

“Even with all this, I could not live without kinkiness”

Kinky Understandings of Everyday Life

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The habits and routines of everyday life can create a sense of safety in their predictability and form unnoticed rhythms and patterns (Ehn & Löfgren 2010:80–81). In addition, everyday life is a place for creativity, improvisation, and multitasking, such as daydreaming in the shower or listening to music while cleaning (Löfgren 2014:91). Amidst the mundane, anything exceptional and the bizarre stands out. However, everyday life experience is not just either boring or exceptional, it is rather complex, nuanced, and varied for individuals. Furthermore, the concept of “everyday life” may hold various meanings for different individuals.

Something such as kink may seem bizarre for some individuals yet be a mundane part of everyday life for others (Highmore 2002:3). Moreover, kink has a multifaceted role in the everyday life of individuals and can occasionally present as ambiguous. In this article, we examine the ways in which kinky individuals navigate the borderlines between their kinks and their everyday lives. *Kink* is a term used for various practices pertaining to consensual use of power dynamics and pain (BDSM) in addition to other non-normative desires, such as fetishism or role-play. A *kinky* person engages in one or more such activity. Different forms of kink are not necessarily related to sex, although they often have erotic qualities. *Everyday life* is often understood as consisting of work, taking care of home, family, and social life, those fragments of life that typically are considered self-evident and even unnoticed (Hämeenaho 2014:73). Everyday life may be thought of as devoid of any eroticism or exceptionality (Edgley 2015; Highmore 2002:3) – let alone eroticism pertaining to kink. We ex-

plore kink, yet we do not discuss merely the kinky acts, such as BDSM play. We are rather interested in the more mundane and marginal aspects of kink: The ways kink is present in the everyday life of individuals. As per cultural analysts Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (2010:7), we shed light on those aspects of kink that may remain unnoticed or which are neglected as aspects of kink. Our research question is: How do kinky-identified individuals negotiate the relationship between kinkiness and everyday life in a society that stigmatizes kink?

We are thus discussing activities which may not be completely accepted by the surrounding society, yet are very important for their practitioners. Even when such activities take place daily in the lives of certain individuals, they are usually not a part of those people’s everyday lives, according to their own views. On the contrary, part of the very attraction of kink is in that it is transgressive and a break from the prevailing norm (e.g. Weiss 2011). Likewise, traits associated with kinky pleasure, such as accentuated dominance or submissiveness, may be ones that are not seen as preferable in everyday situations, and can in fact exist in stark contrast to the ways in which kinky individuals present themselves outside of their kinky activities.

Individuals’ understanding of what constitutes kink is furthermore often shaped by the surrounding culture and society: kinky has sometimes been considered a prefix for a specific type of sex and, thus, may add to the connotation of kink merely pertaining to sexual activity. Our discussion concentrates on those moments where nothing overtly kinky occurs (Ehn & Löfgren 2007). As Ehn and Löfgren (1982:79) suggest, we cannot necessarily interpret all cultures according to the hegemonic un-

derstanding of culture. With this approach, we do not see kink as creating its own normalcy, but rather negotiating its existence around the stigma.¹ Our discussion starts by exploring the kinky everyday life as providing authenticity; second, we discuss the kinky everyday life as an all-encompassing lifestyle of power exchange and compare it with more mundane occurrences of kink; third, we illuminate the leisurely aspect of kink and; finally, we regard kink as an escape from the mundane.

"Kink" is here preferred as a term over "BDSM",² although they are frequently used synonymously, since "kinky" is a concept commonly used in the Finnish kink community, for instance as the name of a kink event, *kinkybileet* (kink party) (Pohtinen 2014) and typically as an identity signifier (as a noun rather than an adjective). For this community, the word denotes wider inclusivity than, for example, just BDSM would. The Finnish kink community is to a large extent comprised of volunteer-based registered associations, private and commercial actors, as well as online communities (the Finnish online discussion forum BDSMbaari.net, Facebook groups, the global website Fetlife.com which has its own regional discussion areas, as well as various local channels on the instant messaging platform Discord). The Finnish kink associations as well as the online forum aim to cater for all different kinks, which is a distinct feature of the Finnish kink community: at the moment, there are no separate associations dedicated to specific kinks such as latex fetish or sadomasochism. A gay leather community, however, has long existed in Finland (Nordling 2009) and queer kinksters are gradually starting to organize and

host their own events. Furthermore, the kink community also exists as a so-called imagined community or a mere knowledge of other kinksters existing (Pohtinen 2017).

