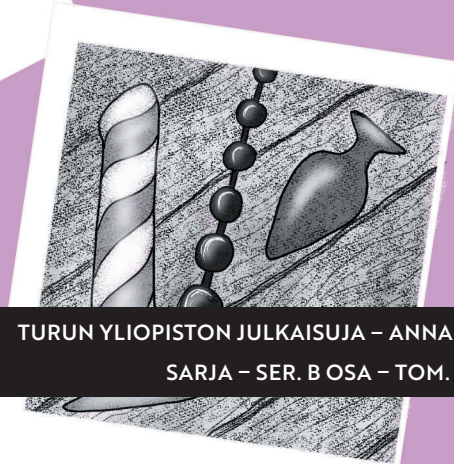
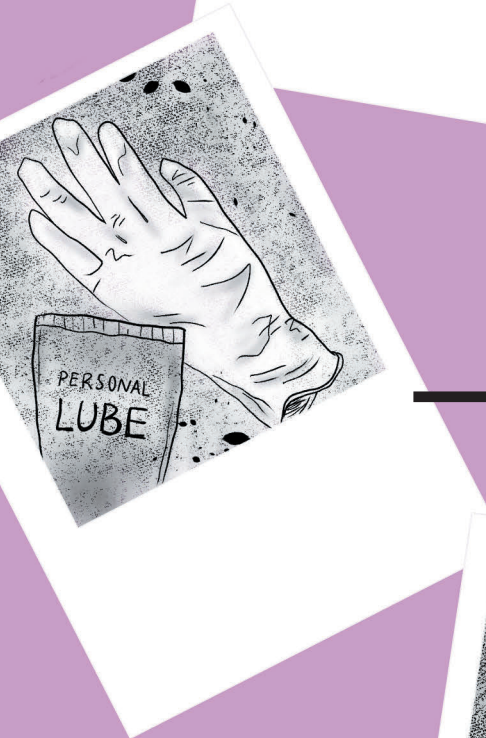
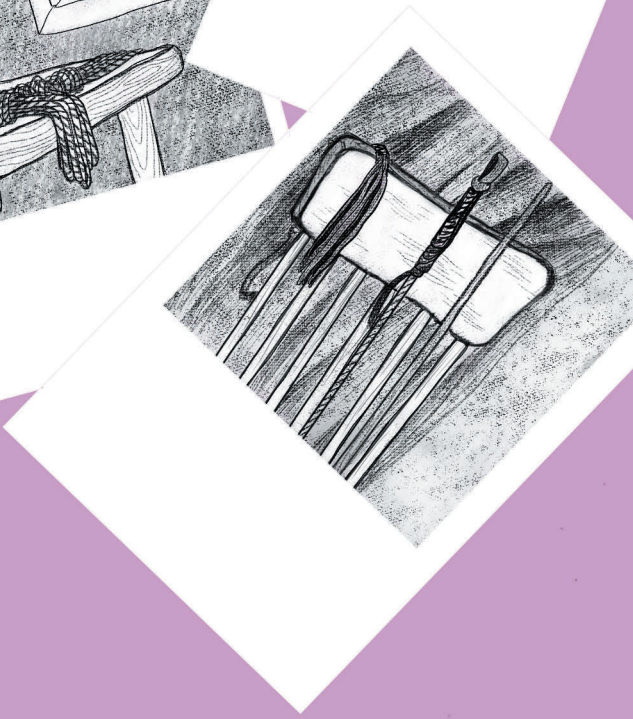




**TURUN
YLIOPISTO**
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THE KINK COMMUNITY IN FINLAND

Affect, Belonging, and Everyday Life

Johanna Pohtinen



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The originality of this publication has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Cover Image: Aarni Riitasointu
Layout: Johanna Pohtinen

ISBN 978-951-29-9159-4 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-9160-0 (PDF)
ISSN 0082-6987 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3191 (Online)
Painosalama, Turku, Finland 2023

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Faculty of Humanities

School of History, Culture and Arts Studies

Department of European Ethnology

JOHANNA POHTINEN: The Kink Community in Finland: Affect, Belonging,
and Everyday Life

Doctoral Dissertation, 92 pp.

Doctoral Programme Juno

January 2023

ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between kink and everyday life, how affects are related to kink, and how community and belonging are important for kinky individuals. The main research material consists of themed writings, which deal with kinksters' relationship to the community and their own kinkiness. The materials also include photographs of kink objects and homes, as well as participant observation and interviews on kink events. The materials are understood as dialogical: they are in dialogue with each other and with the researcher. The research methods are based on cultural analysis and draw on theories on affect, community, and everyday life.

Kink communities, whether in person or online, are important since they may be the only places in which an individual can be openly kinky. The sense of community is built through forms of solidarity such as sharing information and volunteering at kink organisations. Shared affects play a role in creating a sense of identity and belonging. Sometimes kinkiness may be experienced as shameful and is kept a secret, which may cause feelings of loneliness and anxiety. The acceptance of one's kinkiness enriches one's everyday life and improves one's general well-being and is often achieved through finding the community. Kink may offer transgressions of everyday life or be a constant part of it. While drawing attention to the positive aspects of kink might alleviate the stigma, a certain secretiveness is part of the allure of kink. Kink enables the safe exploration of taboo subjects and the acting out of scenarios that are otherwise avoided in everyday life.

This research contributes to the international discourse on kink as an identity and way of life and continues the discussions prevalent in Finnish ethnology pertaining to cultural norms and what is considered accepted or deviant. Kink is a non-normative and often misconceived phenomenon, which, however, is often experienced as a significant and positive part of identity and everyday life.

KEYWORDS: affect, belonging, community, cultural analysis, ethnography, ethnographical fiction, ethnology, everyday life, fetishism, identity, kink, normativity, sexuality, stigma, way of life

TURUN YLIOPISTO

Humanistinen tiedekunta

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Etnologian oppiaine

JOHANNA POHTINEN: Suomalainen kinky-yhteisö. Affekti,

yhteenkuuluvuus ja arki

Väitöskirja, 92 s.

Tohtoriohjelma Juno

Tammikuu 2023

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan kinkyn ja arjen suhdetta sekä sitä, kuinka affektit liittyvät kinkyyn ja millä tavoin yhteisö ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tunne ovat tärkeitä kinkyille. Pääaineistona ovat teemakirjoitukset, jotka käsittelevät kinkyjen suhdetta yhteisöön ja omaan kinkyyteensä. Lisäksi aineisto käsittää kuvia kinkyistä esineistä ja kodeista, osallistuvaa havainnointia sekä haastatteluita kinkybileistä. Aineiston analyysi on kulttuurianalyttinen ja nojaa erilaisiin arjen, yhteisöllisyyden ja affektitutkimuksen teorioihin. Aineistot ymmärretään dialogisina eli niiden katsotaan olevan vuorovaikutuksessa niin toistensa kuin tutkijankin kanssa.

Kasvotusten tai internetissä toteutuvat kinky-yhteisöt ovat tärkeitä, koska ne saattavat olla ainoita paikkoja, joissa voi olla avoimesti kinky. Yhteisöllisyyttä rakennetaan solidaarisuudella, esimerkiksi jakamalla tietoa ja osallistumalla vapaaehtoistoimintaan. Jaetut affektit ovat yhteydessä yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteen luomiseen ja kinkyn identiteetin muodostumiseen. Oma kinkyyttä saatetaan joskus hävetä tai piilotella, mikä voi aiheuttaa yksinäisyyden kokemuksia ja ahdistusta. Yhteisön löytäminen auttaa hyväksymään oman kinkyyden, mikä rikastaa arjen kokemusta ja parantaa elämänlaatua. Kinky voi olla arjesta irtautumista tai pysyvä osa arkea. Vaikka kinkyyn liittyvää stigmaa halutaan hälventää tuomalla esille kinkyn hyviä puolia, tietty salamyhkäisyys on osa sen viehätystä. Kinkyyn kuuluu tabuaiheilla leikittely, ja kinkyn parissa voikin toteutua turvallisesti se, mitä muussa arjessa halutaan välttää.

Tämä tutkimus osallistuu kansainvälisen tiedeyhteisön keskusteluun kinkystä identiteettinä ja elämäntapana ja käsittelee etnologiassa usein pohdittuja normatiivisuuden kulttuurisia kategorioita, sekä hyväksytyä että poikkeavaa. Kinky on epänormatiivinen ja usein väärinymmärretty ilmiö, joka kuitenkin on parhaimmillaan merkittävä ja positiivinen osa kokijansa identiteettiä ja arkielämää.

ASIASANAT: affekti, arki, bdsm, fetisismi, identiteetti, elämäntapa, etnografia, etnografinen fiktio, etnologia, kinky, kulttuurianalyysi, normatiivisuus, seksuaalisuus, stigma, yhteisö, yhteisöllisyys

Acknowledgements

Something I have learned during this research process is that research is not done alone. The researcher is surrounded by a multitude of people, who offer help and point towards new directions. When I first started, I remember worrying about whether my voice could even be heard in my text as peer reviewers, journal editors, and proofreaders suggested revisions to the content and language. After the initial shock, I am now grateful to all the people who have helped me transform my manuscripts into comprehensible and understandable research. Furthermore, the support from people – both in person and on social media – has pushed me forward and reminded me that my work is meaningful, even when much bigger things are happening in the world.

First, I want to thank the preliminary examiners of this dissertation, Laura Stark and Charlotta Carlström, the first of whom has also agreed to act as my opponent, for which I am most grateful.

A great big thank you to my supervisors, Professor of European Ethnology Helena Ruotsala, Professor of Information Studies and Interactive Media J. Tuomas Harviainen, and Associate Professor of Cultural Studies Aljoša Pužar. Helena already supervised my master's thesis on kink and everyday life and upon my graduation, she told me I would be welcome to continue my research at the Department of Ethnology if I wished to do so. I had this in mind when I sent Helena an email after a couple of years after graduating, saying that I would like to begin my doctoral research. Helena's support and faith in me have been a remarkable factor promoting my progress. When I was planning my bachelor's thesis, a friend introduced me to a person who had experience in kink research. This person was J. Tuomas Harviainen, who first lent me a massive pile of books and later talked me into conducting research for a PhD. J. Tuomas also became my supervisor and, I could say, academic mentor. I am grateful to J. Tuomas for all his support and advice during these years. Aljoša Pužar joined my team of supervisors a little bit later – after we had met at a conference in Turku. I am grateful to Aljoša for the unforgettable conference dinner and all the memes, but most of all, for his help during the final stages of my research and the fact that he forced me to read Foucault even though I had actively avoided doing so for a long time.

My journey to becoming a kink researcher thus began already during my bachelor's studies when I had the courage to suggest kink events as a topic for my BA thesis to my teacher Lecturer Timo J Virtanen. I would like to thank Timo for the open-mindedness with which he received my ideas. Perhaps Timo saw something new and refreshing in my work, because the Department of Ethnology also granted me the Ilmar Talve award for my bachelor's thesis. I am grateful for the support I received from Timo, Helena, and the staff of the whole department for my unusual choice of topic.

I would also like to thank all the editors of academic journals who saw the potential in my manuscripts and helped me transform them into journal articles. A massive special thank you to Tuula Juvonen, an editor of the *SQS* journal, for all the help and support with the first article of my dissertation. With Tuula's warm yet firm guidance, we managed to turn my ideas into a research article even when I believed that would never happen. A special thank you to Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and Pia Olsson for their valuable editorial work and support with my article manuscripts.

I would never have chosen to apply ethnographic fiction as a method in my research without the encouragement from other ethnologists. Therefore, I want to thank Maryam Adjam, who told me at a writing workshop in Seurasaaari, Helsinki, that I could do whatever I wanted with my dissertation – even use creative writing. I needed to hear this. Thank you also to Emilia Karjula, Kim Silow Kallenberg, and Jenny Ingridsson for familiarising me with and encouraging me in creative methods of writing. Because of these individuals, I realised a bit of creativity would be possible even in an academic context.

Thank you to the European Ethnology research seminar group and Slow Academy group for their peer support, valuable comments to my texts, and excellent company. Thank you to Katariina Kairavuo and other English language professionals who have made my texts more readable and academic in style.

I am grateful for the grants I received during this research process. I received three year-long grants from the Finnish Cultural Foundation and smaller grants from the Seurasaaari Foundation, the Department of Ethnology at the University of Turku, the Turku University Foundation, and the doctoral programme Juno. The Seurasaaari Foundation also granted me a scholarship for an office space, for which I am immensely grateful. Thank you to Aila Nieminen from the Seurasaaari Foundation and all my colleagues at the office during these years. A special thank you to my first office mate Inés Matres. Thank you also to my longest-standing office pals Tanja Mikkonen and Tytti Lehtovaara, with whom we developed the office into a work community and a peer support group, which I am sure I will miss later.

Thank you to all my friends who have been supportive and sympathetic during this research process. A special thank you to Taru Liski, the friend who introduced me to a person who became the supervisor of my dissertation. Thank you, Taru, for

making me believe in myself and my work even when it occasionally felt impossible and meaningless. My “Päivölä family”, that is, Paula, Jerna, Hanne, Anna, and Liisa – thank you all. Thank you to Kaarna, Pihla, Miia, Tiina, and Amanda, and all those who I have not mentioned here, but who have walked alongside me during these past years. A big thank you to my parents for supporting me and showing interest in my peculiar academic work.

And last, but definitely not least: thank you to all the Finnish kink associations and kinksters for your unapologetic existence and for supporting my research. A special thank you to Turun Baletti, the kink association at whose event the whole idea of this research was born, and which has supported me during my research on multiple occasions. A humongous thank you to all the kinksters who have participated in my research and shared their thoughts and experiences of their lives and kink with me. It has been of immeasurable value. Thank you!

Helsinki, 20 January 2023

Johanna Pohtinen

Kiitokset

Jos jotain olen väitöskirjan tekemisen aikana oppinut, niin sen, että tiedettä ei kukaan tee yksin. Mukana on valtava määrä ihmisiä auttamassa ja osoittamassa oikeisiin suuntiin. Alussa muistan miettineeni, että saako tässä omaa ääntään edes kuuluviin, kun vertaisarvioijat, toimituskunnat ja kielentarkastajat muokkasivat tekstin sisältöä ja kieltä. Vaikka tämä olikin alkuun shokki, nyt koen suurta kiitollisuutta kaikkia matkan varrella mukana olleita kohtaan. Te olette auttaneet muovaamaan teksteistäni ymmärrettävää tutkimusta. Läheisten tuki ja esimerkiksi sosiaalisessa mediassa tuntemattomiltakin saatu kannustus puolestaan ovat saaneet jatkamaan tutkimuksen tekemistä, vaikka se on toisinaan tuntunut toivottomalta tai jopa turhalta aikana, jolloin maailmassa tapahtuu isoja asioita.

Aivan ensin haluan kiittää esitarkastajiani Laura Starkia ja Charlotta Carlströmiä, joista ensin mainitulle olen kiitollinen myös vastaväittäjänäni toimimisesta.

Valtaisan suuri kiitos ohjaajilleni etnologian professori Helena Ruotsalalle, informaatiotutkimuksen ja interaktiivisen median professorille J. Tuomas Harviaiselle sekä kulttuurintutkimuksen apulaisprofessorille Aljoša Pužarille. Helena toimi ohjaajanani jo, kun tein gradua kinkystä ja arjesta. Gradun valmistuttua hän toivotti minut tervetulleeksi jatkamaan väitöskirjan parissa, mikäli niin haluaisin. Tämä toivotus minulla oli mielessä, kun sitten muutamaa vuotta myöhemmin kirjoitin Helenalle sähköpostiviestin, jossa kerroin haluavani aloittaa väitöstutkimuksen. Olen kiitollinen Helenan tuesta ja luotosta tekemiseeni, jotka ovat olleet merkittävä tekijä työni edistymisen kannalta. Tehdessäni kandidaatin tutkielmaa kinkybileistä ystäväni tutustutti minut henkilöön, jolla oli kinkytutkimustaustaa. Tämä henkilö oli J. Tuomas Harviainen, joka ensi alkuun lainasi minulle valtavan pinon tutkimuskirjallisuutta ja myöhemmin ylipuhui minut aloittamaan väitöskirjatutkimuksen. J. Tuomaksesta tuli myös väitöskirjani ohjaaja ja – voisi sanoa – akateeminen mentorini. J. Tuomaksella on siis ollut varsin merkittävä rooli sen kannalta, että tämä väitöskirja ylipäättään on olemassa. Olen kiitollinen J. Tuomakselle neuvoista ja tuesta kaikkien näiden vuosien aikana. Työn loppupuolella ohjaajajoukkoon liittyi myös Aljoša Pužar, johon tutustuin erään konferenssin illallisilla. Kiitos Aljošalle unohtumattoman riemukkaasta konferenssi-

illallisesta ja meemeistä, mutta erityisesti avusta ja kommenteista väitöskirjan viimeistelyvaiheessa sekä siitä, että hän laittoi minut lukemaan Foucault'ta, vaikka välttelin sitä viimeiseen asti.

Matkani kinkytutkijaksi alkoi siis jo kandidivaiheessa, kun uskalsin ehdottaa kandidaatintutkielmani aiheeksi kinkybileitä. Haluankin kiittää etnologian lehtori Timo J. Virtasta ennakkoluultomuudesta, jolla hän otti vastaan tämän epätavallisen aiheen. Kenties Timo näki myös kansatieteen uusia tuulia työssäni, sillä voitin oppiaineen myöntämän Ilmar Talve -palkinnon tutkielmallani. Timon, Helenan ja ylipäätään oppiaineen tuki tutkimusaiheelleni onkin ollut tärkeää ja ansaitsee kiitoksen.

Haluan myös kiittää erityisesti akateemisten julkaisujen toimittajia, jotka ovat uskoneet tekstieni mahdollisuuksiin ja niiden julkaisukelpoiseksi saattamiseen. Valtava erityiskiitos SQS-lehden silloiselle toimittajalle Tuula Juvoselle avusta ja tuesta väitöskirjani ensimmäisen artikkelini kanssa. Tuula jaksoi neuvoa ja opastaa lämpimän jämäkällä otteella ja valaa minuun uskoa, kun itse en tahtonut uskoa tekstistäni tulevan artikkelia laisinkaan. Kiitos myös Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto ja Pia Olsson toimitustyöstänne ja arvokkaasta avustanne artikkelieni kanssa.

En olisi ehkä koskaan uskaltanut käyttää työssäni yhtenä metodina etnografista fiktiota ilman muiden etnologioiden kannustusta. Kiitos siis Maryam Adjamille, joka totesi Helsingin ja Turun kansatieteilijöiden kirjoitustyöpajassa Seurasaarella, että omalle väitöskirjalle voi tehdä mitä haluaa – vaikka sitten kokeilla luovaa kirjoittamista. Kiitos myös Emilia Karjula, Kim Silow Kallenberg ja Jenny Ingridsson luovan kirjoittamisen metodeihin tutustuttamisesta ja kannustamisesta. Teidän ansiostanne tajusin, että se on mahdollista.

Kiitos etnologian tutkijaseminaarilaiset ja Slow Academy -porukka vertaistuesta, arvokkaista kommenteista teksteihini ja hyvästä seurasta. Kiitos myös entinen englantilaisen filologian opiskelutoverini Katariina Kairavuo ja muut englannin kielen ammattilaiset, jotka saattoivat työni kielen luettavaan ja akateemiseen muotoon.

Haluan myös kiittää tutkimustani taloudellisesti tukeneita tahoja. Työtäni rahoitti kolme kertaa vuoden mittaisen jakson ajan Suomen Kulttuurirahaston Keskusrahasto sekä Taru, Ilmari ja Pentti Mannisen rahasto. Pienemmin avustuksin työskentelyäni ovat tukeneet Seurasaarisäätiön Emil ja Lempi Hietasen rahasto, Turun yliopiston etnologian oppiaine, Turun yliopistosäätiö sekä tohtoriohjelma Juno. Seurasaarisäätiön Emil ja Lempi Hietasen rahasto on lisäksi myöntänyt minulle tutkijahuonestipendin, josta olen valtavan kiitollinen. Kiitokset myös Seurasaarisäätiön Aila Niemiselle sekä kaikille työhuonekavereille vuosien varrella. Erityiskiitos ensimmäiselle työhuonekaverilleni Inés Matresille. Kiitokset myös viimeisimmille ja pitkäaikaisimmille työhuonekavereilleni Tanja Mikkoselle ja Tytti

Lehtovaaralle, joiden kanssa Viipurinkadun tutkijahuoneistosta muotoutui työyhteisö ja vertaistukiryhmä, jota tulen taatusti ikävöimään.

