

50 Shades of Social Events: A Global Survey of BDSM Organizers

Dr. Craig Webster and Casey Smith
 Honors College Undergraduate Fellowship
 Ball State University



INTRODUCTION

- The survey conducted as a part of this study looks into the practical considerations of social events in which the BDSM practitioners meet and discuss their lifestyle, among other things.
- BDSM is an umbrella term linking together nonmainstream practices of sexuality. This would include various fetishes (roleplaying involving bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, etc.).

OVERVIEW AND METHODS

An international survey was used to learn about organizers.

- A survey of 222 individuals who organize BDSM social events, often referred to as "munches."
- Organizers from 39 states and 23 countries responded.

Surveys were self-administered questionnaires given to participants via Qualtrics.

Following collection of the data, the survey responses were input into an online database.

Participant Demographics (of 222 Respondents)

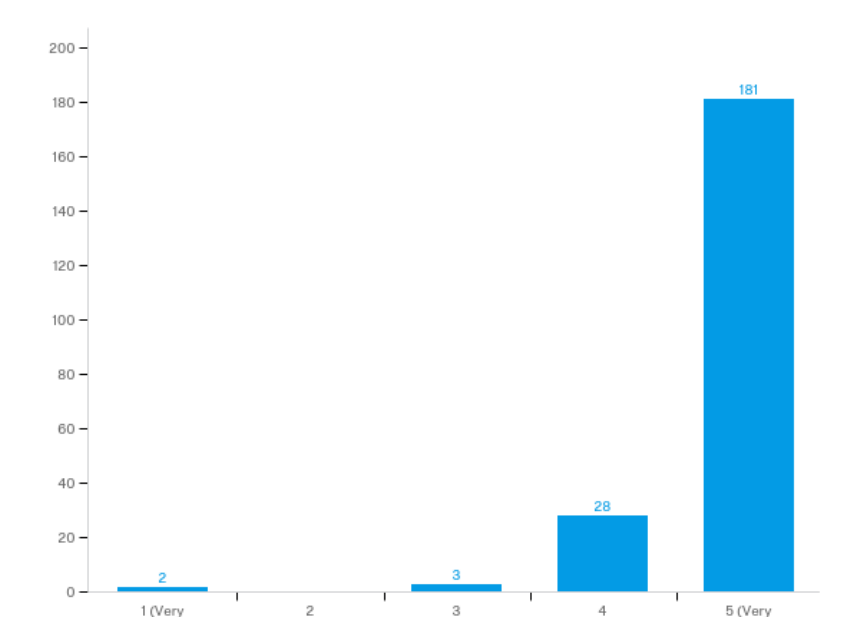
- The majority (92%) were over the age of 35; The largest demographic (36%) was between 46 and 60 years old.
- The majority (51%) were male; Additionally, 13 out of 222 respondents did not identify as male nor female.
- A majority (55%) have obtained a Bachelor's Degree or higher; 25% were educated at the Master's level or higher.
- Just over 41% were married or in a Civil Union; 23% were separated or divorced.
- Nearly 46% of organizers have at least one child; 31% have two or more.
- A majority (58%) reported organizing more than 20 munches or similar events.
- A majority of organizers (59%) go to munches or similar events more than once a month.

RESULTS

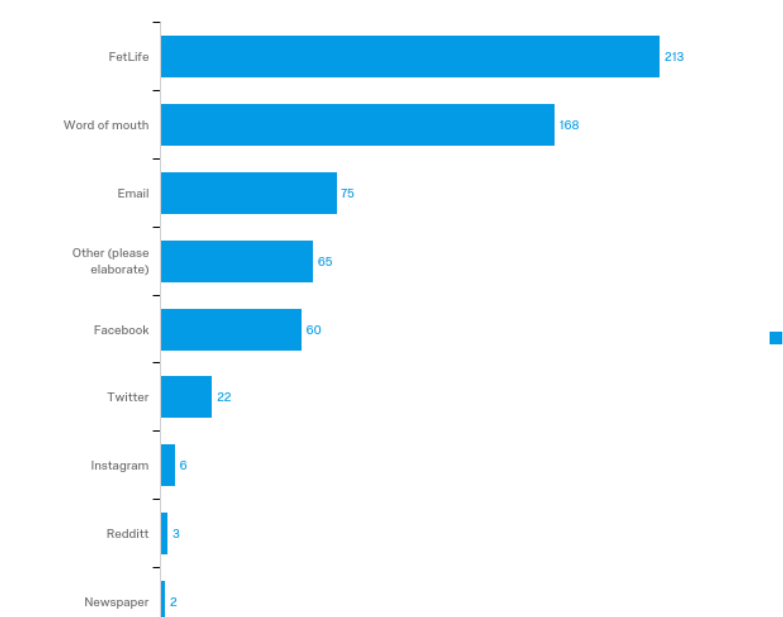
Organizer survey results:

