

08 - 10 August 2025  
Berlin, Germany

## *Healing Through Trauma Play: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Participants' Personal Narratives*

**Aidan Andreas Sunassee**

*The University of Europe for Applied Sciences / The Alternative Sexualities Health Research Alliance (TASHRA), Germany*

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of six **kink / BDSM** practitioners who engage in **trauma play**. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, semi-structured interviews explored participants' motivations, safety practices, perceived outcomes, and the interplay of pleasure and intentionality in trauma play.

Findings reveal two distinct forms of trauma play: intentional trauma play, where scenes are pre-negotiated and goal-oriented, and incidental trauma play, where past traumas surface unexpectedly during a scene. Participants described both modalities as pathways to **posttraumatic growth**, reporting benefits such as improved emotional regulation, sensory reintegration, and a reframed sense of self. Pleasure emerged as a central mechanism in this process, allowing distress to be recontextualized through embodied, controlled experiences. While some acknowledged short-term emotional overwhelm, no participants reported retraumatization. No negative long-term outcomes were reported.

This study challenges the historical pathologization of kink and displays its potential to facilitate healing when practiced within community guidelines prioritizing consent and agency. The findings emphasize the importance of kink-affirmative clinician education and call for further research into how trauma play may differ across diverse populations. By introducing the concepts of intentional and incidental trauma play, this work contributes to broader discussions on potential paths towards posttraumatic growth and **trauma processing** within the kink community.

**Keywords:** trauma play, kink, bdsm, posttraumatic growth, trauma processing