Kiitos ystäväilleni myötäelämisestä väitöskirjaprosessin aikana. Erityisesti kiitos Taru Liskille, joka kandityötäni tehdessäni esitteli minulle henkilön, josta tuli myöhemmin väitöskirjani ohjaaja. Kiitos kun valoit minuun uskoa silloinkin, kun tutkimuksen tekeminen tuntui hyödyttömältä ja merkityksettömältä. ”Päivölä-perhe” eli Paula, Jerna, Hanne, Anna ja Liisa – kiitos teille kaikille. Kiitos myös Kaarna, Pihla, Miia, Tiina ja Amanda sekä ne ystävät, joita en tässä erikseen maininnut mutta jotka ovat kulkeneet mukana väikkärimatkani aikana. Kiitos tietenkin myös vanhemmilleni tuesta, tsemppaamisesta ja kiinnostuksesta omituiseen akateemiseen työhöni.

Lopuksi vielä suuri kiitos suomalaisille kinky-yhdistyksille ja kinkyille anteeksipyytelemättömästä olemassaolostanne ja työni tukemisesta. Kiitos erityisesti Turun Baletille, jonka bileissä ajatus tutkimuksesta sai alkunsa ja joka on yhdistyksenä tukenut tutkimukseni tekoa pitkin matkaa. Valtaisan suuri kiitos myös kaikille niille kinkyille, jotka ovat ottaneet osaa tutkimukseeni ja nähneet sen vaivan, että ovat jakaneet omia ajatuksiaan elämästään ja kinkyystään kanssani. Se on ollut mittaamattoman arvokasta. Kiitos!

Helsingissä, 20.1.2023

Johanna Pohtinen

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications:

- I Pohtinen, Johanna. Creating a Feeling of Belonging. Solidarity in Finnish Kink Communities. *SQS Journal: Queer affects*, 2017; 10(1–2), 21–34.
Available online: <https://journal.fi/sqs/article/view/63645>
- II Pohtinen, Johanna. From Secrecy to Pride: Negotiating the Kink Identity, Normativity, and Stigma. *Ethnologia Fennica*, 2019; 46, 84–108.
Available online: <https://journal.fi/ethnolfenn/article/view/74306>
- III Pohtinen, Johanna and Harviainen, J. Tuomas. ‘Even with all this, I could not live without kinkiness’. Kinky Understandings of Everyday Life. *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 2020; 51, 136–152.
Available online: <https://kga.bokorder.se/en-us/article/4333/ethnologia-scandinavica-2021>
- IV Pohtinen, Johanna. Constructing affective atmospheres at home: The materiality and meaningful objects of kink. In *Reconstructing Home: Affective Materiality and Atmospheres of Belonging*, edited by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Viktorija Čeginskas, Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro, and Anna Kajander. Berghahn, EASA Series. [Forthcoming.]

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1 Introduction

Background and previous research

My interest in researching kink was sparked by the kink events I attended in my early twenties. In my research, I have employed the concept of *kink* because it is used in the Finnish kink community. This concept can be used as either a noun or an adjective, but in this study, I mainly use it as a noun. *Kinky* is the adjective form of the concept, yet it can also be used as a noun. (I will discuss the semantics of the concept in more detail later in this section.) For me, the concept of kink originally formed around what I encountered at the kink events, and which kinks I saw at them. Therefore, I use kink as an umbrella term including for example BDSM (i.e., practices pertaining to the consensual use of restraint, pain, and power play), fetishism, role play, and exhibitionism. While no one definition of kink exists (e.g., Fennell 2022, 52) or is even possible, I here understand all kink as being, by default, consensual and based on mutual agreement and discussions. Furthermore, as an umbrella concept, kink denotes various *non-normative* practices and desires that often, but not always, have to do with sex or have an erotic nature (e.g., Harviainen 2015a, 424).

After attending kink events, I became an active member of the local kink association, Turun BDSM yhdistys ry, or more commonly known as Turun Baletti, in my then hometown of Turku for a couple of years. I took part in organising kink events and attended board meetings. Around 2012, I became less active in the kink scene, apart from infrequent visits to events around Finland. During those years, depictions of kink also began to emerge more frequently in pop culture, including music videos and books, and they often presented kink as a flamboyant or dark aesthetic and typically as not consensual. The kink I encountered at kink events, however, did not merely resemble such pop culture aesthetics or acts but rather seemed more meaningful for the individuals (although the flamboyant aspects tend to be present at kink events as well). As the atmosphere at the events seemed to welcome various kinks and individuals, I realised how misunderstood the phenomenon of kink often was. Furthermore, as an aspiring ethnologist, I felt the kink community would be an interesting phenomenon to investigate ethnographically. I wanted to delve into research on kink in order to present it in the

light it deserved: as an everyday life phenomenon important to individuals in various ways. Consequently, both my bachelor's and master's theses were studies on the kink community.

While kink has been depicted in pop culture – though often in a not-so-favourable light – the atmosphere surrounding kink in Finnish society has changed to some extent during my research process. In 2011, sadomasochism and fetishism, as well as transvestism, were removed from the Finnish edition of the International Classification of Diseases, ICD-10, which is maintained by the World Health Organization. This removal had been done in Denmark in 1995, in Sweden in 2009, and in Norway in 2010. In Finland, sadomasochism and fetishism were therefore considered clinically diagnosable disorders until 2011. Even though such diagnoses were probably not applied in the years (or perhaps decades) preceding the removal, the classification may have affected medical professionals' beliefs and attitudes about kink as well as the general atmosphere in society regarding kink. Kink is still stigmatised to a certain extent, but in general, kinksters as a group cannot be said to experience oppression in the manner that other sexual minorities have experienced, or continue to experience, oppression.

The stigma pertains to the ideas of *normal* and *normativity*. In relation to sexuality, normativity typically concerns the idea of morally “good sex”, which can be defined as mutually satisfying, socially approved, and occurring between two consenting adults (Kulick 2005, 208; McWhorter 2009, 258). Anything that deviates from this, such as kink, may be considered non-normative or a form of “bad sex” and is attached with stigma (Kulick 2005, 206; Rubin [1984] 1994, 151). In more conservative environments, the norms may be even tighter. Furthermore, what is considered normative or deviant depends on the context: sexual desires can be understood as cultural products of a specific time and place (Foucault 1978, 105–106; Rubin [1984] 1994, 143). Certain forms of sexuality thus have a non-normative status at this specific point in time and in this specific culture in which we live and which we ourselves reproduce and create.

Consequently, in our current society, kink is still often considered unconventional, morally bad, or undesirable since it may seem non-consensual and includes facets such as inflicting pain, restraint, or dominance, which are not considered normative and “good sex”. This idea of good and “normal” sexuality is created through a normalising power which exists in a normalising society, where everything is understood as either normal or a deviation from it (Foucault 1995, passim; McWhorter 2014, 318). Rather than by obeying orders, this normativity is reproduced by *conforming* to the norms and by the desire to be part of the normative society, that is, on the side of what is understood as good and normal (McWhorter 2009, 48). However, the normative only exists in relation to the deviant. The deviant is needed so that it can be juxtaposed with the normative to establish and maintain

the norms. For example, kink is needed for *vanilla* (i.e., not kinky; normative desires and practices) to exist as the norm. Subtle mechanisms of power and control create the social sanctions that maintain the stigmatised sexualities (Custer 2014, 450–451; Foucault 1995, 185, 304; McWhorter 2014, 316, 320; Taylor 2014, 3–5).

Individuals with stigmatised identities may find solace in resisting the norms together (McWhorter 2014, 319). Community is thus important for kinky individuals in alleviating the shame and loneliness that may accompany individuals with non-normative identities and desires. My research is centred around the Finnish kink community. Here I understand community not only as the registered kink associations and the online spaces, but also as the knowledge of other kinky individuals' existence, which creates a sense of belonging. My research material was collected in Finland and is thus geographically situated in Finland. My aim is not to compare the Finnish kink community to kink communities in other countries, or to present the Finnish kink community as entirely distinct from those in other countries. Therefore, my research is not comparative by default. Furthermore, my aim is not to give an all-encompassing description of Finnish kink, either, but rather to shed light on the understandings individuals have of kink and the meanings they attach to it. In a temporal sense, this research focuses on our current times. I do not delve into the historical aspects of kink in Finland, nor do I ponder the future – even though the history of kink in Finland could be an interesting topic for further research. A historical perspective would also highlight the gay and lesbian scenes, which were essential in facilitating the birth of the predominantly heterosexual kink scene as well. In what follows, I move on to discuss the definition of kink as well as the sexuality and kink research that has been conducted in Finland and elsewhere. My review of literature is not exhaustive but presents examples of studies that have affected my research.

Defining the concept: From sadomasochism to kink

No general definition of kink exists, but in my research, I have chosen the concept of *kink* as a tool to describe practices, behaviours, and desires that are usually considered non-normative, and that often, but not always, are erotic or sexual in nature. Since kink is a somewhat fuzzy concept, I have attempted to visualise my conceptualisation in Figure 1 below. Kink here functions as an umbrella concept and a continuum: kink may be an additional spice to an otherwise normative sex life, it may involve hobby-like qualities, or it can be a lifestyle. Kinkiness consists of multiple *kinks*, including, but not limited to, BDSM and fetishism, which I will elaborate on in this section. These various kinks may not have anything in common with each other, but what fundamentally defines all forms of kink is consensuality, risk-awareness, mutual willingness, and communication. Furthermore, *kinky* is a

concept that has arisen from within the kink community as a concept of self-identification rather than a label given to someone else (cf., labelling someone as a *pervert* is typically used to insult them) (Fennell 2022, 5). Kink or kinky may thus be an identity signifier or a sexual identity, which may be more significant than a sexual identity based on gender preference (Mains 1984, 20–21; Simula 2015, 171). In other words, to some individuals the right kind of kinkiness is more important than their partner’s gender (Mains 1984, 172–173; Simula 2015, 173–174). However, what is considered kinky fluctuates as different things are considered taboo in different times and in different societies (Fennell 2022, 25). For example, today the enjoyment of flogging is probably considered kinky, whereas the use of vibrators generally is not (Fennell 2022, 27). Furthermore, not all kinky acts carry the same connotation of kinkiness for all individuals (Harviainen 2015a, 424–425). For example, someone who enjoys consensual spanking might not consider it, or themselves, kinky. Similarly, for some individuals, anal sex or fisting may be kinky acts, whereas for others, they are *vanilla* (i.e., not kinky).

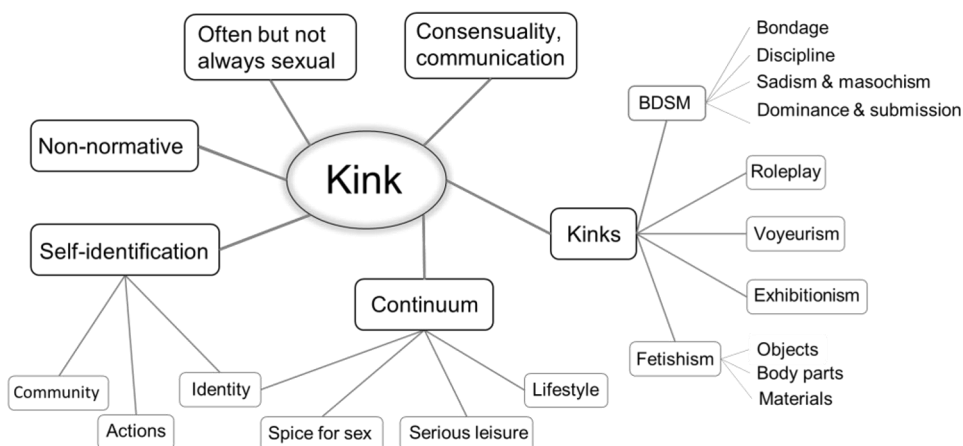


Figure 1. Kink has a multitude of meanings for different individuals and in different contexts. This visualisation is not exhaustive.

Kink is a relatively new concept in research, but there is a long history of language surrounding kink and its scholarly research that goes back 200 years (in the Western world). The earliest of such concepts were sadism and masochism. Today, *sadism* is used to denote the pleasure of inflicting consensual pain, and *masochism* is understood as the pleasure of receiving pain. These concepts were, however, coined to refer to psychopathologies by psychiatrist and sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his prominent work *Psychopatia Sexualis* in 1886 (Krafft-Ebing [1886] 1965). Krafft-Ebing derived the concept of sadism from the last name of the

author Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), whose erotic and pornographic writings such as *Justine, or, the Misfortunes of Virtue* included depictions of inflicting pain and violence in a sexual, and typically non-consensual, context (e.g., Sade [1791] 2013). The concept of masochism Krafft-Ebing derived from the author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–1895), whose perhaps best-known work, *Venus in Furs*, is a story of a man who wants to be dominated by a woman (Sacher-Masoch [1870] 2000; see also Weinberg 2006). In 1984, ethnographer Geoff Mains blamed Marquis de Sade for denigrating sadomasochism as something non-consensual, brutal, and evil (Mains 1984, 32), even though it was Krafft-Ebing who presented the concepts as pathologies. Moreover, literary scholar Suzanne R. Stewart (1998, 60–61) has pointed out how Krafft-Ebing could have named these pathologies after himself as is typically done with new findings in science. Perhaps due to the gravity of these pathologies, Krafft-Ebing chose otherwise.

Sigmund Freud connected the concepts of sadism and masochism by arguing that the two were merely an active and passive form of a singular phenomenon (Freud [1905] 1962, 23–26). *Sadomasochism* has since then been abbreviated to *SM*, *S/M* or *S&M* in both research and popular contexts, yet sadism and masochism are now viewed as connected yet separate entities. In research, and perhaps in kink communities as well, SM has historically been an umbrella concept that includes various kink practices (e.g., Alison et al. 2001, 1–2). More recently, however, SM has been specified to refer particularly to practices that have to do with consensual pain. Consequently, SM is separate from another acronym in kink, *Ds*, which denotes *Dominance* and *submission* and which refers to acts involving power play that do not necessarily include pain. Moreover, SM and Ds are now also distinguished from other aspects of kink, such as bondage, restraint, and discipline as well. To encompass all these concepts, the acronym *BDSM* was coined in early-1990s online environments (Newmahr 2011, 18–19; OED 2013). For instance, in Jay Wiseman’s 1996 book *SM 101: A Realistic Introduction*, BDSM is introduced as a new concept that is “rapidly gaining currency” (Wiseman 1996, 11). Wiseman defines BDSM as it is defined today in both lay and scholarly contexts: it consists of the concepts of bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism (Wiseman 1996, 11).

In her book *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy*, ethnographer and sociologist Staci Newmahr (2011, 18) mentions that in the kink community, SM and BDSM are used alongside each other, whereas kink is less common. However, in the notes she corrects herself by stating further that, by the time her book has gone to press, the concept of kink has gained significant popularity in the community, and that kink might, in fact, no longer be less common than BDSM or SM (Newmahr 2011, 206). In her research, Newmahr uses the concept of SM

instead of BDSM: she explains the choice with the familiarity of SM among all kinksters and adds that for her, SM is an umbrella concept which also includes bondage, discipline, dominance, and submission (Newmahr 2011, 18–19). In scholarly contexts, sadomasochism has been used until quite recently (e.g., Ambler et al. 2017), although BDSM is gaining popularity. Kink, however, has been used to a lesser extent.

According to Julie Fennell (2022, 5), the infrequent use of the concept of kink in research pertains to the fact that researchers are scared of the term and therefore stick to the medicalised SM. Fennell further suggests that kinky is a concept used by the community members themselves (ibid.). The concepts of kinky and kink are widely used in the Finnish kink community as well. For example, the first Finnish kink organisation, which was formed in Helsinki in 1991, was called Kinky Club. Alongside kinky, the concept of *pervo* (Finnish for *perv*) is also often used in the Finnish kink community, typically in a playful manner. However, as it derives from the pathological terms meaning *perverse* and *perversion*, *pervo* carries pejorative connotations outside the kink community and is therefore only used among those belonging the community. Kink is a concept that community members use of themselves, which is a major reason why I have chosen to employ kink in my research instead of BDSM, for example. In addition, there are two more factors behind my choice to use kink to describe this phenomenon.

One factor is inclusivity. When I took my first steps into the ethnographic observation of Finnish kink events as a student of ethnology, I noticed how the events had a multitude of different kinks present. Therefore, it has been important for me to be inclusive in my terminology. I see kink as the ultimate umbrella concept – even though SM and BDSM have traditionally been used as umbrella concepts encompassing all kinks and kinksters. The problem with these acronyms is, however, that they leave many kinks implicit, which makes many individuals feel unseen. While it is implied that BDSM includes, for instance, fetishism, role play, voyeurism, and exhibitionism the acronym BDSM explicitly does *not* include them. Kink, as a concept, may be far from perfect, but I find it rather more inclusive and malleable as a concept than BDSM. Brandy L. Simula also notes that kink is a broader category than BDSM and argues that kink is a definition for “non-normative sexuality” in general (Simula 2015, 167). As a concept, kink could thus include aspects that are not necessarily covered by the concept of BDSM, including strap-on sex, fisting, roleplay, and fetishism (ibid.).

Another factor behind employing kink rather than BDSM is that kinky, or its derivative *kinkster*, can be used as an identity signifier. The use of kinky in this sense is more eloquent than *BDSM practitioner*, which is a concept often employed in kink research to refer to kinky individuals. *BDSM practitioner*, however, denotes a person who actively engages in BDSM acts. For Newmahr, for instance, SM is largely based

on interactions between people, which excludes autoeroticism, among other things (Newmahr 2011, 18). However, not all who relate to the kink community necessarily *practise* BDSM or always practise it with other people. A fetishist might enjoy certain materials or items of clothing on their own, a *shibari* enthusiast might practise rope tying on themselves, or a submissive inherently knows they are sexually submissive without currently engaging in a power dynamic. Even though these individuals do not practise kink as per Newmahr's definition, they would nevertheless qualify as kinky individuals or kinksters.

The etymology of the noun "kink" and the adjective "kinky" is straightforwardly related to the idea of aberration from the usual: initially a 17th-century Dutch, French, and Swedish nautical term describing a twist in the rope, it was semantically extended to describe a "twist" in mental processes, as confirmed in early-19th-century American English, and finally, from the mid-20th century, to describe sexual difference or transgression from the norm (Harper 2019).

Semantically speaking, in Finnish, *kinky* is employed as a noun rather than an adjective. For example, the statement "I am kinky" denotes an individual's identification as a kinkster or their sexual identity rather than their characteristics or qualities as a person (see also Fennell 2022, 31). However, outside my research context or academic discussion in general, *kinky* still carries the connotations of a specific kind of sex (Newmahr 2010, 314, 316). Typically, it may mean a wild, naughty, or racy type of sex or person. Using kinky merely as a descriptive signifier before nouns may thus connote certain kinds of behaviours, which might be stereotypical and to some extent even false. In this study, kinkiness must therefore not be understood merely as an adjective since kink is a phenomenon in its own right and does not necessarily have anything to do with sex. Consequently, when referring to persons, I refer to *kinksters*, *kinky-identified individuals*, or *kinky individuals*. In the same vein, the community I discuss here is a *kink* community rather than a *kinky* community. Thus, I use *kink* rather than *kinky* as a signifier for this phenomenon: I am not merely discussing acts, desires, or kinky characteristics, but rather a more substantial phenomenon.

