Masochistic Behaviour in BDSM

Motivations intensity and differences between men and women

Raven Therapy | Scholarly essay | 25 October 2026

Abstract

Masochistic behaviour in consensual adult BDSM can involve enjoyment of painful sensation, satisfaction in a partner's pleasure, the appeal of being witnessed, and changes in emotional or attentional state. These possibilities make a three-part distinction between submissive, performative and directly pain-enjoying masochists a useful starting hypothesis. They do not establish three discrete kinds of person. This essay develops the proposal into an account of overlapping motivations, drawing on experimental pain research, population surveys, qualitative studies and relationship research. It distinguishes pain enjoyment from pain endurance, submission from masochism, and relational responsiveness from participation driven by fear of rejection. Public play is examined through audience approval, visibility, belonging and performance, without assuming that an audience is always the source of pleasure. The proposed third category is renamed direct pain enjoyment because the term pure risks implying authenticity or context independence. Additional dimensions include emotional and symbolic meaning, challenge, altered states, relief and self-understanding. An explicitly provisional framework separates motivational strength, preferred intensity, centrality, frequency and flexibility. It includes a low-to-extreme descriptive scale without equating intensity with injury or psychological disorder. Research comparing men and women reveals some differences in reported interests and scripts, but offers insufficient evidence for a stable sex-based distribution across the proposed categories. The essay concludes that the most informative question concerns what makes pain worth choosing for a particular person in a particular encounter. That question permits both affirmation of consensual desire and scrutiny of pressure, incompatibility and adverse consequences.

1 Scope and evidential approach

The original proposal identifies three routes through which painful BDSM experiences might become desirable. A submissive person may value a dominant partner's enjoyment; a public participant may value an audience's response; and another person may value the painful experience itself. The considerable strength of this proposal lies in its attention to motivation. Watching a person receive painful stimulation tells an observer relatively little about why that person chose it.

The difficulty begins when these routes become fixed classifications. A single encounter may contain all three. Equally, a person may value none of them in quite the form proposed, seeking instead concentration, challenge, emotional release or a symbolic change in status. The argument developed here therefore treats the initial categories as hypotheses about sources of reward. It asks what each explains, what it confuses, and what would count as evidence against it.

This is a critical narrative synthesis and conceptual proposal, not a systematic review, a new empirical study or a validated assessment instrument. Sources were checked through publisher pages, DOI-linked records, PubMed and accessible original articles. The selection prioritises

research directly addressing masochistic motivation, pain processing, BDSM roles, gender comparisons and clinical interpretation, with relevant evidence identified through October 2026. Where access was limited to an abstract, the discussion is restricted to findings stated there. No claim of exhaustive coverage is made.

The literature repeatedly combines masochism with submission or BDSM more generally. This limits how precisely its results can answer the present question. A finding about BDSM participants cannot automatically be attributed to pain-seeking participants, and a study of submissives cannot establish a characteristic shared by all masochists. Much of the work also uses volunteers recruited from particular communities. These limitations affect the strength of the inferences, rather than making the participants' accounts unimportant.

2 Defining what is being classified

Behaviour identity and experience

For this essay, masochistic behaviour means voluntarily seeking or accepting an experience of pain or aversive feeling because that experience, its meaning or its consequences are valued within consensual adult BDSM. This deliberately broad working definition includes direct and indirect reward. A narrower definition would reserve masochism for finding pain or suffering itself pleasurable or arousing. Under that narrower definition, some people in the first two proposed categories would be pain-tolerant submissives or performers rather than masochists. The classification changes with the definition.

That distinction should remain visible. A person can identify as a masochist while rarely engaging in painful activities. Another can receive pain frequently without using that identity. Someone may fantasise about an experience without wishing to enact it. Behaviour, identity, desire and actual enjoyment are related questions, each requiring its own answer. A taxonomy that treats them as interchangeable will produce misleading results before any statistical analysis begins.

Submission concerns an agreed relationship to authority or control. Masochism concerns the meaning or reward of receiving painful or aversive experience. Neither logically entails the other. A submissive may dislike pain. A masochist may retain control over the encounter or prefer no broader hierarchy. Likewise, a dominant need not enjoy causing pain, while someone who enjoys providing painful sensation need not seek an enduring dominant role. These distinctions follow from separating the components of BDSM rather than treating the acronym as a single psychological trait.

Pain intensity and pleasure

The International Association for the Study of Pain distinguishes pain from nociception, the neural encoding of potentially damaging stimulation. It also recognises biological, psychological and social contributions to pain. Its definition includes unpleasantness, which creates an apparent difficulty when participants describe enjoyable pain. One resolution is to distinguish the aversive component of a sensation from the positive value of the overall experience. Another is that participants use the everyday word pain for a sensation whose affective quality has changed in a desired context (IASP, 2020).

These possibilities should be investigated rather than settled by terminology. A participant might feel considerable pain and enjoy the encounter, feel less pain because the context changes its processing, or value the relief and closeness afterwards. These are different outcomes. A single question asking whether someone likes pain cannot distinguish them. Researchers need separate ratings for perceived intensity, unpleasantness, bodily pleasure, sexual arousal, emotional reward and retrospective satisfaction.

Pain threshold, tolerance and preference also differ. Threshold concerns when stimulation becomes painful. Tolerance concerns what someone is willing or able to continue experiencing under specified conditions. Preference concerns what they want. A person can be highly sensitive yet strongly attracted to a modest painful sensation; another can tolerate considerable discomfort while finding it unrewarding. Neither capacity nor endurance is a reliable substitute for desire.

Atypical interests and disorder

An unusual sexual interest does not by itself establish mental disorder. The American Psychiatric Association's explanation of the DSM distinction separates atypical interests from paraphilic disorders, while contemporary kink clinical guidelines caution against automatic pathologisation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Sprott et al., 2023). This essay does not reproduce diagnostic criteria or offer a diagnostic scale. In particular, its highest intensity level is not a psychiatric category.

The opposite assumption would also be mistaken. Consensual BDSM does not exempt a person or relationship from distress, coercion or impairment. The relevant analysis concerns the actual pattern and its consequences. Neither an unconventional interest nor membership of an affirming community can answer those questions in advance.

3 What the three proposed types explain

The initial model becomes clearer when each category is translated into a question about reward. Is the experience valuable because of what happens between partners, because of how it is witnessed, or because of the painful sensation and associated feelings? These questions preserve the original insight while avoiding an unnecessary division into mutually exclusive identities.

