost every weekend and frequently went on trips together. We confided in each other and celebrated together; we were now best friends. There was never any question of Tom not participating in the second stage of research as a result of our developed friendship. Privately however, I was concerned that our close friendship would affect the interview in some way. Previously Tom had spoken openly and was not embarrassed about being full and frank, I was worried that he would now feel inhibited discussing such intimate topics with me as a result of our developed friendship. Fortunately, Tom was not inhibited in the least, and as a result the interview was rich in experiential detail. Admittedly, there were instances where I was worried I was somehow exploiting my friend, especially when asking Tom to comment on the template and apply it to his experience of BDSM. Would I have asked him if he was not a friend? Would I have chosen another participant instead? Was I taking advantage of his kindness? Eventually I concluded that I had enough faith in our friendship that Tom would tell me if he felt unable to help. Also, Tom was suffering with a throat infection at the time of the interview, which did elicit some feelings of guilt on my behalf. Would Tom have postponed the interview I was a stranger? Would he have allowed the interview to continue for well over two hours if I wasn't his friend? I tried to be as accommodating as possible by ensuring Tom had plenty to drink and stopped for breaks to rest his voice.

Again, I was required to manage the interaction carefully, having to maintain my stance as 'researcher', while not ignoring my position as 'friend'. Tom's unpleasant BDSM scenario referred to a time when he modelled for a BDSM website, and he was very uncomfortable during this situation. I felt sympathetic that this was something he had to endure. Emma the 'friend' would sympathise, and join in criticising and berating the men involved. Emma the 'researcher' instead had to gather as much detail and information as possible about this experience. As his friend, I would want to make Tom feel better, but as a researcher I was required to ask Tom to almost re-live this experience in as much detail as possible. This was a conflict between my two positions as both friend and researcher. I tried to handle this situation sensitively while attempting to elicit as much information as I could from

Tom. This was difficult to manage, though I feel it *was* managed successfully, leading to an insightful interview.

Reflections relating to the participants

An issue encountered during the first stage of data collection was participants' difficulty to articulate their experiences through language. In order to attempt to counter this as far as possible in the second stage, I attempted to incorporate into the research design a way of assisting participants in expressing their experiences verbally as detailed above. Participants were asked to recount two experiences of BDSM, a pleasant experience and an instance where their BDSM had not been successful. I hoped that by asking participants to describe an experience in writing, in their own time, experiences that reflected these two types of example, it would enable more expression through language. On the whole I felt that this was successful in assisting the participants and giving them something concrete to draw upon during the interview. As a result, I am sure I got as near as possible to their lived experience of BDSM.

Reflections on interviewing Steven

There was one interview I did broach with trepidation, this was the interview with one of the original participants, Steven. I found this to be a very strange interview experience, and it was very difficult to prompt Steven to discuss his own sexual enjoyment, which was often downplayed or ignored. I feel as though I still do not have a clearer understanding of *why* Steven participates in BDSM, and where the eroticism featured for him. It was difficult to keep Steven focused on the topic of the interview, and he often went off on tangents talking about things that were not particularly relevant to his experience of BDSM. It is important not to constrain participants during interview, however, Steven frequently needed to be guided back to topic, and it was difficult to keep him there, leading to some frustration on my part. Also, I did not feel particularly comfortable during this interview. It took place at Steven's house and despite doing my best to elicit information during the interview, I was glad to be finished. My impressions were that Steven was trying very hard to impress me and to frame himself as a 'good guy', emphasising that his partner's enjoyment was paramount, (as discussed in chapters 7A & 7B). It is difficult to describe what I found so uncomfortable about Steven, he was not sleazy or

inappropriate at anytime during the interview, but there was an unidentifiable aspect to him that I did not particularly like. I think this interview had limited success, as I was keen to finish and get away, and Steven did not want to go into detail about his sexual enjoyment of BDSM. I found this to be the most difficult of all nine interviews due to Steven's general demeanour and his evasiveness regarding his sexual enjoyment of BDSM. On reflection, this was not the most insightful interview, however, it did yield some interesting themes and acted as a useful comparison to the other interviews during the analysis.

8.2 Reflections on using the phenomenological method to study BDSM

This research has employed two broad phenomenological approaches over two stages of empirical work; the descriptive and interpretive methods. This section will illuminate my own experience of using the approaches, given that they are often positioned in opposition to each other. I will also detail the developments of the methodology through the use of innovative techniques, and the ways these techniques may be useful for other researchers in the field of sexuality studies.

8.2.1 My experience of applying the phenomenological methods

As discussed in chapter six, the two main phenomenological schools, transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology, are usually discussed in the literature in terms of competing methodologies. The differences between the methodologies are emphasised, while their similarities are overlooked. I argued in chapter six that these phenomenological approaches have more features that unite than divide them, and that the fundamentalism (Lawler 1998) regarding the application of the approaches overshadowed the insights that could be gained from utilising these methodologies in a complimentary manner. Both the transcendental and hermeneutic traditions are grounded in human experience of the lifeworld, and researching this lived experience by returning to the things in their appearing (Husserl 1931/1960) is central to phenomenological enquiry. Both approaches are focused on description and meaning rather than seeking to explain phenomena, and both reject positivist and empiricist notions as reductionist. Differences between the phenomenological schools do exist, however I argued that by engaging with and employing these methodologies creatively, it is possible to capitalise on the strengths of each approach leading to an illumination of the lived experience of engaging in BDSM.

A transcendental approach based on Giorgi's (1985) descriptive phenomenology was employed for the first stage of the empirical work (see chapters 4 & 5). The aims of this part of the research were designed to enable an exploration of the phenomenon of BDSM. The descriptive phenomenological approach is well suited to looking afresh at an unfamiliar phenomenon which is loaded with preconceptions (Giorgi 1985), and due to my general inexperience of the BDSM subculture, and need to explore the phenomenon, was the most appropriate method for the first stage of work. This approach forces researchers to recognise and engage with their own presuppositions around the phenomenon under study (Ashworth & Chung 2006) through the application of the epochē and phenomenological reduction in a transparent and systematic fashion. Although I experienced frustration with this stringent Husserlian application of the phenomenological techniques, I did encounter certain preconceptions that were invisible to me prior to engaging with the epochē and reduction therefore this engagement was a useful endeavour. For example, through the use of the epochē and reduction I realised that I was somewhat uncomfortable with dominant men who had female submissive partners. I was able to make these preconceptions explicit and understand my reasons for this discomfort.

The importance of description also became more apparent to me while utilising this approach. Ashworth (2006) argues that description is undervalued within psychology and I concur. Psychology privileges explanation above description, possibly due to the discipline's preoccupation with being recognised as a 'science' with rigorous methods of investigation, however as a result, valuable descriptions which may be of psychological interest are neglected. Contemporary phenomenological psychologists such as Giorgi and Van Manen are returning a focus on description to the discipline, and I suggest that the transcendental approach has much to offer psychological phenomenological researchers. Indeed, I argue that my production of the general structural experience of BDSM participation in chapter five asserts the value of description in psychological research. This is an original contribution to the field made possible via a focus on description, which presents an insightful account of the experiential structure of participating in consensual BDSM. Although at times I did experience frustration with this methodology and its '*tight methods'* (Ashworth 2006: 36), I argue that the emphasis on description as opposed to explanation allows the

study of phenomenon as it appears to experiencers to become foregrounded and prioritised, leading to illuminating research on a variety of phenomena, including my research on BDSM.

For the second stage of work, I opted to employ an interpretive phenomenological approach. Despite the general view espoused in the literature that combining the descriptive and interpretive methods into a coherent piece of research would be problematic, I firmly believed, after reading in depth, that there was more in common than between them. By using the interpretive approach I aimed to develop the findings gained from the initial stage to produce more focused research examining the eroticism within BDSM. I was able to use some of the findings from stage one to formulate the a priori themes as recommended by the template approach; which refined some of the focus for the second analysis. By using the descriptive approach initially, interesting aspects of the phenomenon were revealed, such as the importance of authenticity to participants. I was then able to concentrate on the importance of this specifically related to eroticism during the second stage of research. Without the combination of methodological approaches, the importance of this particular aspect of BDSM might not have been as clear so early in the analysis. Indeed, authenticity is conceptualised in the findings as an integrative theme, highlighting its importance to the eroticism of BDSM. This is just one illustration of the success achieved by using the two approaches within one study, and demonstrates the complementary aspects of the transcendental and hermeneutic schools.

The success of combining these methods within this piece of research can make a case for the application of the two methodologies in future phenomenological psychological work. The second stage of research was certainly strengthened by incorporating findings from the descriptive analysis, yet both stages also yielded interesting findings in their own right. I suggest this research has demonstrated that within phenomenological psychology it is less problematic to make use of the complementary aspects of transcendental and hermeneutic approaches than it would be if using phenomenology as a theoretical endeavour. Therefore it is possible that the methods could be applied in this way more frequently in phenomenological psychological research. I am aware that this may be a more difficult endeavour within pure phenomenology due to the theoretical and philosophical conflicts,

however, when also drawing on the tradition of psychology there is wider scope for pragmatism and flexibility.

8.2.2 Using innovative techniques in phenomenological research

This section will describe the inventive phenomenological techniques I used during the research. I suggest that these methods may prove useful to other phenomenological researchers in the field of sexuality. I modified existing phenomenological techniques to assist the participants to provide as much descriptive detail as possible while also elucidating those aspects of a phenomenon that can be difficult for participants to explain.

Imaginative Variation

During the first stage of the research, Husserl's technique of imaginative variation was employed in line with Giorgi's (1985) tradition, as a method to make abstractions from the data during the process of analysis. However, during the planning for stage two I began to consider using imaginative variation in a more radical manner as an active phenomenological research tool. I noticed during the interviews for stage one that participants were struggling to verbalise their thoughts about their participation in BDSM, and I wanted to assist them to articulate this during the second round of interviews. I decided that asking the participants to use imaginative variation as a thought experiment (Bevan 2007) during the interviews might assist them to describe the minute and nuanced details of their BDSM experiences. King and Horrocks (2010) note that making comparisons between the experience under study and other, similar examples can be useful to clarify distinct experiential aspects. Because BDSM is such a complex and highly subjective phenomenon, I hoped that using imaginative variation would elucidate the subjectivity and encourage participants to describe the subtle differences between an erotic and unerotic BDSM experience, in order to elucidate and make clear those erotic elements. I argue that this element was particularly successful in elucidating rich, descriptive detail of the lived experience of BDSM and also managed to avoid the verbalisation difficulties observed during the first stage of interviews. Using imaginative variation this way in phenomenological psychological research is a novel but extremely useful technique, which could be used more widely in the field of sexuality studies.

Written accounts

Giorgi (1985) advocates using written descriptions as data due to the degree of depth they can contain, and this influenced my choice to include them in the second stage of research. After the initial decision to ask participants to formulate written accounts of their BDSM experiences, I had second thoughts. I was concerned that this would place too many demands on them. I was already asking them, some for the second time, to participate in a long interview about a personal topic and I was concerned that requesting a written account would deter some people, or would place additional pressure on those that agreed. I decided to persevere with the plan, primarily because of the lack of sexual or erotic stories from the first round of interviews. I also wanted to prepare in advance some instances of imaginative variation to use with the participants during the interviews. A number of previous studies have combined written accounts with interviews successfully (see Bargdill 2000, Morley 1998), and I believe that the inclusion of these accounts was certainly useful. Allowing participants to reflect on their experiences before the interview situation led to a rich level of experiential detail that might not have been present without the focus of the written accounts. Also, having pre-prepared instances for the imaginative variation enabled me to consider various different examples to use before selecting the most appropriate one. Had I been forced to think up comparisons on the spot, I doubt the technique would have proved as illuminating. Having to tailor each individual interview schedule to each participant based on their written accounts did mean an increased workload, however, the benefits of obtaining rich, descriptive and illuminating data far outweighed the costs of time and effort.

Bringing an Item or Object

As part of the brief detailing the instructions on writing the descriptive experiential account, I also added that participants could bring an item or object with them to the interview. I explained this could be anything that was related to their experiences of BDSM, such as a photograph, item of clothing, sex toy, restraint and etcetera. I hoped the item or object would act as a memory trigger and lead to increased detail during the interview, or at the least provide a talking point. However, none of the participants brought anything to the interview. King and Horrocks (2010) state that participants require a very clear brief that explains what is required of them. I believe

this part of the instruction was not clear enough, and perhaps appeared as an insignificant addition to my request for a written account. My phrasing was tentative and suggestive rather than providing direct instruction and it is possible that participants were not sure what was expected of them. It is also possible that they simply did not want to bring anything with them. Despite the lack of success in this instance, I would like to attempt this again as I am interested in its usefulness in elucidating detail during interviews, although I would certainly ensure clearer instructions on the next attempt.

8.2.3 Becoming a phenomenological researcher; reflections on learning

When I began this work, I was an inexperienced researcher who had not engaged in any academic endeavour for a few years. This was definitely a limiting factor when beginning the research. I received research training in the form of the completion of master's degree modules, which I found of particular assistance in developing my skills as a researcher and also raising my self-confidence. The expertise of my supervisory team compensated somewhat for my lack of research experience, as did our shared enthusiasm for the subject. I also immersed myself in the subject, reading widely on phenomenology, even attempting to traverse the difficult terrain of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Husserl's *Crisis of European Sciences* during the first few months. My knowledge of BDSM was barely above that of a layperson, I was however, very interested in alternative sexualities given my own experience of bisexuality. I was also interested in the prevalence of the pathologising attitude towards those involved in this subculture, and could not understand why that was the dominant position. We are all sexual beings, and therefore sex is interesting to us as people. While I do not argue I am especially qualified to undertake study of this topic, I contend that my position as a (then) closeted bisexual engaged in a secret same-sex relationship does provide me with some insight into sexualities pigeon-holed as 'problematic'.

The first stage of the empirical work was a steep learning curve. One of the purposes of employing two stages of research was that the first stage would allow me to immerse myself in the world of BDSM, becoming more familiar with the subculture and enhancing my own understandings. This stage also developed my skills as a researcher. I learned much from my first tentative interview with Polly. She was open

and friendly but also explicit in her descriptions, something I was not quite prepared for, despite my best efforts. Polly's narrative about a client who liked to punch her very hard in her genitals was particularly shocking and her description has stayed with me. I was naive and inexperienced, underconfident and unsure what language to use – should I be the professional psychological researcher? Should I use similar language to Polly to try to establish some shared understanding? I spent the interview second guessing myself, and its success is completely down to Polly who was such a good interviewee. Each interview allowed me to hone my craft and develop the difficult skill of effective interviewing, while also building my confidence and understanding. Though the analytical process was difficult and frustrating, again it served as a good grounding for the later stage of work. Without this initial, exploratory stage of empirical work, I believe that the research would not have captured such rich, descriptive detail about the lived experience of engaging in BDSM.

The selection of the phenomenological method in order to understand the lived erotic experience of participating in BDSM was a core strength of this research. The choice to use both a descriptive approach and an interpretive approach was driven by the aims of each stage of the research, and the findings from both stages are enlightening. This piece of work illustrates that these methods have more that unites them than divides them, and that one approach is not more useful or credible than the other. Phenomenology is foremost a philosophy rather than a methodology, therefore the methodological frameworks can appear frustratingly vague and difficult to pin down, at times like trying to grasp water. However, with perseverance, it becomes clearer that this apparent vagueness is actually flexibility and that phenomenology embraces creativity in method, and I have illustrated how phenomenological concepts, such as imaginative variation, can be utilised effectively as a research tool. Phenomenology encourages the researcher to remain grounded in the data, thus enabling the illumination of the lived experience of BDSM participation. I would encourage other researchers to embrace both phenomenological approaches, and to take advantage of the complementarity that exists between them. When these approaches are applied in the ways I have used them, it is clear that a combined approach has much to offer.