The kink community, in all its forms, is relevant to the current study, as the community often shapes the everyday life experiences of kinky individuals. To varying extents, the individuals' everyday lives pertain to kink. Thus, kink does not merely denote sex but is a broader phenomenon (Fennell 2020). Kink, however, may be experienced as freedom from mundane roles, escape from everyday life, as fun and playfulness (Williams & Prior 2015). Furthermore, kink may offer transgression (Newmahr 2011), transcendence (Fennell 2018), and sensations of adrenalin rush or endorphin high (Taylor & Ussher 2001). On one hand, kink can be considered a deviation from everyday life. On the other hand, kink may present as a self-evident, yet an extremely important part of everyday life defined by intimacy and authenticity (Newmahr 2010a; Harviainen 2015; Simula 2017). In addition, kink can be understood as a sexual identity or a sexual orientation (Simula 2015; Fennell 2018).

Research Material and Methods

When conducting research on kink and aiming at understanding rather than making generalizations about the phenomenon, ethnographic analysis is a method that is frequently applied (e.g. Newmahr 2011; Weiss 2011; Harviainen 2015; Pohtinen 2019). Our research material consists of 28 writings by kink-identified individuals through which we aim at a hermeneutic understanding and giving voice to the writers (e.g. Clifford 1986; Hansen 2003). Moreover, along the lines of cultural analysis, we realize that we

as researchers are the ones producing cultural representations of our research topic and our backgrounds affect our understandings and shape our stories and interpretations (Ehn & Löfgren 1982; Kleinman & Copp 1993:13; Ruotsala 2002:42).

Both of us have backgrounds in local kink communities as active community members (for approximately 15 and 26 years, respectively) as well as researchers. Due to our familiarity with the kink community, we may have our own preconceptions of the topics the writers discuss, which might affect our analysis, and of which we need to be mindful. However, we also have tacit knowledge as community members (e.g. Ruotsala 2002), which may render us more sensitive in extracting nuances and understanding features specific to the kink community. This tacit knowledge, in our view, helps us in producing more comprehensive depictions of the phenomenon and in extracting deeper nuances into our ethnography. Our roles as community members and researchers thus help us in analysing the writings, yet we also need to be mindful of our potential predispositions (Van Maanen 1983).

The research material was gathered in two parts: in 2011 and 2017. In both calls for writings, there were questions on various topics related to kink in order to guide and inspire the participants' writing. These topics included their personal journey in kink, relationship to the kink community, and the everyday life. In addition to the question "How does kink show in your everyday life?" another question on the 2011 call for writings concerning everyday life was: "Is there a separate kink-self and an everyday-self and how do they differ?" In the 2017 call-for-writings the questions

pertaining to everyday life were: "Is kink part of your 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 the mundane life, what is it?", "Do you hide your kinkiness? How?" The participants were however encouraged to write about topics that they themselves deemed important regardless of the questions. Both calls for writings were distributed on the mailing lists of Finnish kink organizations, on Finnish kink-related online discussion forums, and the latter call additionally on Twitter and on Facebook.

The first call for writings received 12 answers and the latter 16. These 28 writings are by people from 20 to 62 years old. The writers are from all over Finland, and reported their genders as women (fourteen), cis women (two), men (eight), trans man (one), trans woman (one), and non-binary (two). Among the writers there are perhaps more non-heterosexual and non-monogamous individuals than there are in the general population. The writings are in Finnish, and the quoted parts have been translated here into English by the first author. English pseudonyms are used by the writers in order to enhance the flow of the text and create a more fluent reading experience, in addition to enabling further anonymity for the writers. All material for this research was collected by the first author, in addition to creating the names used here for the individual writers.

As a method, the writings were chosen over interviews as the research topic pertaining to a stigmatized sexuality is rather intimate and the Finnish kink community

is not extensive in size. Thus, the writers might be more open with their narration in addition to being able to remain anonymous to the extent they wish (e.g. Suominen 2016:118). Even though the online spaces are a major part of kink, that is obviously not true for everybody: this research may have been unable to reach those outside online environments, which may also show in the results as the heightened importance of the online communities. Moreover, not everybody is comfortable with sharing their thoughts through writing and, thus, future research might benefit from additional interviews.

Dialogue between the researcher and the respondents is certainly easier to achieve during a live interview, whereas with writings the dialogue is that between the researcher's questions, the respondent's answers, and the interpretation and analysis of the researcher, in addition to the dialogue between the texts (Olsson 2016:178). Since the writings offer little possibility to pose further questions or to read the body language of the interviewee, the quotations were translated with great care from Finnish into English, in order to maintain the connotations in the original text. However, the final word choice was made by the researcher and the translation is thus, in the end, an interpretation of what was originally meant by the writer. Nevertheless, the "correct" translation or interpretation is outweighed by the analytically meaningful, and the final dialogue is that between the researchers' interpretations and the readers (Olsson 2016:180).