Original category	More precise formulation	Central question	Main correction
Submissive masochist	Relationally motivated pain reception	What is rewarding about the partner's response or the power exchange?	Enjoyment of giving pleasure must be distinguished from fear-driven compliance.
Performative or exhibitionistic masochist	Audience-mediated or performative pain reception	What changes when others witness the encounter?	Visibility, belonging, approval and performance are distinct possibilities.
Pure masochist	Direct pain enjoyment	What is rewarding about the painful experience itself?	Direct enjoyment can remain selective and context dependent.

There is relevant empirical precedent, although not validation of this exact model. Labrecque et al. (2021) analysed narratives from 227 practitioners of masochism or submission. Their findings organised reasons for participation around interpersonal power, physical pain and alteration of mental state. These categories overlap with the present proposal but differ substantially: audience response is not one of their three overarching categories, while altered states are central. Their study supports motivational diversity, not a settled three-type taxonomy.

The status of the revised model is therefore modest but useful. It is an organising framework for questions and potentially testable predictions. Its value will depend on whether it describes people's experience accurately and explains outcomes better than simpler alternatives. It should remain open to a participant saying that none of its categories fits.

4 Relationally motivated pain reception

Pleasure in another person's pleasure

The first proposed category contains an understandable form of relational reward. A person may enjoy knowing that a partner is excited, absorbed or satisfied. The painful sensation can acquire value through that response. They may also experience being chosen, trusted, attended to or recognised in a desired role. The reward belongs to the interaction, even when the physical sensation would not be attractive in isolation.

Research on sexual communal strength offers a relevant comparison. In a daily study of 44 couples, Muise et al. (2013) examined motivation to meet a partner's sexual needs and its association with desire. This was not a BDSM study and cannot establish a masochistic subtype. It does, however, make it unreasonable to assume that pleasure derived from a partner's pleasure is inherently inauthentic or pathological. The application to pain reception is a theoretical extension requiring direct investigation.

A useful distinction is between wanting the encounter for its relational value and wanting merely to avoid the consequences of refusal. Both can produce apparent willingness. Their psychological meanings differ. The former might be expressed as a freely chosen gift within reciprocal care. The latter might involve managing disappointment, avoiding criticism or trying to prevent abandonment. A person can also experience both motives at once, making a simple voluntary-versus-involuntary classification inadequate for understanding the whole relationship.

Four processes hidden within one category

First, there is vicarious reward: the dominant's enjoyment contributes positively to the recipient's enjoyment. Secondly, there is the reward of submission itself: the sensation matters because receiving it expresses an agreed transfer of authority. Thirdly, there is identity affirmation: the person values feeling competent or recognisable in a chosen role. Fourthly, there may be relational insecurity: participation is used to protect a bond perceived as conditional. These are proposed distinctions, not established population subtypes.

The first three do not necessarily imply the fourth. It is therefore too strong to claim that the relationship's strength is generally contingent on the submissive enjoying pain. A particular relationship may depend partly on shared interests, as relationships often do, without affection

being withdrawn whenever one partner declines an activity. Compatibility and conditional acceptance need separate consideration. There is a substantial difference between acknowledging an enduring mismatch and making a person prove love through endurance during an encounter.

Nor should the analysis assume that the dominant is a sadist. The recipient may have inferred an expectation that the partner does not actually hold. Conversely, the partner may enjoy the recipient's pleasure more than the painful act itself. In that case, both people could be trying to provide what they mistakenly believe the other wants. The resulting pattern is an important relational hypothesis: mutual accommodation can conceal mutual misunderstanding.

Enjoyment and apparent performance

The phrase need to enjoy it introduces another question. Does the person enjoy the experience, enjoy pleasing their partner despite disliking part of it, or feel obliged to display enjoyment? These possibilities should not be collapsed. Displayed enthusiasm is behaviour; its subjective meaning has to be explored. A partner who rewards only a particular reaction may unintentionally narrow what the recipient feels able to disclose.

One useful counterfactual is whether the person would still choose the encounter if their partner welcomed an honest refusal and remained affectionate. Another asks whether they would want the same sensation if it pleased nobody else. These are reflective questions, not tests to be imposed on someone. Answers may clarify a motivation without proving its origin. The person who would decline in the second situation can still be making an authentic choice in the first.

Sagarin et al. (2009) studied 58 practitioners across two investigations. Participants reporting successful encounters showed increased relationship closeness afterwards, alongside changes in cortisol. This supports the possibility of relational reward but does not show that pain causes durable bonding, that more pain creates stronger relationships, or that recipients must enjoy pain to secure attachment. The quality and interpretation of the interaction remain essential.

The revised first category is thus broad enough to recognise generous, desired participation while identifying a separate dimension of pressure. Pressure should not be built into the definition of submissive masochism. Doing so would make an ethically important problem look like the normal structure of submission.

5 Public performance and the audience

Being seen can mean several things

The proposed performative category recognises that a social setting can change an encounter. However, the image of an adoring crowd specifies only one possible mechanism. Admiration may matter, but so may feeling visible, contributing to an event, sharing an aesthetic experience, displaying a relationship or belonging among people who understand the activity. An audience need not be enthusiastic to matter. For some participants, privacy would reduce the appeal; for others, it would increase it.

Newmahr's (2010) ethnographic research in a public SM community interpreted participation through serious leisure, including acquired skills and valued rewards. This supports considering public BDSM as a social practice with meanings beyond an isolated sexual act. It does not establish

that publicly receiving pain depends on applause. The present distinctions between recognition, performance, belonging and audience approval are analytical extensions of that broader perspective.

At least five audience-related possibilities deserve differentiation. A person may enjoy being watched; enjoy being admired; value the shared atmosphere; want their chosen role recognised; or find that observation intensifies the emotional meaning of the scene. These motives need not involve the same people or the same reaction. Someone might want a partner to witness an encounter but be indifferent to strangers. Another may enjoy presenting a carefully composed performance while disliking competitive attention.

Calling all such behaviour exhibitionistic may create confusion with psychiatric terminology concerning non-consenting observers. Here, audience-mediated means the participation of an appropriately informed, consenting audience in an adult setting. No diagnostic inference follows from the ordinary desire to be seen. Nor does performative mean false. An enacted role can be sincerely experienced while being deliberately presented to others.

Audience configuration and setting

Describe the audience and setting separately from your P rating. The settings below range from privacy to wider visibility. They are descriptive options, not a ladder of achievement, and no one needs to work through them. A larger audience does not automatically mean a stronger performance motive.

