

The New Bottoming Book

By: Dossie Easton & Janet W. Hardy

Foreword

Why A New Edition?

Welcome to The New Bottoming Book. In the nearly ten years since we wrote the original Bottoming Book, there has been tremendous and wonderful evolution in the culture of BDSM. More and more people have become involved in an even wider variety of kink, and all of them are being much more vocal and communicative than ever was the case before. And we, your authors, are proud to have been part of this evolution. So we are writing an updated and expanded edition of our first book.

What's Changed?

S/M culture has massively emerged from the closet. There are dozens of books, endless information on the Internet, national and international conferences publicly held in major hotels, support groups everywhere - we are no longer the ghettoized subculture that we used to be. More people are connecting to S/M, finding others like themselves, and realizing that they are very much not alone with their kinky fantasies.

The Internet. The 'Net has become a major player in the BDSM scene. Along with providing lots of information about kink and connection to like-minded people, the Internet is also exerting a major influence on the content of BDSM. Many things are possible in virtual play that are more difficult to manifest in reality: for instance, we know individuals who are engaged in ownership relationships with people they have never met in person. And so new ways of playing are being devised, and participants are engaging in ever deeper explorations of the psychological aspects of S/M, including extensive dialogue about how our fantasies can inform us about ourselves. We discuss the 'Net and its ramifications at much greater length in Chapter Four.

D&S. Over the last ten years, we have also seen rapid growth and evolution of the dominance and submission aspect of BDSM, with extensive discussion of how the relationship dynamic between two or more persons can be expanded, intensified and eroticized by a conscious and consensual shift in the workings of power and control. More on this in Chapter Ten.

More of Us. Meanwhile, as the scene has become more accessible, more and more new people are joining. This growth in population has made its own changes to the scene, and there is increased market for products and services, which offers much more support for the teachers, artists and craftspeople of our community.

A perhaps less desirable side effect of growth in the BDSM scene is that we are seeing more separated populations emerging. Support groups now are often targeted to very specific members: gay men, dykes, heterosexuals (with bisexuals and transgendered folks welcome to some degree in most if not all of them), with even smaller groups for crossdressers, fetishists and the like. While it may be nice to be able to join a support group exclusively composed of people like yourself, we mourn the loss of diversity. When we were coming out, we learned so much from people who were different from ourselves, and we miss the sense of a larger community and the stimulation and adventures we encountered.

Finally, for us this growth has offered an expanded opportunity in the form of a much wider audience for our writing. When we wrote the initial Bottoming Book, publishing in this area was so economically constrained that we had to keep the book under 120 pages because if it got bigger than that we couldn't afford to print it. How's that for basic? We are proud to announce that our books are now widely distributed, our publisher well established, and we can afford to speak our minds at whatever length we choose.

Language. With the expansion of S/M and extensive public discourse, we are also evolving new language and terminology to describe our experience. And do we all agree on what these new terms mean? Of course not! A definition can be visualized as a way to make a fence around a word so that we can clearly distinguish what is inside

and what is outside the meaning of the word. This works great for science and mathematics, but can be a problem when we are describing our physical, sexual and emotional experience — especially the experience between two or more of us. (See? We can't even assume that a relationship means only two people.)

So our approach to language in this book is to assume inclusive rather than exclusive meanings for all the words we use. Furthermore, we acknowledge more than two genders, and also that many of us explore more than one sense of gender. Common language usage has very few ways to denote the full range of gender expression. In the first edition of *Bottoming Book* we wrote "s/he" in an attempt to include everybody. In our later books, we alternated using he or she, mostly by paragraphs, which seemed to read more smoothly and provide interesting opportunities to challenge gender stereotyping, so we have rearranged this edition accordingly.

On another linguistic front, here is much public discussion and dissent about what to call what we do. Various our perversions have been described as: BDSM, perversion, sadomasochism, S/M, dominance and submission, D/S, bondage and discipline, B/D, leathersex, kink, erotic power exchange, fetishism, *wiitwd* (what it is that we do), powerplay, shadowplay, topping and bottoming, sex magic and radical perversion. Similarly, the people who do these things are known as: perverts, tops, bottoms, masters, mistresses, slaves, dominants, submissives, Daddies, Mommies, pitchers, catchers, boys, bois, girls, leatherpeople, and players.

All these words have slightly different meanings, and you will definitely meet people who choose one of these terms and not the others because that is what best describes their desire. We, however, enjoy all of these aspects of our play, and would be very distressed to have to choose only one category. Thus, as we see it, pigeonholing limits our experience, and we are explorative girls who always want more. So in this edition, we will use all of these terms to describe the whole world of S/M play, except when we are focusing on one particular aspect of play, and we will use these terms, as we do the gender pronouns, interchangeably throughout the text.

We've Changed Too. The two of us have matured, which we hope would happen for any of you in ten years. Our children are no longer children, our careers have ripened, our bodies have aged.

In fact, one of us has changed so much that even her name has changed. The one of us who wrote the first *Bottoming Book* as 'Catherine A. Liszt' did so under a pseudonym, because at the time she had minor children whose boundaries she wanted to protect. Now that her children have grown to adulthood, "Catherine" is now writing and publishing under her real name, Janet W. Hardy.

And we know more than we used to. So the final reason to make a new edition of *The Bottoming Book* is to share with you everything new that we have learned in the last decade about our beloved world of BDSM.

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Part One: Skills

What Kind of Player Are You, Anyway?

We think you're reading this book because something in your life - a fantasy, an experience, a partner who wants to experiment - has led you to a desire to explore bottoming.

But what, exactly, does that mean? There are as many different ways to be a bottom as there are to be a human being. An experience that feels intense, profound and highly erotic to you may do nothing at all for the next guy, and vice versa. So before you begin your explorations of bottoming, it would be a good idea to get a handle on what bottoming is, or could be, to you.

Many bottoms talk about a state of mind they call "bottom space" or "sub space," a kind of altered consciousness in which their relationship with their own minds, with their partners, and/or with the outside world becomes in some way different. Bottom space manifests itself in many different ways: Dossie gets very nonverbal in bottom space, while Janet chatters like a magpie. Among bottoms we've played with,

we've been privileged to witness bottom spaces that range from docile and passive to resistant and bratty to serene and transcendent. Some people find that they go into different bottom spaces in different kinds of scenes - the bottom who is an obnoxious brat in a spanking scene may become a calm, centered nurturer while giving service.

We know people whose bottom space is an extension of their real-world persona — perhaps they're timid and shy in their day-to-day lives, and they like to be "small" and receptive when they bottom. We know others whose bottom space is exactly the opposite of what you'd expect — they're powerful and assertive in their real-life interactions but like to experience being victims, slaves, babies or other powerless beings in their fantasy and play lives. Some people's real-world hobbies and professions are a clue about their bottom space — Dossie likes to knit and crochet, and loves rope — while others bottom in order to have experiences outside their ordinary existences. So your real-life choices may or may not be a clue to what your bottom space will look like.

Some people have negative judgments about bottom spaces that don't look like the kind of bottoming they have in their own fantasies. Unless you're considering playing with someone, they don't get to vote on your bottom space at all. If it's someone you're playing with or would like to, then may need to give you some direction as to what feels sexier to them (talkative Janet is fine with tops telling her that now would be a good time to shut up, thank you very much), or some compromise may be in order. But whatever your bottom space might look like, if it feels real to you, it is real.

What Do You Want From Bottoming? Bottoming gives us a chance to explore feelings, roles and interactions that may not be a good fit for us in the real world. So when you bottom, you may want to experience emotions like.

loss of control, fear, passivity, forgiveness, resentment, sadness, "smallness", nurturing, being nurtured, humility, power, shame, catharsis, competence, anger, helplessness, martyrdom, rebelliousness, objectification, victimhood, redemption, neediness, innocence, lust, abandonment, belonging, pathos, humiliation,

You can experience these emotions while enacting variety of roles, too. Maybe you want to be a...

victim, brat, baby, saint, good girl/boy, fixer, cherished possession, object, target, scapegoat, drama queen, captive, rebel, orphan, sex object, servant, whore, animal, sissy, pleasure slave, nothing, "proud beauty", child, prisoner, criminal, bad girl/boy, martyr, wild thing

When Does It End? It is, unfortunately, not too rare for these roles or emotions to be so potent that we find ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, trying to enact them in places where they don't work out too well for us. For example, you may find yourself so attached to the role of "fixer" that your need to fix things for other people is getting in the way of getting your own needs met, or so fond of being a "bad boy" that you're alienating your friends and coworkers.

If your chosen bottom role is turning into a script for the way you live the rest of your life, this can be a big problem. Some people find that playing that role in the dungeon or bedroom can help make them more conscious of the ways that they're enacting it in the outside world, thus giving them better boundaries for when to play the role and when to leave it alone. Others may find that this form of erotic role-play reinforces the outside-world behavior to an unacceptable degree, so that they may decide that this role is too risky for them to play right now and is better explored in therapy.

For some people, the identity they feel as a bottom feels like their primary identity. They understand themselves better as a submissive or a slave, and seek to manifest that sense of self in all aspects of their lives: they tend to seek out relationships with dominant people in which they can live in their chosen role full-time. People living in full-time D/S relationships have created many clever ways to satisfy the needs of healthy living in a role-defined lifestyle: you will read more about this in Chapter 10.

On the other hand, some bottoms wish to be in role only when they playing a scene, because who they are as a bottom is not compatible with their needs and desires in the outside world. Dossie is one of these: in her bottom space she is very much the passive victim (when she isn't being a brat), and in the rest of her life she is an assertive, outspoken professional.

Neither of these choices, nor any of the gradations between, is inherently more "real" or more valuable than any other: your success will depend on your ability to make your choice work, and your willingness to work hard at it. Either way, it can be very illuminating to examine why we choose the roles we do, what turns us on about them and why this particular role is so very very hot for us.

The "Full-Power Bottom"

When we bottom we feel fabulously powerful. This is the experience of most bottoms we know, and it is in complete contradiction to the popular stereotype of a bottom.

How can bottoming make us powerful? Here is Dossie's description of how she gains power from a flogging:

When I'm being flogged, early on I often come to a place where I need to stretch to take in the intense sensation, where I struggle and wonder if I can take it at all. That struggle seems to make me stronger and soon I feel intense energy running through me, as if all the force with which the whip is thrown at me is injected into me — becomes my energy to play with. While my tops throw the whips at me as hard as they can, I take in their power and dance in the center of the storm.

Standard mythology would have you believe that a bottom is a passive, disempowered, self-destructive, needy, whining wimp. We hope you will refrain from believing these things about yourself. We suggest that you see yourself as a full-power bottom.

Are You Really Powerless? Most of us in our everyday lives struggle constantly with power, striving to empower ourselves, and to protect ourselves from being overpowered. We are always working to find, increase and express our power.

In S/M, in contrast, we play with power for the fun of it - pulling its fangs to turn it into an exciting, erotic experience instead of a serious high-stakes struggle.

S/M has been described as "power games for fun rather than profit." Playing with power offers not only a relief from the tedious battle for power we're stuck with in the so-called "real" world, but also a way to learn and explore

by trying out new and different experiences of power and powerlessness.

In order to play with power safely, it helps to understand the concept of "power-with" as differentiated from "power-over." Most of our culture's systems run on power-over, with sexism, racism and militarism being some ugly examples.

Power-over means that a person sees his or her power as the ability to control others, and thus always sees this power as relative, either greater or lesser than other people's power. People who operate on power-over see the world as a series of hierarchies which they must ascend. Power-over social structures tend to keep people struggling in a position of constant insecurity, as there are always people with more power in some arena or other.

An extreme example of the sexual mythology of power-over can be seen in prison sex, where the person who penetrates is believed to gain power, while the person who gets penetrated is believed to lose power and become degraded. Similarly, in traditional sex roles, many people believe that the man's ability to penetrate confers power, while the woman who gets penetrated is seen as losing power. (Janet's reaction when confronted with this belief: "Oh, you mean like when an electrical plug penetrates a wall socket?...")

The mechanism of power-over lies in the belief that I can increase my power by taking some of yours. The way I get to feel big is to make you feel small, and the way I get to feel secure is to make you feel insecure. (Sound like anybody you know? Janet says it sounds like her ex-boss.) Power-over is achieved by belittling others.

The sad thing about power-over is that it doesn't work. I cannot build a solid foundation of internal security, self-esteem and empowerment by stealing yours.

Power-with is based on the idea that we can all become more powerful by supporting each other in being more powerful. We, your authors, like this idea. We are eroticized to power, so we want you to be powerful because that turns us on, and we want to play with your power. We want you to be turned on to our power too: after all, it doesn't take much of a top to take down a wimp.

Do You Really Have No Choice? The truth is that you are always making choices, whether you admit it or not. Just as no one can actually magically steal your power, your power is always with you whether you want it or not.

As a bottom, it can be very sexy to believe that you have no choices. "Poor me! Forced to endure all this intense sensation, turned on against my will!" To keep this fantasy hot and safe, it is important that we understand that it is a fantasy, and if it is not hot any more, or safe, or feeling okay, then we do have a choice. We can stop the scene, we can ask for something different, we can tell our playmate about the problem we are having. In a worst-case scenario, we can choose a different playmate.

Dossie remembers a scene that strongly highlighted the contrast between fantasy and reality:

The fantasy was that I was tied in the tyrant's bed, available to be fucked at any time against my will. My friend the tyrant indeed did wake me up at four in the morning, as per my request, and fucked me. The problem was, I was exhausted and quite sore from earlier activities, and could not get turned on. I kept turning my mind back to the fantasy of nonconsent, frantically hunting for my turn-on somewhere in there. But this time, in my sleepy state, I convinced myself that I really had no choice, and that this was nonconsensual (all this time my poor friend is dutifully plugging away) and I became genuinely scared. My perceptive tyrant figured out that something was wrong and stopped, and comforted me with good grace, and was also very gracious about not completing the fuck till morning. I got very embarrassed, and got to learn yet one more time that even the hottest fantasy may not play as well in reality as it does in my mind.

Are You Really Passive? We never have liked that word passive — we prefer to think of bottoming as "receptive." Bottoms as a class are not a passive lot in their lives, as you could see at any social event where you would find out that bottoms might be lawyers, doctors, therapists, corporate executives, police officers, entrepreneurs and other high-powered types. Many of the support groups and organizations in the S/M community in San Francisco and elsewhere were founded and are run by bottoms.

Most tops are uncomfortable with bottoms who are excessively passive. Janet, in her Lady Green top persona, occasionally gets letters from men who proudly claim "I am a wimp." Her response: "Oooh, makes me dry." Behind the sarcasm lies a very real discomfort with the idea of taking power from the powerless, and for the unsatisfying scenes that would undoubtedly ensue: why climb an anthill when the world is full of beautiful mountains?

In terms of planning a scene, bottoms very quickly learn that tops cannot read our minds, and that if we want to get our needs met and have our dreams come true, we had better learn how to take an active part in designing and realizing a scene. Bottoms who do not learn this lesson often get very frustrated and wonder why they can't get their needs met. Failing to tell your partner about your needs is also a set-up for finding yourself in a scene you may hate now or regret tomorrow.

Even within the scene, bottoms may be rebellious, resistant, sexually aggressive, loudmouth (or even switch: many bottoms, like Dossie, are excellent tops). Active or interactive bottoms are actually quite popular. Passive bottoms who give little feedback to their tops may leave their tops feeling insecure and clueless: such scenes, while possible, are particularly demanding for the dominant. Thus, on those rare occasions when we get to act very passive in a scene, it feels like a precious luxury.

Do You Really Have No Limits? Good bottoms know their limits, and can communicate them clearly. This is not only a right, it is a responsibility.

There are always limits, whether you state them or not. There are limits of physical safety, limits of understanding, and the all-important limits of what does or does not turn you on. If you haven't already figured out what your limits are, later on we'll explain more about how to find them.

Janet was once involved in a discussion with a woman who was a slave in a full-time master-and-slave relationship:

She told me, "No, I really have no power, I really have no limits. Whatever my master wants is OK with me." I proposed, "Suppose your master woke up tomorrow morning and told you, 'I'm tired of this S/M stuff. From now on, we're only going to have gentle, consensual, egalitarian vanilla sex.'" There was a long pause. Finally, sheepishly, she answered, "You win. I'd be out of there in a minute."

Pretending to play without limits, in our experience, tends to produce less intense scenes, as without a clear understanding of the bottom's limits tops most often wind up doing much less than the bottom can enjoy, just to be on the safe side.

Accepting your limits is about accepting yourself. If the power exchange of S/M consists of giving your considerable power to a top, or giving your self over, then limits are about the parts of yourself, or your reactions, that are beyond your control (like ticklishness) and thus beyond your ability to offer. You can still give all you have to give of yourself to that wonderful person who wants to take all of you that she can get.

Bridging the Gap Between Fantasy and Reality

The common thread that seems to run through this section is that fantasy is not reality. Good players learn to handle reality first and use it as a foundation on which to build really hot fantasies. When you confuse fantasies with reality, you distance yourself from your power. Since S/M players eroticize power, you, as a bottom, must bring your power along or you have none to share.

The origins of our deepest urges toward BDSM, and the most profound of the roles we like to play, do not come from the responsible and adult part of us. The archetypes and emotions we explore arise from our primitive, uncivilized and shadowy parts. This is why the boundary between fantasy and reality is most important to understand and accept, so we can play in psychological as well as physical safety. And as we play deeper, this boundary can get blurred, and our play can seem more "real" than reality. So how do we establish boundaries for emotional safety?

It helps to be conscious of the boundary between "scene space" or "in the game" and out. We arrange to deal with reality outside of scene space so that we can enjoy the fantastic within it. You can even use the tension between fantasy and reality to heighten the excitement — often the heat is where the friction is.

How Real Is the Role? There is some difference of opinion within the BDSM world about choices between temporary and full-time roles. In some communities, rigid hierarchies are observed and full-time roles are the norm — tops in particular never bottom. It is very difficult to stay in role all the time, and such tops sometimes complain of getting tired and wanting some relief. It is equally difficult to bottom all the time, especially if nobody is topping you.

In other communities, roles are mostly dropped outside a scene, with some light roles assumed for purposes of flirtation, humor, and comfort. Many players switch roles with facility. Inevitably, some confusion and arguments arise as to when the players are in role and when they are not, which role they are in, or what they do when they both want to bottom or top at the same time.

You will hear a lot of judgments and criticism between these approaches: some folks proclaim that people who drop roles are not "real" tops or bottoms, while others complain about the rigid and oppressive quality of their communities. We believe that you can do good play from either position, or anywhere in between, as long as you are willing to be flexible and tolerant, and willing to support each other at those times when the "rules" don't give you an answer to a difficulty you are having, and you need to stumble around by trial and error until you find your own solution.

Rule # 1 of S/M: The rules don't work every time.

Thinking With Your Head And Your Gonads. The reason we cannot make rules that will protect us every time, or tell where the boundary should be in every situation, is that the desires we play with are not rational. The desire you may have to be utterly bottom, to be operated by and operated on by another, to be very small, to be owned: this desire is not reasonable. It is, however, powerful, and even the best bottoms have many a desperate argument with themselves on the subject of lust versus sanity.

Janet remembers:

I did a scene once in which I'd gone under very deeply although my usual bottoming style is "powerful masochist," in this scene I'd gone into a very submissive, dependent, passive state of mind. When the scene was over, I began to cry uncontrollably. My partner was afraid he'd done something wrong, that I was angry, but when he got me to talk, all I could say was "I didn't want to come back."

Similarly, when we top we often need to rein in the part of us that wants to be godlike, and that becomes annoyed when our bottoms have the audacity to fail to enjoy what we have so graciously deigned to do to them!

We bottom in order to go to places within ourselves and with our partners that we cannot get to without a top. To explore these spaces, we need someone to push us over the edge in the right ways, and to keep us safe while we're out there flying.

The games we play have the power to bypass our customary psychological defenses, giving us access to amazing experiences and awarenesses. For emotional safety, we establish ways to take care of each other while we are defenseless. Bottom power comes from the gut-level realization that you deserve respect for your vulnerability, and care and support from those who take you down... and thus get to ride along with you on your journey.

Writing New Rules. What makes S/M work at all is that, in order to play, we intentionally alter the customary rules of personal responsibility, and enter into a ritualized codependency. The ritual is what makes it possible, and safe, to travel in the uncharted psychological territory of bottom space. Janet says:

When I teach my classes for novice tops, I say: "Normally, you have a 'bubble' of protectiveness you put around yourself to prevent yourself from being physically or emotionally hurt. When you agree to top someone, you've

just agreed to put that bubble around you and your partner for the duration of the scene."

Time and experience usually make tops and bottoms better at operating these boundaries — so if you're feeling desperately confused right now, don't worry, it'll undoubtedly get easier soon. Experienced players become adept at dropping out of role or scene space to take care of a bit of troublesome reality, and equally skilled at dropping right back in to continue having fun. A ritual - say, putting on and taking off a collar - can serve to define the rules of play and the boundaries between you. Many different rituals will serve your purpose. Don't worry about which ritual is "correct," but look for the rituals that work for you.

We have both found that experience has enabled us to explore more deeply and profoundly, playing roles that involve going down into very primitive parts of ourselves. The deeper the play, the more risky - and rewarding - it can be.

In its finest form, S/M is a form of psychodrama with tremendous possibilities for self-knowledge and transformation, which is why some players say that S and M stand for sex magic. We must remember that this is a very powerful form of magic, worthy of our greatest respect.

Somewhere between fantasy and reality lies the full-power bottom's role in S/M. When we give up our power, we feel more powerful. When we give up control, we feel freer. We encourage you to bring your full power and all your greedy, nasty, raunchy, intense and horny lust to your play, until you pull up enough energy to devour the planet.

Staying Safe and Happy

Before we launch you into the nitty-gritty of how to be the bottom of your (and everyone else's) dreams, we want to do a quick check-in to make sure you know some of the basic ideas and skills you'll need to stay physically and emotionally safe while you follow the advice in the rest of this book. If you're an experienced bottom, much of this material may already be familiar to you, but the fundamentals always bear repeating - so here goes.

know Thyself. Before you can communicate your desires to a partner, it's a good idea to know them yourself - not always easy when your head is full of a tangle of fantasies, beliefs and rumors about romance and sex and BDSM.

One of our favorite exercises to help straighten out the tangle is called "Yes/No/Maybe" - sex educators everywhere use it as a way to get people thinking and talking about their sexual needs and desires. You can do it by yourself, with a partner, or even with a group of friends.

