[Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect" \o "Template:Redirect) [Template:Merge from](/wiki/Template:Merge_from) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Infobox](/wiki/Template:Infobox) **BDSM** is a variety of [erotic](/wiki/Eroticism) practices or [roleplaying](/wiki/Sexual_roleplay) involving [bondage](/wiki/Bondage_(BDSM)), [dominance and submission](/wiki/Dominance_and_submission), [sadomasochism](/wiki/Sadomasochism), and other interpersonal dynamics. Given the wide range of practices, some of which may be engaged in by people who do not consider themselves as practicing BDSM, inclusion in the BDSM community or subculture is usually dependent on [self-identification](/wiki/Self-identification) and shared experience.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

[thumb|The BDSM initialism.](/wiki/File:BDSM_acronym.svg) The term *BDSM* is first recorded in a [Usenet](/wiki/Usenet) posting from 1991,[[1]](#cite_note-1) and is interpreted as a combination of the abbreviations B/D (Bondage and Discipline), D/s (Dominance and submission), and S/M (Sadism and Masochism). *BDSM* is now used as a catch-all phrase covering a wide range of activities, forms of [interpersonal relationships](/wiki/Interpersonal_relationship), and distinct subcultures. BDSM communities generally welcome anyone with a non-normative streak who identifies with the community; this may include [cross-dressers](/wiki/Cross-dresser), [body modification](/wiki/Body_modification) enthusiasts, [animal roleplayers](/wiki/Animal_roleplay), [rubber fetishists](/wiki/Rubber_fetishism), and others.

Unlike the usual "power neutral" relationships and play styles commonly followed by couples, activities and relationships within a BDSM context are often characterized by the participants' taking on complementary, but unequal roles; thus, the idea of [informed consent](/wiki/Informed_consent) of both the partners becomes essential. The participant who exerts sexual dominance over their partner is known as the **dominant** or **top**, while the participant who take the passive, receiving, or obedient role is known as the **submissive** or **bottom**.

Individuals are also sometimes abbreviated when referred to in writing, so a dominant person may be referred to as a "dom" for a man or a woman. Sometimes a woman may choose to use the female specific term "Domme". Both terms are pronounced the same when spoken. Individuals who can change between top/dominant and bottom/submissive roles—whether from relationship to relationship or within a given relationship—are known as *switches*. The precise definition of roles and self-identification is a common subject of debate within the community.[[2]](#cite_note-2)

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## Fundamentals[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[thumb|A woman is chained to the wall in bondage.](/wiki/File:Mairne_in_the_Basement_Bondage.jpg) [thumb|A man handcuffed to a bed and blindfolded.](/wiki/File:Man_Cuffed_to_Bedrail.jpg)

*BDSM* is an umbrella term for certain kinds of erotic behavior between consenting adults. There are distinct [subcultures](/wiki/Subculture) under this umbrella term. Terminology for roles varies widely among the subcultures. [*Top*](/wiki/Top_(BDSM)) and [*dominant*](/wiki/Top_(BDSM)) are widely used for those partner(s) in the relationship or activity who are, respectively, the physically active or controlling participants. [*Bottom*](/wiki/Bottom_(BDSM)) and [*submissive*](/wiki/Bottom_(BDSM)) are widely used for those partner(s) in the relationship or activity who are, respectively, the physically receptive or controlled participants. The interaction between tops and bottoms—where physical or mental control of the bottom is surrendered to the top—is sometimes known as "power exchange", whether in the context of an encounter or a relationship.[[3]](#cite_note-3) BDSM actions can often take place during a specific period of time agreed to by both parties, referred to as "play", a "scene", or a "session". Participants usually derive pleasure from this, even though many of the practices—such as inflicting pain or [humiliation](/wiki/Humiliation) or being restrained—would be unpleasant under other circumstances. Explicit [sexual activity](/wiki/Human_sexual_activity), such as [sexual penetration](/wiki/Sexual_penetration), may occur within a session, but is not essential.[[4]](#cite_note-4) Such explicit sexual interaction is, for legal reasons, seen only rarely in public play spaces, and it is sometimes specifically banned by the rules of a party or playspace. Whether it is a public "playspace"—ranging from a party at an established community dungeon to a hosted play "zone" at a nightclub or social event—the parameters of allowance can vary. Some have a policy of panties/nipple tape for women (underwear for men) and some allow full nudity with explicit sexual interaction allowed.[[3]](#cite_note-3) The fundamental principles for the exercise of BDSM require that it should be performed with the informed consent of all involved parties. Since the 1980s, many practitioners and organizations have adopted the motto (originally from the statement of purpose of GMSMA—a gay SM activist organization) "safe, sane and consensual", commonly abbreviated as "SSC", which means that everything is based on safe activities, that all participants be of sufficiently sound/sane mind to consent, and that all participants do consent.[[5]](#cite_note-5) It is mutual consent that makes a clear legal and ethical distinction between BDSM and such crimes as sexual assault or [domestic violence](/wiki/Domestic_violence).[[6]](#cite_note-6) Some BDSM practitioners prefer a code of behavior that differs from "SSC" and is described as "[risk-aware consensual kink](/wiki/Risk-aware_consensual_kink)" (RACK), indicating a preference for a style in which the *individual* responsibility of the involved parties is emphasized more strongly, with each participant being responsible for his or her own well-being. Advocates of RACK argue that SSC can hamper discussion of risk because no activity is truly "safe", and that discussion of even low-risk possibilities is necessary for truly informed consent. They further argue that setting a discrete line between "safe" and "not-safe" activities ideologically denies consenting adults the right to evaluate risks vs rewards for themselves; that some adults will be drawn to certain activities regardless of the risk; and that BDSM play—particularly higher-risk play or [edgeplay](/wiki/Edgeplay)—should be treated with the same regard as extreme sports, with both respect and the demand that practitioners educate themselves and practice the higher-risk activities to decrease risk. RACK may be seen as focusing primarily upon awareness and informed consent, rather than accepted safe practices.[[7]](#cite_note-7) Consent is the most important criterion here. The consent and compliance for a sadomasochistic situation can be granted only by people who can judge the potential results. For their consent, they must have relevant information (extent to which the scene will go, potential risks, if a safeword will be used, what that is, and so on) at hand and the necessary mental capacity to judge. The resulting consent and understanding is occasionally summarized in a written "[contract](/wiki/Contract_(BDSM))", which is an agreement of what can and cannot take place.[[8]](#cite_note-8) In general, BDSM play is usually structured such that it is possible for the consenting partner to withdraw his or her consent during a scene;[[9]](#cite_note-9) for example, by using a [safeword](/wiki/Safeword) that was agreed on in advance.<ref name=sm101>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>[[10]](#cite_note-10) Use of the agreed safeword (or occasionally a "safe symbol" such as dropping a ball or ringing a bell, especially when speech is restricted) is seen by some as an explicit withdrawal of consent. Failure to honor a safeword is considered serious misconduct and could even change the sexual consent situation into a crime, depending on the relevant law,[[11]](#cite_note-11) since the bottom has explicitly revoked his or her consent to any actions that follow the use of the safeword (see [Legal status](/wiki/BDSM#Legal_status)). For other scenes, particularly in established relationships, a safeword may be agreed to signify a warning ("this is getting too intense") rather than explicit withdrawal of consent; and a few choose not to use a safeword at all. This is sometimes the case for "punishment scenes" between master/slave couples or for some extreme or edgeplay scenes which may include abductions, rape play, or interrogation. This scene dynamic may be referred to as "consensual nonconsent". In some scenes or relationships it may be impossible for consent to be withdrawn in the middle of a scene, or the bottom may have the ability to revoke consent for a relationship as a whole, but not for a particular scene.

### Terminology and subtypes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

The initialism *BDSM* includes psychological and physiological facets:

* Bondage and Discipline (*B&D*)
* Dominant and submissive (*D/s*)
* Sadism and Masochism (or sadomasochism) (*S&M*)
* Female dominance ([Femdom](/wiki/Femdom))

This model for differentiating among these aspects of BDSM is increasingly used in literature today.[[2]](#cite_note-2)[Template:Failed verification](/wiki/Template:Failed_verification) Nevertheless, it is only an attempt at phenomenological differentiation. Individual tastes and preferences in the area of sexuality may overlap among these areas, which are discussed separately here.

