Abstract
Understanding the conditions and motivators of shifts in cultural trends is crucial for those managing and promoting the consumption of tourist activities. This paper explores the recent popular surge of interest in BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadism and Masochism) and develops a model that explains how ‘deviant’ activities move from the margins to the mainstream. The theoretical gap is filled by identifying the oblique exploration of Goffman’s conceptualisation of ‘Backspaces’. Many tourist activities, previously perceived as deviant, have gone through this process and the model can be applied to any activity as its popularity increases, showing how tourists can see deviancy as a liminoid pursuit, something they can share with others whilst escaping their everyday selves. A three-stage methodology addresses a methodological gap: how to research occult tourist behaviour. This is of central importance to the tourism industry, as understanding when a minority, even deviant, pursuit could develop into a mainstream activity has considerable commercial importance.

Highlights
- Identifies the oblique exploration of Goffman’s conceptualisation of Backspaces
- Proposes a three-stage methodology for researching shifts in cultural trends
- elaborates dynamic process of deviant leisure pursuits shifting into the mainstream
- illustrates the commercial importance when minority pursuit develops into mainstream
- Presents a model that can be applied to any activity as its popularity increases

Keywords
Leminoid activities, Backspaces, BDSM, Development
From Leisure to Tourism: How BDSM demonstrates the transition of deviant pursuits to mainstream products

This paper explores how deviant leisure pursuits become positioned to cross-over into mainstream tourism products. Through the example of BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadism and Masochism), it presents the analogy between Goffman’s concept of backspaces and liminoid tourist contexts to demonstrate how an activity such as BDSM has become an example of a pursuit that could offer a liminoid tourist experience. We address the gap in understanding of how an individual can adequately break free of social norms to the extent a back-self may be able to come to the fore. We approach this by answering the questions: How are back-selves explored without being compromised by social norms? And, what conditions allow for a deviant pursuit to be considered a packagable liminoid tourist experience? Thus we build on Goffman’s dramaturgical study and identify that back-selves must be explored obliquely and in a separate context that is free of reference from one’s everyday pursuits so that participants share a social space with each other yet are free to engage with the environment as they please. As well as filling this theoretical gap, a further aim of this paper is to demonstrate to practitioners how fluid the market is and that no niche is beyond consideration. The media identifies opportunities for packaging marginal pursuits into products by presenting activities that society may consider to be deviant yet they are in fact only deviant to those who do not regularly engage with them. Therefore, such pursuits represent packagable liminoid experiences for tourists, where they can break from reality and explore their back-selves.

The Fifty Shades of Grey (James, 2012) trilogy of novels has brought sexual practices involving bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism (BDSM) into the mainstream. The relative marginality of these texts initially seemed to be ensured by both theme (BDSM) and format (online fan fiction), but the emergence of BDSM as a mainstream cultural phenomenon following the runaway success of the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy deserves critical attention. The original book set the record for the fastest selling paperback ever, topping best-seller lists all over the world and being translated into over 50 languages, eventually resulting in film adaptations in February 2015. Such popularity indicates a growing mainstream appetite for discussion of those that would previously be considered ‘deviant’ pursuits. Understanding the ways in which countercultural pursuits gain mainstream popularity is important for those managing the consumption of tourism. The lack of research into the predictors, processes, locations, and implications of such shifts presents four distinct gaps: theoretical, methodological, contextual, and practical. This primarily theory-building paper addresses the theoretical gap by investigating the contemporary emergence of ‘deviant’ pursuits (specifically BDSM) in the mainstream imagination, thereby developing a model explaining this shift in attitudes and consumption. By identifying the role of oblique exploration within Goffman’s conceptualisation of ‘Backspaces’, we explore how occult activities may be identified as shifting from the hidden to the mainstream. This addresses the methodological gap by offering a three-stage methodology by which to investigate deviant countercultural pursuits. These pursuits are contextualised through analyses of websites, observations of participants, and structured interviews with individuals involved at various levels. The prediction of such shifts in consumerism offers a clear practical advantage to management. This paper identifies individuals and artefacts within a marginalised group that establish the conditions necessary for the transition of their activities into the mainstream through liminoid experiences.

The paper now splits into five sections. The first section presents a theoretical review of Goffman in tourism, in particular his conceptualisation of ‘Backspaces’ as the initial setting for individuals to
participate in activities labelled ‘criminal’ or ‘deviant’ by rule-makers and rule enforcers. It then presents the contextual background to the fetish lifestyle and BDSM activities in section two to underpin the empirical investigation. Section three presents a three-stage methodology to address a methodological gap: how to research occult tourist behaviour. The next section is empirical and explores BDSM as a liminoid tourism pursuit that characterises its ability to emerge from ‘backspace’ to mainstream. Finally, in section five a new model is presented, a deviant two-by-two matrix, which charts the emergence of activities from backspaces through to stratified and socially constructed mainstream tourism.

Backspaces and Liminoid Pursuits

Goffman Management Research and Backspaces
The work of the celebrated sociologist Erving Goffman has been frequently applied in management studies, evidenced in the fact that Goffman is the sixth most cited author in social sciences. As presented in Table 1, his work on social roles, impression management and stigma (amongst others) has been used in varied studies in business management, communications, event management, social media, strategy, technology, research methods and tourism. In tourism management studies Goffman’s work has been used to investigate social spaces and tourism settings (MacCannell, 1973); dimensions of authenticity and experiences (Pearce & Moscardo, 1986); the roles that tourists play (Jacobsen, 2000; McCabe, 2005; Wickens, 2002); and studies on deviant tourist pursuits (Redmon, 2003; Uriely, Ram, & Malach-Pines, 2011). This paper places emphasis on the concept of backspaces in Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective.

