

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A RESEARCH STUDY OF THE EROTIC HYPNOSIS COMMUNITY

SAM HUGHES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ, CA

CENTER FOR POSITIVE SEXUALITY, BURBANK, CA

WHAT DO ACADEMICS KNOW ABOUT EROTIC HYPNOSIS?

- Very little
 - Hypnosis, in general, is mostly studied clinically (e.g., Flammer & Bongartz, 2003).
- Only one study ever conducted on erotic hypnosis (Chambers, 2020), which analyzed a message board for gay men into dumb jockification for linguistic features
 - Intentional misspellings
 - Adding “bro” to the end of sentences
 - Performance of masculinity

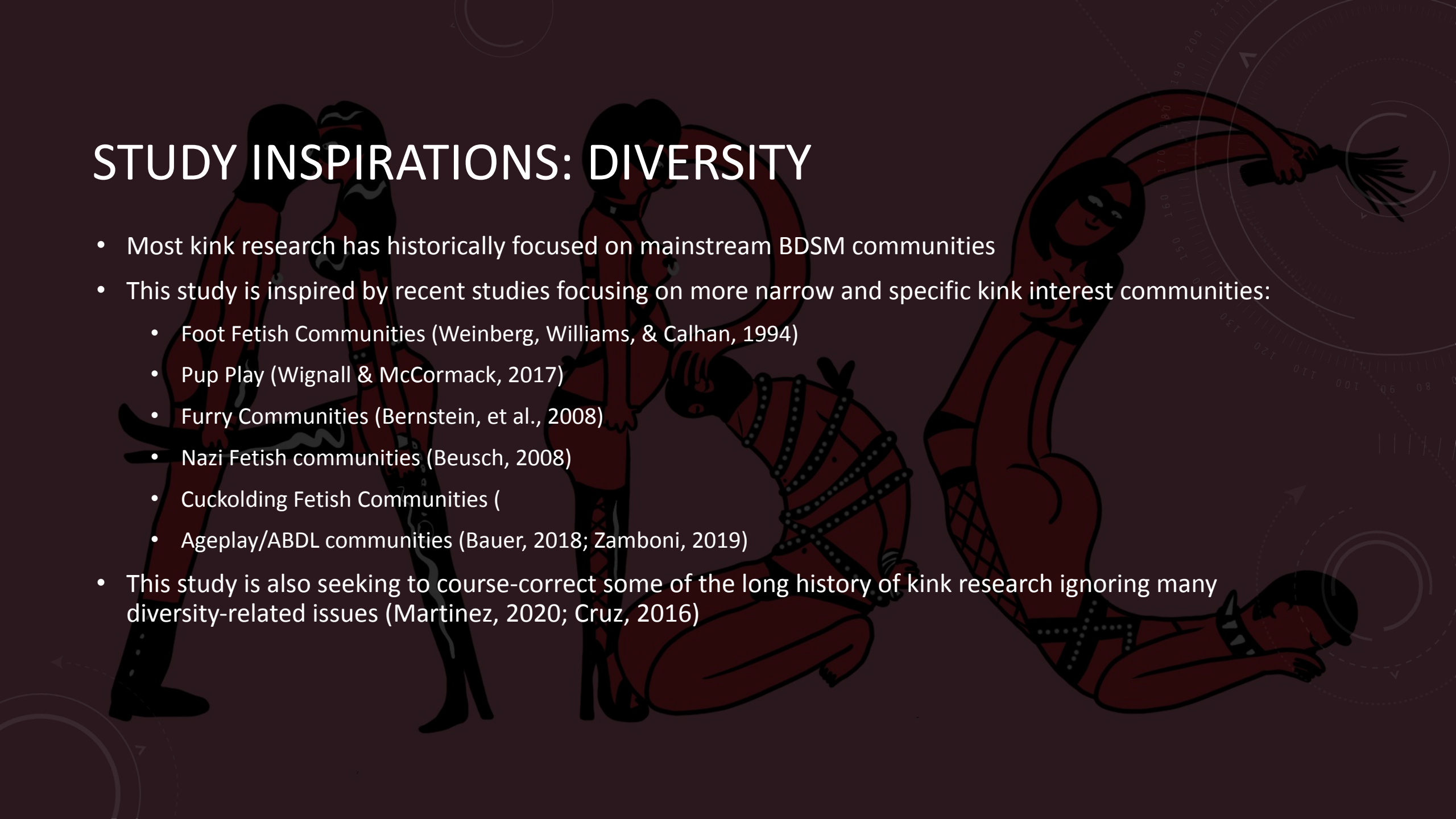


“Thaz how u kno ur dum”