Setting	Who may be present	Possible experience
Private without an audience	An encounter without invited spectators or a desired performance element. A participating partner may still be present.	The sensation, intimacy or role may matter; being watched adds nothing.
Private one to one performance	Performing for one particular partner or individual in a private setting. That person may participate as well as watch.	Their focused attention, expression or recognition may be central, even when nobody else is present.
Private with an invited observer	An encounter witnessed by one invited person in addition to the participating partner.	Being seen by a trusted friend may add excitement, reassurance or a sense of recognition.
Small selected audience	A scene witnessed by a chosen group at a private gathering or in a reserved venue space.	Familiar faces, shared concentration or recognition from a particular community may matter.
Shared club or dungeon space	A scene in a communal play area at an adult sex club, fetish event or BDSM dungeon. Other attendees may watch incidentally.	The shared atmosphere may be welcome even when attracting attention is unimportant.
Deliberate audience focused performance	A planned scene or demonstration for an attentive audience at an adult sex club, fetish event, dungeon or private event.	Being the focus, presenting a chosen role or receiving an audience response may be a main attraction.

Here public means visible to other attendees in an agreed adult setting. A venue name alone does not describe the experience: a private room in a dungeon may allow a one-to-one encounter, while a gathering at home may include an audience. Record who is watching and what their attention means to you.

For analysis, audience configuration should be recorded categorically alongside motivational strength. Audience size, familiarity, attention and response are distinguishable attributes. The configurations above are author-proposed descriptions, not empirically established stages. A person who values an individual partner as an audience may have a stronger performance motive than someone who chooses a communal dungeon for other reasons.

Dependence and enhancement

The strongest version of the original hypothesis predicts that enjoyment would collapse without an approving audience. A weaker version predicts that an audience amplifies an already rewarding experience. These are distinguishable claims. Someone who enjoys both private and public encounters, but prefers the latter, does not have wholly audience-contingent pleasure. Similarly, a person who welcomes observation without caring about approval differs from someone whose satisfaction depends on praise.

Selection presents another problem. People visible at public events are not a random sample of masochists. Observers will disproportionately encounter those who are comfortable with visibility and able to attend. Private participants, people concerned about disclosure, disabled people facing venue barriers and those without access to organised communities may be less visible. It would be a mistake to infer population frequencies from the scenes most readily observed.

Audience effects may be beneficial, neutral or pressuring. The theoretical concern is that public recognition can become a reason to continue after private desire has declined. A person might wish to preserve an image of endurance or protect a partner from embarrassment. This possibility should be investigated without presuming that public play is generally coercive. The key question is whether being witnessed changes the freedom to communicate changing preferences.

Testing the claim

An ethical research programme could use participant-selected vignettes, interviews and diaries of naturally occurring encounters. It could distinguish audience presence from audience approval and compare the same person's private and public experiences. Measures should include desire before participation and satisfaction afterwards, rather than relying exclusively on visible reactions or endurance. Researchers must avoid manufacturing embarrassment, rejection or unwanted exposure to obtain a stronger effect.

The evidence reviewed here is sufficient to justify asking about audience-related reward. It is insufficient to establish a discrete exhibitionistic masochist type or estimate how common audience-dependent enjoyment is. This boundary deserves to be retained. A plausible account should not become a factual claim simply because it sounds recognisable.

6 Direct enjoyment of pain

Why pure is an unhelpful scientific label

The third proposed category describes people who find painful sensation, its emotional quality or its relationship to arousal rewarding in a relatively direct way. This is an important distinction from merely tolerating pain for another outcome. The word pure nevertheless introduces two avoidable assumptions: that this form is more authentic, and that its pleasure exists independently of context. Neither follows from the definition of direct enjoyment.

A person can value the sensation itself while remaining highly selective about who provides it, what it means, the setting and their current state. Enjoying a particular kind of painful experience does not imply welcoming headaches, dental pain, injury or an unwanted encounter. Such selectivity is not evidence that the person's masochism is incomplete. It specifies what the preference actually is.

Kamping et al. (2016) compared 16 people with masochistic interests and 16 matched controls. Participants with masochistic interests reported reduced pain intensity and unpleasantness when painful stimulation accompanied relevant masochistic imagery, with corresponding differences in brain activity and connectivity. Differences did not generalise across the other contexts. This is evidence for contextual modulation in a small, selected sample; it does not identify a context-free masochistic nervous system.

Several forms of direct reward

Direct enjoyment itself may contain different experiences. One person describes a bodily sensation as pleasurable. Another describes simultaneous unpleasantness and sexual arousal. A third values an emotionally charged feeling of vulnerability or intensity. A fourth finds that the contrast between discomfort and relief carries the reward. These descriptions could overlap, but they should not be treated as equivalent answers to a single question.

The timing of reward is particularly revealing. Pleasure during painful stimulation differs from relief when it stops, satisfaction in having completed a chosen challenge, or intimacy experienced afterwards. If only the final satisfaction is measured, these routes become difficult to distinguish. A person may retrospectively value an encounter without wanting every moment repeated. Conversely, an immediately pleasurable experience can lead to dissatisfaction if it conflicts with the person's broader wishes.

Defrin et al. (2015) compared 17 participants routinely engaging in masochistic behaviour with 17 controls. They found higher pressure-pain thresholds in the masochistic group and complex associations between pain, pleasure and context. Their findings also included some positive valuation of everyday pain, complicating any absolute claim that masochistic enjoyment occurs only in erotic settings. Because the study was cross-sectional, predisposition and effects of experience could not be separated.

These two studies should not be forced into a single simple story. Contextual selectivity and some generalisation can both occur, and different methods may capture different aspects of experience. The sensible conclusion is that pain processing and valuation vary. The evidence does not establish that all masochists either feel less pain or convert every painful experience into pleasure.

Emotional masochism needs a narrower vocabulary

Emotional and physical reward may interact, but the phrase emotional masochism can easily absorb unrelated phenomena. A consensual symbolic experience of embarrassment, surrender or chosen vulnerability differs from wanting enduring contempt, exclusion or emotional injury. The same person may welcome a bounded role while rejecting its meaning outside that context. These distinctions are conceptual and relational; they cannot be inferred from how dramatic an encounter appears.