8.3 Summary & concluding remarks

The chapter began with some reflections relating to the practical endeavour of conducting the interpretive stage of research. I discussed the reflections both in relation to myself and in relation to the research participants in order to elucidate my own impact on the research and also the impact the research has had on me personally and as a researcher. Reflections on the use of the phenomenological method to research the lived experience of BDSM were also presented, including comments on the development of the innovative phenomenological techniques and the ways these might be useful to other researchers. The following, final chapter will discuss the key findings of the research as a whole in relation to the original contributions to the field and to existing literature.

Chapter 9

Discussion & Conclusions

Discussion & Conclusions

This study, which was conducted in two stages, aimed to explore the phenomenon of BDSM and elucidate participants' experiences of engaging in this marginalised sexual practice. Previous chapters have presented the analytical findings of both stages of research and have reflected upon the processes involved in undertaking this endeavour. This final chapter discusses the original insights into BDSM resulting from the study as a whole, focusing on the most striking and interesting issues. Findings will be discussed in relation to the existing literature and wider social issues relating to sexuality. The chapter ends by suggesting areas for further research and provides a conclusion to the study.

9.1 BDSM Fantasy & Play

This following section discusses those aspects of the BDSM experience specifically related to eroticism. These elements are fundamentally important to participants' lived experiences of BDSM and will be examined in terms of fantasy and developmental theories of play.

9.1.1 Fantasy

In both stages of research the element of fantasy was a predominant theme, and all participants reported that this was fundamental to their BDSM play. It is noteworthy that not all BDSM involves fantasy, however, this was a fundamentally erotic aspect of the practice for the participants in the current study. In order for play to be successful and sexually satisfying, the pretence of the fantasy must contain elements of believability and genuineness. Participation in BDSM enables a temporary escape into a co-created world of fantasy, providing there is a sense of authenticity present within the fantasy. This concurs with the findings of Taylor and Ussher (2001), who identified the discourse of 'SM as escapism'; a way to escape from the ordinariness of everyday life. Taylor and Ussher (2001) noted that practitioners do not participate in BDSM as a means of reality avoidance, but rather as a means to enter an *alternative* reality where, through creativity, anything is possible. My findings assent with this point; escape into the co-created fantasy world was for the purpose of participating in and sharing an enjoyable erotic experience that would not be possible in the realm of the 'real' world. It was not based on any

need for reality avoidance, rather, participating in BDSM offers a temporary and exciting respite from the hum-drum of the everyday.

9.1.2 The purpose of fantasy in BDSM

Yost (2007) examined the sexual fantasies of BDSM practitioners, and drawing on Weinberg (1978, cited in Yost 2007) argues that participants perceive BDSM to be dependent upon sexual fantasy. The current research supports Yost's findings, and extends this by introducing the notion of the 'authentic fantasy', which will be discussed later in this section. Yost (2007) also contends that a purpose of fantasy within BDSM is to create a contextual field that transforms unpleasant acts into sexually pleasurable activities; therefore the fantasies contextualise the BDSM experience. This was a common theme arising in the analytical findings of the current study; participants described the context of the play as crucial to the eroticism of the situation and the success of the BDSM. Weinberg (1978 cited in Yost 2007) contends that BDSM should be understood as a constructed performance, because BDSM occurs within a theatrical frame, where apparent unpleasantness and/or violence is transformed into pleasurable play. As fantasies serve to contextualise BDSM activities, all participants are aware of the contextual field within which their play occurs. Therefore it is understood, for example, that the contextual field of rape is different from the contextual field of a rape *scene* during BDSM. Weeks (1995) emphasises the subjectivity of BDSM; the meaning of the situation is understood and shared by the involved participants. My findings illustrate that participants, through shared subjectivity, recognised that they were engaging in a mutual *fantasy*, and this shared subjectivity implied that participants ought to become completely immersed and suspend all knowledge of the reality existing outside of the fantasy bubble. Engaging in BDSM enables the realisation of forbidden fantasies (Weeks 1985), and the exploration of these fantasies in a safe space.

Vance (1989) contends that it may be dangerous for women to express their sexual desires or fantasies. Firstly, Vance (1989) indicates the risk of inviting danger; the danger of rape, of pregnancy and/or of unwanted attention from men, and secondly the expression of fantasy violates the traditional feminine role of responsibility for the control of sex. I agree that a woman's sexual role is generally represented in society

as passive, and any contrary display of sexuality may lead to the problems highlighted by Vance. However, I also contend that it can be problematic for men to express sexual desire and reveal their fantasies, especially when these fantasies are judged at best as unconventional and at worst as pathological. Men who fantasise about dominating women in the realm of consensual BDSM are often perceived by the public as misogynistic and dangerous. The gateway theory (Kandel 1975) is often cited as predicting the degeneration of men's behaviour into non-consensual acts, including rape and murder, despite a lack of empirical evidence supporting this argument. My findings indicate that the realm of fantasy in BDSM can be a secure way to express desire, regardless of gender and societal expectations, and participants feel liberated within a safe space for sexual experimentation.

9.1.3 Understanding BDSM fantasy: Play theories

Vygotsky's (1934/1966) play theory can be cited to illustrate the function of make-believe and fantasy. Vygotsky proposed that fantasy play is a tool used by children for the purpose of liberating themselves from situational constraints, and enabling them to explore thoughts and emotions that would not otherwise be possible. I argue that this function of fantasy can be applied to adult practitioners of BDSM, as this play permits entry into a world of make-believe which is only constrained by the limits of imagination. Imagination was an integral element of BDSM play for this study's participants; Vygotsky posits that imagination allows children to enter an illusory world in which impossible or unobtainable desires can be achieved through play (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner & Souberman 1978). This understanding of fantasy can also be applied to adults' erotic imaginative BDSM play. According to Vygotsky, the child is emancipated from everyday situational constraints through play, because people and objects lose their determining force, therefore allowing different reactions to people and objects to occur. The child can change its relation to reality as the structure of perception changes and meanings become detached from their usual objects and actions via imaginative play (Cole et al 1978). I argue that this is also the case for adult play through BDSM. The analytical findings of this research included issues of liberation and corporeality; engaging in BDSM enabled the participants to become emancipated from their own psychological, gendered and bodily constraints as they were able to experience the 'impossible' through imaginative fantasy play.

Developmental theories of play can be used to understand how the BDSM fantasy is managed. Deunk, Bernest and De Glopper (2008) note that engaging in socio-dramatic play allows children to adopt various roles and experience the outcome of different scenarios, which I propose is similar to BDSM participation; BDSM is a form of adult socio-dramatic play for the purpose of pleasure. Goffman (1974) examined children's socio-dramatic play, arguing that 'keys' are used to provide an alternative meaning to an event. A 'key' is conceptualised as 'a set of conventions by which an activity is transformed into something that is patterned like the original activity but is interpreted as something else' (Deunk et al 2008:617). Keys are used during make-believe play (categorised by playfulness, fantasy and dramatic scripting) in order to transform an activity, person or object into something else for the purpose of the play. All participants must be aware that a transformation of meaning has occurred for the play to be successful (Deunk et al 2008). I propose that keying occurs within BDSM play also, in order to transform the seemingly unpleasant situations into activities that adopt an erotic atmosphere and are enjoyable for the participants. Goffman (1974) argues that each transformation of meaning via a key adds a new layer to the activity; the outer layer reflects the status of the activity in the real world i.e. as BDSM participation, while the inner layer represents the most direct meaning of the make-believe event, for example a master disciplining his slave.

Clark (1996) positions children's pretend play as a form of layered interaction, where participants must jointly imagine the pretend layer. This notion corresponds with the consensual co-created nature of BDSM fantasy which arose in the findings, where all involved participants must co-operatively create the scene and have equal investment in the play. Clark (1996) proposes that the first layer is 'the base', or the real world and the second layer is the 'theatrical stage', or the fantasy world. In the theatrical stage, participants understand that their interactions are layered and interactions made within the pretend layer should be interpreted differently from interactions made in the first layer. Participants must construct the pretend layer together in order to develop a shared pretend frame, and to apply the same pretend interpretation to the play. This can be applied to BDSM play, reflecting its co-constituted nature and highlighting the importance of the shared experience and the shared intent of engaging in these practices. Objects, others and events must be interpreted via the medium of pretence, which becomes a world within a world

according to Clark (1996), with different meanings attached to aspects of the real world, and the various layers that allow for these differentiated meanings in both the real and fantasy world. Some conflict arises here between Clark's view and the phenomenological view, as phenomenology would question the positivist notion that one layer was any more 'real' than another, and I will return to this issue later in the section. Another feature of socio-dramatic play that can be applied to BDSM play is the development of roles. Clark (1996) contends that play roles are established through using implicit characters, which can be reinforced by the use of explicit names and behaviours. These roles enable experimentation with language, physical nuances and social conventions (Clark 1996), I argue that engaging in BDSM allows similar experimentation with gender, social non-conventions and physical and psychological sensations and I propose that this kind of adult play is signified by an erotic element.

Halliday-Scher, Urberg and Kaplan-Estrin (1995) argue that children employ four descriptive rules when engaging in socio-dramatic play. The illusion conservation rule dictates that all players ought to negotiate all meaning transformations with the least acknowledgement possible. The implicit pretend rule explains that statements that transform real meanings should be interpreted within the play. The script adherence rule recommends that only transformations that are consistent with the general script of the play should be proposed. Finally, the incorporation rule decrees that when an appropriate transformation is introduced to the play, other participants should adapt to it within the play in manners that adhere to the script of the play. Violations of these rules may interrupt the illusion of the fantasy play and can result in its abandonment. I contend that these rules can also be applied to BDSM fantasy play, as the findings suggest that negotiation, alteration and interruption must be incorporated into the fantasy, otherwise the play becomes less satisfactory and may even lose its eroticism completely for those involved. The conservation rule is particularly central here, as frequent suspension of the pretence would disrupt and even end the BDSM, whereas within-story communication would preserve the illusion of the fantasy. This concurs with Scarlett and Wolf's (1979 cited in Di Lalla & Watson 1988) findings that children develop the concept of a boundary between the realms of fantasy and reality. A permeable boundary, which utilised elements of the existing story to manage issues occurring within the fantasy play, was employed

when children remained within the pretence to resolve conflicts. This is employed during BDSM in order to manage the fantasy and to address any issues that may arise without disrupting the fantasy bubble. Scarlett and Wolf (1979 cited in Di Lalla & Watson 1988) also theorised an integrated boundary where both worlds are integrated and the fantasy world is perceived as a subset of the real world. The child, or the BDSM practitioner, can inhabit the fantasy world and implement changes to the fantasy without the explicit need to step out of the fantasy and both the fantasy and reality realms can be managed simultaneously. Interestingly, Skolnick and Bloom (2006) noted that although children's fantasy play can be frightening and emotional, this does not become displaced into the participants' view of reality.

Stear (2009) contends that participating in BDSM scenes is akin to engaging with fictions, and my findings support this notion. Stear applied Walton's (1990) theory of make-believe, prominent in the philosophy of art, to BDSM. Walton's theory is based upon the principle of generation which refers to the prescribed rules that govern what is to be imagined. Walton (1990) also refers to fictional worlds where characters and props combined with the principle of generation create a fictional realm and within this realm are fictional rules and truths. The rules cannot be disobeyed or the fictional world is damaged. Walton (1990) argues that physiological responses, called 'quasi-emotions', to the fictional world can be experienced. Walton (1990) uses the example of 'quasi-fear', which I argue can be applied to BDSM. Fear is a component of the make-believe fantasy of BDSM for some participants, indeed it was featured frequently during the participant interviews. Walton (1990) proposes that despite being part of the make-believe game, participants are not simply pretending to be afraid, nor are they acting. According to Walton (1990), participants will make-believedly respond in line with the principle of generation, meaning psychological states respond according to the fictional world that has been created. If the fictional world is unpredictable and frightening, as is commonly described in submissives' accounts of BDSM, the participants' response will correspond to the atmosphere created in the fantasy world. Stear (2009) argues that BDSM should be considered as a make-believe game as BDSM scenes involve character and prop oriented fantasy which must be engaged with on a psychological level. Role playing during BDSM enables the participants to experience a range of 'quasi-emotions' that they would not otherwise experience in the real world. Stear (2009) also notes that

despite the make-believedness of BDSM, the sexual pleasure derived from the practice is not pretend; the pleasure is experienced as real, rather than quasi, as a result of the quasi-emotions that are experienced during the play.

Phenomenology is concerned with subjective experiences of the lifeworld rather than with the objective nature of the world; developmental psychological theories however are based upon empiricist notions of objective observations. Phenomenologists argue that this approach is reductionist and they would reject the Cartesian dualism which is intrinsic in the empiricist and positivist views of the world. I alluded earlier to the inherent positivism that exists in these developmental theories. Phenomenology argues strongly against the concept of a knowable external world that directly determines perceptions of it, instead subscribing to the idea that there are multiple interpretations possible of the same phenomena. I argue that these play theories are particularly enlightening and useful in elucidating aspects of BDSM, however, it must be recognised that positivist perspectives are simply *one* form of interpretation among many. Merleau-Ponty's (1948/2004) comments on the phenomenology of art during his radio lectures can be used to elucidate the issue of children's reality and fantasy which is evident in the play theories mentioned above. For Merleau-Ponty, all works of art are creations of the artist rather than a reflection of any pre-existing reality. Viewers of art are not concerned with the resemblance of the artistic creation to the real world but are instead interested in whether the created world is coherent. Modern art moves away from 'realism', representing the world as if it appears from nowhere, towards an embodied meaning of her or his own situated experience of the world. Merleau-Ponty's musings on art can be applied to the theories related to sociodramatic play. Because phenomenology does not subscribe to the notion of a real, objective world, the keys and layers of interaction featured in these theories are no more or less real than any other 'reality'. It is the lived experience of these various experiential layers, including the 'real' world layer, which is interesting to phenomenological researchers.

9.1.4 BDSM as adult leisure

An extension of the application of play theories is the reconceptualisation of BDSM as a form of adult leisure. Newmahr (2010) and Williams (2009) call for a shift in the way that BDSM is understood; towards a view as recreation rather than harmless

kink or as pathological perversion. Williams (2009) argues that the construction of BDSM as a form of 'deviant' leisure is incorrect, and it is the psycho-medical model of deviance that is responsible for this portrayal, which filters into lay understanding of BDSM. The concept of 'serious leisure' was proposed by Stebbins (2007) and framed as commitment to the pursuit of an activity that requires special skill and resources and provides particular benefits. Newmahr (2010) argues that BDSM requires specialised skills, resulting in beneficial outcomes in the form of pleasurable experiences, and therefore it should be perceived as a type of serious leisure. Consistent effort is required which involves gaining knowledge, learning techniques and developing specific skill sets to engage safely in BDSM. Williams (2009) also notes the effort invested in planning, shopping for equipment, constructing toys and equipment and creating costumes, along with practitioners' descriptions of BDSM as fun, games and play, and this was reflected during my interviews. Newmahr (2011) outlines the skills that BDSM practitioners acquire as learning to top and learning to bottom. For Newmahr (2011) effective topping requires learning how to use equipment and understanding communication and emotional responses, while learning to bottom involves negotiating and communicating boundaries as well as reconciling bottoming with feminism. The issue of developing skills was recognised in my findings, as many participants spoke of the importance of skill and judgement in order to administer and receive pleasure. I contend however, that researchers must be wary of assuming a feminist agenda across the community. It was certainly that case in my study that some participants did have such an agenda, while for others it did not feature at all in their experiences of BDSM. It is also the case that feminist issues will not be the same for different combination of genders in each role. As discussed earlier, the issue of feminism in BDSM is a contentious subject, with strong countering viewpoints on all sides of the argument (see Califia 1980, 2000, Dworkin 1979). It is not beneficial or accurate simply to assume that learning to bottom enables reconciliation of these complex issues.