In his dramaturgical perspective Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of an actor on a stage to conceptualise how individuals behave in a social setting, arguing that one constructs a front to make an impression on others, suppressing all that does not align with the projected image. He discusses the effect of conflict between ‘front-self’ and ‘back-self’, showing the image management that takes place of the front-self and the perceived detriment to that image when the suppressed back-self is exposed. Hiding, thus, becomes necessary, and individuals carefully choose the setting and time in which to present the back-self, which they believe outsiders would deem unacceptable. This consistent concealment of one's back-self can be emotionally tiring, so spaces where there is apparent opportunity for release from the tension built over time of the concealment become actively sought. In his later work, Goffman (1967) uses the term 'backspace' to describe spaces where individuals find ‘sanctuary’, safe in the knowledge that their presence therein would not result in them being “…openly avowed, bringing them immediate humiliation and sometimes permanent loss of reputation” (1967: 59). The (at the time) deviant world of gambling in Las Vegas provides Goffman's example of a backspace, offering individuals the opportunity to engage in activities carrying a considerable stigma. In his work on tourism and playful deviance, Redmon (2003) discusses how such backspaces provide “…a liminal license for people to transgress norms, participate in playful deviance, and present their secret self” (2003: 28). Redmon's examples of such backspaces include destinations and events such as Mardi Gras, Spring Break, carnivals, raves, S/M bars and dance-clubs where amateur stripping occurs. The key characteristic of the backspace is that it provides the setting where individuals feel comfortable and safe to reveal a different self (Presdee, 2002). This is analogous with the recent work of Taheri, Gori, O’Gorman, Hogg, and Farrington (2016) who outline the underpinning facets of liminoid consumption in nightclubs, noting the need for people to be able to share experiences yet be able to interpret the
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experience for themselves on an individual level. There is apparent overlap here between the physical context of liminoid spaces (Turner, 1974) and the emotional context of backspaces, where liminoid pursuits represent opportunities to be “apart together…rejecting usual norms”, according to Huizinga (1950 p. 12).

It is necessary to articulate the intricacies of Goffman’s thesis and the related literature so as to accurately frame the contribution of this paper. The attention of Goffman’s interest in backspaces is explicitly on context and implicitly on the activities engaged in within these contexts. These activities can be understood as vehicles of exploration, rather than direct manifestations, of participants’ true or back-selves. The context and the activities are a form of representing the back-self in a manner that amplifies the sense of freedom and expedites opportunities for its exploration. However, what is presented in the backspace is not necessarily a true representation of the back-self, that is to say that individuals would not necessarily engage in drug-fuelled promiscuity as a matter of routine if society truly gave them the freedom and permission to do so. Rather, the activities represent a vehicle for the exploration of the backspaces. This paper uses Goffman as a theoretical vehicle to study BDSM, as the activity studied fits the criteria set out by Goffman (1967) as follows:

- BDSM activities need a setting which supplies “…the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it” (1967: 22)
- Individuals wishing to participate in BDSM activities must enter the BDSM setting as they cannot take on their (desired) role/activity “…until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance once they leave” (1967: 22)
- Individuals partaking in BDSM activities within the assigned setting are provided with “…extra protection for performers who are, or have momentarily become, highly sacred” (1967: 22)

BDSM provides an agreeable combination of context and activities within which people are liberated to elaborate the dialogue they have with their back-selves, it is this dialogue that precipitates the emergence of a paradox between the deviant and the mainstream as will be discussed.

What is BDSM? BDSM as a tourism context
Deviant leisure, also known as adventure recreation (Ewert, 1989), contains “elements of real or apparent danger in which the outcome, while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstance” (Galloway, 2006, p. 219). Galloway (2006, p. 221) notes that activities can be considered deviant if they constitute a “…moral wrong caused by unnecessary exposure to physical harm or death, risk to safety officers and rescuers, as well as risk to the resource itself”. Rojek (1999) suggests that such deviant pursuits represent negative, norm-violating behaviour, whereas others (Galloway, 2006; Wilkins, 1965; Winslow, 1970) would argue that it can be a socially constructive activity. There are many examples of tourist activities which began as deviant minority interests that have become mainstream.

Hedonic pursuits that involve risk-taking and the associated thrills have an established heritage within tourism, for example: backpacking (Buckley, 2012; Elsrud, 2001), mountaineering (Pomfret, 2011), diving with sharks (Gore, Muter, Lapinski, Neuberger, & Van der Heide, 2011), extreme sports, such
as skydiving (Palmer, 2009) and even the emergent space tourism (Crouch, Devinney, Louviere, & Islam, 2009). Gay tourism was once seen as deviant, before developing into an emerging and then mainstream activity (Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, & Jenkins, 1998). Other traditionally marginalised pursuits such as binge drinking (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Yang, Mattila, & Yu, 2006) and casual sex (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Eiser & Ford, 1995; Ryan & Kinder (1996); Sönmez et al., 2006; Wickens & Sönmez, 2007) are no longer minority activities and tourism has been presented as both ‘part symptom’ and ‘part cause’ of such phenomena making the transition from the margins of society into the mainstream. The role of tourism in the identification and legitimisation of such pursuits is to capture the activity as a distinct and separate endeavour from that which operates within everyday norms and boundaries. Wagner (1977) made an early observation of the use of tourism in breaking from the everyday in a manner that delineates the subsequent pursuit as being free of rules, what Lett (1983, p. 35) describes it as “licensed suspension of everyday rules”. That being said, in relinquishing adherence to everyday rules in the interests of entering a liminoid experiential space, there is the requirement for implicit subscription to a context which is understood to be ‘shared’ to the extent that those with whom the space will be shared will also be breaking from their everyday rules. Thus, when it comes to tourism’s role in the pursuit of deviant or hedonic activities, the notion of breaking away is paradoxically coupled with the liminoid destination being a shared space which the participant is joining under the same emotional pretences. In the case of an activity such as BDSM, the circumstances require for it to be commonly understood to the extent that the pretences of the participants align their understanding of the experience they seek so the sense of being ‘apart together’ can be achieved.

