

## What is S/M?

S/M is the generally accepted umbrella-term for a broad group of behaviors that involve the consensual giving and receiving of intense erotic sensation. The behaviors used in consensual S/M are negotiated and involve the communication of limits and the use of a safeword that can stop all action at any time. <sup>4</sup>

S/M can include but is not limited to: tying a person's hands during sex, erotic spanking, wearing a blindfold during sex, being flogged, cross-dressing, wearing leather or latex, or exploring painful stimuli and the resulting endorphins. S/M can be sensual, erotic, sexual or completely non-sexual. No one person enjoys every behavior.

For many, S/M is a type of erotic theater where fantasies can be acted out in safety. Some S/M folk enjoy enacting fantasies in which one person is powerful (perhaps a master, Top or abductor) and one is powerless (perhaps a slave, Bottom or captive). <sup>2</sup> Although outwardly it may look as though the Bottom gives up control to the Top the Bottom actually maintains control by setting limits and by using a safeword. <sup>4</sup>

S/M is often referred to as BDSM which stands for Bondage & Discipline (B&D), Dominance & Submission (D&S), and Sadomasochism (SM). S/M can also be called SM, Kink, Leather Sex, Leather, and SM/Leather/Fetish.

"Researchers estimate that 5-10 percent of the U.S. population engages in sadomasochism for sexual pleasure on at least an occasional basis, with most incidents being either mild or stage activities involving no real pain or violence."

*Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex, 1990* <sup>4</sup>

## S/M is Safe, Sane, and Consensual

Over 15 years ago, the SM/Leather/Fetish Community established a community-wide ethic known as "Safe, Sane and Consensual".<sup>1</sup>

1. **"Safe"** is being knowledgeable about the techniques and safety concerns involved in what you are doing.
2. **"Sane"** is knowing the difference between fantasy and reality.
3. **"Consensual"** is respecting the limits imposed by each participant. One of the most easily recognized ways to maintain limits is through use of a "safeword" – whereby participants can withdraw consent at any time with a single word or gesture.

### The Difference Between SM and Abuse:

The most basic difference between S/M and abuse is **Consent**.

#### It is not consent if...

You did not expressly give consent.

You are afraid to say no.

You say yes to avoid consequences (i.e. conflict, losing a job, losing your home, being outed).

#### S/M is...

Always consensual.

Done with respect for limits.

Fun, erotic, and loving for all partners<sup>3</sup>

Done with an understanding of trust.

Never done with the intent to harm or damage.<sup>3</sup>

## Is it S/M or Abuse?

### Someone may be abused if...

- They cannot withdraw consent and stop what's happening at any time. <sup>3</sup>
- They cannot express limits and needs without being ridiculed, criticized, or being coerced into changing them.<sup>1</sup>
- Their partner threatens to out them for being into S/M or being polyamorous, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and/or transgender.
- Their partner prevents them from interacting in the S/M community or learning more about S/M.
- Their partner ignores their safewords or tries to convince them not to use safewords.<sup>3</sup>
- They cannot refuse to do illegal activities
- They cannot express feelings of guilt, jealousy, or unhappiness<sup>1</sup>.
- They do not feel free to talk to family and friends whenever they choose.
- Their partner has threatened to harm their children, family, and/or pets.
- Their partner has threatened to hurt themselves or them if they leave the relationship.
- Their partner has destroyed or broken their personal belongings.
- Their partner claims the right to control their behavior by virtue of gender, income, or other external factors.
- They are confused about when a scene begins or ends.<sup>3</sup>

If you think someone you know is being abused contact  
The Network/La Red  
617-742-4911 tty: 617-227-4911  
info@tnlr.org

## Some Important Definitions

### Scene

Describes the negotiated interaction that takes place between two or more consenting adults. This is very much like a scripted role-play.

### Play

The specific action that occurs during a negotiated scene.

### Safeword

A word or phrase that is agreed upon prior to the beginning of the scene. In instances where a person is temporarily unable to speak, a hand signal may be used. When this word is uttered or this signal is given, all play is stopped immediately. It is very much like saying "time-out".

### Negotiation

Communication between SM participants that occurs prior to a scene in which participants discuss their interests, set limits, and communicate the safeword to be used.

### Limits

The boundaries that are discussed and set during the negotiation. These limits are set in order to make sure that the scene is pleasurable for all involved.

### Top/Dominant

The person responsible for orchestrating the interaction. This is the person who administers the negotiated stimuli and sets the mood of the scene.

### Bottom/Submissive

The person who receives the stimuli that is administered by the Top. Although outwardly it may look as though the Bottom gives up control to the Top they actually maintain control by setting limits and by using a safeword that can stop all play.

Interest in S/M crosses race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational level, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

## Resources

### The Network/La Red

P.O. Box 6011, Boston, MA 02114

Office: 617-695-0877 v/tty

Hotline: 617-742-4911

tty: 617-227-4911

info@tnlr.org

www.tnlr.org

### New England Leather Alliance (NELA)

PO Box 35728, Brighton MA 02135-0078

Office: 617-876-NELA

board@nla-newengland.org

www.nla-newengland.org

In the U.S. there are over 500 educational and social organizations that exist for SM/Leather/Fetish practitioners.

## Books

### Same-Sex Domestic Violence:

#### Strategies for Change

Beth Leventhal & Sandra Lundy,

Sage Publications, 1999

### When Violence Begins at Home: A

#### Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Violence

K.J. Wilson, Hunter House Publishers, 1997.

### The New Bottoming Book

Janet Hardy & Dossie Easton, Greenery Press, 2000.

### When Someone You Love is Kinky

Dossie Easton & Catherine Liszt, Greenery Press,

2000.

### Different Loving: The World of Sexual Dominance and Submission

Gloria G. Brame, Jon Jacobs, & Will Brame,

Villard Book, 1996.

This pamphlet was written by Sabrina Santiago, MSW.

Portions of this pamphlet were adapted from:

1. The SM vs. Abuse Policy Statement created at the Leather Leadership Conference in 1998.
2. When Someone You Love is Kinky by Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt, Greenery Press 2000.
3. *S/M is Not Abuse*- Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO).
4. *What is S/M?* by Susan Wright and Charles Moser, www.ncsfreedom.org.

## S/M is Not Abuse

### Understanding consensual S/M and how it differs

A guide for professionals

theNetworklaRed

A Collaboration Between:

The Network/La Red

And

The New England  
Leather Alliance  
(NELA)



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