

Another Hue in the Rainbow:
Learning About the BDSM Community

An Information Packet for UU Leaders and Congregations

by

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Introduction

Say the words “sexual diversity” and most people think about sexual/affectional orientation and gender identity. Yet there are other sexual minorities which remain misunderstood and marginalized.

This packet is intended to introduce Unitarian Universalist ministers, directors of religious education, and congregational leaders to the reality behind one of these minority groups: the BDSM or “kink” community. We’ll explore what BDSM is (and is not), the BDSM community and its ethical principles, issues of discrimination and prejudice, and how UUs can help.

I write this as both a Unitarian Universalist and a member of the BDSM community, with the hope and the goal of helping to build a bridge between them. My motivation originally came from reading *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Adults*, and its accompanying volume, *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives for Adults*. While these excellent volumes touched on the subject of sadomasochism, they did not provide a fully accurate picture. My immediate response was to recommend some revision and updating of the material, which was graciously received by the UUA’s Lifespan Religious Education leaders.

Still, the question remained: Would this be enough to educate UUs, especially pastoral and educational leaders who may encounter a member of their congregation who is also involved in BDSM? Believe it or not, we are in many UU congregations across the continent. Some of us are “out” to our ministers, or others in our churches or fellowships; others remain cautiously quiet. All of us share the same need as other UUs to live our lives with honesty and integrity.

And so, you have this packet in your hands. I do not offer it as *the* authoritative guide to BDSM for UUs. One person cannot cover the experiences and perspectives of an entire community. What I have endeavored here is to give you a glimpse into the reality of this community and its members, and in so doing, to help you and others better understand.

Desmond Ravenstone
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Thoughts to Consider...

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

-- *Romans 14:13-14 (NRSV)*

There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible only knows a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period.

-- *Walter Wink*

Our culture needs a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts.

-- *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing*

In my life, I have seen many sexual activities labeled "going too far." When I was a child in an average American neighborhood, sex within marriage was permitted, but pre-marital sex was "going too far." I remember when vaginal intercourse was all right but oral sex was "going too far." Then oral sex became acceptable but anal sex was "going too far." Then came group sex, then bisexuality, then... Where will this end?

-- *Jay Wiseman, BDSM author and educator*

Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.

-- *George Bernard Shaw*

What is BDSM?

The acronym “BDSM” is an amalgam of three acronyms:

- 1) B/D for *bondage and discipline*: the use of bondage and other practices to produce or enhance erotic arousal
- 2) D/s for *dominance and submission*: the consensual empowerment of one person by another to enhance or produce erotic arousal.
- 3) S/M for *sadomasochism*: the practice of deriving sexual pleasure from inflicting and/or receiving pain or other intense stimuli.

It is also known simply as S/M, or by other terms such as “leathersex” and “consensual kink.” In online chats and discussion groups, some people also use WIITWD (“what it is that we do”).

BDSM can best be defined as a continuum of erotic practice and expression involving the consensual use of restraint, intense sensory stimulation, and fantasy role-play. This continuum can run from sensation play and light bondage to bullwhips, suspension, and more. Still, these practices are confined to what is *safe, sane and consensual* – that the risk of potential harm is minimized, that all involved are capable of understanding the consequences, and that all involved agree without coercion or deception. Even when a particular BDSM encounter (or “scene”) appears to be coercive or cruel, it has been negotiated and planned to appear that way, with the bottom or submissive having a *safeword* to indicate when to stop, and with the top or dominant providing nurturing and supportive *aftercare* when the scene is done.

As with the GLBT community, there is a BDSM community, also known as the S/M, “leather” or “fetish” community or “Scene.” Members often identify according to their preferred roles – “tops” or “dominants” at one end of the spectrum, “bottoms” or “submissives” at the other, and “switches” who alternate between the two. People often adopt “Scene names” to distinguish their BDSM personae from their “vanilla” identity, to protect themselves from possible discrimination, to celebrate a sense of transformation or self-discovery, or other reasons.

BDSM is many things, but it is *not* abuse or exploitation. Abuse and exploitation are inherently coercive; BDSM is inherently consensual. Abuse and exploitation are about rage, contempt and mistrust; BDSM is about caring, respect, trust and communication. Abuse and exploitation are about one person having power and control over another for its own sake; BDSM is about one person entrusting another with power and control for the sake of fulfilling each other’s desires.