Williams (2009) contends that BDSM should be viewed as carefully planned serious leisure for the purpose of exploring psychological and bodily sensations, a concept in line with my findings, as demonstrated above. Rather than conceptualising BDSM as immoral and dangerous, Williams (2009) argues it should be perceived as unconventional and unusual. Newmahr (2011) proposes a comparison of BDSM with

extreme sports; indeed, leisure in the form of contact spots such as rugby and boxing are not considered deviant, nor are they pathologised. I suggest it is the inherently erotic and adult nature of BDSM that causes such unfounded reactions, and if BDSM was reconceptualised as serious leisure, it would lend support to the argument against pathologisation. Parallels do appear to exist between BDSM and extreme sports. The seeking of sensation by extreme sports enthusiasts described by Zuckerman (1994) could also be applied to practitioners of BDSM. Sensation seeking is characterised by the desire to experience novel, varied and intense sensations coupled with a willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks to engage in such experiences (Zuckerman 1994). My findings illustrate that these aspects are present within the experience of BDSM. There are also commonalities between the two activities in terms of suffering and endurance. These issues featured prominently in my findings, and are echoed by extreme sports researchers. Le Breton (2000) and Willig (2008b) noted that the more intense the suffering experienced by extreme athletes, the higher the sense of achievement and therefore a higher sense of satisfaction was experienced. Also echoing my findings, it appears that individuals participate in extreme sports for the purpose of escaping the mundane reality of the everyday. Lyng (2005) and Willig (2008b) reported participants were able to transcend the ordinariness of life through extreme sports as a common theme within their respective findings. Interestingly, Willig's (2008b) findings presented many parallels to the findings arising from my research. After conducting a descriptive phenomenological analysis on interview data, Willig detailed that participants in extreme sports experienced an exploration of emotional responses, strong social bonds and feelings of camaraderie, feelings of risk, fear and vulnerability, intense pleasurable emotions, a sense of loss of control and also a sense of mastery and skill.

It is apparent that there are many similarities between the experience of extreme sports and the experience of BDSM, however, there are also substantial differences between the two activities. Robinson (2008a) argues that even though extreme sports are less gendered than mainstream sports, they remain gendered activities. This is illustrated by the frequent disdain expressed by men as women enter and become proficient in the sport (Robinson 2008a). Robinson (2008b) also argues that traditional male masculinity is reinforced through the desire to ignore or medicate

pain and injury sustained during extreme sport participation, and also via competition to posses the most aesthetically pleasing body. From my data, I did not find any evidence of BDSM participation being a particularly masculine activity, certainly traditional notions of masculinity and femininity could be discarded, retained or explored depending on the wishes and fantasies of the participants. Extreme sports are framed by an element of competitiveness among participants (Robinson 2008b), which as suggested by my participants can be present during certain fantasy scenes but is significantly less important in BDSM. In addition, my findings demonstrate that eroticism is a central feature of BDSM for my participants, which is not the case with extreme sports. Robinson (2008b) notes that eroticism can exist on the fringes of extreme sports, in terms of partner attraction to the physically fit body, or the brave and exciting individual, however eroticism in BDSM was foregrounded by the participants in the current study.

Newmahr (2011) continues to frame BDSM as serious leisure by highlighting the social aspect of practicing BDSM; the existence of public play spaces, social organisations, social gatherings such as 'munches' as well as websites, internet forums and chatrooms illustrates a considerable social element common to many other serious leisure pastimes. Newmahr (2010) argues that this relational aspect is often overlooked, and BDSM is considered in sexual terms only. My findings illustrated the fundamental importance of the relational aspect of BDSM, and the effects on the play when this is not present. By highlighting the non-sexual benefits, such as feelings of accomplishment and improved self-image, Newmahr (2010) aims to distance BDSM from sex by emphasising the learning, the financial expenses and the social networks involved. My findings reflected the non-sexual outcomes also, however I contend that although relational and social aspects are part of BDSM, it is inextricably linked with sex and eroticism. Newmahr's (2010) comparison of BDSM with kayaking disregards a fundamental element of BDSM, which is the eroticism located within the acts and practices for the participants. This should not be removed from the equation.

9.1.5 Authentic co-created fantasy

This section will return to the concept of the authentic fantasy mentioned earlier, which was fundamental to the lived experience of BDSM for these participants. The

authentic fantasy I refer to here is the sense of authenticity conveyed by participants that permeates the entire fantasy from conception to conclusion. It should be noted that the authenticity is understood as an experiential perception rather than an essentialist notion. In line with the phenomenological method, I conceptualised the theme of authenticity as an integrative theme during the second stage of analysis, meaning that its presence was essential throughout the erotic experience as it infused throughout the scene. I found a paucity of existing literature exploring the issue of authenticity in BDSM, and I argue my discussion of authenticity is an original contribution to the field arising from the findings. The fundamentally important theme of authenticity can be used to unpick the complexity surrounding the lived experience of BDSM, and illuminates further some of the other findings arising from this analysis. This reveals that the BDSM experience is more than simply acting or pretending. The need for an authentic experience suggests that the deep level of immersion in the scene enables the participants to enter an alternative reality and aim to achieve the most authentic experience possible. The lived experience of engaging in BDSM illustrates that the border that exists between fantasy and reality is complicated and intricate.

This notion of authenticity is linked to the relational aspects involved in the lived experience of BDSM. There are many types of BDSM relationship, ranging from casual hook-ups to committed 24/7 relationships, and regardless of the level of commitment, the relational aspect of BDSM is important. These participants wanted to feel authentically important and involved in the scene by way of relationship mutuality; the authentic relationship between those involved often dictated the success of the scene. In line with the non-pathologising stance of this work, the theme of authenticity also elucidates the issue of consent. The very fact that authenticity depends upon a mutual relationship consisting of a shared understanding and expectation highlights the consensual nature of the lived experience of BDSM. If BDSM practitioners were pathological and consent was incidental, as is commonly suggested in the literature (see Myers et al 2008), then this element would not be vital to the lived experience. The necessity of authenticity and an authentic relationship to the success of the scene illustrates that the wellbeing of all involved is paramount, and despite the apparent contradictory sexual practices that occur during BDSM, consent is a critical relational factor when striving

for an authentic experience. The authentic atmosphere discussed elucidates the complexity of BDSM, and a phenomenological examination of the lived experience has revealed that this permeates the whole sexual scene, and is therefore vital to inform understanding of this phenomenon.

Leading on from the notion of authentic fantasy, the findings also elucidated the co-constituted and co-created nature of BDSM fantasy. There is an abundance of literature examining BDSM fantasy content along with prevalence and frequency of dominant/submissive fantasies (e.g. Zurbriggen & Yost 2004, Alison, Santtila, Sandnabba & Nordling 2001). The majority of these studies were quantitative in nature, I argue however, that a qualitative approach has yielded additional detail to reveal this important aspect of the lived experience of BDSM. Again, this thematic area highlights the importance of the relational aspect of BDSM for these participants, and how despite its appearance, the architecture of the scene is constructed collaboratively reflecting the erotic interests of all involved. Consent is a feature of the co-created fantasy once more, as both top and bottom partners must have some input into designing the scene. However, although this co-creation is congruent with consent it must be recognised that which constitutes consent in BDSM is more complex, and thus would be difficult to address in this work. The collaboratively produced erotic scene enables the immersion required in order to suspend knowledge of reality and adopt the alternative sexual reality occurring through fantasy. An interesting and original finding related to the erotic fantasy scene in BDSM is the notion of the tipping point.

The tipping point describes those specific instances when an erotic experience suddenly alters and as a result loses its sense of eroticism for the participants. The sense of authenticity in the scene is challenged which leads to the occurrence of a tipping point for these participants. I contend that this can occur during any type of sexual encounter, but is particularly pronounced during BDSM play. This is due to the split between reality and fantasy in BDSM, which is less pronounced and arguably less significant during vanilla sex. The tipping point can be understood in terms of Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) concept of an ambiguous world. The world presents itself to us in varying ways, and this ambiguity allows the world to be open to different meanings (see chapter 3 for an elaboration). There appeared to be no criteria to predict when the tipping point might occur, and this was reported as being

confusing and frustrating for the participants. The general consensus was that a tipping point arose when an unpleasant feature from the real world penetrated the realm of fantasy. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) argues that because individuals always experience the world from a situated perspective, it can be difficult to understand and make sense of various aspects of the world. An alternative explanation for the tipping point is that it can be understood as a manifestation of the worldly ambiguity. The tipping point occurs when there is a reduction of ambiguity, and something forces meaning over the other. For example, in Annie's enjoyable BDSM experience, she recounts how she nearly tipped and lost eroticism, but as the erotic meaning was rediscovered, the ambiguity, and thus the eroticism, returned. I contend that a tipping point can be difficult to understand as a result of this ambiguity, and situations that may make sense during one scene, may not have the same meaning during another scene. This leads to a loss of eroticism as the meaning of the scene shifts.

9.2 Non-erotic perspectives

This section of the chapter discusses the other important aspects of BDSM reaching beyond eroticism for these participants. These elements are necessary and significant to participants' lived experiences of BDSM and will be discussed in terms of transgressive behaviour and non-erotic out-comes of BDSM participation.

9.2.1 BDSM as transgression

The inherently transgressive nature of BDSM participation was found by this analysis to be an important experiential aspect of BDSM. Although the accounts differed slightly between individual participants, all participants' accounts involved understanding BDSM as a conscious rejection of the social norms surrounding sex, and creation of a fresh set of sexual rules which prompted feelings of liberation. This was not necessarily a rejection of normative, vanilla sex, but rather a rejection of the social and political rules attached to sex by society. Rubin's (1984) sexual hierarchy illustrates how society ranks and judges sexual practices in terms of a 'charmed circle' and 'outer limits', and Weeks (2003) agrees that normality and sexuality are locked into a fixed hierarchy. Normative, vanilla sex was described by these participants in terms of being a 'lesser' experience than its BDSM counterpart; less exciting, less stimulating and less enjoyable. This differs from the findings of Taylor and Ussher (2001), who presented the discourse of 'SM as dissidence' positioning

practitioners as hostile towards normative, vanilla sex. Instead of a rejection of this type of sex, the current research supports Langdridge and Butt's (2004) concept of BDSM 'extending the norm'. Participants were rejecting the *social norms* surrounding sex, rather than the act of normative sex, and they participated in BDSM to produce opportunities for the extension of norms and the creation of new sexual rules. Rofes (2002) argues that cultural and societal norms expect individuals to fix their sexual desires around concepts of heterosexual 'love' and 'romance', and by engaging in practices which are contrary to the norm, individuals are rebelling against normative sexuality. It is certainly the case from the current findings that the majority of these participants enjoyed challenging the notion of a fixed body; participants experimented with gender and even the concept of being human. Many of the participants were proud that their sexual desires were linked with the taboo, and took pleasure in defying cultural and social norms by making a wider political statement through their BDSM. Individual sexual practices such as BDSM serve to destabilise the normative hierarchy of sexuality and extend the arguments relating to sexual citizenship and sexual rights. This will be discussed further later in the chapter. The de-genitalisation of the sexual during BDSM disrupts societal conventions and expectations about the erotic, and illustrates how the body holds a multitude of possibilities for both genital and non-genital oriented pleasure. Giddens (1992) frames the transgression of BDSM as a form of 'plastic sexuality' which decentres sexuality and eroticism from the needs of reproduction and from the rule of the phallus. Giddens (1992) argues that sexual transgression such as BDSM, should not be classed as a perversion but as another manner of expressing sexuality and self-identity.

It is worth noting that transgression can feature in other social scenes, such as the Goth subculture. The current research findings parallel those of Wilkins (2004), who examined gender in a local Goth scene. Wilkins (2004) found that participants in the subculture enjoyed the transgressive aspect, and consciously used gender roles, relationships and clothing to illustrate this transgression. Women's rights to active sexuality were emphasised by scene participants, and non-monogamy, proactive sexuality and bisexuality were common and judged as unextraordinary. Both women and men used clothing to defy social norms, with women dressing provocatively without fear of unwanted attention, and men frequently genderblending by wearing

feminine clothing and make-up. Wilkins' (2004) findings echo those of my research, where participants were able to experiment with partners, gender roles and sexuality without fear of reproach. Many, but not all, of the participants in the current study rejected societal restrictions of monogamy and heterosexuality and engaged in a theatre of sex where partners could participate in unconventional erotic activities for pleasure (Weeks 1995).

The findings from the current study can be used to reflect on gender theory and illustrate that, for my participants, BDSM is a transgressive act; participation enables practitioners to transgress norms of gender and sex. Butler (1989) concluded that gender is not biologically imposed, but individuals 'become' gender. According to Butler (2004) gender is performatively enacted, individuals perform the cultural and societal norms that dictate how gender ought to be in order to convince others of their gender. The act of performing gender *produces* gender rather than *expresses* it, and these performances must be reproduced in order to maintain the illusion that gender is a representation of the natural state of woman or man. Individuals internalise the norms, categories and meanings that are dominant in their society and thus become self-regulating systems which are perpetuated by social systems such as the media and the medical and education systems (Valocchi 2005). Thus, the body becomes gendered via repeated performances associated with that gender and through gender appropriate actions and gender is publically enacted both individually and collectively (Lloyd 2007).

Butler (2006) argues that heterosexuality is dependent upon performances of normative gender identities, but that actually there is no natural sexuality as heterosexuality is based on continual reproduction of performance. Valocchi (2005) concurs, contending that sexuality can be performed differently by subverting the conventional activities. My findings illustrate that BDSM can subvert conventional performances of sex and eroticism through the eroticisation of non-normative dominance and submission, the transformation of traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity and the exploration of gender. Although BDSM can reinforce as well as destabilise sexual hierarchies, unlike vanilla sex, it can highlight these complexities. In a similar manner to transgender and drag (Lloyd 2007), BDSM highlights how the body can reproduce new and varied gender and sex norms outside of the heteronormative matrix. Conventional notions of relationships and

sexuality are transgressed during BDSM along with participation in the BDSM lifestyle and new ideas of sex, eroticism and gender are performed.

9.2.2 Non-erotic outcomes of BDSM participation

Although the erotic experience was the primary positive outcome, there were also other, non-erotic, positive outcomes arising from BDSM participation. The participants in my study described being able to explore themselves through BDSM, and some reported spiritual, cathartic or therapeutic benefits. This finding is in line with Taylor and Ussher's (2001) discourse of 'SM as transcendence', where BDSM is referred to in terms of a spiritual and mystical experience. Beckmann (2001) also reported that BDSM can function as a form of spiritual practice that allows for the occurrence of transcendental experiences, Hearn and Burr (2008) concur, highlighting that religious uses of pain and discipline, such as Christian flagellation, aim to induce a state of ecstasy. BDSM can also be experienced as a therapeutic endeavour; Barker, Gupta and Iantaffi (2007) argue that practitioners of BDSM can perceive their play as empowering, enabling them to cope with issues such as abuse, stress or pain. Barker et al (2007) also suggest BDSM can be used as a safe space from which to explore personal issues, traditionally discussed through psychotherapy and counselling, although they advise caution when considering 'therapeutic BDSM'. Easton (2007) advocates the use of BDSM play for the purpose of self-exploration and to confront upsetting or anger-inducing issues, and she describes how BDSM can be cathartic and can serve as a metaphoric 'healing injection'. The participants in this study described how engagement in BDSM provided other beneficial outcomes for them along with erotic thrill and sexual gratification; participants experienced BDSM as facilitating self-discovery, self-exploration and relaxation. However, the erotic aspects of BDSM are central to understanding the lived experience of most of those who participated in the current study, and I argue that because they are fundamentally connected, this element should not be neglected from understandings of the phenomenon in order to emphasise the others.