[thumb|right|Two women tapegagged and cuffed to iron bars.](/wiki/File:Tapegag_(Bondage)_2_girls_in_rubber-leather.jpg) Bondage and discipline are two aspects of BDSM that do not seem to relate to each other because of the type of activities involved, but they have conceptual similarities, and that is why they appear jointly. Contrary to the other two types, B&D does not define the tops and bottoms itself, and is used to describe the general activities with either partner being the receiver and the giver.[[12]](#cite_note-12) The term *bondage* describes the practice of physical restraint. Bondage is usually, but not always, a sexual practice.[[13]](#cite_note-13) While bondage is a very popular variation within the larger field of BDSM, it is nevertheless sometimes differentiated from the rest of this field.[[14]](#cite_note-14) Studies among BDSM practitioners in the US have shown that about half of all men find the idea of bondage to be erotic; and many women do as well.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Strictly speaking, bondage means binding the partner by tying their appendages together; for example, by the use of handcuffs or ropes, or by lashing their arms to an object. Bondage can also be achieved by spreading the appendages and fastening them with chains or ropes to a [St. Andrew's cross](/wiki/Saint_Andrew's_Cross_(BDSM)) or [spreader bars](/wiki/Spreader_bar).[[15]](#cite_note-15) The term *discipline* describes psychological restraining, with the use of rules and punishment to control overt behavior.[[12]](#cite_note-12) Punishment can be pain caused physically (such as caning), humiliation caused psychologically (such as a public flagellation) or loss of freedom caused physically (for example, chaining the submissive partner to the foot of a bed). Another aspect is the structured training of the bottom.[[16]](#cite_note-16) "[Dominance and submission](/wiki/Dominance_and_submission_(BDSM))" (also known as **D&s**, **Ds** or **D/s**) is a set of behaviors, customs and rituals relating to the giving and accepting of control of one individual over another in an erotic or lifestyle context. It explores the more mental aspect of BDSM. This is also the case in many relationships not considering themselves as sadomasochistic; it is considered to be a part of BDSM if it is practiced purposefully. The range of its individual characteristics is thereby wide.[[17]](#cite_note-17)[thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Bent_forward_strappado.jpg)[Strappado](/wiki/Strappado_bondage) with rope and a spreader bar. This practice has a distinct effect of immobilization and pain.

Often, "[contracts](/wiki/Contract_(BDSM))" are set out in writing to record the formal consent of the parties to the power exchange, stating their common vision of the relationship dynamic.[[3]](#cite_note-3) The purpose of this kind of agreement is primarily to encourage discussion and negotiation in advance, and then to document that understanding for the benefit of all parties. Such documents have not been recognized as being legally binding, nor are they intended to be. These agreements are binding in the sense that the parties have the expectation that the negotiated rules will be followed. Often other friends and community members may witness the signing of such a document in a ceremony, and so parties violating their agreement can result in loss of face, respect or status with their friends in the community.

In general, as compared to conventional relationships, BDSM participants go to great lengths to negotiate the important aspects of their relationships in advance, and to take great care in learning about and following safe practices.[[18]](#cite_note-18) In D/S, the dominant is the top and the submissive is the bottom. In S/M, the sadist is usually the top and the masochist the bottom, but these roles are frequently more complicated or jumbled (as in the case of being dominant, masochists who may arrange for their submissive to carry out S/M activities on them). As in B/D, the declaration of the top/bottom may be required,[[12]](#cite_note-12) though sadomasochists may also play without any power exchange at all, with both partners equally in control of the play.

### Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|*Portrait of*](/wiki/File:Sade_(van_Loo).png) [*Marquis de Sade*](/wiki/Marquis_de_Sade) by Charles-Amédée-Philippe van Loo (1761).

The term [*sadomasochism*](/wiki/Sadomasochism) is derived from the words *sadism* and *masochism*. These terms differ somewhat from the same terms used in psychology, since those require that the sadism or masochism cause significant distress or involve non-consenting partners.[[19]](#cite_note-19) *Sadomasochism* refers to the aspects of BDSM surrounding the exchange of physical or emotional pain. Sadism describes sexual pleasure derived by inflicting [pain](/wiki/Pain), degradation, humiliation on another person or causing another person to suffer. On the other hand, the masochist enjoys being hurt, humiliated, or suffering within the consensual scenario.[[3]](#cite_note-3) Sadomasochistic scenes sometimes reach a level that appear more extreme or cruel than other forms of BDSM—for example, when a masochist is brought to tears or is severely bruised—and is occasionally unwelcome at BDSM events or parties.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Sadomasochism does not imply enjoyment through causing or receiving pain in other situations (for example, accidental injury, medical procedures).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

The terms *sadism* and *masochism* are derived from the names of the [Marquis de Sade](/wiki/Marquis_de_Sade) and [Leopold von Sacher-Masoch](/wiki/Leopold_von_Sacher-Masoch), based on the content of the authors' works. Although the names of de Sade and Sacher-Masoch are attached to the terms sadism and masochism respectively, the scenes described in de Sade's works do not meet modern BDSM standards of informed consent.[[20]](#cite_note-20) BDSM is solely based on consensual activities, and based on its system and laws, the concepts presented by de Sade are not agreed upon the BDSM culture, even though they are sadistic in nature.[[12]](#cite_note-12) In 1843 the Ruthenian physician Heinrich Kaan published *Psychopathia sexualis* ("Psychopathy of Sex"), a writing in which he converts the sin conceptions of Christianity into medical diagnoses. With his work the originally theological terms "perversion", "aberration" and "deviation" became part of the scientific terminology for the first time.[Template:Dubious](/wiki/Template:Dubious) The German psychiatrist [Richard von Krafft Ebing](/wiki/Richard_Freiherr_von_Krafft-Ebing) introduced the terms "sadism" and "masochism" to the medical community in his work *Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der Psychopathia sexualis* ("New research in the area of Psychopathy of Sex") in 1890.[[21]](#cite_note-21) In 1905, [Sigmund Freud](/wiki/Sigmund_Freud) described "sadism" and "masochism" in his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* ("Three papers on Sexual theory") as diseases developing from an incorrect development of the child psyche and laid the groundwork for the scientific perspective on the subject in the following decades. This led to the first time use of the compound term *sado-masochism* (German *sado-masochismus*) by the Viennese psychoanalytic [Isidor Isaak Sadger](/wiki/Isidor_Isaak_Sadger) in their work, *Über den sado-masochistischen Komplex* ("Regarding the sadomasochistic complex") in 1913.[[22]](#cite_note-22) In the later 20th century, BDSM activists have protested against these conceptual models. Not only were these models were derived from the philosophies of two singular historical figures. Both Freud and Krafft-Ebing were psychiatrists. Their observations on sadism and masochism were dependent on psychiatric patients, and their models were built on the assumption of [psychopathology](/wiki/Psychopathology).[[23]](#cite_note-23) BDSM activists[Template:Who](/wiki/Template:Who) argue that it is illogical to attribute human behavioural phenomena as complex as sadism and masochism to the 'inventions' of two historic individuals. Advocates of BDSM[Template:Who](/wiki/Template:Who) have sought to distinguish themselves from widely held notions of antiquated psychiatric theory by the adoption of the initialized term, "BDSM" as a distinction from the now common usage of those psychological terms, abbreviated as "S&M".[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

## Behavioral aspects[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[thumb|A woman's back covered with different colored waxes.](/wiki/File:Wax_play_on_back.jpg) [thumb|Use of hand and thumbcuffs on the feet with a](/wiki/File:Cuffed_ankles_and_toes.JPG) [Wartenberg wheel](/wiki/Wartenberg_wheel).

On a physical level, BDSM is commonly misconceived to be "all about pain".[[24]](#cite_note-24) Most often, though, BDSM practitioners are primarily concerned with power, humiliation, and pleasure.[[24]](#cite_note-24) Of the three categories of BDSM, only sadomasochism specifically requires pain, but this is typically a means to an end, as a vehicle for feelings of humiliation, dominance, etc. The aspects of D/S and B/D may not include physical suffering at all, but include the sensations inherited by different emotions of the mind.[[24]](#cite_note-24) Dominance & submission of power is an entirely different experience, and is not always psychologically associated with physical pain. Many BDSM activities might not involve any kind of pain or humiliation, but just the exchange of Powers (Power Exchange).[[12]](#cite_note-12)[[24]](#cite_note-24) During the activities, the practitioners may feel [endorphins](/wiki/Endorphin) comparable to the so-called "runner's high" or to the afterglow of [orgasm](/wiki/Orgasm).[[25]](#cite_note-25) The corresponding [trance](/wiki/Trance)-like mental state is also known as "[subspace](/wiki/Subspace_(BDSM))" for the submissive, or "[topspace](/wiki/Topspace)" for the dominant. Some use the term "body stress" to describe this physiological sensation.[[26]](#cite_note-26) This experience of [algolagnia](/wiki/Algolagnia) is important, but is not the only motivation for many BDSM practitioners. The philosopher [Edmund Burke](/wiki/Edmund_Burke) defines this sensation of pleasure derived from pain by the word *sublime*.[[27]](#cite_note-27) There is a wide array of BDSM practitioners who take part in sessions for which they do not receive any personal gratification. They enter such situations solely with the intention to allow their partners to fulfill their own needs or [fetishes](/wiki/Sexual_fetishism). Professional doms and dommes do this in exchange of money for the session activities, but non-professionals do it for the sake of their partners.[[12]](#cite_note-12) In some BDSM sessions, the top exposes the bottom to a wide range of sensual impressions, for example: pinching, biting, scratching with fingernails, [Erotic spanking](/wiki/Erotic_spanking) or the use of objects such as [crops](/wiki/Crop_(implement)), [whips](/wiki/Whip), liquid [wax](/wiki/Wax), [ice cubes](/wiki/Ice_cube), [Wartenberg wheels](/wiki/Wartenberg_wheel), [erotic electrostimulation](/wiki/Erotic_electrostimulation) devices.[[28]](#cite_note-28) Fixation by [handcuffs](/wiki/Handcuffs), [ropes](/wiki/Rope) or [chains](/wiki/Chain) may be used as well. The repertoire of possible "toys" is limited only by the imagination of both partners. To some extent, everyday items like [clothes-pins](/wiki/Clothespin), [wooden spoons](/wiki/Wooden_spoon) or [plastic wrap](/wiki/Plastic_wrap) are used as pervertables.[[29]](#cite_note-29) It is commonly considered that a pleasurable BDSM experience during a session is very strongly dependent upon the top's competence and experience and the bottom's physical and mental state at the time of the session. Trust and [sexual arousal](/wiki/Sexual_arousal) help the partners enter a shared mindset.[[30]](#cite_note-30)[[31]](#cite_note-31) Some BDSM practitioners compare related sensations with musical compositions and representation, in which single sensual impressions are the musical notes of the situation. From this point of view, different sensuous impressions are combined to create a total experience leaving a lasting impression.