We commonly do this exercise in groups or workshops to help people discover their desires and their limits. First, take a big piece of paper and make a list of all the sexual and BDSM activities you can think of, including those that you would not choose yourself.

Prefabricated lists now can be found in books and on the Internet... and we still recommend you make your own. Pay attention to how it feels to speak the words for forbidden and exciting acts of pleasure.

After you finish making the big list of all possible activities, take a regular piece of paper and mark three columns: YES, NO and MAYBE. In the YES column write all the items that you know you already like or clearly want to try. The NO column is for those things that are definitely outside your limits at this time, the things you do not want to try at all. The MAYBE column is for those things that you might like to do if it felt safe, or you were turned on enough, or your partner was confident enough, or you were confident enough. This is the exploration list.

Just in case you didn't think of them, here are some activities that appear on the NO lists of many experienced players:

- Temporary marks like bruises, welts or shallow cuts
- Permanent marks like cuts or burns or tattoos

- Flowing blood of any sort
- Play with piss or shit
- Play with guns or knives
- Sexual or genital play or penetration
- Unsafe sex
- Parts of the body that don't want to be touched, hit or whatever
- Gags or breathing constriction
- Use of intoxicants by top or bottom
- Health issues like poor circulation, allergies, joint problems
- Triggers (like "don't slap my face, it reminds me of my abusive father")
- Emotional limits (like "don't tell me I'm bad," "don't tell me I'm small," "I don't play with abandonment")
- Hypersensitivities (like tickling, or "don't touch my clit right after I come," or...)

After the list is made, give yourself some time to think. Go back over your YES list, and mark with an N those items that you feel you NEED, in the sense that without these things the scene is not worth doing. For instance, for some people a scene needs to include some orgasmic activity. A scene may not be a scene without pain, or without bondage, or without service. Your needs are the items that are essential to you, and are not negotiable: if a prospective top doesn't want to do these, you probably wouldn't have enough in common to play with that person.

You can mark the remaining items, including some in the MAYBE column, with a W for WANT - these are the fascinating challenges that constitute the icing on the cake, and while we can get along fine without any one or two or three of them, without any icing at all that cake may become kind of, well, plain. Try writing all the items on your MAYBE list on cards and putting them in order from what feels safest to what feels scariest. You may learn something about yourself, and when you are ready for some risky exploration, start with the easiest item.

We strongly encourage you to try this exercise. You might also like to check out any of the good "negotiation checklists" available in other books and on some web sites - we like the one in SM101: A Realistic Introduction, but we're prejudiced. Exercises and checklists can help you to know and accept your desires and limits: self-knowledge makes for powerful bottoming, and powerful bottoming makes for hot play!

Negotiating for Bigger and Better Scenes

So here you are, you've made your list and so has your top, you're ready to play. Now what?

Negotiating a scene is basically mutual scheming. What you want to do is compare notes on the things you like till you come up with a list of things you would both enjoy or be comfortable doing, and then you get to do them. So you start by proposing the things you're interested in (remember the YES-NO-MAYBE list?) and asking your prospective top what sorts of things she likes. This always starts the negotiation out on a positive footing since talking about sexy filthy dirty forbidden things that you might want to do is, although embarrassing, a tremendous turn-on.

Don't forget to ask your top what he would like to get out of the scene: too often negotiation is all about the bottoms likes and limits, which is to say about the things the top should and should not do. Inviting your top to tell you what she likes and what her limits are will help make you a popular bottom.

Negotiations must include your limits and any physical or medical problems that require special attention (people with heart problems may do better lying down than standing up, asthmatics need to be able to breathe freely, etc.). Negotiation also must include a discussion of your practices about safer sex, and how you will protect each others health. If this is difficult for you, we suggest you go to a workshop on safer sex risk reduction: your local AIDS program can probably direct you to one, or check the Bibliography for good books on safer sex. We are a sexually active group, and it is imperative that we learn to protect each other from the transmission of diseases: there are no exceptions, and no acceptable excuses. We do note that the aspect of our practices that is about high-tech sex makes us really clever at reducing the risks of transmitting unwelcome organisms: many toys can be sterilized much more easily than people, and the more abstract joys of mental domination pose no risks of disease

whatsoever.

It is also a good idea to bring up and discuss your and your top's customs regarding the use of intoxicants. We strongly recommend that you do not play when you or your partner is stoned or drunk. An intoxicated top is a dangerous top, and a bottom who is so stoned that she cannot tell what is going on is asking for injuries. We advocate moderation or abstinence. If you are so high that you are "feeling no pain," you're probably not feeling much pleasure either. We prefer to play with all our faculties intact because we like to be able to feel everything.

Do let your prospective top know what you don't like: individual differences are valid and important. For example, one man might hate any kind of pain on his scrotum, while another might adore it. Sometimes these differences are surprising: one of your authors hugely enjoys having her nipples bitten and pinched, while the other can't tolerate the lightest touch there.

If your scene will include sex, it's a good idea to let a new partner know the particulars of what works for you to reach orgasm. Do you need clitoral stimulation? A firm grip? Lubricant? A particular position?

Finally, you want to tell your partner how you get turned on, and you want to know how to turn your partner on. A play date is, after all, a commitment to get together, get turned on, and do lots of hot stuff. But what if you get nervous and you can't find your turn-on? Well, nobody gets turned on by magic. If you think about it, there are activities that get you there: the sucking of ears and stroking of necks is a common route. Or maybe tell me a dirty story, or take your clothes off real slow, or take my clothes off real slow... Many of the routes to finding your turn-on when it doesn't show up simply from the magic of opportunity can be discovered by simple common sense. Start with sensual stimulations that pose no challenge: massage, light flogging, touching of less sensitive parts of the body are good warmups for most folks. Intense stimulation and direct stimulation can come later.

So there you are. Stan out getting turned on talking about what you like, tell them the necessities in the middle, and then get hot again with what turns you on... and you're ready to play.

Can You Negotiate In Role? Good negotiation is best done between equals. You may find communities in which this principle is not universally adhered to, but we believe that you can play more, with more people, more safely, and go further out on the edge, if you start from the position of two equals negotiating something they both want to do. They do not become tops or bottoms until the scene begins.

Negotiating in role is not actually an exception to this principle of negotiating between equals, as long as it is understood by both parties that the top has made a commitment to hear and respect the bottom's limits and desires. Remember that you, as a bottom, still deserve complete respect for your limits and desires.

However, there is an increased danger of missed communications when you negotiate in role. Consider, for example, this dialogue. Top: "Seems to me you deserve a good spanking with this hairbrush, my little slut." Bottom (in role as obedient slave): "If it pleases you, sir or madam" — or bottom (in role as reluctant victim): "No! Please! Not the hairbrush!" In either case, the top has no guide to the bottom's real feelings, and the poor bottom, who may have been nonconsensually brutalized by hairbrush spankings as a child and be terrified of anything with bristles, winds up safewording out of the scene while the top wonders what she did wrong.

Partners who have been playing together for a while may understand one another's limits and communication style well enough to overcome these obstacles, and all of us sometimes need to negotiate in role in when something unexpected comes up. Experienced players accept this need and develop a language that works for them. Sometimes the bottom might say "I will do that if it is your desire" which, by agreement, might mean "I really don't want to but I also don't want to mess up this scene." The old convention of having the bottom kiss the whip offers an opportunity for the bottom to evaluate his readiness for the particular object in mind, and, again in role, might offer: "Sir, I could probably take more of that for you if you flogged me with the soft one first." Because of the possibilities for misunderstanding, and because one of your authors becomes conspicuously nonverbal the minute she gets turned on, we do not negotiate play in role with new partners or novice players.

If you have to interrupt a scene to negotiate something, is this necessarily a disaster? So none of your clever

communications in role managed to get across that your left foot has fallen asleep and you can't ignore it any more, or that your top needs to excuse himself to pee? So it's time to take a time out, and organize reality to better support your fantasy. Our experience is that this is not that difficult to do. If you stop the scene and fix whatever needs fixing, you will soon learn that a level of turn-on that took you both an hour to achieve in the first place is not lost, and can be easily reestablished in five or ten minutes.

Negotiations can also be handled in role when a top forces a bottom to reveal his or her most embarrassing fantasy, along with limits and other pertinent information. The top who insists that you tell him or her what you were too shy to say in the first place supports you and gives you permission. The embarrassment makes this very hot: tie me down and force me to reveal my heart's desire? Oh, poor me!

Negotiation can also be done in writing or by e-mail (although we counsel caution in sending e-mail from non-private locations like your workplace). Some dominants order the bottom to write out one or two or three fantasies, including information about his limits and desires. A letter or e-mail has the advantage of being a kind of private communication, reducing self-consciousness as it forces you to think clearly about what you would like. It gives the top time to think and prepare a response, and allows a scene to be set up where the roles are in place when the bottom comes to the door.

Thanks But No Thanks. Sometimes what you learn from a negotiation is that you and your prospective partner do not have enough common ground to develop a successful scene: not enough items in common on your YES lists, or one of you has a need for something that is outside the other's limits. Maybe you don't want to play the same game. Or your relationship needs and expectations are too different. Or maybe, during the negotiation process, you do not feel comfortable or safe with some aspect of this top's approach.

It can be tempting, in this circumstance, to try to push for agreement that doesn't really exist. Or to start operating on the assumption that something is wrong with you if you don't want what this other person does. Or to be untrue to yourself in order to please another.

This won't work. If you can't negotiate a scene honestly, then you need to not play. However embarrassing or uncool or unsatisfying or disappointing it may be, it is important to be able to say NO.

Saying no to sex or S/M needs no reason beyond not wanting to. No excuses are required. All you need to do is say no. No, thank you. No, I find you terrifically attractive but I don't think we want to play the same game. No, I don't feel that there's chemistry between us. No, that's beyond my limits. No, I don't want to. Thank you for offering, but no.

Remember, it's emotionally far easier to say "no" before a scene than to stop one in progress... and the time you're wasting doing a scene you don't want could be better spent doing the scene of your dreams with someone else!

Where Does Sex Fit In? Take some time to look at the meaning of sexuality in your concept of a scene. Many players take this issue for granted - either assuming that there will be sex, or assuming that there won't - far too often. And there is a lot of variation from one individual to another. For some people, sex is the reward they get after successfully completing an intense scene, so after the great beating or whatever the top becomes more of a nurturer arranging for the bottom's pleasure. For others, sex is submission, more a part of how they get into bottom space and how they feel dominated by their top - if this is your picture, then waiting for the end of the scene to get fucked won't work as well for you.

And if your fantasy of giving service includes a little sexual violation now and again, then it is probably better to let your play partner know about this than it is to wait patiently forever in a state of unfulfilled yearning. On the other hand, if your hot fantasy about this is that your top is withholding sex from you because she likes to see you yearning, it's a good idea to check that out with her, because that may not be her idea. Your top cannot read your mind, and unfulfilled yearning (sighing, heavy breathing, etc.) doesn't really look that different from terrifically turned on.

Your authors tend to like a lot of sex in our scenes: foreplay, middleplay, afterplay. We find that for us, sexual

contact increases the intimacy of a scene and can generate an almost psychic intensity.

Turning Fantasies Into Realities. To script scenes from your fantasies, start by recognizing that you already have a lot of skills in manipulating fantasy that you have practiced over and over while playing with yourself -masturbation is a great learning tool as well as good fun. You probably already know how to pace and time the story, to rewind, or play certain parts over and over, and to fast-forward to the orgasmic part at the right moment. Real play can benefit from these skills as you adapt the timing of your mental images to the exigencies of reality, including the needs of a real partner of less-than-infinite strength, technical expertise and sexual capacity.

If you try to make your scene look exactly like your fantasy in every detail, you're scripting too tightly: your top will find it virtually impossible to play with you, and you are very likely to encounter interruptions and disappointments as reality stubbornly refuses to conform to your fantasy. Fortunately, you can help reality along by running the complicated or excessive parts in your imagination. You probably already know how to fantasize while you are driving a car, or at work, even while you're having sex. This is a good way to deal with those frequent occasions when you want more than is really possible: as Dossie puts it, "Sometimes my eyes are bigger than my cunt." Fantasizing while you play also can help you get into your part as slave or kidnap victim or what-have-you (or possibly who-has-you), because you can change your experience of yourself. You knew how to do this when you were a kid: your Batman costume made you a superhero, even with no Batmobile. That's why we call it "play."

Your authors once did a scene together in which Janet was an evil pirate and Dossie her helpless kidnap victim. Janet confessed afterwards her concern that she wasn't providing enough appropriately piratical dialogue, but Dossie reassured her that she had the ship firmly envisioned in her head, and Janet's chuckles of genuine pleasure were all it had taken (besides a little creative costuming and appropriate bondage) to convince Dossie that her cruel captor had malicious designs on her, and to keep the pirate fantasy alive. And so what if one of us thought Dossie was tied to the mast, and the other to the wheel? It was actually some eyebolts on the wall anyway.

S/M players are schemers. We are always scheming ways to take the most outrageous of our imaginings and experience them in reality. No matter how impossible a particular fantasy of, perhaps, extreme violence, or unlikely adventures like sprouting wings and flying, or science fiction extrapolations - the question is simply how to figure out a safe, consensual and do-able way to make it happen.

At any time, in any scene, it may feel right to do part of what you want, but not all of it. Then you can choose whether to grieve over the part that wasn't there, or delight in the part that was. Please remember - there is always the future. Anything that is worth doing in the first place is worth waiting for the opportunity to do it right. And if it's really worth doing, then it's worth practicing and doing it over and over till you get it right. After all, once you do, you'll probably still want to do it over and over again because you got so good at it! We hope you will rejoice in the riches you have today while you scheme for the even greater riches you will enjoy tomorrow.

Keeping It Consensual

Safewords. Since we all agree (we hope!) that BDSM should be consensual, we need ways to ascertain that everybody involved is still consenting once the scene is under way. One of the easiest and most flexible ways to do so is with a safeword.

A safeword is a code word that players agree on to mean "Stop, something is wrong." The reason we need code is that lots of us like to pretend we don't want to have all these amazing things done to us, and we may pretend by joyously shrieking "Nononononono," so we need another word to mean that. Or we may become incoherent and need a one-syllable way to communicate.

Safewords come in many forms. Many players use "red" to mean "stop, something is wrong," and "pink" or "yellow" to mean "I don't want you to stop but could you please do that lighter or slower or something or we will have to stop." "Green" also can come in handy when what you want to say is "more, more, more!"

Some safewords do not have to be in code: "My right foot is asleep" is a perfectly clear message, "May I speak?"

is always a polite form, and "I need a little break now or soon" is also good communication. If you don't want to use words, or you do want a gag, a rubber ball or jangly keyring, held in the hand, can be dropped or thrown to let your top know there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Using a safeword is a difficult decision for a player, particularly an experienced one. Good players know that when their partner uses a safeword, she is often feeling disappointed, chagrined and inadequate over needing to do so. This is an important time for mutual support and affection. Whether the safeword has been invoked by the top (yes, tops use safewords too) or the bottom, it means somebody is having a hard time, and needs and deserves caring support and validation. Dossie was once subjected to ridicule for using a safeword, of the "Aw, c'mon, can't you take it?" variety - and, she says, "It turned me into a real bitch real fast." She never played with that top again.

Never allow anyone to tell you that you were wrong to use a safeword; the judgment of when to use or not use one is purely your decision and is not debatable. Even if you've given consent to an activity in your pre-scene negotiations, you are entitled to withdraw that consent if the activity isn't working for you — if it's too intense or if you're reacting in a way you hadn't anticipated. Although a top may feel disappointed by your use of a safeword, she doesn't get to express anger or reproach, or put you down for safewording. Your safeword is your mechanism for taking care of yourself and nobody but you can tell you how to take care of yourself.

It can happen (and probably will) that in some scene or other, you may fail to safeword, then on later consideration wish that you had. You may have gotten so deeply into the role that you forgot that you had choices, or you got so nonverbal you forgot about speech, or you may have been too embarrassed, or maybe you just kept putting it off... most experienced bottoms will admit to having made all these mistakes. This can leave you in the very uncomfortable position of having played heavier (with, perhaps, some bruises and welts to remind you of it) than you would have if your top hadn't turned your brain off for you like you asked him to.

This is not an occasion to blame anyone, not your top or yourself. It is an occasion to arrange to talk later to the top so that she doesn't continue operating on the assumption that you liked something that in fact you didn't.

We have met bottoms who say they don't want to negotiate a safeword because "if I have one, I use it before I'm really ready for the scene to stop." Our experience has been that as you learn more about your own limits and about your partner, you'll learn how to "stretch" and allow your limits to be pushed further and further. There's also no reason why the use of a safeword should mean that you have to stop playing entirely, unless that's the specific meaning you've negotiated for your safeword: you can safeword, drop out of the scene, do whatever communication is called for to make the scene work for everybody, and then go right back to stretching those limits. Don't give up on safewords... simply learn more about your own capabilities and desires.

We have also met tops who want to dispose of safewords for certain scenes, such as punishment scenes ("How can I push limits if my bottom's just going to call safeword on me?"). We strongly suggest that you not allow this to happen with you. A possible compromise might be an agreement that you will do your best not to use your safeword because of intense sensation, but that you still have it in place if you need it due to extreme emotional distress (such as unexpected age regression or violent rage), an awareness of damage to your body, physical illness, or similar emergencies.

Playing without a safeword may seem like a hot scene — that's the fantasy - but the reality is that in consensual BDSM there are always safewords or safeword-equivalents. They may be subtle, or based on a couple's knowledge of each other, or they may be normal speech or messages in the code of bottom and top roles, but they still function as safewords. When no form of safeword has been agreed on, the bottom has to resort to shrieking "Stop this scene you are a crud I hate you stop NOW!" to get the point across. We think safewords are a more civilized choice.

We have met players who structure scenes by playing heavier and heavier until the bottom calls a safeword. This is not an appropriate goal for a scene: for most bottoms, using a safeword is associated with feelings of failure and shame. Most of us would rather end a scene by succeeding in taking some intense and difficult stimulus. Then everybody feels like a winner. Besides, any fool can do things to you that you don't like - why bother to play at

all?

We hope it never happens to you that you have to call safeword because your top has purposefully and maliciously violated a limit. But if it does, there may be no point in trying to continue the scene; trust has been broken. It may or may not be worthwhile to spend some time later in non-scene space trying to explain your feelings to this top, in hopes that he will learn something from the experience. Or you may find that later, when you're not in role and not under stress, you no longer perceive the top's actions as malicious - in which case you owe him an apology.

But the vast majority of safeword situations fall under the "shit happens" category: something has gone wrong that neither the top nor the bottom could have reasonably predicted, or one partner has made an honest mistake. In this case, it is usually both possible and realistic to talk through what happened, agree on a solution to the problem, and proceed with the scene. You'll find it requires much less time to get back into the same space and level of arousal then it took to get there in the first place. Dossie remembers:

The first year I did S/M with a partner, every scene we did ended in a safeword from one or the other of us. We were new and very nervous, and when one of us safeworded, we would throw all the toys and bondage stuff off the bed, have something to drink, agonize over whatever went wrong this time, despair a little, and then realize that we were terribly turned on and fuck like crazy amidst the abandoned piles of ropes and chains. It took us a long time to realize that these weren't failed scenes — they were successful ones!

Check-Ins. "Check-ins" are a way for tops to take initiative to see how the bottom is doing and stay in touch with what's going on. Consent can thus be reaffirmed throughout the scene without breaking role. Consider, for example, asking a bottom to kiss a whip or other implement: it lets the bottom know what is proposed, giving him or her the opportunity to question or object, or consent with a kiss.

Threats of scary or new activity are also sexy, and offer a chance for the bottom if necessary to say "I don't think I'm quite ready for the steel bullwhip tonight, sir or madam."

Check-ins are necessary to stay in touch with what's going on, especially when the activity places the top in a location where she might not be able to hear words or read facial expressions, or when the top has reason to believe that the bottom has "gone under" to an extent that taking initiative may be difficult. Overly frequent check-ins can be irritating: when a top asks you if you're okay every thirty seconds, you can come to feel that your top's need for reassurance is disrupting the play. However, tops should not be forced to carry on with no reassurance whatsoever; then they might not feel safe to go as far as you want them to.

A top can check in with questions like "Do you remember your safeword?" or "Are you still with me?" Partners can agree on a check-in code similar to a safeword -the "two squeezes" check-in, in which the top squeezes the bottom's hand twice to check in, and the bottom squeezes back twice if he is okay, is growing in popularity.

Can You Change Your Mind? Some players believe consent should never be renegotiated "upwards" mid-scene, because when people are excited they may decide it would be great to do something that in a cooler moment they would regret. You are always entitled to withdraw consent if you have changed your mind about a proposed activity - you may have tried something new and found it didn't work, or you may have reacted in a way you hadn't expected.

Some feel that it's okay to renegotiate consent when the situation is very clear. We've both had experiences in which "very clear" has sounded like "Yes! Push that limit! Do it now! Yes, please!" And that can indeed work very well at times, and we don't want to argue with inspiration... but, if there is any doubt at all, please include the activity in future negotiations rather than trying to include it in that session. Remember, there is always the future, and play that is worth doing is worth waiting for.

The watchword for these kinds of decisions is "know thyself." The more you can be honest and accepting of yourself and your desires, the easier it is to make sane decisions about how to achieve them.

Afterwards. Many good players also set up a time after the scene to review what happened, what worked, what didn't, who wanted more of what, and so on. Maybe the next day, maybe over brunch, maybe a phone call during the week - anytime but directly afterwards. Right after the scene, objectivity is not possible.

Some communicate in person, others by e-mail - some dominants require their submissives to maintain a journal which the dominant can access.

However you choose to organize this discussion, remember to include praise for what you liked, and approach any concerns or difficulties without blarney. None of us are psychic enough to prevent misunderstandings, and so we have to figure out more mundane ways to let each other know what's going on. In a friendly and cooperative manner, share what you liked, and what you might have liked different. Give your top a space to share her experience as well.

If you make this a regular practice in your play, you will rapidly learn to collaborate to create scenes from your wildest fantasies!

The Bridge to Reality

Most people's first bottoming experience does not take place in a bedroom or a playroom or a dungeon. It takes place on an absolutely ideal, perfectly decorated and populated stage: inside their minds. That was our first bottoming experience, and we bet it was yours too.

On that mental stage, we are graceful and gorgeous, our tops do exactly the right kind of perfectly awful things to us, and the perfect toy or piece of equipment magically appears at just the moment we need it and disappears again when we're done with it.