9.3 Assessing the quality of the work

The quality criteria for this research were discussed in detail in chapters four and six; this section will demonstrate how I achieved these criteria to ensure high quality work. The criteria were as follows;

- The importance of fit
- Reflexivity
- Documentation
- Sensitivity to negotiated realities
- Situating the sample
- Owning one's perspective
- Independent scrutiny of the analysis
- Participant feedback
- Creating an audit trail

In order to demonstrate a goodness of fit, I explained the analytical processes in detail throughout the thesis. In chapter six I included each instance of major modifications to the template to illustrate to readers its development, mapping the evolution from the initial template to the final template. I also explained the various alterations to themes and provided justification for these changes. In chapter four I detailed the division of the meaning units and explained the stages of data transformation. A documented audit trail was maintained in order to make transparent the analytical procedures. A comprehensive account of what was done with the data is presented in the relevant chapters. Biographical sketches of the participants were included in both stages of research, situating the participants in the research. Examples of data in the form of quotations are used extensively in chapter seven, which details the findings of the second stage of empirical work. No quotes were used to illustrate the findings of the first stage of work, as this is not accepted practice by the descriptive method, however, the individual structural description is an example of the phenomenon. From this information the reader should be able to assess the interpretations in light of the data and the transparency of the analysis.

I have been reflexive and self-critical throughout this work, demonstrated in the reflexive passages that occur frequently during chapters and more generally in my

writing style. I established my researcher position from the outset of this work in order to contextualise my impact on the research and its impact on me. Due to the nature of phenomenological enquiry, my own values and assumptions were continually made explicit. The descriptive approach called for all presuppositions about the phenomenon of BDSM to be identified and then bracketed aside. The interpretive approach expected me to critically recognise these presuppositions and the ways they might influence the analysis. I have taken notice of the ways my interpretations have been viewed by those who took part in the study by utilising participant feedback. This was not for the purpose of gaining validation of the findings, but for the purpose of enquiring whether the interpretation made sense in terms of their own experience of BDSM. Indeed, as Ashworth (2003) argues, using participant feedback for the purpose of verifying analytical findings is an untenable position.

9.4 Conclusions

This section of the thesis will serve to illustrate the implications and conclusions of the work with reference to the wider field. Traditionally, this section also suggests recommendations for practice, however, in line with the phenomenological approach, I question the appropriateness of outlining a prescriptive set of recommendations. The implications will be discussed in terms of psychiatric nosologies and issues of citizenship and equality along with some implications for phenomenological research.

9.4.1 The DSM IV & ICD-10

Existing research (e.g. Klein & Moser 2006, Kleinplatz & Moser 2007) has argued that those who engage in consensual BDSM are demonised by society. Considered deviant and pathological, practitioners who are 'out' about their lifestyle face discrimination (Wright 2006, Klein & Moser 2006) and criminalisation (Weait 2007). As mentioned previously, BDSM and its associated practices remains categorised as a psychiatric disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM IV) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10), the diagnostic criteria of the World Health Organisation. Unconventional sexual practices are categorised by these diagnostic criteria as 'paraphillias', this includes sexual sadism, sexual masochism and other practices associated with

BDSM. Although my research aims were not to disprove a link with pathology, my findings do provide a contrast to the psycho-medical literature as my participants presented themselves and their practices in an ethical and rational fashion throughout the research process. Kleinplatz and Moser (2007) provide a compelling argument for the removal of BDSM from the DSM IV, contending that in the absence of theory or research indicating the constituents of 'normal' sexuality, it is easy to follow social attitudes into the pathologisation of the unusual and the misunderstood. Reiersøl and Skeid (2006) tackle the ICD-10, arguing that the inclusion of sadomasochism, fetishism and transvestism is outdated and should be repealed. There is a wider debate around psychiatric diagnoses in general, aside from the classification of 'paraphilias', which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the reliance on diagnoses and nosologies as a social tool is concerning and is in need of revision.

Given that medical notions regarding illness inform the public and lay opinion, it is unsurprising that the general perception of BDSM is far from favourable. Consolidating this view is the unclear position of BDSM and the law. Weait (2006) notes that BDSM is not a crime; there is no law against being a sadomasochist, however, certain aspects of BDSM may incite a criminal law response. Indeed, the Spanner trial culminated in the imprisonment of a number of men who were engaging in consensual BDSM (see www.spannertrust.org for more information). Public perception is shaped by these factors, and coupled with the depiction of BDSM in the media (as discussed in chapter 2 page 39), it is easy to understand how individuals who engage in BDSM can become victims of discrimination. Wright (2006) reported that BDSM-identified individuals had suffered violence and/or harassment as well as job discrimination. A particularly high profile case involved the U.N. Weapons Inspector, Jack McGeorge, whose professional abilities were questioned by national U.S. newspapers in light of Mr McGeorge's sexual proclivities. Klein and Moser (2006) illustrated discrimination against practitioners of BDSM by highlighting a child custody case where strict visitation rights were imposed on a mother involved in a BDSM relationship with her partner. The mother's sexual relationship was the focus of the hearing, despite the child being unaware of his mother's sex life. This case indicates how the court system can be biased against erotic minorities, particularly BDSM identified individuals. In this case the DSM IV

diagnosis of sexual sadism and sexual masochism were invoked, branding the mother as pathological. It is clear from the above studies to see the impact of the inclusion of BDSM in the DSM IV.

There is a growing body of literature across the social sciences calling for the removal of BDSM and its practices from diagnostic manuals, including the latest, fifth edition of the DSM due for publication in 2013 (for example Langdridge & Barker 2007, Kleinplatz & Moser 2006). The current proposals for the DSM 5 suggest a revision (from 'paraphilia' to 'paraphilic disorder') rather than a removal from the classification (American Psychiatric Association 2010). My research findings support the view that involvement in and enjoyment of consensual BDSM is in no way illustrative of psychological disorder or criminality. Indeed, what arose from my findings was the importance of the mutual relationship, indicated by the level of care, compassion and respect between participants. Consent and the co-created nature of the scene were framed as being of central importance to my participants. The descriptors of care, compassion, respect and consent do not appear to me to be features of a violent psychological disorder as presented in the DSM IV and ICD-10. The view from certain sections of the sexuality activist community, is that sexual freedom is under sustained attack (see www.informedconsent.co.uk). I join the calls for the removal of BDSM and its associated acts from these diagnostic manuals, as their inclusion continues to perpetuate misinformation and discrimination.

9.4.2 Equality & citizenship

Monro (2005) defines citizenship as a collection of rights and responsibilities which determine socio-political membership and provides access to certain benefits and resources. Evans (1993) contends that traditional theories of citizenship exclude non-normative individuals, and that mainstream Marshallian models preserve the heterosexual and familial conceptualisation of citizenship. In his seminal work, Evans (1993) developed a theory of sexual citizenship and its relation to sexual rights based on the relationship between the market and the state. If citizenship is understood, in part, to be related to access to a collection of rights, then it is reasonable to assume that those who are not afforded citizenship are denied access to these rights. Following Evans, a number of authors examined citizenship in relation to sexuality including Plummer (1995), Weeks (1995), Phelan (1997) and

Richardson (2000). Although the participants in my study did not explicitly discuss their sexual practices in terms of equality and citizenship, many of the points they made regarding public perceptions of BDSM practitioners and barriers to them becoming more open about their sexual preferences relate to these issues.

Despite the available literature addressing various aspects of sexual citizenship, there has been limited research specifically focusing on issues of BDSM and citizenship. Monro (2005) and Langdridge (2006) argue that practitioners of BDSM are currently excluded from full citizenship in the U.K., and therefore may be at risk of less protection from the law, as well as detrimental social and economic influences. Indeed, many of my participants expressed discomfort at being open about their preference for and enjoyment of BDSM with others outside of their sexual circle, particularly employers and medical professionals. Langdridge (2006) argues that BDSM practitioners are not afforded sexual citizenship due, in part, to legal and medical challenges. As discussed, the psycho-medical literature continues to frame consensual BDSM as pathological and the dubious British legal position enables state intervention to prohibit such activities, thus in turn denying citizenship rights. The participants in the current study frequently referred to the pathologising stance of psychiatry and medicine, and some, justifiably, based their decisions to maintain secrecy on this general stance. Lack of disclosure leads to a lack of visibility, however; Phelan (2001) suggests that visibility is important for citizenship and wider recognition of erotic minorities. This is a problematic issue for BDSM citizenship because as Weiss (2006) reports; visibility in media representations consist of a diluted and de-sexualised version of BDSM (see chapter 2 page 39 for a discussion of this), and the challenging and transgressive nature of BDSM is ignored. Weeks (1995), speaking of lesbian and gay equality, argues that transgression is a necessary moment of challenge to the traditional order of sexual life, which in turn leads to a call for inclusion in order to incorporate the previously excluded ways of being; moving towards full sexual citizenship. By transgressing the normative sexual order, BDSM practitioners extend the boundaries of the sexual, which can challenge the status quo leading to a demand for inclusivity and equality in the form of sexual citizenship. This appears to be the case for gay and lesbian individuals, however, it appears that other sexual minorities such as bisexual and BDSM identified individuals have been ignored (Monro 2005).

Langdridge (2006) proposed that by its nature, BDSM tests the boundaries for citizenship, and questions whether practitioners of BDSM are simply too erotic and too transgressive to be afforded full citizenship. In order to minimise the sexual and erotic, some sections of the BDSM community deliberately focus on the non-sexual aspects of the practice, such as the relational issues involved, for the purpose of gaining wider acceptance, and eventually citizenship. Langdridge notes that the abbreviation EPE (erotic power exchange), illustrates a shift away from the sexual overtones of other labels such as 'sadomasochism' or 'BDSM'. Bell and Binnie (2000) contend that this represents a compromise in sexual practices; a bid to become 'less' sexual and 'less' erotic in exchange for legitimate citizenship. For some practitioners, including some participants from my study, being outside the fringes of acceptability is a pleasurable and enjoyable aspect of BDSM, and such individuals would not want to be recognised as sexual citizens in this way. Richardson (2005) examined gay and lesbian sexual citizenship, I suggest here that many of her arguments can be applied to individuals who engage in BDSM. Richardson warns that there is a risk of deploying 'sameness' between gays and lesbians, and heterosexuals through a politics of normalisation. The normative model subsequently becomes *the* model for sexual citizenship, and variations from this lead to a devaluing of individuals that do not conform and a loss of legitimate citizenship. Warner (1999) argues that normative citizenship is achieved through the de-sexualisation and purification of formerly unacceptable citizens, and new norms of identity and sexual practices which are in line with the heteronormative lifestyle become internalised by these 'good' sexual citizens (see also Richardson 2005). Of course, establishing norms and boundaries always excludes 'others', which can be perceived as problematic and in need of regulation, leaving these 'other' non-normative citizens at risk of discrimination and persecution.

It appears that for BDSM identified individuals, exclusion from legitimate citizenship leads to a loss of the rights which are afforded to non-BDSM citizens. Practitioners of BDSM are denied access to important social and personal services as a result of the legal and medical views of BDSM, and they are also denied access to privacy which is automatically granted to others (the Spanner case is an example of such lack of privacy). This work highlights the need for the notion of citizenship to expand to include *sexual practices* as well as issues of identity, sexuality and gender. Plummer

(2003) attempted this by rejecting sexual citizenship in favour of 'intimate' citizenship, arguing that a 'sexual' citizenship does not adequately account for gender, queer or patriarchal concerns. Langdridge (2006) counters this however, arguing that the intimate citizen simply represents a clustering together of diversity and therefore may not be a suitable challenge to sexual citizenship. It remains to be seen whether BDSM practitioners can emulate the lesbian and gay movement in their claim for rights, or whether they would want to, but broadening the concept of citizenship may lead to increased sexual rights for those who engage with BDSM as a lifestyle, as well as an erotic pastime.

9.4.3 Phenomenology

I contend that this research also has implications for phenomenological research. It is widely accepted that phenomenology can be a difficult subject to understand. The complexity of the various concepts along with the breadth of the subject means it is difficult to master. Indeed, I frequently struggled to grasp nuanced meanings while reading Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Encountering such difficulties may deter researchers, especially inexperienced researchers, from undertaking phenomenological research. Although phenomenology is a popular and respected approach in health disciplines such as nursing, it has traditionally been less popular in the field of psychology. The rising popularity of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (see Smith 2008) is beginning to counter the lack of phenomenological methods present in psychology, however, debates continue over whether IPA engages adequately with the philosophy of the approach. I personally think the limited application of phenomenology within psychology is disappointing as this approach can offer so much insight into people's lived experiences. Employing additional active methods such as the application of imaginative variation in interviews may make phenomenology a more appealing method. Idhe's (1986) *'Experimental Phenomenology'* also advocates a dynamic and active use of phenomenological experiments in phenomenological research, which can add excitement and autonomy to the research process. Framing the technique as a tool to be used by the researcher during analysis and *also* during interviewing participants may assist researchers to engage in phenomenological research on a more grounded, rather than completely abstract level. I found this technique as applied to participants during interviews extremely helpful in elucidating information

at a micro level. Seemly small and insignificant alterations to BDSM fantasies made a huge difference to the eroticism of the scenes, and by using imaginative variation the importance of these small nuances was recognised. This technique can be used to tease out the fine detail of the lived experience of any phenomenon, and therefore should be recognised within phenomenology as a useful research tool at both data collection and analytic stages of research.

One more noteworthy point regarding the implications of this research for phenomenology is the use of mixed phenomenological approaches in a cohesive and complimentary manner. Much of the literature focuses on the differences between these approaches (see chapter 6 for more on this), but this work demonstrates that descriptive and interpretive phenomenology can be utilised together successfully in order to elucidate the lived experience of complex phenomenon.

9.5 Suggestions for further research

Despite the complexity of BDSM, there is a dearth of research, particularly research focusing on the lived experience of this phenomenon. Conducting this work has highlighted many avenues that would benefit from further research.

- One of the main issues in current BDSM, and wider sexuality research is the lack of diversity in samples (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs 2010). Focusing on the experiences of racial and cultural groups would enable a more complete understanding of the phenomenon and would also explore the ways in which BDSM is perceived cross-culturally. The inclusion of trans and intersex participants would also contribute to the creation of a more complete understanding by capturing the diversity of the BDSM community.

- I would like to look further at issues of citizenship. Lesbian and gay (and to a lesser extent bisexual and trans) populations have received legitimisation in the form of attention from various Acts of Parliament including the Equalities Act (2010), the Gender Recognition Act (2004), the Civil Partnership Act (2004) and the Local Government Act (2003) containing legislation to repeal Section 28. It appears from these documents however, erotic minorities, such as practitioners of BDSM, have been ignored. As discussed, lack of legitimate

citizenship can have implications in terms of rights and access to services. This also raises wider issues in terms of 24/7 and polyamorous BDSM relationships. By phenomenologically investigating the experiences of those deprived of sexual citizenship, the impact of this can be elucidated.

- I deliberately excluded 24/7 BDSM relationships from the sample for this research. A phenomenological investigation of the experience of being involved in one of these relationships would enable the exploration of the similarities and differences between 24/7 relationships and other BDSM relationships. Employing the phenomenological method would also enable understanding of the lived experience of this phenomenon. During the current research, two participants were involved in a relationship, though interviewed separately. Using individual and couple dyad interviews with those involved in a 24/7 relationship would provide interesting data.

- A number of studies focusing in more depth at some of the themes arising from the analytical findings of this research are worthy of exploration at a more in-depth level. The act of transgression as a deliberate behaviour warrants further study. The conscious nature of the transgression was particularly interesting and unexpected, and an expanded exploration of the meaning of participating in transgressive sexual acts is worthy of further research.

