



BDSM IRELAND

In the first of a series, our intrepid reporter Gareth Stack sticks his nose deep into one of Ireland's most exciting scenes.

The Irish BDSM community is wary of publicity. Researching this article, Blue Ireland contacted professional dominatrixes, burlesque performers, munch workshop facilitators and dungeon masters, as well as rank and file members of Ireland's kinkiest subculture.

Most were afraid to speak to us, fearing that exposure would bring down the judgement and potentially the wrath of their neighbours. In an era of vigilante attacks, sensationalist yellow press titillation, and in a country at once obsessed with talking about sex and fearful of soberly indulging, who could blame them?

The world of BDSM is structured around casual non-sexual meetings known as 'munches'. Munches began in the early 1990's at the 'Burger Munch' fast food restaurant in Palo Alto, California, and together with internet news groups allowed an informal community to coalesce around a variety of kinky interests sharing the common thread of domination, submission, bondage and sadomasochism. These interests are not new from Greco-Roman Vases to the Karma Sutra to Victorian daguerreotypes, history reveals our continuing interest in the erotic elements of pain and power exchange. In recent decades California has become the epicenter of BDSM, with a cross pollination of

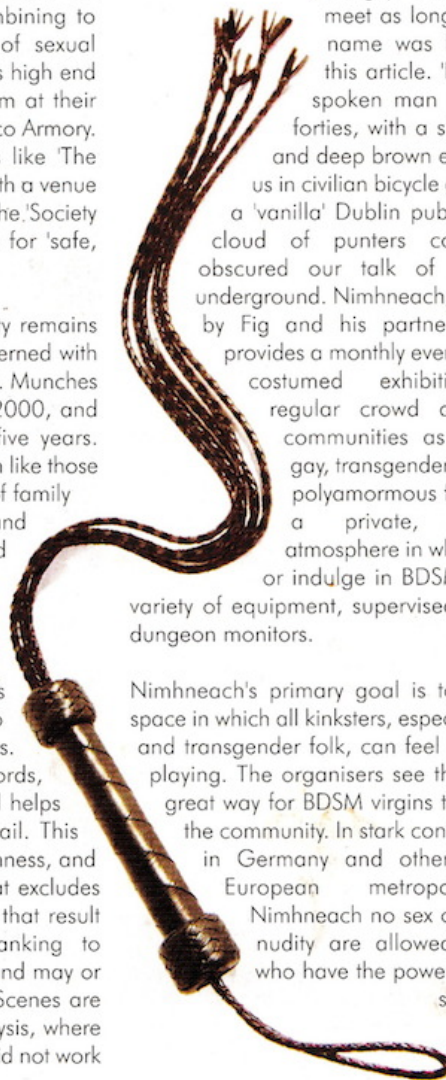
alternative sexualities and identities like the gay 'leather man' subculture, combining to create an environment tolerant of sexual diversity. Today much of the world's high end BDSM porn is created by Kink.com at their dungeon in the former San Francisco Armory. Meanwhile, SF community efforts like 'The Citadel', provide ethical kinksters with a venue for their activities, and groups like the 'Society of Janus' help to establish norms for 'safe, sane, and consensual' play.

In Catholic Ireland, the community remains more hidden, though no less concerned with the safety and comfort of kinky folk. Munches here have been run since about 2000, and have met regularly for the past five years. These informal gatherings are much like those any other fan group. Discussions of family life and community go hand in hand with arguments about the best kind of whip, and recollections of recent encounters. Munches also provide the opportunity for 'prenegotiation'. Because of the dangers inherent in BDSM sex, individuals preparing to play together need to explicitly negotiate their boundaries. Prenegotiation establishes safe words, individual interests and limits; and helps to outline planned 'scenes' in detail. This requires a capacity for sexual openness, and is one of the aspects of BDSM that excludes the sexually insecure. The scenes that result can involve anything from spanking to whipping to more extreme kinks, and may or may not include penetrative sex. Scenes are usually followed by post play analysis, where participants discuss what did and did not work for them.