BDSM is also not all about sex. It is also about sensuality, spirituality and creativity. It is about playing with illusion and paradox, with the light and shadow of human desire. BDSM is as much about artistry as it is about arousal.

And with all that said and done, what do those of us in the BDSM community want? Ultimately, we want the same thing that vanilla people want: to live, work and love as we choose, to be a part of a community and a family. We want to be understood and respected, or at least left alone. We want to be known for who we are really – *all* of who we really are – as opposed to the myths and stereotypes of what we do. We want it to be known that we are as spiritual as everyone else, and as concerned with ethics as everyone else. And we want to be able to join others in expressing our spiritual and ethical concerns without shame or fear.

Most vanilla people are not necessarily interested in *what* we do, as it can make them feel uncomfortable at some level. This we understand, as not all of us kinksters are completely comfortable with things that other kinksters may do. We even have a term for such a feeling – *squick*, as in: “What those two were talking about really squicked me.”

So, I will not go into detail about various BDSM practices. By the same token, if you hear about one or another form of erotic expression, don't assume that any kinksters you know will be into it, much less experts.

It's also more important to answer three other questions: *Who* does BDSM? *Why* do we do it? *How* do we meet, agree to and engage in it safely?

Who Are We?

The Scene is filled with all types of people – male, female, transgender and intersex; hetero, gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning; single, married, divorced, widowed, partnered; young, old and in between; rich, poor and average income; and from a variety of occupations and backgrounds. While our community includes people across the educational spectrum, we've noticed that we lean heavily towards the more educated end, with many kinksters having advanced degrees.

There are, of course, a number of myths and misconceptions about who we are. Some will sound familiar to members of the GLBT community: that we are all emotionally disturbed, victims of child sexual abuse, unable to form lasting relationships, or just plain amoral. Aside from a growing body of objective research which contradicts these generalizations, there is also the experience of kinksters everywhere. The vast majority of us are stable and productive members of society, often happily married or partnered, and have a high sense of ethical values.

Another fallacy is that kinky people are incapable of having regular “vanilla” sex or relationships, that we are in a sense “addicted” to our kinks and fetishes. That assumes, however, that kinksters are all the same, and that regular sex and kink are mutually exclusive. Remember that BDSM is a spectrum, and not everyone falls on the same place on that spectrum. Most people enjoy and try a few kinky things, while others are more adventurous; some do kink once in a while, others more frequently; only a handful attempt to live in dominant/submissive roles as a lifestyle (or “24/7”).

Why?

The reasons why people explore BDSM are as diverse as the people you will find in the Scene, and the types of erotic play in which they engage. Some enjoy exploring different fantasies, emotions and personae in erotic role-play; others are drawn to more sensual and physical elements, both sublime and intense. Some are aroused by aggression, fear, or embarrassment. Some enjoy the ritual and structure of much BDSM play, or share a deep trust and intimacy with their dominant or submissive partner.

There are some biological components behind the attraction to BDSM play. First, the same center of the brain responsible for sexual arousal - the limbic system - is also the seat for aggression and fear. All three states can produce similar physiological effects: increased heart rate, flushing, changes in sensory perception, etc. Another element involves sensations of pain and pleasure, which follow intertwined neural pathways. Lastly, many propose that, just as people have different tastes in food - some preferring spicy and others mild, for example - so people have different erotic tastes.

Many kinksters will point to the fact that pleasure and pain, arousal and aversion, are often dependent upon context. A long-distance runner may continue running even when her muscles are aching, all to attain the goal of finishing a race; yet that same person would stop and quit if her muscles ached because she was engaged in some unpleasant task. Similarly a submissive male would not tolerate being slapped in the face by a total stranger, but may deeply desire having his dominant partner do so under right conditions and context.

BDSM Groups and Community

One of the major reasons that BDSM groups exist is for more experienced members to educate others in our community, especially newcomers (or “newbies”) to the Scene. With all that it entails, and the high requirement for safety and consent, BDSM erotic encounters are anything but “casual.”

