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Only as a last resort: perceptions of police among gender, sexual and relationally diverse (GSRD) BDSM/kink participants

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ABSTRACT

Those who engage in BDSM (bondage/discipline, domination/submission and sadism/masochism) activities may experience rare injury, physical/sexual assault, consent violation, etc. However, prior negative experiences with police coupled with the stigmatisation and in some country's criminalisation of BDSM, may deter kink practitioners from seeking police assistance if needed. This may be increasingly true for Gender, Sexual and Relationship Diverse (GSRD) kink-involved individuals (e.g. LGBTQ+). Using mixed methods and an intersectionality and minority stress model framework, we surveyed 623 international self-identified BDSM participants, to explore their perceptions of police. Overall, GSRD participants (e.g. transgender) had greater negative perceptions of police inside and outside of BDSM-contexts compared to non-GSRD participants (e.g. cisgender, heterosexual). Within BDSM-contexts, participants felt that police were poorly educated about BDSM, viewed BDSM dynamics (e.g. dominant/submissive) negatively, did not take reports of consent violations seriously, and should play a minor role in kink communities. While some participants said they would contact police if there was evidence a severe crime was committed, they still expressed concerns and hesitancy. These included fears of judgement, discrimination, not being taken seriously and outing. Others explained a lack of trust in police and therefore would never seek police assistance, or only as a last resort. Nevertheless, participants recognised the existence of a poor relationship between police and kink communities, and a need to improve the relationship. Specific areas where BDSM/police relationships can be improved are discussed, including the use of collaborative officer education initiatives and on-going and future revisions to existing legal frameworks internationally.

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Introduction

Just as law enforcement are obligated to interact in professional and ethical manners with the communities they serve (Shields 2021), their ability to perform their job safely and most effectively occurs when communities are comfortable cooperating, such as reporting crimes and helping identify suspects (Tyler and Fagan 2010). Underlying this comfort is a community's trust in law enforcement, which has been undermined within certain populations, such as Gender, Sexual and Relationship Diverse (GSRD) communities. This is due to a documented history of adverse experiences (Braga *et al.* 2019, Hodge and Sexton 2020, Miles-Johnson 2020) leading to negative perceptions (Serpe and Nadal 2017, Dario *et al.* 2020) and an erosion of police effectiveness within these communities.

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BDSM (bondage/discipline, domination/submission and sadism/masochism) and kink are umbrella terms referring to a variety of sexually diverse behaviours, interests and fantasies (Simula 2019). A recent scoping review (n = 60 articles) concluded that 40–70% of adults fantasise about BDSM, while 20% engage in BDSM activities (Brown *et al.* 2020). When compared to the general population, those from diverse sexual orientations (Sprott 2023) and relationship styles (Vilkin and Sprott 2021), comprise a disproportionate share of BDSM practitioners. Given that BDSM activities may consist of sexual activities and/or intense physical bodily sensations, it is important that should a problem arise (e.g. physical/sexual assault, consent violation), practitioners feel comfortable enough, and are willing, to reach out to law enforcement for support. However, research suggests kink practitioners may also be fearful of police (Wright *et al.* 2015, Haviv 2016). When GSRD statuses and engagement in kink are combined, these may synergistically increase fear and hesitancy of practitioners to turn to police for assistance.

In the current study we seek to address the existing gap in understanding how the combination of GSRD statuses (e.g. LGBTQ+) and participation in BDSM activities impacts perceptions of police and their willingness to contact police should they experience a BDSM-related problem. Specifically, we explore three research questions through a series of online open- and close-ended survey questions. First, do GSRD kink practitioners hold more negative perceptions of police outside of their kink community (i.e. in their local community) than non-GSRD kink practitioners. Second, do GSRD kink practitioners hold more negative perceptions of police on topics related to BDSM than non-GSRD kink practitioners? Third, how likely are kink practitioners to contact police should they experience a problem within a kink context (e.g. consent violation, assault, rape, etc.).

We begin by defining GSRD and reviewing two theories – minority stress model and intersectionality – that underpin the current study. Next, we highlight the research conducted exploring police perceptions of various GSRD communities, followed by GSRD individuals' general experiences and perceptions of police. We conclude by focusing more directly on each of the GSRD communities' perceptions of police, beginning with gender diversity (e.g. transgender), followed by relationship diversity (e.g. consensual non-monogamy; CNM), and ending with sexual diversity (e.g. kink).

Defining GSRD

In much of the world, a series of diverse communities are lumped together in the LGBTQ+ (e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Other individuals) umbrella acronym. Expansions of this umbrella continue to emerge, adding additional letters to represent previously absent groups from the acronym, such as asexuals. An alternative umbrella conceptualisation is GSRD, which groups various gender, sexual and relationship diversities together. Pioneered by United Kingdom (UK) psychologists, this alternate conceptualisation contends that because these are inextricably linked, they need to be viewed together rather than separated out, which GSRD seeks to accomplish (Davies and Barker 2015). Moreover, several groups often left out of the LGBTQ+ umbrella, such as relationship diversity (e.g. polyamory), are included in the GSRD conceptualisation. Going forward, the GSRD acronym will be employed except when referencing literature that specifically addresses a community within this umbrella.

Relevant theoretical background

Meyer (2003) posited that mental health and education disparities evident in lesbian and gay (LG) communities were the result of stressors. These stressors came from external (e.g. hate crime discrimination), interactive proximal (e.g. vigilance for self-protection) and internal (e.g. stigma) sources. Reviewing 20 years of research conducted since its introduction, Frost and Meyer (2023) identified strong empirical evidence supporting the minority stress model theory. It had also been expanded to other GSRD communities including transgender and gender diverse individuals, applied to GSRD communities in a broad array of geographic regions, utilised considerably by

scholars and researchers, and appeared relevant for policy formation. Within the current study, we expand the theory's use to BDSM communities.

Intersectionality was coined to explain how race, class and gender inequality may compound within an individual to create unique discrimination experiences (Crenshaw 1989). For example, Crenshaw argued that a given business may claim that they are not being discriminatory against women or people of colour because they have both in their employ. However, further examination would reveal that there are no women of colour in their workforce. Thus, the disadvantage of being a woman and a person of colour intersect to create a unique and previously invisible experience of disadvantage until specifically examined. This theory of intersectionality has been expanded to explore ways that multiple identities that are disadvantaged in society can compound to create unique obstacles and experiences for individuals holding these identities. Within the current study intersectionality is utilised to explore how the unique stressors of GSRD and kink individuals may compound to form unique experiences with police and in turn unique perceptions of them.