- I am interested in the reconceptualisiation of BDSM as a form of adult leisure, while maintaining the erotic element as a central feature of the experience. Further research could expand on the findings already highlighted in this thesis, and advance exploration of this phenomenon.

9.6 Concluding comments

The findings of this research have provided insight into the lived experience of engaging in consensual BDSM, and have illuminated the erotic constituents of BDSM participation. No previous work has focused on elucidating the eroticism in BDSM, and the complexity of the study's findings reflects the complexity of this phenomenon. This thesis has contributed a general structure of the experience of

engaging in BDSM and also has examined in detail that which practitioners find erotic about these set of activities.

As a non-practitioner of BDSM, I had no prior agenda before beginning this work, however, the insight gained into this phenomenon via the research findings demonstrated no evidence of pathology and indeed illuminated the level of reciprocal care present between practitioners of BDSM. This work will contribute to the growing body of non-pathologising research serving to counter common misconceptions in supporting the removal of BDSM from all diagnostic manuals and the wider acceptance of BDSM and its practitioners.

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Appendix 1

Participant Information Sheet for Stage One

Participant Information Sheet

The experience of participating in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, and sadism & masochism (BDSM).

You are being invited to take part in a research study. You have received this information sheet because you contacted Emma Turley about participating in her PhD research. Before deciding whether to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being carried out and what participation will involve. Please read the information on this sheet carefully as it gives an explanation of the research study. Please get in touch on the contact details below if you need clarification or if you have any queries about the study or about taking part.

Whether you decide to participate in this research is entirely your choice. Your participation will remain confidential. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the study, without giving reason.

The Research

This PhD research aims to explore people's experiences of engaging in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, and sadism & masochism (BDSM). To do this, I would like to speak to individuals who regularly take part in BDSM, and find out about what it is like to participate in these set of sexual practices.

The Researcher

This study is being conducted by Emma Turley from The Centre for Applied Psychological Research at The University of Huddersfield. The research is being

conducted for the purpose of producing a PhD thesis examining the experiences of individuals who participate in BDSM.

Why have I been chosen?

You expressed an interest in taking part in this study, and contacted me for further information. I would like to speak to people that regularly engage in consensual BDSM about their experiences. I hope to interview between 5 and 8 people about these experiences.

What does taking part involve?

If you decide that you would like to participate in the study, you will take part in a face to face interview with me, which will last between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. The interview will be held at a date, time and location that is convenient to you, which will be arranged if you decide to go ahead with the study. Before the interview begins you will be asked to sign a form giving your agreement to participate, and you will be asked to confirm that you are still willing to take part.

During the interview I will ask questions about your participation in BDSM and your experiences of engaging in this practice. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. The interviews will be audio recorded, and only I will listen to these recordings. These recordings will then be typed up word for word to enable an analysis of the content.

Confidentiality & anonymity

If you decide to take part in the research, your real identity will not be disclosed. No one will know that you participated in the study unless you tell them. A false name will be assigned to the tape recordings and interview transcripts, and all identifying information, such as names and locations will be altered or removed. Your name and contact details will not be stored together with your recording or transcript, and all recordings and transcripts will be securely stored. The audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research. You will be able to check your own transcript to

ensure you are satisfied with the level of anonymity, and further changes can be negotiated if necessary.

The information collected during the interviews will be analysed, and presented in a PhD thesis. You can request a copy of the analysis and findings once the PhD has been completed, or the full version can be accessed from The University of Huddersfield Repository.

What next?

If you would like further details about the research study or you would like to take part, please contact me:

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Appendix 2

Consent Form

The Lived Experience of BDSM: A Phenomenological Investigation

I agree to take part in the study.

I understand that information from the interview will be treated confidentially.

I understand that my identity will remain anonymous.

I agree that direct quotations from the interview can be used in this study, as long as these are anonymised.

I understand that the findings from this study will be published in the form of a PhD thesis and in research journal articles.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during or after the interview without giving reason and without my rights being affected.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3

Participant Brief for Written Accounts in Stage Two

Before we do the interview I would like you to write me a couple of examples detailing your experiences of BDSM.

First, I would like a concrete example of a time when your BDSM was really successful and really satisfying; an occasion when things worked really well. Can you include details about the setting, who was there and what happened, thinking about how you felt during the experience?

Also, can you do the same for a time when your BDSM didn't quite work out? Maybe it started successfully but something changed, or it wasn't particularly satisfying for you. Again, include details about the setting, who was there, what happened and your thoughts on how you felt.

You only need to write between half a side and a side of A4 for each account. It can be an older or more recent event. Please don’t worry about spelling or grammar etc. I hope this doesn’t seem like unnecessary work, but I'm going to base most of the interview on the examples you provide. Feel free to bring an item or object related to your BDSM along with you to the interview so we can talk about it in relation to the written accounts.

Please get in touch with any queries and email them to me when you're done.

Appendix 4

Example of Participant Written Account: Tom

Account One – When things go right

I'd start putting on whatever he'd laid out for me, I would rarely object to his selection unless I had something in mind that I really wanted to wear. On this particular occasion I was to wear rubber shorts, crotch-less of course (It just makes things difficult otherwise), a rubber vest, hand mitts, a collar with a lead attached and a nametag hanging from the front. The nametag was black with my name engraved on it, and Joes phone number underneath it, just in case I ran away. There were also several dildo's and toys laid out on the bed, whips and blindfolds, as well as a very tasty looking rubber bone. Last in the array of toys and whips was a rubber butt plug with a rubber puppy dog tail attached. Woof!

After I'd squeezed myself in to all of the rubber and Joe had helped me on with my mitts it was time for some chem's, I don't know why Joe called them chem's I think it was probably to detract from the fact he was taking drugs. GHB was first, to get it out of the way, as usual it made me baulk, the smell alone was enough to make me start to retch. But I promptly downed it followed swiftly by a whole can of Coke and an E. Last was Ketamine, this was my favourite by far, the lovely fizzing in your brain as reality starts to melt away, replaced by pretty colours and a unusual feeling of wellbeing and happiness. Joe always carefully titrated my dose of Ketamine, he'd start off my just giving me enough to make me silly and relax, He knew it made it easier for me to role play, and then later when things got heavier he'd crank up the dose.

Puppy play is so much fun, its like being released, given permission to play endlessly, you have nothing to worry about just having fun. By now the rubber bone was being thrown around and Joe was trying to get it to go down the stairs so I'd have further to go to bring it back. Finally the bone hit the top of the banister and fell to the bottom of the stairs. I promptly gave chase running on all fours trying not to get carpet burns on my knees. After about 10 minutes of me not returning upstairs with the bone Joe ventured down to find out what I was up to. Much to his dismay he found me sitting at the front door with my leash in my mouth and a massive hard on. I'd tried to get Joe to take me for walkies several times bet to no avail, as usual he headed back towards the stairs calling "come on boy" and looking around for the bone (He couldn't find it because I'd promptly buried it beneath the sofa).

This time for some reason Joe gave in, and off we went venturing out into the forest near Joes house. We played outside, had sex outside, being fucked outside with very few clothes on all the time barking was very hot. I ran around and got very dirty barking and howling at cars as they passed by on the near by road. Joe actually enjoyed it too but we soon got too cold and returned back inside. Joe decided that as I'd been outside for the first time that I needed to have a visit to the Vet's. My tail wagging and my dick hard Joe led me to the bedroom. I jumped up on to the examination table, also known as the bed, and Joe began to examine me. After a few minutes he whispered in my ear ''do you trust me'' to witch a replied "Woof!" "Enough to let me do whatever I like to you?" he replied, again all he got in response was a very emphatic "woof!" He laughed and then told me to lie down on the bed. He tied my paws to its four corners and walked out of the room. When he returned the first thing he did was blindfold me and put on some industrial earmuffs. I couldn't see or hear anything nor could I move. I don't think I had ever been this turned on before, I could feel Joe playing with the precum on the end of my dick and I hardly ever get precum.

Joe began to play with my dick, after awhile he started to slide something down it, I didn't know if it was a Sound or a catheter, if felt quite cold so I guessed it must be a sound. This always made me super horny. He stopped and then something else, this didn't feel cold, he was catheterising me, this is something we'd done before and I loved it. He then put on a hood, this was really tight and had a tube going into my mouth, and he put the earmuffs back on over the hood. Now I couldn't speak either. I felt something go up my bum, it was Joe giving me some more drugs, but I had no idea what he was giving me or how much. Within about 30 seconds the fizzing started it was K, and a lot of it. While I was completely restrained both physically and mentally Joe whipped me all over, tickled me till I cried and fucked me. He used all sorts of toys, different sizes and shapes. I loved the whole thing to be completely unable to object totally taken over, all the time the room spinning and changing around me, flying and falling at the same time. Joe attached the electro stim to my cock and balls and turned it on, it hurt like hell but I loved it, I could feel my cock twitching every time it pulsed with electricity. Every pulse took me closer and closer to cuming till eventually I came, even with the catheter in which is not the best ting to do but it was so worth it. I just lay there for ages afterwards, Very content.

Account Two – When things do not go right

I was lying down on a padded table, my arms and legs tied down, unable to move. As Paul came towards me with a paddle in his hand I couldn't help but sigh. Paul was quite cute for a scally, but I wasn't attracted to him at all. The two other men in the room were Lee, a 50 odd year old, who hadn't aged well, he was sleazy and made me feel uncomfortable. I had to remind my self that he was the one paying me. The second was the guy who's dungeon we were making use of for the shoot. This was the second time I'd done some 'modelling' for Lee's web site, the first time hadn't been so bad, this time I would have rather have been just about anywhere. Paul would play with me and whip me, and tickle me. We moved from the table to a kind of stool type contraption that allowed me to be strapped in a forward leaning position. Paul continued to whip me, harder and harder, he must have been able to hear that I was in quite a lot of pain and the absence of an erection must have told him that I really wasn't enjoying his efforts all that much, however he persisted. Paul didn't seem to be enjoying himself all that much either.

After a short break and a discussion about how hard I liked to be hit and what he could do to get me off we recommenced the afternoons activities. Paul started again with different toys and devices, each time with no pleasure in his eyes and with no idea how much pain I enjoyed. I think Lee must have been able to see the absents of stimulation and decided to take over, with little effect. I was cold and lonely and didn't want to be there a second longer, All of the things they were doing would usually be enough to get me off if nothing else, but it all felt so false, so forced and Paul gave the impression that he couldn't care less if I were there of not. I longed to be curled up in the cage in Joe's playroom warm and safe. A quick cum shot and exchange of money and I was in my car and on the M6, on my way home.

Appendix 5

Example of Participant Specific Interview Schedule: Tom

Interview Schedule – Tom

* Taking these two examples, I'd like you to think about what in particular made the difference for you between a satisfying and unsatisfying sexual experience?

For these questions I would like you to think about the example of the successful BDSM scene you wrote.

* At the beginning you mentioned you were to wear rubber shorts and vest. Can you tell me what this brings to the sexual experience?

* Can you imagine if instead of rubber, the clothing was made out of satin? How would that alter your sexual experience?

* During the scene, you wore a collar and lead. How does this affect your sexual experience?

* You wrote about taking various drugs during this particular scene, and said it made it easier for you to role play. What do you think would be different about this experience if you did not use any drugs?

* A major part in your example was that you, as a puppy, were allowed to go outside for the first time. Can you tell me why this was a sexier experience than playing inside?

* How was the outside puppy play sex different to the usual indoor puppy play sex?

(dark, cold, natural elements)

* Would the sexual experience have been different if, for example, you were playing on a beach instead of in a forest?

* Can you explain what it is about puppy play that you find sexual? (understand the feelings it elicits, but why is it sexual?)

* Have you ever tried playing the role of another animal? What happened?

* Why do you choose to play the role of a puppy?

* Imagine playing the role of a pony. Is this as sexual as playing the role of a puppy? What is different?

* Imagine instead of a collar and lead, you're wearing a bridle and saddle, and a long horse tail instead of a dog tail, and imagine you're being ridden not walked. How does this make you feel?

* What about this is/is not sexually exciting?

* When you were being examined by the vet, how important were the restraints and the sensory deprivation to the scene?

* What did being restrained add to the sexual nature of the scene?

* What did the sensory deprivation add to the sexual nature of the scene?

* What would the scene have been like without them?

* How would it affect the scene?

* You said you had never been so turned on, so up to this point, is there anything that could have made the experience even better? Why?

* You guessed Joe was inserting sounds into you, and that sounds always really turned you on, so what is it about sounds that you find arousing?

* How does it feel when they are inside your body?

* How does this feeling relate to the sexual excitement?

* What did the inclusion of the sounds add to your 'vet' experience?

* Would it change the experience if they were absent?

* Would it make a difference if the sounds were made out of plastic rather than metal?

* You also enjoy being catheterised, can you explain why you find this sexual?

* Are there any occasions you would not find it exciting? (e.g. a real hospital setting?)

* Joe then put a hood over your face, rendering you unable to speak. What difference did the inability to verbally communicate make to the sexual experience?

* How did you feel when you didn't know what drugs you had been given?

* By now you were well into the role, so what did the extra ketamine bring to the experience?

* You wrote about being mentally restrained, can you tell me what you mean by this?

* What difference did it make to the sexual experience?

* You said you were 'unable to object, totally taken over' can you tell me more about why this is sexually significant?

* What feelings/emotions did you experience?

* Can you think of anything that would have changed this experience into something that was not enjoyable?

* You said the electro stim was particularly painful, so how did you derive pleasure form this?

* What did playing with the electro stim bring to the experience?

* Can you think of a situation when this wouldn't be a pleasurable experience?

* You described feeling content when you had orgasmed, can you tell me a bit more about your feelings?

* When Joe was acting the role of your owner and you his puppy, what sort of language did he use? (aggressive, kind, masterful)

* What did this bring to the experience?

* Imagine if he spoke to you in (an aggressive/kind) way. How would this alter the sexual experience?

* Did Joe's language change when he was playing the role of the vet?

If Yes: What effect did this have on the experience?

If No: Do you think the experience could be improved by a change in the style of language?

* You communicated by barking, how would speaking normally affect the sexual experience?

* How do you experience time during these sessions? (quicker, slower)

* Does time affect your sexual experience in any way?

For the next questions, I would like you to think about the second example you wrote, a time when your BDSM wasn't successful.

* You said the first time modelling for Lee hasn't been too bad. Can you tell me what was different this time?

* What was particularly off-putting?

* What was unappealing about being spanked by Paul?

* Would it have made a difference to your experience if Paul had been more attractive?

* Would it have made a difference if Paul had been using something other than a paddle?

If Yes: What?

If No: Can you think of anything that may have made the experience feel more sexy?

* Did the presence of the other men make it less enjoyable?

* You said Lee made you feel uncomfortable, can you tell me more about this?

* Is there anything Lee could have done to change this?

* When Paul whipped and tickled you, how was this different from an arousing time when you were whipped and tickled? (e.g. in the 1st example) (person, context, surroundings)

* What could have made this situation sexually arousing?

* You said Paul whipped you hard and you were suffering a lot of pain. How did this pain differ from pain inflicted in a sexual context?

* Paul did not seem to be having a good time, do you think it would have changed the experience if Paul was enjoying himself? Why?

* You had a break and discussed what you liked to do, so did this make you feel differently about what was forthcoming?

* Why wasn't Paul's new approach more arousing?

* What could Paul have changed to make the experience more stimulating?

* You mentioned Paul was not enjoying himself either. How important is it that you know the other person/people involved are enjoying themselves?

* How does it affect the sexual experience?

* How did it feel when Lee took over the domination?

* You described feeling lonely, can you tell me why you felt like this?