### Types of play[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

Some types of BDSM play include, but are not limited to: [Template:Div col](/wiki/Template:Div_col)

* [Bondage](/wiki/Bondage_(BDSM))
* [Cock and ball torture (CBT)](/wiki/Cock_and_ball_torture_(sexual_practice))
* [Control](/wiki/Power_and_control_in_abusive_relationships)
* [Erotic electrostimulation](/wiki/Erotic_electrostimulation)
* [Edgeplay](/wiki/Edgeplay)
* [Flogging](/wiki/Flogging)
* [Golden showers (urinating)](/wiki/Urolagnia)
* [Medical play](/wiki/Medical_fetishism)
* [Predicament bondage](/wiki/Predicament_bondage)
* [Sexual roleplay](/wiki/Sexual_roleplay)
* [Spanking](/wiki/Erotic_spanking)
* [Suspension](/wiki/Suspension_bondage)
* [Torture](/wiki/Torture)
* [Tickle torture](/wiki/Tickle_torture)
* [Wax play](/wiki/Wax_play)

[Template:Div col end](/wiki/Template:Div_col_end)

### Safety[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Aside from the general advice related to [safe sex](/wiki/Safe_sex), BDSM sessions often require a wider array of safety precautions than [vanilla sex](/wiki/Vanilla_sex) (sexual behaviour without BDSM elements).[[11]](#cite_note-11) In theory, to ensure consent related to BDSM activity, pre-play [negotiations](/wiki/Negotiation_(BDSM)) are commonplace, especially among partners who do not know each other very well. In practice, pick-up scenes at clubs or parties may sometimes be low in negotiation (much as pick-up sex from singles bars may not involve much negotiation or disclosure). These negotiations concern the interests and fantasies of each partner and establish a framework of both acceptable and unacceptable activities.[[32]](#cite_note-32) This kind of discussion is a typical "unique selling proposition" of BDSM sessions and quite commonplace.[[33]](#cite_note-33) Additionally, [safewords](/wiki/Safeword) are often arranged to provide for an immediate stop of any activity if any participant should so desire.[[34]](#cite_note-34) Safewords are words or phrases that are called out when things are either not going as planned or have crossed a threshold one cannot handle. They are something both parties can remember and recognize and are, by definition, not words commonly used playfully during any kind of scene. Words such as *no*, *stop*, and *don't*, are often inappropriate as a safeword if the roleplaying aspect includes the illusion of non-consent. The most commonly used safewords are *red* and *yellow*, with *red* meaning that play must stop immediately, and *yellow* meaning that the activity needs to slow down.[[35]](#cite_note-35) At most clubs and group-organized BDSM parties and events, [dungeon monitors](/wiki/Dungeon_Monitor) (DMs) provide an additional safety net for the people playing there, ensuring that house rules are followed and safewords respected.

BDSM participants are expected to understand practical safety aspects. For instance, they are expected to recognize that parts of the body can be damaged, such as nerves and blood vessels by [contusion](/wiki/Contusion), or that skin that can be scarred. Using crops, whips, or [floggers](/wiki/Cat_of_nine_tails), the top's fine motor skills and anatomical knowledge can make the difference between a satisfying session for the bottom and a highly unpleasant experience that may even entail severe physical harm.[[36]](#cite_note-36) The very broad range of [BDSM "toys"](/wiki/Sex_toy) and physical and psychological control techniques often requires a far-reaching knowledge of details related to the requirements of the individual session, such as [anatomy](/wiki/Anatomy), [physics](/wiki/Physics), and [psychology](/wiki/Psychology).[[37]](#cite_note-37)[[38]](#cite_note-38)[[39]](#cite_note-39) Despite these risks, BDSM activities usually result in far less severe injuries than sports like boxing and football, and BDSM practitioners do not visit emergency rooms any more often than the general population.[[40]](#cite_note-40) It is necessary to be able to identify each person's psychological "[squicks](/wiki/Wikt:squick)" or triggers in advance to avoid them. Such losses of emotional balance due to sensory or emotional overload are a fairly commonly discussed issue. It is important to follow participants' reactions [empathetically](/wiki/Empathy) and continue or stop accordingly.[[11]](#cite_note-11)[[41]](#cite_note-41) For some players, sparking "freakouts" or deliberately using triggers may be a desired outcome. Safewords are one way for BDSM practices to protect both parties. However, partners should be aware of each other's psychological states and behaviors to prevent instances where the "freakouts" prevent the use of safewords.

## Social aspects[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

### Roles[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

Top and bottom

[thumb|A typical slave collar with ring for possible attachment of a leash. Such or comparable models are sometimes used by bottoms as a symbol of ownership to their tops.](/wiki/File:Collar_01.JPG)

At one end of the spectrum are those who are indifferent to, or even reject physical stimulation. At the other end of the spectrum are bottoms who enjoy discipline and [erotic humiliation](/wiki/Erotic_humiliation) but are not willing to be subordinate to the person who applies it. The bottom is frequently the partner who specifies the basic conditions of the session and gives instructions, directly or indirectly, in the negotiation, while the top often respects this guidance. Other bottoms often called "brats" try to incur punishment from their tops by provoking them or "misbehaving". Nevertheless, a purist "school"[[42]](#cite_note-42) exists within the BDSM community, which regards such "topping from the bottom" as rude or even incompatible with the standards of BDSM relations.

### Types of relationships[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

Play

[thumb|A typical BDSM "sling".](/wiki/File:Sling.jpg)

BDSM practitioners sometimes regard the practice of BDSM in their sex life as [roleplaying](/wiki/Sexual_roleplaying) and so often use the terms "play" and "playing" to describe activities where in their roles. Play of this sort for a specified period of time is often called a "session", and the contents and the circumstances of play are often referred to as the "scene". It is also common in personal relationships to use the term "kink play" for BDSM activities, or more specific terms for the type of activity. The relationships can be of varied types.[[43]](#cite_note-43)

Long term

Early writings on BDSM both by the academic and BDSM community spoke little of long-term relationships with some in the gay leather community suggesting short-term play relationships to be the only feasible relationship models, and recommending people to get married and "play" with BDSM outside of marriage. In recent times though writers of BDSM and sites for BDSM have been more focused on long-term relationships.