BDSM is “a group of behaviours and lifestyle practices that include a variety of fetishes, role-playing, and other nonmainstream activities” (Stockwell, Walker, & Eshleman, 2010, p. 309). It generally involves the exchange of power or pain, often, but not exclusively, in a sexual context with explicit shared understanding. In the US approximately 10% of the population engage in BDSM (Masters, Johnson, Kolodny, & Bergen, 1995), and the most popular activities are flagellation and bondage. There is a huge variety of BDSM-related materials available in adult stores and over 27 million webpages devoted to the specific theme (Nordling, Sandabba, Santilla, & Alison, 2006). In international terms, the internet has had a noticeable impact on enhancing the visibility and acceptability of BDSM practices. The online social network Fetlife (www.fetlife.com), arguably the largest kink and fetish online community provides a useful impression of the popularity of BDSM practices and a geographical breakdown of the number of online members. For example in the UK Fetlife has 266,113 registered members, while in Australia there are 98,268 members. Virtual BDSM spaces such as Fetlife, Evil Monk and Adult Match-maker facilitate in bringing established and or new practitioners and outsiders together in real spaces. For example the ‘Stockroom’ a Los Angeles-based adult store, ‘Uberservices’, a Sydney-based events company run BDSM awareness events that sell-out in twenty minutes. These events, more akin to club nights place emphasis on overtly sexualised exhibition with BDSM-lite practices that in a sense comprise the ‘entry-level’ for newbies and outsiders. Such is the popularity of such events, that the Hellfire Sydney event is known as the ‘McDonalds of the S&M world’ (Vida-Douglas, 2011: 22).

Misconceptions and myths surround the world of BDSM, which recent literature has attempted to dispel. The most common myth is that BDSM is all about pain, when in reality there may not be any pain involved. There are different kinds of pain and some may enjoy extreme levels of pain for various reasons, but this could be seen “…as analogous to the pain experienced by long distance runners or boxers in pursuit of their sport” (Nichols, 2006: 282).
The most fundamental principle for BDSM practitioners demands that it is performed by responsible adults, of their own volition and in a safe way. These basic principles have been condensed into the SSC motto for ‘Safe, Sane and Consensual’ and it underlines the importance of safe, sane and consenting behaviour at all times by all parties (Medlin, 2001). Others have proposed an alternative to SSC, the RACK slogan ‘Risk Aware Consensual Kink’ (Barker, Iantaffi, & Gupta, 2007). Not all members of the BDSM community adhere to one principle to the exclusion of the other. Some people subscribe to both mottos, using SCC as a description of the activities to any member of the general public, while using RACK as a description of the activities within members and communities. There are other mottos used by some groups; PRICK (Personal Responsibility Informed Consensual Kink) emphasizes the concept of taking personal responsibility for your actions, as well as informed analysis of the risks. The CCC (Committed Compassionate Consensual) is another one which is circulated in some more ‘old-guard’ clubs and communities. These slogans create the framework to bracket BDSM with dangerous sports, rather than with psychopathologies, allowing for a complexity of harmful behaviours to be recognised and puts in place a sense of adult awareness of potential risks accompanied by harm reduction strategies. These slogans most importantly pose the question: “How is BDSM more dangerous than bungee jumping or parachuting?” Putting danger aside, some uncertainty remains in terms of the psychological effects of BDSM on individuals. Despite pioneering research on those who engage in BDSM behaviour there remains a paucity of empirically derived information about the psychological features of this population. A recent study by Connoly (2006) found no evidence to support the notion that “…clinical disorders, including depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsion- are more prevalent among the sample of individuals with BDSM interests than among members of the general population” (2006: 117). The same study also did not find any evidence of widespread PTSD, trauma-related phenomena, psychological sadism, psychological masochism or other personality disturbances. It could be argued that if the safety rules are followed then BDSM is far less dangerous than other deviant leisure pursuits which require a certain level of luck to avoid accidents, while practising BDSM in a safe and regulated environment does not. Perhaps, taboos aside, BDSM in essence stands as a legitimate pursuit.

**Researching BDSM**

Recent research of this kind has adopted a highly qualitative ethnographic approach, for example Newmahr (2010) partook, went native, and reported the experience. Here we have no previous experience, nor did we partake in BDSM activities. Given the lack of empirical enquiry surrounding BDSM, embedded within an interpretivist paradigm (MacIntosh and O’Gorman 2015) we adopted a sequential, three stage, exploratory approach (Alexander et al. 2012). There is no pre-existing framework for the study of these types of activities, therefore, a reflexive ethnographic research design allowed this progressive exploratory approach to create structure, yielding incrementally robust data that led to the insights presented in the discussion section. Netnographic engagement (Coulson et al., 2014) first provided a perspective on the broader context of BDSM by analysing the active online community; a purposive sample of BDSM participants was then accessed for ethnographic observation in a BDSM club (Anderson & Littrell, 1995), affording a first-hand look at the world of BDSM through an outsider’s lens. Finally, structured interviews provided a further level of interpretive and communicative meaning to the observations made during the second stage of data collection.
Stage 1: Online Analysis

The initial entrée to the landscape of BDSM was a netnographic approach (Coulson et al., 2014) identifying a focused and research question-relevant segment, topic, or group; significant traffic and volume of postings; high numbers of discrete message contributors; detailed or descriptively rich data; and a greater number of member interactions. Following our entrée into the BDSM online scene, a purposive data set was compiled, which yielded a snapshot of the BDSM market, in terms of its size, scope and proliferation of offerings (Coulson et al., 2014). The database revealed an international network of clubs, houses and events catering for the needs of BDSM devotees internationally (Anderson & Littrell, 1995). The reference point for activities and interactions of interest to this study was for them being specific to BDSM and not another related form of fetish pursuit. This was to ensure that the study encompasses a variety of offerings in relation to type, location and price but still isolates BDSM as being the focus of the study so as to focus commentary on BDSM as a discrete pursuit that represents an emergent tourism genre. This approach was dictated by the literature which has highlighted a recent trend of democratization of BDSM consumption in popular culture.