Jock identity and orthographic play on a male erotic hypnosis messageboard

Eric Chambers | SUNY New Paltz ^{NY}, USA

STUDY INSPIRATIONS: DIVERSITY

A stylized illustration in a dark, muted color palette (shades of brown, tan, and grey) depicting four figures in various kink-related poses. On the left, a person in a high-heeled, lace-up boot and a corset-like top stands. Next to them, a person is bent over, wearing a striped, cage-like garment. In the center, a person is kneeling or crouching, also in a similar striped garment. On the right, a person is lying on their back, holding a long, thin object (possibly a whip or flogger) above their head. The background features faint, circular, concentric lines and arrows, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

- Most kink research has historically focused on mainstream BDSM communities
- This study is inspired by recent studies focusing on more narrow and specific kink interest communities:
 - Foot Fetish Communities (Weinberg, Williams, & Calhan, 1994)
 - Pup Play (Wignall & McCormack, 2017)
 - Furry Communities (Bernstein, et al., 2008)
 - Nazi Fetish communities (Beusch, 2008)
 - Cuckolding Fetish Communities (
 - Ageplay/ABDL communities (Bauer, 2018; Zamboni, 2019)
- This study is also seeking to course-correct some of the long history of kink research ignoring many diversity-related issues (Martinez, 2020; Cruz, 2016)

STUDY INSPIRATIONS: STIGMA AND MINORITY STRESS

- BDSM/kink-oriented people sometimes experience high levels of stigma around kink interests and identity (Bezreh, et al., 2012; Waldura, et al., 2016; Hughes & Hammack, 2020).
- Stigma harms physical and mental health (Meyer, 2003; Hatzenbuehler, 2009)
- Stigma unique to Erotic Hypnosis?



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What motivations do participants identify for these interests?
- What stigma and challenges does the erotic hypnosis community face?
- How do the variety of intersecting identities participants occupy alongside their erotic hypnosis identity (age, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) impact and complicate their experiences with erotic hypnosis?

METHOD

Data Collection

- In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews
 - Typically about 90 minutes, though ranged from 50-150 minutes
- 83 Participants recruited at four erotic hypnosis conventions (2 in-person, 2 online, 39 participants) and via snowball sampling and online advertisements (44 participants)
- Highly diverse on many demographics (including 39% people of color)

Data Analysis

- Data transcribed and anonymized from interview audio-recordings
- Abbreviated Inductive Thematic Analysis (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2008) for emerging themes.

INTERVIEW TOPICS

The erotic hypnosis community

Life story of realizing erotic hypnosis interests

Privacy and online communities

Problems and challenges

Perspectives on consent

Experiences in the light of other identities (race, age, gender, etc.)

Community-submitted questions

INTERVIEW TOPICS

The erotic hypnosis community

Life story of realizing erotic hypnosis interests

Privacy and online communities

Problems and challenges

Perspectives on consent

Experiences in the light of other identities (race, age, gender, etc.)

Community-submitted questions

MOTIVATIONS FOR EROTIC HYPNOSIS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Exchanging power,
control, and trust

Tool for experiencing
physically or ethically
impossible kink
interests

Spice for enhancing
other kink interests

The stresses of being
smart

Coping with mental
and physical health
challenges

Achieving altered
states of
consciousness

MOTIVATIONS: EXCHANGING POWER, CONTROL, AND TRUST

- I knew it was a power thing for me, the trust and control and that sort of thing. It's really the functionality of hypnosis and the need to give over consent and trust, give over control, and the trust that that that requires. It really does it to me.

MOTIVATIONS: TOOL FOR EXPERIENCING PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE KINK INTERESTS

- Participant: ...being able to hypnotize people to believe things that are actually impossible, opens up a lot of creative doors that you don't see other places.
- Sam: What are some of the impossible beliefs you've seen people play with?
- Participant: That their bodies are changing...there are people who do and they do just some really weird stuff. Body horror kinds of things like your lips are stuck together like in the Matrix or your arm is melting off and you can't do anything about it.