I have hopefully clarified the definition of kink in the context of my research. However, I do not propose kink to become a term for general use. When referring to BDSM or specific fetishes, for example, I find it important to refer to those specific phenomena. For example, when discussing specifically sadomasochism, I would suggest the appropriate concept to use would be sadomasochism rather than the concept of kink. Because kink connotes certain kinds of sex or behaviour, I would also advise discretion in its use. Rather than adopting kink as a general term for all related discussions, I apply kink and its derivatives here as a tool to conceptualise my understanding of the phenomenon in the context of this particular research. That said, I must note that my use of the concept of kink in the research articles is

inconsistent: for instance, in my first article, I discussed “kinky sexuality” but later realised how it undermines the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. This, however, pertains to the development of my thought process during my research. I will elaborate on this further in Chapter 4: Articles and reflections.

Other kink-related concepts

In contrast to kink, the concept of *vanilla* is used to refer to a person, relationship, or type of sex that is not kinky. This concept has historically had pejorative connotations, but it has recently come to be used as an easy way of distinguishing kinksters from the non-kinky. Aspa Chalkidou (2020, 9) conceptualises vanilla as the naturalisation of the power dynamic of a relationship which reinforces male dominance and heterosexuality and is perceived as “normal”. Within kink, on the other hand, these power dynamics are negotiated and consensual. As a concept, vanilla pertains to the knowledge production that needs kink as its counterpart in a similar manner to how normalcy needs deviance to remain normal (Taylor 2014, 3–5). Vanilla is normative only as long as it is reflected in kink. Thus, not all normative sex is necessarily vanilla – only that which is seen in relation to kink.

Consent and *consensuality* define kink most fundamentally. Without the consent of all participants, the things that happen in kink play would often be abuse. Even though some kinky acts might seem violent or dangerous, the intention is to respect the boundaries set by the play participants and not to harm anyone. (Fennell 2022, 159.) Whatever occurs in kink is negotiated beforehand so that the participants can give their informed consent.

Play, *play session*, or *session* refers to the practice of kink and, usually more specifically, BDSM. Practising kink such as spanking is typically called *playing* (Fin. *leikkiminen*). However, playing is not a concept merely used to describe kink practices since it can denote sexual activity in general (e.g., Paasonen 2018, 1). In Finnish, *session* (Fin. *sessio*) is perhaps the most common term for the consensual act of practising BDSM or other forms of kink for an agreed period of time. In English, however, the concept of *scene* is typically used when referring to what in Finnish would be called a session (e.g., Finnish *bondage-sessio* would be called *bondage scene* in English). *Scene* can also be used to denote the community in both English and in Finnish (i.e., *kink scene* and *kinkyskene*). A kink play session may entail anything that is agreed beforehand by the participants: it may include, but is not limited to, various physical sensations that may range from gentle touch to tickling or pain, dominance and submission, humiliation, role play, acts of service, engaging in fetishes, or anything that the participants desire and decide to pursue. During play sessions, a *safe word* is typically used, which means that the scene or ongoing action is immediately paused or stopped if a certain word (e.g., “red” as in

traffic lights) is uttered or a specific gesture (e.g., tapping with hand) is made. The final part of the session is *aftercare*, during which the participants recuperate from the play session and return to the present moment from the figurative *play space*. This can be achieved by taking care of the physical and mental welfare of the participants, for example, by cuddling or discussing the scene (e.g., Fennell 2022, 192–193; Newmahr 2011, 76). Aftercare serves as a transition from the roles and dynamics of the play session to the participants' ordinary life.

In kink, *role play* often, but not necessarily, includes some form of power play between the partners and typically draws on taboo subjects. Role play may include age play (e.g., Daddy Dom and little girl), pet play (e.g., puppy and Owner), or gender play (e.g., sissy boy), or it may make use of environments such as school, hospital, or the military. Role play may also include a power dynamic with dominant and submissive roles.

In kink play sessions, specific terms of address are typically used. These are negotiated between the partners, and individuals may have preferences according to the type of relationship or session, or their overall kink identity. Some examples of terms used for the submissive partner include *bottom*, *sub*, *slave*, *pet*, *boy*, *girl*, *toy*, or *rope bunny*. Those for the dominant partner include *top*, *Master*, *Madam*, *Dom*, *Domme*, *Owner*, or *rigger*. In Ds relationships, dominance may be indicated with the use of capitalisation, as I have also done in my ethnography.

Bondage may denote any form of restraint with various devices such as hand cuffs, chains, or ropes. The more artistic forms of tying with ropes that originate from Japan are called *shibari* and *kinbaku*. These forms of bondage are often seen as aesthetically pleasing. The person tied up in a rope scene is sometimes called a *rope bottom* or a *rope bunny*, and the person doing the tying is typically called a *rigger*.

Fetishism is the fascination with and objectification of materials, body parts, and objects, for example. Fetishes may increase sexual pleasure, or they may be sources of positive affect (i.e., of feeling good but not necessarily being able to express why). Examples of fetishes mentioned in my research material included latex outfits, and jute and hemp ropes. Sometimes sadomasochism is regarded as a fetish, but I would like to distinguish between these two and consider them separate phenomena. Nevertheless, the word fetish is present in the names of kink events, which are often called *fetish clubs* in Finland.

The desire to peep or look at others is called *voyeurism*, whereas *exhibitionism* is the desire to be viewed or looked at. These can be seen to occur consensually at kink events, at which people may be dressed in revealing or fetish outfits or engage in kink play with other participants.

Leather (as in *Leathersex* or *Leather dyke*) is a concept that has historically been used as a euphemism for queer sadomasochism and is still used today to refer to queer or gay kink (see, e.g., Kamel 1980). In Finland, Leather is mainly employed

by the gay kink community, MSC Finland – Tom’s Club, and is not a widely used concept in the kink community that is the subject of this research.

Quantitative research on kink

Internationally, ever since Krafft-Ebing in 1886 introduced sadism and masochism as sexual pathologies involving the infliction and enjoyment of pain, scholarly studies have been published on kink. Quantitative studies have typically focused on the well-being of kinky individuals and their psychological characteristics (e.g., Ambler et al. 2017; Wismeijer & van Assen 2013). For instance, psychology scholars Andreas Wismeijer and Marcel van Assen (2013, 1949) found in their study that people involved in kink (902 participants) were generally less neurotic and less sensitive to rejection and “had higher subjective well-being” than the control group of non-kinky individuals (434 participants). This study conducted in the Netherlands also established that BDSM desires were not associated with previous traumatic experience (Wismeijer & van Assen 2013, 1951). Similar results have also been obtained in Finnish studies on kink with quantitative data. Niklas Nordling studied male sadomasochism, both homosexual and heterosexual, for his PhD dissertation in the field of psychology (Nordling 2009). He observed that sadomasochists were “socially well adjusted”, which indicated that sadomasochists did not display psychopathological traits (Nordling 2009, 41). In 2020, a quantitative master’s thesis in psychology, which was later developed into a research article, mapped the BDSM interests and personality characteristics of BDSM practitioners and was based on extensive data (Paarnio 2020; Paarnio et al. 2022). This research showed an increase in the acceptance and practice of kink among the Finnish population. It also highlighted that the personality traits of kinksters did not differ from those of the general population.

The increase in the acceptance of and interest in non-normative sexuality has also been witnessed in the FINSEX research, which maps the sexual habits of Finnish people. FINSEX has been conducted since 1971 by the Family Federation of Finland¹, and the latest data were gathered in 2015 with 6,000 participants. However, the research can be criticised for its outdated questions, which have not been revised to better suit modern understandings of sexuality and gender. For example, the research questions ask what is considered “perverse” (with sadomasochism rated highest by the participants), to what extent consensual sadomasochism is “accepted”, and whether people have tried bondage or

¹ The Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto) provides research, advocacy and services pertaining to relationships and sexuality with a focus on the well-being of families.

sadomasochism (The Family Federation of Finland 2021). The questions themselves reflect certain attitudes towards these sexual desires and behaviours and thus affect the results and the way they are then interpreted and understood. For example, the word “acceptance” and the “trying” of bondage suggest an assumption that no one actually practises them regularly. However, the purpose of FINSEX is to compare the research results obtained over the years, which explains why changes have not been made to the questions.

Qualitative research on kink

While the quantitative results are important in mapping certain aspects of the kink phenomenon, qualitative research offers deeper nuances to the discussion. These nuances typically concern the experiences and understandings of kinksters themselves. In Finland, ethnological studies have covered sexual behaviour mostly in agrarian contexts. The romancing habits and gender norms of agrarian society have typically been discussed from the perspective of what was or was not normative or accepted, such as extramarital affairs (see, e.g., Löfström 1999; Pohjola-Vilkuna 1995; Sarmela 1981). Even though ethnological discussions have shifted towards contemporary everyday life, kink as such has not previously been discussed in the field of ethnology in Finland. The first Finnish kink-themed publication, which was a mix between a non-fiction handbook and academic ethnography, was Auli Kaartinen and Anna-Kaarina Kippola’s book on mostly lesbian sadomasochism published in 1990. It was contemporaneous with international research on the male gay sadomasochist scene in the United States conducted, for example, by sociologist and ethnographer G. W. Levi Kamel (1980) and ethnographer Geoff Mains (1984), as well as with another book on lesbian sadomasochism published by Samois, a US-based lesbian BDSM organisation, in 1981. In the same vein as Kamel and Mains, Kaartinen and Kippola aimed to present sadomasochism as a healthy form of sexuality and to dispel the stigma around it (Kaartinen & Kippola 1990). Following in the footsteps of Samois, a Finnish anarchist lesbian group Extäasi-ryhmä also published a book on lesbian sadomasochism in 1989. For them, sadomasochism represented anarchy and a radical non-conformity to the hetero norm.

Based on similar premises – an understanding of kink as healthy behaviour and as essentially a social phenomenon – numerous ethnographic analyses of kink have been published in the field of social sciences internationally and especially in the United States (e.g., Brodsky 1993; Fennell 2022; Mains 1984; Newmahr 2010; Simula 2019; Weiss 2011). In addition to social sciences, kink has also been studied in cultural and media studies (e.g., Wignall 2017) as well as gender and sexuality studies (e.g., Martinez 2015; Stryker 2008). Even though kink research is largely conducted in the United States, there are also European qualitative studies on kink.

To mention a few examples, BDSM has been discussed by gender studies scholar Aspa Chalkidou in Greece (2015; 2020), by social science researcher Laura Zambelli in Italy (e.g., 2017), and by Charlotta Carlström in Sweden (e.g., 2018; 2019b). Both Zambelli and Carlström have also pondered the relationship between feminism and BDSM (Zambelli 2016; Carlström 2017). Likewise, in the United Kingdom, Ani Ritchie and Meg Barker (2005) have discussed the relationship between SM and feminism. Social work and gender studies scholar Robin Bauer has conducted research on the queer BDSM community in Germany (2014). These are only a few examples of existing research on kink in Europe, the amount of which has increased immensely during my years of involvement in this field. In Finland, qualitative research on kink has been conducted by information scientist J. Tuomas Harviainen, who has delved into the stigma avoidance strategies of sadomasochists and the narratives and information literacies in sadomasochist play sessions (Harviainen 2015a; 2015b). In the field of musicology, Anna-Elena Pääkkölä (2016) has introduced the notion of “kink listening” in her PhD dissertation on sadomasochism in music. Furthermore, media and sexuality scholar Susanna Paasonen has touched upon kink themes in her research (e.g., Paasonen 2018).

Relationship between my research and previous research

Previous studies have to a large extent aimed to dispel the stigma attached to kink. I have mentioned the quantitative evidence indicating that kinky-identified individuals are on the whole doing well regardless of being stigmatised. I have also noted the ethnographies on the communities and relationships, kink and gender roles, and the different meanings of kink. Along similar lines, my research aims to further dispel the stigma by describing the meanings kink has for individuals and discussing how kink is experienced in everyday life. Previous research has not delved exhaustively into the mundane aspects of kink, which is a discussion I hope to contribute to. Although more studies on kink in Finland seem to be emerging, I provide an ethnologist’s perspective through qualitative and hermeneutic analysis, that is, an in-depth understanding of the kink phenomenon through individuals’ experiences. My study presents kink as mundane but also as something that makes individuals’ everyday life experience more exciting, elevated, and worth living. By discussing everyday lived experience and the affectivity of kink, I attempt to bring a new nuance to the discussion of kink and the understanding of kinky individuals.

Objective and research questions

Human motivation is at least in part based on feeling good. Feeling good is addictive and animal, as well as human. And feeling good, although not limited to these, is inexorably tied to basic functions (Mains 1984, 113).

Above Geoff Mains writes about the essence of kink, which is about feeling good, but which penetrates the “basic functions” as well. Kink is thus a source of positive experiences, emotions, and feelings, but furthermore, it cannot be separated from everyday life experience. Moreover, individuals mould their everyday lives to make themselves feel good (Jokinen 2005, 160; Pink et al. 2015, *passim*). If one has kink desires, to feel good in life often requires those desires to be fulfilled (Pohtinen & Harviainen 2021, 139–141). However, since kink is stigmatised, individuals may keep their desires hidden from others or even renounce their kinkiness altogether. My aim in this research has been to explore how kinky individuals navigate the stigma to feel good in their everyday lives. Furthermore, from the very start, my research interest has been in the many meanings that kink holds for different individuals. To explore these meanings in the field of ethnology, I find feelings, emotions, community, and everyday life as the domains in which these meanings are actualised and created.

My main research questions are:

- What is the relationship between kink and everyday life?
- In what ways are affects related to kink?
- How are community and belonging important for kinky individuals?

In this research, I thus explore kink as an affective experience, as belonging, and as everyday life. By affect, I mean the embodied sensations that are typically *felt* in the body and may then be formulated into language as feelings or emotions (see Chapter 2: Theory and concepts). In the first article, I discuss how a feeling of belonging is created in the kink community with special regard to events. In the second article, I explore how kink identity is constructed and negotiated with respect to normativity and stigma, and how affects are related to these negotiations. In the third article, I ask how kink shows in the everyday life of kinky individuals. In the final article, I continue with the discussion of how kink shows in everyday life; however, I explore everyday life through kink materialities and their affective qualities for kinky individuals. By answering these questions in the context of the Finnish kink community, I hope to increase our understanding of kink, as well as of human sexuality. For example, stigma avoidance and hiding one’s sexual identity are explicitly present in kink but can be witnessed in the larger society as well. By exploring how kink is understood, experienced, and felt, and how kinksters navigate

stigma, it is possible to learn how people in general create understandings of their desires, ways of life, and sexual identities. Furthermore, I want to explore how kink enhances and pertains to the well-being of individuals' lives, and how it exists as a mundane part of everyday life.

2 Theory and concepts

In this section, I will introduce the key theoretical concepts of my research. Through these concepts, I also present the theoretical background of my work and the literature on which my analyses are based.

Community and belonging

Newmahr (2010, 317) pointed out in 2010:

[W]e have little information about the experiences of people who participate in SM contemporary communities, and SM has not been theorized outside of the paradigm of sexuality.

Luckily, since this, more research on individuals involved in kink communities has emerged, and nuanced understandings of kink have been produced (e.g., Carlström 2017; 2019a; Fennell 2022). The studies on kink communities have typically been conducted among specific face-to-face or online communities (e.g., Mains 1984; Brodsky 1993; Newmahr 2011; Wignall 2017). In my research, however, the kink community may also mean a larger, more abstract, entity.

The kink community can be seen to be actualised on two levels. First, there are local face-to-face communities, which in Finland are typically registered associations that organise various types of kink events and collect membership fees. Second, there is a global kink community, which, in its most abstract form, is actualised as the mere knowledge that other kinksters exist. Both create a sense of belonging. Both also use online spaces as their means of bonding. Online spaces are valuable on their own, but they can also function as catalysts for face-to-face meetings (Pohtinen 2017, 25). The kink community, whether local, global, or online, serves as an important place for sharing knowledge and skills, meeting like-minded people, and creating a sense of self through the feeling of belonging. A feeling of belonging is considered important for individuals' well-being in general (Hudson 2015, 27–28; Hughes & Hammack 2019, 163). Mains observes that some kinksters find most affinity with other kinksters and feel most at ease with each other (Mains

1984, 81). In the kink community, individuals often have a sense of belonging even if they are not involved in any face-to-face communities. This belonging may be fostered through online platforms or the mere knowledge that other kinksters exist. Kink communities can thus be seen as “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991, 6) as they are too vast for all the members to personally know or meet each other yet provide a feeling of belonging.

The Finnish local-level kink community which I discuss here consists to a large extent of kink communities registered as associations. In Finland (similarly to the US), the vanguard of kink communities has been the gay male kink community, which is usually called the “Leather” community (e.g., Kamel 1980). For example, MSC Finland – Tom’s Club has existed since the 1970s, catering for the Leather community. Finnish kink associations for lesbians and heterosexuals began to emerge in the early 1990s. At the time of writing, there currently are eight registered kink associations in Finland dedicated to the “pansexual” crowd. Kink communities have been called pansexual since they aim to cater for “various gender and sexual orientations” (Weiss 2011, vii). No specifically queer kink associations exist – apart from Tom’s Club – even though the existing associations are sometimes seen as too straight and cis-normative² for sexual or gender minorities. Therefore, there is a need for a queer kink community, and a queer kink scene is perhaps slowly emerging as an entity of its own.

The Finnish kink associations create a special kink community because they bring together various forms of kinks and kinksters together on a non-profit and volunteer basis. The associations and their events aim to cater for everyone, and there are no separate associations, for instance, for latex fetishists or age players. Furthermore, only a few specifically kink or BDSM commercial venues exist in Finland. The majority of Finnish kink events are held at night clubs, theatres, or other venues that are deemed suitable. To compare, Newmahr’s (2011) study on the pansexual kink community in “Caeden”, USA, focuses on kink events at a specific SM club, The Playground, in the same vein as Mains studied Leather clubs in San Francisco (1984), and Brodsky examined the gay sex club The Mineshaft (1993). In this regard, the Finnish kink scene is perhaps less commodified than the one in the United States, for instance. The non-profit, volunteer nature of the Finnish kink scene might, on the one hand, render the Finnish community more sporadic as volunteers may come and go, and the organisation of events depends on the number and enthusiasm of the people involved in the associations (Pohtinen 2017, 26–27). On the other hand, this organisation requires intense, committed participation.

² Cisgender means that the person’s gender identity is the same gender they were assigned at birth. Cis-normative means that all individuals are assumed to be cisgender.

According to Michel Maffesoli, modern communities are often sporadic and temporary, yet often regular, and the sense of belonging is fostered by affectivity and solidarity (Maffesoli 1995, 27, 56–58). The amount of commitment people put into a kink community is a choice, and individuals may join and leave the community as they find necessary (Pohtinen 2017, 26–27).

Kink communities have been discussed by many scholars. Margot Weiss (2011) sees BDSM as a social technique, a community centred around specific practices and materialities. Weiss (2011, 12) states:

Kinky people become real BDSM practitioners through participation in a social, sexual, and educational community that teaches techniques of the self, alongside rope bondage and flogging skills.

For Weiss, what separates a person who enjoys “rough sex” from a “BDSM practitioner” is, essentially, community participation. According to Weiss, kink identity is thus something that is formed in relation to belonging to the community. In the same vein, Newmahr (2010, 329–330) argues that kink community offers a powerful sense of belonging and identification, which affects people’s sense of self. Self-actualisation and self-expression are achieved through this community belonging (Newmahr 2010, 323). An individual’s sense of self or identity is thus strengthened through their belonging to the kink community (Pohtinen [forthcoming]). Furthermore, as I discussed in the previous chapter, kink may also provide identity labels: one may identify as a kinkster, or a sub or Dom, for example. These may function as the most significant sexual identifications for some individuals.

Everyday life

Everyday life has been studied extensively in ethnology and is perhaps one of the defining features of ethnological research. Everyday life is often described as boring, consisting of routines, taking place at work and at home, and – in Finnish – grey (Highmore 2002, 1; Hämeenaho 2014, 73). However, everyday life is also constantly made and remade to maintain safety through its predictability, flow, and rhythm, as well as a feeling of living one’s own kind of life (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 81; Jokinen 2005, 160; Löfgren 2014, 78, 92). Everyday life is thus not merely a “passive backdrop” but could also be viewed as actively constructed and even creative (Löfgren 2014, 81). This creativity may show in daydreaming while performing a chore, combining tasks (e.g., listening to music while vacuuming), and repurposing household items (Löfgren 2014, 91). Everyday life therefore involves a duality: on

the one hand, it is undesirable in its mundanity; on the other hand, it is a place for creating one's own mundane haven.