Stage 2: Ethnographic Observation

Working closely with members of a BDSM club, access was granted, on the conditions of secrecy and anonymity. Gaining, and not betraying, the trust of everyone involved was vital, as bondage is a private activity, and information offered fully depended on openness of the participant. To this end the researchers conducted monthly visits when the club was open over a period of a year. Access was granted on the condition that we were not to take any photographs or use any form of visual recording. While scientifically curious, the researchers did not partake in any activities at any time and their observations were limited to the ‘public’ areas of the club. Notwithstanding the potential stigma associated with participating in such deviant pursuits in the name of research, Crang’s (1996) seminal work was considered in the research design, whereby participation and immersion was of central value to the conclusions drawn in the study. However, principally our study explores the dynamics of a deviant pursuit as it evolves to become a more legitimised activity and its emergent membership to a form of touristic trope whereby tourism provides the vehicle from deviant to mainstream. Therefore, our interest did not attend to BDSM in itself, rather what it represents as a contemporary example of this evolution of the deviant to the mainstream via tourism pursuits, Crang (1996) discusses the differences between living and observing phenomena. Although in certain contexts living within the forum of analysis yields valuable insights, the difficulties of disentangling a group’s own internal dynamic from the representative dynamic of the culture being studied can be challenging when engaging as a participant. By observing rather than participating, we also retained the ability to distinguish between the people and the category of BDSM, as discussed by Sørensen (2003). Access behind closed doors was restricted; this reinforced the distinction between our role as observers of the cultural meaning behind the pursuit rather than the pursuit itself, which in turn reinforces our objective of understanding the evolution of BDSM towards being a tourism pursuit rather than the intricacies of its practice as a leisure pursuit. The researchers kept to their role of outsiders at all times, following the rules to keep the trust of the club and the organizers throughout. The data was collected in the form of a research diary, updated after visits with thoughts, ideas, and anything else of note (Lo & Lee, 2011; Sin, 2009; Tomazos & Butler, 2012). Although not foreseen in the design stages, another emergent benefit of engaging with the environment as observers rather than participants was that the focus of any interactions with the club members and the prevailing discussion points in the subsequent interviews centred on the why of BDSM rather than the what, something that researcher participation could have negatively influenced, especially when the subject matter is underpinned by concepts of identity and
the self, which can be interwoven with other identities and are contingent on interactions with others (Howard, 1994).

**Stage 3: Interviews**

Finally, twenty seven face-to-face interviews took place to triangulate the data and draw out the meaning from the cultural context and espoused behaviours assembled through the first two stages of data collection. As Gubrium and Holstein (2004) note, the sociocultural and temporal bounds of the interview will have a significant impact on the nature of the data collected and therefore must be acknowledged: the interviews took place in an office area at the club following a polite request to guests to join us for a small chat, before or after their session. These conversations lasted between 20 minutes and an hour depending on the participant. As this research is conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, unstructured interviews were used to allow focus and flexibility. The main implication of employing such a strategy is that dialogue can be developed, primarily due to the openness of questions, and probes might be used if the interviewer feels that more could be said (Gillham, 2005). Most of the previously curious participants only relaxed and showed willingness to talk to us about their activities after in-house dominatrix 'Mistress X' had participated in her first interview. After interviewing some of the regulars, it became easier to speak to other members. Here, the physical presence of the researchers assisted in building a connection, which helped the participants feel more comfortable as they identified with the interviewers (Alexander et al., 2012). This in turn allowed the interviewers to gain further insight and to provide context to their observations from the perspective of a complete outsider. All interview questions were framed to ensure identities were kept hidden, and no pressure was exerted on the candidates to answer any questions they did not want to.

**Data Analysis**

The data set was analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis (Alexander, Chen, Maclaren, & O'Gorman, 2010). Thematic analysis, as defined by Blum (1997), King (2004) involves themes being gathered a priori before the main research is carried-out. These are used to create a template against which the results of the research can be analysed and compared. The conceptual framework developed from the literature is applied to the data collected; following this, emergent themes are identified by cross-comparison of the data to identify common rhetoric and goals, establishing relevant concepts that provide insight into the position of BDSM as an emergent tourism pursuit (Boudens, 2005). Similarities identified following engagement with the data are discussed and these themes are then contextualised within the prevailing discourse of the literature. The framework is subsequently built-on and augmented to offer a cohesive structure that both complements and develops existing literature.

The data were first fragmented through an open coding process, and then grouped into categories and subcategories. The process involves coding the data based on components and grouping these components into sub-themes that ultimately relate to the a priori themes. Once organised, these components can be mapped against their sub-themes and ultimately their main a priori themes. Selective coding for specifically observed concepts and themes helped to further inform various categories and properties.

Starting from the a priori themes and the data associated with each, the second step in the data analysis consists of an inductive reflective process that follows the procedures illustrated by Corley and Gioia (2004). The raw data associated with each of the initial broad themes is partitioned into discrete
paragraphs. The criterion for partitioning into discrete paragraphs is that the paragraph can be summarised through a single concept. First order concepts stay close to the original data and can be considered a summary of the meaning that the participant intended in the paragraph. Once the first order concepts are gathered, they are compared and contrasted with each other and in relation to the phenomenon under investigation in its context so that second order themes emerge. Following more reflection on the themes, a pattern begins to emerge whereby some second order themes appear to speak to the overall picture of BDSM and its relationship with identities, whereas others seem to refer to BDSM as a community. This leads to separating second order themes into two distinct sections of aggregate themes. One section of aggregate themes is labelled “paradox of identity”. The other section of aggregate themes consists of BDSM as an emergent tourism activity.

These aggregate themes form the structure for the discussion and findings section, thus helping to bring into focus a sometimes-opaque view on how progression is made from the original data through the theming process and on to the contribution of the research. The inductive thematic analysis moved through coding the components of sub-themes that inform the main themes, and then using those themes to inductively re-engage with the literature to develop the discussions around the aggregate themes.

**Exploring BDSM as Leisure Tourism**

**Exploring the Web in search of BDSM activities**
DungeonNet.com, the directory of BDSM websites of the world, advertises top rental destinations on their website. From the varied destinations, level of access and prices, key insight into the organised BDSM phenomenon can be obtained. The analysis shows that BDSM activities are available globally, and highly prominent in the UK and the US. Information needed to partake is available online, customers know what to expect for their money, and the introduction of bondage “workshops”, increases the efficiency with which they can participate in these activities. The present nature of the industry keeps activities at a low scale, facilitating service personalisation, and a climate of trust. However, should the genre keep growing, a standardized product may become available, for example a bondage cruise or a *Fifty Shades of Grey* experience holiday.

**Observing BDSM through the Eyes of an Outsider**
In order to effectively deconstruct the outsider experience, this section presents the first-hand experience of the authors at a BDSM club. The following discussion revolves around the first observation visit at a ‘mixer event’.