It is preferable to ask which feeling is wanted and what makes it valuable. Is the desired experience exposure, relief from responsibility, the enactment of a fantasy, or reassurance after a difficult emotion? Does its value depend on retaining a secure understanding of the relationship? The answer might support an emotional or symbolic dimension within masochism, or indicate that the rewarding element is principally something else.

The third category is therefore best described as direct pain enjoyment, with separate attention to bodily pleasure, sexual arousal and emotional meaning. It is a useful dimension. Calling it pure contributes little explanatory precision.

7 Additional motivations and combinations

Altered attention and relief from self-monitoring

Some people may seek a change in consciousness more than either pain or submission as such. The experience might involve absorbed attention, reduced self-consciousness or temporary relief from ordinary responsibilities. Baumeister's (1988b) escape-from-self account proposed that masochistic experience could narrow attention towards immediate bodily experience. It remains a theory, with a broader explanatory ambition than the available evidence can establish.

Ambler et al. (2017) investigated 14 experienced participants assigned to top or bottom roles. Their preliminary findings were consistent with role-related altered states, using self-report and cognitive-task measures. The small sample and indirect indicators limit the conclusion: the study did not demonstrate a universal neurological state called subspace or directly image a prefrontal shutdown. An altered-state motive is plausible, but the mechanisms and individual variation need further study.

In the expanded framework, attentional change is a source of reward in its own right. Pain may be one route towards it, alongside the structure of an encounter or the demands of a chosen role. A person who seeks absorption might therefore have low interest in pain outside the conditions that make absorption possible. This would be poorly represented by a scale measuring only preferred stimulus intensity.

Challenge and achievement

A further proposed motivation is meeting a self-chosen challenge. The person may value concentration, endurance, learning their responses or achieving something difficult. Private accomplishment can supply the reward without an audience. Nor must challenge mean continual escalation. Repeating a familiar experience with greater self-awareness may be more satisfying than increasing its intensity.

Schuerwegen et al. (2021) compared 256 BDSM practitioners with 300 controls and found higher sensation-seeking scores among practitioners, alongside differences in reported coping. About 40% of practitioners reported using BDSM as a coping strategy. These findings support examining stimulation and coping, but neither establish that all masochists are sensation seekers nor demonstrate that BDSM produces better psychological health. A cross-sectional association cannot identify the direction of influence.

Challenge should also be distinguished from proving worth. A privately chosen aim can become socially compelled when status depends on exceeding others or a partner defines stopping as failure. This is not a separate extreme type of masochist. It is a change in the conditions under which participation occurs. The framework needs to detect that change without treating ambition itself as pathological.

Emotional regulation and recovery

A person may value feeling calmer, more present or more emotionally connected after a scene. Such a function is not automatically problematic: many valued activities regulate emotion. The more useful questions concern effectiveness over time, freedom to choose alternatives and the balance between immediate benfeit and later cost. A strategy that occasionally helps someone settle differs from a pattern they cannot interrupt despite mounting harm.

Relief, catharsis and recovery should nevertheless remain descriptive terms unless particular mechanisms are demonstrated. A powerful emotional experience does not establish that trauma has been processed or that a psychological disorder has been treated. The possibility of subjective benefit deserves respect, while claims of therapeutic efficacy require appropriate outcome research. A counsellor can explore what the activity means without prescribing its enactment as treatment.

Symbolism identity and agency

Painful encounters may also acquire meaning through a chosen narrative: a task completed, a role inhabited, vulnerability permitted or authority temporarily surrendered. A person's account may include ritual or personal significance without implying a supernatural mechanism. Taylor and Ussher's (2001) interviews with 24 self-identified sadomasochists documented diverse explanations, including pleasure, escape and transcendence. Those qualitative findings demonstrate a range of accounts, not the frequency or causal truth of each explanation.

Agency deserves special attention. A person may find value in determining the terms of an otherwise aversive experience. Another may value delegating particular decisions within previously agreed limits. These can appear opposite while both depend on a broader sense of authorship over participation. The proposed model should therefore distinguish momentary control within a role from the underlying ability to choose that role.

Mixed profiles

The following examples are invented illustrations, not client accounts or findings. An adult might enjoy modest painful sensation privately, take additional pleasure in a partner's response, and dislike being watched. Another might value public performance and shared atmosphere while having little interest in the sensation itself. A third might seek strong sensations for absorbed

attention, reject submission and remain indifferent to spectators. A fourth might enjoy all three original dimensions but participate only occasionally.

Each of these profiles is coherent. No ranking of authenticity is required. The same person's pattern may also change between partners or over time. It is more accurate to describe the configuration surrounding an encounter than to assume that one behaviour reveals an enduring psychological essence.

8 What the biological evidence can explain

Pain research offers mechanisms through which context can alter experience, but it does not presently supply a biological taxonomy of BDSM masochists. Changes in attention, expectation, affect and descending modulation can influence how noxious stimulation is processed. Theoretical integrations of BDSM pain propose interactions between these processes and interpersonal meaning, rather than a single switch that converts pain into pleasure (Dunkley et al., 2020).

Baudic et al. (2022) studied 15 men engaging in masochistic behaviour and 15 controls. Their use of a spinal nociceptive reflex alongside contextual imagery supported a role for descending modulation. Baseline measures did not show a general difference across thermal pain thresholds. The male-only sample and small numbers restrict generalisation, but the work gives a physiological basis for investigating context effects beyond verbal description alone.

Other studies suggest temporary changes around actual interactions. Wuyts et al. (2021) reported changes in pain thresholds following BDSM encounters, including an increase among submissive participants. Their analyses included 34 dominants, 33 submissives and 24 controls. Recruitment from a particular club-attending community and differences between experimental measures limit the claim. A temporary threshold change does not reveal how much someone wants, nor does it show that stronger stimulation would be beneficial.

Wuyts et al. (2020) also investigated biological markers around BDSM interactions. The broader review by Wuyts and Morrens (2022), which included ten studies, described evidence involving cortisol and endocannabinoids while identifying uncertainties around other systems. Such work is preliminary. Hormone or endocannabinoid changes cannot by themselves identify a motivation, measure consent or demonstrate a universal pleasure mechanism.

The common account that every masochistic experience is an endorphin high therefore exceeds the evidence. Candidate mechanisms should be distinguished from direct measurements, and peripheral biomarkers from processes inside particular brain circuits. Equally, a brain-imaging association cannot tell us whether a person is acting from devotion, social reward or private sensory enjoyment. Psychological meaning requires additional evidence.