Kink has occasionally been defined as “serious leisure” (Newmahr 2010; Sprott & Williams 2019; Williams & Prior 2015; Williams & Storm 2012). *Serious leisure* is a concept coined by Robert Stebbins (1982) to denote career-like activities through which people acquire a sense of belonging in addition to achieving self-enrichment and development through making an effort to gain knowledge or skills. Newmahr (2010) has applied the concept to kink communities. In them, the characteristics of serious leisure are prevalent since kink may provide an all-encompassing lifestyle and be present in people's social lives and hobbies. Learning skills and gaining knowledge are important aspects of kink since they are essential in ensuring safe play. I have also conceptualised kink as serious leisure because I think it offers yet another way to view kink as an everyday life phenomenon and a way of life instead of focusing on kink merely as a sexual practice (Pohtinen & Harviainen 2021).

Stigma

The everyday life of kinky-identified individuals is often affected by stigma, which is still attached to various forms of kink even though society may have become more understanding of sexualities that differ from the norm (e.g., Damm et al. 2018, 1–2; Graham et al. 2015, 2, 9–10; Hughes & Hammack 2019, 149; Ling et al. 2022, 1076). According to Foucault, stigma refers to an individual's “permanent, constitutive, congenital condition” (Foucault 2003, 298). Stigma is thus a fundamental difference and a deviation from what is understood as “normal” (Goffman 1963, 1–5). Social scientist Erving Goffman describes stigma as “a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap”, and something we consider “not quite human” (Goffman 1963, 1–5). What lies behind stigma is normativity, which is a value system that defines everything as either normative or non-normative (McWhorter 2014, 318). Subtle mechanisms of normalising power and discipline are applied to maintain the norm (Foucault 1978, 92–102). The social implication of this normalising discipline is the stigmatisation of certain practices, desires, or individuals that are considered non-normative. Hence, due to such normalisation and the resulting stigma, certain sexual behaviours that deviate from what is seen as “good sex” are seen as “low status” behaviours (Kulick 2005, 206, 208; Rubin [1984] 1994, 151). In other words, stigmatised sexuality is something other than sex between two adults in an established heterosexual relationship and certainly without domination or pain (Kulick 2005, 208; Rubin [1984] 1994, 151). Thus, a value system of sex exists, and kink is not very high in this hierarchy.

One normalising value system is heteronormativity. Ethnologist Ingeborg Svensson (2016) discusses how attempts have been made to assimilate people with

non-normative sexualities into the hetero norm through emphasising romantic love. Svensson continues that this “romantic love is central to the subordination of non-normative sexuality” (Svensson 2016, 212). While the focus is on romance, the sexual aspects of desire may still be considered deviant. Heteronormativity comprises various norms and habits that exist in everyday life and create an order that is not to be questioned or debated (Jokinen 2005, 140, drawing on Berlant & Warner 1998). I understand that this order refers to the specifically monogamous, cisgender, vanilla heterosexuality that is typically understood as “natural”. For certain norms to achieve the status of being “natural”, they need to be repeatedly enacted (McWhorter 2014, 316–317). This reproduction of norms – normalisation – results in a normativity that only allows for certain types or behaviour while simultaneously condemning other types of behaviour deviant, undesirable, and wrong (Taylor 2014, 4–5). Heteronormativity carries connotations of normalcy and rightness (Jokinen 2005, 140, drawing on Berlant & Warner 1998). Even though kink can be heterosexual and heteronormative, it is nevertheless a deviation from this normativity and thus attached with stigma – notwithstanding that for kinksters themselves, kink can be a normal and natural way of life (Pohtinen 2019a, *passim*; Pohtinen & Harviainen 2020, 140). According to Foucault, the stigmatised may embrace their deviance as an innate identity and by joining forces challenge the stigmatisation together (Foucault 1978, 101; McWhorter 2014, 319).

The stigmatisation of kink is actualised in and reproduced by various institutions which have condemned non-normative forms of sexuality, such as religion, law, and medicine (e.g., Graham et al. 2015, 2, 9; Ling et al. 2022, 1076; Rubin [1984] 1994, 151). While the Christian religion has historically deemed non-normative sexual practices to be a sin (and continues to do so), more recently kinky-identified individuals have experienced discrimination in other institutional fields. First, due to the stigma, kink can be used against individuals in legal cases, as a result of which kink community members may lose custody cases or employment (Ling et al. 2022, 1076). Second, because the stigma also affects healthcare professionals’ views and attitudes, kink may be viewed as proof of violence or a cause of mental health issues (Damm et al. 2018, 4; Ling et al. 2022, 1076). In a Finnish survey concerning kinksters’ experiences within the healthcare system conducted by the Sexpo foundation³ in 2020, 74% of the 211 participants felt that healthcare providers did not have sufficient information about kink, and 33% mentioned they had not sought help in fear of discrimination (Sexpo 2021). Even though this survey was not peer

³ The Sexpo foundation is a non-profit organisation that provides counselling and education in sexuality and relationships and also trains sexual counsellors, therapists and other clinical sexologists.

reviewed or scientific as such, the results are nevertheless on par with international research on the experiences of stigma among kinksters (e.g., Ling et al. 2022).

The stigma shows and is maintained in society, for example, by depictions of kink in media and popular culture, where kink is typically presented as a joke, violence, or a result of trauma. Kink is thus typically seen as a comedic trope or in a news story about a violent murderer (Pohtinen 2019a, 93–94). All these ways in which society has treated and continues to treat kink, be it a sin, illness, crime, or comedic trope, have an effect on how kinky individuals view themselves, and how accepting they are of their own desires. Kinky individuals may internalise the stigmatisation emanating from the surrounding society, which may contribute to their staying in the closet and fear of others finding out (Hughes & Hammack 2019, 162–163). This may result in feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Hughes & Hammack 2019, 162–163; Pohtinen 2019a, 95, 99). However, these negative feelings are typically mitigated by a sense of community belonging and the creation of more empowering narratives around one’s sexuality (Hughes & Hammack 2019, 163; Ling et al. 2022). Occasionally, the community might not feel equally welcoming to all kinksters, either. Within the community, some kinks may be stigmatised by other kinksters through rendering certain kinks more acceptable than others (Harviainen 2015a, 425). This typically shows at kink events at which some kinks are displayed more often than others, and at certain events, some kinks are not permitted at all.

Affect

Feelings and emotions have often been the topic of research in ethnological studies since they are typically part of people’s everyday life experience (e.g., Frykman & Löfgren 2005, 20; Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016a, 17). More recently, they have been conceptualised as *affects* (e.g., Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016b). While affect has been conceptualised in various ways, I have defined it in my research (Pohtinen 2019a; Pohtinen & Harviainen 2019) as follows: an affect is a fleeting sensation that underpins emotions and precedes consciousness (Watkins 2010, 278–279). Affects can be caught or transmitted, which can be perceived in situations such as changes of mood or atmosphere in certain environments or among groups of people (Brennan 2004). Affects can also be seen as unconscious forces “that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension” (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, 1). Even though the word “force” is used when discussing affects, they do not necessarily have forceful characteristics. Rather, affects may be minimal and go unnoticed. (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, 2.) In sum, I understand affect as an embodied sensation that is experienced after a stimulus but not necessarily yet named

as an emotion or a feeling, but rather experienced as an “intensity” (Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016a, 14–15).

Affect theory is suitable for researching kink because part of the fascination with kink is its ability to offer strong affective states (Carlström 2017, 22). Emotions were already mentioned as an integral part of kink by Kamel in his 1980 ethnography (Kamel 1980, 183–184). Mains has also noted that kink is more than mere sexual acts and rather allows for a deep inner peace, which can be achieved through BDSM play (Mains 1984, 179). A particular mental state or headspace is typically pursued in kink practices, and the physical activities may merely serve as means to achieve it (Simula 2019, 222). This headspace could also be described as an *affective state*. In addition to kink practices, affects pertaining to kink may be actualised, for instance, in relation to kink events and materiality (Pohtinen 2017, 28; Pohtinen [forthcoming]).

Atmosphere is a “lived affect” or formed by affects transmitted between people (Brennan 2004, 1–15; Stewart 2011, 452). Billy Ehn, Orvar Löfgren, and Richard Wilk conceptualise atmosphere as a “totality of emotional mood”, which diminishes boundaries between people and is built of many aspects such as light, space, smell, sound, and rhythm (Ehn et al. 2016, 83). Therefore, they consider atmosphere a productive analytical concept for cultural analysis. Atmospheres can also be actively created, and this creation can be executed, for instance, through affective objects (Pink & Leder Mackley 2016, 185). On the one hand, affectivity may thus be related to materiality and bodily proximity, and, on the other hand, materiality may be used to contextualise affects (Ahmed 2010, 33; Löfgren 2016, 127).

Materiality

Affect and atmosphere are highly entwined with *materiality*. Kink is often thought of as highly materialistic in nature (e.g., Weiss 2011, 6) since many kink practices require material objects such as ropes and shackles for restricting movement, riding crops and floggers for impact play, or specific objects, materials, and items of clothing for engaging in fetishes. However, materiality has not often been the focus of discussion in kink research. Finnish ethnology includes a strong tradition of research on materiality: objects and clothing have been one of the first subjects of research. For instance, ethnologist U.T. Sirelius (1915; 1919; 1921) focused on the Finnish national dress and objects of Finnish agrarian society. Typically, when materiality and objects were the subject of ethnological study, they were examined out of the context of actual lived life and without the context of the community to which they belonged (Rauhala 2019, 36). In contemporary Finnish ethnology, however, discussions of materiality emphasise the context in which the object is situated and the kinds of meanings it has for individuals (e.g., Rauhala 2019;

Roivainen 2017). Moreover, recently researchers have also discussed objects in relation to feelings and how they arouse emotional responses, that is, through their affectivity (Kajander & Koskinen-Koivisto 2021, 351). My discussion of kink materialities thus continues these research traditions of contemporary Finnish ethnology on materiality with a strong emphasis on the affectivity of kink objects. Furthermore, my focus is on mundane materiality, such as kink objects in homes, which further anchors my discussion to ethnological research of everyday life.

In this research, I examine kink materiality in the final article (Pohtinen [forthcoming]). I understand material objects as being attached with affective value, which happens through people's meaning-making (Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016a, 10; Sedgwick 2003, 19). In the kink community, certain affective symbols are shared. For instance, black leather is typically associated with traditional BDSM and fetishes, but the material also carries connotations of orderliness, power, and transgression (Karttinen & Kippola 1990, 48; Löfström 2000, 218–219, 230–231; Mains 1984, 30–31). Corsets and high heels could be understood as symbols of eroticism, and for instance a dog collar is typically regarded as a symbol of a submissive role in kink play. Objects that have shared affective value are used to create a special atmosphere at kink events or during kink play sessions. Mains also mentions how for kink community members, “dress is a form of shared identity appropriated for their purposes alone” (Mains 1984, 27). Affective objects may enhance a sense of belonging to a community and an individual's sense of self (Pohtinen [forthcoming]). For instance, if an individual places a riding crop on display in their home, it might function both as a symbol of a collective identity and as a representation of “me” (e.g., Alftberg 2018, 27, 32; Löfgren 2016, 145). The affectivity of objects can thus be both intimate and personal and shared by the community.

3 Methodology

Research material

Understanding humans is one of the aims of ethnological study (e.g., Lehtonen 2005, 16). As ethnologist Helena Ruotsala (2005, 28) highlights, the aim is to create understanding rather than find the final truth, as many truths coexist. The generation of such understanding requires that researchers get as close as possible to the research subjects, which is typically pursued through ethnographic field work (Ruotsala 2005, 45). In ethnology, the field can be understood as the “space or place where the research material is created in interaction with the research participants” (Ruotsala 2005, 48; translation by author). My research field was the Finnish kink community. I entered the field through kink events and moved on to the everyday life experiences of kinky individuals. In the field, I was attentive to new directions that could be taken to achieve an understanding of the kink phenomenon. This approach to knowledge production, the role of the field, and the focus on everyday life can be seen as essential factors that distinguish ethnological research from research conducted in other fields (e.g., Ruotsala 2005).

My research material was manifold and accumulated over the years of being on and off the field. My main research material consisted of 28 themed writings with the additional material of 19 photographs, interviews with five individuals, and participant observation at kink events. The interviews (H1–H5) were conducted in 2009 for my bachelor’s thesis, 12 of the themed writings (T1–T12) were collected for my master’s thesis in 2011, and the remaining 16 themed writings (T13–T28) I collected for my doctoral dissertation in 2017. I collected the photographs (K1–K9) in 2020 and conducted the participant observation in 2009 and 2016. The research materials were stored without names or other identifying data in the Collection of Ethnology of the Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku, where they are available for research or teaching⁴.

I thus collected my research material during approximately ten years, according to the need in each phase of research. Typically, the previously collected material

⁴ TYKL/aud/1150; TYKL/spa/1150; TYKL/spa/1228_1–16; TYKL/spa/1228_17; TYKL/dg/781–31.

raised new research interests or was not sufficient for my new research questions, which led me to collect new material with a different focus. Even though I collected my research material in such a snowball manner, even the earliest materials served as important additions to my field work. Together, these different materials I gathered in the field, my tacit knowledge, and research conducted by others created a triangulation that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of my research topic and enabled me to write a more thorough ethnography. A more detailed presentation of the research materials employed in each article is shown in Table 1 in Chapter 4: Articles and reflections.

Writings

The collection of research material through writings has been a common method in Finnish ethnology throughout its history (e.g., Latvala & Laurén 2012, 126; Korhikangas et al. 2016, 8). Since the late 19th century, these collection projects typically centred around a specified theme regarding everyday life and were aimed at “ordinary people” (Latvala & Laurén 2012, 126; Korhikangas et al. 2016, 10–11). The organiser behind these projects was often the Finnish Literature Society or the Finnish Antiquarian Society, and the writings were collected to both preserve Finnish folk culture and raise awareness and pride of Finnishness (Korhikangas et al. 2016, 10). In keeping with early ethnologists, the main material for my research consists of 28 themed writings by kinky-identified individuals that I have collected through two calls for writings in 2011 and 2017.

Themed writings function in a similar manner to themed interviews, which are centred around a specific topic, but they have no strict structure, and the conversation may take different directions (Apo 1995, 173–174; Helsti 2005, 149–151; on themed interviews, see, e.g., Ruotsala 2005, 65–69). Accordingly, my calls for writings included questions and themes, but I left them very open so that the writers could decide how and what they would share. The themed writings I received for my master’s thesis in 2011 met my needs methodologically, but since I had new research questions for my doctoral research, I decided to collect additional writings in 2017. Originally, I opted for themed writings instead of interviews because I felt at the time I could easily reach people all around Finland through writing. Moreover, since topics pertaining to sexuality or identity can be rather sensitive, I thought people might feel more inclined to respond in writing than through a face-to-face interview. There may be a certain sense of anonymity when responding through writing, which may increase respondents’ willingness to share more intimate details of their life (Apo 1995, 176; Helsti 2005, 150; Suominen 2016, 118). That said, a good interviewer could probably achieve this as well.

I posted the first call for writings (Appendix 1) in 2011 to the mailing lists of three Finnish kink associations (Bizarre Club in Jyväskylä, Rsyke in Tampere, and Turun Baletti in Turku) and on online discussion forums that were available at the time (the discussion forum of Turun Baletti and *tuntematonmaa.net*, which no longer exists as such). In 2017, I published the call for writings (Appendix 2) in Finnish and in English as a Google document, shared the link on my website and social media (on my Facebook profile, several Facebook groups and pages, and Twitter), and posted it on Finnish kinksters' online discussion forum *BDSMbaari.net* and the mailing lists of ten Finnish kink associations. I encouraged people to share the link to the call for writings, and on Twitter, for instance, it was retweeted 19 times. I have no knowledge of whether and how it was shared on other platforms, or whether the associations distributed the email to their members. During the two months, the link was clicked 479 times, mostly through *BDSMbaari.net*, as well as through Facebook and Twitter.

I received 12 writings (T1–T12) for my first call for writings from 20- to 56-year-old individuals from around Finland (at least the Turku and Helsinki areas and Eastern Finland were mentioned). The writers reported their gender as women (seven), men (four), and androgynous intersex (one). Many of the writers did not specify their sexual orientation or their relationship status, but three mentioned being non-monogamous and three being non-heterosexual. Seven respondents were 30 years old or younger. To the latter call for writings, I received 16 texts (T13–T28) from people situated all around Finland, aged 23 to 62 years, and reporting their gender as woman (seven), man (four), cis woman (two) gender fluid (one), trans man (one), and trans woman (one). In other words, ten women, five men, and one gender fluid individual took part in my research in 2017. Most of the writers mentioned being non-monogamous (e.g., polyamorous, relationship anarchist, or open relationship) and non-heterosexual (e.g., pansexual, bisexual, queer, heteroflexible, or bi-curious).

In both calls for writings, I asked participants to define their kinkiness and describe their everyday life experiences as kinky individuals. I also wanted to hear their stories of discovering their kink desires or identities and about their relationship to the community. These themes were central in both my calls for writings, yet the latter included more specific questions (see Appendices 1 and 2). I also highlighted kink events in both calls for writings and posed several questions concerning them since, initially, I had thought my research would focus more on the events. However, as often happens in the research process, the initial research questions changed as my knowledge of the phenomenon developed and expanded during field work (Helsti 2005, 151). Even though kink events can be regarded as an actualisation of the kink community, the writings luckily touched upon several themes and also depicted other aspects of kink besides events.

Instead of themed writings, I decided to call the texts autobiographical writings⁵. Understanding and interpreting the texts as autobiographical was a conceptual as well as a methodological choice. By viewing the texts as mini autobiographies or sexual autobiographies, I could read them as life story narratives. The organisation of life events into narratives or stories can be seen as part of human nature (Helsti 2005, 149). The writings I received were typically framed as stories with clear beginnings and endings (Helsti 2005, 149; Ekrem 2016, 91). Many of them started with an introductory part and ended with a short summary of what had been discussed, an apology for oversharing, an offer to provide more information if needed, a thank you, or a good luck wish for the researcher. Even though these texts were stories of individuals, shared understandings were also communicated through them. As Ehn and Löfgren (2010, 216) suggest:

[T]hese seemingly inconspicuous personal everyday experiences in fact feed on shared understandings, and they become culturally organised when they are verbalised, reflected on, and communicated to others.

Thus, through reading texts by individuals, it is possible to learn about a larger phenomenon.

Everyday life experience and affectivity are emphasised in life story narratives since experience and subjectivity are essential parts of them (Koskinen-Koivisto 2013, 44–45). Life story narratives are typically used to present individuals' formative experiences or experiences of change, for example, and to represent "the voices of previously silent groups and individuals" (Koskinen-Koivisto 2013, 45). In addition, autobiographical texts often include journey narratives or descriptions of struggles that have been overcome (Hänninen 1999, 44, 46, 50, 51). In my research material, the writers sometimes travelled back in time all the way to their childhood or early teenage years to describe how they discovered their kink interests and, often, a feeling of being different from others. Some also described how finally fulfilling their kink desires or entering the kink community was a turning point in their lives.