We call the writings "autobiographical", as many of them have a narrative structure akin to a life story. For example, many of the writings illustrate a person's journey in

kink from an early age until the day of writing, including challenges that have been overcome, which is a common feature of a life story narrative (Hänninen, V. 1996). Even the writings without a story-like structure offer so-called "micro narratives" where the writers describe certain details in a more thorough manner (Ekrem 2016:93; Koskinen-Koivisto 2014). Our reading of the texts is cultural-analytical: "people's perceptions and habits are cultural products" which, over the lifetime, are learned, communicated, and naturalized into something taken for granted (Ehn & Löfgren 2010:5, 208). In this study, these writings were read through the lens of everyday life experiences, and those narratives with reference to everyday life were incorporated into our discussion. In these narratives, we were able to see the diverse role of kink in people's lives. These understandings and experiences of the relationship of kink and everyday life may depend on the ways an individual defines sex or leisure, and what the writers perceived as their everyday life or, conversely, an escape from it.

Kink as Authenticity

To feel like one's own kind of life, an individual needs to feel they are living an authentic life, true to themselves. This authenticity is most frequently realized in the everyday life practices. According to the sociologist Eeva Jokinen, it is important for individuals that their everyday life, especially at home, is self-defined and happens at "one's own free pace" (Jokinen 2005:146), which also includes one's own customs and habits (ibid. 149). Kink is thus felt to be just as important as other aspects of everyday life. For instance, 28-year-old Matt writes:

Kink means as much to me as other important things in my life. I want to have a job, get a salary, be in good health, love my partner, own a home, have a family... But even with all this I could not live without kinkiness. (T6)

By juxtaposing kinkiness with being healthy and having a family, Matt highlights the significance of kink in making his life meaningful and living it to the fullest. Owen, a single, 37-year-old “sadist and a general kinkster”, on the other hand, contemplates the importance of kink with regard to relationships:

For me, if I were in a relationship with someone I love, I’d feel as though something important was missing if there was nothing kink-related between us. For a vanilla,³ I could explain it through a metaphor, such as, I’d feel like we were in friendzone if I were in a relationship without kink. (T20)

Owen voices a desire for a romantic relationship where he would be able to live as his most authentic self. He expresses this by mentioning how the relationship would be lacking without the element of kink in it. For both Matt and Owen, kink is needed to feel authentic and for everyday life to feel like one’s own free pace (Jokinen 2005).

Living one’s own kind of life with kinkiness as an essential part of it can also be seen in 41-year-old Rosa’s writing:

For me, being kinky is being completely me. For me it’s the natural way of being and thinking. To me, it’s no different or any more deviant than any other sexuality today. I am kinky all the time, I don’t have breaks when I’d stop feeling kinky and would feel ordinary instead. I feel like I’m ordinary all the time because kinkiness is part of me, which I accept as my own part of myself. (T9)

Rosa expresses, in rather a powerful and intense manner, how kink is a fundamen-

tal part of her persona and repeatedly utters the importance kink has for being herself. There is often emotional intensity expressed related to kink, and occasionally kink is considered an integral part of the self (e.g. Simula 2017; Prior & Williams 2015). Furthermore, Rosa mentions being kinky as an essential or a natural part of herself. For her being kinky manifests, as the ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (2010) would say, as the naturalized way of being. Kink is thus understood as an integral part of the self and part of personal identity through the everyday life experiences.

Disclosing private aspects of ourselves is often linked to intimacy (Nippert-Eng 2010:6). By providing an “access to pieces of selves that we understand to be protected from most other people” (Newmahr 2011:186) kink enables an intensely intimate experience. Kink often, but not always, transgresses boundaries related to conventional norms and ethics and allows immersion into spaces which create a potential violation of trust and which would in other situations be avoided (Newmahr 2011:186). Kink may therefore provide a more intense intimacy and a deeper connection between partners (Simula 2017). For example, Sophia addresses kink as a means of showing affection and intimacy to her partner:

In everyday life, kink mostly exists in the bedroom as ropes, shackles, and whips. To me, doing kinky stuff is [...] a way to show my partner affection and intimacy. (T13)

Mona likewise writes:

Kink is a thing that makes our relationship special and it is the very thing that we both need. It is the listening and caring for the other that every relationship should be based on. (T17)

Both Mona's and Sophia's writings suggest that kink could be viewed as a means to establish affection and intimacy in a relationship.

The negotiations around play scenes and safety-ensuring communication are essential parts of kink. The communication surrounding kink also contains the sensitive and fragile "disclosure of some otherwise-private aspects of self" to each other, which for its part enhances the experience of intense intimacy (Newmahr 2011:170). Kink can occur as an improvisation and experimentation among the everyday life routines where the rules of everyday life are changed and, for instance, dirty talk or tugging hair becomes acceptable (Paasonen 2018:20). Moreover, even though roles pertaining to power exist in some forms of kink, they are distinctly separate from *playing* a role. Rather, in kink, practitioners seek emotional, physical, and psychological authenticity (Newmahr 2010a:395–396; Weiss 2011; Harviainen 2015).