A 2003 study, the first to look at these relationships, fully demonstrated that "quality long-term functioning relationships" exist among practitioners of BDSM, with either sex being the top or bottom (homosexual couples were not looked at).[[44]](#cite_note-44) Respondents in the study expressed their BDSM orientation to be built into who they are, but considered exploring their BDSM interests an ongoing task, and showed flexibility and adaptability in order to match their interests with their partners.<ref name=autogenerated4>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> The "perfect match" where both in the relationship shared the same tastes and desires was rare, and most relationships required both partners to take up or put away some of their desires.[[45]](#cite_note-45) The BDSM activities that the couples partook in varied in sexual to nonsexual significance for the partners who reported doing certain BDSM activities for "couple bonding, stress release, and spiritual quests".[[46]](#cite_note-46) The most reported issue amongst respondents was not finding enough time to be in role with most adopting a lifestyle wherein both partners maintain their dominant or submissive role throughout the day.<ref name=autogenerated2>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref>

Amongst the respondents it was typically the bottoms who wanted to play harder, and be more restricted into their roles when there was a difference in desire to play in the relationship.[[47]](#cite_note-47)<ref name=autogenerated3>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> The author of the study, Bert Cutler, speculated that tops may be less often in the mood to play due to the increased demand for responsibility on their part: being aware of the safety of the situation and prepared to remove the bottom from a dangerous scenario, being conscious of the desires and limits of the bottom, and so on.[[48]](#cite_note-48) The author of the study stressed that successful long-term BDSM relationships came after "early and thorough disclosure" from both parties of their BDSM interests.[[48]](#cite_note-48) Many of those engaged in long-term BDSM relationships learned their skills from larger BDSM organizations and communities[[49]](#cite_note-49) There was a lot of discussion by the respondents on the amount of control the top possessed in the relationships with almost non-existent discussion of the top "being better, or smarter, or of more value" than the bottom.<ref name=autogenerated1>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> Couples were generally of the same mind of whether or not they were in an ongoing relationship, but in such cases the bottom was not locked up constantly, but that their role in the context of the relationship was always present, even when the top was doing non-dominant activities such as household chores, or the bottom being in a more dominant position.[[50]](#cite_note-50) In its conclusion the study states:

The respondents valued themselves, their partners, and their relationships. All couples expressed considerable good will toward their partners. The power exchange between the cohorts appears to be serving purposes beyond any sexual satisfaction, including experiencing a sense of being taken care of and bonding with a partner.[[51]](#cite_note-51)

The study further goes on to list three aspects that made the successful relationships work: early disclosure of interests and continued transparency, a commitment to personal growth, and the use of the dominant/submissive roles as a tool to maintain the relationship.[[52]](#cite_note-52) In his closing remarks the author of the study theorizes that due to the serious potential for harm that couples in BDSM relationships develop increased communication that may be higher than in mainstream relationships[[53]](#cite_note-53)

Professional services

A professional [dominatrix](/wiki/Dominatrix) or [professional dominant](/wiki/Professional_dominant), often referred to within the culture as a "pro-dom(me)", offers services encompassing the range of bondage, discipline, and dominance in exchange for money. The term "dominatrix" is little-used within the non-professional BDSM scene. A non-professional dominant woman is more commonly referred to simply as a "domme", "dominant", or "femdom". There are also services provided by professional female submissives ("pro-subs"). A professional submissive consents to her client's dominant behavior within negotiated limits, and often works within a professional [dungeon](/wiki/Dungeon_(BDSM)). [Professional submissives](/wiki/Professional_submissive), although far more rare, do exist.[[54]](#cite_note-54) Most of the people who work as subs normally have tendencies towards such activities, especially when sadomasochism is involved.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Males also work as professional "tops" in BDSM, and are called "masters" or "doms". However it is much more rare to find a male in this profession. A male "pro-dom" typically only works with male clientele.[[12]](#cite_note-12)

### Scenes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

In BDSM, a *scene* is the stage or setting where BDSM activity takes place, as well as the activity itself.[[55]](#cite_note-55)[[56]](#cite_note-56)[[57]](#cite_note-57)[[58]](#cite_note-58) The physical place where a BDSM activity takes place is usually called a [dungeon](/wiki/Dungeon_(BDSM)), though some prefer less dramatic terms, including "playspace", or "club". A BDSM activity can, but need not, involve [sexual activity](/wiki/Human_sexual_activity) or [sexual roleplay](/wiki/Sexual_roleplay). A characteristic of many [BDSM relationships](/wiki/BDSM_relationship) is the [power exchange](/wiki/Power_exchange_(BDSM)) from the bottom to the dominant partner, and bondage features prominently in BDSM scenes and sexual roleplay.

'The Scene' (note the use of the definite article 'the') is also used in the BDSM community to refer to the BDSM community as a whole. Thus someone who is on 'the Scene', and prepared to play in public, might take part in 'a scene' at a public play party.[[59]](#cite_note-59) <gallery class="center" > File:TwoWomenTiedTogether.png|Two women tied together. Image:Suspension-bb-lorelei-9016-jonwoods.jpg|A bondage scenario using time period costumes. Image:Andreaskreuz mit Model Monique.jpg|A model attached by [bondage cuffs](/wiki/Bondage_cuffs) to a wooden [Saint Andrew's cross](/wiki/Saint_Andrew's_Cross_(BDSM)). |Forced CBT exhibition as a form of BDSM humiliation. </gallery>

A scene can take place in private between two or more people, and can involve a domestic arrangement, such as [servitude](/wiki/Servitude_(BDSM)) or a casual or committed lifestyle [master/slave relationship](/wiki/Master/slave_(BDSM)). BDSM elements may involve settings of [slave training](/wiki/Master/slave_(BDSM)#Slave_training) or punishment for breaches of instructions.

A scene can also take place in a club, where the [play](/wiki/Play_(BDSM)) can be viewed by others. When a scene takes place in a public setting, it may be because the participants enjoy being watched by others, or because of the [equipment](/wiki/Bondage_equipment) available, or because having third parties present adds safety for play partners who have only recently met.[[60]](#cite_note-60)

### Etiquette[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

Standard social etiquette rules still apply when at a BDSM event, such as not intimately touching someone you do not know, not touching someone else's belongings (including toys), and abiding by dress codes.[[61]](#cite_note-61) Many events open to the public also have rules addressing alcohol consumption, recreational drugs, cell phones, and photography.[[62]](#cite_note-62) the difference was statistically significant.[[90]](#cite_note-90) The corresponding figures for the masochistic scenarios were 15% for male students and 17% for female students, a non-significant difference.[[90]](#cite_note-90) In a 2011 study on 367 middle-aged and elderly men recruited from the broader community in [Berlin](/wiki/Berlin), 21.8% of the men self-reported sadistic fantasies and 15.5% sadistic behaviors;<ref name=ahlers>[Template:Citation](/wiki/Template:Citation)</ref> 24.8% self-reported any such fantasy and/or behavior.[[91]](#cite_note-91) The corresponding figures for self-reported masochism were 15.8% for fantasy, 12.3% for behavior, and 18.5% for fantasy and/or behavior.[[91]](#cite_note-91) In a 2008 study on gay men in [Puerto Rico](/wiki/Puerto_Rico), 14.8% of the over 425 community volunteers reported any sadistic fantasy, desire or behavior in their lifetime; the corresponding figure for masochism was 15.7%.[[92]](#cite_note-92)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Lifetime BDSM behaviors among North American Medical students**[**[93]**](#cite_note-93) | **Straight men** | **Gay men** | **Bisexual men** | **Straight women** | **Gay women** | **Bisexual women** |
| Has been restrained for pleasure | 12% | 20% | 13% | 19% | 38% | 55% |
| Has restrained someone else for pleasure | 17.5% | 17% | 13% | 13% | 36% | 51% |
| Has received pain for pleasure | 4% | 6.5% | 18% | 8% | 10% | 36% |
| Has inflicted pain for pleasure | 5% | 6% | 9% | 4% | 6.5% | 26% |

### Medical categorization[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The current version of the [American Psychiatric Association's](/wiki/American_Psychiatric_Association) manual, [DSM-5](/wiki/DSM-5), excludes consensual BDSM from diagnosis when the sexual interests cause no harm or distress. The International Classification of Diseases ([ICD-10](/wiki/ICD-10)) indicates that "mild degrees of sadomasochistic stimulation are commonly used to enhance otherwise normal sexual activity."[[94]](#cite_note-94) In Europe, an organization called ReviseF65 has worked to remove sadomasochism from the ICD.[[95]](#cite_note-95) In 1995, Denmark became the first [European Union](/wiki/European_Union) country to have completely removed sadomasochism from its national classification of diseases. This was followed by Sweden in 2009, Norway in 2010 and Finland 2011.[[96]](#cite_note-96)[[97]](#cite_note-97)[[98]](#cite_note-98) Recent surveys on the spread of BDSM fantasies and practices show strong variations in the range of their results.[[99]](#cite_note-99) Nonetheless, researchers assume that 5 to 25 percent of the population practices sexual behavior related to pain or dominance and submission. The population with related fantasies is believed to be even larger.[[99]](#cite_note-99)

### Coming out[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[thumb|BDSM Activists at Taiwan](/wiki/File:BDSM_Company_on_Taiwan_Pride_2005.jpg) [Pride](/wiki/Gay_pride) 2005, [Taipei](/wiki/Taipei). [thumb|](/wiki/File:Ponygirl_folsom2005.jpg)[Sulky](/wiki/Sulky) drawn by a pony-girl, [*Petplay*](/wiki/Petplay) at the *Folsom Parade* 2005.