Many BDSM groups have some form of *protocol* – rules of conduct, ritual and etiquette centered around respect for others, their property and space. This is particularly true of the “Old Guard” movement of gay male leather clubs, where the concept of protocol originated, and their “New Guard” and “Emerging Guard” offshoots; other sources come from BDSM erotic literature. One common protocol on the Internet is the use of all lower-case for submissives and capitals for dominants (“my name is severin, i am the collared sub of Mistress Wanda, and i have been with Her for four years.”). Another is to not engage in conversation with a submissive without the permission of their dominant partner.

A major concern is how people meet prospective partners, specifically being safe about it. People are encouraged to arrange *safe-calls* as a form of protection. The person tells a “safe-call buddy” where and with whom they will be, and arranges a time when she or he will call back; if the buddy does not receive the call at the appointed time, then he or she contacts the police or makes other arrangements. Some local and regional groups even have safe-call networks, so that people can find safe-call buddies. Other measures, such as obtaining references from prospective partners, are also encouraged.

Along with teaching new members about protocols and personal safety measures, BDSM groups often have workshops on meeting prospective partners and *negotiating* possible scenes. Negotiation of scenes is common practice to assure both full consent and mutual compatibility, by discussing what each person expects and desires, and establishing limits as to what kind of play they will engage in later on. Other workshops can explore a variety of topics ranging from physical techniques to psychological and spiritual insights. There is also a strong tradition of mentoring within the Scene, not to mention a wide variety of print and web resources. The goal is to give people the opportunity to expand their knowledge, to understand other perspectives in the kink community, and most importantly to emphasize the ethical ideal of safe, sane and consensual play.

BDSM groups also hold other events where people can get together in either formal or structured ways. Some have support or discussion groups for specific interests. *Munches* are informal social gatherings at restaurants or food courts where kinksters can meet in a relaxed setting. *Play parties*, where people can meet and engage in BDSM play in a safe setting, are another common event. BDSM groups also have events to raise

funds for charities such as civil liberties organizations, domestic violence projects, and disaster relief.

Understanding Dominance & Submission (D/s)

One of the major components of BDSM relationships is that of consensual dominance and submission (D/s), also sometimes called “erotic power exchange.” For religious liberals and other progressives, the idea of someone submitting to their partner – even calling their partner “Master” or “Mistress” and referring to themselves as that person’s “slave” – seems fundamentally wrong. Why would anyone demean and degrade themselves by giving up their personal power to another?

First, D/s relationships are *consensual and negotiated*. The partners come together as equals, and the “power exchange” that occurs is both *voluntary* and *conditional*. Many in the Scene actually speak of the “gift of submission,” and frequently debate the full meaning and implication of that phrase (including the question of whether there is a corresponding “gift of dominance”). Speaking for myself as a dominant, I view the power exchange of a D/s relationship as a trust; one person bestows power on another on condition that such power will be used to beneficial ends, and not abused in any way. If the dominant does abuse her or his power in any way, or otherwise cannot uphold their end, the submissive retains the right to walk away from the relationship. When a submissive entrusts me with power, that is her gift to me; what I do with that power is my gift to her.

Second, not all D/s relationships are the same. Some are restricted to sexual activities, some are nonsexual and service oriented, others go further, and only a handful aspire to the “ideal” of lifestyle or 24/7 role-play (as sometimes called “total power exchange” or TPE). Even lifestyle D/s partners do not always live out their fantasy roles “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week,” but engage in a fluid shifting of vanilla and BDSM personae and behaviors.

Nor are all D/s relationships “Master/Mistress” and “slave,” either in intensity of commitment or preferred mode of role-play. Some engage in *animal play*, where the submissive assumes an animal persona, and the dominant is their “trainer” or owner; others prefer *age play* where the submissive assumes a child persona, and the dominant one of a parent, teacher, governess, etc.

Third, D/s relationships have their own complexity and mutuality. Beneath the archetypal fantasy roles, they are rooted in the very real emotional needs and desires of the individuals involved. Submissives take great pride in how they “serve” their dominants, who in turn are proud to see their submissive partners demonstrate their growth and strength. And if it is laudable for a person to give themselves over to a cause or vocation, then why not to an intimate relationship?