Attempts to initiate conversation with some people fail as we were quickly marked as outsiders. Perhaps the assumption is that those who are not willing to be in regular attendance are not worthy. Eventual conversations indicated that only around half of the people in the club are members. According to some this is common at mixer events; non-members see it as an opportunity to see the club without feeling intimidated or pressurised.

Our thoughts of non-members’ motivations and commitment were interrupted by the sight of men being led around the room on a leash, only wearing their underwear. We soon became used to the sight of people who like to be treated like pets or slaves. This shift in normality challenges notions of ‘deviant’ versus ‘normal’ behaviour: when thresholds are challenged or pushed, it is easy to adapt to new surroundings. A club member informed us that existing members visit clubs in other cities. This is unsurprising, as typical BDSM devotees view bondage activities as a form of serious leisure. This is a hallmark of the emergence of tourism patterns of behaviour and one of the principal points that we
highlight as marking the shift towards the mainstream and the packagable for BDSM. As regular participants seek out their pursuits in new contexts, the providers (other BDSM clubs) adapt to package the opportunity for the visitors. This increases tolerance for the idea of transient participants and in-turn lowers the barrier of entry to first-timers, as the manner in which access is packaged for the itinerant enthusiast doubles as a gateway for the curious newbie. Enthusiasts would therefore be likely to participate in other bondage activities in a different setting, as a hiking enthusiast travels to different destinations, or a surfer samples different surfs. This evolutionary step is the fertile ground for tourism development around a peripheral pursuit.

The club’s relaxed atmosphere was striking. People socialised and chatted as in any other pub or club, and those in BDSM outfits paraded with pride. It is apparent that people drop social defences when they are in the club, feeling safe from the outside world.

During the evening we got a first-hand opportunity to experience the strictness of the club rules. Towards the end of the night a couple were ejected for conducting sexually explicit activities. It was made abundantly clear from the start of the night that sexual activities were not tolerated. The members seemed particularly keen to emphasise that their club was not a sex club, which shows a level of pride and honour in protecting the club. These boundaries mean whilst bondage activities may seem unstable and wild to outsiders, behaviours are far more controlled and regulated than a lot of other leisure activities found in the industry today, for example contemporary hen and stag nights or groups of young revellers in European destinations like Faliraki or Ibiza.

Defying the Norm or Just Being Themselves?

All the interviewees partook in some form of fetish activity (including Mistress X). Participants ranged between 20 to 40 with a nearly-even male and female split. All interviewees were found to express themselves in different ways and varied in terms of their involvement, their activities and their motivation. To clarify this point we have divided the interviewees into four categories. The first section is devoted to one participant: Mistress X; the second is comprised of outsiders-turned-members; the third category includes those who see just another club where they can socialise, and who may or may not partake in the activities; the fourth category includes those participants who have embraced all that the club represents and have invested time, effort, and money into subscribing to its norms. These individuals describe how partaking in BDSM transcends socializing, becoming something that underpins their wellbeing and identity.

I Providing the Backspace?

The interview with Mistress X provided an insight into BDSM from the point of view of a professional, who has carved out a career in BDSM. Mistress X proved forthcoming with her answers regarding the club, but refused to answer any questions about her life outside the club. Yet there was a time when her two lives were intermeshed and shared the same space:

“Once demand grew I could afford to rent out space which I modified to suit, then as the numbers of the members grew I eventually invested in this space, my own space which we now use for our business. You could say I am a full-time mistress now” (MX)

When asked what is BDSM to her:
“It is a big part of my life, I make most of my money through freelance Dominatrix work, at the end of the day it is one of the only things I can count on, it is one of the only things I am any good at” (MX)

This might apply to any professional discussing their work. She added:

“I never get sick of it, even though it is my job, I spend my free time thinking about how to make the next session better, what to wear, what to buy..” (MX)

It is noted that dominatrices like Mistress X seem to enjoy their work; however, the taboo nature of the profession presents difficulties. When prompted about her family, it was evident that this was a contentious subject. Her responses regarding family were clipped, notably, she said with a sense of pride but also resilience:

“My friends are my family. We all know each other and can accept each other more than our own families probably ever could” (MX)

This highlights marginalization through misunderstanding. Perhaps an outsider views MX as a prostitute. This is not the case but it is apparent that her view of BDSM is representative of what Goffman would describe as belonging to her front self, her professional pursuit. Drawing on Goffman, spaces where individuals “need not conceal their stigma, nor be overly concerned with cooperatively trying to dissent it,” are where one presents their most authentic self (Goffman, 1959 pp. 81). This could suggest that the element of unpredictability could hinder the authenticity of the space as the risk of an outsider’s presence in the space may influence the behaviour, or ‘performance’ of those operating within the space (Urry, 1990, Hughes, 1995; Andriotis, 2009; Larsen & Urry, 2011). Therefore the characteristics of the public socio-cultural space are capricious as the space is subject to varying “sociocultural dynamics through which power, identity, meaning and behaviour are constructed, negotiated and renegotiated,” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000 pp.884). An argument can be made then, that a space characterised by the behaviours of those individuals present at one particular time can never be totally reproduced.

2 Looking—in from the outside

Only two participants openly admitted to being new and to being outsiders. This is understandable as the club only hosts outsiders once a month, when asked why they were in the club, answers varied. Some highlighted the adventure and the thrill as a pull factor, which links their responses with theories on deviancy and the pursuit of adventure (Galloway, 2006). Respondents anticipated danger whilst being fully aware that the potential risk was nil. Anticipation of danger is part of the scene, for example:

“It is really exciting and dangerous, you feel very sexy and it is like a little adventure into an unknown world” (P13)

“…the thrill of the chase, the adventure that you would not get in any other club in town” (P12)

To these individuals the club is a place of titillation, or a place of intriguing mystery. Some may be here for a dare, or under peer pressure, but they are part of the reality of the club once every month, indeed they are tourists, noting the “exciting” and “dangerous” sensations and the feeling of entering “another world”, entering a liminoid experience.
3 The backspace becomes normal

These individuals were part of a group that visited the club every month. They displayed a very nonchalant attitude viewing it as their place of social gathering, just like a local pub or favourite night spot, typically. One of the group explained:

“It is just what we do every month, we do not put much thought into it. It is like a ritual for us and a good laugh.” (P15)

To this group the club is just a place for gathering with friends and reliving the first night they ended up there. It was not clear whether any of this particular group of friends come back alone, or if they have partaken in any of the activities. They may see their visits to the club as an inside joke for their group, underlining their common history and their social bond, but equally the sense that social structures exist in their shared pursuit and there is a routine to their visits is notable.