We spoke to one of the founders of Dublin's regular BDSM night, Nimhneach ('pain' as

Gaeilge), who agreed to meet as long as his real name was kept out of this article. 'Fig' is a soft spoken man in his early forties, with a shaved head and deep brown eyes. He met us in civilian bicycle gear outside a 'vanilla' Dublin pub, where the cloud of punters conversations obscured our talk of the sexual underground. Nimhneach, established by Fig and his partner in 2005, provides a monthly evening of adult costumed exhibitionism. A regular crowd drawn from communities as diverse as gay, transgender, pagan and polyamorous folk, provide a private, welcoming atmosphere in which to enjoy or indulge in BDSM acts on a variety of equipment, supervised by trained dungeon monitors.

Nimhneach's primary goal is to provide a space in which all kinksters, especially women and transgender folk, can feel comfortable playing. The organisers see the club as a great way for BDSM virgins to break into the community. In stark contrast to clubs in Germany and other liberalised European metropolises, at Nimhneach no sex or full frontal nudity are allowed. Monitors, who have the power to veto any scene (although in practice they prefer to interrupt with a quiet warning or word of advice), ensure participants' comfort. Kinksters drink, chat and perform scenes, all



Glossary of BDSM Terms

BDSM - Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, Sadism & Masochism. An umbrella term, BDSM covers both the more theatrical 'dress up', rope play, and constraint related 'bondage', as well as interests directly related to the pleasure of providing or receiving physical pain. BDSM includes a whole variety of behaviours from relationships in which the participants establish dominant and submissive roles, to scenes, to kinky sexual encounters.

Dominant (Dom) / Top - One who is dominant, provides direction and control in a relationship, scene or sexual encounter.

Submissive (Sub) / Bottom - One who is sexually submissive, either temporarily during a relationship or specific set of sexual encounters, or as an orientation.

Switch - An individual who can inhabit both dominant and submissive sexual roles.

Dominance - Exerting control over another with their consent, either verbally or physically.

Submission - Exchanging power with another to become submissive to their will.

Discipline - Any use of reward and punishment to control or 'train' a submissive.

Bondage - Tying, binding, or constraining a submissive.

Sadism - Pleasure derived from the pain of another.

Masochism - Pleasure derived from one's own pain.

Humiliation - That aspect of a BDSM scene focusing on

in a welcoming non-judgmental environment. Dublin's previous regular bondage night 'Gag' died out in the late nineties. Gag fell victim to police attention and ultimately found itself unable to find a permanent venue. Nimhneach's organisers are keen to avoid the same fate, and the club has retained its location in Dublin's Academy for the past two years, being careful 'not to stain the carpets'.

BDSM clothing has entered the mainstream, through designs by the likes of Britain's recently deceased Alexander McQueen, whose fetish inspired high fashions have been sported by Madonna and Lady Gaga. Many couples are quietly experimenting with bondage and domination fantasies, as kink slowly becomes less controversial. Nimhneach's organisers are happy to welcome those new to the community but are wary of sightseers. BDSM is not swinging, and vanilla folks looking for an 'easy score' are not welcome. The club enforces a rigid dress code, including fetish, cyber, gothic, burlesque, rôleplay, cosplay and lingerie styles. In practice this can mean anything from clingfilm, corsets, rubber skirts (on men), and mesh tops, to gladiator and school master outfits to more traditional leather, vinyl and PVC dungeon gear. A high formal option (top hat, tails, cane, ruffled shirt) provides an alternative for newbies frightened by the expense or revealing nature of full fetish gear. Still, visitors arriving at Nimhneach in less than appropriate attire are not automatically turned away. If the organisers judge them sincerely interested they can be lenient, stripping them and furnishing a make do costume from bondage tape and assorted accessories. Fig recommends visitors consult Nimhneach on potential costumes beforehand.