Some people who feel attracted by the situations usually compiled under the term BDSM reach a point where they decide to come out of the closet, though many sadomasochists keep themselves [closeted](/wiki/Closet(ed)). Even so, depending upon a survey's participants, about 5 to 25 percent of the US population show affinity to the subject.[[78]](#cite_note-78)[[100]](#cite_note-100) Other than a few artists and writers,[[101]](#cite_note-101) practically no celebrities are publicly known as sadomasochists.

Public knowledge of one's BDSM lifestyle can have devastating vocational and social effects ([*persona non grata*](/wiki/Persona_non_grata)) for sadomasochists. The reason for this is seen by some authors as primarily a lack of public educational advertising, exacerbated by overly lurid and sensationalized media coverage.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) People also face severe professional consequences if they are exposed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, as sadomasochists.[[102]](#cite_note-102) Within feminist circles the discussion has been split roughly into two camps: some who see BDSM as an aspect or reflection of oppression (for example, [Alice Schwarzer](/wiki/Alice_Schwarzer)) and, on the other side, pro-BDSM feminists, often grouped under the banner of [sex-positive feminism](/wiki/Sex-positive_feminism) (see [Samois](/wiki/Samois)); both of them can be traced back to the 1970s.[[103]](#cite_note-103) Some feminists have criticized BDSM for eroticizing power and violence, and for reinforcing [misogyny](/wiki/Misogyny). They argue that women who engage in BDSM are making a choice that is ultimately bad for women.[[104]](#cite_note-104) Feminist defenders of BDSM argue that consensual BDSM activities are enjoyed by many women and validate the sexual inclinations of these women.[[105]](#cite_note-105) They argue that there is no connection between consensual kinky activities and sex crimes, and that feminists should not attack other women's sexual desires as being "anti-feminist". They also state that the main point of feminism is to give an individual woman free choices in her life; which includes her sexual desire. While some feminists suggest connections between consensual BDSM [scenes](/wiki/Scene_(BDSM)) and non-consensual rape and [sexual assault](/wiki/Sexual_assault), other sex-positive ones find the notion insulting to women.[[106]](#cite_note-106)[[107]](#cite_note-107) It is often mentioned that in BDSM, roles are not fixed to [gender](/wiki/Gender), but personal preferences. The dominant partner in a heterosexual relationship may be the woman rather than the man; or BDSM may be part of male/male or female/female sexual relationships. Finally, some people [switch](/wiki/Switch_(BDSM)), taking either a dominant or submissive role on different occasions. Several studies on the correlation of BDSM pornography and the violence against women also indicate a lack of correlation. As an example, Japan is listed as the country with the lowest sexual crime rate out of all the industrialized nations, despite being known for its distinct BDSM and bondage pornography (see [Pornography in Japan](/wiki/Pornography_in_Japan)).[[108]](#cite_note-108) In 1991 a lateral survey came to the conclusion that between 1964 and 1984, despite the increase in amount and availability of sadomasochistic pornography in the US, Germany, Denmark and Sweden there is no correlation with the national number of rapes to be found.[[109]](#cite_note-109) [Operation Spanner](/wiki/Operation_Spanner) in the UK proves that BDSM practitioners still run the risk of being [stigmatized](/wiki/Social_stigma) as criminals. In 2003, the media coverage of [Jack McGeorge](/wiki/Jack_McGeorge) showed that simply participating and working in BDSM support groups poses risks to one's job, even in countries where no law restricts it.[[110]](#cite_note-110) Here a clear difference can be seen to the situation of homosexuality.[Template:Clarify](/wiki/Template:Clarify) The psychological strain appearing in some individual cases is normally neither articulated nor acknowledged in public. Nevertheless, it leads to a difficult psychological situation in which the person concerned can be exposed to high levels of emotional stress.[[111]](#cite_note-111) In the stages of "self awareness", he or she realizes their desires related to BDSM scenarios or decides to be open for such. Some authors call this *internal coming-out*. Two separate surveys on this topic independently came to the conclusion that 58 percent and 67 percent of the sample respectively, had realized their disposition before their 19th birthday. Other surveys on this topic show comparable results.[[112]](#cite_note-112)[[113]](#cite_note-113) Independent of age, coming-out can potentially result in a difficult life crisis, sometimes leading to thoughts or acts of suicide. While homosexuals have created support networks in the last decades, sadomasochistic support networks are just starting to develop in most countries. In German speaking countries they are only moderately more developed.[[114]](#cite_note-114) The Internet is the prime contact point for support groups today, allowing for local and international networking. In the US [Kink Aware Professionals](/wiki/Kink_Aware_Professionals) (KAP) a privately funded, non-profit service provides the community with referrals to psychotherapeutic, medical, and legal professionals who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the BDSM, fetish, and leather community.[[115]](#cite_note-115) In the US and the UK, the [Woodhull Freedom Foundation & Federation](/wiki/Woodhull_Freedom_Foundation_&_Federation), [National Coalition for Sexual Freedom](/wiki/National_Coalition_for_Sexual_Freedom) (NCSF) and [Sexual Freedom Coalition](/wiki/Sexual_Freedom_Coalition) (SFC) have emerged to represent the interests of sadomasochists. The German Bundesvereinigung Sadomasochismus e.V. is committed to the same aim of providing information and driving press relations. In 1996 the website and mailing list [Datenschlag](/wiki/Datenschlag) went online in German and English providing the largest [bibliography](/wiki/Bibliography), as well as one of the most extensive historical collections of sources related to BDSM.

### Social (non-medical) research[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

Richters et al. (2008) study also found that people who engaged in BDSM were more likely to have experienced a wider range of sexual practices (e.g. [oral](/wiki/Oral_sex) or [anal sex](/wiki/Anal_sex), more than one partner, [group sex](/wiki/Group_sex), [phone sex](/wiki/Phone_sex), viewed [pornography](/wiki/Pornography), used a [sex toy](/wiki/Sex_toy), [fisting](/wiki/Fisting), [rimming](/wiki/Anilingus), etc.). They were, however, not any more likely to have been coerced, unhappy, anxious, or experiencing [sexual difficulties](/wiki/Sexual_dysfunction). On the contrary, men who had engaged in BDSM scored lower on a psychological distress scale than men who did not.[[67]](#cite_note-67) There have been few studies on the psychological aspects of BDSM using modern scientific standards. Psychotherapist [Charles Moser](/wiki/Charles_Allen_Moser) said there is no evidence for the theory that BDSM has common symptoms or any common psychopathology, emphasizing that there is no evidence that BDSM practitioners have any special psychiatric other problems based on their sexual preferences.[[111]](#cite_note-111) Problems do sometimes occur in the area of self classification by the person concerned. During the phase of the "coming-out", self-questioning related to one's own "normality" is quite common. According to Moser, the discovery of BDSM preferences *can* result in fear of the current non-BDSM relationship's destruction. This, combined with the fear of discrimination in everyday life, leads in some cases to a double life which can be highly burdensome. At the same time, the denial of BDSM preferences can induce stress and dissatisfaction with one's own "vanilla"-lifestyle, feeding the apprehension of finding no partner. Moser states that BDSM practitioners having problems finding BDSM partners would probably have problems in finding a non-BDSM partner as well. The wish to remove BDSM preferences is another possible reason for psychological problems since it is not possible in most cases. Finally, the scientist states that BDSM practitioners seldom commit violent crimes. From his point of view, crimes of BDSM practitioners usually have no connection with the BDSM components existing in their life. Moser's study comes to the conclusion that there is no scientific evidence, which could give reason to refuse members of this group work- or safety certificates, adoption possibilities, custody or other social rights or privileges. The Swiss psychoanalyst Fritz Morgenthaler shares a similar perspective in his book, *Homosexuality, Heterosexuality, Perversion* (1988). He states that possible problems result not necessarily from the non-normative behavior, but in most cases primarily from the real or feared reactions of the social environment towards their own preferences.[[116]](#cite_note-116) In 1940 psychoanalyst [Theodor Reik](/wiki/Theodor_Reik) reached implicitly the same conclusion in his standard work *Aus Leiden Freuden. Masochismus und Gesellschaft*.[[117]](#cite_note-117) Moser's results are further supported by Richters et al.'s (2008) study on the demographic and psychosocial features of participants in BDSM done in Australia. Richters et al. (2008) found that BDSM practitioners were no more likely to have experienced sexual assault than the control group, and were not more likely to feel unhappy or anxious. The BDSM males reported higher levels of psychological well-being than the controls. It was concluded that "BDSM is simply a sexual interest or subculture attractive to a minority, not a pathological symptom of past abuse or difficulty with 'normal' sex."[[118]](#cite_note-118)

### Gender observances in research[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

Not much empirical research has been done on gender differences or prevalence rates of categorized roles within BDSM. Though, one Australian demographic study found higher rates of female participants than males, it can not be generalized.[[67]](#cite_note-67)