A recent study adds a useful complication. Vetterlein et al. (2026) compared matched groups of 214 participants with and 214 without sadomasochistic sexual preferences. Chronic pain was reported by 47.2% and 29.4%, respectively; attitudes to pain also differed. The study was observational and concerned broader sadomasochistic preference, not exclusively masochism. The findings justify investigating chronic pain and coping, but do not show that BDSM causes chronic pain, treats it or explains any particular individual's interests.

Taken together, these findings argue for distinguishing a person's ongoing bodily condition from the pain they choose in a particular setting. Pleasure, analgesia, arousal and relief are separate outcomes. Their relationships may differ between individuals and encounters, which is precisely why a multidimensional account is needed.

9 A provisional motivational profile

The expanded framework proposes seven overlapping dimensions. Each concerns the contribution of a particular reward to the person's desire for an encounter. The dimensions are conceptually derived from the original proposal and the literature discussed above. They have not been validated as independent factors, and some may prove redundant when tested.

Dimension	Proposed source of reward	Useful distinguishing question
Direct sensation	The painful sensation or its immediate pleasurable quality	Would the sensation itself retain appeal without praise or an audience?
Relational response	A partner's enjoyment, attention or closeness	How much does the specific partner's response matter?
Submission and role	Enacting an agreed relationship to authority	Would the experience retain its meaning without submission?
Audience and performance	Visibility, recognition, shared atmosphere or display	Does observation add pleasure and does approval matter separately?
Altered state	Absorption, reduced self-monitoring or a valued shift in awareness	Is the desired outcome a change in attention or consciousness?
Challenge and achievement	Meeting a personally meaningful difficulty	Would private accomplishment be rewarding without recognition?
Emotional and symbolic meaning	A chosen feeling, narrative, ritual or sense of agency	Which meaning would be lost if the same sensation occurred differently?

For exploratory discussion, each dimension can use six ordinal anchors: 0 no contribution; 1 a small addition; 2 a secondary pleasure; 3 a significant motive; 4 a central motive; and 5 essential in the specified context. This aligns the rating range with the companion journal and workbook. Several dimensions can receive the same high rating. They should not be added into a total masochism score. These proposed anchors have not been validated as equal psychological intervals.

The companion S P G profile is a compact reflection format: S groups relational and submissive meanings, P concerns performance and witnessing, and G concerns direct bodily or emotional gratification. The seven dimensions above retain distinctions for fuller enquiry. The P anchors below illustrate how an importance rating stays separate from audience configuration.

Level	Descriptor	Description and example
0	No audience contribution	Being witnessed adds no appeal. Privacy may feel equally welcome or preferable. Example: I prefer a private encounter; being watched adds nothing to the sensation or relationship I enjoy.
1	A small audience bonus	Being seen adds a little, but I would barely miss the audience or recognition. Example: In a shared dungeon space, occasional attention adds a little, but I mainly want the sensation and would enjoy it privately.
2	An enjoyable addition	Visibility, recognition or shared atmosphere adds worthwhile pleasure, while other reasons matter more. Example: One invited observer adds worthwhile pleasure to a private scene, while other rewards matter more.
3	A significant motive	Being witnessed or sharing the setting is a clear part of why I want this encounter. Example: Being seen by a small chosen group is a significant part of the appeal, alongside the sensation or relationship.
4	A central motive	Performance or visibility is a main attraction. Without the witnessing I seek, the encounter would lose much of its appeal. Example: Performing for one particular partner in private is a main attraction; without their attentive response, much of the appeal would be lost.
5	Essential in this context	I would not choose this particular encounter without the kind of audience, witnessing or recognition I seek. Example: I want this particular scene as an audience-focused performance at an adult club or dungeon; without the witnessing I seek, I would choose another encounter.

An invented profile of S3 P5 G2 I2 could describe someone who wants mild pain as a private performance for one particular partner. Their attention is essential to this encounter, the relational exchange is significant, and the sensation adds secondary pleasure. P5 does not require a crowd.

An invented profile of S2 P1 G4 I3 could describe someone who enjoys moderate painful sensation in a shared dungeon space. Observation adds only a small bonus; the direct experience is central. Being in a public play area does not establish a strong performance motive.

Fear of rejection, perceived obligation and freedom to decline should be recorded separately. They are conditions affecting participation, rather than additional pleasures to be scored alongside it. This separation prevents a person whose behaviour is strongly pressured from being classified as especially motivated simply because they endure a great deal.

Any proposed dimension also needs a distinction between importance and necessity. A partner's pleasure might enrich an encounter without being essential. An audience might be indispensable in one fantasy and irrelevant in another. Asking what would happen if a component were absent is more informative than asking only whether it is liked. Even then, a hypothetical answer should not be mistaken for a verified causal effect.

10 Describing tendencies from low to extreme

Why one ladder is insufficient

A levelling system is useful only when it states what increases. Preferred sensory intensity, frequency of desire, importance to identity and inability to feel satisfied without a particular experience are different dimensions. A frequent mild preference can be central to someone's life. An occasional strong preference can remain peripheral. Neither can be called more masochistic in every respect.

The proposed intensity scale below therefore concerns desired subjective intensity in a specified kind of encounter. It does not rank people, assess skill, indicate physical force or define safe practice. Its descriptions are provisional communication anchors, without normative cut-offs or psychometric validation. Moving upwards is not an expected course of development.

Level	Descriptive label	Meaning within the person's stated context
0	No pain sought	I am not seeking painful sensation here. Other BDSM interests or motivations may still matter.
1	Very low intensity	I want very mild painful sensation, at the faint end of what I personally recognise as pain.
2	Low intensity	I want mild, clearly noticeable pain that remains toward the lower end of my preferred range.
3	Moderate intensity	I want a distinctly painful experience that I describe as moderate within this particular context.
4	High intensity	I actively want a strong painful sensation in the specified experience.
5	Very high intensity	I prefer very strong painful sensation in this context, while retaining specific limits and choices.
6	Extreme subjective intensity	I want exceptionally intense perceived pain within specified limits. This does not mean unlimited tolerance or injury.

The scale should be completed separately for different sensory experiences where necessary. A single number conceals the possibility that someone values one sensation strongly and rejects another completely. Emotional intensity should also be described separately, using the person's own account of the feeling involved. It cannot be calibrated reliably against physical intensity by assigning both the same number.