Discrimination, Prejudice and Politics

There is a reason why BDSM groups and individuals often seem invisible. The myths, misconceptions and distortions about us remain a powerful force for political, legal and social discrimination. People have lost their jobs and experienced harassment – even violence – when they come out as kinky, or are forced out by others. Many in the Scene have difficulty finding doctors or counselors who are open to their sexuality, even fearing that a doctor will misread the marks they receive from consensual play as signs of domestic violence. Private parties in people’s homes, or in legally rented spaces, are often raided and participants arrested on trumped up charges. In some states, some of the consensual activities which we do are often regarded as criminal assault and battery, even though there is no “victim” and the activities are no more harmful or dangerous than many sports.

BDSM also faces the dilemma of being attacked from the Right *and* the Left. Radical Right groups denounce BDSM as “perversion” and “obscenity” while radical feminists see BDSM as inherently violent and misogynist (despite the fact that many women are openly and proudly involved in BDSM).

Many local, regional and national BDSM groups are part of the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF), an alliance of groups dedicated to protecting the rights of consenting adults to freedom of sexual expression. NCSF and its members provide educational and support resources for the BDSM, polyamory and swing communities, including outreach to law enforcement and medical professionals. Recently they have taken on maintenance of a listing of “kink-aware professionals” (doctors, lawyers, therapists, etc.) on their website.

National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF)
822 Guilford Avenue, Box 127
Baltimore MD 21202-3707
Phone 410-539-4824
<http://www.NCSFreedom.org>

BDSM versus Abuse

One of the greatest misconceptions about BDSM is that it cannot be distinguished from abuse or domestic violence. In fact, there is a clear distinction between BDSM and physical/emotional/sexual abuse:

<u>BDSM</u>	<u>Abuse</u>
Always consensual	Never consensual
Negotiated beforehand	Inflicted without warning
Desired by the recipient	Always unwanted
Planned to assure well-being	Unplanned with no regard for well-being
Done according to established rules	Has no rules
Dom/top retains emotional control	Abuser out of control
Never done while under the influence of alcohol or drugs	Often done while abuser is under the influence of alcohol or drugs
Never done in the presence of children or nonconsenting adults	Often done in the presence of children, family or friends without consent
Can be stopped with a safeword	Cannot be stopped by the victim
Followed by supportive aftercare	No aftercare of victim by abuser
Done in the context of emotional intimacy and mutual pleasure between equals	Done by the abuser to release rage and exercise power and control over the victim

Groups like the National Leather Association-International and the Leather Leadership Conference have taken steps to educate our community about domestic violence and abuse, and local groups have even raised funds and done other work in support of domestic violence programs in their respective communities.

BDSM and UU Principles

Do the principles and practices of BDSM fit in with those of Unitarian Universalism?
Yes!

** The inherent worth and dignity of every person*

We believe that each person should be treated with respect, regardless of their gender, sexual/affectional orientation, ethnicity, political views, relationship status or preferred means of sexual or erotic expression.

** Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations*

We believe strongly in consent, fair treatment, and personal freedom, whether in sexual/relational matters or any other human endeavor.

** Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth*

BDSM is not just about finding new ways to express our sexuality. There is often a spiritual component where participants explore one another's emotions, desires and limitations.

** A free and responsible search for meaning and truth*

The freedom to engage in consensual BDSM – or any form of sexual or erotic expression – is balanced by the responsibility for the safety and well-being of all involved.

** The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and society at large*

As a misunderstood and often persecuted group, we are fully aware of the need for personal freedom, due process, civil discourse and social tolerance.

** The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*

The BDSM community is a diverse worldwide community, where people of all backgrounds can share ideas with other kinksters and find or build safe spaces to express their desires and share erotic pleasure. We also build bridges with other communities, both out of common cause and to build common understanding.

** Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*

Our respect for one another is part of the respect we hold for all life.

What Can UUs Do?

While some in the BDSM community have found a spiritual home in the Unitarian Universalist faith, more often than not it is a home where both explicit and implicit messages tell us to keep silent about our sexuality. Others would like to join, but wonder if they would be fully welcome. And all of us welcome greater awareness and support from both individual UUs and UU organizations.

We understand that it will take time before UUs and UU congregations can be as open and welcoming to kinky people as to other communities. But it cannot happen unless individuals begin and continue the process of education and bridge-building.