The image of the PVC clad, whip wielding



female dominatrix has become a visual shorthand for anything kinky or sexually subversive. Although real ProDommes do exist (operating fairly openly in Ireland, and charging about 200 - 300 euro an hour for their services), they do so outside the main BDSM scene, primarily working for submissive men who can't find the dominant women they prefer in the existing dating pool. Contrary to salacious stereotype, Dominatrices are not prostitutes, and rarely offer sexual services. The services they do provide couples or individuals can extend from mild humiliation and sissification to more sophisticated, risky and painful procedures like breath play, needle play and mummification. For some men and women such services are worth paying for, and waiting for, as UK dominatrices travel occasionally to Ireland for 'tours' of major cities.

In bigger European capitals, population pressure has split the BDSM community into two distinct camps. In London, folk more interested in the theatrical and light bondage side of things frequent the hip 'Torture Garden'; while more hardcore,

Continues Next Page

Brave New World Confessions of a Sub

I'm sitting in the auditorium. This isn't the show I expected. I consider leaving and standing outside. Chain-smoking might help me.... But then, I don't want to stink of smoke for him. I sit and watch and have no idea what's happening. I wonder if the show is substandard, or am I just that distracted. As the show finishes, I start to sweat. I wipe my hands on my dress, but it doesn't dry them for long. My breathing is more frenetic, I know I'm going to see him soon and I jolt into a heightened state of arousal.

He rings me to tell me he's on his way and I start to walk in the direction I know he'll approach me from. My mind is racing with so many thoughts that I can't tell how long it is before he pulls over next to me. I get in, he tells me to put my seat belt on, and that is all it takes; my brain twists and ties itself in a knot, it just ceases control. Usually I am confidently

Continued Page 52

the erotic use of demeaning or belittling language, costumes, tasks, codes of behavior or public embarrassment. Humiliation may be the aspect enjoyed by a submissive of the bondage or pain inflicting elements of BDSM, over the more readily apparent physical aspect of a scene. Humiliation can involve insults, embarrassment or even cuckoldry (humiliating a partner with a third party).

Fetish - Psychologically, a fetish is a sexual proclivity or interest in a body part, situation or activity which must be present for an individual to become aroused. For example, someone with a foot fetish requires symbolic or

actual foot stimulation (their own or another's) to reach climax. Within the BDSM community the term can also refer to clothing (fetish gear), to BDSM in general, or to a strong kink.

Kink - Sexual proclivities or interests deviating from normative heterosexual or homosexual activity. A kink is any unusual sexual interest, from spanking to suspension to role play.

Fetish Gear - Outfits and costumes traditionally associated with BDSM. Often made from leather or PVC, such costumes include chaps, corsets, male skirts, gothic

boots, harnesses, ball gags, slave bells, collars / chokers, etc. Most BDSM clubs enforce a dress code primarily focused around fetish gear.

Master / Slave relationship - A consensual power exchange BDSM relationship, which involves a great deal of control over the submissive's daily life by the dominant partner. The degree of control or power can vary greatly, as can the commitment to this lifestyle.

ProDomme - A Female professional Dominatrix. Most do not offer sexual release, but rather guide individual men & women or couples through a scene- providing a

Continues Next Page **23**

BDSM IRELAND

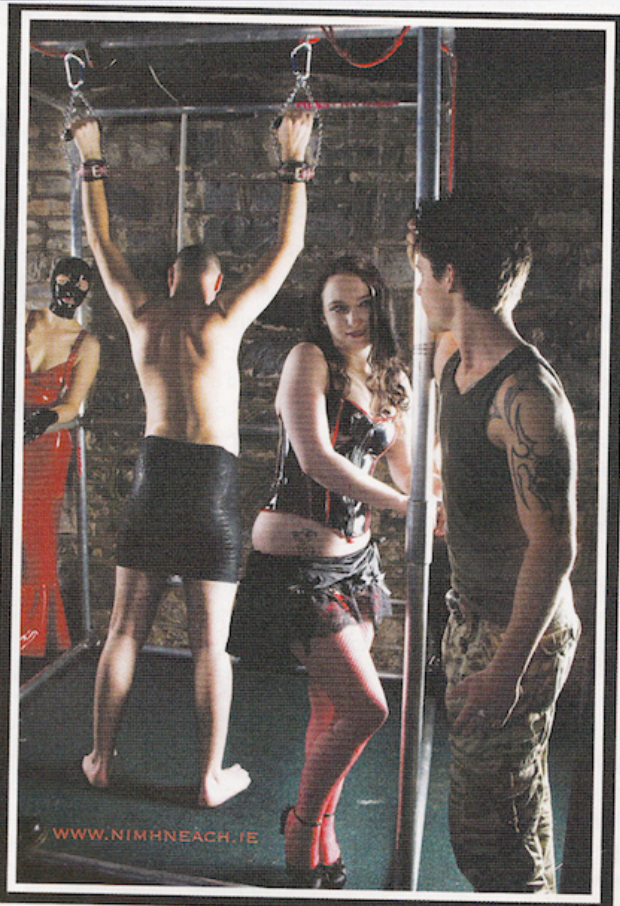
"Most people repress their sexual demons, BDSM folks take them out for rides around their loft."