4 Regular Members

The fourth category of participants included those who saw the club as more than a fun night out or just another club. Due to the richness of the data, their responses were further summarised into three subthemes; motivation, community and trust, and agency.

- Motivation

To some BDSM was a hobby, and most responses reflected it was a leisure pursuit, something that made them feel good, in particular their levels of stimulation.

“It is just a hobby, some people like collecting dolls, I like being gagged and bound” (P19)

“But, it makes you feel, I like to push myself when I go to these clubs, the pain is actually pleasure for me, it wakes my body up and makes me feel alive. That is what keeps me coming back, and without it I do not know what I would do” (P4)

This is reflected in literature which highlights the effects of different levels of stimulation and dopamine endorphins (Stewart, 2000; Henry, 2009). For example, evolutionary socio-biologists argue that the genetic makeup of humans can trigger inherent elements of deviance (Ellis and Walsh, 1997) and there is a relationship between dopamine and endorphin levels and deviant behaviour where people become excited and experience an opiate-like high (Stewart, 2000). In particular, individuals with depressed levels of dopamine engage in challenging or intensely stimulating activities in an attempt to increase their arousal at normal levels, therefore sensation seekers are expected to demonstrate higher levels of deviance than those with normal sensitivity to environmental stimulation (Henry, 2009).

Other participants visited the club because their partners wanted to, underlining social facilitation as a key motivating factor, not dissimilar to a spouse picking up tennis or a new hobby so that they can spend time together. When prompted to elaborate one respondent observed:

“When you are in a relationship, you have to put all the bad things you have done, and sometimes your desires to one side and love that person for who they are. It is unconditional and you have to build a different type of trust to be in a relationship.” (P16)

Joining was proof of his feelings for his partner and allowed the opportunity to build trust through the shared secret of BDSM activities, thus protecting themselves from the feelings or reactions of outsiders.
- **Community and Trust**

Trust is key to BDSM and is manifest in different contexts. To some it was the relationship between the people involved, especially when power is temporarily surrendered, and individuals are at the ‘mercy’ of others:

“It’s this ability to let go that makes it all worthwhile…something very basic. You find kindness and cruelty all in the same act…I cannot describe it” (P6).

While most of the respondents had faith in the management systems employed by the club (nobody can attend without an invitation from an existing member), others raised the issue that trust depends on who brought them. When someone appears, and their association is unclear, suspicion and discomfort arise. Suspicion of outsiders and the zealous guarding of their club echo the literature in relation to participants identifying with the club as part of their social norms, asserting authority over initial conditions, altered to establish safety and freedom from ‘normal’ conditions. This surfaces the theoretical paradox associated with the apparent ‘deviance’ of the activities at the BDSM club and the reporting of norms, social structures and discomfort with change among the regular participants. Such reports are incongruent to the risk-taking image conventionally associated with the pursuit, the most profound sense of deviance in its purest sense, one of novelty and other-worldliness, is evident in the reports of the monthly guest visitors rather than the regular users.

**Backspace Users**

Backspace users reject their environment and escape to a place where their own rules apply, creating spaces or institutions within which they can be themselves. Such escapism is a characteristic of liminal people (Turner, 1975) where escape is integral to their individuality. Others reveal that they struggle to be accepted by others or create relationships outside the club:

“I used to be painfully shy, if I went to a normal club with my friends I would probably just stand in the corner. I never had a girlfriend growing up and got bullied at school, and I regained control over my life by choosing to be submissive to someone, I allow myself to have fun with it now rather than letting it eat away at me” (P6)

By finding peace and belonging in marginalised activities, this individual begins to subtly augment current understandings of normality and deviance. Others interviewed did not have such complex needs. Participation appears to have been the result of a spontaneous decision or just luck. Such serendipity could become the inspiration for somebody to embrace BDSM as a devotee. This would mean that if the opportunity was available and the taboo barrier lifted, then perhaps BDSM could become more popular with outsiders. However, this raises some issues in relation to the participants. Would they be able to function and derive the same satisfaction through their participation if BDSM were to become mainstream? One of the respondents was comfortable with the idea:

“I do not think I would mind, at the end of the day everyone is entitled to do what they want, and if there is a market for it then I do not see why the product should not exist, I would not anticipate it to have a great effect on me” (P4)
The prospect of BDSM becoming a mainstream pursuit being acceptable to current regular participants reveals more about its place in their lives. This shows that what BDSM provides for them is perhaps not so much a symbolic rejection of conventional pursuits; it was just the activity that they discovered was a place they felt they belonged. This chimes with Goffman’s notion that where regular and direct activity exists, so too do performed identities and front-selves. Thus the notion of deviancy becomes open to subjective interpretation, a BDSM regular may be seen as a social deviant by society but they are less likely to be deviating far enough away from their own front-selves to explore their back-selves. This idea reinforces the paradox of Goffman’s dramaturgical study to demonstrate that deviancy is subjective relevant to the constructed and performed front-self that is necessary to navigate the encounters one engages in regularly. Perhaps BDSM may become organised and accepted to the extent that different individuals can choose between different products based on different levels of deviancy, represented by a framework. Such a framework could also allow researchers to target different elements and aspects of BDSM consumption and understand where and why BDSM as a tourist product sits within the spectrum of engagement with it.

Tourism as a conglomeration of activities, services and industries spanning a combination of key sectors, presented through an extensive range of actors (Pearce, 1998). It can be seen to reflect the hyper complexity of society, a clear response to an increasing number of refined tourists demanding specialist tourism experiences (Prabakaran and Panchanatham, 2013; Zahra & Ryan, 2007). This has led to the advancement of niche tourism and as this quest for the alternative grows, Gnevosa (2011) affirms that there has been an explicit shift from wholly external determinants, such as climate and security, towards internal incentives of self-development and creative expression.

