

SEXUALITY AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION IN IDENTIFICATION AND INTEREST IN KINK AND BDSM THROUGHOUT THE LIFE COURSE

Daniel Cardoso^{1,2}, Patrícia M. Pascoal^{3,4}

¹CICANT – Lusófona University, Lisbon, Portugal

²FCSH – NOVA University of Lisbon, Dpt. Of Communication Sciences, Lisbon, Portugal

³HEI-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Labs, (Lusófona University, Lisbon, Portugal)

⁴Clínica Universitária de Psiquiatria e Psicologia Médica, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Objective: Drawing from existing research on sexual fluidity, and its applicability to kink, we aimed to understand how a stigmatized sexual group, people who identify as kinksters/BDSM'ers, in Portugal, experience and perceive changes in their identification and practices, what sources of change or evolution they identify, and how those experiences are integrated into their self-experience as sexual subjects.

Design and Method: We deployed an online survey with, among others, open-ended questions about how kinksters in Portugal report any changes in their identification, practices and what those mean to them. By using thematic analysis, we map out both the different sources of (un)change, and how change is experienced in relation to their subjectivity.

Results: Preliminary results are congruent with existing research, and expand on it. We found that there are various types of sources that may become a part of kinksters' evolving engagement with BDSM, such as media representations, community and in-group resources, and intimate relationships. These can both promote changes in behavior and identification, or lead to what is felt as a consolidation of practices or identity/ies. We also found that, for some participants, change meant an evolution towards a 'truer' form of sexual self-expression, whereas others saw it as an opening up of potentials in an open-ended process of experimentation.

Conclusions: There are no universal pathways into BDSM, nor a unitary model of kink identities that can account for the various ways in which people feel themselves change (or not) through kink. Sexuality research needs to consider the multitude of pathways through which sexuality develops during the life course. Both positive and negative experiences can directly impact people's perception of their own sexual self-hood, especially in the presence of social stigma.