MOTIVATIONS: TOOL FOR EXPERIENCING ETHICALLY IMPOSSIBLE KINK INTERESTS

- Gay Participant:
- I had a desire to you know, just touch or feel another man's body, and I wanted to be able to do so, and I perceived society to be like a place where gay people really didn't exist. So I thought, you know I'm going to have to do something that is without his consent....How can I do this in a way that doesn't necessarily harm this person, but yet at the same time like I get to do it? And so I would see movies that had hypnosis in it, there was someone being hypnotized and then made to rob a bank and then they don't remember afterward. And I thought 'oh, if this is possible, then you know I don't want someone to commit crimes, but you know it would be nice to you know just have a few stolen moments with another man's body.

MOTIVATIONS: SPICE FOR ENHANCING OTHER KINK INTERESTS

- [Hypnosis is] a tool or spice for other things. It is also very different. It's just on its own the relaxation and feeling of that loss of control. I mean, submission is my main kink and hypnosis can serve that. I'm also into bondage and it can serve as a tool to augment or replace that.

MOTIVATIONS: THE STRESSES OF BEING SMART

- I remember somebody said “You know, if you really think about it, bimbofication play doesn’t have to be about big boobs and blonde hair. It can be all about the IQ play aspect of it”. And I was like “Okay, go on”. I think I’m fairly book smart. I’ve got a fair few degrees...I think at the time it was kind of like wow, people do this as mental escapism. That’s kind of fun. ...My girlfriend is the same. She’s real book smart. She’s super analytical, so watching her go from that to this like absolute joyful kind of dumbness is just absolutely amazing. Her and I really bonded on that kind of front.

MOTIVATIONS: COPING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

- I've been depressed basically as long as I can remember and it's been pretty severe. I'm not actively suicidal. I was a lot in my early twenties especially. Experiencing something like ego-death through hypnosis can be [pause] it's not therapy, but therapeutic. When you're suicidal, you're not wanting to die exactly, you're wanting the pain to stop. Having just a taste of oblivion, that you can come back from afterwards, is so so nice. It's methadone for suicide, to put it flippantly.

MOTIVATIONS: ACHIEVING ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

- I realized that the person on the other end of the phone was hypnotized. And it was like probably the first time that I had tranced somebody by voice. And I was just like, like ‘holy cow this person is like in an altered state of mind, and I did that.

DIVERSITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost
- Self-Reinforcing Cycle

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
- Gender Dysphoria
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- PTSD
- ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost
- Self-Reinforcing Cycle

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
 - Gender Dysphoria
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - PTSD
 - ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

YOUNGER PEOPLE AS VULNERABLE

- “There are a few known predators on the online communities that prey on new, younger people. Especially there’s a few people that create files and they put suggestions in the files that are essentially brainwashing, to get these people to continue listening to their files, to reach out to these hypnotist outside of the files, to get them to do things that they wouldn’t normally be willing to do.”

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost
- Self-Reinforcing Cycle

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
- Gender Dysphoria
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- PTSD
- ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

RACE

- From a Black participant:
- Black people in particular tend to see hypnosis as a kind of voodoo, magic, or at the very least it's an interference in their relationship with God. It's an intercedence, and they feel like they are surrendering their will and they feel like they should only do that to their higher power...There's concerns about being fetishized by other people that are there, and just not being comfortable...Racism still exists, and it's not overt. It's very subtle...Nobody's going to drag out a flaming cross or anything, but we can cancel his ass [Referring to a POC in the community].

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
 - Gender Dysphoria
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - PTSD
 - ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

GENDER IMBALANCE IN ROLES

- From a Participant who is a Woman:
- I am a talented hypnotist who is reasonably attractive and also does not charge money. Therefore, everybody wants me. There are a lot of male submissives, who want that connection, and generally most women who are considered attractive and talented at hypnosis and even some of that aren't, will charge good money to provide that service because there is a demand.

ALLEVIATING GENDER DYSPHORIA

- From an Agender Participant:
- Especially for trans people there are so many transformations in the scene that you can do that I think really helps with dysphoria because if you were assigned male at birth, but you're a woman, you can do hypnosis to make someone feel more feminine. And then like there's a whole bunch of like feminizing hypnosis and stuff that people really respond to.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
 - Gender Dysphoria
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - PTSD
 - ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

- I had a severe concussion, I'm still recovering. It turns out I have cognitive issues still...Hypnosis actually became a part of my rehabilitation. Even the erotic side of it became a part of my rehabilitation because hypnosis is actually found to help regenerate some of the pathways in the brain. It helps reconnect and force the brain to think in ways that it normally doesn't. So all of my rehab team is like "whatever works to get your brain thinking, do it...It's always the next day [after an erotic hypnosis session] I'd be doing really well, and [the rehab team] would notice!