* What in particular elicited this feeling?

* You wrote that you would usually get off on what was happening, but that it felt false and forced. Can you explain more about this?

* Why did these feelings of falseness and forcedness matter for the sexual experience?

* Can you tell me how being in that dungeon with those three men compare to being with Joe in his play room?

* How did you feel when it was over?

* Can you tell me about the language Lee and Paul used?

* Do you think this had any impact on the sexual experience?

* How did you experience time during this occasion?

*Any questions?

Appendix 6

Development of Template for Stage Two

1. Participants' understanding of their BDSM experiences (level 1)

1. Experiential (level 2)

1 Fusion of experiences (level 3)

1 Experience of impossible/new realities (level 4)

2 Meaningful experience (level 3)

2. Exploratory (level 2)

1 Sensory experience (level 3)

2 Corporeality (level 3)

1 Imposed corporeal limitations

2 Corporeal awareness

3 Manipulated corporeal sensation

3. Enjoyable (level2)

1 Element of fun (level 3)

4. Emotive experience (level 2)

1 Fusion of emotion

2 Building and strengthening of bonds (all level 3)

3 Creation of emotional intimacy

4 Positive personal effect

5. Natural (level 2) (lower theme?)

2. Expressions of power and powerlessness (level 1)

1. Eroticism in power exchange (level 2)

1 Eroticism in submission (level 3)

1 Dominant partner's power (level 4)

2 Submissive's own powerlessness (level 4)

1 Lack of responsibility (L 5)

2 Removal of autonomy (L 5)

3 Removal of free will (L 5)

4 Synthesis of contrary emotion becomes erotic (L5)

2 Eroticism in domination (level 3)

1 All powerful status (level 4)

2 Adulation from submissive partner (level 4)

2. Interpretations of roles (level 2)

1 Role of the submissive (level 3)

1 Challenge of endurance (level 4)

2 Total submission (level 4)

3 Desired/prized by the dominant (level 4)

4 Really in control of the scene (level 4)

2 Role of the dominant (level 3)

1 Utilise skill and judgement (level 4)

2 Guaranteed sexual pleasure (level 4)

3 Provide sexual pleasure to the submissive (level 4)

4 Privileged position of power (level 4)

3. Reward (level 2)

1 Feelings of accomplishment (level 3)

2 Sexual rewards (level 3)

4. Incongruence between sexual role and behaviour (level 2)

1 Unambiguous roles (level 3)

2 Ambiguous behaviour not illustrative of role (level 3)

3 De-sexualisation of sexual acts/objects ? (level 3)

3. Co-creation of fantasy world (level 1)

1. Creation of alternative sexual reality (level 2)

1 Imaginative immersion in fantasy (level 3)

1 Sexual drama (level 4)

2 Deep immersion in the fantasy (level 4)

2 Incarnation as character (level 3)

1 Transformative (level 4)

2 Adoption of sexual persona (level 4)

3 Authenticity (level 3)

1 Realism

2 Believability (all level 4)

3 Genuineness

4 Sense of propriety

4 Suspension of knowledge of reality (level 3)

5 Role of imagination (level 3)

1 Creative (level 4)

6 Personal meanings (level 3)

1 Erotic subtext (level 4)

2 Erotic connotations (level 4)

7 Context (level 3)

1 Wider experiential context (level 4)

2 Sexual context (level 4)

1 Eroticised pain (physical & emotional) (L 5)

2. Fantasy and reality (level 2)

1 Erotic fantasy – unerotic reality (level 3)

1 Pretence of danger

2 Pretence of gender (all level 4)

3 Unerotic reality of danger

2 Safety in reality (level 3)

1 Physical safety (level 4)

2 Emotional security (level 4)

3 Private & public sphere (level 3)

1 Privacy (level 4)

2 Self-protection (level 4)

1 Practicality (L 5)

2 Explainability (L 5)

3 Concealment? (L 5)

4 Performing for audience (level 3)

5 Exposure of private aspect of self (level 3)

6 Distraction from reality (level 3)

3. The erotic unknown (level 2)

1 The unforeseen (level 3)

1 The element of surprise (level 4)

2 Anticipating the sexual scene (level 3)

3 Anticipation as foreplay (level 3)

4 Role of the imagination (level 3)

4. Ritual and symbolism (level 2)

1 Sexual ritual (level 3)

1 Functions of the sexual ritual (level 3)

2 Symbolism (level 3)

4. Facilitators and obstructions to BDSM participation (level 1)

1. Obstructions to BDSM engagement (level 2)

1 Issues relating to participants (level 3)

1 No sense of partnership (level 4)

2 Reductionist attitude (level 4)

2 Negative influences (level 3)

1 View of self (level 4)

2 Effect of negative experience (level 4)

3 Problems with fantasy engagement (level 3)

1 Absence of vital components of fantasy (level 4)

2 Lack of immersion in fantasy (level 4)

4. Repellent features/distractions (level 3)

1 Fantasy content (level 4)

2 Repellent sensory input (level 4)

5. Tipping point (level 3)

More lower order here??

2. Relationship solidarity (level 2)

1 Relationship dynamic/mutuality (level 3)

1 Sense of the personal (level 4)

1 Familiarity (L 5)

2 Presence of care (level 4)

3 Mutual regard (level 4)

2 Sharedness of experience (level 3)

1 Investment (level 4)

2 Intent (level 4)

3 Implicit understanding (level 3)

1 Communication (level 4)

1 Verbal (L 5)

2 Non-verbal (L 5)

2 Instinctive (level 4)

4 Equality (level 3)

1 Equality of pleasure in unequal circumstances (level 4)

2 One sided pleasure – unerotic (level 4)

5 Consent (level 3)

1 Implicit consent & explicit consent (level 4)

2 No coercion present (level 4)

3 Negotiation (level 4)

5. Sexual transgression (level1)

1 Breaking taboos (level 2)

1 Enjoyment of socially unacceptable act (level 3)

2 Subverting sexual convention (level 3)

2 Liberation (level 2)

1 Unconstrained experience (level 3)

2 Liberation from traditional sexual practices (level 3)

3 Freedom from responsibility (sub) (level 3)

3 Political statement (level 2)

1 Female perspective?

6. Temporal nature of BDSM experience (level 1)

1 Passage of time (level 2)

1 Incongruent perception of time (level 3)

2 Build up (level 2)

1 Lead up to the BDSM experience (level 3)

2 Slow build up to trust and sexual acts/practices (level 3)

Appendix 7

Development of Template for Stage Two

1. The nature of BDSM participation (level 1)

1. Experiential (level 2)

1 Fusion of experiences (level 3)

1 Experience of impossible/new realities (level 4)

2 Meaningful experience (level 3)

2. Exploratory (level 2)

1 Sensory experience (level 3)

2 Corporeality (level 3)

1 Imposed corporeal limitations

2 Corporeal awareness

3 Manipulated corporeal sensation

3. Enjoyable (level2)

1 Element of fun (level 3)

4. Emotive experience (level 2)

1 Fusion of emotion

2 Building and strengthening of bonds (all level 3)

3 Creation of emotional intimacy

4 Positive personal effect

5. Natural (level 2)

1 Non-pathological

2 Normal

6. Temporal (level 2)

1 Passage of time (level 3)

1 Incongruent perception of time (level 4)

2 Build up (level 3)

1 Lead up to the BDSM experience (level 4)

2 Slow build up to trust and sexual acts/practices(level 4)

2. Expressions of power and powerlessness (level 1)

1. Eroticism in power exchange (level 2)

1 Eroticism in submission (level 3)

1 Dominant partner's power (level 4)

2 Submissive's own powerlessness (level 4)

1 Lack of responsibility (L 5)

2 Removal of autonomy (L 5)

3 Removal of free will (L 5)

4 Synthesis of contrary emotion is erotic (L5)

2 Eroticism in domination (level 3)

1 All powerful status (level 4)

2 Adulation from submissive partner (level4)

3 Sexual choice

2. Interpretations of roles (level 2)

1 Role of the submissive (level 3)

1 Challenge of endurance (level 4)

2 Total submission (level 4)

3 Desired/prized by the dominant (level 4)

4 Really in control of the scene (level 4)

2 Role of the dominant (level 3)

1 Utilise skill and judgement (level 4)

2 Guaranteed sexual pleasure (level 4)

3 Provide sexual pleasure to the submissive (level 4)

4 Privileged position of power (level 4)

3. Reward (level 2)

1 Feelings of accomplishment (level 3)

2 Sexual rewards (level 3)

3. Co-creation of fantasy world (level 1)

1. Creation of alternative sexual reality (level 2)

1 Imaginative immersion in the bubble of fantasy (level 3)

1 Sexual drama (level 4)

2 Deep immersion in the fantasy (level 4)

2 Incarnation as character (level 3)

1 Transformative (level 4)

2 Adoption of sexual persona (level 4)

3 Authenticity (level 3)

1 Realism

2 Believability (all level 4)

3 Genuineness

4 Sense of propriety

4 Suspension of knowledge of reality (level 3)

5 Role of imagination (level 3)

1 Creative (level 4)

6 Personal meanings (level 3)

1 Erotic subtext (level 4)

2 Erotic connotations (level 4)

7 Context (level 3)

1 Wider experiential context (level 4)

2 Sexual context (level 4)

1 Eroticised pain (physical & emotional) (L5)

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2 Pretence of gender (all level 4)

3 Unerotic reality of risk/danger

2 Safety in reality (level 3)

1 Physical safety (level 4)

2 Emotional security (level 4)

3 Private & public sphere (level 3)

1 Privacy (level 4)

2 Self-protection (level 4)

1 Practicality (L 5)

2 Explainability (L 5)

3 Concealment? (L 5)

4 Performing for audience (level 4)

5 Exposure of private aspect of self (level 3)

6 Distraction from reality (level 3)

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1 The element of surprise (level 4)

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3 Anticipation as foreplay (level 3)

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1 View of self (level 4)

2 Effect of negative experience (level 4)

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1 Absence of vital components of fantasy (level 4)

2 Lack of immersion in fantasy (level 4)

4. Repellent features/distractions (level 3)

1 Fantasy content (level 4)

2 Repellent sensory input (level 4)

5. Tipping point (level 3)

1 Loss of eroticism

2. Relationship solidarity [facilitator] (level 2)

1 Relationship dynamic/mutuality (level 3)

1 Sense of the personal (level 4)

1 Familiarity (L 5)

2 Presence of care (level 4)

3 Mutual regard (level 4)

2 Sharedness of experience (level 3)

1 Investment (level 4)

2 Intent (level 4)

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1 Enjoyment of socially unacceptable act (level 3)

2 Subverting sexual convention (level 3)

2 Liberation (level 2)

1 Unconstrained experience (level 3)

2 Liberation from traditional sexual practices (level 3)

3 Freedom from responsibility (sub) (level 3)

4 Freedom of sexual expression (level 3)

3 Political statement (level 2)

6. Self-presentation to interviewer (level 1)

1 Present an image of 'normality' (level 2)

2 Ambiguous behaviour

1 De-sexualisation of sexual acts/objects ? (level 3)

2 Incongruence between sexual role and behaviour (level 3)

Appendix 8

Development of Template for Stage Two

1. The nature of BDSM participation (level 1)

1. Experiential (level 2)

1 Fusion of experiences (level 3)

1Experience of impossible/new realities (level 4)

2 Meaningful experience (level 3)

2. Exploratory (level 2)

1 Sensory experience (level 3)

2 Corporeality (level 3)

1 Imposed corporeal limitations (all level 4)

2 Corporeal awareness

3 Manipulated corporeal sensation

3. Enjoyable (level2)

1 Element of fun (level 3)

4. Emotive (level 2)

1 Fusion of emotion

2 Building and strengthening of bonds (all level 3)

3 Creation of emotional intimacy

4 Positive personal effect

5. Natural (level 2)

1 Non-pathological

2 Normal

6. Temporal (level 2)

1 Passage of time (level 3)

1 Incongruent perception of time (level 4)

2 Anticipation (level 3)

1 Lead up to the BDSM experience (level 4)

2 Slow build up to trust and sexual acts/practices (level 4)

2. Expressions of power and powerlessness (level 1)

1. Eroticism in power exchange (level 2)

1 Eroticism in submission (level 3)

1 Dominant partner's power (level 4)

2 Submissive's own powerlessness (level 4)

1 Lack of responsibility (L 5)

2 Removal of autonomy (L 5)

3 Removal of free will (L 5)

4 Synthesis of contrary emotion is erotic (L5)

2 Eroticism in domination (level 3)

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2 Adulation from submissive partner (level4)

3 Sexual choice

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1 Role of the submissive (level 3)

1 Challenge of endurance (level 4)

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4 Really in control of the scene (level 4)

2 Role of the dominant (level 3)

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1 Transformative (level 4)

2 Adoption of sexual persona (level 4)

3 Authenticity (level 3)

1 Realism

2 Believability (all level 4)

3 Genuineness

4 Sense of propriety

4 Suspension of knowledge of reality (level 3)

5 Role of imagination (level 3)

1 Creative (level 4)

6 Personal meanings (level 3)

1 Erotic subtext (level 4)

2 Erotic connotations (level 4)

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2 Sexual context (level 4)

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1 Erotic fantasy – unerotic reality (level 3)

1 Pretence of danger

2 Pretence of gender (all level 4)

3 Unerotic reality of risk/danger

2 Safety in reality (level 3)

1 Physical safety (level 4)

2 Emotional security (level 4)

3 Private & public sphere (level 3)

1 Privacy (level 4)

2 Self-protection (level 4)

1 Practicality (L 5)

2 Explainability (L 5)

3 Concealment? (L 5)**

4 Performing for audience (level 3)

5 Exposure of private aspect of self (level 3)

6 Distraction from reality (level 3)

3. The erotic unknown (level 2)

1 The unforeseen (level 3)

1 The element of surprise (level 4)**

2 Anticipating the sexual scene (level 3)

3 Anticipation as foreplay (level 3)

4 Role of the imagination (level 3)

4. Ritual and symbolism (level 2)

1 Sexual ritual (level 3)

1 Functions of the sexual ritual (level 3)

2 Symbolism (level 3)

4. Facilitators and obstructions to BDSM participation (level 1)

1. Obstructions to BDSM engagement (level 2)

1 Issues relating to BDSM partners (level 3)

1 No sense of partnership (level 4)

2 Reductionist attitude (level 4)

2 Negative influences (level 3)

1 View of self (level 4)

2 Effect of negative experience (level 4)

3 Problems with fantasy engagement (level 3)

1 Absence of vital components of fantasy (level 4)

2 Lack of immersion in fantasy (level 4)

4. Repellent features/distractions (level 3)

1 Fantasy content (level 4)

2 Repellent sensory input (level 4)

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1 Familiarity (L 5)

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3 Mutual regard (level 4)

2 Sharedness of experience (level 3)

1 Investment (level 4)

2 Intent (level 4)

3 Implicit understanding (level 3)

1 Communication (level 4)

1 Verbal (L 5)

2 Non-verbal (L 5)

2 Instinctive (level 4)

3 Trust (level 4)

4 Equality (level 3)

1 Equality of pleasure in unequal circumstances (level 4)

2 One sided pleasure – unerotic (level 4)

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1 Implicit consent & explicit consent (level 4)

2 No coercion present (level 4)

3 Negotiation (level 4)

5. Sexual transgression (level1)

1 Breaking taboos (level 2)

1 Enjoyment of socially unacceptable act (level 3)

2 Subverting sexual convention (level 3)

2 Liberation (level 2)

1 Unconstrained experience (level 3)

2 Liberation from traditional sexual practices (l 3)

3 Freedom from responsibility (sub) (level 3)

4 Freedom of sexual expression (level 3)

3 Political statement (level 2)

6. Presentation to interviewer (level 1)

1 Self-presentation (level 2)

1 Present an image of normality (level 3)

1 Rational (level 4)

2 Non-pathalogical (level 4)

3 Overemphasis on normalising (level 4)

2 Awareness of pretence/reality not naïve (level 3)

3 Teacher/educator (level 3)

4 'Nice guy' image/great partner (level 3)

1 Overemphasising niceness (level 4)

2 Genuine/subtle (Level 4)

5 Ambiguous behaviour (level 3)

1 De-sexualisation of sexual acts & objects (level 4)

2 Incongruence between role and behaviour (level 4)

6 Private (level 3)

2 Presentation of the BDSM (level 1)

1 Fun/game (level 2)

2 Loving act (level 2)

3 Experimental (level 2)

4 Confidence/ego boost (level 2)

5 Journey (self-discovery?) (level 2)

Appendix 9

Coded Interview Transcript Excerpt: Kim

27/05/09

Interview – Kim

I: Thinking about the two examples you gave me, I'd like you to think about what in particular made the difference for you between the satisfying and unsatisfying experience?