Many of the texts I received in 2011 had a more autobiographical approach to them than the texts I received in 2017. This is probably due to the questions I had asked: in the first call for writings, I specifically asked for kink life stories and posed

⁵ In my first article, in lieu of a better concept, I called the writings *query answers*, but this material was not exactly collected via a query method per se. A query would suggest a form with questions that the participants fill in either online or on paper, but the method I used was not as structured and encouraged a less restricted flow of writing. See Appendices 1 and 2.

fewer questions, whereas in the second call, I had more specific research questions in mind and thus posed more questions. The larger number of questions perhaps encouraged the writers to *provide answers* rather than engage in a free flow of writing. Research participants may sometimes choose a problem-solving approach to answering questions and aspire to give “correct” answers or answer out of a feeling of duty (Ekrem 2016, 94; Olsson 2016, 171; Suominen 2016, 139). This might result in shorter answers that reveal less emotion and affect. However, even such not-so-clearly autobiographical texts include “small stories” or “micro narratives” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, 379; Ekrem 2016, 93, following Roos 1992; Koskinen-Koivisto 2014, 4, 12). *Small stories* are small in terms of length as they are often short fragments of narrative, but they are also metaphorically small since they may narrate a more fleeting aspect of lived experience (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, 379). Small stories may come into existence through a writer’s sudden urge to tell more, which may overcome the writer even when they mostly give short answers to set questions (Ekrem 2016, 87). Furthermore, small stories are interesting in the context of cultural analysis, which I will elaborate on below, since it often looks for minute details and finds meaning in the seemingly insignificant (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 1–8). Thus, I included these small stories in the autobiography genre as well and interpreted and analysed them as such.

Photographs

Similarly to writings, photographs have also been collected already in the early days of Finnish ethnology in the 1920s and 1930s as a means to capture and record Finnish folk culture (Sinisalo 2005, 210). Moreover, photographs have been used widely in Finnish ethnological research especially when studying materiality. Often these photographs have been obtained from museum archives (Roivainen 2017, 61–62). Photographs, both archived and taken for a specific research, have also been used to support interviews, inspire interviewees, or illustrate the topic discussed in the research (e.g., Koskela 2014, 213, 220–222; Roivainen 2017, 67; Sinisalo 2005, 214). For the final article of my doctoral research, I wanted to gain a further understanding of the relationship between kink and everyday life through photographic research material. I also felt the need to depict kink objects and kink materiality through pictures since kink can be rather unfamiliar to many. My aim was thus to further illustrate my research topic with pictures as well as to analyse the photographs to add depth to my ethnography (cf., Sinisalo 2005, 201).

In the call for materials (Appendix 3), I asked for three types of photographs: how kink is present in homes through material choices, how kink objects are hidden in homes, and favourite kink objects. Instead of going into the homes of kinksters to take photographs, I decided to ask for photographs taken by kinksters themselves.

There were two rather practical reasons behind this. First, we were in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it seemed more appropriate to avoid close proximity with other people. Second, since I am perceived as a woman, and my research topic addressed sexuality and was often misunderstood, I did not feel comfortable with entering strangers' homes. I did have certain apprehensions about what kinds of photographs I would receive as well. Yet another reason for giving the camera to the research participants was that in this way, the photographs might present more personal and intimate aspects of the research participants' lives that had significant meanings to them (Koskela 2014, 230).

To supplement the photographs, I also requested for texts that would further explain the photographed items: what was depicted and what the objects meant to the photographer. Sarah Pink suggests that photographic research material should be supplemented with interviews (2007, 91). She (2007, 76) has also discussed "collaborative photography", in which the intentions of both the researcher and the research participants are combined when creating the research material. In the call for materials, I included questions as inspiration similarly to my previous calls for writings, yet I emphasised that it would be most interesting for my research to receive participants' contemplations of their relationship to kink and the objects which were depicted. In my view, this method was collaborative since I guided the themes of the photographs, but the participants could depict what was important to them and also explain why. In a similar manner to photo-elicitation interviews, my aim was for my research participants to *elicit* information from the photographs into the accompanying texts (Clark-Ibáñez 2004, 1512; Koskela 2014, 213).

I published the call for materials in Finnish as a Google document, which I posted on my website, various Facebook groups, my Twitter and Instagram feeds, and the Finnish kink discussion forum BDSMbaari.net in June 2020. This time, I did not translate the call for materials into English because previously I had received responses only in Finnish and assumed that perhaps an English translation was not required. Since I published the call for materials in early June, the beginning of the Finnish summer holiday season, I decided to continue it until the end of September to receive more participants. I requested a maximum of three photographs from each individual accompanied by a text of a desired length and received a total of 19 photographs that met my guidelines from nine individuals (K1–K9), who were 21 to 50 years old and mainly from the bigger cities in Finland. Four of the respondents were women, four were men, and one was non-binary. Additionally, two individuals sent me photographs that did not meet my instructions, and since they did not respond when I reminded them about the guidelines, I excluded them from my research. The majority of the respondents reported being non-monogamous and non-heterosexual, as had been the case with my previous research material. I asked the respondents to provide me background information such as gender, sexual

orientation, age, and place of residence. Unfortunately, it did not occur to me to ask about the living arrangements of the participants, which in hindsight could have been interesting information to have. It is likely that sharing one's home with children or housemates, for example, is a major factor affecting the display of kink objects at home. The socioeconomic situation of a person also has an effect on the materiality of their home. It may affect aspects such as the size of the home and decoration style preferences. Such issues could be addressed in future research.

When I published the call for materials, I was apprehensive about whether I would receive any photographs at all: what if asking people to photograph their homes was too invasive and posed too big a risk for individuals of a stigmatised community? Therefore, I was overjoyed when photographs began to arrive. The 19 photographs depicted kink in a variety of ways: the photographs depicted traditional kink objects; cupboards, closets, bedrooms, and living rooms – even a kitchen drying cabinet; favourite accessories worn by their owners; symbolic objects and art; and ropes. Every letter of BDSM, as well as fetishism, were represented in these 19 photographs. Some of the texts gave pragmatic accounts of what the photographed objects were and how they were used, while other writers narrated their relationship to kink in general. Therefore, these 19 photographs from nine individuals were more than sufficient for my analysis of kink materiality.

Other materials: Interviews and participant observation at kink events

In 2009, I conducted interviews on the topic of kink events for my bachelor's thesis (Appendix 4). Two of the three interviews had two interviewees present, and one interview I conducted with one interviewee. I had approached the five interviewees at a kink event of the local kink association. Four of them were event visitors, while one also had experience in organising kink events. The interviewees lived in Turku, they were 20 to 32 years old, and four of them were women and one was a man. However, I never asked about their gender identities, and they were therefore merely based on my assumptions at the time. The interviewees constituted a somewhat homogenous group of event attendees. As an undergraduate student and a beginner ethnographer, it was perhaps easier for me to approach people who were close to my age. Even though this material was less extensive and was gathered quite some time ago during my undergraduate studies, it has nevertheless contributed to my current study on kink and is therefore included in this research. I used the interview material in the first and second articles of this dissertation as I discussed kink events.

Ethnological field work is typically expected to include some form of participant observation among the researched community or environment. My research started with participant observation at kink events – or, perhaps, observant participation, since I was already a community member and a frequent visitor to events – which

provided me with tacit knowledge and a basis for my research of the kink phenomenon. I conducted participant observation at kink events on at least two⁶ occasions: the first was when I was doing field research for my bachelor's thesis (Appendix 4), and the second was when I was starting my PhD dissertation in 2016. Kink events are relatively easily accessible occasions to explore kink both as a lay person and as a researcher. However, they only present one side of the kink phenomenon. Therefore, my research interests shifted from the occasionally very flamboyant and showy events towards the everyday life experience of kink. Due to this shift in my research focus, participant observation also became less relevant. Nevertheless, through participant observation at kink events, I gained valuable insights into the kink phenomenon, which helped me develop and refine my research (Ruotsala 2005, 58).

Tools of analysis

Understanding everyday life through cultural analysis

My main method in collecting and then interpreting my research material was *cultural analysis*, which is often applied in ethnology when conducting research on mundane aspects of life. Cultural analysis can be understood as both a methodological instrument and an analytical tool; it is applied in the collection as well as the analysis of research material (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 9). Cultural analysis could thus be understood as a way of looking at the world or as a special *mentality* regarding the conduct of research (Löfgren 1996, 79–80; Ruotsala 2005, 46). One purpose of cultural analysis is to make one aware of what is normalised and goes unnoticed in its familiarity and mundanity (Ehn & Löfgren 1982, 12). This is done by shifting the point of view and posing questions to render the familiar strange (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 11; Ehn et al. 2016, 25). Cultural analysis thus regards mundane situations and unnoticed routines as phenomena worth studying. By studying them, we can gain knowledge of cultural patterns that are learned and naturalised over time, as well as of how “individual habits, thoughts, and feelings are culturally shaped” (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 7). In essence, the purpose is to reveal the implicit knowledge in society (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 209). Furthermore, ethnologists and cultural analysts Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (2012, 5) point out how the grey everyday life is what fundamentally defines the society we live in. By examining hidden aspects

⁶ I have field notes or observation questions from two occasions, yet I remember conducting participant observation at several kink events. However, these memories tend to blur because I have attended kink events before and after my field work. Therefore, I can be certain of only these two participant observation cases.

of everyday life, one is often surprised to find something bigger and more profound than what was expected lying underneath (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 15). As an ethnologist engaged in cultural analysis, my interest has therefore shifted during the research process and now lies in the mundane aspects of kink.

In my research, the key aspect of cultural analysis is the understanding of everyday life experiences as culturally organised – they are learned and then naturalised into taken-for-granted routines (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 208–216). I read my research material to find patterns, similarities, and aspects that were perhaps thought of as self-evident or, on the other hand, special or bizarre. I also needed to be mindful of what Ehn and Löfgren call “home blindness” (*hemmablindhet*), that is, my own presuppositions about the familiar field, by attempting to render visible the implicit and tacit knowledge I possessed (Ehn & Löfgren 1982, 12). Cultural analysis also pushed me towards affective analysis since the methodology encourages an affective understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied. Ehn and Löfgren (2012, 77) suggest that field work should be conducted with all the senses. As an example, they propose that ethnographers should close their eyes to listen to or smell the environment so that they can perceive more nuances (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 65–68). I remember doing this during participant observation at a kink event: I could hear the slapping sounds of spanking and smell the rubber of latex outfits (Pohtinen 2017, 28).

Since cultural analysis may include various methods and materials, and it has no one specific route to follow, the method I applied in the analysis of my research material was *close reading* (Ehn & Löfgren 2001, 145; Pöysä 2010, 331). In close reading, the research material is read several times to achieve a more thorough understanding and thus a deeper analysis of the topic. Close reading may yield different interpretations in each round of reading, and while it is typically applied to texts, it can also be applied to such research materials as photographs (Pöysä 2010, 338–339). To be able to conduct a cultural analysis of my research material, I read the material carefully and thoroughly multiple times from different perspectives and through different theoretical lenses. During the reading process, I attempted to create syntheses, to trace repeated narratives or cultural patterns, which began to appear after I became more and more familiar with the material (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 95). I regarded close reading as a tool in my cultural analysis: close reading was the method of reading and rereading, and cultural analysis was the methodology or the larger framework through which meanings were drawn from the research material – close reading was the “how”, whereas cultural analysis and my theoretical concepts made up the “what” of my research.

Research material as dialogical

I understand the research process as *dialogical* meaning-making. When I gathered my research material and interpreted it, I was engaged in a dialogue with the field: by entering and leaving the field, reading and rereading the material, and writing my ethnography, I was engaged in a process in which new questions and understandings were built upon previous ones. My questions, the participants' responses, and my interpretations were in a dialogue with each other during the research process. At the same time, there was a dialogue between the responses of the different participants and between the different materials (Olsson 2016, 177–178). The results of the research were thus dependent on the dialogue as well as the context in which they were produced (Heikkilä 2021, 34). However, I was aware that as the researcher, I still held a certain amount of power because I defined the questions and perspectives, and I was responsible for the interpretations (Helsti 2005, 157). I could have further reduced these power relations and increased the dialogical nature of my research by sending my ethnography or analysis back to the participants for review and comments and then revising it accordingly.

In my view, the research material was interactively produced, and both the researcher's and the participants' backgrounds affected the resulting material (Kuczynski 2017, 30). Therefore, in my research, I did not refer to those who participated in my research as "informants". I did not merely collect information, as the term might suggest, but rather produced research material *with* the kink community members by posing questions and directing the focus towards specific research questions (Kuczynski 2017, 30). I employed terms such as *writer*, *autobiographical writer*, and *interviewee* when appropriate and used both *respondent* and *participant* interchangeably with them. This choice illustrates my awareness of my position of power as a researcher and highlights my methodological ideal of using a collaborative approach to gathering research material and producing research results (e.g., Pink 2007).

Creating an understanding through ethnographic fiction

In cultural analysis, it is common to use various materials in one's research (i.e., the so-called *bricolage* method; see, e.g., Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 125). In addition to the more typical research material that is collected specifically for research, material such as novels or movies can be used as examples of the cultural phenomena discussed (e.g., Ehn & Löfgren 2010, *passim*). Moreover, ethnographic writing may occasionally take certain liberties with the scientific form as it tends to be narrated in the first person and is typically rich with descriptive details. According to anthropologist James Clifford (1986, 5), scientific writing has been defined by the omission of subjectivity, fictionality, and a certain rhetoric. Even though

ethnographies have experimented with form and language and are not assumed to be “objective”, it might nevertheless be challenging to express tacit and affective knowledge while maintaining a scientific tone, especially if the researcher is familiar with the research topic and an insider (Clifford 1986, 5–11; Elliott 2016, 26; Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg 2018, 63, 72). One solution, suggested by ethnologists Jenny Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow Kallenberg (2018, 59), is ethnographic fiction.

Fictional narrative, or *ethnographic fiction*, can be used to shed light on an everyday life phenomenon in a form that is more nuanced and condensed than typical academic form of writing. Ethnographic fiction is a method of creative writing, which has been applied in cultural research to present research findings or give a voice to research participants, for example (e.g., Ingridsdotter 2017; Palmgren 2018; Silow Kallenberg 2017). I used ethnographic fiction in one of my articles to present the everyday life experiences of kinksters in a more nuanced manner (Pohtinen 2019a). Furthermore, ethnologist Maryam Adjam suggests that ethnographic poetics provides a means of allowing the reader access to more aspects of the researched phenomenon and enabling them to sense the experiences that the researcher and the research participants have experienced (Adjam 2017, 55, 57–60). Thus, combining the scientific tone with a more creative or artistic one might enable a better understanding of the phenomenon under research.

Ethnographic fiction draws heavily on the researcher’s experience, yet it is not autoethnographic per se. In my ethnographic fiction, I drew on my tacit knowledge and my research material to create literary representations of specific aspects of the kink phenomenon. Following cultural anthropologist Denielle Elliott, I also used “the imaginative to illuminate, to conjure” (Elliott 2014, 152). Adjam mentions how through poetic narratives, it is also possible to present the embodied and the vague, as well as things that are not articulated into words (Adjam 2017, 38, 42, 46, 56–57). In the same vein, I wished to be able to describe the affectivity of the kink experience in a subtler and more nuanced manner (Elliott 2016, 26). The purpose of applying ethnographic fiction was not to move away from the research material, but rather to use an additional methodological tool in my ethnography and cultural analysis (Elliott 2014, 152). Ingridsdotter and Silow Kallenberg further add that through ethnographic fiction, the subjectivity of the researcher can be made explicit and thus a certain transparency established (Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg 2018, 59).

Positionality

My position as a community member and researcher is not uncommon in ethnology and has had both advantages and challenges (e.g., Kleinman & Copp 1993, 10–13; Ruotsala 2002, 49). During my research process, I attempted to be conscious of my

potential presuppositions, although I was aware that objectivity was not possible or even required (Kleinman & Copp 1993, 10–13; Van Maanen 1979, 548). I am thus aware that my insider position has influenced my research from the definition of the research objective and the questions for the research participants to my interpretations in the final ethnography. In cultural research, the researcher's interpretation is emphasised because the research typically cannot be repeated, and it is not restricted by a limited set of rules (Vakimo 2010, 95). Consequently, since the researcher's interpretation generates the final result of the research, the researcher holds a certain position of power (e.g., Helsti 2005, 157). By being mindful of this power structure, I have aimed to give space to the research participants and conduct my analysis in a manner that respects their voice and creates understanding among a larger audience. With the participants, I have also participated in producing cultural representations of my research topic (Ruotsala 2002, 42).

Due to my insider position in the kink community, entering the field was relatively effortless for me. At the first stages of my kink research, I did participant observation at kink events, conducted interviews, and collected themed writings. I believe at least some of the kink community members participated in my research because they knew we were “on the same side” and therefore deemed me trustworthy. They may also have been inclined to help a fellow community member with their studies and, later, research. Since I was most familiar with kink events, I initially assumed they would also form the basis of my research. That is why I ended up including several questions regarding kink events in my second call for writings (Appendix 2), only later to realise the events were not the focus of my research. As I increased my understanding of the topic during the research process, I constantly re-evaluated and negotiated my focus and research questions.

Tacit knowledge

Over the years, my role in the kink community has shifted from an active kink association board member to someone who merely visits events sporadically. Therefore, I have gained *tacit knowledge* of the community. Tacit knowledge can be understood as knowledge that cannot be put into words or explained (Gascoigne & Thornton 2013, 1–10). Tacit knowledge is something we carry in our bodies and which then affects our understanding of the environment we are in (Ingold 2000, 162). For example, I know what the atmosphere of a kink event feels like, or what it feels like to visit a kink event for the first time. In this respect, tacit knowledge would seem similar to *affective* knowledge, which I have attempted to express through ethnographic fiction (Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg 2018, 72). According to philosopher Hannele Koivunen, tacit knowledge includes all “genetic, bodily,

intuitive, mythical, archetypal, and experience-based knowledge that a person has, and which cannot be verbalised” (Koivunen 1997, 78–79, translation by author). In this regard, affective knowledge is one aspect of tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge pertains to the ways in which my position as a researcher and a kink community member has affected my research. Tacit knowledge is the background knowledge that I have gathered over the years of being involved in the kink community and having a personal relationship to kink. In addition, I gained tacit knowledge during my research process, which pushed me in certain directions in my research either deliberately or unconsciously. There are skills that are culturally acquired from the world around us (Ehn & Löfgren 2012, 9; Rauhala 2019, 18; Ruotsala 1998, 104). Such cultural competence is often acquired collectively or in communities and may pertain to traditions, and such competence affected the way I conducted my research and created understandings (Koivunen 1997, 84; Rauhala 2019, 20; Ruotsala 1998, 104). Therefore, since I made my position clear in my calls for materials, it was safe for the respondents to assume we shared tacit knowledge, and they could, to a certain extent, trust that I knew what they talked about.

My insider position, tacit knowledge of the kink community, and other life experiences affected my research in multiple ways (Kleinman & Copp 1993, 10–13). First, they affected and guided my research objectives. Second, my position had an effect on the manner in which the participants wrote to me. Third, my position and knowledge affected my interpretations and understandings of the research material: for example, my knowing a participant may have affected the way I interpreted their writing, or my being familiar with the topics they addressed may have affected my interpretation and analysis of that topic. It is possible that I interpreted my research material differently than someone without that tacit knowledge would. Even two ethnographers with a similar background might produce different interpretations of the same phenomenon and material.

In my work, recognising my position and my tacit knowledge has been of utmost importance. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that has accumulated over time and has become so naturalised that people no longer pay attention to it (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 208). Furthermore, tacit knowledge precedes field work and is also acquired in the field, but does not necessarily appear explicitly in the research material. In my research, it was present in my preconceptions about my research field, which were necessary to formulate appropriate research questions, for example (Ruotsala 2005, 48). I also attempted to render my tacit knowledge explicit by frequently mentioning my own involvement in the kink community and reflecting on my position, as well as by means of ethnographic fiction. Even though tacit knowledge is often rather implicit and challenging to express in words, being aware of its existence may have brought more delicate nuances to my ethnography. This may have helped me construct a more comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon under research.

Gendered power dynamics in the field

Researchers have responsibilities to their research field and participants (Ruotsala 2005, 55). In my calls for materials, I was open about my position as a community member and an ethnologist conducting doctoral research. In addition, I shortly explained my research objective and highlighted that I wanted to create understanding of the phenomenon. I thus informed potential participants of the nature of my research and the details of the material collection as thoroughly and as concisely as possible. I have already touched upon my role as a researcher and the power I, to a certain extent, hold over the research participants. However, the researcher is not necessarily always the one in the position of power; rather, power fluctuates between the researcher and research participants (e.g., Kaaristo 2022, 14; Koivunen 2010, 704). Gender is a typical factor that affects power imbalances in field work situations (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016; Kaaristo 2022, 14). Being perceived as a woman researcher may attract unwelcome attention and comments especially when the research is conducted in a mostly male community or addresses themes pertaining to sexuality (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016, 235; Koivunen 2010, 685). According to social scientist Tuija Koivunen (2010, 701–702), men can exercise power in several ways in a field work situation in which the researcher is a woman. First, there may be heterosexualised tension, which may be actualised as flirting. Second, individuals may decline formal participation yet discuss related issues openly outside the research situation, suggesting they have plenty to tell. Third, respondents may take the lead of the situation by initiating interaction yet refuse to participate on the researcher's terms. Finally, they may dismiss or criticise the researcher.