Police perceptions of GSRD individuals

Little research has been conducted on officer perceptions of GSRD individuals. The most notable was a survey of a mostly male (82%), White (79%) and entirely heterosexual sample of officers ($n = 222$) conducted by Bernstein and Kostelac (2002). This study found that when heterosexism is endorsed, the relationship between officer attitudes and actual discrimination of LG individuals was strong. Moreover, 30–40% contended that LG individuals would not be treated and/or their responses for police assistance would be deprioritised compared to heterosexuals. However, the study also noted a lack of direct evidence between officer attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards LG individuals.

Indirectly, studies have explored police perceptions of GSRD individuals by studying LGBTQ+ police officers' observations. Exemplifying this, Couto (2018) studied two samples of Canadian LGBTQ+ officers. In the first sample ($n = 21$), most officers believed that departments were more inclusive today than in the past, but that police departments retained a heterosexist bias. In the second sample ($n = 40$), workplace harassment due to the participants' gender tended to be more overt than discrimination against their sexual orientation. This was explained as possibly due to sexual orientation being less visible than gender. Relatedly, Jones and Williams (2015) conducted a survey ($n = 836$) of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) officers in England and Wales. They found that 17% reported workplace discrimination and that LGB officers in both small and large departments were more likely to be discriminated against than their heterosexual peers during their academy training. As a close-knit collective, if officers are nevertheless discriminatory towards their own LGB colleagues, then it is possible that these attitudes extend to LGB individuals in general and by proxy, other GSRD communities.

Several studies have investigated the use of LGBTQ+ diversity training to improve officer interactions with GSRD communities. Israel *et al.* (2017) explored resistance and receptiveness to one such training ($n = 120$) of officers. They found that there was significant resistance to diversity training, but noted nuances that upon further reflection highlighted some areas of emerging receptivity. Specifically, that behaviour which first appeared resistant may in fact have been receptive. Together, this sparse literature suggests that while officer attitudes towards GSRD communities may have improved, discrimination persists.

GSRD's experiences and perceptions of police

Law enforcement depends on the public to execute their duties effectively and the public's perception impacts their likelihood of cooperating with officers (Dario *et al.* 2020) or reporting crimes (Serpe and Nadal 2017, Miles-Johnson 2020). Consequently, as public servants, it is crucial for the police to have a positive relationship with those who will rely on them in times of need. While the general

public views police favourably (Li *et al.* 2016), many GSRD populations hold negative perceptions of law enforcement (Dario *et al.* 2020, Hodge and Sexton 2020).

The fractures between GSRD populations and police are even more problematic given that people from these groups, such as gay (Herek 2009) and transgender (Miles-Johnson 2020) individuals appear at elevated risk of victimisation (Miles-Johnson 2013). Despite potentially being in greater need of police assistance, GSRD groups appear less willing to contact law enforcement (Hodge and Sexton 2020). This is likely due, in part, to their greater distrust of police officers than heterosexual (Miles-Johnson 2013) and cisgender people (Serpe and Nadal 2017). Jachimowski *et al.* (2024) found that between 1992 and 2021, hate crimes regarding sexual orientation were significantly underreported, with perceptions of police being the strongest predictor of non-reporting. Likewise, Shields (2021) conducted a series of focus groups with urban, US LGBTQ+ participants ($n = 98$) exploring when they would or would not seek police assistance. Participants who viewed the police negatively, based upon prior negative experiences with the police including reports of bias and harassment, took steps to avoid them when possible. Only two-thirds stated that they would reach out to the police under any circumstance, and many would only do so for emergencies. Outside of the US, Girardi (2022) conducted a qualitative study ($n = 20$) with young LGBTQ+ community members from various European countries to explore their interactions with police. Participants reported over-policing of LGBTQ+ individuals in public spaces, underreporting of hate crimes experienced, due to victimisation by the police, and mistrust of the entire criminal justice system.

Gender diversity

Under GSRD, gender diversity includes both transgender and other types of gender diversity (e.g. agender, gender nonbinary, etc.). Historically gender diversity has been policed by various policies which criminalised expression of genders outside of the sex one was born (Platt and Milam 2018). Through the policing of gender, transgender and gender-nonconforming communities have at times been met with institutional violence by police. Compounding the problem are perceptions that behaviours, body features and attire associated with non-heteronormativity are viewed by others as risky, dangerous and deviant (Girardi 2022). If these perceptions of gender non-conforming people are true, they may contribute to explaining the over-policing of some gender diverse groups.

While literature on transgender people's perceptions of the police is limited, the existing research does show that transgender communities hold negative perceptions of law enforcement (Serpe and Nadal 2017, Lloyd and Fountain 2023). As to why they hold these views, Jauk (2013) found reluctance to report crime because of prior harassment from police. Similarly, Hereth (2021) found that transgender participants described experiences of police harassment and victimisation related to their transgender identity when they reached out to police. Utilising the United States Transgender Survey, Stenersen *et al.* (2022) found that 45.7% of transgender respondents reported at least one incident of police harassment or violence within the past year. These reported experiences of police harassment may play an important role in transgender communities holding negative perceptions of law enforcement.

Relationship diversity

Relationship diversity in the GSRD acronym includes various forms of CNM such as polyamory, open relationships, swinging and ethical non-monogamy, and is participated in by approximately 20% of the population (Hauptert *et al.* 2017). Despite its frequency, the common societal belief that monogamy is the healthy norm (e.g. mononormativity) has led to those in CNM relationships experiencing stigmatisation, societal judgement and discrimination (Valadez *et al.* 2020). As a result, 64.5% of CNM individuals reported experiencing strain in explaining their relationship structure to outsiders, such as medical providers and colleagues (Vilkin and Spratt 2021). This could be seen as an environmental stressor unique to this GSRD population within the minority stress model.

