

S/M roleplaying — what is it? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What is S/M roleplaying?

— Curious

Answer

Dear Curious

Role-playing, kink, S/M, BDSM. All of these are forms of sexual activity that involve a *consensual* exchange of power and some degree of creativity. People who play with S/M (which stands for sado-masochism) may find themselves leaning towards one particular role or another. A "top," for example, enjoys playing a more dominant role in the sack and a "bottom" prefers to play a more submissive role. A person who is a "switch" enjoys both, depending on their partner and mood. A word of note: "top," "bottom," and "switch" are also terms used frequently by men who have sex with men in reference to the penetrator (top) and penetratee (bottom), so this means that people sometimes have to clarify what they mean when they use these terms. This may contribute to the myth that S/M does not occur in heterosexual pairings. In fact, kink and S/M are practiced by every gender identity and sexual orientation out there, as well as every race, income level, and in many nations throughout the world. S/M may include any of the following, depending on the likes and dislikes of the people involved:

- **Bondage and restraint.** Many people find bondage to be a blast. Why? For the bottom, giving over control by being tied up is a total turn-on. For the top, the act of tying up and/or over-powering their partner is the turn-on. Partners may use rope, cuffs (made of nylon, leather, or rubber), scarves, handcuffs, handkerchiefs, or any variety of material.
- **Flogging, whipping, paddling.** For players who enjoy giving and/or receiving pain, there are a tremendous variety of tools and tricks to try. Some people only enjoy hitting that involves an open hand, often delivered in the form of a spanking. Other people enjoy the feeling, sound, and movement of items such as riding crops and floggers. Pain play can include heavier activities too like play piercing, cutting, or delivering of electrical shocks. The key here is to avoid harm, meaning the pain caused does not create permanent injury, injury that interferes with functioning (e.g. cutting off circulation, hitting organs), and that the

bottom does not want. For example, some bottoms like marks on the body while others do not. Temperature play involves using heat and/or cold. Ice, frozen metal objects, hot wax (that melts at low temperatures), to name a few. This form of S/M may result in extreme sensation without causing pain.

- **Emotional/Psychological power play.** This involves more emphasis on words, facial expressions, body language, and other more subtle forms of dominance and submission or role play.

S/M roles can take on additional flavors. When a couple feels comfortable enough with each other to act out their fantasies, a scene (as creative sexual interchanges are often called) can have a very imaginative quality. Some popular S/M roles [2] can include "teacher/student," "drill sergeant/soldier," "doctor/patient," and any others you or your amour can dream up.

These are just a few examples of the myriad activities available to try. For a beginner, S/M should be practiced with someone who you know and who you trust. When playing with someone for the first time, it works best if you discuss ahead of time what activities will and will not occur. Also, agreeing on a "safe word or gesture" is a very good idea and allows you both (or more than both if it's a group scenario) the freedom more deeply into your roles. A safe word tells the other person that you want to immediately cease the activity or at least decrease the intensity level. It should be a word that would not be uttered during sex. Two common safe words are "red" to mean stop and "yellow" to mean decrease intensity.

Why do some people enjoy feeling pain? Interestingly, pain and pleasure pathways in the brain occur in close proximity. So in the right circumstance and mind-set, pain can actually feel pleasurable. Why do some people enjoy inflicting pain? In many S/M circles, people use the phrase "inflicting pleasure" because what really makes a top hot is causing extreme pleasure. Tops who practice safe, sane, and consensual S/M enjoy power and domination in sex but it doesn't mean they enjoy inflicting pain or dominating others in non-sexual situations. Much of S/M is about acting out fantasy and exploring limits.

Resources and places to learn more about S/M and kink in general abound. The book *SM101: A Realistic Introduction* by Jay Wiseman is a great place to learn more. For more information online, check out Leather and Roses [3] or Babeland [4].

Here's to curiosity,

Alice!

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