Yet as perfect as that stage is, most of us sooner or later hanker to step off it and into something a bit more, shall we say, immediate. We want to connect with real partners and experience real sensations. This chapter is about how to step across the chasm between our fantasies and our realities.

Where Are You Starting From? Both of us started out with solo and rather lonely fantasies, feeling like we were the only people in the world who had thoughts like ours. Dossie struggled to reconcile her fantasies of kidnap and captivity with her feminist beliefs. Janet had a hard time figuring out how a nice girl like her could be hankering to wallop perfectly innocent backsides. Eventually, we both hooked up with folks who helped guide us to recognition that there were safe, healthy and ethical ways to enact our fantasies without taking or giving up any more power than we wanted to.

Sad to say, many people still struggle in isolation with questions like ours — although it's certainly a much easier and more informative world in which to be a pervert than the one we came of age in.

Today, many people pick up an erotic or educational kinky book or magazine, and find that something in them responds to the thoughts or images they discover there. Some may learn about their local educational or support group through an ad, a booth at a street fair, or a public demonstration of some kind.

And then, of course, there's the Internet. We think it's safe to say that as we write this, the 'Net is by far the greatest single point of entry for new players into the BDSM scene. (In the first edition of this book, written a decade ago, there is one paragraph of information about the 'Net. How rapidly the world has changed!)

Whatever your point of entry, we think it's safe to say that you'll experience some rude shocks as well as some blissful revelations as you cross the threshold into real-time play with a flesh-and-blood partner.

About the 'Net. Whole books have been written about sexuality and the Internet - it may well be the cause of the most radical shift in sexual thinking since the advent of reliable birth control. One of your authors is a dedicated 'Net geek, the other uses it only when absolutely necessary — but each of us has been part of the leather scene for well over a decade, and know our way around pretty well by now. If you're new or just learning, we think it's a

pretty good idea for you to get on-line and begin exploring. However, there are some pitfalls as well as many benefits to on-line oration, so we'd like to give you our thoughts about what you might expect from the many different venues available through your friendly household computer.

In some ways, the Internet is not much like reality at all — one of our friends says, "The 'Net bears about the same resemblance to real life that television does." But, like TV, the 'Net affects real emotions and addresses real issues, and is an important mode of interpersonal communication for a and growing number of people. Electronic interactions are like real-world ones in some ways. Although a cyber-scene or discussion may not leave you with bruises or welts, they can affect your emotions and relationships in many of the same ways that real-world play might. The skills you're learning elsewhere in this book — negotiating your needs and wants, setting your limits, getting to know your tops before you play with them, going slowly, checking in afterwards, and so on - are just as necessary when your scene takes place on a monitor as they are when it happens in a dungeon. We've both heard many unhappy tales of bottoms who thought that just because their play was virtual instead of real, that they didn't need to take good care of themselves... and who found out otherwise when a scene left them feeling surprisingly used, upset, unseen or generally stomped-on.

Virtual play enables its participants to connect and mirror their fantasies in a kind of feedback loop not available in the "real world," often leading to startlingly intense fantasy gratification. The reason we put "real world" in quotes is because in many ways cyberplay is real: the shared fantasy is a real fantasy, and the physiological response in your body is very very real... so in some, but not all, ways, the universe you create in your head and manifest through your keyboard and monitor is just as real as the one you're occupying now.

On the other hand, many of the people playing in cyberspace have little or no experience in real-time BDSM. This absence of "reality checks" sometimes means that it's easy for them to get unrealistically caught up in their roles, enacting the impossibly controlling and arrogant dominant, or the cringing and servile submissive, without much recognition for their own or their partners' real needs or limits. If you find yourself in an Internet environment where it seems like bottoms aren't valued, or are treated rudely or disrespectfully, we assure you that there are plenty of other places to hang out - the 'Net is a huge and varied universe. Leave, and let the other folks there know why you're leaving - some of them might just decide to follow you.

One final warning: one of the down sides to cyber-interaction is a lack of accountability - the 'Net lets you play however you want, with little or no chance of your actions ever being connected with your real-world self. Good people use this opportunity to explore roles, scenes and characters that may be too scary or unrealistic or embarrassing to enact in reality. Bad people can use it to stalk you, threaten you, insult you, tell people untruths about you, or reveal information about you without your consent. We suggest that you be as careful about who you associate with on-line as you would be in real life, and be especially careful in sharing information about your name, location or life situation, unless this is information you'd be comfortable having the whole world know about you.

Now that we've talked about the scary part, let's talk about the good part - the Internet offers a wide world of information, support, friends and possible play. But the 'Net is a huge jungle of websites, mailing lists, newsgroups, chatrooms and other venues... so how do you get started?

A lot of people exploring kink on the Internet get started looking at sites on the World Wide Web. These sites resemble magazines in many ways; they may feature pictures, text, and sometimes even video and audio, and they allow you to move from one page to another as your interests dictate. They are appealing to many beginners because you don't have to participate in anything to look at them: they are very anonymous, although many do require paid membership, or ask that you register with a relatively inexpensive service which confirms that you are old enough to look at sexually oriented material.

Some may be porn sites, intended purely for sexual stimulation. Others might be informationally oriented, with articles about various aspects of BDSM, and links (connections that you can click on to go look at something else) to other informational sites. Some might belong to a manufacturer of sex toys, publications, or fetish clothing, and still others are maintained by support and education groups for BDSM folks. Since the Web is essentially

unregulated and chaotic, the only way you can tell what kind of site you're looking at is to use your own common sense - if it seems to be mostly there as a sexual turn-on, its not intended as a source of realistic advice and ideas.

Information on the Web, or for that matter anywhere on the Internet, is only as good as the person who put it there. Don't take any advice from a single source. Look at several websites, and discover for yourself where they agree and where they disagree: the points of disagreement may be issues that you'll want to think about and explore carefully.

Another way to explore the Internet is in chat rooms. These rooms enable you to converse in real time (just like an in-person conversation, except typed onto a screen) with other folks who share your interests. Chat rooms tend to be sorted by sexual orientation (special rooms for female-dominant/male-submissive players, gay players, etc.), sexual fantasy (rooms that explore the male-dominant culture described in the "Gor" fantasy novels by John Norman, rooms for men who enjoy being treated as "sissies," etc.), support (rooms for people married to non-kinky people, for people overcoming abusive backgrounds, etc.), or location (rooms in which people who live close together can get to know one another). There are also many general get-acquainted rooms in which everybody can mix freely.

Chat rooms can be great fun, and a terrific way to meet kindred spirits - either for on-line interaction, or in person. However, be aware that many of these rooms have special protocols, such as ways in which submissives are expected to address dominants, which are not necessarily typical of realtime kink interactions. If you want to hang out in a chat room, learn and use the local conventions, but don't assume that anyone outside the chat room will use or appreciate them.

People often "play" in chat rooms, sometimes only in words ("I fasten the collar around your neck and stroke your silky hair"), sometimes by giving the submissive orders that can be followed at home.

Janet once did a chat room scene that led to new insights for herself, her partner and several onlookers:

I knew and liked my friend C - a male top -from many online conversations in the past, but we'd never actually played, in reality or on-line. But one night we were in an open channel, with quite a few people exchanging conversations around us... and, well, one thing kind of led to another: we wound up exploring a lengthy scene that was his first experience ever as a bottom.

In lustful, stroke-by-stroke detail, I described myself shaving his backside, sensually applying the warm lather, deftly slicing through it with the edge of my safety razor, exposing stripe after stripe of fresh pink skin until his butt was smooth and glowing. He, in his turn, described the slippery creamy lather, the cool feeling as the hair and foam were stripped away, the vulnerability of his new hairlessness. Then, when we were both thoroughly turned on by the shaving, I informed him that I was strapping on my "dick"... by this point, everybody else's conversation had pretty much stopped; they were mesmerized by C's and my scene. I described the thick glob of lube I put on my fingers and used to probe his butthole. Then, each of us took turns describing our sensations as my relentless dildo took possession of his freshly denuded backside. I described the rhythmic pressure of the dildo flange against my mound, and how it was driving me closer and closer to orgasm... he described the relentless pressure against his prostate, the intensity of my thrusting, the feeling of being totally possessed... and eventually, in cyberspace (and perhaps in real space as well) we both reached orgasm.

It was a reality-changing scene for both of us. Soon afterwards, C went on to explore his bottom space in real time — the last time I saw him he was a happy switch. I discovered a shaving kink I'd never known I possessed. And, based on the enthusiastic and slightly startled comments I got afterwards, several onlookers learned a bit more about their own turn-ons! It's easy to assume that, since no physical force is being exerted, you don't need to negotiate your limits or needs. On the contrary, we both know people who have experienced unexpected and genuine emotional trauma from chatroom encounters: our suggestion is that you negotiate them as carefully as you would a physical scene. You can use the "Yes/ No/Maybe" exercise we describe on page 34, or any one of several negotiation checklists available on-line, as a jumping-off point.

Newsgroups and Bulletin Boards are environments in which people can post messages which everybody can read,

just like a bulletin board on which people could tack up notes. The best-known newsgroup environment is called Usenet, and offers tens of thousands of groups for every interest, including yours. Some newsgroups are "moderated," which means that someone keeps an eye on what's posted there to keep out unsolicited advertisements (known as "spam"), insulting or haranguing posts (known as "flames"), and off-topic discussion. Other groups are unmoderated, and have more of a free-for-all spirit. Some people prefer moderated groups for their relative calmness, others prefer the uncensored chaos or unmoderated groups.

People who post in newsgroups and bulletin boards are often longtime players with lots of experience to share, and a generous willingness to share it. You may have to comb through a lot of garbage to get to the gems, though. Some people enjoy starting fights in newsgroups by posting inflammatory questions or statements; these are known as "trolls" and are universally loathed. In addition, there's no way to know which newsgroup posters are knowledgeable and which are not, unless you hang out long enough to get a sense of who seems sensible and experienced... which we recommend that you do.

Private Mailing Lists are a bit like newsgroups in that messages get posted for people to read at their convenience. However, posts to a mailing list get sent to a central entity, which then copies them and sends them to the e-mail addresses of all the subscribers, so you receive them in your inbox along with your other e-mail.

Many mailing lists are regional (some are set up especially to announce local BDSM events), and others are for discussion of specific topics. Some particularly knowledgeable, respected or charismatic leaders in the kink communities maintain private mailing lists for their fans or followers, and some kink-related businesses might have mailing lists which they use to announce new products or special offers. Most mailing lists are at least somewhat moderated, usually by the individual who runs the list.

Mailing lists can be extremely useful in that they can be tailored especially for your particular interest, and some are very specialized indeed: if you like to be spanked by left-handed carpenters of Latino ancestry, there's probably a mailing list for you. If not, you can start one!

What's the Same? What's Different?

The Internet has certainly brought a lot more novice players into the real-time scene than either of us ever imagined possible. Your first steps into physical interaction are going to be very similar whether you started with a book, a website, a workshop, or a thought in your head and a hand between your legs. Some things will be less wonderful than you imagined and some will be even more wonderful... you'll probably even discover terrific new things to do that you never even thought of before.

Here are some of the discoveries you may make when you have your first encounter with physical reality:

people. The tops in your fantasies are such good mind-readers, aren't they? Not only do they dominate you in exactly the way that transports you to ecstasy, but they look, dress and sound just as you want them to!

Whether the tops who live in your head were created exclusively by your own fertile imagination, or whether they moved in after you met them on a website, in a magazine, or during a professional domination session, we think it's a safe bet that they don't look or act much like the tops you'll meet in real life. Real tops have love handles, troubles at work, moments of guilt and insecurity, and all the other problems that you, or anybody else, might have. They don't usually look like the tops in magazines or on websites, and the kind of scene they want to do with you might not match up in every particular with the kind of scene you've been masturbating to in your favorite John Preston or Pat Califia book for years and years.

And what about you? In your fantasies, you might be spectacularly beautiful or handsome, infinitely submissive and pliable, as flexible as a yogi and masochistic enough to take anything anybody wants to dish out. In reality, we bet, you're not. We're not, anyway. And you may feel shy, guilty or inadequate because you don't match up with the fantasy bottom in your head.

We're big fans of flexibility. The top who looks nothing like your fantasy creature might be hot, creative and

empathetic once the dungeon door closes. The scene that includes activities you'd never even considered might turn out to be the biggest turn-on imaginable. Trying to fit every dominant you meet into an exact match for the dominants who live in your head is a surefire recipe for disaster, and disrespectful besides.

And likewise — you're pretty swell too. Not perfect, of course, but who is? Instead of mourning what you're not, make a resolution to celebrate what you are - the cute, sexy bottom who's willing to explore and to do your best to make each and every scene a success.

That Darned Reality. As far as we know, nobody's ever been impotent on-line — since your playing field is your imagination, you get to have an erection as huge and durable as you want... even if you're female. Likewise, in cyberspace nobody's flogging arm ever gets tired and nobody ever gets a cramp in their foot.

Real-world play, while it has its own satisfactions, doesn't offer these advantages. Tops and bottoms in the real world get tired and sweaty, we get cramps and aches, our bodies sometimes refuse to cooperate just when we most want them to. Cyberplay doesn't necessarily do a good job of preparing us for such minor disappointments and interruptions: be prepared to process them lovingly with plenty of reassurance for yourself and your partner when necessary, and remind yourself that the joys of the flesh more than compensate us for its weaknesses.

sensations- One friend of ours played with a bottom who told him she was very experienced, a heavy masochist with a particular fondness for canes. But the first time he gave her a moderate-strength cane stroke, she safeworded. Surprised, he backed off, did a bit more warmup, and tried again — and she safeworded again. At that point he stopped the scene to find out what was wrong... and discovered that she had never received an actual physical caning before, although she'd been "cyber-caned" on many occasions.

This is, perhaps, an extreme example, but it points out an important issue. Play doesn't always feel the same way in reality that it did in your fantasies. That gloriously submissive kneeling posture may set off intolerable aching in your knees and thighs, that "Pulp Fiction" like leather hood might actually make it hard for you to breathe, doing your dominant's dishes may feel pretty much like, well, doing dishes, and that sexy wooden frat paddle may just be a bit too much for your very first spanking.

Even if your fantasies, or your reading, or your cyberplay, have been extraordinarily intense, we strongly counsel caution and going slowly during your first steps into physical reality. Some experiences will feel much worse than you thought they would, some will feel about the way you imagined them, and some will feel much, much better - and there's plenty of time to explore them all. Be honest about your experiences and feelings and take the time to savor each new experience.

Where the Fantasy Ends. The nice thing about all your hot bottomy fantasies is that when one of them starts to feel boring or excessive, you simply stop having it for a while. When you begin to explore that fantasy in real life, you may find that being tied up and parked in a corner feels very very exciting... for about twenty minutes. Then, you start to wonder what's on TV.

As thrilling and compelling as your fantasies might be, we recommend a slow and careful approach, trying a little bit today and a little bit more tomorrow. You'd probably much rather do a scene that leaves you wanting more than one that leaves you feeling bored, angry, overwhelmed or turned off - and remember, there's always plenty of time for exploration!

Connecting

In this book we teach you how to be a good bottom, an exceptional bottom, even a great and sought-after bottom. With the skills you will learn here, you can pursue your wildest fantasies with confidence.

One of the most important qualifications you need in order to become a bottom is... at least one top. For many folks, unfortunately, this is easier said than done. There are typically more bottoms than tops in any given S/M scene, and good tops - skilled, empathetic, ethical and uninhibited — are a rare and precious commodity.

If you read this book and take it to heart, we guarantee that you will have made yourself a better and hence more desirable bottom. But building a better bottom doesn't necessarily mean that the world will beat a path to your ass. How can people know what a spectacular and devoted bottom you are if they've never met you?

Here are a few ways that people we know have found tops - as one-time play partners, for ongoing play relationships, and even as life partners.

Ads and Such. Placing and answering personal ads can and does pay off for many people - and now, with many newspapers, magazines, Usenet newsgroups, private mailing lists and World Wide Web sites offering personal ads, you have a lot more options in terms of what you can say and where you can say it.

Who cruises the ads? Probably a lot of people more or less like you. If you've never placed or answered a personal ad before, you might believe that only losers use the ads. But actually, advertisers and answerers come from a wide range of fairly ordinary folk - maybe not conservative enough to restrict their choices to their church's singles group, but wanting something more connected and intelligent than trying to pick up partners in a bar where loud music and alcohol make conversation virtually impossible. Both of us have had experiences in which we've answered a personal ad and found out that the person on the other end was already a friend of ours - which may sound a little embarrassing but can actually lead to a decision to try out a little friendly play. ("Hey, I never knew you were into that!")

There is a normal progression to how you meet someone from the ads. You respond to an ad, or get a response to yours, either by e-mail or, if the ad is in the paper, by voice mail. After some back-and-forth communication in these modes, you exchange phone numbers and chat on the phone. If the future still looks rosy, or at least attractive, then you arrange to meet in person for a coffee date or the like, with no intention of leaping into bed or the dungeon. In the argot of the ads, the first meeting is where you determine if there is "chemistry," by which they mean magic, which really means whether there's a spark of attraction between you and the other person. These meetings - by e-mail, phone and in person — are all opportunities to share information about likes and dislikes, to decide if this person wants to play the same game as you do.

If you decide that you're ready to try placing an ad, read pages 33 to 35 about the Yes/No/Maybe exercise and do it by yourself before you write your ad, so that you're working from good clear knowledge of what you're looking for and what doesn't interest you. You also need to be working from a lot of knowledge about yourself. Some people get together with a friend for support when writing an ad: your friend can help you brainstorm a list of things that are attractive about you (melting eyes, incisive wit, playfulness, intelligence, creativity, sensuality and the like). Or, if you must write alone, start out by writing down a list of ten attributes that would make someone very lucky to get you.

If age, appearance or body image are worrying you, fear not. The people who cruise the ads come in all shapes and sizes themselves, and many recognize that being sexy is not the exclusive province of the young and thin. If you put yourself out there honestly, then you're likely to reach someone who honestly wants you - whereas if you're dishonest, all you'll catch is someone who wants somebody else, which won't do you any good at all.

Some information you might want to include in your ad: your gender, age range, body type, particular kinds of play that interest you, kinds of play that don't interest you, any extenuating factors such as existing relationship commitments or busy work schedules, and what kind of relationship you want (Long-term committed or just-for-fun? Monogamous or open? Basically egalitarian, or an ongoing exchange of power?). Do *not* fib about any of these items — that's dishonest and a terrible way to start off a relationship.

Print ads vary widely in terms of what they'll let you say about your BDSM desires - be as clear about your interests and playstyle as the paper you're advertising in will allow. Gay and lesbian papers usually give greater latitude than heterosexually oriented or mainstream papers, although some urban lifestyle weeklies are pretty open-minded. If you live in an area with conservative papers that don't allow words like "dominant," "submissive," "S/M," "top" and "bottom," consider yourself lucky if you can place an ad that clearly conveys your interests at all. Try catch-phrases such as "meek," "obedient," "strong sensation," "overwhelmed," etc., or talk

about works of literature that are S/M-oriented.

Kink-oriented newsgroups, mailing lists and websites are relatively uncensored, so you can be quite explicit about what you want and what you have to offer. Be sure that the group you're posting to allows personal ads — very few discussion-only groups and lists do, and if you post an ad in one of these groups, you can expect to find your inbox full of nasty e-mails the next day. However, there are plenty of groups that are specifically oriented toward personals, or that allow all forms of content including personals.

No matter what venue you choose for your ad, be sure to do lots of up-front communication with potential tops before you actually play. Back in Janet's novice-top days (which took place in a smaller community than San Francisco), she used to meet potential bottoms almost exclusively by answering their personal ads. Her first letter or call to them was an instruction to "write down your most submissive fantasy and send it to me."

First-Time Meetings. Even after you've exchanged a lot of e-mails and phone calls and letters and such, it's a good idea to be very, very careful about your first face-to-face meeting.

Good ways to meet a new friend for the first time might include meeting at a public gathering such as a club meeting or a "munch" (a gathering of kinky folks in a non-kink setting such as a restaurant or bar). Or you might meet in a public place such as a restaurant; scout around until you can find one with a busy and well-lit parking lot or entrance so you can walk safely to and from your transportation. Do *not* meet an unknown potential play partner in her home, or in a private place such as an abandoned outdoor location.

And wherever you're meeting your partner, make sure someone knows where you are, who you'll be with, and when you're due back, and the person you're meeting knows that you've shared that information. This advice holds true regardless of your gender or orientation.

When it comes time for an actual play date, we counsel the use of a "silent alarm" (sometimes called a "safe call"). You make arrangements with a trusted friend: the friend knows who you're with, where, and for what purpose. Your play partner knows you've made this agreement with an outsider.

You agree to call your friend at a time after you're sure your date should be over. You may want to agree on a "code word" you can include in your conversation to let your friend know that you're OK, and a different "code word" that says "I'm in trouble, get help." If your friend doesn't receive the call at the appointed time, he is to assume you need help and act accordingly: you and the friend should decide together ahead of time what kind of action is appropriate, up to and including calling the police to go make sure that everything's OK.

Do It Yourself. Another way to find a top is to "build your own." If you are already partnered and your partner is open to experimentation, or if you live in an area where there is no S/M community and thus little to no chance of finding an experienced and self-realized top, this may be your best bet.

If your top-to-be is a little freaked out by the whole idea, you'll have to move slowly. Our book *When Someone You Love Is Kinky* is designed to help explain kinky play to vanilla folks and may be a good way to open up a discussion. It will also help you think through how you want to proceed if your friend/lover/partner/spouse wants nothing to do with the whole idea - which we hope won't happen to you.

Once you've got your potential top ready to at least give it a try, the trick is to teach gently and slowly, to settle for less than you may want as she gets a sense of what leathersex is like, and to give lots of praise and appreciation (first-time topping can be very scary!). Be prepared to process well-meaning mistakes. Also be aware that your new top may know little or nothing about play except for the unrealistic, nonconsensual picture painted by S/M porn. Showing her your beloved copy of "Bullwhip Babes" and saying "See, this is what I want you to do to me" is almost sure to be a bad idea: learning to be a top, just like learning to walk, ride a bike or write a book, takes place one step at a time. Remember, there's always a future, and you don't have to do it all in your first session.

We have both heard of novice tops who have trouble distinguishing between BDSM play and abuse, not because they want to be abusive, but because they figure that's what bottoms "really" want. Realistic how-to books and

magazines like those listed in the bibliography are an excellent antidote.