Negative attitudes by society can also serve as barriers for CNM individuals seeking to access community resources. For example, Ling *et al.* (2022) found that CNM participants believed that authority figures, like police, would not believe them due to their diverse identities. Access to police can be

further hindered for CNM groups due to their unique legal vulnerability in many locations. Stein (2020) noted that many US states have adultery laws that criminalise CNM and treat infidelity and CNM as legally synonymous. Even if not enforced, the mere presence of these archaic and discriminatory laws and the lack of legal protections may make CNM individuals hesitant to seek police assistance if needed.

Sexual diversity: BDSM/kink

Within the GSRD umbrella, BDSM is categorised as a type of sexual diversity. Throughout the early twentieth century, the community self-identification term *kink* has gained popularity to describe more generally those who participate in BDSM and related activities that are invisible under the BDSM acronym (Bienvenu 1998). Therefore, the terms BDSM and kink will be used interchangeably going forward to refer to the larger kink community, not just those represented by the BDSM acronym (e.g. bondage and discipline).

Increased representations of kink within mainstream media in the global north do not appear to have had a significant impact on decreasing stigmatisation (Hansen-Brown and Jefferson 2022) nor criminal cases brought against those engaging in these consensual activities (Ferris 2020). Many western legal systems criminalise BDSM activities that result in an injury meeting a certain threshold of seriousness, regardless of the victim's consent (Bennett 2023). However, these thresholds are subjectively interpreted and consequently minor injuries that do not include medical attention (e.g. bruises or cuts) may see punitive police action in some jurisdictions. For example, in the US BDSM injuries are criminalised if they result in 'serious bodily injury'. While there have been documented deaths associated with kink activities (Schori *et al.* 2022), these are extremely rare and typically involve unique circumstances. Nevertheless, courts often inflate the risk of death and interpret kink activities as falling within this category (Sheff 2021).

Although some countries, such as Austria, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands, have legalised some kink activities, others explicitly (e.g. Switzerland) or intermittently (e.g. India) criminalise it (Doshi 2015). In the United Kingdom (UK) *Operation Spanner* (2 WLR 1993), in which a group of adult gay men engaged in consensual kink acts and were subsequently arrested and prosecuted under assault laws (White 2006), led to participation in BDSM being criminalised across the UK. Visual depictions (images and videos) of kink activities were later criminalised under the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 and Audiovisual Media Services Regulations of 2014. Within the US, although technically illegal in many jurisdictions, prosecution appears to vary considerably based on region (Sheff 2021). Within Canada, a 2004 Supreme Court ruling stated that videos seized by police depicting BDSM activities were not obscene and did not constitute violence, but rather normal sexual activity between consenting adults (Barker *et al.* 2007).

Even when laws exist legalising kink activities, fears of being victim-blamed, being outed, shamed for being a part of a stigmatised community, and difficulty explaining the difference between consensual BDSM, and non-consensual abuse can lead practitioners to avoid contacting police for support (Haviv 2016). This was evidenced in a kink community survey that found only a minority ($n = 29$) of the people experiencing consent violations ($n = 1,041$) divulged these to law enforcement (Wright *et al.* 2015). These fears may build upon poor police interactions some BDSM practitioners have experienced as members of other GSRD groups (e.g. transgender), creating unique perceptions of police, consistent with intersectionality, and unique stressors when needing or having to interact with police, consistent with the minority stress model.

Method

Participants

Participants came from a large, online, anonymous, international survey on motivations, experiences and benefits of BDSM. The survey was disseminated primarily through social media, university and

non-university kink/sexuality organisations (e.g. Kinsey Institute). The Qualtrics-based 45-minute survey asked about nine general topics (see Westlake and Mahan 2023 for in-depth study details). Inclusion criteria included participant self-identified BDSM involvement, English language proficiency and being at or past the age of 18. Participants failing to meet these criteria were excluded. In total, 979 people attempted the survey (i.e. completed at least 5%) and 595 (61%) completed the entire survey. Participants included in the current study were those who completed the 'community' section of the survey ($n = 623$). At the conclusion of the survey, participants could navigate to a separate page to enter a lottery for one of six \$100 USD payments. Given that most studies of kink populations are unfunded and consequently lacking incentive offerings to participants, this study's novel lottery incentive likely improved participation and based upon metrics like survey completion time, did not appear to introduce data quality problems. Moreover, based upon recent empirical findings supporting lottery incentive as mitigating the dangers of hypothesis bias, which is common in studies lacking incentives (Ahles *et al.* 2024), we believe this incentive mitigated bias in our sample.

Participants (Table 1) resided in 34 different countries with 62.2% US, 14.1% Canada and 7.5% UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) being the most common. Respondents were asked to identify the race(s) with which they identified, with 83.6% selecting White, 2.8% Black, 3.3% LatinX/Hispanic, 2.3% South/East Asian and 8.1% other races (mixed, Indigenous, West Asian and Oceania). More than one-third (38.6%) identified as heterosexual, followed by bisexual (30.6%), pansexual (14.7%) and 16.0% other orientations (e.g. asexual, bicurious, demisexual, gay, lesbian, queer). In terms of gender, 35.7% identified as men, 48.9% as women and 15.3% as another gender identity (e.g. agender, gender fluid, non-binary). Through a separate question, participants were asked if they identified as transgender, with 9.7% saying 'yes'.

Measures

Police perceptions

There were 11 perceptions of police statements, each scored on a five-point Likert scale – 1 strongly disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree and 5 strongly agree (see Table 2). These questions were formulated based on prior interviews with kink community leaders. Responses to all 11 statements were optional and there was also a 'don't know' option, which was incorporated into subsequent analyses as 'missing'. The first three statements asked about the respondent's local (non-BDSM) community, to provide a baseline perception of police.

- (1) Police are effective at enforcing laws within my local (i.e. non-BDSM) community,
- (2) Police are approachable and easy to talk to in my local community, and
- (3) Police treat victims of abuse in my local community fairly.

The remaining eight statements assessed perceptions of police within a BDSM context.

- (1) My BDSM community has a good relationship with police,
- (2) My BDSM community needs to have a better relationship with police,
- (3) Police are educated on BDSM,
- (4) Police view consensual BDSM power dynamics negatively,
- (5) Police should play a minimal role in BDSM communities,
- (6) Police are concerned about the safety of BDSM participants,
- (7) Police would/do take BDSM-related reports seriously, and
- (8) Police would/do take consent violations within a BDSM context seriously.