Even though my gender identity is situated somewhere on the non-binary or gender queer spectrum, I understand that I am typically perceived as a woman, and therefore this binary gendered power dynamic has applied in my research as well. Throughout my research process, I was approached by several men – mostly through email as well as on social media – who were eager to participate in my research, typically letting me know their vast experience would make them a valuable addition to my research. Women are often stereotyped as “good listeners”, providing a “sympathetic ear” and “facilitating men's narratives”, which might encourage such unsolicited (attempts at) disclosures (Pini 2005, 203; Sampson & Thomas 2013, 177). These men wished to define the terms on which their participation would take place. For example, they contacted me without regard to my schedule or methods of collecting material, or expressed their willingness to chat by phone or email, or to meet in person. Most of them were not willing to send material through my calls for materials when I suggested this instead. By refusing to accept my rules such as my schedule for collecting material, these men attempted to take control of the situation

and thus exercise masculine dominance and, essentially, wield power over me (Koivunen 2010, 700–701).

Since there are individuals to whom a woman conducting research on a topic pertaining to sexuality represents a call for harassment, I was not eager to run the risk of meeting such an individual in person in the privacy of their home when I decided to include photographs of people's homes in my research. I was even somewhat apprehensive about asking for photographs taken by the participants themselves. Nine individuals, four of them men, sent me material that I included in my research. One of these entries, however, was such that I hesitated over including it in my research. This man had staged a photograph and manipulated the surroundings so that only he himself was visible in the photograph. He was clad in various fetish gear, and the tone of the photograph was humorous. In the accompanying text, he did not exactly write about the issues I had instructed, but rather had written what I interpreted as a lengthy dating advertisement. It was challenging to find the information meaningful for my research in his text and his photograph – the information I had asked for. It may be that this participant's exercise of power through heterosexualised tension was unintentionally inappropriate and flirtatious, yet it was a way of asserting control (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016, 238; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2013, 501). Such performances of masculinity might be explained by the vulnerability that men experience when they expose parts of themselves to a researcher: male research participants need to amplify their masculinity to be able to act vulnerably (Koivunen 2010, 685).

In addition to the nine individuals who sent me photographs that met my instructions, I was also approached by two men who did not follow my rules. They sent me photographs that included nudity, sent more pictures than I had requested, and included no accompanying texts. One of them sent me a Google folder full of photographs of an elderly man that did not follow my directions in any way. The men did not answer me when I reminded them of my directions and gave them another chance to participate. My call for materials clearly stated that I did not wish to receive photographs with nudity or otherwise erotic material (see Appendix 3). The researcher is an active participant in creating the boundaries pertaining to their research. The context has an enormous effect on how nudity in a photograph sent online, for example, is received (Paasonen et al. 2019, *passim*). I created a context and boundaries for the photographs I wished to receive, which these men did not respect. Such instances of mock participation in my study were thus mere attempts to wield masculine power over a female researcher on their terms without respecting my boundaries or consent (cf., Amundsen 2021, 1470, 1476).

In retrospect, I was perhaps too nice to these men. I should have blocked the individuals who contacted me on social media sooner, and I should not have answered their emails in such a friendly tone. Furthermore, I should rather have

reported the mock participation photographs to the police as sexual harassment, which they essentially were. However, new researchers sometimes tend to “recruit at all costs”, which may prompt them to overlook unwanted behaviour (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016, 236). Woman researchers might also give male participants symbolic control in situations such as interviews so as not to threaten their masculinity by denying them all control (Koivunen 2010, 687). In my case, such allowing of control could be seen to take place in how I engaged in conversations and validated the men by telling them I would keep them in mind for my next round of collecting material. Hannah Chiswell and Rebecca Wheeler also propose that the researcher’s own preconceptions about the research participants might add to their willingness to dismiss certain behaviour (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016, 238). Thus, my reaction (or non-reaction) was perhaps affected by my preconception that the kink community included men like these, and responses such as these would be expected in this field of research.

Even though consent is key in kink practices, the kink community is by no means perfect, as can be seen from these men’s understanding of consent. However, the above incidents are not unfortunate individual occurrences in the kink community, but rather manifestations of the systematic ways in which men exercise power over people they perceive as women, and which are ingrained in our society. Sometimes it might be innocent or humorous (e.g., Kaaristo 2022, 5–6), but other times it might warrant a harassment report. And as social scientists Helen Sampson and Michelle Thomas (2013, 177) conclude:

Whatever the motivation, however, this [uncalled-for interaction in the field] has implications for researchers’ time and for their emotional wellbeing. Such conversations are emotionally draining [for researchers].

Since all the individuals who took the liberty of contacting me outside the boundaries of my calls for materials were indeed male, one can but wonder how much my assumed gender affected these contacts, and how often a male researcher would be contacted in a similar manner.

Ethical considerations

Anonymity and naming of the participants

The kink community in Finland is rather small, and therefore it has been my priority to protect the anonymity of my research participants throughout the research process as per the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2009; 2019). I have archived all my research materials following the TENK 2009

and 2019 guidelines. In the case of my research materials, this has meant the use of pseudonyms and the non-disclosure of the participants' place of residence and birth, profession, health status, or anything that might make them easily recognisable to others. In the first call for writings, I promised that the answers would be "anonymised" and archived. In the second call, I described the meaning of "anonymisation" more specifically (i.e., as explained above) and mentioned that the archived material could later be used for scientific purposes. In the final call for materials, I further explained that by participating in the research, the respondents would give their consent for the publication of their photographs in international academic journals and my dissertation. I also added that the material would be archived in the Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku so that it could be used for research and teaching in the future. Thus, there were slight differences in how I informed the participants about the ethical aspects of the research process in each call for materials, yet they were able to provide their informed consent (see Appendices 1 to 4).

In my first article, I referred to the research participants by using the codes T1 to T12 for the writings and the codes H1 to H5 for the interviews. The letter T denoted texts, and H denoted interviews (respectively *teksti* and *haastattelu* in Finnish). I realised it would be convenient to provide the research participants with names during the last stages of the review process of my second article (Pohtinen 2019a). Since the review process was already nearly completed, the names were not a major concern as I was otherwise preoccupied with finishing the article. I chose to name the research participants with English pseudonyms, which is something I would reconsider if I were to make this decision now. I would now opt for Finnish names instead because the participants were Finnish, and my research is about the Finnish kink community. At the time, I thought that English names would be congruent with my English text and would thus maintain the fluency of the text. I chose the names carefully according to the individuals' approximate birth years, making use of websites that listed the most popular baby names in those years.

Another purpose of using English pseudonyms was to protect the participants' anonymity, although I did realise that there was more to anonymity than names. English names nevertheless created a distance from the Finnish persons, and I also wanted to prevent the accident of naming a participant with their actual name since I did not necessarily know the participants' real names. In the kink community, it is common to use pseudonyms or nicknames. In fact, you might know a person for years and never learn the name they use outside the community. As some respondents participated multiple times, I used the same name when referring to them in different materials if I was certain the materials had been created by the same person. I also wished to be consistent by using the same names in my later research as well. However, in retrospect, the choice of English names was made in haste, and

Finnish names could have been chosen to highlight the aspect of Finnishness in my research, whilst anonymity and the flow of reading could still have been maintained.

Resulting research material

I should note some factors that may have affected the responses I received for my calls for materials. First, each call for materials was published online, required writing or photographing, and necessitated responding via email or a shared Google Drive file. This may have limited the responses because not all people have the necessary skills and means available. On the other hand, since kink community also exists online, reaching out to the community members online might have been an efficient way of reaching a vast number of people. Whilst writing and photographing might not be activities everyone is willing or able to engage in, they might be the preferred manner of communication for some. Second, research participants' assumptions about the recipient affect what they share in their writings (Helsti 2005, 150). The writings and photographs I received were produced for a researcher who was also a community member and even a familiar face to some respondents. This may have resulted in the omission of features that were assumed evident to a community member, for example. Seeing me as a peer with at least some shared experience may also have generated trust in my motive to conduct fair research as well as in my being someone they could confide in (Marttila 2017, 377).

There may be an element of confiding or catharsis present especially in accounts of one's (minority) sexuality or gender (Plummer 1995, 33). Many respondents shared parts of their intimate lives in their writings and photographs. Besides helping a researcher, respondents interpret and analyse their own lives when they write (and possibly photograph as well), and it can thus be a therapeutic experience (Ekrem 2016, 88; Helsti 2005, 150). Since the kink community had not been previously studied in Finland through the methods I applied, the respondents may also have been motivated to participate because they wished to support my research as well as to be heard and be given a voice. They may have felt that it was important to "write the [kink] community visible" – if not for the whole world to see, then at least for a researcher (Helsti 2005, 150; Olsson 2016, 165). Thus, there may also have been a sense of obligation behind some of the answers.

Ethnologist Pia Olsson (2016, 165–168) encourages us to consider issues such as what characteristics the research participants share. In the same vein, ethnologist Hilka Helsti (2005, 152) suggests that we should pay close attention to the homogeneity of the respondents and also notice those aspects that are missing. In my calls for materials, I did not ask about ethnic or socioeconomic background, for example, although such factors affect kink communities as well. Kink communities, and studies about them, are often criticised for being significantly white and middle

class (e.g., Bauer 2008, 238; Damm et al. 2018, 2, 8; Fennell 2022, 152–157; Sheff & Hammers 2011, 199–200), which to a certain extent also applies to Finnish communities and likely to my research material as well. Since the background questions in my calls for materials were voluntary, some aspects may have remained unrevealed and therefore, I may have made incorrect assumptions about the participants. For example, no one in my research material mentioned being a person of colour, yet I cannot know this since there was no discussion on the matter. Thus, I made the assumption, which correlated with other research conducted on kink, that the individuals in my research material were, indeed, mostly white. The kink communities studied by Weiss (2011) and Newmahr (2011), for example, were largely middle or upper middle class. However, a certain DIY spirit is perhaps encouraged more in Finnish kink communities, which might render the kink communities in Finland less middle class and more accessible to others as well. Nevertheless, more research on these aspects of Finnish kink communities is needed.

One question that concerns all research material is whether the respondents have told the truth, and whether the research material is thus valid. Ethnographer John Van Maanen (1979, 544) argues that individuals who recount their personal narratives may be unreliable narrators, and that they may evade certain topics and thus mislead the researcher. Harviainen (2015a, 428–429, drawing on Fisher 2013) suggests that due to issues such as stigma, individuals may not be reliable when it comes to their own sexuality. In ethnology, however, it is typically understood that there are no such things as “real” or “truth” in life experiences or memories, and all accounts and narratives can be viewed as *representations* of lived reality and as being true for the experiencer (Helsti 2005, 153; Laurén 2010, 437). Cultural studies scholar Kirsi Laurén (2010, 438) further mentions how imagination is also part of being human and the human experience. My research materials were therefore products of the moments of their creation, shaped by the contexts in which they were produced and representing issues that were important to their producers (Ehn & Löfgren 2010, 214–216; Laurén 2010, 437; Plummer 1995, 16). Information, whether numerical, pictorial, or written, never presents a plain truth but is always filtered through someone’s subjective understanding (Laurén 2010, 439).

Giving back to the field

As an ethnologist, it has also been important to me to “give back” to the kink community. As Olsson remarks, scientific research is not conducted for the scientific community alone, but rather has a variety of different readers (Olsson 2005, 288). One group of readers are those who were the subject of the research (*ibid.*). Since my research subjects were Finnish, my research might be inaccessible to them both in its academic style and due to the language barrier. Because academic research is

not accessible to many, and especially because my research is in English, I have participated in many non-academic Finnish events such as panel discussions and podcasts and written blog posts (e.g., antroblogi.fi, which popularises anthropological and other cultural research). In addition, I have created Finnish content on my Instagram account about various aspects of kink that I discuss in my research. I have attempted to use language that is also accessible to those who are not familiar with an academic style. The posts have included topics such as “Kink and feelings”, “Kink and community”, and “The meanings of kink”. Even though the number of my followers is not enormous (slightly over 1,000), the posts have had 60 to 200 likes and have been generally well received. At the earlier stages of my research, I was also active in popularising my research results on Twitter, but later I found Twitter slightly restrictive as a social media format and Instagram’s picture-based approach more engaging.

Furthermore, art can be used to share research findings and engage with the field (Diver & Higgins 2014, 8). I created a collage poetry zine⁷ based on the autobiographical writings in the spring of 2020. My aim was to create poems that represented how individuals experienced kink and what kinds of meanings it had in their lives. A collage poem is a poem that is composed of already existing material, which in this case was my research material: each poem was crafted from one autobiographical writing and thus represented one person’s understanding of kink. When collecting the research material, I had asked the writers’ permission to use the material in research and teaching contexts. Even though this collection of poetry could be viewed as artistic research, I wished to ensure the participants’ informed consent. I thus sent an email to all the participants whose contact information I had, and all those who answered gave their permission. I only used material from those authors who had given me their consent to do so. I also gifted them with the finished zine. To cover the printing expenses, I sold the zine on my social media accounts at a pay-what-you-can cost (for around 2 to 5 euros) and was positively surprised at the interest it attracted. I sent out approximately 30 zines. I thus hoped that the results of my study would also reach those without access to academic research.

⁷ Short for magazine, a “zine” is a self-published small-circulation publication. My kink poetry zine included 12 pages with 11 Finnish poems.

4 Articles and reflections

Table 1. The four articles, their research questions, main materials, methods, and themes.

	TITLE	MAIN QUESTION	MATERIAL	MAIN METHOD	MAIN THEME
I	Creating a feeling of belonging. Solidarity in Finnish kink communities.	How is a feeling of belonging created in the kink community based on the reports of kink event participants?	12 autobiographical writings, 5 interviews, participant observation	Cultural analysis	Community, belonging
II	From secrecy to pride. Negotiating the kink identity, normativity, and stigma	How is the kink identity constructed and negotiated with regards to normativity and stigma? What kinds of affects are related to this negotiation?	28 autobiographical writings, 5 interviews, participant observation	Ethnographic fiction, affective analysis, cultural analysis	Affect, everyday life
III	'Even with all this, I could not live without kinkiness'. Kinky Understandings of Everyday Life	How kinky-identified individuals negotiate the relationship between kinkiness and everyday life in a society that stigmatises kink?	28 autobiographical writings	Cultural analysis	Everyday life
IV	Constructing affective atmospheres at home: The materiality and meaningful objects of kink	How does kink show in the everyday life of kinky-identified individuals through materialities? What meanings do the kinky-identified individuals give to these materialities?	19 photographs and accompanying texts	Photograph as text, affective analysis, cultural analysis	Materiality, affect, everyday life

This dissertation consists of four articles that can be viewed chronologically since there is a flow from one article to another. This chronology can be perceived in the way my analysis delves deeper into the kink phenomenon in each article. Typically,

as the research process unfolded, the previous article would give rise to a new research topic, and my research would take directions alluded to in the previous articles. Furthermore, this continuum from one article to another also reflects the development of my understanding of the kink phenomenon as well as the increasing depth of my analysis as I gained more knowledge of the phenomenon and theory to support my discussion. Naturally, I had a research plan already at the beginning, including plans for the themes of the articles as well. However, along the way, I applied for funding and therefore rewrote and updated my research plan, which kept my vision clear about which direction to take next. The feedback from the journal editors and peer reviewers also affected the focus of the articles to a certain extent. In this synthesis, I have already clarified my theoretical and methodological background. In what follows, my aim is to shed light on the contents, main findings, and contributions of my research articles and reflect on my academic growth during the process of writing these articles.

I Creating a feeling of belonging. Solidarity in Finnish kink communities

In my first article, I continued with the themes and research materials of my master's thesis: I discussed the feeling of belonging created in kink communities with a particular focus on kink events. In terms of this dissertation, this article is introductory in multiple ways. In addition to being my introduction to academic writing and the article publishing process, it also shows how the kink community was first introduced to me: through events. Kink events were the starting point for my research during my undergraduate studies in ethnology. The special atmosphere, symbolism, and solidarity that I witnessed at kink events intrigued me as an aspiring ethnologist. Moreover, kink events can be seen as representations of the kink community, although the kink presented at events might be showier and more flamboyant than the kink that occurs in more private settings (see Fennell 2022, 185–186). The introductory nature of this article is also manifested in the terminology. At the time of writing this article, I assumed my research would focus on a community revolving around “kinky sexuality”. Later, however, I realised how kink is not merely sexual, but in fact a more profound phenomenon, and therefore I refrained from discussing “kinky sexuality”. Even though the focus of this article was on community belonging and events, I also incorporated discussion around concepts that only later became the connecting thread of my research: everyday life, identity, and affects.

In this article, I discussed entry into the kink community, which is sometimes described in an intense and emotional manner and as a feeling of finding home. Even though the positive affect of the first encounter might subside, and the individual

might leave the community, they nevertheless know that the community exists, and that they could return if they wanted to. Following Maffesoli's (1995, 56–58) discussion of modern communities, people's participation in the kink community may also be sporadic yet recurrent and stable. Individuals can choose their level of commitment according to their needs. Kink communities function on various levels: there are online communities, face-to-face communities, as well as what Benedict Anderson (1991, 6) would call the "imagined community", which is typically based on the mere knowledge that other kinksters exist. The online community might offer the first introduction to kink and encourage people to attend kink events or other face-to-face events. Online spaces also reinforce their sense of belonging to the community by creating familiarity with others when not in physical contact and through shared knowledge and experiences.

Another point I introduced in this article was solidarity, which is manifested in the creation of kink events through volunteer work, the inclusion of amateur performers from the community, the paying of compliments to each other's outfits, and the engagement in small talk about the atmosphere. The respondents mentioned the social aspect of kink events as an important factor affecting their attendance and the creation of the atmosphere. The need to bond with others is perhaps more urgent among people who are affected by stigma in their everyday life, and therefore communication is more frequent at kink events than in a regular bar, for example. Other factors that separate kink events from regular night outs include the lesser consumption of alcohol, the special code of conduct in place at kink events, and the visual aspect and materiality of the events. According to the code of conduct, things such as touching without permission and photographing are prohibited at kink events. However, consensual play is encouraged, and many individuals take advantage of the dungeon equipment present in the event spaces to play with their partner(s). Kink event participants are usually dressed in revealing and flamboyant outfits that differ from their mundane clothes. The affective atmosphere is thus actively created by the organisers and the participants alike through solidarity. During participant observation at a kink event, I also applied the ethnography of the senses suggested by cultural analysts Ehn and Löfgren (2012, 59, 65, 77) and listened to the sounds and smelled the air: the sounds of music and people chatting were mixed with whipping sounds and screams of pleasure and the smell of rubber and vinyl clothing (Pohtinen 2017, 28). Together, these elements and the sense of solidarity affect the special atmosphere experienced at kink events.

Contributions

In this article, I proposed that kinksters need kink communities and kink events to have safer spaces without the fear of stigma. A sense of belonging is important for the well-being of individuals, and it is reinforced by solidarity at kink events.

Solidarity is maintained through performing volunteer work, abiding by the rules of the events, and communication that is distinctive to kink events.

II From Secrecy to Pride. Negotiating the Kink Identity, Normativity, and Stigma

While I had laid the groundwork for what the kink community was and how it thrived on solidarity in the first article, I dived deeper into individuals' experiences of kink in my second article. The second article was also more method-driven as I gathered more research material, and it included many quotations from the autobiographical writings. Furthermore, I also applied creative writing in my ethnography. After the rebellious realisation that I could do that, I hoped ethnographic fiction would enable me to perceive deeper nuances and thus improve my understanding of what everyday life kink experience was like. The article discussed the journey many individuals go through from hiding and secrecy to accepting and being proud of their kinkiness. In my previous article, I had established that the kink community was important for the individuals' well-being, and I now explored how normativity and stigma affected the construction of kink identity, and what kinds of affects were related to it. I highlighted this affective experience with the help of ethnographic fiction.