Here are some things that you and other UU leaders, both ordained and laity, can do to help in that process:

- 1) Read more about BDSM and other sexual minorities, and be willing to pass on this information to others. Two highly recommended books are *When Someone You Love is Kinky* by Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt, and *Bound to be Free* by Charles Moser and JJ Madeson (see the list of suggested books on the last page).
- 2) Find local BDSM organizations in or near your community, and contact their leaders; keep their resources on hand, and maintain communication with them. You can also join an online discussion group of UUs with BDSM interests at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OUUCH>.
- 3) When you hear misconceptions and distortions about BDSM and the BDSM community being repeated in your UU congregation, gently correct them; emphasize how those involved with BDSM engage in *safe, sane and consensual* practices.
- 4) Be supportive of those in your congregation whom you know to engage in BDSM, especially if they decide to come out to one degree or another.
- 5) Speak out against antiquated sex laws which criminalize any form of consensual sexual or erotic expression, or other forms of discrimination against BDSM people or other sexual minorities.
- 6) If you hold a GLBT Pride event, consider inviting members of your local BDSM community to attend.
- 7) If the Adult OWL module is presented as part of your Religious Education program, consider inviting a spokesperson for the BDSM community to the guest panel on Sexual Diversity.

Glossary of Terms

This is a partial listing of terms used by members of the BDSM community. Some terms use words considered offensive in mainstream (or “vanilla”) society, but in different ways. An attempt to include synonyms for many terms is also made here. Words in italics are terms which can be cross-referenced here.

AFTERCARE - Period of rest and discussion after a session or scene of play.

AGE PLAY - *Role-play* where the *dominant* assumes an adult role (“Daddy”, “Mommy”, schoolteacher, etc.), and the *submissive* a childlike role (“boy”, “girl”, student, etc.).

ALT-SEX - Abbreviation for alternative sexuality, encompassing BDSM, *polyamory*, swing, and other “non-mainstream” forms of erotic interest and expression.

ANIMAL PLAY - *Role-play* where one or more partners assume the identity of an animal. Aficionados of animal play are often called *furries*. Animal play should not in any way be confused with bestiality or zoophilia.

ARCHETYPE - Jungian term for symbolic role which represents an aspect of the human psyche. BDSM *role-play* often draws on archetypes in creating role personae.

BDSM - Acronym combining B&D (*bondage & discipline*), D/s (*dominance & submission*) and S/M (*sadomasochism*). A continuum of erotic practice and expression involving the consensual use of restraint, intense sensory stimulation, and fantasy *role-play*.

BONDAGE - Practice of using physical restraint and/or confinement to produce or enhance erotic arousal.

BONDAGE & DISCIPLINE (B&D) - Use of bondage and other practices to produce or enhance erotic arousal; the term was originally used to indicate a “lighter” form of S/M, but the two are now considered part of the BDSM continuum.

BOTTOM - Person who receives sensation and/or consents to be restrained during play; sometimes used interchangeably with *submissive*.

BOTTOMING FROM THE TOP - Practice of assuming a *top* or *dominant* role, but at the direction of the *bottom* or *submissive*. See *dominant masochist, service top, submissive sadist, uppity bottom*.

BOTTOM-SPACE - Alternate term for *sub-space*.

CANE - A slender rod used for impact play; traditionally made of rattan, but there are now canes made of various materials.

COLLARING CEREMONY - Ritual whereby a *dominant* and a *submissive* commit to a deeper relationship, often assuming the roles of *Master/Mistress* and *slave* respectively. Along with the slave receiving a collar as a symbol, the partners may also sign a *contract* spelling out the specific terms of their relationship.

CONTRACT - A document spelling out the terms of a relationship between a *dominant* and a *submissive*, especially if they commit to deeper level of relationship (see *collaring ceremony, lifestyle, Master/Mistress, slave*).

DOMINANCE & SUBMISSION (D&S, D/s) - Consensual empowerment of one person by another to enhance or produce erotic arousal. Sometimes referred to as "erotic power exchange."

DOMINANT - A person entrusted with power by a *submissive*. Also called: (a) "dom"; (b) "maledom" and "femdom" to distinguish gender; (c) "domme" or "dominatrix" by some female dominants.