Additional ratings that must remain separate

Variable	Suggested record	Reason for separation
Current desire	Absent, low, moderate, strong or very strong	A strong preference can exist even when opportunity is rare.
Frequency	Desire and actual participation recorded separately over a stated period	Availability and circumstance affect behaviour.
Centrality	Optional, valued, important or essential to desired encounters	Mild sensation can be essential while stronger sensation remains optional.
Flexibility	How preferences change with partner, setting and alternatives	Specificity does not itself establish impairment.
Perceived pressure	None, uncertain or present, with explanation	Endurance cannot establish freedom of choice.
Consequences	Immediate and later physical, emotional and relational effects	Intensity does not predict the whole outcome.

For example, a person might report low preferred intensity, frequent desire and high centrality, with strong relational motivation. Another might report very high intensity, infrequent desire and low centrality, with a strong challenge motive. The framework records both without assigning one a superior identity. Ratings also need a date and context, because a preference is not a permanent instruciton.

Extreme intensity and harm

The highest category must never be defined by tissue damage, loss of consciousness, disregard of limits or inability to stop. Those are not evidence of greater authenticity. Physical risk has to be assessed independently; it does not follow directly from the person's subjective pain rating. Equally, low pain does not establish low danger. The scale supplies no procedural advice and no threshold at which an activity becomes safe.

Existing measurement research does not validate this proposed ladder. Weierstall and Giebel (2017) developed the Sadomasochism Checklist in a sample of 652 adults, assessing attraction to and frequency of practices across dominance and submission. That work demonstrates the possibility of structured measurement, but its constructs and item content differ from the motivational and intensity framework proposed here. Borrowing the word scale cannot transfer validation from one instrument to another.

11 Differences between men and women

Different questions produce different comparisons

Differences between male and female participants require careful interpretation because studies measure different things. Overall BDSM interest, preference for submission, enjoyment of pain and public participation are not interchangeable outcomes. A comparison of who identifies as

submissive cannot establish which group experiences greater sensory pleasure from pain. A comparison of reported pain tolerance cannot establish which group desires masochistic encounters more often.

Sex-related biological variables and gender-related experiences can both matter, but the available studies often do not measure them separately. Many use binary self-report categories without enough information to distinguish the effects of physiology, identity, social expectations or sampling. Their results should therefore be reported using the categories they actually measured. They cannot justify a precise biological explanation merely because the sample was divided into men and women.

Interest and participation

Joyal and Carpentier (2017) surveyed 1,040 adults in Quebec. They reported no statistically significant difference between men and women in masochistic interest, while survey mode affected disclosure. This is direct evidence against treating female predominance in masochistic desire as a settled universal finding. It does not prove identical distributions, identical motives or the absence of smaller differences that the study could not resolve.

Holvoet et al. (2017), in a Belgian sample of 1,027, found higher overall BDSM and fetish interest among men. Their study also showed that participation in at least one BDSM-related activity was much more common than self-identification as a practitioner. These results concern broad interests and measurement choices. They cannot be used to conclude that men are more directly pain-enjoying or women more relationally motivated.

The apparently conflicting findings become less puzzling once the measured constructs are separated. A sample may contain men with greater interest in some activities and women with greater interest in others, while showing little difference in a broad masochism category. Recruitment, age distribution, sexual orientation, cultural context and willingness to disclose can further alter the comparison. A single prevalence percentage cannot settle a motivational theory.

There are clearer differences in some samples' role distributions. Wismeijer and van Assen (2013) reported that 75.6% of women and 33.4% of men in their BDSM sample identified with the submissive role; dominant identification was 8% and 48.3%, respectively. These are substantial differences within that volunteer sample. They concern role identification, however, and do not show that women enjoy pain primarily for a partner's benefit or that men prefer pain independently of relationship meaning. Submissive identification cannot serve as a proxy for the first proposed category.

Scripts and representations

Baumeister's (1988a) study of masochistic scripts reported sex differences in their content, including greater severity of pain and aggregate humiliation in male scripts. The evidence concerns selected accounts rather than an unbiased observation of all masochistic behaviour. It is historically situated and cannot establish an inherent contemporary male preference, a biological mechanism or the distribution of the three proposed types.

Script research nevertheless raises worthwhile questions. A person may find a role compelling partly because it contrasts with expectations attached to everyday masculinity or femininity. That is

a hypothesis about meaning, not a universal explanation of either sex. Some people experience kink as continuity with their ordinary self; others experience a deliberate departure. Their accounts need to be elicited rather than supplied from a stereotype.

The same caution applies to the idea that women perform for approval while men enjoy pain more directly. The studies reviewed here do not establish that distribution. Nor do they demonstrate that male masochism is fundamentally about humiliation and female masochism fundamentally about attachment. These claims would require direct measures of motivation and appropriate comparisons within masochistic samples.

Pain sensitivity is not masochistic desire

The IASP's review of sex and gender differences in pain describes generally lower experimental pain thresholds and tolerance in women, with substantial variation by method and context. It also notes the influence of social expectations and observers (IASP, 2024). These findings cannot be translated into a rule that women enjoy pain less, men are more masochistic, or one group requires stronger stimulation. Sensory sensitivity and the value assigned to an experience remain separate variables.

Indeed, the direction of a possible association is not obvious. Greater sensitivity could mean that a desired intensity is reached with less stimulation. It could also make a particular experience less attractive, or have little relevance once context and personal preference are considered. These are alternative hypotheses. None can be selected simply by appealing to average laboratory differences between sexes.

The small BDSM pain studies are not adequate for a detailed sex-specific taxonomy. Baudic et al. (2022) included men only, so their result cannot test a male–female difference. Mixed samples in other studies are also small, and the absence of a significant subgroup effect would not demonstrate equivalence. Studies need sufficient power for the interaction being tested, not merely a statistically significant result in one group and a non-significant result in another.

Relationships gender and autonomy

There is no reason to restrict relational motivation to women or direct sensory enjoyment to men. Such an allocation would reproduce assumptions the proposed model should examine. Similarly, male submission should not be interpreted as failed masculinity, and female submission should not automatically be interpreted as acceptance of inequality outside the encounter. These are interpretive errors because they infer a person's broader commitments from a bounded sexual or relational preference.

Transgender and non-binary participants also cannot simply be added to whichever binary group seems convenient. Research should record the variables relevant to its question, with clear consent and adequate privacy, and avoid treating very small groups as representative. Biological hypotheses may require specific physiological measures; hypotheses about recognition or role meaning may require identity and social-context measures. The design should follow the mechanism under investigation.