In addition to the 11 statements, were two questions. The first asked more generally, 'Would you go to law enforcement if you had a problem in a kink scene?' Respondents could answer 'yes', 'no', or 'not sure'. The second question asked was 'What would determine whether you went to law

Table 1. Demographic frequencies of study participants, by sex at birth.

	Sex at birth ^a			Sample ^a (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Intersex (%)	
<i>Geographic region</i>				
USA	158 (65.6)	219 (59.7)	3 (100.0)	380 (62.2)
Canada	29 (12.0)	57 (15.5)	0 (0.0)	86 (14.1)
UK	16 (6.6)	29 (7.9)	0 (0.0)	45 (7.5)
Other Country	38 (15.8)	62 (16.9)	0 (0.0)	100 (16.4)
<i>Generation</i>				
Baby Boomer (1946–1964)	64 (26.8)	23 (6.2)	1 (33.3)	88 (14.4)
Generation X (1965–1980)	72 (30.1)	87 (23.5)	0 (0.0)	159 (25.9)
Millennial (1981–1996)	85 (35.6)	185 (49.9)	0 (0.0)	270 (44.0)
Generation Z (1997–2010)	18 (7.5)	76 (20.5)	2 (66.7)	96 (15.7)
<i>Gender</i>				
Man	209 (85.7)	11 (3.0)	1 (33.3)	221 (35.7)
Woman	9 (3.7)	293 (78.8)	1 (33.3)	303 (48.9)
Genderqueer ^b	26 (10.7)	68 (18.3)	1 (33.3)	95 (15.3)
<i>Transgender</i>				
Yes	19 (7.8)	41 (11.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (9.7)
No	224 (92.2)	331 (89.0)	3 (100.0)	558 (90.3)
<i>Sexual orientation</i>				
Heterosexual	123 (50.6)	115 (31.0)	0 (0.0)	238 (38.6)
Bisexual	58 (23.9)	129 (34.8)	2 (66.6)	189 (30.6)
Pansexual	30 (12.3)	61 (16.4)	0 (0.0)	91 (14.7)
Other	32 (13.2)	66 (17.8)	1 (33.3)	99 (16.0)
<i>Race^c</i>				
White	211 (87.9)	300 (80.6)	3 (100.0)	514 (83.6)
Black	4 (1.7)	13 (3.5)	0 (0.0)	17 (2.8)
Hispanic/LatinX	6 (2.5)	14 (3.8)	0 (0.0)	20 (3.3)
South/East Asian	4 (1.7)	10 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	14 (2.3)
Other	15 (6.3)	35 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	50 (8.1)
<i>Current relationship ‘Style’</i>				
Single	45 (18.6)	49 (13.3)	0 (0.0)	94 (15.3)
Monogamous	62 (25.6)	103 (27.9)	1 (33.3)	166 (27.0)
‘Mostly’ Monogamous	43 (17.8)	54 (14.6)	0 (0.0)	97 (15.8)
Polyamorous	46 (19.0)	78 (21.1)	1 (33.3)	125 (20.4)
Open	24 (9.9)	36 (9.8)	0 (0.0)	60 (9.8)
Swinging	4 (1.7)	6 (1.6)	0 (0.0)	10 (1.6)
Other	22 (9.1)	43 (11.7)	0 (0.0)	65 (10.6)
<i>Education</i>				
High School or Less	14 (5.7)	39 (10.5)	0 (0.0)	53 (8.6)
Some College	81 (33.2)	102 (27.5)	0 (0.0)	183 (29.6)
Bachelor’s Degree	81 (33.2)	134 (36.1)	3 (100.0)	218 (35.3)
Post-Graduate	68 (27.9)	96 (25.9)	0 (0.0)	164 (26.5)

^aSome participants did not respond to every demographic question, so totals do not add up to 623.^b'Genderqueer' includes responses of genderqueer, genderfluid and non-binary.^cParticipants were able to select more than one category.**Table 2.** BDSM practitioners level of agreement to 11 statements about their perception of police, by percentage.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Effective (in Non-BDSM Context)	23.7	22.7	23.9	24.2	5.6
Approachable (in Non-BDSM Context)	22.6	24.8	23.0	22.8	6.9
Treat Victims Fairly (in Non-BDSM Context)	26.3	24.0	28.5	16.1	5.1
BDSM Cmty. Has a Good Relatsh w Police	23.0	20.7	28.2	23.0	5.2
BDSM Cmty. Needs Better Relatsh w Police	12.7	12.3	31.0	31.7	12.3
Educated on BDSM	55.8	29.1	11.3	3.5	0.3
View BDSM Dynamics Negatively	4.1	2.4	20.3	37.2	35.9
Should Play Minimal Role in BDSM	4.9	9.8	25.5	27.2	32.6
Are Concerned about BDSM Practitioner Safety	24.2	21.6	28.7	23.2	2.3
Take BDSM Reports Seriously	24.1	29.7	21.7	18.3	6.2
Take BDSM Consent Violations Seriously	29.5	29.8	17.0	17.0	6.6

enforcement?’ This question was open-ended and allowed respondents to better articulate their reasoning for involving law enforcement or not.

Gender, sexual and relationship diversity

To investigate the perceptions of police among GSRD BDSM practitioners, three demographic variables were included in the analyses – gender, sexual orientation and relationship style. Each is described in turn.

First, gender was separated into three categories. Those who responded ‘male’ to sex at birth and ‘man’ to gender identity or ‘female’ to sex at birth and ‘woman’ to gender identity were categorised as cisgender ($n = 501$). Those who identified as agender, androgynous, gender fluid, gender queer, non-binary, etc were categorised as genderqueer ($n = 58$). Finally, those who answered ‘yes’ to identifying as transgender ($n = 62$) were parsed out from genderqueer and analysed separately, to better report their unique perceptions. Second, sexual orientation was separated into two categories. Those who identified as heterosexual ($n = 238$) from those who identified as a sexually diverse orientation (SDO; $n = 379$). This included pansexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, etc. Third, relationship style was separated into two categories. First were those who practised CNM ($n = 292$). This comprised polyamorous ($n = 125$), mostly monogamous ($n = 97$), open ($n = 60$) and swinging ($n = 10$). Second were those who identified with other relationship styles ($n = 322$). Most common in this group were monogamous ($n = 166$) and single ($n = 94$).