DISABILITY AS A SOURCE OF KINKY FUN

- From a deaf participant with a cochlear implant
- “Well, having an implant is unique, you don't have any sound going into your ear and in doing so, people can' be made aware of what is being said or heard. With an implant, the sound feeds directly into your inner ear and into your brain. No one would ever know if you were being controlled or being hypnotized or being trained. It is also, essentially a computer. Computers can be hacked especially when they are connected to the internet through Bluetooth.”

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Age

- Younger People as Vulnerable
- Ageism Against Older Community Members
- Older community members presumed to be skilled
- Older Community members expected to take on Mommy/Daddy Roles

Race

- Community is Overwhelmingly White
 - Lack of awareness among many white participants
- Nerd Culture
- Conservative Religious Traditions
- Financial Cost

Gender

- Gender Imbalance in Fetish Roles
- Alleviating Gender Dysphoria
- The Challenges of Kink and Feminism

Disability

- Benefits of Erotic Hypnosis for Alleviating Disability Symptoms
 - Anxiety
 - Pain management
 - Gender Dysphoria
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - PTSD
 - ADD/ADHD
- Disability as Fun

Sexual Orientation

- Gay men's community relies on more implied consent
- Gay men's spaces as more fetish-oriented
- Pansexual community relies on more affirmative consent

GAY MEN'S COMMUNITY RELIES ON MORE IMPLIED CONSENT

- [On the Hypnosisforguys Discord Server] There are no imposed rule sets of behaviors or expectations about behaviors. So it is pretty much a free for all and it's free for all in which people involved are largely aroused men. So, they're thinking about what gets them off rather than ...what is an ethical, moral code of behavior. What is it that builds community in the longer term. And that's understandable and I can't complain about it. For them the hypnosis site, that site is about getting off. So, you know, that's what it is to them, it's understandable people are gonna view it that way and behave that way.

PANSEXUAL COMMUNITY RELIES ON MORE AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT

- Well these days, people are more concerned with consent. I run a Discord server and we always make sure, if somebody tried that shit, it would be like “Oh hell no! Get the mods in. Shut that shit down now, you know?” if you don’t have consent for all that kind of stuff.

RESULTS: THE 6 BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING THE EROTIC HYPNOSIS COMMUNITY

Erotic Hypnosis Sites and Erotic Hypnosis Content Getting Shut Down

Stigma, Ignorance, and Misunderstanding

Diversity and Inclusivity Issues

The Handling of Consent Violation Allegations

Cliquey-ness

Accessibility

Fetish Clang

EROTIC HYPNOSIS SITES AND EROTIC HYPNOSIS CONTENT GETTING SHUT DOWN

- Well I mean from a business standpoint the erotic hypnosis community is at a loss especially for things like sex workers or content creators of any sort. Your content will get banned, PayPal will not work with you. No...no really— almost no financial carrier will work with you the second that they find out that you're doing hypnosis content in any way, shape, or form and sadly enough what this does is it kind of limits the amount of marketing, the amount of positive marketing that they can do for themselves. So it keeps the erotic hypnosis community as this sort of perceived shameful taboo thing which makes it so much harder for people to actually find it.

STIGMA, IGNORANCE, AND MISUNDERSTANDING

- “That whole idea of from the outside looking like we’re breaking consent. ‘Cause it is a CNC or RACK or whatever type kink. Where it’s like oh it’s kinda breaking consent if-if you remove their ability to think about whatever or move. It’s like, it’s kinda like drug play. You’re putting them in an altered state of consciousness. But I think as long as we preach, like, pre-talk and heavy consent, that’s-that’ll be resolved a little bit.”

THE HANDLING OF CONSENT VIOLATION ALLEGATIONS

- “I think that just letting people know that we're not shady, and I think all the predators that we've had really hurt our community as well. Like we have that issue of having predators and then not dealing with it properly because we have people that want to forgive them, and then they have with their supporters that think that they've never done anything wrong to begin with and everybody that's come forward and every bit of evidence is just something made up. That's an issue that we have in the community.”