It's fine at first to teach your novice top exactly how you want to be topped... but realize that sooner or later, if he has any genuine top energy, he is going to want to try something that you hadn't thought of but that turns him on. If the proposed activity isn't a "hard limit" for you, we suggest you hold on tight and enjoy the ride... you might discover a whole new area for fantasy and experimentation!

Join the Community and Make Friends. For people who live in or near cities with good-sized BDSM communities, there are almost certainly support groups you can join. Such groups usually offer meetings and programs where you can learn about the games you want to play. They also offer the chance to make friends with a bunch of people with whom you have perversions in common, and who may know a lot that you would like to learn. Even in smaller communities that don't have formal support groups, there will probably be "munches" and other social gatherings where you can meet like-minded folks.

Joining the community is about a lot more than just finding the top of your dreams, so we don't recommend that you walk into a kinky environment solely looking for Mr. or Ms. Right. Meet as many people as you can: they may or may not be folks you will actually play with, but if they've been around the community for a while, they can probably make introductions, fill you in on gossip and background, and maybe even get you parry invitations. Friends can "mentor" you through difficult phases with support and advice. They can also get the word out regarding your skills and charms as a bottom and as a person, and can tell you about tops whose playstyle might be a fit for yours.

Janet's life partner started out as her friend and mentor; since both of them were at that time exclusively top, it didn't occur to her to look at him as a possible partner until a bit later. They've been together for well over a decade now.

The moral to this section: joining the community is a key step in making your dreams come true. Find it. meet everyone and be as friendly and pleasant as you can. We guarantee you will learn a lot and have fun - let the play partners fall where they may. Soon enough, you'll get to fall too... at their feet, perhaps?

Choosing Tops

Once you've followed one or more of the steps outlined above, you will need to start looking at the people you meet with an eye to choosing tops.

The first advice we could give you is to open your mind. Many bottoms come into S/M with a fantasy top in their head that they have been constructing every night at bedtime for who knows how many years. The mistake many people make, in the vanilla world as well as the kinky one, is to judge all the potential partners they see by how closely they fit their fantasy.

If you are matching up a real person with the picture in your mind, you are not seeing the person you are meeting. You can't play with a figment of your imagination... and to treat a person like an object in your fantasy is disrespectful. This kind of thinking, no matter the gender or orientation of the bottom, is objectification, and will rapidly turn off or burn out potential tops. As Janet says, "A top is a lot more than a life support system for a whip."

We do advocate cruising for tops. Waiting forever for someone to choose you is unlikely to get you what you want: remember, Sleeping Beauty had to wait a hundred years. You can look around, see who you like and introduce yourself.

Try making a list of what you're looking for in a top. Many traits on the list will be qualities you'd want in any lover: honest, caring, warm, and so on. In a top, we also want someone who makes a good emotional connection, negotiates clearly and openly, has a good understanding of the difference between fantasy and reality, takes care of physical safety, and treats bottoms with respect (except when he's not supposed to).

We may also want tops who are nasty, domineering, pushy, stern, aggressive, and a lot of similar traits that are very sexy in a scene and a very big problem in the real world. So here we come to the difficult part. Attitude is attractive, and lot of us have a taste for rough trade. So how can you tell who to trust?

Since you are seeking somebody you want to trust a lot, it's a good idea to check references - ask several people around the community, and ask the top who he has played with who you might know. Be aware that many alternative sexuality communities are rife with politics and feuds, and that a "warning" may have to do with a personal vendetta rather than an honest safety concern: it's best to check with several different people, and to pay attention to your intuition. If an alarm bell goes off, listen to yourself, and take a little more time to explore the situation. While we don't see a need to wait a hundred years, we do like to get to know someone well enough to feel safe.

The vast majority of tops we know are responsible, honorable and civilized people whom we would trust, and have trusted, with our lives. But everybody isn't nice, and some people are drawn to BDSM for the wrong reasons — like because they really want to do that power-over stuff. And we have been attracted to them.

There are tops who try to work out in play what would be better dealt with in a therapists office. You might find them dumping a lifetime of rage and frustration on you, and you'll hate it a lot.

There are tops who think it's hot to play dangerously. Now, we like risk as well as the next bottom, but when you hear a top speak with scorn of safewords, sobriety, safe sex or safety in general, don't play with that one.

There are tops who are rigid, cold and rejecting, unwilling or unable to make connection. You can often recognize them by their refusal to drop role, insisting on acting like a top all the time. This works for them because people who are afraid of connection feel safer when they push people away. And we have been attracted to them too. What a challenge, to try to warm up a cold-blooded creature: aren't reptiles sexy? But too many times, you're just asking for rejection after rejection after rejection. We recommend you chase tops who are already warm and friendly.

When something goes wrong in a scene, the quality of your top is not judged by the fact that she tried something that didn't work out (within the limits of physical safety and consensuality), but by her willingness to listen to you when you tell her about it. A top whose ego is invested in always being right cannot hear feedback, and a top who cannot hear feedback is dangerous. A good top will listen, be concerned about your well-being and your enjoyment of the scene, and be flexible enough to adjust to your needs to make the scene work.

A good top cares about how you feel. When you care about how she feels too, then that platform of mutual care and respect becomes a stage for outrageously hot and nasty play.

Getting What You Want, And Lots Of It!

So you have dreams and fantasies of being taken, tortured, punished. Forced to submit, or submitting with joy. Being treated like a thing or an animal or a baby. Being subjected to nearly unbearable levels of stimulation. The prospect can seem overwhelming.

But we believe that you deserve to get what you want -all of it, plenty of it. And you don't need to trade off your dignity and self-respect to get it.

A lot of people who have no experience seem to believe that to get what you want as a bottom you need to give up all of your healthy individuality and strength and power: that submissives and masochists are less than complete people, especially less than the tops they play with. As we have already said, that's not how it really happens. Even if you run into some people who operate on these beliefs, we encourage you to ignore other people's bad judgment, and continue being the strong, gorgeous and exciting person that you are today, even - maybe even especially - when you are on your knees.

Buying into such ridiculous judgments can pose serious obstacles to having a good time. Do you believe that you

won't be attractive as a bottom unless you have no limits, are heavily into groveling, are able to rocket into submissive headspace at the first sound of your mistress's voice, and are turned on to the point of orgasm by intensely painful stimulations that you never tried before? Well, nonsense.

If you give yourself permission to start out where you are and learn about how to play with your fantasies in reality, you will become that bottom or submissive of your fantasies in a surprisingly short time. That is, if you take good care of yourself and insist on playing with tops who take good care of you too.

Some people believe that to achieve your bottom potential you need to approach every scene as if you were about to jump off a cliff with no bungee cord. That is not what has worked for us, and we have found very few tops who are eager to be there to catch such bottoms when they land. Give yourself permission to learn one step at a time, each new sensation, each challenge of submission, and do everything possible to make it easy on yourself so that you, and your top, have the best possible chance of succeeding at the undertaking at hand. Do the easiest thing first, and then the next easiest, and soon you will be dancing through the tough stuff.

Some people seem to think safety is for sissies, but we have become eager, popular and well-respected bottoms by taking care of ourselves, and our tops, every step of the way. And it didn't take us very long to get there.

Responsibility

The real skills of bottoming lie in how you interact with your partners - what kind of communication you do and what kind of support you give to the wonderful people you play with. A good bottom does his end of the work of developing a scene.

So who is responsible for what? You are responsible for knowing your limits and making sure your top knows them, for communicating clearly, explaining what you want, keeping agreements, supporting your top, and helping your top get his needs met. Your top is responsible for knowing and setting her limits, respecting yours, maintaining safety, and communicating his wants and needs. Both of you are responsible for scripting, for clear negotiations, for maintaining scene space, and for closure after the scene is done.

A responsible bottom figures out what she wants, and what her limits are, and communicates this information to her top. If you're a novice, you may not have all this information just yet - but you still have to communicate what you do know about your fantasies and limits, and to share new information and insights as you gain them.

Where Is Your Power?

Right inside you, where it always is.

A bottom's power may not always look like power. Sometimes being powerful is about triumphing over a difficult stimulation or struggling heroically against impossible odds. Sometimes it's about calm, competence and devotion. Sometimes it's about being secure enough to let yourself feel scared or vulnerable or small, knowing that more conventional power will be there for you when and if you need it.

Whatever kind of power bottoming brings to you, that is where you'll find your center. When you grasp your power firmly as you enter a scene, you may be surprised to discover that your sense of your own power intensifies as you play. Submission, sex, pain play: all raise power. Maybe it's part of the endorphin effect, or maybe when we feel so extremely sexy we can't help but feel magnificent. So when you are a mass of nerves contemplating your first attempt at bringing your fantasy into reality, remember this: as the power of the play overcomes the self-consciousness, as you and your top get more excited, as the juices begin to flow, you will feel incredibly powerful.

We grasp our power in order to share it. We share our power when we give the control over to the top, and together we become enormously potent.

When we fail to grasp our power, we may become overly passive or overly directive, either too needy or too

demanding. The passive bottom fails to grasp his power, and the demanding bottom, clutching shreds of power for dear life, disempowers her top: neither situation could be described as an erotic power exchange.

Bottoms who get stuck at the passive end of the spectrum come off sounding whiny, dependent, needy, clinging - tops may feel claustrophobic around them. They are often reluctant to let a top know what they like or want ("I just want to please you!"), which leaves the top out on a limb, without a clue as to what will work for this bottom, and stranded with the entire responsibility for deciding how to play. The top in this position is not adequately supported by the bottom.

Bottoms who err at the overly directive end of the spectrum can be bossy, entitled, nagging, sometimes childish, demanding "do-me queens." You have a right to get your needs met, and the responsibility to get those needs met by grownup tactics and straightforward communication. When you manipulate your top, you fail to support his role as top, undermining his authority and ultimately the scene.

If you feel you are being overly passive or directive, what can you do? We suggest you start by asking yourself: Why am I not giving myself permission to ask for what I want directly? Do I have some fantasy that nothing counts unless my top spontaneously wants to do exactly what I want? This is a common hitch for some folk.

Be reassured - smart tops discover early on that when they are willing to honor and acknowledge their bottoms' fantasies, they get hotter scenes and happier bottoms for their trouble. Most tops welcome constructive suggestions — they generate new ideas for more and better play.

Your tops cannot read your mind. They can, however, enjoy hearing about what interests you, and can also tell you what interests them. When everyone puts their desires on the table, it becomes easy to figure out how to script a scene that will make everyone feel good. (The Yes/No/Maybe exercise from Chapter 3 can be of particular help here.) And when you feel secure about getting what you want, you can afford to feel generous about what your partners might want.

We will point out again that it's not just okay to want your wildest fantasies, but it's actually necessary — with no desires, there would be no hot scenes at all! Remember, greed makes you generous.

What's In It for You?

Now that you know a lot more detail about your desires and your limits, you are well along the road to realizing your fantasies. Look at your Yes/No/Maybe list one more time from a different perspective, and see if it answers these questions: What are my goals? What are the rewards I'm looking for? This list contains the items that make up your fantasy; you will construct it step by step, like a puzzle.

And here we are back to looking at the big picture: your actual fantasy or fantasies. At this point many people, experienced players as well as novices, get really embarrassed and begin to believe that their fantasy is particularly juvenile, selfish, stupid, boring, primitive, trite, or whatever other judgments they have about themselves. The truth is that lots of fantasies are rather primitive, and many come from very young parts of ourselves, so they are juvenile. Fantasy is also the material from which we construct our movies, TV shows, books, songs and videos, so fantasies may also seem trite... you've probably seen them before.

It helps to understand that fantasies have a lot in common with mythology: they are stories that people become attached to for a variety of reasons, they satisfy some sexual or psychological need or want in our (probably only partially conscious) minds, they are rich in symbolism and emotional texture. These are the stories that dreams are made of.

So here are your dreams, and how are you going to use them as information to set up the scenes that you want? We've already discussed the physical issues... now let's look at the less tangible rewards of play, which, although they can be harder to define, are the clearest description of who you want to be as a bottom.

If you tell us that all you want is to make your mistress happy, we'll send you back to the blackboard to try again.

Many tops feel completely lost with bottoms who don't have the faintest idea of what they want, and, as we have said, it's irresponsible for bottoms to expect the tops to do all the work. And there is no way to choose a top or negotiate play with a top until you have some idea of what it is you want to get from your play.

A good question to start with is: What's in it for me? What is the reward I would like to get out of this scene? Do I want to be punished? Praised? Show off? Become invisible? Who am I as a bottom? How do I want to feel?

We need to understand that there are lots of different states of consciousness we move through every day - waking and sleeping, for instance. Being turned on is a state of consciousness, and all the parts of the sexual response cycle are too. Pain play in S/M generates states of consciousness that probably relate to how our bodies produce endorphins in response to pain. Submission is, we believe, a trancelike state of consciousness which includes heightened suggestibility and a sense of calm and Tightness. And all of our scenes, physical, emotional, mental, can be looked at as efforts to get into a particular state of consciousness.

So when you understand what you're looking for from a scene - what you want to be happening in your mind, body and soul as you connect with this wonderful person who wants to take you on this fabulous journey — you'll be all set to explain your desires and move forward to the play of your dreams.

The New Bottoming Book

By: Dossie Easton & Janet W. Hardy

Part Two: Scenes

The Rewards

Here we are going to share some examples of what has worked for various bottoms based on how they want to get to feel in a particular scene. There will be a lot more detail about how to explore these rewards in actual scenes later in the book, in Chapter 10.

Getting "In the Flow": There is a sense in BDSM play of getting to a place where everything flows, a sort of slow-motion world where you feel quite sure you are doing it all just perfectly. There is a sense of rightness - everything is as it should be. We can feel the power flowing through both of us, feel all the players in the scene connected in the flow of power, we are all flying together. When we get in the flow we feel that we can take any risks, and communication seems easy and obvious.

One friend of ours, a service-oriented submissive, told us: "When I'm serving, I know what I need to do, it's uncomplicated. I love service because it's not about me — it's about the other person. I seek to make service into an act of love. It turns off all my self-focus and lets me exist in a separate space. When I'm serving at my very best, I'm invisible — an extension of the will of my master."

Catharsis: Tears of grief tears of joy. Sometimes what you want out of a scene is a purging, to go into overload and let it all out. Maybe there is something happening that you need to cry about, or maybe you just need to clear your feelings out in general. We have deliberately negotiated to play scenes to vent anger or other difficult emotions. Sometimes catharsis is found by bringing out a forbidden part of ourselves, like for instance the crybaby that we were teased for being in childhood. We all value these scenes for the emotional release they bring, and our partners usually value sharing in the process. Next time it might be our partners turn - catharsis works from the top as well as from the bottom. It helps to let prospective partners know that if you burst into tears, or become enraged, it's what you want, and that whatever they are doing, it's obviously working.

For example, Dossie recalls an intensely emotional flogging scene at a party that was fueled by the fact that a close friend of both Dossie and her top had died that week of AIDS. She had been an important member of our community, indeed the founder of the Society of Janus, and virtually everybody at the party knew her and was moved by her death.

As David flogged me, I felt myself go into intense sadness, almost crying, and then felt overtaken by equally intense rage, that seemed to have nowhere to go until I reared up, turned to my top in the presence of a lot of people, and screamed: "You stupid fuck can't you hit any harder than that?" This would be a seriously rude maneuver in most scenes, but we were in the flow and David understood perfectly. Grinning wolfishly, he swung his arm back and gave it all he had. I let my rage pour out, and fell again into sadness, then reared up again screaming in rage, with David flying right along with me. Round and around we went until the rage was satisfied and I fell down crying - he fell right on top of me, and we both cried until we were satisfied. And both agreed that there was something magically right about this scene, that in struggling against each other we had done just what we needed to do for funeral games.

Spiritual States: Many players report that the feelings they have in playing a great scene can only be described as spiritual. Some people may feel they leave their body, others feel an intense psychic connection, or perhaps an awakening of kundalini, the snake that represents the spiritual energy that can be felt in the spine. Sometimes we may envision ourselves shape-shifted into a totem animal, and writhe like a panther under the whip. Another time we may become a god. Or maybe our top becomes goddess.

If this is where you go when the play goes well, it's a good idea to discuss it with your top beforehand, especially if you tend to leave your body during play. Some tops love it, and feel like they fly right along with you - others may feel abandoned, and want to stay connected in some more tangible way.

Getting Bigger, Getting Smaller: Some bottoms see themselves as warriors, conquering an ordeal, an initiation, triumphing over the obstacles presented by their top. They want to find their strength in an ordeal, and they want their tops to be strong enough to challenge them. Others, or maybe the same people at different times, want to get small. They want to become invisible, helpless, overwhelmed, they want to dissolve. They love to enter into struggle and lose, to be conquered, to give it up to a powerful and inexorable top.

Whether you like to get bigger or smaller, you need to cooperate with your top. Your top may have her own limits about playing with unconquerable or invisible bottoms, and she needs a chance to figure out what's coming and express her own needs. The following story will illustrate the importance of negotiating the direction of the scene beforehand.

A friend of ours was topping an interrogation scene in which she set out to conquer the bottom and get him all soft and squishy, as she imagined was her task. The bottom in this case, however, in his own fantasy saw himself as nobly suffering and refusing to give in no matter how hard it was: in short, wanted to conquer an ordeal. It soon became obvious that they were working at cross purposes in the scene, and the bottom eventually, and appropriately, safeworded out. The fact that we can even relate this story to you illustrates an important point - these two people didn't just end the scene, they talked about it later and figured out what went wrong. Willingness to get together and unscramble what happened when a scene went wrong is another mark of a great player.

Submissive States: In the submissive mode - you may recognize a lot of this from your fantasies - the desired state of mind is one of will-lessness, receptiveness, passivity, even selflessness. In giving over as much of your own choices as feasible to a trusted top, you can allow yourself the luxury of turning your brain off. Everything becomes really simple: will my dominant like this or not? Nothing else to worry about.

There are two distinct modes of submissive consciousness (well, probably lots more but these are the two we want to tell you about). In one, the bottom is a sort of tabula rasa blank slate who waits for input. The bottom in this state is totally receptive, obedient, with no worries about whether or not he is doing something right because he will be told exactly what is required. Some of us like to be corrected, reined in, contained - it tells us someone is paying attention. Or receptivity might involve being acted upon while having no actions whatsoever to perform yourself, as in a bondage scene: this allows an intense focus, free of distraction, on whatever sensational or emotional exchange you and your top have chosen. The selflessness here involves giving yourself over to another so completely that you effectively leave your self behind.

A second state is the submissive who likes to please, who takes the initiative to have that cup of tea ready before the master is even aware he wants one. The rewards of the pleaser include being recognized: thanked, stroked, petted, appreciated, rewarded for competence and graciousness. The selflessness comes from putting yourself into the service of someone else's goals and having none of your own. The selflessness of the submissive can become like a meditative state, very quiet, tuned in, serene.

Do keep this distinction in mind when you negotiate for a submissive scene. One friend of ours tells us she was once playing with two doms, one of whom loved service, the other, the blank slate. Our friend eventually figured this out - she tells us it was a challenge to remember what she was supposed to do in each circumstance.

Fighting Back: The resistance scene is a tremendously collaborative scene, because if you fight hard enough you can probably discourage any reasonably ethical top from continuing. So if your fantasy is all about struggling, resisting, needing to be conquered or forced to have a good time, you need to work that out with your top in advance, and maybe set up a safeword for the top so she can tell you if you're fighting harder than she can stay on top of. A lot of us really love the thrill of being forced against our will, so we collaborate to fight over some hot scenes - Janet once bottomed in a scene where her hands were tied with about eighteen inches of slack rope

between them, so she could fight back like she meant it and still be pleasantly certain of losing.

We have met other players who like to fight it out to see who will top and who will bottom in a ritual of dominance with no predetermined winner. All you need to know then is what are the accepted forms of struggle and what is below the belt (or maybe outside the belt, since below the belt is exactly where you may want to get...)

Forbidden Thrills: Some people don't want things all clean and nice. Their notion of a good bottom space is feeling dirty, nasty, naughty, beyond the pale - breaking the rules. They want to preserve the sense of doing what you're not supposed to and enjoy the guilty thrill: guilt and shame are, after all, more sexy emotions to be explored. Some enter into the forbidden with the script of finding a passion there that is cleansing, and that washes away shame. For others, it's more fun to just get dirty.

Punishment: Some bottoms find a keen delight in being treated as the naughty child, or adult, and punished for real or imagined crimes. The state of mind is one of expiation, and perhaps another form of catharsis: a person of authority, our top, has seen our sins, found us sexy, and purged our errors in pain that can transform into ecstasy. It's a very good idea to get clear, before playing with anything that looks like punishment, to decide whether this is "play punishment" for erotic fun, or genuine punishment designed to modify behavior (we discuss both of these activities in more detail in Chapter 10). One of your authors is very turned on by playing with punishment, while it's a serious limit for the other one... so it's clear that even experienced bottoms may have limits in this area, and that going slowly here is advisable.

Archetypes: We will discuss archetypes in more detail later, but for now take a look at who you are in your fantasies: warrior, baby, pleasure slave, captive, kid, cheerful, tearful - all these are archetypal characters, the roles we play in s/m. The better you understand what role you are playing, the easier it is to arrange for everyone to play along with you. All you need to keep things clear is to figure out who you are when you are in scene space.

Confusion can arise when a bottom falls into a role in the middle of a scene and doesn't really have a clear idea of what that role is. In the middle of an intense pain scene which included being drawn on with the tip of a sharp knife, Janet once startled and annoyed her top by asking, "I like elephants - will you draw me an elephant, please?" It was only later that the two of them realized that the intensity of the painplay had brought out a kid persona, who just happened to love animals of all kinds and especially elephants.

Sensation. Oooh, let I not forget sensation, lots and lots of it. S/M features an enormous range of sensation, from the gently sensual to the acutely intense, with an abundance of possibilities in between. Many of us describe ourselves as stimulus junkies — we don't see that as a pathological addiction, but rather as an extraordinary capacity to experience and enjoy a huge range of sensation. Play can transform sensations: small sensations become huge when we eroticize them, a blindfold can turn a feather touch into an ecstasy of suspense. Sensational!

So many fabulous rewards to choose from! As you continue your journey as a bottom, you may find new ones, or discover that a form of play you didn't think appealed to you has suddenly come to seem very desirable indeed. Stay open to new possibilities and you may be in for some wonderful surprises.