Data analysis

To determine whether GSRD BDSM practitioners held more negative perceptions of police outside (i.e. local community) and within BDSM contexts than non-GSRD BDSM practitioners, ordinal regression analyses were conducted on each of the 11 police perceptions statements, using gender, sexual orientation and relationship style as independent variables. High frequencies of empty cells, leading to poor model fit, during initial analyses resulted in the five-point Likert scale being reduced to a three-point, merging ‘strongly disagree’ with ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly agree’ with ‘agree’. Model fit was determined using Pearson goodness of fit, given that the independent variables were categorical, while the test of parallel lines was used to evaluate the proportional odds assumption.

To determine how likely BDSM practitioners were to contact police should they experience a BDSM-related problem, two measures were assessed. First, chi-square analyses were conducted comparing GSRD to non-GSRD participants on the question ‘Would you go to law enforcement if you have a problem in a BDSM scene’. Phi was used to measure effect size, with values >0.10 being small, >0.30 being medium and >0.50 being large. Second, a content analysis was conducted on the question ‘What would determine whether you went to law enforcement?’ All responses were reviewed through a two-coder iterative approach. First, both coders independently reviewed all responses and identified preliminary codes. The two coders then met to discuss the codes and develop a consensus codebook. One of the coders then coded all responses based on the developed codebook. The two coders then met to review the revised classification of participants and refine the categories where necessary. Once all responses were accurately coded, broad categories and narrower sub-categories were determined.

Results

Perceptions of police within non-BDSM contexts

Overall (see Table 2), only 5.6% of participants felt that police were effective at enforcing laws within their local, non-BDSM, community, with most disagreeing (22.7%) or strongly disagreeing (23.7%). Participants felt similarly to police being approachable (easy to talk to), with only 6.9% strongly

agreeing, while 24.8% disagreed and 22.6% strongly disagreed. Finally, 5.1% felt that police treated victims of abuse fairly, while 24.0% disagreed and 26.3% strongly disagreed.

GSRD participants were less likely to agree with all three non-BDSM community questions than non-GSRD participants (see Table 3). Compared to cisgender participants, transgender participants were 2.29 times (OR = 0.30, 95% CI [0.14, 0.65]) less likely to feel police were effective, 4.10 times (OR = 0.20, 95% CI [0.09, 0.44]) less approachable and 3.39 times (OR = 0.23, 95% CI [0.09, 0.58]) less likely to be fair to victims of abuse. There was no difference between cisgender and genderqueer participants across all three questions. SDO participants were 75% (OR = 0.57, 95% CI [0.38, 0.86]) less likely to perceive police as effective, 54% (OR = 0.65, 95% CI [0.38, 0.83]) less approachable and 1.36 times (OR = 0.42, 95% CI [0.27, 0.66]) less fair, when compared to heterosexual BDSM participants. Finally, CNM participants were 77% (OR = 0.57, 95% CI [0.46, 0.94]) less likely to see them as being approachable, and 73% (0.58, 95% CI [0.38, 0.88]) less likely to think police treat victims of abuse fairly.

Perceptions of police within BDSM contexts

The remaining eight questions assessed perceptions of police within BDSM contexts. Overall, participants believed that their kink community had a poor relationship with law enforcement (Table 2). However, 44.0% agreed or strongly agreed that it was important for their community to improve its relationship with police. While participants believed it was important to improve relationships, the majority (59.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that law enforcement should play a minimal role in policing kink communities. Central to this perception may be that more than half (55.8%) strongly disagreed that police are educated about BDSM. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters (73.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that police view consensual BDSM power dynamics negatively. It is unsurprising then that only 2.3% strongly agreed that they perceived police as being concerned about the safety of BDSM practitioners. Finally, most participants felt that police do not take BDSM reports seriously. When it came to 'general' BDSM-related reports, 53.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that police took them seriously. Specific to consent violations, a similar 59.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed that police took them seriously.

GSRD participants were more likely than non-GSRD to hold negative perceptions of police within BDSM contexts (see Table 3). Specifically, SDO participants were 1.41 times (OR = 0.41, 95% CI [0.23, 0.74]) and CNM participants were 1.14 times (OR = 0.47, 95% CI [0.28, 0.79]) less likely to believe their kink community had a good relationship with law enforcement. Interestingly, transgender participants were 5.17 times (OR = 0.16, 95% CI [0.07, 0.37]) more likely to feel that a better relationship between kink communities and law enforcement was not needed. There were no differences between other GSRD and non-GSRD participants on this question. However, transgender (OR = 2.83, 95% CI [1.24, 6.44]), SDO (OR = 1.52, 95% CI [1.01, 2.30]) and CNM (OR = 1.49, 95% CI [1.01, 2.19]) participants were more likely than non-GSRD participants to believe that law enforcement should play a minimal role in kink communities. Likewise, SDO participants were 1.16 times (OR = 0.46, 95% CI [0.29, 0.74]), 1.39 times (OR = 0.42, 95% CI [0.26, 0.68]) and 1.23 times (OR = 0.45, 95% CI [0.28, 0.73]) more likely than heterosexuals to perceive police as not being concerned about BDSM practitioner safety, not taking BDSM-related reports seriously, and not taking BDSM-related consent violations seriously. Finally, transgender participants were 2.10 times (OR = 0.32, 95% CI [0.11, 0.96]) more likely than cisgender participants to believe police did not take consent violations seriously.

What would determine whether you went to law enforcement?

When asked whether they would go to law enforcement if they had a problem while engaging in BDSM, 103 (16.6%) participants said they would, while 239 (38.4%) said they would not, and 280 (45.0%) were unsure. Compared to cisgender and genderqueer participants, transgender participants were less likely to go to police if they had a problem (χ^2 (2, N = 342) = 8.42, p = .015), with a

Table 3. GSRD factors (odds ratios) associated with differing perceptions of police among BDSM practitioners across 11 statements.

