

A person wearing a black leather outfit is shown from the chest up. Their right hand is resting on their left shoulder. The person is wearing a gold ring on their ring finger. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“COMFORTING, REASSURING, AND...HOT”: A QUALITATIVE
EXPLORATION OF ENGAGING IN BDSM AND KINK FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF AUTISTIC ADULTS.

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BACKGROUND

Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism and (sado)Masochism (BDSM hereafter) and/or kink as umbrella terms encompass a variety of practices, activities and desires, including power exchange, physical restriction, the giving or receiving of pain/sensory stimulation, and roleplay

Very little exploration of autistic intimacy (particularly BDSM/kink) through a non-pathologising lens

METHOD

We interviewed 6 autistic adults about their experiences.

Our research questions were:

- a) What are the experiences of autistic adults who engage in BDSM?
- b) How do autistic adults describe their engagement in BDSM as it relates to their autistic identity?

Pseudonym	Age	Gender(self-described)	Sexual orientation (self-described)
Alee	32	Female	Bi/pansexual
Noel	52	Male	Heterosexual
Alice	45	Unsure	Unsure
Bucky	27	Non-Binary	Queer
Autumn	29	Non-Binary	Gynosexual
Quin	33	Non-Binary	Queer



“It’s not that there’s no unexpected wild cards, but it's more like when wildcards appear they’re within the scope of what you already imagined” (Bucky)

THEME 1:
“PRACTICING SAFE
‘SEX’”: SAFETY,
CLARITY AND
PREDICTABILITY





1.1. 'STRENGTH IN VULNERABILITY'

"It's surrendering responsibility. You spent so much time being responsible, managing, acting, having to mask having to...it's like or so almost in your head having...a version of you that's looking back at you, that you're always self analyzing. You live in such a strict, controlled way...That to just not have any power, to not have any control is, it's. It's here as well [gestures to head]" (Noel)

THEME 2: "SO MANY WAYS TO TOUCH AND BE TOUCHED": KINK AND SENSORY JOY

"cause I think there are so many ways to touch and be touched by someone...like in the past I've been asked like do you want to do temperature play? And I was like no [laughs]. That sounds like the worst idea I've ever heard. Absolutely not."



THEME 3: SUBVERTING (NEURO) NORMATIVITY

“We are taught to endure as autistic people, and again, I think it's something about naming the unknown. It's empowering in the way that in naming something you assume the power of it, and then you can choose what to do with it...there are a lot of things [as autistic people] we have to endure and I think the flip side and the unspoken side of that is that our pleasure isn't equivocal? I think we get that lesson a lot, that like, the things that we take joy in aren't enough or equivalent to neurotypical joy. And that's why you get people being shamed over like special interests and their hobbies”

“I guess the alternative scene always interested me growing up...I never connected to the mainstream people”.

NORMAL

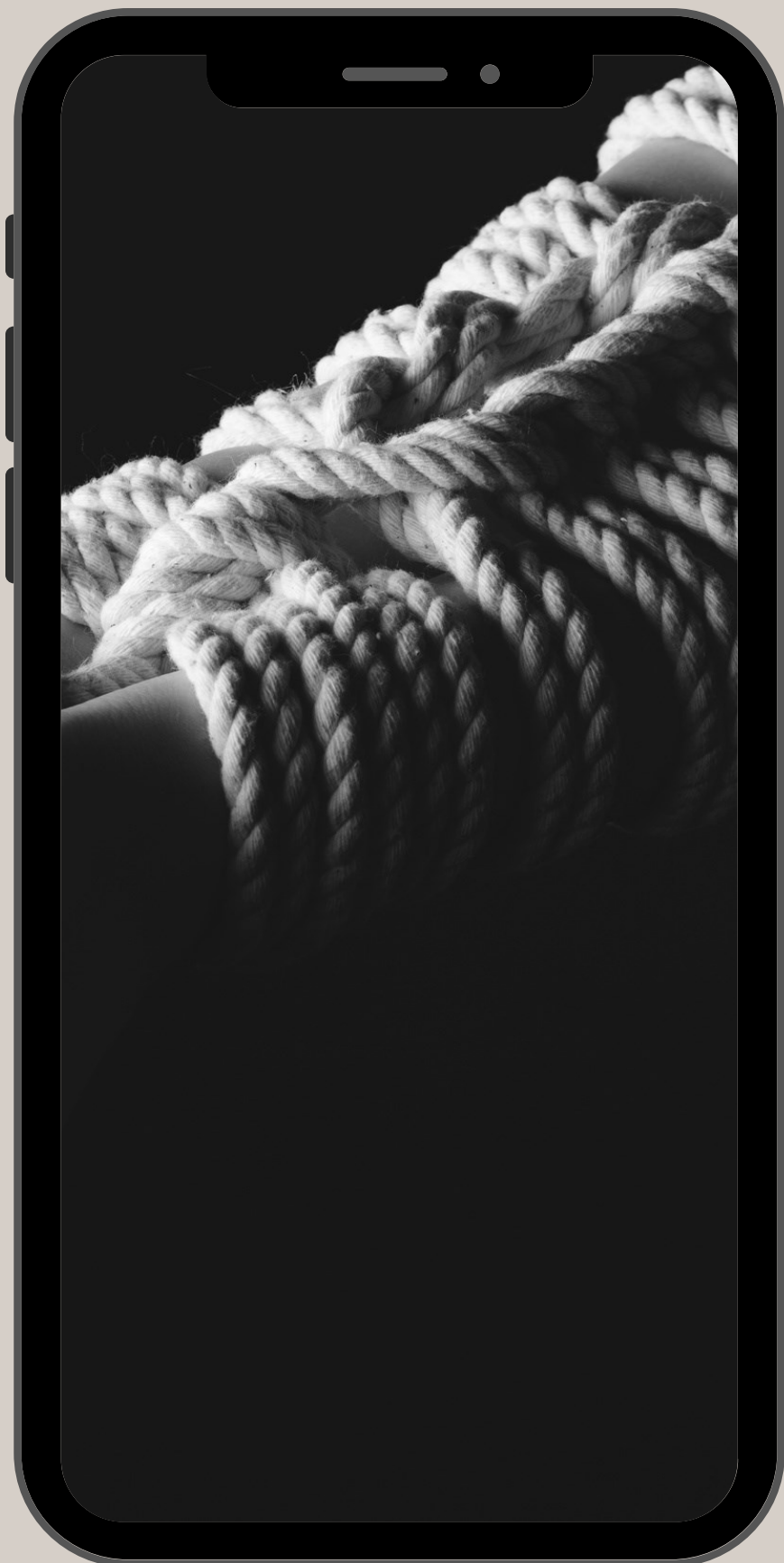
IS

BORING

SUMMARY

This is a valuable insight concerning the depth to which BDSM/kink engagement relates to our autistic participants identities as autistic people; their engagement in a non-normative activity, like BDSM and/or kink, is not just a personally empowering experience, but something that can drive autistic emancipation more widely.





THANK YOU

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