Getting Ready

G rooming Yourself, Physically and Mentally. Any scene actually begins before you are even in the presence of your top. Before you play, you will usually spend some time showering, bathing, dressing, preparing a space if you are playing in your home, and (of course!) fantasizing: your authors once did a scene that got started almost an hour late because Janet was so busy fantasizing that she drove right past the freeway off-ramp to Dossie's house. This is the time when you prepare to present yourself as a valuable gift to the lucky person who has a date with you.

Now is the time to do some relaxation, remember your deep breathing, maybe put music and candles in the bathroom while you relax in a long soak. Now is the time to get grounded, centered, to get in touch with your own power. You can think about what you want to communicate, use your fantasies as rehearsal for the encounter to come. Investing some time and energy in preparation will also begin to excite you, so you can greet your partner in the attractive flush that comes from thinking filthy thoughts. Don't forget these preparations even when you're getting ready for a session with your life partner - Dossie, as a therapist, is constantly reminding couples who live together to take the time to prepare for their encounters as they did when they were dating... a great way to revive the spirit of honeymoon lust.

As you gain experience in preparing yourself for play, you will probably begin to discover certain thoughts and activities that are particularly helpful in preparing you, physically and mentally, for the adventures to come. You might like to moisturize your skin extra-carefully to make it supple and resilient, or to do a series of yoga stretches to prepare yourself for challenging bondage. We know one male bottom who conditions his beard before play so it will be soft and pleasing to his mistress's feet. Extra attention applied to cleaning sensitive parts of your body will bring rewards of turn-on as well as hygiene.

And what gets your mind ready for play? Is there a particular piece of music you like to listen to that helps get you into a lovely bottomy state? Is there a fantasy you like to review in your head to help get your juices running? A piece of literature you might like to read? A mantra you can repeat, out loud or in your mind? Or would you like to simply kneel for a while in a quiet spot, breathing calmly and centering yourself? Whatever works for you to get yourself revved up, turned on and ready to play, now's a good time to do it.

This is also the time for you to pump up your pride in yourself and the gift you give your top. You needn't be rich, or have expensive clothes, or be young and thin to be terrifically attractive. Good grooming, a little creative drag from the thrift store, a proud posture and a happy expression send out the right message and make you gorgeous - we promise!

On Your Mark... Get Set... Go! So here you are in the dungeon, the playroom, the bedroom or wherever. Your top may start the scene by touching you, hugging you, blindfolding you, tying you up, collaring you, throwing you to the floor and tearing your clothes off... the possibilities are infinite, and you'll learn more about as many of them as we can imagine in the next chapter.

The initiative belongs to the top - so what is your responsibility? Your responsibility is to respond: to get turned on and to make sure your top knows you're turned on.

One of the myths we encounter is that you have to be turned on before you start playing. If we believed that, we wouldn't get to play very much. Remember in the last chapter when we told you to spend part of your negotiation time telling your top what turns you on, and finding out what turns him on? Well, here's where both of you get to use that information.

We've found it's often easier to get turned on with physical sensation than to try to launch right into emotional or role-played mental stimulation. Many people like to begin a scene with having their top place a collar around their neck, with appropriate ritual and, perhaps, a few prearranged words from one or both of you about what the collaring means to you. Sexual players might enjoy having necks kissed or sucked, ears nibbled, nipples pinched. A light flogging works to get a lot of people turned on; so does getting tied up. With practice, you may be able to learn to breathe yourself into an altered state.

Atmosphere is important, too. It's tough to get turned on if the room is cold or if there's a bright light shining in your eyes (unless you're planning an interrogation scene). Make sure that distractions have been minimized - the phone ringer is off, the pets are locked out, any visual clutter has been cleared away. If you have a favorite piece of music, especially if it's one that you've come to associate with play, now is a good time to put it on - Janet can get turned on just listening to the Velvet Undergrounds "Venus In Furs".

A lot of people run into obstacles when they try to get into role - they may feel self-conscious in the beginning,

before they start to feel turned on. We suggest that you act as though you were turned on, because you'll probably find that you convince yourself. So whimper and moan, breathe heavily, play your role (one of our friends loves to use the phrase "This is so scary!"). At first, while you're searching for your turn-on, this may feel awkward and phony. But then a miracle can happen: if you start by playacting an appropriate response, perhaps even dramatizing your responses a bit, you will probably start to get a little turned on, and so will your top. The more excited you both get, the more real the scene will seem, and the more naturally you will respond... and before you know it you're both part of a full-blown reality.

Remember - now is not the time to judge yourself. There are no critics in this audience; when you and your top are both turned on, you're a superstar!

Ending the Scene - And Afterwards

Closure. Alas, even the hottest scene must eventually come to an end. The best answer to the question "When do you end the scene?" is "When either partner wants to."

If you're really enjoying yourself as a bottom, you may get to what Dossie calls "The Forever Place," where you feel that you want to keep on doing this forever and ever and ever. A good top gives you some warning when the scene is drawing to a close, so you can start gradually withdrawing from The Forever Place and getting ready to come back into the real world. An excellent way to bring a flagellation, for example, to an end is for the top to announce "Pick a number from one to ten (or fifty, or a hundred)." Then you know you're going to get that many strokes of the greatest intensity you can possibly take, so get ready for the big climax!

The scene isn't over when the action stops, either. It can take quite a while for both partners to decompress and be ready to deal with reality. Don't try too soon after a scene to do tasks that take concentration and focus, or to do detailed post-scene negotiations - whether you know it or not, you're probably still a little spacey and a little bit in role.

It's a good idea to learn what your decompression pattern looks like so you can tell your top what to expect: Dossie says "I sometimes get a little hyper, I want to talk, not sleep, but I'm really kind of stupid and I can't remember which goes on first, my stockings or my shoes"; Janet says, "I get verbal again right away - sometimes even making puns or jokes or acting a little smart-assed - and tops think I'm back, but I'm not; I'm emotionally very fragile."

Closure is not a chore (except the picking-up-the-toys part). It's an invaluable time for intimacy and closeness, part of the scene's rewards for both people. Your boundaries arc down and it's going to take a while for them to come back up — why not relax and enjoy it?

Here are some of the ways we like to close and decompress:

- Having sex or an orgasm
- Taking a nice hot bubble bath
- Being put into a flannel nightie or PJs and tucked in - with the top there to cuddle us
- Doing something to get back up into our heads, like going to a movie (only somebody else better drive!). Janet remembers:

I'd done a submissive scene at a Saturday night party that put me way under. My top had me sleep in my collar, and I woke up the next morning still deeper than the lost continent of Atlantis. I served him breakfast and sat on the floor at his feet reading the newspaper... and somewhere in the middle of the Datebook section I drifted back up, thought "Hey, wait a minute, this is me" and wanted the collar off right away.

- Having something to eat or drink together (Janet is notorious for craving donuts and milk after a scene)
- Moving around or doing something, like taking a walk together
- Curling up for a snuggle to savor the connection

Later. After you're both pretty sure you're back to your day-to-day selves, you might want to talk briefly about the scene - what worked for you, what didn't, what you'd like to try next time. But we suggest you leave the detailed discussion for the following day, when you're one hundred percent yourself again.

Even if the scene went badly, try not to be judgmental or harsh in discussing it with your top: it's virtually certain that she was doing her best. Be constructive, and be sure to talk about those aspects of the scene that did work for you. And don't forget to express your appreciation and affection.

Remember, topping, like bottoming, entails a significant emotional risk. One good reason to try topping, if you can, is so you can experience firsthand the vulnerable feeling it entails. We once heard of a therapist who explained, "the subconscious doesn't understand consensuality." Your top is engaging in activities that at some level are scary and guilt-producing - a harsh or critical judgment from you can be devastating. If you want to criticize, do so gently, and use a lot of "I" and "me" statements: not "the clamps were awful," but "the clamps didn't work for me."

Good tops can hear feedback, and good bottoms can offer it without blaming or guilt-tripping. Work constructively with your top toward figuring out what can be improved - so you can have an even better, hotter scene next time.

When the Game Is Over. Doing BDSM can be so fulfilling, so magical, so extraordinary that we hate to see our scene end. The desire to stay in role or to go on experiencing these marvelous sensations can be so compelling that we feel anger toward the partners, or toward the pressing real-world issues, that make us need to stop and go back into our day-to-day personas.

Remember, tops may have a "Forever Place" too. The feeling of being invulnerable, in control, impervious, is very compelling. Help your top stay flexible enough to come out of role by making sure that he is sure of your friendship and affection even when he shows vulnerability: tops sometimes worry that you're only interested in their top persona and not in their real-world persona.

Similarly, as bottoms, we feel that one of the wonderful things about play is that it gives us a safe space in which to be boundary-less and will-less, a vacation from the responsibilities of everyday life. We hope this book will help you develop the flexibility to be able to assert your boundaries and make your own decisions outside scene space, and the ability to return from scene space to the rest of your life, so that giving up power in scene is a delicious contrast and a safe adventure.

Playing: Scripts, Scenes, Roles.

When you think about the many and varied scenes and roles you might choose to explore, you might recognize a continuum of apparent intensity of dominance - from analytically collaborative, through nurturing and supportive, to harsh and frightening. It's important to remember, however, that all scenes are collaborative at heart in that they require the active cooperation of top and bottom in order to succeed.

A lot of BDSM folk distinguish between bottoms who are submissive and those who are masochistic — you often hear such people state, "I'm a submissive, not a bottom" or vice versa. We're not sure the lines are all that clear, nor that it's all that good an idea to support such binary or even hierarchical thinking. So, instead of a dualistic model with S/M and D/S in opposition or in distinctly separate pigeonholes, we see a continuum, with some scenes getting more of their heat from control and power, and others depending more on sensation - but with virtually all scenes containing at least some aspects of each. Thus, instead of labeling ourselves and expecting the world to figure out what we mean by the label, we've both found it easier to describe what kinds of scenes we like and who we like to do them with.

Please keep in mind as we discuss these various scenes that very few scenes fit classically into any one pigeonhole: it's typical, for example, for a mistress/slave scene to have governess/child or captor/captive overtones. As we explore scenes we've seen, heard about, and participated in, please view them as inspirations,

not as rigid scripts or categories.

Another point of difference from one scene to the next is genital sexuality. Whether you choose to include sex in your scene depends partly on the nature of the scene — it may not be appropriate for a mommy to fuck her baby, or for a footstool to get fucked at all - or it may be a function of your own, or your top's, individual limits. You can choose to have sex within your scene if that seems appropriate, you can finish the scene and the role and then have sex out of role, or you can choose not to have sex at all (at least not with your partner at that time... you can always have sex with yourself later, fueled by hot memories!).

Sex is often overlooked or underemphasized during negotiation - many of us are still shy about forthright discussion of our sexual needs, wants and intentions. But it deserves and needs full negotiation and attention or someone's feelings are likely to get hurt when what she gets isn't a good match for what she expects, needs or wants. And we all need to master clear communication about sex to maintain our safer sex standards.

Bondage

In a pure bondage scene, the heat comes mainly from the top's control of the bottom's movement and/or senses. The trip for a bottom in such a scene is receiving permission to do absolutely nothing except experience sensation... "Wow, my top wants me to feel all these intense things." The delightfully passive and helpless feeling of "getting done" often also includes a strong sense of being desired and desirable... "I'm tied up and helpless and she's still sticking around to do all these marvelous things to me." Bottoms often feel very taken care of in such scenes.

The bondage itself contributes to the turn-on: many people build up a lot of muscle tension as they approach orgasm, so having the rope or chain to pull and yank on lets us build up a more intense state of arousal. Many are also turned on by the sensuousness of rope and the intricate complexities of knots. There can be a surprising, trancelike eroticism in the experience of immobilization. Or the bondage may be secondary, a way to get you to stay put for whatever other stimulations your tops may have in mind for you.

Sensations during bondage may range from no stimulation at all - which is called sensory deprivation — to the gentlest and lightest of stroking, to intense sexual stimulation and/or pain. Many tops love to boast about how long they can keep their bottoms orgasming, or how many orgasms they can give a bottom. Being brought to orgasm "against one's will" is such an overwhelming feeling that some bottoms perceive it as intrusive or even painful, and others find it intensely delightful.

Bondage for a lengthy scene, whether it's about pain, sex or both, needs to be comfortable, so that you can set up the bondage and then stay with it for a while. Those wicked-looking leather cuffs with the studs are often padded or fur-lined to coddle your wrists and ankles, so you can yank on them to your hearts content. Let your top know if your circulation is being cut off, or if a muscle is being painfully stretched. We find it worthwhile to spend some time fussing over the bondage at the beginning to prevent interruptions later.

Bondage can also be supportive. Standing bondage, where the wrists are tied to something overhead, lets you rest your weight on the restraints, and lying on your back with your legs tied up is much easier than holding them up by yourself. Bondage is supportive on the psychological level, too: when your top ties you up, it gives you clear permission to bottom.

Bondage can be purely decorative, and those of us who are turned on to rope can spend many happy hours making a rope body harness, or a corset, or duplicating Japanese or Bettie Page bondage from pictures.

Bondage can in itself be painful or demand endurance - eroticizing endurance is a major component of Japanese rope bondage. One way to play this is to put someone in fairly constricting bondage, then tighten a part to the point of pain, then demand that the bottom deal with it for a short period of time, perhaps a count of five. Or you can be placed in bondage which starts out relatively comfortable and grows more strenuous the longer you stay in it (with frequent check-ins to ensure that nerves and blood vessels are not being dangerously constricted).

Take care not to stretch joints and muscles too far: we don't want to achieve bondage by Ace bandage for the next two weeks.

Bondage can also play an important role in capture and captivity scenes, which we'll discuss under "Rough and Tough" later in this chapter. After all, how can you possibly capture someone without tying them up?

Total immobilization is technically difficult and requires lots of practice... but trying to immobilize somebody can be hot in and of itself, and as even a partial immobilization can be very effective, who's to say the time we spend learning is wasted? Dossie has been in bondage so complete that she just plain forgot that she could move for several hours. Mummification, as you might guess, is immobilization by wrapping the body entirely in rope, Ace bandages, strips of cloth, duct tape over plastic wrap, or plastic wrap alone (don't forget that you will want to breathe!). Bandage scissors should be kept nearby, both for quick release in emergencies and to open up the mummy at sensitive spots to apply whatever stimulation seems appropriate. Full body bags of leather, canvas and other sturdy materials are also a very hot way to mummify, but can be a big investment.

Bondage Safety. It is possible, although uncommon, to get injured if you and your top aren't careful with bondage. Be sure to tell your top about any unpleasant-feeling pull on muscles, tendons or ligaments. Although pins and needles or numbness in your hands and feet aren't a major emergency, they're a good reason to readjust the bondage to prevent nerve injuries - and any bondage that hurts in a bad way should be adjusted immediately.

If you're tied up, you are helpless to at least some degree, and vulnerable to real-world emergencies like fires and earthquakes: nobody should ever be left alone while in bondage, especially very restrictive or standing bondage.

Standing bondage is demanding on the circulation, especially when your top is busily attracting all your blood to below your waist: there may not be enough left to operate your brain. Tell your top if you start to feel dizzy or nauseated. You may be tempted to carry on a little longer because you're having such a good time, but you won't be able to carry on at all if you throw up or faint... so let your top know what's going on with you; you can always continue the scene once you get horizontal.

Use padded wrist cuffs with your arms spread apart, so if your weight falls suddenly you won't break a wrist or dislocate a shoulder. Don't allow any vulnerable parts of your body, like your neck or your genitals, to be tied to a stationary object like an eyebolt, unless the rest of your body is well enough supported to protect them if you fall.

Many tops like to add "panic snaps" to standing bondage so they don't have to lift their bottom's weight in case of a faint; a winch, so you can be lowered gradually and comfortably to the ground, is an even better idea. Fainting is also common when the scene is over and your arms are let down, so be extra-careful during this time.

Collaborative Bondage. Some bondage scenes are so technically demanding that they require full cooperation and ongoing communication between the top and the bottom - full suspension bondage, in which ropes must be placed with tremendous care and precision, is a good example. In such a technically complex scene, the top and the bottom may work together toward a mutual goal of sensation, and neither of them may feel the need to go into role or to get out of intellect in order to do it.

Dossie has participated in full-body suspension scenes requiring as much as five hours to set up and enjoy; throughout the scene, she was required to communicate in accurate detail about her sensations so that the ropes could be placed in the proper locations and with the proper tightness.

Many bondage scenes start out collaboratively, then shift in tone - applying bondage safely and thoroughly requires considerable cooperation from the bottom. Once you are securely tied up, you may play a non-collaborative scene that involves struggling, squirming, begging and other delights, and having comfortable bondage will add immeasurably to the pleasure of such a scene.

The benefit to collaborative scenes is that they offer a safe way to experience mind-blowing sensations. They are

easy on the top in that she doesn't have to wonder about the bottom's state of mind or whether consent is still meaningful. Such scenes may be the best way to play with someone for the first time, particularly if you're feeling at all unsure about the person or if either of you is a novice.

However, they do require that you stay in your mind and body; you may or may not find that you can still get "trancey" and high as you give good feedback to your top. In Dossie's aforementioned suspension scene, after literally hours of trial and error, with much discussion, the suspension was finally accomplished and Dossie was hanging in the air in a web of rope. The top rang a chime in her ear, and she instantly shot off, entranced, into a deep and meditative bottom space.

Sensory Deprivation. Bondage often goes with sensory deprivation: with earplugs, a blindfold, possibly a head hood, and plastic wrap around the fingers and toes so you can't even feel your own skin, you will not know where your top is until he touches you or speaks near enough to your ears so that you can hear. Bottoms lose their time sense in the altered state of sensory deprivation, so we recommend that tops make contact frequently the first couple of times you try this scene, until you learn what your limits are.

Sensory deprivation can also be much simpler: a blindfold is a very potent toy. Taking away the visual sense makes the bottom less powerful and more dependent, gives her a gratifying sense of helplessness, and tends to turn off verbal and intellectual consciousness. The focus goes inward, and any touch, painful or sensual, becomes terrifically intensified. For an added attraction, blindfolds offer some protection to new or nervous tops, as their bottoms can't see them fumbling with an unfamiliar toy.

Earplugs provide a feeling of floating, totally disconnected from reality, completely focused on sensation. Earplugs actually only cut some of your hearing - even if you use the foam ones from the drugstore, and add fur earmuffs over, you will be able to hear your top when she is close, but not when she is farther away than about four feet. In a scene with more than one top, the tops can hold conversations out of earshot of a person wearing earplugs. Earphones with music can provide more complete isolation.

A few players get a heady rush from breath control, by choking with the hands or cutting off air in a gas mask, often simultaneously with sexual stimulation. This is advanced and very risky play; such constriction can cut off impulses to the nerve that controls your heartbeat, landing you in a coffin and your top in prison. If breath control play turns you on, we suggest that you learn a lot about it and then proceed very slowly with great caution. Taking choking to the point of blacking out is dangerous, and multiple blackouts extremely so. Some people practice autoerotic asphyxiation by putting themselves in bondage that constricts the neck and masturbating. Autoerotic asphyxiation kills hundreds yearly, and we do not advocate it under any circumstances.

Gags, a safer alternative, change the senses not only by removing your ability to speak (you can usually still grunt and moan) but also by forcing you to breathe more slowly, and thus relax more. The intrusion of the gag into the mouth changes perception by providing a constant stimulus in a place you normally have as your own. Gags also give you permission to bite, in much the same way that bondage gives you permission to struggle.

People vary widely in their physical ability to tolerate gags. A sore jaw is a good reason to limit either the length of time gagged, or the size of the gag. If your nose is stuffed up, either get a good shot of nasal decongestant spray beforehand or don't allow yourself to be gagged at all. Your top should stay extra-close to you at all times when you're gagged. Remember to negotiate a non-verbal safeword before the gag goes in!

All forms of sensory deprivation can be both sexy and entrancing, and can get the bottom, and vicariously the top, into a transcendent state of altered perception where the lightest touch can feel like a miracle, and a sexual stroke becomes the only event in the universe.

Dominance and Submission

This is an incredibly broad category that can include all forms of giving up or taking power, from an hour of teacher/schoolboy roleplay to a deeply felt owner/slave relationship that lasts for decades. What all the scenes

we'll talk about here have in common is that they draw their heat from recreating the power-over situations of the real world, but in ways that feel safe, sexy, growthful and enjoyable for all concerned.

In order to play safely with power, it's important to have a clear understanding of where the power disparity between you and your top begins and ends. Are you doing it for the duration of a scene, for a day, for a weekend, a month, a year? Will the dominant's power end at the dungeon or bedroom door, or will it extend into other parts of your life like your work or relationships? What kinds of power do you want to give to your partner, and what kinds do you want to keep for yourself?

We have seen players come to grief by assuming that the only "right" way to play with power is to give as much of it away as possible - they leap from "Hi, my name is Susie" to a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week owner-slave relationship with no intermediate steps at all. Later, they discover that some aspects of this kind of relationship don't work for them or their owners, but they don't believe that it's okay to just change the rules of the game they are playing. So they struggle to achieve the impractical, and both lovers wind up feeling like terrible failures for not having lived up to an ideal that isn't a good fit for them.

We suggest instead that you start by giving your dominant one or two pieces of your power in areas of your life where you already feel pretty secure - the power to place certain sexual demands on you, to give you certain sensations, or to require you to perform certain duties, for example. Then, when that's gone well for a little while, you can experiment with adding to what's already working. That way you have a pretty good chance of success with each power exchange you try... which we assure you is a lot more fun than feeling like a failure at your own fantasy!

We think it's a good idea to ask for what works for you, rather than trying to force your submission to fit into a pattern created by other people to fit their needs and not yours. One submissive woman of our acquaintance describes her D/S script like this:

I want to be a good girl. I want to struggle heroically to get everything just right. And I want my top to make that hard for me - so I can feel that I've conquered incredible odds.

We're afraid we're going to disappoint some of our readers when we emphasize here that submission is not a "cure" for a life that seems out of control, and it should not be a way to avoid the hassles and tribulations of life as an adult in the 21st century. We've certainly had such fantasies, and maybe you have too - life is often difficult and complicated, and the urge to dump all your problems in the lap of an all-knowing and omnipotent top can feel very strong indeed. But we don't think a loving erotic relationship can or should take the place of human growth and responsibility. If you are having trouble with your life, work toward straightening it out — perhaps with the help of a good therapist, credit counseling service, employment counselor, substance abuse clinic or whatever other professional seems appropriate - and then you'll have a real gift to give to the lucky dominant who's fortunate enough to own you.

So, what are some of the kinds of ways in which people play with the exchange of power?