Thus, kinky play as well as kinky everyday life strive for authenticity. By verbalizing, reflecting, and communicating the seemingly inconspicuous aspects of one's own reality, everyday life becomes shared and culturally organized (Ehn & Löfgren 2010:216). The intimacy achieved through discussions related to kink play may enhance the experience of everyday life as a deeper connection to one's partner or an enhanced understanding of the self, but furthermore, connect one to the kink community through shared cultural understandings. Outside of play contexts kink is experienced as natural part of individuals' lives: it may not be desirable for kink to be "normalized", yet it seems to be a naturalized feature of kinksters' everyday lives.

Kinkiness exists as a sexual and personal identity and is essential for the experience of living a good life.

From Total Power Exchanges to More Mundane Occurrences

There is a variation of kink called "total power exchange", where, for an agreed-upon period of time, all the power in the dynamic is given to one partner whereas the other submits (Dancer et al. 2006). The difference from other kink play is that in a total power exchange dynamic the submissive submits in everyday life, not merely during sexual play but, for example, through acts of service for the dominant (Weiss 2011). Sometimes, a total power exchange can be agreed by the participants to take place all the time, which is typically called a 24/7 relationship.⁴ In this form of BDSM, everyday life becomes an arena for kink and BDSM encompasses the entire everyday life of the individuals engaged in the relationship. Typically, all participants involved in this dynamic have the right to end or pause the dynamic and renegotiate the boundaries. The concepts denoting roles in these forms of dynamics may include Master/Mistress, Owner, Sir/Madam, or Lord for the dominant and, for example, sub, slave, pet, servant, or boy/girl for the submissive. These can be forms of address agreed upon by the participants of a certain dynamic, or identity signifiers that may be more permanent in nature.

A detailed description of a 24/7 lifestyle, which takes the form of a Master-and-slave dynamic, is provided by Lena, a 43-year-old woman married to her wife, who later also became her "owner":

For me, kink is present all the time in a concrete manner, except for when I am at work. Outside of

work I live according to my owner’s rules: I do what She wants me to do. We have certain rituals, which enforce our power relationship in a nice way every day. I have certain rules for my behaviour, which I follow. The practicalities of scheduling, making decisions and plans are Her responsibility, I just carry them out. Sometimes she asks for my opinion, but I have no discretion. My everyday life consists of serving Her in various ways, mostly by doing chores. In my free time I dress different than at work: a little more revealing and in a way that is more pleasing to Her (with other people present of course according to situation). [...] The work-me is distinct from the slave-me. At first, it felt hard, on one hand, to submit to someone and, on the other hand, to be an independent professional at work. Nowadays, I actually feel first and foremost that I am Her slave, I just temporarily take the professional role and then return back to “normal” as slave. I don’t feel as much conflict between the roles as in the beginning. As of now, my identity is quite whole. I always wear a jewellery-resembling metallic collar, also at work. (T11)

In their relationship, Lena was the one to first present her kink desires to her wife. After initial shock, they decided to explore the world of BDSM together, eventually resulting in a 24/7 owner-and-slave dynamic with total power exchange (T11). For Lena and her “owner”, kink encompasses their whole life. The dynamic between them is not merely present during kink play sessions, but in mundane decision making and chores as well. The form of their relationship thus renders kink an everyday life practice in the most fundamental sense. The media and sexuality scholar Susanna Paasonen (2018) mentions how, in a 24/7 total power exchange relationship, everyday life is enmeshed with kink and the two become inseparable. The roles in this kind of dynamic are not merely roles that can be stepped in and out of but are rather “mode[s] of be-

ing in the world” (Paasonen 2018:101). Likewise, Prior and Williams point out how 24/7 slavery can be perceived as a complex and natural part of individual’s sense of self (Prior & Williams 2015).

A 24/7 dynamic can be quite extreme for many, and there are only two among the 28 writers engaged in this lifestyle at the time of writing (T11, T27). Another one mentions having developed a Master-and-slave-style dynamic in previous romantic relationships (T4). However, kink may also occur in mundane situations without the 24/7 element. An example is provided by Amy:

For me submitting is mostly sexual. Of course, sometimes the play continues outside the bedroom as well. Power play adds a totally different dimension, for example, when shopping for a TV in Gigantti. (T25)

Amy admits that even though her kinkiness is mostly related to sex, kink may also add another layer of meanings to an everyday life activity. Engaging in power play while performing mundane chores or, for instance, buying home electronics, creates a special atmosphere between the people engaged in this play, yet is invisible to outsiders. While many people may daydream through mundane chores (Ehn & Löfgren 2010), in kink those daydreams can be turned into a lived experience, or the chores into an exciting and secretive part of kink play.