DOMINANT MASOCHIST - A *bottom* who enjoys directing a *top* to deliver erotic pain or other intense sensation. See also *submissive sadist, topping from the bottom, uppity bottom*.

DUNGEON - A room arranged for BDSM play, often with special equipment or furniture, and thematic decoration.

ENDORPHIN HIGH - Alternate name for *sub-space* or *bottom-space*, especially when induced by intense stimulation; endorphins are created by the central nervous system in response to such stimuli, especially pain.

EROTIC PAIN - Sensation which may be painful, but is enjoyable in an erotic context.

EROTIC POWER EXCHANGE (EPE) - Alternate term for *Dominance & submission* (see above).

FETISH - Eroticization of an object, body part, style of clothing, etc.; examples of fetishes can be for feet, underwear, latex, leather, and so forth. "Fetish wear" refers to clothing or fashion indicative of the *kink* or broader *alt-sex* community; it can be specific articles of clothing (corsets, stiletto heeled boots or shoes) or styles suited to eroticized roles (biker, schoolgirl, vampire) or clothes made of specific materials (latex, leather, PVC, rubber).

FLAGGING - Wearing a colored or patterned hanky to signify one's erotic preferences. See *hanky code*.

FLOGGER - A multi-tailed whip used for erotic impact play; floggers are made of various materials, and are often referred by the types of sensations they produce: "light" versus "heavy", "stingy" and/or "thuddy", and so forth.

FURRIES - Subculture of people interested in *animal play*.

GENDERFUCK - Practice of transposing different elements of gender for erotic, political and/or cultural reasons.

HANKY CODE - System of colored and patterned hankies worn on the back pocket to signify one's particular interest, including whether one identifies as a *top* (left pocket) or *bottom* (right pocket). Derived from the gay leather subculture.

IMPACT PLAY - BDSM play involving impact on a *bottom* or *submissive* with any of various implements including floggers, canes, straps, paddles, bare hand or gloved hand.

KINK - Erotic practice or interest which is outside of the mainstream. While the spectrum of BDSM encompasses many kinks, there is no consensus on whether they include all kinks.

KINK-AWARE or KINK-FRIENDLY - Specifically refers to a *vanilla* person who is informed about and accepting of BDSM and consensual kink.

KINKSTER - A person who is into *kink*, especially one who is openly involved in the kink community at some level.

LEATHER - Specific group within the BDSM and *fetish* community revolving around leather garb generally, especially biker leather, and more precisely the *Old Guard* and its offshoots.

LIFESTYLE - (a) Generally, can refer to someone with a serious interest in BDSM; this can be confusing, as members of the swing community also frequently refer to themselves as "the lifestyle." (b) Specifically, the practice of living in *D/s roles* as a lifestyle, thus also referred to as *24/7* or *total power exchange (TPE)*.

LIMITS - Set of limitations which a *bottom* or *submissive* sets during *negotiation*. "Hard limits" are those which should never be crossed, but over a time a *top* or *dominant* may "push limits" to expand the couple's erotic repertoire within a safe, consensual and nurturing context.

MARKS - Temporary or permanent markings on the skin of a *bottom* or *submissive* as a result of consensual play; temporary marks can include, bruises, abrasions and cuts; permanent marks can include scarification, tattoos and other body art or body modification.