In this environment, contemporary trends along with the sociological discourse of this new type of tourist have led to modernist theory being replaced by post-modernist thought (Drummond, 2013). This fluid era of seeking the ‘other’ along with ever growing mobility aided by advances in technology has facilitated a continuous blurring and hybridization of identities that constitute the tourist’s multidimensional self. This process lends itself well to the discussion of the findings of this paper. While BDSM activities have an international scope and they are being supported by a network and services, it is the simulation and re-invention in a tourism context to capture the mainstream that is of interest to the study of tourism and tourism managers. Baudrillard (1994), in his ‘hyper realism of simulation’, argues that the real is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial within its own ritual extermination is what gives it its form and meaning. Similarly we can understand how BDSM is becoming mainstream oriented, how it has a different meaning to different people (as illustrated in the findings) and how in turn this process can spawn new tourism products, services and ideas: all that is required is a little spark of inspiration and the right environment. As elements such as media and advertising have and will further alter the authentic BDSM experience to the point that “…reality is only recognised when it is re-produced in simulation” (Harrison and Wood, 2003: 1), such activities, products or services will increasingly become more appealing to mainstream markets. Pretes (1995) used the term ‘Santa Clause Industry’ to illustrate how contemporary society is dominated by spectacle. Santa Clause went through a process before he became a western cultural product, a simulacrum of the original archetype whose roots are lost in history and lore. Now this amalgam of history, myth and commercialization has been and is reproduced for consumption and touristic services even in non-Christian countries; it has ultimately turned into a commodity for consumption.

We propose that BDSM will go through a similar process. It will be packaged, unpackaged, re-invented and sold to different people in different ways, so that in the future all that we will have will be the simulation of the original; demonstrated by yoga and eastern philosophies of well-being and the way they have been packaged, repackaged and reinvented in order to meet the needs of tourists and have
become bone fide tourist activities, instantly recognised in the offering of resorts and destinations across the world. It is no longer easy to separate these simulations of yoga and yoga philosophy from the original archetype. Plus, new interpretations of yoga that are regularly offered that are more palatable to selected markets as the service and product is further segmented. The same is likely to happen to BDSM pursuits as they enter into the mainstream and BDSM could have similar success as its simulated and derivative versions capture new markets.

It will not matter whether it is authentic or not; in tourism theory we understand the power and lure of the simulacrum. Post-modern tourists seek escapism into some sort of simulation where dreams become reality (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999). Baudrillard went as far as to imply that we, as humans, may actually prefer the simulation to the real thing. Brown (1996) argues that experiences of simulation encapsulate authenticity in and of themselves due to authentic relationships between what is presented (we argue BDSM is represented) and the postmodern tourists (we argue BDSM partakers at all levels of our model) being more powerful than that of tourists and objects (we argue the symbols, instruments and service environment of BDSM). So in our view it will not matter whether the BDSM element is at mainstream level or at deviant subscriber level, as it will hinge on the individual and the human interactions that take place.

Towards a Perceived Deviancy Framework

This paper sought to explore the motivations for participation in BDSM and establish a contribution to tourism studies by understanding how the BDSM scene has formed and developed. Four levels of participants in a threshold activity emerge as forming a scene such as BDSM. These levels are suggested through the findings and discussion to accumulate over time to populate a stratified and socially constructed field in which particular activities are pursued.

Figure 1: Subjective Deviancy Framework
Hedonic Pioneers initiate the pursuit of activities at the threshold, establishing both the threshold itself and the moral and social norms that define it as being abnormal. As this activity endures, Deviant Subscribers enter to give shape to what must now emerge as a field of interest or scene. The emergence of subscribers implies the existence of tacit rules informing the nature of pursuits and perceived acceptability of behaviours. This additional layer of members further drives exposure and awareness amongst the mass population. Increased exposure precipitates a new level of deviant joining the scene: the Regulated Deviant. Participants representing this group are deviant in mindset but gain awareness of the scene through more socially acceptable or formalised channels. Their level of deviance is thus different to that of the Hedonic Pioneer, and their more conventional sensibilities require a level of regulation or formalisation that did not originally exist. The final group to be absorbed by the scene are Mass Deviants: those who are exposed to the scene by channels squarely considered to be mainstream and widely accessible. Tension at this stage will be tangible between the nature of the activities originally undertaken by the Hedonic Pioneers and the subsequent repositioning of these within society. So, further distinct layers emerge amongst the scene’s participants.

What is revealed is that deviancy exists subjectively and is inversely proportionate to involvement in the scene. Therefore, although society may define a Hedonic Pioneer such as MX as a true deviant, her everyday pursuit of BDSM defines her as someone who has constructed a front-self that is performed within a set of social norms in the BDSM world. Conversely, the Mass Deviant may be the least deviant in the eyes of society yet they are exposed to the most authentic liminoid experience and in reality, their subjective experience renders them the most authentically deviant. This subjective deviance is the underpinning feature of other tourism pursuits such as ‘gay tourism’ or ‘backpacking’.