Kinky activities are typically enacted out of sight of people who do not share a kinky worldview, similarly to how sex is expected to be hidden behind doors and other barriers (Edgley 2015). However, for a kinkster, almost any everyday life situation can be turned into a kink scene, without the outsiders ever knowing. As mundane an

activity as watching a movie or exercising may have different connotations for a kinkster than it has for a non-kinky individual. For instance, Lily mentions how her masochistic qualities are released through "torturing herself with sports" (T4). The pain experienced in sports is sometimes akin to pain experienced in sadomasochism, as it may be done for a greater reward and thus "worth it" (Newmahr 2011:141–142; see also Mickelsson 2017). In this manner, kink penetrates everyday life even without a 24/7 total power exchange relationship.

The existence of kink in everyday life is a continuum reaching from mundane occurrences to a negotiated consensual non-stop power exchange. In a 24/7 dynamic the kinky everyday life becomes a mode of being, whereas for some other individuals kinkiness shows only in connection with sex. Occasionally kinkiness, however, pierces the everyday life experience as temporary power play in mundane situations or as connotations and imaginations while performing some other tasks with a resemblance to kink, such as sports. These imaginations are not daydreaming as such, but rather giving an added significance to a mundane activity, or an exercise of kinky perspective in everyday life.

Kink, Social Life, and Leisure

Kink has occasionally been conceptualized as serious leisure (Newmahr 2010b; Williams & Storm 2012; Williams et al. 2016; Sprott & Williams 2019). Serious leisure is a concept first used and defined by the sociologist Robert Stebbins (1982) as a volunteer or hobbyist activity with career development, self-enrichment, sense of belonging, and which requires effort in gaining knowledge or skills. The ethnog-

rapher, sexologist, and sociologist Staci Newmahr adds to this definition that belonging to a kink community offers "deep and meaningful identification" (Newmahr 2010b:329–330). Newmahr mentions that many community participants structure their lives around the community, create careers there, and even have a limited number of friends or acquaintances outside of the community (Newmahr 2010b:319; see also Weiss 2011, for comparison). Even though in Finland it is perhaps more uncommon to devote one's whole life to kink (i.e., to have a social and professional life centred solely around kink), the autobiographical writings nevertheless describe how people's everyday lives are highly enveloped by kink. This enveloping entails, according to the writings, participating in and planning of face-to-face meetings and events both in Finland and abroad, friendships with others from the kink community, and the online presence.

The online spaces play an important role in many of the kinksters' lives. These spaces include websites, discussion forums and, increasingly, social media (see e.g. Wignall 2017). For instance, Amy, a woman in her forties, describes the importance of the kink community:

I found the kink community online. When I was young there was no internet, so I didn't know there were others like me. But then a few years ago I found BDSM-baari [the Finnish online forum for kinksters] and realized I wasn't sick in any way. Through the forum, I met many people, and sub munches were very important for me back then. (T25)

Amy entered the kink community through the online platform, through which she learned she was not the only one with

kink desires. She later met other submissive kinksters at casual meetings at pubs or restaurants (which are typically called “a munch” in English or “miitti” in Finnish). Like Amy, Mona also recounts finding play partners and a romantic partner through the kinky online forum (T17), whereas Katie, who is relatively new to kink, sees the educative aspects of the forum as important (T17). Through these online spaces an “everyday virtual presence” can be created among people who are not physically together (Ehn et al. 2016:76). Online spaces, thus, can be seen as realizations of kink as serious leisure, since the aspects that define serious leisure are present on these online platforms: finding identification and belonging, gaining knowledge and acquiring skills. Moreover, as the online community is typically encountered first, the online spaces occasionally act as catalysts in entering a face-to-face community (Pohtinen 2017).

Many writers discuss the ways kink seeps into their everyday life in the form of friendships or other social relations that are made in the kink community. For example, 37-year-old Meredith explains the meanings of various social acquaintances in the kink community:

Some are friends to party and chat with, some to play with [...], some I only see occasionally, and some are people I have learned from [...]. Through the community I have met one of my best friends, had awesome experiences, grown as a person, influenced others' lives, surrounded myself with wonderful people, and learned a lot. I most definitely would not be the same person if I had never got involved in the local kink organization and become part of the kink community. (T21)

Social relations, such as meeting new people and seeing old friends, are among the

main reasons people enter and stay in the kink community and which create a sense of belonging among the community members (Pohtinen 2017). The sense of belonging to the kink community enhances the everyday life experience and is, moreover, seen as enhancing the general wellbeing of individuals (Hudson 2015). However, Meredith also expresses other positive aspects of how joining the kink community has affected her. She has learned new skills, and by submerging herself into the community she feels as though she has grown as a person, which corresponds to Newmahr's (2010b) definition of kink as serious leisure discussed above.