- MASTER/MISTRESS - Both a role and a title frequently assumed by *dominants*. A *submissive* may refer to her/his *dominant* as “my Mistress” or “my Master,” especially when they have entered a deeper committed relationship. The titles are also frequently assumed by dominants who have acquired a certain level of expertise and respect within the BDSM community.
- MINDFUCK - The practice of making a play partner believe that the course of play is more risky or dangerous than it actually is, as a way of building tension, anticipation and arousal. Mindfucking requires both great skill on the part of the *top* or *dominant*, and considerable trust between the partners involved.
- MUNCH - Social gathering of *kinksters* at a restaurant or food court to meet one another, exchange information, etc.; an excellent opportunity for *newbies* to learn more about their local BDSM community.
- NEGOTIATION - The discussion between prospective play partners as to what forms of play are desired and/or acceptable, so as to assure that the play in question is mutually consensual and enjoyable.
- NEWBIE - Novice in the BDSM community, especially someone not very experienced in *kink*.
- OLD GUARD - A specific group within the BDSM community, originating from the gay male *leather S/M* clubs formed in the 1950's. The Old Guard clubs developed strict *protocols* based on military discipline (many members were veterans of World War II) and insisted that members start as *bottoms* and work their way into being *tops*. A few Old Guard “families” or “tribes” still exist, and there are also offshoots called “New Guard” and “Emerging Guard” which preserve many of the traditions and practices, but within a more flexible and inclusive framework.
- PANSEXUAL - Encompassing all gender identities and sexual/affectional orientations.
- PERVERT, PERV, PERVIE - Some *kinksters* deliberately call themselves and their friends “perverts” or “pervs” to reclaim the term, much as gay and lesbian people reclaim words like “faggot” or “dyke”; not every *kinkster* does this, however.
- PLAY - BDSM or kink activity. Also used to refer to specific interests (age play, animal play, impact play, etc.).
- PLAY PARTY - A social gathering where people may engage in BDSM play.

POLYAMORY - Consensual and responsible non-monogamy. Polyamory is regarded as distinct from swinging, in that the latter focuses mainly on casual sexual activity, while polyamory considers emotional as well as physical intimacy. Some BDSM people are also polyamorous, and often *kinksters* will engage in nonsexual play with people other than their primary partners.

PRODOMME - Shorthand term for a professional dominatrix, a woman who provides BDSM sessions for paid clientele. Prodommes do not provide sex or sexual services for money, and therefore are not technically engaging in prostitution, yet they may still face various legal issues due to the nature of their work. Many prodommes are also respected educators and activists within the BDSM community. There are even a handful of male professional dominants.

PROTOCOL - The rules of conduct, ritual and etiquette within (a) a specific D/s relationship, (b) a BDSM play party or club, or (c) the larger BDSM community. Protocols originally developed from the *Old Guard* clubs of the 1950's and 1960's, which in turn reflect a military style discipline and code of conduct. Other groups draw upon BDSM erotic fiction. While there are both regional and subcultural variations, protocol is generally based upon ideas of respect for one another, for people's property and partners, and for play space.

ROLE-PLAY - Adopting roles (characters, personae, different gender identities, *dominant* or *submissive* stances) within an erotic context, to enhance arousal, give context to specific forms of play (i.e., caning and other punishment within a "teacher/student" role-play) and/or added fun.

SADOMASOCHISM (S&M, S/M, SM) - The practice of deriving sexual pleasure from inflicting and/or receiving pain or other intense stimuli.

SAFE-CALL - Arrangement for assuring a person's safety when meeting some-one for BDSM play; the person arranges to call a "safe-call buddy" at a prearranged time, and if the buddy does not receive the call, she or he then contacts the police or makes other arrangements to protect the person.

SAFE, SANE AND CONSENSUAL (SSC) - Maxim within the BDSM community, delineating acceptable forms of play. While the expanded meaning of these terms is still discussed and disputed within the Scene, the general consensus is: (a) "Safe" means not causing injury which would require professional intervention to heal; (b) "Sane" means being able to distinguish fantasy from reality; (c) "Consensual" means that all that is being done is understood and agreed to by all who are involved.

SAFECWORDS - Code words or signals by which a partner may call for a scene to end, or otherwise communicate distress. This allows for *bottoms* and *submissives* to feign

resistance in a scene, or to signal the *top* or *dominant* when gagged or other-wise unable to speak.

SCENE - A session of BDSM or kinky erotic play. "The Scene" is also used to refer to the BDSM community, or a specific subgroup within it (i.e., "the *Gorean Scene*").

SENSATION PLAY - Erotic play involving the use of various techniques of sensory stimulation and/or deprivation.

SEX RADICAL - Term for politically active members of the *alt-sex* community, especially those who seek to challenge laws and cultural norms which discriminate against sexual minorities

SEXUAL MINORITY - Used variously to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, polyamorous and/or BDSM people, among others.

SERVICE TOP - A top who engages in play at the direction of the *bottom*. See also *submissive sadist*.

