

# Investigating Bias in Psychotherapy with BDSM Clients

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**SUMMARY.** There is a concern among consensual BDSM participants that they will receive biased care from mental health professionals. Results are presented of an anonymous Internet-based survey administered to both BDSM-identified individuals who have received psychological care and to mental health professionals. The survey included socio-demographic data and invited participants to write narrative accounts of biased or culturally sensitive care, from which common themes were

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[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Investigating Bias in Psychotherapy with BDSM Clients." Kolmes, Keely, Wendy Stock, and Charles Moser. Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality* (Harrington Park Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 50, No. 2/3, 2006, pp. 301-324; and: *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* (ed: Peggy J. Kleinplatz, and Charles Moser) Harrington Park Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc., 2006, pp. 301-324. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-HAWORTH, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: docdelivery@haworthpress.com].

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doi:10.1300/J082v50n02\_15

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identified. Mental health providers (N = 17) responded in fewer numbers than those who identified as BDSM-identified participants (N = 175). Descriptive characteristics of the sample will be discussed. Themes from the qualitative data may be useful in informing the future development of guidelines for practitioners to work more responsibly with clients who identify as members of this sexual minority group. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Psychotherapy bias, paraphilia, cultural sensitivity, BDSM, sadomasochism, sexual minorities

Consensual sadomasochism (BDSM or SM) has both community-based and scientific definitions. By various definitions, sadomasochistic sexual behavior is not uncommon. Up to 14% of American males and 11% of American females have engaged in some form of sadomasochistic (BDSM or SM) sexual behavior defined as pleasure-in-pain practice, in which one inflicts harm and/or pain on another for sexual and/or psychological satisfaction or one achieves sexual gratification by anticipating or experiencing pain before or during sex (Janus & Janus, 1993). Other estimates indicate that up to 50% of the general population has experienced sexual arousal in response to being bitten (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), while 5% of the population has experienced sexual pleasure in inflicting or receiving pain (Hunt, 1974). It is likely that many more Americans experience sexual fantasies along the sadomasochistic spectrum, whether or not these fantasies are ever acted upon.

The community-based definition of BDSM is most commonly understood as the, "knowing use of psychological dominance and submission, and/or physical bondage, and/or pain, and/or related practices in a safe, legal, consensual manner in order for the participants to experience erotic arousal and/or personal growth" (Wiseman, 1996 p. 10). However, it is worth noting that Sexual Sadism has been described in the psychiatric literature as a pathological pattern of behavior that may be enacted with non-consenting victims (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). This view of Sexual Sadism and Sexual Masoch-