Peter, a 30-year-old who self-proclaims as “mainly a sub”, discusses his life in kink and is one of the few to express kink to be at the centre of his social life and to offer personal self-fulfilment:

When travelling to other countries, other kinky folks were closer to me than other Finns or my colleagues. For me, kink events, organizations, online forums [...] provide a place for self-fulfilment. Save for professional circles and related hobbyist groups (and of course relatives), my social life has begun to centre around the kink community. (T7)

Peter feels closest to the kink community members even when travelling with other Finns or with his colleagues. Certain meanings and values are shared in the kink community globally, which may result in a more profound identification than with other groups. This phenomenon “of global system of meaning and values” is also prevalent in other leisure activities (see e.g. Hänninen, R. 2006). The identification that Peter conveys could be seen as further illustration of kink as serious leisure as per Newmahr's definition (2010b).

Furthermore, these meanings and values can be seen as symbols (Ehn & Löfgren 1982), which are understood globally by the kink community members, thus creating feelings of being an insider and belonging in the community (Pohtinen 2017).

Peter, like many other writers, portrays himself as an active participant in kink-related activities: he travels and finds local kink events which he attends, participates in a house-building project for a Dominatrix, is active online and at local events. Through his own effort Peter has become a well-seasoned kinkster with knowledge, skills, and a social life in the kink community. Practically, Peter depicts kink as serious leisure which envelopes his everyday life. However, he adds: "I try to separate kink from everyday life." (T7)

Other leisurely communities can be seen as encompassing individuals' lives in much the same ways as kink does,⁵ yet there appears to be no need to separate these activities or identifications from everyday life. With regard to kink, this need is, however, prevalent among the autobiographical writers. The need to separate kink from everyday life might be due to what Peter adds as the reason behind his need to keep kink and everyday life separate: "It's not good to be submissive in the real world. In fact, I am very independent and even dominant if needed." (T7)

Peter emphasizes how he is only submissive in the kink context and not in his everyday life. Kink, unlike some other leisurely communities, pertains to a stigmatized sexuality and there might exist a false assumption that an individual's sexuality is interchangeable with or determined by their personality, even though these two can be rather separate entities (Weiss 2011).

The underlying fear of a stigmatized sexuality taking control might have thus affected the autobiographical writers' need to separate kink from everyday life. Ehn and Löfgren (2010:187) mention how many people find their fantasies bizarre and, thus, fear losing themselves too deep into their out-of-the-ordinary sexual fantasies and losing contact with reality. While Peter tries he separates kink from everyday life, engaging in activities related to kink still plays an important role for him. Moreover, the activities that Peter describes are typically hidden from outsiders, even though they constitute a great part of life for the individual and include aspects of serious leisure, such as planning, learning, and commitment. The element of secrecy might, however, add to the notion of not seeing these kink activities as everyday life experience, since everyday life may be thought of as something that occurs in the public sphere, whereas the secretive parts, such as kink, belong to the private realm (Nippert-Eng 2010). The need to separate kink from everyday life may also add to the essential mystery (Pohtinen 2019) and the escapist function of kink.

To conceptualize kink as serious leisure is also to see it as part of everyday life and to further highlight the understanding of everyday life as being actively made and remade (Löfgren 2014). To be able to incorporate kink in everyday life, kink needs to be seen as more than a mere sexuality: for some individuals it offers deep identification, a social life, and a lifestyle that is actively pursued. Furthermore, individuals fashion their everyday life to be able to engage in kink activities, whether through online or face-to-face connections. Searching for other kinksters when travel-

ling, and engaging in online conversations are active actions that shape individuals' everyday lives. Within a society that stigmatizes kink, the kink community presents as highly sociable, embracing commitment as well as active participation.

Escaping the Mundane

The escapist aspect of kink may occur in a multitude of ways, for example, in as seemingly mundane a context as an online discussion. For example, Mona, a 30-year-old submissive, describes her rebellious excitement upon encountering the kink community online:

The euphoria at the beginning related to all this [finding the kink community] was wonderful: I somehow felt extremely alive. [...] When I got the children to bed, I would go online to chat and to read about kink. It felt somehow forbidden, but on the other hand it was an escape into a world of my own away from the realities of being a single parent. I didn't have a possibility to attend kink events, so I lived in my own secret bubble on the internet. (T17)

For Mona, the online discussions after the children's bedtime feel like an escape from her reality as a single mother. Often, however, an escape from everyday life is achieved during kink play through assuming a certain role, or through creating a space dedicated to play. The temporary power exchange, which is the foundation of most BDSM play, creates a magic circle of escape from everyday life (Newmahr 2011:71–72). Thus, the individual steps out of everyday life across the threshold into a different reality or into a magic circle (Harviainen & Frank 2016; Paasonen 2018). However, for Mona the online virtual reality can be seen as a magic circle of its own.