- The organizers generally attend the munches or similar events they organize. Helping newcomers is the most common job for organizers.
- Most of them (55%) have been a part of the lifestyle for more than 10 years.
- The reasons given for organizing munches or similar events are: they were asked by someone else in the lifestyle, they were elected by members of the community to organize, or they self-started on their own.
- The issues they identified with when organizing munches or similar events are privacy, discreet seating and finding a venue that is big enough.
- Some organizers (18%) said they were offered incentives (e.g. free food, discounts priority seating and treatment, etc.) for choosing a particular venue and/or continuing to use that venue.

Importance of Munch to Involvement in the Lifestyle



How Organizers Publicize Munches and Similar Events



RESULTS

Organizer Survey Results

- A majority (53%) said they had informed managers or staff at the location of the munch or similar event that the gathering is a meetup for kinksters.
- Almost 45% of organizers said they believe other people at the venue of the munches or similar events know the event is a meetup for kinksters.



- Most organizers (90%) said they have seen attendees at munches or similar events wearing symbols of the lifestyle. The most common are the Ring of O, patches/pins, and fetish attire (e.g. corsets, vests).

What kind of symbols have you seen at munches or similar events?

Answer	%	Count
Fetish Attire	37.50%	36
Other	16.67%	16
Jewelry	15.63%	15
Ring of O	8.33%	8
Fetish-related toys	7.29%	7
Costumes	4.16%	4
Patches	4.16%	4
Handkerchiefs	3.13%	3
Total	100%	96

- The behavioral issues they identified with at munches or similar events are aggressive behavior by newcomers, excessive alcohol consumption, attendees there for the wrong reasons (e.g. just to pick someone up), and wearing kink clothing when asked not to.
- A majority of organizers (94%) said they took responsibility when addressing these issues.

What are some concerns you face when organizing munches or similar events?

Answer	%	Count
Event Attendance	20.93%	58
Obtaining/keeping a venue	18.50%	50
Privacy	15.52%	43
Event Engagement	14.07%	39
Finding a discreet venue	9.03%	25
Participant behavior	9.03%	25
Finding a venue with the right size	7.94%	22
Picking a good date/time	5.42%	15
Total	100%	277

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

The major skills I found through my experience and the findings are:

- The definition of a munch:** A munch can be defined as a meeting/social gathering of members in the BDSM community/lifestyle. These are non-play events (meaning no fetish play sexual activity) and they typically take place at restaurants or bars.
- The importance of symbols:** As I became more familiar with the BDSM community and lifestyle, it became clear that visible symbols are important for attendees at munches and other similar events. These symbols are not necessarily recognizable to those outside of the lifestyle and allow those in the community to identify themselves discreetly.
- The importance of inclusivity:** Organizers consistently make attempts to be as inclusive as possible to attendees and potential attendees at munches. Even when an attendee acts out at an event, the organizers almost always makes an effort to educate and re-welcome those individuals again.
- Creating an International Survey:** During this fellowship, I learned how to use Qualtrics to create an international survey. Dr. Webster and I were meticulous about the wording and distribution of this survey, and it taught me a lot about working with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and carrying out research on a more global scale.
- Working with a minority:** Members of the BDSM community are not always visible to those outside of the lifestyle. When formulating research questions and carrying out the survey, communicating with members who are in the community was important before making the survey public in order to avoid offending anyone, as well as to ensure we were asking the right questions.
- Coding:** Once the survey closed, I worked with Dr. Webster's graduate student and learned the basics of coding the organizer's responses. This was my first introduction to SPSS, as well, and I'm now more-informed in regards to synthesizing research data.
- Issues with International Research:** Language and cultural differences posed barriers when working with survey participants outside of the United States. Communicating with organizers via FetLife — the largest online community of munch organizers — also proved to be challenging.

Lessons Learned from Dr. Webster:

- Research takes time. Although it took us several weeks and months to hammer out different parts of the survey, Dr. Webster's persistence was very encouraging.
- Coding also takes time. When I sat down and began working with all the data we collected, I quickly learned how crucial it is to work at a reasonable pace.
- Communicating with coordinators and participants. Dr. Webster was very open with those who had questions about what we were doing and why we were doing it, and he's taught me how to be transparent with research.



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