In this second article, I refined the concepts related to kink. This was when I decided to consistently employ *kink* community instead of *kinky* community, for example. I also discarded the idea of *kinky sexuality* as I began to understand that kink and kinkiness were a more extensive phenomenon than a mere descriptive word for sex. To be consistent in my use of *kink*, *kinky*, and *kinkiness*, I searched this article for phrases in which I had used these words. This search created the poem below, which also managed to outline the contents of the article. This collage poem has not been previously published, but I have included it in a conference presentation (Pohtinen 2019b). I add the poem here as an example of ethnographic poetics and to illustrate the main themes of this article.

Journey of kink: a poem
because of their kinkiness
to renounce his kinkiness
hiding her kinkiness
keeping her kinkiness a secret
coming to terms with one's kinkiness
courage to face her kinkiness
accepting one's kinkiness
confidence in her own kinkiness
being proud of one's kinkiness
kinkiness is celebrated

The beginning of the poem deals with denying or hiding one's kinkiness. Due to the vanilla norm and the stigma, kinksters tend to keep their kinky identities hidden from outsiders. None of my respondents, however, discussed whether they had ever been found out or mentioned any related consequences. In the ethnographic fiction pieces that I incorporated in this article, I depicted Helen, who had faced the decision of whether to come out of the kink closet to her colleague. In these narratives, I wanted to highlight the mundanity of the situations in which kink may become a visible part of one's everyday life. Therefore, no talk of sex practices is needed in order for kink to pop up in conversation. The fear of being found out as a kinkster may be a result of the stigma, which is internalised into personal shame. Secrecy is thus a typical part of the kink experience. However, secrecy might not always be undesirable; it may be a necessary element of kink. Taboo and transgression tend to excite people, and the sense of a shared secret and engaging in the forbidden might in fact be part of what makes kink desirable, exciting, and *hot*.

In this article, I coined the concept of *vanilla-normativity* to denote the role kink plays in society compared to vanilla. In contrast to vanilla-normativity, kink appears as non-existent, misunderstood, shameful, and undesirable. I could have conceptualised kink merely as stigmatised, but juxtaposing it with vanilla-normativity placed it into a more mundane context. As a result of the stigmatisation of non-normative sexualities, vanilla is the norm, and it is therefore assumed that vanilla is a preference shared by everyone. This is why I saw vanilla-normativity as a useful concept when contextualising kink in everyday life. In relation to the internalisation of the stigma and the vanilla norm, some of my respondents described a journey from feeling alone and having difficulties in accepting their kinkiness to feeling pride and a sense of belonging to the kink community. This journey was typically defined as courageous. In fact, the feelings of loneliness and being different may act as catalysts that encourage people to enter the kink community and find other like-minded people. In my previous article, I had discussed the feeling of finding home and the exhilaration experienced when people finally found the community. Here, I maintained that the experience of a sense of belonging may be accompanied by self-acceptance and empowerment. At the end of the poem above, kinkiness is celebrated, which can be seen as realised at kink events, which carnivalise kink to a certain extent.

Even though I had already discussed affect and atmosphere in my first article, in this article, I wished to focus on the affects of kink in more detail. As can be witnessed in the poem, many of the lines carry connotations of intense feelings or emotions. In the autobiographical writings, the issues discussed in relation to these lines were often intensely affective. There were descriptions of the fear of being

found out and feelings of loneliness, but also depictions of feelings of empowerment, contentment, and pride. The affects were transmitted to me as well: I felt the ups and downs with the writers. In this article, however, I discussed affects as somewhat synonymous with emotions or feelings and thus as rather tangible phenomena that were found in the autobiographical writings. However, I developed my affective analysis further in my fourth article.

Contributions

Matters pertaining to identity tend to be affective. Kink has not always been conceptualised as an identity, nor is it typically discussed from the perspective of affects either. In this article, I discussed how kinky individuals negotiate their kinkiness in their everyday lives and mundane situations in a vanilla-normative world, and how these negotiations affect the formation of their kink identities. Stigma and vanilla-normativity shape our understanding of kink at both societal and individual levels. This may result in the internalisation of stigma, thus affecting individuals' acceptance of their kinkiness. Some individuals may therefore need to struggle towards accepting their kink desires or identities. On this journey, finding a community is of utmost importance. When they discover a community of other kinksters, it is possible to experience the shared affects of stigmatisation together and turn them into pride. In this article, I suggested that such shared affects, as well as the discovery of a sense of belonging play a part in the construction of kink identity. I also proposed that ethnographic fiction provides a valid means to illustrate everyday life scenarios in which affectivity is at play.

III 'Even with all this, I could not live without kinkiness'. Kinky Understandings of Everyday Life

I wrote the third article with my supervisor, J. Tuomas Harviainen. My contribution as the first author included research planning and outlining the theme and structure of the article, as well as gathering, pseudonymising, and analysing the research material. I also acted as the corresponding author of the article. We both participated in the writing and analysis of the article. In this article, I wished to continue and develop the discussion of my previous research. While I had previously discussed how the vanilla norm and stigma affected the construction of kink identity, here we were interested in finding out how kinksters navigate their everyday life or, essentially, how kink is experienced as part of everyday life. We thus delved deeper into the discussion of kinky individuals' experiences of everyday life that I had begun in the previous article. This was the only article that did not deal with affects per se. However, when focusing on individuals' experiences, affectivity is perhaps

an underlying, ever-present aspect. Instead of affective analysis, we analysed kink through various theories concerning everyday life.

We discussed the intertwining of kink and everyday life 1) as an authentic part of the self, 2) through total power exchange relationships as well as mundane chores, which can be given kinky meanings even without the total power exchange context, 3) as social life and serious leisure, and 4) as a form of escapism. These aspects of kink were described in the autobiographical writings, yet they were not always understood as part of everyday life. Some of the research participants stated that kink was not part of their everyday life yet described their active daily involvement in the kink community. It thus appears that activities such as participation in online conversations or kink associations' board meetings are not considered to be everyday life kink. This might be due to the existence of so-called 24/7 relationships, in which the Dominant/submissive or Ds power dynamic is continuously in place. These continuous total power exchange relationships, which were not highly prevalent in the research material, are then regarded as the measuring stick of how kink is manifested in everyday life. Our participants seemed to think that everyday life kink is actualised in kink play, but that participation in the running of the affairs of the kink community or its events does not count as such.

A certain ambiguity seems to be a fundamental part of kink: the meanings kink has for an individual might be different in different contexts or at different times. Some participants mentioned how they could not determine whether kink was part of their everyday lives since kink was there all the time and could not be switched on or off. They understood kink as their identity and part of their selves. However, even for these individuals, kink could offer occasional transgressions and escapism from everyday life. Play sessions or engagement in a fetish could present a special event that stood out from the monotony of everyday life. These moments were typically eagerly anticipated and fondly remembered afterwards with wishes and hopes for the future. For a short while, the transgressive moments of kink lifted the individuals involved above the mundane and into another reality.

Contributions

Our discussion in this article defined the point I made at the very beginning of this dissertation concerning the meanings of kink: kink can be understood as a continuum. In our article, we introduced the points of view of several individuals, who all understood kink in different ways, and in this regard, kink is truly a continuum. Even though the participants themselves did not necessarily regard all kink-related activities as actualisations of kink in their everyday lives, kink nevertheless enveloped the individuals' lives in various ways. Furthermore, this envelopment was viewed as positive since it typically contained different forms of social engagement. As the participant cited in the title of this article stated: even if

he had a job, good health, a loving partner, and a nice home, he could not live without kinkiness. Kink plays multiple important roles in individuals' lives and creates a significant framework for their everyday life experience.

IV Constructing affective atmospheres at home: The materiality and meaningful objects of kink

In my first article, I had already started a discussion of kink materiality pertaining to events. I had briefly discussed kink outfits seen at kink events and the dungeon equipment and other paraphernalia present at them. In this final article, I returned to the issue of materiality in a more thorough and, perhaps, more intimate manner. Furthermore, I collected additional material for this article: photographs showing how kink was present in individuals' homes and their favourite kink objects. I continued the discussion of how kink is manifested in the everyday lives of individuals – but this time at the level of material objects. Furthermore, I asked what kinds of affects were related to these objects, and what kinds of meanings they had for kinksters.

I discovered that kink objects are already loaded with affect when they are acquired, which includes a plethora of matters to consider. For many, the quality and usability of the product matter, but sometimes ethical values or identity are also important factors when making a purchase decision. People may do a lot of research to find the most desirable kink item. This process of creating expectations for and considering the potential of an object imbues it with affect. A further layer of affectivity is added through the use of the object. Whether used in kink play, such as a whip or restraint equipment, or worn at kink events or everyday life, such as boots or a collar, the object acquires affective value. The memories of past use and the hopes for future use render the object special. Occasionally, the more the object is used, the more it acquires affective value. In addition to the affective value gained through use, objects may also carry historical and symbolic connotations that strengthen an individual's sense of self and feeling of belonging. An accessory may make them feel like they are part of the larger kink community, or the accessory might function as a statement of individuality presented to other kinksters.

Occasionally, kink objects are also placed in homes. As they have this aura of kinkiness, they can be thought to transmit that affectivity to the surrounding objects and the inhabitant as well (Brennan 2004, 1). This stickiness of affects contributes to the ability of an object to maintain an individual's sense of self in its proximity or create a feeling of belonging (see Ahmed 2004, 90–91). Therefore, kinksters might bring kink objects to their homes and place them on visible spots. These objects are for the visitors to see and may function as provocative discussion openers or serve an aesthetic purpose. Nevertheless, such objects are placed in homes to convey

something of the inhabitant, as well as to reinforce the inhabitant's sense of self. While some kink objects are placed on visible spots at home, others are hidden away from outsiders. This may be a means of protecting the self or visitors who might not be kinky and therefore might not understand the objects as a kinkster would. The affective qualities of objects are thus personal and not necessarily shared by others.

Contributions

Even though kink is typically deemed highly materialistic (e.g., Weiss 2011, 8), little research has been conducted on the materialities of kink. There have been depictions of equipment or kink event decor, in addition to extensive research on sex toys (e.g., Attwood 2005; Heljakka 2016; Newmahr 2011; Piha et al. 2020; Weiss 2011). However, the meanings of materiality for kinksters have not been further discussed. In this article, I suggested that materiality is fundamental in kink not merely to enable the infliction of pain and restraint and fetishes, but also to create a sense of identification and belonging through affectivity. Moreover, these kinky affects may also be attached to everyday life objects, and specifically kink paraphernalia is not always needed. Such affects are created by using mundane objects in kink contexts. This further highlighted the point I made in my previous article about how kinkiness can add a layer to the most mundane tasks: shopping for food may become a secret exercise of a power dynamic, or a toothbrush may become a symbol of the dynamic.

5 Conclusions

Already in 1984, Geoff Mains stated in his ethnography on a gay SM community that kink was not merely about sexuality, but entailed much more than that, including community, comradeship and friendship, emotion, sense of self-worth, status, and motive (Mains 1984, 11, 30, 60, 179). Mains also highlighted that kink was about feeling good. My research shares and further contributes to this understanding, as many studies have before (e.g., Brodsky 1993; Carlström 2019a; 2019b). However, in my research, I have focused on the affectivity of the everyday life experience of living as a kinky individual. While I have discussed stigma and vanilla-normativity, and kink is still a misunderstood phenomenon, kink is essentially not about suffering or discrimination. Rather, kink is experienced as something that enhances one's quality of life and one's *own way* of living. Sociologist Eeva Jokinen suggests that a feeling of "good life" is created through a balancing act between "social obligations" and "negotiated intimacies" (Jokinen 2005, 143, drawing on Gillies 2003). For kinksters, this balancing act entails finding a balance between living in the closet and being openly kinky on a level that makes life feel good. This might be the result of giving certain weight to social obligations – the extent to which individuals conform to vanilla-normative society. In kink, negotiations of how an intimate relationship is formed and maintained are essential. The experience that life is "good" is essentially established through balancing the normative way of life and the negotiations of non-normative intimacies. According to my research participants, kink does not need to become a mainstream phenomenon, yet they hoped it would be better understood.

In my research on kink, I have discussed Finnish kink communities from three main perspectives: as part of everyday life, as an affective experience, and through the lens of belonging. In the four research articles, my discussion has first shifted from kink communities as places of belonging to individuals' journeys in kink in relation to stigmatisation, from which I moved on to examine the various roles kink has in the everyday life of individuals and, finally, to discuss materiality and kinksters' homes, thus increasing our understanding of kinky everyday life. The chronological order of the articles also shows my personal growth as a researcher and the development of my academic understanding of the phenomenon I have studied. In this research on the kink community, I wanted to answer three main

questions. My first aim was to explore the relationship between kink and everyday life. The relationship between kink and everyday life is complex and somewhat vague: individuals do not necessarily see kink as part of everyday life, yet when analysing my research material, it seemed obvious that kink seeps into individuals' everyday life experience in multiple ways. Kink can thus be understood as more than mere practices pertaining to sex. Rather, kink is a nuanced, multifaceted, and intense phenomenon that may permeate all facets of everyday life and be experienced as an identity.

My second research question pertained to affects and how they are related to kink. Kink can be seen as a highly affective phenomenon: the affectivity of kink ranges from mundane experiences to transgressive BDSM play sessions and an individual's sense of identity. My research material also depicted an affective journey during which kink may initially be a cause of shame or dismissed entirely, but then transform into acceptance, excitement, and pride. By analysing kink through affects, the nuanced nature of kink and its significance to individuals and their everyday life were made visible.

Third and finally, I wanted to examine how community is important for kinky individuals, and what role the feeling of belonging plays. A sense of belonging is important for individuals and their well-being; for kinky individuals, this importance is increased due to the stigmatised nature of kink. The discovery of the kink community is typically the factor which transforms the negative affects of kink into positive ones. Community is thus needed to discover that other people with similar non-normative interests exist, which alleviates feelings of loneliness and being different. The community provides a social network and, furthermore, thrives on solidarity through the sharing of knowledge, for example. However, the existence of the community may be important even when an individual does not participate in any community activities. In other words, a sense of belonging may be created through the mere knowledge that other kinksters exist.

Even though the kink community often provides a safe haven for kinksters, it is situated in and shaped by the culture of the society in which it exists. The kink community is not an island, nor does it exist in a vacuum. Therefore, the same values, beliefs, and political sentiments that prevail in society at large exist in the kink community as well, thus maintaining the same power imbalances. In other words, involvement in kink practices or the kink community does not mean that one is free from abusive structures or individuals who misuse their power. On that note, the kink community might not be welcoming to everyone, such as gender minorities, people with disabilities, or people of colour. However, through consciously working to dismantle these systems of power, creating policies against discrimination, and making events and discussions more accessible, it would be possible to accommodate these groups as well.

I have conducted this ethnography by examining the autobiographical narratives of kinky individuals, which often convey the multifaceted nature of kink through affective states and everyday life experiences. Throughout the four articles, I have discussed kink as a community, which does not necessarily mean an actual physical community, but rather the idea that other kinksters exist, and how the sense of belonging to this community is related to kink. The affective qualities of kink and the ways in which kink is present in the everyday lives of individuals have also been recurring themes in all the four articles. I have also touched upon kink as an identity, and how belonging, affects, and everyday life experiences are related to the formation and maintenance of kink identity. As I discussed in Chapter 1, my definition of kink is a tool to encompass a wide variety of non-normative desires that often have an erotic nature and are based on communication and consent by default. Charlotta Carlström (2019a, 413) has also mentioned how kinkiness is not necessarily something one *is* or *does*, but rather a process of self-enhancement and becoming abled. In my definition, too, being kinky does not require active actions. Instead, I understand kink as an open and fluctuating concept and a process or journey of constantly finding and learning about certain parts of oneself and being curious. However, kink is not an identity label for everyone, nor do I suggest that it should be applied in all contexts or all research.

In this research, I have to a great extent excluded sex, or the ways in which kink is done, which has been criticised in the context of kink research (e.g., Bauer 2014, 60–61; Fennell 2021, 785; Fennell 2022, 2). My research interest here, however, has not been the kinky acts, or *how* kink is practised or performed, but rather the meanings and affects behind those practices. Even though in this research, I have highlighted that kink is much more than sex, I also want to emphasise that I do not wish to neutralise kink into a sterile activity devoid of any carnality. According to a recent study by social scientist Julie Fennell, while intimacy and trust are typically emphasised in the kink community, sexual arousal still plays a significant role among kinksters (Fennell 2022, 61). Kink can be painful, gross, and messy, and it deals with taboos – and sex. Kink may be practised merely because it is enjoyable or sexually arousing without any purpose beyond that. Furthermore, moulding kink into a recreational activity that has nothing to do with sexuality or taboos would not remove the stigma surrounding it. Rather, the removal of the stigma would mean the acceptance of kink in its various forms and an understanding that being turned on by taboo can be healthy in itself. Moreover, as Fennell (2021, 2) remarks, what constitutes “sex” is not an objective category either. Even though the carnality of kink was out of the scope of this research, it could definitely be explored further.

I have conducted this research as an insider, as a member of the kink community. This has had its positive and negative aspects, which I have discussed thoroughly. Since I have conducted multiple calls for materials and thus asked for active

participation from the community members, I have also wanted to give back to the kink community as a researcher. I have done so by sharing my research on social media, publishing a poetry zine, participating in interviews by various media outlets, and giving presentations at non-academic events. Environmental scholars Sibyl Diver and Margot Higgins (2014, 5, 7) ask whether “giving back” is ever enough. I hope that my own contributions to the kink community have been, and continue to be, sufficient at least when combined with the scientific knowledge that hopefully also spreads into the field of clinical sexology and other areas of health care and helps remove the stigma attached to kink. The stigma often pertains to misconceptions of kink as violence or a pathology.

While there have been depictions of kink in popular culture in recent years, including the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy (James 2011; 2012; 2012) and the Finnish film *Dogs Don't Wear Pants* (Valkeapää 2019), they have typically omitted the most fundamental aspect of kink: consensuality. Such depictions of kink as dark and mysterious further feed into the stigma that surrounds kink and associate it once again with violence or a pathology. However, these books and films also frame kink as entertainment for the wider audience and have become cultural products that are widely consumed outside the kink community. If compared to, for instance, the niche spirit of Marquis De Sade, who was sent to a mental asylum in the 18th century for his writings, which have later been interpreted as sadomasochistic, the atmosphere in the 21st century is very different. Even though it might be irrelevant to compare events 300 years apart, this harsh juxtaposition enables us to become aware of the current cultural patterns and our understanding pertaining to kink. In other words, while the depictions of kink are still not perfect and lack consent, we now seem to be able to approach the topic of kink with positive curiosity. Perhaps, as a result of this change in atmosphere, the next step in popular culture depictions of kink could be the inclusion of consensuality. Furthermore, in the spirit of cultural analytical bricolage, these products of popular culture could be explored further as representations of kink in our current cultural environment. Contemporary depictions of kink might reveal something about how we understand these stigmatised individuals or sexuality that we consider different.

Having been a member of the kink community for over 15 years and having examined it through the lens of a researcher for nearly as long, I believe kink is in general becoming more normalised. In addition to the slightly more positive depictions of kink in popular culture, the tone regarding kink has become more understanding in recent years, especially in various media outlets. During my research process, the way of viewing kink has shifted so that it is understood more as part of sexual health than a pathology. According to my research, kink is important to individuals because it may be experienced as part of one's self, it may be

transgressive, and it may envelope an individual's everyday life. Furthermore, kink is perceived as necessary for maintaining a good life.

References

Research material

All the research material is archived in the Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku.