For some of the autobiographical writers, kink play presents first and foremost as an escape or a total separation from everyday life. Some writers describe falling into a trance-like state during play, such as 23-year-old Sophia:

Kink is the way for me to express myself and my feelings. For example, with ropes I can give power to a person I trust without having to worry about a thing. I can just fall into a kind of trance and relax my mind and my body. (T13)

The trance-like experiences or descriptions of a "high" during kink play can be mystical in nature and may be described as enabling the experiencer to reach a heightened state of consciousness or feel more alive (Taylor & Ussher 2001). Furthermore, this high can be experienced as addictive (ibid.). Ellen expresses kink and especially submission as a need and as something she is unable to live without:

For me kink is part of everyday life: power roles, fantasies, sex with my man (as a sub or a dominant), I have a vast sexual taste and I have sex very often. As a sub I can let go of everything, to enter a trance, which I cannot live without. (T22)

What often is of utmost importance in kink is the mental aspect. The headspace, which is sometimes described as trance, high, or sub-space that can be achieved during play, may be more desirable than, for instance, an orgasm (Simula 2017). According to Simula (2017), the physical parts are only a means to achieve the desired headspace and intimacy.

An escape from everyday life can also be reached by engaging in fetishism, such as dressing up in a particular outfit or material. Matt, a 28-year-old latex fetishist, de-

scribes his relationship to his fetish, and the sense of mystique is present here as well:

My fetishes are present in my life nearly every day. When I'm alone I often want to dress up in different [latex] outfits and use my toys, chains, etc. For me my fetishes are a total escape from everyday life. The presence of my fetishes is indescribable. I believe only a fetishist can understand such great pleasure. (T6)

Matt describes his love for dressing up in latex as something that, even if it is difficult for him to describe, creates a complete escape from everyday life. The ethnologist Bo Lönnqvist (2006:63) suggests that the process of taking off one's everyday clothes and dressing up for a special occasion is a means of crossing a threshold from mundane into special. By changing clothes, an individual is able to experience a temporary detachment from the "shackles of everyday life" and find freedom and authenticity (Lönnqvist 2006:63). These "shackles" might include everyday roles related to, for example, profession, gender, or social status. Dressing up in a fetish outfit provides a momentary sense of freedom and authenticity from the roles of everyday life.

Furthermore, fantasizing and daydreaming may act as escapism from everyday life. Daydreaming is typically related to boredom and routines: the mind wanders while performing the daily tasks or, for instance, while travelling (Ehn & Löfgren 2010). In the autobiographical writings, many daydreams are rather mundane,⁶ although writers also mention having fantasies about kink (T7, T10, T11, T16, T22, T23, T24) or describe sexual fantasies (T4, T25). April, a 30-year-old woman who has discovered her kinkiness recently, writes: "At the moment, a big part of my energy

goes into trying to figure out how to better achieve my wishes regarding my sexuality and also other parts of life." (T18)

Kye dreams of having more kink in life, hoping kink will become a lifestyle, whereas Mona's dream is to find a friend who is also a submissive woman like herself (T15, T17). Preparing for events, furthermore, involves hopes, fantasies, and excitement regarding what the event might be like, or what might occur there (e.g., T2, T6, T13, T16). Imagination and daydreams may also act as a preparation or planning for a desirable future (Ehn & Löfgren 2010:198–200).

Everyday life is filled with sensations and desires that yearn to be fulfilled, even though they may be difficult to achieve (Highmore 2002:14). In general, people escape in books, television, and other media to fantasize and to gather material for their daydreaming (Ehn & Löfgren 2010). Peter tells how he used to find torture scenes in books especially interesting, whereas for Matt, Catwoman in a Batman movie made him realize his fascination for latex as a teen (T7; T6). Kinksters thus find scenarios which they might or might not want to occur in their own lives as well. Daydreaming is a way of making our wishes concrete without ever having to actually experience them. While daydreaming, the dreamer has control over the situation (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk 2010). However, employing fiction and fantasy and applying them in real life contexts may be an important part of kink for many (Harviainen 2015).

Escaping in BDSM play, fetishism, or even kink-related online discussions may present as crucial aspects in making everyday life enjoyable and meaningful for kinky individuals. Even in a 24/7 dy-

namic the play sessions can be seen as the escapist highlight of everyday life (T11). The issue of kink as escapism, however, is a highly contested one. The challenge is that in the same way that kink may be sexual for most but not all practitioners (e.g. Langdrige 2006, versus Newmahr 2011), it is not escapism for all. While scholars such as Roy F. Baumeister (1988) have argued that all sadomasochism is escapism, and popular media typically re-produce this idea, field data do not fully support that conclusion. In our responses, two of the 28 writers (T24, T25), for example, stated that kink was not escapism for them, which correlates strongly with views expressed by Weiss (2011) and Newmahr (2011). As a result, we can solely conclude that kink has an escapist function for many, but not for all.