		Effective	Approachable	Fair	Good Relationship	Need Better Relationship	Educated on BDSM	View BDSM Negatively	Minimal Role in BDSM	Concerned about BDSM Safety	Take reports seriously	BDSM Consent Violations Seriously
n		409	447	349	210	281	341	287	424	307	287	301
Gender	Transgender	0.30**	0.20**	0.23**	0.44	0.16**	— ^a	2.20	2.83*	0.53	0.56	0.32*
	Genderqueer	0.81	0.78	0.58	0.64	0.59	1.58	2.16	0.84	0.86	0.89	0.87
Sexual Orientation	Cisgender	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
	SDO	0.57**	0.65**	0.42**	0.41**	1.34	0.31**	2.34**	1.52*	0.46**	0.42**	0.45**
Relationship Style	Heterosexual	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
	CNM	0.87	0.57*	0.58**	0.47**	1.30	0.81	1.16	1.49*	0.83	0.79	0.68
Goodness of Fit	Other Styles	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
	Chi-square (DF)	14.23	8.05	14.14	14.59	18.91	16.58	20.49	12.59	8.79	16.41	13.54
Parallel Lines	Chi-square	10.13*	4.14	6.06	4.46	4.16	4.21	15.61**	5.07	2.81	2.15	2.30

^aThere was no diversity in responses (all said disagree) among transgender participants.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

small effect size ($\Phi = .157$). Likewise, CNM ($X^2(1, N = 341) = 8.21, p = .004$) and SDO ($X^2(1, N = 341) = 14.59, p < .001$) participants were less likely to go to police, when compared to non-GSRD participant. The effect sizes for both were small at $\Phi = .155$ and $\Phi = .207$ respectively.

A number of participants ($n = 456$) provided written responses to what would determine whether they went to law enforcement in a BDSM context. Responses were initially coded into 11 categories, then refined to five categories. Each is discussed in order of frequency.

The first category was *if a crime was committed* ($n = 279$; 61.2%). Common responses were if there was evidence ($n = 26$), physical assault ($n = 32$), and/or sexual assault (37). However, even in these circumstances, some expressed caution with reaching out to law enforcement:

Physical and sexual assault I perhaps would, but I would be worried about being judged or not taken seriously. I would also worry they would not be able to see the difference between consensual BDSM interaction and non-consensual (e.g. pain enjoyed and asked for vs pain given when not asked for or consented to). (Participant #184)

and

Unless it's a case of rape or non-consensual assault, most situations can be resolved through education, intervention, and communication. (Participant #42)

Other common responses in this category were the severity of the crime ($n = 105$), if they were advised by a community member and/or friend ($n = 8$), and/or if they were required to report, such as by hospital staff ($n = 2$).

The second category was the *context of the incident* ($n = 66$; 14.5%), which included answers such as 'it depends on the context' and 'case specific'. Within these responses, participants mentioned different circumstances that would be taken into consideration, such as who was involved ($n = 7$), what was the intent ($n = 6$) and where it took place ($n = 3$). In addition, the desires of the victim ($n = 7$) would also be considered. This included 'if the victim wishes to involve law enforcement' and 'if I wanted to press charges'. Participants ($n = 3$) also noted the impact to themselves, such as 'how it would affect my mental health'. Finally, the privacy of the victim *and* the perpetrator ($n = 10$) was also noted as a contextual factor. Two participants opened up about their consent violation experience and discussed their decision not to report it because of a fear for outing themselves:

I was violated once and did not report it because of fears that 1) it would not be taken seriously, and 2) I'd be outing myself as a non-monogamous, kink-involved woman. (Participant #13)

and

The only reason I would go to law enforcement is battery resulting in hospitalization, rape, or grand theft. Anything less than that and the risks associated with "outing" myself to law enforcement is not worth it. (Participant #224)

For these participants, the fear of being 'outed' appeared to be viewed as a greater risk than the crime they would be seeking police support in reporting.

In the third category *trust in police* ($n = 40$; 8.8%), participants expressed their hesitance over pursuing law enforcement because they were worried about being judged, harassed and not believed. Participants provided responses such as 'if I thought police would take it seriously' and 'if I believed the police would help me'.

The fourth category included participants who *would not go to the police* ($n = 48$; 10.5%); which consisted of two subcategories. In the first subcategory were those who would not go to police in general ($n = 32$). These participants shared responses such as 'nothing. I would not go to law enforcement' and 'I'm a Black male in the south, that's not happening'. One participant in this category explained that their multiple marginalised identities put them at greater risk with law enforcement:

Nothing would change me not going to law enforcement. I'm disabled, intersex, neurodivergent, and mentally ill. I am not safe around them even in a non-kink context. (Participant #162)

and

There is no point, if you are a female and raped and consent to BDSM activities the police won't help you. (Participant #97)

This concern over police violence was shared across participants. Another respondent also detailed their worry for violence being directed towards marginalised people:

Police are ineffective here, brutal, discriminatory. Inviting police into these spaces will likely not result in any effective or compassionate investigation, and opens the space and marginalized people (POC, queer, etc.) to harassment or even death. (Participant #382)

In the second subcategory were those who would not go to the police for BDSM-related issues ($n = 16$). Responses here included 'if it was not BDSM-related' and 'in a non-sexual situation'. Many of the respondents stated that they did not believe that law enforcement would be able to help in problems involving consent.

The final category was *only as a last resort*, if alternatives were not available ($n = 22$; 4.8%). Responses in this category included 'I would engage the person in discussion with assistance of community/board' and 'I would first talk to the bottom and depending on that conversation I would go to the police'. One participant's response illustrated this direness:

If I had no other choice, then the police would be my final straw. They arrest us for consensual kink, and ignore us when consent violation is reported. If I was dying and no one else was answering my calls, why not call the cops and see what happens, at that point. (Participant #315)

This participant illustrates the severity of the distrust some participants reported feeling for the police, hindering their seeking support from officers when in need.

Discussion

In the current study we sought to answer three research questions about the perceptions of police among BDSM practitioners. First, we found that GSRD participants held more negative perceptions of police outside of their BDSM community than non-GSRD participants. Second, GSRD participants also held more negative views of police as it relates to BDSM contexts than non-GSRD participants. This was especially true for transgender and SDO participants, and less so for genderqueer participants, when compared to cisgender and heterosexual participants. Third, in general, participants were not likely to contact police if they experienced a problem during a BDSM activity. Overall, general negative views of police by BDSM practitioners represent a new marginalised identity's perspective. Additionally, as all GSRD participants face at minimum two socially marginalised identities (i.e. kink and another GSRD identity), their views may reflect GSRD community members more generally or provide a new intersectional perspective. Both warrant further attention and nuanced investigation.