SINGLE-TAIL - The classic snakelike whip, shorter ones being called signal whips and longer ones bullwhips. Within BDSM, they are used more as symbols and noise-makers; using them on *bottoms* or *submissives* requires considerable skill and practice.

SLUT and WHORE - Terms reclaimed within the BDSM, *polyamory* and broader *alt-sex* communities to mean: (a) anyone, especially a woman, who openly enjoys sex; (b) a polyamorous individual; (c) a person who openly enjoys a certain erotic practice and/or sensation (i.e., "pain slut" or "bondage whore"). Whore is also reclaimed by some activists within the sex workers' rights movement.

SQUICK - To make one feel uncomfortable at some level, as in: "That scene really squicked me."

SUBMISSIVE - A person who entrusts power to a *dominant*. Also called: (a) "sub"; (b) "malesub" and "femsub" to distinguish gender.

SUBMISSIVE SADIST - A *top* who enjoys delivering erotic pain or other intense sensation at the direction of the *bottom*. See also *bottoming from the top*, *dominant masochist*, *service top*.

SUB-SPACE - A euphoric state experienced by some *submissives* and *bottoms* during play scenes, caused either by (a) physiological response to intense stimulation, or (b) deeply identifying with their submissive role. Also referred to as *bottom-space* or *endorphin high*.

SUSPENSION - Form of bondage where the *bottom* or *submissive* is literally suspended off the floor. Suspension is an advanced practice requiring specialized equipment and knowledgeable attention by the *top* or *dominant*.

SWITCH - A person who can alternate between *top* and *bottom*, and/or *dominant* and *submissive*, depending upon various contexts (play partners, types of play, etc.).

TOP - Person who delivers sensation and/or restrains a consenting *bottom* during play; sometimes used interchangeably with *dominant*.

TOPPING FROM THE BOTTOM - Practice of assuming a *bottom* or *submissive* role, but directing the *top* or *dominant*. Once seen negatively, but now recognized as a legitimate form of play in some circumstances, such as when a seasoned bottom guides a novice top. See also *dominant masochist*, *service top*, *submissive sadist*, *uppity bottom*.

TOTAL POWER EXCHANGE (TPE) - Alternate term for *lifestyle D/s*; also sometimes referred to as 24/7.

TOY - Any piece of equipment used during BDSM play: floggers, bondage equipment, vibrators, etc.

24/7 - Common term for *lifestyle D/s* or *total power exchange (TPE)*; describes the ideal of living in dominant and submissive *roles* “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week”; in reality, such relationships show a more fluid shifting of roles.

UPPITY BOTTOM - A *bottom* who tends to take charge in BDSM play. See also *dominant masochist*.

VANILLA - Refers specifically to sex without BDSM elements; more generally can refer to non-BDSM people, places and things. This should not be misinterpreted as derogatory.

WHORE - See above SLUT and WHORE

WIITWD - Acronym for “What It Is That We Do”; an alternative term for BDSM, most often used online.

Suggested Books

Brame, Gloria G. *Come Hither: The Commonsense Guide to Kinky Sex*. Fireside Books, New York NY, 2000.

Califia, Patrick. *Sensuous Magic: A Guide to S/M for Adventurous Couples*. Cleis Press, San Francisco CA, 2001.

Easton, Dossie and Catherine A. Liszt. *When Someone You Love is Kinky*. Greenery Press, Emeryville CA, 2000.

Henkin, William A. and Sybil Holiday. *Consensual Sadomasochism: How to Talk About It and How To Do It Safely*. Daedalus Publishing Company, San Francisco CA, 1996.

Miller, Philip and Molly Devon. *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns: The Romance and Sexual Sorcery of Sadomasochism*. Mystic Rose Books, Fairfield CT, 1995.

Moser, Charles. *Health Care Without Shame: A Handbook for the Sexually Diverse and Their Caregivers*. Greenery Press, Emeryville CA, 1999.

Moser, Charles and JJ Madeson. *Bound to be Free: The SM Experience*. The Continuum Publishing Company, New York NY 2002.

Ravenstone, Desmond. *The Principled Libertine: The Ethical Case for Sexual & Erotic Freedom*. Lulu Press, Morrisville NC, 2006.

Wiseman, Jay. *SM101: A Realistic Introduction*. Greenery Press, Emeryville CA, 1996.