K: Ok, well they were both very different times, and the obvious answer is that one experience was very enjoyable and the other was not in the least bit enjoyable.

I: Right, can you tell me more about why that was?

K: When I was with Katy at the club, I felt very confident and very in control. I was relaxed and looking forward to a nice and exciting evening with my girlfriend, who I love very much, and who I trust very much. With Cath, it was a strange feeling to begin, even before the SM started. She had bought bags of sex toys home with her, which…put me on the back foot. It made me feel…less secure about our relationship, I was worried she was becoming bored and it was making me worry about losing her. So there is a big difference straight off, I felt completely different before we'd even got into the SM. With Katy, it was an extremely different prospect.

I: Ok, so I'd like to focus on the experience you had with Katy for the following questions. How important was it for your sexual experience that you went to the club with a partner you regularly engaged in BDSM with?

K: I had played out scenarios there before with people I didn't know very well, and that was ok. It was fine. I think I didn't know it beforehand, but going with someone you know well does enhance the experience. It's that sense of familiarity and security. If you fuck it up, they won't be angry at you or think any the worse of you. If something goes wrong, it doesn't matter because you can try it again some other time, or go home and laugh about it. There's a lot more pressure when you're doing something like that w/ people you don't know very well, or don't know sexually because if something goes awry then it's difficult, there are no second chances, well very few anyway. That pressure was removed with Katy, we both knew we

wanted to have a good time together and…maybe push the boundaries of our relationship a little bit.

I: Can you explain what you mean by that?

K: I mean that Katy had never done any SM in public before. She had been to play parties with other people, but had never participated in a public space before. It was her decision to do SM at the club, and I was happy to go along with that and do that for her. We talked about it and she thought it would be exciting, and so did I.

I: Can you tell me why you had the fantasy in mind before you arrived at the club?

K: We had discussed what we wanted to do there, and how far we wanted to go. It was the practical thing to do because Katy had never done that before so we wanted to feel prepared. We needed to wear the appropriate clothes for our characters and take any kit with us. It was just so we both felt happy and confident and secure in what we going to do.

I: Can you tell me why you chose that particular role play fantasy of student-teacher?

K: It was a fantasy we acted out regularly, and we both enjoyed it, so that's why we decided to go with that one. On a practical level again, it didn't involve a great deal of kit or dress so it was easy to execute. It wouldn't make sense to have to take lots of kit for a torture or kidnap role play and we didn't think the club would have the correct play space for a prison guard – prisoner fantasy, so it made sense to act out our characters from the student-teacher role play.

I: Can you explain what you find erotic about that role play?

K: The teacher role play?

I: Yes please.

K: *(pause)* There is the power dynamic there to begin with, so you can work with that. The teacher is always in the position of authority from the outset, there is no question of that, and the student is always in the inferior position without any authority. I think it can be easier to do SM when the roles clearly define the power position of those involved because it is absolutely clear who is charge from the

beginning and there is no chance that it could change, there can be no power shift. I think that is very stimulating, and very sexy. I know I have all the authority and power, and it makes me feel very much in control from the beginning, and if I know I'm unquestionably in total control then I can have a good time. It's got nothing to do with any...deep-rooted crush on a school teacher, or anything to do with being attracted to children in any way, it's a relationship where the boundaries are clearly defined in life, well for most people. When you act a fantasy like that...it's breaking the rules, students shouldn't have relationships with teachers, and I think that aspect of it is quite sexy too, like breaking a taboo in more ways than one. Also the way Katy looks makes it work really well, she can look quite boyish, not masculine, but boyish, so that works well for us when we want to genderfuck. It something that works well for us, and we both enjoy it.

I: Can you tell me how important the clothing you wore was for your sexual experience?

K: It was very important. It was important that we each looked like we should if we were really a headmistress or a student, otherwise we might have been acting any fantasy. You need action as well as words when you're doing SM, and what you wear can have a big impact on the SM. What I chose to wear as Miss Baxter made me feel very attractive in myself, and helped me to transform into her. These are not very fetishist clothes, just things you can buy from the high street, but it's not the type of clothing I wear usually, unless it's for SM. I used to be a fetish model and I'm not opposed to wearing clothing like that, but there's no need for it with this fantasy. I think it's better when you act the stock roles, roles like that, to go with the stereotype of the common fantasy, unless you know specifically if other person likes something else. Katy was very keen on Miss Baxter's clothing and so was I.

I: Can you tell me about what Katy wore?

K: Ok, it had to be even more obvious for Katy, because she wasn't only playing a role, she was playing another gender. We went for the white school shirt, quite baggy and tie with cord trousers, and we

slicked her hair back with gel. It's quite short anyway, so this makes it look more like boy's hair. The clothing didn't really do anything for me…but I did quite like her in the loose shirt and tie. I think the clothing is just there, with Katy, to stress her role as a school boy, or student. My clothing represents a sexiness and a teasing, so it can be tight fitting and sexy, but Katy's clothing is there just to illustrate that she's a boy and she's at school or college. Saying that though, what we both wear is very important…just in different ways.

I: Can you imagine that you were wearing plain, everyday clothing, like you would usually wear, how would that affect your sexual experience?

K: I think it would make a massive difference. I wouldn't feel like Miss Baxter if I wasn't dressed as one, if I was just dressed in jeans and a jumper I would feel like me. The whole point of role play is to be someone else for a while. Think in a way you wouldn't normally think, act and think as someone else. That can be a liberating experience because you can leave all your hang-up's with *you* and take on the persona of someone new, and that persona can be anything in the world you want it to be. That's what I enjoy about role play, and why we play like that a lot, is there's no end to the possibilities, you can conjure people up and mould and shape them how you want. You're not restricted by race, gender, class, ethnicity, intellect, ability, it's like taking a break from yourself, and in a way having lots of new partners. I tried being poly a few years ago, but found it really difficult, and I think this is the next best thing. You can have a variety of partners, while still having your own, it's the same with sex, you can have lots of different sex but without having lots of different sexual partners. Sorry what was the question again?

I: If you wore plain clothing instead of dressing up.

K: Yes. There's no doubt that the clothes…facilitate the role play. I think it would be very difficult without dressing up. Why would a headmistress be wearing jumper and jeans? She would have to dress a certain way for work, so I would have to dress a certain way to play her role.

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BDSM play - Special event

I: So what would you say was not erotic about wearing your everyday clothing? seems like 'an event'.

K: It's just not very special. It doesn't make sense to go to the trouble of planning a fantasy and then not going through with it properly and incorporating the clothes as well. It adds something to the...atmosphere of excitement. When you're getting all hyped up and ready, and you're thinking up ways to please yourself while pleasing the sub, and...well that's part of the excitement. It's a bit like getting ready to go out, I feel the night starts when I start to get dressed and put on make-up and jewellery, and it's the same with SM. It's all the beginning of getting dressed up and feeling sexy, and feeling a bit turned on at what's come and how much power you'll have. I suppose it's like a ritual, and part of that ritual is wearing the correct attire, and if you're about the act the role of a bossy, domineering headmistress then you should try to dress like one and look like one as well as act like one.

I: How important was it that the props in the play space subscribed to your role play?

K: They weren't ideal, it was more of an office set up I remember, but it could be adapted to suit us, after all an office isn't that different from a headmistress' office. It's similar to what I spoke about with the clothes. There's no point going to tons of effort just to leave something major out, and I think how the scenario is set up is very important. How would I be able to act out the role of a headmistress without a desk or without a cane? It has to look the part. I suppose having a setting like this, this elaborate is slightly less important. I've done SM with very little special props, but I think if you *can* do it then you should. It does make it all seem...proper I suppose, like it's really happening. It adds to the atmosphere of fantasy and playfulness. I suppose it's like being a child playing house, it's fine to imagine a house and play in it and cook in it and whatever, but it's much better if you have a real wendy house to play in. I think it frees up the imagination if you have decent props, you can focus on the role you are acting rather than imagining a coffee table is a desk or whatever.

planned and detailed committed to fantasy auth, more exciting to dress up. anticipation adds to the excitement - build up

Ritualistic element - Preparation

Dress - how it makes K feel - Sexy

anticipation of power - Erotic

BDSM - ritual auth.

visual impact important for the fantasy

Special event

practicality

Builds ant.

ant.

Atmosphere.

anticip.

Ritualistic elements.

prep.

Eroticism begins before the scene w/ prep.

authenticity.

visual asp.

auth.

Space was adapted to suit - acceptable element of auth.

need for auth.

Space - important for S. exp.

Props / Space crucial for the genuineness of fantasy, can be done but less auth.

Setting needs to be auth.

creative

Elaborate less important than auth.

Sense of propriety

Believable Strong exp; Fantasy atmosphere imp. for S. enjoyment

Playful

Better exp believable setting.

sense of propriety.

atmos.

playful.

imagination to immerse in fantasy

More scope for play if props / setting is well suited & believable.

Auth = better play.

Taking time & effort to create the exp.

importance for sex. exp - imagination

imagination - allows total immersion in the fantasy

I think that imagination is so important when you do SM, it can be quite difficult to imagine you have complete control over another human being, because you don't, you never can. If you can really imagine though, then that's when it becomes a really good experience.

aware of the fantasy. Sep. of fantasy & reality

divide between fantasy & reality.

imagination - erotic component & immersion in the fantasy

erotic compo-nent - imagina-tion

imagination can overcome the reality of the situation

I: Can you imagine how this experience might differ if the play space wasn't set up like this?

setting has to be relevant to fantasy. Believable

truth.

K: The experience would not be as good. It wouldn't work if we had to try to act out this particular fantasy in completely unrelated surroundings, but I knew what the play spaces were so I was aware there would be one to suit. If there wasn't... you might as well stay home and play there, or change the role play and do something more appropriate to the set-up and the props. I don't think there would be much point going to a club to do SM in public if your ideas and fantasies were not catered for, because I think you would be under pressure to suddenly think up something else, and you would be under prepared, and I doubt that would make for a good time at all. I can think of ways to change the space we did use to make it look more like a school office, but there were other people at the club too, so they had to make it very generic. It worked well for us though, we only had to use a small bit of our imaginations and the rest could focus on the fantasy. I'm not expressing that very well...we...could focus more on our fantasy, and really live it rather than having to imagine our surroundings.

believability

Preparation important for a good time, & no worries

Importance of Setting & can prevent a fantasy from working

setting - make or break

propriety - important all is 'correct'.

V. important till is 'correct'

Prep & planning seem important for a good time, & no worries

preparation removes the uncertainty & relaxing.

truth.

generic set could accom-modate their fantasy

imagination not consumed by furnish-able surround-ings

Freed up imagination for immersion

immersion.

Exp. fully the fantasy.

not 'lasting' imagina-tion

I: Yes, I understand. I'm very interested in the fact that Katy played the role of a boy. Can you tell me about the rationale for this?

Immersion is possible.

some difficulty with explanation

difficulty explaining why this is erotic.

K: *(smiling)* I nearly didn't write about this instance, and that's why. I didn't know *how* I could explain why a gay woman would be interested in pretending her girlfriend is a sixteen, seventeen year old boy. *(pause)* I find the whole concept of genderfucking really intriguing and it's something I like to play around with a bit. When you fuck with gender...it allows you to explore things you never normally would. As a gay woman, I've never had experience with men, ever. I knew I was gay for as long as I can remember, so I didn't experiment

new possibi-lities

Exp impossib-ilities

personal interest in the concept: likes to explore

Exploration. 'Make believe'

new exp. that would otherwise be impossible.

Fantasy makes impossibili-ties possible. (Function)

Exp. sex with men through the G.F. fantasy - never get this exp. without this fantasy.

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with men like a lot of gay women do, so it's something I would never, ever get the chance to do, nor would I want to might I add. We only genderfuck when we do SM, and not every time. I think…it's not that I'm attracted to men, or want to have sex with a man or anything to do with that. it's another way to be, another way to change. I rarely do it, it's usually my partners that do it. With Katy is was something she had done before, and we did it in SM quite frequently, and she decided she wanted to express herself that way for our night out. I think…I see it as a form of self expression, and it's amazing that you can take on, not just a new persona but also a new gender. I find it very much to be about exploration, I'm exploring another gender through Katy, I know she's not really a man, but her portrait of a man is good enough for me. It lets me get even further away from myself when I do SM and further into the realm of living through or living as someone else, and it's very exciting. It takes our realities further away from us, Kim and Katy are not there, but instead we have Miss Baxter and Max, and the two sets of characters don't relate at all.

I: I find that very interesting…

K: Yes, so do I.

I: So do still find Katy attractive when she acts the role of Max?

K: *(pause)* Now that's a good question, and I'm not really sure I have an answer for it. I find Katy very attractive when we do SM, well I find her attractive all the time, but sometimes when you do SM things can get…ugly. I mean ugly…people's bodies and faces can look contorted in ways you wouldn't normally see, people can be marked, bruised, occasionally a little bloody, be sticky and sweaty or crying, so let's say people don't always look their best or at their most attractive. When she is dressed as a French maid, cheesy I know but, I find her very attractive in the pretty dress we have and her hair is done nicely, I find her attractive when she is dressed in a hospital gown , even when she is wearing rubber. I think it's something else when she is acting Max. I don't know what it is. I think perhaps it is because she is so good at playing him, I really don't…perceive or see him as Katy. I see him as a boy, but of course it isn't 'me' seeing

him anyway, it's Miss Baxter seeing him as Max, just in the same way it's not Katy seeing Miss Baxter, it's Max seeing her. It is like we become different people, and that's what I find do very exciting about SM, you can be whoever you want to be and can do whatever you want. I would say that I do find Katy attractive when she's acting Max, as I do always, and I have great admiration for her being able to pull it off. I really think it's Miss Baxter who finds Max attractive though.

I: Ok, so can you imagine you sexual experience if Katy was playing the role of a female student instead of a male student?

K: *(pause)* That's another good question…and it's something I've never really considered. Katy usually doesn't genderfuck, and she sticks with her own gender for most of what we do, so I don't think it's really an issue…

I: I'm thinking about this scene in particular though, can you imagine how your sexual experience would differ if she stuck with her own gender?

K: Well it would change the whole dynamics of the fantasy, so that would change my experience. Let me think *(pause)* I think it would make the fantasy seem more safe in a way. When she genderfucks it makes everything edgier, because we're screwing with something that it…fundamental. Gender is universal, despite whether you're gay, straight, bi, trans, queer or whatever, I think most people feel as though they have a gender. It might not fit with conventional categories like boy girl, but I do reckon most people have a notion of gender. To be able to play with that, and do it well is a skill and then when you throw in SM to the mix…it adds a whole new dynamic to the SM. There's even more subversion about what is *(inverted commas gesture)* 'correct' and 'normal' and what people are supposed to do and supposed to be. I enjoy pushing the boundaries of sex when I do SM, and adding the genderfucking aspect as well, definitely pushes those boundaries, which in turn gives more of a …thrill, which is what I want when I do SM. I'm sure we would still have a good time if Katy stuck to her own gender, but it adds another

edge to the SM play, and I think a fantasy like that needs something extra. If we're doing medical play, there's lots you can do, the type of things you can do is very wide ranging, but I think that teacher role play can be limited sometimes as to what you are able to do. You have to stick to the fantasy to a certain degree, so when you introduce other interesting and…quirky aspects, like genderfucking, it takes the fantasy to another, very exciting level.