Through the current study, we confirmed and expanded upon a small qualitative study ($n = 20$) of Israeli BDSM individuals (Haviv 2016) and a consent violation survey (Wright *et al.* 2015), suggesting that BDSM practitioners may be fearful or hesitant about contacting police. We did this by increasing the sample size, international scope of the population, and questions asked. More specifically we explored more in-depth where concerns about police involvement reside (e.g. lack of knowledge, negative opinion of BDSM dynamics, not taking reports seriously) and kink practitioners' rationale for seeking or not seeking police assistance. Additionally, we demonstrated that GSRD identities may intersect with kink participation to compound fears of police involvement in BDSM contexts (e.g. Miles-Johnson 2013, Dario *et al.* 2020, Hodge and Sexton 2020, Shields 2021). This evidence of intersectionality between GSRD and kink identities and how these identities shape unique perceptions of police deserves further research. Moreover, the additional external and internal stressors that arise from fears of discriminatory police practices, based on one's participation in kink, warrants further investigation under the minority stress theory framework.

Like the experiences of marginalised, discriminated against, and/or stigmatised populations, such as sex workers, perceptions that police are more antagonistic than protective can potentially

decrease overall safety within kink communities. This is because fear and hesitancy to involve police in BDSM situations that call for their assistance (e.g. consent violation, physical/sexual assault) may lead to an increase of predators targeting kink communities, with the understanding that there are minimal threats of formal recourse (e.g. arrest and charge). Thanks to popular culture, this can lead to a growing kink population, that is largely composed of GSRD populations already at greater risk of victimisation (Herek 2009, Miles-Johnson 2013, Miles-Johnson 2020), being at even greater risk. Therefore, it is important that relationships between police and kink communities are improved, and/or procedures put in place to identify potential predatory offenders operating within kink communities, to maintain the safety of this population.

While most GSRD study participants demonstrated higher negative perceptions of police than non-GSRD participants, there were differences between gender, sexually, and relationally diverse groups. First, consistent with prior literature findings (Serpe and Nadal 2017, Lloyd and Fountain 2023), transgender individuals held more negative perceptions of police than cisgender individuals and were reluctant to reach out to police when in need (Jauk 2013). This may be due to historical policing of gender diversity (Capers 2008, Platt and Milam 2018), current police harassment targeting transgender populations (Stenersen *et al.* 2022), and/or perceptions of heightened vulnerabilities due to having non-heteronormative bodies (Girardi 2022). Regardless of the reason, this points to a group of kink practitioners already at high risk of victimisation being even more at-risk.

Second, while SDO participants viewed police more negatively than heterosexual, it is worth noting that this hesitancy towards law enforcement was lower than expected. This may suggest that some gains have been made in SDO/police relationships since the early periods in history when homosexuality was criminalised or police regularly raided gay establishments in the past. Yet, it may also reflect a general poor relationship between police and kink communities around the world, irrespective of sexual orientation. However, the largely White, US, Canada and UK sample this study may temper these findings and caution is thus warranted. Rather, these findings seem to align with the prior literature suggesting that while improving, for SDO communities the legacy of poor police interactions continues to this day (Shields 2021, Girardi 2022) even among SDO officers (Couto 2018). This painful legacy and mainstream homophobic attitudes that influence police behaviour may take more time to turn and may be aided or hindered by progress with other GSRD groups.

Third, while CNM participants held more negative views of police outside of BDSM contexts, their perceptions within BDSM contexts were akin to other relationship styles. Given the predominantly White sample composition, it is possible that CNM participants can access White privilege, and thus, some CNM individuals are able to 'hide' their relationship diversity in some contexts that a gender or sexually diverse person would be less able to accomplish. This ability to hide a GSRD identity is a privilege unique to some GSRD identities. For example, gender diverse individuals are unable to access this privilege because their diversity is visibility apparent in cues that may be viewed negatively (Girardi 2022). This additional privilege may mitigate apprehensions about police involvement in BDSM contexts for relationship diverse practitioners. This may further reinforce that differences in negative perceptions of law enforcement among kink communities are largely driven by gender and sexual perceptions outside of BDSM contexts (i.e. a general negative perception) rather than the BDSM context itself. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that CNM participants were more likely than other relationship styles to believe that police should play a minimal role in policing BDSM activities. Therefore, future research should seek to recruit a larger sample of CNM participants, from regionally, racially, sexually and gender diverse groups to determine the interaction between these factors. This will further parse out the root cause of negative perceptions among kink practitioners to GSRD (gender and sex) or BDSM stigmatisation.

Limitations

While the sample was sexually diverse, with heterosexuals comprising a smaller proportion of participants, the sample was also largely White, and from English-speaking countries, namely the US,

Canada and UK. Consequently, a more racially and geographically diverse sample may have revealed different results. Thus, further study is recommended to be conducted examining this group specifically to determine whether these improvements are more generalisable.

Policy implications

As positive interactions with police may improve citizens' perception of and consequential cooperation with police (Peyton *et al.* 2019), it is hoped that policy makers, law enforcement officers, and other stakeholders will utilise this study as a catalyst for follow-up study, improved officer education about BDSM, and policy changes to improve relationships with kink communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that kink communities play a role in facilitating safety and therefore need to implement policies and procedures to minimise the need for police intervention. Therefore, the policy implications presented here for improving kink/police relationships, and safety within kink communities, follow the collaborative principles of community policing that have been put forth for improving relationships with ethnic and racially diverse communities (Braga *et al.* 2019).

Given that the negative views of police among those who participated in this study appear to generalise inside and outside BDSM contexts, the most utilitarian intervention would likely be to improve perceptions among all GSRD populations rather than targeting kink communities specifically. As participants repeatedly voiced that police should play a minimal role in kink communities, directed efforts by law enforcement to engage with kink facilities and events may worsen the relationship, at least currently. This is because kink communities may view legitimate goodwill efforts as invasive, and these efforts may conjure up negative feelings associated with the legacy of police discrimination among GSRD practitioners and allies. This could cause further rifts and lead to practitioners from marginalised groups leaving the informal social control that exists within public kink communities, thereby potentially increasing the risk of nonconsensual violence for these practitioners.