Our findings suggest that two things occur as a scene such as BDSM develops. First, the pioneers evolve to become ‘front-self’ deviants where issues relating to safety, liability and respect (objectively defined and positioned within the moral bounds of society), are internalised by participants within the scene. These apparently minor alterations to the existing conditions of morality by marginal agents may result in a significant reconfiguration of acceptable behaviour in mainstream society (Poincaré 1913). From this, the activities are framed and formalised into a structure that can be packaged and engaged with by outsiders, forming a liminoid process that facilitates true escapism. The resultant landscape is one that shows a paradoxical pursuit of deviance whereby the activities of BDSM leak into the public consciousness and present an opportunity for exploiting it as a means of breaking away from normality and pursuing the oblique exploration of the back-self. As opposed to the Hedonic Pioneers whose pursuit of BDSM is better represented by notions of Goffman’s front-self. The Hedonic Pioneers occupy positions within a stratified arena that ultimately points to a generative lifecycle, being the evolution of social norms that precipitate the redefinition of what society does and does not tolerate as acceptable behaviour sets. Deviance by implication defines and structures its counterpoint in society. The emergent levels of deviance defined within our findings indicate a threshold of deviance itself, whereby there is sufficient stratification and structure to frame the deviance and ultimately undermine its position as being at the threshold. Yet, as the masses occupy the field and access it through channels that they control (media and pop culture rather than internal referral and direct everyday pursuit) they move to a position of dominance over the original pioneers as they define the field on their terms and are in fact the only ones being truly deviant. This is not a novelty, and this study has presented examples of a similar process taking place. In the other examples referenced in the paper, the massification of ‘gay tourism’ or the ‘lads holiday’ have only served to improve the field for all, both pioneers and followers. This example presents a generative cycle of escapism and mass occupation, where the arrival of society en masse to the field is the hallmark of shifting boundaries of identity.
The example provided is one of illustrating how tourism can facilitate and capitalise on a phenomenon that is in the process of transition from being a pursuit for those who principally identify with it to those who see it as a potential outlet through which they can explore a deeper aspect of their character. The paradox that exists at the core of this paper is the position the context represents in the identity of the participants. Implicit within the lifestyles and behaviours of those who participated in BDSM (e.g. the club members) prior to its more mainstream commercial exposure is that BDSM is not a deviant behaviour to them, it is part of their external selves as it forms their routine context, social network and activities. It is only deviant in its relationship with the rest of society. Thus when considering the work of Goffman, the idea of a front-self and a back-self suggests that backspaces must represent opportunities where typical social and routine structures have not had the opportunity to be incorporated into the manner in which the participant engages with the environment. Therefore, one’s true self must be explored obliquely through pursuits that represent opportunities for liminoid experiences in which one can engage in exploration of the parts of one’s personality that are not typically exercised. The paradox is such that traditionally a pursuit like BDSM was only interesting to those who engaged in it as part of their norms, where social structures and ‘cultural conventions’ are apparent, it was only deviant in the sense that it was beyond the prevailing norms of society. In contrast, as it becomes more mainstream, its application as offering the opportunity for true deviance from one’s front-self is increased by it being packaged as a liminoid space but within a public consciousness that shares the identification of it as liminoid: it can objectively be identified as offering an opportunity to be ‘apart together’.

This paper to some extent understands that one of the key characteristics of the capitalist system is that it serves human desire and as such it has a chameleon like quality of adapting to new environments and conditions and produces new products or ideas that become ready and available for consumption. As evident in many cases, capitalism has the ability to turn its most fierce criticism into a vehicle for its sustenance and proliferation. Just like a stage magician, before the consumers’ eyes capitalism absorbs critique, packages it and then markets it as one more opportunity for acquiring profit. Even where diametrically opposed convictions and beliefs are at stake, they do not bring about any pivotal change; instead even the most non-conformist or even deviant pursuits, products and ideas become part of the mainstream and part of the capitalism juggernaut that assimilates products and ideologies.

According to Deleuze (1969), the human person is an assemblage of desire; a desire that is always assembled, but not in one particular way (Choat, 2009). Desire is a creative, anarchic force that is impossible to pin down, or place in the service of a specific form or purpose. Inevitably, at any moment, in any organization and/or social order, desire may find a crevice or a niche in that order and proceed to explode through it. In effect, it could be argued that order is nothing more than a temporary state, a pause or temporary check on desire-driven disorder.

In this temporal environment the desire for BDSM experiences, in a tourism context will be packaged and sold, not only in the form of tourist products promoting perhaps BDSM holidays, but in many shapes and forms to anyone who is interested and/or can afford them. In the periphery many businesses may emerge that will provide different services to meet the wants and desires of those wishing to sample deviant experiences from any segment of the framework illustrated in Figure 1. In the process the ethos, idea, concept or even BDSM’s soul will be treated as a means of furthering capitalist accumulation by means of brand-alignment, extension strategies, as well as other tie-ins, buy-ins or product ideas.
Conclusion
This paper has shown that in a world of simulacra, plasticity, pervasive sponginess, apparent utopia and complete free choice we must accept the tourists’ playful attitude towards what they experience. Just like children they make-believe and in their imaginations construct scenarios and playful scenes that perhaps do not hold to scrutiny, but in their eyes are real. This is the power of the simulacrum and it is important that tourism managers understand the process of deviant pursuits becoming mainstream tourism activities. The value of this paper is in the illustration of how desire and fantasy can be translated into tourism dollars. Future research should focus specifically on this commercial transition and on new developments in BDSM as a tourism activity and the tourists’ playfulness in consuming them.

By exploring the online and physical contexts of BDSM this paper has shown that the mainstream acceptance of ‘deviant’ pursuits is driven by particular individuals who see the pursuit as a core part of their identity, being those individuals, coherent groups, and artefacts in the margins of society that alter or augment the conditions that otherwise exclude certain activities from mainstream. These transitional agents facilitate the emergence of ‘deviant’ pursuits into the mainstream, and establish an augmented set of conditions that is more open to the acceptance of ‘deviant’ pursuits. In doing so, the paper addresses gaps in the theory of shifts in cultural trends, and the methodology of researching such shifts. The practical implications for tourism management are twofold; on the one hand it becomes apparent that it is in managers’ interests to keep monitoring trends and deviant pursuits as they cross-over because, in so doing, they become deviant liminoid experiences for a whole new audience. Tourism destination managers also should seek to understand deviants and their potential to comprise new markets, as destinations diversify their tourist offering. This paper shows that the margins between deviancy and mainstream move in cycles, and that the boundaries between what is normal and what is deviant are becoming increasingly blurred. In this environment, the influence of a seemingly unimportant element (cultural artefact, individual, group) can become the passport for a previously deviant pursuit to cross into the mainstream. It is common practice in other sectors of industry and marketing for large corporations to infiltrate social subgroups and subcultures in an attempt to keep a finger on the pulse of new trends, as established brands have long understood that subgroups and non-conformist deviants can also be profitable. What is pivotal in this emerging picture is that, as understanding of the pursuit develops within the consciousness of the wider public, it becomes a feasible liminoid experience that can be packaged and sold as such. This requires enough understanding of it to be sold commercially as a tourist product but without the identity constraints apparent among those who belong to the original pioneering group, who have everyday norms embedded within their own ‘deviancy’. We propose that the tourism industry should learn from the above tactics. If something as extreme as BDSM and its symbols can find its way into the mainstream consciousness, and explode into the cultural imagination, then the tourist industry should maintain an open mind and explore the potential of turning new trends into products for tourist consumption.

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