#### Gender differences in masochistic scripts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

One common misconception of BDSM and kink is that women are more likely to take on masochistic roles than men. Roy Baumeister (2010) actually had more male masochists in his study than female, and fewer male dominants than female. The fact that neither of these gender differences were significant, suggests no assumptions should be made regarding gender and masochistic roles in BDSM. One explanation why we might think otherwise lies in our social and cultural ideals about [femininity](/wiki/Femininity); masochism may emphasize certain stereotypically feminine elements through activities like [feminization](/wiki/Feminization_(activity)) of men and ultra-feminine clothing for women. But such tendencies of the submissive masochistic role should not be interpreted as a connection between it and the stereotypical female role—many masochistic scripts do not include any of these tendencies.[[119]](#cite_note-119) Baumeister (2010) found that masochistic males experienced greater: severity of pain, frequency of humiliation (status-loss, degrading, oral), partner infidelity, active participation by other persons, and [cross dressing](/wiki/Cross-dressing). Trends also suggested that male masochism included more bondage and oral sex than female (though the data was not significant). Female masochists, on the other hand, experienced greater: frequency in pain, pain as punishment for 'misdeeds' in the relationship context, display humiliation, genital intercourse, and presence of non-participating audiences. The exclusiveness of dominant males in a heterosexual relationship should be noted because, historically, men in power preferred multiple partners. Finally, Baumeister (2010) observes a contrast between the 'intense sensation' focus of male masochism to a more 'meaning and emotion' centred female masochistic script.[[119]](#cite_note-119) Prior argues that although some of these women may appear to be engaging in traditional subordinate or submissive roles, BDSM allows women in both dominant and submissive roles to express and experience personal power through their sexual identities. In a study that she conducted in 2013, she found that the majority of the women she interviewed identified as bottom, submissive, captive, or slave. In turn, Prior was able to answer whether or not these women found an incongruity between their sexual identities and feminist identity. Her research found that these women saw little to no incongruity, and in fact felt that their feminist identity supported identities of submissive and slave. For them these are sexually and emotionally fulfilling roles and identities that, in some cases, feed other aspects of their lives. Prior contends that third wave feminism provides a space for women in BDSM communities to express their sexual identities fully, even when those identities seem counter-intuitive to the ideals of feminism. Furthermore, women who do identify as submissive, sexually or otherwise, find a space within BDSM where they can fully express themselves as integrated, well-balanced, and powerful women.[[120]](#cite_note-120)

#### Women in S/M culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

Levitt, Moser, & Jamison's 1994 study provides a general, if outdated, description of characteristics of women in the sadomasochistic (S/M) subculture. They state that women in S/M tend to have higher education, become more aware of their desires as a young adult, are less likely to be married than the general population. The researchers found the majority of females identified as heterosexual and submissive, a substantial minority were versatile—able to switch between dominant and submissive roles—and a smaller minority identified with the dominant role exclusively. Oral sex, bondage and master-slave script were among the most popular activities, while feces/watersports were the least popular.[[121]](#cite_note-121)

### Orientation observances in research[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

Though BDSM in itself can be considered a sexual orientation or identity, and is considered one by some of its practitioners,[[122]](#cite_note-122) the BDSM and kink scene is more often seen as a diverse pansexual community. Often this is a non-judgmental community where gender, sexuality, orientation, preferences are accepted as is or worked at to become something a person can be happy with.[[123]](#cite_note-123) In research, studies have focused on bisexuality and its parallels with BDSM, as well as gay-straight differences between practitioners.

#### Differences and similarities between gay and straight men in S/M[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[thumb|A gay male](/wiki/File:Rubberist_Male_Top.JPG) [top](/wiki/Top,_bottom,_switch_(BDSM)#top) cross-dressing in latex clothes

Demographically, Nordling et al.'s (2006) study found no differences in age, but 43% of gay male respondents compared to 29% of straight males had university level education. The gay men also had higher incomes than the general population, and tended to work in white collar jobs while straight men tended toward blue collar ones. Because there were not enough female respondents (22), no conclusions could be drawn from them.

Sexually speaking, the same 2006 study by Nordling et al. found that gay males were aware of their S/M preferences and took part in them at an earlier age, preferring [leather](/wiki/Leather_subculture), [anal sex](/wiki/Anal_sex), [rimming](/wiki/Rimming), [dildos](/wiki/Dildo) and special equipment or uniform scenes. In contrast, straight men preferred verbal humiliation, mask and blindfolds, [gags](/wiki/Gag_(BDSM)), [rubber/latex](/wiki/Latex_and_PVC_fetishism) outfits, [caning](/wiki/Caning), [vaginal sex](/wiki/Vaginal_sex), and [cross-dressing](/wiki/Cross-dressing) among other activities. From the questionnaire, researchers were able to identify four separate sexual themes: [hyper-masculinity](/wiki/Hypermasculinity), giving and receiving pain, physical restriction (i.e. bondage), and psychological humiliation. Gay men preferred activities that tended towards hyper-masculinity while straight men showed greater preference for humiliation. Though there were not enough female respondents to draw a similar conclusion with, the fact that there is a difference in gay and straight men suggests strongly that S/M (and BDSM in general) can not be considered a homogenous phenomenon. As Nordling et al. (2006) puts it, "People who identify as sadomasochists mean different things by these identifications." (54)[[124]](#cite_note-124)

#### Bisexuality[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

In Steve Lenius' original 2001 paper he explored the acceptance of [bisexuality](/wiki/Bisexuality) in a supposedly [pansexual](/wiki/Pansexuality) BDSM community. The reasoning behind this is that 'coming-out' had become primarily the territory of the gay and lesbian, with bisexuals feeling the push to be one or the other (and being right only half the time either way). What he found in 2001, was that people in BDSM were open to discussion about the topic of bisexuality and pansexuality and all controversies they bring to the table, but personal biases and issues stood in the way of actively using such labels. A decade later, Lenius (2011) looks back on his study and considers if anything has changed. He concluded that the standing of bisexuals in the BDSM and kink community was unchanged, and believed that positive shifts in attitude were moderated by society's changing views towards different sexualities and orientations. But Lenius (2011) does emphasize that the pansexual promoting BDSM community helped advance greater acceptance of alternative sexualities.[[125]](#cite_note-125)[[126]](#cite_note-126) Brandy Lin Simula (2012), on the other hand, argues that BDSM actively resists gender conforming and identified three different types of BDSM bisexuality: [gender-switching](/wiki/Genderqueer), gender-based styles (taking on a different gendered style depending on gender of partner when playing), and rejection of gender (resisting the idea that gender matters in their play partners). Simula (2012) explains that practitioners of BDSM routinely challenge our concepts of sexuality by pushing the limits on pre-existing ideas of sexual orientation and gender norms. For some, BDSM and kink provides a platform in creating identities that are fluid, ever-changing.[[127]](#cite_note-127)

### History of psychotherapy and current recommendations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

Psychiatry has an insensitive history in the area of BDSM. There have been many involvements by institutions of political power to marginalize subgroups and sexual minorities.[[75]](#cite_note-75) Mental health professionals have a long history of holding negative assumptions and stereotypes about the BDSM community. Beginning with the [DSM](/wiki/Diagnostic_and_Statistical_Manual_of_Mental_Disorders)-II, Sexual Sadism and Sexual Masochism have been listed as sexually deviant behaviours. Sadism and masochism were also found in the personality disorder section.[[128]](#cite_note-128) This negative assumption has not changed significantly which is evident in the continued inclusion of Sexual Sadism and Sexual Masochism as [paraphilias](/wiki/Paraphilia) in the [DSM-IV-TR](/wiki/DSM-IV-TR).[[129]](#cite_note-129) The [DSM-V](/wiki/DSM-5), however, has depathologized the language around [paraphilias](/wiki/Paraphilia) in a way that signifies "the APA's intent to not demand treatment for healthy consenting adult sexual expression".[[130]](#cite_note-130) These biases and misinformation can result in pathologizing and unintentional harm to clients who identify as sadists and/or masochists and medical professionals who have been trained under older editions of the DSM can be slow to change in their ways of clinical practice.

According to Kolmes et al. (2006), major themes of biased and inadequate care to BDSM clients are:

* Considering BDSM to be unhealthy
* Requiring a client to give up BDSM activities in order to continue in treatment
* Confusing BDSM with abuse
* Having to educate the therapist about BDSM
* Assuming that BDSM interests are indicative of past family/spousal abuse
* Therapists misrepresenting their expertise by stating that they are BDSM-positive when they are not actually knowledgeable about BDSM practices

These same researchers suggested that therapists should be open to learning more about BDSM, to show comfort in talking about BDSM issues, and to understand and promote "safe, sane, consensual" BDSM.[[75]](#cite_note-75) There has also been research which suggests BDSM can be a beneficial way for victims of sexual assault to deal with their trauma, most notably by Corie Hammers, but this work is limited in scope and to date, has not undergone empirical testing as a treatment.