This is not to say that there should be no efforts to improve the relationship between law enforcement and kink communities. Most participants did believe that an improved relationship with law enforcement was needed. This presents a challenging dichotomy whereby participants believe that a better relationship is needed, but also feel that law enforcement should play a minimal role in policing BDSM. However, this may not be as challenging as it appears on the surface. While how to accomplish this broadly is likely beyond the scope of this brief discussion, and will warrant in-depth study and analysis before implementation, there are initial, incremental, steps that can be taken. Participants' beliefs that police are not well educated on BDSM and view BDSM dynamics negatively point to areas where significant improvements could be made. Additional research is needed to determine the level of knowledge and perceptions of BDSM dynamics among police officers. If it is found that police officers are poorly educated on BDSM and/or hold negative views, educational courses developed by legal advocacy and educational groups such as the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF), or leaders within larger kink communities could be a pathway forward. These courses are already provided free of charge by some of these organisations informally, but they could also be developed for more formal channels. For example, within the US, officers are required to undergo a certain number of continuing professional training hours every two years. A course describing BDSM, and how to identify the signs that differentiate it from intimate partner violence, could be provided through the cultural diversity training category of the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) curriculum. Similar training could be implemented in other countries (e.g. UK), where officers are also required to engage in continuing education. Of course, no one approach to officer education will likely fully accomplish the task. Therefore, studies should examine officer receptivity to these trainings as they are implemented, parallel to prior literature (Israel *et al.* 2017).

Sensitive to the existing perceptions of police held by BDSM practitioners, a more measured approach to improving police responses to BDSM-related situations may be to collaborate with

advocacy groups. Through these partnerships, more effective policies to guide procedures for law enforcement can be developed without the direct involvement of kink communities. This partnership is demonstrated within the US where the criminalisation of kink may be shifting, thanks to the pending 2025 publication of proposed changes to section 213 of the Model Penal Code (The American Law Institute 2021). This change serves as a model for state legislatures to adopt language that uses explicit prior consent to distinguish between criminal activities (e.g. assault and abuse) and consensual adult kink.

While some have contended that legalisation of kink may cause problems with prosecuting criminal assault due to the post hoc kink defence, the American Law Institute's (ALI) Model Penal Code's language requiring explicit consent to an activity prior to engaging in it appears to mitigate these concerns. Prior legal arguments have responded well to these contentions and found that legalisation of kink does not pose these feared risks (Bennett 2021). Moreover, in their analysis of a Supreme Court ruling regarding not using morality to justify legal action, Onoma (2017) contends that legalisation of kink now is a constitutional mandate. Likewise, focusing on the concept of consent, in 2011 the Canadian Supreme Court ruled that consent was revoked when a person becomes unconscious, irrespective of whether consent has been given prior (R. v JA 2011). These adjustments to legal interpretations of BDSM in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere, can serve as frameworks for other countries, such as the UK, to modify existing laws to allow for consensual BDSM activities between adults (i.e. bodily harm) while still protecting against assault concerns (lack/revocation of consent). While the Model Penal Code represents a potential step forward in the legalisation of some forms of kink in the U.S., the situation has appeared far more dire in the U.K., where legislation appears more restrictive towards sexual diversity, as has been seen in the 2008 Criminal Justice and Immigration Act and the 2014 Audiovisual Media Services Regulations. It is hoped that U.K. legislators will follow the progress of the Canadian Supreme Court, Model Penal Code, and current legalisation of some kink activities in other countries rather than the criminalisation of sexual difference as was seen in Operation Spanner (2 WLR 1993).

Finally, policies for improving education training of law enforcement on how to properly engage with BDSM practitioners are necessary. However, it is imperative that kink communities take an active role in creating environments that are inhospitable to harm, by developing policies to effectively handle conflicts internally (i.e. self-policing). It has been shown that these policies, both formal and informal, do exist within many kink communities (Holt 2016, Haymond 2021, Bowling *et al.* 2024). For example, some communities implement extensive vetting protocols for new participants, mandatory and voluntary consent education, extensive mentoring practices, and prohibition of certain, risky, activities, such as fire, asphyxiation, blood, urine, etc. Likewise, some communities operate with self-policing observers (i.e. dungeon monitors) at public events, who are tasked with monitoring for problematic behaviours and consent communication (Haymond 2021). However, in many of these examples, the procedures implemented may not be independent of influential community members such as event organisers. As a result, inequities and imbalances can lead to a failure in self-policing. Furthermore, even when these policies exist, nuance within various types of safety concerns (e.g. accidental permanent marks or nerve damage) can lead to challenges in implementing self-policing policies. Therefore, neutral arbitration and discernment for these nuances is imperative in implementing these policies and procedures. Finally, while some communities contain formal written procedures for expelling problematic community members, in practice this seems to be inconsistently implemented leading to ineffective management (e.g. problematic but popular community members behaviour being excused or wrongful blacklisting of a community member without due process) (Holt 2016). Organisations such as NCSF (2024) are available to offer free support for kink communities in developing more robust and effective safety self-policing policies and procedures. Even when self-policing is done best, there are no doubt instances when these efforts will be inadequate for the situation and officer support will be required. Thus, we conclude that while kink communities can do better at self-policing, officer competency raising via education and engagement with kink communities is also of imperative policy importance.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reviewed the results of a survey of 623 self-identified kink/BDSM practitioners to explore their perception of police. In particular, we explored the intersections between GSRD identities and kink impacting these perceptions. Notably, non-GSRD identifying kink individuals were less likely to hold strong negative views of police and transgender kink individuals were the most likely to hold negative views of the police. Police policy implications and a discussion of future directions for research were reviewed. It is our hope that this study will provide a foundation for facilitating research and conversations that seek to improve the relationship between GSRD, kink, and GSRD kink communities and police so that officer effectiveness and community safety will be improved. We hope that through a better understanding of the perceptions of police, and the specific areas where relationships can be improved, more effective law enforcement policies and procedures can be implemented, increasing police officer knowledge and BDSM community trust and safety in police.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics approval

This study was approved by the San Jose State University human subjects Institutional Review Board (Approval Number: 21-163) and all subjects completed informed consent prior to participating with this study.

Data availability statement

Due to legality of kink/BDSM in various jurisdictions and heightened risk of identifiability of participants in multiple minority communities, the data is not publicly available. However, access to a redacted version of the data underlying the current study is available upon request directly to the authors.

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