For the present model, the strongest conclusion is limited: the evidence does not establish a reliable male–female allocation across relational, audience-mediated and direct pain-enjoyment profiles.

Some differences in broad interests, reported scripts and experimental pain responses exist, but their relevance to these particular dimensions remains untested. Individual enquiry is therefore more defensible than sex-based prediction.

12 Trauma attachment and clinical interpretation

Neither a universal trauma story nor a universal absence of difficulty

Masochistic interests should not be treated as evidence that trauma occurred. Richters et al. (2008), using a national Australian survey, did not support a general account of BDSM participation as a symptom of prior abuse or sexual difficulty. Wismeijer and van Assen (2013), comparing 902 BDSM participants with 434 controls, reported several favourable psychological characteristics in the BDSM group. Both findings challenge blanket pathology assumptions; neither proves that every participant is psychologically secure or that BDSM causes well-being.

There is also evidence that complicates an equally blanket denial of trauma associations. Selič and Jug (2025), in a convenience sample of 318 adults, reported associations between childhood sexual abuse and aspects of BDSM involvement. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causation. Some attachment subscales showed weak reliability, further limiting interpretation. This study warrants careful consideration, not conversion into a universal explanation or dismissal merely because its results are uncomfortable.

The defensible clinical position is individual and conditional. A person's history may be relevant to the meaning of their interests, but it cannot be inferred from those interests. Nor does the presence of trauma establish that the interests are symptoms requiring removal. A meaningful formulation asks how past experience, current relationships and chosen activities interact for this person now.

Applying the framework without imposing it

The model offers a structure for curiosity. A practitioner might ask what the person anticipates, what feels rewarding during the experience and how they feel afterwards. They can then examine whether the desired outcome concerns sensation, the relationship, observation, challenge or another meaning. A participant's answer should be allowed to revise the model. The framework becomes counterproductive if the therapist treats its categories as hidden truths to be uncovered despite disagreement.

Consent research emphasises communication and negotiated meaning within BDSM, while clinical guidance addresses stigma and the need for relevant competence (Dunkley and Brotto, 2020; Sprott et al., 2023). The practical implication here is specific: distinguish a chosen asymmetry within an encounter from the absence of freedom to refuse it. A recognised role or agreement cannot answer whether a particular act remained wanted.

Within a relational or psychodynamic formulation, the first category may prompt questions about recognition, approval and imagined expectations. The public category may prompt questions about visibility and whose judgement matters. Direct enjoyment may prompt careful attention to bodily experience and the person's own language. These are proposed lines of enquiry, not interpretations that follow automatically from a label. A therapist should also examine whether their discomfort or fascination is shaping the questions they ask.

When distress is present, assess its source. It may arise from stigma, incompatibility, secrecy, unwanted pressure, adverse experiences or an unrelated problem. High intensity alone cannot discriminate among these possibilities. Conversely, describing an activity as low intensity should not obscure humiliation that was unwanted, affection made conditional or a pattern of feeling unable to say no.

Self-punitive beliefs deserve enquiry when the person reports them. There is a difference between choosing a symbolic scene and believing that one deserves actual harm. That distinction requires attention to intention, aftermath, persistence and freedom of choice. It should not be presumed from an activity's appearance. Kink affirmation is compatible with taking a person's suffering seriously.

13 How the proposed model could be tested

The first task is qualitative development. Interviews should deliberately recruit private participants as well as people active in public communities, including non-submissive masochists, switches and people who receive pain without identifying as masochists. Researchers should ask open questions before introducing the seven dimensions. Otherwise, participants may reproduce the proposed framework because the interview has supplied it.

The next task is measurement. Candidate items should separately assess motives, preferred intensity, actual participation, emotional outcomes and pressure. Cognitive interviewing can establish whether respondents interpret the items as intended. Statistical work should then compare dimensional models with discrete-class alternatives rather than assuming three classes in advance. Factor analysis could test whether proposed dimensions separate; latent-profile analysis could explore recurring combinations without declaring them natural kinds.

Repeated observations are especially important. A diary design could examine whether the same person's motivation changes with partner, setting or emotional state. Multilevel analysis would help distinguish differences between people from changes within a person. Without that distinction, a temporary public preference might be misrepresented as an enduring exhibitionistic identity.

Several predictions follow from the proposal. Relationally motivated reward should track the recipient's perception of the partner's response, while pressure may predict a different pattern of later satisfaction. Audience-mediated motivation should predict changes associated with observation or approval after controlling for other contextual differences. Direct sensation motivation should predict reported enjoyment of a desired painful sensation while still allowing strong context effects. An altered-state dimension should explain variation beyond the amount of pain reported.

These predictions could fail. The audience dimension might divide into belonging and approval with little connection between them. Submission might overlap strongly with relational motivation in some samples and remain distinct in others. Direct enjoyment might require separate measures of bodily pleasure and sexual arousal. Such findings would improve the model by making it more faithful to experience.

Sex and gender comparisons should follow measurement validation, including tests that the questions function comparably across groups. Analyses need to consider sexual orientation, recruitment source, age, experience and relationship context. Effect sizes and uncertainty intervals

matter more than declaring a group difference from a p-value alone. Results from one community should be replicated elsewhere before being treated as general features of men or women.

The proposed intensity ladder also requires validation if it is to become more than a discussion aid. Researchers would need to assess whether people understand its anchors consistently, whether ratings remain meaningful over time and whether they add useful information beyond existing measures. No stage of this work would justify turning intensity into a measure of personal worth or an expectation of progression.

14 Concluding argument

The original three-part idea identifies an important problem: outwardly similar masochistic behaviour can be organised around different rewards. Its most productive development is to retain the distinctions while loosening the categories. Relational enjoyment, audience-related enjoyment and direct pain enjoyment can be investigated as overlapping dimensions, alongside submission, altered states, challenge and emotional meaning.

Three revisions are essential. Pleasure in a dominant's pleasure must be separated from fear of losing the relationship. Public participation must be separated from dependence on admiration. Direct pain enjoyment must be allowed to remain selective and context dependent, without being called more authentic than other forms. These revisions preserve the original observation while removing claims the evidence does not establish.

A useful levelling system can describe preferred subjective intensity from very low to extreme, provided that frequency, centrality, flexibility and risk remain separate. It should help someone explain what they want. It should never tell them what they ought to endure. Likewise, sex-related research can inform questions but cannot presently assign men and women to the proposed motivational categories.