Writings

Code used in text, age, archive code, name given by author

T1, 20, TYKL/spa/1150a
T2, 22, TYKL/spa/1150b, Erin
T3, 23, TYKL/spa/1150c, Tina
T4, 23, TYKL/spa/1150d, Lily
T5, 23, TYKL/spa/1150e, Hale
T6, 28, TYKL/spa/1150f, Matt
T7, 30, TYKL/spa/1150g, Peter
T8, 38, TYKL/spa/1150h
T9, 41, TYKL/spa/1150i, Rosa
T10, 43, TYKL/spa/1150j
T11, 43, TYKL/spa/1150k, Lena
T12, 56, TYKL/spa/1150l
T13, 23, TYKL/spa/1228_1, Sophia
T14, 26, TYKL/spa/1228_2, Katie
T15, 27, TYKL/spa/1228_3, Kye
T16, 29, TYKL/spa/1228_4, Victor
T17, 30, TYKL/spa/1228_5, Mona
T18, 30, TYKL/spa/1228_6, April
T19, 36, TYKL/spa/1228_7, Paul
T20, 37, TYKL/spa/1228_8, Owen
T21, 37, TYKL/spa/1228_9, Meredith
T22, 40, TYKL/spa/1228_10, Ellen
T23, 40, TYKL/spa/1228_11, Jennifer
T24, 43, TYKL/spa/1228_12, Nicole
T25, 44, TYKL/spa/1228_13, Amy
T26, 50, TYKL/spa/1228_14, Gary
T27, 53, TYKL/spa/1228_15, Robert
T28, 62, TYKL/spa/1228_16, Karen

Photographs and texts

Archive code for texts and photographs: TYKL/spa/1228_17

Code used in text, age, archive code for photographs, name given by author

- K1, 21, TYKL/dg/7813–5, Emily
- K2, 30, TYKL/dg/7816–8, Kye
- K3, 30+, TYKL/dg/7819–21, Ashley
- K4, 33, TYKL/dg/7822–3, Josh
- K5, 40, TYKL/dg/7824–26, Meredith
- K6, 40+, TYKL/dg/7827, Heather
- K7, 44, TYKL/dg/7828–9, Ryan
- K8, 47, TYKL/dg/7830, Chris
- K9, 50, TYKL/dg/7831, James

Interviews

Code used in text, age, archive code, name given by author

- H1, 32, TYKL/aud/1150m
- H2, 31, TYKL/aud/1150m
- H3, 19, TYKL/aud/1150n, Emma
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Call for writings I

Originally published only in Finnish as part of my master's thesis in December 2011. Translation by author.

Questions for themed writings

How do you experience kink in your life? What does it mean to be kinky?

Tell your kink life story. In your text, you can discuss the things that make kink important to *you*; how kink shows in your everyday life and escape from the mundane; what kind of community the “kink scene” is; and what kind of role the events play. You can also discuss the political aspects of kink and different gender presentations and roles. Your experiences and the meanings you give to kink are of utmost interest. Below are questions to aid you with your writing. The style is free, and there are no length requirements for the text. You can be a newcomer or already familiar with the kink scene. Every writing is important.

I am conducting my master's thesis in European Ethnology at the University of Turku about the meanings of kink to kinksters themselves. This thesis continues the theme of my bachelor's thesis, which discussed kink events. My aim is to gather understanding about the world of kink, and therefore everyone's personal experience about the topic is important.

The answers will be handled anonymously, and all information that would make a person identifiable will be removed so that no one can be recognised based on distinctive characteristics.

Here I use the concept of “kinky” in a very broad sense. “Pervert” [*pervo*] might be the closest synonym, but due to its negative connotations, I prefer the use of kinky.

The many meanings of kink

Background information

- age
- gender
- profession/job, marital status, family, the size of the place you are from

- Tell your kinky history. For example, when did you first feel you were “kinky”, when did you first go to a kink event, or how long have you been involved in the kink community, and how did you find your kink community?

The meaning of kink and dressing up

- What does “kinky” mean to you? What/who is *kinky*? Who is *not*?
- What do the party events mean to you? How do you dress for kink party events? What do you do there? Describe the party events.
- Think about the norms and unwritten rules that are associated with kink outfits and dressing up, and how they appear in your own clothing.

Belonging to a group, the community

- Do you feel part of the group? Describe your experiences of belonging/not belonging to the group.
- What kind of community are the kinksters? Where is the kink community located for you (everyday life, events, internet, associations, etc.)?
- What role does the existence of the kink community play in your life?

Kink and everyday life

- How does kink show in your everyday life?
- Are your kink self and everyday life self different from each other?

Political aspects

- Is there a political aspect to kink? Is dressing up in kink attire a political statement?
- Do you want to send a message to outsiders?
- Does kink belong in the closet, or should it become mainstream culture? Where does the kink scene belong?

Gender, roles

- How do you see gender and gender differences in the kink scene?
- Describe the gender representations and gender roles within the kink scene.
- Describe the different roles that occur in the kink scene. You can for instance compare the role expectations in everyday life to the kink roles.

Other issues

- If you wish, you can discuss any matters pertaining to kink that have not yet been addressed.

Appendix 2. Call for writings II

Originally published in Finnish and in English for PhD research in April 2017.

Kink community – call for writings

You are welcome to take part in research on kink communities!

In your own words, write about your relationship to kinky sexuality and the kink community. You can tell your story about how you found out you were kinky, and how you discovered the community. How is kinky present in your everyday life? In my research, I am especially interested in the Finnish kink events. You can discuss your experiences of fetish and BDSM parties and other events: the atmosphere, dressing up, what happens there, why you attend or do not attend them. What do the events mean to you?

Below you can find a list of more specific questions that you can use as guides if you wish.

Who can take part in this survey?

I am looking for writings from people who are kinky. Whether you are a sadist, fetishist, bondage artist, or something completely different – if you feel the concept of kinky applies to you in some way, or the questionnaire covers your area of interests, you are most welcome to join!

Directions

- You can include some background information about yourself, such as age, gender (and pronouns), where you come from or where you live (no need to name the actual city), ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status.
- The set of questions are here to guide your thinking towards the topics that are relevant to my study. You do not need to answer them all. You may focus on themes that are interesting or important to you.
- I study Finnish kink communities, but you may compare your experiences from communities outside Finland as well.
- There are no limitations to the length of the writings. You may write in English or Finnish.
- Please mention in the text whether I may contact you later and add your email address.
- Send your answers **by 31 May 2017** to ***@gmail.com

More information about the study can be found at the end of this form.

THE MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

You may use these questions if you want to.

You as kinky

I use the concept of “kinky” in my research. Not all people identify with this label.

- How do you define your kinkiness? What concepts do you prefer?

How did you notice you were kinky?

- How did you find the kink community?
- What is your relationship to that community now? Do you feel like you are part of it or belong to it? If not, why?

Kinky sexuality?

- Do you consider kinky a sexuality or a sexual orientation? Is kink always related to sex or sexuality, or is it something else? A lifestyle, a hobby...? What?

Kink community

- Who are the kinky (e.g., men, women, queer, academics, geeks, working class, disabled, gay, lesbian, bisexual, polyamorous, goths, white, Finnish, sociable, introvert..)? Are there some groups of people who are left out? What do you think is the reason?
- What does kink community mean to you? What is a kink community? Where is it situated? Who belongs to it?
- How does the online kink community differ from the face-to-face community?
- Who are the kink associations/organisations and events for?
- Is it easy to access the kink community?
- If you feel it might be more difficult for some than others to access the community, what would be needed for this to change? Is this necessary?
- What are the factors that create a sense of belonging in the kink community?
 - between individuals
 - in the associations
 - at the events
 - online
- What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the kink community?
- Has the kink community changed over time? How? Is the change positive?
- Is kinky nowadays more present in everyday life through media and popular culture, for example? Should kinky be out of the closet? Have you attended a Pride parade as a kinky? Is that a place for the kinky?
- What makes the kink community special compared to other communities?
- What negative aspects are there that are specific to the kink community?
- Are you an active/board member of a kink association? What motivates you? What do you get from volunteering?

Events/parties

By events, I mean the BDSM and fetish parties that are organised in Finland usually by BDSM and fetish associations but by other actors as well.

- Why do you go/do not go to kink events?
- Who goes to these events? Why?
- Why are kink events needed? Why are they organised?
- What kinds of events are there? How do they differ from one another?
- What is the difference between commercial events and those organised by associations? Are there different reasons for attending? Are they for different guests?
- What creates the special atmosphere at kink events? What would ruin this atmosphere?
- Does it matter whether the event includes stage performances? Does it have any significance whether the performers are from the organising association or commercial performers?

Attending the events

You may discuss, for example

- Your feelings before the event (e.g., how do you prepare, get ready and set the mood)
- What was the event location like?
- How did the people there look like?
- What happened in the event space?
 - What was it like to enter the event?
 - How did the evening proceed?
- What roles do being sociable, having alcohol, and playing play?
- What feelings did you experience?
- Your feelings after the event

First time at a kink event

Discuss your feelings at the first event you attended

- How did you feel prior to the event?
- What was the reception like?
- What kinds of feelings did you experience?
- Did you want to attend another event? Why/why not?

Organising kink events

- What is the process like to organise a kink event?
- Why do you take part in organising the events even though you get no monetary compensation?
- What is your “reward”, and what motivates you to organise the events?
- What makes you frustrated? What do you wish was different?

Dressing up

- Is it important to dress in a fetish outfit at an event? Is it beneficial to have dress codes at events? Or perhaps unnecessary?

- On what basis do you choose your outfit for an event? How do you dress up? What did you wear the last time you attended a kink event?
- Discuss the significance of dressing up for the atmosphere of the events.
- Do you also dress up in fetish attire at home? In what situations? Why?
- Is dressing up (in the context of kink) only related to fetishes, or does it have other meanings as well?

Everyday life

- Is kinky part of everyday life?
- How does kink show in your everyday life?
- Is there such a thing as mundane kinky? For instance, light sadomasochism or dressing up in sexy lingerie at home? Or is kinky always rather the opposite of mundane?
- If kinky is not part of everyday life, what is it?
- Do you hide your kinkiness? How?

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The researcher

I am Johanna Pohtinen (MA), a PhD student in European Ethnology at the University of Turku. My interest is the Finnish kink community, a feeling of belonging, and everyday life. Back in the day, I was a board member in a kink association in Turku (Turun BDSM yhdistys ry, Turun Baletti), but since I have left the association, I now attend events around Finland only occasionally. I graduated with a master's degree in European Ethnology in 2012.

The research

The purpose of this research is to present kinky sexuality and the kink community through the narratives of individuals. I want the voice of the kinky to be heard and will discuss issues introduced in these writings. I have studied kink communities already in my master's thesis (you can find it here: <http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/76818>). The first article for my PhD dissertation will be published in the spring of 2017 in the SQS journal. I work in Helsinki, but I also visit Turku frequently because of my studies. My aim is to complete my dissertation by 2020.

Anonymity

The kink community in Finland is rather small, and I therefore aim to protect the anonymity of my respondents carefully. In my research, I never reveal the respondent's name, profession, place of residence, or physical illness, for example. I might include a respondent's age, gender, and details such as "lives in a rural area" or "has higher education" if it is necessary. The anonymised writings will be stored in the Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts at the University of Turku. There the writings will be available to use for scientific work only.

Can you be asked for further information via email?

Hopefully, these query answers will make up the main data for my research. However, I might need to gain more information on a certain topic and therefore might either do interviews face to face or ask further questions via email or Skype (text form preferred). Please include your email address if I may contact you later. This does not obligate you to anything, and you may decline to participate later. My aim is to complete my dissertation by 2020, and the queries and interviews will most likely take place in 2017–2019.

Appendix 3. Call for photographs and writings

Originally published only in Finnish in June 2020. Translation by the author.

Call for materials: The materiality of kink and everyday life

You are welcome to take part in research on kink communities!

Take photographs of kink that is meaningful to you, such as equipment, accessories, your favourite clothing, or the presence of kink in your home.

I am looking for photographs that could be part of an article of my PhD dissertation in which I discuss the materiality of kink: those objects, equipment, clothes, accessories, etc. of the material world that have meaning to you in kink. The objects on the photos can be bought, self-made, or repurposed. In addition, you can photograph kink that is on display in your home. I also wish to receive writings to accompany and describe the photographs.

The definition of kink in my research: non-normative, often erotic, often but not always related to sex/sexuality; for example, BDSM, fetishes, other preferences and desires outside of what is seen as the norm. Kink may be spice for sex, an identity, a way of life, a hobby, or anything in between. It may be a new thing to you or a familiar field.

See below for further instructions and more information about the research.

Note:

- The purpose of this study is not to collect nude photographs or erotic material – these kinds of pictures probably have other, better outlets!
- The photograph does not need to be an aesthetic or technically skilled piece of work, but since they are likely to be published online and in print as part of my dissertation, clarity and good lighting are always a plus. I hope you send the photographs using the largest possible size.
- The equipment, clothes, and toys may be ones that were bought specifically for a certain kink purpose, self-made, or even repurposed household items – anything that is part of your kink paraphernalia.

The purpose and use of the photographs

The photographs are likely to be published in an international scientific journal and as part of my PhD dissertation. Every photograph will not be published, but they will be used as part of my study. By sending material through this call for materials, you agree on its use for research purposes and its storage in the Archives of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku. If you do not wish to be recognisable in the photos, please censor the photographs yourself in a manner of your choice.

DIRECTIONS

Photographs:

The photographs may cover the following themes, for example:

1. **How kink merges with the mundane surroundings:** Take a picture of kink that is visibly present in your home. It could be a whip in a vase at the bedside table or a painting reflecting your fetish on your wall, or anything else.
2. **Hidden kinky:** Photograph a place where you keep your kink paraphernalia. It may be a room dedicated to kink, the closet you store your toys in, or a box of kink objects, for example.
3. **Kink objects:** Photograph your kink equipment/clothes/accessories. For example, the object may be on the bed or on the floor (on a surface where the object is clearly visible), or it may be your favourite outfit or the item of clothing of your kink event outfit, which you may spread on the floor or hang on a clothes hanger, for example (you can also be dressed yourself, but please do keep in mind the purpose of the photographs).

Text:

Write about what you have photographed and why. The length of the text is up to you. What would be most interesting for my study would be a discussion about your relationship to kink, and what the objects you photographed mean to you as a kinkster. Below are some questions to support your writing, but you do not need to answer them directly. You can write freely about the photos you have taken, in short or at length.

- Background information:
 - o You can include background information of your choice, such as age, gender, whereabouts you are from (no need to name the city), sexual orientation, your relationship status (do you have a family, are you single, polyamorous...)
 - o Have you participated in my research before? I have collected writings in 2010 and 2017.
- What is in the photograph?
- Why did you photograph these particular things?
- What does the photograph tell about you as a kinky individual? I.e., how are the objects/clothes/accessories related to you?
- What feelings, memories, or thoughts do you have regarding the objects/clothes/accessories in the photos?
- How can kink be seen in your home?
- In what kinds of situations do you take out the photographed objects/clothes/accessories?
- Where or with whom do you use the photographed objects/clothes/accessories?
- Do you have favourite objects/clothes/accessories? What makes them your favourites?

- Acquiring/purchasing new objects/clothes/accessories: what makes you acquire new paraphernalia? What makes you not to? How do you make the purchase decision?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about the photograph?

DIRECTIONS FOR SENDING THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT:

Send 1 to 3 photographs and a descriptive text via email to ***@gmail.com by **31 August 2020**. Alternatively, you can save the photographs in cloud and share the link, so I can download them for my use (recommended!). The size of the photographs should be as large as possible. Please do not reduce the size of the photographs if you retouch them.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The researcher

I am Johanna Pohtinen (MA), a PhD student in European Ethnology at the University of Turku. My research interest is the Finnish kink community and kink identity, a feeling of belonging, and everyday life. Back in the day, I was a board member in a kink association in Turku (Turun BDSM yhdistys ry, Turun Baletti), but since I have left the association, I now attend events around Finland only occasionally.

The research

The purpose of this research is to present kinky through the narratives of individuals. I want the voice of the kinky to be heard and discuss issues introduced in these writings. I have studied kink communities already in my master's thesis (you can find it here: <http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/76818>). The first article for my PhD dissertation about kink community was published in the spring of 2017 in the SQS journal. Second article on affects related to kink was published in 2019 in journal Ethnologia Fennica. The third article discusses everyday life and mundanity of kink, and now I am collecting material for the fourth and final article of my dissertation, which is going to examine the material aspects of kink. My aim is to complete my dissertation by 2021.

Anonymity

The kink community in Finland is rather small, and I therefore aim to protect the anonymity of my respondents carefully. I have named the writers with English pseudonyms reflecting the gender they have mentioned in their texts. In my research, I never reveal the respondents' name, profession, place of residence, or physical illness, for example. I might include a respondent's age, gender, and details such as "lives in a rural area" or "has higher education" if it is necessary. The anonymised writings (i.e., without reference to e.g., name or email address) will be stored in the Archives of History, Culture and Arts at the University of Turku. There the writings will be available to use for research and teaching purposes.

Did you participate in the call for writing of my master's thesis in 2010-2011 or of my PhD dissertation in 2017?

You can absolutely participate again. It would be nice, although not compulsory, if you could tell if you participated previously. This guarantees you do not need to repeat what you may have already written before.

Appendix 4. Interview questions and participant observation sheet

Originally published in Finnish as part of my bachelor's thesis in November 2009. Translation by the author.

Interview questions

- Years of birth and ages
- How did you come up with the idea of attending a kink event?
- When was this? Have you been attending them regularly since then, or have you had longer breaks?
- What was it like to attend a kink event for the first time?
- How were you welcomed in the scene as a newbie? Was it easy to feel included, or did you feel like an outsider?
- What keeps you coming back to kink events?
- If we compare a kink event to a night out in a regular nightclub... Do you go to nightclubs?
- How do you get ready for a kink event? E.g., choosing an outfit, donning make-up, a pre-party, drinking alcohol...? Are things like these more/less important for the party mood when you are attending a regular nightclub vs. a kink event?
- Do you drink more/less alcohol, or different kinds of drinks, or for different reasons?
- Has anyone tried to hit on you? Was this different from being hit on in a regular nightclub? If so, how?
- Have you encountered event etiquette violations, e.g., physical harassment or something else unpleasant?
- Do you use the dungeon equipment available at the events? If you do, with whom? If you use it with strangers/new acquaintances, how does this happen, who asks whom? Is there flirtation?
- Do you experience a sense of belonging at the events? Do you feel like you are part of the group?
- Do you think there are visible hierarchies, or an attitude that certain people are better than others at the events? Are some folks looked down on?
- How do you react to newcomers? Can you spot a newcomer from the crowd?
- How do you react to "tourists", i.e., people who arrive not knowing it is a kink event or dressed in street clothes?
- Have you made new friends/acquaintances at the events?
- Do you have friends/acquaintances you only meet at the events?
- What do you think, why do people attend kink events in the first place? What is the most important reason?
- What is best and worst about kink events?

Participant observation sheet

Event attendees

- Young, old, gay, straight, women, men, trans people, people dressed up in kink attire, people in street clothes, couples, stag parties/groups of men, hen parties/groups of women, groups of friends, people alone.
- Is it possible to spot the newcomers from the crowd, e.g., by the way they dress or behave?
- What kinds of visible roles do people have? Domina, Master, slave, sub, goth...

Party culture

- The event location: Decoration? How has an erotic nightclub been turned into a kink event?
- Aesthetics/carnivalisation: What kinds of outfits/fetishes are represented? How are people dressed up? Is showing off an integral part? How does this show?
- Drinking: How do people drink in comparison to regular bars? What is being drunk, how much?
- Dancing: Do people dance? Who are dancing? What is the music like?
- Hitting on/flirting: Does it occur? Is it noticeable? How does it happen? Are there arse grabbers? Is the etiquette followed?
- Other activities: The use of the dungeon equipment – at what point of the night? Who are using it? Other action?

Interaction between event attendees

- Are there “groups” that are not open to others? Do these groups mix with others?
- Small talk? E.g., complimenting outfits, welcoming newcomers...?



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ISBN 978-951-29-9159-4 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-9160-0 (PDF)
ISSN 0082-6987 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3191 (Online)