Kink Defining Everyday Life

Everyday life can be understood in various ways, which can be seen in our research material, the autobiographical writings, as the writers describe aspects of their lives: for some, everyday life includes work, home, relationships, and sexuality, whereas for others, everyday life contains mainly the mandatory chores and routines that are needed for the basic upkeep of comfortable life. Also, kink can be understood in various ways: for some it is related to sex or play sessions, whereas for others it is a fundamental part of their being. With regard to these understandings, we have discussed kink as four everyday life experiences.

Kink can provide authenticity to everyday life and often kink is needed to reach a sense of living an authentic life. It can be a mode of being and as part of the self, and therefore it cannot necessarily be turned on

or off. Occasionally, the role assumed in, for instance, the work environment may be less authentic for an individual than the role assumed in kink. For some individuals kink becomes a 24/7 power exchange encompassing the whole of everyday life, whereas for others a kinky mindset may occasionally add a special titillating aspect to mundane chores. On some occasions, for some individuals, online presence, BDSM play, engaging in fetishism, or day-dreaming have an escapist function. This escapism, the exceptions and expectations in the everyday life, may render the mundane more bearable or worth living.

The kink community is significant, as it creates the frames (or counterpoints) for many of the activities practised in everyday life, such as social contacts. Kink can be considered serious leisure as it offers its practitioners a space for building one's skills and knowledge, creates a sense of belonging and even a sense of self. Conceptualizing kink as serious leisure highlights its significance in the everyday life of individuals and the ways kink envelopes everyday life. Kink, for all, is not merely BDSM play or sex, nor is it playing a role. Rather, kink is a variety of practices intertwined into everyday life activities, which also, to a certain extent, constructs a sense of authenticity in individuals' lives.

Our analysis of kink and everyday life has focused on certain aspects of kink, although everyday life and kink could be discussed from other aspects as well. Further research that would be worthwhile in continuing our discussion could explore secrecy and privacy of kink, and how kink events in particular function as a means of escaping the mundane. As suggested by Simula (2019), considerably more research

into the actual experiences of kinksters is needed. Our discussion offers insights into the understanding of everyday life of individuals identifying with sexuality to which a stigma is attached. Here, we have explored the ways kinky-identified individuals negotiate their everyday life in terms of the society that stigmatizes kink. However, human sexuality is far too complex for simplistic generalizations. For example, if one daydreams about kink while working, is that a part of everyday life, escapism, or both, if that person's workflow does not break at any time? Furthermore, a certain mystery and taboo character is essential to kink and, thus, to see kink as a form of "new normal" would be to interpret it against the hegemonic understandings of sexuality, identity, and relationships. Kink can rather be seen as a naturalized part of everyday life for kinksters and it has its own symbols and values that are shared globally in the kink communities.

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Notes

- 1 Even though the discussion surrounding stigma is not in the scope in this article, stigma is intertwined with the everyday life of kinksters (see e.g. Pohtinen 2019).

- 2 BDSM in many definitions stands for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism (e.g. Newmahr 2011:18), whereas kink can be perceived as a broader concept including not only BDSM but also, for instance, fetishes that may have nothing to do with power dynamics or pain (Simula 2015; Pohtinen 2019). Inside the community, the term "pervo" (perv) is frequently used in the same manner, which is, however, reserved for the insiders and may have negative or unfavourable connotations outside. Furthermore, "kinkster" is a concept that is used of people engaging in kink.
- 3 The non-kinky is called "vanilla", which may denote both a person who is not kinky and the nature of sex or a relationship they are having. The term has a history of being used in a derogatory manner but is nowadays generally used as neutral shorthand to denote that something or someone is "non-kinky".
- 4 24/7 denoting 24 hours a day for seven days a week, i.e. full-time.
- 5 For example, the ethnologist Riitta Hänninen (2006; 2012) mentions the snowboarding community as having characteristics, which are also present with regard to kink community, such as: being based on skills and knowledge; offering identification; involving a certain otherness and the feelings of authenticity and freedom; and being the dominating aspect of everyday life.
- 6 In the call for writings there were no questions concerning daydreaming or fantasies, although that would be an interesting topic for further research (see e.g. Zurbriggen & Yost 2004; Stear 2009).

References

Fieldwork material

The Archives of History, Culture and Arts Studies,
University of Turku

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

Collected in 2011

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

Collected in 2017

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

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