sadomasochistic types head to 'Club Rub' for heavy duty 'edge play'. Ireland lacks the population to sustain such distinctions. The many and diverse interests of the BDSM community are represented at Nimhneach, attended by roughly equal numbers of dominant men and submissive women, along with about 10% non gender specified folks (from transgender to transexual to genderqueer) as well as a number of gay kinksters. Nimhneach is proud of its minority population, who have helped cement its reputation as one of the friendliest BDSM clubs in Europe.

For Fig and other ordinary members of the community, BDSM is as much about personal exploration and even spirituality as sex. To Fig the 20% of us who 'think outside the box' socially and sexually, have a duty of care to society as a whole. Being 'out' as a sex positive kinkster gives others an opportunity to reevaluate their attitude to sex and their own desires. There's an old saying, Fig tells me "Most people repress their sexual demons, BDSM folks take them out for rides around their loft." BDSM is all about expressing your individual sexuality, "Your most outrageous fantasy is both possible and fun". It's not all

about pain either, as submission and dominance are core elements of the interest, underlying its more alien, theatrical fetishes (like pony girls or human furniture). From the outside such acts may appear bizarre or even ridiculous, as only those involved are party to the mental and emotional power-exchange at the heart of the experience.

Fig believes BDSM is more than just an effort at hedonistic sexual exploration. "Finding God through sex is not new, the Indians have temples to sex. Spiritual sexuality does not mean having lots of sex. But being good unexpectedly leads you to spiritual aspects of human existence. There are many paths up the mountain to find God." He leans in, "There are people who've told me, you're the only one I'd trust to [perform a suspension] on me. And that degree of trust, that's a spiritual thing."



If you're interested in getting involved in the Irish BDSM scene, hop online to the **BDSM Ireland** message board at <http://www.bdsmireland.org/>, there you can chat with experienced members of the community, and ask to attend one of the regular munches held in Cork, Galway or Dublin. Club Nimhneach - <http://fetish.ie>, provides another entry point for the more adventurous. A strict dress code applies.

If you're just looking to expand your sexual opportunities, but have no interest in kink, then a swingers' site might be a better fit.

variety of physically and emotionally punishing services for a pre-agreed fee. The relative rarity of sexually dominant women creates a market for submissive men willing to pay for their services.

Safe word - A safe word or gesture is a pre-agreed term or sign which allows the submissive partner in a scene to stop activities at any time. This allows both partners to explore the boundaries of their sexual desires and dominant or submissive tendencies, while minimizing the danger of compulsion.

SSC (Safe Sane and Consensual) - Three principles of

informed and healthy BDSM relationships and encounters adhered to by most members of the community. Broadly, activities should not endanger the life or health of participants (safe), participants and activities should be sane, and partners should provide consent prior to engaging in activities (consent can be withdrawn at any time).

Role Play - Adopting any of a variety of stereotyped roles for the purposes of a scene or lifestyle. Role play includes the clichéd master / slave leather clad couple, as well as an enormous number of specific fetish scenes,

including medical, religious etc imagery and costumes.

Cross Dressing - Within the context of BDSM, cross-dressing may refer to the dressing of a male sub in 'female' stereotyped attire.

For a more complete glossary of terms log on to www.blue-ireland.com