Giving Service. Some dominants and submissives enjoy power exchange that include some aspect of service — the submissive gives some kind of valuable effort to the dominant. This may be sexual service, personal service such as massages or pedicures, house service such as cleaning, cooking, butler or handyman chores, or outside-world service - Janet once met an investment-counselor slave who had made his mistress a very wealthy woman.

Bottoms who enjoy giving service may find it erotic, or fulfilling in other ways that often have to do with competence and caretaking. For them, it is a good way to show their respect to give energy back to the top, and to clarify roles.

The most important thing to remember is that if you have agreed to give service, give it wholeheartedly and excellently. Almost nothing annoys a top more than the bottom who decides that the task he agreed to do isn't

erotic or fun and thus slacks off - except perhaps the bottom who does it wrong intentionally in order to get punished. This isn't a service scene, it's a SAM (smart-assed masochist) or resistance scene and needs to be negotiated as such. Otherwise, you are guaranteed to disappoint or piss off your top... and a competent top won't punish you, she will send you away and refuse to play with you again without serious renegotiation.

If your dominant wishes to train you to perform the service in the way she likes best, recognize that the time she puts into training you is an investment toward your future value as a submissive. Accept that training with gratitude and eagerness.

Do keep in mind that service-givers get to have limits, and to ask for what they want, too. If you eroticize the simple act of doing your top's dishes, that's great - but if you don't, be sure to ask for what you do want, or you're likely to wind up frustrated and with dishpan hands.

Discipline, Reward and Punishment. "Discipline" as a codeword for flagellation is, perhaps unfortunately, well established within the leather community, particularly as part of the phrase "bondage and discipline." As a result, players sometimes get very confused when trying to distinguish between erotic "discipline" (e.g., spanking, whipping or flogging in order to create pleasure for your dominant and/or yourself) and discipline which is actually intended to exert control and/or shape behavior.

Within the context of a dominant-submissive relationship, it is pretty much axiomatic that the dominant will have the right and the desire to control some aspects of the submissives behavior. Discipline in this context has a much broader meaning, and includes a variety of feedback mechanisms, including reward as well as punishment. Some players, for example, distinguish between "good-girl spankings" and "bad-girl spankings" (or, of course, "good-boy/bad boy") - the former includes lots of warmup and plenty of affectionate and/or erotic stimulus, and might be used as a reward; the latter is harsher, is designed to communicate the dominant's genuine displeasure, and is used to punish for an infringement of rules or agreements.

Some submissives are so distressed by punishment that it can shatter the bond of trust between the partners. Others are so turned on by the whole idea that it becomes reward and works in the exact opposite way from its intention. For others yet, the mere knowledge that they have disappointed or displeased their dominant may be enough to dissuade future undesired behavior.

Many bottoms build a whole fantasy structure around the idea of getting punished (Janet is one). A great deal of S/M literature, particularly flagellation literature, revolves around punishment scenes. There's no question that getting punished can be a marvelously healing way to play with the powerful emotions of guilt and shame.

In the real world, punishment is not intended to be erotic. We feel that the only place non-erotic punishment has in the BDSM world is in a full-time or ongoing dominant-submissive relationship: if you don't own me, what right do you have to punish me?.

For those of us who love to play with punishment but aren't comfortable with being punished for real-world errors, what's a safe way to do it? It can sometimes work to punish for little transgressions like forgetting to pick up the laundry... they're lighthearted enough not to cause too much trouble. We also know some tops who punish their bottoms for saying self-deprecating or self-hating things: "I heard you put yourself down, and you're in serious trouble!" The underlying tone of love and concern in such an action seems to us to have a healing value.

A very safe way is either make up something you're supposed to have done and play it out as a script (the "caught smoking in the boys' room" kind of thing), or ask your top to punish you for mistakes made during the scene. Some tops enjoy giving the bottom an impossible task ("hold this cane in your mouth and don't drop it while I make you scream!"), knowing that she will fail and thus "earn" the punishment, a deliciously shameful feeling. Such punishments can be very erotic and great fun — a chance to sin, atone and be forgiven, all at once.

Contracts. If you and your top are in a committed relationship that involves frequent authority play, you may wish to define both of your obligations, limits, commitments and rules in a spoken or written contract. The most

common form of agreement is a master/slave or mistress/slave contract.

Do not enter into a contract frivolously. Yes, a piece of paper defining you as owned chattel is a hot fantasy — but it represents a tremendous moral, if not legal, obligation. If you do decide to enter into a contract, we strongly suggest it be for a pre-defined length of time, perhaps no more than a month to start with. At the end of that period of time, you and your top can re-evaluate and refine the contract and, if you like, extend it for a longer time. We also suggest that, human memory being the frail thing it is, your contract be written rather than spoken.

Some of the subjects your contract should define are the bottom's and the top's duties, rights and obligations, the top's authority, the nature of both partners' sexual and social commitments to one another, and both partners' needs and limits - too often, contracts define the slave's responsibilities and limits, but not the owner's. Your contract should definitely include some provision for how you will deal with disagreement. We also suggest that your contract include clear definitions of when the two of you are entirely in role or partially in role - for example, it's a good idea to reach some understanding about when your owner does and does not prefer to be called "Master" or "Mistress."

Many contracts require one or both people to write in a personal journal at certain times: daily, weekly, monthly, or perhaps after a scene. The journal is a "free zone" where the dom or the sub can speak their minds without fear of judgment or reprisal. Usually, the other partner may read the journal: this can be a way to communicate things that might not fit into the roles.

Do remember that no contract can cover every contingency, so you need to build in some wriggle room. One creative contract we read gives the slave a certain number of "get out of jail free" cards per month - a limited number of occasions on which the slave can break certain rules without reprisal. Neither the contract nor the relationship can possibly control every aspect of your life, and it's not possible for you to have no control whatsoever - you still need to breathe for yourself, and otherwise be responsible for your own life.

The contract does not exist just to turn you on; it represents a serious commitment. Enter into it with the same care and forethought you would give to accepting an employment contract. The rewards of a master/slave contract lie in the deepening of roles, an intense security in those roles, and an ultimate feeling of belonging: you must be very valuable if your beloved wants to own you!

Pain (The Good Kind)

A lot of play centers around the generation and enjoyment of pain, commonly brought about by whips, paddles, canes, hot wax, the placement and removal of clips or clothespins, and many other techniques. We don't believe that masochists are very different from other people, but rather that most people are physiologically equipped to enjoy masochism if they so choose.

Many people see pain in S/M as a "punishment" and are surprised to discover that pain can be immensely rewarding in and of itself. (Or, in the words of a novice we know while receiving her first caning, "Why do I like this?") One of the rewards lies in the body's defense against pain—When our bodies perceive a painful stimulus, they respond by producing neurotransmitters called "endorphins" that are chemically very similar to morphine. Endorphins generate a "high" that is really an altered state of consciousness, and can change the way we perceive pain so that the experience really becomes pleasurable. At least, that's what we think happens: this is a theory that fits our experience, and the medical establishment is very unlikely to subject this to scientific research, so we just have to believe in our own sensations.

Pain can give you an "excuse" and open up a pathway for emotions that are too strong and frightening to let loose in other contexts. You may experience a state of catharsis in which you feel terrifically powerful. Dossie may turn into a tigress and growl and snarl a lot. Janet perceives herself as absorbing the energy of each blow and transmuting it into strength and power. These are just some of the cathartic and empowering ways in which pain may equal pleasure.

Pain in S/M doesn't mean just any old pain. We don't enjoy stubbed toes any more than anybody else does. Stimulations are carefully chosen to feel both right and tolerable. And we like to create an environment that feels safe so that we can let intense stimulations in without tensing up or panicking. So when you read our suggestions for painplay here, you can see them as examples of types of pain that other players have both enjoyed and felt safe with.

Start easy with any new stimulus, and build up gradually so you can become familiar with the sensation you're dealing with. For many players, context is everything: in the words of one friend of ours, "Any fool can hit me with a two-by-four - but it takes a real genius to make me like it."

Most pain scenes begin with a warm-up, such as a sensual flogging, to give the body some stimulus and time to build up endorphins, which takes about twenty minutes. Experienced bottoms become adept at bringing up the endorphins, and might warm up much faster. You can tell you are warmed up when a stroke that hurt too much five minutes ago doesn't hurt enough now.

Please do remember that in changing your perception of pain, you may also lose your normal way of knowing when your body is being damaged. The top must keep a close eye on physical safety, because you may not be able to. Tops may also find that as they hit harder and harder in response to your increasing excitement, their control and accuracy may diminish. We suggest that tops in these scenes regularly check the red marks on your hide to make sure that whips are landing on well-padded body parts.

When you come to the place where you actually want things to hurt more, you are ready for really intense stimulation. Now is the time for your top to break out the sting-iest cat, or the heaviest canes and riding crops. An excellent stimulation for the "pain slut" is a brief, very intense pain followed by some recovery time, during which the bottom can actually feel the endorphin release: many bottoms go down with a scream and come up giggling. We especially like canes for this.

It may help you to know that there is an end point, so you can choose to stretch yourself to handle a greater intensity as long as you know it's not going to last forever. So a caning scene might start out at one at a time, then the top might suggest three at a time, then maybe five... always with the reward time in between, so it becomes like going on the roller coaster, getting off staggering, and getting back in line to go round again, and again, and again.

Another way to do a pain scene is with clothespins or any other clip or clamp that will hold a pinch of skin. Clips can be placed just about anywhere you can pull up a pinch of skin. Sometimes a clip gets put on a particular spot that is intolerable, maybe because there is a nerve there. It is normal and acceptable to request that an overly painful clip be moved to a better spot, often only half an inch or so away.

The interesting thing about clips is that they hurt somewhat when they are put on, and then that spot gradually becomes numb as the circulation is reduced. The most intense sensation comes when the clip is removed, gently or harshly, and blood flows back into the area. (Clips with teeth or ridges should not be yanked off.) So putting the clips on becomes the warm-up and taking them off is the roller coaster... frequently with a bit of sexual or affectionate touching during the break between clips.

As in a caning scene, the bottom may want some resolution time after each clip is taken off. This time may be an excellent opportunity for some sensual touching or sexual stimulation between the moments of agony. A particularly nasty way to intensify the sensation of clips being removed is to tie them at intervals along a cord so you can yank several of them off at once; these are called "zippers." What we like about zippers is the contrast between the flash of excruciating pain as they come off — pain that's over so fast that by the time we realize it happened, we're already screaming - and the intense endorphin rush afterwards, that often leaves us giggling uncontrollably and feeling very silly.

Other pain sluts prefer long, slow-building, intense pain, without the roller-coaster effect. Clips can give these bottoms the unremitting sensation they need. To build intensity, the top can pull on the clips, weight them or

attach them to another body part with tension in the attachment; she can also twist them or use fingers to stretch the skin on either side of them. Removing a clip and then replacing it on the same spot is extremely intense... replacing it with a heavier clip is even more so. Yanking a clip off is a "jolt" of pain that may not work as well in this type of scene, since it may interfere with sustained slow build-up.

Whips. The impact of whips on flesh can provide an immense range of sensation — from gentle and sensual, through deep massage, all the way out to full-tilt-boogie thrash-and-scream intensity. So if you have never tried them, the first thing to know about whips is that they don't need to hurt at all. Soft doeskin and glove-leather whips can be purely sensual, or can thump like a firm massage, or warm up skin to make it rosy and sensitive with no pain. Dossie recalls:

When I first came out into S/M, I had very negative feelings about whips. I am an abuse survivor, and the idea of being hit made me a little sick to my stomach; my fantasies were about bondage, intense sensation and nonconsent. I remember at my first Janus meeting tremulously asking the assembled scary-looking leatherpeople if I could be into S/M if I didn't want to get hit. They gave me good support, and agreed that I could. My first experience with a whip, more than a year later, was actually with a belt, administered by a top who understood how scared I was - and was I surprised! This didn't feel bad, it didn't feel like punishment, it felt nothing like the abuse I had known - it did feel intensely warm, sensual and deeply sexual.

So whips do not have to be about pain and punishment. They can be sensual and sexual in and of themselves, and they don't need to hurt unless you want them to.

Basic safety info about whips: don't allow yourself to be hit with anything hard on bone or over organs, or on any other part of your body that could be easily damaged; save heavy whips for well-padded flesh like the ass and thighs, or the big muscles of the upper back. Safer sex requires that whips be cleaned between uses, particularly if skin has been broken or abraded, or if they've come into contact with semen or vaginal fluid. Remember, you can't always know for sure whether a whip has been contaminated, so when in doubt, clean. If you can't clean it, put it aside for a month in a dry, cool place.

Sensation sluts tend to collect lots and lots of whips, because each has a slightly different feeling when it lands, and when you keep changing the feeling you can make a whipping interesting for a really long time. What this means for the novice is that if you don't like the feel of the whip that is being used on you, just try a different one. With any new toy, start out with light taps and build up as you get to know the feel of it.

You will probably eventually want to own some of your favorite whips - that way they'll always be on hand, and you can take responsibility for their cleanliness. Most new players start out enjoying thick heavy (loggers with lots of tails, and avoiding thin stringy whips that sting - sting is a taste which some acquire quickly, some later, and some never acquire.

Dossie, in her pilgrims progress from terrified novice to pain pig, for a while said that she didn't like pain but did like intense stimulation. Toward the end of this period, a potential top introduced herself at a party, saying that a mutual friend had told her that Dossie was into pain. Dossie replied, "No, I'm not, but you won't be able to tell the difference."

She notes:

Recently I received a lengthy flogging on my ass with a deep thuddy flogger, so I could feel the reverberations of the strokes deep inside shaking up all my sexual parts. To my amazement, and with no other stimulation, I came three times.

Surfing the Pain. There is a particular way of breathing and timing that works well in pain scenes; Dossie calls it "surfing the pain." Make your top read this part too -you II need someone to remind you when to do what, like a labor coach. This strategy involves relaxing your body so the pain sort of flows through you: you 11 find you can ride it like a wave.

The most important single physical skill for the pain slut, we think, is breathing. It's almost impossible to get in trouble in a scene - panicky, hysterical or out of control - if you're breathing deeply and regularly. If you sense yourself losing control, the first thing to do is try to regulate your breathing. Sometimes your top will remind you verbally to breathe, or place a hand on your chest to remind you to breathe, or simply breathe the way he wants you to, encouraging you to pace your breathing together.

You are at your most relaxed physically when you breathe out, so your top can tell you — in words or by example - when to inhale and exhale, and arrange to hit you or pull off a clip while you are breathing out. Striking at the very end of an exhalation has the added advantage of helping to prevent screaming if you don't have a soundproof playroom - it's hard to shriek if you have no air in your lungs.

Making sounds such as screaming or moaning can keep your breathing regular and help release some of the energy your body is taking in. (If you're a screamer or a moaner, and you're playing in a non-soundproof environment, ask for a gag, a pillow, or a piece of leather or cloth to bite, and make all the noise you want into it.) Janet says, "The pitch of the noise I make is a reliable indicator of how tense I am: A deep moan or growl means my neck and throat muscles are relaxed and I'm basically dealing well with the sensation, whereas a high-pitched scream means I may be heading for trouble."

Along with deep, regular breaths, focus on relaxing your muscles. You might be tensing up muscles in the area that's receiving sensation - say, for example, your ass. The taut muscles make the area being stimulated feel "harder," and may make the sensation tougher to take. Or you might be tensing muscles elsewhere in your body, typically your neck and shoulders, stomach or face. This tension makes your breathing shallow, increases the likelihood that you'll panic or suffer an emotional upset, and prevents you from accepting as much sensation as you'd like. With practice, you can stay very still and relaxed and achieve a trancelike state. A good top can help you relax by placing a hand on the tense part and sending some energy into your muscles, possibly even moving the pan back and forth to loosen it up.

This can serve to move your attention away from the focal point of pain or sex, and get you reconnected to your entire body, not just the spot that's getting done to. You can do this yourself by taking in and releasing your breath, and letting your attention cruise your whole body, starting out with toes and fingers and gradually letting your attention move back into your center. You may find interesting sensations out there on the periphery that you haven't been noticing: Do your toes tingle? Do your fingers itch to knead something, like a cat? When you're ready to focus back on the sensations your top is providing, you'll be surprised with a happy increase in intensity.

Once you have learned to surf the pain by staying relaxed, it is interesting to tense up your muscles on purpose, in order to feel the strokes even more intensely. You can do this yourself, or your top can instruct you when to relax and when to tense. So you can let the play come in waves, each convulsion of pain followed by feelings of warmth and pleasure. This is how some bottoms giggle or laugh with joy in the midst of horrible "torture." Such bottoms can go on for a very long time like this, so tops should be prepared to have stamina or put together a relay team.

If the sensation you're feeling is strong, particularly if it's a rhythmic or steady sensation without too much variation, you may be able to leave your body for a while, assuming this is OK with your top. Music provides a convenient, friendly "boat" on which you can float away. Or focus on a light, an object, a mantra — anything that lets you drift. It may help to imagine that the sensation is happening to someone else, not to you. (A warning on leaving your body: It's very easy to lose touch with what's going on to the point that you allow damage to be done to you. Be sure you trust your top, and that you've negotiated limits very thoroughly, before you go on any pleasure cruises.) Your top can bring you back into your body with hands on skin, massage, physical closeness or calling your name.

As we mentioned earlier, all these skills can be consciously learned as "head" skills. Your body also learns to process sensations differently over time: both of us have noticed that our endorphins flow much quicker than they used to.

Most bottoms also find that they bruise much less as they bottom more. However, if you get to where you enjoy heavy pain scenes, you will sooner or later have to face the reality of bruises, welts and scratches — commonly referred to as "marks." Some bottoms love marks and feel disappointed if they don't have any after a session: we know one who keeps a scrapbook full of Polaroid photos of the aftermath of her pleasure. But if you don't like to be marked, you have a dilemma — we don't know any way to play with heavy pain without running a risk of marking. You can reduce the probability of marks by avoiding aspirin and other anti-inflammatory drugs the day you play, and by putting ice on the affected areas immediately after the scene.

Your body may let you know that you've gone far enough with symptoms of dizziness, nausea or trembling. You need to let your top know when this happens, and either take a break, change stimulation or bring the scene to a close. Sometimes changing from a standing to a lying-down position will solve the problem and you can continue without difficulty. A drink of water, and perhaps a bite to eat, can be a very good idea too. Other times, these are symptoms that you are getting ready to faint, which is kind of rude. You may be shaky and cold after an intense pain scene - we recommend blankets and warm bodies.

The reward of a good pain scene is a transcendent and blissful high that persists for at least an hour or two, and maybe even into the next day — be prepared to relax and enjoy it. This may not be a good time to drive a car, but it is probably a great time to make love.

Body Modification

Body modification refers to piercing, cutting, tattooing, branding and scarification, as well as body sculpting through corsetry and related practices, often intended to permanently mark or alter the body. These practices are currently very popular, and piercing and tattooing "parlors" are now found in most large and many smaller cities. People who are into piercing, cutting and tattooing may or may not be into S/M, and may or may not take masochistic pleasure in the sensation involved. Some mark important events or transitions in their lives by having another tattoo or piercing, while others acquire multiple piercings and cuttings over time just for the sake of having the decorated body that results.

Rings in permanent piercings through the nipples or parts of the genitalia can also be looked upon as installed toys: interesting sensations result from pulling or twisting, or warming the metal by dripping wax from a white paraffin candle on it. Piercings tend to increase the sensitivity and arousability of the part of the body they inhabit, and some people get rings installed so they can feel more sensation in that particular area. We also find the gleam of metal in unlikely places very attractive.

Piercings, cuttings and brands can be temporary or permanent - some people play with tattoo needles with no ink - but It's important to remember that you can't really predict how your body will heal, so don't count on a shallow cutting or temporary piercing disappearing without a scar. Safety is a major consideration in any form of play that opens the skin, so please do not attempt this at home without taking the time and trouble to learn about how to do it right. It's best to take a workshop or consult with one of the professionals in your area to find out if your plan is feasible and safe. We are not going to tell you how to do body modification scenes in this book because a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and there is a lot to know before you attempt a body modification. If you want a permanent piercing or scarification to come out well, consult a pro.

Playing with cutting might involve a shallow decorative cut, no deeper than a cat scratch, done for the experience itself and not intended to leave a permanent mark. Play piercing involves placing needles through the skin (not deeper). Thread or string can be laced around the needles to hang weights on, or to tie the needles together so the piercings get pulled every time you forget to hold still. A white paraffin candle can be used to dribble hot wax on the needles, which warms them up under the skin until the sensation is barely tolerable - oh, my!

Very elaborate play piercing scenes can be done with lots of needles and strings attached to some sort of frame that winds up being a form of sculpture. Bottoms will enjoy the sensation of being able to pull on the needles by pulling against the strings; you'll be surprised by how hard you can pull with no damage. A steady pressure can

feel very good, and to this end small weights are sometimes hung from play piercing needles.

Piercing, cutting, branding and tattooing can all give the bottom tremendous endorphin rushes. In planning this kind of play please remember that you may get very high, so plan on some recovery time when you don't have to be responsible and can enjoy the experience. Please don't drive until you come down.

Physical safety note: play clean, with sharps containers, gloves, and lots of alcohol (oooh, sting!). Emotional safety note: when you open up the body by cutting or burning or piercing the skin, there is often a genuine opening of the mind, emotions and spirit as well. This opening can make you very vulnerable, which feels wonderful and has certain inherent dangers. If you're going to be all open, with no defenses, take care to be with people that you like and trust, and make provisions for your emotional as well as physical safety. On the positive side, sharing this profound opening with people you love can be an experience of intense connection and deep intimacy.

Lookin' Good

Costumery and Drag. Lots of us love to get dressed up. Costumes we have seen and worn for public play range from a few artfully draped chains on an otherwise charmingly naked body to full military uniforms and prom queens complete with crinolines and tiaras. We call all of it drag, to honor our outspoken elders, the drag queens, who paved the way for public outrageousness through very conspicuous personal appearances. Drag is also a word that implies bringing out an alternate persona - when we do business, your authors get themselves up in corporate drag that brings out the businesswoman within. Similarly, to call forth any inner self who plays a role in our fantasies, we can wear the costume to help us become the character.

S/M drag has many forms and many purposes, and the reasons a player might choose to dress up are as diverse as our fantasies.

There are practical reasons for dressing up. For example, some of the better play parties and clubs in San Francisco won't let you in the door in normal clothes, thus helping keep vanilla gawkers out and maintaining a festively pervy atmosphere.