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY ISSUES

- I feel like there is a lot, like, although- There are lots of people in the community that have mental health challenges, especially. I also feel there's a lot of stigma. I can't remember where I- we had this conversation, like in a study group, and nobody could find the book where it was mentioned. So we're all feeling like we imagined it, but there was some book that was kind of an introductory book for erotic hypnosis, where it said something like, you know, 'if people have mental health challenges, you shouldn't be playing with them'

BAD ACTORS IN POSITIONS OF POWER

- I think a lot of the time it's because the person, like, has a position of power, or like they have a lot of--they've been around for a long time and, um, like a lot of times they can prey on new people and because they're seen as like having more experience the new person's experience is, like, dismissed because they think that this person--yes, they have a lot of prestige a lot of the time like often they can be like very involved in the community and involved in like a lot of events and things. Yeah, it really--yeah it's challenging because, like, people don't want to, like lose that presence so they sort of just dismiss any, um, anything that's brought up against them sort of thing, yeah.

ACCESSIBILITY

- I would say that we're so spread out and there's also yeah--there's a huge community in the US but in European countries, it's very small and that's why it's kinda hard to--to find someone and find a play partner for hypnosis here. It keeps growing, but, you know, it's not half the size of the normal BDSM community here. So, yeah. I'll say lack of people that are interested.

ACCESSIBILITY

- A deaf participant:
- (during a stage hypnosis show) From the stage, the tist told all the participants that their life would improve, feeling positive and all that stuff. I was in depression at that time and somehow I think it helped me getting out and stop taking antidepressants. I did search for hypnosis but the biggest problem is the interpreter cost. There is no deaf hypnotist or any hypnotist who know ASL (American Sign Language) So that lead me to go online and I have strong sex drive and always go on porn or sex sites, and discovered hypnosis as the fetish. So that led me to explore more.
- Sam: I see...What made the porn and sex sites more accessible to you?
- Participant: Because of the platforms that allows text to communicate.

A NEW TERM: FETISH CLANG

- The variety of attention-demanding positive, negative, and neutral feelings that occur when a person with a fetish interest suddenly and unexpectedly encounters their fetish in a non-kink-oriented context, often when there are others around who are unaware of the feelings the person with the fetish is experiencing.

FETISH CLANG

One participant:

- “I went to go see Incredibles Two in theaters, ...that was one where I saw it and I went ‘this is a movie for kids? This is a movie that I'm going to show children one day!’”

Another participant:

- “I would go to those like hypnosis shows at like the fair and stuff and I would be so fucking uncomfortable. Because to me it was like watching people have sex in front of a bunch of other people like for the first kind of thing where I'd just be like oh my God, I can't believe they're doing this in front of other people. Everyone would just be watching it and just having a good time and I would just be like wow, like is anyone else like really uncomfortable with this? That's this seems crazy that this is happening on stage in front of us like with kids around you know what I mean?

CONCLUSIONS

Some shared motivations with Kink/BDSM, others fairly unique to erotic hypnosis.

- Some use erotic hypnosis primarily as a tool, while others are interested in erotic hypnosis in and of itself.

A variety of challenges faced from both internal community dynamics and external stigma

- As well as stigma from the BDSM community

Experiences are complex and diverse along other axes of identity.

- Age, Race, Gender, Disability, and Sexual Orientation all color and complicate experiences with erotic hypnosis in a variety of ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Common demographic features of community mentioned by participants:

- High prevalence of geek/nerd/gamer culture
- High prevalence of neurodivergent people
 - Especially autism-spectrum, ADD/ADHD, anxiety disorders.
- High prevalence of transgender people
- High prevalence of white people
- High prevalence of highly educated people

LIMITATIONS

1

Not a representative sample (Intentionally oversampled for diversity)

2

Causal claims are participant's subjective interpretations of causation.

3

Results are preliminary



FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND LINKS TO EXISTING BDSM LITERATURE