### History of behavioral treatment[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

Both terms were introduced to the medical field by German [psychiatrist](/wiki/Psychiatrist) [Richard von Krafft-Ebing](/wiki/Richard_von_Krafft-Ebing) in his 1886 compilation of case studies *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Pain and physical violence are not essential in Krafft-Ebing's conception, and he defined "masochism" (German *masochismus*) entirely in terms of control.[[131]](#cite_note-131) [Sigmund Freud](/wiki/Sigmund_Freud), a psychoanalyst and a contemporary of Krafft-Ebing, noted that both were often found in the same individuals, and combined the two into a single dichotomous entity known as "sadomasochism" (German *sadomasochismus*, often abbreviated as *S&M* or *S/M*). This observation is commonly verified in both literature and practice; many sadists and masochists[Template:Who](/wiki/Template:Who) define themselves as "[switchable](/wiki/Switch_(BDSM))"—capable of taking pleasure in either role. However it has also been argued (Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*) that the concurrence of sadism and masochism in Freud's model should not be taken for granted.

Freud introduced the terms "primary" and "secondary" masochism. Though this idea has come under a number of interpretations, in a primary masochism the masochist undergoes a complete, not just a partial, rejection by the model or courted object (or sadist), possibly involving the model taking a rival as a preferred mate. This complete rejection is related to the death drive (*todestrieb*) in Freud's psychoanalysis. In a secondary masochism, by contrast, the masochist experiences a less serious, more feigned rejection and punishment by the model. Secondary masochism, in other words, is the relatively casual version, more akin to a charade, and most commentators are quick to point out its contrivedness.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

Rejection is not desired by a primary masochist in quite the same sense as the feigned rejection occurring within a mutually consensual relationship—or even where the masochist happens to be the one having actual initiative power (this is the confusion of the distinctions of casual appearance and discrete motives which underlies the analyses of Deleuze and Sartre, for example).[Template:OR](/wiki/Template:OR) In [*Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*](/wiki/Things_Hidden_Since_the_Foundation_of_the_World), [René Girard](/wiki/René_Girard) attempts to resuscitate and reinterpret Freud's distinction of primary and secondary masochism, in connection with his own philosophy.

Both Krafft-Ebing and Freud assumed that sadism in men resulted from the distortion of the aggressive component of the male sexual instinct. Masochism in men, however, was seen as a more significant aberration, contrary to the nature of male sexuality. Freud doubted that masochism in men was ever a primary tendency, and speculated that it may exist only as a transformation of sadism. Sadomasochism in women received comparatively little discussion, as it was believed that it occurred primarily in men. Both also assumed that masochism was so inherent to female sexuality that it would be difficult to distinguish as a separate inclination.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

[Havelock Ellis](/wiki/Havelock_Ellis), in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, argued that there is no clear distinction between the aspects of sadism and masochism, and that they may be regarded as complementary emotional states. He also made the important point that sadomasochism is concerned only with pain in regard to sexual pleasure, and not in regard to cruelty, as Freud had suggested. In other words, the sadomasochist generally desires that the pain be inflicted or received in love, not in abuse, for the pleasure of either one or both participants. This mutual pleasure may even be essential for the satisfaction of those involved.

Here, Ellis touches upon the often paradoxical nature of widely reported consensual S&M practices. It is described as not simply pain to initiate pleasure, but violence—"or the simulation of involuntary violent acts"—said to express love. This irony is highly evident in the observation by many, that not only are popularly practiced sadomasochistic activities usually performed at the express request of the masochist, but that it is often the designated masochist who may direct such activities, through subtle emotional cues perceived or mutually understood and consensually recognized by the designated sadist.

In his essay *Coldness and Cruelty*, (originally *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, 1967) [Gilles Deleuze](/wiki/Gilles_Deleuze) rejects the term "sadomasochism" as artificial, especially in the context of the quintessentially modern masochistic work, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus In Furs*. Deleuze's counterargument is that the tendency toward masochism is based on intensified desire brought on or enhanced by the acting out of frustration at the delay of gratification. Taken to its extreme, an intolerably indefinite delay is 'rewarded' by punitive perpetual delay, manifested as unwavering coldness. The masochist derives pleasure from, as Deleuze puts it, the "Contract": the process by which he can control another individual and turn the individual into someone cold and callous. The sadist, in contrast, derives pleasure from the "Law": the unavoidable power that places one person below another. The sadist attempts to destroy the [ego](/wiki/Id,_ego,_and_super-ego#Ego) in an effort to unify the [id](/wiki/Id,_ego,_and_super-ego#Id) and [super-ego](/wiki/Id,_ego,_and_super-ego#Super-ego), in effect gratifying the most base desires the sadist can express while ignoring or completely suppressing the will of the ego, or of the conscience. Thus, Deleuze attempts to argue that masochism and sadism arise from such different impulses that the combination of the two terms is meaningless and misleading. A masochist's perception of their own self-subjugating sadistic desires and capacities are treated by Deleuze as reactions to prior experience of sadistic objectification. {E.g. in terms of psychology, compulsively defensive appeasement of pathological guilt feelings as opposed to the volition of a strong free will.} The epilogue of *Venus In Furs* shows the character of Severin has become embittered by his experiment in the alleged control of masochism, and advocates instead the domination of women.[Template:OR](/wiki/Template:OR)

Before Deleuze, however, [Sartre](/wiki/Sartre) had presented his own theory of sadism and masochism, at which Deleuze's deconstructive argument, which took away the symmetry of the two roles, was probably directed. Because the pleasure or power in looking at the victim figures prominently in sadism and masochism, Sartre was able to link these phenomena to his famous philosophy of the "Look of the Other". Sartre argued that masochism is an attempt by the "For-itself" (consciousness) to reduce itself to nothing, becoming an object that is drowned out by the "abyss of the Other's subjectivity".[[132]](#cite_note-132) By this Sartre means that, given that for the "for-itself" desire to attain a point of view in which it is both subject and object, one possible strategy is to gather and intensify every feeling and posture in which the self appears as an object to be rejected, tested, and humiliated; and in this way the for-itself strives toward a point of view in which there is only one subjectivity in the relationship, which would be both that of the abuser and the abused. Conversely, Sartre held sadism to be the effort to annihilate the subjectivity of the victim. That means that the sadist is exhilarated by the emotional distress of the victim because they seek a subjectivity that views the victim as both subject and object.

This argument may appear stronger if it is understood that this "look of the other" theory is either only an aspect of the faculties of desire, or somehow its primary faculty. This does not account for the turn that Deleuze took for his own theory of these matters, but the premise of "desire as 'look'" is associated with theoretical distinctions always detracted by Deleuze, in what he regarded as its essential error to recognize "desire as lack"—which he identified in the philosophical temperament of Plato, Socrates, and [Lacan](/wiki/Jacques_Lacan). For Deleuze, insofar as desire is a lack it is reducible to the "look".[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

Finally, after Deleuze, [René Girard](/wiki/René_Girard) included his account of sado-masochism in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of The World*, originally *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, 1978, making the chapter on masochism a coherent part of his theory of [mimetic desire](/wiki/Mimetic_desire). In this view of sado-masochism, the violence of the practices are an expression of a peripheral rivalry that has developed around the actual love-object. There is clearly a similarity to Deleuze, since both in the violence surrounding the memory of mimetic crisis and its avoidance, and in the resistance to affection that is focused on by Deleuze, there is an understanding of the value of the love object in terms of the processes of its valuation, acquisition and the test it imposes on the suitor.[Template:OR](/wiki/Template:OR)

### Clinical issues[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

Nichols (2006) compiled some common clinical issues: countertransference, non-disclosure, coming-out, partner/families, and bleed-through.[[133]](#cite_note-133) [Countertransference](/wiki/Countertransference) is a common problem in clinical settings. Despite having no evidence, therapists may find themselves believing that their client’s pathology is "self-evident". Therapists may feel intense disgust and aversive reactions. Feelings of countertransference can interfere with therapy. Another common problem is when clients conceal their sexual preferences from their therapists. This can compromise any therapy. To avoid non-disclosure, therapists are encouraged to communicate their openness in indirect ways with literatures and artworks in the waiting room. Therapists can also deliberately bring up BDSM topics during the course of therapy. With less informed therapists, sometimes they over-focus on clients’ sexuality which detracts from original issues such as family relationships, depression, etc. A special subgroup that needs counselling is the "newbie". Individuals just coming out might have internalized shame, fear, and self-hatred about their sexual preferences. Therapists need to provide acceptance, care, and model positive attitude; providing reassurance, [psychoeducation](/wiki/Psychoeducation), and [bibliotherapy](/wiki/Bibliotherapy) for these clients is crucial. The average age when BDSM individuals realize their sexual preference is around 26 years.[[75]](#cite_note-75) Many people hide their sexuality until they can no longer contain their desires. However, they may have married or had children by this point. Therefore, therapists need to facilitate couple's counselling and disclosure. It is important for therapists to consider fairness to partner and family of clients. In situations when boundaries between roles in the bedroom and roles in the rest of the relationship blurs, a "bleed-through" problem has occurred. Therapists need to help clients resolve distress and deal with any underlying problems that led to the initial bleed-through.[Template:OR](/wiki/Template:OR)

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

### Origins[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[thumb|A](/wiki/File:Tomba_Della_Fustigazione.jpg) [fresco](/wiki/Fresco) in the [Etruscan](/wiki/Etruscan_civilization) [Tomb of the Whipping](/wiki/Tomb_of_the_Whipping), fifth century BC. [thumb|Copper engraving, about 1780.](/wiki/File:Sm2.jpg) [thumb|Flagellation scene, illustration to](/wiki/File:Édouard-Henri_Avril_(8).jpg) [Fanny Hill](/wiki/Fanny_Hill) by [Édouard-Henri Avril](/wiki/Édouard-Henri_Avril).