Warmth is a good thing. One of your authors discovered the joys of lingerie, particularly thigh-high stockings, when she was living in the mountains and heating with wood. Lingerie was clothing you could have sex in that would also keep you warm. Another player at an S/M camp out in the high and chilly mountains found a hundred ways to eroticize a union suit.

There are other practical limits to drag that you want to keep in mind. Elaborate antique clothes are too fragile to wear for most scenes, and whatever you wear needs to be calculated to work for sexual accessibility. If you like for your partner to take your clothes off you, it behooves you to select clothing that will make this fairly easy. Strapless dresses, for instance, are essential if you want to have your clothes removed while your hands are tied. And if your dream scene involves your wicked ravager cutting your garments off with a very sharp knife, it is accepted and conventional to pick up a set of something cheap at a thrift store for the purpose. A helpful hint: nylon tricot, the stuff most slips are made out of, is just about impossible to cut with a knife. Scissors work.

Shopping can be foreplay. If you love to shop, drag is for you. Major money is no requirement: many of the best drag queens excel at creating magnificent ensembles from the thrift store, and there are advantages to the fact that discount stores often feature rather trashy fashion. Tawdry is another fantasy, right?

Drag can be for you regardless of your age, size or gender: this is sex, and we all want to look our best. Lots of wonderful clothes and undies are designed to enhance and uncover our innate sexiness: stockings and heels, chest harnesses, corsets and codpieces, whatever makes you look, and feel, like your sexiest self. And by wearing sexy garments, we present ourselves to the world as sexual beings.

Fetish wear is fashion designed specifically to please a sexual fetish. Clothing made of leather or spandex or

rubber, chains or ropes, textures and tastes and smells can evoke a particular eroticism in the wearer or his partner. Impossibly high heels may enhance a feeling of helplessness, leather garments next to the skin may bring out the primitive. Costumes can make you very aware of your body by restricting certain movements, or by exposing parts that don't normally get out in the open air.

Clothing can shape your body and change the way you move. Corsets and waist-cinchers, push-up bras and posture collars can sculpt the body of your dreams. Broad-shouldered jackets and heavy-soled boots give the timidest wearer a powerful butch swagger. Constricting the body can also cause what feels like release of endorphins: the first time Dossie got strapped into a waist cincher, she was surprised and delighted to experience an almost instantaneous shift in consciousness, from everyday awareness to highly excited and happy.

Women's lingerie is often specifically designed to be sexual, in appearance and texture and in what is revealed: maybe that's one reason so many men love to cross-dress. Many women are turned on to shorts and briefs and undershirts to express and sexualize the male parts of themselves.

We can dress for our loves. If what we wear turns our tops on, that works for us. Sometimes dressing is a major part of play. A body servant can lovingly dress and undress his mistress, a Daddy top can play dolls with her little girl. Drag changes who you are to each other, and can be a way of announcing to your lovers that you are in a particular frame of mind, or looking for a particular scene. If you wear your police uniform, does that mean you want to arrest me?

Make new connections: Dossie loves costumes, the bigger the better, drag is a necessity of life to her. She has been constantly amazed and delighted to watch the different people who respond to her in her different presentations (yes, presentation, like a yummy dish). One time she went to a play party all done up as Scarlet O'Hara in red satin, corset and crinolines, and to her amazement attracted and played with two gay men in exquisitely tailored uniforms. Surprises are so nice.

Costumes change your awareness of who you are. When you wear something out of the ordinary you get to be someone out of the ordinary. If you present yourself as the Princess of the Playroom, that is how other people will see you, respond to you, and treat you. So if you want to make your fantasies come real, dress yourself up in your favorite fantasy, and watch everybody else relate to your fantasy self.

Set the stage for drama. Players may put on costumes to play a particular scene, like the naughty schoolgirl or -boy, the stern bitch governess, the drill sergeant, the buck (later naked) private. And putting on a costume can be a window to bring forth an alternate persona, a piece of our character, that we want to play in a particular scene. You can experiment with costumes on your own — how do you feel in a white nightie? Is there a vampire in your fantasies? A popular costume scene discussed further in the section on precious inner beasts is the pony boy or girl, tricked out in elaborate, and confining, harness bondage.

Uniforms can make you feel powerful and grant you membership into a community of like-minded souls. There are longstanding traditions of initiation in leather and motorcycle clubs, where you undergo various initiations in order to earn your leathers. Some bottoms enjoy getting initiated over and over - boot camp, after all, might be more fun than anything that comes later.

Humiliation: to be dressed up as a little girl or boy, a baby, a sex toy, a puppy dog - how delightfully embarrassing! We know a top who likes to humiliate her bottoms by dressing them in frumpy clothes they would never choose to wear. This may sound dreadful at first, but when you understand that her purpose is to take her bottoms beyond worrying about how they look by forcing them to overcome challenges in the body image department, you can see how it could be a profoundly affecting experience to be sexualized by your lover when you're looking your worst. Other tops delight in hauling their hapless bottoms to the local leather store or maybe Fredericks of Hollywood to embarrass and delight them by forcing them to try on lots of sexy stuff, and maybe making a present of a particularly fetching outfit. Poor bottoms!

Dressing and disrobing can have spiritual significance, and again support a shift in consciousness from the

mundane to the other-worldly — drag becomes vestments that heighten spiritual awareness and set the stage for ritual.

We hope that someday you have an opportunity to attend a large leather event where a group of S/M people entirely occupy a conference hotel, so there is nobody there but us chickens. The constant parade of costumes is a powerful reminder of our collectively wonderful and infinite creativity, and the marvelous ingenuity our people engage in when they set out to be the sexiest they can be.

Body Worship and Fetishes. A fetish is an object or body part that a person has eroticized and made part of his or her sexuality. Common fetishes are leather, latex, high heels, boots, gloves, fur, lingerie, handcuffs and automobiles. Mythology would have it that a fetishist is some pathetic soul who can't get off without his or her teddy bear and who also can't get off with another person. The fact is, however, that we all eroticize objects - if you have a particular item of clothing, toy, piece of furniture or whatever that makes you feel sexy, you are to some degree a fetishist. Many of us collect vibrators, whips, costumes and other sex toys. Most of us love to share our toys.

Many people also fetishize body parts: hands and feet, breasts, buttocks, male or female genitalia, hair, ears and so on. Most of us have a special affinity for some body part or another; kinkyfolk are often inveterate butt-, crotch-, foot-or breast-watchers. Keep in mind, however, that there's a person attached to the body part of your dreams, and that she may start to feel bored or left out if you pay too much attention to the body part and not enough to the human being.

Many people are eroticized to body fluids such as blood, menstrual blood, spit, piss, shit and sweat. If this is you, some research and some creativity will be involved to make sure you don't expose anyone to harmful microorganisms. We can't go into lengthy detail on safer-sex precautions here, but check with your local AIDS prevention group to learn how to play safely with other people's body fluids — for instance, it's completely safe to taste your own blood.

"Body worship" may be a subset of fetishism, or may be a kind of service. It means playing with your top's body, either particular parts of it or the whole thing. It may be a euphemism for fellatio or cunnilingus, or it may involve worshipping - stroking, touching, licking, sucking or massaging - other body parts such as feet or breasts. Bathing or massaging your top may be a form of body worship, as may personal services such as manicures and hairbrushing. Janet has played with a bottom who delighted in sitting at her feet painting her toenails while she wrote and chatted on the phone - a charmingly decadent scene.

Bootblacking, the ritualized spit-polishing of boots and shoes, is so popular a fetish that there are public events where contestants compete for the title of best bootblack. Here a fetish is combined with service bottoming - with delightful results, including perfectly shined shoes.

Body worship can create an excellent script for bottoms to offer some sensual or sexual stimulation to their tops, and the chance for cops to lie back and get done to as though they were gods.

Let's Pretend

We feel some hesitation about putting this into a separate section, since we think all of life is a role-play - were playing "author" right now, for instance. But scenes that are like theater, in which the players get to pretend to be someone other than their day-to-day selves and maybe to act out a hot erotic fantasy story, are a particular subset of BDSM that warrants a closer look.

Some novices think that all BDSM play has to be role-play, with elaborate narratives, props and costumes. Since we find that role-playing is one of the most challenging types of play, we think of it more as a special-occasion production number. Trying to remember what your role is and how you're supposed to behave, at the same time as you enact a fantasy and manage whatever props and costumes you've set up and take care of your own and your partners turn-ons, is a high art. Getting around the shy self-conscious place where you feel a little bit silly

about the whole thing can be challenging, too. While we love role-play and consider it a major treat when we get to do it, we've done a whole lot of fabulous scenes in which we were just plain old Janet and Dossie. Still, role-play offers a chance to indulge our love of theater and to enact parts of ourselves that otherwise would have to stay hidden — what fun!

Role-playing fills the need for theater and play, which we believe is programmed into the human animal. It's also a safe environment in which to experiment with feelings that wouldn't be acceptable in the outside world... rebelliousness, dependency, subservience and so on.

We suggest that role-players adopt some tangible symbol to show when the scene has started and they're in role, and when it's over. The collar, of course, is a classic, but may not be appropriate for many kinds of role-play - for example, governesses rarely collar their students, but they may force them to wear a neatly tied school tie. Use of such a symbol helps maintain the boundary between play persona and real world, and eases the transition back to reality.

Authority Scenes. These scenes include all those in which the top takes the role of an adult authority figure - a master or mistress, teacher, military officer, sensei, doctor or nurse, boss or whatever - and the bottom is under his or her control, as slave, student, private, patient, maid or houseboy, employee. The roles may be very harsh and unyielding, like a drill sergeant, or they may be nurturing and supportive, like a "nice nurse." Role-playing in which the bottom's age regression plays a major role is a special case and is handled separately in the next section.

Like all BDSM, these scenes require some willing suspension of disbelief. A real drill sergeant probably isn't going to care much if a buck private crumples to the ground sobbing, but a "drill sergeant" in a consensual role-playing scene might interpret the tears as cause for a break and some conversation... or, perhaps, as a sign that things are just starting to get good!

If you're a little self-conscious about expressing your bottom or top energy in your own persona, taking on another persona may give you easy access to that part of your personality. Janet once read of a couple who, when the top needed to switch, would cast the bottom as the "overseer." The top would leave his employee a letter instructing her how to train the "new slave"... guess who. Never forget that you get to write the script however you want to!

Regression Play for Big Kids. Regression play means any form of play in which one or more participants pretends to be younger than they are, or "regresses" to an earlier time in their life. Any age will do, from teenager to baby, and many people have fantasies involving playing out scripts from a certain age, or playing with another person in a kid persona.

The top in such a scene is most often an adult (parent, teacher, governess, nurse, babysitter), but once again variations may range further: a regression scene could involve two ten-year-olds playing doctor in the woods. Dossie once played with water pistols with another baby in a playpen... foolish adults who ventured within range got wet too. {Bad babies.} She has also played as a teacher being topped by two nine-year-old boys who were actually thirty-year-old dykes and utterly vicious - the kind of kids who pull wings off bugs.

Generally, adolescent personae are horny and eager, and may be looking for support in developing a sense of identity or a particular self-image. Pre-adolescent kids (about eight to eleven) can be playful, silly, explorative and sometimes cruel. Small kids and babies are more likely to play with nurturance and discipline, sometimes with nurturance alone. An erotic dancer once asked Dossie to come to her birthday dressed as a schoolmarm; it turned out her fantasy was to be a seven-year-old boy, to sit on Dossie's lap and get read a story - a sweet and tender gift for the birthday child.

Infantilism means baby play that may involve diapers, potty training and very parental tops. Fetish latex retailers supply oversized rubber panties and the like, and we have heard of some creative adventures with KY Jelly or canned pears for those who want the sensation without the smell of actual poop.

The top doing a regression scene might be harsh or nurturing; she might offer training, discipline and punishment, and/or nurturance, cuddling and loving. Often the top's role is to provide containment for wild kid energy that needs a limit-setter to feel safe. Janet, in an effort to explore both discipline and nurturance in this setting, actually wound up evolving two entirely separate child personae: bratty, rebellious, whiny and sexually explorative "Jessie," whose age varies from about nine to twelve, and sweet, compliant four-year-old "Janey."

Child play can be very light and playful, and many child personae are fairly easy to get in and out of. Other scenes may involve wounded inner children carrying old pain and conflict, and may require a lot of support. For tops, the chance to be both the good parent and the bad parent may be both profound and challenging. Ideally, these deep scenes are planned and negotiated with the full consent of the top as well as the bottom.

Dossie recalls a scene that was conceived after watching Madonna's "Oh, Father" video. She and her top discovered that they were both abuse survivors, and were interested in playing a scene about that.

We talked extensively beforehand, and agreed in particular to support one another if the scene got too hairy. I had always avoided punishment "bad girl" scenes before, so I had no idea how I would respond. My top cleverly devised a way to nurture me while he was being stern and punitive by holding me down with lots of body contact while spanking me and saying the agreed-upon "Now listen here young lady" script. I found myself saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry" over and over again, and recognized my own child voice. I think because of the support I was able to get into that scared kid space in a very safe way - I had expected to sort of fall over the edge, but I actually went down, with my top, so easily that I knew it would be just as easy to come back up.

Nowhere is it more important to know your own limits than in regression play and nowhere is it more challenging. These are psychological limits and difficult to predict, so you often discover them by tripping over them — be ready to be good-natured about learning from your mistakes. If you are a survivor of physical or sexual abuse, give yourself permission to honor your own limits whether they make sense or not. You may have some areas that are better explored in your therapy than in your play, and it's important to recognize that too.

Be clear about whether or not you want to play with punishment (see the section on punishment earlier in this chapter), and whether or not you want to play with sex, penetrative or non-penetrative. Some adult babies, for example, might like to be touched but be too little to get fucked, and others might love it.

An adult regressed into a child state may become genuinely childlike and quite fragile, so to do deep regression play, it's important to establish safe physical and psychological space. Be particularly clear about the boundaries of scene space, establishing when you are and are not playing, and allowing plenty of time and support for re-entry.

We acknowledge in society that children have a special vulnerability, and thus need and deserve special protection; this is also true for children in regression play. The rewards of regression play range anywhere from having a lot of uninhibited fun through exploring some uncharted territory and perhaps all the way into healing old wounds and reclaiming damaged childhoods.

Gender Plat. When you were a kid, did you like to play dress-up? Did anybody give you a hard time about it? In the so-called "real world," gender roles are very rigidly prescribed, and serious sanctions are applied to men and women who violate them. In the kink world, playing with gender allows you to create new options, rewrite your gender scripts, try on new roles with your drag, and express forbidden parts of yourself.

Janet's first experience with gender play came by surprise:

I was doing an intense, but not role-played, scene in which I was topping a good male friend. I'd strapped on a harness and dildo and was happily fucking him up the ass to our great mutual enjoyment. Suddenly he looked back over his shoulder at me and asked in a small, urgent voice: "Will you please call me your bitch?" Wow! I experienced an immediate and highly arousing shift in consciousness. I wasn't wearing a dildo any more, I was using my own dick to fuck my bitch... I could feel the nerve endings in my penis as it moved back and forth. I

grabbed his hair and told him to call me "sir"... and the scene exploded into powerful orgasms for both of us.

Gender transformation is erotic in and of itself for many players, and the scenes they play might be entirely about crossdressing: a fantasy so popular that many professional dominants keep a stock of make-up and costumes for "transformation" scenes. For other players, gender play may be an important part of a larger script. Some players have gender roles or personae that they only bring out in scene space, while others find support in the leather community for exploring how they want to manifest their gender in their complete life: the term "transsexual" refers to people who live full-time in a gender identity other than that determined by their chromosomes, and differentiates them from "transvestites," who crossdress mainly for erotic purposes. "Transgendered" is an inclusive term referring to anyone who lives in more than one gender, or perhaps somewhere in between.

Gender roles range way beyond the simple crossgender images of a man in a dress or a woman packing a (preferably huge) dildo. One individual may have many gender roles: a male friend of ours sometimes sees him/herself as a woman, and other times as a drag queen. In gender-fuck, people express aspects of both genders at once, like a man in an evening gown cut low so you can see his chest hair or even his cock, or a woman exposing her cleavage in a tuxedo. Gender play for another person might involve an exaggeration of their anatomical gender, as in the gay macho man or Flaming Mamie the HyperFemme.

It's important not to make stereotypical gender assumptions about people you may see in drag of some sort or other. You may fantasize that the butch with the crew-cut and the bulge in her Levi's wants to kidnap you, while she may actually be hoping to get down on her knees and worship your corset. The guy dressed up in crinolines and pink silk could want to tie you down and beat you to shreds. You also can't tell what orientation a person in drag may have — a man in lacy lingerie may be looking for a femme woman, a butch dyke, a macho man, or another man in lingerie. Butch women in uniforms may play with each other as "faggot dykes," with gay men as equals, or even with femmes (the perverts!).

How do you know what to do amidst all this confusion? Well, you have to ask. We think that one of the most wonderful aspects of the BDSM scene is the facility with which its members explore gender, so maybe you might want to let go of some of the rules and requirements of official gender roles, cut loose, and get to know a little bit more about yourself and the people you're attracted to.

Beasties. Have you a creature inside you aching to be let out? Try playing the beast within. Animal play is an opportunity to really turn your brain off and can be wonderfully uninhibited and releasing. And you have lots of animals to choose from.

Human horses tend to have a lot of accoutrements: bridles and saddles and bells and hooves; insertable horsetails are available. Horsies sometimes prance, sometimes get ridden or pull a cart; they might like to be blindfolded and patted on the rump while being led back to the barn. They might get whipped.

Dogs and puppies like a lot of attention and petting; they also get obedience training. They might get taken for walks and fed from a bowl, and they are very good at licking things. Negotiate in advance whether you're a good dog or a bad dog: we have friends who hold "disobedience school."

In animal play you can explore a totem animal by becoming that creature; getting validation and feedback from others helps to make the role feel more real. Many animal scenes are about predator tops and prey bottoms. Or become a unicorn, a dragon, a werewolf, or a mythical creature of your own imagining.

Wild animals do a lot of snarling, growling, biting, scratching and general rumpussing: Janet once did a scene where both she and her top were wild animals, and agreed to speak only in growls, shrieks, hisses, purrs and such... a great scene that cost them both sore throats for several days. Animals like getting primal.

Inanimate Objects. Bottoms in a scene can become inanimate objects — sometimes useful, like coffee tables, or purely decorative, as in a bondage sculpture. Dossie once spent a very contented hour or two wrapped up in

miles of rope, blindfolded and hooded, while an orgy that she could hear but not see took place at her feet. This might sound frustrating, but the actual experience was wonderful: there is a trancelike delight in having absolutely nothing to do in a sexy environment.

To be a human coffee table may satisfy a need to suffer in the name of submission, or may be an excuse to do nothing but enjoy the presence of your top and his guests. Again, much of the reward comes from the extreme passivity of the role.

Bondage sculptures, using hundreds of strings attached to permanent or play piercings, are a popular human art form. You get the stimulation of lots of needles, and can hold still and do nothing while one or more piercers fusses all over you. A major piercing sculpture could involve several bottoms: we recall an especially delightful "string quartet." Do be careful to choose a position that you can maintain for several hours without needing a chiropractor to recover.

Dossie recalls a mannequin scene in which the bottom was required to stand in very high heels with a book balanced on her head while two tops tried to distract her. This forced her to stay very centered and perfectly in line with gravity while absorbing a lot of stimulation, with no permission to respond to it in any way. Miss High Heels got very high indeed!

Tops might want to recognize that holding still for long periods of time is very difficult and often painful. In some scenes, this might be appropriate material for additional cruelty; in others, the bottom might perform better with praise and appreciation for his or her hard work, and occasional opportunities to stretch.

Rough and Tough

this is the section where we talk about the scenes that involve struggle, resistance, and the outward appearance of nonconsent - some of the most challenging, and the hottest, play in our communities' repertoire. This kind of play gives us the chance to exert ourselves and to be overcome — to fight our hardest, see our tops at their most powerful, and finally knuckle under to what we really wanted all along.

Resistance Scenes: Captivity, Kidnap, Rape, Interrogation. If you enjoy playing as a strong, powerful, resistant bottom who has been overcome by force, these are the scenes for you. Since many of our fantasies are nonconsensual, the outward appearance of nonconsensuality can make these scenes incredibly hot - and the closer to the edge of nonconsensuality you get, the hotter the scene can be. But playing close to the edge of nonconsensuality can also raise the emotional and physical risks for both partners; therefore, special negotiations and agreements are in order.

Resistance play is big fun in that it relieves you of your sense of responsibility: "Help! Someone save me... just not right now, OK?" The struggle, both emotional and physical, can also be very cathartic: Janet once spent a delightful hour or two getting tortured and raped, with her hands tied to the headboard, her feet tied behind her top's back, and a gag in her mouth, and felt relaxed and sexy for days afterward.

There are some practical concerns that must be dealt with in resistance play. It's actually not all that easy, and sometimes nearly impossible, to subdue a bottom who is resisting with all his might. So if you intend to lose the wrestling match, you need to figure out how: some people just cut their strength; others use a handicap, like tying one limb down first, so they can struggle all they want and still be certain not to escape. Struggling needs to be discussed beforehand with your top — tops have limits too, and may need some way to reassure themselves that you really want to while you pretend you don't.

We have also found that sometimes the adrenaline rush that accompanies struggle may be incompatible with sensual openness, so some form of transition may need to be written into the script. One top of our acquaintance liked to wrestle wildly until the bottom was securely bound, then quiet her down with a massage before proceeding further.

A resistance scene gone wrong can bear heavy consequences: genuine anger that can interrupt friendships or even, in a worst-case scenario, precipitate violence. Resistance scenes played out in public also run the risk of rescue attempts by well-meaning outsiders.

Some of the emotions that can come up for the bottom in a resistance scene are real-world fear, anger and panic. Depending on what you've negotiated, you can either stop the scene when one of these emotions comes up for you, or go on playing and see what lies beyond the strong emotion. Janet once went through a period where her real-world anger stopped several scenes in a row... she and her top finally decided to play through it, and what turned out to lie beyond the anger was floods of cathartic tears.

If you're going to play through your anger or fear, you should be prepared to experience a strong and sometimes disturbing catharsis that may take hours, days or even weeks to process fully. It's not a good idea to surprise your top with such strong emotions; if you suspect that a scene might trigger old issues or cause real-world emotion, it is essential to have your tops informed consent to what might happen, and to be sure that your top is willing to be supportive of you throughout this entire spectrum of experience.