The most revealing enquiry is therefore relational and experiential: what is valuable about this experience, under these conditions, for this person? A satisfactory account must be able to accommodate pleasure, generosity, performance and private intensity without assuming pathology. It must also remain capable of recognising pressure and harm without treating them as the inevitable meaning of masochism. Keeping both possibilities open to evidence is what makes the model useful.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Paraphilic disorders. DSM-5 explanatory fact sheet. https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-Paraphilic-Disorders.pdf

Ambler, J. K., Lee, E. M., Klement, K. R., Loewald, T., Comber, E. M., Hanson, S. A., Cutler, B., Cutler, N., and Sagarin, B. J. (2017). Consensual BDSM facilitates role-specific altered states of consciousness: A preliminary study. Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice, 4(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000097

Baudic, S., Poindessous-Jazat, F., and Bouhassira, D. (2022). Pain and masochistic behaviour: The role of descending modulation. European Journal of Pain, 26(10), 2227–2237. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejp.2037

Baumeister, R. F. (1988a). Gender differences in masochistic scripts. Journal of Sex Research, 25(4), 478–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498809551477

Baumeister, R. F. (1988b). Masochism as escape from self. Journal of Sex Research, 25(1), 28–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498809551444

Defrin, R., Arad, M., Ben-Sasson, M. P., and Ginzburg, K. (2015). Attitudes and emotions towards pain and sensitivity to painful stimuli among people routinely engaging in masochistic behaviour. European Journal of Pain, 19(9), 1321–1330. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejp.662

Dunkley, C. R., and Brotto, L. A. (2020). The role of consent in the context of BDSM. Sexual Abuse, 32(6), 657–678. https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063219842847

Dunkley, C. R., Henshaw, C. D., Henshaw, S. K., and Brotto, L. A. (2020). Physical pain as pleasure: A theoretical perspective. Journal of Sex Research, 57(4), 421–437. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1605328

Holvoet, L., Huys, W., Coppens, V., Seeuws, J., Goethals, K., and Morrens, M. (2017). Fifty shades of Belgian gray: The prevalence of BDSM-related fantasies and activities in the general population. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 14(9), 1152–1159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2017.07.003

International Association for the Study of Pain. (2020, 16 July). IASP announces revised definition of pain. https://www.iasp-pain.org/publications/iasp-news/iasp-announces-revised-definition-of-pain/

International Association for the Study of Pain. (2024, 28 June). Overview of sex and gender differences in human pain. https://www.iasp-pain.org/resources/fact-sheets/156455/

Joyal, C. C., and Carpentier, J. (2017). The prevalence of paraphilic interests and behaviors in the general population: A provincial survey. Journal of Sex Research, 54(2), 161–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1139034

Kamping, S., Andoh, J., Bomba, I. C., Diers, M., Diesch, E., and Flor, H. (2016). Contextual modulation of pain in masochists: Involvement of the parietal operculum and insula. Pain, 157(2), 445–455. https://doi.org/10.1097/j.pain.0000000000000390

Labrecque, F., Potz, A., Larouche, É., and Joyal, C. C. (2021). What is so appealing about being spanked, flogged, dominated, or restrained? Answers from practitioners of sexual masochism/submission. Journal of Sex Research, 58(4), 409–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2020.1767025

Muise, A., Impett, E. A., Kogan, A., and Desmarais, S. (2013). Keeping the spark alive: Being motivated to meet a partner's sexual needs sustains sexual desire in long-term romantic relationships. Social Psychological and Personality Science, 4(3), 267–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550612457185

Newmahr, S. (2010). Rethinking kink: Sadomasochism as serious leisure. Qualitative Sociology, 33(3), 313–331. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-010-9158-9

Richters, J., de Visser, R. O., Rissel, C. E., Grulich, A. E., and Smith, A. M. A. (2008). Demographic and psychosocial features of participants in bondage and discipline, "sadomasochism" or dominance and submission (BDSM): Data from a national survey. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 5(7), 1660–1668. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2008.00795.x

Sagarin, B. J., Cutler, B., Cutler, N., Lawler-Sagarin, K. A., and Matuszewich, L. (2009). Hormonal changes and couple bonding in consensual sadomasochistic activity. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38(2), 186–200. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-008-9374-5

Schuerwegen, A., Huys, W., Coppens, V., De Neef, N., Henckens, J., Goethals, K., and Morrens, M. (2021). The psychology of kink: A cross-sectional survey study investigating the roles of sensation seeking and coping style in BDSM-related interests. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 50(3), 1197–1206. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01807-7

Selič, M., and Jug, V. (2025). Childhood sexual abuse, adult attachment styles, and involvement in BDSM practices in adult intimate relationships. Behavioral Sciences, 15(6), 813. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15060813

Sprott, R. A., Herbitter, C., Grant, P., Moser, C., and Kleinplatz, P. J. (2023). Clinical guidelines for working with clients involved in kink. Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 49(8), 978–995. https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2023.2232801

Taylor, G. W., and Ussher, J. M. (2001). Making sense of S&M: A discourse analytic account. Sexualities, 4(3), 293–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/136346001004003002

Vetterlein, A., Kirrinnis, S., Monzel, M., König Guasch, A.-L., and Reuter, M. (2026). Gaining the upper hand? Further evidence of pain as a pleasurable experience and the unexpected relationship between sadomasochistic sexual preference and chronic pain. European Journal of Pain, 30(2), e70230. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejp.70230

Weierstall, R., and Giebel, G. (2017). The Sadomasochism Checklist: A tool for the assessment of sadomasochistic behavior. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 46(3), 735–745. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0789-0

Wismeijer, A. A. J., and van Assen, M. A. L. M. (2013). Psychological characteristics of BDSM practitioners. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 10(8), 1943–1952. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12192

Wuyts, E., De Neef, N., Coppens, V., Fransen, E., Schellens, E., Van Der Pol, M., and Morrens, M. (2020). Between pleasure and pain: A pilot study on the biological mechanisms associated with BDSM interactions in dominants and submissives. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 17(4), 784–792. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2020.01.001

Wuyts, E., De Neef, N., Coppens, V., Schuerwegen, A., de Zeeuw-Jans, I., Van Der Pol, M., and Morrens, M. (2021). Beyond pain: A study on the variance of pain thresholds within BDSM interactions in dominants and submissives. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 18(3), 556–564. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.01.001

Wuyts, E., and Morrens, M. (2022). The biology of BDSM: A systematic review. Journal of Sexual Medicine, 19(1), 144–157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.11.002