Headspace and subspace

Consent, and similar challenges to how
BDSM communities attempt to self-police

Transient hypofrontality and escape from
self

Minority stress theory



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

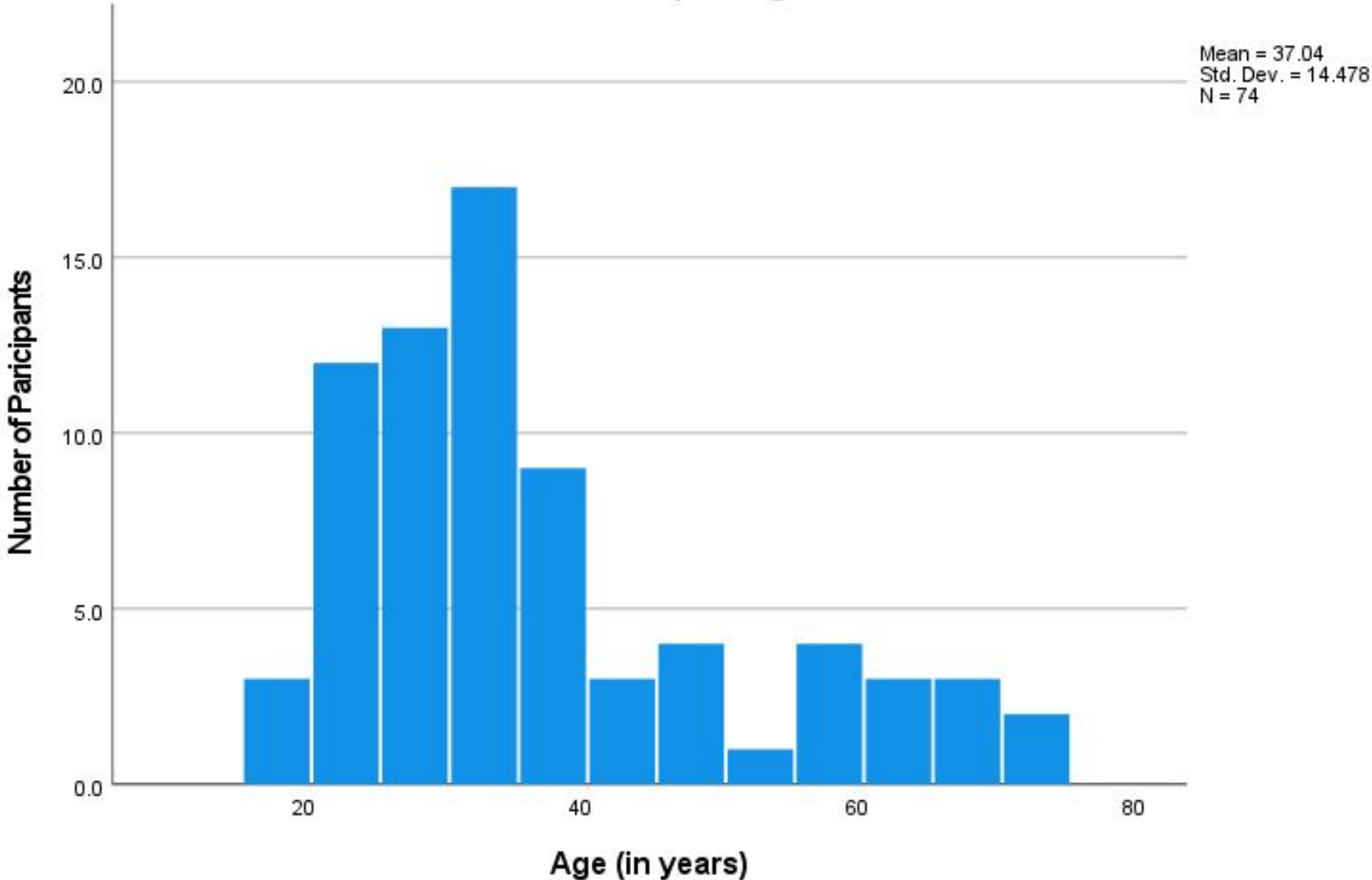
Undergraduate Transcribers and Coders: Paola Alban Zavala, Aman Mehrotra, Marina Rivera, Lauren Woo, Christie Ling, Daniel Levy, Helen Everbach, Eleonore Melon-Drahon, Andrew Singer, Alana Schoen, Georgie Blewett, Ben Robinson, Aiyanna Joan Veras, Madeliene Schlieter, Eva Di Giorgio, Audrey Creel, Emma Thompson, Rachel Saunders, Malachi Ross, Max Silverstein, Blair Sass, Jayleen Jamie, Bambi Ajwa, Akasha Abraham, Mia Boak, Louie Dunn, Rachel Heath, Melia Arken, Toby Baylon, Alicia Charles D'Avalon, Alison Murchek, Cece Felicich, Crissy Smith, Emily Silva, Emma Preston, Jill Lissner, Jill Rubinstein, Ivan Burke, Kai Ingraham, Long Tran, Ridley Waldman, Stella Storin.