I: Ok, great. You said the characters, Max and Miss Baxter were familiar, can you tell me more about that?

K: Whenever we played that fantasy, even from the beginning of our relationship, Katy always chose to play it as a boy, always. That was mainly because of what I've just outlined above. The stock characters we invented and played as gradually developed their own personalities and characters and I suppose evolved into Max and Miss Baxter. We play with them when we do SM at home, and having established characters makes it…I want to say easier, but that's not a very good word…it takes a lot of the work out of it. We have these characters and roles we can whip out when we need them, so we're not having to conjure up a different storyline every time. We don't use those two *all* the time, and they only come out during the teacher role play so it's not keeping things the same in a monotonous way, but keeping things comfortably the same when we need to. The club was a perfect example of this. We hadn't been there together before and Katy had never done SM in a public space before, so it was good to have these two characters to…keep us safe in a way. Again, we know our roles so we can just concentrate on having a good time and absorbing all the physical and sensory experiences you get with SM.

I: You mentioned feelings of excitement and anticipation prior to the session, can you describe how you felt in more detail?

K: I felt very hyped up and full of excited energy. We had never done this before so it was a very new experience for both of us. I was also very aware that some people would probably stop and watch at some point, so I felt a little nervous…well quite nervous to be honest. I wanted my performance to be a good one, and wanted people to be

impressed by me. I felt…a little like I was going to an exam, those
feelings of nerves and tension but also excitement and anticipation. I
had no idea what was to come…no that's not true, I had some idea
because I knew Katy in SM situations, but there were many more
variables there than at home. Mostly though I felt very positive about
it and very excited. I felt an intense anticipation, like…I couldn't wait
to get started and get on with it. I imagine it's how actors feel as they
are about to go onstage, very aware they will be putting on a
performance and that's how I felt, like I was putting on a performance
and my role was Miss Baxter, and I had to do it convincingly and
effectively, to please Katy and myself and also to please the
audience. I wouldn't say it's the most pleasant feeling in the world,
but it wasn't terrible *(pause)* I suppose the word surreal sums up how
it felt just before we began.

I: yes, let's talk about the beginning, when you began to verbally
humiliate Max, yet you said that Katy didn't particularly enjoy this…

K: Yes.

I: Why was that sexually important for you?

K: The main reason is to establish our roles, to show that I can do
and say whatever I want. I am the dominant woman and I want
everyone to know that. It also helps me to get into the role of Miss
Baxter, how she speaks, moves and treats her students. She is a
strict, severe and impenetrable woman, and by speaking to Max in
that way, it really gets my adrenaline and excitement going, so I can
really *become* Miss Baxter, really live through her. Katy doesn't mind
verbal humiliation, she doesn't avidly dislike it or anything, but it
doesn't do a great deal sexually for her. I think it does help her, in the
same way, to establish her position and to let her figure out which
way she's going to play Max, so whether she'll be apologetic or
nonchalant or whatever. Another thing is that it went with the
fantasy, in this case Max had messed up his science work, he
couldn't do it and as Miss Baxter was the head of a very prestigious
college, that was unacceptable. I wouldn't have continued with it for a
long time, but it was the most appropriate way to begin the session. I

used for practical & facilitative reasons rather than sexual/erotic reasons

Reassuring for K - then she can begin?

wouldn't say it was very sexually important, but…well yes it is in a way. It starts the transformation process from Kim to Miss Baxter, and it gives me that power trip I need to get going.

Transformative

Feels powerful & can adapt the role.

power rush - erotic.

I: Can you imagine how the experience might have been different if you didn't use humiliation?

Total control - erotic

Facilitates the play

K: I would take longer to get into it. What else could I do to start the discipline? There would be no point in taking a cane to him immediately, there has to be a chance to get into it, so we can morph into our roles. I don't think the fantasy would work without a bit of humiliation, as Miss Baxter is annoyed with Max for his behaviour, so there would be no other way to introduce the storyline of the fantasy, not just for us but also for whoever was watching. I think our experience would be very different and I don't think it would work as well. If Katy really couldn't stand the humiliation then we'd have to think up a new fantasy to replace it. I would never do anything she didn't agree with one hundred percent.

Has to make sense

Not erotic per se

Have to transform

Practical aspects to the fantasy.

Realistic/believable - so important

Would rather scrap it than be inauth.

Have to transform.

Rules of the fantasy

Self-imposed rules

Practical. F must make sense auth.

consent.

Not Sub/Dom - cloudy.

Ambiguous roles - decisions etc.

I: When you pulled Katy's hair, you said the feeling of powerfulness was arousing for you, can you describe this?

Consent.

Not Sub.

K: I find the feeling of power so overwhelmingly erotic and sexy and arousing. It's that feeling of holding another person's fate in your hands, and knowing that person will abide by your power, and respect that power enough to let you completely control them. It's such a rush, and that's why I could never switch, because I couldn't do without that rush of power I get from domination. Sometimes…I can be quite reserved and…taking on this role really brings me out of myself, and I experience feelings I never normally would when I do SM. It lets me have that absolute power, and I feel totally in control…in control of Katy and in control of myself, I feel very…commanding *(laughs)* and I enjoy having those feelings I don't have in my real life.

Being in control - power.

Feeling ultimately powerful - erotic.

Responsibility over another person.

Sex. arousing

Eroticism - from the effect of the power over the sub.

Unconstrained

BDSM - allows self-expression as a way to release from constraints of own personality

Self expression - self-exploration.

Power to give pleasure - erotic.

Fantasy is opportunity to exp. feelings that is usually would not.

erotic

Reality & fantasy.

Divide F & R.

Fantasy gives an exp unable to get in reality.

I: So what is erotic about feeling so powerful?

Idea of power - erotic.

K: I think power is a sexy attribute, it has many connotations attached to it. If you have power then you have respect and authority, and people don't want to go against that. If my partner finds me

All powerful = no one challenges you = Security

attached connotations

fear?

powerful status provides security

protected from uncertainty

No risk of challenge or uncertainty & secure position.

Having someone to submit to her & the erratic beh - special.

powerful, and I'm talking about SM now, then I have the green light to act like a bitch, act unfairly, scream and shout and swear, and having someone who is prepared to take all the shit you dish out, makes me feel...very special indeed. I know Katy wouldn't take that from anyone else, but because of my power, she takes it, because of the power I have over her. When I feel so in control, that's what I find erotic, that someone respects my power to the nth degree, that they will give me total control over their life. I get to control everything, when they speak, when they pee, when they come, and the sexy part is that they've willingly given me all that, and let me do what the hell I want with it.

I: So was it important for your power trip that Katy didn't know what you were going to do her?

K: Usually that plays a bigger part in our SM, but we had discussed what we wanted to do this time in more depth, because it was a first and we wanted to enjoy ourselves and feel secure. I think this time it was important that we both had any idea of how things were going to go. We'd discussed the type of punishment I was going to inflict and how long we expected the scene to last and that sort of thing. So Katy did have more of idea than she would normally, but we didn't draw diagrams or anything, she didn't know exactly what was coming, and that was fun, it emphasised my power again. The notion I was able to do what I wanted and she didn't have a clue.

I: How important was it for your sexual experience that it was Katy's first time playing in public?

K: It was something I was very aware of throughout. It was my first time doing SM that way with a steady partner, so it was a first on both counts. I really wanted it to be an enjoyable and fun experience for her, but you never know for sure how someone will react. I've been there before where people have freaked out massively and that was awful to see, so I was...very cautious with Katy, I knew that she would be fine, but I think it's better to be cautious. The flip side was that I found it very sexy to be able to do that for her. It made me feel very special that she would choose to do that with me, and I wanted

flattered ka trusted her enough to share exp - P.Ship.

to give her an experience she would never forget. That was a power trip in itself, the fact that she had never done SM that way, but she wanted to do that with me, it made me feel like I was a really good at the dominant role. The other person's pleasure is very important to me, I don't think SM works if it's very one sided and one partner is receiving more pleasure that the other.

I: Katy followed your orders, and obeyed you without question, even when you left her lying across the desk, can you describe your feelings at that point?

K: I was on such a power trip by then. I'd really got into the head of Miss Baxter, and had found my rhythm as her. I didn't feel like I was me, I felt like I was her. Max was sprawled out across the desk, so I just left him, because I ran that school and I could behave how I liked. Max was just a pathetic student who couldn't cope with the demands of the college and he needed to be disciplined to make him understand. That's what was running through my mind. I wasn't thinking 'right I'll leave her here for three minutes then I'll start spanking her' it's not like that. I do what the character feels is right to do. I'm taken over by Miss Baxter, and do what she wants. It was really exciting to see Katy staying very still, even holding her breath, waiting for what was to happen next, I was pleased she was doing well and enjoying herself. The over riding feeling was that of total power and I felt invincible by that point. All my concerns had evaporated and I was sure Katy would be fine and I was sure she was having a good time, so it was all good at this point.

I: You mentioned the sense of anticipation building, I'm interested to know what is erotic about that anticipation?

K: Anticipation is a massive part of SM. You know something very pleasurable, sexually pleasurable is on its way and you know that you will be able to pick and choose what type of pleasure you receive and the sub receives. I know I'm going to get exactly the experience and the sex I want, if I want Katy to go down on me, I know that's what will happen because I'm in charge. The waiting and imagining is very sexy... I know I'm about to have a really pleasurable time, and

imagination plays an important role in K's BDSM.

imagining what's going to happen is a turn on. Maybe there's even more anticipation on the submissive's part because they could be imagining anything because the don't have any ides what's coming, but I like the anticipation from my perspective too. Being certain that I will be able to demand what I want and get it, and just waiting for that to start to happen, that's what's sexy about the anticipation, it whets the appetite.

I: How would you imagine the scene would differ without this sense of anticipation?

K: *(pause)* You wouldn't be all fired up and ready to go. I don't think it's even possible to do SM and not have some sense of anticipation or looking ~~foreword~~ forward. It would lose something, I suppose I would feel…cold. Not cold temperature wise, but not as excited about the SM as I would be otherwise, not very turned on. It's difficult to imagine really as I don't see it ever happening, I don't see how it could happen. All I can say is that I would be going into the SM without a certain level of arousal that comes from the anticipation of it all, and that would make for a less enjoyable experience, initially at least. *(pause)* I haven't really got anything else to say about that, except that it's difficult to imagine.

I: Ok, let's move on to talking about the people watching you. Can you describe how you felt when you realised that people had gathered to watch?

K: It was very, very sexy. More than I'd expected. I definitely felt the need to up my game because they were watching us, I wanted to put on a good show for them. It was that sense of power again, they had decided to stop and watch Miss Baxter, so they were subscribing to my idea that I was in control and had tons of power. It was very exciting from a sexual point of view, having them observing us really turned me on…I'm not sure *why* it did apart from making me feel even more powerful. I suppose I felt attractive being watched and I felt I must have been doing a job with Katy, and that people were enjoying watching that.

I: Can you describe what this did for your sexual experience?

K: It made it better. I was having a good time anyway, but it…brought in something else…added a new dimension to our SM. Knowing that I was turning Katy on and giving her a great deal of pleasure, knowing I was really turned on and then on top of all that knowing that I was turning these people on, and arousing them was a total thrill from me. It gave me such a sexual kick, and…took the SM to a new high or to a new place. I was very aware of the moves I made, and how I slapped Katy and the noises she was making, and how I spoke to her…having the others watch made me aware of everything and made me want to improve and do things better and better. It was such a good…boost sexually, which obviously improved the sexual experience I was having. I was a bit concerned beforehand that if people watched us it would…ruin the intimacy of it, change it from being our moment together to something else. In reality I think it increased the intimacy between us, because even though we were top and bottom, it was still us together, us in on the action and they were…still the outsiders, only watching. It made me feel like it was us together, putting on a show for them, and being immensely grateful for that.

I: That's really interesting, I'd like us to talk about the slapping now. How important was it for your sexual excitement to inflict pain on Katy?

K: It is important for me, I do get a kick out of doing that, that's why I top because I find it enjoyable. It's a way for me to emphasise that power I have again. I was very involved with the fantasy as well, and I wanted to punish Max and discipline him for his behaviour, so it was important to do that. It made sense to do that. I wasn't causing massive amounts of pain at this point, I was slapping with the palm of my hand, and I knew Katy really enjoyed spanking and slapping and really got off on that kind of pain. I was getting off on doing that to her, and making Max sorry for his behaviour. I was completely immersed in the role of Miss Baxter, and the whole fantasy was working out really well so I decided to go a step further.

I: Yes, can you tell me about that?

Appendix 10

Participant Information Sheet for Stage Two

Participant Information Sheet

The erotic experience of participating in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, and sadism & masochism (BDSM).

You are being invited to take part in a research study. You have received this information sheet because you contacted Emma Turley about participating in some PhD research. Before deciding whether to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being carried out and what participation will involve. Please read the information on this sheet carefully as it gives an explanation of the research study. Please get in touch if you need clarification or if you have any queries about the study or about taking part.

Whether you decide to participate in this research is entirely your choice. Your participation will remain confidential. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the study, without giving reason.

The Research

This PhD research aims to explore people's erotic experiences of engaging in consensual bondage, discipline, dominance & submission, and sadism & masochism (BDSM). To do this, I would like to speak to individuals who regularly take part in BDSM, and find out about what is erotic about participating in BDSM.

The Researcher

This study is being conducted by Emma Turley from The Centre for Applied Psychological Research at The University of Huddersfield. The research is being

done for the purpose of producing a PhD thesis examining the experiences of individuals who participate in BDSM.

Why have I been chosen?

You expressed an interest in taking part in this study, and contacted me for further information. I would like to speak to people that regularly engage in consensual BDSM about their experiences, particularly what they find erotic about participating in BDSM. I hope to interview between 8 and 12 people about these erotic experiences.

What does taking part involve?

If you decide that you would like to participate in the study, you will be asked to write a descriptive account of your BDSM experience. You will also take part in a face to face interview with me, which will last between one and two hours, which will be based on your written account. The interview will be held at a date, time and location convenient to you, which will be arranged if you decide to go ahead with the study. Before the interview begins you will be asked to sign a form giving your agreement to participate, and you will be asked to confirm that you are still willing to take part.

During the interview I will ask questions about your participation in BDSM and your experiences of engaging in this practice. The questions will focus on how you experience eroticism when taking part in BDSM. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. The interviews will be audio recorded, and only I will listen to these recordings. These recordings will then be typed up word for word to enable an analysis of the content.

Confidentiality & anonymity

If you decide to take part in the research, your real identity will not be disclosed. No one will know that you participated in the study unless you tell them. A false name will be assigned to the tape recordings and interview transcripts, and all identifying information, such as names and locations will be altered or removed. Your name and

contact details will not be stored together with your recording or transcript, and all recordings and transcripts will be securely stored. The audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research. You will be able to check your own transcript to ensure you are satisfied with the level of anonymity, and further changes can be negotiated if necessary.

The information collected during the interviews will be analysed, and presented in a PhD thesis. You can request a copy of the analysis and findings once the PhD has been completed, or the full version can be accessed from The University of Huddersfield Repository.

What next?

If you would like further details about the research study or you would like to take part, please contact me:

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