For example, both of your authors had some strongly negative childhood experiences with having our faces slapped, so face-slapping is a serious emotional trigger for both of us, that we will allow our tops to do only if they are willing and able to work through deep emotional stuff with us. Janet tells tops that she trusts a lot, "If you slap my face, I can't predict how I'll react — but if I come unglued, you're going to have to help put me back together again."

If you are not sure that you and your top are both ready for this kind of emotional fallout, tell him or her, or use your safeword, when real-world emotions come up.

Playing through strong emotion is an enormous, emotionally risky commitment for top and bottom alike. If you find a top who trusts you enough, and who you trust enough, to explore this area, recognize and appreciate the gift she is giving you. Similarly, a bottom who opens up and shares such difficult and profound emotion offers a great gift to his top. We all do well when we honor the courage and love it takes to play on the edge.

Dossie's Promises for Resistance Play. In order to play safely with resistance, Dossie has developed three promises that she gives her top during negotiations for these scenes. They are:

This is not where I'm going to process disagreements with you. If I feel angry with your real-world persona, we will discuss that outside scene space.

I will resist only when I am turned on, so any time I fight back you know the scene is working.

If I get mouthy, resistant or angry, I promise you that will always be an invitation to aggress. Feel free. Be bad.

These rules, or similar ones, are an important safeguard to your own and your top's emotional well-being during resistance play

Humiliation and Verbal Abuse

A good scene may create more than one set of reddened cheeks! The "sweet shame" of humiliation is a potent addition to many playstyles, and some bottoms find that humiliation is where the juice is for them.

The tricky question is: what do you find humiliating? Crossdressing, for example, is a source of pride to one bottom, a window to an alternate persona for another, and an acute humiliation to a third. Some bottoms find the act of kneeling to their top, or of speaking the word "Master" or "Mistress," to be profoundly humiliating, while others grovel and abase themselves without a second thought.

Consider the difference between the foot fetishist, to whom kissing a well-shaped foot is a keen delight and privilege, and the "captive" who finds it an agony of indignity and unwilling submission. You can see, then, that

almost any scene in this book can be played as a humiliation scene - if you find it humiliating.

Some players like to further season the stew of humiliation with verbal abuse (a term, by the way, which we don't like much — we wish there were another word than "abuse" for a consensual scene). Verbal abuse involves the top calling the bottom nasty names, or scoffing at him, or belittling his performance in some way.

If you play with verbal abuse, you'll probably find that some words and phrases are so easy to tolerate that they hardly qualify as abuse: we both find it very entertaining when a top says during a scene, "You enjoy this, don't you, girl?" — obviously, we do. And, since we wrote "The Ethical Slut," we think being called "slut" is a big compliment. Other words may be humiliating in what feels like a good way creating a pleasantly erotic sense of shame and outrage.

If a particular type of verbal abuse - for example, disparagement of your physical appearance, intelligence, earning capacity or whatever — creates serious real-world anger or loss of self-esteem for you, it's probably better to tell your top ahead of time, and perhaps to avoid that type altogether. These limits may come up unexpectedly, and may not be altogether rational - we know one bottom who adores being called "slut," "cunt" and similar names, but lost it with real-world rage when her top called her a "bootlicker."

Conversely, if what really turns you on is being called "scrawny," "fat," "stupid" or whatever your pet word is, you're entitled to get that, although it may be tough finding a top who's comfortable giving it to you - keep trying.

Remember, a good humiliation scene takes cooperation — your top can only humiliate you with your help!

Playing With Cultural Trauma. A kind of play that is particularly controversial for many individuals and groups within the BDSM communities is play that involves enacting some of the horrors of our cultural past. Although humanity has a shocking history of torture and genocide to choose from, the scenes that are likeliest to cause problems are those from the more recent past — most often those that involve the Holocaust and Nazis, and those that invoke the racially based slavery of the American eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Older incidents such as the Spanish Inquisition seem to push fewer buttons because they're buried in our cultural memory. We know bottoms who belong to recently oppressed minority groups and who have found tremendous healing and excitement in building scenes around that historical oppression. One African-American friend says, "Playing a consensual scene in which my top called me 'nigger' made me much better able to handle hearing it in the real world. Before, when I heard the word, I'd become irrationally, reflexively furious. Last week a panhandler called me that and I laughed in his face — now there's a smart way to ask for money, bozo!"

Obviously, these scenes can carry a deep and serious emotional charge for both bottom and top. Tops may have trouble with invoking the spirit of bigotry even when they know themselves to be loving and egalitarian people: we know lots more people of color interested in playing slave than we do white folks who are comfortable being Simon Legree. Bottoms may find unexpected wellsprings of anger or internalized oppression. We suggest extreme care in negotiating and enacting such scenes, similar to the precautions we've suggested for playing around a history of personal trauma such as rape and abuse.

Additionally, if these scenes are enacted at a play party or other gathering, onlookers may be shocked, scandalized or infuriated. These issues have been hotly debated. Check with party hosts about scenes involving racism, sexism or Nazis: remember that if you enter a party wearing swastikas you may be stimulating people who haven't chosen to play with you. When you shout words like "nigger," "dumb cunt," or "filthy Jew," the people around you can't close their ears. While we believe partygoers must be responsible for their own reactions, it's courteous to let people know ahead of time the nature of the scene you're about to do so that they can choose whether or not they want to watch or move into another room.

And when you and your top can work together to reclaim parts of yourself that have been wounded by humanity's sad history, what a great and worthwhile gift that is - a perfect example of how the darkest corners of BDSM can bring the greatest illumination.

Some Notes on Public Play

If you see a large crowd of people gathered around a scene at a play party, you may find Dossie or Janet at the center of it. We're both avid exhibitionists and love public play (by which we mean play in front of a consenting group of kink-friendly people — not playing out there in the real world, which can nonconsensually involve bystanders).

We recognize that play parties don't work for many of our readers. Some feel that they cannot come that far out of the closet (although confidentiality is a paramount rule of any responsible play party), some are too shy, and some simply live in areas where there are no play parties, poor dears. Nonetheless, we feel that play parties are a vital part of the growth of the scene in general, and a great way to grow as a player.

Play parties give you a chance to observe the play of someone you are considering bottoming to, and offer a very safe place to play with a new top for the first time. Couples in exclusive relationships also often attend play parties, not to play with others, but for the many rewards of seeing and being seen.

Parties give you a great opportunity to be a responsible voyeur. By "responsible" we mean someone who is sensitive to the boundaries of the players, who doesn't interfere with scene space or attempt to join scenes without permission, and who respects confidentiality. Voyeurism gives you a chance to learn new playstyles and techniques. It's also wonderfully validating to see happy, proud, confident people publicly doing whatever it is you're scared to do because it's "too sick."

So what, you ask, is a play party? It's basically an environment in which people do BDSM scenes within the sight and hearing of other players — from half a dozen to hundreds or, in the case of some of the huge national leather conferences, even thousands. Playing in an environment where you're surrounded with the screams and moans of other bottoms can multiply your own excitement tremendously.

Most play parties take place in a home or industrial space that has been to some degree converted for kinky play. Typically, you walk in the front door — sometimes paying a small fee to cover rent and edibles - and into a socializing space. In this space, people eat, talk and negotiate. In another area you will find one or more play spaces, often dungeonlike rooms filled with thrillingly mysterious equipment: slings, bondage tables, St. Andrew's crosses - a large X-shaped cross for bondage - spanking horses and so on. Walls and ceilings are equipped with eyebolts to attach you to. Often, the dungeon has some space in which polite voyeurs may sit or stand quietly to watch the play.

Most play parties these days enlist experienced volunteers as "dungeon monitors," or "DMs." Dungeon monitors, often identified by an armband or special t-shirt, observe the play and intervene if necessary to preserve the party rules and safe boundaries. Anytime you have a problem at a party, the DM is there to help you. If you have concerns about the safety of a scene you're watching, you talk to the DM, who is familiar with party standards and is usually the only person authorized to interrupt a scene. DMs are also happy to show you how to use the equipment, to answer any questions, and to bring you safer sex supplies, water, and such items if you're all tied up and can't quite reach them.

To make yourself welcome at play parties, respect the house rules. They may vary widely from one party to the next — read the rules sheet, or ask a dungeon monitor or other authority figure if you're not sure. Do not attempt to join a scene in progress unless you have been specifically invited, and do not interrupt a scene to ask if you can join: this will disrupt the very play you were admiring. Be polite when asking to play with someone and friendly if they decline, and be ultra-respectful of people's boundaries. It's an act of courage to take off your armor in public, and people who are doing so need and deserve your courtesy and sensitivity.

Intoxication of any kind is a serious breach of party etiquette. Janet once attended an unfortunate party where a first-time attendee, obviously stoned, took one look at a beautiful submissive who was awaiting her master in a classic slave pose and started to giggle. That first-timer was never invited back.

Many parties have a "party safeword" - often, here in San Francisco, the word "SAFWORD" itself - which is a "Mayday" signal that can be called by a top or a bottom who needs outside help in a scene: for example, a top whose bottom has fainted and who needs help taking care of him, or a bottom who feels his top may be out of control and not respecting his regular safeword. If you hear someone shout the party safeword, be prepared to help.

One of the most radical acts of the sexual revolution is the de-privatization of sex. Party play helps us unlearn our modesty, our shame, our inhibition. It provides a "reality check" as to what it is that BDSM people "really" do. And, last but certainly not least, it's a great source for hot new fantasies!

S/M and Spirituality

Sexuality has always been our path, even before S/M became available to us. Starting with the task of reclaiming our sexuality from the Puritans, sex has been the path on which we explored psychological growth and healing, feminist empowerment, self-knowledge, and spiritual communion.

In the BDSM communities, spiritual practice has always been common, if not always talked about. A number of the early S/M support groups were established as churches with very serious religious intent. In recent years, ceremony and practice involving S/M and body modification have become more widespread and better known, and many support groups and circles, even businesses, have sprung up to fill the needs of ritual players and modern primitives. It will be impossible to let you know everything about this complex and wonderful subject in one chapter, but we will do the best we can.

Sex Is Spiritual

Every orgasm is a spiritual experience. Think of a moment of perfect wholeness, of yourself in perfect unity, of expanded awareness that transcends the split between mind and body and integrates all the parts of you in ecstatic consciousness. Sound familiar?

Western tradition is to think of sex and spirituality as being in opposition, as if enjoying sex could somehow take you further from spirit. This superstition may already have caused you a lot of grief

Divine consciousness, the tao, all the deities that have ever inspired anybody, and sexuality, flow through all of us all the time. Just as there is no time when you are separate from your sexuality, and no time when your sexuality is not part of you, there is no time when you are separate from the divine. When you bring spiritual awareness to your sexual practice, you can become directly conscious of - connected to - that divinity that always flows through you, even when you are not paying attention. So for us, sex is already an opportunity to see god.

Far out, huh? Please remember that we are not talking about the extra-special experience of somebody who spent twenty years in a cave in the Himalayas. We are talking about your orgasm, your play, your integrity with your spirit, your moment of ecstasy. Whether you want to think about it in this way is your choice.

Many of us are choosing to pursue our spirituality and our sexuality together through S/M and related practices. Following is some information gathered from our own experiences and the experiences of those who consciously explore spiritual BDSM play.

Sacred Space

A lot of what we do in S/M qualifies as ritual in and of itself: games we play, roles we enact, fetish objects, acts of symbolic significance, and the whole theater of psychodrama have all the elements of a mystery play. The unbounded space we enter when we play is mythological: a land of archetypes, of mystery, of symbolic enactments, where we use the path of ritual theater to pull up tremendous physical and emotional intensity. This altered state of consciousness that we can enter into is known by many names: dreamtime, inner space, higher

power, the place between the worlds.

These rituals and ceremonies are all ways of opening awareness and expanding consciousness. When we open ourselves up in this way, we let go of some of our usual boundaries, and our normal defenses, so we need to take care to protect ourselves when we are in this vulnerable state.

To this purpose players normally establish sacred space, a ritual environment, a circle. When we form the circle, we cast out negativity, temporarily send away difficult stuff and create a special place of caring and high consciousness, where the physical world is taken care of in advance so that we are free to focus on spiritual experience.

You can get the idea from the text of one of our favorite circle incantations:

Everything to the North of here is sacred
Everything to the South of here is sacred
Everything to the East of here is sacred
Everything to the West of here is sacred
Everything above here is sacred
Everything below here is sacred
Everything here is sacred

People who circle together often feel a special bond, since when our boundaries are down, more open, or more permeable, we feel closer to one another. Doing group sex in sacred space can feel very warm and intimate, as the circle brings people together in safety and harmony to celebrate their sexuality with the highest of awareness. In group ritual, you get to focus the energy of all the people present, which amplifies the power.

Doing a rite in the presence of others can give you more commitment - partly from their support, and partly because it would be more embarrassing to quit in the middle, so you may push yourself a little harder, and maybe get further. Sometimes it is necessary to quit in the middle no matter how embarrassing it is: safewording out of a ritual is an act of tremendous honesty, and deserves respect.

Kundalini And The Chakras

S/M ritual requires considerable knowledge and experience to perform successfully and safely. Training often starts with learning how to go into trance states by means less drastic than the physical pain of opening the skin. You can learn to attain trance states through many different practices, including self-hypnosis and meditation. We especially recommend yoga for its powers of physical conditioning, relaxation and mental clarity — important skills for any bottom (and anybody else).

Hindu teachers see our spirit in the form of centers of energy going up the spine, with spiritual force, kundalini, envisioned as a snake made of pure energy that can crawl up our spine. Imagine your backbone as beads strung on a serpent. To get a feel for kundalini, try the following grounding exercise:

Sit tailor fashion, or lotus if you can, or any comfortable position with your back straight.

Imagine that your vertebrae are blocks, and you can line them up one atop another like a block tower, so perfectly that your body could stay erect without any effort at all from your muscles, with your head balanced on top like a ball on a seal's nose. Relax. Breathe. Let your bones support you.

Imagine a string going down through the centers of your vertebrae, down into the ground, through the layers of soil, through the rocks, down into the magma, all the way to the center of the earth where it's hot.

Imagine the heat at the earth's core coming up your string, and up your tower of blocks. Imagine that you can send anything you have extra, anything you don't want, down into the earth to melt in the magma.

Imagine that you can pull the earth's energy up your string, through your body, and out the top of your head all the way to the stars. Enjoy this for a while.

When you are through imagining, pull your string down from the stars with a thank you to the cosmos. Send down into the earth any energy you don't need, pull your string back up into yourself, and thank the earth.

As you pulled the heat up your spine, you may have noticed certain places where there is particularly strong feeling. The Hindus call these centers of energy the chakras.

To find your chakras, start at the bottom where your string comes into your body from the earth. This is the root chakra, the ground of being.

The second chakra is the sexual chakra, located where you feel it, in your genital area.

Third is the chi, center of gravity of the body, located near your navel. Martial artists find their strength and centeredness in this place.

Fourth is the heart chakra, located by your heart - this is where we love and cry and feel other strong emotions.

Fifth is the throat chakra, where you speak — it governs communication, the feeling of peace, and the love of truth.

Sixth is the third eye, located between your eyebrows -here there be visions, colors, pictures - and intellectual concepts.

Seventh is the crown chakra at or slightly above the top of your head, where your string goes out and all the way up to the cosmos, and may return in the form of sweet rain all over your body.

When you touch these places on yourself or another person, there may be special feelings of connection, grounding, emotion, serenity or ecstasy. We like to hold the tops of people's heads when we feel they need containment, and touch their heart for strength and safety in the presence of strong emotion. No chakra is higher than another chakra - all of them are essential. It's like an electrical circuit: you gotta connect all the poles, or the kundalini doesn't flow.

Conscious Ritual, Here and Elsewhere

Mystics throughout history have used physical and sexual stress to raise endorphins and engender a visionary experience. Dossie says, "I used to think that these people were so spiritually advanced that they could endure all this pain as proof of their detachment from the material. Now I know that they seek out the pain in order to achieve the transcendent state/" The pain brings them to ecstasy, an endorphin rush directed to a spiritual purpose.

Many ancient practices have been adapted by S/M spiritualists for use in our rituals here and now. We learn from sadhus in India who modify their bodies and genitals by constriction, piercing and stretching as a lifelong practice. At a festival in Kuala Lumpur people have their skin, cheeks and tongues pierced with needles, hooks and spears; they dance to a shrine as a sacrifice to the gods, for the granting of a wish or in thanks for a particular blessing. Pacific Island traditions include scarification, genital piercings, tattooing of much of the body. The Maoris tattoo patterns all over their faces that signify communion with their ancestors. Native American traditions include the Sun Dance, where participants attach a rope to a tree and to a chest piercing, and lean on the rope until the piercing breaks through, a meditation that may take several hours. Flagellation is still practiced by Roman Catholics in the Philippines.

All these practices are done in trance states, and it is often noted that there is little bleeding and that wounds close up faster than one would expect and heal with magical speed.

Current Practices. Modern primitives here in the U.S. may choose to build a ritual around a piercing, or have cuttings or tattoos with symbolic themes as a rite of passage to mark a transition in their lives. Sexual piercings are reputed to increase the sensitivity (awareness) at the site of the piercing, and rings are placed so as to remind you of parts of your body you may have been taught to ignore, a step toward more complete consciousness.

Rhythm can also carry you upwards, and drumming, chanting and trance dancing are often included in S/M rituals. Dossie is particularly fond of being drummed on: "As the drumming becomes more intense, and the pain more difficult to deal with, I find my whole body gets pushed into the rhythm, my consciousness gets pushed into the rhythm, and I get pushed over the edge in a communion with the drummer that sends us both flying."

Various types of suspension, stretching and hanging can be the stretch that expands consciousness - this is the secret meaning of the "Hanged Man" of the Tarot, and the reason he looks so happy. Hanging in rope bondage with the body fully off the ground is not only an amazing bondage experience, but can also be a very trancey trip. The ultimate in suspension is when people suspend their entire body weight on a large number of piercings (carefully designed to distribute the weight and allow for a comfortable trip and a safe return).

The ball dance is a piercing ritual adapted from the sadhus in which balls, bells, lemons or other objects are tied to the skin by putting sterile filaments in shallow piercings, most commonly on the chest, back and arms. People come together in groups with trained piercers, preferably in a meadow somewhere on a mountain. Dossie, who has participated in many ball dances, explains:

You establish trance first in whatever way works best for you, then let the piercings entrance you further. The circle is made, the drums start up, and you dance with the balls on. At first, you may move with caution as you test the sensation of swinging a weight that is attached inside of you. Then it becomes intriguing to play with the risk, and let the sensation carry you out a little further. After a while, the dance takes over and you might jump up and down or swing wildly, deliberately maximizing the pull of the balls on your skin. The body goes way out into ecstasy, and where the mind goes defies description.

Communion, Transcendence and Transformation

We very strongly recommend that you not try any of this until you join a community where you can find knowledgeable people to learn from. This is advanced activity, and its not for everyone. It requires a lot of commitment and hard work, as well as great care for safety and health, to pull off successfully.

When you do body ritual, it is imperative to have a goal in mind — these practices are too powerful to just use them to get high without any sense of purpose or direction. Goals might be to celebrate a transition, to give thanks, to look for healing, to connect with gods, ancestors or spirit guides, or to seek a vision. Goals are as varied as the people who do ritual. A good goal is to seek communion with the divine.

States of trance and ecstasy are experiential. They are what you feel. They have no causes, and are not about figuring anything out — there are no whys and wherefores. This is a holistic experience, so you are best advised to shut up and listen, or as we used to bless each other in the sixties: "May the Baby Jesus shut your mouth and open your mind." As in all forms of BDSM, when you believe enough in the game you are playing, it becomes true: this is the power of manifesting.

In the state of transcendence we have a heightened awareness, which makes this a good time to let in new truths. This is a time of suspense — remember the Hanged Man? — a time to let go of our self-consciousness, to leave our selves, propelled by divine mercilessness.

This experience of Dossies helps illustrate the dark energy of S/M spirituality:

A while ago I was having a lot of difficulty with some painful losses in my life, and had gotten stuck blaming myself for my losses, and blaming myself for feeling bad when I was terribly sad and angry - I was in sorry shape. I contacted a friend of mine, another heavy bottom, and asked if she would be willing to channel some of

my disturbed energy in the form of a caning that I would perform on her. I promised to own my energy, and take it back when we were through, not to just dump it on her and leave her with it. She agreed. I began caning her, and after a warmup time the energy, and the caning, became really intense, and I definitely had the feeling that I was throwing out a lot of my rage and grief along with the cane, and that she was taking it in and riding it with great pleasure. I was using my rage as the scary part of the rollercoaster. Periodically, as we went along, and as the play became harder and faster, I would move up to her head and hold her while I checked in to make sure she was all right. After a particularly violent attack from me, when I checked in, she turned to me with a beatific smile and said, "I love your energy. I love your shadow." This was a revelation to me - that she could find a way to love what I most hated about myself - what a lesson. This bottom transformed her top.

We can do healing, change and growth with S/M and ritual. We believe old wounds can sometimes be healed by going through the wounds, as if there were parts of us that we can only access through those painful openings. How can we do spirituality and healing with such dirty stuff? A lover of Dossies had a fine answer for that - "I know my fantasies have dirty roots." And how else would you grow roses?

The New Bottoming Book

By: Dossie Easton & Janet W. Hardy

When You Fuck Me I Become Enormous

By Dossie Easton

When you fuck me I become enormous.
A greatness grows inside of me,
around your hand I
Swell.

Resistance amplifies, friction heats.
Pushing pulls up power so I
Struggle, thrashing and yelling, straining
against you.

Restraining, you overpower me,
hold me down
hold me still so I feel
heat of cunt, pressure of blood,
swelling of delicate tissues stretched beyond reason.

Your face over mine, your eyes
dig in, your fist deep
You string me on a burning rope
from your hand in my cunt
all the way to your tongue
in my mouth
You open a channel through me that reaches
far beyond both of us.
Laughing now me gasping
Gigantic full of you while you
Grab my hair, take my head, drown me with your
tongue, sweet hot taste of tangled spit
You spread your fingers wide inside me, blow me up a huge balloon:
Bellowing, I suck you in deeper.

You fuck a rougher rhythm.
I raise myself to reach you
still holding me down.
I reach my heart out below us and
Draw up fire from the center of the earth
where rock melts, you falling into me
Cavernous:
You pour through me red like vaporized stone

With your hand
I pull you through me
on the burning rope

and shoot you from the earth to the moon.

I can take you,
all of you,
and I can give you back.

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