Practices of BDSM survive from some of the oldest textual records in the world, associated with rituals to the Goddess [Inanna](/wiki/Inanna) ([Ishtar](/wiki/Ishtar) in Akkadian). Academic historian and archaeologist Anne O Nomis has undertaken research revealing cuneiform texts dedicated to Inanna which incorporate domination rituals. In particular she points to ancient writings such as Inanna and Ebih (in which the Goddess dominates Ebih), and Hymn to Inanna describing cross-dressing transformations and rituals "imbued with pain and ecstasy, bringing about initation[Template:Sic](/wiki/Template:Sic) and journeys of altered states of consciousness; punishment, moaning, ecstasy, lament and song, participants exhausting themselves in weeping and grief."[[134]](#cite_note-134)[[135]](#cite_note-135) During the ninth century BC, [ritual flagellations](/wiki/Flagellation#Association_with_religion) were performed in [Artemis Orthia](/wiki/Artemis_Orthia), one of the most important religious areas of ancient [Sparta](/wiki/Sparta), where the [Cult of Orthia](/wiki/Cult_of_Orthia), a pre[olympic](/wiki/Olympic_Gods) religion, was practiced. Here ritual flagellation called *diamastigosis* took place, in which young adolescent men were whipped in a ceremony overseen by the priestess.[[136]](#cite_note-136) These are referred to by a number of ancient authors, including Pausanius (III, 16: 10-11).[[137]](#cite_note-137) Various forms of triskele have had many uses and many meanings in many cultures; its BDSM usage derives from the *Ring of O* in the classic book [*Story of O*](/wiki/Story_of_O). The BDSM Emblem Project claims copyright over one particular specified form of the triskelion symbol; other variants of the triskelion are free from such copyright claims.[[182]](#cite_note-182) The [leather pride flag](/wiki/Leather_pride_flag) is a symbol for the [leather subculture](/wiki/Leather_subculture) and also widely used within BDSM. In continental Europe, the [*Ring of O*](/wiki/Ring_of_O) is widespread among BDSM practitioners.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

The BDSM rights flag, shown to the right, is intended to represent the belief that people whose sexuality or relationship preferences include BDSM practises deserve the same human rights as everyone else, and should not be discriminated against for pursuing BDSM with consenting adults.

The flag is inspired by the leather pride flag and BDSM emblem, but is specifically intended to represent the concept of BDSM rights and to be without the other symbols' restrictions against commercial use. It is designed to be recognisable by people familiar with either the leather pride flag or BDSM triskelion (or triskele) as "something to do with BDSM"; and to be distinctive whether reproduced in full colour, or in black and white (or another pair of colours).[[183]](#cite_note-183) BDSM and fetish items and styles have been spread widely in western societies' everyday life by different factors, such as [avant-garde](/wiki/Avant-garde) fashion, [heavy metal](/wiki/Heavy_metal_music), [goth subculture](/wiki/Goth_subculture), and science fiction TV series,[[184]](#cite_note-184) and are often not consciously connected with their BDSM roots by many people. While it was mainly confined to the [Punk](/wiki/Punk_subculture) and BDSM subcultures in the 1990s, it has since spread into wider parts of western societies.

### Theatre[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=42)]

Although it would be possible to establish certain elements related to BDSM in classical theater, not until the emergence of contemporary theatre would some plays have BDSM as the main theme. Exemplifying this are two works: one Austrian, one German, in which BDSM is not only incorporated, but integral to the storyline of the play.

* [*Worauf sich Körper kaprizieren*](/wiki/Worauf_sich_Körper_kaprizieren), Austria. Peter Kern directed and wrote the script for this comedy which is a present-day adaption of [Jean Genet's](/wiki/Jean_Genet) 1950 film, [*Un chant d'amour*](/wiki/Un_chant_d'amour). It is about a marriage in which the wife (film veteran [Miriam Goldschmidt](/wiki/Miriam_Goldschmidt)) submits her husband ([Heinrich Herkie](/wiki/Heinrich_Herkie)) and the butler ([Günter Bubbnik](/wiki/Günter_Bubbnik)) to her sadistic treatment, until two new characters take their places.[[185]](#cite_note-185)\* [*Ach, Hilde*](/wiki/Ach,_Hilde) (Oh, Hilda), Germany. This play by Anna Schwemmer premiered in Berlin. A young Hilde becomes pregnant, and after being abandoned by her boyfriend she decides to become a professional dominatrix to earn money. The play carefully crafts a playful and frivolous picture of the field of professional dominatrices.[[186]](#cite_note-186)

### Literature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=43)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Although examples of literature catering to BDSM and fetishistic tastes were created in earlier periods, BDSM literature as it exists today cannot be found much earlier than World War II. However, such work as [*The Trial of Gilles de Rais*](/wiki/The_Trial_of_Gilles_de_Rais) that dates to 1440 has expressions that coincide with *S&M* which refers as easily to *sadist and masochist* as to *slave and master*... a revealing and leveling equation: *sadist-slave,* *masochist-master,* both alternating as victims.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

A central work in BDSM literature is undoubtedly the [*Story of O*](/wiki/Story_of_O) (1954) by [Anne Desclos](/wiki/Anne_Desclos) under the pseudonym [Pauline Réage](/wiki/Pauline_Réage).

Other notable works include [*9 ½ weeks*](/wiki/9½_Weeks_(book)) (1978) by [Elizabeth McNeill](/wiki/Elizabeth_McNeill), some works of the writer [Anne Rice](/wiki/Anne_Rice) ([*Exit to Eden*](/wiki/Exit_to_Eden), and her [*Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*](/wiki/The_Claiming_of_Sleeping_Beauty) series of books), [Jeanne de Berg](/wiki/Jeanne_de_Berg) ([*L'Image*](/wiki/The_Image_(novel)) (1956) dedicated to [Pauline Réage](/wiki/Pauline_Réage)). Works from the [Gor](/wiki/Gor) series by [John Norman](/wiki/John_Norman), and naturally all the works of [Patrick Califia](/wiki/Patrick_Califia), [Gloria Brame](/wiki/Gloria_Brame), the group [Samois](/wiki/Samois) and many of the writer [Georges Bataille](/wiki/Georges_Bataille) (Histoire de l'oeil-Story of the Eye, Madame Edwarda, 1937), as well as [Bob Flanagan](/wiki/Bob_Flanagan): *Slave Sonnets* (1986), *Fuck Journal* (1987), *A Taste of Honey* (1990). A common part of many of the poems of [Pablo Neruda](/wiki/Pablo_Neruda) is a reflection on feelings and sensations arising from the relations of EPE or erotic exchange of power. The [*Fifty Shades*](/wiki/Fifty_Shades_trilogy) trilogy is a series of very popular erotic romance novels by [E. L. James](/wiki/E._L._James) which involve BDSM; however the novels have been criticized for their inaccurate and harmful depiction of BDSM.

### Art[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=44)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

* In photography: [Eric Kroll](/wiki/Eric_Kroll) and [Irving Klaw](/wiki/Irving_Klaw) (with [Bettie Page](/wiki/Bettie_Page), the first well-known bondage model), and Japanese photographer [Araki Nobuyoshi](/wiki/Araki_Nobuyoshi), whose works are exhibited in several major art museums, galleries and private collections, such as the Baroness Marion Lambert, the world's largest holder of contemporary photographic art. Also [Robert Mapplethorpe](/wiki/Robert_Mapplethorpe) , whose most controversial work is that of the underground BDSM scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s of New York. The homoeroticism of this work fuelled a national debate over the public funding of controversial artwork.
* In music: the Romanian singer-songwriter [Navi](/wiki/Navi_(Romanian_singer)) featured BDSM and [Shibari](/wiki/Shibari) scenes in her music video "Picture Perfect" (2014).[[187]](#cite_note-187)