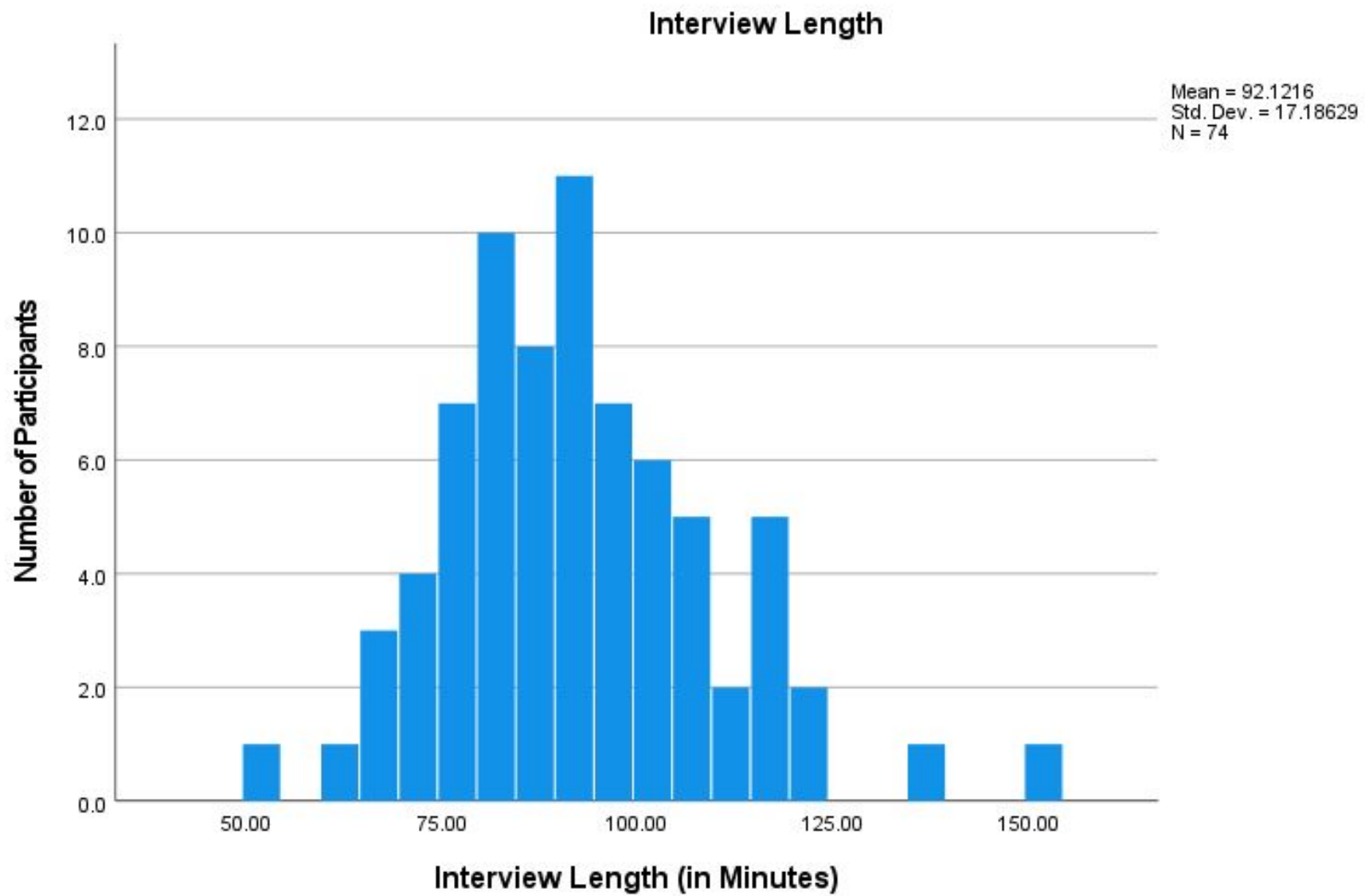
Research Advisors: Phil Hammack & Adriana Manago

Sexual and Gender Diversity Lab: Logan Barsigian and Dan Copulsky

Study expenses covered via crowdfunding donations, the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the Federico and Rena Perlino Award, and the Drs. Veronica and James Elias Positive Sexuality Student Research Award.

Participant Age Distribution





Gender Distribution

